

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 21, 2017 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 251 ~ 1 of 31

- 1- Recycling trailers
- 1- Johnson Agency Ad
- 1- Kindergarten Screening
- 1 - DQ Help Wanted
- 2- State DI is this weekend
- 3- FCCLA News
- 3- All State Band info
- 3- Laundromat is open
- 4- Classifieds
- 4- Bates Township Notices
- 4 - GDI Living Heart Fitness Ad
- 4- City Council Meeting
- 5- Garbage Routes effective next week
- 6- Deep Thoughts Article
- 7- Average price of gas holds steady
- 8- National Honor Society
- 9- Today in Weather History
- 10- Local Weather Forecast
- 11- Yesterday's Groton Weather
- 11- Today's Weather Climate
- 11- National Weather map
- 12 - Daily Devotional
- 13- News from the Associated Press



DAIRY QUEEN HELP WANTED

Dairy Queen in Groton is now hiring. If you're looking for a fun job with part-time hours, flexible scheduling, please stop in for an application.

Open: Recycling Trailer in Groton
The recycling trailer is located at 10 East Railroad Ave.

The cardboard/paper
recycling trailer at the school is **OPEN**

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Tuesday, March 21

Student Congress at GHS

School Lunch: Submarine, French fries, fruit, carrots and dip.

School Breakfast: French toast sticks, links, fruit, juice, milk.

Senior Menu: Hamburger steak, braised onions, mashed potatoes, broccoli, cookie bar, whole wheat bread.

Wednesday, March 22

School Lunch: Tater tot hotdish, corn, fruit, Cauliflower and dip, garlic toast.

School Breakfast: Egg sausage biscuit, fruit, juice, milk.

Senior Menu: Herbed roast pork, baked potatoes and sour cream, tomato spoon salad, cinnamon apple sauce, whole wheat bread.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Lenten meal at 6 p.m. (Sunday School serves), worship at 7 p.m.

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

2017 Groton Area Elementary

Kindergarten Roundup (Screening) for children turning

5 on or before September 1, 2017

Friday, March 31

Parents of children who will be turning 5 on or before September 1, 2017 in the Groton Area School District are asked to contact Heidi Krueger at the Groton Area Elementary School during school hours at 397-2317 to set up a screening time or to confirm their screening time. If your child is currently attending Junior Kindergarten they will not be screened.

Packets will be sent home this week with a scheduled time and additional paperwork that will need to be completed.

Kindergarten Roundup will take place at the Groton Area Elementary School. Please check in at the office.

JOHNSON AGENCY

Real Estate & Insurance

Jay Johnson, Broker

www.johnsonagencygroton.com

102 N Main St. Office: 605/397-2424
Groton, SD 57445 Home: 605/397-8565



Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 21, 2017 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 251 ~ 2 of 31

State DI Tournament is this weekend

The State Destination Imagination tournament will be held Saturday in Pierre. Schools being represented at state are Brandon Valley, Clear Lake, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte, Custer, Doland, Rapid City Douglas, Dupree, Edison Middle School, Elk Point-Jefferson, Gayville Volin, Groton Area, Huron, Meade, Mitchell, Pierre Indian Learning Center, Rapid City Catholic, Rosholt, Spearfish, Todd County, Tri-Valley, Wagner, Watertown, Webster and West Central.

Here is the schedule for the Groton Area teams:

Challenge D: 3-Peat Improvisational - Room 309

Bazang Boys - Groeblichhoff/Barse - ML - Main Challenge at 11:30 a.m., Instant Challenge at 8:50 a.m.

Army Ants - Marzahn - EL - Main Challenge at 2:30 p.m., Instant Challenge at 1:05 p.m.

Challenge C - Vanished - Fine Arts - Band Room

The Wonderful Nonsense - Jensen/Rosenau - SL - Main Challenge at 8:40 a.m., Instant Challenge at 11:50 a.m.

The Aquarium Solvers - Kosel/Bahr - EL - Main Challenge at 10:20 a.m., Instant Challenge at 2:05 p.m.

Dysfunctional Broad Squad - Milbrandt - ML - Main Challenge at 2:15 p.m., Instant Challenge at 9:10 a.m.

Challenge B - Top Secret - Scientific - Choir Room

Out of the Boxers - Fjelstad - SL, Main Challenge at 11:10 a.m., Instant Challenge at 1:40 p.m.

Challenge A - Show & Tech - Technical - Main Gym

Dumpling Jokers - Groeblichhoff/Weismantel - EL, Main Challenge at 2:00 p.m., Instant Challenge at 10:10 a.m.

And this is from the state affiliate, Dean Fenenga:

Once again congratulations to your team for qualifying for the South Dakota Destination Imagination Affiliate Tournament. I am certain all of your garages are full of spray paint stains and duct tape patches, kitchens full of glitter and balsa wood, and those improv kids are still trying to figure out how to stuff one more thing into that tiny box. That being said, praise those kids, encourage them on, and sit back and be amazed at the solutions they are responsible for. Win or lose, they have all arrived at solutions to be proud of.

So I have some house keeping and details for the teams arriving at Pierre.

1. We will open the doors for teams at 8:00 AM. The only exception being the 2-3 teams performing before 8:30. We will allow teams to enter at 7:30 so they can be at the prop check in the 30 minutes before as required. Please allow this time so we can make sure the appraisers and volunteers are 100% ready for each team.

2. Those of you unfamiliar with Riggs High School in challenges Vanished and Top Secret. Be prepared for stairs. Parents and Volunteers can help get props to the storage area. But that is transport only. Any repairs or touch up need to be done by the teams, and once the props are in storage -- HANDS OFF -- by any one who is not a team member.

3. Concessions will be available on site. As well as sales and jar raffle.

4. Arrive for your challenges 30 minutes early to check in (or earlier for In it Together). Get your team gathered for a couple deep breaths.

5. Be respectful of all teams. Watch other teams, other challenges. Applaud, cheer, laugh, and support others in your challenge as well as other challenges. Be amazed at your peer's solutions.

6. Award ceremony will start at 4PM. Jar Raffle will be immediately before then.

7. First place teams have the opportunity to go to globals. If your team gets first and are not planning on Globals let me know as soon as possible so we can offer the opportunity to second place.

8. Immediately after the awards ceremony, we will have a brief Q&A meeting for the teams advancing to Globals. We will let you know at the awards ceremony.

9. Your Volunteers will soon be getting information on their duties. I will be sending information out to individual appraising teams. Those that are not appraising will be a sign up genius link to chose a task. I ask that each team volunteer try to sign up for at least 4 hours. More if they are having the fun I am sure they will. This is first come first serve so if they have their heart set on a position, they should sign up early.

10. Reply to all for general questions. I am sure if you have it, someone else is thinking the same. Feel free to contact me or your regional tournament director for team specific questions,

Once again welcome to the SDDI Affiliate Tournament. We are looking forward to your team's solutions.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 21, 2017 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 251 ~ 3 of 31

FCCLA News

On March 9, 2017, Groton FCCLA chapter met for the March meeting in the FACS Room. There was an opening ceremony led by Madison Sippel. Lexi Harder read treasurer's report. New business includes member sign up for lunch committee for April meeting. There is officer interview on April 19 for anyone who is interested. Style show is coming up! The FCCLA style show will be at the end of April and Prom dress sign up is in Mrs. Tietz room. Unfinished business included State dues need to be paid March 22 and Mother Daughter night was March 7 and everyone who attended had a blast! The meeting was closed by President Madison Sippel.

67th ANNUAL ALL-STATE BAND TO FEATURE SOUTH DAKOTA'S TOP HIGH SCHOOL BAND MUSICIANS

The sixty-seventh annual South Dakota All-State Band Concert will be held at the Lorang Theatre at O'Gorman High School in Sioux Falls, SD on Saturday, March 25th. Each year, the All-State Band brings together South Dakota's most talented high school instrumental musicians and provides an opportunity for students to practice and perform under the direction of conductors who may be recognized around the world. The students participating in the 2017 All-State Band were selected through statewide competitive auditions that were held at five sites during the month of January. The 2017 All-State Band is made up of 178 students from 45 high schools.

The members of the All-State Band have been divided into two equal bands, with each band being directed by its own guest conductor. The smaller bands have been named after two of the most prominent names from South Dakota history, Lewis and Clark. The Lewis Band will be directed by Dr. Myron Welch from the University of Iowa, and the Clark Band will be directed by Dr. Elva Kaye Lance from Mississippi State University.

The Lewis Band will perform on Saturday, March 25th beginning at 4:00 p.m., followed by the Clark Band. Ten minutes prior to the concert, special awards will be presented by the South Dakota Bandmasters Association, and the Phi Beta Mu honorary music group. The South Dakota Bandmasters will be inducting Arlen Hofer into their Hall of Fame.

The doors to the concert will open at 2:00 p.m. All tickets for the All-State Concert are general admission. The ticket price will be \$15 for adults and \$10 for high school and elementary students.



Now Open!
GDI CLEAN!
Downtown
Groton

Paul - 397-7460
Tina - 397-7285

PLEASE Empty your pockets before loading the washer!

Welcome to GDI Clean!
For any questions or problems, call or text
Paul 605-397-7460
or Tina 605-397-7285

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 21, 2017 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 251 ~ 4 of 31

Bates Township Right-of-Way Notice

Bates Township Board of Supervisors reminds all landowners and tenants that the road right-of-way extends 33 feet from the center of the township road. This ditch is to be maintained and mowed. Any crops planted in the road right-of-way will be mowed and charged to the landowner, effective with the 2017 growing season.

Bates Township Board of Supervisors
Betty Geist
Township Clerk

Bates Township Equalization Meeting Notice

The Bates Township Board of Equalization will meet at the Clerk's home on Tuesday, March 23rd, 2017 at 6:30 pm.

All persons disputing their assessments are requested to notify the clerk prior to the meeting.

Betty Geist
Bates Township Clerk
14523 409th Ave
Conde, SD 57434



**Call or Text
Paul at
397-7460
or Tina at
397-7285
for
membership
Information**

GDI Living Fitness
25 Main St., Downtown Groton

Top Kote gets low bid for street project

It was a short city council meeting Monday night at the Groton Community Center. Bids were opened for this year's street project. Four bids were received. They were Jensen Rock & Sand from Mobridge for \$125,094.66, Bituminous Paving from Ortonville, Minn., for \$100,520.70, The Road Guy from Yankton for \$95,724 and the low bid from Top Kote out of Yankton for \$87,322.60 was accepted.

