

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 1 of 85

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [1- Truss Pros Help Wanted](#)
- [1- Graduation Balloons](#)
- [2- Groton Area JK/KG Roundup Ad](#)
- [3- Avantara Ipswich Announces Closure of its Skilled Nursing Facility](#)
- [4- Lana's Annals- a report from Pierre](#)
- [5- Boys Golf Awards](#)
- [6- JACKRABBITS OUTLAST UCLA, ADVANCE TO WNIT FINAL](#)
- [7- Drought Monitor](#)
- [8- Gas Prices](#)
- [9- Obit: Joyce Krueger](#)
- [10- Weather Pages](#)
- [14- Daily Devotional](#)
- [15- 2022 Community Events](#)
- [16- Subscription Form](#)
- [17- News from the Associated Press](#)

## Graduation Balloons

Order your graduation balloons now while the supply is good. Go to [397news.com](http://397news.com), click on graduation on the left hand side.

## UpComing Events

### Friday, April 1

FFA CDE at SDSU, Brookings  
School Breakfast: Stuffed Bagels  
School Lunch: Fish Sandwich, Puzzle Tots  
Senior Menu: Lemon baked fish, rice pilaf, California blend veggies, fruit crisp, whole wheat bread.

### Saturday, April 2

ACT testing in Groton, 8 a.m. to Noon

### Sunday, April 3

2 p.m. and 5 p.m., POPS Concert  
3:30 p.m.: GHS FCA Meeting: "The Chosen" Watch Party at Kim Weber's house, 501 E 16th Ave  
Emmanuel: 9 a.m. Worship with communion, 10:15 a.m. Sunday school, 10:15 a.m. 1st Communion Class, 7 p.m., Choir  
St. John's: 8 a.m. Bible Study, Worship with communion at 9 a.m. at St. John's and 11 a.m. at Zion, 10 a.m. Sunday School

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

*"You cannot do kindness too soon,  
for you never know how soon it  
will be too late."*

RALPH WALDO EMERSON



Chicken Soup  
for the Soul

### Monday, April 4

Emmanuel: 6:30 a.m.. Bible Study  
School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.  
School Lunch: Cheese sticks, marinara sauce, corn.  
Senior Menu: Ranch chicken breast, boiled potato, squash, fruit, whole wheat bread.

### Tuesday, April 5

7 p.m.: City Council Meeting  
St. John's: 1 p.m.: Ladies Aid LWML  
School Breakfast: French toast sticks.  
School Lunch: Tangereine chicken, rice.  
Senior Menu: Hamburger with bun, oven roasted potatoes, mixed vegetables, fruit, ice cream sundae.

## Truss Pros Help Wanted

Truss Pros in Britton is looking to hire a CDL driver to deliver trusses in the tri-state area. Home every night. Competitive wage! Full benefit package!

To apply call 605-277-4937 or go to [www.uslbm.com/careers](http://www.uslbm.com/careers) and search for jobs in Britton, SD.

## OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

© 2022 Groton Daily Independent

## 2022 Groton Area Elementary

**Kindergarten Roundup (Screening) for children turning**

**5 on or before September 1, 2022**

**Friday, April 1, 2022**

**If your child is currently attending Junior Kindergarten at Groton Area Elementary school, please DISREGARD this notice. Your teacher will be sending information if necessary.**

**Packets are being sent home this week with information regarding KG Roundup. These would apply to families who have children eligible for KG and JK this coming 2022-2023 school year who are not currently enrolled in our school. Please contact the school if you do not receive a packet. We do not have all children in our census. Thank you!!!**



## Avantara Ipswich Announces Closure of its Skilled Nursing Facility

After significant discussions amid ongoing assessment, Avantara Ipswich has made the difficult decision to move forward with the closure of its skilled nursing facility, located in Ipswich, South Dakota.

"It is always a difficult decision to close a skilled nursing facility, but the challenges related to staffing and the continued impact of COVID-19, have created an environment where we can no longer keep the doors of Avantara Ipswich open," said Connie Ortega on behalf of Avantara Ipswich. We were fortunate enough to serve a great community, who in return provided incredible support to both our residents and staff, during a global pandemic. "The staff at Avantara Ipswich are incredibly hardworking and dedicated to the care of our residents and community. They deserve to be recognized for their commitment, especially over the last two years. They are true heroes in the community, and we will be working closely with both our residents and staff to help them through the closure of Avantara Ipswich."

Each resident, in conjunction with their physician and loved ones, will have individual plans developed to ensure that their health and well-being are the highest priority during this period of relocation. Additionally, Avantara Ipswich will do its best to assist its staff and help them explore alternate employment opportunities.

Since day one, Avantara Ipswich has been committed to investing in the physical needs of the facility, as well as being committed to personnel, community, and state relations, in order to improve the facility and continue its operations. After a significant investment into the facility, an exhaustion of both internal and external resources, and engagement with officials from the state of South Dakota, it is apparent that the facility's continued operational viability is no longer possible.

Avantara Ipswich has provided a formal written "Notice of Closure" to the South Dakota Office of Licensure and Certification, in addition to providing written notice to each resident and their designated point of contact. Avantara Ipswich's last day of operation will be May 31, 2022.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 4 of 85

## Lana's Annals- a report from Pierre

Greetings once again. We had a couple of weeks' break from the Legislature before Veto Day occurred on March 28th. We convened to either sustain or to override vetoes on HB1281, HB1223, and SB151. HB1281 dealt with spending authority. The bill stated that the departments had the ongoing authority to fund their programs as long as no new programs were created. Somehow that idea got lost in translation and whereas the bill heartily passed during session, many people changed their votes on the 28th, thus upholding the veto. HB1223 would have given a pregnant minor decision making ability on a health problem if the parents could not be contacted or were abusive. The entire bill, in my opinion, seemed unnecessary. The simple fix would be to have a parental medical release signed ahead of time in case of an emergency like this. I am somewhat certain that schools have these consent forms in place in case a student experiences a health related problem and a parent or guardian cannot be contacted. This bill needed to be vetoed as its passage could have opened the future door for a minor to be making added medical decisions without parental knowledge or consent.

SB151 was a bill that would have erased past Class 1 marijuana convictions from one's record. The House did not vote on this bill as it started in the Senate, and those members voted to sustain that veto. In addition to the aforementioned bills meeting their demise, rules were suspended to vote on SB213, which gave additional money to long term care. That idea was readily embraced and flew through the Senate and the House. We also had House members ask to suspend the rules on two different topics: one was to exempt people from our state gas/diesel tax for 2 months this year, possibly August and September. No debate took place, however, as it took 2/3 of the members elect to suspend and the vote fell short. The second ask was to suspend the rules to get vaccination language in bill form into place. That vote to suspend failed miserably. The popular thought process is not to introduce new legislation on Veto Day.

As a former teacher, I will surprise the readers when I say that I received an "F" on a cannabis score card today. I cannot ever remember getting that type of grade during my school years, so this was new to me. Score cards are put out by various groups. They are highly subjective and based on group thought processes. Some of the groups who use these are Citizens for Liberty (Rapid City), Americans for Prosperity, NRA, Family Heritage Alliance, and now the newly formed marijuana group. Basically, the scores are recorded on a wall of shame to draw out how the legislators from each district voted on certain bill numbers. Anyway, 8 of us House members drew the ire of the marijuana backers, and we each got an "F!" I am proud of that grade in this instance because in my search of the voting results on the state website, the majority of my voters did NOT endorse having marijuana freely marketed.

Last, I want to thank all of you constituents who have supported me through these past 8 years. As your representative, I am grateful for your messages and prayers. I do not wish to run for Senate at this time, and I am term limited in the House so I will not be campaigning this fall. I have enjoyed the friendships made and the education received which spans far beyond any textbook!! I plan to stay informed as to what it happening at our capitol during the upcoming sessions. Perhaps at some point I will run again. We shall see. With that, have a great week.

Rep. Lana Greenfield

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 5 of 85



**The awards for the boys 2021 golf season have been presented. Carter Simon was awarded the most improved and Brevin Fliels as the top medalist. (Courtesy Photo)**

## JACKRABBITS OUTLAST UCLA, ADVANCE TO WNIT FINAL

South Dakota State women's basketball outlasted UCLA 62-59 Thursday night to advance to the championship game of the WNIT. The win came in front of a sold-out crowd of 5,227 fans packed into Frost Arena.

The Jackrabbits will play in the first WNIT championship game in program history Saturday afternoon at Frost.

The back-and-forth contest came down to the last 10 minutes, which featured seven lead changes and three ties in that quarter alone. Tied at 40-all after three quarters, the Jackrabbits outscored the Bruins 22-19 in the final period. SDSU regained the lead for the final time at 60-58 on a Haleigh Timmer baseline jumper with 38 seconds to play. UCLA's Iimar'I Thomas went 1-for-2 at the charity stripe 11 seconds later to pull back within one before Tori Nelson iced the game with a pair of free throws at the 20-second mark. UCLA missed one last 3-point shot at the buzzer.

State went 8-for-13 from the field and 6-of-7 from the free throw line in the fourth quarter. The team got a combined 15 of its 22 points in that stretch from Timmer and Myah Selland.

The Jackrabbits were paced by 24 points and nine rebounds from Selland, both of which led all players. Timmer added 15 points on a 7-for-9 shooting effort to go with seven boards. Nelson and Paiton Burckhard added seven points apiece and Tylee Irwin chipped in five. Kallie Theisen was the only Jackrabbit to score off the bench, contributing three points.

UCLA's Thomas matched Selland's 24 point output. She was joined in double figures by Charisma Osborne, who scored 11 points and had eight assists.

### NOTES

The Jackrabbits improve to 28-9 on the season and have won 25 of their last 27 games. .  
SDSU has won 15 consecutive games at Frost Arena, the fourth longest active streak in the nation.  
Myah Selland put up 20+ points for the eighth time this season.  
The Jackrabbits hit only one 3-pointer, the fewest of the season.  
SDSU gave out six assists as a team, also a season low.

### UP NEXT

South Dakota State hosts Seton Hall Saturday afternoon at 2 p.m. CT in the championship game of the WNIT.

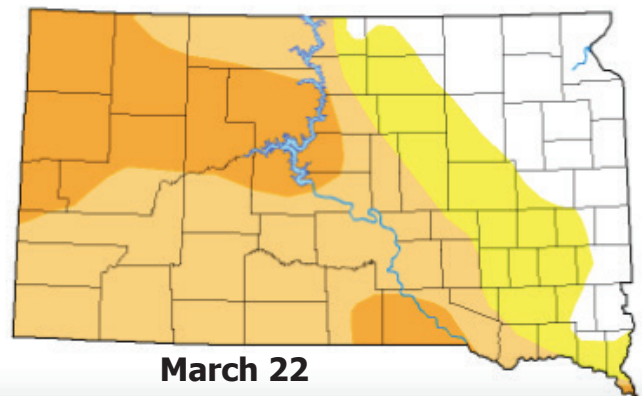
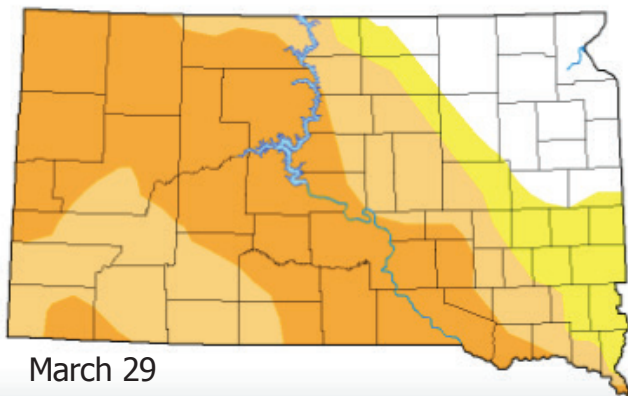
# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 7 of 85

## Drought Classification



## Drought Monitor



## High Plains

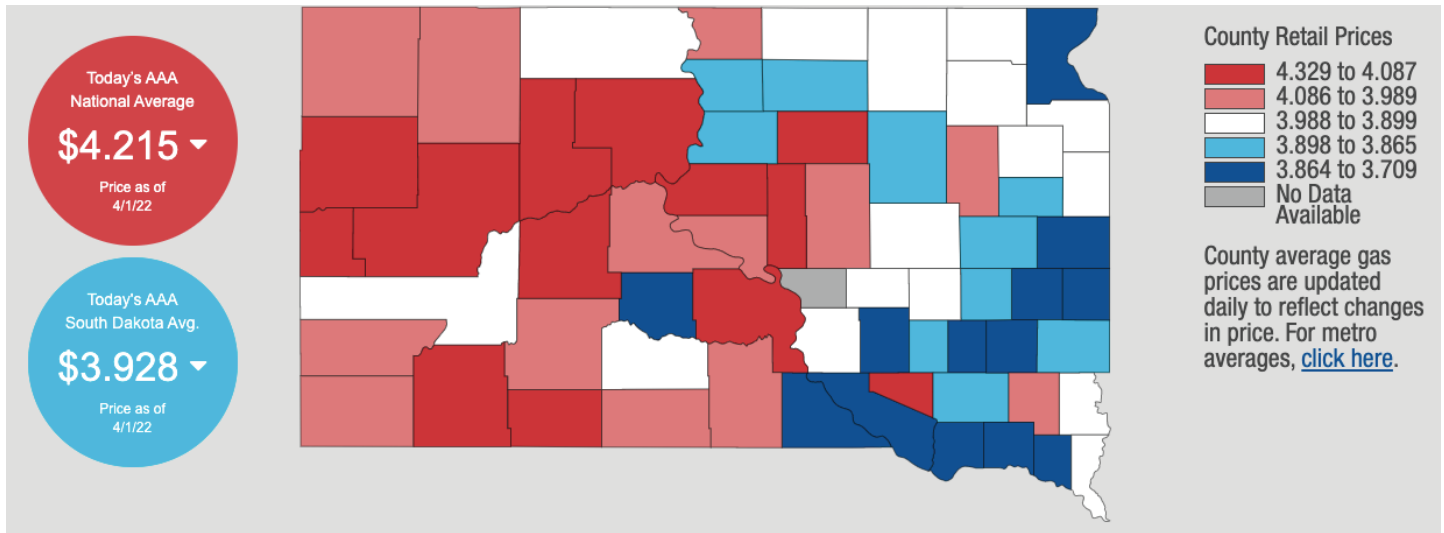
Much of the High Plains remained dry last week resulting in deteriorating drought conditions across parts of the Dakotas and Nebraska. The eastern edges of abnormal dryness (D0) and moderate drought (D1) crept eastward. Severe drought (D2) expanded over a large swath from southwest North Dakota to central Nebraska. Extreme drought spread in central Nebraska. Short-term dryness is superimposed over long-term moisture deficits across the region. The lack of seasonal snow cover combined with the onset of spring has people in the region worried. Soil moisture is very low, stream flows continue to decline and state reports indicate that stock ponds are drying up.

## Heavy Snow

You thought the snow was heavy. There's a good reason. It had lots of moisture in it. After melting the four inches of snow that we had, I measured .71 of moisture content. That brings the March precipitation to 0.82 with the monthly average at 0.89. For the year, the total moisture has been 1.80 with the average being 2.06.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 8 of 85



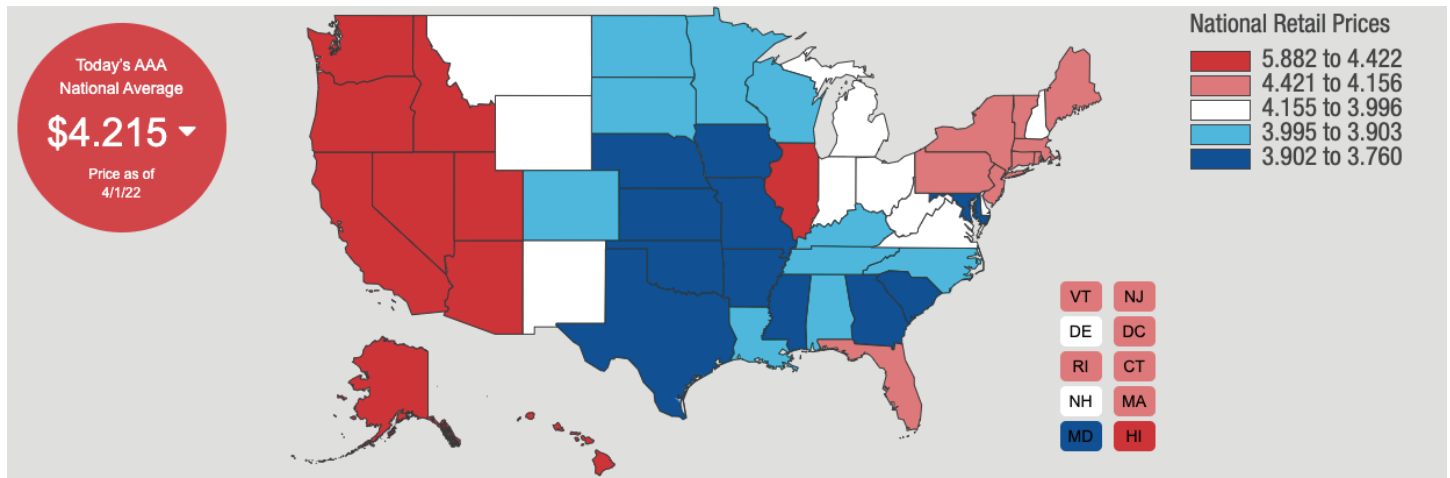
## NATIONAL AVERAGE DECLINES AS U.S. PLANS DAILY RELEASES FROM OIL RESERVE

Since Monday, the national average for a gallon of regular gasoline has decreased by two cents to \$4.22. According to new data from the Energy Information Administration (EIA), total domestic gasoline stocks increased by 800,000 bbl to 238.8 million bbl last week. Gasoline demand decreased from 8.63 million b/d to 8.5 million b/d. The drop in gas demand, alongside growth in total stocks, contributes to price decreases. If demand continues to decline as gasoline stocks continue to build, the national average will likely continue to move lower.

At the close of Wednesday's formal trading session, WTI increased by \$3.58 to settle at \$107.82. Crude prices climbed after EIA's weekly report revealed that total domestic crude stocks declined last week by 3.5 million bbl to 409.9 million bbl, approximately 18 percent lower than the level at the end of March 2021. However, crude prices will likely reverse course today amid news that the U.S. will release 1 million barrels of oil per day from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. While the pump price impact will be determined by the exact amount of oil purchased in the market and the duration of the daily releases, some reports have noted that releases could last for up to 180 days. If the releases occurred for that long, the market would likely see downward pressure on oil prices. However, the global oil market remains highly volatile, so additional news that threatens supply could put upward pressure on oil prices.

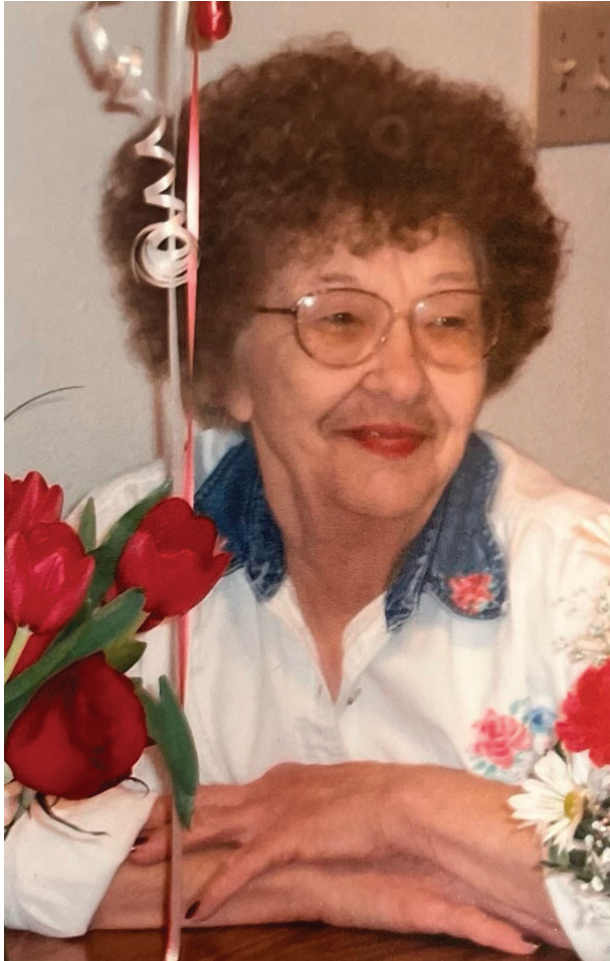
### Largest Weekly Changes

Since last Thursday, these 10 states have seen the largest changes in their averages: Hawaii (+11 cents), Delaware (+8 cents), Florida (+8 cents), Georgia (-8 cents), Nevada (+6 cents), North Carolina (-6 cents), Washington, D.C. (+5 cents), Wyoming (+5 cents), Rhode Island (-5 cents) and Michigan (-5 cents).





## The Life of Joyce Krueger



Private family services for Joyce Darlene Krueger, 94, of Groton, will be Friday at Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton. Rev. Larry Johnson and Rev. Craig Grams will officiate. Burial will follow in St. Paul's Lutheran Cemetery, Ferney under the direction of Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel.

Joyce passed away on Sunday, March 27, 2022 at Sun Dial Manor, Bristol.

Joyce was born on February 14, 1928 to August and Ida (Schmidt) Pigors in East Hanson Township of Brown County. She came from a family of 8 children, her being the youngest. Joyce was baptized and confirmed in St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Ferney. She attended country school and graduated from Groton High School.

Joyce married Paul "Lefty" Krueger on November 20, 1946 in Day County. They lived on a farm south of Groton all of their lives, where they raised 8 children.

Joyce very much enjoyed farm life, raising her children, gardening, growing flowers and loved old fashioned country music. She was an amazing cook and baker. Her sense of humor was full of one liners that would catch you so off guard and would make you laugh for hours. Joyce had a heart of gold and would put others before herself. After the kids were grown, she worked at the Groton Nursing Home for several years in the kitchen. Once retired, she returned

back to her love of cooking, baking, gardening and spending time with her family and many grandchildren.

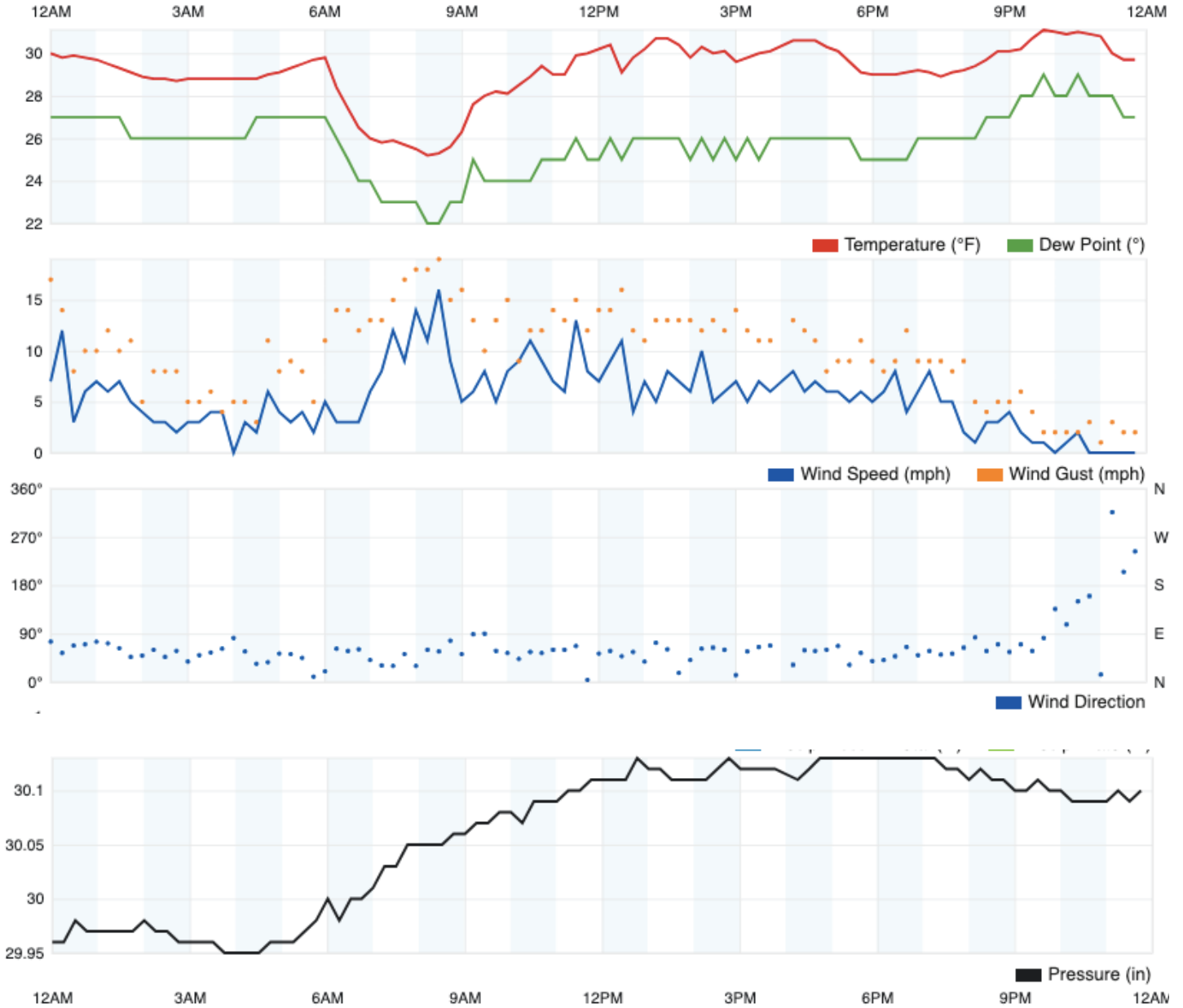
Grateful for having shared her life are her children: Roger Krueger, David (Cheryl) Krueger, Sheila (Chuck) Johnson, Paula (Craig) West, Doug (Heidi) Krueger, Dan Krueger and Kevin Krueger. Joyce is also survived by her grandchildren: Shonna, Darin, Angela, Amy, Kayla, Jeff, Jamie, Savanna and great-grandchildren: Aubray, Trevor, Amanda, Ben, Jessie, Avery and Bridger.

Preceding her in death were her parents, her husband, 6 brothers, one sister and eldest daughter, Edith (Krueger) Knapp.

# Groton Daily Independent






Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 10 of 85

## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



# Broton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 11 of 85

Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
				
Chance Rain/Snow then Chance Rain	Chance Rain then Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny	Increasing Clouds	Chance Rain/Snow then Chance Rain
High: 48 °F	Low: 29 °F	High: 52 °F	Low: 32 °F	High: 45 °F



## Wet & Warmer Friday

Highs: 40s to low 50s

⚡ **Few afternoon thunderstorms.** Strongest storms to produce pea sized hail or graupel

❄️ **Wintry mix this morning and evening.** Light snow accumulations around 1" or less for most locations. No snow over n central SD.



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

[www.weather.gov/abr](http://www.weather.gov/abr)

Created:  
4/1/2022 4:09 AM

Highs in the 40s to low 50s today equals more snow melting over northeastern South Dakota. A few afternoon thunderstorms are expected today, with the strongest storms producing pea sized hail or graupel. Otherwise, a wintry mix of rain and snow will remain possible this morning and again this evening, with light snow accumulations. Temperatures should remain too warm for snow over north central South Dakota.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 12 of 85

## Today in Weather History

April 1, 1960: Heavy snow of 4 to 10 inches fell in the eastern half of South Dakota. Some highways were closed mainly due to the difficulty of plowing the heavy, wet snow. Power and phone failures of short duration were caused by the snowfall in the Aberdeen area, which received 7.5 inches, setting the record for April 1st. Snow with high water content aggravated floods that were currently in progress on the James, Vermillion and Big Sioux Rivers.

April 1, 2011: Snowmelt flooding in March continued across much of central and northeast South Dakota as the rest of the snowpack melted into early April. Many roads along with many acres of crop and pastureland remained flooded. Roads, culverts, and bridges were damaged across the region. Several roads were washed out with many closed. Many homes were threatened with some surrounded by water. Rising lake levels in northeast South Dakota also threatened and flooded many homes. Many people had to use four-wheelers to get to their homes. A Presidential Disaster was declared for all counties due to the flooding damage. The total damage estimates, including March, were from 4.5 to 5 million dollars for the area. The flooding diminished across much of the area into May. The snowmelt flooding damaged many roads and highways, including U.S. Highway 81, throughout Hamlin County. Many roads were closed throughout the county. In the late evening of April 13th on U.S Highway 81, a car with four people inside went through a flooded area at a high rate of speed and ended up in the flooded ditch. They all got out with no injuries. The snowmelt runoff caused Lake Kampeska to rise to nearly 44 inches overfull. The lake flooded several roads and also threatened many homes. Sandbagging was done to hold off the rising lake. Waves and ice chunks did eventually do some damage to homes. Also, many boat lifts were damaged. Mud Creek near Rauville also went slightly above the flood stage of 9 feet to 9.64 feet for a couple of days in early April.

1875: The London Times published the first daily newspaper weather map. The first American newspaper weather map would be issued on 5/12/1876 in the New York Herald. Weather maps would first appear on a regular basis beginning on 5/9/1879 in the New York Daily Graphic.

1912 - A tornado with incredible velocity ripped into downtown Houston, TX, breaking the water table and giving the city its first natural waterspout. (The Weather Channel)

1923 - Residents in the eastern U.S. awoke on "April Fool's Day" to bitterly cold temperatures. The mercury plunged to -34 degrees at Bergland MI and to 16 degrees in Georgia. (David Ludlum)

1960: The first weather satellite, TIROS 1 (Television and Infra-Red Observation Satellite) began sending pictures back to Earth. The TIROS series would have little benefit to operational weather forecasters because the image quality was low and inconsistent. The most critical understanding achieved from the new technology was the discovery of the high degree of organization of large-scale weather systems, a fact never apparent from ground and aircraft observations.

1973: A tornado touches down near Brentsville, Virginia, then traveled to Fairfax hitting Woodson High School. This F2 tornado injured 37 and caused \$14 million in damage.

