

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 1 of 73

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [1- Truss Pros Help Wanted](#)
- [2- City Council Story](#)
- [3- Gov. Noem Restricts Critical Race Theory in K-12 Schools](#)
- [3- C&MA Church to host Easter Cantata](#)
- [3- Way of the Cross](#)
- [3- Ken's Help Wanted](#)
- [4- Weather Pages](#)
- [9- Daily Devotional](#)
- [10- 2022 Community Events](#)
- [11- Subscription Form](#)
- [12- News from the Associated Press](#)

## UpComing Events

### Wednesday, April 6

- United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.
- Emmanuel: 6 p.m. Soup Supper (Nigeria Circle is host), 7 p.m. Lenten Service
- St. John's: Lenten Service, 7 p.m.
- School Breakfast: Egg omelets.
- School Lunch: Hamburgers, fries.
- Senior Menu: Scalloped potatoes with ham, peas, sunset salad, cookie, whole wheat bread.

### Thursday, April 7

- 8:34 a.m. to 3 p.m.: FFA CDE in Groton
- 6 p.m.: FFA Banquet

### Friday, April 8

- 11:30 a.m.: Track meet in Miller

### Saturday, April 9

- Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park

- Dueling Pianos Baseball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm

### Monday, April 11

- 7 p.m.: School Board Meeting

### Tuesday, April 12

- ELECTION DAY IN GROTON
- 11 a.m.: Track meet in Groton

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

"UNEXPECTED KINDNESS IS THE MOST POWERFUL, LEAST COSTLY, AND MOST UNDERRATED AGENT OF HUMAN CHANGE."

— BOB KERREY

Chicken Soup  
for the Soul



### Wednesday, April 13

- 7 p.m.: "Way of the Cross" at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church

### Friday, April 15 - Good Friday

- No School, Groton City & States offices closed

### Monday, April 18 - Easter Monday

- No School, Groton City & State offices closed
- 10 a.m.: Girls Golf at Whetstone Creek GC in Milbank

### Tuesday, April 19

- 7 p.m.: City Council Meeting

### Wednesday, April 20

- 6 p.m.: FCCLA Banquet in GHS Arena Lobby

### Thursday, April 21

- Track Meet in Redfield

## 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.

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## City continues garbage pickup with Heartland Waste

There was a 40 minute discussion on the garbage pickup contract. Three-year bids were submitted by A-1 Sanitation of Aberdeen and Heartland Waste Management of Moberge.

The issue came up whereas Heartland has been doing the garbage pickup for 15 years and has provided curbside pickup. Their bid was \$15.95 per household. A-1 Sanitation would provide 95 gallon totes which would be picked up with an arm from the truck. They also offer 65 gallon totes for the elderly if they want a smaller one. The totes would have to be placed by the curbside with the lid facing a certain way. After the discussion, the council deferred further discussion to executive session. After the executive session, the council voted to go with no totes and to accept the bid from Heartland Waste Management for a three-year contract.

Two bids were submitted for the seal coat project for this summer. Top Coat out of Yankton submitted a bid of \$2.461. Bituminous Paving of Ortonville, Minn., for \$3.45 per square feet. The council accepted the bid from Top Coat. The original 75,000 square feet project will have to be reduced. The price last year was \$1.66 and Terry Herron had estimated a price this year of \$1.75.

There was discussion of expanding the airport by installing electrical, water and hangers. It would cost around \$60,000 to \$80,000 and there is a chance the state would pay for half of the cost. There would be a chance to rent out the hangers which would generate some revenue. Councilman David Blackmun said the city should budget it for a couple of years before pursuing the project. No action was taken.

Councilman David Blackmun talked about the the proposed new bathroom/concession stand project for the baseball field. There was discussion of putting up a storm shelter to coincide with the project, but that would put the cost over a million dollars with FEMA contributing about 83 percent of the cost of the storm shelter. There is also discussion of putting up a storm shelter and bathroom facility at the park.