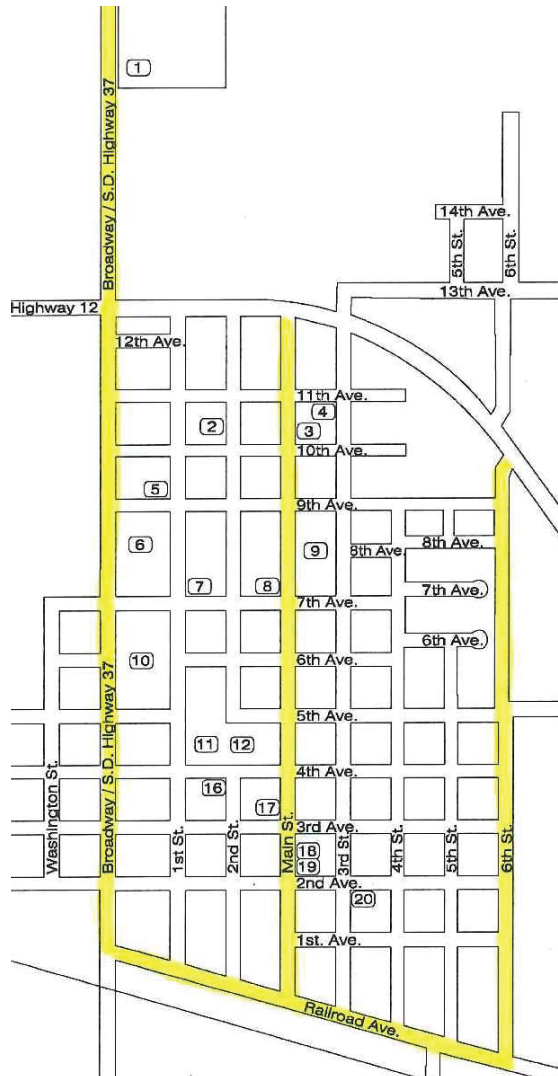
Election workers for the Ward 2 election were approved: Debra McKiver, Wanda Hamilton and Linda Locken. Their pay will be \$130 for the 13 hour day.

The garbage routes were announced which will be in effect next week.

After the council meeting, they went into executive session with Stacy Mayou present, and then went into equalization.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 21, 2017 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 251 ~ 5 of 31



EFFECTIVE MARCH 27TH, 2017 UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE

**To Help Preserve Our Streets
GROTON Garbage Pickup Service
Will only be on Railroad Ave,
Main St, 6th St, & Hwy 37**

Residents of HRH Mobile Home Park need to take their garbage to Highway 37.

Residents north of 13th Avenue (Olson and Jacobson Development) need to bring their garbage to the Bus Barns.

Please bring your garbage bags & cans to these streets for Tuesday pickup
Thank you for your cooperation!!

Sanford
Underground
Research
Facility



Subscribe at: Sanfordlab.org/newsletters

Deep Thoughts

Notes from the underground by Communications Director Constance Walter

Monday, March 20, 2017

Building on core knowledge

Long before Sanford Lab became the home to huge physics experiments, it was the Homestake Mine. Over its 126-year history, Homestake delved deeper and deeper to extract precious minerals. Eventually, Homestake's footprint extended 8,000 feet below the surface and included a maze of tunnels, ramps and shafts that, if laid end to end, would measure nearly 370 miles—about the distance from Lead to Sioux Falls.

During that time, Homestake compiled a vast knowledge of the fabric, or character, of the rock. As Sanford Lab prepares to excavate more than 800,000 tons of rock to build the Long-Baseline Neutrino Facility and Deep Underground Neutrino Experiment (LBNF/DUNE), that knowledge is even more precious than gold.

Understanding rock

"Nature abhors a vacuum. When one is created deep underground, it is only natural for the rock to relax and begin to creep into that space," said David Vardiman, geotechnical project engineer at Sanford Lab. Geotechnical engineers study the strengths, weaknesses and stress forces of the rock so they can determine how rock will behave when excavated. Sigma 1, Sigma 2 and Sigma 3 define the orientation and magnitude of these forces, which varies throughout the Earth's crust—and sometimes within a single excavation. The perfect ratio is 1-to-1, which rarely ever happens. However, at Sanford Lab, it's really close at 0.87-to-1. That's nearly ideal for excavating huge caverns.

Core samples

"We know the rock is nearly 2 billion years old," Vardiman said. "The core samples tell us about the

strength and geologic composition of the rock and reveal the orientation of folds and other imperfections in the rock mass." The information gleaned from studying core samples, influences the design of tunnels and determines what kind of ground support is needed.

Ground support

Once engineers know the stresses within and the strength of the rock, they begin to design the appropriate ground support. What shape will the caverns take and what is the span of each? How many rock bolts will be needed? How long do the bolts need to be? What kind of shotcrete is required? How much steel mesh is needed?

"Ground support reduces the risk of rock unraveling into work areas," said John Keefner, underground operations engineer. "It pins the rock together in a strong configuration, like a Roman arch, distributing the load and ensuring the opening remains intact." Rock bolts reinforce the rock, while shotcrete and steel mesh keep smaller rocks from popping loose providing a strengthening buttress effect that supports the opening.

Monitoring the earth

Remember, nature abhors a vacuum. The LBNF/DUNE caverns will be 90 feet high, 60 feet wide and up to 600 feet long. That's a lot of empty space. So, in addition to "overwhelming the ground with support," Sanford Lab will monitor the ground, Vardiman said. Extensometers and inclinometers measure movement of the rock, while routine inspections for cracks in shotcreted walls and cement floors reveal stresses in the rock. "Geotechnical investigations help ensure we do things right."

ERT member hangs up her gear



For nine years, Kay Rear was an integral part of the Emergency Response Team at Sanford Lab. She provided CPR training and first aid instruction before becoming a benchman—the person who tests breathing apparatus—for the ERT two years ago.

On March 8, Rear participated in her last training then hung up

her PPE for the last time.

"The time is right to retire," Rear said. "There's a good team in place."

Rear, who fought forest fires and served as an EMT and paramedic, plans to continue her service with the Lawrence County Search and Rescue Team.

"Kay is very knowledgeable and is a real leader," said Tom Regan, who works with ESH and is a member of the ERT. "She will be missed very much."

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 21, 2017 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 251 ~ 7 of 31

Average Gas Prices Holding Steady to Begin Spring

March 20, 2017 – Pump prices remain relatively stable, with today's national average price for regular gasoline holding at \$2.29 per gallon. South Dakota's price average at the pump stands at \$2.32 today, down three cents from the March high of \$2.35 recorded on March 10.

"The latest Energy Information Administration report shows that Gulf Coast crude oil inventories dropped 2.4 million barrels for the week ending March 10, the result of a nearly 500,000-per-barrel drop in regional imports last week," said Marilyn Buskohl, spokeswoman for AAA South Dakota. "The Oil Price Information Service reports that a unit fire at Lyondell Basell's 302,300-per barrel Houston, Tex., refinery resulted in production cuts. The refiner ships most of its product north via the Magellan Pipeline."

Current Price Averages per Gallon of Regular Gasoline

Sioux Falls – \$2.22, down two cents in the past month ... up 28 cents since 3/20/16

Rapid City – \$2.32, unchanged over the past month ... up 45 cents since 3/20/16

South Dakota – \$2.32, unchanged over the past month ... up 33 cents since 3/20/16

U.S. – \$2.29, up one cent in the past month ... up 31 cents since 3/20/16

Quick Stats

The nation's top ten least expensive markets are: South Carolina (\$2.01), Tennessee (\$2.04), Alabama (\$2.05), Mississippi (\$2.06), Arkansas (\$2.08), Oklahoma (\$2.09), Texas (\$2.09), Virginia (\$2.09), Louisiana (\$2.10) and Missouri (\$2.10).

The nation's markets that have seen the largest yearly increases include: Washington (+61 cents), Utah (+60 cents), Alaska (+58 cents), Idaho (+56 cents), New Jersey (+55 cents), Oregon (+54 cents), Hawaii (+51 cents), Montana (+44 cents), Pennsylvania (+43 cents) and Connecticut (+40 cents).

Global Market Dynamics

While prices have been flat in recent weeks, a long-term bearish sentiment continues to underscore the global oil market as speculation about the balance between OPEC cuts and U.S. production drives the market. Last Friday, OPEC's Joint Technical Committee met to review compliance and participant's level of adherence to the production cut agreement. Following the JTC meeting, Russia agreed to drop total production by 300,000 barrels per day by the end of April and pledged to maintain that level until the deal expires at the end of June. Saudi Arabia followed the compliance meeting with news that it may consider working with partner countries to continue the cuts beyond the June agreement deadline.

Even with OPEC's compliance in the 90 percent range, U.S. production continues to cut into any rebalancing efforts by OPEC and non-OPEC countries. On Friday, oil service company, Baker Hughes, reported that the U.S. rig count increased again last week when producers added 14 drilling rigs, bringing the total rig count to 631 in the United States. Traders will continue to watch whether OPEC and non-OPEC members make moves to further cut production in an attempt to balance the global oil supply. At the close of Friday's formal trading session on the NYMEX, WTI was up three cents to settle at \$48.78 per barrel.



National Honor Society ceremony is set for Monday

The National Honor Society will hold its induction ceremony on Monday, March 27, 7 p.m., at the GHS Conference room. The event is open to parents, grandparents and friends of the members and inductees. Members who will be inducted this year are pictured above, in back, left to right, are Hattie Weismantel, Alexandra Stange, Trey Wright, Madison Sippel and Hannah Lewandowski; and in front, left to right, are Kate Helmer, Madilyn Wright, Jenifer Fjelstad and Emma Donley.

The current members of the Groton Area Gold Key Chapter of the NHS are Macy Knecht, Erin Smith, Keri Pappas, and Landon Marzahn. The students who will be inducted this year are seniors Kate Helmer, daughter of Loren and Alicia Helmer, and Trey Wright, son of Russell and Janet Wright; juniors Hannah Lewandowski, daughter of Brad and Becky Lewandowski, Madilyn Wright, daughter of Stephan and Lynn Wright, Madison Sippel, daughter of Monte and Sandi Sippel, Alexandra Stange, daughter of Doug and Vicci Stange, Emma Donley, Daughter of Don and Joann Donley, Hattie Weismantel, daughter of Marty and Amy Weismantel, and Jenifer Fjelstad, daughter of Clint and Tara Fjelstad.

Today in Weather History

March 21, 1997: As temperatures began to warm up towards the end of March, the near record to record winter snowpack over central, north central, and northeast South Dakota began melting. The resulting runoff filled up ditches, lakes, creeks, streams, and low-lying areas. The massive amount of water swamped hundreds of sections of county and township roads as well as several state and federal highways. The inundated sections of roads were either broken up or washed out. Tens of culverts were blown out or damaged, and several bridges were either damaged or washed out by chunks of ice and the high water flow. Road closures were extensive, with rerouting taking place for school buses, mail carriers, farmers, and ranchers. Many spillways and dams received some damage or were washed out. In addition, thousands of acres of farmland and pastureland were underwater. Due to the high groundwater, a countless number of homes received water in their basements. A few towns were partially flooded, including Twin Brooks in Grant County, Corona in Roberts County, and Raymond in Clark County. The following week, in the early morning hours of March 27, water flowed into Raymond filling the basements of several homes. In rural areas, several farms were surrounded by water and were inaccessible, leaving some people stranded and livestock marooned. Many other residences and businesses, mainly across northeast South Dakota, received significant damage or were a total loss. As a result, several people had to be evacuated. At the time, many long-term residents said this was the most significant flooding they had seen in their lifetimes. The flooding continued into early to mid-April.

1801: The Jefferson Flood hit the Connecticut Valley. The flooding was the greatest since 1692. The Federalists named the flood for the new President, who they blamed for the disaster.

1876: More than 40 inches of snow stopped traffic at Montreal, Quebec Canada. Trains were delayed, and mail carriers resorted to snowshoes.

1932: A tornado swarm occurred in the Deep South. Between late afternoon and early the next morning severe thunderstorms spawned 31 tornadoes in Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia and Tennessee. The tornadoes killed 334 persons and injured 1784 others. Northern Alabama was hardest hit. Tornadoes in Alabama killed 286 persons and caused five million dollars damage.

1951: Antarctica is the windiest place in the world. Port Martin averaged 40 mph winds throughout the year. On this day, the winds averaged 108 mph.