1987 - Forty-five cities across the southeastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date. Lows of 37 degrees at Apalachicola FL, 34 degrees at Jacksonville FL, 30 degrees at Macon GA, and 22 degrees at Knoxville TN, were records for April. (The National Weather Summary)

1987 - A tornado touched down briefly during a snow squall on the south shore of White Fish Bay (six miles northwest of Bay Mills WI). A mobile home was unroofed and insulation was sucked from its walls. (The Weather Channel)

1988 - A powerful spring storm produced 34 inches of snow at Rye CO, 22 inches at Timpas OK, 19 inches at Sharon Springs KS, and up to 35 inches in New Mexico. Severe thunderstorms associated with the same storm spawned a tornado which caused 2.5 million dollars damage at East Mountain TX. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Up to six inches of snow blanketed the Adirondacks of eastern New York State and the Saint Lawrence Valley of Vermont. Up to a foot of snow blanketed the Colorado Rockies. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 13 of 85

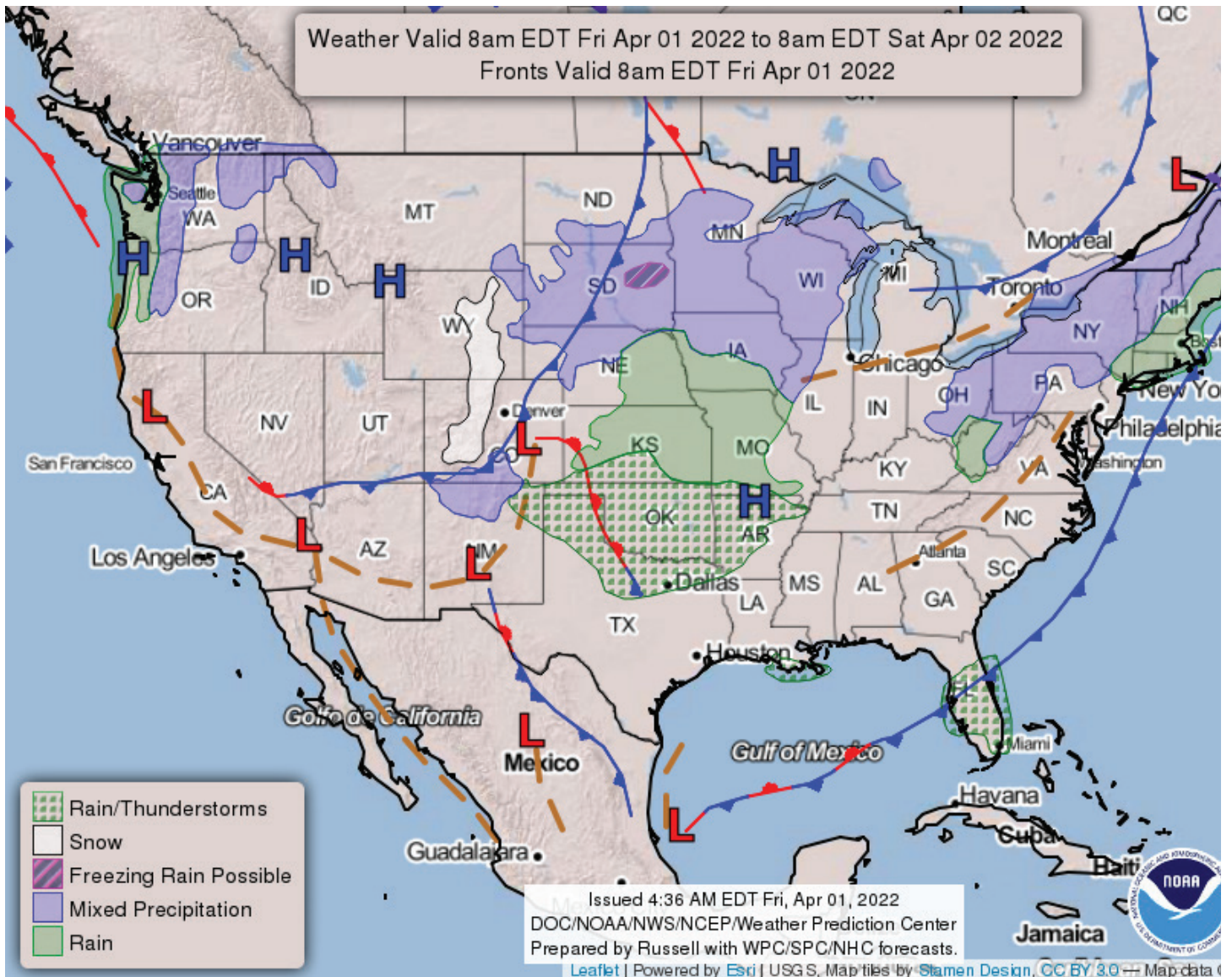
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 31.1 °F at 9:45 PM**  
**Low Temp: 25.2 °F at 8:15 AM**  
**Wind: 19 mph at 8:30 AM**  
**Precip: 0.00**

Day length: 12 hours, 51 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 80 in 1928  
Record Low: -0 in 1899  
Average High: 51°F  
Average Low: 26°F  
Average Precip in April.: 0.04  
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.83  
Average Precip to date: 2.10  
Precip Year to Date: 1.80  
Sunset Tonight: 8:01:52 PM  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:08:36 AM



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 14 of 85



## HELP WANTED NOW!

One might imagine that a king, especially one like King David, had everything he wanted, and every problem solved every day of his life. But that image is incorrect according to Psalm 141. David appears to be in trouble.

Hear his cry: "O, Lord, I call to You, come quickly to me; hear my voice when I call to You. May my prayer be set before You like incense."

David was not hesitant to request and receive an immediate audience with God. "I call to You...so...hear my voice." There was no doubt about God's availability or that someone would be ahead of him for one reason or another waiting for an audience with God. God is always available to hear our voice and attend to our needs whenever we call on Him at any time from anyplace.

David also knew that there was nothing or no one that could stop God from helping him. "Come quickly to me." No doubt he had gone to others for help, and they were either unable or unwilling to help him. His situation was critical, and he needed God's assistance immediately. He had turned to others with no results. Now it was time for him to turn to God.

David was also aware of God's acceptance of him and his needs. "May my prayer be set before You." He did not doubt that God was there for him. He was not afraid that his concerns would embarrass God or surprise God or be of no interest to God or be beyond God's power. He knew that whatever he needed would get God's attention!

Prayer: How blessed we are, Father, to know that we all have equal standing before You and every need is acceptable. Thank You for Your attention. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: I call to you, Lord, come quickly to me; hear me when I call to you. May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice. Psalm 141:1-2

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 15 of 85

## 2022 Community Events

- 01/30/2022 84th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)  
01/30/2022 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am – 1pm, Groton Community Center, 109 N 3rd St, Groton,  
04/07/2022 Groton CDE  
04/09/2022 Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)  
04/09/2022 Dueling Pianos Baseball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm  
04/23/2022 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)  
04/24/2022 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)  
05/07/2022 Lions Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)  
St John's Lutheran Church VBS 9-11am  
05/30/2022 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)  
Transit Fundraiser at the Community Center 4-7pm (Thursday Mid-June)  
06/17/2022 SDSU Alumni & Friends Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 12pm Start  
06/18/2022 Groton Triathlon  
Ladies Invitational at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Registration 10am Start  
07/04/2022 Firecracker Couples Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Registration, 10am Start  
(4th of July)  
07/10/2022 Lions Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)  
Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar 11am-1pm at the Groton Legion  
Baseball Tourney  
07/21/2022 Pro Am Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course  
Ferney Open Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Start  
How can we... "Love Groton"? United Methodist Church 9:30am  
Moonlight Swim at the Swimming Pool 9-11pm for 9th grade to age 20  
Golf Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove Golf Course 11a-1pm  
08/05/2022 Wine on Nine at Olive Grove Golf Course 6pm  
08/12/2022 GHS Basketball Golf Tournament  
United Methodist Church VBS 5-8pm  
Groton Firemen Summer Splash Day 4-5pm GHS Parking Lot  
09/10/2022 Lions Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)  
6th Annual Doggie Day at the Swimming Pool 3:30-5pm  
09/11/2022 Couples Sunflower Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 12pm  
Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport  
10/14/2022 Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am (2nd Friday in October)  
10/01/2022 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm  
10/31/2022 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)  
10/31/2022 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm  
11/12/2022 Legion Post #39 Turkey Party 6:30pm (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)  
11/24/2022 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)  
12/03/2022 Tour of Homes & Holiday Party at Olive Grove Golf Course  
Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-12pm  
01/29/2023 Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 16 of 85

## The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

### Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

- Black & White ..... \$41.54/year
- Colored ..... \$74.55/year
- Colored ..... \$42.60/6 months
- E-Weekly\* ..... \$21.30/year

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

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

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

City \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

Mail Completed Form to:

Groton Independent

P.O. Box 34

Groton, SD 57445-0034

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

## Groton Daily Independent

[www.397news.com](http://www.397news.com)

### Subscription Form

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

- 1 Month ..... \$15.98
- 3 Months ..... \$21.30
- 6 Months ..... \$26.63
- 9 Months ..... \$31.95
- 12 Months ..... \$42.60

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

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

City \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

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

Password \_\_\_\_\_

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

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





## News from the Associated Press

### **US taps \$420M to boost water supplies hit by climate change**

By SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — Federal officials slated millions of dollars for rural water projects in several states, with the Biden administration looking to shore up infrastructure needs made more urgent by long-term drought conditions that have been exacerbated by climate change.

The U.S. Interior Department announced Thursday that \$420 million will be spent on projects in New Mexico, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota and Iowa. The work includes construction of water treatment plants, pipeline connections, pump systems and reservoirs to provide drinking water to rural and tribal communities.

The West is experiencing a more than 20-year megadrought. Scientists say the region has become much warmer and drier in recent decades and that climate change will continue to make weather more extreme, wildfires more frequent and destructive, and water supplies less reliable.

From Idaho and Montana south to New Mexico and Arizona, even soil moisture levels have hit record lows as major reservoirs along the Colorado River have plummeted. Earlier this month, Lake Powell hit a record low, spurring concerns about the ability to crank out more hydropower from the dam that holds it back.

Native American tribes that are finally seeing federal money after years of being underfunded are working to get at water they long had rights to but could not access without funds to build the infrastructure. On the Navajo Nation, tens of thousands of people still live without running water, while tribes in the upper Midwest are awaiting pipeline extensions that would tap into reliable sources.

In all, the infrastructure measure included \$5 billion for Western water programs, with 20% of that dedicated to rural projects.

Federal officials said the allocations were based on project plans and significant goals that are projected to be reached with the funding.

The largest share — \$160 million — will go toward a project decades in the making that will eventually provide water for about 70,000 people who live in communities along the New Mexico-Texas state line, where the Ogallala aquifer is being pumped at a faster rate than it's being replenished.

The Eastern New Mexico Water Utility Authority will receive additional money from the Bureau of Reclamation and the state of New Mexico. When combined with matching money from the utility, the total for this year will be more than \$228 million.

"This will take us far in the construction of this critically important project," said Michael Morris, chairman of the water authority and mayor of Clovis, a rural community in eastern New Mexico.

Other allocations include \$75.5 million for the Lewis & Clark Rural Water System, which spans parts of South Dakota, Iowa and Minnesota. The system is designed to pipe water from the Missouri River to areas as far as 60 miles (97 kilometers) away that have less plentiful resources.

In North Dakota, \$51 million will go to a section of the Pick-Sloan Missouri Basin Program.

More than \$57 million will go to the Rocky Boys/North Central Montana Rural Water System, which serves the Rocky Boy's Reservation and numerous municipalities. The Fort Peck Reservation in Montana will benefit from \$7 million for the water system there.

Tanya Trujillo, assistant Interior secretary for water and science, was flanked by water managers in Albuquerque when she made the announcement.

"The department is committed to bringing clean, reliable drinking water to rural communities to help strengthen resilience to climate change," Trujillo said.

### **Noem wants federal rental assistance funds to go to tribes**

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem said Thursday that her administration is returning \$81.5 million in emergency rental assistance funds to the federal government and is asking that

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 18 of 85

a portion of the money be redirected to three tribal nations.

Noem sent a letter to the Department of Treasury on Thursday, saying she is returning the federal funds that were originally sent to the state to help people pay rent during the COVID-19 pandemic.

She is asking that \$17.9 million of that money be redirected to the Oglala Sioux, Lower Brule Sioux and Crow Creek Sioux, the Argus Leader reported.

"Throughout this pandemic, my administration worked closely with South Dakota's nine tribal sovereign nations," she wrote. "Our office looked for ways to partner with them over the last two years and provided any additional help that we could. They identified this as one area where we can work together."

Noem requested that more than \$14.5 million be distributed to the Oglala Sioux, with the other two tribes receiving more than \$1.6 million each.

## South Dakota's Dawn Plitzuweit takes over at West Virginia

By JOHN RABY AP Sports Writer

South Dakota women's basketball coach Dawn Plitzuweit, who took the Coyotes to a surprising run to the Sweet 16, was hired Thursday as coach at West Virginia.

Plitzuweit replaces Mike Carey, who retired two weeks ago after 21 seasons.

South Dakota beat Ole Miss and No. 2 seed Baylor in the NCAA Tournament before losing to Michigan, 52-49. The Coyotes finished the season 29-6.

"Dawn is a proven winner everywhere she has been, and her track record for sustained success is impressive," West Virginia athletic director Shane Lyons said in a statement. "When we started our search, it was quite obvious that her reputation as a program builder and championship coach put her at the top of our list."

Lyons said Plitzuweit will have a five-year contract worth a total of \$3 million with a starting salary of \$550,000, plus incentives.

Plitzuweit went 158-36 in six seasons at South Dakota, including four NCAA Tournament appearances. She was named the Summit League's coach of the year three times.

She won a Division II national championship in 2006 as head coach at Grand Valley State in Michigan.

Plitzuweit has the task of replacing West Virginia's all-time winningest coach. Carey went 447-239 but had just one NCAA Tournament appearance in the past five seasons and never took the Mountaineers past the second round in his career.

"I just cannot wait to get to Morgantown to meet with our team and to connect with them," Plitzuweit said.

She'll inherit a team that went 15-15 this past season and lost leading scorer KK Deans to the transfer portal last week. Plitzuweit is a native of West Bend, Wisconsin, and played at Division II Michigan Tech.

## Election skeptics roil GOP contests for secretary of state

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY and JULIE CARR SMYTH Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose was clear in the months after the 2020 presidential election.

"Elections are run better and more honestly than really I think they ever have been," he said in response to conspiracy theories being floated about the election. Months later, he said in an interview what has proved true in state after state - that voter fraud is rare.

Fast forward to 2022, when Republican secretaries of state face a delicate test with voters: Touting their work running clean elections while somehow not alienating GOP voters who believe the false claims of fraud fueled by former President Donald Trump and his allies.

LaRose has shifted his tone on Twitter, recently saying the "mainstream media is trying to minimize voter fraud to suit their narrative" and "President Donald Trump is right to say that voter fraud is a serious problem."

That tweet came a day after LaRose learned he had drawn not one but two primary challengers, both of whom have said they believe the 2020 election was stolen from Trump.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 19 of 85

All but one of the eight incumbent Republican secretaries of state seeking to continue as their state's elections chief have drawn at least one GOP challenger who either outright denies Democrat Joe Biden won the presidency or makes unsubstantiated claims that elections are not secure.

That raises the prospect that the nation's voting process will become further politicized if candidates who embrace conspiracy theories or promote without evidence the false narrative of widespread fraud win races for offices such as secretary of state, which play critical roles in managing elections and are intended to be neutral.

Trey Grayson, a former Republican secretary of state from Kentucky who has been outspoken against the efforts to delegitimize the 2020 presidential results, said some of the incumbent GOP secretaries need room to maneuver politically so they can defeat opponents within their own party who might seek to undermine fair elections if they win.

"These are guardians of democracy," he said. "Their opponents are people who don't show respect for the law or evidence or the vote-counting process. They are willing to ignore counts, willing to ignore safeguards we have in the system. In some cases, they are just making stuff up."

Trump's false claims have led to restrictive voting laws in Republican-controlled states, partisan election reviews, voting system security breaches and now a wave of candidates seeking to take over election administration at the state and local levels.

In addition to Ohio, Republican secretaries of state in Arkansas, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska and South Dakota are seeking to remain in office. Only Iowa's Paul Pate is running unopposed.

In Alabama, Idaho, Nevada and North Dakota, the GOP incumbents have opted against seeking reelection or are term-limited, leaving open contests. Wyoming Secretary of State Edward Buchanan has yet to announce his plans.

Democratic secretaries are running to keep their seats in California, Colorado, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico and Washington. So far, only one has drawn a Democratic challenger.

The job of secretary of state has tended to attract candidates focused more on process than politics. The races are typically low-key contests overshadowed by campaigns for governor and state attorney general.

That changed after Trump disputed his loss and decided to target election officials in political battleground states, sometimes pressuring them to reverse his loss. In one instance, Trump made a phone call to Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger in which he asked Raffensperger to "find" enough votes to overturn Biden's win.

Raffensperger didn't cede to Trump's demands and has defended Georgia's election in a re-election bid this year where he faces three primary challengers. He has sought to counter them by touting his conservative credentials, downplaying differences with Trump and wooing primary voters with a call to ban non-citizen voting. He also has pointed to his efforts to include a photo ID requirement for mail ballots as part of a sweeping election bill passed by lawmakers last year.

At a recent rally in Georgia, Trump blasted Raffensperger as a "lousy secretary of state." In an interview, Raffensperger said he has been working to counter the continuing misinformation and disinformation campaigns.

"We checked every allegation; I made sure we did," Raffensperger said. "I stand on the truth, and no one has been stronger on election integrity than me."

Trump has endorsed one of Raffensperger's opponents, U.S. Rep. Jody Hice. Hice objected to Georgia's electoral votes being counted for Biden, despite a lack of any evidence of widespread fraud or tampering. Georgia's 5 million votes cast for president were counted three times, including once by hand.

Hice has been leading all candidates in fundraising and is part of a new group called the "America First Secretary of State Coalition," organized by Jim Marchant, a former state lawmaker who is running for the open secretary of state seat in Nevada.

The group, which also includes Trump-endorsed candidates in Arizona and Michigan, has among other things advocated for limits on mail voting.

Trump won Kansas with 56% of the vote, and the state had no significant problems with its 2020 elec-

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 20 of 85

tions. Even so, Kansas Secretary of State Scott Schwab is facing a Republican primary opponent.

Schwab has pushed back on conspiracy theories and potentially angered many GOP voters in doing so. After a recent hearing in which lawmakers heard from Trump allies making false claims about the 2020 election, he wrote the committee to say the testimony "sought to undermine confidence in our county election officers, election results, and the longstanding systems used to securely conduct elections in Kansas."

Despite any evidence of problems with Kansas' elections, Schwab's Republican opponent, Mike Brown, has called for tougher rules on drop boxes and mail ballots, supports partisan ballot reviews and wants ballots printed on special paper. He said Schwab hasn't been vigilant when it comes to protecting elections.

Schwab downplayed the criticism and said he has an open line to Trump.

"If he's got concerns, you know, the president's team can call our office and say, 'Hey, we want to talk to you about the 2020 election,' but they don't because they know there's no concerns," Schwab said.

He and some other incumbents have tried a delicate balance in messaging as they seek to retain their seats — touting election performance in their own state while hinting vaguely at election problems elsewhere.

In South Dakota, Secretary of State Steve Barnett defended the work of his office and blamed "disinformation, misinformation, mal-information" for lowering voter confidence nationwide.

"I can only speak to what went on in South Dakota," he said. "I can't speak to what happened in these other states."

Barnett's challenger, Monae Johnson, said she was "answering the call of concerned citizens" to run and criticized Barnett for sending absentee ballot applications during the pandemic and supporting online voter registration.

In Ohio, LaRose's pro-Trump statements haven't stopped his GOP challenger, former state lawmaker John Adams, from claiming that he hasn't taken election integrity seriously; a second primary challenger was disqualified for paperwork errors.

Adams told a group of Republicans gathered recently at a sports bar in suburban Columbus that "there's no way that Trump lost," likening LaRose to Georgia Democrat Stacy Abrams for his positions in favor of ballot access. LaRose says Adams is basing his campaign on "conspiracy theories and nonsense," but brushed aside questions about whether his own rhetoric had shifted.

All this has left many GOP primary voters conflicted. Lyle Adcock, 72, a semi-retired computer sales representative who listened to Adams at the sports bar, said he has always trusted Ohio elections but now isn't sure what to think.

"It's not like I feel my vote doesn't count, but I wonder if there is any of this fraud," he said.

Asked who he was supporting in the secretary of state's race, Adcock said he hadn't yet decided.

## Regents map out goals, including addressing brain drain

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A new strategic plan for South Dakota's six public universities, two university centers and two special schools makes retaining graduates for the state's workforce a priority.

The Board of Regents plan states that South Dakota will add as many as 32,000 new jobs by 2030 with 38% of them requiring a bachelor's or more advanced degree.

That's why the board is focusing on brain drain, or the emigration of graduates taking jobs elsewhere as they enter the workforce. Engaging in discussions on brain drain and its impact to the state's workforce will be critical in the next decade, according to the strategic plan.

Challenges facing the Board of Regents also include the competition for high school graduates in the region, attracting and retaining non-resident students and workforce shortages because of the limited availability of skilled workers.

The plan said there will also be a need to enroll more non-traditional, underserved and non-resident student populations, the Argus Leader reported.

Plan goals have been established for governance, access and affordability, academic excellence, student outcomes, workforce and economic development, financial health and competitiveness.

Each goal has specific initiatives on a timeline from now to 2027, with some already in progress or complete.

The regents plan to set up strategy sessions on enrollment, analyzing new tuition and fee models, decreasing the number of low productivity programs in favor of those that are in high demand, as well as increasing advocacy for student mental health.

## **Pope begs forgiveness of Indigenous for Canada school abuses**

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis apologized and begged forgiveness Friday for the “deplorable” abuses suffered by Indigenous Peoples in Canada’s residential schools, saying he was ashamed and indignant at all they had endured at the hands of Catholic educators.

Francis made the apology and vowed to visit Canada during an audience with dozens of members of the Metis, Inuit and First Nations communities who came to Rome seeking a papal apology and a commitment for the Catholic Church to repair the damage.

More than 150,000 native children in Canada were forced to attend state-funded Christian schools from the 19th century until the 1970s in an effort to isolate them from the influence of their homes and culture. The aim was to Christianize and assimilate them into mainstream society, which previous Canadian governments considered superior.

“For the deplorable conduct of those members of the Catholic Church, I ask forgiveness of the Lord,” Francis said. “And I want to tell you from my heart, that I am greatly pained. And I unite myself with the Canadian bishops in apologizing.”

The trip to Rome by the Indigenous was years in the making but gained momentum last year after the discovery of hundreds of unmarked graves outside some of the residential schools. The three groups of Indigenous met separately with Francis over several hours this week, culminating with Friday’s audience.

Francis spoke in Italian and it wasn’t immediately clear if the audience understood what he had said, though they stood and applauded after he finished.

And the audience continued on with joyous performances of Indigenous prayers, drum, dance and fiddlers that Francis watched, applauded and at one point gave a thumbs up to. The Indigenous then presented him with gifts, including snow shoes.

The head of the Metis, Cassidy Caron, presented Francis with a bound book of their people’s stories: Much of what the Indigenous sought to accomplish during their meetings this week was to tell Francis the individual stories of loss and abuse that they suffered.

The Canadian government has admitted that physical and sexual abuse was rampant at the schools, with students beaten for speaking their native languages. That legacy of that abuse and isolation from family has been cited by Indigenous leaders as a root cause of the epidemic rates of alcohol and drug addiction on Canadian reservations.

Nearly three-quarters of the 130 residential schools were run by Catholic missionary congregations.

Last May, the Tk’emlups te Secwepemc Nation announced the discovery of 215 gravesites near Kamloops, British Columbia, that were found using ground-penetrating radar. It was Canada’s largest Indigenous residential school and the discovery of the graves was the first of numerous, similar grim sites across the country.

## **Inflation in 19 nations using euro soars to record 7.5%**

By KELVIN CHAN AP Business Writer

LONDON (AP) — Inflation in Europe soared to another record, according to new EU figures released Friday, in a fresh sign that rising energy prices fueled by Russia’s war in Ukraine are squeezing consumers and adding pressure on the central bank to raise interest rates.

Consumer prices in the 19 countries that use the euro currency rose by an annual rate of 7.5% in March,

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 22 of 85

according to the European Union statistics agency, Eurostat.

The latest reading smashed the high set just last month, when it hit 5.9%. It's the fifth straight month that inflation in the eurozone has set a record, bringing it to the highest level since recordkeeping for the euro began in 1997.

Rising consumer prices are a growing problem around the world, making it more difficult for people to afford everything from groceries to their utility bills. Spiking energy costs are the main factor driving inflation in Europe, with those prices surging 44.7% last month, up from 32% in February, Eurostat said.

Oil and gas prices had already been rising because of increasing demand from economies recovering from the depths of the COVID-19 pandemic. They jumped higher after Russia, a major oil and gas producer, invaded Ukraine, on fears that sanctions and export restrictions could crimp supplies.

At an outdoor market this week in Cologne, Germany, shopper Andreas Langheim bemoaned how life was getting more expensive.

"I can see the effect of increasing prices, especially here at the market," Langheim, 62, said as he picked up some bread from a bakery van. "Everything is more expensive now."

The latest figures make it more urgent for the European Central Bank to get off the sidelines and take action, analysts said. The bank is balancing record inflation with the threat that the war may hurt an economy under pressure. Last month, it sped up its exit from economic stimulus efforts to combat inflation, but has not taken more drastic steps.

"We think that the ECB will soon conclude that it can't wait any longer before starting to raise interest rates," Jack Allen-Reynolds, senior Europe economist at Capital Economics, said in a report.

Other central banks have started raising rates, including in the U.S., where inflation has soared to a 40-year high of 7.9%. European countries that don't use the euro, including Britain, Norway and the Czech Republic have done the same.

In the eurozone, there were price increases for other categories of spending besides energy. Food, alcohol and tobacco costs rose 5%, compared with 4.2% in the prior month, while prices for goods like clothing, appliances, cars, computers and books rose 3.4%, up from 3.1%; and service prices rose 2.7%, versus the previous 2.5%.

Italian Premier Mario Draghi, a former European Central Bank president, outlined how the problem hits households.

"Inflation is rising because raw materials prices are going up, in particular those for foodstuffs. Those are the ones that hit hardest a family's buying power," Draghi told foreign journalists Thursday. "Shortages in some raw materials creates a bottleneck in production and forces further price hikes."

Draghi said that as long as inflation remains temporary, governments can respond with budgetary measures, such as payments to help low income families with higher heating and electricity costs. But if it becomes a longer-term issue the response will have to be structural, he said.

## Ukraine war tops agenda at EU-China summit

By LORNE COOK, SAMUEL PETREQUIN, KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Top European Union officials began talks Friday with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, as the 27-nation bloc seeks assurances that Beijing won't help Russia to circumvent economic sanctions leveled over the invasion of Ukraine.

The virtual summit will also see European Council President Charles Michel, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell hold talks with Chinese President and Communist Party leader Xi Jinping.

Prior to the annual meeting, EU officials said they would also look for signs Beijing is willing to cooperate on bringing an end to the war in Ukraine.

Other topics include China's travel ban on members of the European Parliament; Beijing's economic boycott of EU member Lithuania over its Taiwan relations; the fate of a stalled investment agreement; and civil and political rights under China's authoritarian Communist Party regime.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 23 of 85

The summit takes place amid sharply rising negative sentiment toward China within the bloc, fueled by China's increasingly aggressive foreign policies and trade practices.

Beijing has dismissed European criticisms as biased and driven by an anti-China agenda being pursued by its chief global rival, the United States.

The war in Ukraine has thrown those differences into stark relief, with the EU rallying to the Ukrainian cause and China refusing to condemn Russia, while repeating Russian disinformation about the war and criticizing punishing economic sanctions brought against Moscow.

"We are looking for assurances that China has no intention of providing an economic lifeline or other support to Russia during this war," an EU official told reporters Thursday, speaking on customary condition of anonymity in line with his institution's rules.

At a daily briefing Friday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said that when it came to Ukraine, Beijing would not be forced to "choose a side or adopt a simplistic friend-or-foe approach. We should, in particular, resist the Cold War thinking and bloc confrontation."

He also reiterated China's opposition to economic sanctions against Russia, saying those would "not help solve problems at all and will even create new problems."

"China disapproves of solving problems through sanctions, and we are even more opposed to unilateral sanctions and long-arm jurisdiction that have no basis in international law," Zhao said.

Underlying the EU's expectations for China is the possibility of penalties against Chinese companies that undermine measures taken against Russia. EU officials point out that 13.7% of China's total trade is done with the 27-nation bloc, and 12% with the United States, compared with just 2.4% with Russia.

Officials said they also wish to emphasize the impact the war is having on the availability of fertilizer and global energy and food prices, which are hitting the poorest countries in Africa and the Middle East hardest.

The EU also plans to raise China's trade spat with Lithuania sparked by the Baltic state's decision to allow Taiwan to open an unofficial representative office in its capital, Vilnius, under the name "Taiwan." China considers the self-governing island republic part of its territory with no right to independent foreign relations and has frozen trade with Lithuania in retaliation.

Beijing also sanctioned some European Union lawmakers last year after the EU, Britain, Canada and the United States launched coordinated sanctions against officials in China over human rights abuses in the far western Xinjiang region.

The European Parliament responded by saying it will not ratify a long-awaited business investment deal as long as the sanctions remain in place.

Rights groups have also urged the EU to take a more assertive stand with China over repression in Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong and elsewhere and the persecution of Chinese dissidents including Sakharov Prize winner Ilham Tohti and Chinese-Swedish publisher Gui Minhai.

"The EU's foreign policy chief has pointed with alarm to the Chinese government's 'revisionist campaign' against universal human rights and institutions," Sophie Richardson, China director at Human Rights Watch said in a news release.

"Brussels should revise its approach to match the magnitude of that threat," Richardson said.

## **Analysis: High oil prices, Ukraine war at Saudi pivot point**

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — A spike in global energy prices benefits Saudi Arabia as the world's top oil exporter, but problems remain for the kingdom's impulsive crown prince.

Whether trying to find jobs for a growing number of unemployed youth or finding a way to end the long war he launched in Yemen, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and his father King Salman now face a potential pivot point for the kingdom amid Russia's war on Ukraine.

Can the ruling Al Saud family reset a now-troubled relationship with the United States, long the security guarantor for the wider Persian Gulf, as tensions simmer with Iran and higher fuel prices squeeze Washington? Or does the kingdom tip toward further toward China, now its biggest buyer of crude, or Moscow?

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 24 of 85

An American rapprochement seems unlikely. Asked in a recent interview about what he'd want President Joe Biden to know about, Prince Mohammed bluntly said: "I don't care."

"It's up to him to think about the interests of America," the prince added.

For Saudi interests, however, perhaps no other country in the world stands to rapidly benefit financially from the war as the kingdom.

Its vast oil resources, located close to the surface of its desert expanse, make it one of the world's cheapest places to produce crude. For every \$10 rise in the price of a barrel of oil, Saudi Arabia stands to make an additional \$40 billion a year, according to the Institute of International Finance.

It's a wild turn of events considering oil prices in April 2020 turned negative at the height of lockdowns in the coronavirus pandemic. Now, benchmark Brent crude stands at \$105 a barrel — highs unseen since 2014.

The additional cash comes in handy for 36-year-old Prince Mohammed, whose vision for Saudi Arabia includes developing a futuristic city called Neom in the desert reaches along the Red Sea. Its latest iteration involves a ski slope project called Trojena, advertised in a computer-generated commercial now in heavy rotation across Mideast satellite channels.

But while expansive palaces now exist there, satellite photos from Planet Labs PBC show the wider Neom project remains still at an early stage. It likely will be years before they produce the jobs the prince counts on to slingshot the kingdom's economy away from oil.

Meanwhile, unemployment among youth — a carefully watched barometer since the uprisings of the 2011 Arab Spring — stood at 32.7% for men and 25.2% for women late last year, according to the Saudi General Authority for Statistics. Reopening cinemas and allowing concerts in a kingdom where ultraconservatives view music as a sin comes as a part of that push for jobs.

"If I'm going to get the employment rate down, and tourism could create 1 million jobs in Saudi Arabia, ... that means I have to do it," the prince told *The Atlantic* magazine in a recent interview. "Choose a lesser sin rather than a bigger sin."

The sheen, however, has come off for human rights activists and some Western nations.

Saudi Arabia just put to death 81 prisoners in a single day, the biggest known mass execution in the kingdom's history, after a pandemic lull. The Saudi-led war in Yemen against the Houthis rages on despite a unilateral Ramadan cease-fire years after the prince promised a quick victory, decimating the Arab world's poorest country.

Internationally, perhaps nothing received more attention than the killing and dismemberment of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul in 2018. The kingdom falsely insisted for days Khashoggi left the consulate before acknowledging his slaying.

Turkey moved Thursday to end an ongoing court case over Khashoggi's death as its president seeks to repair ties to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates over economic concerns. For the United States, whose intelligence services believe Prince Mohammed approved the operation that killed Khashoggi, finding a resolution to the killing of a permanent resident of the U.S. remains much-more fraught.

Biden, who called the crown prince "a pariah" while campaigning, pointedly has only spoken to King Salman since entering the White House. Biden's first foreign trip was to a G-7 summit in England — rather than the sword-dancing embrace then-President Donald Trump gave to Saudi Arabia.

But now, with gasoline prices at the pump hitting record prices in March, Biden faces a Saudi Arabia that repeatedly says it can't be held responsible for higher energy prices as it faces attacks from the Houthis. That puts increasing pressure on Biden, whose administration withdrew American air defenses from Saudi Arabia last year.

Saudi Arabia, as well as the UAE, appear to be leveraging the situation to extract American concessions on Yemen while maintaining their own ties to Russia. The kingdom also is again reportedly thinking of selling some crude oil in Chinese yuan to Beijing, rather than the U.S. dollar.

Even Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy dramatically weighed in on the situation in recent days, telling regional energy powers "the future of Europe depends on your efforts."

"The kingdom cannot — and must not — be left alone to safeguard global energy supplies at a time when the entire world is unanimously hurting from price hikes which have been further sparked by the



uncertainty due to the situation in Ukraine,” wrote Faisal J. Abbas, the editor-in-chief of Saudi Arabia’s English-language daily newspaper Arab News.

