

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 1 of 82

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [4- School Records broken again](#)
- [5- State Track Meet Results](#)
- [8- SD SearchLight: Trump 'slush fund' echoes scorned 19th-century spoils system, academics say](#)
- [11- SD SearchLight: Lawsuit challenges South Dakota's new ban on abortion-pill advertising](#)
- [12- SD SearchLight: Forest Service and state of South Dakota sign agreement to work together on forest management](#)
- [13- SD SearchLight: Trump ordered limits on voting by mail. The Postal Service is moving to make states comply.](#)
- [15- SD SearchLight: Trump's 'anti-weaponization' fund blocked for now by federal judge](#)
- [16- SD SearchLight: Tense hearing on uranium drilling tests new language-translation law before its effective date](#)
- [18- SD SearchLight: Flesh-eating screwworms head for American livestock](#)
- [21- Weather Pages](#)
- [27- Daily Devotional](#)
- [28- Subscription Form](#)
- [29- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [30- News from the Associated Press](#)

## Saturday, May 30

Pickleball, 9:30 a.m., Elementary Gym  
State Track Meet in Sioux Falls

## Sunday, May 31

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's, 9 a.m., at Zion, 11 a.m.  
United Methodist: Worship at Conde, 8:15 a.m.; at Groton, 9:30 a.m.; at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; Groton Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 10:30 a.m.; Cody Swanson Piano Recital, 3 p.m.  
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.  
First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.  
Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m.



## ONE LAST TIME TO ROAR!

### FINISH FIERCE, TIGERS!

GROTON AREA'S STATE TRACK SCHEDULE FOR SATURDAY, MAY 30TH	
10:40AM	<b>BOYS 100M DASH</b> (KEEGEN TRACY - LANE 7)
10:55AM	<b>GIRLS 4X200M RELAY</b> (MCKENNA TIETZ, TARYN TRAPHAGEN, KELLA TRACY, MAKENNA KRAUSE - LANE 5)
11:25AM	<b>GIRLS 1600M RUN</b> (RYELLE GILBERT - HEAT 1)
11:45AM	<b>BOYS 1600M RUN</b> (JAYDEN SCHWAN - HEAT 1)
12:50PM	<b>BOYS 400M DASH</b> (KEEGEN TRACY - LANE 5)
1:05PM	<b>GIRLS 300M HURDLES</b> (MCKENNA TIETZ - LANE 3)
2:05PM	<b>BOYS 200M DASH</b> (KEEGEN TRACY - LANE 2)
2:25PM	<b>GIRLS 4X400M RELAY</b> (MCKENNA TIETZ, TARYN TRAPHAGEN, MAKENNA KRAUSE, KELLA TRACY - LANE 7)

**COMPETE. BELIEVE. LEAVE IT ALL ON THE TRACK.**  
**TIGER NATION IS BEHIND YOU!**



## Monday, June 1

Senior Menu: BBQ Chicken breast, au gratin potatoes, coleslaw, fruited Jell-O, whole wheat bread.  
State Golf Meet in Sioux Falls  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.  
Jr. Legion hosts Britton, 5:30 p.m.  
U12 Baseball hosts Roslyn, DH, 5:30 p.m., Falk Field  
T-Ball Practice, 6 p.m., Nelson Field

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

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 2 of 82

# 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.**

## **Kennedy Overhaul Blocked**

A federal judge yesterday blocked key parts of President Donald Trump's plan for the Kennedy Center, ordering the removal of his name from the building within two weeks and halting its planned two-year closure for renovations.

The ruling found the center's board exceeded its authority when it voted to rename the venue and approve the shutdown, noting only Congress can officially rename federally established institutions. The judge also said the board failed to deliberate properly before approving the changes. The closure was set to begin in July as part of a \$257M renovation plan; Trump has argued the building is outdated. Officials involved in the project are expected to appeal the ruling.

The Kennedy Center was conceived in the 1950s as a bipartisan effort to build a national cultural center and was later nurtured by President John F. Kennedy, who helped raise funds, including through a televised gala featuring then-7-year-old cellist Yo-Yo Ma. The project was completed after JFK's assassination in 1963 and was renamed in his honor before opening in 1971.

## **Fourteen-year-old Californian wins Scripps National Spelling Bee.**

Shrey Parikh won the title after going into a spell-off with competitor Ishaan Gupta, during which he correctly spelled 32 words in 90 seconds. Parikh won more than \$52K in prize money.

## **Federal judge temporarily blocks anti-weaponization fund.**

The \$1.77B fund was proposed by the Trump administration, with the stated justification of compensating individuals who were unfairly targeted by the federal government. The money is drawn from the Justice Department's Judgment Fund, which is typically used to settle lawsuits, but the specific use has drawn bipartisan criticism from Congress.

## **Former Attorney General Pam Bondi testifies before Congress.**

Ousted in April by President Donald Trump, reportedly in part over frustration with her handling of the Epstein files, Bondi fielded questions yesterday on the department's handling of material related to the deceased sex criminal. Reports from the transcribed interview suggest Bondi largely placed the responsibility on current acting Attorney General Todd Blanche.

## **Blue Origin rocket explodes on launchpad.**

The New Glenn rocket, which malfunctioned during a "hot fire" engine test, was expected to deploy the latest batch of satellites for Amazon Leo, the space-based internet service.

## **Six more bodies recovered in Washington state paper mill explosion.**

The disaster unfolded Tuesday, after a tank of 600,000 gallons of "white liquor"—used to break down wood chips into paper pulp—imploded. The death toll currently stands at eight, with three other victims believed dead but as of yet unrecovered.

## **Spinosaurus likely "cried" salty tears.**

Paleontologists discovered evidence the predatory theropod, which hunted in brackish waters roughly 100 million years ago, had specialized tear glands that helped remove salt from the creature's bloodstream.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 3 of 82

## Humankind(ness)

Dear readers—We're taking an intermission next month to feature stories about dads and fatherhood. Share a memory, lesson, or note of gratitude [here](#) for a chance to be featured. In the meantime, enjoy a sampling of submissions about mothers.

"During my teen years in the '60s and '70s, my mom and I butted heads over many things. We were both strong women, after all. She used to say I always asked 'Why?' to everything. But in the end, we became best friends! She encouraged me to think for myself (don't just follow the crowd); to learn how to do things myself, rather than hire someone ('THAT'S how you make money!'); to stand up for myself and what I believed in! And kindness. These lessons have served me well over the years."

— Mari H. in San José, Costa Rica

"I never saw my mother get angry or raise her voice. Twice, when grocery shopping and different cashiers were being disrespectful to customers, my mother said, with her usual kindness, 'Honey, are you having a bad day?' Each time, the cashier apologized for their behavior and had a smile and kind words when we left."

— Steven V. in Paso Robles, California

"My mother was what they all called a doozy. A little wild and a lot of fun, and loved to talk to everyone. She wore hats every day for her last 40 years or so, all decorated with her favorite silk flowers. After her stroke, to get her spirits up, I asked her to decorate some hats for the nursing home ladies for Mother's Day. She was the belle of the ball, handing them all out. Now, every year, in her honor, my chapter of Red Hat sisters collects hats from local thrift stores, and gets together and does the same for a nursing home in our community."

— Candace W. in Port St. Lucie, Florida

"My mom made me an Easter basket every year until I was 49 years old. When I turned 50, I was expecting an Easter basket, as I had gotten every year since childhood. But nooo! I did not get one! So, I called her and said, 'Mom, where's my Easter basket? Did you forget?' She says, 'No, you are just wayyy too old for an Easter basket now.' My response was, 'Couldn't you at least wait until I was 50!' We both laughed so hard we were in tears. I plan on giving my grandchildren one until they're 50!"

— Billie J. in Atlanta, Georgia



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 4 of 82



## Gilbert sets school record

After 38 years, a new name stands atop the Groton Area girls' 800-meter run record board.

Groton Area sophomore Ryelle Gilbert broke the school record in the 800-meter run during the SDHSAA Class A State Track and Field Meet, posting a time of 2:22.55. Gilbert surpassed the previous mark of 2:22.98, set by Stephanie Herseth in 1988.

The record-breaking performance capped an impressive journey to the state meet. Gilbert earned her state berth after making a special trip to a last-chance meet in Arlington, where she improved her time enough to qualify. She was able to make the trip thanks to her grandfather, Gene Loeschke, who drove her to the meet. (Photo

from Groton Area facebook page)



## 800m Relay Team sets school record

The Groton Area girls' 4x200-meter relay team has done it again!

Competing Friday at the SDHSAA State A Track & Field Meet in Sioux Falls, Makenna Krause, Kella Tracy, Taryn Traphagen and McKenna Tietz delivered another record-breaking performance.

The Tiger quartet raced to a second-place finish in the preliminaries with a blazing time of 1:45.88, shattering their own school record of 1:46.87 by nearly a full second.

Not only did the girls rewrite the record book, but they also secured their spot in Saturday's state championship finals. (Photo from Groton Area facebook

page)

## Schwan sets school record in 3200m run



Groton Area senior Jayden Schwan races toward a third-place finish in the Class A boys 3200-meter run Friday at the SDHSAA State Track and Field Meet in Sioux Falls. Schwan earned the bronze medal with a personal-record time of 9:40.14, improving his previous best by more than 24 seconds and lowering the school record he set earlier this season. (Photo from Groton Area

facebook page)



## Schwan earns bronze medal, multiple Tigers advance to Saturday finals at State Track Meet

SIOUX FALLS – Groton Area continued its strong showing at the SDHSAA State Track and Field Meet on Friday at Howard Wood Field, highlighted by a state medal performance from Jayden Schwan and several athletes advancing to Saturday's championship finals.

Schwan earned a third-place finish in the Class A boys 3200-meter run, turning in a season-best time of 9:40.14 to claim the bronze medal. The performance added another accomplishment to an outstanding season for the Tiger distance standout, who earlier this year broke a school record that had stood since 1975.

Groton Area also qualified multiple athletes and relays for Saturday's finals.

Keegen Tracy continued his impressive state meet by qualifying for the championship finals in both the 400-meter dash and 200-meter dash. Tracy posted a personal-record time of 49.67 in the 400-meter preliminaries, finishing second overall and securing a spot in Saturday's final. Later in the day, he advanced in the 200-meter dash after placing fifth in the preliminaries with a time of 22.82.

On the girls side, McKenna Tietz added two more school records while helping lead Groton Area into a pair of relay finals.

The Tigers' 800-meter relay team of McKenna Tietz, Taryn Traphagen, Kella Tracy and McKenna Krause raced to a school-record time of 1:45.88 while finishing second in the preliminaries. The performance earned the quartet a place in Saturday's championship final.

Tietz also advanced in the 300-meter hurdles, placing third in the preliminaries with another school-record performance of 45.49.

The girls 1600-meter relay team of Tietz, Traphagen, Krause and Tracy also qualified for Saturday's final. The quartet finished sixth in the preliminaries with a season-best time of 4:08.42.

Another school record fell during Friday's finals as sophomore Ryelle Gilbert capped an unforgettable season in the girls 800-meter run. Gilbert placed 15th in Class A with a school-record time of 2:22.55, breaking the mark she had established just one day earlier. Gilbert's state appearance came after a last-chance qualifying effort in Arlington that moved her into the state field.

Jayden Schwan also competed in the boys 800-meter run finals, placing 19th with a time of 2:04.18.

In field event action, Ethan Kroll represented Groton Area in the boys triple jump, placing 14th with a leap of 40 feet, 8¼ inches.

Other Tiger competitors included the boys 800-meter relay team of Lincoln Krause, Ryder Schwan, Ethan Kroll and Jordan Schwan, which finished 20th in 1:34.87. The boys 1600-meter relay team of Kyson Kucker, Jordan Schwan, Ethan Kroll and Jace Johnson placed 19th with a time of 3:38.36.

Heading into Saturday's final day of competition, Groton Area will have several opportunities to add to its medal count with Tracy competing in the finals of both the 200- and 400-meter dashes, Tietz in the 300-meter hurdles finals, and both the girls 800-meter and 1600-meter relay teams vying for podium finishes.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 6 of 82



**Jumping standout Ethan Kroll during State long jump.** (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)



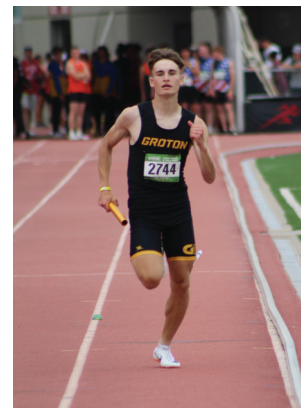
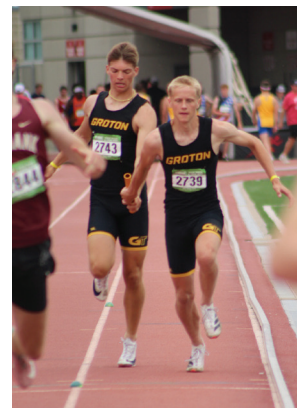
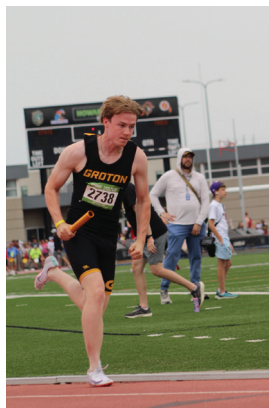
**Senior Kegan Tracy qualifies in the 400m race finals.** (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)



**Senior Jaydon Schwan receives 3rd place in the 3200m run.** (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)



**Groton Area 4x200 relay sets a personal record and qualifies for the Saturday finals. L-R McKenna Tietz, Kella Tracy, Taryn Traphagen and Makenna Krause.** (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)



**Boys 4x200m relay Lincoln Krause, Jordan Schwan, Ethan Kroll, and Ryder Schwan.** (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 7 of 82

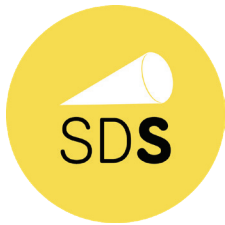


**Groton Area 4x400 relay. L-R Jace Johnson, Jordan Schwan, Kyson Kucker, and Ethan Kroll. (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)**



**Kyson Kucker, Kucker hands off to Jordan Schwan, Ethan Kroll, Kroll hands off to Jace Johnson. (Photos courtesy Bruce Babcock)**





## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Trump 'slush fund' echoes scorned 19th-century spoils system, academics say

BY: JONATHAN SHORMAN

President Donald Trump's extraordinary \$1.776 billion fund to pay off allies and others who say they have been wronged by past administrations has drawn widespread condemnation by opponents, including some Republicans, who characterize it as an act of brazen corruption.

But the Trump administration's push to reward its supporters also harkens back to an earlier era of American cronyism, experts say, while expanding the frontiers of political favoritism.

From the early years of the United States until well into

the 19th century, a spoils system dominated the federal government. Presidents handed out jobs to supporters, filling the bureaucracy with workers who had demonstrated loyalty to the administration in power.

Trump's political idol, President Andrew Jackson, replaced large numbers of federal officials after his 1829 inauguration, for instance. One appointee to a role at the Port of New York made out with more than \$1 million, valued at tens of millions today.

The comparison isn't exact. The spoils system was associated with the distribution of government jobs to political allies, a practice called patronage. Trump's new fund would instead deliver taxpayer dollars directly to favored individuals.

Yet, academics who have studied the spoils system and the presidency see parallels between the past and present — with a desire to reward allies and build allegiance at the center of it all.

"It seems to me that may be the common element here," said Sidney Shapiro, a professor of law at Wake



**A mob of Trump supporters gathers in front of the U.S. Capitol Building on Jan. 6, 2021 in Washington, DC. An "anti-weaponization" fund was created by the Department of Justice in May 2026 that could make payments to those who took part in the Jan. 6 attack.** (Photo by Jon Cherry/Getty Images)

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 9 of 82

Forest University who wrote before the 2024 election that Trump wanted to reinstate the spoils system. "It appears President Trump is thinking about using the fund to reward people unfairly punished, but I think in his mind it's unfairly punished because they were trying to support him."

## Five-member board to be named by Trump

The Department of Justice announced the "anti-weaponization fund," which critics call a "slush fund," on May 18 as it moved to settle a lawsuit Trump had filed in his personal capacity against the IRS over the leaking of his tax returns by a former agency contractor.

The suit placed Trump in the extremely unusual position of effectively negotiating with himself because he has erased the DOJ's post-Watergate tradition of independence from the White House.

Even before the settlement, the Justice Department under Trump had taken actions that would have been unheard of in other recent administrations. For instance, federal prosecutors have brought a case against former FBI Director James Comey and tried to pursue criminal charges against New York Democratic Attorney General Letitia James.

The DOJ has also obtained an indictment against the Southern Poverty Law Center, a frequent critic of GOP politicians.

Trump's settlement agreement provides for the creation of the fund overseen by a board of five members chosen by acting Attorney General Todd Blanche, who previously served as Trump's personal attorney. Trump can fire the members for any reason.

The fund's board will have the power to make decisions about payments, as well as issue formal apologies. Claims submitted to the fund must be processed by Dec. 1, 2028, prior to the end of Trump's term.

## Jan. 6 rioters line up

A bevy of Trump supporters and hangers-on have said they plan to apply for compensation. They include individuals who stormed the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, disrupting Congress' certification of President Joe Biden's Electoral College victory. Trump previously pardoned rioters when he took office in January 2025.

Former Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrio, who was convicted of seditious conspiracy and sentenced to 22 years in prison before Trump pardoned him, predicted on a recent podcast that a "lot of J6ers are going to spend their money on firearms."

Trump has cast the fund as an act of magnanimity on his part because the settlement agreement doesn't include a monetary payout to him.

However, Blanche also signed a document barring any additional scrutiny of the president's past tax history, a move that shields him from audits. The New York Times and ProPublica reported in 2024 that Trump could have owed \$100 million if he lost an audit battle over improper tax breaks.

"I gave up a lot of money in allowing the just announced Anti-Weaponization Fund to go forward. I could have settled my case, including the illegal release of my Tax Returns and the equally illegal BREAK IN of Mar-a-Lago, for an absolute fortune," Trump wrote on Truth Social, referring to the FBI search of his Florida residence in 2022.

"Instead, I am helping others, who were so badly abused by an evil, corrupt, and weaponized Biden Administration, receive, at long last, JUSTICE!"

Trump has adopted a "patrimonial" approach to governing, James Pfiffner, a professor emeritus at George Mason University who has studied the presidency, wrote in an email to States Newsroom.

Benefits, like federal contracts, go to those who are loyal, Pfiffner wrote, and the government is treated as if it were a family business and the state's resources were his personal property.

The "anti-weaponization fund" represents an extension of that approach, Pfiffner wrote, but also goes further than past presidents. He wrote that he could think of no past precedents in the modern presidency for such a blatant use of taxpayer money to potentially reward loyalists.

"At least in the spoils system, the people hired by the government were working and presumably doing their jobs," Pfiffner wrote. "The beneficiaries of this fund have done nothing to earn their benefits, and

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 10 of 82**

presumably some will be rewarded for having committed crimes to overturn the 2020 election.”

Congress began curbing the spoils system after the 1881 assassination of President James Garfield by a spurned job seeker.

Over the next two decades, many federal positions were moved into a civil service system. While the federal government still includes some 4,000 political appointees today, the vast majority of the bureaucracy is staffed by civil servants.

## **Critics and defenders in Congress**

But it's unclear whether Congress will block Trump's fund, despite an intense backlash.

Anger among Republican senators has stalled action on budget legislation funding immigration enforcement, which Democrats would have used to force votes on amendments to block the fund. Democrats have introduced multiple bills aimed at halting it.

“Congress cannot stand by while Trump turns the federal government into a political operation for his friends and cronies,” Sen. Michael Bennet, a Colorado Democrat, said in a statement.

Obstacles exist to congressional action. Even if Republicans who control both chambers voted with Democrats, Trump could veto bills passed placing restrictions on the fund, which would require two-thirds majorities in the House and Senate to override.

And some GOP lawmakers have defended the fund.

On May 21, Sen. Tommy Tuberville, an Alabama Republican, objected to a unanimous consent request by Sen. Alex Padilla, a California Democrat, to pass a bill that would prohibit payments to Jan. 6 rioters.

“Thankfully, acting Attorney General Todd Blanche and the Trump Department of Justice established a standard and lawful process to hear from American citizens who suffered lawfare or weaponization under the Biden administration,” Tuberville said on the Senate floor.

Lawsuits have been filed challenging the fund and how it's structured. Two police officers who defended the Capitol on Jan. 6 have sued, warning that rioters could use the money to organize.

## **Fund blocked temporarily**

On Friday, a federal judge in Virginia ordered the Trump administration to halt work on the fund for at least two weeks while she considers ordering a lengthier pause.

The decision came in a lawsuit brought by a former federal prosecutor fired by the DOJ and a California professor who was charged but acquitted of assaulting a federal officer after protesting an immigration raid.

Legal advocacy groups also argue Congress didn't intend for federal money to be used for these kinds of payoffs.

“Another commonality is we the taxpayers are funding both,” Shapiro, the Wake Forest professor, said of the spoils system and the Trump fund. “We certainly fund the jobs that people have and now we're funding this fund.”

*Jonathan Shorman covers democracy for States Newsroom. Based in Kansas City, his coverage area includes elections and voting rights, fights over state and federal power, civil liberties and more. An alumnus of the University of Kansas, he previously covered politics for The Kansas City Star.*



## Lawsuit challenges South Dakota's new ban on abortion-pill advertising

BY: MEGHAN O'BRIEN

South Dakota's new law criminalizing the providing and advertising of abortion pills and other abortion-related items faces a lawsuit alleging the advertising prohibition is unconstitutional.

A New York-based nonprofit, Mayday Health, and a Democratic former South Dakota lawmaker, Nancy Turbak Berry, filed the lawsuit Friday in federal court against South Dakota's Republican governor and attorney general.

The state's Republican-dominated Legislature passed the bill in March, and Gov. Larry Rhoden signed it into law that same month. It's scheduled to take effect July 1.

South Dakota already had a law that bans abortions except when necessary "to preserve the life of the pregnant female." The new law says no person may knowingly dispense, distribute, sell or advertise an article or thing designed, adapted or intended to produce an abortion. The ban also covers any article, instrument, substance, drug, medicine or thing that is "advertised or described in a manner calculated to lead another to use or apply it for producing an abortion."

Violations are felonies punishable by up to two years in prison and a \$4,000 fine. The law also gives the state attorney general authority to recover civil penalties of \$10,000 per violation.

The lawsuit alleges it's unconstitutional to prohibit advertising that's protected by the free speech guarantees in the First Amendment.

Turbak Berry previously led a group supporting a failed 2024 ballot question that would have restored abortion rights in the state. The lawsuit alleges her free speech is deterred by the new law. As an example, the lawsuit says the prohibition on advertising would prevent her from wearing a sweatshirt that features Mayday's mission and web address.

"Unless this court grants relief, Turbak will be deterred from wearing the sweatshirt, and thereby deterred from engaging in lawsuit First Amendment-protected speech," the lawsuit says.

Turbak Berry responded to South Dakota Searchlight with a written statement.

"Apparently, our state government isn't satisfied with controlling women's reproductive organs — they even want to control our eyes and ears," Turbak Berry said. "They even want control over what women in South Dakota can see and hear. It's outrageous."

Gov. Rhoden responded to the lawsuit in a post on X, formerly Twitter.

"If Mayday Health and the abortion lobby want to sue us for defending unborn life, bring it on."

State Attorney General Marty Jackley issued a written statement.

"The U.S. Supreme Court has made it clear that states have the right to protect life," Jackley said. "As with Mayday's previous unsuccessful lawsuit, I will defend innocent life."

Mayday previously engaged in a legal battle with Jackley over advertisements Mayday placed at gas stations around the state saying "Pregnant? Don't want to be?" and directing people to Mayday's website,



**A new South Dakota law unconstitutionally bars Nancy Turbak Berry from wearing this sweatshirt advertising abortion-pill information, she alleges in a lawsuit.** (Image from court documents)

which includes information on obtaining abortion pills.

Mayday Health posted signs like this one at gas stations around South Dakota in December 2025 as part of a campaign to spread awareness about the availability of abortion pills. (Courtesy of Mayday Health).jpeg

Mayday Health posted signs like this one at gas stations around South Dakota in December 2025 as part of a campaign to spread awareness about the availability of abortion pills. (Courtesy of Mayday Health)

In dueling state and federal lawsuits, Jackley accused the nonprofit of violating South Dakota's abortion ban. Mayday claimed its advertisements were protected under the First Amendment. The lawsuits ended with a settlement that included Mayday removing the ads.

In 2023, medication abortions accounted for 63% of abortions in the country, according to data from the Guttmacher Institute. The drugs mifepristone and misoprostol, commonly used in medication abortions, are also listed on the World Health Organizations' list of essential medicines.

The U.S. Supreme Court decided earlier this month to preserve telehealth access to mifepristone until after the U.S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals has ruled on the merits of the lawsuit Louisiana v. Food and Drug Administration. Louisiana, where state officials sued the FDA in October, is arguing that a rule allowing telehealth access to mifepristone undermines the state's abortion ban.

*EDITOR'S NOTE: South Dakota Searchlight has engaged attorney Jim Leach, who represents the plaintiffs in the lawsuit, in a past legal matter.*

*Meghan O'Brien is the audio reporter for South Dakota Searchlight where she covers the state government and its impact on South Dakotans. She's previously reported in Nebraska with a focus on health care and rural communities across the state.*

## Forest Service and state of South Dakota sign agreement to work together on forest management

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

The U.S. Forest Service announced Friday that it has signed a five-year agreement to work with the state of South Dakota to carry out projects on national forest and adjacent land, possibly including timber harvesting, prescribed burning, forest thinning, grazing, and habitat and watershed restoration.

Meanwhile, a former national forest employee said he suspects the agreement will allow the Forest Service to lean more on the state's help to maintain logging levels.

The shared stewardship agreement is between the state Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources and the Forest Service. It follows similar agreements in other states and comes after President Donald



**A May 2024 view of the Black Hills National Forest in South Dakota.** (Photo by Seth Tupper/South Dakota Searchlight)



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 13 of 82

Trump's executive order last year calling for an "immediate expansion" of American timber production.

Following the initial five-year term, the agreement may be extended in increments of three years. It does not authorize any project by itself. Specific projects involving money, services, property or other resources would require separate agreements and approvals.

Forest Service Chief Tom Schultz said in a press release the agreement is meant to align state and federal priorities, including work to reduce wildfire threats and address insect and disease outbreaks.

"With this agreement, we are aligning federal and state priorities to accelerate active management in high risk areas," Schultz said.

Gov. Larry Rhoden said in the press release that the agreement reinforces the state's collaboration with the Forest Service to "reduce wildfire risk, improve rangeland health, and support the state's forest products industry."

Dave Mertz, a retired Black Hills National Forest natural resource officer, said in an interview with South Dakota Searchlight that he suspects the agreement's purpose is to maintain or increase timber production by relying more on the state. The Trump administration fired thousands of Forest Service workers nationwide during Department of Government Efficiency cuts last year, although lawsuits resulted in rehiring.

"I'm suspicious that the primary reason for it is to help the Forest Service get more trees cut," Mertz said.

In recent years, a debate has raged about the quantity of trees large enough to serve as sawtimber in South Dakota's Black Hills National Forest. Environmental and conservation groups have argued that decades of mountain pine beetle infestations and large wildfires have reduced the number of trees to a level that requires reduced logging for sustainability. Timber companies have argued that the forest can sustain a higher level of logging.

The Forest Service determines areas available for logging and sells the rights to cut trees. Timber sales in the Black Hills National Forest declined from 2021 to 2024 but increased last year. The roughly 8.4 million cubic feet of timber sold last year in the forest was still far lower than a peak of 25.3 million sold in 2008.

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

## **Trump ordered limits on voting by mail. The Postal Service is moving to make states comply.**

**BY: JONATHAN SHORMAN**

The U.S. Postal Service on Friday took its first major step to carry out President Donald Trump's executive order restricting voting by mail, proposing a rule that would require states to submit lists of voters before mailing ballots.

But the proposed rule appears to smooth over some of the rougher edges of the executive order, which has been condemned by Democratic state officials as an intrusion on their constitutional authority to administer elections.

"The proposed rule would apply uniform standards for the mailing of absentee ballots to and from voters, which the Postal Service understands will facilitate the faithful execution of federal law," the Postal Service said in a document posted on the Federal Register website.

The executive order faces at least five lawsuits. Experts on the Postal Service have also warned that Trump's attempt to assert authority over the agency threatens its decades-long record of independence.

The order remains in effect for now ahead of the November midterm elections. A federal judge on Thursday declined to block it after finding the federal government had taken few steps to implement it. However, with Friday's proposed rule, that's beginning to change.



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 14 of 82

## Some exemptions

Trump's March 31 order directed the postmaster general, who leads the Postal Service, to propose a rule that would block states from sending ballots through the mail except to voters on lists provided by the state to the Postal Service. In effect, states would be blocked from allowing residents to vote by mail unless they provide their names to the federal government.

The proposed rule fulfills that directive, but it exempts overseas and military voters — a concession that wasn't included in the executive order. Voting by citizens who are abroad and in the military is regulated by the federal Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act. The law sets strict deadlines for states to send ballots.

The rule also doesn't require states to submit voter lists for primary elections.