1952 - Severe thunderstorms spawned thirty-one tornadoes across Arkansas, Tennessee, Missouri, Mississippi, Alabama and Kentucky. The tornadoes killed 343 persons and caused 15 million dollars damage. Arkansas and Tennessee each reported thirteen tornadoes. The towns of Judsonia AR and Henderson TN were nearly wiped off the map in what proved to be the worst tornado outbreak of record for Arkansas. A tornado, one and a half miles wide at times, left a church the only undamaged building at Judsonia. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)








1987 - A winter storm in the Northern High Plains Region produced blizzard conditions in western South Dakota. Winds gusted to 70 mph at Rapid City SD, and snowfall totals ranged up to 20 inches at Lead SD. The high winds produced snow drifts six feet high. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Bitterly cold weather prevailed across the northeastern U.S. Portland ME reported their coldest spring day of record with a morning low of 5 above, and an afternoon high of just 21 degrees. Marquette MI reported a record low of 15 degrees below zero. (The National Weather Summary) (The Weather Channel)

1989 - Snow blanketed the northeastern U.S. early in the day, with six inches reported at Rutland VT. Morning and afternoon thunderstorms produced large hail and damaging winds from southwestern Mississippi to southwest Georgia. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

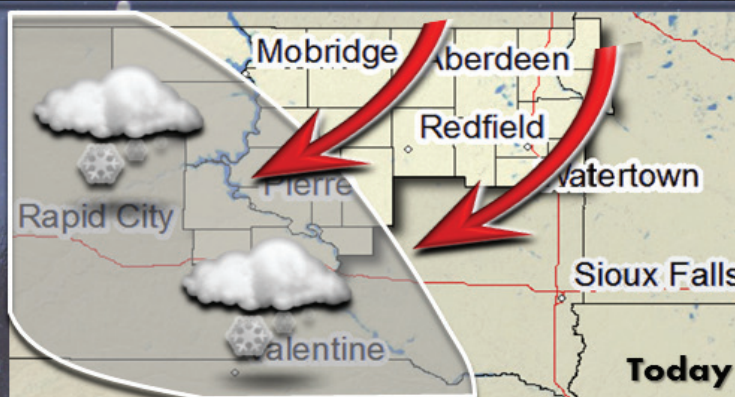
Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 21, 2017 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 251 ~ 10 of 31

Today	Tonight	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday
						
Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy then Slight Chance Snow	Snow Likely then Wintry Mix Likely and Breezy	Mostly Cloudy	Chance Rain	Chance Rain	Chance Rain
High: 36 °F	Low: 21 °F	High: 37 °F	Low: 31 °F	High: 48 °F	Low: 36 °F	High: 46 °F

Active Pattern This Week

A Few Inches
West
Less Into
Central SD



Dry & Cold AIR
In The East

Wednesday

Band of Precip Moves SW-NE
Snow Initially – Chang to Rain/Drizzle w/ Warming Temps

Thursday/Friday

Broad Weather System Brings Mainly Rain & Mild Temps

National Weather Service – Aberdeen, SD



weather.gov/Aberdeen



National Weather Service Aberdeen



@NWSAberdeen

Updated: 3/21/2017 4:46 AM Central

Published on: 03/21/2017 at 4:50AM

We're looking at an active pattern this week. This morning an area of snow will move across the western half of South Dakota with generally light accumulations for central South Dakota. Another weather feature moves back across the state for Wednesday, spreading snow from southwest to northeast through the day. Snow accumulations will be limited as it changes to rain/drizzle and temperatures warm above freezing. A broad circulation moves across the region Thursday and Friday with some decent rainfall amounts and milder temperatures.

Groton Daily Independent

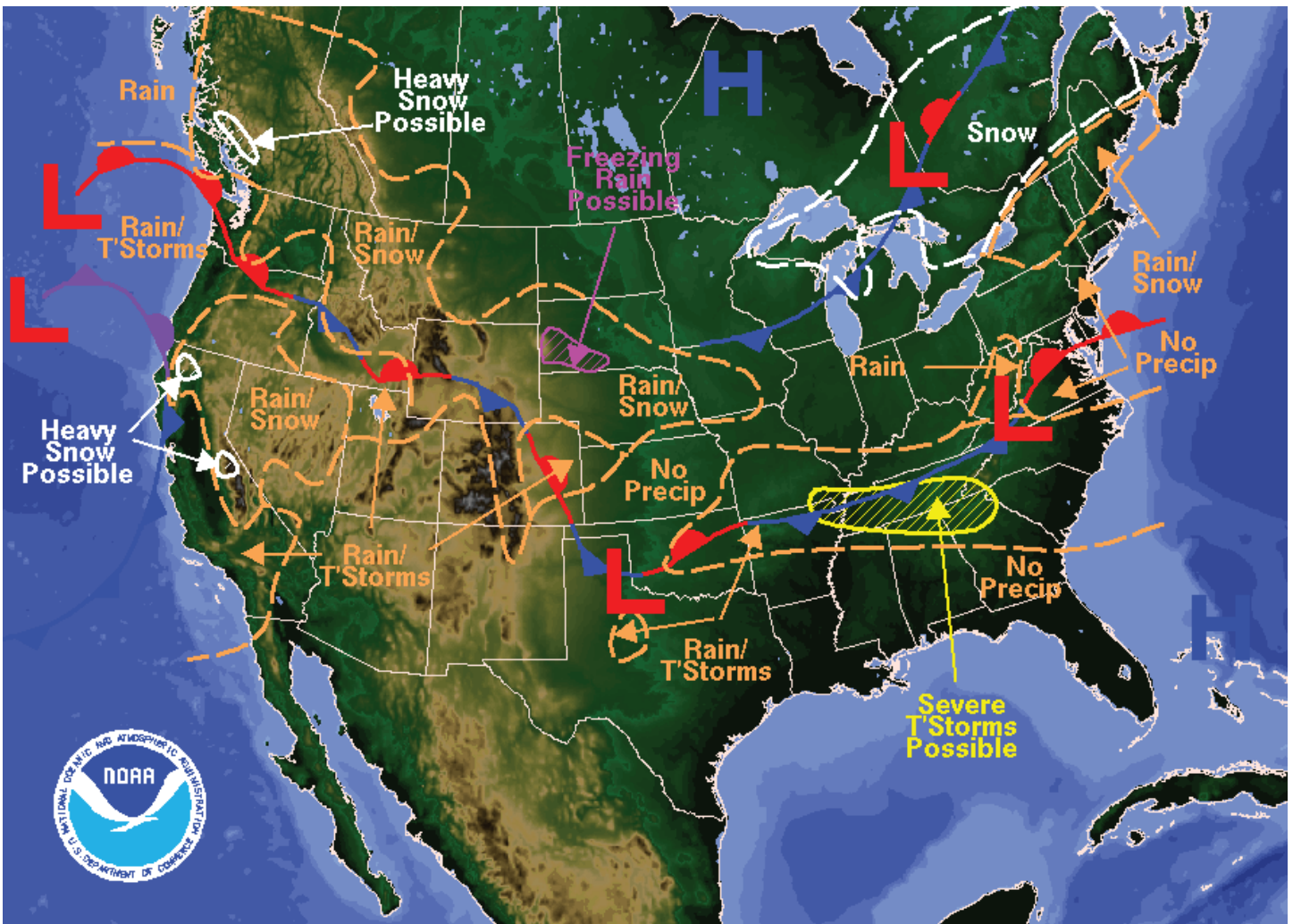
Tuesday, March 21, 2017 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 251 ~ 11 of 31

Yesterday's Weather

High Outside Temp: 51.5 F at 5:38 PM
Low Outside Temp: 33.7 F at 11:57 PM
High Gust: 22.0 Mph at 10:34 PM
Snow: Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 79° in 1907
Record Low: -12 in 1965
Average High: 42°F
Average Low: 22°F
Average Precip in March.: 0.71
Precip to date in March.: 0.59
Average Precip to date: 1.73
Precip Year to Date: 0.59
Sunset Tonight: 7:47 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:32 a.m.



Weather Forecast for Tue, Mar 21, 2017, issued 4:47 AM EDT
DOC/NOAA/NWS/NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by McReynolds based on WPC, SPC and NHC forecasts

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 21, 2017 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 251 ~ 12 of 31



THE "IN" IN WINNERS

It was the end of the football season and Ryan received a trophy for rushing for over 1,500 yards – the most in the history of his high school. On the way home his father said, "I'm proud of you, Son. I never won a trophy!"

"Dad," he asked softly, "did you ever try?"

Some never win anything in life because they never begin anything in life that is worthwhile. They wander aimlessly from one interest to another because they are unwilling to do what is necessary or make the sacrifice to become a winner.

Others do not win anything because they give in to doubts and difficulties. They lack the determination to seek help or advice from others who faced the same problems but refused to give in and persevered until they achieved their goals.

If we want to win, we need to begin where the Bible begins – with God. Moses wrote, "In the beginning God..." When we begin any project or attempt to achieve any goal we can count on God to be with us to guard us and guide us, to uphold us and sustain us.

Before we begin a task or work toward any goal we need to stop and pray earnestly and sincerely asking God to keep us from making mistakes, follow His will and give us His wisdom and strength. If we rely on Him in all things for all things, He will lead us from one victory to another.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we know that we can do all things through You and for You, if we remain in You. May we overcome all obstacles in life as we follow You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture for Today: Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

News from the Associated Press

Company: Dakota Access pipeline on track, despite "threats"

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — The company building the Dakota Access pipeline said Monday that the project remains on track to start moving oil this week despite recent "coordinated physical attacks" along the line.

The brief court filing late Monday from Dallas-based Energy Transfer Partners didn't detail the attacks, but said they "pose threats to life, physical safety and the environment."

The filing cited those threats for redacting much of the rest of the 2½-page report, but ended: "These coordinated attacks will not stop line-fill operations. With that in mind, the company now believes that oil may flow sometime this week."

A spokeswoman for the company declined to elaborate on the types of attacks. A spokesman for the Morton County sheriff's office, the center of months of sometimes violent conflicts between protesters and law enforcement, didn't immediately respond to an email.

The Standing Rock and Cheyenne River Sioux tribes have battled the \$3.8 billion pipeline in court for months, arguing it's a threat to water and their right to practice their religion.

The company has maintained the pipeline, which will move oil from North Dakota's Bakken oil field more than 1,000 miles across four states to a shipping point in Illinois, will be safe.

An appeals court on Saturday refused a request from the tribes for an emergency order to prevent oil from flowing through the pipeline.

The tribes have challenged an earlier ruling by U.S. District Judge James Boasberg not to stop final construction of the pipeline, and they wanted the appeals court to halt any oil flow until that's resolved.

The appeals court said the tribes hadn't met "the stringent requirements" for such an order.

The tribes had asked Boasberg to direct the Army Corps of Engineers to withdraw permission for Energy Transfer Partners to lay pipe under Lake Oahe in North Dakota, which the Corps manages for the U.S. government. The stretch under the Missouri River reservoir is the last piece of construction for the pipeline.

The company is wrapping up pipe work under the lake and had said oil could start flowing between Monday and Wednesday.

The tribes' appeal rests on the religion argument. Boasberg has said he doesn't think the tribes have a strong case on appeal. He also said ETP would be "substantially harmed" by a delay in pipeline operations.