“This is an international issue that impacts almost every household around the globe. Saudi Arabia, therefore, deserves all the support it can get.”

Where the support comes from in the future remains the question.

## **Russians leave Chernobyl; Ukraine braces for renewed attacks**

By NEBI QENA and YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian troops left the heavily contaminated Chernobyl nuclear site early Friday after returning control to the Ukrainians, authorities said, as residents in parts of eastern Ukraine braced for renewed attacks and awaited blocked supplies of food and other humanitarian relief.

Ukraine’s state power company, Energoatom, said the pullout at Chernobyl came after soldiers received “significant doses” of radiation from digging trenches in the forest in the exclusion zone around the closed plant. The International Atomic Energy Agency said it could not independently confirm the exposure claim.

In what would be the first attack of its kind, if confirmed, the governor of Russia’s Belgorod region accused Ukraine of flying helicopter gunships across the border on Friday morning and striking an oil depot.

The depot run by Russian energy giant Rosneft is located about 35 kilometers (21 miles) north of the Ukraine-Russia border. The helicopter attack set the facility ablaze, and two people were injured, according to a Telegram post by Belgorod governor Vyacheslav Gladkov.

“The fire at the oil depot occurred as a result of an airstrike from two helicopters of the armed forces of Ukraine, which entered the territory of Russia at a low altitude,” the governor wrote on the messaging app.

It was not immediately possible to verify the claim or images that were circulating on social media of the alleged attack. Russia has reported shelling from Ukraine before, including an incident last week that killed a military chaplain, but not an incursion of its airspace.

Elsewhere, Ukrainian forces have retaken the villages of Sloboda and Lukashivka, which are south of the besieged northern city of Chernihiv and located along one of the main supply routes between the city and Ukraine’s capital, Kyiv, according to Britain’s Defense Ministry.

Ukraine has also continued to make successful but limited counterattacks to the east and northeast of Kyiv, the ministry said.

Russian forces have subjected both Chernihiv and Kyiv to continued air and ground-launched missile strikes despite Moscow officials saying Tuesday they planned to reduce military activity in those areas.

Western officials said there were growing indications Russia was using its talk of de-escalation in Ukraine as cover to regroup, resupply its forces and redeploy them for a stepped-up offensive in the eastern part of the country.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy warned that Russian withdrawals from the north and center of the country were just a military tactic to build up strength for new attacks in the southeast.

“We know their intentions,” Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address to the nation. “We know that they are moving away from those areas where we hit them in order to focus on other, very important ones where it may be difficult for us.”

“There will be battles ahead,” he added.

Ukrainian and Russian negotiators planned to resume talks via video on Friday, five weeks into a conflict that has left thousands dead and driven more than 4 million refugees from Ukraine. There seemed little faith that the two sides would find agreement on their respective demands any time soon.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said conditions weren’t yet “ripe” for a cease-fire and he wasn’t ready for a meeting with Zelenskyy until the negotiators do more work, Italian Premier Mario Draghi said after a Thursday telephone conversation with the Russian leader.

Following a plea from Zelenskyy when he addressed Australian Parliament on Thursday, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said that his country would send mine-resistant armored personnel carriers to Ukraine.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 26 of 85

He said Friday the four-wheel drive Bushmaster vehicles, specifically requested by Zelenskyy, would be flown to Europe but did not say how many would be delivered or when.

"We're not just sending our prayers, we are sending our guns, we're sending our munitions, we're sending our humanitarian aid, we're sending all of this, our body armor, all of these things, and we're going to be sending our armored vehicles, our Bushmasters, as well," Morrison said.

In the encircled strategic port city of Mariupol, Russian forces on Thursday blocked a convoy of 45 buses attempting to evacuate people after the Russian military agreed to a limited cease-fire in the area. Only 631 people were able to get out of the city in private cars, according to the Ukrainian government.

Russian forces also seized 14 tons of food and medical supplies in a dozen buses that were trying to make it to Mariupol, Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said.

The city has been the scene of some of the worst suffering of the war. Tens of thousands of residents managed to get out in the past few weeks by way of humanitarian corridors, reducing the population from a prewar 430,000 to an estimated 100,000 by last week. But continued Russian attacks have repeatedly thwarted aid and evacuation convoys.

The International Atomic Energy Agency said it had been informed by Ukraine that the Russians forces at Chernobyl had transferred control of the site of the world's worst nuclear disaster to the Ukrainians in writing. The last Russian troops left Chernobyl early Friday, the Ukrainian government agency responsible for the exclusion zone said.

Energoatom gave no details on the condition of the soldiers it said were exposed to radiation and did not say how many were affected. There was no immediate comment from the Kremlin, and the IAEA said it was seeking more information.

Russian forces seized the Chernobyl site in the opening stages of the Feb. 24 invasion, raising fears that they would cause damage or disruption that could spread radiation. The workforce at the site oversees the safe storage of spent fuel rods and the concrete-entombed ruins of the reactor that exploded in 1986.

Edwin Lyman, a nuclear expert with the U.S.-based Union of Concerned Scientists, said it "seems unlikely" a large number of troops would develop severe radiation illness, but it was impossible to know for sure without more details.

IAEA Director-General Rafael Grossi was in the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad on Friday for talks with senior officials there about nuclear issues in Ukraine.

In addition to concerns about Chernobyl, nine of Ukraine's 15 operational reactors are currently in use, including two at the Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhya facility, the IAEA said.

Early this week, the Russians said they would significantly scale back military operations in areas around Kyiv and the northern city of Chernihiv to increase trust between the two sides and help negotiations along.

But in the Kyiv suburbs, regional governor Oleksandr Palviuk said on social media Thursday that Russian forces shelled Irpin and Makariv and that there were battles around Hostomel. Pavliuk said there were Ukrainian counterattacks and some Russian withdrawals around the suburb of Brovary to the east.

At a Ukrainian military checkpoint outside Kyiv, soldiers and officers said they don't believe Russian forces have given up on the capital.

"What does it mean, significantly scaling down combat actions in the Kyiv and Chernihiv areas?" asked Brig. Gen. Valeriy Embakov. "Does it mean there will be 100 missiles instead of 200 missiles launched on Kyiv or something else?"

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said intelligence indicates Russia is not scaling back its military operations in Ukraine but is instead trying to regroup, resupply its forces and reinforce its offensive in the Donbas.

"Russia has repeatedly lied about its intentions," Stoltenberg said. At the same time, he said, pressure is being kept up on Kyiv and other cities, and "we can expect additional offensive actions bringing even more suffering."

The Donbas is the predominantly Russian-speaking industrial region where Moscow-backed separatists have been battling Ukrainian forces since 2014. In the past few days, the Kremlin, in a seeming shift in its war aims, said that its "main goal" now is gaining control of the Donbas, which consists of the Donetsk

and Luhansk regions, including Mariupol.

## High energy costs are hitting UK. It's about to get worse

By DANICA KIRKA and SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Tia Rutherford is worried about her 3-year-old son.

As energy prices soared last fall, she tacked fleece blankets over her doors and windows to keep the cold out and started serving Jacob breakfast in his room so she didn't have to heat the living room. But she's consumed by worry that she can't pay her utility bills and that her son isn't warm enough.

"There are effects on his health," said Rutherford, a 29-year-old single mother who lives in southeast London. "He's constantly catching colds."

People across the United Kingdom will face similar choices in coming months with energy costs for millions of households set to rise by 54% on Friday. It is the second big jump in energy bills since October, and a third may be ahead as rebounding demand from the COVID-19 pandemic and now Russia's war in Ukraine push prices for oil and natural gas higher.

Energy costs are the main driver of rising consumer prices. While inflation is a worldwide phenomenon, it's a bigger issue in Britain because it's more exposed to rising natural gas prices than even its gas-reliant European neighbors, where utility bills and other costs also have soared. Prices for natural gas, which is used for electricity and heating, have more than doubled in the past year.

In the U.K., economists warn of the biggest drop in living standards since the mid-1950s, fueled by rocketing energy costs, food prices and preplanned tax increases. Disposable household incomes, adjusted for inflation, are expected to fall by an average 2.2% this year, according to the Office for Budget Responsibility.

Those figures obscure the impact on low-income people being hit disproportionately by the crisis. Because they spend a larger percentage of their budgets on food and energy, the poorest quarter of British households will see their real incomes drop by 6% this year, according to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, a think tank focused on improving living standards.

People who rely on government benefits and state pensions are being doubly squeezed because their annual cost-of-living adjustment was based on annual inflation figures through September — before consumer prices spiked.

That means benefits are set to rise by just 3.1% this year. But inflation jumped to a 30-year high of 6.2% in February and is expected to peak at around 8% this year as the war sends food and energy prices ever higher, the Bank of England predicted.

As costs rise, people are moving their beds near windows so they can read by the light of the streetlamps outside, said outreach workers at Christians Against Poverty, which offers counseling for those in debt. Divorced fathers skip meals so they can afford to buy food for their children when they visit, and an increasing number of people report the pressures make them contemplate suicide.

"The cost-of-living crisis is genuinely costing lives," said Gareth McNab, the charity's external affairs director. "Almost every single call to our new inquiries team is mentioning the energy crisis and an inability to cope. And yeah, it's desperate out there."

Energy prices for 22 million households will rise Friday as an update of the national price cap kicks in. Regulators adjust it every six months. Analysts expect a third consecutive jump in the cap later this year, which could leave consumers with utility bills that are more than double what they were a year earlier.

Britain relies more heavily on natural gas to meet its energy needs than European Union countries, having less nuclear and renewable energy. Britain also has been slower than its neighbors in insulating and sealing the nation's aging housing stock, so it takes more energy to heat them.

Britain's largest gas storage facility also was allowed to close five years ago, leaving the country with the capacity to store just 12 days of supply, compared with about 80 days in Germany, which is also heavily reliant on natural gas. That means in crisis, Britain is more dependent on buying gas through "spot markets" that reflect short-term price swings.

"In normal times, we're using more energy than (the Europeans) are to heat their houses, but ... the

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 28 of 85

price is low enough that you don't really notice a big difference in the cost of living," said Arun Advani, an inequality expert at the University of Warwick. "Now that energy prices are going up, they are paying more, but we're paying a lot more. And so that difference is magnified."

Even so, some European governments have acted more aggressively than Britain in trying to limit costs. France forced a state-controlled utility to limit electricity price hikes to 4% this year. Spain imposed a tax on energy producers' windfall profits that will be passed on to consumers.

Britain responded in February with a 9 billion-pound (\$11.8 billion) package designed to help offset rising utility bills. Treasury chief Rishi Sunak announced more measures last week, including a cut in the tax on vehicle fuels. But he ignored calls to impose a tax on producers' windfall profits or delay a planned 1.5 percentage point increase in income taxes, also set for April.

Sunak said the government has to keep spending under control amid uncertainty caused by the war in Ukraine and after public debt last year rose to the highest level since 1963.

Lawmakers from all parties criticized Sunak for missing the point, suggesting he failed to understand the scale of the problem for low-income people. But he isn't backing down.

Meanwhile, people who have little are trying to live on less. Chris Price, who runs a community charity called Pecan in south London, says food bank clients are passing up potatoes and other root vegetables because they need to be cooked.

"People are saying, 'I need to have food which I can cook easily and cheaply because if I put something in the oven for too long, it takes up so much ... electricity or gas,'" he said. "And they are really uncertain if they can afford it."

These are the people also hit hardest by the pandemic and recent cuts in government benefits, leaving them with little to fall back on in the new crisis, said Adam Scorer, chief executive of National Energy Action, a charity focused on fuel poverty.

"There's no cutting back. There's no smart decisions," Scorer said. "You just don't heat your home, and you don't use your cooker, and you don't heat water, and you don't shower. You just don't do those things because you can't afford to do those things. There's no choices for many people."

Rutherford is one of those running out of choices.

She gets her energy through a prepaid meter, often the only option for people who fall behind on bills. Prepaid meters allow customers to control how much they spend, but they pay high prices and can be left without power if they run out of credit.

That has left her struggling to top up the meter, pay off debt she already owes her energy supplier and keep her son warm when he comes home from day care. She's tried to save by turning off the lights, living in the dark except for strings of tiny white Christmas tree lights that use less electricity.

"I didn't have to live like this before," she said. "I literally have no money — and my electric is going to cut out."

## Shanghai moves to 2nd part of lockdown as testing lines grow

BEIJING (AP) — About 16 million residents in Shanghai are being tested for the coronavirus during the second stage of the lockdown that shifted Friday to the western half of China's biggest city and financial capital.

Meanwhile, residents of Shanghai's eastern districts who were supposed to be released from four days of isolation have been told their lockdowns could be extended if COVID-19 cases are found in their residential compounds.

The lockdown in Shanghai, being done in two phases over eight days to enable testing of its entire population, has shaken global markets worried about the possible economic impact. China's manufacturing activity fell to a five-month low in March, a monthly survey showed Thursday, as lockdowns and other restrictions forced factories to suspend production.

For four days starting Friday, residents of Puxi on the west side of the Huangpu River dividing Shanghai cannot leave their neighborhoods or housing compounds. The gates at some compounds were locked

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 29 of 85

from the outside, with groceries and meals delivered to collection points.

Government workers and volunteers wearing full protective equipment went door-to-door with megaphones in the city with 26 million people, calling on residents to report for testing at designated sites where they were met by long lines and waits of more than 90 minutes.

China's National Health Commission said another 1,787 domestic cases of COVID-19 had been recorded on Thursday, including 358 in Shanghai. Another 5,442 tested positive for the virus without becoming ill, 4,144 of them in Shanghai.

People who tested positive without symptoms are being taken to temporary isolation centers, including gymnasiums and exhibition centers.

Public transport has been suspended and roads closed, bringing the normally bustling metropolis to a standstill. While city residents are being told to stay put, airports and train stations remain open.

The lockdown reflects China's continuing adherence to its "zero-COVID" approach, despite restrictions being eased elsewhere. China set the hard-line tone at the start of the pandemic in 2020 with the 76-day lockdown on the city of Wuhan where the virus was first detected.

The measures have been decried by some Chinese as excessive, although there has been little open defiance. Amid the grumbling, Shanghai authorities have conceded shortcomings in their handling of the surge driven by the omicron variant, after panic buying stripped store shelves of necessities.

"We didn't prepare sufficiently enough," Ma Chunlei, a senior Shanghai official said at a news conference Thursday. "We sincerely accept the criticisms from the public and are making efforts to improve it."

## **In Serbia, pro-Russia is seen as the winning election stance**

By DUSAN STOJANOVIC Associated Press

BELGRADE, Serbia (AP) — Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, who has fostered close ties with Russia and refused to impose sanctions against Moscow for its invasion of Ukraine, is expected to extend his almost 10-year grip on power in the Balkan country when it holds national elections on Sunday.

Polls predict that Vucic, a populist who has boasted about his personal ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin, will win another five-year term as president. His right-wing Serbian Progressive Party also is expected to continue to dominate the country's parliament.

But polls indicated a close local government race in the capital, Belgrade. A loss for Vucic's party there could undermine his increasingly autocratic rule.

Most political parties taking part in the presidential, general and municipal elections lean right, reflecting the conservative stands prevalent among Serbia's 6.5 million voters. But a new Green-left coalition campaigning on the need to tackle long-neglected environmental problems also is fielding candidates.

Opposition party officials say Russia's war in Ukraine has only strengthened Vucic's dominance of Serbian politics and the mainstream media. Soon after Russian tanks entered Ukraine, the president's election slogan changed to "Peace. Stability. Vucic."

"The war has diverted public attention from what is happening in Serbia and of course, with media support, enabled Vucic to blame the crisis for everything that is wrong in Serbia," Dragan Djilas, a leader of the biggest opposition coalition United Serbia, said in an interview.

"Articles are published here every day about how a kilogram of bread costs 9 euros in Italy and Germany, how they have no fuel, how they will have food stamps and how great we are," Djilas said. "People are scared, and it always suits the authorities because people say, 'Let's not change anything now.'"

Serbia, a traditional Russian ally, has rejected calls from the European Union and the United States to join in sanctions against Moscow, citing national interests. The country's representative to the United Nations did vote in favor of a resolution condemning Moscow's attack on Ukraine as a violation of international law.

Despite the Serbian government saying it is seeking EU membership, Vucic and his allies have refrained from condemning Russia over the invasion, a possible sign they want to avoid alienating pro-Russia voters ahead of Sunday's election.

Much of the pro-Russia sentiments among Serbs comes from their hatred of NATO; the Western mili-

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 30 of 85

tary alliance bombed the country in 1999 to stop a bloody Serb crackdown on ethnic Albanians seeking independence for Kosovo, a Serbian province at the time.

Former Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic said that imposing sanctions on Russia would be tantamount to "political suicide" because Moscow has blocked U.N. membership for Kosovo which declared independence in 2008.

"If we are ready to give up Kosovo, then we can impose sanctions on Russia," Dacic said. "But if we are not ready, then we cannot."

Thousands of people in Serbia have turned out for pro-Putin rallies during the five-week invasion, waving Russian flags and displaying the letter Z - a symbol seen on Russian military vehicles in Ukraine. The support for Moscow makes Serbia somewhat of an outlier in Europe.

Opposition officials said that despite Vucic's almost full control of the media and the pro-Russian narrative that has been created leading up to the elections, they expect a good result on Sunday.

"As far as we are concerned, the situation in Ukraine was very clear. It is about Russian aggression, and we immediately condemned it," Dobrica Veselinovic, who is running for mayor of Belgrade as the candidate of the environmentalist We Must coalition.

Election polls predict Vucic will win the presidential election outright on Sunday. If he does not receive more than 50% of the vote, he would face an unpredictable runoff in two weeks, likely against opposition candidate Zdravko Ponos, a Western-educated former army general.

The election for National Assembly lawmakers was not scheduled until 2024, but Vucic called an early vote after criticism from the EU that Serbia's 2020 election had not been free and fair. The opposition boycotted that election.

"I don't see any difference between these elections and those two years ago," political analyst Slobodan Stupar said. "A parliament will be formed in which Vucic will have fewer lawmakers than now. He will be able to tell Europe, 'Yes, we are a democratic country. See how many enemies I have in parliament.'"

## War in Ukraine fuels fears among draft-age Russian youths

By The Associated Press undefined

As Moscow's forces bog down in Ukraine, many young Russians of draft age are increasingly jittery about the prospect of being sent into combat. Making those fears particularly acute is an annual spring conscription that begins Friday and aims to round up 134,500 men for a one-year tour of military duty.

Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu pledged at a meeting of the military brass this week that the new recruits won't be sent to front lines or "hot spots."

But the statement was met with skepticism by many in Russia who remember the separatist wars in the southern republic of Chechnya in the 1990s and early 2000s, when thousands of poorly trained young men were killed.

"I don't trust them when they say they won't send conscripts into combat. They lie all the time," said Vladislav, a 22-year-old who is completing his studies and fears he could face the draft immediately after graduation. He asked that his last name not be used, fearing reprisals.

All Russian men aged 18-27 must serve one year in the military, but a large share avoid the draft for health reasons or deferments granted to university students. The share of men who avoid the draft is particularly big in Moscow and other major cities.

Even as President Vladimir Putin and his officials say that conscripts aren't involved in what Russian authorities call "the special military operation in Ukraine," many appeared to have been taken prisoner during its initial days. Videos emerged from Ukraine of captured Russians, some being shown calling their parents, and were put on social media.

The mother of one of the prisoners said she recognized her 20-year-old draftee son in a video even though he was shown blindfolded.

"I recognized him by his lips, by his chin. You know, I would have recognized him by his fingers," said the woman, who asked to be identified only by her first name, Lyubov, for security reasons. "I breastfed

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 31 of 85

him. I raised him.”

The Defense Ministry was forced to walk back its statements and acknowledge that some conscripts were sent to Ukraine “by mistake” and were taken prisoner while serving with a supply unit away from the front.

There have been allegations that before the invasion, some conscripts were forced to sign military contracts that allowed them to be sent into combat — duty that is normally reserved only for volunteers in the army. Some of the captured soldiers said they were told by their commanding officers that they were going to a military exercise but suddenly found themselves fighting in Ukraine.

Lyudmila Narusova, a member of the upper house of the Russian parliament, spoke in early March about an entire company of 100 men who were forced to sign such contracts and were sent into the combat zone — and only four survived. Military officials did not comment on her allegation.

Svetlana Agapitova, the human rights commissioner in St. Petersburg, said Wednesday that relatives of seven soldiers had written to her to complain the men had been forced to sign the contract and sent to Ukraine against their will. She said two of them already had been brought back to Russia.

In recent years, the Kremlin has emphasized increasing the share of volunteer contract soldiers as it sought to modernize the army and improve its readiness. The force of 1 million now has over 400,000 contract soldiers, including 147,000 in the infantry. If the war drags on, those numbers could be insufficient to sustain the operations.

The Kremlin could eventually face a choice: Keep fighting with a limited number of troops and see the offensive stall, or try to replenish the ranks with a broader draft and risk public outrage that could fuel anti-draft sentiment and destabilize the political situation. Such a scenario occurred during the fighting in Chechnya.

Dmitry, a 25-year-old IT expert, has a deferment that should keep him out of the draft for medical reasons. But he’s still nervous like many others, fearing authorities could abruptly waive some deferments to bolster the military.

“I hate the war. I think it’s a total disaster,” said Dmitry, who also asked that he not be identified by his last name, fearing reprisals. “I fear that the government could change the rules and I could face the draft. They also were saying for months that they wouldn’t attack Ukraine, so why should I trust what they say about the draft now?”

Proposed legislation would facilitate the draft by allowing military recruiters to call up conscripts more easily, but the bill has been put on hold for now.

Still, it added to the public’s anxiety.

Alexei Tabalov, a lawyer who advises conscripts, said medical panels at recruitment offices often admit youths who should be exempt from service because of illness. Now, he added, their attitudes could grow even tougher.

“It’s quite probable that doctors may shut their eyes to conscripts’ illnesses and declare them fit for military duty,” Tabalov said.

In addition to lowering the medical standard for draftees, there are fears that the government could try to impose some sort of martial law that would ban Russian men from leaving the country and, like Ukraine, force them to fight.

“We have received a lot of calls from people fearing mobilization,” Tabalov said. “People now are afraid of everything in this situation. No one even thought before about the need to analyze the law on mobilization.”

The Kremlin has strongly denied any such plans, and military officials insist the army has enough contract soldiers to serve in Ukraine. Still, many Russians remain skeptical of the officials’ denials, given their track record.

“What kind of trust could there be if Putin says one day that conscripts will not be sent there ... and then the Defense Ministry recognizes that they were there?” Tabalov asked.

An existing law allows for a 21-month alternative civil service in hospitals, nursing homes and other facilities for those who view military duty as incompatible with their beliefs, but military conscription offices often broadly ignore requests for such service.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 32 of 85

After the war began, Tabalov said his group saw a large increase in inquiries about the alternative service law, which is vaguely phrased and allows military officials to easily turn down applications.

"We are worried that in the current militarist mood, military conscription offices can take a tougher attitude and reject appeals for the alternative civil service," he said.

## **New Mexico launches cannabis sales, within Texans' reach**

By MORGAN LEE Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) — New Mexico is bringing sales of recreational marijuana to the doorstep of Texas, the largest prohibition state, as the movement toward broad legalization sweeps up even more of the American West.

As of midnight Friday in New Mexico, anyone 21 and older can purchase up to 2 ounces (57 grams) of marijuana — enough to roll about 60 joints or cigarettes — or comparable amounts of marijuana liquid concentrates and edible treats.

New Mexico has nurtured a medical marijuana program since 2007 under tight restrictions. Friday's changes still represent a sea change for local law enforcement, taxation officials, commercial growers and residents who thought full-blown legal access to pot would never come.

Across the state, would-be marijuana farmers are bidding for water rights and learning to raise their first cannabis crops, as experienced medical cannabis producers ramp up production and add new retail showrooms.

New Mexico is among 18 states that have legalized pot for recreational use, with implications for cannabis tourism and conservative Texas, where legalization efforts have made little headway.

In Clovis, New Mexico, a high plains town of about 40,000 residents less than 10 miles (16 kilometers) from Texas, Earl Henson and two business partners have pooled resources to convert a former gun shop and shooting range into a cannabis store and companion growing room at a Main Street address.

"I can't explain how happy I am," said Henson, a former real estate agent who says his affection for marijuana was a burden in the past. This week, he began harvesting the first crop for a cannabis store titled Earl and Tom's. "I think these cities that are near Texas, for the next two years it is going to change their economies."

In the state capital of Santa Fe, marijuana is going on sale across the street from the city's newly built visitors center on a block lined with galleries, clothing boutiques and restaurants.

LeRoy Roybal, manager of Minerva Canna's downtown cannabis store, said he hopes the stigma of cannabis use quickly fades.

"I think we're liberating a lot of hearts and souls," he said. "It's going to be like getting a cup of joe at Starbucks."

Supportive lawmakers hope that broad legalizing of marijuana will stamp out black markets, boost employment and provide stable new sources of government income.

Consumers initially will rely heavily on supplies from 35 legacy marijuana businesses that took root over the past 15 years. Cannabis regulators have issued more than 230 new marijuana business licenses so far — to growers, retailers and manufacturing facilities for extracts and edibles.

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham on Thursday said that broad marijuana legalization responds to popular demands and is generating small business opportunities.

"This is what consumers want," said Lujan Grisham, up for reelection in November. "We have the potential for 11,000 more workers, jobs in places where young people can work and stay, like Torrance County and Texico and Tukumcari and Raton."

Local governments can't ban cannabis businesses entirely, though they can restrict locations and hours of operation. Public consumption is prohibited under threat of a \$50 fine for first-time infractions.

New business licenses for cannabis cafes or lounges haven't been requested yet — leaving people to indulge in their homes or designated hotels, casinos and cigar shops.

In southern New Mexico, Mayor Javier Perea of Sunland Park says marijuana retailers can set up any-



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 33 of 85

where across the small city flanked by the Rio Grande and fencing along the U.S. border with Mexico.

He said about 30 marijuana businesses have sought authorization in the city of just 17,000 residents, banking on tourism from nearby El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juarez in Mexico.

Perea hopes the industry creates economic opportunity and tax income to bolster city services. Local governments will receive a minority share of the state's 12% excise tax on recreational marijuana sales, along with a share of additional sales taxes. Medical cannabis remains tax-free.

"The one thing that we are going to struggle with is we are going to run out of buildings" for new businesses, he said.

Legal experts warn that people who purchase cannabis in New Mexico and chose to return home to other states could risk criminal penalties, arrest and incarceration — most notably in Texas.

Paul Armento, deputy director of the drug policy group NORML, said Texas is among the leading states for marijuana-possession arrests, and that possession of marijuana concentrates, which are legal in New Mexico, is punishable in Texas by up to two years in prison and a \$10,000 fine.

Marijuana also remains illegal under federal law to possess, use or sell — a standard that applies across vast tracks of federal land and Indian Country in New Mexico.

New Mexico's cannabis industry, still reliant on cash to avoid running afoul of federal law, is gaining access to banking services through an alternative certification system for credit unions and banks supported by state attorneys general.

The state also plans to underwrite \$5 million in low-interest loans to small cannabis businesses that can't access traditional credit.

Lawmakers in New Mexico have sought to reverse harm inflicted by marijuana criminalization on minority communities and poor households by automatically dismissing or erasing past cannabis convictions, encouraging social and economic diversity in employment and reducing financial barriers for startup businesses.

The state's micro-business license to cultivate up to 200 plants for a flat \$1,000 fee is attracting first-time commercial growers such as recently retired U.S. Marine Kyle Masterson and wife Ivy, a Hispanic Army veteran with business consulting experience. They are raising three children and making a mid-life career shift into cannabis.

The Mastersons, residents of suburban Rio Rancho, searched more remote areas for an affordable building to cultivate high-grade marijuana under lights, settling on a vacant former movie theater in tiny Cuba, New Mexico, at the base of the Jemez Mountains.

"It felt right, it felt good and out of a vision of what we could do," said Kyle, who served in four combat deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. "We're used to working out of austere environments without much direction and doing our best."

## **\$14M jury award for protesters could resonate around US**

By COLLEEN SLEVIN Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — A federal jury's \$14 million award to Denver protesters hit with pepper balls and a bag filled with lead during 2020 demonstrations over the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis could resonate nationwide as courts weigh more than two dozen similar lawsuits.

The jury found police used excessive force against protesters, violating their constitutional rights, and ordered the city of Denver to pay 12 who sued.

Nationwide, there are at least 29 pending lawsuits challenging law enforcement use of force during the 2020 protests, according to a search of the University of Michigan's Civil Rights Litigation Clearinghouse.

The verdict in Denver could give cities an incentive to settle similar cases rather than risk going to trial and losing, said Michael J. Steinberg, a professor at the University of Michigan Law School and director of the Civil Rights Litigation Initiative. It could also prompt more protesters to sue over their treatment at the hands of police.

"There's no doubt that the large jury verdict in Denver will influence the outcome of pending police misconduct cases brought by Black Lives Matter protesters across the country," said Steinberg, whose law

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 34 of 85

students have been working on a similar lawsuit brought by protesters in Detroit.

Lawyers for the claimants argued that police used indiscriminate force against the nonviolent protesters, including some who were filming the demonstrations, because officers did not like their message critical of law enforcement.

"To the protest of police violence they responded with brutality," one of their attorneys, Timothy MacDonald, told jurors.

People who took part in the protests have already made similar allegations in lawsuits filed across the country.

In Washington, DC, activists and civil liberties groups sued over the forcible removal of protesters before then-President Donald Trump walked to a church near the White House for a photo op. The claims against federal officials were dismissed last year but a judge allowed the case against local police to continue.

Several lawsuits alleging protesters were wrongfully arrested or that police used excessive force have been filed against New York City and its police department, including one brought by New York Attorney General Letitia James that claims police used excessive force and wrongfully arrested protesters. In Rochester, New York, people who protested the death of Daniel Prude, a Black man who lost consciousness after being pinned to the street by officers during a mental health call in 2020, claim police used extreme force against them in a lawsuit that also alleges city officials have allowed a culture of police brutality against racial minorities to fester.

One of their attorneys, Donald Thompson, said he plans to raise the Denver award in settlement talks with the city and note that unlike most of the Denver protesters, some of his clients suffered lasting injuries including the loss of an eye and scarring from being hit in the face with a tear gas canister. Thompson also thinks the Denver verdict shows that the public, in the age of cellphone and body camera videos, is not as willing to give police the benefit of the doubt anymore.

"Now people see how this policing really works. You can't be naïve," he said.

A spokesperson for Rochester did not return a call and an email seeking comment. When the case was filed, the city said it had already revised the way police responds to protests.

Over the last two months, the city of Austin, Texas has agreed to pay a total of \$13 million to four people who were hit in the head with bean bag rounds fired by police.

Even before the Denver ruling last week, the police department made some changes in response to criticism that arose from the protests, including eliminating the use of 40mm foam rounds for crowd control and changing the way officers are permitted to use pepper balls.

Denver's Department of Public Safety, which includes the police department, said in a statement that the city was not prepared for the level of sustained violence and destruction. During the trial, lawyers and witnesses said over 80 officers were injured as some in the crowds hurled rocks, water bottles and canned food at them.

The department said it continues to evaluate its policies to "better protect peaceful protestors while addressing those who are only there to engage in violence."

Still, the large award is not expected to lead to an overhaul of how officers respond to what experts say are inherently chaotic situations that are difficult to prepare for.

Ed Obayashi, a use-of-force consultant to law enforcement agencies and a deputy sheriff and legal adviser in Plumas County, California, said society may have to bear the cost of such settlements because innocent people can be injured during protests as outnumbered police try to react on the fly, including to people intent on violence.

"It really goes south in an instant because there are individuals out there who want to cause chaos," he said.

Obayashi said there is not much police training for protests, which have been relatively rare. He said it would be prohibitively expensive to have officers practice deploying equipment such as tear gas canisters. Because projectiles used in crowds and considered "less lethal" by police, such as rubber bullets and pepper balls, have less velocity and less power to hurt people, it is harder to ensure they hit their intended target, he said.

Lawyers representing people who have also alleged police misconduct and violation of their constitutional right to protest can now use the Denver damage award as part of their own settlement negotiations, said Mark Silverstein, legal director of the American Civil Liberties Union, which represented some of the winning Denver protesters.