"Primary elections largely involve political parties selecting nominees through their chosen procedures, rather than direct election of federal officials, and thus implicate different considerations that bear on the necessity for these provisions," the Postal Service said in a document outlining the proposed rule.

The Postal Service document emphasizes that states retain full control of who gets to vote by mail or alter the information.

The proposed rule creates data reporting standards that "can provide information regarding the sending of ballots through the mails that would be available for use by law enforcement," the document says.

The Postal Service plans to formally publish the rule on June 2.



**The U.S. Postal Service on May 29, 2026 proposed a rule to carry out President Donald Trump's executive order restricting voting by mail.** (Photo by Jane Norman/States Newsroom)

## Noncitizen voting

Trump and administration officials have framed the executive order as a way to combat noncitizen voting, which occurs very rarely. Trump has long attacked mail voting, though he has voted by mail multiple times.

"I think this will help a lot with elections," Trump said when he signed the order.

But opponents of the executive order say it violates the U.S. Constitution, which gives states the responsibility of running elections and allows Congress to pass regulations. The order represents an attempt by Trump to unilaterally control elections, they say.

After a federal judge in Washington, D.C., declined to block the order, another federal judge in Massachusetts will hold a hearing on June 2 in a separate lawsuit challenging the directive brought by Democratic attorneys general.

"Widespread chaos and confusion is the goal of this executive order," Cliff Albright, co-founder of Black Voters Matter, said in a statement.

Jonathan Shorman covers democracy for States Newsroom. Based in Kansas City, his coverage area includes elections and voting rights, fights over state and federal power, civil liberties and more. An alumnus of the University of Kansas, he previously covered politics for The Kansas City Star.

## Trump's 'anti-weaponization' fund blocked for now by federal judge

BY: JONATHAN SHORMAN

A federal judge on Friday temporarily blocked the Trump administration from moving forward with a fund that opponents fear will be used to pay off the president's political allies.

Judge Leonie Brinkema in the Eastern District of Virginia issued a brief order halting the Department of Justice, the Treasury Department and other high-ranking administration officials from taking any additional actions to create the fund or make payments from it.

The order came in a lawsuit filed by a former federal prosecutor and a California professor. The plaintiffs are represented by the legal advocacy groups Democracy Forward and Common Cause. The lawsuit is part of a flurry of legal challenges against the fund.

The Justice Department on May 18 announced a nearly \$1.8 billion "anti-weaponization fund" that will make payments to individuals who believe they have been wronged by past administrations. The fund came as part of a settlement agreement in a lawsuit filed by President Donald Trump over the leaking of his tax return information by a former IRS contractor.

Trump's settlement agreement provides for the creation of the fund overseen by a board of five members chosen by acting Attorney General Todd Blanche, who previously served as Trump's personal attorney. Trump can fire the members for any reason.

Brinkema, a President Bill Clinton appointee, took no position on the legality of the fund in her order. She wrote that her order is to ensure no money is "irreversibly disbursed" while the plaintiffs' motion for a temporary restraining order is pending.

She also set a hearing for June 12 — likely ensuring the fund will remain blocked for at least the next two weeks.

The plaintiffs in the lawsuit include Andrew Floyd, a former federal Jan. 6 case prosecutor who was fired by the DOJ in June 2025, and Joseph Caravello, a California university professor who was charged with felony assault on a federal officer after protesting an immigration raid last summer. A jury acquitted Caravello in April.

The nine-count lawsuit alleges in part the fund violates the plaintiffs' First and Fifth Amendment rights, and violates the authority of Congress.

"Since its inception, this fund has been on a collision course with the United States Constitution," their complaint says.



**President Donald Trump gives a speech at the World Economic Forum on Jan. 21, 2026 in Davos, Switzerland.** (Photo by Chip

Somodevilla/Getty Images)



Trump has written on social media that the fund will help those “who were so badly abused by an evil, corrupt, and weaponized Biden Administration” receive justice.

*Ashley Murray contributed to this report.*

*Jonathan Shorman covers democracy for States Newsroom. Based in Kansas City, his coverage area includes elections and voting rights, fights over state and federal power, civil liberties and more. An alumnus of the University of Kansas, he previously covered politics for The Kansas City Star.*

## Tense hearing on uranium drilling tests new language-translation law before its effective date

**Proceeding is on hold during lawsuit alleging insufficient support for Lakota interpretation**

**BY: MEGHAN O'BRIEN**

A new state law requiring language translation services for some government proceedings — like a contentious recent hearing for a permit application to drill for uranium in the Black Hills — has had its first test drive, even though it doesn't take effect until later this summer.

The law requires the decision-making office or board in an administrative contested case to hire an interpreter or translator when a witness or party needs it.

“Any proceeding that's open to the public would receive or have those translation services available at no cost to the participants, so it would be covered by the state of South Dakota,” said Rep. Erik Muckey, D-Sioux Falls, the law's sponsor.

The law was adopted in March, and it takes effect July 1.

Meanwhile, a decision on a permit application for a company to explore underground for uranium in the southern Black Hills near Edgemont has been pending since 2024.

Dozens of people have signed on as official project opponents, making the matter a contested case. Some have expressed concerns about potential water contamination they said could result from underground drilling, while others have said the proposed drilling site is too close to Craven Canyon — which is lined with ancient Native American petroglyphs and is used for prayer and ceremonies.

Some of those people speak Lakota, the language of tribes in western South Dakota. Elizabeth Lone Eagle, a project opponent, submitted a request for Lakota interpretation services last August and listed five interested parties in the case as Lakota first-language speakers.

Despite not being legally required to provide a translator since the new law hasn't taken effect yet, Board



**The South Dakota Board of Minerals and Environment conducts a hearing about a uranium exploration permit application on May 19, 2026, at the Mueller Civic Center in Hot Springs, South Dakota.** (Photo by Meghan O'Brien/South Dakota Searchlight)



# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 17 of 82**

Chairman Glenn Blumhardt referenced the new law during a March meeting, when the board was voting to overturn an earlier decision by Hearing Chairman Bob Morris, who had denied interpretation services.

"Is this bill currently in effect? The answer is no," Blumhardt said. "The point is whether or not this is applicable at this time."

The board voted to provide translation services as outlined in the law.

## **What the law says**

Muckey introduced the legislation known as Helen's Law, for Helen Red Feather, one of five Lakota first-language speakers who requested Lakota interpretation services.

"This isn't just about this particular case and trying to tip the odds of this particular instance, but to make it a fair process for this case and virtually every case going forward," Muckey said. "I'm just grateful that the department saw that need and was willing to change course to follow the spirit of a new law that was soundly supported."

The state will pay for interpretation services needed during a proceeding. People involved in a contested case can pay for translation services for processes like discovery and document translation. If they're successful in the case, they can recover those costs.

Oral interpretation slowed the pace of the uranium drilling permit hearing.

"But I don't know that I was necessarily concerned about that when we were drafting the law," Muckey said. "The concern was, are we leaving people out of the law? And the answer to that was yes. And so we had to find a way to correct that."

Though the bill was inspired by Red Feather's need for translation throughout the case's proceedings, it's not just for Lakota speakers, Muckey said.

"We're also talking about folks who are hard of hearing. They might be blind, and they might need those types of interpretive or translation services, and you have a litany of other languages that are spoken in South Dakota," he said. "We can't turn people away from due process of law."

State officials offered to pay \$61.88 per hour for interpreters during the uranium drilling contested case hearing. The Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources said the rate would be split between the two interpreters who were hired, "so only one interpreter is being paid at a time."

"I was insulted," by the rate, said Alex White Plume, an Oglala Sioux tribal member, and one of the two interpreters hired.

"I did it anyway," he said. "I did it because there was a need and it was important for the ones to hear exactly what it's like in their own language so they can have a clearer understanding."

Lakota has experienced a decline in speakers as an effect of colonization, and because of forced attendance at boarding schools that required Native American students to speak English in the 1800s and much of the next century. But White Plume said most of the people in his area still speak their own language.

"I grew up speaking Lakota, and English is my second language," he said. "The vast majority of the members of my community will still speak Lakota, and it's funny to hear somebody come speak white-man language amongst us, cause it sounds funny."

Translating for Lakota speakers in the audience was an honor, White Plume said.

"That was really important for the Lakota speakers to really hear their language and get a clear understanding about what the legal jargon was that the lawyers were speaking," he said.

## **Hearing started without interpretation**

The uranium drilling permit hearing started May 18 in Hot Springs and was scheduled for five days. On the first day, state officials began the hearing without a Lakota interpreter, despite agreeing to provide one.

A state Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources staff member said potential interpreters had conflicts of interest or scheduling conflicts that prevented them from accepting the role.

After project opponents complained about the lack of an interpreter, the state entered into a contract with White Plume and Leola One Feather to interpret the second and following days of the hearing.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 18 of 82

When some portions of the hearing's second day proceeded without Lakota interpretation, project opponents objected.

"This is institutionalized racism, and you are promoting it," Elizabeth Lone Eagle said, standing from her seat in the audience.

She said the board was "forbidding" the translator, One Feather, "from doing her job, because you want your white colonizer sanitized way of doing things." The audience cheered, and the board did not respond.

On the third day, the hearing was adjourned indefinitely after Lone Eagle filed a federal lawsuit against the board, the state's Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Clean Nuclear Energy and state employees involved in evaluating the permit application, alleging violations of due process. Lone Eagle filed the lawsuit herself, without representation by an attorney.

Lone Eagle, along with six other people, including five described as Lakota first-language speakers, are listed as plaintiffs. The suit alleges "systematic, ongoing, and deliberate denial of meaningful participation to Lakota first-language speaking" project opponents.

A spokesman for the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources told South Dakota Searchlight "the Board has postponed the hearing pending resolution of the federal case. Because the Department is a party to the litigation, we are not able to comment on the lawsuit."

Last week, a federal judge denied Lone Eagle's request for a temporary restraining order that would have stopped the permit hearing's proceedings, but the lawsuit remains active.

*Meghan O'Brien is the audio reporter for South Dakota Searchlight where she covers the state government and its impact on South Dakotans. She's previously reported in Nebraska with a focus on health care and rural communities across the state.*

## Flesh-eating screwworms head for American livestock

BY: KEVIN HARDY

Southern states are bracing for a potential invasion of the New World screwworm that could disrupt livestock markets and raise already high meat prices.

So far, the parasite has yet to land in the United States, but it has been spreading across Mexico and Central America. Previously eradicated from the United States in the 1960s, the fly can infest livestock, pets, wildlife and in rare cases, humans. The parasites are named for their larvae, which burrow into living flesh like a screw, causing severe tissue damage and sometimes death.

With multiple cases reported within 100 miles of the U.S.-Mexico border, the federal government has already banned the import of live cattle from Mexico, compounding the shortage of domestic beef. State and federal officials also have created new monitoring, testing and quarantine protocols even as the feds put in place measures to sterilize millions of flies — including a \$750 million new facility



**A pinned specimen of a full-grown New World screwworm fly is shown in this image. Federal and state officials are preparing for a potential invasion from the flesh-eating parasite that could disrupt livestock markets.** (Photo courtesy of Michael Miller/Texas A&M AgriLife)

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 19 of 82

that will produce sterile flies.

"It's going to be very challenging, I think, at this point to keep it out of the United States," said Dr. Samantha Holeck, state veterinarian with the New Mexico Livestock Board, which regulates the livestock industry.

Beef prices are already at record highs, with federal data showing the average price of ground beef at \$6.90 per pound this month. That's a 77% increase since January 2020, when ground beef stood at \$3.89 per pound, Yahoo Finance reported.

Years of drought, increased operating costs and other supply disruptions have pushed ranchers to liquidate their herds to the smallest level in 75 years, according to the American Farm Bureau Federation. Despite the drop in supply, demand remains strong, which has pushed many ranchers to feed cattle to record-high weights.

Beef prices are unlikely to fall, because it takes time to grow herds and increase production, said David Anderson, professor and extension specialist in livestock and food product marketing at Texas A&M University. He said beef producers appear well prepared to fight a domestic screwworm invasion, which many view as an inevitability.

"I think we will re-eradicate it. I think it just depends on how much time it takes us to do that," he said.

But the market has already been disrupted by the ban on live Mexican cattle imports, which traditionally occupy American pastures and feedlots before going to slaughter.

"We certainly are feeling the consequences of our policy response to fears of screwworms," he said.

## 'A long-term response'

Last week, the New Mexico Department of Agriculture launched a new website in collaboration with several agencies to provide a single source of information about the New World screwworm, including how to identify infestations, protect people and animals, and report suspected cases.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has approved emergency use of several medications for prevention and treatment of the parasite. Those include ivermectin, the drug that many people hoarded for off-label use during the coronavirus pandemic, even though the U.S. Food and Drug Administration did not approve its use for the virus. But Holeck said ranchers must be careful about starting preventive medications too early and overusing them.

"While it's important that we have these medications, we need to be very judicious about how we use them, because we don't want to create resistance to these medications and then have them become ineffective," Holeck said.

The fly larvae (maggots) can burrow into the flesh of living animals through wounds as small as a tick bite or in body openings such as the eyes or nose. About the size of a common housefly, the adult screwworm fly has orange eyes, a metallic blue or green body, and three dark stripes along the back.

Holeck said ranchers will need to keep close watch over newborn calves with exposed umbilical cords. They may also have to rethink branding and tagging operations in the case of an infestation, because those wounds can provide an entry for the pests.

New Mexico has distributed test kits to every county extension office for producers and the general public who suspect cases. Holeck said the state has already performed about 30 tests — all were negative.

She noted that the last infestation took more than a decade for American and Mexican officials to eradicate.

"It's not going to be a quick fix," she said. "It's going to be a long-term response, and it's going to require everybody to work together to help get control of it."

## 'We're going to get infested'

To combat the screwworm, the federal government plans to breed sterile male flies and then release them into areas with established populations. The sterilized males will mate with females, which will then lay unfertilized eggs. With females mating only once in their lifespan, officials say this method progressively reduces and eliminates the fly population.



# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 20 of 82**

USDA just broke ground on a \$750 million sterile fly facility in Edinburg, Texas, that aims to produce up to 300 million sterile flies per week when it opens next year. The agency has also invested in sterile fly facilities in Mexico and Panama.

But Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller said those plants won't produce enough sterile flies to eradicate the parasites.

"We're going to get infested," he said. "There's no doubt about it. And USDA knows that. They've already distributed test kits to ranchers and farmers and veterinarians and wildlife personnel up and down the Rio Grande."

"It wouldn't surprise me if we had a case today," he said earlier this month.

Miller said ranchers should have no trouble accessing effective drugs like ivermectin, which he said he still personally takes each week.

He expects the screwworm to cause temporary fluctuations in livestock markets as ranchers treat and quarantine affected herds. Texas is by far the nation's leading beef producer, with more than 12.5 million cattle. For now, he expects an outbreak to affect animals in a few counties along the Southern border.

"Now, if the whole state of Texas gets infected, that's a lot," he said.

In the case of an outbreak, USDA has created monitoring, reporting and quarantine protocols for animals. But because the disease does not create food safety concerns, the agency will not stop any movement of animal products, including meat.

But the infestation could ripple to other animal products, livestock and even pets, officials warn.

While ranchers can hold back cattle during an outbreak, dairies may face immediate losses during infections, according to the University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources.

"Dairy cows produce milk every day that must be processed immediately — if a farm is quarantined or a plant shuts down, milk spoils quickly and has to be dumped," said Daniela Bruno, a dairy adviser with University of California Cooperative Extension.

She said producers should review their insurance coverage and bolster biosecurity against threats such as screwworm and avian flu, which has reemerged in California dairies.

The federal government and states have been preparing for months.

On a February trip to the Rio Grande Valley with Texas Republican Gov. Greg Abbott, USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins said, "We are as prepared as we could possibly be." In March, the secretary told Oklahoma Farm Report that the agency had predicted an invasion into Texas as early as last summer, but she acknowledged the ongoing risk.

"There's no question, when you look at the heat maps, that it is in large proportion moving up," she said of the screwworm.

*Stateline reporter Kevin Hardy can be reached at [khardy@stateline.org](mailto:khardy@stateline.org).*

*This story was originally produced by Stateline, which is part of States Newsroom, a nonprofit news network which includes South Dakota Searchlight, and is supported by grants and a coalition of donors as a 501c(3) public charity.*

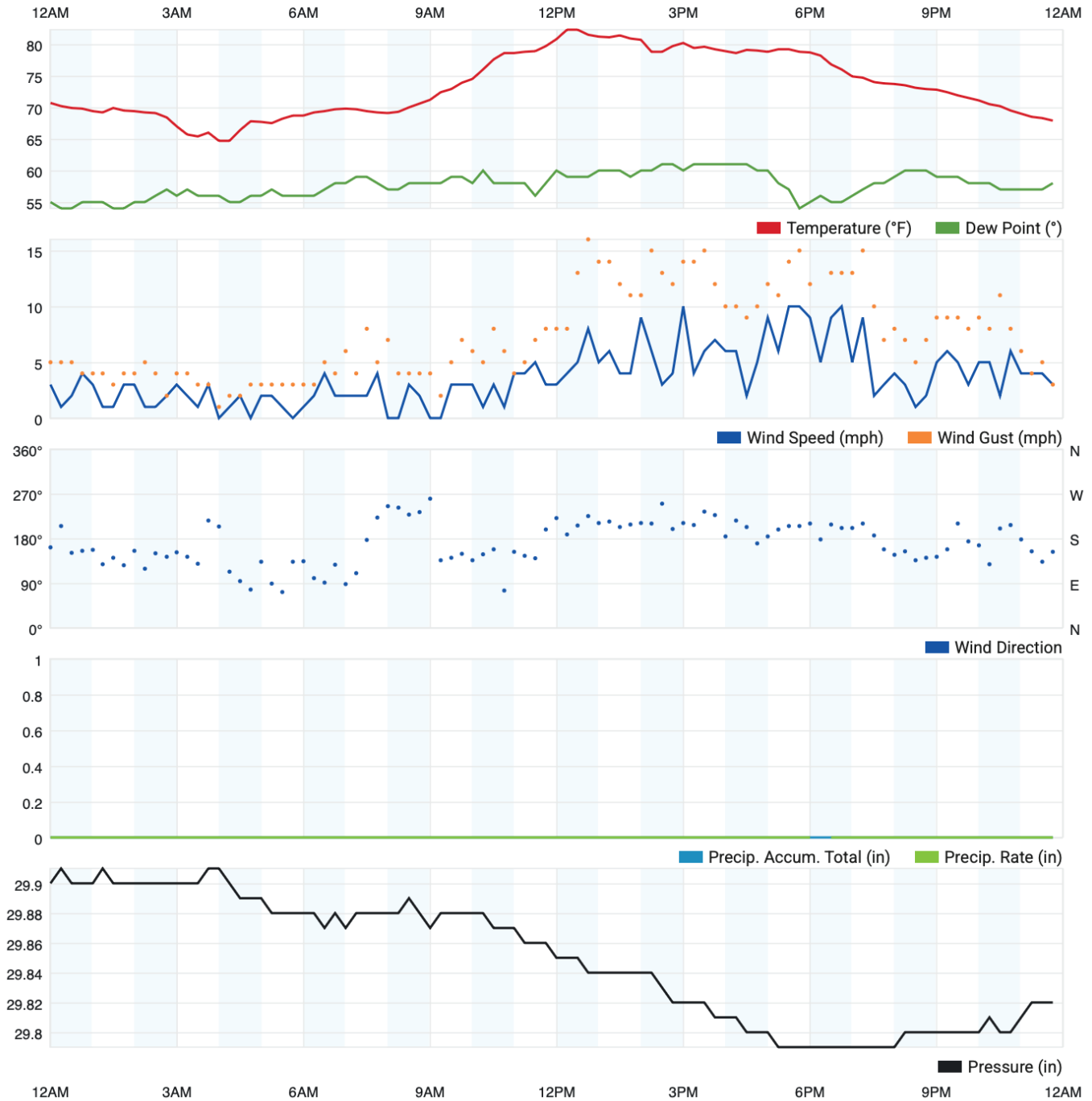
*Kevin Hardy covers business, labor and rural issues for Stateline from the Midwest.*

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 21 of 82

## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

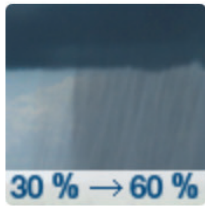
May 29, 2026



# Broton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 22 of 82

Today

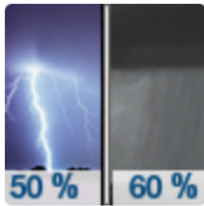


30 % → 60 %

High: 79 °F

Chance  
Showers then  
Showers  
Likely and  
Breezy

Tonight

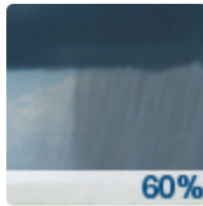


50 % | 60 %

Low: 58 °F

Chance  
T-storms then  
Showers  
Likely

Sunday



60%

High: 81 °F

Showers  
Likely

Sunday Night



80%

Low: 54 °F

Showers

Monday



High: 79 °F

Mostly Sunny

## THREAT ASSESSMENT

### HIGHEST LOCAL RISK

2

WHAT THIS MEANS:  
Scattered Severe Storms  
Possible

**By Saturday Evening  
Into Overnight**

### PRIMARY THREATS



DAMAGING  
WIND GUSTS  
of 60-70 mph



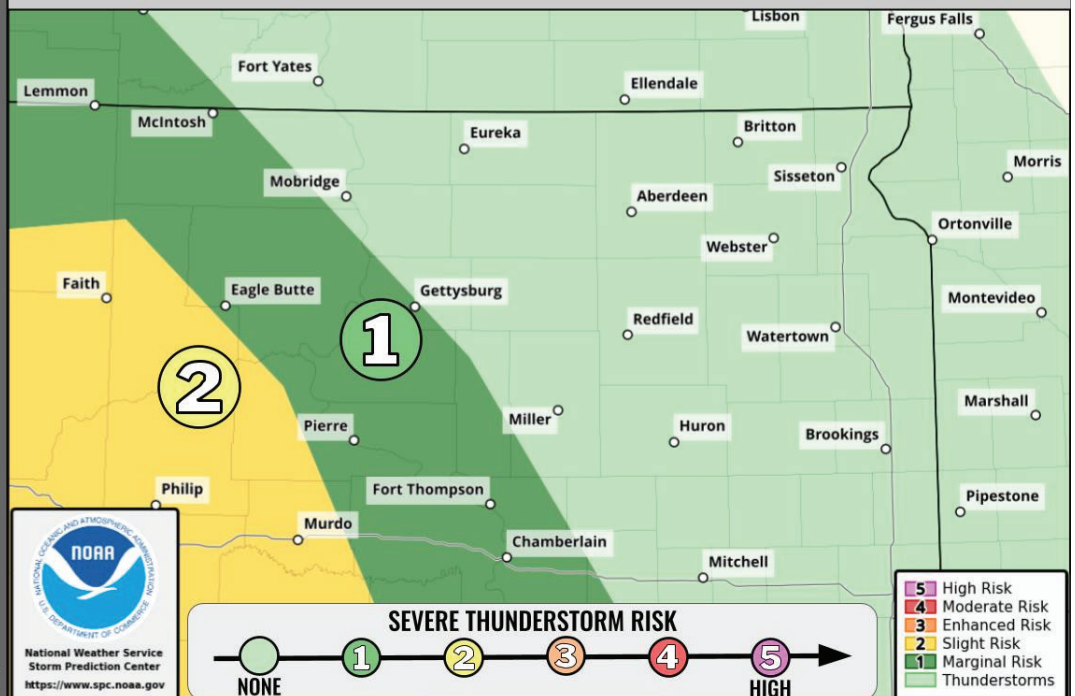
LARGE HAIL of 1"  
in diameter

NWS  
Aberdeen, SD



NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE  
Storm Prediction Center  
<https://www.spc.noaa.gov>

## Marginal To Slight Risk For Severe Storms This Evening, May 30th



There is a slight risk (level 2 out of 5) for severe storms over parts of central and north central SD this evening. A marginal risk (level 1 out of 5) extends farther into central and north central SD. The primary threat will be damaging wind gusts of 60-70 mph, but hail an inch in diameter will also be possible.



# Broton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 23 of 82

## THREAT ASSESSMENT

### HIGHEST LOCAL RISK

1

WHAT THIS MEANS:  
Isolated Severe Storms  
Possible

**Sunday Afternoon**  
**Into Late Sunday**  
**Evening**

### PRIMARY THREATS



DAMAGING  
WIND GUSTS  
of 60 mph

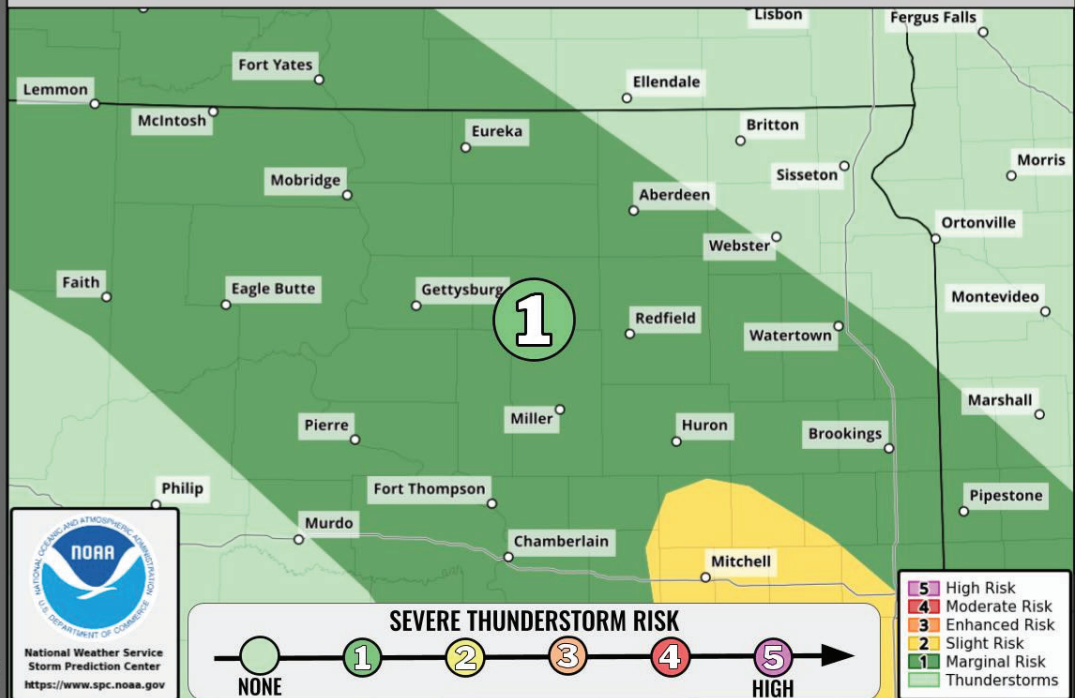


LARGE HAIL of 1"  
in diameter

NWS  
Aberdeen, SD



## Marginal Risk For Severe Storms Sunday, May 31st



## Off And On Rain Chances Through Friday, June 5th

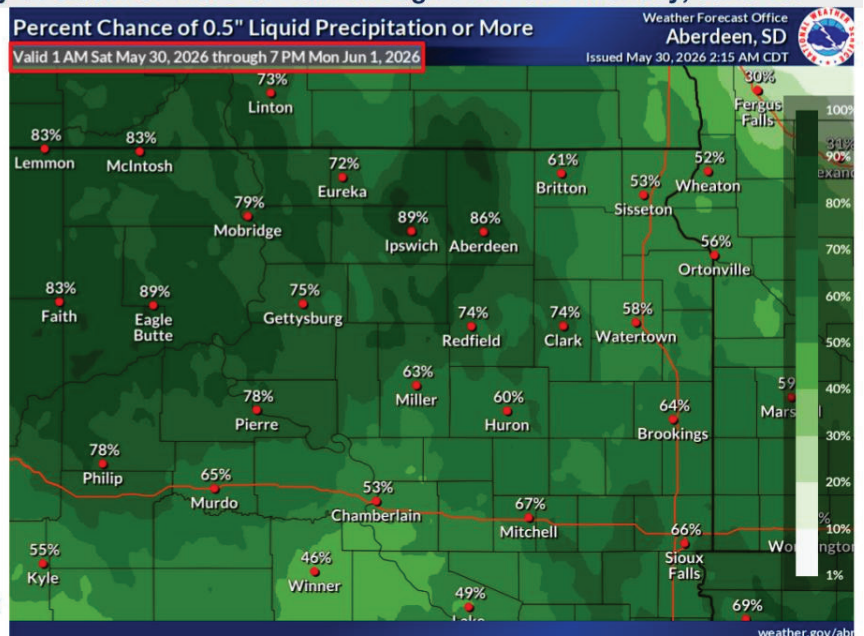
May 30, 2026

3:34 AM

\*\*\*This Map Depicts The Probability Of 0.50in Or More Of Rain through 7 AM CDT Monday, June 1st\*\*\*

- Scattered/numerous showers, with embedded thunderstorms, continuing into tonight.
- There is a **risk of severe thunderstorms Saturday evening into the overnight**, mainly throughout the Missouri River valley region, and west-river, in South Dakota
- Combining** forecast rainfall amounts for today, Sunday and Monday, the resulting **likelihood of a half-inch or more of rainfall** is shown in the image on the right.