Authorities ID Rapid City man killed in motorcycle crash

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — Authorities have released the name of the Rapid City man who died in a weekend motorcycle crash in the Rapid City area.

The Pennington County Sheriff's Office identifies the victim as 51-year-old Ronald West.

Sheriff's deputies found West's body with the help of Rapid City police at the scene of the crash on Dark Canyon Road early Sunday.

The crash remains under investigation.

San Francisco bars travel to South Dakota for city employees

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota has landed on San Francisco's list of places where city workers aren't allowed to go on official business because the state passed a law allowing religious-affiliated adoption agencies to not place children with unmarried or same-sex couples.

City employees will be barred from traveling on state or city-subsidized business to South Dakota or from contracting with South Dakota businesses, said Jack Gallagher, a spokesman for the San Francisco city administrator. The prohibition is part of an ordinance blocking travel to states that approve legislation that discriminates against the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, the Argus Leader

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 21, 2017 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 251 ~ 14 of 31

reported Monday (<http://argusne.ws/2mNk9JH>).

There are four other states on the list — Kansas, Mississippi, North Carolina and Tennessee.

Earlier this month, Republican Gov. Dennis Daugaard signed a bill to give legal protections to faith-based organizations that, based on their religious beliefs, refuse to place children in certain households. Supporters say the measure preemptively protects religious adoption and foster care agencies. Civil liberties groups and LGBT advocates say it opens the door to discrimination.

The travel ban's financial impact on South Dakota wasn't immediately clear.

Daugaard's office said Monday that the new law won't lead to unfair treatment of LGBT people or others.

Information from: Argus Leader, <http://www.argusleader.com>

Some emergency responder to get bulletproof vests

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A federal grant will provide bulletproof vests for emergency responders in eight southeastern South Dakota counties.

The idea for the vests came from a Hartford Consensus Compendium report aimed at improving survival in active shooter and mass casualty events, the Argus Leader (<http://argusne.ws/2nJUnY2>) reported.

"The world is changing and we have different emerging threats," said Minnehaha County emergency manager Lynn DeYoung. "This not the first evolution in protecting first responders, and it won't be the last."

Emergency responders have dealt with two high-profile shooting cases in the area recent years. In 2015, emergency responders were at Sioux Steel in Lennox where there was a fatal workplace shooting. That same year, a Harrisburg High School student was arrested after shooting his principal.

DeYoung said the idea for the vests came from a Hartford Consensus Compendium report. The report is aimed at improving survival in active-shooter and mass-casualty events.

Med-Star Paramedic Ambulance owner Jay Masur isn't convinced the vests are needed. He said the changing dangers affecting emergencies aren't happening in Sioux Falls, but rather in larger cities nationwide. He thinks local incidents that call for bulletproof vests will be few.

"I think it's great they are putting money into us," Masur said. "There is a lot of emphasis that times are changing and these vests will make a difference, but I don't think we need them."

The counties receiving the bulletproof vests through a Homeland Security grant are Minnehaha, Lincoln, Union, Clay, McCook, Turner, Moody and Lake.

Information from: Argus Leader, <http://www.argusleader.com>

Boston Pops to showcase Gershwin on tour of US Midwest

BOSTON (AP) — The Boston Pops is headed to the heartland.

The renowned orchestra, conducted by Keith Lockhart, kicks off a seven-city, seven-state tour around the Midwest this week.

Organizers say the tour will showcase the music of George Gershwin.

The tour gets underway Friday in Kansas City, Missouri, and moves to Iowa City, Iowa, on Saturday and Lincoln, Nebraska, on Sunday.

Next week's stops include Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on March 27; Chicago on March 31; Van Wert, Ohio, on April 1; and Carmel, Indiana, on April 2.

Actress and celebrated Broadway star Bernadette Peters will join the Pops at the Chicago and Ohio stops.

No electronics on some US-bound jets from Mideast, Africa

By ALICIA A. CALDWELL and DAVID KOENIG, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. government is ordering passengers on nonstop, U.S.-bound flights from a handful of mostly Middle Eastern and North African countries to pack electronic devices other than cellphones in their checked baggage.

Senior Trump administration officials said that starting Tuesday morning airlines flying directly to the United States from 10 airports in eight countries could allow only cellphones and smartphones in carry-on bags for U.S.-bound flights. Other electronics, including laptops and tablets, will be indefinitely banned from the passenger cabin.

The officials said the airlines were to have 96 hours to implement the security order or face being barred from flying to the United States. The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the security ban despite President Donald Trump's repeated insistence that an anonymous source should not be trusted.

The electronics ban affects flights from international airports in Amman, Jordan; Kuwait City, Kuwait; Cairo; Istanbul; Jeddah and Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; Casablanca, Morocco; Doha, Qatar; and Dubai and Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates. About 50 flights a day, all on foreign carriers, will be impacted. The officials said no U.S.-based airlines have non-stop flights from those cities to the United States.

The officials said the decision was prompted by "evaluated intelligence" about ongoing potential threats to airplanes bound for the United States. The officials would not discuss the timing of the intelligence or if any particular terror group is thought to be planning an attack.

The ban would affect laptops, iPads, cameras and most other electronics. Royal Jordanian Airlines tweeted about the ban Monday, telling passengers that medical devices would also be allowed onboard with passengers.

Details of the ban were first disclosed by Royal Jordanian and the official news agency of Saudi Arabia.

In its statement, Royal Jordanian said the electronics ban would affect its flights to New York, Chicago, Detroit and Montreal.

Across the Atlantic early Tuesday, problems and confusion ensued.

Egyptian officials at the Cairo International Airport said they had not received any instructions on banning passengers from bringing laptops, iPads, cameras and some other electronics on board direct flights to the United States. The officials said a New York-bound EgyptAir flight departed and that passengers were allowed to take their laptops and other electronics on board in their carry-on luggage.

A spokesman for Royal Jordanian says the airliner has not yet started to enforce the new U.S. regulation. Basel Kilani has told The Associated Press that the airline was still awaiting formal instructions from the relevant U.S. departments, which could possibly come later on Tuesday.

However, the Mideast's biggest airline is confirming that U.S.-bound passengers will be prevented from carrying electronic gadgets aboard aircraft.

Dubai-based Emirates said Tuesday the ban takes effect on Saturday. That guidance differs from the information provided by senior Trump administration officials, who have said the ban is in place from Tuesday

Brian Jenkins, an aviation-security expert at the Rand Corp., said earlier that the nature of the security measure suggested that it was driven by intelligence of a possible attack. There could be concern about inadequate passenger screening or even conspiracies involving insiders — airport or airline employees — in some countries, he said.

Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly phoned lawmakers over the weekend to brief them on aviation security issues that have prompted the impending electronics ban, according a congressional aide briefed on the discussion. The aide was not authorized to speak publicly about the issue and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The administration officials who briefed reporters about the ban said foreign officials were told about the impending order starting Sunday.

A U.S. government official said such a ban has been considered for several weeks. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity to disclose the internal security discussions by the federal government.

The ban would begin just before Wednesday's meeting of the U.S.-led coalition against the Islamic State group in Washington. A number of top Arab officials were expected to attend the State Department gathering. It was unclear whether their travel plans were related to any increased worry about security threats.

Another aviation-security expert, Jeffrey Price, said there could be downsides to the policy.

"There would be a huge disadvantage to having everyone put their electronics in checked baggage," said Price, a professor at Metropolitan State University of Denver. He said thefts from baggage would skyrocket, as when Britain tried a similar ban in 2006, and some laptops have batteries that can catch fire — an event easier to detect in the cabin than the hold.

Most major airports in the United States have a computer tomography or CT scanner for checked baggage, which creates a detailed picture of a bag's contents. They can warn an operator of potentially dangerous material, and may provide better security than the X-ray machines used to screen passengers and their carry-on bags. All checked baggage must be screened for explosives.

Associated Press writers David Keonig in Dallas, and Matthew Lee, Joan Lowy and Ted Bridis in Washington contributed to this report.

S. Korea prosecutors grill Park over corruption allegations

By HYUNG-JIN KIM, Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korean prosecutors grilled the country's just-ousted president on Tuesday in a long-awaited investigation of corruption allegations that ended her rule and now threaten to put her in jail.

The questioning of Park Geun-hye came 11 days after the Constitutional Court unanimously ruled to dismiss her over suspicions she colluded with a confidante to extort money from businesses and committed other wrongdoings. Her powers had been suspended since she was impeached by parliament in December.

"I am sorry to the people. I will sincerely undergo an investigation," Park told reporters, without elaborating, when she arrived at the prosecutors' office.

It was not clear if Park's brief statement meant she acknowledged the corruption allegations, since she has repeatedly denied any legal wrongdoing. South Korean politicians embroiled in scandals often offer public apologies for causing trouble though they deny any involvement.

In Park's questioning, expected to last until late in the evening, prosecutors were trying to determine whether to seek an arrest warrant, according to South Korean media. Many other suspects implicated in the scandal have already been arrested, including Park's confidante Choi Soon-sil, some top government officials and Samsung heir Lee Jae-yong.

Prosecutors have previously accused Park of extortion, bribery and abuse of power, which could theoretically carry penalties of up to life imprisonment. But arresting Park would be a delicate matter because it might aggravate a national divide and create a strong conservative backlash ahead of an election in May to choose her successor, some political experts said.

Park's scandal has roiled South Korea for months, with those opposing and supporting her rule staging massive rallies. After the March 10 Constitutional Court ruling, Park supporters clashed with police, leaving three dead. On Tuesday, hundreds of Park's supporters waited for hours outside the prosecutors' office, holding anti-impeachment signs and the national flag, which has become a symbol of their protest.

Park had immunity while in office and had refused to meet with prosecutors or allow officials to search her presidential compound. After leaving office, she has continued to reject the allegations, saying "I believe the truth will certainly come out."

Park is the first democratically elected leader to be forced out of office in South Korea since democracy replaced dictatorship in the late 1980s.

It was a dramatic fall for Park, the daughter of slain dictator Park Chung-hee who became the country's first female president in early 2013 with the backing of conservatives who remembered her father as a hero who pulled the country up from poverty despite his suppression of civil rights.

Moon Jae-in, a liberal who lost the 2012 presidential election to Park, currently has a commanding lead in opinion surveys for next leader.

Associated Press writer Kim Tong-hyung contributed to this story.

Martin McGuinness, Irish rebel turned politician, dies at 66

By SHAWN POGATCHNIK, Associated Press

DUBLIN (AP) — Martin McGuinness, the Irish Republican Army commander who led his underground paramilitary movement toward reconciliation with Britain, died Tuesday, his Sinn Fein party announced. He was 66.

Turning from rebel to peacemaker, McGuinness served as Northern Ireland's deputy first minister for a decade in a Catholic-Protestant power-sharing government.

The party said he died following a short illness.

McGuinness suffered from amyloidosis, a rare disease with a strain specific to Ireland's northwest. The chemotherapy required to combat the formation of organ-choking protein deposits quickly sapped him of strength and forced him to start missing government appointments.

"Throughout his life Martin showed great determination, dignity and humility and it was no different during his short illness," Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams said.

"He was a passionate republican who worked tirelessly for peace and reconciliation and for the reunification of his country. But above all he loved his family and the people of Derry and he was immensely proud of both."

Irish President Michael D. Higgins said people across Ireland would miss "the leadership he gave, shown most clearly during the difficult times of the peace process, and his commitment to the values of genuine democracy that he demonstrated in the development of the institutions in Northern Ireland."

Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who worked with McGuinness to forge Northern Ireland's 1998 peace accord, expressed "immense gratitude for the part he played in the peace process."

"Whatever the past, the Martin I knew was a thoughtful, reflective and committed individual," Blair said. "Once he became the peacemaker he became it wholeheartedly and with no shortage of determined opposition to those who wanted to carry on the war."

But some who suffered at the hands of the IRA could not forgive.

Former British government minister Norman Tebbit, whose wife was paralyzed by the IRA bombing of a hotel in Brighton in 1984, said he hoped McGuinness was "parked in a particularly hot and unpleasant corner of hell for the rest of eternity."

McGuinness' transformation into a peacemaker was all the more remarkable because, as a senior IRA commander during the years of gravest Catholic-Protestant violence, he insisted that Northern Ireland must be forced out of the United Kingdom against the wishes of Protestants.

Even after Sinn Fein — the IRA's legal, public face — started to run for elections in the 1980s, McGuinness insisted as Sinn Fein deputy leader that "armed struggle" remained essential.

"We don't believe that winning elections and any amount of votes will bring freedom in Ireland," he told a BBC documentary team in 1986. "At the end of the day, it will be the cutting edge of the IRA that will bring freedom."

Yet within a few years of making that stubborn vow, McGuinness was exploring the opposite option in covert contacts with British intelligence that led eventually to a truce, inter-party talks and the installation of the IRA icon in the heart of Northern Ireland's government.

Irish Times columnist Fintan O'Toole argued in January 2017 that McGuinness had been "a mass killer — during his period of membership and leadership the IRA killed 1,781 people, including 644 civilians — whose personal amiability has been essential to the peace process. If he were not a ruthless and unrepentant exponent of violence, he would never have become such a key figure in bringing violence to an end."

Unlike his close ally Adams, McGuinness never hid the fact that he had been a commander of the IRA — classed as a terrorist organization by the British, Irish and U.S. governments. Nor could he.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 21, 2017 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 251 ~ 18 of 31

Born May 23, 1950, he joined the breakaway Provisional IRA faction in his native Londonderry — simply Derry to Irish nationalists — after dropping out of high school and working as an apprentice butcher in the late 1960s. At the time, the Catholic civil rights movement faced increasing conflict with the province's Protestant government and police.

He rose to become Derry's deputy IRA commander by age 21 as "Provo" bombs systematically wrecked the city center. Soldiers found it impossible to pass IRA road barricades erected in McGuinness' Bogside power base.

McGuinness appeared unmasked at early Provisional IRA press conferences. The BBC filmed him walking through the Bogside discussing how the IRA command structure worked and stressing his concern to minimize civilian casualties, an early sign of public relations savvy.

In 1972, Northern Ireland's bloodiest year, McGuinness joined Adams in a six-man IRA delegation flown by the British government to London for secret face-to-face negotiations during a brief truce. Those talks got nowhere and McGuinness went back on the run until his arrest on New Year's Eve in the Republic of Ireland near a car loaded with 250 pounds (110 kilograms) of explosives and 4,750 rounds of ammunition.

During one of his two Dublin trials for IRA membership, McGuinness declared from the dock he was "a member of the Derry Brigade of the IRA and I'm very, very proud of it."

Historians and security analysts agree that McGuinness was promoted to the IRA's ruling army council following his November 1974 parole from prison and would have overseen many of the group's most spectacular and divisive attacks. These included bomb attacks on London tourist spots and the use of "human bombs" — civilian employees like cooks and cleaners at British security installations — who were forced to drive car bombs to their places of work and were detonated by remote control before they could raise the alarm.

His central role in the IRA command was underscored when Britain in 1990 opened secret dialogue with the underground group in hopes of securing a cease-fire. An MI6 agent codenamed "The Mountain Climber" met McGuinness several times as part of wider diplomatic efforts that delivered a 1994 IRA truce and, ultimately, multi-party negotiations on Northern Ireland's future and the U.S.-brokered Good Friday peace accord of 1998.

Northern Ireland's first power-sharing government, formed in 1999, was led by moderates and afforded only minor roles for Sinn Fein and the most uncompromising Protestant party, Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionists. When Sinn Fein nominated McGuinness to be education minister, many Protestant lawmakers recoiled and insisted they would never accept what one called "an IRA godfather" overseeing their children's education.

That first coalition collapsed under the twin weight of Paisley-led obstruction and the IRA's refusal to disarm. McGuinness served as the lead liaison with disarmament officials.

After election results vaulted the Democratic Unionists and Sinn Fein to the top of their communities for the first time, pressure mounted on the IRA to surrender its stockpiled arsenal. This happened in 2005, paving the way for Paisley to bury the hatchet with the group he called "the Sinners."

No observer could have foreseen what happened next: a genuine friendship between First Minister Paisley and Deputy First Minister McGuinness. Belfast wits dubbed them "The Chuckle Brothers" because of their public warmth, an image that quickly eroded Protestant support for Paisley and forced him out as Democratic Unionist chief within the year.

McGuinness maintained more businesslike relations with Paisley's frosty successor, Peter Robinson. Together they met Queen Elizabeth II for a historic 2012 handshake in Belfast and were guests of honor at Windsor Castle two years later. All the while, McGuinness expressed newfound support for the police as they faced attacks from IRA splinter groups — a U-turn that exposed McGuinness and his relatives to death threats in their Derry home.

His relations with the newest Democratic Unionist Party leader, Arlene Foster, turned sour with surprising speed. When Foster rebuffed Sinn Fein's demands to step aside, McGuinness resigned in January, toppling power-sharing in the process.

"Over the last 10 years I have worked with DUP leaders and reached out to unionists on the basis of equality, respect and reconciliation. Today is the right time to call a halt to the DUP's arrogance," a frail,

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 21, 2017 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 251 ~ 19 of 31

weak-voiced McGuinness said as he resigned as deputy first minister.

Foster said Tuesday that "his contribution helped build the relative peace we now enjoy."

"While our differing backgrounds and life experiences inevitably meant there was much to separate us, we shared a deep desire to see the devolved institutions working to achieve positive results for everyone," she said.

McGuinness is survived by his wife, Bernadette, two daughters and two sons.

10 Things to Know for Today

By The Associated Press

Your daily look at late-breaking news, upcoming events and the stories that will be talked about today:

1. SUPREME COURT NOMINEE FACING DAYLONG QUESTIONING

Senate Democrats are determined to press Neil Gorsuch on everything from abortion and guns to his independence from Trump.

2. WHAT TRUMP IS AIMING TO DO

The U.S. president is trying to rally support for a revised version of the health care overhaul by taking his case directly to Capitol Hill.

3. US MOVES TO BOLSTER AIRLINE SECURITY

The temporary move would prohibit passengers on certain flights originating in eight other mainly Arab countries from packing most electronics in carry-on luggage, but regional airlines appear unaware.

4. IRISH REBEL TURNED POLITICIAN DIES

Martin McGuinness, the Irish Republican Army commander who led his underground paramilitary movement toward reconciliation with Britain, is dead at 66.

5. WHO IS SAYING 'SORRY'

Park Geun-hye, South Korea's ousted president, apologized to the people as she underwent questioning by prosecutors over a corruption scandal.

6. 'BREAD WAR' BREWING IN VENEZUELA

Caracas' socialist government is seizing bakeries in the latest effort to combat long food lines.

7. HOW ONE CITY IS TACKLING BLIGHT EPIDEMIC

In historic Memphis, an effort is underway to reclaim the landscape of abandoned houses and trash-strewn vacant lots.

8. HAMAS AIMS TO IMPROVE INTERNATIONAL IMAGE

The Islamic militant group drafts a new political program to project a more pragmatic image, hoping this will improve ties with Egypt and help it get off Western terrorism lists.

9. FOX NEWS CHANNEL PULLS NAPOLITANO FROM AIR

The cable news network had disavowed legal analyst Andrew Napolitano's on-air claim that British intelligence officials helped Obama spy on Trump.

10. 'IF YOU CAN PLAY, GO OUT THERE AND PLAY'

Injured Miami Heat star Chris Bosh tells AP he has a simple perspective when it comes to the rest-or-play debate that is prompting the NBA to enact changes.

High court nominee to face daylong questioning in Senate

By ERICA WERNER and MARK SHERMAN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Supreme Court nominee Neil Gorsuch faces hours of questioning from senators as frustrated Democrats are determined to press him on everything from abortion and guns to his independence from President Donald Trump.

Republicans are unanimously supporting Gorsuch, and certain to give him what cover they can as he appears before the Senate Judiciary Committee for Day 2 of his confirmation hearings on Tuesday. But Democrats made clear on the first day that they were in no mood to "rubber stamp a nominee selected by extreme interest groups and nominated by a president who lost the popular vote by nearly 3 million

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 21, 2017 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 251 ~ 20 of 31

votes," as Democratic Sen. Patrick Leahy of Vermont put it.

Gorsuch himself sought to emphasize his strong belief in the separation of powers in his opening statement, pledging to be independent or "hang up the robe." Seeking to take the edge off Democratic complaints that he has favored the wealthy and powerful in more than 10 years as a federal judge, the 49-year-old Coloradan said he has tried to be a "neutral and independent" judge and has ruled both for and against disabled students, prisoners and workers alleging civil rights violations.

"My decisions have never reflected a judgment about the people before me, only my best judgment about the law and facts at issue in each particular case," Gorsuch said.

The first day of the hearing was given over to opening statements, with questions saved for Tuesday, and Judiciary Chairman Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, warned senators that the session could last 10 hours or more.

A Supreme Court confirmation hearing is a major occasion on Capitol Hill, but Monday's was overshadowed by a separate event in the Capitol complex. On the House side, FBI Director James Comey testified that the bureau is investigating Russian meddling in last year's election and possible links and coordination between Russia and associates of Trump.

Blending the two hearings, Democratic Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut referred to "a looming constitutional crisis" that the Supreme Court might need to resolve. The court's eight current justices are roughly divided ideologically between conservatives and liberals.

The Russian story line as well as Trump's verbal attacks on federal judges both during the campaign and as president have fed into Democratic efforts to force Gorsuch to break publicly with the man who nominated him. Gorsuch already has told some senators in private meetings that he found the criticism of the judges disheartening. But Blumenthal said the nominee needs to make a statement "publicly and explicitly and directly."

For their part, Republicans uniformly portrayed Gorsuch as a genial, principled judge whose qualifications make him eminently suitable for the nation's highest court, and they derided the Democrats' strategy.

"The nominee before us today is not President Trump," said Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C. "The nominee before us today is not Leader McConnell," the Senate GOP leader, Mitch McConnell, who engineered a 10-month blockade of Obama's court pick, Judge Merrick Garland, last year.

Justice Antonin Scalia died last February and Republicans insisted that the next president would fill the court vacancy.

Democrats remain incensed over Garland's treatment, and are facing pressures from liberal voters and interest groups to oppose Gorsuch, but he seems all but certain to be confirmed. Either Democrats will provide the eight votes he needs to meet a 60-vote threshold, or McConnell and Republicans will unilaterally change Senate rules to allow Gorsuch to be confirmed with a simple 51-vote majority.

Seeming to acknowledge that the outcome was not in question, Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., remarked to Gorsuch: "You're going to have your hands full with this president. He's going to keep you busy."

Associated Press writer Mary Clare Jalonick contributed to this report.