The decision came nearly two years after thousands of people angry about Floyd's death took the streets nationwide, a relatively quick result for the legal system and soon enough for others who allege misconduct by police to file a claim. In Colorado and many other states, there is a two-year statute of limitations for such lawsuits Silverstein said, leaving only a few months for others to sue.

The city attorney's office said it has not decided whether to appeal the verdict, but appeals in such big cases are common, said Gloria Browne-Marshall, a professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Outside lawyers will also scrutinize the case to try to determine if there are unique circumstances that may have led to a "lightning in a bottle" verdict that is less likely to be repeated.

However, she thinks the verdict sends a significant message that regular people respect the right of protest and demand change from the government, which she believes police and prosecutors have been undermining.

"It should send a message to both, but whether or not they listen is a different issue," Browne-Marshall said.

## **African refugees see racial bias as US welcomes Ukrainians**

By PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

Wilfred Tebah doesn't begrudge the U.S. for swiftly granting humanitarian protections to Ukrainians escaping Russia's devastating invasion of their homeland.

But the 27-year-old, who fled Cameroon during its ongoing conflict, can't help but wonder what would happen if the millions fleeing that Eastern Europe nation were a different hue.

As the U.S. prepares to welcome tens of thousands of Ukrainians fleeing war, the country continues to deport scores of African and Caribbean refugees back to unstable and violent homelands where they've faced rape, torture, arbitrary arrest and other abuses.

"They do not care about a Black man," the Columbus, Ohio, resident said, referring to U.S. politicians. "The difference is really clear. They know what is happening over there, and they have decided to close their eyes and ears."

Tebah's concerns echo protests against the swift expulsions of Haitian refugees crossing the border this summer without a chance to seek asylum, not to mention the frosty reception African and Middle Eastern refugees have faced in western Europe compared with how those nations have enthusiastically embraced displaced Ukrainians.

In March, when President Joe Biden made a series of announcements welcoming 100,000 Ukrainian refugees, granting Temporary Protected Status to another 30,000 already in the U.S. and halting Ukrainian deportations, two Democratic lawmakers seized on the moment to call for similar humanitarian considerations for Haitians.

"There is every reason to extend the same level of compassion," U.S. Reps. Ayanna Pressley, of Massachusetts, and Mondaire Jones, of New York, wrote to the administration, noting more than 20,000 Haitians have been deported despite continued instability after the assassination of Haiti's president and a powerful earthquake this summer.

Cameroonian advocates have similarly ratcheted up their calls for humanitarian relief, protesting in front of the Washington residence of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and the offices of leading members of Congress this month.

Their calls come as hundreds of thousands in Cameroon have been displaced in recent years by the country's civil war between its French-speaking government and English-speaking separatists, attacks by the terrorist group Boko Haram and other regional conflicts.

The advocacy group Human Rights Watch, in a February report, found many Cameroonians deported

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 36 of 85

from the U.S. suffered persecution and human rights violations upon returning there.

Tebah, who is a leading member of the Cameroon American Council, an advocacy group organizing protests this month, said that's a fate he hopes to avoid.

Hailing from the country's English-speaking northwest, he said he was branded a separatist and apprehended by the government because of his activism as a college student. Tebah said he managed to escape, as many Cameroonians have, by flying to Latin America, trekking overland to the U.S.-Mexico border and petitioning for asylum in 2019.

"I will be held in prison, tortured and even killed if I am deported," he said. "I'm very scared. As a human, my life matters too."

The Department of Homeland Security, which oversees TPS and other humanitarian programs, declined to respond to the complaints of racism in American immigration policy. It also declined to say whether it was weighing granting TPS to Cameroonians or other African nationals, saying in a written statement only that it will "continue to monitor conditions in various countries."

The agency noted, however, that it has recently issued TPS designations for Haiti, Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan — all African or Caribbean nations — as well as to more than 75,000 Afghans living in the U.S. after the Taliban takeover of that Central Asian nation. Haitians are among the largest and longest-tenured beneficiaries of TPS, with more than 40,000 currently on the status.

Other TPS countries include Burma, Honduras, Nepal, Nicaragua, Syria, Venezuela and Yemen, and the majority of the nearly 320,000 immigrants with Temporary Protected Status hail from El Salvador.

Lisa Parisio, who helped launch Catholics Against Racism in Immigration, argues the program could easily help protect millions more refugees fleeing danger but has historically been underused and over-politicized.

TPS, which provides a work permit and staves off deportation for up to 18 months, doesn't have limits for how many countries or people can be placed on it, said Parisio, who is the advocacy director for the Catholic Legal Immigration Network.

Yet former President Donald Trump, in his broader efforts to restrict immigration, pared down TPS, allowing designations for Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea in West Africa to expire.

Although programs like TPS provide critical protections for vulnerable refugees, they can also leave many in legal limbo for years without providing a pathway to citizenship, said Karla Morales, a 24-year-old from El Salvador who has been on TPS nearly her whole life.

"It's absurd to consider 20 years in this country temporary," the University of Massachusetts Boston nursing student said. "We need validation that the work we've put in is appreciated and that our lives have value."

At least in the case of Ukraine, Biden appears motivated by broader foreign policy goals in Europe, rather than racial bias, suggests María Cristina García, a history professor at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, focused on refugees and immigrants.

But Tom Wong, founding director of the U.S. Immigration Policy Center at the University of California, San Diego, said the racial disparities couldn't be clearer.

"The U.S. has responded without hesitation by extending humanitarian protections to predominately white and European refugees," he said. "All the while, predominately people of color from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia continue to languish."

Besides Cameroon, immigrant advocates also argue that Congo and Ethiopia should qualify for humanitarian relief because of their ongoing conflicts, as should Mauritania, since slavery is still practiced there.

And they complain Ukrainian asylum seekers are being exempted from asylum limits meant to prevent the spread of COVID-19 while those from other nations are being turned away.

"Black pain and Black suffering do not get the same attention," says Sylvie Bello, founder of the D.C.-based Cameroon American Council. "The same anti-Blackness that permeates American life also permeates American immigration policy."

Vera Arnot, a Ukrainian in Boston who is considering seeking TPS, says she didn't know much about the special status until the war started and wasn't aware of the concerns from immigrants of color. But

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 37 of 85

the Berklee College of Music sophomore hopes the relief can be extended to other deserving nations.

Arnot says TPS could help her seek an off-campus job with better pay so she doesn't have to rely on her family's support, as most in Ukraine have lost their jobs due to the war.

"Ukrainians as a people aren't used to relying on others," she said. "We want to work. We don't want welfare."

For Tebah, who is staying with relatives in Ohio, TPS would make it easier for him to open a bank account, get a driver's license and seek better employment while he awaits a decision on his asylum case.

"We'll continue to beg, to plead," Tebah said. "We are in danger. I want to emphasize it. And only TPS for Cameroon will help us be taken out of that danger. It is very necessary."

## House passes \$35-a-month insulin cap as Dems seek wider bill

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House has passed a bill capping the monthly cost of insulin at \$35 for insured patients, part of an election-year push by Democrats for price curbs on prescription drugs at a time of rising inflation.

Experts say the legislation, which passed 232-193 Thursday, would provide significant relief for privately insured patients with skimpier plans and for Medicare enrollees facing rising out-of-pocket costs for their insulin. Some could save hundreds of dollars annually, and all insured patients would get the benefit of predictable monthly costs for insulin. The bill would not help the uninsured.

But the Affordable Insulin Now Act will serve as a political vehicle to rally Democrats and force Republicans who oppose it into uncomfortable votes ahead of the midterms. For the legislation to pass Congress, 10 Republican senators would have to vote in favor. Democrats acknowledge they don't have an answer for how that's going to happen.

"If 10 Republicans stand between the American people being able to get access to affordable insulin, that's a good question for 10 Republicans to answer," said Rep. Dan Kildee, D-Mich., a cosponsor of the House bill. "Republicans get diabetes, too. Republicans die from diabetes."

Public opinion polls have consistently shown support across party lines for congressional action to limit drug costs.

But Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., complained the legislation is only "a small piece of a larger package around government price controls for prescription drugs." Critics say the bill would raise premiums and fails to target pharmaceutical middlemen seen as contributing to high list prices for insulin.

Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, said Democrats could have a deal on prescription drugs if they drop their bid to authorize Medicare to negotiate prices. "Do Democrats really want to help seniors, or would they rather have the campaign issue?" Grassley said.

The insulin bill, which would take effect in 2023, represents just one provision of a much broader prescription drug package in President Joe Biden's social and climate legislation.

In addition to a similar \$35 cap on insulin, the Biden bill would authorize Medicare to negotiate prices for a range of drugs, including insulin. It would penalize drugmakers who raise prices faster than inflation and overhaul the Medicare prescription drug benefit to limit out-of-pocket costs for enrollees.

Biden's agenda passed the House only to stall in the Senate because Democrats could not reach consensus. Party leaders haven't abandoned hope of getting the legislation moving again, and preserving its drug pricing curbs largely intact.

The idea of a \$35 monthly cost cap for insulin actually has a bipartisan pedigree. The Trump administration had created a voluntary option for Medicare enrollees to get insulin for \$35, and the Biden administration continued it.

In the Senate, Republican Susan Collins of Maine and Democrat Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire are working on a bipartisan insulin bill. Georgia Democratic Sen. Raphael Warnock has introduced legislation similar to the House bill, with the support of Sen. Majority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York.

Stung by criticism that Biden's economic policies spur inflation, Democrats are redoubling efforts to

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 38 of 85

show how they'd help people cope with costs. On Thursday, the Commerce Department reported a key inflation gauge jumped 6.4% in February compared with a year ago, the largest year-over-year rise since January 1982.

But experts say the House bill would not help uninsured people, who face the highest out-of-pocket costs for insulin. Also, people with diabetes often take other medications as well as insulin. That's done to treat the diabetes itself, along with other serious health conditions often associated with the disease. The House legislation would not help with those costs, either. Collins says she's looking for a way to help uninsured people through her bill.

About 37 million Americans have diabetes, and an estimated 6 million to 7 million use insulin to keep their blood sugars under control. It's an old drug, refined and improved over the years, that has seen relentless price increases.

Steep list prices don't reflect the rates insurance plans negotiate with manufacturers. But those list prices are used to calculate cost-sharing amounts that patients owe. Patients who can't afford their insulin reduce or skip doses, a strategy born of desperation, which can lead to serious complications and even death.

Economist Sherry Glied of New York University said the market for insulin is a "total disaster" for many patients, particularly those with skimpy insurance plans or no insurance.

"This will make private insurance for people with diabetes a much more attractive proposition," said Glied.

## **Bargainers: Bipartisan deal near on trimmed \$10B COVID bill**

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Lawmakers have moved to the brink of shaking hands on a scaled-back bipartisan compromise providing a fresh \$10 billion to combat COVID-19, a deal that could set up final congressional approval next week.

The price tag was down from an earlier \$15.6 billion agreement between the two parties that collapsed weeks ago after House Democrats rejected cutting unused pandemic aid to states to help pay for it. President Joe Biden requested \$22.5 billion in early March. With leaders hoping to move the package through Congress quickly, the lowered cost seemed to reflect both parties' calculations that agreeing soon to additional savings would be too hard.

The effort, which would finance steps like vaccines, treatments and tests, comes as Biden and other Democrats have warned the government is running out of money to counter the pandemic. At the same time, the more transmissible omicron variant BA.2 has been spreading quickly in the U.S. and abroad.

"We've reached an agreement in principle on all the spending and all of the offsets," Sen. Mitt Romney of Utah, the lead Republican bargainer, told reporters Thursday, using Washington-speak for savings. "It's entirely balanced by offsets."

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., and others were more circumspect.

"We are getting close to a final agreement that would garner bipartisan support," Schumer said on the Senate floor. He said lawmakers were still finalizing the bill's components and language, and awaiting a cost estimate from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office.

Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., chair of the Senate health committee and another bargainer, said, "I'm hoping," when asked about Romney's assessment.

Once clinched, an agreement would represent a semblance of bipartisan cooperation in battling the pandemic that dissolved a year ago, when a far larger, \$1.9 trillion measure proposed by the new president cleared Congress with only Democratic votes. That bill was laden with spending to help struggling families, businesses and communities, while this one would be aimed exclusively at public health.

Many Republicans have been willing to go along with the new expenditures but have insisted on paying for them with unspent funds from previous bills Congress has enacted to address the pandemic.

Half the new measure's \$10 billion would be used for treatments, said Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Mo., who has helped negotiate the agreement. He said top federal health officials would be given wide discretion on spending the rest of it but it would include research and other steps for battling the disease, which has

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 39 of 85

killed around 975,000 Americans and millions across the world.

Romney and others said savings the two parties had agreed to for the new bill would not include the cuts in state assistance that House Democrats opposed. He said some unused funds would be culled from another pandemic program that gives state and local governments funds for grants to local businesses.

Blunt said both sides had also agreed to savings that include pulling back an unspent \$2.2 billion for aiding entertainment venues closed during the pandemic and more than \$2 billion still available for assisting aviation manufacturing.

Romney said the \$10 billion might include \$1 billion for vaccines, treatments and other support for countries overseas. Blunt said that figure seemed unresolved. One third of the earlier, \$15.6 billion measure had been slated to go abroad.

The lowered figure for assisting other countries encountered opposition in the House, where some Democrats wanted to boost the figure. Epidemiologists have cited the need to vaccinate more people around the world and reduce the virus' opportunities for spinning off new variants.

"It's a problem," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., told reporters. "It's a shame."

Kate Bedingfield, White House communications director, said officials were "very hopeful" an agreement would be reached and prodded lawmakers to include funds to help other countries cope with the disease.

"We're not going to be able to put this pandemic behind us until we stop the spread and proliferation of new variants globally," Bedingfield said.

Leaders hope Congress can approve the legislation before lawmakers leave for a spring recess after next week.

Republicans have leverage in the Democratic-controlled, 50-50 Senate because 60 votes are needed to pass most major bills. Romney and Blunt both said they believed a finalized package they described would attract significantly more than the 10 GOP votes needed.

Since the pandemic began, Congress has approved more than \$5 trillion to address the economic and health crises it produced. Only a small fraction of that has been for public health programs like vaccines.

In an interview earlier Thursday with Punchbowl News, Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said the measure's price tag seemed to have fallen to \$10 billion because Democrats weren't agreeing to additional savings.

Minutes later, Schumer took to the Senate floor and mentioned no figures but suggested its size could fall.

"I'm pleading with my Republican colleagues, join us," Schumer said. "We want more than you do, but we have to get something done. We have to get something done."

Asked if he thought an agreement could be reached before lawmakers' recess, McConnell said, "We'll see. Hope so."

## Another solid month of US hiring expected despite obstacles

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

Defying a pandemic and supply chain disruptions, the U.S. economy has cranked out more than 400,000 jobs every month for nearly a year — a blazing winning streak in wildly uncertain times.

And despite surging inflation, the hiring wave likely continued last month in the face of yet another jolt: Russia's war in Ukraine, which has unsettled the economic outlook and catapulted gasoline prices to painful levels.

Economists surveyed by the data firm FactSet expect the Labor Department's jobs report for March to show that employers added 478,000 jobs and that the unemployment rate dipped from 3.8% to 3.7%. That would mark the lowest unemployment rate since just before the pandemic struck two years ago, when joblessness reached a 50-year low of 3.5%.

The government will issue the March jobs report at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time Friday.

"With the war in Ukraine, economic uncertainty rising and surging energy prices, we may see a modest slowdown in hiring in March," said Daniel Zhao, senior economist at the jobs website Glassdoor. "However, employer demand remains strong, which should sustain a healthy level of hiring."

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 40 of 85

The booming U.S. job market reflects a robust rebound from the brief but devastating coronavirus recession, which wiped out 22 million jobs in March and April 2020 as businesses shut down or cut hours and Americans stayed home to avoid infection.

But the recovery has been swift. Fueled by generous federal aid, savings amassed during the pandemic and ultra-low borrowing rates engineered by the Federal Reserve, U.S. consumers have spent so fast that many factories, warehouses, shipping companies and ports have failed to keep pace with their customer demand. Supply chains have snarled, forcing up prices.

As the pandemic has eased, consumers have been broadening their spending beyond goods to services, such as health care, travel and entertainment, which they had long avoided during the worst of the pandemic. The result: Inflation is running at 40-year highs, causing hardships for many lower-income households that face sharp increases for such necessities as food, gasoline and rent.

It's unclear whether the economy can maintain its momentum of the past year. The government relief checks are gone. The Fed raised its benchmark short-term interest rate two weeks ago and will likely keep raising it well into next year. Those rate hikes will result in more expensive loans for many consumers and businesses.

Inflation has also eroded consumers' spending power: Hourly pay, adjusted for higher consumer prices, fell 2.6% in February from a year earlier — the 11th straight month in which inflation has outpaced year-over-year wage growth. According to AAA, average gasoline prices, at \$4.23 a gallon, are up a dizzying 47% from a year ago.

Squeezed by inflation, some consumers are paring their spending. The Commerce Department reported Thursday that consumer spending rose just 0.2% in February — and fell 0.4% when adjusted for inflation — down from a 2.7% increase in January.

Still, the job market has kept hurtling ahead. Employers posted a near-record 11.3 million positions in February. Nearly 4.4 million Americans quit their jobs, a sign of confidence that they could find something better.

"We're still seeing a very tight labor market," said Karen Fichuk, CEO of the staffing company Randstad North America, who noted that the United States now has a record 1.7 job openings for every unemployed person.

Even so, so many jobs were lost in 2020 that the economy still remains more than 2 million shy of the number it had just before the pandemic struck. Over the past year, employers have added an average of 556,000 jobs a month. At that pace — no guarantee to continue — the nation would recover all the jobs lost to the pandemic by June. (That still wouldn't include all the additional hiring that would have been done over the past two years under normal circumstances.)

Brighter job prospects are beginning to draw back into the labor force people who had remained on the sidelines because of health concerns, difficulty finding or affording daycare, generous unemployment benefits that have now expired or other reasons.

Over the past year, 3.6 million people have joined the U.S. labor force, meaning they now either have a job or are looking for one. But their ranks are still nearly 600,000 short of where they stood in February 2020, just before the pandemic slammed into the economy.

## Labor groups close in on Amazon in two tight union elections

By HALELUYA HADERO and ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — Labor organizers always knew it would be tough to convince Amazon workers to unionize. But a surprisingly strong early showing in a New York election and a still-uncertain outcome in an Alabama election are giving them hope.

In Staten Island, New York, 1,518 warehouse workers have so far voted "yes" to forming a union while 1,154 have voted "no," according to an early tally Thursday evening by the National Labor Relations Board, which is overseeing both elections. Ballots will continue to be counted Friday morning.

Meanwhile, Amazon workers in Bessemer, Alabama, appear to have rejected a union bid but outstanding challenged ballots could change the outcome. The votes were 993-to-875 against the union. A hearing to



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 41 of 85

review 416 challenged ballots is expected to begin in the next few days.

If a majority of Amazon workers ultimately votes yes in either Staten Island or Bessemer, it would mark the first successful U.S. organizing effort in the company's history. Organizers have faced an uphill battle against the nation's second-largest private employer, which is making every effort to keep unions out.

John Logan, director of labor and employment studies at San Francisco State University, said the early vote counts in New York have been "shocking." The nascent Amazon Labor Union, which is leading the charge on Staten Island, has no backing from an established union and is powered by former and current warehouse workers.

"I don't think that many people thought that the Amazon Labor Union had much of a chance of winning at all," Logan said. "And I think we're likely to see more of those (approaches) going forward."

After a crushing defeat last year in Bessemer, when a majority of workers voted against forming a union, the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union got a second chance to organize another campaign when the NLRB ordered a do-over after determining that Amazon tainted the first election.

Though RWDSU is currently lagging in the latest election, Logan said the early results were still remarkable because the union has made a good effort narrowing its margin from last year.

Stuart Appelbaum, president of the RWDSU, said on Thursday that the union would be filing objections to how Amazon handled the election in Bessemer but declined to specify. He also took the opportunity to lash out at current labor laws, which he believes are rigged against unions and favor corporations.

"It should not be so difficult to organize a union in the United States," he said.

Chris Smalls, a fired Amazon employee who has been leading the ALU in its fight on Staten Island, remains hopeful of victory.

"To be leading in Day One and be up a couple hundred against a trillion dollar company, this is the best feeling in the world," Smalls said after the conclusion of Thursday's counting.

While Smalls' attention has been focused on securing victory in New York, the efforts in Alabama also weighed heavily.

"I'm not too sure what's going in Alabama right now, but I know that the sky's the limit if you can organize any warehouse," he said, noting that the vote in Alabama could well end up differently. "I hope that they're successful. I don't know what's going on yet, but we know we show our support and solidarity with them."

Amazon has pushed back hard in the lead-up to both elections. The retail giant held mandatory meetings, where workers were told unions are a bad idea. The company also launched an anti-union website targeting workers and placed English and Spanish posters across the Staten Island facility urging them to reject the union. In Bessemer, Amazon has made some changes to but still kept a controversial U.S. Postal Service mailbox that was key in the NLRB's decision to invalidate last year's vote.

In a filing released on Thursday, Amazon disclosed it spent about \$4.2 million last year on labor consultants, which organizers say the retailer routinely solicits to persuade workers not to unionize. It's unclear how much it spent on such services in 2022.

Both labor fights faced unique challenges. Alabama, for instance, is a right-to-work state that prohibits a company and a union from signing a contract that requires workers to pay dues to the union that represents them.

The mostly Black workforce at the Amazon facility, which opened in 2020, mirrors the Bessemer population of more than 70% Black residents, according to the latest U.S. Census data.

Pro-union workers say they want better working conditions, longer breaks and higher wages. Regular full-time employees at the Bessemer facility earn at least \$15.80 an hour, higher than the estimated \$14.55 per hour on average in the city. That figure is based on an analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's annual median household income for Bessemer of \$30,284, which could include more than one worker.

The ALU said they don't have a demographic breakdown of the warehouse workers on Staten Island and Amazon declined to provide the information to The Associated Press, citing the union vote. Internal records leaked to The New York Times from 2019 showed more than 60% of the hourly associates at the facility were Black or Latino, while most of managers were white or Asian.

Amazon workers there are seeking longer breaks, paid time off for injured employees and an hourly

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 42 of 85

wage of \$30, up from a minimum of just over \$18 per hour offered by the company. The estimated average wage for the borough is \$41 per hour, according to a similar U.S. Census Bureau analysis of Staten Island's \$85,381 median household income.

A spokesperson for Amazon said the company invests in wages and benefits, such as health care, 401(k) plans and a prepaid college tuition program to help grow workers' careers.

"As a company, we don't think unions are the best answer for our employees," the spokesperson said in an emailed statement. "Our focus remains on working directly with our team to continue making Amazon a great place to work."

## Closing arguments next in Michigan Gov. Whitmer kidnap plot

By ED WHITE Associated Press

Jurors will hear closing arguments Friday in the trial of four men accused of a brazen conspiracy to kidnap Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, a case built with informants, undercover agents, secret recordings and two people who pleaded guilty and cooperated.

Only one defendant, Daniel Harris, chose to testify in his own defense. But his denial of any crime Thursday was met by an aggressive cross-examination in which prosecutors used his own words to show his contempt for Whitmer and even suggestions about how to kill her.

Adam Fox, Barry Croft Jr. and Brandon Caserta declined to testify, and defense attorneys called only a few witnesses. The four deny any scheme to get Whitmer at her vacation home in fall 2020, though they were livid with government as well as restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The men were arrested in October 2020 amid talk of raising \$4,000 for an explosive that could blow up a bridge and stymie police after a kidnapping, according to trial evidence. Fox twice traveled to northern Michigan to scout the area.

Defense attorneys, however, insist they were under the spell of informants and agents who got them to say and do violent, provocative things.

Harris repeatedly answered "absolutely not" when asked by his lawyer if he was part of a plot. His testimony was perilous because he exposed himself to numerous challenges by prosecutors who had been offering evidence against the group for days.

Harris and Assistant U.S. Attorney Jonathan Roth sometimes talked over each other. At one point, Harris snapped, "Next question."

"Everyone can take it down a notch," U.S. District Judge Robert Jonker said later.

Roth confronted Harris with his own chat messages about posing as a pizza deliveryman and killing Whitmer at her door. He reminded Harris, a former Marine, that he worked with explosives while training with the group, especially in Luther, Michigan, in September 2020, about a month before their arrest.

Roth played a conversation of Croft talking about militias overthrowing governments in various states and "breaking a few eggs" if necessary.

"When this man talks to you at a diner about killing people, you don't stand up and walk out, do you sir?" Roth asked. "You don't say, 'This group is not for me,' do you sir?"

"No," Harris answered.

A "shoot house" that was intended to resemble Whitmer's second home was a key part of the Luther training weekend, according to the government. Harris admitted that he brought materials but said he didn't build it with her house in mind.

He didn't participate in an evening ride to Elk Rapids, Michigan, to scout Whitmer's home and a bridge during that same weekend. Harris said he had purchased \$200 of cheap beer and cigarettes so he could return to the camp and "get wasted" with others.

Two more men, Ty Garbin and Kaleb Franks, pleaded guilty and cooperated with investigators. Garbin last week said the group acted willingly and hoped to strike before the election, cause national chaos and prevent Joe Biden from winning the presidency.

Whitmer, a Democrat, rarely talks publicly about the kidnapping plot, though she referred to "surprises"

during her term that seemed like “something out of fiction” when she filed for reelection on March 17.

She has blamed former President Donald Trump for fomenting anger over coronavirus restrictions and refusing to condemn right-wing extremists like those charged in the case. Whitmer has said Trump was complicit in the Jan. 6 Capitol riot.

## Caseworkers: Texas order on trans kids handled differently

By PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — When Texas Gov. Greg Abbott put in motion abuse investigations into the parents of some transgender kids, child welfare supervisor Randa Mulanax said what happened next strayed from normal protocols.

There was unusual secrecy, with texts and emails discouraged. Allegations about trans kids received elevated status. In Texas, fewer than three in 10 child welfare investigations end with findings that harm likely occurred — classified as “reason to believe” — but the changes looked to Mulanax like these cases would be predetermined from the start.

“It was my understanding that they wanted to be found ‘reason to believe,’” Mulanax told The Associated Press in her first interview since leaving the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, where she worked for six years until quitting last month. “That’s why we were having to figure out a way to staff it up and see how we go about it, since it doesn’t match our policy right now.”

As early as Friday, the Texas Supreme Court could decide whether the state can resume at least nine investigations into the parents of transgender children. They are the first to fall on the radar of child welfare authorities since Texas’ Republican governor in February directed the state to begin handling reports of gender-confirming care for kids as child abuse — the first such order issued in the U.S.

The court fight in Texas comes as Republicans across the country are leaning into policies aimed at transgender Americans, most prominently through bans on transgender athletes on girls sports teams. But Texas is the only state where a GOP governor has greenlighted abuse cases against the parents of transgender children, which several current and departing Texas child welfare workers say was rushed into action and has sunk already low morale at their troubled state agency even deeper.

It is unclear how many Texas child welfare investigators — who are tasked with carrying out Abbott’s directive — have quit in protest. Mulanax is one of at least two state Child Protective Services workers who are leaving and added their names this week to a court brief that urged Texas’ justices to keep the investigations sidelined. Five other investigators who remain at the agency also signed on.

Abbott’s instructions to Texas child welfare officials takes aim at treatments for children that include puberty blockers and hormone therapy.

Patrick Crimmins, spokesman for the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, declined comment Thursday, citing the ongoing lawsuit.

“We’re being so closely monitored on those type of cases that you wouldn’t be able to just say, ‘Oh, nothing to see,’” said Shelby McCowen, a child welfare investigator who called the directive the ‘last straw’ and is quitting after less than a year at the agency.

Texas completed more than 157,000 child welfare investigations in the last fiscal year, according to state data. McCowen said the cases involving parents of transgender families were drawing the same attention as child death investigations, and like Mulanax, said instructions were given not to discuss the cases through state emails or phones — only on personal devices, or face-to-face.

The cases were to be referred to as “special assignments” rather than using a case name or number, according to McCowen. She said upper managers told investigators a survey would be sent out internally to address questions about the directive, but none ever arrived.

“I don’t know how many times they go into the cases, but we’re told that if we get one of these cases, the documentation has to be almost instant because it’s being monitored,” she said.

Abbott’s directive goes against the nation’s largest medical groups, including the American Medical Association, which have opposed Republican-backed restrictions filed in statehouses nationwide. On Thurs-

day, President Joe Biden marked Transgender Day of Visibility by denouncing such legislation, saying “the onslaught of anti-transgender state laws attacking you and your families is simply wrong.”

In pressing that the investigations in Texas be allowed to continue, Republican Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton’s office wrote that “if DFPS cannot investigate possible child abuse, children may be harmed — perhaps irreversibly — in the interim.”

Mulanax said if the investigations were to resume, she considers it unlikely that any children would be removed from their homes around Texas’ biggest cities, which are controlled by Democrats and where some county officials have already said they would reject such cases.

But in the event of a finding of harm, Mulanax said, putting in place what are usually other safety plans don’t make sense to her either. She said those options typically include required parental supervision or services such as therapy, which Mulanax said some of the families might already be doing.

“It was just a complete betrayal of the department,” she said.

## Live updates | Australia sending armored vehicles to Ukraine

By The Associated Press undefined

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said Friday that his country will be sending armored Bushmaster vehicles to Ukraine to help in its war against Russia.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy specifically asked for them during a video appeal to Australian lawmakers for more aid.

Zelenskyy addressed the Australian Parliament on Thursday and asked for the Australian-manufactured four-wheel-drive vehicles.

Morrison told reporters the vehicles will be flown over on Boeing C-17 Globemaster transport planes, but he didn’t specify how many Bushmaster vehicles would be sent or when.

“We’re not just sending our prayers, we are sending our guns, we’re sending our munitions, we’re sending our humanitarian aid, we’re sending all of this, our body armor, all of these things and we’re going to be sending our armored vehicles, our Bushmasters as well,” Morrison said.

### KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR:

- Heavy fighting rages near Kyiv as Russia appears to regroup
- Kremlin decree says foreign currency can still buy natural gas
- As Russia sees tech brain drain, other nations hope to gain
- Ukraine refugees encouraged to find work as exodus slows
- Ukrainians in US mobilize to help expected refugees
- Go to <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine> for more coverage

### OTHER DEVELOPMENTS:

LVIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he has stripped two generals of their military rank.

Zelenskyy said “something prevented them from determining where their homeland was” and they “violated their military oath of allegiance to the Ukrainian people.”

According to Zelenskyy, one of the generals had headed internal security at the SBU, the main intelligence agency.

He said the other general had been the SBU head in the Kherson region, the first major city to fall to the Russians.

Zelenskyy didn’t say anything about the fates of the two generals other than them being stripped of their rank.

LVIV, Ukraine — The Ukrainian government said Russian forces blocked 45 buses that had been sent to evacuate civilians from the besieged port city of Mariupol, and only 631 people were able to get out of

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 45 of 85

the city in private cars.

Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said late Thursday that 12 Ukrainian buses with humanitarian aid left Melitopol for Mariupol, but the Russian forces stopped the buses and seized the 14 tons of food and medicines.

According to Ukrainian officials, tens of thousands of people have made it out of Mariupol in recent weeks along humanitarian corridors, reducing the prewar population of 430,000 to about 100,000 by last week.

Vereshchuk said about 45,000 Mariupol residents have been forcefully deported to Russia and areas of eastern Ukraine controlled by Russian-backed separatists.

**LVI**, Ukraine — The last Russian troops left the Chernobyl nuclear plant early Friday, according to the Ukrainian government agency responsible for the exclusion zone around the plant.

Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said Russian troops who dug trenches in the forest were exposed to radiation, but that could not be confirmed.

The Ukrainian nuclear operator company Energoatom said Thursday that Russian troops were headed toward Ukraine's border with Belarus.

Energoatom said that the Russian military was also preparing to leave Slavutych, a nearby city where power plant workers live.

**LVI**, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said after Russian troops withdrew from the north and center of the country, the situation has been heating up in the southeast where Russian forces are building up for new powerful attacks.