For specific precipitation probabilities for your area, check out: <https://www.weather.gov/crh/pqpf?sid=abr>



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 24 of 82

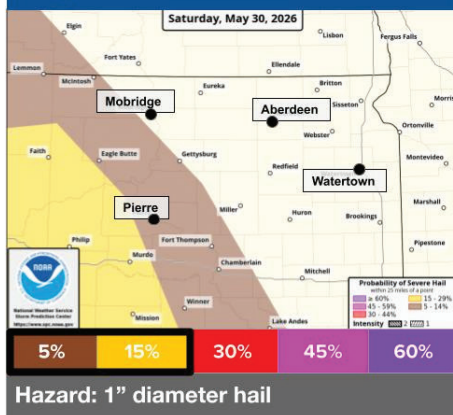


## This Evening's (May 30th) Severe Weather Hazards

May 30, 2026  
3:44 AM CDT

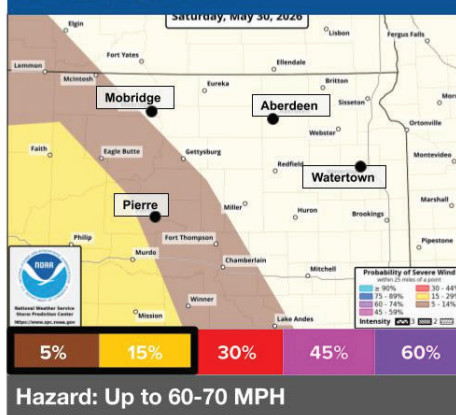
Probabilities of Each Severe Weather Element

### Large Hail



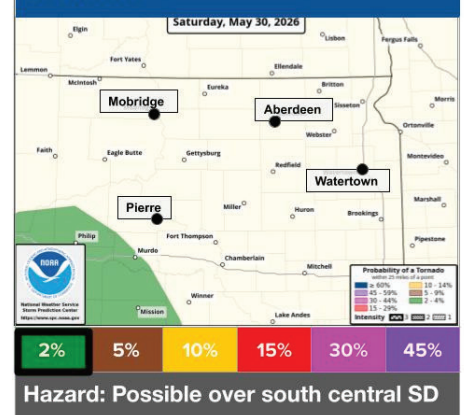
**Potential Impacts:** Damage to vehicles, homes, property.

### Damaging Winds



**Potential Impacts:** Tree damage possible, power line damage possible, minor shingle damage possible, outdoor furniture and loose objects blown around.

### Tornado



**Potential Impacts:** Property damage or destruction.



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

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 25 of 82

## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 83 °F at 12:17 PM**

**Low Temp: 64 °F at 4:05 AM**

**Wind: 16 mph at 12:30 PM**

**Precip: : 0.23**

## Today's Info

Record High: 110 in 1934

Record Low: 27 in 1947

Average High: 76

Average Low: 50

Average Precip in May.: 3.17

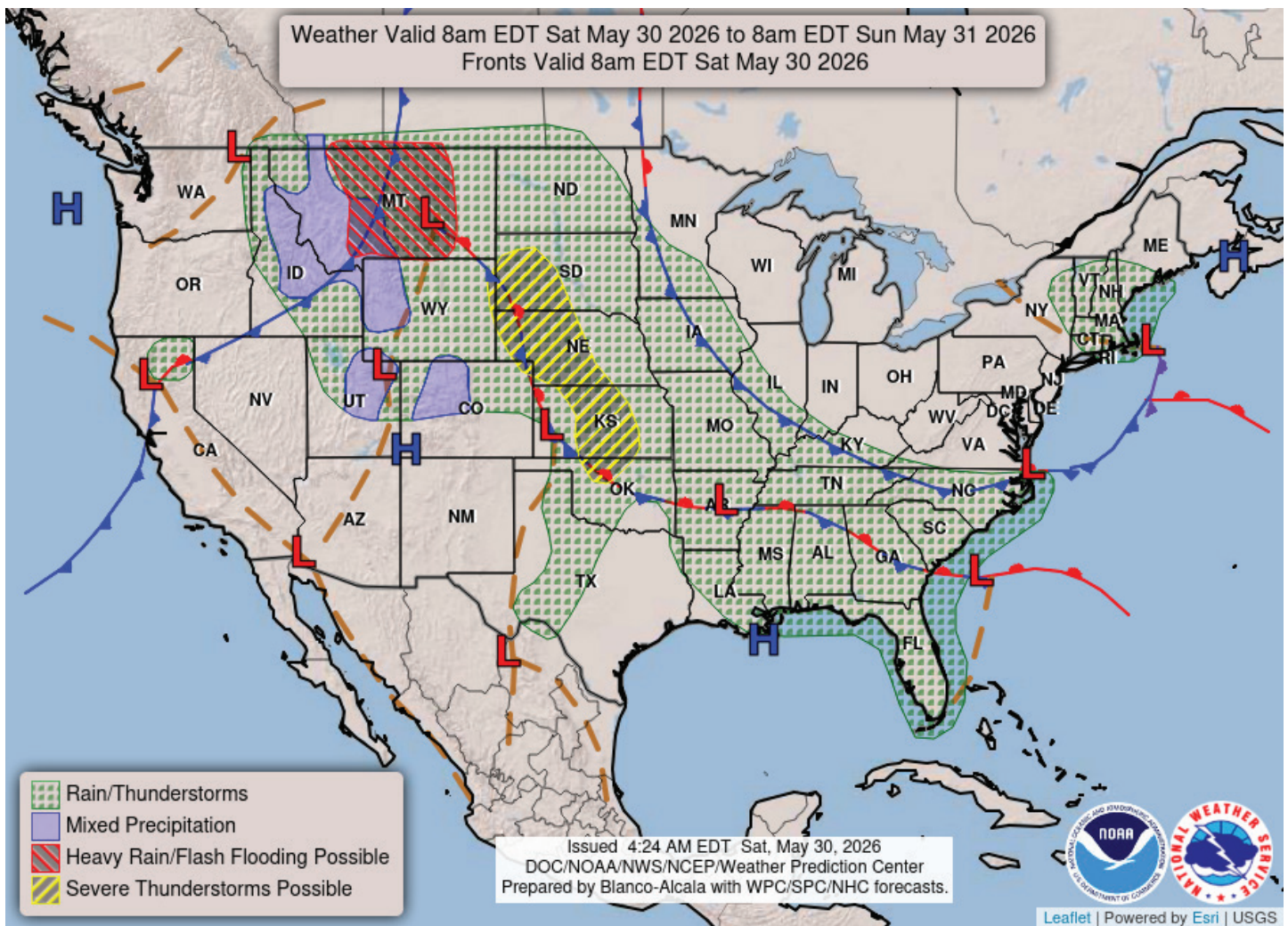
Precip to date in May.: 1.96

Average Precip to date: 7.14

Precip Year to Date: 5.08

Sunset Tonight: 9:11 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:48 am



# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 26 of 82**

## **Today in Weather History**

May 30th, 1998: An F4 tornado moved through southeast South Dakota, killing six people and injuring another 150. The tornado crossed into McCook County at approximately 7:38 pm CST and moved through downtown Spencer at about 7:39 pm CST. The total cost of damage was more than \$18 million, with an additional half million in crop damage.

1879 — A major outbreak of severe weather occurred in Kansas and western Missouri. In Kansas, tornadoes killed eighteen persons at Delphos, and thirty persons at Irving. Two tornadoes struck the town of Irving within a few minutes time virtually wiping the small Kansas community off the map. The second tornado was perhaps two miles wide, and exhibited multiple vortices. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1948 — A railroad bed acting as a dam gave way during a flood along the Columbia River destroying the town of Vanport, OR. The nearly 19,000 residents escaped with little more than the clothes on their backs. (David Ludlum)

1948 — Twenty carloads of glass were needed in Denver, CO, to replace that destroyed by a severe hailstorm. (The Weather Channel)

1987 — Unseasonably warm weather prevailed across the eastern U.S. Eighteen cities, from Virginia to Ohio and Michigan, reported record high temperatures for the date. Afternoon highs of 97 degrees at Baltimore, MD, and Washington, DC, and 98 degrees at Newark, NJ, were records for the date. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 — Memorial Day heralded heavy snow in some of the mountains and higher passes of Wyoming, closing roads in Yellowstone Park. McDonald Pass, MT, was blanketed with eight inches of snow, while the temperature at Miles City, MT, soared to 94 degrees. A "supercell" thunderstorm in west Texas produced baseball size hail in Bailey and Lamb counties, and up to five inches of rain in less than an hour. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — Thunderstorms produced severe weather from the Upper Mississippi Valley to the Upper Ohio Valley during the day. A powerful (F-4) tornado injured three persons and caused a million dollars damage at New Providence, IA. Baseball size hail was reported at Blue Earth, MN. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 — Thunderstorms developing along a warm front spawned fourteen tornadoes in northeastern Texas during the late afternoon and evening hours. The thunderstorms also produced baseball size hail near Marshall, wind gusts to 77 mph at Commerce, and up to five inches of rain. Thunderstorms over southwestern Kansas produced up to six inches of rain. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 27 of 82



Daily Devotion

## How to Love Others

**When we rely on the Holy Spirit, we can love even the unlovable.**

Matthew 22:35-40: 35 One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him,

36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"

37 And He said to him, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND."

38 "This is the great and foremost commandment.

39 "The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'

40 "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

Jesus told the disciples, "In everything ... treat people the same way you want them to treat you" (Matthew 7:12). This is commonly called the Golden Rule, and most of us would probably agree that, in theory, it's a good foundation for a healthy relationship. In practice, though, the principle is tough to live up to consistently.

It's easy to love when others treat us well. But how do we respond when their behavior is hurtful or unpleasant? The truth is, Jesus meant for us to love others all the time, not just when they're lovable. Regardless of their attitude toward us, we are to think about the relationship qualities we value—like loyalty, trust, encouragement, forgiveness, acceptance, and protection—and let these flow from us toward the other person.

When we care for others in the way the Lord prescribes, relationships thrive and deepen. Loving as Jesus commanded is impossible on our own, but the good news is, we don't have to do it alone. The Holy Spirit lives in us and empowers us to love in ways we never could by ourselves.

Consider how you hope others will treat you—with kindness, patience, and grace. Ask God to show you one relationship where He wants to work through you today, and trust Him to provide what you need to love as Jesus loves.

*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 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 28 of 82

## The Groton Independent

Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

### Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.2% Sales Tax

- ☐ Black & White.....\$52.00/year
- ☐ Colored.....\$80.00/year
- ☐ Colored.....\$49.00/6 months
- ☐ E-Weekly\*.....\$35.00/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.....\$16.00
- ☐ 3 Months.....\$28.00
- ☐ 6 Months.....\$38.00
- ☐ 9 Months.....\$52.00
- ☐ 12 Months.....\$60.00

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 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 29 of 82



## WINNING NUMBERS

### MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.29.26

9 25 33 35 42 2

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$1,000,000/year**

NEXT DRAW: 13 Hrs 23 Mins 41  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.29.26

19 24 47 59 65 7

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$346,000,000**

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.27.26

2 27 32 37 48 8

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$28,170,000**

NEXT DRAW: 12 Hrs 23 Mins 41  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.27.26

5 10 22 30 32

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$109,000**

NEXT DRAW: 12 Hrs 38 Mins 41  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.27.26

4 9 43 62 68 3

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 13 Hrs 7 Mins 41  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.27.26

5 14 21 31 51 13

Power Play: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$172,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 13 Hrs 7 Mins 41  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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

### **WHO chief visits epicenter of the Ebola outbreak in eastern Congo as cases outpace response**

By JUSTIN KABUMBA and MARK BANCHEREAU Associated Press

BUNIA, Congo (AP) — The head of the World Health Organization on Saturday visited eastern Congo's Bunia, a city at the heart of an outbreak of a rare type of Ebola, where the virus is spreading faster than the response despite better-organized health facilities and new aid arrivals.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus is expected to visit a treatment center and meet local authorities, health workers and affected families in Bunia.

"The best way to address this is to provide all the necessary support to fight the disease at its epicenter and to continue offering every assistance needed," the WHO's director-general told reporters late Friday.

The health organization said latest official figures showed 906 suspected cases and 223 suspected deaths. Neighboring Uganda has confirmed nine cases and one death, the Ugandan ministry of health said Friday.

The Bundibugyo virus, the current kind of Ebola, has no approved treatment or vaccine.

"This is a difficult situation, and we recognize that. But the Democratic Republic of Congo has faced the Ebola virus many times before. We are confident that it can once again bring this outbreak under control," Tedros said after meeting with Congo's Prime Minister Judith Suminwa Tuluka on Friday.

Medical aid donated by the European Union arrived in Ituri, the heart of Congo's Ebola outbreak, on Thursday. More shipments are expected in the coming days. The U.S. announced \$80 million in additional aid on the same day, bringing its total commitment to more than \$112 million.

Response efforts at Bunia's Rwampara and General hospitals appear more organized, with additional staff, protective gear and medical supplies, though patients continue arriving around the clock, a reporter from The Associated Press observed on Friday.

The response has not kept pace with one of the fastest-spreading outbreaks on record, Doctors Without Borders, or MSF, warned on Saturday.

"Never before has an Ebola outbreak recorded so many cases so soon after its declaration," Dr. Alan Gonzalez, MSF's deputy director of operations, said in a statement. "Nobody knows the true scale and severity of this outbreak."

Gonzalez called for an immediate expansion of testing, faster deployment of aid workers and sustained access for medical supplies.

The dangers faced by health workers have been heightened by anger among residents over the stringent medical protocols for handling the victims' bodies, which clash with local burial rites. Residents have launched at least three attacks against health centers.

Attacks in Ituri by the Allied Democratic Forces, a rebel group allied with the Islamic State group, and a coalition of ethnic militias have also hindered the response.

The illness also has been reported in the Congolese provinces of North Kivu and South Kivu, south of Ituri, where the Rwanda-backed M23 rebel group controls many key cities, including Goma and Bukavu. The rebels have reported two cases.

Uganda and Rwanda have closed their borders, while the Trump administration last week banned entry of non-U.S. passport holders who had recently visited Congo, Uganda or South Sudan.

Border closures and travel bans are "not effective at all" in preventing the spread of the outbreak, Tedros said on Friday.

"Closing borders, as some countries have done, only discourages transparency. The Democratic Republic of Congo is reporting the situation openly and transparently," he said, urging countries to reconsider these measures.

## 'What's the word?' New Jersey voters look for answers about Tom Kean Jr.'s absence from Congress

By MIKE CATALINI Associated Press

WESTFIELD, N.J. (AP) — When New Jersey voters gathered this week to talk with a state lawmaker about affordable housing and new data centers, there was something else on their mind, too. Where is their congressman, Republican Tom Kean Jr.?

"What's the word?" Steve McCabe, an 80-year-old retired lawyer, asked Jon Bramnick, a GOP state senator.

Bramnick had no answer for Kean's unexplained medical absence that has stretched over nearly three months. But he told the audience how Kean hated to miss votes when they served together in the Legislature, even if that meant driving through a snowstorm.

"I said, 'Tom, we should really turn around,'" he recalled.

Now Kean has missed more than 100 votes in Congress, and he has not been spotted in Washington or in his district. It is a political mystery with potentially national consequences: Kean represents a district that is among Democrats' top targets as they try to retake control of Congress.

Kean's office insists he is still running for reelection. He is not facing any challengers in Tuesday's primary while several Democrats are running for their party's nomination.

Harrison Neely, Kean's campaign consultant, said the congressman was dealing with a medical emergency. He promised that Kean would be transparent about the issue and would return to a full schedule "very soon."

"This was an emergency, you don't get to plan these," Neely said. "There's no good timing for this."

To Bramnick, it seems like it must be something serious.

"For him not to be there, that's a big deal," he said.

"We're expecting him back here soon"

Kean represents the 7th Congressional District, a mix of suburbs and small towns. It includes President Donald Trump's Bedminster golf course.

Despite being redrawn after the most recent census in 2021 to become more favorable to Republicans, the district has seesawed between the parties in each of the last two midterm elections. Republican Leonard Lance lost to Democrat Tom Malinowski in 2018. Malinowski lost to Kean in 2022.

Kean's last vote in the House was March 5. Since then his absence has drawn escalating attention.

"We're expecting him back here soon," said House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., recently. "He's going to be fully transparent."

Kean comes from a storied political family. His father served as governor. An ancestor was New Jersey's first leader after the United States declared independence.

The New Jersey Globe, a local political website, said it received a call from Kean this month. He did not explain his condition, only that "my doctors are confident that I'm on the road to a full recovery."

McCabe, the voter who asked Bramnick about Kean, said he wanted an update after reading the news about the congressman's absence.

"I hope he's not sick," he said.

What if Kean steps down?

Bruce Paterson, a 75-year-old retired engineer from Garwood, described himself as a "regular Democrat, not like the crazy Democrats they have today." He attended the town hall with Bramnick and plans to support Kean in the general election.

"I hope he comes back," he said. "I mean, will I vote for him? Probably only because we need a nice balance" in a state otherwise dominated by Democrats.

Another voter asked Bramnick if Kean steps down after Tuesday's primary whether he would accept the Republican nomination for the 7th District. If that were to happen, party leaders in the district's counties would hold a convention to choose a replacement.

Bramnick repeatedly noted Kean is running for reelection and questioned whether his own candidacy would be a good fit in today's Republican Party. While Bramnick has criticized Trump, including during



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 32 of 82

Bramnick's failed campaign for governor last year, Kean has embraced the president and features his endorsement prominently on social media accounts.

"I'm not considered the biggest fan of Donald Trump," Bramnick said. "I don't think that the Republican Party is interested in sending someone to Washington that may vote yes or no depending on how I feel about the issue."

Democrats are waiting in the wings

Some Democrats running in the primary have criticized Kean over the failure to tell constituents about what is going on.

"Tom Kean disappeared from the job," said Michael Roth, a former Small Business Administration official.

Rebecca Bennett, a former Navy pilot also in the race, wished Kean a speedy recovery but criticized his record in Congress, including the battle over money for a new railway tunnel connecting New Jersey with New York City.

"He was nowhere to be found when funding got cut for the Gateway Tunnel, which is a critical infrastructure project in our district," she said.

Candidates Tina Shah, an intensive care unit doctor, and Brian Varela, a marketing agency founder, have also been critical of Kean during debates.

Kean, who has a cash advantage at this point over his potential Democratic opponents, still has time before the November election to connect with voters, said Benjamin Dworkin, director of the Rowan Institute for Public Policy & Citizenship.

"The issue is not going to be that he was out for a hundred plus votes in the spring," he said. "The question is really, how effective is he going to get once he returns?"

## **Congress has taken on Epstein. But lawmakers and survivors are still searching for accountability**

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — For nearly a year, public demand and increasingly outspoken calls from the survivors of Jeffrey Epstein's sexual abuse have driven Congress to mostly set aside party politics and search for accountability.

Yet even after interviews with some of the highest-ranked officials to ever appear before a congressional investigation, including a former president, lawmakers have little to show in terms of criminal culpability for Epstein's crimes or a definitive acknowledgment of government failure.

Democratic Rep. Ro Khanna of California, who sponsored legislation to force the release of case files on Epstein, told The Associated Press he is still asking, "Why there has not been a single investigation of people who have allegedly abused or committed financial crimes?"

Lawmakers hoped to get some answers to those questions during a transcribed interview Friday with Pam Bondi, President Donald Trump's former attorney general who oversaw the release of the files.

But the interview left Democrats fuming at Bondi's decision to defend the Trump administration's handling of that material, as well as her refusal to answer questions about the Republican president's involvement. Democratic lawmakers also singled out Republican Rep. James Comer, chair of the House Oversight Committee, saying he has allowed administration officials to dodge tough questions from Congress.

For survivors of Epstein's abuse, including several who traveled to Washington to confront Bondi, it was a frustrating development at a time when many are weary of pleading their case before government officials. They say the Department of Justice's chaotic release of the files, which included nude photos and personal information of potential victims, has only added to a wider failure by the criminal justice system to believe or protect them.

"The government's refusal to acknowledge the failures that were there have led to so much harm," said Annie Farmer. "And I think whenever you're thinking about things from a perspective of justice or healing, without acknowledgment, it's really hard to move forward."

Push for accountability scrambled political lines

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 33 of 82**

The committee's investigation has been remarkably bipartisan at many moments, with Democrats and Republicans joining to issue subpoenas and force witness testimony. Besides Bondi, lawmakers have interviewed former Democratic President Bill Clinton, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Trump's commerce secretary, Howard Lutnick.

That effort shows lawmakers are willing to cross political lines when there is overwhelming public pressure to act. Dozens of women have accused Epstein, a wealthy and well-connected financier, of sexual abuse and rape, including in the years after he reached a deal with federal prosecutors in 2008 to dispose of a federal investigation in exchange for pleading guilty to state level sex offense charges in Florida.

Epstein, who was found dead in a New York jail cell in 2019 while facing sex trafficking charges, was accused of paying underage girls hundreds of dollars in cash for massages and then molesting them.

His case has captured the public imagination as an example of how the rich and powerful escape accountability for wrongdoing. Lawmakers took up the cause last year after the administration failed to meet promises to provide transparency on the case.

Different continents, different standards?

Despite the investigation originating in the United States, the reckoning over Epstein has been relatively mild in the country compared with Europe. There, senior figures in governments including the United Kingdom, Sweden, Norway and Slovakia have all been forced to step down over their ties to Epstein.

In its investigation, the House committee spoke to some of Epstein's closest associates, including his former financial client Les Wexner, his lawyer Darren Indyke and his accountant Richard Kahn. The Clintons, Lutnick and others were also called to testify.

All have said more or less the same thing: They knew nothing about Epstein abusing underage girls.

Still, the release of Epstein files has had consequences. At least eight American academic and business figures have been forced from positions of power, including former Treasury Secretary Larry Summers from teaching at Harvard University and Kathy Ruemmler from her post as the chief legal officer at Goldman Sachs.

Bank of America and Epstein's estate have reached multimillion-dollar settlements with women who have accused the institutions of facilitating Epstein's sex-trafficking operations.

Comer, R-Ky., said last week that the names of three people allegedly involved in abuse had come up in an interview with Epstein's former personal assistant, Sarah Kellen. The congresswoman plans to interview six more people with connections to Epstein in the coming weeks, including billionaire Bill Gates, private equity investor Leon Black, the former CEO of Barclays Bank Jes Staley and Ruemmler.

"The government has failed the survivors. There's no doubt about that," Comer said, adding, "What we're trying to do is connect all the dots and see if there is a way to hold people accountable."

But it has stung lawmakers to see a reckoning over Epstein for figures such as Britain's former Prince Andrew at time when the administration has tried repeatedly to move past the issue.

"A prince has been taken down and here in the United States, our Department of Justice, which is sitting on millions of files, is refusing to act," said Rep. Melanie Stansbury, D-N.M., pointing to unreleased case files that the Justice Department is withholding on the grounds that they are duplicative or illegal to make public.

"That is not a failure, that is a choice," Stansbury said.

Survivors and Democratic lawmakers have also taken issue with the administration's decision to move Ghislaine Maxwell, Epstein's longtime confidant and former girlfriend, to a minimum-security prison camp. She is serving a 20-year sentence for luring teenage girls for Epstein to abuse.

Will survivors be heard?

Scattered across the country and busy with lives of their own, survivors of Epstein's abuse have made repeated trips to Washington to push for government action. After years of fighting in court and sharing traumatic stories privately, they have become increasingly outspoken in their quest for accountability.

"It is very taxing to be continually focused on this case," Farmer said. She added that even if the government's response has not met her hopes, she has seen a wider cultural movement to address sexual

predation.

To Marina Lacerda, another survivor, "Accountability is kind of hard right now. But we are looking for saving the next generation."

But they also want the administration to listen to their stories. Pressing for the president's ear, several victims spoke this month at a hearing just miles away from Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida that was organized by Democrats on the House committee.

For some of the survivors, the return to South Florida was also an opportunity to finally be heard. Jena-Lisa Jones told the panel that she was 14 years old when she was abused by Epstein in Palm Beach.

She implored the lawmakers: "Find a way to bring closure to the story of Jeffrey Epstein to allow survivors and this country to finally begin to move forward so that one day, and I pray soon, Jeffrey Epstein's name is no longer something we are forced to hear every single day."

## Capitol rioters clamor for payouts from Trump's new 'anti-weaponization' fund despite backlash

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — David Johnston was a licensed attorney when he illegally entered the Capitol with a mob of President Donald Trump's supporters on Jan. 6, 2021. More than five years later, the South Carolina man is offering to help fellow "J6ers" apply for payouts from the Trump administration's nearly \$1.8 billion new fund for people claiming to be victims of a weaponized government.

He'll do it for a 10% cut of any award, capped at \$5,000 apiece.

"I think the narrative is changing" about how the history of that day is being told, Johnston said in a video he posted to social media. "I think good things are happening for us."

Hundreds of Trump loyalists pleaded guilty to storming the Capitol, admitting under oath that they broke the law. Now pardoned by Trump, many hope to capitalize on their crimes by tapping into the \$1.776 billion settlement fund designed to compensate the Republican president's allies who believe they were politically prosecuted.

A bipartisan backlash to the fund and a legal roadblock have not dimmed the celebratory response from Jan. 6 rioters clamoring for a share of the taxpayer money. Some are staking claims even though the government has not established an application process and a judge has frozen the fund's formation, at least temporarily.

Rioters seek compensation payouts

The fund's critics see it as another vehicle for Trump and his allies to whitewash the events of Jan. 6, retroactively justify the mob's assault on a pillar of American democracy and reward some of Trump's most loyal followers.

Jason Riddle, a military veteran from New Hampshire who was sentenced to 90 days behind bars after pleading guilty to riot charges, publicly rejected a pardon from Trump. Likewise, he said it would be "ridiculous" for him or any other Jan. 6 rioter to get government compensation.

"I'd love money, but I can't accept that. That would bother me for the rest of my life," he said. "We weren't innocently persecuted just because of who we are or who we vote for. We were persecuted for committing criminal behavior in the Capitol of the United States."

Plenty of other "J6ers" do not share Riddle's reluctance.

A Florida man who posed for photos with then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's podium argued on social media that he deserves to be compensated for the cost of his infamy. A rioter from New Jersey described by prosecutors as a Nazi sympathizer hailed the fund as "good news not just for J6ers but all victims of weaponization." A Texas man who received a seven-year prison sentence for storming the Capitol with a metal tomahawk celebrated the fund as "payback" for "victims of Biden's tyranny," referring to Democratic President Joe Biden.

Oregon resident Pamela Hemphill, sentenced to 60 days in jail for her conviction, rejected a pardon from



# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 35 of 82**

Trump but has drafted a written claim for compensation from the fund. Unlike scores of rioters who claim to be victims of a government weaponized by Democrats, Hemphill blames Trump for her legal troubles. Her claims letter says she is seeking \$5 million in compensation.

"I wouldn't have been through all of this if Trump hadn't lied about the election being stolen," she said during a telephone interview. "It's a direct result of his lies that I was even there that day."

Fund faces legal and political challenges

It is an open question whether anyone convicted of a Capitol riot-related crime could be eligible for payments from a fund created to resolve Trump's lawsuit against the IRS over the leak of his tax returns.

Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche has not ruled out that possibility. Blanche said there are no limits on who can apply, but he noted that the fund's five commissioners — all yet to be named — will decide who deserves to be compensated and why, based on factors such as "what the person did, his sentence, how much time he was in jail."

"That's up to the commissioners," Blanche told The Associated Press on Thursday when asked about his position on whether violent Jan. 6 defendants should be eligible for payments.

"You have to define something and then stick to it. That's something I've been hesitant to try to do, because it's very fact-intensive," Blanche said. "Me sitting here and talking in hypotheticals is something that I don't think is fair to the process."

It is unclear whether Congress would block payments to Jan. 6 defendants. Senate Republicans who are angry about the settlement have said they want to place parameters on the fund as part of a Department of Homeland Security spending bill. They abruptly left town earlier this month after a tense meeting with Blanche and will return on Monday with the situation unresolved.

A federal judge in Virginia has frozen the fund's establishment and temporarily blocked any processing or paying of claims. The judge issued that ruling Friday in one of at least three lawsuits challenging the fund.

Brendan Ballou, a former prosecutor who tried several Jan. 6 cases before leaving the Department of Justice last year, sued on behalf of two police officers who helped defend the Capitol from the mob. Ballou views the fund's creation as part of a broader Trump campaign to undermine democratic institutions and rewrite the history of Jan. 6.

"And if the president is successful in that effort, if he's able to get people to either forget or condone that day, he knows that he can get people to accept any attack on democracy," Ballou said.

Rioters emboldened by Trump's Jan. 6 recasting

Nearly 1,600 people were charged with Capitol riot-related federal crimes. More than 1,200 were convicted and sentenced before Trump issued mass pardons and ordered the dismissal of all pending Jan. 6 cases. Trump also freed far-right extremist group members who were imprisoned for plotting to attack the Capitol to keep Trump in office after he lost the 2020 presidential election to Biden.

The self-described "J6 community" isn't the only pro-Trump constituency angling for cuts of the money.

Meshawn Maddock, who was charged as being a fake elector for Trump in Michigan before a judge dismissed the case last year, said she and her husband, state Rep. Matt Maddock, "absolutely" plan on making a claim. She believes the fund's use of taxpayer money is justified because it "paid for the prosecution and investigation of the years that I was being hunted down."