The city-wide spring-cleanup date has been set for Groton for April 30 through May 6.

A special event alcoholic beverage license was approved for the Groton Firemen's Fun Night set for April 23.

Malt Beverage License Renewals for 2022-23 were approved for Ken's Food Fair, MJ's Sinclair and Dollar General. Olde Bank N' Cafe opted not to renew their license this year.

The council approved the donation of four season baseball passes and a family pool pass for the Dueling Duo silent auction set for April 9.

Councilman Karyn Babcock talked about The Pantry. Tentative hours are Mondays from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. and Tuesdays from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. A representative from Feeding South Dakota coming to Groton to visit the site on April 14th around 1 p.m. A form will need to be filled out for people coming to get food - all it asks is how many in the households and the age of each member. The Groton Lions Club is sponsoring the 503C3 tax exempt status for The Pantry. Babcock said, "It's super exciting news." The Pantry is located in the northwest room at the Groton Community Center.

Jason Wambach will be the new replacement for Kristi Flihs on the city council. He will be appointed at the first meeting in May.

The baseball crew was hired after an executive session. They are: Matt Locke, softball/baseball coordinator and Legion coach; Seth Erickson, assistant Legion coach; Dalton Locke, junior Legion coach; Aaron Severson, junior Teener or junior Legion coach; Susan Fjeldheim, U12 girls softball coach; Kenzie McInerney, U8 girls softball coach; Anne Hinkelman, Brenna Imrie and Jerica Locke, gatekeeping; Bradin Althoff, Kaleb Hoover, Tate Larson, Cole Simon and Alyssa Thaler, groundskeepers.

Thomas Strickland was hired as a new police officer. He is currently a police officer in Moberge.

Aaron Grant came before the council during the public input part and he apologized for his actions he had done at the Brown County Courthouse. He had smashed an old computer at the county auditor's office after the last election.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 3 of 73

## Gov. Noem Restricts Critical Race Theory in K-12 Schools

PIERRE, S.D. – Yesterday, Governor Kristi Noem signed Executive Order 2022-02, which restricts the teaching of Critical Race Theory in K-12 education in South Dakota.

“Political indoctrination has no place in our classrooms,” said Governor Noem. “Our children will not be taught that they are racists or that they are victims, and they will not be compelled to feel responsible for the mistakes of their ancestors. We will guarantee that our students learn America’s true and honest history – that includes both our triumphs and our mistakes.”

Executive Order 2022-02 restricts Critical Race Theory in the following ways:

The Department of Education (DOE) shall not compel employees, students, or teachers to personally affirm, adopt, or adhere to inherently divisive concepts;

The Secretary of Education will review all policies within DOE to identify if any promote inherently divisive concepts;

DOE will review other materials and trainings to identify if any promote or endorse inherently divisive concepts;

If any policies, materials, or trainings promote inherently divisive concepts, they shall end or be removed no later than October 1; and

Directs the Board of Education Standards to ensure South Dakota Content Standards do not promote inherently divisive concepts.

“Inherently divisive concepts” are defined in Section 7 of Executive Order 2022-02.

In the 2022 legislative session, Governor Noem signed HB 1012 to block mandatory Critical Race Theory trainings and orientations at colleges in South Dakota.

Last year, Governor Noem signed Executive Order 2021-11, blocking federal civics and history grants due to concerns with ties to Critical Race Theory. She also worked with the Board of Regents to ensure that Critical Race Theory will not be the basis of education at South Dakota schools.

**HELP  
WANTED!**

**Part time deli clerk and part  
time cashier and stocker.  
Apply at Ken’s Food Fair, Groton**

## C&MA Church to host Easter Cantata

Groton Christian and Missionary Alliance Church will be hosting our Easter Cantata on Sunday, April 10 at 6pm. Please join us for “Jesus The Undeclared One” created by Lee Black & Jason Block and arranged by Daniel Semsen. Afterwards, please stay for a time of fellowship with desserts and refreshments. We have not performed an Easter Cantata since 2019, so we are excited to see all you again and we celebrate our victorious Redeemer!