In his nighttime video address to the nation Thursday, Zelenskyy said it was heartening for all Ukrainians to see Russian troops retreating from north of Kyiv, from around the northern town of Chernihiv and from Sumy in the northeast. By he urged Ukrainians not to let up, saying the withdrawal was just a Russian tactic.

Zelenskyy said he spoke Thursday with European Council President Charles Michel and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, while his adviser spoke with U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan.

"We need more support from our partners right now when Russian troops are concentrating additional forces in certain areas," Zelenskyy said.

**WASHINGTON** — The top-ranking Ukrainian Catholic cleric in the United States warned Thursday that religious minorities in the Eastern European country stand to be "crushed" if Moscow gains control, as fighting raged on more than a month after the Russian invasion began.

Archbishop Borys Gudziak said groups at risk include Catholics, Muslims and Orthodox who have broken away from the patriarch of Moscow.

Gudziak also cited reports that Russian forces have damaged two Holocaust memorials and Moscow's false portrayal of Ukraine as a "Nazi" state although Ukraine overwhelmingly elected a Jewish president in Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

"What is at stake for the people of faith is their freedom to practice their faith," Gudziak said during an online panel discussion on the war, hosted by the Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life at Georgetown University.

Gudziak is head of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia and president of Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, Ukraine. He also oversees external relations for the Kyiv-based Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church.

**WASHINGTON** — The Pentagon says an initial half-dozen shipments of weapons and other security assistance have reached Ukraine as part of the \$800 million package of aid that President Joe Biden approved on March 16.

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said Thursday that the shipments included Javelin anti-tank weapons, Stinger anti-aircraft missile systems, body armor, medical supplies and other material. He said the 100

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 46 of 85

Switchblade armed drones that Biden approved as part of the package have not yet been delivered.

Kirby said the \$800 million in assistance is likely to be fully delivered within about two weeks. It also includes Mi-17 helicopters, small arms, ammunition, vehicles, secure communications systems, and satellite imagery and analysis capability.

Separately, Kirby said U.S. troops are not training Ukrainian troops in Poland but are acting as liaisons with Ukrainian personnel who cross the border into Poland to take possession of U.S. security assistance. He noted that the standard U.S. military training mission that had existed in Ukraine for years was suspended shortly before Russia invaded.

DOHA, Qatar — A video showing the head of Ukrainian soccer wearing an armored vest on the streets of Kyiv brought the impact of Russia's war into the FIFA Congress.

Andriy Pavelko used a recorded message to the gathering in Qatar on Thursday to talk about the deaths of footballers even as the sport "has taken a back seat in our country."

The gathering in Doha featured delegates from Russia, including Alexey Sorokin, the chief executive of Russia's 2018 World Cup organizing committee.

Russia won't be in the draw for the World Cup on Friday after being disqualified from playing internationally by FIFA over the war. Ukraine can still qualify but its playoff semifinal against Scotland has been postponed until June with the hope the team will be in a position to return to the field by then.

LVIV, Ukraine — Ukraine's ombudsperson says that at least one person has been killed and four others have been wounded in the Russian shelling of a humanitarian convoy.

Ukrainian Human Rights Commissioner Lyudmyla Denisova said those who came under the shelling on Thursday were volunteers accompanying a convoy of buses sent to the northern city of Chernihiv to evacuate residents.

She said that the Russian forces besieging Chernihiv have made it impossible to evacuate civilians from the city that has been cut from food, water and other supplies.

The Russian shelling continued two days after Moscow announced it would scale back military operations around Kyiv and Chernihiv.

BERLIN — The International Atomic Energy Agency says it has been informed by Ukraine that the Russian forces which were in control of the Chernobyl nuclear plant have "in writing, transferred control" of the facility to Ukrainian personnel.

Ukraine said three convoys of Russian forces have already left the site toward Belarus, while the remaining troops were presumed to be preparing to leave, the agency said Thursday.

The IAEA added that it was in close consultations with Ukrainian authorities on sending a first assistance and support mission to Chernobyl in the next few days.

The agency said it has not been able to confirm reports of Russian forces receiving high doses of radiation while being inside the exclusion zone of the now-closed plant, but is seeking further information in order to provide an independent assessment of the situation.

ANKARA, Turkey — Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan renewed his offer to host a meeting between the Ukrainian and Russian leaders during a telephone call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

A statement from Erdogan's office said the Turkish president also told Zelenskyy Thursday that a meeting between Ukrainian and Russian negotiators who met in Istanbul earlier this week had given "a meaningful impetus" to efforts to end the fighting.

Earlier this week, Ukraine's delegation laid out a framework under which the country would declare itself neutral and its security would be guaranteed by an array of nations, including Turkey.

Meanwhile, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said during a joint news conference with a top Turkish Cypriot official that Erdogan also is expected to speak with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 47 of 85

WASHINGTON — U.S. President Joe Biden on Thursday said there's "no clear evidence" that Vladimir Putin is scaling back military operations around Kyiv and suggested that the Russian president may have ordered some of his advisers fired or placed under house arrest.

Biden told reporters that "there's some indication" that Putin has taken those steps against some of his advisers. He added, "But I don't want to put too much stock in that at this time because we don't have that much hard evidence."

The White House on Wednesday released unclassified intelligence findings that Putin is being misinformed by his advisors about how badly the Russian military is performing.

The president made the comments after formally announcing that the U.S. would release 1 million barrels of oil per day from the nation's strategic petroleum reserve in hopes of easing surging gasoline prices.

Biden also reiterated that his administration remains skeptical that Russia will scale back operations around Kyiv as Moscow announced earlier this week.

Russian forces continued to shell Kyiv suburbs Thursday, two days after the Kremlin announced it would significantly scale back operations near both the capital and the northern city of Chernihiv.

UNITED NATIONS — The U.N. humanitarian coordinator in Ukraine says the United Nations and its partners have delivered supplies for thousands of people in the country's northeast but have been unable to reach some encircled cities in the south.

Osnat Lubrani said Thursday that food rations from the humanitarian organization People in Need and the U.N. World Food Program will benefit nearly 6,000 people in Sumy and areas including Trostianets and Okhtyrka.

In addition, she said, basic household items including blankets and kettles from the U.N. refugee agency will support 1,500 people and sanitation kits will help 6,000 people with hygiene and drinking water.

Lubrani said medical supplies and trauma kits from the U.N. World Health Organization will treat 150 patients needing intensive care for serious injuries while other medical supplies will support 10,000 people for three months.

Shei said the U.N.-facilitated humanitarian notification system with Ukraine and Russia enabled safe passage for the convoy to Sumy on Thursday "but this is clearly not enough." Efforts over the past month to reach Mariupol, Kherson and other encircled cities in the south have been unsuccessful because of safety concerns.

BERLIN — The U.N. nuclear watchdog says its director-general has arrived in Russia's Baltic Sea exclave of Kaliningrad for talks with senior Russian officials.

The International Atomic Energy Agency didn't specify in a tweet whom exactly Rafael Mariano Grossi will meet on Friday or give further details of his agenda.

He arrived in Kaliningrad Thursday following a visit to Ukraine, where he visited a nuclear power plant and conferred with the energy minister and other officials on efforts to ensure the safety of Ukraine's nuclear power plants.

Ukraine has 15 active nuclear reactors at four plants -- one of which, at Zaporizhzhia, is under the Russian military's control.

GENEVA — A team with the International Committee of the Red Cross has arrived in a Ukraine-held city where staff are preparing to take civilians out of the beleaguered port city of Mariupol.

Julien Lerisson, deputy director of operations for the ICRC, said Thursday that the team assembling in the southeastern city of Zaporizhzhia, has medicines, food, water, hygiene items and other essentials.

He said the organization has high-level agreement for the mission but is focused on making sure "the order trickles down the chain of command," allowing the team to enter and leave Mariupol safely.

The Russian military has said it committed to a cease-fire along the route from Mariupol to Zaporizhzhia.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 48 of 85

Ukrainian authorities have said 45 buses would be sent to collect citizens and provide resources to those who remain.

Lucile Marbeau, a staff member with the ICRC team hoping to enter Mariupol, said on Thursday: "We're here because really, we hope to be able to facilitate safe passage for civilians desperately wanting to flee Mariupol."

LONDON — Britain's defense minister says Ukraine's international allies have agreed to send more military equipment, including artillery ammunition and armored vehicles.

U.K. Defence Secretary Ben Wallace held a conference call Thursday with defense ministers from more than 35 countries, including the United States, New Zealand, South Korea and Japan.

Wallace said that as a result "there will be more lethal aid going into Ukraine." He said that would include "more long-range artillery, ammunition predominantly," to help counter Russia's bombardment of Ukraine's cities.

Wallace said Ukraine was "also looking for armoured vehicles of some types, not tanks necessarily, but certainly protective vehicles."

He said allies were also "looking to see what more we can do" to help Ukraine defend its coastline.

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration has sanctioned an employee of a state-affiliated Russian defense firm that developed malicious software that was used to target the energy sector.

The Treasury Department on Thursday sanctioned Evgeny Viktorovich Gladikh. He was one of four Russians charged in Justice Department indictments unsealed last week that alleged the hacking by Russia of critical infrastructure around the globe, including in the U.S. energy and aviation sectors.

Among the thousands of computers targeted in some 135 countries were of a Saudi petro-chemical plant where the hackers overrode safety controls.

That hack is singled out in a Treasury Department release announcing sanctions against Gladikh and several other employees of the research firm. In total, the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control announced that it was designating 21 entities and 13 individuals, including in the aerospace, marine and electronics sectors.

LVIV, Ukraine — Russian troops were leaving the Chernobyl nuclear power plant and heading towards Ukraine's border with Belarus, the Ukrainian nuclear operator company said Thursday.

The operator, Energoatom, said that the Russian military was also preparing to leave Slavutych, a nearby city where power plant workers live.

Energoatom also said reports were confirmed that the Russians dug trenches in the Red Forest, the 10-square-kilometer (nearly four-square-mile) area surrounding the Chernobyl plant within the Exclusion Zone, and received "significant doses of radiation."

The Russian troops "panicked at the first sign of illness," which "showed up very quickly," and began to prepare to leave, the operator said. The claim couldn't be independently verified.

Energoatom said the Russians have signed a document confirming the handover of the Chernobyl plant and stating that the plant's administration doesn't have any complaints about the Russian troops who were "guarding" the facility.

LONDON — The head of Britain's military says Russian President Vladimir Putin has "already lost" in Ukraine and is weaker than he was before the invasion.

Adm. Tony Radakin at a think-tank seminar Thursday in London said Moscow's aim to "take the whole of Ukraine" fell apart. He added that the coming weeks "will continue to be very difficult" for Ukraine.

"But in many ways, Putin has already lost," he said. "Far from being the far-sighted manipulator of events that he would have us believe, Putin has damaged himself through a series of catastrophic misjudgements."

Radakin also said there was "disquiet" at all levels of Russia's military about the campaign, from troops



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 49 of 85

who were not told they were invading Ukraine up to senior commanders.

Western officials say Putin's small inner circle is not giving him the true picture of the war, and his isolation may have contributed to miscalculating the strength of resistance Russian troops would meet.

**BERLIN** — The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe expressed regret Thursday at Russia's decision to veto the extension of its observer mission in Ukraine.

The OSCE's special monitoring mission has been present in Ukraine since 2014, when fighting between Ukrainians and Russia-backed separatists broke out in the country's eastern regions after Russia's annexation of Crimea.

Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau, who holds the OSCE rotating chair, said the observers had played a "crucial role by providing objective information on the security and humanitarian situation on the ground and relentlessly working to ease the effects of the conflict on the civilian population" in Ukraine for the past eight year.

The Vienna-based body's secretary general, Helga Maria Schmid, expressed gratitude to the mission's members, several of whom were wounded or killed over the years.

**BERLIN** — Germany's economy minister says Europe should impose additional sanctions on Russia to prevent what he described as a "barbaric" war in Ukraine.

Robert Habeck said he discussed what further measures could be taken with his French counterpart during a bilateral meeting in Berlin on Thursday.

"The last package (of sanctions) doesn't need to be the final one, it should not be the final one," he told reporters, adding that he and French Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire had "identified additional points that could be included in a (sanctions) package."

Habeck declined to elaborate on what those points might be.

Speaking ahead of Russian President Vladimir Putin's announcement on new rules requiring countries to pay for Russia's natural gas sales in rubles, Habeck insisted that contracts would be adhered to. These stipulate payment in euros or dollars.

**BERLIN** — The Austrian and German leaders have underlined their rejection of a halt to Russian energy deliveries at this point.

Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer noted that several central and eastern European countries depend to one extent or another on Russian gas deliveries.

He and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz argued that existing sanctions already are having a significant effect and said they need time to switch to new providers and renewable energy sources.

Nehammer said that "sanctions only make sense ... when they hit those they are supposed to hit, and don't weaken those who carry out sanctions."

**ROME** — A Kremlin decree says "unfriendly countries" can continue to pay for natural gas in foreign currency through a Russian bank that will convert the money into rubles.

The decree published Thursday by state media came a day after the leaders of Italy and Germany said they received assurances from President Vladimir Putin.

Putin talked tougher, saying Russia will start accepting ruble payments starting Friday for Western countries that imposed sanctions over its conflict with Ukraine. He said contracts will be stopped if buyers don't sign up to the new conditions, including opening ruble accounts in Russian banks.

European leaders had rejected paying for deliveries in rubles, saying it would undermine sanctions imposed because of the war in Ukraine.

The decree Putin signed and published by state news agency RIA Novosti says a designated bank will open two accounts for each buyer, one in foreign currency and one in rubles. The buyers will pay in foreign currency and authorize the bank to sell that currency for rubles, which are placed in the second account,

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 50 of 85

where the gas is formally purchased.

ROME — Italy's leader is urging Europe to "cultivate all available land" as a partial remedy to reductions in agricultural imports, especially of Russian grain, due to the war in Ukraine.

Premier Mario Draghi told reporters on Thursday that under existing agricultural practices in the European Union 10% of land is purposely left fallow, but that must now change as European countries search for ways to reduce dependency on farm imports.

It's not clear whether Ukraine, one of the world's largest exporters of wheat, maize and sunflower oil, might be able to salvage any of this planting season.

Meanwhile, Draghi noted that Western Europe will be looking to food producers like Canada, the United States and Argentina to help make up the shortfall of imports from Ukraine and Russia.

STOCKHOLM — The deputy director of Sweden's Military Intelligence and Security agency says Russia has made "a strategic miscalculation when invading Ukraine."

Daniel Olsson said the invasion of Ukraine "has shown that the Russian leadership is ready to take great risks, larger than previously taken."

The government agency's analysis suggested a likely "a western containment of Russia," including reducing trade in Russian energy.

## Russians leave Chernobyl site as fighting rages elsewhere

By NEBI QENA and YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian troops handed control of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant back to the Ukrainians and left the heavily contaminated site early Friday, more than a month after taking it over, Ukrainian authorities said, as fighting raged on the outskirts of Kyiv and other fronts.

Ukraine's state power company, Energoatom, said the pullout at Chernobyl came after soldiers received "significant doses" of radiation from digging trenches in the forest in the exclusion zone around the closed plant. But there was no independent confirmation of that.

The withdrawal took place amid growing indications the Kremlin is using talk of de-escalation in Ukraine as cover while regrouping, resupplying its forces and redeploying them for a stepped-up offensive in the eastern part of the country.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Russian withdrawals from the north and center of the country were just a military tactic and that the forces are building up for new powerful attacks in the southeast.

"We know their intentions," Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address to the nation. "We know that they are moving away from those areas where we hit them in order to focus on other, very important ones where it may be difficult for us."

"There will be battles ahead," he added.

Meanwhile, a convoy of 45 buses headed to Mariupol in another bid to evacuate people from the besieged port city after the Russian military agreed to a limited cease-fire in the area. But Russian forces blocked the buses, and only 631 people were able to get out of the city in private cars, according to the Ukrainian government.

Twelve Ukrainian buses were able to deliver 14 tons of food and medical supplies to Mariupol, but the aid was seized by Russian troops, Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said late Thursday.

The city has been the scene of some of the worst suffering of the war. Tens of thousands have managed to get out of Mariupol in the past few weeks by way of humanitarian corridors, reducing its population from a prewar 430,000 to an estimated 100,000 as of last week, but other relief efforts have been thwarted by continued Russian attacks.

A new round of talks was scheduled for Friday, five weeks into the war that has left thousands dead and driven 4 million Ukrainians from the country.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 51 of 85

The International Atomic Energy Agency said it had been informed by Ukraine that the Russian forces at the site of the world's worst nuclear disaster had transferred control of it in writing to the Ukrainians.

The last Russian troops left the Chernobyl plant early Friday, the Ukrainian government agency responsible for the exclusion zone said.

Energoatom gave no details on the condition of the soldiers it said were exposed to radiation and did not say how many were affected. There was no immediate comment from the Kremlin, and the IAEA said it had not been able to confirm the reports of Russian troops receiving high doses. It said it was seeking more information.

Russian forces seized the Chernobyl site in the opening stages of the Feb. 24 invasion, raising fears that they would cause damage or disruption that could spread radiation. The workforce at the site oversees the safe storage of spent fuel rods and the concrete-entombed ruins of the reactor that exploded in 1986.

Edwin Lyman, a nuclear expert with the U.S.-based Union of Concerned Scientists, said it "seems unlikely" a large number of troops would develop severe radiation illness, but it was impossible to know for sure without more details.

He said contaminated material was probably buried or covered with new topsoil during the cleanup of Chernobyl, and some soldiers may have been exposed to a "hot spot" of radiation while digging. Others may have assumed they were at risk too, he said.

Early this week, the Russians said they would significantly scale back military operations in areas around Kyiv and the northern city of Chernihiv to increase trust between the two sides and help negotiations along.

But in the Kyiv suburbs, regional governor Oleksandr Palviuk said on social media Thursday that Russian forces shelled Irpin and Makariv and that there were battles around Hostomel. Pavliuk said there were Ukrainian counterattacks and some Russian withdrawals around the suburb of Brovary to the east.

Chernihiv came under attack as well. At least one person was killed and four were wounded in the Russian shelling of a humanitarian convoy of buses sent to Chernihiv to evacuate residents cut off from food, water and other supplies, said Ukrainian Human Rights Commissioner Lyudmyla Denisova

Ukraine also reported Russian artillery barrages in and around the northeastern city of Kharkiv.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said intelligence indicates Russia is not scaling back its military operations in Ukraine but is instead trying to regroup, resupply its forces and reinforce its offensive in the Donbas.

"Russia has repeatedly lied about its intentions," Stoltenberg said. At the same time, he said, pressure is being kept up on Kyiv and other cities, and "we can expect additional offensive actions bringing even more suffering."

The Donbas is the predominantly Russian-speaking industrial region where Moscow-backed separatists have been battling Ukrainian forces since 2014. In the past few days, the Kremlin, in a seeming shift in its war aims, said that its "main goal" now is gaining control of the Donbas, which consists of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, including Mariupol.

The top rebel leader in Donetsk, Denis Pushilin, issued an order to set up a rival city government for Mariupol, according to Russian state news agencies, in a sign of Russian intent to hold and administer the city.

With talks set to resume between Ukraine and Russia via video, there seemed little faith that the two sides would resolve the conflict any time soon.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said that conditions weren't yet "ripe" for a cease-fire and that he wasn't ready for a meeting with Zelenskyy until negotiators do more work, Italian Premier Mario Draghi said after a telephone conversation with the Russian leader.

In other developments, Ukraine's emergency services said the death toll had risen to 20 in a Russian missile strike Tuesday on a government administration building in the southern city of Mykolaiv.

As Western officials search for clues about what Russia's next move might be, a top British intelligence official said demoralized Russian soldiers in Ukraine are refusing to carry out orders and sabotaging their equipment and had accidentally shot down their own aircraft.

In a speech in Australia, Jeremy Fleming, head of the GCHQ electronic spy agency, said Putin had ap-

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 52 of 85

parently "massively misjudged" the invasion.

The Pentagon reported Thursday that an initial half-dozen shipments of weapons and other security assistance from the U.S. have reached Ukraine as part of an \$800 million aid package President Joe Biden approved this month.

The shipments included Javelin anti-tank weapons, Stinger anti-aircraft missile systems, body armor, medical supplies and other materials, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said.

U.S. intelligence officials have concluded that Putin is being misinformed by his advisers about how badly the war is going because they are afraid to tell him the truth.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that the U.S. is wrong and that "neither the State Department nor the Pentagon possesses the real information about what is happening in the Kremlin."

## Amazon staff reject union in Alabama, lean toward it in NYC

By HALELUYA HADERO and ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — Amazon workers in Alabama appear to have rejected a union bid in a tight race, according to early results on Thursday. But outstanding challenged votes could change the outcome.

In New York, union supporters have the edge in a count that will continue Friday morning.

Warehouse workers in Bessemer, Alabama, voted 993 to 875 against forming a union. The National Labor Relations Board, which oversees the election, said that 416 challenged votes could potentially overturn that result. A hearing to go through the challenged ballots will occur in the next few days.

Meanwhile, in a separate union election in Staten Island, New York, the nascent Amazon Labor Union is leading by more than 350 votes out of about 2,670 tallied.

The close election in Bessemer marks a sharp contrast to last year, when Amazon workers overwhelmingly rejected the union.

"This is just the beginning and we will continue to fight," said Stuart Appelbaum, president of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, which is organizing the union drive in Bessemer, at a Thursday press conference. "Regardless of the final outcome, workers have shown what is possible. They have helped ignite a movement."

Appelbaum said RWDSU will be filing objections to how Amazon handled the election but declined to be specific. He also took the opportunity to lash out at current labor laws, which he believes are rigged against unions and favor corporations.

"It should not be so difficult to organize a union in the United States," he said.

If a majority of Amazon workers votes yes in either Bessemer or Staten Island, it would mark the first successful U.S. organizing effort in the company's history. Organizers have faced an uphill battle against the nation's second-largest private employer, which is making every effort to keep unions out.

In New York, the ALU has led the charge to form a union along with Chris Smalls, a fired Amazon employee who now heads the fledgling group. Turnout for the in-person election was unclear but Smalls was hopeful of victory.

"To be leading in Day One and be up a couple hundred against a trillion dollar company, this is the best feeling in the world," Smalls said after the conclusion of Thursday's counting.

While Smalls' attention has been focused on securing victory in New York, similar efforts in Alabama also weighed heavily.

"I'm not too sure what's going in Alabama right now, but I know that the sky's the limit if you can organize any warehouse," he said, noting that the vote in Alabama could well end up differently. "I hope that they're successful. I don't know what's going on yet, but we know we show our support and solidarity with them."

The warehouse in Staten Island employs more than 8,300 workers, who pack and ship supplies to customers based mostly in the Northeast. A labor win there was considered difficult, but organizers believe their grassroots approach is more relatable to workers and could help them overcome where established unions have failed in the past.

John Logan, director of labor and employment studies at San Francisco State University, said the early vote

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 53 of 85

counts in New York has been "shocking." ALU has no backing from an established union and is powered by former and current warehouse workers. The group had also filed for a union election after getting support from about 30% of the facility's workforce, a much lower percentage than what unions usually seek.

"I don't think that many people thought that the Amazon Labor Union had much of a chance of winning at all," Logan said. "And I think we're likely to see more of those (approaches) going forward."

Though RWDSU is currently lagging behind with challenged ballots outstanding, Logan said that election was also remarkable because the union has made a good effort narrowing its margin from last year's election.

After a crushing defeat last year, when a majority of workers voted against forming a union, RWDSU is hoping for a different outcome in the Bessemer election, in which mail-in ballots were sent to 6,100 workers in early February. Federal labor officials scrapped the results of the first election there and ordered a re-do after ruling Amazon tainted the election process.

The RWDSU said election there had a turnout rate of about 39% this year, much smaller than last year. Appelbaum blamed the low numbers on high turnover — he believes thousands of people who worked for Amazon in January and were on the official list to be eligible to vote either quit or were fired. He also believes that an in-person election, which the RWDSU had asked for, would have made a difference.

Amazon has pushed back hard in both elections. The retail giant held mandatory meetings, where workers were told unions are a bad idea. The company also launched an anti-union website targeting workers and placed English and Spanish posters across the Staten Island facility urging them to reject the union. In Bessemer, Amazon has made some changes to but still kept a controversial U.S. Postal Service mailbox that was key in the NLRB's decision to invalidate last year's vote.

Both labor fights faced unique challenges. Alabama, for instance, is a right-to-work state that prohibits a company and a union from signing a contract that requires workers to pay dues to the union that represents them.

The mostly Black workforce at the Amazon facility, which opened in 2020, mirrors the Bessemer population of more than 70% Black residents, according to the latest U.S. Census data.

Pro-union workers say they want better working conditions, longer breaks and higher wages. Regular full-time employees at the Bessemer facility earn at least \$15.80 an hour, higher than the estimated \$14.55 per hour on average in the city. That figure is based on an analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's annual median household income for Bessemer of \$30,284, which could include more than one worker.

The ALU said they don't have a demographic breakdown of the warehouse workers on Staten Island and Amazon declined to provide the information to The Associated Press, citing the union vote. Internal records leaked to The New York Times from 2019 showed more than 60% of the hourly associates at the facility were Black or Latino, while most of managers were white or Asian.

Amazon workers there are seeking longer breaks, paid time off for injured employees and an hourly wage of \$30, up from a minimum of just over \$18 per hour offered by the company. The estimated average wage for the borough is \$41 per hour, according to a similar U.S. Census Bureau analysis of Staten Island's \$85,381 median household income.

A spokesperson for Amazon said the company invests in wages and benefits, such as health care, 401(k) plans and a prepaid college tuition program to help grow workers' careers.

"As a company, we don't think unions are the best answer for our employees," the spokesperson said in an emailed statement. "Our focus remains on working directly with our team to continue making Amazon a great place to work."

## Washington OKs 1st statewide missing Indigenous people alert

By GILLIAN FLACCUS and TED S. WARREN Associated Press

TULALIP, Wash. (AP) — Washington Gov. Jay Inslee on Thursday signed into law a bill that creates a first-in-the-nation statewide alert system for missing Indigenous people, to help address a silent crisis that has plagued Indian Country in this state and nationwide.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 54 of 85

The law sets up a system similar to Amber Alerts and so-called silver alerts, which are used respectively for missing children and vulnerable adults in many states. It was spearheaded by Democratic Rep. Debra Lekanoff, the only Native American lawmaker currently serving in the Washington state Legislature, and championed by Indigenous leaders statewide.

"I am proud to say that the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's and People's Alert System came from the voices of our Native American leaders," said Lekanoff, a member of the Tlingit tribe and the bill's chief sponsor. "It's not just an Indian issue, it's not just an Indian responsibility. Our sisters, our aunts, our grandmothers are going missing every day ... and it's been going on for far too long."

Tribal leaders, many of them women, wore traditional hats woven from cedar as they gathered around Inslee for the signing on the Tulalip Reservation, north of Seattle. Afterward they gifted him with a hand-made traditional ribbon shirt and several multicolored woven blankets.

The law attempts to address a crisis of missing Indigenous people — particularly women — in Washington and across the United States. While it includes missing men, women and children, a summary of public testimony on the legislation notes that "the crisis began as a women's issue, and it remains primarily a women's issue."

Besides notifying law enforcement when there's a report of a missing Indigenous person, the new alert system will place messages on highway reader boards and on the radio and social media, and provide information to the news media.

The legislation was paired with another bill Inslee, a Democrat, signed Thursday that requires county coroners or medical examiners to take steps to identify and notify family members of murdered Indigenous people and return their remains. That new law also establishes two grant funds for Indigenous survivors of human trafficking.

This piece of the crisis is important because in many cases, murdered Indigenous women are mistakenly recorded as white or Hispanic by coroners' offices, they're never identified, or their remains never repatriated.

A 2021 report by the nonpartisan Government Accountability Office found the true number of missing and murdered Indigenous women in the U.S. is unknown due to reporting problems, distrust of law enforcement and jurisdictional conflicts. But Native American women face murder rates almost three times those of white women overall — and up to 10 times the national average in certain locations, according to a 2021 summary of the existing research by the National Congress of American Indians. More than 80% have experienced violence.

In Washington, more than four times as many Indigenous women go missing than white women, according to research conducted by the Urban Indian Health Institute in Seattle, but many such cases receive little or no media attention.

The bill signing began with a traditional welcome song passed down by Harriette Shelton Dover, a cherished cultural leader and storyteller. Dover recovered and shared many traditions and songs from tribes along Washington's northern Pacific Coast and worked with linguists before her death in 1991 to preserve her language, Lushootseed, from extinction. Women performed an honor song after the event.

Tulalip Tribes of Washington Chairwoman Teri Gobin said Washington and Montana are the two states with the most missing Indigenous people in the U.S. Nearly four dozen Native people are currently missing in Seattle alone, she said.

"What's the most important thing is bringing them home, whether they've been trafficked, whether they've been stolen or murdered," she said. "It's a wound that stays open, and it's something that we pray with (for) each person, we can bring them home."

Investigations into missing Indigenous people, particularly women, have been plagued by many issues for decades.

When a person goes missing on a reservation, there are often there are jurisdictional conflicts between tribal police and local and state law enforcement. A lack of staff and police resources, and the rural nature of many reservations, compound those problems. And many times, families of tribal members distrust non-Native law enforcement or don't know where to report news of a missing loved one.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 55 of 85

An alert system will help mitigate some of those problems by allowing better communication and coordination between tribal and non-tribal law enforcement and creating a way for law enforcement to flag such cases for other agencies. The law expands the definition of "missing endangered person" to include Indigenous people, as well as children and vulnerable adults with disabilities or memory or cognitive issues.

The law takes effect June 9 and some details are still being worked out. For example, it's unclear what criteria law enforcement will use to positively identify a missing person as Native American and how the information will be disseminated in rural areas, including on some reservations, where highways lack electronic reader boards — or where there aren't highways at all.

The measure is the latest step Washington has taken to address the issue. The Washington State Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and People Task Force is working to coordinate a statewide response and had its first meeting in December. Its first report is expected in August.

Many states from Arizona to Oregon to Wisconsin have taken recent action to address the crisis of murdered and missing Indigenous women. Efforts include funding for better resources for tribal police to the creation of new databases specifically targeting missing tribal members. Tribal police agencies that use Amber Alerts for missing Indigenous children include the Hopi and Las Vegas Paiute.

In California, the Yurok Tribe and the Sovereign Bodies Institute, an Indigenous-run research and advocacy group, uncovered 18 cases of missing or slain Native American women in roughly the past year in their recent work — a number they consider a vast undercount. An estimated 62% of those cases are not listed in state or federal databases for missing persons.

The law is already drawing attention from other states, whose attorney generals have called to ask how to enact similar legislation, said state Attorney General Bob Ferguson, who called the law "truly groundbreaking."

"Any time you're doing something for the first time in this country, that's an extra heavy lift," he said. "This most certainly will not be our last reform to make sure that we bring everybody back home. .. There is so much more work that needs to be done and must be done."

## Oscars producer says police offered to arrest Will Smith

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Oscars producer Will Packer said Los Angeles police were ready to arrest Will Smith after Smith slapped Chris Rock on the Academy Awards stage.

"They were saying, you know, this is battery, was a word they used in that moment," Packer said in a clip released by ABC News Thursday night of an interview he gave to "Good Morning America." "They said we will go get him. We are prepared. We're prepared to get him right now. You can press charges, we can arrest him. They were laying out the options."

But Packer said Rock was "very dismissive" of the idea.

"He was like, 'No, no, no, I'm fine,'" Packer said. "And even to the point where I said, 'Rock, let them finish.' The LAPD officers finished laying out what his options were and they said, 'Would you like us to take any action?' And he said no."

The LAPD said in a statement after Sunday night's ceremony that they were aware of the incident, and that Rock had declined to file a police report. The department declined comment Thursday on Packer's interview, a longer version of which will air on Friday morning.

The Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences met Wednesday to initiate disciplinary proceedings against Smith for violations against the group's standards of conduct. Smith could be suspended, expelled or otherwise sanctioned.

The academy said in a statement that "Mr. Smith's actions at the 94th Oscars were a deeply shocking, traumatic event to witness in-person and on television."

Without giving specifics, the academy said Smith was asked to leave the ceremony at the Dolby Theatre, but refused to do so.

Smith strode from his front row seat on to the stage and slapped Rock after a joke Rock made about

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 56 of 85

Smith's wife, Jada Pinkett Smith, when he was on stage to present the Oscar for best documentary.