"I want vengeance and I want retribution," Maddock said.

Trump's campaign to recast Jan. 6 as a peaceful protest seems to have emboldened many convicted rioters.

Johnston's eagerness to help other Capitol rioters with claims contrasts with his remorse at sentencing in 2022. He apologized for his "terrible lapse in judgment" before a judge sentenced him to three weeks in jail and three months of home detention. He pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor trespassing charge.

"It was a dumb, dumb thing to do," Johnston told the judge. "I am 100% responsible for what I did that day."

## Most new moms get the baby blues. But it could be something more serious: postpartum depression

By LAURA UNGAR AP Medical Writer

Moments after Jenna Carberg gave birth to her daughter, doctors put the baby on her chest.

"I felt a disconnect right away," she recalled.

At home, the Orlando, Florida, mom was exhausted and anxious and cried every day. She was eventually diagnosed with postpartum depression — a potentially dangerous condition that can fill a typically joyous time with deep despair.

The mood disorder has been on the rise. A 2024 study in the journal JAMA Network Open found that U.S. rates more than doubled in just over a decade, climbing from 9.4% in 2010 to 19% in 2021, partly due to improved screening and diagnosis.

It can be hard to differentiate the disorder from the much milder and more common "baby blues" brought on by plummeting hormone levels. But recognizing and treating postpartum depression is crucial, said OB-GYN Dr. Tiffany Moore Simas at the University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School.

Moms who go untreated may have problems bonding with and caring for their babies. And they're at increased risk of suicide.

"A healthy you will ultimately be important for a healthy baby," Moore Simas said.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This story includes discussion of suicide. If you or someone you know needs help, the national suicide and crisis lifeline in the U.S. is available by calling or texting 988.

How to tell if postpartum sadness is more than baby blues

Baby blues affects about 8 in 10 new moms, striking shortly after delivery.

"Moms will feel kind of more emotional than normal," said Dr. Jennifer Payne, an expert in reproductive psychiatry at the University of Virginia.

But the crying jags and feelings of sadness aren't severe enough to interfere with normal life. Moms should still be able to care for themselves and their babies.

Screening tools can help discern if the problem is more serious. A commonly used 10-item questionnaire, often given at a postpartum checkup, asks how often a mom has experienced feelings such as sadness, panic or worry. A high score points toward the need for further evaluation.

Experts say there's no single cause of postpartum depression. Genetics, physical changes and emotional issues may contribute to it.

"We're pretty sure that having a case of the baby blues doesn't increase your risk of postpartum depression," Payne said. "But it does seem that both conditions can develop in the same person."

Signs of postpartum depression to watch out for

If sadness lingers for more than two weeks, that's one sign.

Others include intense feelings of despair, anxiety, loss of interest, feelings of guilt and worthlessness, low energy and decreased concentration and appetite. Moms may worry constantly about their babies, be unable to sleep, or stop showering for days.

They "feel negatively and badly about themselves. They'll feel that they're a bad mother. They might not feel attached to the baby very much," Payne said.

They may even have thoughts of harming themselves.

Carberg, who gave birth to her daughter in 2016, had such thoughts a couple of times — once while driving with her daughter. She went to a psychiatric facility for a few days and did better for a while.

But she later had a severe breakdown. She sent text messages to her husband, Chris, saying she was sorry, then turned her phone off. Chris desperately tried to reach her, worried she'd hurt herself.

"She luckily went to the hospital ER," he said.

Postpartum depression can be treated effectively

Ultimately, finding the right medication was the key to Jenna Carberg's recovery.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 37 of 82**

"I felt like myself again," she said after taking the stimulant Vyvanse.

Other medications include antidepressants such as Zoloft or Prozac, or Zuruvae, the first pill approved for postpartum depression. Talk therapy is another common treatment, and experts also stress the importance of getting enough sleep and support from family and friends.

To help others, the Carbergs started an online information resource — [postpartumdepression.org](http://postpartumdepression.org) — to provide support and connect patients with professional help.

Doctors advise anyone who thinks they or a loved one may have postpartum depression to reach out to their OB-GYN, primary care doctor or mental health provider.

If necessary, be persistent, said Dr. Kerry Hudson, an OB-GYN at Newport Women's Health Services in Rhode Island. When she suffered postpartum depression two decades ago, she said, her doctor told her she was just an overstressed medical resident. She finally got help after breaking down in front of colleagues during a presentation.

After therapy and medications, Hudson went on to have a second child. So did the Carbergs. All are doing well.

"When we get people help, I think they can have a good future ahead of them," Hudson said. "You don't have to suffer in silence."

## **Rescuers free 4 men who had been trapped in a flooded Laos cave, search for 2 still missing**

By JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Rescue workers in Laos said Saturday they have safely evacuated four villagers trapped in a flooded cave for 10 days, the day after another one was successfully extracted. Two men remain missing.

Lao and Thai rescue groups posted about the successful operation on social media, along with photos of the men lying on stretchers, wearing oxygen masks and being wrapped in foil blankets.

The villagers had reportedly entered the cave last week to look for valuable minerals before being trapped by flash flooding that blocked their way out. One other villager escaped in time and alerted the authorities to the seven left behind.

Lao organization Rescue Volunteer for People said on its Facebook page that the water level inside the cave receded low enough for them to leave with divers who had gone in to deliver food and water. They said they will continue their search for the two who remain missing.

A video posted online by a Thai rescuer at the scene, Chakkit Taengtang, showed the men being assisted one by one out of the cave's entrance, bodies covered in mud. After they got out, some collapsed on the ground and were hugged by a group of rescuers who cried in joy.

The first of the trapped group was safely evacuated on Friday. According to rescuers, that operation took about 30 minutes. Videos showed the moment he emerged from the water alongside a diver, catching his breath before struggling to crawl through a narrow, flooded passage and rising unsteadily to his feet.

The villagers had reportedly entered the cave last week to look for valuable minerals before being trapped by flash flooding that blocked their way out. One other villager escaped in time and alerted the authorities to the seven left behind.

Five of them were found alive Wednesday. They were identified by their first names as Khamla, Mued, Ee, Ing and Laen.

Rescue teams from Laos and neighboring Thailand were joined by Japanese and Malaysian colleagues. Indonesian, French and Australian specialists also reportedly arrived at the site in a rugged area in the central province of Xaisomboun, about 120 kilometers (75 miles) north of the capital, Vientiane.

Several of them had taken part in the complicated 2018 cave rescue in northern Thailand of 12 school-boys and their soccer coach.

Rescuers are also preparing to search for the two villagers who remain missing.

Kengkaj Bongkawong, head of the Thai rescue group Metta Tham Rescue Kalasin, said Friday that the



team plans to explore an area deeper inside the cave, about 20 to 25 meters (yards) beyond where the survivors were found. However, he cautioned that the section is heavily flooded.

## **Hegseth tones down warnings about China but says US remains committed to Pacific security**

By DAVID RISING Associated Press

SINGAPORE (AP) — U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth assured Pacific allies on Saturday that Washington remained committed to the region, but toned down previous comments calling China a threat.

Speaking to a group of world leaders, diplomats and top security officials at the Shangri-La defense conference in Singapore, Hegseth said that the region “has profound implications for U.S. security and prosperity” and that Washington’s priority was to “achieve a lasting and favorable balance of power in the Pacific.”

It was his second time addressing the forum, hosted by the International Institute for Strategic Studies. Last year, he raised the ire of Beijing by warning of rapidly developing threats from China, particularly its aggressive stance toward Taiwan. He said China is no longer just building up its military forces to take Taiwan, it’s “actively training for it, every day.”

This year, however, the meeting comes only about two weeks after U.S. President Donald Trump visited Chinese leader Xi Jinping in Beijing, following which Trump called Xi a “great leader” and said that they were going to have a “fantastic future together.”

Hegseth says China won’t be allowed to dominate the region

Hegseth, who was with Trump in Beijing, said the two leaders had agreed that China and the U.S. should “build a constructive relationship of strategic stability, based on fairness and reciprocity, reaffirming that while our nations will vigorously protect our respective interests, we can secure practical, mutually beneficial agreements where our interests align.”

However, he said it was still an American priority to ensure that China is not allowed to dominate the Indo-Pacific.

“There is rightful alarm regarding China’s historic military buildup and the expansion of its military activities in the region and beyond,” he said.

“We share a clear-eyed assessment of that security environment and a mutual understanding that a Pacific dominated by any hegemon would unravel the regional balance of power and undermine the equilibrium we all seek to preserve.”

Later in the day, Chinese Maj. Gen. Meng Xiangqing praised Hegseth’s remarks about the meeting between Xi and Trump, saying the consensus the leaders reached “should provide strategic guidance for China-U.S. relations over the next three years and beyond.”

“During his meeting with President Trump, President Xi Jinping made it clear that such constructive strategic stability should be a positive form of stability centered on cooperation, a healthy form of stability in which competition remains within reasonable bounds, a normal state of stability in which differences are managed and kept under control, and a lasting form of stability that offers the prospect of peace,” he said.

U.S. Sen. Tammy Duckworth, part of a congressional delegation to the conference, accused the Trump administration of “cozying up” to China.

“I worry that this administration is being distracted into wars that they’ve started in other parts of the world at the expense of our commitment here in the Indo-Pacific,” the Illinois Democrat told reporters on the sidelines.

“I am concerned that it seems like our president is entering into, you know, policies where he’s doing what Beijing wants him to do,” she added.

After the meetings between Xi and Trump, the American president raised questions about Washington’s willingness to defend Taiwan, calling a new \$14 billion arms package that he has yet to greenlight “a very good negotiating chip for us” with China.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 39 of 82**

China claims the democratic self-governing island as its own, and Xi has not ruled out using force to take it. The U.S. is required by law to help provide Taiwan with the means to defend itself, though follows a policy of "strategic ambiguity" on whether it would intervene militarily if China were to attack the island.

Hegseth told the forum that there was "no change in our status" toward Taiwan, but would not comment on the arms deal.

"Any decision about future Taiwan arms sales, as the president said, will rest with him," he said.

US praises countries that spent more on defense

He underscored the Trump administration's insistence that allies increase defense spending, saying "we need partners, not protectorates."

He lauded several countries in Asia for their efforts, while reiterating criticism of European allies, without naming names, who he suggested got "distracted by empty globalist rhetoric about the rules-based international order."

"Our partners in Asia have long understood that the bedrock of a durable partnership is not based on idealistic values but on the concrete alignment of national interests," he said.

"When our interests diverge, we adjust pragmatically, without the drama or the moralizing," he added. "I think Western Europe might take note — this is a mindset we fully embrace."

Hegseth did not mention either the war in Ukraine or Iran war in his speech. When asked about Iran, he only said that Trump had assured him that when negotiations with Tehran had concluded, "any deal will be a good deal."

Australian Defense Minister Richard Marles, whose country was among those Hegseth praised for increased military spending, said that while the international rules-based order is not perfect, the "task before us, all of us, including the great powers, is the renovation of that order, not its dismemberment."

"When the rules apply, smaller states have agency," Marles said in a speech that followed Hegseth's. "When the rules yield to power, sovereignty becomes, as others have put it, the purview of the powerful, and no state in this room today, whatever its size, is well served by that outcome."

UK, US and Australia announce new undersea drone initiative

At an event held outside the conference, Hegseth, Marles and British Defense Secretary John Healey announced a new initiative in their AUKUS partnership, whose primary focus has been the development and construction of nuclear-powered submarines.

Under the so-called second pillar of AUKUS, the three said they would together invest in the development of improved capabilities for underwater drones.

"Together we produce a range of cutting-edge sensors or weapons systems for undersea drones," Healey said, adding it will help detect threats including to underwater cables and pipelines.

## **As Ebola scourges Congo, experts warn of link to eating wild animals**

By RODNEY MUHUMUZA Associated Press

KINSHASA, Congo (AP) — The vendors of wild meat at the sprawling Masina Market in the Congolese capital don't always display their goods openly. Customers must ask for whatever they're looking for, whether it is a giant swamp rodent or the severed parts of an antelope.

Others occasionally sell in the open, like the women who preside over impossibly large baskets of squirming caterpillars at the market in Kinshasa.

For many in Congo and elsewhere in Central and West Africa wild meat is a craving and a key part of the cultural milieu. Even a disease as punishing as Ebola, currently ravaging a remote part of eastern Congo, has failed to stem demand for wild meat from the Congo Basin, an expansive forested ecosystem sometimes called Earth's second lung.

The Congo Basin is rich in all kinds of wildlife, from great apes to serpents — both of which are hunted for their meat. One consequence for locals is exposure to zoonotic diseases such as Ebola.

Although Ebola is generally not spread by food, cases in Africa have been associated with hunting,

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 40 of 82**

butchering and processing meat from infected animals, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has said.

"Once there is human, animal and environment interface, we have these kinds of outbreaks on a frequent level," said Dr. Tolbert Geewleh Nyenswah of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. "And this is why one health approach in dealing with virus outbreaks is important, because we still interact with the bats, and our hunters are still killing monkeys, and we are close to the environment."

The link between wild meat and Ebola

The Congolese government has confirmed more than 1,000 suspected cases, with at least 220 deaths, since it declared an outbreak of Ebola on May 15. It appears the virus spread undetected for weeks, and the World Health Organization suspects it is much larger than what has been reported.

Ebola, named for a tributary of the Congo River, was first discovered in 1976 in simultaneous outbreaks in Congo and present-day South Sudan. Outbreaks are believed to start with the virus spilling over into humans from an infected animal such as a fruit bat. These cross-species infections often happen when people handle and eat wild meat, experts say.

But since Ebola outbreaks happen only sporadically in communities that regularly eat wild meat, some people "don't believe the linkage" and others are "totally ignorant" of the health threat from eating wild meat, said Dr. Misaki Wayengera, a microbiologist who advises Uganda's Ministry of Health on epidemics.

"It is very difficult to change some of these core practices," he said.

Locals have paid a heavy price for occasional outbreaks of Ebola, whose bloody symptoms can terrorize entire villages and cause many to believe they are under an evil spell.

The Ebola virus is responsible for 17 outbreaks in Congo and many others elsewhere in the region. The deadliest outbreak, in West Africa between 2014 and 2016, infected an estimated 28,000 people and killed more than 11,300.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization — which studied the Ebola risk stemming from the eating and handling of wild meat after West Africa's epidemic — animal-to-human spillovers of Ebola are rare, but "their consequences are nonetheless disastrous."

Once Ebola has infected one person, the virus then spreads through close contact with sick or deceased patients' bodily fluids, such as sweat, blood, feces or vomit. Health workers without sufficient protective gear are seen as highly vulnerable.

The current outbreak in eastern Congo is caused by the Bundibugyo virus, a rare type of Ebola that has no approved medicines or vaccines.

The outbreak is occurring in a part of Congo that also faces armed violence by rebel groups and the displacement of large numbers of people fleeing the violence.

A need for education

While Congolese authorities have prohibited hunting endangered wildlife, including great apes sent to the brink of extinction by poachers, there is no blanket ban on the wildlife trade and illegal hunting persists for totemic creatures like the bonobo.

Many in and around the Congo Basin have wild meat as their primary source of animal protein. The yearly extraction rate of wild meat from the Congo Basin is estimated at 4.5 million tons, according to the Center for International Forestry Research.

Viande de brousse, as wild meat is known in French, is a popular food, even served in trendy restaurants. That's intensified pressure on the dwindling resources of the Congo Basin. Despite the ongoing biodiversity losses, the Congo Basin remains the world's largest carbon sink, surpassing the Amazon in its ability to capture and store carbon.

Public health campaigners need to step up education campaigns on how Ebola starts and is spread among communities that face recurring outbreaks, said Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka, founder of the Uganda-based Conservation Through Public Health group.

People need to be told that "eating meat from an unknown source, or a dead animal, is a no-no," Kalema-Zikusoka said. "It's a very cultural thing."



# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 41 of 82**

Some fruit bats are believed to be natural hosts of the viruses that cause Ebola, according to the WHO. Yet bats are known to be a delicacy in many parts of Central and West Africa. The soup of a roasted fruit bat is highly sought after, as are the parts of a wide range of monkeys.

In Kinshasa's Masina Market one recent morning, before the latest Ebola outbreak, traders said they sold antelope, rodent and snake meat sourced from the Congo Basin.

They said they long ago stopped selling the meat of monkeys, possible reservoirs of the Ebola virus.

One vendor, Guyva Mputu, was selling python, whose frozen flesh started to steam in the humid weather.

Another, Charles Ntanga, wielded a flywhisk to swat flies that settled on the rancid carcass of a giant rodent, with a kilogram going for about \$17. Ntanga said he gets clients from all walks of life.

"We sell wild meat," he said. "We make our lives through this business."

## **Israeli soldiers share rare accounts from Gaza, describing ongoing killings despite the ceasefire**

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — The Israeli combat soldier saw his teammates yelling in celebration, congratulating one another. They had just struck a vehicle of Palestinians driving near the Israeli-controlled part of the Gaza Strip, killing everyone inside.

The reservist said scenes like this had become common after a fragile ceasefire took effect in October. In the weeks he was stationed in Gaza, he said, he saw soldiers relishing the chance to go after those who crossed — or came close to crossing — the so-called yellow line that divides the strip into Israeli-controlled and Palestinian areas.

"It was a jungle," the soldier, in his 20s, told The Associated Press. "After the ceasefire, the order was: If someone crosses the line, you shoot them."

As diplomatic efforts to strengthen the deal have stalled, three soldiers described to AP a sense of confusion in the embattled territory, with a lack of clarity on rules of engagement around the yellow line. Some commanders paid lip service to the agreement, the soldiers said, while privately voicing desire for the war in Gaza to continue. Sometimes, troops were too far away or acted too quickly to recognize who they were shooting, one soldier said — a concern echoed in comments from a whistleblower group of veterans.

The soldiers' accounts are a rare glimpse into what's happened in the Israeli-controlled part of Gaza since the deal went into effect seven months ago. The soldiers — reservists deployed throughout Gaza between October and January who've since returned — spoke on condition of anonymity because they feared being ostracized over their comments. They said they were speaking out because they were angered and saddened by what they saw.

AP has documented shootings of Palestinian civilians, including children playing, close to the yellow line. And the soldiers said it felt like the killings never stopped amid the tenuous deal.

"To call it a ceasefire is a joke," one soldier told AP.

Gaza's yellow line has been ambiguous, and Israel has taken control of more land

When the ceasefire went into effect, Israel withdrew troops to a buffer zone demarcated by a yellow line, giving it control of just over half the strip. Under the agreement, Israeli forces are meant to complete a fuller withdrawal, though there's no timeline for that. The U.S.-backed diplomat overseeing the truce says progress is deadlocked over the central sticking point of disarming Hamas, upon which all other issues — including Israeli withdrawals and reconstruction — hinge.

In the meantime, Israel has expanded control over additional territory in Gaza. Both sides have accused the other of violating the ceasefire.

The line's exact location has been ambiguous and sometimes invisible. In some places, it's marked with yellow blocks and barrels; in others, it at times hasn't been indicated at all.

The Israeli military invited AP this week to see a section of the yellow line in central Gaza, near the Maghazi refugee camp. The line there was visible, demarcated by a wide dirt path and small yellow markings. To the east was a desolate stretch of open space leading to a heavily fortified Israeli military post

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 42 of 82**

about 500 meters away.

An Israeli military commander said Hamas is active on the other side of the line and frequently sends people — militants and civilians — toward the line and even across it to test the army's readiness and responses.

"There is no reason for anyone to come near the line," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity under military rules. "There's nothing here."

The army says the entire line, which stretches the length of Gaza, is now clearly marked.

Since the ceasefire went into effect, more than 900 people have been killed in Gaza — dozens of those close to or over the yellow line, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. The ministry doesn't say how many are militants, but unarmed men and children have been among the dead.

Israel's military has said most of the people killed crossing the line posed a threat to troops. But soldiers who spoke to AP and Breaking the Silence — the whistleblower group that has collected troops' testimonies throughout the war — say that at times soldiers were too far away, acting too quickly and under too much pressure to tell.

Israel's army told AP that the area adjacent to the yellow line is a "sensitive operational environment" with signs saying approaching is prohibited. It said the army doesn't target civilians solely for approaching the line and that its rules of engagement require the use of warnings before using force. In situations involving an immediate threat, forces are authorized to act, it said.

One soldier says troops must act fast, with information sometimes based on a hunch

It was the combat soldier's second tour in Gaza when the ceasefire began. He said he was posted several hundred meters from the yellow line and saw several people trying to cross it killed by soldiers.

Soldiers shooting or ordering drone strikes don't always know who's crossing the line, he said. Although soldiers must provide coordinates and get approval from superiors before striking, it's hard to give exact information as people are moving, he said. He described soldiers calling in coordinates based on a hunch or the last place they saw someone.

Breaking the Silence says the general rules of engagement are extremely permissive, especially for those crossing the line, with orders in many areas being "shoot to kill." Executive director Nadav Weiman, a veteran who served in Gaza but not in this war, said distance from the target and some trigger-happy soldiers can be problematic.

He said orders and policies from the military's high commanders "have created a reality where countless civilians have and are being killed for crossing invisible lines."

In one account to Breaking the Silence, in interview notes seen by AP, a soldier describes instructions for troops about anyone crossing the yellow line: "eliminate him no matter what."

A soldier who was stationed in Gaza says human lives weren't valued

Another soldier stationed in Gaza for weeks after the ceasefire said the message from commanders was to hold the line at all costs.

"There was a general feeling that human lives are not valuable," he said.

When it came to demarcating the yellow line, the soldier said his superiors told him it was "too much work," not their job and that Palestinians should know where it was.

Being in Gaza took an emotional toll, he said.

Sometimes snipers fired warning shots at people close to the line, he said, but commanders told troops to do more to protect themselves. The soldier understood that to mean firing more lethal shots.

He and the other soldiers who spoke to AP said troops generally understood, based on leaders and fellow soldiers' actions, that Israel was in Gaza for the long run, not an eventual withdrawal.

Israel's strikes are 'increasingly proactive,' according to an internal report

An internal report circulated among aid groups last month and seen by AP said that across Gaza, Israel has become "increasingly proactive" with its strikes.

Separate data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, a U.S.-based nonprofit, said April was the deadliest month in Gaza this year and that recorded deaths near the yellow line or of people

who crossed it increased by more than 25% from January to April, to 73 from 58.

This week, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel controls 60% of Gaza and the next step was to move to 70% control.

The soldiers told AP that on the ground, the ceasefire is elusive.

"We need to stop using this term," one said of the word, ceasefire. "It's not serving people that want to stop the war."

## **Iowa Democrats hoping to flip a US Senate seat are torn over which of 2 hopefuls has the best shot**

By HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

AMES, Iowa (AP) — Iowa Democrats say they want to vote in Tuesday's U.S. Senate primary for the candidate who gives the party its best chance to flip a Republican-held seat in November.

Some just haven't decided which of the two state lawmakers in the race fits the bill.

"I am having a lot of trouble," said Mike Lazere, a 65-year-old Democrat who always votes on Election Day.

State Rep. Josh Turek and state Sen. Zach Wahls are seeking the nomination for the seat held by retiring Sen. Joni Ernst in the state where Republicans have an advantage but Democrats think they could have a chance.

It means the primary choice carries high stakes for Iowa's Democratic voters, who haven't had many recent examples of successful statewide candidates to help guide their decision. The last Democrat to win federal office statewide was President Barack Obama in 2012. All six members of the federal delegation are Republicans, and the GOP has had a statehouse trifecta for nearly a decade. The most recent Democratic U.S. senator from Iowa, Tom Harkin, was elected in 2008 and retired from office six years later.

U.S. Rep. Ashley Hinson is running for the GOP nomination, and a Republican-aligned political group has already pledged \$29 million to defend the seat.

Turek and Wahls say the differences between them are clear, but voters still weighing their options disagree.

"They both have strong legislative records. They both have compelling stories. I think they both share my values," Lazere said Thursday outside of the Ames public library, where Story County Democrats had just held their monthly meeting.

"Since they're so close, I just want the candidate who is more likely to have a chance," he said. "It's an uphill battle, probably, in Iowa still."

Turek says he can win independents and GOP voters

At the Des Moines Farmers' Market last weekend, where both candidates waded through the crowds, Sundie Ruppert shouted her support for Turek as he passed by her tent, saying he had her vote.

Ruppert called the race an "embarrassment of riches," something that's been rare as of late. She said the two stand for "virtually everything the same," so for her, it's a matter of who can win the crossover support to get over the finish line in November.

Turek, a four-time wheelchair basketball Paralympian born with spina bifida, says his story of overcoming adversity and his politics appeal to independent and moderate Republican voters. He represents a state House district that supported President Donald Trump.

Turek said he's laser-focused on securing a livable wage, health care access and drinkable water, not the culture-war issues that he said Republicans use to distract voters from the core problems they are facing.

"I'm not gonna get dragged down the rabbit hole of worrying about these distraction issues," Turek said in an interview.

"I think that if we are going to win again in a state like Iowa, it is going to be a message of economic populism," he said. "It is going to be that we as a Democratic Party stand for the workers and for the middle class. That's the way forward."

Ruppert said she thinks general election voters are more likely to vote for Turek, even if they "have to



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 44 of 82

hold their nose."

"We've got to get the independents," she said. "I do believe that Josh in a red district has better pull than Wahls."

Wahls says he will stand up to leadership in both parties

About 37 miles (60 kilometers) north in Ames on Thursday, Shellie Orngard said she's heard that logic and doesn't buy it.

Orngard said both are good people and strong candidates, but Wahls strikes her as "somebody with real character behind his convictions."

"I think that whether you're Democrat or Republican or independent, you appreciate authenticity and real values," Orngard said. "I think Zach Wahls just seems to have the character that I feel he's the person that I want to put my vote behind."

Wahls says he's the candidate willing to defy leadership in both parties, and he has criticized Turek for not rejecting Democratic Sen. Chuck Schumer as caucus leader.

He says his anti-establishment message is winning back the working-class voters, especially common across eastern Iowa, who supported Obama before they pivoted to Trump.

"We're not just talking about building a coalition that can win in November, we are already doing it," he said. "These are voters who are not hardcore MAGA Trump Republicans. A lot of them are just really frustrated with both parties, they don't trust Washington, they don't trust the establishment."

"And what we hear from people all the time is, 'Even if we don't agree on every issue, if you are willing to take them on, you've got my vote,'" Wahls said.

Iowa will be a tough win for either Democrat

Iowa has shifted considerably since Obama's win in 2012, voting for Trump in the last three presidential elections. Democrats lag Republicans by roughly 200,000 registered voters statewide.

Rob Sand, state auditor and candidate for governor, was the only Democrat to win statewide in 2022.

Nearly 30,000 Democrats have already cast their ballots as of Friday, according to data from the secretary of state's office. Still, in Ellston on Wednesday, many of the two dozen southwest Iowa Democrats waiting to hear from Turek said they'd rely on a gut feeling.

"As far as I'm concerned, Ashley Hinson has got to be beat," said Lynne Wallace, a 67-year-old from Mount Ayr. The staunch Democrat said she'd support either candidate in the general election, already eager to make calls and knock on doors, but added that she's got "shaky faith" that either Democrat can pull it off.

Lois Rose, 77, and her 79-year-old husband, John, said at the Des Moines farmers' market that they might not vote in the primary at all since they, so far, hadn't been able to make up their minds on whether one candidate is stronger than the other.

She suggested the pair could also coordinate their votes, each casting a ballot for one of the two. John liked the idea.

"They're both so qualified," said Lois Rose of West Des Moines. "They're both very genuine, hence the difficulty."

## Candidates for California governor scramble to deliver final pitch to voters with days to go

By SOPHIE AUSTIN Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — The end of California's chaotic governor's race was approaching Saturday as leading candidates rushed to deliver their closing arguments before voting concludes Tuesday.

Former U.S. health secretary Xavier Becerra has called for "hot competence summer," promoting his decades of public service as evidence he has what it takes to be California's next governor.

Republican Steve Hilton pledged an end to a "bloated, nanny-state bureaucracy" during remarks outside the state Capitol on Wednesday.

Billionaire climate activist Tom Steyer told reporters this week in Berkeley, California, that he's made it his life's work to advance progressive causes, a mission he'll bring to Sacramento.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 45 of 82**

They're seeking to stand out in a field of roughly 60 candidates on a single ballot, regardless of party, under California's top-two primary system. The two candidates who receive the most votes will face off in the general election to replace Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom, who can't seek a third term.

The crowded race includes Democrats Becerra, Steyer, former U.S. Rep. Katie Porter, and Matt Mahan, the mayor of San Jose. Hilton, a former Fox News host backed by President Donald Trump, and Riverside County Sheriff Chad Bianco are the most prominent Republicans in the race.

As of Friday afternoon, 13% of voters had cast their ballots. That included 13% of Democrats and 18% of Republicans, according to a tracker by Democratic strategist Paul Mitchell. The breakdown is unusual because Democrats in recent years have tended to vote early while many Republicans wait until Election Day.

Some Democrats have been waiting to cast their ballots to see if a candidate breaks away from the pack in the final days, or because they're unimpressed with the crowded field.

Two polls conducted in mid-to-late May suggested that Becerra and Hilton each have the support of about 2 in 10 California likely voters. In one poll, Steyer landed closer to Becerra and Hilton, with Bianco and Porter trailing further behind, but similar shares of voters were supporting Steyer, Bianco, and Porter in the other poll. None of the other candidates were in the double digits in either poll.