Trump to Capitol in last-ditch lobbying for health care bill

By ALAN FRAM and RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is rallying support for the Republican health care overhaul by taking his case directly to GOP lawmakers at the Capitol, two days before the House plans a climactic vote that poses an important early test for his presidency. Top House Republicans unveiled revisions to their bill in hopes of nailing down support.

At a rally Monday night in Louisville, Kentucky, Trump underscored what he called "the crucial House vote."

"This is our long-awaited chance to finally get rid of Obamacare," he said of repealing former President Barack Obama's landmark law, a GOP goal since its 2010 enactment. "We're going to do it."

Trump's closed-door meeting with House Republicans was coming as party leaders released 43 pages

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 21, 2017 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 251 ~ 21 of 31

worth of changes to a bill whose prospects remain dicey. Their proposals were largely aimed at addressing dissent that their measure would leave many older people with higher costs.

Included was an unusual approach: language paving the way for the Senate, if it chooses, to make the bill's tax credit more generous for people age 50-64. Details in the documents released were initially unclear, but one GOP lawmaker and an aide said the plan sets aside \$85 billion over 10 years for that purpose.

The leaders' proposals would accelerate the repeal of tax increases Obama imposed on higher earners, the medical industry and others to this year instead of 2018. It would be easier for some people to deduct medical expenses from their taxes.

Older and disabled Medicaid beneficiaries would get larger benefits. But it would also curb future growth of the overall Medicaid program, which helps low earners afford medical coverage, and let states impose work requirements on some recipients. Additional states could not join the 31 that opted to expand Medicaid to more beneficiaries under Obama's law, the Affordable Care Act.

Republican support teetered last week when a nonpartisan congressional analysis projected the measure would strip 24 million people of coverage in a decade. The Congressional Budget Office also said the bill would cause huge out-of-pocket increases for many lower earners and people aged 50 to 64.

Democrats have opposed the GOP repeal effort. They tout Obama's expansion of coverage to 20 million additional people and consumer-friendly coverage requirements it imposed on insurers, including abolishing annual and lifetime coverage limits and forcing them to insure seriously ill people.

The GOP bill would dismantle Obama's requirements that most people buy policies and that larger companies cover workers. Federal subsidies based largely on peoples' incomes and insurance premiums would end, and a Medicaid expansion to 11 million more low-income people would disappear.

The Republican legislation would provide tax credits to help people pay medical bills based chiefly on age, and open-ended federal payments to help states cover Medicaid costs would be cut. Insurers could charge older consumers five times the premiums they charge younger people instead of Obama's 3-1 limit, and would boost premiums 30 percent for those who let coverage lapse.

House approval would give the legislation much-needed momentum as it moves to the Senate, which Republicans control 52-48 but where five Republicans have expressed opposition. Trump used Monday's trip to single out perhaps the measure's most vociferous foe — Kentucky GOP Sen. Rand Paul.

"He's a good guy," Trump said of one 2016 rival for the GOP presidential nomination. "And I look forward to working with him so we can get this bill passed, in some form, so that we can pass massive tax reform, which we can't do till this happens."

Enactment of the health care bill would clear the way for Congress to move to revamping the tax code and other GOP priorities. Defeat would wound Trump two months into his administration and raise questions about his ability to win support from his own party moving forward.

Among the disgruntled were GOP lawmakers in the hard-right House Freedom Caucus, though the strength of their opposition was unclear. The group has seemed to have around 40 members, but that number may be lower now and some have expressed support or an open mind for the bill.

Caucus leader Rep. Mark Meadows, R-N.C., an outspoken opponent, said the group was not taking a formal position on the measure. That could indicate that a significant fraction of its members were not willing to vow "no" votes.

Meadows said he believes the House will reject the bill without major changes.

Associated Press reporters Matthew Daly and Julie Bykowicz contributed to this report.

'If you can play, play': Chris Bosh speaks on rest debate

By TIM REYNOLDS, AP Basketball Writer

MIAMI (AP) — Chris Bosh never wanted to take games off as a player and would give anything to be playing right now. So he has a very simple perspective on the NBA's rest-or-play debate .

"If you can play," Bosh said, "go out there and play."

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 21, 2017 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 251 ~ 22 of 31

Having the game taken away from him for what will amount to the last season-and-a-half — and counting, maybe for good — because of issues related to blood clots is still not an easy pill for Bosh to swallow. Now working as an analyst for Turner Sports, he's seeing the game in a different way than he was just a year or so ago.

He gets the players' side. He understands the fans' frustration. He's acutely aware of the demands that come with playing 82 games in 170 days, and how it's been an even hotter-than-usual talking point in the NBA of late with teams like Golden State and Cleveland — the last two NBA champions — electing to rest superstars in recent nationally televised games.

"I can see it in some instances," Bosh said in an interview with The Associated Press. "But then at the same time, if you can play, play. When there's so much work to do, it's kind of hard to see why guys would take time off. With that said, from a player's side, the schedule is intense. But I guess that's part of being in the NBA. And I think what happened was when young guys start saying 'Oh, rest,' that kind of brought it to a tipping point a little bit."

These days, Bosh isn't playing, nor is he resting.

He's spent about a month working with Turner on its "Players Only" Monday night broadcasts, something that gets him back around some NBA peers and into a setting where a locker-room type camaraderie reigns. The last of those five broadcasts is next week, and Bosh hasn't ruled out more television work in the future.

"They have a very candid bunch of guys, champions, guys who have made their names in their own ways in so many different generations in the league," Bosh said. "Being in there with Chris Webber and Isiah Thomas, Kevin Garnett, a big-brother type guy in Baron Davis, it's cool. It has been therapeutic because you don't realize how much you miss that locker-room aspect until you're away from it."

Bosh remains under contract with the Miami Heat, though the team is likely to begin a process of waiving him and getting salary-cap relief from the final two years of his deal. He'll be owed about \$52.1 million for 2017-18 and 2018-19, money he is guaranteed to receive but dollars that may not count against the Heat books.

He is reticent to discuss his playing future, though acknowledged again that planning to play this season but not being able to because of a failed physical "was a challenge."

"I'm still a basketball player at heart," Bosh said. "I can't help it."

Bosh was sidelined by a blood clot at the All-Star break in 2015, met the same fate at the same time in last season's schedule, and hasn't played since.

"I'm a little bit more adjusted now," Bosh said. "But before, you're going 100 mph and the brakes are slammed on and now you're not moving at all. It's definitely an adjustment, just being able to get used to things and finding that purpose that I think we all need to succeed and have good mental health. It's been a challenge. Things happen for a reason, I guess."

The TV gig, for now, is part-time.

The five kids at home, that's full-time. And they're used to having their dad at home when they arrive back from school in the afternoon, something Bosh — who is playing some basketball in workouts — has happily gotten used to as well.

"People are so concerned and I appreciate it, but I'm doing fine," Bosh said. "I'm very happy. I'm getting to do other things that I have never been able to do. I'm a beginner in a lot of things. But I've learned to like it, and just look at the nice new picture I have of the world."

Fox pulls Napolitano from air after Trump report

By DAVID BAUDER, AP Television Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Fox News Channel has pulled legal analyst Andrew Napolitano from the air after disavowing his on-air claim that British intelligence officials had helped former President Barack Obama spy on Donald Trump.

A person with knowledge of the situation who spoke on condition of anonymity because it was a personnel matter said Napolitano has been benched and won't be appearing on the air in the near future. Fox had no immediate comment Monday.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 21, 2017 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 251 ~ 23 of 31

Napolitano's report last week on "Fox & Friends," saying he had three intelligence sources who said Obama went "outside the chain of command" to watch Trump, provoked an international incident. Britain dismissed the report as "nonsense" after White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer quoted it in a briefing, part of the administration's continued defense of Trump's unproven contention that Obama had wiretapped him at Trump Tower during the 2016 presidential campaign.

FBI Director James Comey, testifying before Congress on Monday, became the latest official to state that no evidence has been found to support Trump's charge.

The president, when asked about the incident, said that "all we did was quote a certain very talented legal mind who was the one responsible for saying that on television. I didn't make an opinion on it. You shouldn't be talking to me. You should be talking to Fox."

Fox's Shepard Smith, on the air Friday afternoon, quickly stepped the network away from Napolitano's claim.

"Fox News knows of no evidence of any kind that the now-president of the United States was surveilled at any time, in any way," Smith said.

Napolitano is a senior judicial analyst who has worked at Fox News Channel since 1998, and frequently comments on the Fox Business Network. He was a New Jersey Superior Court judge from 1987 to 1995.

Napolitano's removal from the air was first reported in the Los Angeles Times.

GOP leaders propose health bill changes to help older people

By ALAN FRAM, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Top House Republicans hunting votes for their health care overhaul are proposing amendments aimed at providing more help for older people, curbing Medicaid and accelerating the repeal of some tax increases.

The bill would let people deduct more medical costs from taxes. It would repeal many tax increases boosted by President Barack Obama's 2010 statute this year instead of 2018.

Older and disabled Medicaid recipients would get more generous benefits. But states could impose work requirements on the program.

The bill would let the Senate approve tax credits more generous to people age 50 to 64. Congressional analysts say the current GOP legislation would hit many with big cost increases.

GOP leaders released the changes late Monday, three days ahead of a planned House vote on the bill.

Comey: FBI probing Trump-Russia links, wiretap claims bogus

By ERIC TUCKER and EILEEN SULLIVAN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The FBI is investigating whether Donald Trump's associates coordinated with Russian officials in an effort to sway the 2016 presidential election, Director James Comey said Monday in an extraordinary public confirmation of a probe the president has refused to acknowledge, dismissed as fake news and blamed on Democrats.

In a bruising five-hour session, the FBI director also knocked down Trump's claim that his predecessor had wiretapped his New York skyscraper, an assertion that has distracted White House officials and frustrated fellow Republicans who acknowledge they've seen no evidence to support it.

The revelation of the investigation of possible collusion with Russians, and the first public confirmation of the wider probe that began last summer, came in a remarkable hearing by one branch of government examining serious allegations against another branch and the new president's election campaign.

Tight-lipped for the most part, Comey refused to offer details on the scope, targets or timeline for the FBI investigation, which could shadow the White House for months, if not years. The director would not say whether the probe has turned up evidence that Trump associates may have schemed with Russians during a campaign marked by email hacking that investigators believe was aimed at helping the Republican defeat Democrat Hillary Clinton.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 21, 2017 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 251 ~ 24 of 31

"I can promise you," the FBI director vowed, "we will follow the facts wherever they lead."

Comey for the first time put himself publicly at odds with the president by contradicting a series of recent tweets from Trump that asserted his phones had been ordered tapped by President Barack Obama during the campaign.

"With respect to the president's tweets about alleged wiretapping directed at him by the prior administration, I have no information that supports those tweets, and we have looked carefully inside the FBI," Comey said. The same was true, he added, of the Justice Department.

His confirmation of the Russia-links investigation was striking given the FBI's historic reluctance to discuss its work. But Comey said the intense public interest in the matter — and permission from the Justice Department — made it appropriate to do so.

Comey said the collusion inquiry began last July as part of a broader probe into Russian meddling in American politics, meaning Trump was elected president as associates remained under investigation for possible connections to Russia.

Clinton allies on Monday contrasted Comey's silence during the campaign with public comments he made last year when closing out an investigation into Clinton's email practices and then, shortly before Election Day, announcing that the probe would be revived following the discovery of additional emails. Many Democrats blame Comey's public updates with stoking worries about Clinton's trustworthiness and turning voters against her.