On Monday, Smith issued an apology to Rock, the academy and to viewers, saying "I was out of line and I was wrong."

The academy said Smith has the opportunity to defend himself in a written response before the board meets again on April 18.

Rock publicly addressed the incident for the first time, but only briefly, at the beginning of a standup show Wednesday night in Boston, where he was greeted by a thunderous standing ovation. He said "I'm still kind of processing what happened."

## Report: US military must do more to avoid civilian deaths

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. military needs to adjust its planning, training, targeting and use of weapons in order to better avoid widespread civilian deaths and damage such as the devastating 2017 battle to liberate the Syrian city of Raqqa from Islamic State militants, a new RAND report said Thursday.

The report requested by the Pentagon reflects criticism of the military's airstrike campaign that, according to some estimates, killed more than 1,600 civilians in Raqqa, as the U.S.-led coalition worked to destroy the Islamic State caliphate that wrested control of large swaths of Iraq and Syria.

Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said the report, which lays out a series of recommendations to improve military procedures and strategy, will be used as the department develops its own broader plan to reduce civilian harm.

"No other military works as hard as we do to mitigate civilian harm, and yet we still cause it," said Kirby. "We're going to continue to try to learn from past issues."

RAND concluded that the battle for Raqqa provided important lessons.

Michael McNerney, lead author of the RAND report, called Raqqa "a cautionary tale about civilian harm in urban combat." He said it "should serve as an extra incentive to the DoD to strengthen its policies and procedures to mitigate, document and respond to civilian harm."

The RAND report noted that there has been a wide range of estimated civilian casualties during the siege, but also said it believes that 60%-80% of Raqqa was left uninhabitable by the time the city was liberated in October 2017.

Initially the U.S.-led coalition estimated that it was responsible for 38 incidents involving 240 civilian casualties — including 178 who were killed. A consortium of local Syrian and international groups, including Amnesty International and Airwars, put the number of casualties at a "high estimate" of 1,600, but said that about 774 of them could specifically be "verified" by data as the result of coalition action.

The report makes it clear that several thousand more civilians likely died, based on the number of bodies uncovered by U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, but many were probably killed by IS or other fighters on the ground.

"Our report focuses on U.S. actions in Raqqa, but the actions of the Syrian government and its Russian and Iranian partners undoubtedly contributed far more to civilian harm and suffering in Syria overall," McNerney said.

The report noted that the challenges in Raqqa were compounded by limits on the number U.S. troops that could be there, as well as where they could be positioned. U.S. troops on the ground could have provided better targeting and civilian information, including on Islamic State militants' efforts to use civilians as human shields, the report said.

RAND recommended that the U.S. military provide more extensive training and guidance on the need to avoid civilian harm, and plan and execute operations in ways to achieve those goals. Changes could include improved planning, better assessments of potential collateral damage, increased mission rehearsals, improved intelligence gathering, and more selective use of air strikes and munitions that minimize bomb fragmentation.



## California reparations plan advances movement, advocates say

By RUSS BYNUM and COREY WILLIAMS Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — In the long debate over whether Black Americans should be granted reparations for the atrocity and injustices of slavery and racism, California took a big step this week toward becoming the first U.S. state to make some form of restitution a reality.

The state's reparations task force tackled the divisive issue of which Black residents should be eligible — it narrowly decided in favor of limiting compensation to the descendants of free and enslaved Black people who were in the U.S. in the 19th century.

Whether Tuesday's vote by the task force spurs other states and cities to advance their own proposals, and whether they adopt California's still controversial standard for who would benefit, remains to be seen. Some veteran reparations advocates disagree strongly with proposals to limiting eligibility to only Black people who can prove they have enslaved ancestors, while excluding those who cannot and leaving out victims of other historic injustices, such as redlining and mass incarceration.

Still, one advocate noted California's move is a step that could lend momentum to stalled reparation proposals elsewhere in the U.S.

"It's precipitated a debate and it will influence communities," said Ron Daniels, president of The Institute of the Black World 21st Century and administrator of the National African American Reparations Commission, an advocacy group of scholars and activists.

As to whether others will adopt the same approach to eligibility, Daniels said: "That's to be decided. ... We think that ultimately a more expansive definition will prevail."

The commission headed by Daniels has taken a position that limiting reparations to slave descendants, or to Americans whose ancestors were free Blacks living during the time of slavery, ignores the effects of racism that persisted for more than a century after emancipation.

"There are always going to be criteria" for reparations, Daniels said. "The problem is the harms have been so gross that almost no Black person is not eligible in some form or another."

Although there is still debate among historians about when exactly the practice began, chattel slavery in what would become the U.S. dates back to 1619 when about 20 enslaved Africans were brought to Jamestown, Virginia — then a British colony. Over the next two centuries, more than 300,000 men, women and children were forcibly taken from Africa to work on plantations in southern colonies and later the Southern states, according to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, a project funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and maintained by Rice University.

Slavery in the U.S. officially ended in 1865 with the ratification of the 13th Amendment. Union Army General William Sherman promised compensation to freed slaves in the form of land and mules to farm it — hence the phrase "40 acres and a mule" — after the North's victory over the South in the Civil War. But President Andrew Johnson took away the offer.

More than 120 years later, then-Rep. John Conyers, a Detroit Democrat, first introduced H.R. 40, a bill that would create a federal commission to study reparations and make proposals. Conyers reintroduced it in every congressional session until he resigned in 2017. As a candidate, President Joe Biden said he supported creating the commission, but has yet to formally back it as commander-in-chief. Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, a Texas Democrat, is currently the lead sponsor of the House bill.

Getting governmental leaders to openly consider slavery reparations has been daunting and taken decades. But progress has been made at both the state and local levels, particularly since the national reckoning on racial injustice that was sparked after the 2020 murder of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis.

In Michigan, legislative proposals submitted earlier this year in the House of Representatives call for \$1.5 billion in federal dollars to be placed in a racial equity and reparations fund within the state's treasury. The funds would be issued to various state departments and agencies to provide grants, loans and other economic assistance for businesses and economic developments that promote the Black community.

The bills have yet to receive a hearing in the House.

Last year, Evanston, Illinois, — the first U.S. city to find a source of funding for reparations — began

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 58 of 85

giving eligible Black residents \$25,000 housing grants for down payments, repairs or existing mortgages. The program is meant to atone for the history of racial redlining and housing discrimination. Recipients were selected randomly from among the applicants, Black residents who lived in the city between 1919 and 1969.

And in Providence, Rhode Island, the mayor announced a city commission on reparations in February that will look to atone for the city's role in slavery and systemic racism, as well as the mistreatment of Native Americans.

For Anita Belle, a grassroots activist in Detroit, where residents in the mostly Black city voted in November to create a city reparations commission, getting to this point in the pursuit of reparations is cause for celebration. But what happens next is worrisome, especially when it comes to who gets what and how much, she said.

"I am happy for all of us who have been doing the groundwork for all these years," said Belle, founder of the Reparations Labor Union. "We are somewhat afraid that these people who have jumped on the bandwagon are actually there to sabotage it and make reparations \$12.62, if that. There will be those saboteurs — people who look like us, but have hidden agendas."

"You have some of that fear in California where the scope for reparations was narrowed to the people who can prove they were enslaved," she added. "The people of California will be like 'why am I paying reparations for someone who was enslaved in Mississippi?'"

In California, the task force is taking the next step with economists to determine the cost of compensating more than 2 million Black residents, although all of them would not be eligible. Following slavery abolition, Black migration to California happened primarily in the immediate decades after World War II, with newly arrived African Americans settling in cities like Oakland, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

The Black population there rose from just under a half-million residents, or 4.4% of the population, in 1950 to 1.4 million residents, or 7% of the population, by 1970. Decades later, the 2020 census recorded 2.1 million Black residents in California, or about 5.3% of the state's population.

While proposals and who would be eligible appear to vary, they still are types of reparations, according to Rashawn Ray, senior fellow of Governance Studies at the Brookings Institution.

"California chose to focus on enslavement of Black people," Ray said. "In Evanston, it's redlining and housing segregation. Both are issues that need restitution to them based on what the wrong is."

But, Ray added, "Federal reparations — without a doubt and hands-down — that's what we need. What is happening in California should be happening in Congress."

As a former alderman for the city of Evanston, Illinois, and a longtime reparations advocate, Robin Rue Simmons said reaching consensus on eligibility can be tough because policymakers should be as expansive and inclusive as possible, while also identifying specific harms that they're seeking to address.

The big step taken by California could help spur action on reparations proposals in other cities and states, Simmons said, and perhaps add pressure for the federal government to act, which she sees as critical.

She doesn't expect California's lineage-based eligibility standard to become the norm.

"I don't think any community should think that another has figured it out for them," Simmons said, "because every community is going to have their own priorities and their specific history."

## Trump's 8-hour gap: Minute-by-minute during Jan. 6 riot

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A lot is known about the few hours that shook American democracy to the core. The defeated president's incendiary speech, the march by an angry crowd to the U.S. Capitol, the breaking in, the beating of cops, the "hang Mike Pence" threats, the lawmakers running for their lives, the shooting death of rioter Ashli Babbitt. All of that chaos unfolded over about eight hours on one day: Jan. 6, 2021.

But for all that is known about the day, piecing together the words and actions of Donald Trump over that time has proved no easy task, even though a president's movements and communications are closely monitored.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 59 of 85

There's a gap in the official White House phone notations given to the House committee investigating Jan. 6 — from about 11 a.m. to about 7 p.m., according to two people familiar with the congressional investigation into the riot. Details may still turn up; the former president was known to use various cell phones and often bypassed the White House switchboard, placing calls directly.

And over the past four-plus months a lot has surfaced about what Trump did do and say on Jan. 6 — in texts, tweets, videos, calls and other conversations.

The following account is based on testimony, timelines and eyewitness reporting gathered by The Associated Press and The Washington Post and CBS News, and from officials and people familiar with the events who spoke to The AP on condition of anonymity.

## SORE AT HIS NO. 2

Trump entered the Oval Office at 11:08 a.m. By that time, about 400 pro-Trump demonstrators had already massed at the Capitol. Trump placed a call to Vice President Mike Pence — their only conversation of the day. It didn't go well: Trump wanted Pence to stop the certification of Joe Biden's 2020 election victory, and he was very unhappy the vice president wouldn't do it.

At 11:38 a.m., the president left the White House to address his rally on the Ellipse, a big grassy oval behind the White House, about a mile or so from the Capitol. It was bitter cold, but that didn't keep the crowd away. Trump was up on stage by 11:57 and addressed his supporters until about 1:15 p.m.

Among Trump's challenging final words: "We fight. We fight like hell, and if you don't fight like hell you're not going to have a country any more. My fellow Americans, for our movement, for our children, and for our beloved country. So we're going to, we're going to walk down Pennsylvania Avenue. And we're going to the Capitol."

## 'THEY'RE THROWING METAL POLES'

Growing crowds were migrating to the Capitol. Almost immediately after Trump concluded, a Capitol Police officer called for backup.

"They're throwing metal poles at us," the officer said in a panicked voice. "Multiple law-enforcement injuries."

Would Trump himself head for the Capitol, as he'd suggested in his speech? It was unclear at first, but his motorcade turned to head back to the White House.

At 1:21 p.m., Trump met with his valet at the White House, logs say. At the Capitol, meanwhile, then-Capitol Police Chief Steven Sund begged for help from the National Guard as the crowd started to swell around the west side of the building and became increasingly violent.

By then the TV networks had picked up the melee and were broadcasting live as the mob broke through metal police barricades and advanced toward the doors of the building where lawmakers were gathered to certify the presidential election results. The surreal images soon filled television screens throughout the West Wing, where staffers watched, stunned.

## LOCKDOWN

By 2 p.m. the U.S. Capitol was locked down. At 2:11, Pence was evacuated. At 2:15, congressional leaders were evacuated. At 2:43, demonstrator Babbitt was shot trying to enter the House chamber through a window broken by the mob.

No official record has surfaced yet of what Trump was doing during this time. The next entry in Trump's daily diary is not until 4:03 p.m., when he went out to the Rose Garden to tape a public address after frantic urging.

But during this time Trump was hardly idle. He was in touch with lawmakers and he was, according to aides, watching the violence unfold on national television. And he was tweeting.

At 2:28, he tweeted not about the violence but to show his pique at his vice president:

"Mike Pence didn't have the courage to do what should have been done to protect our Country and our Constitution, giving States a chance to certify a corrected set of facts, not the fraudulent or inaccurate ones which they were asked to previously certify. USA demands the truth!"

At some point, Trump also talked to lawmakers. Republican Kevin McCarthy told a California radio station that he had spoken to the president.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 60 of 85

"I was the first person to call him," McCarthy said. "I told him to go on national TV, tell these people to stop it. He said he didn't know what was happening."

Washington Republican Rep. Jaime Herrera Beutler said McCarthy relayed that conversation to her. By her account, when McCarthy told Trump it was his own supporters breaking into the building, Trump responded: "Well, Kevin, I guess these people are more upset about the election than you are."

Trump also talked to Ohio Rep. Jim Jordan and Sen. Tommy Tuberville of Alabama, among other GOP lawmakers. Tuberville later said he spoke to the president while the Senate was being evacuated. Utah Sen. Mike Lee said Trump accidentally called him when he was trying to reach Tuberville.

Others, including former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, tried but failed to get through to the president.

'IT HAS GONE TOO FAR'

At 3:14 p.m. a Trump tweet at last made a sideways reference to the havoc. "I am asking for everyone at the U.S. Capitol to remain peaceful. No violence! Remember, WE are the Party of Law & Order – respect the Law and our great men and women in Blue. Thank you!"

At some point, he sequestered himself in the dining room off the Oval Office to watch the violence play out on TV, rewinding and re-watching some parts, according to former aides. Unable to get through by other means, allies including his former chief of staff and communications director resorted to tweeting at him to try to get through. Chief of Staff Mark Meadows was getting a flurry of texts from lawmakers, from Fox News personalities and even Trump's own children.

"Hey, Mark, protestors are literally storming the Capitol. Breaking windows on doors. Rushing in. Is Trump going to say something?" reads one text.

"We are all helpless," says another.

As the violence continued, the president's elder son texted Meadows:

"He's got to condemn this s(asterisk)(asterisk)(asterisk) ASAP," Donald Trump, Jr. texted.

Meadows responded: "I'm pushing it hard. I agree."

Trump, Jr. texted again and again, urging that his father act:

"We need an Oval address. He has to lead now. It has gone too far and gotten out of hand."

'REMEMBER THIS DAY FOREVER!'

At 4:08 p.m. Trump went out to the Rose Garden. At 4:17 p.m. he released a scripted, pre-recorded video, which included a call for "peace" and "law and order" and finally told his supporters "you have to go home now."

But they didn't. Things were still wildly out of control. In fact, the Capitol building was not secured until 5:34 p.m.

At 6:01, Trump's message was back to indignant: "These are the things and events that happen when a sacred landslide election victory is so unceremoniously & viciously stripped away from great patriots who have been badly & unfairly treated for so long," he wrote. "Remember this day forever!"

At 6:27, he went back to the residence, and started calling his lawyers.

Congress did not resume counting electoral votes until 8 p.m. They finished at 3:40 a.m. and certified Biden as the winner.

## South Carolina's Aliyah Boston wins AP player of the year

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Aliyah Boston dominated women's college basketball on both ends of the court this season.

The junior forward helped South Carolina go wire-to-wire as the No. 1 team in the country, putting up an SEC-record 27 consecutive double-doubles, and she has helped put the Gamecocks two wins away from the program's second national championship.

Boston was honored as The Associated Press women's basketball player of the year on Thursday. She is the second player from South Carolina to be recognized with the award, joining former Gamecocks great A'ja Wilson.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 61 of 85

"Not often do you get the complete package. I think this recognition is for what she was able to do on both sides of the ball," South Carolina coach Dawn Staley said. "The player of the year is usually for offensive-minded people who think that when you put the ball in the hole, you should be bestowed the player of the year. She's the full package. Every single day."

Boston's parents and aunt as well as the entire South Carolina team were in the audience of the ceremony that also honored AP Coach of the Year Kim Mulkey.

"Coming into this year I said in the back of my mind I wanted to change the narrative this year about women's basketball," Boston said. "To get this award means a lot and I can't wait to do more in the future."

Boston received 23 votes from the 30-member national media panel that votes weekly for the AP Top 25. Iowa's Caitlin Clark received six votes and Baylor's NaLyssa Smith got one.

Boston averaged 16.8 points, 12 rebounds and 2.6 blocks this year.

"I think Aliyah is so unselfish that she's not very comfortable taking over basketball games," Staley said. "She doesn't want to be seen by her teammates as selfish and chasing numbers."

Boston's parents surprised the unanimous first-team AP All-American with the news on Zoom that she had won the award.

"I'm in shock, I got the chills," Boston said to her parents on the call.

Staley said that Boston is one of the hardest workers on the team.

"Young people will follow anyone, good or bad," the coach said. "Aliyah has the personality where you'd follow her because of how hard she works, how unselfish she is, how giving she is. When it's time to make plays she delivers. She's a leader to follow for all the right reasons."

## LSU's Kim Mulkey wins AP Coach of the Year for third time

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Kim Mulkey knew she had a rebuilding project when she took over as coach of LSU this season.

The longtime Baylor coach quickly was able to orchestrate an incredible turnaround for the Tigers, who won 26 games — 17 more than last season.

Mulkey was honored Thursday as The Associated Press women's basketball Coach of the Year, the third time she has won the award. Geno Auriemma and Muffet McGraw are the only other coaches to have accomplished the feat.

"I'm certainly honored to be in that group," Mulkey said. "This doesn't happen without players who allow you to coach them and buy into a system. We had a really, really good year."

Mulkey received 10 votes from the 30-member national media panel that votes on the AP Top 25 each week. South Carolina Dawn Staley was second with eight votes. Stanford's Tara VanDerveer received three while Nicki Collen, who replaced Mulkey at Baylor, got two along with Wes Moore of N.C. State. Five coaches got one vote apiece.

The veteran coach shared the stage with AP Player of the Year Aliyah Boston, who she coached against this year.

Mulkey, who was surprised by her team last week who told her she won, thanked her coaches and individually named each of her players in the ceremony. She choked up when talking about her family, who were still in Texas.

LSU rose to No. 6 in the AP poll and hosted the first two rounds of the NCAA Tournament. The Tigers lost to Ohio State in the second round and finished with more than 25 wins for the first time since the 2007-08 season. Mulkey compared this season to her first at Baylor when she inherited a team that won just seven games the year before she took over.

"You make goals that are realistic such as having a winning season," she said. "Beat your first ranked team, we're going to celebrate that. In conference if we finish in the top half of SEC we can then potentially get to the NCAA Tournament. It sounds so simple. but you have to crawl before you can walk, and have to walk before you can run. We were just realistic."

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 62 of 85

The Tigers went 13-3 in the tough Southeastern Conference and had wins over Georgia, Tennessee and Kentucky. Mulkey's squad also played South Carolina tough, only falling by six points.

After the ceremony, Mulkey bumped into Nikki Fargas, the coach she replaced at LSU. The two hugged and had a 15-minute conversation. It was the first time they had talked since Mulkey got the job.

Mulkey grew up in Louisiana and won national titles with Louisiana Tech as both a player and assistant coach before a 21-year run at Baylor in which she won three national titles and became the fastest coach in women's college basketball history to 600 victories, doing so in just 700 games. In 2020, she was inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame.

Mulkey also won AP Coach of the Year in 2012 and 2019 while at Baylor.

"I can't name all the things that the team did this year but it was unbelievable," she said. "We were not supposed to do what we did in a year. That's hard to do."

## Stadiums built but scrutiny endures for Qatar World Cup head

By ROB HARRIS AP Global Soccer Writer

DOHA, Qatar (AP) — A dozen years of defending Qatar's suitability to host the World Cup can leave Hassan Al-Thawadi exasperated at the enduring glare of scrutiny and the accusatory, rather than celebratory, tone.

At times, Al-Thawadi can seem to be the face — even leader — of this Persian Gulf nation given his prominence. As head of the bid, and now general secretary of the organizing committee, Al-Thawadi has rights groups, protesting football federations and fans worldwide to answer to.

The responses do not always placate those aghast at the suffering of migrant workers whose low-paid labor was relied on to build not only stadiums but also Qatar's wider infrastructure that is beyond Al-Thawadi's direct remit.

But it is the changes to working conditions and rights in the nation that Al-Thawadi is trying to accentuate on the eve of the World Cup draw when the finalists discover who and where they will be playing in November.

"Human suffering is a tragedy. Simple as that," Al-Thawadi said in an interview with The Associated Press on Thursday. "We recognized from day one from before we bid to host the World Cup, that things had to change. This is not something that dawned upon us as a result of the World Cup."

And yet changes to labor laws were not part of the public Qatar bid. They only came in recent years rather than before construction started on the eight new stadiums required after the 2010 vote once groups, including Amnesty International, applied pressure.

"We knew that this World Cup will be an accelerant," he said, "and will assist the government in terms of making that change."

They include the introduction of a minimum wage and the dismantling of the "kafala" sponsorship system binding workers to their employer. Enforcement across Qatar is the challenge, especially as investigators hone in on construction sites away from the eight World Cup stadiums that are complete.

Al-Thawadi sees Qatar as setting the "benchmark" — particularly with more restrictive working practices enduring elsewhere in the Gulf — and pointing to how some of the "most ardent of critics" are now working with them.

"Nobody accepts any sort of suffering, and we are doing our bit to ensure that this doesn't occur," he said. "I'm working very diligently and we're very committed that this progress that has been done over the last 12 years will continue after 2022 and will remain."

But Al-Thawadi went from the interview to the FIFA Congress where Norwegian football federation president Lise Klaveness called out the freedoms and safety denied to workers and the lack of LGBTQ+ protections in Qatar.

Al-Thawadi was riled, claiming in response that Klaveness had not attempted to contact him. It is a sign of how vexed Al-Thawadi can be having to continue justifying Qatar as the Middle East's first World Cup host.

"The World Cup is an opportunity for everybody to come and get to understand different people of different backgrounds with different values," Al-Thawadi said. "We don't necessarily always ... agree on

everything ... but that in itself has to be respected and accepted.

"What we say is what we're offering them, providing a safe World Cup, a welcoming World Cup for everybody. And this is the opportunity for everybody to sit down and build relations."

Al-Thawadi is hoping people will listen, even if the answers or Qatari laws do not satisfy them.

"People are very quick to pass judgment," he said. "Very quick and very firm in their judgment with that, whether they have the full information or not."

## COVID pandemic's end may bring turbulence for US health care

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When the end of the COVID-19 pandemic comes, it could create major disruptions for a cumbersome U.S. health care system made more generous, flexible and up-to-date technologically through a raft of temporary emergency measures.

Winding down those policies could begin as early as the summer. That could force an estimated 15 million Medicaid recipients to find new sources of coverage, require congressional action to preserve broad telehealth access for Medicare enrollees, and scramble special COVID-19 rules and payment policies for hospitals, doctors and insurers. There are also questions about how emergency use approvals for COVID-19 treatments will be handled.

The array of issues is tied to the coronavirus public health emergency first declared more than two years ago and periodically renewed since then. It's set to end April 16 and the expectation is that the Biden administration will extend it through mid-July. Some would like a longer off-ramp.

Transitions don't bode well for the complex U.S. health care system, with its mix of private and government insurance and its labyrinth of policies and procedures. Health care chaos, if it breaks out, could create midterm election headaches for Democrats and Republicans alike.

"The flexibilities granted through the public health emergency have helped people stay covered and get access to care, so moving forward the key question is how to build on what has been a success and not lose ground," said Juliette Cubanski, a Medicare expert with the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation, who has been researching potential consequences of winding down the pandemic emergency.

### MEDICAID CHURN

Medicaid, the state-federal health insurance program for low-income people, is covering about 79 million people, a record partly due to the pandemic.

But the nonpartisan Urban Institute think tank estimates that about 15 million people could lose Medicaid when the public health emergency ends, at a rate of at least 1 million per month.

Congress increased federal Medicaid payments to states because of COVID-19, but it also required states to keep people on the rolls during the health emergency. In normal times states routinely disenroll Medicaid recipients whose incomes rise beyond certain levels, or for other life changes affecting eligibility. That process will switch on again when the emergency ends, and some states are eager to move forward.

Virtually all of those losing Medicaid are expected to be eligible for some other source of coverage, either through employers, the Affordable Care Act or — for kids — the Children's Health Insurance Program.

But that's not going to happen automatically, said Matthew Buettgens, lead researcher on the Urban Institute study. Cost and lack of awareness about options could get in the way.

People dropped from Medicaid may not realize they can pick up taxpayer-subsidized ACA coverage. Medicaid is usually free, so people offered workplace insurance could find the premiums too high.

"This is an unprecedented situation," said Buettgens. "The uncertainty is real."

The federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, or CMS, is advising states to take it slow and connect Medicaid recipients who are disenrolled with other potential coverage. The agency will keep an eye on states' accuracy in making eligibility decisions. Biden officials want coverage shifts, not losses.

"We are focused on making sure we hold on to the gains in coverage we have made under the Biden-Harris administration," said CMS Administrator Chiquita Brooks-LaSure. "We are at the strongest point in our history and we are going to make sure that we hold on to the coverage gains."

ACA coverage — or "Obamacare" — is an option for many who would lose Medicaid. But it will be less

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 64 of 85

affordable if congressional Democrats fail to extend generous financial assistance called for in President Joe Biden's social legislation. Democrats stalling the bill would face blame.

Republicans in mostly Southern states that have refused to expand Medicaid are also vulnerable. In those states, it can be very difficult for low-income adults to get coverage and more people could wind up uninsured.

State Medicaid officials don't want to be the scapegoats. "Medicaid has done its job," said Matt Salo, head of the National Association of Medicaid Directors. "We have looked out for physical, mental and behavioral health needs. As we come out of this emergency, we are supposed to right-size the program."

## TELEHEALTH STATIC

Millions of Americans discovered telehealth in 2020 when coronavirus shutdowns led to the suspension of routine medical consultations. In-person visits are again the norm, but telehealth has shown its usefulness and gained broader acceptance.

The end of the public health emergency would jeopardize telehealth access for millions enrolled in traditional Medicare. Restrictions predating COVID-19 limit telehealth mainly to rural residents, in part to mitigate against health care fraud. Congress has given itself 151 days after the end of the public health emergency to come up with new rules.

"If there are no changes to the law after that, most Medicare beneficiaries will lose access to coverage for telehealth," the Kaiser Foundation's Cubanski said.

A major exception applies to enrollees in private Medicare Advantage plans, which generally do cover telehealth. However, nearly 6 in 10 Medicare enrollees are in the traditional fee-for-service program.

## TESTS, VACCINES, TREATMENTS, PAYMENTS & PROCEDURES

Widespread access to COVID-19 vaccines, tests and treatments rests on legal authority connected to the public health emergency.

One example is the Biden administration's requirement for insurers to cover up to eight free at-home COVID-19 tests per month.

An area that's particularly murky is what happens to tests, treatments and vaccines covered under emergency use authorization from the Food and Drug Administration.

Some experts say emergency use approvals last only through the duration of the public health emergency. Others say it's not as simple as that, because a different federal emergency statute also applies to vaccines, tests and treatments. There's no clear direction yet from health officials.

The FDA has granted full approval to Pfizer-BioNTech's COVID-19 vaccine for those 16 and older and Moderna's for those 18 and older, so their continued use would not be affected.

But hospitals could take a financial hit. Currently Medicare pays them 20% more for the care of COVID-19 patients. That's only for the duration of the emergency.

And Medicare enrollees would have more hoops to jump through to be approved for rehab in a nursing home. A suspended Medicare rule requiring a prior three-day hospital stay would come back into effect.

Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra recently told The Associated Press that his department is committed to giving "ample notice" when it ends the public health emergency.

"We want to make sure we're not putting in a detrimental position Americans who still need our help," Becerra said. "The one that people are really worried about is Medicaid."

## Judge strikes down parts of Florida election law; cites race

By BRENDAN FARRINGTON Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — A federal judge struck down portions of a Florida election law passed last year, saying in a ruling Thursday that the Republican-led government was using subtle tactics to suppress Black voters.

The law tightened rules on mailed ballots, drop boxes and other popular election methods — changes that made it more difficult for Black voters who, overall, have more socioeconomic disadvantages than white voters, U.S. District Judge Mark Walker wrote in his ruling.



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 65 of 85

"For the past 20 years, the majority in the Florida Legislature has attacked the voting rights of its Black constituents," Walker wrote. Given that history, he said, some future election law changes should be subject to court approval.

Florida's Republican-led legislature joined several others around the country in passing election reforms after Republican former President Donald Trump made unfounded claims that the 2020 election was stolen from him. Democrats have called such reforms a partisan attempt to keep some voters from the ballot box.

"It was only designed to fuel the narrative around the big lie and that the election was stolen from Trump," Democratic state Rep. Fentrice Driskell, who is Black, said in a phone interview after the ruling was issued. "What we absolutely can't have is a system that, I almost feel like, is separate and unequal. Making it harder for Black people to vote is unconstitutional."

Democratic state Rep. Ramon Alexander said he and others argued before the bill passed that it would disproportionately affect voters of color, and he is glad Walker agreed.

"Florida has a long history of discrimination at the ballot box, and (the bill) was just another roadblock put in front of Black people trying to cast a legal vote," said Alexander, who is Black.

Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis, who made the election bill a priority, said the state will appeal Walker's decision and win.

"In front of certain district judges, we know we will lose no matter what because they are not going to follow the law," DeSantis said at a news conference in West Palm Beach. He did not say specifically why he believes the ruling is incorrect.

Upon appeal, the case would go to the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta, Georgia, which is seen as being more conservative.

Republican Sen. Dennis Baxley, who sponsored the bill, didn't immediately return a voicemail message seeking comment.

Much of the debate focused on vote-by-mail ballots and how they are collected and returned. Walker overturned a provision of the law limiting when people could use a drop box to submit their ballot, along with a section prohibiting anyone from engaging with people waiting to vote. Walker said the latter provision "discourages groups who give food, water, and other forms of encouragement to voters waiting in long lines from continuing to do so."

"One way, then, to measure whether this provision will have a disparate impact on Black or Latino voters is to determine whether Black and Latino voters are disproportionately likely to wait in line to vote," said Walker, citing testimony that showed that to indeed be the case.

Walker, who was appointed by former President Barack Obama, also overturned a provision in the law putting new restrictions on groups that register voters, including requiring that people working to register voters submit their names and permanent addresses to the state.

Walker ordered that for the next 10 years, any attempt by the Legislature to write new laws on the issues he overturned will need court approval.

"Floridians have been forced to live under a law that violates their rights on multiple fronts for over a year," he wrote. "Without preclearance, Florida could continue to enact such laws, replacing them every legislative session if courts view them with skepticism. Such a scheme makes a mockery of the rule of law."

## **LGBTQ groups sue Florida over so-called 'Don't Say Gay' law**

By ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Gay rights advocates sued Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis on Thursday to block a new law that forbids classroom instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity in kindergarten through third grade.

The law has catapulted Florida and DeSantis, a potential 2024 Republican presidential candidate, to the forefront of the country's culture wars. Critics call it the "Don't Say Gay" law and argue that its true intent is to marginalize LGBTQ people and their families.

The challenge filed in federal court in Tallahassee on behalf of Equality Florida and Family Equality al-

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 66 of 85

leges that the law violates the constitutionally protected rights of free speech, equal protection and due process of students and families.

"This effort to control young minds through state censorship — and to demean LGBTQ lives by denying their reality — is a grave abuse of power," the lawsuit says.

"The United States Supreme Court has repeatedly affirmed that LGBTQ people and their families are at home in our constitutional order. The State of Florida has no right to declare them outcasts, or to treat their allies as outlaws, by punishing schools where someone dares to affirm their identity and dignity," the lawsuit says.

The law deliberately employs broad terms and invites arbitrary and discriminatory enforcement, empowering parents to be roving censors who can sue school boards for damages based on any perceived violation, the lawsuit adds.

The law states: "Classroom instruction by school personnel or third parties on sexual orientation or gender identity may not occur in kindergarten through grade 3 or in a manner that is not age appropriate or developmentally appropriate for students in accordance with state standards." Parents would be able to sue districts over violations.