Candidates make their final pitch

The contenders have been traveling across the state that includes roughly 23 million registered voters as they seek an edge over rivals. Becerra, Hilton, Steyer and Bianco will all be in the San Francisco Bay Area this weekend. Fresno and Los Angeles have also been popular campaign stops.

Becerra has been highlighting the more than 35 years he's spent in state and federal office.

"This is not a place for on-the-job training," he said on a podcast hosted by political commentator Ana Navarro. "You better know what you're doing."

He'll hit a text-banking event with Democratic Attorney General Rob Bonta in San Francisco and rally with the Service Employees International Union in San Jose.

Hilton has been selling himself as someone who would bring a fresh set of eyes to state government, reduce regulations, and bring down housing and energy costs. He thinks it'll be a unifying message, he told reporters this week in Sacramento.

"It's not ideological," Hilton said. "It's just simple, practical commonsense — \$3 gas, cut your electric bills in half."

Hilton will host a town hall in Silicon Valley on Saturday night. He has been cautious not to emphasize Trump's endorsement. If he advances to the November election, he'll need to appeal to voters outside his party to win in the Democrat-dominated state that hasn't had a Republican governor since 2011.

Steyer, a self-described "billionaire who wants to tax other billionaires," said the race was a contest between three candidates: Himself, Hilton and Becerra.

"There is a hard-right Republican who's endorsed by Donald Trump," he told a crowd of supporters at a sports bar in Berkeley.

"The second candidate is Xavier Becerra, who, to my surprise, is a corporate Democrat," Steyer continued, referencing his acceptance of campaign contributions from Chevron.

"And the third person's me," he said. "And I am running because Californians can't afford to live here anymore."

Steyer's headed to a campaign rally Saturday in San Francisco to put a finer point on his message to voters.

Mahan, meanwhile, will mingle with voters in Los Angeles, Porter will give a speech in Orange County, and Bianco will lay out his vision at a church in San Jose.

## In Southern California Chinese enclave, a mayor's arrest stokes fears of Beijing's influence

By JAIMIE DING Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — In 2024, voters in the Southern California city of Arcadia elected the first all-Asian city council in the city's history.

Now, one of those politicians has pleaded guilty to being an illegal agent of the Chinese government. Former Arcadia Mayor Eileen Wang's plea, entered in federal court Friday, continues a saga that some residents of the area worry could bring unfair scrutiny on the broader Chinese and Asian American community.

Arcadia has gone under rapid demographic change in the last two decades as immigrants from China, Taiwan and Hong Kong flocked to the San Gabriel Valley east of Los Angeles. After Wang's case was made public May 11, the news made national headlines and filled the unassuming suburban city with anger, disappointment and murmurs of quiet concern. On social media, fears about spies and Chinese Communist Party influence abounded.

"We cannot allow this moment to become an excuse for people to paint entire communities with one brush or weaponize ethnicity for political gain," acting Mayor Paul Cheng said in a statement.

Shock in heavily Chinese community

Wang agreed in April to plead guilty to doing the bidding of Chinese officials by sharing articles favorable of Beijing on a news website she ran, without notifying the U.S. government as required by law.

The 56-year-old was elected in November 2022 to a five-person City Council, from which the mayor is selected on a rotating basis. She was born in Chengdu, China, and immigrated to the U.S. in 1995.

The San Gabriel Valley is home to the largest concentration of residents of Chinese and Taiwanese descent in the United States. Beginning in the 1970s, real estate developers marketed the region as "Chinese Beverly Hills" to woo affluent immigrants. As the population grew, it became a haven for newer immigrants who could go about life without needing English, access business opportunities, and avoid putting their children through China's intensely competitive education system. Arcadia's population of about 53,000 is majority Asian, like many other cities in the region.

Ted Tseng, 52, arrived in Arcadia from Taiwan nearly 40 years ago with his parents, who emigrated because they feared potential conflict between Taiwan and China.

Tseng was concerned Wang's indictment would deepen animosity against Asian Americans and discredit their contributions to the region. Fears of anti-Asian racism, though hate crimes are down since the COVID-19 pandemic, still linger.

"I'm just worried our image has been damaged," Tseng said.

Feds crack down on Chinese espionage

The U.S. Department of Justice has escalated efforts in recent years to combat Chinese espionage. In April, a man accused of running a secret Chinese spy outpost in Manhattan's Chinatown neighborhood was convicted of acting as an illegal foreign agent.

Wang has suggested that she was misled by her former fiance, Yaoning "Mike" Sun, who pleaded guilty to the same charge last year and is now serving a four-year prison sentence. Sun was the treasurer for Wang's 2022 election campaign.

A statement shared by Wang's lawyers references her "trust and love for apparently the wrong person who ultimately led her astray."

April Verlato, a former City Council member who served with Wang, said Wang and Sun lived together, and Sun accompanied Wang wherever she went.

Verlato said Wang should have stepped down as soon as she came under investigation.

"She was being selfish, getting sworn in as mayor and not resigning when she knew she was going to be pleading guilty to something," Verlato said.

Gene Sun, a long-time lawyer in Arcadia, agreed.

"I don't understand how she could have continued being a City Council member," he said.

Beijing seeks influence overseas



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 47 of 82

It is not surprising that the Chinese government would attempt to exert political influence in the region, especially given the increased political tension and economic rivalry between China and the U.S. in recent years, said Wei Li, a professor of Asian Pacific American Studies at Arizona State University.

"A lot of countries, if they have the will and if they have the means, will try to influence their diaspora," Li said.

According to his federal criminal complaint, Sun was in contact with John Chen, who also pleaded guilty to being an illegal agent of the Chinese government, regarding local politicians that Beijing could influence. In reports to Chinese officials, Sun and Chen called Wang a "New Political Star" and bragged about her contacts with mainstream U.S. politicians.

They also wrote of combatting "anti-China forces" such as Taiwan independence and the Falun Gong, an exiled anti-communist spiritual movement.

In a January 2023 message from Chen to Wang referenced in Sun's criminal complaint, Chen said: "You are doing a good job, I hope you can continue the good work, make Chinese people proud."

Some fear political repercussions for Asian Americans

Not only was the news of her guilty plea like a "slap in the face," the reaction from some community members has also been painful, said Cheng, the acting mayor.

Some residents at a May 19 City Council meeting blamed remaining council members for enabling Wang and called for their resignations.

"I've been called more names, been told to go back to China although that's not where I'm from," said Cheng, who came to the U.S. from Taiwan at age 2.

For many Arcadia residents and workers, life was as usual the day after the news broke. Many smiled apologetically when asked about the issue, saying they don't pay attention to politics.

Aliza Mo, who emigrated from China six years ago for her children's education, said she first thought the headlines must be exaggerated.

"A lot of people wondered if it was discrimination," she said.

When she learned what Wang pleaded guilty to, she changed her mind.

"I think it would be improper for anyone to be doing something like that," she said.

## Russian spies are aggressively seeking Western technology as sanctions bite, officials say

By EMMA BURROWS AP European Security Correspondent

STOCKHOLM, Sweden (AP) — Russia's intelligence agencies have grown more aggressive in their efforts to steal Western technology and defense secrets as sanctions squeeze the country's wartime economy, three senior European intelligence officials told The Associated Press.

Moscow's agents are building fake companies, recruiting middlemen and deploying cyber spies and hackers who are gathering information that could also be used to attack key infrastructure, they said.

Four years of international sanctions have hampered Moscow's ability to procure machinery, technology and research from Europe, while the grinding war in Ukraine has taxed key industries and pushed the country toward a potential financial crisis.

"They really know what they need," and are putting "serious effort" into acquiring advanced machine tools, factory equipment, research and dual-use technology, said Christoffer Wedelin, deputy head of operations at the Swedish Security Service.

Russia seeks high-end research, defense technology and software

In Sweden, Russia is targeting the defense industry and high-end research on the country's most advanced weaponry, such as the Gripen fighter jet, Wedelin said. It is also trying to procure camera and laser technology developed for civilian purposes that could be integrated into Russian weapons systems, he said.

Moscow is also trying to steal technology to help it keep pace — or give it an edge — against the West in the decades ahead, said Juha Martelius, the director of Finland's Security and Intelligence Service.

"We're talking about space technology, quantum ... arctic technology, marine technology," he said, add-

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 48 of 82**

ing that space technology is something Russia needs "right now," without elaborating. Countries use such technology for satellite imaging, communications and navigation.

Russia also needs sanctioned computer technology and software updates for machine tools, Martelius said.

On Wednesday, Anne Keast-Butler, the director of the U.K.'s signals intelligence agency, accused Russia of "relentlessly targeting" the U.K. and its European allies, by stealing technology and plotting sabotage and assassination attempts.

In May, Swedish police arrested two people on suspicion of violating sanctions relating to a company in Turkey that has made dozens of shipments of metalworking and metal-turning machine tools to Russia.

As the schemes to acquire technology grow more complex, companies need to be more aware they could unwittingly become part of Russia's war supply chain, Wedelin said.

"All of the security and intelligence services in Russia are helping out on the state's efforts to get this," he said.

Intelligence officials say Russia cares less about getting caught

Moscow is also deploying cyberattacks against European firms and critical infrastructure in an attempt to gather information, which it could exploit "when they get the chance and when it serves their purpose," Wedelin said. He pointed to an attack on a Swedish power plant last year.

Russia-linked actors tried to "destroy" the plant but failed because the system detected the intrusion, Wedelin said. He said the attack was partly aimed at undermining Western support for Ukraine.

Before then, Sweden's security services had mostly observed reconnaissance for potential attacks, intelligence gathering or activity linked to cybercriminals. The attack marked a "switch" in Russia's modus operandi, Wedelin said.

"They're no longer caring as much about potential attribution after their activities, so they are taking greater risks to achieve their goals," he said.

Problems are mounting for Russia's economy

Russia's increasingly aggressive tactics may reflect mounting internal concerns about its economy, which "is not doing well at all," said Kaupo Rosin, the head of Estonia's Foreign Intelligence Service.

About a third of Russia's gross domestic product currently goes to the war effort, Martelius said. The war and ensuing sanctions have slowed growth and fueled stubborn inflation.

Russian officials planned to have a budget deficit of 3.7 trillion rubles (\$52.1 billion) for the whole of 2026 and had already reached about 3.4 trillion rubles (\$47.9 billion) by the end of February, Rosin said.

The Iran war that erupted on Feb. 28 has provided a boost by causing oil prices to soar. The U.S. has granted sanctions waivers for the sale of Russian oil and the U.K. watered down its sanctions in an attempt to lower global fuel costs.

Increased revenue since then has likely improved Russia's budget, but "it doesn't save them," Rosin said, adding that if Western pressure persists, Moscow could face a financial crisis toward the end of the year.

Rosin said intelligence seen by his agency shows a gloomier outlook among Russian officials over the past six months, with the narrative of "total victory" in Ukraine having vanished. Keast-Butler, of British intelligence, said almost 500,000 Russian soldiers have been killed in Ukraine since the full-scale invasion in 2022.

Russia and Ukraine have mostly kept their combat casualty figures under wraps.

Stalled progress on the battlefield and economic woes have many Russian officials privately asking "what is this all for," Rosin said, citing the intelligence reports.

Martelius, of Finland's intelligence service, said that while some reports on the war in Ukraine may have been "sanitized" before reaching President Vladimir Putin's desk, he believes the Russian leader has a fairly clear picture of the economic challenges.

But that does not mean there will be political change.

It is "very dangerous ... to start analyzing Russia as if it is some country like ours," Martelius said. "It is not."

## How a chemical tank disaster struck at the heart of a Washington state mill town

By CLAIRE RUSH Associated Press

LONGVIEW, Wash. (AP) — From his living room window, Washington state Sen. Jeff Wilson can see the paper mill where a chemical tank ruptured this week in Longview, killing 11 people. He used to perform work there as the owner of an environmental cleanup company, and when he heard the sirens go past, he called his son, who works on the larger industrial site, to make sure he was safe.

"I personally have been inside that tank and near that tank many times," said Wilson, who has lived in Longview for 56 years. "I can assure you that we all know somebody there. ... The casualties are our friends and neighbors."

The tank, which contained more than 500,000 gallons (1.9 million liters) of a mixture used to break down wood for making paper, collapsed Tuesday morning at the Nippon Dynawave Packaging Co. The rupture expelled a flood of caustic chemicals powerful enough to overturn pickup trucks and damage buildings at the site.

The chemical disaster, one of the deadliest U.S. workplace accidents in recent decades, has struck at the heart of a community where generations of families have worked in local mills. Longview itself was founded by a timber baron to support the first mills established there, and over its roughly century-long history, residents' lives have become intertwined with the lumber and paper industries.

Supporting victims and worrying about the future

Amid immediate concern about supporting grieving families, there is also worry about what the accident could mean for the future of the plant: It provides crucial jobs in an industry that once powered the forested region but has dwindled in recent decades.

The plant's parent company, Tokyo-based Nippon Paper Group, said in a statement that it was assessing the accident's impact on its financial performance.

"Last night at the vigils, people who work in mills told me that they're proud of their jobs and they're proud of their work, and they don't want to lose it," U.S. Rep. Marie Gluesenkamp Perez, whose district includes Longview, told reporters Wednesday.

Residents who spoke with The Associated Press similarly highlighted how important those jobs are for the city.

"If you're a waitress, a grocery store worker, a teacher, a paraeducator as I was for 30 years — every walk of life here knows somebody and is related to somebody from these mills," Cindy Stiebritz said in the antiques store where she volunteers.

Generations in the mills

Stiebritz said her husband's parents met while working at the lumber company owned by the city's founder, Robert A. Long.

"Those mills, that is the backbone of this town," Stiebritz added. "You feel like you've lost part of your family."

Longview's industrial zone lies along the Columbia River and hosts timber, paper and chemical businesses. Many residents in the city of nearly 40,000 can see the facilities or the steam from the boilers from their homes, or smell the sulfuric odor of the pulp and paper industry.

The city's mill history is also imprinted on its downtown, where R. A. Long Square serves as a central landmark and gathering place, including for the vigil held after the disaster. A park around a man-made lake, another project of Long, features a burst of greenery where pedestrians enjoy its walking paths or the nearby tree-lined streets.

Authorities said the cause of the tank's collapse is still under investigation. The facility, which dates to 1953 and employs about 1,000 people, makes material for tissues, printing paper, cups, plates, cartons and other goods.

According to fundraisers organized for the victims' families, those who lost their lives include a grandfather who was always willing to help anyone; two brothers, one of whom was the sole provider for his partner



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 50 of 82

and three children; and a husband who left behind two children and a wife with a baby on the way.

Brianna Pesio, a server at the Mill City Grill downtown, said her father has worked at the plant for over 30 years. She described the fear Tuesday morning when her brother, who works at the lumber mill next door, told her he couldn't get a hold of him.

"I just didn't know if I lost my dad or not," said Pesio, whose husband also works in a paper mill. "I drove over to my dad's house and pounded on his door until he did wake up. He had just gotten off shift at 5 a.m."

At the nearby Country Folks Deli, longtime server Gayle Leavitt said her in-laws also worked at the mill for decades, adding: "That's how this town has survived."

'This is not the virtual world'

Officials representing the area echoed the pride residents take in the mills and the economic importance of their good-paying jobs in a region where other areas have been hit hard by the decline of the timber industry.

"This is a place where real people make real things. This is not the virtual world," state Rep. Jim Walsh said at a news conference at the plant on Tuesday. "Real things and real industry always carries risks. But it's our job to make sure that risk like this is well managed and, to the extent it can be, controlled."

Stiebritz, the antiques shop volunteer, said she hopes authorities find out the cause "so it never happens again."

"If anything comes out of it, I hope lives can be saved," she said, tearing up as she thought of the children who have lost their parents.

"This town is family. It's one big family," she added. "But we'll make it though. We're strong. We've got a lot of love."

## 3 climbers who fell near treacherous pass on Alaska's Mount McKinley are dead; 1 rescued

By BECKY BOHRER and JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

JUNEAU, Alaska (AP) — Three climbers on Alaska's Mount McKinley who fell near a treacherous pass on North America's tallest peak have died, a Latvian mountaineering group announced Friday. A fourth climber was rescued.

The four were members of a Latvian mountaineering expedition, the group said. They were part of a seven-person team traversing a route known for its exposed sections — where many injuries and deaths have occurred over the years — when they fell Wednesday, the National Park Service has said.

McKinley stands at about 20,310 feet (6,190 meters), and the climber who was rescued was brought off the mountain from about 17,200 feet (5,240 meters) by Denali National Park and Preserve search and rescue personnel late Thursday afternoon. A long line from a helicopter was used in the rescue because the terrain and conditions prevented the helicopter from landing, the park service said Friday. The climber was later airlifted to a hospital.

The fall happened during the climb near Denali Pass, which is about 18,200 feet (5,550 meters), the park service said. It provided few other details. The three others in the climbing group helped with the rescue work and started experiencing "declining physical conditions," the park service said. Crews evacuated them from the mountain Friday.

The group was on the West Buttress route, the most popular path to the summit. It's known for crevasses, steep ice and exposed ridges.

Over the years, many climbing injuries and deaths have occurred on the traverse between an area known as high camp at around 17,200 feet (5,240 meters) and Denali Pass, mainly resulting from unprotected falls, according to the park. Most of the deaths along the pass have happened while climbers are descending.

Park rangers and mountain guides install and maintain snow pickets — which are used to help build anchors for extra protection on areas like steep slopes — between the high camp and Denali Pass, the park has said. That area also is known as the Autobahn, a snow and ice slope that can be marked by

conditions ranging from deep snow carrying avalanche risk to hard ice, the agency said.

Climbers can put in their own pickets if needed, but "you might have to bash it in through very, very dense snow and ice even," said climber Clint Helander, who has summited McKinley and been on the mountain numerous times.

Intense glaciation, rapid weather changes, altitude and the sheer scale of the peak make climbing McKinley "a huge undertaking," he said. Climbers also must carry a significant amount of gear for what can be long expeditions, he said.

"It's immensely easy for something to happen and turn an otherwise straightforward trip into an epic," Helander said.

Only about 1,000 to 1,200 climbers attempt to reach the top of Mount McKinley each year, mostly during May and June. The trip usually takes about 17 days, and less than half made it to the summit last year, according to park statistics.

More than 130 people have died on the mountain in the history of the park, including two deaths last year, according to park statistics. In 2012, four climbers from Japan were killed after a shallow avalanche pushed them into a crevasse.

There were 516 climbers on the mountain as of Thursday, said Scott Carr, a park service spokesperson.

Two others climbers who were not with the group that fell were evacuated from the mountain by helicopter Wednesday, according to the park service.

## **Canadian man pleads guilty to selling lethal substances to people who killed themselves**

By ROB GILLIES Associated Press

NEWMARKET, Ontario (AP) — A Canadian man accused of selling lethal products across 40 countries to hundreds of people who bought them to end their own lives pleaded guilty Friday to 14 counts of counseling or aiding suicide.

Kenneth Law, dressed in a dark blazer and white shirt, stood in the prisoner's box of a Newmarket, Ontario court to enter his guilty pleas. Under the terms of the agreement, Canadian prosecutors will withdraw 14 murder charges against him. Sentencing is scheduled for September.

In the courtroom gallery, family members of the victims dabbed away tears as a prosecutor detailed the final moments of almost 100 people who died after using the lethal products purchased from Law.

Police in Canada and around the world have been investigating more than 100 suicides linked to Law. The charges against him in the Canadian court are related to 14 people across Ontario who were between the ages of 16 and 36.

---

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story includes discussion of suicide. The U.S. suicide and crisis lifeline is available by calling or texting 988. There is also an online chat at [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org). In the U.K., the Samaritans can be reached at 116 123 or [www.samaritans.org](https://www.samaritans.org).

---

Canadian police said Law, 60, used a series of websites to market and sell sodium nitrite, a substance commonly used to cure meats that can be deadly if ingested.

Law is suspected of sending at least 1,200 packages to more than 40 countries, with about 160 of those allegedly sent to addresses in Canada, police said. He has been in custody since his arrest at his Mississauga, Ontario, home in May 2023.

UK victims will be taken into account at sentencing

Prosecutors in the U.K. decided not to charge Law or apply for his extradition despite investigating him over 112 deaths. The decision comes in part because British authorities believe he would be able to challenge a U.K. prosecution under "double jeopardy" laws that prevent a suspect being tried twice for the same crime.

During Friday's proceedings, a Canadian prosecutor described the final moments of those who died us-

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 52 of 82**

ing Law's products, detailing cases from both the 14 victims in Canada and dozens of others in the U.K. British prosecutors say 79 U.K. victims who died as a direct result of purchasing Law's products will be taken into account by the Canadian judge when deciding on a sentence.

The Canadian prosecutor on Friday provided the court with an Agreed Statement of Facts documenting the impact of Law's crimes on U.K. victims. This revealed that 73 people died in England and Wales, five in Scotland and one in Northern Ireland as a result of using products he supplied to them. It also documents that Law sent 330 packages to the U.K. via Canada Post.

In the U.K., David Parfett, whose 22-year-old son Thomas Parfett took his own life in 2022 after receiving a package from Law, said the British government is "failing in its duty to protect life."

"I had wanted Law to face charges in the U.K. ... He really needed to face justice over here," Parfett told the BBC.

**Victims' parents speak out**

Kim Prosser of Ontario said her 19-year-old son, Ashtyn, began struggling with his mental health during the isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic. He died by suicide in 2023 after using a product purchased from Law.

"Hearing his name read in there is tough," Prosser said Friday. "Seeing his name next to the word deceased has always been the most challenging to grasp."

A 29-year-old Toronto man called 911 himself after ingesting a chemical he'd bought from Law, pleading for medical help, the court heard.

"He repeatedly said, 'please,' and 'I am going to die soon,' and then began crying," Prosecutor Cindy Nadler said. By the time paramedics got there, he was unresponsive and struggling to breathe, she said. He later died in a hospital.

Speaking to reporters outside the courtroom Friday, Stephen Mitchell Sr., whose son Stephen Jr. died by suicide after purchasing lethal products from Law, condemned Law as a "vulture" who "took people in their most vulnerable state" and used them for profit.

**Suicide and Canadian law**

Authorities in the United States, Italy, Australia and New Zealand also have conducted investigations. A Canadian prosecutor said 431 packages were sent to the U.S.

Those found guilty of aiding suicide in Canada can face up to 14 years in prison, while first-degree murder carries an automatic sentence of life in prison with no chance of parole for 25 years.

A New Zealand coroner found that four people who died by suicide there had ordered items online from a business associated with Law, but noted that Law's activities are outside the jurisdiction of New Zealand courts.

It is against Canadian law to recommend suicide, although assisted suicide has been legal since 2016 for people 18 and older. Any adult with a serious illness, disease or disability may seek help in dying, but they must ask for assistance from a physician.

## **Another US strike on an alleged drug boat kills 3 in the eastern Pacific Ocean**

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. military said it carried out another strike Friday on a boat accused of smuggling drugs in the eastern Pacific Ocean, killing three men in the third attack this week and pushing the overall death toll above 200 people.

U.S. Southern Command announced the latest strike in the monthslong campaign against alleged drug boats traversing the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific with its usual language that the vessel was "engaged in narco-trafficking operations" and operated by a designated terrorist organization. It provided no evidence.

While the military's social media announcements always include video of the attacks, this appears to be the first with the footage in color instead of black and white. The video shows a small vessel floating in the ocean before it's hit and engulfed in a fireball. It cuts to what could be the boat in flames, surrounded



by a large plume of parcels or some other objects spread around it in the water.

The attack puts the death toll at 202 people from the series of U.S. strikes that began in early September, with two other attacks announced Tuesday and Wednesday. The Trump administration has declared that the U.S. is at armed conflict with Latin American drug cartels, saying they are behind the flow of drugs into American communities.

U.S. Southern Command said in its post on X that the strike came at the direction of Gen. Francis L. Donovan, the top U.S. commander in Latin America, who on Friday also met with Cuban military leaders near the U.S. Navy base in Guantanamo Bay.

## Trump tells agencies to align with study calling for narrower childhood vaccine recommendations

By COLLIN BINKLEY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Friday gave his endorsement to a January study by the Department of Health and Human Services that calls for cutting the number of vaccines recommended for every American child.

An executive order from Trump directs federal agencies to align their policies behind the study, which recommended an overhaul long called for by Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. The study found that the United States recommends more childhood vaccines than many peer nations.

The Trump administration previously moved to narrow the number of recommended childhood vaccines in response to the report, but the move was blocked by a federal judge in Massachusetts. The administration is appealing the decision.

The study recommends vaccinating all children against 11 diseases. Several others would be recommended only for high-risk groups or when doctors recommend them in what's called "shared decision-making." That includes vaccines for flu, rotavirus, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, some forms of meningitis and RSV.

Trump's order adds weight behind the study at a time when the administration had appeared to be trying to shift focus away from Kennedy's more contentious vaccine policies and toward more mainstream topics like healthy eating.

The order directs the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to review the study and "take any appropriate steps" to update its vaccine recommendations. It says the CDC should "provide maximum flexibility to parents and doctors" and directs agencies to make sure all actions, regulations and funding are aligned with the study.

The order adds that any changes should ensure that Americans retain their current access to vaccines. States, not the federal government, have the authority to require vaccinations for schoolchildren. While CDC requirements often influence those state regulations, some states have begun creating their own alliances to counter the Trump administration's guidance on vaccines.

Trump directed HHS to carry out the study in December.

Kennedy is a longtime activist against vaccines and has sought ways to inject his skepticism about the shots into national guidance. Last year, he announced the CDC would no longer recommend COVID-19 vaccines for healthy children and pregnant women, a move questioned by public health experts who saw no new data to justify the change.

Last June, he fired a 17-member CDC vaccine advisory committee and later installed several of his own replacements, including multiple vaccine skeptics.

The January report found that vaccine recommendations for American children had increased in recent decades. It also highlighted countries where no vaccines are required to attend school.

## US commander meets with Cuban military officials as Trump pressures island nation

By BEN FINLEY and KONSTANTIN TOROPIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The top U.S. commander in Latin America met with Cuban military leaders Friday in a “brief exchange on operational security matters” near the U.S. Navy base in Guantanamo Bay, the latest official to visit the island nation as President Donald Trump ramps up pressure on its leaders.

Trump has warned that Cuba “is next” after U.S. military forces captured Venezuela’s autocratic leader, Nicolás Maduro, in a January raid. In the months since, the Trump administration has imposed an oil blockade on Cuba, maintained warships in the Caribbean Sea and indicted former Cuban President Raúl Castro on federal charges.

Gen. Francis Donovan, head of U.S. Southern Command, met with Lt. Gen. Roberto Legrá Sotolongo and other Cuban military officials.

Cuba’s Revolutionary Armed Forces said in a statement that both sides viewed “the meeting positively because it addressed security issues along the perimeter separating the military enclave, and they agreed to maintain communication between the two military commands.”

Top Trump aides, including Secretary of State Marco Rubio and CIA chief John Ratcliffe, also have met with Cuban officials to explore possible improvements in relations. But the U.S. side has come away unimpressed from those talks, leading to even more sanctions imposed on the Cuban government.

Besides the meeting, Donovan also assessed the security of the U.S. naval base in Guantanamo Bay and discussed the “safety of service members and their families, and operational readiness with base officials,” U.S. Southern Command said in a post on X.

The U.S. maintains the base despite decades of friction with Cuba’s socialist leaders, whom Trump wants removed from power.

The U.S. military has a handful of Navy ships, including at least one amphibious assault ship, in the Caribbean, a much smaller force than was present at the time of the Maduro raid.

On Friday, the Pentagon announced that a new unit of 1,300 sailors and Marines would be replacing the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit, which deployed to the region last summer.

## Blue Origin investigates rocket explosion as public is warned about possible wreckage washing ashore

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Jeff Bezos’ Blue Origin is assessing damage to its launch pad after a rocket exploded during a test firing, creating a giant orange fireball seen and felt for miles around.

The company fueled the hulking New Glenn rocket Thursday night, hoping to briefly ignite the engines ahead of a satellite launch next week. But the 321-foot (98-meter), rocket blew up, taking part of the pad with it.

Aerial views on Friday revealed heaps of crumpled structures on the ground, with just one tower and the water tank still standing. Emergency officials warned the public to avoid any wreckage that might wash ashore and to instead call 911. There were no reported deaths or injuries.

It’s a major setback for Blue Origin, coming just one month after the entire New Glenn fleet was grounded because of an upper-stage engine issue that dumped a satellite in the wrong orbit.

Named after John Glenn, the first American in orbit, New Glenn is the rocket that Blue Origin plans to use to launch landers to the moon under NASA’s Artemis program that aims to build a sprawling base near the moon’s south pole. The goal is to land the first Artemis moonwalkers as early as 2028. Earlier this week, the space agency awarded a new contract to Blue Origin worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

One of the biggest rockets to reach orbit, New Glenn has seven first-stage engines fueled by liquid oxygen and liquefied natural gas, which is essentially methane. It has flown three times.

None of the assigned 48 Amazon Leo satellites were on board the newest rocket when the blast oc-

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 55 of 82

curred. Another batch of Amazon Leo satellites — competing with SpaceX's Starlinks to provide internet service to remote locales — lifted off from another pad at Cape Canaveral Space Force Station on Friday night, courtesy of United Launch Alliance's Atlas V rocket.