## Way of the Cross

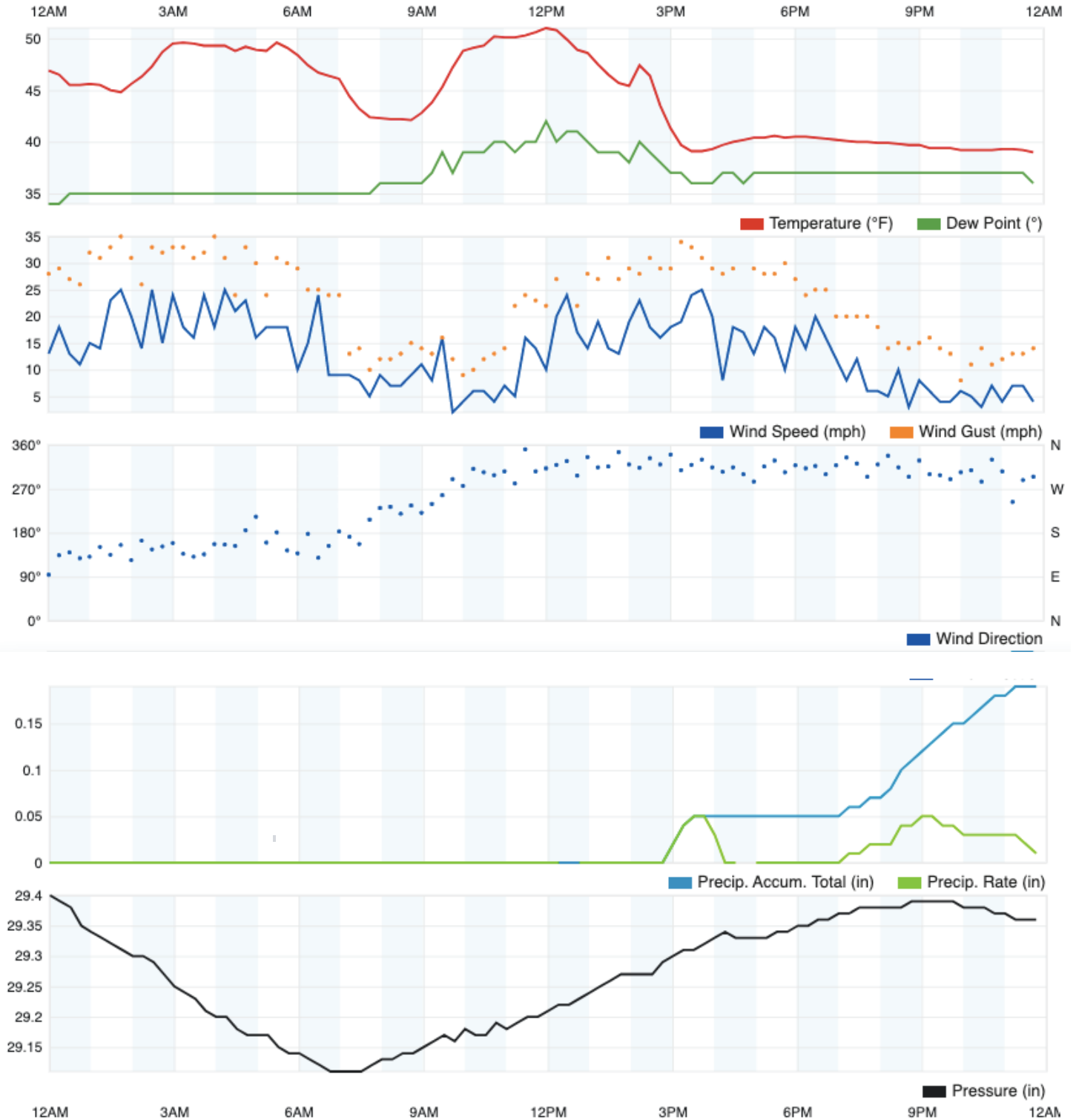
The portrayal of Christ’s journey to the cross done by the Groton SEAS High School students will be held Wednesday, April 13, starting at 7 p.m. It is the annual “Way of the Cross”.