U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona met with LGBTQ students and their family members at a school in Orlando on Thursday, discussing privately how the legislation is affecting their lives. Cardona's visit was one of several Biden administration events Thursday showing support for the queer community, including a presidential proclamation recognizing Transgender Day of Visibility.

"We know while many transgender students experience valuable support at school, many others face significant challenges because of hostility directed at them by others," Cardona said. "This includes a growing number of state laws that bully and intimidate LGBTQI+ students and their families."

DeSantis and other Republicans have repeatedly described the rules as reasonable, saying children should learn about sexual orientation and gender identity from their parents, not in schools.

"We will make sure that parents can send their kids to school to get an education, not an indoctrination," the governor said when he signed it into law this week.

Many critics have said the law's language, particularly the phrases "classroom instruction" and "age appropriate," could be interpreted so broadly that discussion in any grade could trigger lawsuits, creating a classroom atmosphere where teachers would avoid the subjects entirely.

Intense public backlash followed the bill's introduction in Florida's Republican-controlled legislature this year, with the White House, Hollywood celebrities, students, Democrats and LGBTQ advocates condemning the policy. Legal challenges have been expected.

The filing by Kaplan Hecker & Fink LLP and the National Center for Lesbian Rights seeks to block the law from taking effect and also names Florida Education Commissioner Richard Corcoran and other education officials as defendants.

"Already, our children have told us that they are afraid that they will not be able to talk about their family at school," Dan and Brent VanTice, parents of two first-grade students, said in the statement announcing the suit. "We are heartbroken that our children are already feeling isolated and stigmatized by this law."

Andrew Spar, president of the Florida Education Association union, said the law is politically motivated because elementary schools, especially in kindergarten through third grade, do not teach about these subjects and have state curriculum standards guiding classroom lessons.

The law adds fuel to a persistent feud between DeSantis and Democratic President Joe Biden, who tweeted after DeSantis signed the bill this week that "My Administration will continue to fight for dignity and opportunity for every student and family — in Florida and around the country." Cardona has said his agency will be monitoring for any federal civil rights violations that result.

## Grammy Awards set sights on Las Vegas for first time

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The Grammys might be missing stars like Drake, The Weeknd and Kanye West as

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 67 of 85

a performer, but the biggest night in music could still shine bright on the Las Vegas Strip.

The ceremony relocated to Las Vegas for the first-time ever with several artists who could have epic nights including Billie Eilish, Olivia Rodrigo and Jon Batiste. The awards shifted from Los Angeles because of the rising COVID-19 cases and omicron variant in January. Sunday's show will air live beginning at 8 p.m. Eastern on CBS and the Paramount+ streaming service.

Host Trevor Noah calls Las Vegas a "perfect place to have a celebration" with fans at the MGM Grand Garden Arena. Last year, the Grammys had a music festival vibe with parts of the show held outdoors in an intimate in-person setting with music artists mixed with pre-taped performances.

Noah expects an entertaining show with several performers set to hit the stage including Rodrigo, Eilish, Lil Nas X, Jack Harlow, Brandi Carlile, Batiste, Silk Sonic, H.E.R., Chris Stapleton, Leslie Odom Jr. and Brothers Osborne. He said the awards will be a celebration of the music industry coming back to life.

"There's an element of this (show) that's like a music camp," Noah said. "I think it's going to bring a different energy, and I'm excited to be a part of it."

It's still unclear whether the Foo Fighters will take the stage following the recent death of its drummer Taylor Hawkins. The rock band – nominated for three Grammys – is scheduled to perform during the ceremony, but they recently canceled all upcoming concert dates.

The Grammys will continue to move forward without West, known as Ye, after news surfaced earlier this month that he wouldn't perform at the show because of his "concerning online behavior." The Weeknd is still boycotting the awards and Drake said he wanted no part in competing for a Grammy, withdrawing his two nominations.

The three popular performers will be missed, but the show will certainly go on.

The multitalented Jon Batiste enters the Grammys as the leading nominee with 11 in a variety of genres including R&B, jazz, American roots music, classical and music video. Justin Bieber, Doja Cat and H.E.R. are tied for the second-most nominations with eight apiece.

The awards will introduce its expanded 10 nominees in three major genres — record, album and song of the year. The growing categories will make the competition stronger but could make choosing a winner a lot tougher.

For album of the year, the Recording Academy expanded the category's eligibility for any featured artists, producers, songwriters and engineers — even if the music creator co-wrote one song on the project. That means there could be a large amount of winners on stage, depending on who wins.

For example, if Bieber's "Justice" wins at the show, more than 50 creators could pack the stage. The same could be said for Ye, Doja Cat and H.E.R., who have a plethora of contributors.

But Eilish's "Happier Than Ever" features songs written by the young star and her brother Finneas, who produced all of her tracks. Tony Bennett, Lady Gaga and Rodrigo are sitting in the same boat.

Harvey Mason jr., the academy's CEO, said the number of creators in a category won't dictate the winner. Either way, Noah said he doesn't mind.

"It'll be great to see that moment," he said. "You get to be on stage and celebrated for your work. I'm excited for that. I want to see 25 people on stage celebrating and sharing the love and joy for something they've done."

Before the awards, the academy will hold a couple events including a tribute to Joni Mitchell at the MusicCares Person of the Year on Friday night. Chaka Khan, Cyndi Lauper, Billy Porter and Beck are among those expected to perform.

On Saturday, Grammy winner John Legend will be honored during the academy's Black Music Collective. The singer will receive his first-ever Recording Academy Global Impact Award for his personal and professional achievements in the music industry.

Legend will be celebrated with a performance by Summer Walker, D-Nice and MC Lyte as the voice for the evening. Jimmy Jam will be making remarks.

**Biden oil move aims to cut gas prices 'fairly significantly'**

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 68 of 85

By ZEKE MILLER and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Thursday ordered the release of 1 million barrels of oil per day from the nation's strategic petroleum reserve for six months, a bid to control energy prices that have spiked after the United States and allies imposed steep sanctions on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine.

The president said it was not known how much gasoline prices could decline as a result of his move, but he suggested it might be "anything from 10 cents to 35 cents a gallon." Gas is averaging about \$4.23 a gallon, compared with \$2.87 a year ago, according to AAA.

"The bottom line is if we want lower gas prices we need to have more oil supply right now," Biden said. "This is a moment of consequence and peril for the world, and pain at the pump for American families."

The president also wants Congress to impose financial penalties on oil and gas companies that lease public lands but are not producing. He said he will invoke the Defense Production Act to encourage the mining of critical minerals for batteries in electric vehicles, part of a broader push to shift toward cleaner energy sources and reduce the use of fossil fuels.

The actions show that oil remains a vulnerability for the U.S. Higher prices have hurt Biden's approval domestically and added billions of oil-export dollars to the Russian government as it wages war on Ukraine.

Tapping the stockpile would create pressures that could reduce oil prices, though Biden has twice ordered releases from the reserves without causing a meaningful shift in oil markets. Biden said Thursday he expects gasoline prices could drop "fairly significantly."

Part of Biden's concern is that high prices have not so far coaxed a meaningful jump in oil production. The planned release is a way to increase supplies as a bridge until oil companies ramp up their own production, with administration officials estimating that domestic production will grow by 1 million barrels daily this year and an additional 700,000 barrels daily in 2023.

The markets reacted quickly with crude oil prices dropping about 6% in Thursday trading to roughly \$101 a barrel. Still, oil is up from roughly \$60 a year ago, with supplies failing to keep up with demand as the world economy has begun to rebound from the coronavirus pandemic. That inflationary problem was compounded by Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine, which created new uncertainties about oil and natural gas supplies and led to retaliatory sanctions from the U.S. and its allies.

Stewart Glickman, an oil analyst for CFRA Research, said the release would bring short-term relief on prices and would be akin to "taking some Advil for a headache." But markets would ultimately look to see whether, after the releases stop, the underlying problems that led to Biden's decisions remain.

"The root cause of the headache is probably still going to be there after the medicine wears off," Glickman said.

Biden has been in talks with allies and partners to join in additional releases of oil, such that the world market will get more than the 180 million barrels total being pledged by the U.S.

Americans on average use about 21 million barrels of oil daily, with about 40% of that devoted to gasoline, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. That total accounts for about one-fifth of total global consumption of oil.

Domestic oil production is equal to more than half of U.S. usage, but high prices have not led companies to return to their pre-pandemic levels of output. The U.S. is producing on average 11.7 million barrels daily, down from 13 million barrels in early 2020.

Republican lawmakers have said the problem results from the administration being hostile to oil permits and the construction of new pipelines such as the Keystone XL. Democrats say the country needs to move to renewable energy such as wind and solar that could reduce the dependence on fossil fuels and Putin's leverage.

Sen. Steve Daines, R-Mont., blasted Biden's action to tap the reserve without first taking steps to increase American energy production, calling it "a Band-Aid on a bullet wound."

Daines called Biden's actions "desperate moves" that avoid what he called the real solution: "investing in American energy production," and getting "oil and gas leases going again."

The administration says increasing oil output is a gradual process and the release would provide time to ramp up production. It also wants to incentivize greater production by putting fees on unused leases on

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 69 of 85

government lands, something that would require congressional approval.

Oil producers have been more focused on meeting the needs of investors than consumers, according to a survey released last week by the Dallas Federal Reserve. About 59% of the executives surveyed said investor pressure to preserve "capital discipline" amid high prices was the reason they weren't pumping more, while fewer than 10% blamed government regulation.

In his remarks Thursday, Biden tried to shame oil companies that he said are focused on profits instead of putting out more barrels, saying that adding to the oil supply was a patriotic obligation.

"This is not the time to sit on record profits: It's time to step up for the good of your country," the president said.

The steady release from the reserves would be a meaningful sum and come near to closing the domestic production gap relative to February 2020, before the coronavirus caused a steep decline in oil output.

Still, the politics of oil are complicated with industry advocates and environmentalists both criticizing the planned release. Groups such as the American Petroleum Institute want to make drilling easier, while environmental organizations say energy companies should be forced to pay a special tax on windfall profits instead.

The administration in November announced the release of 50 million barrels from the strategic reserve in coordination with other countries. And after the Russia-Ukraine war began, the U.S. and 30 other countries agreed to an additional release of 60 million barrels from reserves, with half of the total coming from the U.S.

According to the Department of Energy, which manages it, more than 568 million barrels of oil were held in the reserve as of March 25. After the release, the government would begin to replenish the reserve once prices have sufficiently fallen.

News of the administration's planning was first reported by Bloomberg.

## **A key inflation gauge sets 40-year high as gas and food soar**

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — An inflation gauge that is closely monitored by the Federal Reserve jumped 6.4% in February compared with a year ago, with sharply higher prices for food, gasoline and other necessities squeezing Americans' finances.

The figure reported Thursday by the Commerce Department was the largest year-over-year rise since January 1982. Excluding volatile prices for food and energy, so-called core inflation increased 5.4% in February from 12 months earlier.

Robust consumer demand has combined with shortages of many goods to fuel the sharpest price jumps in four decades. Measures of inflation will likely worsen in the coming months because Thursday's report doesn't reflect the consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which occurred Feb. 24. The war has disrupted global oil markets and accelerated prices for wheat, nickel and other key commodities.

Squeezed by inflation, consumers increased their spending by just 0.2% in February, down from a much larger 2.7% gain in January. Adjusted for inflation, spending actually fell 0.4% last month. The decline partly reflected a shift away from heavy spending on goods to a focus on services, such as health care, travel and entertainment, which consumers had long avoided during the worst of the pandemic.

Spending on such services grew 0.6%, the most since July, while purchases of autos, furniture, clothes and other goods dropped 2.1%. Many economists had previously suggested that a shift away from goods purchases might loosen supply chain snarls and cool inflation. But prices are still rising rapidly for goods, including a 1.1% increase in February.

Americans' overall incomes rose 0.5% in February, the highest gain since November and up from just 0.1% in January. Wages and salaries jumped 0.8%, the most in four months.

Businesses have been raising pay to attract and keep employees — a trend that is benefiting workers but also giving employers cause to raise prices to offset their higher labor costs. That cycle is helping fuel inflation.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 70 of 85

Last month, food costs climbed 1.4%, the most in nearly two years. Energy costs spiked 3.7%, the biggest such increase since October.

The Federal Reserve responded this month to the inflation surge by raising its benchmark short-term interest rate by a quarter-point from near zero, and it's likely to keep raising it well into next year. Because its rate affects many consumer and business loans, the Fed's rate hikes will make borrowing more expensive and could weaken the economy over time.

Michael Feroli of JPMorgan is among economists who now think the Fed will raise its key rate by an aggressive half-point in both May and June. The central bank hasn't raised its benchmark rate by a half-point in two decades, a sign of how concerned it has become about the persistent surge in inflation.

On a monthly basis, prices rose 0.6% from January to February, up slightly from the previous month's increase of 0.5% and matching the highest monthly figure since 2008. Core prices rose 0.4%, down from a 0.5% increase in January.

Gas prices have soared in the past month in the aftermath of Russia's invasion, which led the United Kingdom and the Biden administration to ban Russia's oil exports. The cost of a gallon of gas shot up to a national average of \$4.24 a gallon Wednesday, according to AAA. That's up 63 cents from a month ago, when it was \$3.61.

Michael Pearce, an economist at Capital Economics, estimated that the gas price spike will cost Americans an annualized \$100 billion in March.

Americans will likely dig into their savings to cover the higher gas costs in the near term, he said. "But if higher gasoline prices are sustained, that will eventually weigh on spending in other areas."

On Thursday, President Joe Biden is expected to order the release of up to 1 million barrels of oil a day from the nation's strategic petroleum reserve in an effort to reduce gas prices.

Thursday's report follows a more widely monitored inflation gauge, the consumer price index, that was issued earlier this month. The CPI jumped to 7.9% in February from a year ago, the sharpest such increase in four decades.

Many economists still expect inflation to peak in the coming months. In part, that's because price spikes that occurred last year, when the economy widely reopened, will begin to make the year-over-year price increases appear smaller. Yet Fed officials project that inflation, as measured by its preferred gauge, will still be a comparatively high 4.3% by the end of this year.

## Will Smith's Oscars slap felt by comedians beyond Chris Rock

By LYNN ELBER AND DAVID BAUDER The Associated Press

When Will Smith slapped Chris Rock over an Oscars ceremony punchline, other comedians felt the sting. "I know Chris and I know what it's like to be on a stage in front of an audience that doesn't like your material," said stand-up comedian Judy Gold. "But to be physically assaulted, that's a whole other thing. It felt like every comedian was smacked across the face. It really felt like that."

Smith's act comes during a stressful time for comedy. While boundaries for humor constantly shift — think George Carlin's 1972 monologue on seven so-called "dirty words" banned by TV — comics say they have felt increased pushback from audiences and society. Comedy great Dave Chappelle drew sharp criticism last year for what some deemed anti-transgender humor in his Netflix special "The Closer." Kathy Griffin's career was derailed in 2017 when she was photographed holding a mock-up of former President Donald Trump's head.

Some comedians expressed concern that Smith's behavior might embolden other displeased audience members.

"No one went up to Chris Rock and said, 'Are you OK?'" Sheryl Underwood, co-host of "The Talk," said on the show Tuesday. "I'm going to say this as a comic, I am afraid now to get on a stage, because in my third show, when everyone's been drinking, if you don't like my joke, do you now believe that you can get up and slap me? There's got to be accountability quicker."

Griffin tweeted that "now we all have to worry about who wants to be the next Will Smith in comedy

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 71 of 85

clubs and theaters.”

“Which is the worst crime here?” veteran comedian Gilbert Gottfried said in an interview with The Associated Press. “Chris Rock being physically assaulted? Or Chris Rock making a joke? That’s it, pure and simple. He made a joke.”

Dean Obeidallah, a lawyer and stand-up comic who hosts a show on the SiriusXM Progress channel, said there is never “a place for a violent response to a joke” but doubted there would be copycat behavior. In his time in comedy clubs, he’s seen yelling, screaming and, once, a glass thrown at somebody. But he’s never seen a punch thrown, nor a comedian slapped.

“If someone were to strike a comedian, they’re going to be prosecuted criminally. They don’t have the privilege that Will Smith has,” Obeidallah said.

The Los Angeles Police Department said Sunday that it was aware of the incident, but Rock had declined to file a police report. Smith stayed through the rest of the ceremony Sunday and received the best-actor Oscar.

Gold said she’s been confronted but never struck, and she knows other female comedians have faced difficult circumstances. “People have been getting on stage, people have thrown things,” she said.

Comedian-actor Yamaneika Saunders calls Smith’s behavior upsetting and Sunday a sad day for “two beloved Black men in entertainment.” She also views what happened through the lens of a “Black woman in comedy.”

“I’m constantly being threatened...by some man who doesn’t like some (expletive) I said about being a woman, some white guy who doesn’t like some (expletive) I said about being Black,” she said.

Insult humor isn’t new to high-profile ceremonies, which call on comics to liven up what can be tedious events. Ricky Gervais made a meal of celebrities at successive Golden Globe ceremonies, and they grin — or grimace — and bear it. The most famous bad sport: Trump at the 2011 White House correspondents’ dinner, where he sat stone-faced during then-President Barack Obama’s extended ribbing of him.

Rock wasn’t the first to tweak Smith or wife Jada Pinkett Smith at Sunday’s Oscars. Ceremony co-host Regina Hall made what appeared to be a veiled joke about their marriage in trying, unsuccessfully, to draw Smith into a comedy bit.

Rock’s wisecrack was targeted at Pinkett Smith. “Jada, I love you. ‘G.I. Jane 2,’ can’t wait to see it,” the comedian said to Pinkett Smith, whose close-shaven head looked similar to Demi Moore’s in the 1997 movie. Whether Rock was aware that she has a hair-loss condition, alopecia, is unknown, but Smith reacted with the smack and an angry warning to “keep my wife’s name out your (expletive) mouth!”

A tearful Smith later accepted the top acting award for “King Richard,” his somewhat remorseful speech eliciting a standing ovation from the Dolby Theatre crowd. The Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences has since condemned Smith’s attack and said it’s reviewing the matter.

Whatever the result, his actions indelibly marred the ceremony and ignited discussions about violence, toxic masculinity and the advantages of fame. Smith, who’d conspicuously left Rock out of his remarks Sunday, apologized to the comic and decried “violence in all of its forms” in a statement the next day issued by his publicist and posted on Instagram.

Pinkett Smith’s first public comment came in an Instagram post in which she said, “This is a season for healing and I’m here for it.” Rock referred briefly to the slap at a comedy show Wednesday in Boston, saying he was “still kind of processing what happened.” He appeared to become emotional as the audience gave him several standing ovations.

Whatever pushback comedians may encounter on stage, verbal or physical, they have to guard against censoring themselves to avoid it — and they will, said Obeidallah: “They shouldn’t change, and there’s nothing about this that tells me that they will change.”

They can’t because their role goes beyond providing laughs, as comedians see it.

“We are the truth tellers. We speak truth to power,” said Gold, author of the 2020 book, “Yes, I Can Say That: When They Come for the Comedians, We Are All in Trouble.”

Gottfried cites a favorite Carlin quote — “It’s the duty of the comedian to find out where the line is drawn

and cross it deliberately” — and can’t resist serving up a punchline.

“If Will Smith is reading this, dear God, please don’t come to my shows,” he said.

## Scientists finally finish decoding entire human genome

By LAURA UNGAR AP Science Writer

Scientists say they have finally assembled the full genetic blueprint for human life, adding the missing pieces to a puzzle nearly completed two decades ago.

An international team described the first-ever sequencing of a complete human genome – the set of instructions to build and sustain a human being – in research published Thursday in the journal *Science*. The previous effort, celebrated across the world, was incomplete because DNA sequencing technologies of the day weren’t able to read certain parts of it. Even after updates, it was missing about 8% of the genome.

“Some of the genes that make us uniquely human were actually in this ‘dark matter of the genome’ and they were totally missed,” said Evan Eichler, a University of Washington researcher who participated in the current effort and the original Human Genome Project. “It took 20-plus years, but we finally got it done.”

Many — including Eichler’s own students — thought it had been finished already. “I was teaching them, and they said, ‘Wait a minute. Isn’t this like the sixth time you guys have declared victory? I said, ‘No, this time we really, really did it!’”

Scientists said this full picture of the genome will give humanity a greater understanding of our evolution and biology while also opening the door to medical discoveries in areas like aging, neurodegenerative conditions, cancer and heart disease.

“We’re just broadening our opportunities to understand human disease,” said Karen Miga, an author of one of the six studies published Thursday.

The research caps off decades of work. The first draft of the human genome was announced in a White House ceremony in 2000 by leaders of two competing entities: an international publicly funded project led by an agency of the U.S. National Institutes of Health and a private company, Maryland-based Celera Genomics.

The human genome is made up of about 3.1 billion DNA subunits, pairs of chemical bases known by the letters A, C, G and T. Genes are strings of these lettered pairs that contain instructions for making proteins, the building blocks of life. Humans have about 30,000 genes, organized in 23 groups called chromosomes that are found in the nucleus of every cell.

Before now, there were “large and persistent gaps that have been in our map, and these gaps fall in pretty important regions,” Miga said.

Miga, a genomics researcher at the University of California-Santa Cruz, worked with Adam Phillippy of the National Human Genome Research Institute to organize the team of scientists to start from scratch with a new genome with the aim of sequencing all of it, including previously missing pieces. The group, named after the sections at the very ends of chromosomes, called telomeres, is known as the Telomere-to-Telomere, or T2T, consortium.

Their work adds new genetic information to the human genome, corrects previous errors and reveals long stretches of DNA known to play important roles in both evolution and disease. A version of the research was published last year before being reviewed by scientific peers.

“This is a major improvement, I would say, of the Human Genome Project,” doubling its impact, said geneticist Ting Wang of the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, who was not involved in the research.

Eichler said some scientists used to think unknown areas contained “junk.” Not him. “Some of us always believed there was gold in those hills,” he said. Eichler is paid by the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, which also supports The Associated Press’s health and science department.

Turns out that gold includes many important genes, he said, such as ones integral to making a person’s brain bigger than a chimp’s, with more neurons and connections.

To find such genes, scientists needed new ways to read life’s cryptic genetic language.



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 73 of 85

Reading genes requires cutting the strands of DNA into pieces hundreds to thousands of letters long. Sequencing machines read the letters in each piece and scientists try to put the pieces in the right order. That's especially tough in areas where letters repeat.

Scientists said some areas were illegible before improvements in gene sequencing machines that now allow them to, for example, accurately read a million letters of DNA at a time. That allows scientists to see genes with repeated areas as longer strings instead of snippets that they had to later piece together.

Researchers also had to overcome another challenge: Most cells contain genomes from both mother and father, confusing attempts to assemble the pieces correctly. T2T researchers got around this by using a cell line from one "complete hydatidiform mole," an abnormal fertilized egg containing no fetal tissue that has two copies of the father's DNA and none of the mother's.

The next step? Mapping more genomes, including ones that include collections of genes from both parents. This effort did not map one of the 23 chromosomes that is found in males, called the Y chromosome, because the mole contained only an X.

Wang said he's working with the T2T group on the Human Pangenome Reference Consortium, which is trying to generate "reference," or template, genomes for 350 people representing the breadth of human diversity.

"Now we've gotten one genome right and we have to do many, many more," Eichler said. "This is the beginning of something really fantastic for the field of human genetics."

## Got a dime? Businesses seek Treasury help with coin shortage

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Got a dime you can spare? Coins are in short supply — again.

Retailers, laundromats and other businesses that rely on coins want Americans to empty their piggy banks and look under couch cushions for extra change and "get coin moving."

A group of trade associations that represent individual businesses including banks, retail outlets, truck stops, grocery stores and more is asking the Treasury Department for more help convincing Americans to get coins back in circulation.

The consequences of the circulation slowdown hit people who don't have an ability to pay for items electronically, they say.

"If retailers are not able to offer change for cash purchases consumers who rely on cash will be vulnerable," the associations said in a letter to Treasury.

For example, people who do their laundry at coin laundry mats could have a harder time finding change to wash their clothes. And on a larger scale, people who don't have cash access aren't able to patronize certain card-only businesses.

It's not a coin shortage America faces, but a lack of circulation.

"We can't print our way out of this problem," said Austen Jensen, a senior vice president for government affairs at the Retail Industry Leaders Association.

Jensen's group, along with the American Bankers Association, National Association of Convenience Stores, and National Grocers Association, is trying to meet consumer demand and wants a new public campaign to increase coin circulation.

Jensen said his group is also encouraging member retailers to find creative ways to deal with the shortage of coins, including rounding-up purchases for charity promotions. And he says businesses with multiple locations could send coins from one store to another.

This is not the first time during the pandemic that the issue of low coin circulation has arisen.

The coronavirus disrupted consumers' buying habits and shifted purchases largely to plastic cards to such an extent that in July 2020, the Federal Reserve restricted coin orders by financial institutions.

The Fed also convened a U.S. Coin Task Force, made up of representatives from various federal agencies, which led to a campaign encouraging the public to get coins into circulation.

This February, the task force issued a State of Coin report, which said pandemic lockdowns slowed small

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 74 of 85

transactions that generated change and there was a temporary aversion to cash for perceived hygienic reasons. The report also said the Federal Reserve and the U.S. Mint contracted with a third party consultant to review the coin supply chain.

Coin deposit volumes began to increase gradually starting in the summer of 2020, but businesses say the problem has come up again as people have stopped using coins and have stuck to plastic cards.

The issue has had the biggest impact on people who don't have bank accounts. An estimated 22 percent of U.S. Americans were "unbanked" or "underbanked" in 2019, according to the Federal Reserve.

The Treasury Department has yet to respond to the letter. The government encourages people to help get coin moving by spending it with retailers, taking it to their banks and credit unions, or using a coin recycling kiosk like the ones found at grocery stores.

## Migrants hopeful, suspicious at US reopening to asylum

By GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO Associated Press

CIUDAD JUAREZ, Mexico (AP) — More than a dozen migrants excitedly ran out of their dormitory at the Good Samaritan shelter here at the mere mention that the Biden administration may lift a rule that expels people at the border before they can request a chance at humanitarian protection in the United States.

They quizzed a reporter they'd overheard speak of the expected change in a rule that for the past two years has forced asylum seekers to wait at shelters in Mexican border cities terrorized by organized crime.

At times the wait has seemed interminable. They struggle to find work, worry about debts accumulated to just reach the border and live in fear that they or their children could be snatched by drug cartels preying on the most vulnerable.

Migrants have been expelled more than 1.7 million times from the U.S. under public health powers invoked in March 2020 that are designed to prevent spread of Covid-19. The Biden administration plans to lift Title 42 authority – named for a 1944 public health law – by May 23, according to people familiar with the matter, with an official announcement expected as early as Friday. Near the height of the omicron variant in late January, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had extended the order to this week.

Reaction at migrant shelters in Ciudad Juarez shows the determination of many migrants to settle in the United States as soon as possible.

Most of the 63 people staying at Good Samaritan, across the border from El Paso, Texas, were women and their children from Mexico and Central America. The Rev. Juan Fierro, the shelter's director, said the vast majority had either been expelled under Title 42 authority or were still waiting to try for asylum.

A group of women said that if Title 42 ended they would run to the bridge at the border to request asylum, because returning to their homes was not an option.

Melida Castro, a 32-year-old from Honduras, has been at the shelter for four months with her children, ages 3 and 8. "There's nothing more for us to do but wait," she said, explaining she had fled Honduras after a gang killed her uncle.

"I saw him die in my arms," she said. Her family crossed the border once and turned themselves over to Border Patrol agents, but they were flown to El Paso and pushed back to Mexico. She said the agents mentioned Title 42, but didn't explain what it meant.

While word of lifting the asylum limits provided a glimmer of hope, the possibility was also met with suspicion.

Delaying the lifting until late May, when the Biden administration has had more than a year in office to prepare, struck some as a way to buy time until the U.S. government can come up with another obstacle.

"Suddenly they're going to say, 'We're not going to lift it,'" said Victor Sanchez, who fled Honduras with his wife and her three younger siblings. They have been staying at another shelter in Ciudad Juarez for a month.

The nine-bedroom concrete Oscar Romero House shelter clusters around a small courtyard with a pomegranate tree where children play after returning from school. The parents sit on the second floor terrace, fearful to go outside, sharing care of the youngest children and looking across the dusty desert cityscape

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 75 of 85

to the mountains of El Paso less than 10 miles away.

Katherine, Sanchez's wife, had a baby while in Mexico. "If we have to wait, we wait," she said. "Now that there are organizations that can help us, we'll wait for a legal way."

There have been signs that the Biden administration has been preparing for an expected surge of asylum seekers trying to make their way to the border.

Two weeks ago, U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas visited Mexico and Costa Rica to discuss managing migration flows. Without providing details, Mayorkas said he had reached a "migration arrangement" with Costa Rica.

In his State of the Union Address this month, President Joe Biden had said, "We're securing commitments and supporting partners in South and Central America to host more refugees and secure their own borders."

Both Mexico and Costa Rica are taking in substantial numbers of asylum seekers that in many cases would otherwise try to enter the United States. They could also be critical in trying to control the flow of migrants to the U.S. border.

Last month, Costa Rica started requiring visas for Venezuelans and Cubans, a step toward slowing their migration north. Mexico already required visas of Cubans and added Venezuelans in January.

Still, large numbers of migrants have been reaching the border. The Department of Homeland Security said Tuesday that about 7,100 migrants were coming daily, compared with an average of about 5,900 a day in February and on pace to match or exceed highs from last year, 2019 and other peak periods.

Camilo Cruz, a spokesman with the United Nations International Organization for Migration, said this week that every U.S. move on immigration affects migration flows in the region.

"It moves people, generates hope or some kind of speculation by the traffickers," Cruz said. "That motivates people to come to try to cross the border." He said the IOM supports a network of shelters along the border and has worked in recent years to build their capacity.

Immigration advocacy groups applauded the decision, which they universally viewed as long overdue. Like the migrants, some questioned the delay until late May when the Biden administration has had months to prepare.

"A phased wind-down strategy just further proves this was never about public health," Erin Mazursky, interim director of Families Belong Together, a coalition of groups opposed to Trump-era immigration policies, said in a statement. "This policy was in place for two years too long and the reported decision to extend Title 42 until May 23rd is simply another excuse to expel more people. If the intent is to stop upending people's lives and hold true to America's commitment to asylum and due process, the expulsions must end now."

U.S. Rep. Judy Chu, a Los Angeles-area Democrat, told reporters in a conference call Thursday that administration officials visited congressional offices this week to brief lawmakers and their staffs on plans for accommodating larger numbers of migrants — up to about three times the current flow under one scenario.

The administration is "working very hard at finding a way to process migrants lawfully, humanely and efficiently," she said.

## Election skeptics roil GOP contests for secretary of state

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY and JULIE CARR SMYTH Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose was clear in the months after the 2020 presidential election.

"Elections are run better and more honestly than really I think they ever have been," he said in response to conspiracy theories being floated about the election. Months later, he said in an interview what has proved true in state after state - that voter fraud is rare.

Fast forward to 2022, when Republican secretaries of state face a delicate test with voters: Touting their work running clean elections while somehow not alienating GOP voters who believe the false claims of fraud fueled by former President Donald Trump and his allies.

LaRose has shifted his tone on Twitter, recently saying the "mainstream media is trying to minimize

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 76 of 85

voter fraud to suit their narrative” and “President Donald Trump is right to say that voter fraud is a serious problem.”

That tweet came a day after LaRose learned he had drawn not one but two primary challengers, both of whom have said they believe the 2020 election was stolen from Trump.

All but one of the eight incumbent Republican secretaries of state seeking to continue as their state’s elections chief have drawn at least one GOP challenger who either outright denies Democrat Joe Biden won the presidency or makes unsubstantiated claims that elections are not secure.

That raises the prospect that the nation’s voting process will become further politicized if candidates who embrace conspiracy theories or promote without evidence the false narrative of widespread fraud win races for offices such as secretary of state, which play critical roles in managing elections and are intended to be neutral.

Trey Grayson, a former Republican secretary of state from Kentucky who has been outspoken against the efforts to delegitimize the 2020 presidential results, said some of the incumbent GOP secretaries need room to maneuver politically so they can defeat opponents within their own party who might seek to undermine fair elections if they win.