It was the second launch of the day. SpaceX launched more Starlinks to orbit Friday morning, within 12 hours of the explosion. CEO Elon Musk has two Florida pads in action, one on the Space Force side where the latest Falcon 9 lifted off and the other at NASA's Kennedy Space Center.

Blue Origin has just one Florida pad: Launch Complex 36 dating back to the early 1960s. NASA's Mariner and Pioneer interplanetary probes rocketed away from there, as well as the moon-bound Rangers and Surveyors. The Washington state-based Blue Origin spent more than \$1 billion rebuilding the launch complex — taking it from double pads to a single — after leasing it from the Air Force in 2015.

The company's smaller New Shepard rockets soar from Texas, skimming space for a few minutes with tourists and science experiments. Those suborbital hops were paused in January so the company could focus on New Glenn and upcoming moonshots. All that is now on hold, pending the investigation into the explosion.

NASA Administrator Jared Isaacman said late Thursday that the space agency will evaluate near-term impacts to the Artemis program, which saw four astronauts fly around the moon in April. That Artemis II mission was hoisted by NASA's Space Launch System rocket.

Before the explosion, Blue Origin was on track to launch a prototype lunar lander to the moon on a New Glenn this fall, with another lander due to rocket into orbit around Earth in 2027 for docking practice by the soon-to-be-announced Artemis III crew.

A touchdown by two astronauts on Artemis IV — using a Blue Moon lander or SpaceX's Starship, whichever is ready first — was targeted as early as 2028.

## Judge says Kennedy Center board broke law putting Trump's name on building, blocks closure

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and STEVEN SLOAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal judge ruled Friday that President Donald Trump's name was illegally added to the Kennedy Center and blocked the administration from closing the cultural and arts venue for major renovations — the latest legal setback for Trump's efforts to leave his personal mark on the landscape of the nation's capital.

Trump said in response that he's backing away from his proposed renovation and returning control of the arts institution to Congress.

"Unless I am free to do what I do better than anyone else, bring this Institution back, physically, financially, and artistically, I have no interest in continuing what could only be a hopeless journey into 'NEVER NEVER LAND,'" Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform.

U.S. District Judge Christopher Cooper in Washington, D.C., ruled that the Kennedy Center board's March 16 vote to close the facility was "ill-informed and seemingly preordained" with no regard for its legal obligations. The administration had announced the work would begin in July and last approximately two years, but Cooper's ruling halts those plans for now.

"The trustees might have assessed the propriety of closure in a number of prudent ways. This was not one," he wrote.

Cooper also concluded that the board "overstepped its statutory bounds" by unilaterally adding Trump's name to the center. Congress gave the Kennedy Center its name, and only Congress can change it, he said.

The judge, who was nominated to the bench by Democratic President Barack Obama, ordered the defendants to remove Trump's name from the institution's façade and any "official materials," such as digital or physical signs, within two weeks.

"May the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts be renamed absent Congressional authorization? The answer, plain from the face of the statute, is no. Nor can any other individual be memorialized on the front portico of the building," Cooper wrote.



# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 56 of 82**

Trump said the judge "should be ashamed of himself" in a social media post hours after the decision was issued.

The Republican president said he instructed his administration to "make all necessary arrangements" to have the center transferred to Congress.

Trump determined to leave his mark on DC

Trump has made it a priority of his second term to leave his personal stamp on some of the most historic spots in Washington. He demolished the East Wing of the White House to build a ballroom. His name or image has been added to government buildings, including the U.S. Institute of Peace and Justice Department headquarters. He is pushing for a triumphal arch overlooking the Potomac River.

Opponents have challenged other Trump construction projects in court — and won favorable rulings. But the district court judges likely won't have the final say as the administration pursues appeals.

Roma Daravi, the Kennedy Center's vice president of public relations, said Friday the institution is "confident that on appeal the court will uphold the Board's will to recognize President Trump's historic contributions to our nation's cultural center." She said the decision would be reviewed "carefully."

"Though the reality remains — the Center requires an urgent and significant restoration — a truth that even the plaintiff acknowledges," Daravi said. "With \$257 million secured by President Trump and approved by Congress, the resources are in place and we remain committed to pursuing every lawful avenue to ensure the Trump Kennedy Center is restored as a national cultural landmark for all Americans to enjoy."

Cooper held hearings in late April for parallel lawsuits challenging the project. One was filed by a group of cultural and historic preservation organizations. The other was brought by Rep. Joyce Beatty, an Ohio Democrat who serves as an ex officio member of the Kennedy Center's board. He ruled in favor of Beatty's request but rejected the other challenge.

Beatty called the decision a win for the Kennedy Center and the performing arts. "Now hopefully people can come back to work, we can continue to be the Kennedy Center that we were intended to be," she told The Associated Press.

Justice Department attorneys said renovation plans for the building are limited in scope and well within the board's authority to make without needing outside approvals.

How much of an overhaul is needed?

The plaintiffs worry the president and his board allies will flout preservation rules designed to maintain the building's historic fabric. In earlier statements in court hearings, attorneys for Beatty and the preservation groups raised doubts about the limited scope of the project, pointing to Trump's statements that he would "fully expose" the building's steel skeleton.

Beatty has said she was "very fearful that we'll see what happened with the East Wing and what happened with the Rose Garden" if the center is closed and the renovations allowed unsupervised, referring to major changes the president has made at the White House.

Mike Floca, the Kennedy Center's executive director and chief operating officer, spent several weeks during the spring walking a bipartisan group of lawmakers and their staffs, along with journalists and Washington city officials, through the expansive building that sprawls across 1.5 million square feet.

The tours were intended to show that the Kennedy Center, which began construction in 1965, was in genuine need of an overhaul. The walkthroughs showed severe water damage, apparent in some places through discoloration and pooling. Some pieces of equipment, including several 800-ton chillers that help cool the building, are decades old and in need of replacement.

Floca told reporters in April that he considered doing the repairs individually but insisted it was his recommendation to Trump to close the building and move forward with the renovation all at once.

Trump has taken a keen interest in the Kennedy Center's operations since he returned to the White House last year. He installed a handpicked board that named him chairman. His name was added to the façade of a building that is considered a living monument to Kennedy.

The Kennedy Center has kept up performances ahead of the closure, though at a much slower pace than in previous years. Trump attended the premiere of the musical "Chicago" in March and other shows,

including "Moulin Rouge," are slated for June.

Bill Maher, the comedian who has had an up and down relationship with Trump, is expected to be awarded the Mark Twain Prize for American Humor on June 28, an event that was anticipated to be one of the final big moments at the Kennedy Center before the closure.

## **Israeli troops push deeper into Lebanon as the two sides start military talks at the Pentagon**

By BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Israeli troops entered a southern Lebanese village early Friday, pushing deeper into the country as Lebanese and Israeli military officials held direct talks at the Pentagon over the deadly conflict.

The entrance of Israel's troops into the village of Dibbine, near the town of Marjayoun, came as Israeli airstrikes killed at least six people. Five were killed in an airstrike on the villages of Deir Qanoun al Nahr and Abbasiyeh, while a municipal policeman was killed in the village of Ebba, state media reported.

In Washington, a six-member Lebanese military delegation met Friday with Israeli military officials in the first direct military talks between the two countries in decades.

The Pentagon, in a statement released late Friday, said the talks were "productive" but stopped short of noting any accomplishments or achievements. It said the talks "focused on building practical frameworks for regional security and stability" and the "tangible outcomes" from their discussions will directly inform the negotiations with political leaders being conducted by the State Department next week.

Talks between senior officials from Israel and Lebanon have been going on since last month but are complicated by the fact that Hezbollah, Israel's target, is not participating in the discussions and has refused to accept their results.

A nominal ceasefire went into effect on April 17. A senior Lebanese military official told The Associated Press earlier on Friday that the Lebanese delegation, led by the army's head of operations Brig. Gen. George Rizkallah, would aim to make it comprehensive.

The official added the Lebanese delegation will request the reactivation of the committee monitoring the enforcement of an earlier U.S.-brokered ceasefire that halted the war between Israel and Hezbollah in late 2024.

Another Lebanese official, who was briefed throughout the day about the talks at the Pentagon, also said the delegation would seek the comprehensive implementation of the ceasefire and a stop to ongoing hostilities.

He said implementation would be followed by talks at a later date on matters such as deploying the Lebanese army along the border and the withdrawal of Israeli troops from southern Lebanon.

Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the media about the ongoing talks in Washington.

President Joseph Aoun's office said he received a call Friday from U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and they discussed the situation in Lebanon and the latest developments in the Middle East. Aoun's office said the president told Rubio that efforts should concentrate on implementing the ceasefire as it is "the essential entry point for transitioning to any other issues."

In April, Lebanon and Israel held the first direct talks in Washington in more than three decades.

The Israeli military issued several evacuation warnings for southern Lebanon on Friday, forcing hundreds of families to flee to safer areas further north.

Israeli troops fought Hezbollah fighters inside the villages of Yohmor and Zawtar al-Sahrqieh near the city of Nabatieh after they crossed the strategic Litani River, which the Israeli military has used as a de facto boundary. Large areas to the south are under Israeli military control, despite the April ceasefire.

Hezbollah, whose members have been fighting Israeli troops for days in the area, said in statements that its members struck Israeli troops inside Yohmor.

The two villages are close to the Crusader-built Beaufort castle that is about 15 kilometers (9 miles) from the Israeli border and overlooks wide parts of southern Lebanon. It was not clear if Israeli troops

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 58 of 82

are trying to capture the castle, which lies north of the Litani.

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited the northern front Friday where he spoke to members of the military. "I must tell you that there are very impressive results here. Our forces have crossed the Litani; they have advanced to controlling positions," he said.

"We are operating in Beirut, in the Bekaa, across the entire width of the front, and we are dealing Hezbollah a crushing blow," Netanyahu said referring to Lebanon's eastern Bekaa Valley and Beirut's southern suburbs where Israel's air force struck on Thursday.

The violence in southern Lebanon came as U.S. and Iranian negotiators reached a tentative agreement Thursday to extend the ceasefire in the 3-month-old war by 60 days and start a new round of talks on Iran's nuclear program, according to a U.S. official familiar with the matter.

Iran did not immediately confirm any deal. Vice President JD Vance on Thursday evening confirmed there was a tentative agreement, but said it was unclear if President Donald Trump would approve it.

Hezbollah legislator Hassan Fadlallah said Friday that any deal between Iran and the U.S. would stop Israel's offensive in Lebanon. Officials in Iran, Hezbollah's main backer, have said that they insist that a deal with Washington would stop the latest Israel-Hezbollah war that started on March 2, when Hezbollah fired rockets into northern Israel two days after Israel and Iran attacked in Iran.

The latest Israel-Hezbollah war has left 3,200 people dead in Lebanon and over 1 million people displaced.

## Djokovic's French Open loss to teenager Fonseca ensures a new men's Grand Slam winner

By SAMUEL PETREQUIN and JEROME PUGMIRE Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — There will be a new men's champion at the French Open after Novak Djokovic followed Jannik Sinner out of Roland Garros in a five-set stunner on Friday.

Brazilian teenager Joao Fonseca beat 24-time major winner Djokovic 4-6, 4-6, 6-3, 7-5, 7-5 in the third round to follow Thursday's huge upset, when No. 1 Sinner — last year's runner-up lost to 56th-ranked Juan Manuel Cerundolo.

"Ten minutes after the match I could realize a little bit what I did, what I achieved," the 19-year-old Fonseca said. "How difficult it was and how amazing it was for me."

Djokovic's latest quest for a record 25th Grand Slam singles title was ended and it was just the second time he lost from two sets up, the other also coming in Paris in 2010.

Along with Daniil Medvedev, Marin Cilic and Stan Wawrinka, all the men's major winners are out, thus guaranteeing that a new pair of hands will raise the Coupe des Mousquetaires trophy aloft on June 7 on Court Philippe-Chatrier.

"Of course, Jannik and Djokovic out, there's more chances," said Fonseca, who next faces two-time runner-up Casper Ruud, who beat Tommy Paul 4-6, 6-7 (4), 6-4, 7-6 (4), 7-5.

Second-seeded Alexander Zverev, the 2024 runner-up, also advanced to the fourth round with a 6-4, 6-3, 5-7, 6-2 win late Friday over Frenchman Quentin Halys.

The 39-year-old Djokovic faded as the court slowed in the evening cool.

"Tough one for me to lose," Djokovic said. "I was barely standing on my legs toward the end of the match."

In the final game, Djokovic had a break point for 6-6 but Fonseca served out with three consecutive aces and became the first teenager to beat Djokovic at a Grand Slam tournament.

"I just enjoyed being on court and what a pleasure it was. It's my first stepping on court against him," Fonseca said. "We still think he's 20. At the end of the match I think he was more fit than me, that's crazy."

Fonseca wished his mother in the crowd happy birthday and thanked all the Brazilians who turned up to watch.

Djokovic doubts

This wasn't as big an upset as Sinner's loss because Djokovic came to Paris with doubts.

After he lost the Australian Open final to Carlos Alcaraz, a shoulder injury limited his clay-court buildup to one competitive match and Djokovic labored for at least three hours in each of his previous two rounds



# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 59 of 82**

before facing the full fury of Fonseca's booming forehand.

"Taking everything in consideration and all the circumstances, I think the level was really good," said Djokovic, whose last major title was the 2024 U.S. Open.

The heat that stressed Sinner also got to Djokovic, who applied ice packs on both sides of his face during changeovers. Djokovic snapped at a television camera operator for getting too close to his face at one point.

By the fifth set he couldn't hide his fatigue: He hunched over the advertising boards, his forearms dangling; slumped back in his chair with a towel on his head; grabbed his head with his hands.

He was gracious in defeat.

"I told him (after the match) that he deserved to win and he should be proud of himself," Djokovic said. "We've all seen today why there is hype around him."

Djokovic said he was unsure if he would play at the French Open next year, although he said the same after his semifinal defeat to Sinner last year.

**Kostyuk keeps going**

Still unbeaten on clay this season, Marta Kostyuk reached the fourth round for the second time and set up a big match against four-time champion Iga Swiatek in the women's draw.

The 15th-ranked Ukrainian extended her winning streak on clay to 15 matches with a 6-4, 6-3 victory over Viktorija Golubic on yet another hot day in Paris.

She lost to Swiatek in the fourth round in 2021. A rematch is coming up next after Swiatek defeated fellow Polish player Magda Linette 6-4, 6-4.

Swiatek has won in straight sets all three times against Kostyuk and boasts a 43-3 record at Roland Garros. Seventh-seeded Elina Svitolina was another Ukrainian woman to advance. She beat Tamara Korpatsch 6-2, 6-3.

**A dominant win**

Also advancing was 36-year-old Sorana Cirstea, who routed Solana Sierra and became the oldest player in the Open Era to claim a 6-0, 6-0 win in a Grand Slam tournament. She next faces China's Wang Xiyu, who has still not dropped a set.

Eighth-seeded Mirra Andreeva progressed with a 6-4, 6-2 win against Czech opponent Marie Bouzkova and leads the women's tour with 32 victories this season.

## **Bus hits cars in Virginia, killing 5 people and injuring 34, state police say**

By ERIK VERDUZCO and ALLEN G. BREED Associated Press

A bus crashed into vehicles slowing for a work zone on Interstate 95 in Virginia early Friday, killing five people and injuring dozens, including the driver, authorities said.

The crash happened at about 2:35 a.m. on southbound I-95 in Stafford County, near Quantico. All five of the people who died were in vehicles hit by the bus, and 44 people were taken to hospitals, including three in critical condition, police said.

"The preliminary investigation indicates that traffic was slowing southbound for an upcoming work zone," state police said in a news release. "A bus failed to slow for traffic and struck six vehicles."

Police said there were "approximately" 34 passengers on the bus.

"We've got patients in multiple hospitals. We've got the driver at a hospital here," said Peyton Vogel, a Federal Transit Administration spokesperson who was on the scene. "I've got to say, this is one of the most tragic things I've ever seen. Absolutely tragic."

Four of the fatalities were in one car, which caught fire. State police said the victims were a 45-year-old male, a 44-year-old female, a 13-year-old female and a 7-year-old male, all from Greenfield, Massachusetts. Their names were not released by police, but a statement from the school the children attended in Greenfield said they were Dmitri and Ecaterina Doncev and their daughter, Emily, and son, Mark.

"The Doncev family was a cherished part of our school community, and their loss is being felt deeply by our students, families, faculty, and staff," Providence Christian Academy said.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 60 of 82**

The fifth victim, an unidentified 25-year-old female from Worcester, Massachusetts, was in an SUV that was struck by the bus.

State police identified the bus driver as Jing S. Dong, 48, of Staten Island, New York. Charges are pending, authorities said.

Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy said on the social media platform X that Dong was an American citizen originally from China who got his commercial driver's license two years ago in New York.

Mary Washington Healthcare said it received 19 patients from the crash. It posted online that seven of the patients were taken to its trauma center in Fredericksburg, where four were being discharged and three remained in treatment — one in serious condition and two in critical condition. Twelve were taken to its hospital in Stafford, where they were later discharged in good condition.

The National Transportation Safety Board posted online that it was sending a "go-team" to conduct a safety investigation into the crash and that it would have a spokesperson at the scene.

The southbound lanes had reopened by noon, but traffic was still backed up for a couple of miles, according to a state transportation advisory.

Bus company had satisfactory record

The bus was operated by E&P Travel Inc., based in Kings Mountain, North Carolina. A compliance snapshot from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration showed only one injury accident involving the company's vehicles in the previous two years and listed its safety rating as "satisfactory."

The company was incorporated Nov. 24, 2023, by Shuo Liu, according to records from the North Carolina Secretary of State's office. Liu is also listed as the registered agent. The FMCSA site said the company operated four vehicles and had 11 drivers.

While it is too soon to say what caused Friday's crash, federal authorities have been grappling with interstate passenger bus safety issues for decades.

Following a series of passenger bus crashes in 2008 that killed 41 people, the U.S. Department of Transportation published a Motorcoach Safety Action Plan.

The NTSB investigated 16 fatal motorcoach crashes between June 1998 and January 2008, finding that driver-related problems such as fatigue, medical condition and inattention accounted for 56 percent of the accidents. The agency said driver-related problems were responsible for 60 percent of the fatalities in those crashes.

Among the actions recommended were creation of a pre-employment driver history screening program and a national drug- and alcohol-testing database "to enable motorcoach operators to determine if drivers have a history of violating DOT alcohol or drug rules."

## **Louisiana enacts new congressional districts in a bid to give the GOP another seat**

By JACK BROOK and MARC LEVY Associated Press

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — Louisiana enacted a new map of congressional districts Friday that is designed to help Republicans pick up a seat while eliminating one of the state's two majority-Black House districts, both of which are represented by Democrats.

Republican Gov. Jeff Landry signed the plan hours after it overwhelmingly passed the state's Republican-controlled Legislature.

Approval of the new House map came a month after the U.S. Supreme Court struck down Louisiana's current map — with its two majority-Black districts — as an illegal racial gerrymander, weakening the landmark 1965 federal Voting Rights Act. That decision intensified a national redistricting battle fueled by President Donald Trump's efforts to protect Republicans' slim U.S. House majority in the midterm elections. Louisiana is one of several Southern states now redrawing their maps to help Republicans.

Louisiana Republicans had considered drawing a map giving the party a shot at winning all six of the state's U.S. House seats. But that would have required adding more registered Democrats to Republican-held districts, potentially backfiring with GOP losses.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 61 of 82**

The map approved Friday in a 28-10 state Senate vote along party lines reflected Republican arguments that a 5-1 map is safer for the GOP and better protects U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson from facing a difficult reelection. Republicans currently hold four of Louisiana's six congressional seats.

'Vicious race to the bottom'

Democrats contend that the new map is racially gerrymandered to squeeze more Black voters — who tend to be registered Democrats — into a single district.

Democratic state Sen. Royce Duplessis pointed out during floor debate Friday that some other Southern states, such as South Carolina, had refused to redraw their maps in the middle of an election year, and said Louisiana is participating in a "vicious, vicious race to the bottom."

The bill's sponsor, Republican state Sen. Jay Morris, repeatedly insisted that party affiliation, not race, drove district boundaries.

"I purposely put more Democrats into District 2 to make the remaining districts better performing for Republicans," Morris said at one point.

Morris said he told the map demographers to avoid including any data on race or including those statistics in information shared with lawmakers before the vote.

Democratic state Sen. Sam Jenkins told Morris, "I think it's a racially gerrymandered district that's going to get us into a lot of trouble here."

"Agree to disagree," Morris told Jenkins.

More litigation expected in Louisiana

Louisiana is currently using a map ordered by a lower court in 2024 to comply with the Voting Rights Act by including a second district with a majority-Black population.

That map, however, was challenged in court, and the Supreme Court responded on April 30 by striking it down as an illegal racial gerrymander.

Landry postponed the state's closed U.S. House primary slated for May 16. He later signed a law making the U.S. primary open and shifted the date to Nov. 3 to allow time for Republican lawmakers to draw and pass a new map. All candidates, regardless of party affiliation, will be on the ballot for voters in their district.

The new map redraws Democratic U.S. Rep. Cleo Fields' district, clustering it around predominantly white communities in the Baton Rouge area and southern Louisiana. It also adds part of Baton Rouge to a heavily Democratic, majority-Black district based in New Orleans currently represented by Democratic U.S. Rep. Troy Carter.

More lawsuits were expected over the new map.

Democrats say the map could draw a legal challenge over racial gerrymandering, and the ACLU of Louisiana suggested Friday that it could sue, calling the map a "racial gerrymander hiding behind the thin veneer of partisanship" and warning that "this fight is just beginning."

Meanwhile, the victorious plaintiffs in the U.S. Supreme Court's decision criticized the Legislature's map earlier this week for leaving a majority-Black district in place.

Nationwide battle over district lines

In the weeks following the Supreme Court's decision, several other Republican-controlled Southern states have seized upon a weakened federal Voting Rights Act to try to redraw their own congressional districts.

So far, Republicans are winning the redistricting contest. But that doesn't necessarily mean they will win a narrowly divided U.S. House in November. Republicans think they could gain as many as 15 seats from their redistricting efforts so far, while Democrats think they could gain six seats from new districts in California and Utah.

Meanwhile, a court decision in Wisconsin on Friday could give Democrats a new avenue to pick up seats in 2028.

The liberal-controlled Wisconsin Supreme Court said it would hear an appeal of a case filed by a bipartisan coalition of business executives that seeks to redraw the state's Republican-friendly congressional districts. Republicans hold six of the state's eight House seats, but only two are considered competitive.

A three-judge panel dismissed the case in April. Those who filed the lawsuit weren't seeking a ruling in



time for the 2026 election. Instead, they are asking the state Supreme Court to send the case back to the lower court for a trial on their claims, which would likely not take place until 2027.

## Trump ponders whether to move forward with Iran deal but hasn't yet decided

By AAMER MADHANI and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. President Donald Trump held a White House Situation Room meeting with his advisers on Friday but has not yet made a decision on whether to move forward with a deal to extend the Iran ceasefire and reopen the Strait of Hormuz. Iran said the agreement has not been finalized.

Ahead of the meeting, Trump said he was looking to make a "final determination." A senior administration official later said the roughly two-hour meeting with national security aides had concluded without a decision.

The official, who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity, said Trump would only sign a deal that "satisfies his redlines" and curbs Iran's nuclear ambitions.

Trump confirmed the high-level talks the day after The Associated Press and other news outlets reported that U.S. and Iranian negotiators had come to terms on a tentative agreement. The deal would extend the fragile ceasefire by 60 days as new talks are held on Iran's disputed nuclear program.

Trump wrote on social media that "Iran must agree that they will never have a Nuclear Weapon or Bomb." He said the strait must be reopened for international navigation and all sea mines destroyed.

Iran's main negotiator said Friday that it has "no trust in guarantees or words," only actions, underscoring lingering distrust after the U.S. and Israel have twice attacked Iran over the past year while it was engaged in nuclear negotiations.

"No step will be taken before the other side acts," Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf wrote on X. "We do not gain concessions through talks, but through missiles."

Nuclear issues remain unresolved

Later, but before Trump's meeting concluded, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei told a state broadcaster that the agreement "has not been finalized yet."

On Thursday, U.S. Vice President JD Vance suggested negotiators were trying to strike general terms on Iran's nuclear program, with the specifics to be hammered out in the ensuing talks.

Baghaei, however, said Friday that Iranian officials were "focused on the end of war and are not discussing the details of the nuclear plan at this point."

Iran also wants any deal to include a truce between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah militants in Lebanon, where fighting has intensified despite a nominal ceasefire. And the Islamic Republic has been seeking the release of billions of dollars in frozen funds.

Ebrahim Azizi, who heads the Iranian parliament's national security commission and is close to top leaders, posted on social media Friday that Iran "sets the terms: cash for cash, credit for credit, nothing for nothing."

The Islamic Republic has 440.9 kilograms (972 pounds) of uranium that is enriched up to 60% purity, a short, technical step from weapons-grade levels of 90%, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Iran has long maintained its nuclear program is peaceful and has not publicly committed to giving up the stockpile. It's believed to be buried under three nuclear sites that were badly damaged by U.S. strikes last year.

Trump returned Friday to his on-and-off demand for the removal of the cache as part of a deal. The material would be unearthed by the U.S., in coordination with Iran and the IAEA, "and DESTROYED," he posted.

Deal would reopen the Strait of Hormuz

The proposed memorandum makes clear that Iran would not be able to impose tolls on the Strait of

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 63 of 82**

Hormuz and that it would have to remove all mines from the vital waterway within 30 days, according to a U.S. official who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The U.S. would gradually lift its blockade on Iranian ports and would also agree to relax sanctions, allowing Iran to sell more of its oil.

Baghaei said Iran and Oman, which lie on opposite sides of the strait, would manage it and “adopt mechanisms” for transit through it, “based on their own national interests and the interests of the international community.”

The two nations’ foreign ministers discussed the issue by phone earlier Friday, according to Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who wrote on X that he had expressed solidarity “in the face of any threat.”

On Wednesday, Trump had warned Oman — a U.S. ally — not to enter into any agreement with Iran to share control of the strait or the U.S. will “have to blow them up.”

Iran has effectively closed the strait since the U.S. and Israel launched a surprise attack on Feb. 28 that killed Iran’s supreme leader and other top officials. Before then, the waterway was open to international traffic, and around a fifth of the world’s oil and gas passed through it.

The closure of the strait has caused the price of fuel and other goods to soar, with the effects felt far beyond the Middle East.

Iran has said it lets some commercial vessels pass — about two dozen daily in recent days, compared with more than 100 a day before the war. But the Islamic Republic also has charged tolls for at least some ships and established a formal gatekeeper agency earlier this month, spurring a new round of U.S. sanctions this week.

The agency, called the Persian Gulf Strait Authority, condemned the sanctions Friday but deemed them a sign of its own “positive performance.”

Since the ceasefire began about seven weeks ago, the U.S. and Iran have traded strikes and accusations of ceasefire violations. But they have not returned to full-scale hostilities and have kept negotiating.

## **US adult cigarette smoking rate hits another all-time low**

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The cigarette smoking rate among U.S. adults dropped to another all-time low last year, with 1 in 11 adults saying they were current smokers, according to government survey data released this week.

Cigarette smoking is a risk factor for lung cancer, heart disease and stroke, and it’s long been considered the leading cause of preventable death.

The preliminary findings from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention were based on survey responses from more than 24,200 adults. In the survey, CDC officials defined current cigarette smoking as smoking at least 100 cigarettes in a lifetime and now smoking every day or some days.

In the mid-1960s, 42% of U.S. adults were smokers. The rate has been gradually dropping for decades, due to cigarette taxes, tobacco product price hikes, smoking bans, public education campaigns and changes in the social acceptability of lighting up in public.

In 2024, the percentage of current adult smokers fell below 10% for the first time. Last year, it was 9%, according to the new survey.

The use of electronic cigarettes has been inching up among adults, but has held about steady in 2025, at about 7%.

“The continued decline in smoking is a monumental public health achievement that has saved millions of lives and billions in healthcare costs,” said Yolonda Richardson, president and chief executive of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, a Washington, D.C.-based advocacy and research organization.

Richardson said current smoking-prevention efforts have been set back by cuts President Donald Trump’s administration made that eliminated the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Office on Smoking and Health and its “Tips from Former Smokers” advertising campaign.

She cited estimates that the “Tips” campaign alone helped more than 1 million Americans quit smoking

and saved over \$7.3 billion in healthcare costs.

"This critical work must be restored and sustained to continue reducing smoking-related disease, death and healthcare costs nationwide," Richardson said.

## **Bondi refuses to answer lawmakers' questions about Trump's involvement in Epstein files release**

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former Attorney General Pam Bondi refused to answer questions Friday on President Donald Trump's involvement in the release of the Jeffrey Epstein case files as she defended the Trump administration's actions before House lawmakers scrutinizing the process.

Bondi, who spent roughly four hours on Capitol Hill for her closed-door interview, was again defiant when she was confronted by lawmakers about the Epstein investigation. In her opening statement, she stood behind the Department of Justice's handling of the case files and said that Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche, now the acting attorney general and Trump's former personal attorney, had overseen the process to publish them.

"The bottom line is: justice and transparency in this matter have been delivered at the direction of President Trump and his administration," she said, according to her opening statement.