Comey acknowledged that "some folks may want to make comparisons to past instances" where he and other officials were more open, but he said those were about concluded investigations.

In the current case, it's not clear how long it will take for the FBI to decide if a crime was committed, but counterintelligence investigations are known for being complicated and time-intensive — and for frequently concluding without charges. Comey would not commit to a timetable.

Regardless of the outcome, the investigation is unquestionably an unwelcome distraction for an administration that has struggled to move past questions about ties to Russia. The White House tried anew Monday to distance itself from two former senior members of Trump's team, Paul Manafort and Michael Flynn, who have been under scrutiny for foreign contacts.

Rep. Devin Nunes, the California Republican who chairs the committee, told Comey that revelations about the investigation had placed a "big gray cloud" over people trying to lead the country.

"The faster you can get to the bottom of this, it's going to be better for all Americans," he said.

Comey is the latest government official to reject Trump's claims, made without any evidence, that Obama had wiretapped Trump Tower, his campaign headquarters.. Nunes rejected them earlier in the hearing.

Comey testified along with National Security Agency Director Michael Rogers, who also disputed allegations that British intelligence services could have been involved in such wiretapping. The White House last week pointed to a report of British involvement in an attempt to bolster the president's claim. The move only angered an ally.

The hearing quickly divided along partisan lines, Democrats pressing for details on the status of the FBI's investigation while Republicans focused on news coverage and possible improper disclosures of classified information developed through surveillance.

Trump took to Twitter before Monday's hearing began, accusing Democrats of making up allegations about his campaign associates. He said Congress and the FBI should be going after media leaks and maybe even Clinton instead.

"The real story that Congress, the FBI and others should be looking into is the leaking of Classified information. Must find leaker now!" Trump tweeted early Monday as news coverage on the Russia allegations dominated the morning's cable news.

The president continued to tweet throughout the hearing, creating an unusual public conversation between the embattled president and his FBI director.

After Trump tweeted that the FBI and NSA had told Congress that Russia did not influence the electoral process, Comey disputed that description. The FBI has offered no opinion and has no view and no information on the potential impact on the election because that's not something the bureau has

looked at, he said.

The president also claimed that Comey had said there was no evidence of collusion between his aides and Russia, though Comey said no such thing.

Trump also suggested, without evidence, that Clinton's campaign was in contact with Russia and had possibly thwarted a federal investigation. U.S. intelligence officials have not publicly raised the possibility of contacts between the Clintons and Moscow. Officials have said they believe Moscow had hacked into Democrats' computers in a bid to help Trump's election bid.

The panel's ranking Democrat, Rep. Adam Schiff of California, outlined a chronology that he said suggested frequent and troubling contacts between Trump associates and Russian intermediaries.

"Is it possible that all of these events and reports are completely unrelated and nothing more than a entirely unhappy coincidence?" he asked rhetorically. "Yes, it is possible. But it is also possible, maybe more than possible, that they are not coincidental, not disconnected and not unrelated."

Follow Eric Tucker on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/etuckerAP>

Associated Press Writers Deb Riechmann, Julie Pace Josh Lederman in Washington contributed to this report.

Macron, Le Pen clash in first French election TV debate

By JOHN LEICESTER, Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — The two front-runners for the French presidency clashed spectacularly in the campaign's first televised debate between leading candidates Monday night.

All five candidates landed punches during vigorous discussion on the big issues for France: jobs, terrorism, immigration, Europe.

But the faceoff between independent centrist Emmanuel Macron and far-right populist Marine Le Pen provided political theater, even moments of high drama in pitting two opposing visions of France.

Macron's performance, in particular, was being closely watched. One of the big surprises of the election has been the success of the former economics minister's new-look campaign, positioning himself as a centrist alternative to France's traditional left-right politics.

But Le Pen, the anti-immigration, anti-European Union leader of the National Front, was looking for opportunities to pounce. With polls suggesting that she and Macron could be direct rivals in the decisive May 7 runoff of the two-round election, both sought to score points against each other.

As Macron was discussing foreign policy, Le Pen portrayed him as wishy-washy, muttering: "It's empty, completely empty."

"We don't know what you want," she said.

Macron proved during the three-hour evening debate that overran and spilled past midnight that he can defend himself. With limited experience of public office, he sought to portray himself as presidential and hard to push around.

Some of the most heated exchanges centered on the place of religion in France and the separation of church and state.

Macron reacted vigorously when Le Pen accused him of being in favor of Muslim swimwear — essentially suggesting that her rival isn't really committed to France's secular values and policies.

"I don't need a ventriloquist," he retorted. "When I have something to say, I say it clearly."

He, in turn, accused Le Pen of using Islam to divide the French. Le Pen wants all visible religious symbols worn by people, including Muslim headscarves and Jewish kippahs, banned from public.

"The trap you are falling into, Madame Le Pen, with your provocations is to divide society," Macron said.

Macron also used humor to defuse Le Pen's attacks. After a thinly veiled dig from Le Pen suggesting that the former banker would be beholden to financial lobbies if elected, Macron told her: "You'd be bored without me."

While they were feisty, conservative candidate Francois Fillon was noticeably and unusually restrained.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 21, 2017 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 251 ~ 26 of 31

Once considered a leading contender to move into the presidency's Elysee Palace, Fillon's campaign has been badly hurt by accusations that his wife and children were paid with public money for jobs they allegedly did not do, which he denies. The ex-prime minister appeared weary and at times absent during the debate.

"I may have made mistakes. I have defects. Who doesn't? But I have experience," Fillon said.

Socialist candidate Benoit Hamon and far-left leader Jean-Luc Melenchon, both looking to boost their poll numbers, were the first to take swipes at Le Pen.

Hamon described Le Pen's attitude as "sickening" after she spoke of French schools as "a daily nightmare," so dangerous that pupils attend with "fear in their stomachs."

Melenchon interrupted Le Pen as she was calling for boosted French-language teaching.

"How do you learn French, dear madam? By speaking it!" he said.

Of the 11 candidates in the election, only the five who are expected to be the largest vote-getters in the first round were included in the debate.

The first-round vote is set for April 23; the top two candidates go to the May 7 runoff.

Police: Brady's missing Super Bowl jerseys tracked to Mexico

By MARK PRATT and PETER ORSI, Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Tom Brady's missing Super Bowl jersey has been found in Mexico six weeks after it vanished from the Patriots' locker room — but the mystery isn't over.

The NFL said the jersey was found in "possession of a credentialed member of the international media," and authorities were investigating Monday whether a former Mexican tabloid newspaper executive played a role in the theft.

It wasn't the only piece of memorabilia recovered: Authorities found a Brady jersey that had gone missing after the Patriots' 2015 Super Bowl win over the Seattle Seahawks. A helmet belonging to a Denver Broncos player was also discovered, NFL spokesman Brian McCarthy said.

The stolen jersey — and the investigation that stretched from Boston to the border — captivated Patriots fans and social media for several days after the Patriots' 34-28 overtime win over the Atlanta Falcons.

"If it shows up on eBay or something, somebody let me know," Brady said after the game.

Houston police investigators relied on a tip from an informant to trace the jersey, estimated to be worth about \$500,000, to Mexico.

U.S. and Mexican officials have not identified the suspect, but the name of a former newspaper director circulated widely in Mexican news media and on social networks.

A Mexican federal government official, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the case, said the attorney general's office participated in the investigation and obtained a search warrant. The jersey and other objects were found March 12, the official said.

The newspaper's owner, Organizacion Editorial Mexicana, issued a statement saying the director resigned two days later for "personal reasons."

The paper said that if the accusations are true, it "strongly condemns" that the employee used his position "to obtain a media accreditation to be able to access the field of play, news conferences and probably other areas of NRG Stadium." The paper said it had not been contacted by investigators.

A company official who was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly told The Associated Press on condition of anonymity that the former director was not part of the media outlet's Super Bowl coverage.

"He got accredited on behalf of La Prensa, but he took vacations. ... He was not sent by us," the person said. "They were not even aware that (he) had gone to the Super Bowl."

The former director handed over his company phone when he resigned last Tuesday, the person said.

No arrests had been made. The AP is not identifying the director because he has not been charged.

Brady, in a statement from his agent, Don Yee, expressed gratitude to investigators but said he hadn't yet been reunited with the jerseys.

"I am happy my jerseys from SB 49 and SB 51 have been recovered, and I want to thank all of the

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 21, 2017 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 251 ~ 27 of 31

law enforcement agencies involved," Brady said. "I know they worked hard on this case — and it is very much appreciated. Hopefully when I get the jerseys back I can make something very positive come from this experience."

Houston police Chief Art Acevedo proudly congratulated his team, but was equally quick to say finding the jersey wasn't a top priority in a city with violent crime. He described the theft as the only blemish on an otherwise successful Super Bowl.

"You don't come to Texas and embarrass us here on our home turf," Acevedo said.

A Patriots spokeswoman said the team had no comment.

The jerseys are in the possession of the NFL and FBI in Boston, and law enforcement was working to authenticate them, the chief said.

"We are highly confident that these are the jerseys," Acevedo said.

Former Mexican President Felipe Calderon alluded to political tensions between his country and the United States while weighing in on Twitter.

"A real embarrassment that a Mexican may have stolen Tom Brady's Jersey. It gives pretexts to the anti-Mexican offensive," Calderon tweeted. "He should be punished."

Orsi reported from Mexico City. Associated Press journalists Carlos Rodriguez and Eduardo Castillo in Mexico City, Howard Fendrich in Washington, D.C., and William J. Kole in Boston also contributed to this report.

For more NFL coverage: <http://www.pro32.ap.org> and http://www.twitter.com/AP_NFL

YouTube reverses some restrictions on gay-themed content

By BARBARA ORTUTAY, AP Technology Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The YouTube video shows two women, dressed in suits and ties. They smile; they sniffle back tears; they gaze into each other's eyes. They are reading their wedding vows to one another.

The four-minute video titled "Her Vows" contains no nudity, violence or swearing. There's no revealing clothing. No one is engaging in activities that have a "high risk of injury or death." And yet, YouTube had deemed the video unsuitable for people under 18.

YouTube acknowledged Monday that it might have made a mistake, saying in a tweet, "Some videos have been incorrectly labeled and that's not right. We're on it! More to come." The restriction on the vows video was lifted by Monday afternoon. But others — including one from YouTube celebrity Tyler Oakley titled "8 Black LGBTQ+ Trailblazers Who Inspire Me" — remained on YouTube's age-restricted list.

Several YouTube users, many of them have in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, have been complaining that their videos are categorized as "restricted" for no obvious reasons.

The "restricted" designation lets parents, schools and libraries filter out content that isn't appropriate for users under 18. Turning on the restriction makes videos inaccessible. YouTube calls it "an optional feature used by a very small subset of users."

It's unclear whether the types of videos in question are now being categorized as "restricted" for the first time, or whether this is a long-standing policy that is only now getting attention. More likely, it is the latter.

U.K.-based YouTube creator Rowan Ellis made a video criticizing the restrictions last week. This video itself was restricted, though YouTube has since reclassified that video as OK. In an email, Ellis said YouTube needs to reach out to the LGBTQ community to explain "how this system works, and how it came to flag like this, if it was indeed an error and not a deliberate targeting."

Companies like Google, Facebook and Twitter rely on humans and computer software to weed out unsuitable content. Mistakes can happen whether it's a person or a machine.