“These are guardians of democracy,” he said. “Their opponents are people who don’t show respect for the law or evidence or the vote-counting process. They are willing to ignore counts, willing to ignore safeguards we have in the system. In some cases, they are just making stuff up.”

Trump’s false claims have led to restrictive voting laws in Republican-controlled states, partisan election reviews, voting system security breaches and now a wave of candidates seeking to take over election administration at the state and local levels.

In addition to Ohio, Republican secretaries of state in Arkansas, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska and South Dakota are seeking to remain in office. Only Iowa’s Paul Pate is running unopposed.

In Alabama, Idaho, Nevada and North Dakota, the GOP incumbents have opted against seeking reelection or are term-limited, leaving open contests. Wyoming Secretary of State Edward Buchanan has yet to announce his plans.

Democratic secretaries are running to keep their seats in California, Colorado, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico and Washington. So far, only one has drawn a Democratic challenger.

The job of secretary of state has tended to attract candidates focused more on process than politics. The races are typically low-key contests overshadowed by campaigns for governor and state attorney general.

That changed after Trump disputed his loss and decided to target election officials in political battleground states, sometimes pressuring them to reverse his loss. In one instance, Trump made a phone call to Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger in which he asked Raffensperger to “find” enough votes to overturn Biden’s win.

Raffensperger didn’t cede to Trump’s demands and has defended Georgia’s election in a re-election bid this year where he faces three primary challengers. He has sought to counter them by touting his conservative credentials, downplaying differences with Trump and wooing primary voters with a call to ban non-citizen voting. He also has pointed to his efforts to include a photo ID requirement for mail ballots as part of a sweeping election bill passed by lawmakers last year.

At a recent rally in Georgia, Trump blasted Raffensperger as a “lousy secretary of state.” In an interview, Raffensperger said he has been working to counter the continuing misinformation and disinformation campaigns.

“We checked every allegation; I made sure we did,” Raffensperger said. “I stand on the truth, and no one has been stronger on election integrity than me.”

Trump has endorsed one of Raffensperger’s opponents, U.S. Rep. Jody Hice. Hice objected to Georgia’s electoral votes being counted for Biden, despite a lack of any evidence of widespread fraud or tampering. Georgia’s 5 million votes cast for president were counted three times, including once by hand.

Hice has been leading all candidates in fundraising and is part of a new group called the “America First Secretary of State Coalition,” organized by Jim Marchant, a former state lawmaker who is running for the

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 77 of 85

open secretary of state seat in Nevada.

The group, which also includes Trump-endorsed candidates in Arizona and Michigan, has among other things advocated for limits on mail voting.

Trump won Kansas with 56% of the vote, and the state had no significant problems with its 2020 elections. Even so, Kansas Secretary of State Scott Schwab is facing a Republican primary opponent.

Schwab has pushed back on conspiracy theories and potentially angered many GOP voters in doing so. After a recent hearing in which lawmakers heard from Trump allies making false claims about the 2020 election, he wrote the committee to say the testimony "sought to undermine confidence in our county election officers, election results, and the longstanding systems used to securely conduct elections in Kansas."

Despite any evidence of problems with Kansas' elections, Schwab's Republican opponent, Mike Brown, has called for tougher rules on drop boxes and mail ballots, supports partisan ballot reviews and wants ballots printed on special paper. He said Schwab hasn't been vigilant when it comes to protecting elections.

Schwab downplayed the criticism and said he has an open line to Trump.

"If he's got concerns, you know, the president's team can call our office and say, 'Hey, we want to talk to you about the 2020 election,' but they don't because they know there's no concerns," Schwab said.

He and some other incumbents have tried a delicate balance in messaging as they seek to retain their seats — touting election performance in their own state while hinting vaguely at election problems elsewhere.

In South Dakota, Secretary of State Steve Barnett defended the work of his office and blamed "disinformation, misinformation, mal-information" for lowering voter confidence nationwide.

"I can only speak to what went on in South Dakota," he said. "I can't speak to what happened in these other states."

Barnett's challenger, Monae Johnson, said she was "answering the call of concerned citizens" to run and criticized Barnett for sending absentee ballot applications during the pandemic and supporting online voter registration.

In Ohio, LaRose's pro-Trump statements haven't stopped his GOP challenger, former state lawmaker John Adams, from claiming that he hasn't taken election integrity seriously; a second primary challenger was disqualified for paperwork errors.

Adams told a group of Republicans gathered recently at a sports bar in suburban Columbus that "there's no way that Trump lost," likening LaRose to Georgia Democrat Stacy Abrams for his positions in favor of ballot access. LaRose says Adams is basing his campaign on "conspiracy theories and nonsense," but brushed aside questions about whether his own rhetoric had shifted.

All this has left many GOP primary voters conflicted. Lyle Adcock, 72, a semi-retired computer sales representative who listened to Adams at the sports bar, said he has always trusted Ohio elections but now isn't sure what to think.

"It's not like I feel my vote doesn't count, but I wonder if there is any of this fraud," he said.

Asked who he was supporting in the secretary of state's race, Adcock said he hadn't yet decided.

## Prosecutor seeks end to Khashoggi murder trial in Turkey

By SUZAN FRASER Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — The Turkish prosecutor in the case against 26 Saudi nationals charged in the slaying of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi made a surprise request Thursday that their trial in absentia be suspended and the case transferred to Saudi Arabia, raising fears of a possible coverup.

The panel of judges made no ruling on the prosecutor's request but said a letter would be sent to Turkey's Justice Ministry seeking its opinion on the possible transfer of the file to Saudi judicial authorities, the state-run Anadolu Agency reported. Trial was adjourned until April 7.

The development comes as Turkey has been trying to normalize its relationship with Saudi Arabia, which hit an all-time low following Khashoggi's grisly October 2018 killing. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said in an interview on Thursday that Saudi authorities were more cooperative on judicial issues

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 78 of 85

with Turkey, but did not elaborate.

In arguing for the transfer, the prosecutor told the court that the Saudi chief public prosecutor's office requested the Turkish proceedings be transferred to the kingdom in a letter dated March 13, and that international warrants issued by Ankara against the defendants be lifted, according to the private DHA news agency.

The prosecutor said that because the arrest warrants cannot be executed and defense statements cannot be taken, the case would remain inconclusive in Turkey.

Amnesty International urged Turkey to press ahead with the trial, saying if it is transferred to Saudi Arabia, Turkey will be "knowingly and willingly sending the case to a place where it will be covered up."

Moving Khashoggi's trial to Saudi Arabia would provide a diplomatic resolution to a dispute that represented the wider troubles between Ankara and the kingdom since the 2011 Arab Spring.

Turkey under Erdogan supported Islamists as the uprisings took hold, while Saudi Arabia and its ally the United Arab Emirates sought to suppress such movements for fear of facing challenges to their autocratic governments. Meanwhile, Turkey sided with Qatar in a diplomatic dispute that saw Doha boycotted by Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Since then-President Donald Trump lost the 2020 election, the Gulf Arab states have set aside — but not fully resolved — the Qatar dispute. Meanwhile, Turkey under Erdogan has faced a rapid devaluation of its lira currency over his refusal to hike interest rates. Bilateral trade to the kingdom and the UAE, a major transshipment point for the world economy, also collapsed.

Since the start of 2022, Erdogan has sought to improve those ties, including making his first visit to the UAE in nearly a decade. Saudi Arabia and the UAE, after fighting through the coronavirus pandemic's economic effects, facing a grinding war in Yemen and struggling with renewed tensions with Iran, also want to resolve the outstanding feud.

Khashoggi disappeared on Oct. 2, 2018, after entering the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, seeking documents that would allow him to marry Hatice Cengiz, a Turkish national who was waiting outside the building. He never emerged.

Turkish officials allege that the Saudi national, who was a United States resident, was killed and then dismembered with a bone saw inside the consulate. His body has not been found. Prior to his killing, Khashoggi had written critically of Saudi Arabia's crown prince in columns for the Washington Post.

Turkish authorities said he was killed by a team of Saudi agents. Those on trial in absentia include two former aides of the prince.

Saudi officials initially offered conflicting accounts concerning the killing, including claims that Khashoggi had left the consulate building unharmed. But amid mounting international pressure, they stated that Khashoggi's death was a tragic accident, with the meeting unexpectedly turning violent.

Turkey decided to try the defendants in absentia after Saudi Arabia rejected Turkish demands for their extradition.

The slaying had sparked international condemnation and cast a cloud of suspicion over Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Western intelligence agencies, as well as the U.S. Congress, have said that an operation of this magnitude could not have happened without his knowledge.

In urging Turkey to proceed with the trial, Amnesty International said Ankara would be complicit in a coverup if it grants the Saudi request for a transfer.

"If the prosecutor's request is granted, then instead of prosecuting and shedding light on a murder that was committed on its territory ... Turkey will be knowingly and willingly sending the case to a place where it will be covered up," said Tarik Beyhan, Amnesty's campaign director for Turkey.

Beyhan said he didn't want to "think about the possibility" that the prosecutor's request may be related to the improving ties between Riyadh and Ankara.

"Basic human rights ... should not be made the subject of political negotiations," he said. "A murder cannot be covered up to fix relations."

Some of the men were put on trial in Riyadh behind closed doors. A Saudi court issued a final verdict in

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 79 of 85

2020 that sentenced five mid-level officials and operatives to 20-year jail terms. The court had originally ordered the death penalty, but reduced the punishment after Khashoggi's son Salah, who lives in Saudi Arabia, announced that he forgave the defendants. Three others were sentenced to lesser jail terms.

On Thursday, Khashoggi's fiancée, Cengiz, appeared to criticize the prosecutor's request in a tweet in English. "It is an exemplary situation in terms of showing the dilemma facing humanity in the modern era," she wrote. "Which of the two will we choose? To want to live like a virtuous human being or to build a life by holding material interests above all kinds of values."

She did not respond to a request for comment.

## **Pakistan's embattled PM Khan defiant, says he won't resign**

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Pakistan's embattled Prime Minister Imran Khan remained defiant Thursday, telling the nation he won't resign even as he faces a no-confidence vote in parliament and the country's opposition says it has the numbers to push him out.

Besieged by the opposition and abandoned by coalition partners, Khan is battling for his political survival after the opposition called the vote, which is expected to take place on Sunday.

The opposition accuses him of economic mismanagement and claims he is unfit for the role of prime minister. A parliament session which was to debate his role was adjourned on Thursday within minutes of opening and without any explanation.

Lawmakers were reportedly to reconvene on Sunday for a debate and vote on Khan — which could now be a formality since a series of defections appear to have given Khan's political opponents the 172 votes in the 342-seat house to push him out.

Earlier on Thursday, the leader of a key opposition party, Bilawal Bhutto, urged Khan to resign. "You have lost. . . You have only one option: Resign," Bhutto said.

But in a video address to the nation late Thursday, Khan struck a defiant tone.

"I will not resign," said the former cricket star turned politician and added, invoking a cricket analogy: "I will fight until the last ball."

In his speech, Khan lashed out at the United States, claiming Washington had conspired with the Pakistani opposition against him and that America wants "me, personally, gone ... and everything would be forgiven."

He claimed that Washington opposed his relentless criticism of the U.S. war on terror — "and not a single Pakistani was involved in the 9/11 attacks" — as well as drone attacks in Pakistan and his refusal to agree to allow Pakistan to be used for "over-the-horizon" U.S. missions against terror targets in what is now a Taliban-ruled Afghanistan.

As for Washington's dismay at Khan's visit to Russia on Feb. 24, hours after Russian tanks rolled into Ukraine, Khan said that underscored U.S. attempts to control Pakistan's foreign policy.

Khan came to power in 2018, promising to rid Pakistan of corruption even as he partnered with some of the country's tainted old guard. He called them 'electables' — necessary to win elections because their wealth and vast land holdings guaranteed votes in large swaths of the country.

In politics, Khan has espoused a more conservative brand of Islam. He has also kept company with radical clerics, including Maulana Tariq Jameel, who once said that women in short skirts had caused the COVID-19 epidemic.

Still, Khan is credited with building the country's foreign reserves, now over \$18 billion. Remittances from Pakistanis living overseas was a whopping \$29 billion in 2021, despite the economic downturn caused by the pandemic.

Khan's reputation for fighting corruption has encouraged Pakistanis to send money home and he has also cracked down on the unofficial money transfer system, known as Hawala. However, the opposition blames him for high inflation and a weak Pakistani rupee.

His handling of the coronavirus pandemic brought him international praise. His implementation of so-called "smart" lockdowns that targeted heavily infected areas — rather than a nationwide shutdown — kept

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 80 of 85

some of the country's key industries such as construction afloat.

Khan's often-stated opposition to Washington's "war in terror" and the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan has brought him popularity at home.

He has tried to reach out to Afghanistan's new Taliban rulers, fostered close ties to China and Russia and abstained from the U.N. Security Council vote condemning Russia for invading Ukraine. Still, Khan has denounced the war and called Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy this week in support. The two reportedly spoke for 40 minutes.

Madiha Afzal, a fellow at the Washington-based Brookings Institution blamed Khan's political woes on his confrontational style and a cooling of relations between him and the powerful military, widely reported to have assisted Khan's election victory in 2018.

Pakistan's army has been the country's de facto ruler more than half of its 75-year history — even when governments are democratically elected, the military maintains considerable control from behind the scenes, despite their claims of neutrality.

In a Brookings Institution podcast, Afzal said it's rare for a Pakistani political leader to finish his term. "This is part of a much larger, longer cycle that reflects on Pakistan's built-in political instability," she said.

"Essentially, opposition parties don't wait for elections to occur, for the previous party to be voted out, or for the prime ministers to be ousted from power," Afzal added. "While the military says that it is neutral in this situation, in this political crisis, what many read that as saying is that the military has basically withdrawn its support from Khan."

## Long-term mortgage rates rise again; 30-year breaches 4.5%

WASHINGTON (AP) — Average long-term U.S. mortgage rates rose again this week as the key 30-year loan rate vaulted over 4.5% and attained its highest level since the end of 2018.

Against a backdrop of inflation at a four-decade high, the increases in home loan rates come a few weeks after the Federal Reserve raised by a quarter point its benchmark short-term interest rate — which it had kept near zero since the pandemic recession struck two years ago — to cool the economy. The central bank has signaled potentially up to seven additional rate hikes this year.

The developments mean that mortgage rates likely will continue to rise over the year.

Mortgage buyer Freddie Mac reported Thursday that the average rate on the 30-year loan this week rose to 4.67% from 4.42% last week. That's a sharp contrast from last year's record-low mortgage rates of around 3%. A year ago, the 30-year rate stood at 3.18%.

The average rate on 15-year, fixed-rate mortgages, popular among those refinancing their homes, jumped to 3.83% from 3.63% last week.

Home prices are up about 15% over the past year and as much as 30% in some cities. Homes available for sale have been in short supply even before the pandemic started two years ago. Now higher prices and rising loan rates will make it even harder for would-be buyers as the spring homebuying season gets underway.

The government reported Thursday that an inflation gauge closely monitored by the Fed jumped 6.4% in February compared with a year earlier, with sharply higher prices for food, gasoline and other necessities squeezing Americans' finances. That figure was the largest year-over-year rise in 40 years — since January 1982. Excluding volatile prices for food and energy, so-called core inflation increased 5.4% in February from 12 months earlier.

Robust consumer demand has combined with shortages of many goods to fuel the sharpest price jumps in four decades. Measures of inflation will likely worsen in the coming months because Thursday's report doesn't reflect the consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which began on Feb. 24. The war has disrupted global oil markets and accelerated prices for wheat, nickel and other key commodities.

Squeezed by inflation, U.S. consumers increased their spending by just 0.2% in February, down from a much larger 2.7% gain in January.



## Ukraine nuclear operator: Russian troops leave Chernobyl

LVIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian troops were leaving the Chernobyl nuclear power plant and heading towards Ukraine's border with Belarus, the Ukrainian nuclear operator company said.

The operator, Energoatom said that the Russian military was also preparing to leave Slavutych, a nearby city where power plant workers live.

Energoatom also said reports were confirmed that the Russians dug trenches in the Red Forest, the 10-square-kilometer (nearly four-square-mile) area surrounding the Chernobyl plant within the Exclusion Zone, and received "significant doses of radiation."

The Russian troops "panicked at the first sign of illness," which "showed up very quickly," and began to prepare to leave, the operator said. The claim couldn't be independently verified.

Energoatom said the Russians have signed a document confirming the handover of the Chernobyl plant and stating that the plant's administration doesn't have any complaints about the Russian troops who were "guarding" the facility.

"It turns out that the occupiers 'guarded' the station for more than five weeks, and even so well that there are no complaints," Energoatom said in a statement on Telegram.

## As Russia sees tech brain drain, other nations hope to gain

By LIUDAS DAPKUS Associated Press

VILNIUS, Lithuania (AP) — Russia's tech workers are looking for safer and more secure professional pastures.

By one estimate, up to 70,000 computer specialists, spooked by a sudden frost in the business and political climate, have bolted the country since Russia invaded Ukraine five weeks ago. Many more are expected to follow.

For some countries, Russia's loss is being seen as their potential gain and an opportunity to bring fresh expertise to their own high-tech industries.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has noticed the brain drain even in the throes of a war that, according to the U.N. refugee agency, has caused more than 4 million people to flee Ukraine and displaced millions more within the country.

This week, Putin reacted to the exodus of tech professionals by approving legislation to eliminate income taxes between now and 2024 for individuals who work for information technology companies.

Some people in the vast new pool of high-tech exiles say they are in no rush to return home. An elite crowd furnished with European Union visas has relocated to Poland or the Baltic nations of Latvia and Lithuania.

A larger contingent has fallen back on countries where Russians do not need visas: Armenia, Georgia and the former Soviet republics in Central Asia. In normal times, millions of less-skilled laborers emigrate from those economically shaky countries to comparatively more prosperous Russia.

Anastasia, a 24-year-old freelance computer systems analyst from the Siberian city of Novosibirsk, chose Kyrgyzstan, where her husband has family.

"When we heard about the war on (Feb. 24), we thought it was probably time to leave, but that we might wait and see. On February 25, we bought our tickets and left," Anastasia said. "There wasn't much thinking to do."

Like all the Russian workers contacted for this story, Anastasia asked to remain anonymous. Moscow was cracking down on dissent even before the invasion of Ukraine, and people living outside Russia still fear reprisals.

"As long as I can remember, there has always been fear around expressing one's own views in Russia," Anastasia said, adding that the war and "the background noise of patriotism" made the environment even more forbidding. "I left one day before they began searching and interrogating people at the border."

The scale of the apparent brain drain was laid bare last week by Sergei Plugotarenko, the head of the Russian Association for Electronic Communications, an industry lobbying group.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 82 of 85

"The first wave – 50,000-70,000 people – has already left," Plugotarenko told a parliamentary committee. Only the high cost of flights out of the country prevented an even larger mass exit. Another 100,000 tech workers nevertheless might leave Russia in April, Plugotarenko predicted.

Konstantin Siniushin, a managing partner at Untitled Ventures, a tech-focused venture capital fund based in Latvia, said that Russian tech firms with international customers had no choice but to move since many foreign companies are hastily distancing themselves from anything Russia-related.

"They had to leave the country so their business could survive, or, in the case of research and development workers, they were relocated by HQs," Siniushin wrote in emailed remarks.

Untitled Ventures is helping in the migration; the firm chartered two flights to Armenia carrying 300 tech workers from Russia, Siniushin said.

Some nearby countries are eager to reap the dividends.

Russian talent is primed for poaching. A 2020 Global Skills Index report published by Coursera, a leading provider of open online courses, found that people from Russia scored highest for skill proficiency in technology and data science.

As soon as the war started in Ukraine, the Central Asian nation of Uzbekistan radically streamlined the process for obtaining work visas and residence permits for IT specialists.

Anton Filippov, a mobile app programmer from St. Petersburg, and the team of freelancers with whom he works made the move to Tashkent, the Uzbek capital, where he grew up, even before those incentives were made public.

"On February 24, it was like we had woken up to this different terrible reality," Filippov said. "We're all young, less than 27 years old, and so we were afraid we might be called up to take part in this war."

As in-demand tech workers explore their options, their diaspora resembles a roaming caravan. Some countries, like Uzbekistan, are picked as stepping stones because Russian citizens do not need visas for short-term stays. But young professionals like Filippov do not plan to necessarily stay where they first landed.

"If the conditions they find differ from the ones they were promised, they will simply move on," he said.

In many cases, entire companies are looking to relocate to avoid the fallout from international sanctions. A senior diplomat from another Russian neighbor, Kazakhstan, made a naked appeal this week for fleeing foreign enterprises to come to his country.

Kazakhstan is eyeing high-tech investors with particular interest as the country tries to diversify its economy, which relies on oil exports. In 2017, the government set up a technology park in the capital, Nur-Sultan, and offered tax breaks, preferential loans, and grants to anybody prepared to set up shop there.

The uptake has been moderate so far, but the hope is that the Russian brain drain will give this initiative a major shot in the arm.

"The accounts of Russian companies are being frozen, and their transactions do not go through. They are trying to keep customers, and one available opportunity is to go to Kazakhstan," said Arman Abdrasilov, chairman of Zerde Holding, an investment fund in Almaty, Kazakhstan's business hub.

Not all countries are so eager, though.

"Russian companies or startups cannot move to Lithuania," said Inga Simanonyte, an adviser to the Baltic nation's Economy and Innovation Minister. "We do not work with any Russian company with their possible relocation to Lithuania, and the ministry has suspended all applications for startup visas since February 24."

Security concerns and suspicion that Russians might spy or engage in cyber mischief abroad make some governments wary about welcoming the country's economic refugees.

"The IT sector in Russia is very closely connected to the security services. The problem is that without an extremely strong vetting process, we risk importing parts of the criminal system of Russia," Lithuanian political analyst Marius Laurinavicius told The Associated Press.

Siniushin, the managing partner at Untitled Ventures, is urging Western nations to throw open their doors so their employers can take advantage of the unusual hiring opportunity the war created.

"The more talent that Europe or the United States can take away from Russia today, the more benefits these new innovators, whose potential will be fully realized abroad, will bring to other countries," he said.

## Review: 'Morbius'? More like moribund. This is just batty

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

The latest hero from Marvel is hard to explain. He's a man and yet also a bat. No, not Batman. Let me try again: He's a daywalking vampire, but, no, not that cool cat Blade. This guy is good but also very bad. Look, he's clearly got an identity crisis and his film is equally in trouble.

"Morbius" is a forgettable, often laughable, entry in Sony's attempt to fill its own Spider-Man-adjacent cinematic universe, a poorly edited, derivative time suck — pun intended.

It wastes the considerable talents of Jared Leto, who is often left here looking like the snarling lead singer of a death metal band. So confused is the film's execution that it more closely resembles a horror movie than a superhero flick.

Leto stars as Dr. Michael Morbius, a frail, brilliant and wealthy biochemist with a rare blood disease whose desperate search for a cure leads to a serum that makes him strong but also turns him into a vampire with a thirst for blood.

After a hit of serum, he goes from needing crutches to swinging midair on pipes like an Olympic athlete. "I don't know what I'm capable of," he says. One downside: He has to chug blood bags, so there's that. He also seems to be able to turn into a bat and fly but why he hasn't flapped his way out of this film is unfathomable.

The filmmakers — director Daniel Espinosa, hobbled by a meandering script from Matt Sazama and Burk Sharpless — simply do not know what to do with this creature once they've given us his backstory. They throw in a rivalry with his best friend (Matt Smith) and a love interest (Adria Arjona) hoping to reach something Shakespearian, but they're treading water.

Instead of a seamless, tight visual style, we are given jiggly camerawork and a buffet of previous films — "The Matrix," "American Psycho," "The Usual Suspects" and "An American Werewolf in London." Typical Marvel violence is unleashed, including so much muscle that our hero smashes through New York City concrete streets to the subway system below.

What's astonishing is that despite a whole movie, we know very little about Morbius. He is so principled that he turns down a Nobel Prize but perfectly OK slaughtering henchmen. He makes delicate origami animals for sick kids and, despite having oodles of cash from inventing artificial blood, wears a cheap Casio watch. At one point, Morbius loses focus as the main guy when Smith's rival character hijacks the film entirely.

The special effects team work overtime to give Leto, unfortunately wearing a messy manbun throughout the film, a sort of bat-ness — his pupils cloud and his ear hairs vibrate like he's using sonar. His skin will suddenly stretch over bone and he snarls a lot, too. For some reason, whenever he leaps, he is enveloped by a viscous cloud. He can also slo-mo and duck bullets and the action sequences build to moments when everything is suddenly stylistically still and quiet, like inside a hurricane's eye.

"It's a curse," Leto declares at one point and you wonder if maybe he's talking about the role and its place in his career. But he'll be fine. He just has to ignore moments like when Morbius is chained to a desk in a police department's interview room and says: "I'm starting to get hungry and you don't want to see me when I'm hungry."

There will be a lot of debate over where "Morbius" sits in the Marvel canon. There are clues that he has a future fighting Spider-Man but maybe the best thing for our vampire anti-hero is just to ignore him or swat at him like a wayward bat.

"Morbius," a Sony Pictures release slated for theaters Friday, is rated PG-13 for "intense sequences of violence, some frightening images, and brief strong language." Running time: 104 minutes. One star out of four.

## OPEC sticks to modest boost in oil despite war jitters

LONDON (AP) — OPEC and allied oil producers including Russia decided Thursday to stick to a modest increase in the amount of crude they pump to the world, a step that supports higher prices even as the

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 84 of 85

Biden administration plans to try to lower them by releasing oil from strategic reserves.

The group, known as OPEC+, said it would add 432,000 barrels per day in May, as it works to gradually restore production cuts made during the depths of the coronavirus pandemic. That's slightly up from 400,000 barrels in previous months, with officials saying they're revising baseline production levels.

The alliance has been unmoved by pleas from oil-consuming countries to pump more oil as energy prices soar, fueling inflation worldwide. High prices have helped Russia — the world's largest exporter with 12% of the global market — offset some of the economic pain from Western sanctions over its invasion of Ukraine.

The U.S. and European sanctions have dealt a severe blow to Russia's economy but contain exceptions for energy payments. That is a U.S. concession to European allies who are much more dependent on Russian energy than the U.S., which has banned the import of Russian oil. Europe by contrast gets 40% of its natural gas and 25% of its oil from Russia, and officials there have shied away from a boycott, instead aiming to reduce dependency through conservation and boosting wind and solar energy as fast as they can over the next several years.

Oil prices have risen as global demand rebounded for fuel for cars, trucks and airplanes. The war pushed them ever higher over fears Russian oil might be lost to the market if sanctions tighten.

They have a major influence on how much U.S. drivers pay at the pump, with crude oil accounting for about half the price of a gallon of gas. To combat high gasoline prices — averaging \$4.24, up \$1.38 from a year ago — U.S. President Joe Biden is preparing to order the release of up to 1 million barrels per day from strategic petroleum reserves, with an announcement expected as soon Thursday.

Diesel fuel for trucks, farm equipment and factories has also jumped in price, to a U.S. average of \$5.25 per gallon, up \$2.02 from a year ago, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

In November, the White House announced the release of 50 million barrels in coordination with other countries, and after the war began, the U.S. and 30 other countries agreed on an additional release of 60 million barrels.

Oil prices slumped on expectations of a new release, but analysts at UniCredit bank said the impact of such moves on prices "is usually short-lived." That's because reserves are finite, and the production shortfall is open-ended. Once reserves fall below a certain level, the market might fear they would be insufficient to combat a further shortfall and prices would go up.

U.S. oil prices were down 6.3%, to \$100.99, while international benchmark Brent crude dropped 5.6%, to \$107.50.

## Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, April 1, the 91st day of 2022. There are 274 days left in the year. This is April Fool's Day.

Today's Highlights in History:

On April 1, 1972, the first Major League Baseball players' strike began; it lasted 12 days. Twenty years later, on April 1, 1992, the National Hockey League Players' Association went on its first-ever strike, which lasted 10 days.

On this date:

In 1865, during the Civil War, Union forces routed Confederate soldiers in the Battle of Five Forks in Virginia.

In 1891, the Wrigley Co. was founded in Chicago by William Wrigley, Jr.

In 1924, Adolf Hitler was sentenced to five years in prison for his role in the Beer Hall Putsch in Munich. (Hitler was released in December 1924; during his time behind bars, he wrote his autobiographical screed, "Mein Kampf.")

In 1945, American forces launched the amphibious invasion of Okinawa during World War II. (U.S. forces succeeded in capturing the Japanese island on June 22.)

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 01, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 268 ~ 85 of 85

In 1970, President Richard M. Nixon signed a measure banning cigarette advertising on radio and television, to take effect after Jan. 1, 1971.

In 1975, with Khmer Rouge guerrillas closing in, Cambodian President Lon Nol resigned and fled into exile, spending the rest of his life in the United States.

In 1976, Apple Computer was founded by Steve Jobs, Steve Wozniak and Ronald Wayne.

In 1977, the U.S. Senate followed the example of the House of Representatives by adopting, 86-9, a stringent code of ethics requiring full financial disclosure and limits on outside income.

In 2003, American troops entered a hospital in Nasiriyah (nah-sih-REE'-uh), Iraq, and rescued Army Pfc. Jessica Lynch, who had been held prisoner since her unit was ambushed on March 23.

In 2011, Afghans angry over the burning of a Quran at a small Florida church stormed a U.N. compound in northern Afghanistan, killing seven foreigners, including four Nepalese guards.

In 2016, world leaders ended a nuclear security summit in Washington by declaring progress in safeguarding nuclear materials sought by terrorists and wayward nations, even as President Barack Obama acknowledged the task was far from finished.

In 2020, resisting calls to issue a national stay-at-home order, President Donald Trump said he wanted to give governors "flexibility" to respond to the coronavirus. Under growing pressure, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis joined his counterparts in more than 30 states in issuing a stay-at-home order.

Ten years ago: A coalition of more than 70 partners, including the United States, pledged to send millions of dollars and communications equipment to Syria's opposition groups. Myanmar's democracy icon, Aung San Suu Kyi (ahng sahn soo chee), was elected to her country's parliament. Taylor Swift was named entertainer of the year for the second year in a row at the Academy of Country Music Awards.

Five years ago: An avalanche of water from three overflowing rivers swept through a small city in Colombia, leaving more than 300 dead. Bob Dylan finally received his Nobel Literature diploma and medal during a small gathering in Stockholm, where he was performing a concert. Two-time NBA scoring champion Tracy McGrady, Kansas coach Bill Self, former Chicago Bulls executive Jerry Krause and former UConn star Rebecca Lobo were among 11 people named to the Basketball Hall of Fame.

One year ago: On the opening day of the baseball season, the game between the Washington Nationals and the New York Mets was postponed after four Nationals players tested positive for COVID-19; the entire three-game series would be postponed a day later. Virginia's highest court ruled that the city of Charlottesville could take down two statues of Confederate generals, including one of Robert E. Lee that became the focus of a violent white nationalist rally in 2017. Seven pro-democracy advocates in Hong Kong were convicted on charges of organizing and participating in massive anti-government protests. North Carolina said Hall of Fame basketball coach Roy Williams was retiring; the decision came two weeks after Williams closed his 18th season with the Tar Heels.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Don Hastings is 88. Actor Ali MacGraw is 83. R&B singer Rudolph Isley is 83. Reggae singer Jimmy Cliff is 74. Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito is 72. Rock musician Billy Currie (Ultravox) is 72. Actor Annette O'Toole is 70. Movie director Barry Sonnenfeld is 69. Singer Susan Boyle is 61. Actor Jose Zuniga is 60. Country singer Woody Lee is 54. Actor Jessica Collins is 51. Rapper-actor Method Man is 51. Movie directors Albert and Allen Hughes are 50. Political commentator Rachel Maddow is 49. Former tennis player Magdalena Maleeva is 47. Actor David Oyelowo (oh-YEHLOH'-oh) is 46. Actor JJ Field is 44. Singer Bijou Phillips is 42. Actor Sam Huntington is 40. Comedian-actor Taran Killam is 40. Actor Matt Lanter is 39. Actor Josh Zuckerman is 37. Country singer Hillary Scott (Lady A) is 36. Rock drummer Arejaya Hale (Halestorm) is 35. Actor Asa Butterfield is 25. Actor Tyler Wladis is 12.