Bondi's transcribed interview presented lawmakers with an opportunity to question a Cabinet official who was central to the political firestorm over Epstein that at times has rattled Trump's Republican administration. She initially raised expectations for the full release of the Epstein case files, only to later backtrack. That reversal prompted Congress to step in and pass the law requiring the release.

But Democratic lawmakers said that Bondi told them she would not speak about the president in the interview and, consulting with a lawyer from the Department of Justice, said that she could decline those questions because she agreed to appear before the committee voluntarily.

"It's a sham in there," said Democratic Rep. Dave Min of California during a break in the interview. "They are not answering any questions."

Democratic Rep. James Walkinshaw of Virginia said he asked Bondi whether Trump had any knowledge of Epstein's crimes before they became public. Reading from his notes of the exchange, Walkinshaw told reporters that Bondi's response was, "I'm not certain of the extent of his knowledge."

Epstein killed himself in a New York City jail cell in 2019 while awaiting trial for trafficking and sexually abusing underage girls. Trump was friends with Epstein in the 1990s and early 2000s but has said he cut ties with him years before Epstein pleaded guilty to Florida state charges in 2008 for soliciting prostitution from a minor.

Survivors tried to confront Bondi

Several survivors of Epstein's abuse gathered outside the Capitol office where the interview was taking place. They tried to make their presence known to Bondi as she entered the room, but several said they were shoved aside by police officers.

"I just hope that she does have a moment where she remembers her own humanity and our humanity and finds her compassion and remembers that this is a bigger story than political rhetoric," said Danielle Bensky, one of the survivors.

The survivors also implored lawmakers to hold Bondi accountable for the handling of the Epstein case files' release, which included the personal information of potential victims.

They confronted the committee chair, Republican Rep. James Comer of Kentucky, and he told them that he would press for the complete release of case files mandated by law.

"We want justice for the survivors, we do," Comer added.

Bondi told lawmakers in her opening statement that releasing the Epstein case files was "an enormously complicated and labor-intensive process" and conceded that the Justice Department had made redaction errors. But she mostly defended the department's work, saying that it had complied with the law and



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 65 of 82

demonstrated "an unprecedented commitment to transparency."

Even after being ousted as attorney general last month, Bondi has stayed within the Republican president's orbit.

Trump appointed Bondi, who revealed this week that she is being treated for thyroid cancer, to a White House panel on artificial intelligence this week, and she was accompanied Friday by Justice Department officials, including Harmeet Dhillon, who heads the department's Civil Rights Division, acting as her counsel.

Democrats called that arrangement a conflict of interest.

Dhillon told reporters after the interview that she had been there to "represent the interests of the Department of Justice" because Bondi was answering questions about her time as attorney general. She said she had advised Bondi to only answer questions that were within "the ground rules laid with the committee" and not on other topics.

Interview was not videoed

Friday's interview was only the latest clash between Bondi and Democrats.

Bondi was subpoenaed by the committee in March in a bipartisan vote, but she tried to head off that demand by holding a closed-door meeting with lawmakers. The maneuver only added to the enmity between her and Democrats on the committee.

Bondi's departure from the Justice Department also raised doubts about the enforcement of the congressional subpoena. After the committee's Democrats maneuvered to press for a civil contempt of Congress resolution against Bondi, she agreed to sit for a transcribed interview rather than a sworn deposition.

Democrats on the Oversight panel criticized that arrangement, saying it allowed Bondi to decline to answer questions. They also objected to Comer's decision not to video the interview.

"We continue to be incredibly disappointed of the decision to not have this interview videotaped and then released to the American public," said Rep. Robert Garcia of California, the top Democrat on the panel.

Comer has said he allowed Bondi to sit for a transcribed interview rather than a deposition as an incentive to cooperate. Previously, he had enforced a subpoena on former President Bill Clinton and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton after they resisted the demand. Both of their depositions were video-recorded.

Comer said that Bondi could face prosecution if she lies to Congress and that the committee would release a transcript of the interview.

Meanwhile, Democrats suggested they could still press to enforce the subpoena for Bondi. They also said they wanted to subpoena Blanche. Both actions would need Republican support.

"It's important that we continue to keep this pressure on them," said Democratic Rep. Summer Lee of Pennsylvania.

## US stocks gain ground, adding to their records, as Dell soars

By DAMIAN J. TROISE and ALEX VEIGA AP Business Writers

Wall Street pushed further into the record books Friday, as the major stock indexes extended the market's recent winning streak and closed out a solid month of gains.

The S&P 500 rose 0.2%, notching its seventh consecutive gain and ninth straight winning week — the longest such streak since 2023. The benchmark index set an all-time high for the fourth day in a row.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average gained 0.7% and the Nasdaq composite added 0.2%. The Dow and Nasdaq also reached new heights after posting record highs earlier in the week.

Big technology stocks have been behind much of the market's record-breaking streak. Their pricey stock values give them more influence in directing the market higher or lower. In May alone, technology stocks within the S&P 500 rose more than 15%, while most of the sectors in the benchmark index actually lost ground.

"The rally has been largely tech-led and supported by resilient earnings, but the key question is whether it can be sustained," wrote Angelo Kourkafas, senior global strategist at Edward Jones, in a research note.

Tech stocks also powered the market higher Friday. Microsoft rose 5.4% and Broadcom gained 4.7%.

Dell Technologies surged 32.8% to lead all stocks in the S&P 500 after delivering profits that blew past

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 66 of 82

expectations. The company also raised its outlook, citing powerful demand for AI computing.

Most other sectors in the S&P 500 lost ground Friday. Among the decliners: Paramount Skydance fell 1.9%, Amazon.com dropped 1.2%, and Costco Wholesale closed 3.9% lower.

Wall Street has been gaining ground despite worries that the U.S. war with Iran is worsening inflation and jeopardizing economic growth.

The U.S. and Iran are reportedly working toward a deal to extend a ceasefire. That eased pressure on oil prices. The price for August delivery of Brent crude, the international standard, fell 1.7% to settle at \$91.12 per barrel. It is still well above the \$70 per barrel level in late February before the war began. The price for a barrel of benchmark U.S. crude oil for July delivery fell 1.7% to settle at \$87.36.

Treasury yields held relatively steady as oil prices fell. The yield on the 10-year Treasury slipped to 4.44% from 4.45% late Thursday.

Still, high oil prices remain a key concern for Wall Street. The war has stifled the flow of oil shipments through the Strait of Hormuz. Roughly a fifth of the world's oil and natural gas is shipped through the waterway.

That has pushed up prices for gasoline and a wide range of goods, feeding inflation and squeezing consumers and businesses. Prices were already rising before the war began from the ongoing impact of tariffs.

Several reports this week reflected inflation's rise and impact on consumers. A measure of inflation preferred by the Federal Reserve accelerated in April to its highest level in three years. Consumer confidence is slipping amid the squeeze from rising inflation.

Wall Street's worries about rising inflation have been somewhat muted by the latest round of corporate profit reports. Companies in the S&P 500 have reported profit growth of 28% overall for the most recent quarter, according to FactSet. The overwhelming majority of companies in the S&P 500 have already reported their latest results. That could mean investors' focus may shift back toward inflation, consumers' behavior and the Fed's path ahead for interest rates.

The Fed has been holding its benchmark interest rate steady as it closely watches rising inflation. It is expected to continue holding rates steady at its next meeting in June and through the year, according to CME's FedWatch tool. Cutting interest rates could help lower borrowing costs and give the economy a jolt, but it could also worsen inflation at time when prices are already high and rising.

Despite the market turbulence caused by the conflict in the Middle East, stocks notched further gains in May. The S&P 500 closed out the month with a 5.1% gain. It's up 10.7% so far this year.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 16.43 points to 7,580.06 on Friday. The Dow gained 363.49 points to 51,032.46, and the Nasdaq added 55.15 points to finish at 26,972.62.

Markets in Europe and Asia mostly rose.

## Federal judge says New Hampshire must make it easier to prove citizenship when registering to vote

By HOLLY RAMER and JULIE CARR SMYTH Associated Press

CONCORD, N.H. (AP) — A federal judge has said that New Hampshire must make voter registration easier by allowing applicants to attest to their U.S. citizenship if they don't have the documents to prove it.

The case was seen as the first major legal test of an election reform that has been pushed nationally by President Donald Trump and has gained favor among many Republicans, though U.S. District Court Judge Samantha Elliot said she was not deciding whether requiring proof of citizenship itself is constitutional. Her ruling late Thursday night on a narrower question of New Hampshire law was significant, however, because it underscored the potential perils of implementing strict requirements for voters to document their U.S. citizenship so they can cast a ballot.

Elliot found that changes in 2024 to the state voter registration law unconstitutionally removed one method of proof -- namely, a voter's sworn affidavit attesting to citizenship.

"The evidence shows that this is the only method of proof available to a significant number of New Hampshire voters," she wrote.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 67 of 82

The changes took effect last year, after former Gov. Chris Sununu, a Republican, signed the bill two years ago. The attorney general's office said it plans to appeal the judge's ruling, calling the citizenship requirements a "common-sense approach to voter registration and election administration designed to protect the integrity of our elections."

The ruling was a win for the American Civil Liberties Union of New Hampshire and other plaintiffs who argued that the changes that took effect last year were burdensome and unnecessary.

"New Hampshire's elections have always been safe, secure, and accurate — and this law could have unconstitutionally and needlessly prevented thousands of eligible voters from casting a ballot," said Henry Klementowicz, deputy legal director of the ACLU of New Hampshire.

In her ruling, Elliott said eliminating the affidavit option created a significant burden for voters and did little, if anything, to further the state's interests. She noted that an expert on voter fraud found only 47 instances of wrongful voting out of roughly 8.3 million votes between 1998 and 2024. During that time, only eight noncitizens may have cast ballots, she said.

"If wrongful voting is rare in New Hampshire, wrongful voting by noncitizens is essentially non-existent," she wrote.

The lawsuit, filed on behalf of the Coalition for Open Democracy, the League of Women Voters of New Hampshire, the Forward Foundation and five voters, called the state's voter registration law one of the most restrictive in the nation. During town elections last fall, some voters had trouble gathering passports, birth certificates or other proof of citizenship.

New Hampshire is not the only state with a proof-of-citizenship law for voters. Arizona, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming have similar laws already in effect, according to the Brennan Center for Justice. Florida passed a law this year requiring documentary proof of citizenship to vote, but it won't take effect until next year.

A similar law in Kansas, which required proof of citizenship for state and federal elections, was found in 2018 to violate both the U.S. Constitution and the National Voter Registration Act after it prevented more than 31,000 citizens from registering to vote.

Arizona established a two-tiered system after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 2013 that the state could not require citizenship documentation for federal elections. In August 2024, the court allowed some parts of the state's proof-of-citizenship law to be enforced as the legal fight continued in lower courts.

The ruling comes as Trump is trying to push a proof-of-citizenship bill, the SAVE America Act, through Congress. Voting rights advocates say such a federal requirement could disenfranchise millions of people. A 2025 University of Maryland study estimated that 21.3 million Americans who are eligible to vote do not have or have easy access to documents to prove their citizenship, including nearly 10% of Democrats, 7% of Republicans and 14% of people unaffiliated with either major party.

New Hampshire Secretary of State David Scanlan said he will reimplement the use of voter affidavits for registrants to prove citizenship, but noted the ruling doesn't affect other 2024 changes to the law, including a requirement that those registering to vote provide documentary proof of identity, age and address. Voters also will continue to be required to show proof of identity on Election Day.

## Russian drone targeting Ukraine hits apartment building in Romania, injuring 2, officials say

By STEPHEN McGRATH and NICOLAE DUMITRACHE Associated Press

BUCHAREST, Romania (AP) — A Russian drone that was part of an attack on Ukraine went astray and struck an apartment building in eastern Romania, injuring two people in the NATO member country, Romanian officials said Friday. The incursion added to concerns that the war could spread across the alliance's borders.

The drone was tracked overnight by radar in Romanian airspace, crashed onto the roof of the building in the Danube port city of Galati and sparked a fire, the Defense Ministry said in a statement. The two injuries were minor and several people were evacuated.



# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 68 of 82**

It was the latest in a series of drones — from both Russia and Ukraine — to hit a NATO member since Moscow launched its full-scale invasion in February 2022.

The incidents have left the 32-member military alliance on edge. Friday's incursion drew strong condemnation across Europe, with leaders calling Russia's actions reckless and irresponsible.

Romania scrambled two F-16 fighter jets and a helicopter, and alerted residents of the affected areas, but the aircraft didn't engage the drone in the city, which is located near the borders of Ukraine and Moldova.

Romania asked NATO to speed up the transfer of anti-drone capabilities to its military, the Foreign Ministry said, calling the incursion a serious violation of international law.

Asked about the drone during a state visit to Astana, Kazakhstan, Russian President Vladimir Putin said its origin is yet to be determined, telling reporters that "no one can say what origin a particular aircraft has until it has been examined." He urged Romania to turn the drone over to Russia for it to conduct "an objective investigation."

But Romanian President Nicusor Dan identified the drone as Russian.

"We had a Russian drone, Geran-2, leaving Russia. We know the trajectory, we know where it went through Ukraine, we know where it entered Romania, part of a swarm of 43 Russian drones, of which only one reached Romanian territory," a statement from Dan said.

He said later that investigators determined it was probably carrying at least 30 kilograms (66 pounds) of explosives.

Gen. Gheorghe Maxim, interim commander of the Romanian armed forces' joint staff, told a news conference that the drone in Galati wasn't "an attack from Russia against Romania," but he added that "Romanians should understand that Russia is a threat to the security of the countries in the area."

In Kyiv, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he had spoken to Dan, praising the country's "principled, prompt, and strong" response. In a social media post, he said the countries' militaries were in contact and that "we will remain in constant communication with Romania and continue working together to protect lives from all potential Russian threats."

Earlier drones in Romania

Romania has confirmed drone fragments landed on its territory on multiple occasions since the war began, including in Galati last month, but no one was hurt in any of those incidents, with debris falling in remote areas.

Dan convened Romania's top defense body Friday to discuss what he called "the worst incident to hit the national territory" since the war began.

After the Supreme Council of National Defense met in Bucharest, Dan said the Russian consul in the Black Sea port of Constanta has been declared persona non grata and that the consulate will be closed. Foreign Minister Oana Toiu summoned Russian Ambassador Vladimir Lipaev and told him the consul had 72 hours to leave Romania.

Territorial violations have become so common in Romania in recent years that lawmakers adopted legislation last year allowing the army to shoot down drones entering its airspace as a last resort. But the country has remained cautious in downing errant drones, which can pose risks to populated areas.

Russia has been using long-range missiles and drones to damage Ukraine's power grid and hammer cities, and Ukraine has braced for further heavy bombardments. Kyiv also has sent long-range drones deep into Russia to attack oil refineries, military bases and other infrastructure.

Friday's incident adds to recent drone-related incursions in Europe. Ukrainian drones have hit the chimney of a power plant in Estonia and empty fuel tanks in Latvia, and also were shot down by Romanian fighter jets stationed in Lithuania. Ukrainian officials apologized and said the drones were aimed at military targets in Russia, but veered off course by Russian electronic interference.

Poland, Croatia, Romania and non-NATO member Moldova all have reported airspace violations and found drone fragments on their territory since the war began. The airspace violations have raised questions about the state of air defenses on NATO's eastern flank.

A senior U.S. military official recently told reporters the number of "hybrid activities" — drone incursions, hacking attacks and other acts short of military force in Europe that can be attributed to Russia — have

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 69 of 82

increased in recent years and are part of a campaign to achieve strategic objectives without actually going to war.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to talk candidly about the ongoing situation, said it is believed that there's an opportunity for the U.S. and other NATO countries to be more aggressive in countering these actions, particularly since there is a belief that Russia won't see the responses as escalatory.

Allies' condemnation

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte said he had spoken to Dan and expressed "absolute solidarity" with its ally.

"NATO stands ready to defend every inch of Allied territory. We will continue to enhance our readiness to deter and defend against any threat, including from drones," he said in a post on X.

A senior NATO military official said the alliance detected and tracked the Russian drone, but it entered Romanian airspace only minutes before striking the apartment building in Galați. It was traveling at nearly 200 kilometers per hour (nearly 124 mph) over a populated area less than 15 kilometers (less than 10 miles) from the border, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive military information.

NATO is assessing what more can be done to optimize Romania's and NATO's network of sensors and shooters to safely neutralize such threats, the official added.

NATO allies spoke informally about the incursion, but no official meeting was scheduled Friday. Romania can request formal NATO consultations if it believes its territory or security is under threat.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said Russia "has crossed yet another line," and that the European Union will draft a 21st set of sanctions against Moscow.

Putin also was asked in Kazakhstan about comments that NATO is capable of destroying Russian military assets in Moscow's Baltic exclave of Kaliningrad. He responded that Russia "has every means to raze to the ground anyone who tries to do so."

He said nations posing a direct military threat to Russia "are legitimate targets," responding to an earlier claim by Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service that Ukraine sent troops to Latvia to launch drones at Russia. Officials in Latvia and other Baltic nations rejected Moscow's claims.

Estonian Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna said the risk of such "serious incidents" was raised by "Putin's increasing nervousness, driven by military setbacks."

Dmitry Medvedev, deputy chairman of Putin's National Security Council, told European leaders to "just shut up" about the drone.

Medvedev, known for his provocative and inflammatory statements, said in an expletive-filled post on his messaging channel MAX that the leaders were "scoundrels" and "imbeciles" and that their countries were part of the "warring nations" in the conflict.

"European drones, their spare parts, and other weapons, not to mention intelligence data, are used daily in attacks on our country," he wrote. "Their operations result in damage to residential buildings, killing civilians."

## Rescuers evacuate the first of 5 villagers found trapped in a cave in Laos; 2 still missing

By JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI and GRANT PECK Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Rescue divers in Laos on Friday night safely evacuated the first of five local villagers who had been trapped in a cave for more than a week by floodwaters.

Lao and Thai rescue workers posted the news on social media, along with a video showing the first rescued villager with a lamp strapped to his forehead. The villager, who was not immediately identified, was walking unsteadily with the assistance of two men. They handed him over to other team members amid a waiting crowd for a medical check.

The five had been found by divers on Wednesday, but that left rescue workers with two serious tasks: extricating the five and finding two more who are still missing.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 70 of 82**

Evacuations of the other four were suspended until tomorrow because they were not ready, said Chakkit Taengtang of Sai Than Association, one of the Thai rescue organization at the scene.

Rescue teams had pumped water out of the flooded cave's passages on Friday, but a morning rainstorm complicated their work. The trapped men have already been supplied with water, soft food, and foil blankets to keep them warm.

The villagers had reportedly entered the cave last week to look for valuable minerals before being trapped by flash flooding that blocked their way out. One other villager escaped in time and alerted the authorities to the seven left behind.

A video shot inside the cave on Thursday vividly illustrated the desperation the trapped men were feeling.

Thai rescue diver Norrased Palasing spoke with a trapped villager named Khamla, who urged the divers to let the group attempt to swim out immediately.

"I can't go on. I don't have any strength," he said.

Norrased sought to reassure him, telling him that the water was being drained, and handing over blankets and food. He cautioned Khamla to eat slowly to avoid digestive problems.

Divers from several nations joined the rescue effort.

Rescue teams from Laos and neighboring Thailand were joined by Japanese and Malaysian colleagues. Indonesian and French specialists also had been reported to be coming to the site in a rugged area in the central province of Xaisomboun, about 120 kilometers (75 miles) north of the capital, Vientiane.

Working in the dark in unfamiliar surroundings, divers had to make their way through twisting, narrow, flooded passages with jagged walls.

A good rescue plan depends on "the length of the dives involved, the restrictions and the sheer size of the passages that they are in, and the support that's available," said Gary Mitchell, press officer for the South & Mid Wales Cave Rescue Team, which is associated with the British Cave Rescue Council.

Other necessities normally include the space and equipment to recharge air or oxygen cylinders, and a medical team.

Rescuers must weigh risks of waiting for flooding to recede.

At the same time, rescuers must weigh the high risks of guiding survivors without diving skills through zero-visibility water against the strategy of waiting for water levels to recede, said Mitchell, who took part in the complicated 2018 cave rescue in northern Thailand of 12 schoolboys and their soccer coach. Several of the divers at the Lao site had also taken part in the Thai rescue.

"You can't leave people underground too long without medical support, without proper food, sustenance, clean water ... before their condition is going to deteriorate," Mitchell warned Thursday from Wales in a video interview.

The five found Wednesday were identified by their first names as Khamla, Mued, Ee, Ing, and Laen. They were reportedly in good health but exhausted from dehydration and lack of food.

A video filmed by Norrased showed the emotional moment he and Finnish diving instructor Mikko Paasi emerged from the water and discovered the trapped men sitting on a rock surrounded by floodwater.

Mued delivered a message to his family on camera, saying, "Don't worry mom, dad. I'm still strong, I'm still healthy. Tomorrow I will be home. I love you, mom and dad."

Lao officials say the villagers normally forage in the mountainous surroundings for a living.

The villagers are believed to have been searching for gold.

The villagers had been reported to have entered the cave to look for gold deposits. Bounphong Khammanyong, a local official in Longcheng, the district where the cave is located, said they had noticed rocks or sand with unusual colors in the cave, so they entered it in the hope of digging them out to see if they were valuable.

Bounphong, in an interview on Thursday with local media outlet Xaisomboun Province Television, said the villagers entered the cave on May 20, contradicting rescuers who put the date at May 19.

## **Tomatoes become latest symbol of America's affordability squeeze**

By MATT SEDENSKY AP National Writer

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 71 of 82

NEW YORK (AP) — Tomatoes, ubiquitous in everything from fast-food burgers to haute cuisine, are taking on a new role beyond the plate: A nagging reminder of rising costs.

Prices for those red orbs have soared more than any other food product over the past year to cement a spot as one of the consumer headaches du jour.

"The tomato has become a symbol of something much deeper," says Isaac Bernal Carbajo, a New York City chef who lamented life's "simplest pleasures" falling victim to price increases. "Something as basic as buying fresh vegetables is starting to become a serious financial decision for many families."

Tomato prices are up about 40% over a year ago, according to the latest Consumer Price Index, dwarfing increases for other groceries, including coffee (up 18.5%), beef roasts (up 17.8%) and frozen fish and seafood (up 12%), among other products that have become symbols of America's affordability squeeze.

A separate inflation gauge released Thursday showed that overall prices increased 3.8% in April from a year earlier, the highest reading in nearly three years.

Alongside crop yields, experts blame price increases for tomatoes, in part, on two pillars of President Donald Trump's second-term policies: the Iran war and tariffs. The war spiked gas prices and increased shipping costs. Meantime, the U.S. withdrew from a deal allowing duty-free imports of tomatoes from Mexico, which grows most of America's supply.

Usha Haley, a Wichita State University economist, says it's "a perfect storm of trade policy, extreme weather and Mideast policy."

American tomato farmers cheered the withdrawal from the tomato deal last July, saying it would help rebuild their shrinking industry. But for consumers, it's been painful. Though the U.S. withdrew from the Mexico tomato deal in July, it took time to see the impact in the produce aisle, with more imports in late winter and early spring.

When the tomatoes arrived, they were slapped with a 17% tariff.

"Tariffs are undeniably a big driver of the price inflation," says Brett Massimino, a Virginia Commonwealth University business professor. "Because the U.S. relies on Mexico for the majority of its tomato supply, any changes in trade policy can have a large impact."

U.S. tariffs collected on tomatoes ballooned from just \$16,424 in 2024 to nearly \$4.6 million, according to federal data, a staggering 27,879% increase.

As the cost trickles down, outraged shoppers have pulled out their phones in the produce aisle, shooting videos lamenting costs they said quadrupled, with some vowing to plant a garden to avoid prices of up to \$8 a pound. But the impact has been most pronounced for businesses that rely on tomatoes as a key ingredient in their kitchens.

MarginEdge, which tracks prices for restaurants, says grape tomatoes have increased most — 65% in just a month — but prices have gone up across all types of tomatoes.

Phillip Coles, a professor of supply chain management at Lehigh University, says prices should drop later in the year when domestically grown tomatoes are harvested. Higher prices, he says, will also "induce farmers to increase planting to meet the demand, but this takes longer because of the lead time."

Meantime, it's translating to a big hit for businesses like Snarf's Sandwiches, which puts a tomato in nearly every sandwich it makes.

Wayne Humphrey, chief operating officer of Snarf's, which operates dozens of stores in Colorado, Missouri and Texas, said cases of tomatoes went from costing him \$27 to \$93 in the space of a year, piled on top of rising expenses for other ingredients including bread and beef, as well as increased labor costs.

"That single ingredient now costs us more than \$1.7 million in additional spend annually," says Humphrey. "The math is getting harder to ignore."

## Takeaways from inside a teen treatment center for adoptees, funded by taxpayers: runaways, assaults

By SALLY HO and CLAIRE GALOFARO Associated Press

LAKE OZARK, Mo. (AP) — An Associated Press investigation finds that private, for-profit residential treat-



# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 72 of 82**

ment centers that care for adopted kids at exceptionally high rates are often funded by taxpayer dollars, but are subject to little oversight and few consequences after allegations of abuse and neglect.

The investigation looks deeply at a facility in rural Missouri called Calo Programs, or Change Academy at Lake of the Ozarks, which costs as much as \$20,000 a month and attracts families from all over the country, who send their children across state lines to the facility.

Calo promises relief for desperate parents whose adopted kids are struggling — a lakeside, summer camp-like academy where kids can heal by bonding with golden retrievers, where caring employees “create joy.”

But the AP report paints a more complicated and less idyllic picture.

Law enforcement is often called to Calo to investigate assaults or track down runaways. State agencies that pay to send kids there have questioned its operations, training and transparency. Parents and former employees say there is minimal treatment and barely any schooling, with only young, poorly trained staff to supervise the kids. Two mothers described it as something out of “Lord of the Flies.”

In emailed statements, Calo denied allegations of wrongdoing, and said student outcomes prove the strength of their approach: “For nearly two decades, Calo has provided innovative treatment and critical mental health services for young people who have been failed by the system. Over and over again, parents across the country have come to us in their moment of need, and we are proud of the track record we’ve established helping treat their children and return them to their families with the skills and tools they need to get ahead.”

The AP obtained troves of state data and documents through public records requests, and interviewed young adults who recently attended, parents who sent their children there, former employees and lawyers engaged in more than a dozen lawsuits against the company.

You can read the full story here. Here are the takeaways:

Runaways, assaults, injuries

Hundreds of pages of Camden County Sheriff’s Office reports documenting calls to the facility from 2020 to the fall of 2025 show that children in Calo’s care have been alleged victims, witnesses and perpetrators.

There was the free-for-all last summer when escaping girls ran toward the woods and jumped into the lake to swim away, employees chasing them and returning them, only to see them escape again. (Calo said none of them were injured.)

Just before that, sheriff’s deputies wrote that two kids had reportedly gotten high on methamphetamine that a Calo employee brought in her purse. (Calo said the employee was fired and the substance was never confirmed to be meth.)

Not long before that, deputies called to Calo were told that staffers were outnumbered as teens “stormed” a room to attack another student. One boy climbed onto the roof and jumped, landed on rocks below and had to be airlifted to the hospital. (Calo said altercations happen among troubled kids, that the staff followed protocol in calling for help, and the boy who jumped sustained a sprained ankle.)

A mother from Illinois reported in 2024 that her daughter and another girl had been sexually assaulted by another child. She said Calo didn’t notify them, the state or law enforcement. She alleged Calo covered it up.

Her daughter’s stay there was paid for by the state of Illinois, through a little-known program called the Family Support Program run by the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services that is designed to fund behavioral health care. She and other Illinois parents told AP that they believed the state had vetted the program because it paid for so many kids at Calo.

That agency and the Illinois State Board of Education both list Calo among approved residential treatment programs they fund. Over the last decade, the two Illinois agencies have spent more than \$35 million sending kids to Calo, according to data obtained by AP.

Last year alone, the Board of Education paid more than \$1.6 million to send 13 kids there for special education services; Healthcare and Family Services spent \$1.2 million for 19 kids. Some families used money from both.

Bill Hayden said he also used Illinois education money to send his daughter, who was adopted from Russia, to Calo a decade ago. The retired doctor was among families that Calo asked be interviewed. Hayden

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 73 of 82

told AP he believes Calo changed his daughter's life.

"I felt that they were dedicated professionals who were trying to do their best with about the toughest group of kids you could probably ever house," Hayden said.

Remarkable profits, struggling kids

Calo is part of the so-called troubled teen industry, a sprawling network of loosely regulated, for-profit residential centers, boarding schools and wilderness programs that have been quietly institutionalizing adopted children at extraordinarily high rates.

Calo opened in 2007 with 40 beds and has expanded greatly since, with a capacity of 144 this year. It specializes in adoption trauma and says 90% of its clients are adopted.

Calo was acquired around 2011 by a private equity firm led by the Stanford-graduate Alex Stavros, who over the next 13 years expanded the business by merging with other treatment centers to become the parent company Embark Behavioral Health. Stavros, who stepped down in 2024, did not respond for comment.

Stavros claims in his LinkedIn profile that he built Embark to 38 programs across 20 states and achieved a remarkable 40-fold increase in revenue, to \$180 million. Under his leadership, Calo shifted its business model "from entirely private pay to majority third party reimbursed," including both private health insurance and Medicaid, and a range of government programs.