This is not the first time, and probably not the last, that an internet company is mired in controversy about what types of content it restricts. Facebook has faced similar complaints, for example, with its removal — and later, reinstatement — of a Pulitzer Prize-winning photo of a naked, screaming girl run-

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 21, 2017 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 251 ~ 28 of 31

ning from a napalm attack in Vietnam.

The latest complaints spawned the hashtag #YouTubeIsOverParty over the weekend.

YouTube said in a tweet Sunday that LGBTQ videos aren't automatically filtered out, though some discussing "more sensitive issues" might be restricted. But the company, which is owned by Google, did not specify what it counts as "more sensitive issues."

In an emailed statement on Monday, YouTube said "some videos that cover subjects like health, politics and sexuality may not appear for users and institutions that choose to use this feature." In the case of LGBT topics, which are by definition intertwined with health, politics and sexuality, filtering out what is and isn't appropriate can be difficult.

YouTube followed that statement with another hours later: "We recognize that some videos are incorrectly labeled by our automated system and we realize it's very important to get this right. We're working hard to make some improvements." The statement offered no further explanation.

YouTube content creators can decide to age-restrict their videos themselves. But that's just one of the ways sensitive content is filtered out. YouTube says it also uses "community flagging," which means users who have a problem with content in a video can flag it to YouTube for possible restrictions or removal.

But just because something is flagged, it is not automatically removed. Once a video is flagged, YouTube says it reviews it.

"If no violations are found by our review team, no amount of flagging will change that and the video will remain on our site," YouTube says in its online support page.

What sorts of content gets filtered out in restricted mode can vary by region, based on countries' varying community standards. In general, though, it includes "sexually explicit language or excessive profanity," or violence or disturbing content, according to YouTube's policies.

YouTube's rules also state that videos "containing nudity or dramatized sexual conduct may be age-restricted when the context is appropriately educational, documentary, scientific or artistic. Videos featuring individuals in minimal or revealing clothing may also be age-restricted if they're intended to be sexually provocative, but don't show explicit content."

Videos that show adults engaging in "activities that have a high risk of injury or death" may also be age-restricted.

High court nominee: I'll be unbiased or 'hang up the robe'

By MARK SHERMAN and ERICA WERNER, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Supreme Court nominee Neil Gorsuch pledged to be independent or "hang up the robe" as the U.S. Senate began rancorous hearings Monday on President Donald Trump's conservative pick to fill a Supreme Court seat that has been vacant for more than a year.

Gorsuch sought to take the edge off Democratic complaints that he has favored the wealthy and powerful in more than 10 years as a federal judge. The 49-year-old Coloradan told the Senate Judiciary Committee he has tried to be a "neutral and independent" judge and has ruled both for and against disabled students, prisoners and workers alleging civil rights violations.

"But my decisions have never reflected a judgment about the people before me, only my best judgment about the law and facts at issue in each particular case," Gorsuch said. That was his opening statement a day ahead of expected pointed questioning from committee Democrats.

A Supreme Court confirmation hearing is a major occasion on Capitol Hill — the last one was in 2010 — but Monday's was overshadowed by a separate event in the Capitol complex. On the House side, FBI Director James Comey was testifying that the bureau is investigating Russian meddling in last year's election and possible links and coordination between Russia and associates of Trump.

Blending the two hearings, Democratic Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut referred to "a looming constitutional crisis" that the Supreme Court might need to resolve. The court's eight current justices are roughly divided ideologically between conservatives and liberals.

The Russian story line as well as Trump's verbal attacks on federal judges both during the campaign and as president have fed into Democratic efforts to force Gorsuch to break publicly with the man who

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 21, 2017 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 251 ~ 29 of 31

nominated him. Gorsuch already has told some senators in private meetings that he found the criticism of the judges disheartening. But Blumenthal said the nominee needs to make a statement "publicly and explicitly and directly."

For their part, Republicans uniformly portrayed Gorsuch as a genial, principled judge whose qualifications make him eminently suitable for the nation's highest court. "I'm looking for a judge, not an ideologue," Sen. John Kennedy of Louisiana said.

Actual questioning is to begin Tuesday. Committee chairman Chuck Grassley, an Iowa Republican, said he expects a committee vote on Gorsuch's nomination on April 3, which would allow the full Senate to take up the nomination that week. Gorsuch could be on the bench by the time the justices meet for a round of arguments in mid-April.

Democrats, under intense pressure from liberal base voters horrified by the Trump presidency, entered the hearings divided over how hard to fight Gorsuch's nomination given that the mild-mannered jurist is no right-wing bomb thrower and is widely expected to win confirmation in the end, one way or another.

Even while insisting they would evaluate Gorsuch fairly, several spoke angrily about the treatment of Judge Merrick Garland, Obama's Supreme Court nominee, who was denied even a hearing for 10 months last year by Senate Republicans. The Democrats also took shots at Trump himself, and criticized the fact that Gorsuch appeared on a list of potential Supreme Court nominees vetted by the Federalist Society and Heritage Foundation.

"Senate Republicans made a big show last year about respecting the voice of the American people in this process," said Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt. "Now they are arguing that the Senate should rubber stamp a nominee selected by extreme interest groups and nominated by a president who lost the popular vote by nearly 3 million votes."

Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., repeated a comment by White House chief of staff Reince Priebus last month that Gorsuch "represents the type of judge that has the vision of Donald Trump."

"I want to hear from you why Mr. Priebus would say that," Durbin said to Gorsuch. "Most Americans question whether we need a Supreme Court justice with the vision of Donald Trump."

Republican senators disputed the Democratic criticism.

"If you believe this has been a great plan to get a Trump nominee on the court you had to believe Trump was going to win to begin with. I didn't believe it," said Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C. "I'm trying to hear someone over there tell me why he's not qualified," Graham said of Gorsuch.

Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, suggested Gorsuch should disregard Democrats' attempts to draw him out on individual topics.

"You're not a politician running for election, judge, as you know," Cornyn said. "I would encourage my colleagues to carefully consider the nominee on the merits and nothing else."

With his wife, Louise, sitting just behind him, and dozens of relatives, friends and professional associates nearby, Gorsuch made repeated references to judicial independence and humility.

"These days we sometimes hear judges cynically described as politicians in robes, seeking to enforce their own politics rather than striving to apply the law impartially. If I thought that were true, I'd hang up the robe. But I just don't think that's what a life in the law is about," Gorsuch said.

He made a brief reference to his mother, Anne Gorsuch Burford, who had a controversial run as administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency early in the Reagan administration. "She taught me that headlines are fleeting; courage lasts," Gorsuch said.

Several of the more liberal Senate Democrats have already announced plans to oppose Gorsuch and seek to block his nomination from coming to a final vote. But Republicans could respond to a Democratic delay by eliminating the 60-vote filibuster threshold now in place for Supreme Court nominations, and with it any Democratic leverage to influence the next Supreme Court fight.

Republicans control the Senate 52-48. The filibuster rule when invoked requires 60 of the 100 votes to advance a bill or nomination, contrasted with the simple 51-vote majority that applies in most cases.

Associated Press writer Mary Clare Jalonick contributed.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 21, 2017 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 251 ~ 30 of 31

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, March 21, the 80th day of 2017. There are 285 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 21, 1952, the Moondog Coronation Ball, considered the first rock and roll concert, took place at Cleveland Arena.

On this date:

In 1556, Thomas Cranmer, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, was burned at the stake for heresy.

In 1685, composer Johann Sebastian Bach was born in Eisenach, Germany.

In 1804, the French civil code, or the "Code Napoleon" as it was later called, was adopted.

In 1925, Tennessee Gov. Austin Peay (pee) signed the Butler Act, which prohibited the teaching of the Theory of Evolution in public schools. (Tennessee repealed the law in 1967.)

In 1935, Persia officially changed its name to Iran.

In 1946, the recently created United Nations Security Council set up temporary headquarters at Hunter College in The Bronx, New York.

In 1957, President Dwight D. Eisenhower and British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan began a four-day conference in Bermuda.

In 1963, the Alcatraz federal prison island in San Francisco Bay was emptied of its last inmates and closed at the order of Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy.

In 1972, the Supreme Court, in *Dunn v. Blumstein*, ruled that states may not require at least a year's residency for voting eligibility.

In 1981, Michael Donald, a black teenager in Mobile, Alabama, was abducted, tortured and killed by members of the Ku Klux Klan. (A lawsuit brought by Donald's mother, Beulah Mae Donald, later resulted in a landmark judgment that bankrupted one Klan organization.)

In 1997, President Bill Clinton and Russian President Boris Yeltsin wrapped up their summit in Helsinki, Finland, still deadlocked over NATO expansion, but able to agree on slashing nuclear weapons arsenals.

In 2006, the social media website Twitter was established with the sending of the first "tweet" by co-founder Jack Dorsey, who wrote: "just setting up my twttr."

Ten years ago: Former Vice President Al Gore made an emotional return to Congress as he pleaded with House and Senate committees to fight global warming; skeptical Republicans questioned the science behind his climate-change documentary, "An Inconvenient Truth."

Five years ago: A previously divided U.N. Security Council sent a strong and united message to the Syrian government and opposition to immediately implement proposals by international envoy Kofi Annan to end Syria's yearlong bloodshed. Meting out unprecedented punishment for a bounty system that targeted key opposing players, the NFL suspended New Orleans Saints head coach Sean Payton without pay for the coming season and indefinitely banned the team's former defensive coordinator; in addition to other sanctions, Commissioner Roger Goodell fined the Saints \$500,000 and took away their second-round draft picks for the current year and the next.

One year ago: Laying bare a half-century of tensions, President Barack Obama and Cuban President Raul Castro prodded each other over human rights and the longstanding U.S. economic embargo during an unprecedented joint news conference in Havana. A former U.S. State Department employee who had used his government-issued computer to prey on vulnerable young women and manipulate them into sharing nude photos was sentenced in Atlanta to five years in federal prison.

Today's Birthdays: Actress Kathleen Widdoes is 78. Songwriter Chip Taylor ("Wild Thing") is 77. Pop singer/musician Keith Potger (The Seekers) is 76. Actress Marie-Christine Barrault is 73. Singer-musician Rose Stone (Sly and the Family Stone) is 72. Actor Timothy Dalton is 71. Singer Ray Dorset (Mungo Jerry) is 71. Singer Eddie Money is 68. Rock singer-musician Roger Hodgson (Supertramp) is 67. Rock musician Conrad Lozano (Los Lobos) is 66. Rhythm-and-blues singer Russell Thompkins Jr. (The Stylistics) is 66. Comedy writer-performer Brad Hall is 59. Actress Sabrina LeBeauf is 59. Actor Gary Oldman is 59. Actress Kassie Depaiva ("Days of Our Lives") is 56. Actor Matthew Broderick is 55.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, March 21, 2017 ~ Vol. 24 - No. 251 ~ 31 of 31

Comedian-talk show host Rosie O'Donnell is 55. Rock musician Jonas "Joker" Berggren (Ace of Base) is 50. Rock MC Maxim (Prodigy) is 50. Rock musician Andrew Copeland (Sister Hazel) is 49. Hip-hop DJ Premier (Gang Starr) is 48. Actress Laura Allen is 43. Rapper-TV personality Kevin Federline is 39. Actor Scott Eastwood is 31. Actor Forrest Wheeler is 13.

Thought for Today: "History is principally the inaccurate narration of events which ought not to have happened." — Ernest Albert Hooten, American anthropologist (1887-1954).