In the thick of the COVID-19 pandemic, as residential programs struggled with enrollment, Embark called on dozens of industry people to talk business strategies. "DOING EPIC SH\$t" was printed on the cover of the August 2020 "Embark Academy Sales & Marketing Conference" handbook. It featured a session on how to "overcome objections" with sales tactics to "build your client base and keep your pipelines full!"

In a session that touted admissions as a vital part of the treatment team, the handbook noted: "The admissions person sells hope when the family is at their lowest and most hopeless, scary, and vulnerable time."

The company defends its marketing efforts aimed at families in distress.

"It is a common misconception that for-profit entities are more expensive or less ethical than non-profit organizations," Calo said in a statement. "Reaching them through thoughtful outreach and advertising helps break down the mental health stigma that keeps people from seeking treatment ..."

'Making money off these kids'

Some officials have expressed skepticism about Calo's business model.

Stacy Roberts, who runs the local juvenile detention center, said his agency is frustrated by Calo and processes as many as a dozen cases each year involving Calo kids who live out of state.

Many families have decried the conditions at Calo as jail-like. Roberts rejects that comparison — because traditional juvenile detention centers like his are held to a higher standard, he said. Unlike Calo, Roberts answers to the public, a judge and the juvenile justice system, which monitors children's stays within his facility.

"It's a business," Roberts said. "They're not doing this because they want to help. They're making money off these kids."

## Inside a taxpayer-funded treatment center for adoptees, tales of abuse, neglect and little oversight

By SALLY HO and CLAIRE GALOFARO Associated Press

LAKE OZARK, Mo. (AP) — A facility deep in rural Missouri promises relief for desperate parents whose adopted kids are struggling — a lakeside, summer camp-like academy where kids can heal by bonding with golden retrievers, and where caring employees "create joy."

The company that operates the place known as Calo Programs says it exists "to serve the hardest-to-treat cases — the students and families the broader system has given up on."

But an Associated Press investigation paints a more complicated and less idyllic picture.

Law enforcement is often called to Calo to investigate assaults or track down runaways. State agencies

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 74 of 82**

that pay to send kids there have questioned its operations, training and transparency. Parents and former employees say there is minimal treatment and barely any schooling, with only young, poorly trained staff to supervise the kids. Two mothers described it as something out of "Lord of the Flies."

The price is steep and taxpayers often pick up the tab. Also known as Change Academy at Lake of the Ozarks, Calo has charged up to \$20,000 a month to treat adopted children. Some stay for years.

It is part of the so-called troubled teen industry, a sprawling network of loosely regulated, for-profit residential centers, boarding schools and wilderness programs that have been quietly institutionalizing adopted children at extraordinarily high rates — adoptees are as much as 10 times more likely to be sent away than the general population.

A deep dive into Calo's practices — how it makes money, and what happens to kids under its watch — offers a window into a larger phenomenon: Some youth treatment centers, backed by private equity companies, share a business model that depends on government funding, despite limited oversight and few consequences for negligence.

The AP obtained troves of state data and documents through public records requests and interviewed young adults who recently attended, parents who sent their children there, former employees and lawyers who are engaged in more than a dozen lawsuits against the company.

In emailed statements, Calo denied allegations of wrongdoing and said student outcomes prove the strength of their approach and innovative treatment.

"Over and over again, parents across the country have come to us in their moment of need, and we are proud of the track record we've established helping treat their children and return them to their families with the skills and tools they need to get ahead."

Hundreds of pages of Camden County Sheriff's Office reports documenting calls to the facility from 2020 to the fall of 2025 show that children in Calo's care have been alleged victims, witnesses and perpetrators.

There was the free-for-all last summer when escaping girls ran toward the woods and jumped into the lake to swim away, employees chasing them and returning them, only to see them escape again. (Calo said none of them were injured.)

Just before that, sheriff's deputies wrote that two kids had reportedly gotten high on methamphetamine that a Calo employee brought in her purse. (Calo said the employee was fired and the substance was never confirmed to be meth.)

Not long before that, deputies called to Calo were told staffers were outnumbered as teens "stormed" a room to attack another student. One boy climbed onto the roof, jumped, landed on rocks below and had to be airlifted to the hospital. (Calo said altercations happen among troubled kids, staff followed protocol in calling for help, and the boy who jumped sustained a sprained ankle.)

Stacy Roberts, who runs the local juvenile detention center, said his agency is frustrated by Calo and processes as many as a dozen cases each year involving Calo kids who live out of state.

Many families have decried the conditions at Calo as jail-like. Roberts rejects that comparison — because traditional juvenile detention centers like his are held to a higher standard, he said. Unlike Calo, Roberts answers to the public, a judge and the juvenile justice system, which monitors children's stays within his facility.

"It's a business," Roberts said. "They're not doing this because they want to help. They're making money off these kids."

**Selling hope at a vulnerable time**

Calo opened in 2007 with 40 beds and has expanded greatly since, with a capacity of 144 this year. It specializes in adoption trauma and says 90% of its clients are adopted.

Many are diagnosed with a rare condition called reactive attachment disorder, which experts say has been misapplied to many adoptees who struggle with the trauma of being divorced from their birth families and, for foreign adoptees, their country and culture.

The company says it's treated thousands of young people ages 9 to 20 from more than 30 states as one of the nation's largest for-profit centers of its kind, popular for out-of-state placements.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 75 of 82**

Critics ranging from advocacy groups to local law enforcement say serving faraway families has allowed places like Calo to avoid dedicated oversight and strict regulation.

Calo said it responds to serious incidents as required by law, and it “operates under rigorous, continuous external oversight” from governments that fund its students, some of which visit the campus annually or monthly.

And it defends its marketing efforts aimed at families in distress.

“It is a common misconception that for-profit entities are more expensive or less ethical than non-profit organizations,” Calo said in a statement. “Reaching them through thoughtful outreach and advertising helps break down the mental health stigma that keeps people from seeking treatment ...”

Nationally, the need for youth mental health services has skyrocketed, along with its cost.

That demand, coupled with free-flowing public funds, has attracted investors. It’s estimated that the broader industry taps billions of dollars annually from government sources, including health programs, child welfare agencies, school districts and juvenile justice systems.

Calo was acquired around 2011 by a private equity firm led by the Stanford-graduate Alex Stavros, who over the next 13 years expanded the business by merging with other treatment centers to become the parent company Embark Behavioral Health. Stavros, who stepped down in 2024, did not respond to The Associated Press for comment.

Stavros claims in his LinkedIn profile that he built Embark to 38 programs across 20 states and achieved a remarkable 40-fold increase in revenue, to \$180 million. Under his leadership, Calo shifted its business model “from entirely private pay to majority third party reimbursed,” including both private health insurance and Medicaid, and a range of government programs.

This is so integral to Calo’s business model that Nicole Fuglsang, its current CEO, once led a presentation at an industry conference on how to diversify revenue. The 2014 session was titled: “Show me the Money — An Innovative Approach to Finding Funding for Families.”

In the thick of the COVID-19 pandemic, as residential programs struggled with enrollment, Calo kept admissions humming.

Among the residents in 2020: a 9-year-old boy adopted from Haiti. Illinois education funds paid for his stay there. He later told his mother he was bullied. Other kids used racial slurs against him and defecated and urinated on his bed, his mother said. When she took him out, he woke up screaming for weeks, she said, before finally telling her that he’d been sexually assaulted there by an older boy.

Calo officials later told law enforcement that they couldn’t substantiate the sex abuse claim and that the bullying was mutual, according to the incident report.

His mother, who the AP is not naming to protect the identity of her son, said she reported what happened to him to everyone she could: law enforcement, Illinois state authorities and Calo’s parent company. She felt that no one cared. Though they told her they investigated, she said she watched as Calo continued business as usual.

“The almighty dollar will prevail once again,” she wrote to the Illinois State Board of Education, “and Calo will grow in wealth from school systems and cause harm to young children like my son.”

A month after her son arrived at Calo, Embark called on dozens of industry people to talk business strategies. “DOING EPIC SH\$t” was printed on the cover of the August 2020 “Embark Academy Sales & Marketing Conference” handbook. It featured a session on how to “overcome objections” with sales tactics to “build your client base and keep your pipelines full!”

Attendees were urged to touch hearts to help “assure a doubting child or resentful spouse.” In a session that touted admissions as a vital part of the treatment team, the handbook noted: “The admissions person sells hope when the family is at their lowest and most hopeless, scary, and vulnerable time.”

At Calo’s request, the AP called families who the company recommended and said had good experiences. Several said they believe the facility helped heal their children.

Bill Hayden said his daughter, who was adopted from Russia, was never harmed during the 15 months she was at Calo, starting in 2016. A retired doctor, Hayden believes Calo changed his daughter’s life, and



# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 76 of 82**

said that his daughter agrees.

"I felt that they were dedicated professionals who were trying to do their best with about the toughest group of kids you could probably ever house," Hayden said. "We were content that things were going as well as they could with kids with extraordinary problems."

Reported abuse, little accountability

A New Hampshire family said they paid about \$100,000 for their adopted daughter's 10-month stay, beginning in June 2023, when she was 10 years old. The New Hampshire state government provided additional funds.

The girl had already suffered so much before her adoption — in-utero drug exposure, violence, sexual abuse and extreme neglect, her mother said. In her new home, she still struggled with mental health problems and increasingly explosive behavior.

Her mother remembers the red flags she ignored — how dirty the facility was and how unhappy the children looked. Her daughter woke up screaming during a visit months into her stay. Her mother found a disturbing journal entry: "I had a vision that (she) attacked me but not just a few scratches," her daughter scrawled, naming the assailant. "I had blood dripping everyw(h)ere."

Late one night weeks later, the mother's phone rang. It was another mom whose daughter had been at Calo. The woman, from Illinois, told her both of their daughters had been molested by another girl.

The AP is not naming the mothers or their daughters because it does not typically identify people who say they are victims of sexual assault.

The mothers say they both reported their concerns to the same therapist who treated their daughters, and allege Calo covered up the assaults.

The Illinois mom said her adopted 11-year-old daughter was sent to Calo after struggling with thoughts of suicide. In February 2024, she told her mom that a girl in her preteen program had months earlier touched her genitals while lying next to her and had threatened to beat her up if she told anyone about it.

Such incidents of abuse were rampant at Calo, the girl said to her mom: "(She) touched me, but (she) touches everybody. Everybody knows that."

The mother says the Calo therapist first dismissed it as "girls playing footsie" before the company acknowledged it had lost track of the daughter's initial report. The mother also alleges the therapist and a Calo director later told her the issue had been "handled," assuring her that the troubled girl was gone, so everyone was safe.

The mother was frustrated, but she believed Calo's claim that it was just an innocent communication mistake and that the problem had been remedied.

Then, weeks later, the girl told her mother that the same attacker had done the same thing to an even younger girl, the one from New Hampshire.

Both families immediately took their daughters home and notified authorities. They are now among a group of families suing Calo.

After the mothers complained, Calo said it immediately reported it to authorities, including the state child welfare agency, which looked into it and "determined the claim did not meet the requirements for a full investigation."

"We acknowledge the delayed report due to a staff member not following the established protocols and failing to route the statement to the quality assurance team for processing," Calo said in a statement.

The Missouri Department of Social Services has previously noted that Calo has repeatedly failed to fully report serious incidents. In 2022, for example, the state ordered them to turn in five such missing files, to which a company official "acknowledged Calo needs to change their practice as it is not currently working."

The mothers were also the first to report the allegations to law enforcement. The sheriff's office told AP in a statement that deputies "revealed what appears to be a mistake by Calo staff not reporting the allegations," though deputies did not investigate further.

They also contacted authorities in their home states, some of which were helping to pay the tab for the girls to stay at Calo.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 77 of 82**

The Illinois mother said her daughter's treatment was paid by a little-known program called the Family Support Program run by the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services that is designed to fund behavioral healthcare. She learned about it from Calo. She and other Illinois parents told AP that they believed the state had vetted the program because it paid for so many kids at Calo.

That agency and the Illinois State Board of Education both list Calo among approved residential treatment programs they fund. Over the last decade, the two Illinois agencies have spent more than \$35 million sending kids to Calo, according to data obtained by AP.

Last year alone, the Board of Education paid more than \$1.6 million to send 13 kids there for special education services. Healthcare and Family Services spent \$1.2 million for 19 kids. Some families used money from both.

Melissa Kula, an Illinois government spokeswoman, said in a statement on behalf of both agencies that they don't oversee Calo's day-to-day operations or regulate the facility, and rely on the Missouri government for Calo's licensing and approvals.

The Illinois State Board of Education said the state doesn't have a direct role in placements — it only reimburses school districts that determine where students go. The education department said it has never set foot on Calo's campus. The law only requires on-site visits if the facility is within 50 miles (80.47 kilometers) of Illinois state lines.

'An effort to stonewall'

Healthcare and Family Services visited for the first time in May 2024, after multiple reports of children suffering severe harm, including the girls from Illinois and New Hampshire.

The Illinois team of five nurses and officials arrived at Calo and the report of what they found there, obtained by the AP through a public records request, is scathing.

Calo administrators insisted they attend a new employee training session, and the team was shocked by what they saw, according to the report: It "was only a drum circle," they wrote. "There was no explanation regarding how the drum circle related to therapeutic activities nor any explanation of the purpose in training new employees."

To the AP, the company defended the drum circle as a "therapeutic, experiential activity."

The Illinois investigators said they were "closely controlled," and denied free access to much of the staff and property, including reviewing records and training curriculum. The team worried there was "an effort to stonewall" their inspection.

"This, along with witnessing the drum circle's supposed training for new staff training led the reviewers to think that an organized training curriculum and training plan does not exist," the report said.

Calo asserts that investigators weren't denied access to its campus but acknowledged that there was "a disagreement" over restricted records. Its employee had "an error in judgment" that the company said was promptly corrected, and that Illinois investigators were later offered full access digitally.

The Illinois team was also skeptical of claims the school made about their therapy methods, noting that staff was "not aware of any research" supporting their effectiveness. They found the facility did not seem to have a "professionally appropriate" understanding of serious mental health problems children likely suffered, such as bipolar disorder. Instead, Calo insisted that the children's problems were always viewed as a symptom of adoption trauma.

Calo's parent company, Embark, swooped in to negotiate changes. The Illinois investigators ultimately said they believed the company was committed to the "commendable" swift reforms it pledged, including raising salaries and lowering capacity until it could hire more staff.

"At the end of the visit, we recognized that we may have talked past each other regarding our clinical offerings — something we were able to address and resolve through subsequent dialogue with the evaluators," Calo wrote in a statement.

Former teachers like Dustin Wood, who worked at Calo for six years as an English teacher before quitting in 2024, said when he tried to report his concerns to company leaders, Calo administrators stopped inviting him to parent retreats and started writing him up for infractions like contacting parents to discuss

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 78 of 82**

their children's progress.

Wood said all employees got the same minimal training, whether as a teacher, cook or "coach" tasked with monitoring the children 24 hours a day. They were told all the kids had something called reactive attachment disorder, but were given no guidance as to how to help them, he said.

Calo said it conducts 40 hours of training. It said it investigated and addressed "in good faith" the concerns raised by Wood and another teacher that company officials "thought were valid."

Wood said as Calo took on more kids, sometimes younger children mixed in with older teens, without enough adults to supervise them. It grew increasingly chaotic, he said.

"There's not a single kid," Wood said of the students he worked with, "who left in better condition than when they started."

'She's a runaway from Calo'

One day last June, Amos Pierce jolted from a nap to the sound of his Ford F-150's engine turning over. He ran outside and saw a girl hiding inside the truck.

He's lived within earshot of Calo for decades, and figured she was from there, partly because he was so used to constant screams, escapes and vandalism, he told AP.

Pierce said he tried to coax the girl, who was screaming and crying, out of the truck. He had a daughter about her age, he told her. He wasn't mad and wouldn't hurt her. Come out, he said, and we can call the police.

"I could tell that girl was so scared that she was prepared to do whatever she had to do to get away from what had her in that panic state," he said.

He watched as she drove off, ploughing over his plants as she backed out of the drive, nearly careening into a ditch. She clearly was too young to know how to drive.

"I had tears in my eyes," Pierce said. "I was upset, by tenfold more scared for that child than I was worried about my truck."

The girl's desperate escape from Calo thrust her into a tense and at times dangerous encounter with law enforcement.

Deputies spotted the truck and followed, lights and sirens blaring. Two other police departments were called in. They stretched spike strips across the highway road to puncture the truck's tires and stop her.

After she got out of the truck, at least one officer pointed a gun at her. The girl climbed over a median to dart across the highway, running into a swamp as officers chased her, according to Lake Ozark police body camera video obtained by AP. She panted and sobbed as she was arrested face-down on the side of the road, surrounded by officers.

Did anyone know who she was? One officer said simply: "Calo does. She's a runaway from Calo."

The chase was also captured by the reality TV show "Ozark Law," which reported that she was 15 years old and going as fast as 70 mph.

Sheriff Chris Edgar said the incident was a turning point for him.

For years, deputies often visited Calo for runaways, injuries, vandalism and assaults. When the AP asked about 17 specific reports involving serious incidents during the last five years, Chief Deputy Colonel Scott Hines of the Camden County Sheriff's Office said most were found to be unsubstantiated.

The Missouri Department of Social Services is also called to Calo. Baylee Watts, a department spokesperson, declined to comment on individual cases, citing closed and confidential records, and said its role was to respond to every report and assist law enforcement.

Hines said Calo itself has never been investigated for wrongdoing.

But Edgar, who took office in January 2025, said after the girl stole the truck, he demanded Calo officials be more accountable.

"There was a lot of cases that they would not give witness statements. They wouldn't talk to law enforcement. In a sense, preventing us from being able to investigate stuff. And that was one of the things that I had a problem with," he said.

Edgar said he even threatened to put them in jail if they prevented officers from going inside or inter-

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 79 of 82

viewing kids and staff.

"They have the care, custody and control of the child, so therefore, I feel the responsibility would bear with them," Edgar said.

Calo insisted it has a great relationship with Edgar's office, and sent a photograph of a letter on Edgar's letterhead supporting their business.

Edgar, whose son has worked at Calo, declined to send the letter directly to AP. He instead offered a different statement that says his office's relationship with Calo has improved, including allowing deputies unrestricted access: "I know things were not like this in the past, but this is refreshing to know everyone is working together."

He didn't respond to follow-up questions.

Calo said its facility is open and unlocked, a place where "students are free to move throughout the campus rather than being confined to their rooms or a single building." The girl who stole the truck, it said, was later sent to a facility with higher-level care, including locked doors, due to her history of running away.

"In this instance, a neighbor unfortunately left his keys in an unlocked car with doors wide open. A student who eloped took advantage of the accessible vehicle," Calo said.

Pierce, the neighbor, told the sheriff's office he didn't want to press charges against the girl, but wanted Calo held accountable.

Pierce's daughter, meanwhile, took to social media. She urged that Calo be investigated because she believed the children there weren't safe.

In response, Pierce said, a Calo employee admonished him and his daughter for the post, pleading with Pierce to take it down. He should keep a closer eye on his child, he was told.

Pierce was aghast. He wasn't worried about his own kid, he said. He was worried about theirs.

## War and displacement in Gaza are fueling a rise in early marriage

By TOQA EZZIDIN and WAFAA SHURAFU Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Majda was destitute. Her husband and eldest son had been killed by Israeli airstrikes. Living in a ragged tent in Gaza with rats and the stench of sewage, she couldn't support her children and feared her daughters would be harassed going to the communal latrine in a camp with hundreds of strangers.

So she made a decision she now deeply regrets. She married off her 13- and 14-year-old daughters to men who promised safety and support.

"I thought I was protecting them," she said. "Fear was slaughtering me."

The devastation that Israel's campaign has wreaked in Gaza has helped fuel an increase in marriages of young girls, according to experts and official data. With almost the entire population driven from their homes, most living in squalid camps and dependent on aid, some parents have sought some financial stability for their teen daughters by giving them away in marriage.

For the girls, it meant a loss of their childhood and future — and, often, dangerous pregnancies.

For Majda's daughters, it meant horrific physical abuse.

Child marriage was declining before the war

Before the war, child marriage had been slowly declining in Gaza, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. In 2022, the last tally released by the bureau, 17.8% of marriages involved a girl under the age of 18, down from more than 22% in 2015.

The minimum legal age for marriage in Gaza is 17, with some exceptions allowed; the U.N. and most humanitarian groups categorize marriages of girls under 18 as early marriage.

That trend appears to have reversed.

After an Associated Press request, the Supreme Shariah Court in Gaza, where marriages are registered, gathered data from court employees. According to its figures, 20.6% of the 35,474 marriages recorded in 2024 and 2025 involved a girl under 18, including 627 marriages of girls under 15.

The real rate could be much higher because many marriages went unregistered during the chaos of the



# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 80 of 82**

war, said Amal Siyam, director of the Women's Affairs Center in Gaza. The number of marriage contracts recorded by the court dropped 35% in 2024, the first full year after Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack triggered the war.

The AP spoke to six girls in Gaza who got married between 13 and 16 and their parents, all on condition they not be identified by their full names because of the deep sensitivity of the issue. The AP does not identify rape victims. Majda agreed to be identified by only her first name.

All of the parents said that if not for the war, they would have never resorted to marrying off their daughters so young.

One mother is paralyzed by grief

After her husband and son were killed in separate strikes in April 2024, Majda descended into severe depression.

She begged the doctors for sedatives, which kept her asleep for days at a time. She couldn't care for her girls in their patched-up tent by the sea, battered by wind, cold and rain in the winter. Charity kitchens, on which they depended for food, were scarce and irregular.

"I was entirely shaken from the inside," Majda said.

Two brothers in their 20s, from a family that had been their neighbors in Gaza City before they were all forced to flee, asked to marry her daughters.

Majda, who got married at 14, didn't want a similar fate for her girls. But her father joined the brothers' family in insisting it was the only way. They promised, Majda said, that they could sign the marriage contracts but wait until after the war to bring the girls to live with their husbands.

"I was not in my right mind. I am still not in my right mind," Majda said. "I don't know how I agreed to this."

Majda's eldest daughter, who was 14 at the time, didn't want to accept. "I felt lost," the daughter said. "I thought if I got married, someone would be financially responsible for me ... I truly regretted it."

Marriage is seen as a way to ease the family burden

Most of the girls who spoke to the AP said they were not coerced by their parents to marry. But they felt a duty to ease the burden on their families.

By marrying, they were counted with their husbands as a separate family to receive aid from relief groups, rather than being under their parents' allotment. Several girls also said that since schools largely shut down during the war, they saw no hope of continuing their education.

One girl said she and her parents and seven brothers and sisters were displaced more than 25 times during the war. Her father had been totally against early marriage and wanted her to enroll in university. But the family was so desperate that he agreed to a suitor.

She said she agreed as well. She was 16.

"I couldn't forgive myself for taking a share of the little food my family had," she said. She also worried that she and her siblings would be left without support if her parents were killed in an airstrike. Now 17, she was five months pregnant when she spoke to the AP.

Another girl also cited her family's multiple displacements, each draining the little money they had. When they were sheltering at a hospital in Khan Younis, a 25-year-old man staying there asked to marry her. Then 17, she said she agreed.

"Marriage felt like the only sense of normalcy I could restore to my life," she said.

The law in Gaza allows exceptions to the minimum age of 17 with parental consent and authorization by a judge. The Supreme Shariah Court has rules for court officials not to approve exceptions below the age of 14 years and seven months.

But parents sometimes enter informal agreements without officially registering the marriage. Two mothers who spoke to the AP did so, one of them after an official refused because her daughter was 14.

In the Israeli-occupied West Bank, the Palestinian Authority in 2019 set the minimum age at 18, and early marriages have plunged since to around 5%, according to official statistics.

Siyam said that at times of widespread displacement in conflicts with Israel, some Palestinians have

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 81 of 82**

seen marriage as a way to bring stability for their daughters. "Wars and conflicts lead to a return to more conservative traditions," she said.

Younger girls who marry are more vulnerable to rape and violence, including abuse from in-laws as they load household chores on them, Siyam said. Because divorce rates in early marriages are high, "the girl ends up returning home with one or two children."

Some girls were abused and fled

Majda said the in-laws broke their promise and soon demanded her elder daughter be brought to her 23-year-old husband, who was living in his family's tents in Deir al-Balah.

For the first 10 days, the girl screamed whenever her husband approached her. "I kept screaming and he hit me," the elder daughter said.

Eventually, his mother "tied up my hands above my head," the daughter said. The husband then raped her.

After that, he repeatedly threatened to bring his mother to tie her up if she screamed, she said. She recounted repeated instances of rape and said on one occasion, she had to be taken to the hospital with bleeding.

A few months later, the family came to take her 13-year-old sister to join her 21-year-old husband. She "kept screaming that she did not want to get married," Majda recalled.

The younger sister told the AP that she too was tied up by her mother-in-law and raped by her husband. She said she had two miscarriages, both after her husband kicked her while she was pregnant.

Majda's elder daughter gave birth to a son. Months later, in November, she fled, carrying her son for 15 kilometers (9 miles) to her mother's tent.

Not long after that, the younger sister also fled back to Majda. They then discovered that she was pregnant.

Girls experienced high-risk pregnancies

The maternity ward of Awda Hospital in central Gaza saw an increase in the rate of teenage pregnancies during the war, said the ward's head, Yasser Shaaban. Many suffered severe health complications from getting pregnant so young, he said.

On top of that, the vast majority were malnourished, as Israeli restrictions on aid drove Gaza's population to the brink of famine at times.

Four of the girls who spoke to the AP had given birth, and all described dangerous pregnancies or births. Three had at least one miscarriage.

One of them almost died during childbirth from severe bleeding, her mother said. She was 16 and severely malnourished at the time.

"I was unconscious for many days (after birth), and I couldn't hold my daughter for a while," the girl said.

The family faced another painful choice

Back with their mother, Majda's daughters were terrified at any talk of going back to their husbands. Speaking to the AP in April, her youngest said returning would be akin to "death."

Majda said her younger daughter had always been a talkative, playful girl. But since her marriage, "she does not talk to anyone, not to her husband and not to me," she said.

The girls had returned to school, but the elder said she felt excluded and ashamed because she was the only student who was married with a baby. She described herself as a child mothering a child.

"I am tired," she said. "I want to die."

Majda was coming under heavy pressure from her father and her in-laws, who said she couldn't afford to care for her daughters, the grandson and the baby on the way.

Women can divorce their husbands in Gaza, but the process is expensive and complicated. Divorce also carries stigma, mainly for women, and would make it difficult for the girls to ever remarry.

The in-laws assured Majda that her daughters would be treated well.

Feeling she had no choice, she relented. The girls returned to their husbands, now in Gaza City, in early May. Majda hasn't been able to contact her daughters since then.

"They did not want to return," she said. "They were crying."

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 30, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 359 ~ 82 of 82**

## **Today in History: May 30, Trump found guilty on 34 felony charges**

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Saturday, May 30, the 150th day of 2026. There are 215 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On May 30, 2024, Donald Trump became the first former American president to be convicted of felony crimes as a New York jury found him guilty of all 34 charges in a scheme to illegally influence the 2016 election through a hush money payment to a porn actor who said the two had sex. (Trump received a no-penalty sentence, or unconditional discharge, just 10 days before his January 2025 inauguration to a second term.)

Also on this date:

In 1431, Joan of Arc, condemned as a heretic, was burned at the stake in Rouen, France.

In 1911, the first Indianapolis 500 auto race was held at Indianapolis Motor Speedway; driver Ray Harroun won the race with an average speed of 74.6 mph (120 kph).

In 1922, the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., was dedicated in a ceremony attended by President Warren G. Harding, Chief Justice William Howard Taft and Abraham Lincoln's surviving son, 78-year-old Robert Todd Lincoln.

In 1935, Babe Ruth played in his last major league baseball game for the Boston Braves, leaving after the first inning of the first game of a doubleheader against the Philadelphia Phillies. (Ruth announced his retirement three days later.)

In 1937, 10 people were killed when police fired on steelworkers demonstrating near the Republic Steel plant in South Chicago.

In 1971, the American space probe Mariner 9 blasted off from Cape Kennedy on a journey to Mars.

In 1972, three members of the militant group known as the Japanese Red Army opened fire at Tel Aviv's Lod Airport, now Ben-Gurion Airport, killing 26 people. Two attackers died; the third was captured.

In 2002, a solemn, wordless ceremony marked the end of the cleanup at ground zero in New York, 8 1/2 months after the terror attacks of Sept. 11 brought down the World Trade Center's twin towers.

In 2012, former Liberian President Charles Taylor was sentenced to 50 years in prison after being convicted on 11 counts of aiding and abetting war crimes and crimes against humanity at a trial at The Hague.

In 2023, disgraced Theranos CEO Elizabeth Holmes began serving an 11-year sentence at a Texas prison after being convicted on felony counts of fraud and conspiracy for overseeing an infamous blood-testing hoax.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Keir Dullea is 90. Actor Stephen Tobolowsky is 75. Actor Colm Meaney is 73. Country singer Wynonna Judd is 62. Musician Tom Morello (Audioslave; Rage Against The Machine) is 62. Filmmaker Antoine Fuqua is 61. Actor-singer Idina Menzel is 55. Rapper-singer Cee Lo Green is 51. Rapper Lucki is 30. Actor Jake Short is 29. Actor Sean Giambrone is 27.