The portrayal is not appropriate for small children, parental discretion advised.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 4 of 73

## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



# Broton Daily Independent

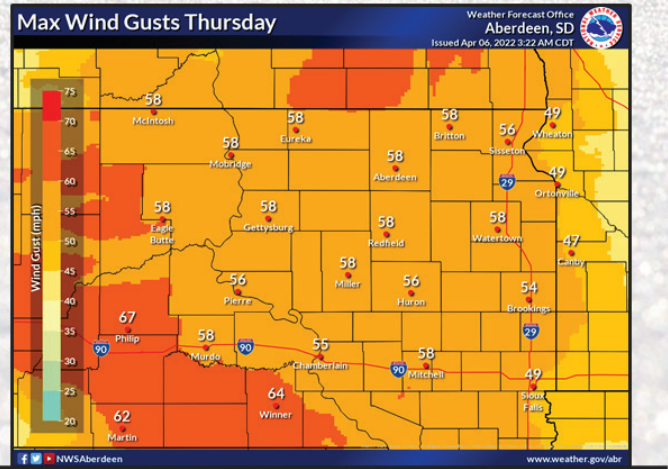
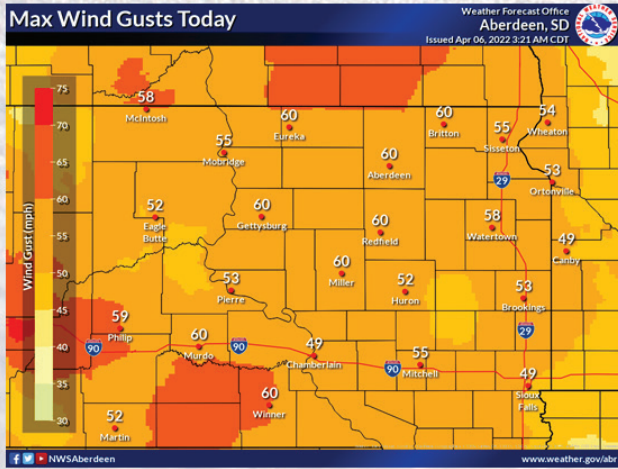
Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 5 of 73

**High Wind Warning**

Today	Tonight	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday
40%	10% → 50%	60% 40%		
Windy. Chance Rain/Snow then Decreasing Clouds	Slight Chance Rain and Windy then Chance Snow and Blustery	Windy. Snow Likely then Chance Rain/Snow	Mostly Cloudy and Blustery	Sunny and Breezy
<b>High: 47 °F</b>	<b>Low: 31 °F</b>	<b>High: 43 °F</b>	<b>Low: 27 °F</b>	<b>High: 48 °F</b>

## Strong Winds Will Continue Through Thursday

- Sustained northwesterly winds of 30 to 40 mph with gusts of 55 to 60 mph can be expected today through Thursday.
- Periods of rain and/or snow today and Thursday.
- High winds can be a hazard to high-profile vehicles.



Visit [www.weather.gov/abr](http://www.weather.gov/abr) for a detailed local forecast

Updated: 4/6/2022 4:18 AM CT

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE  
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

A storm system over Minnesota will continue producing high winds across the area today through Thursday. Northwestern winds of 25 to 40 mph with gusts of 55 to 60 mph can be expected. Strong winds can be a hazard to high-profile vehicles.

# Broton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 6 of 73

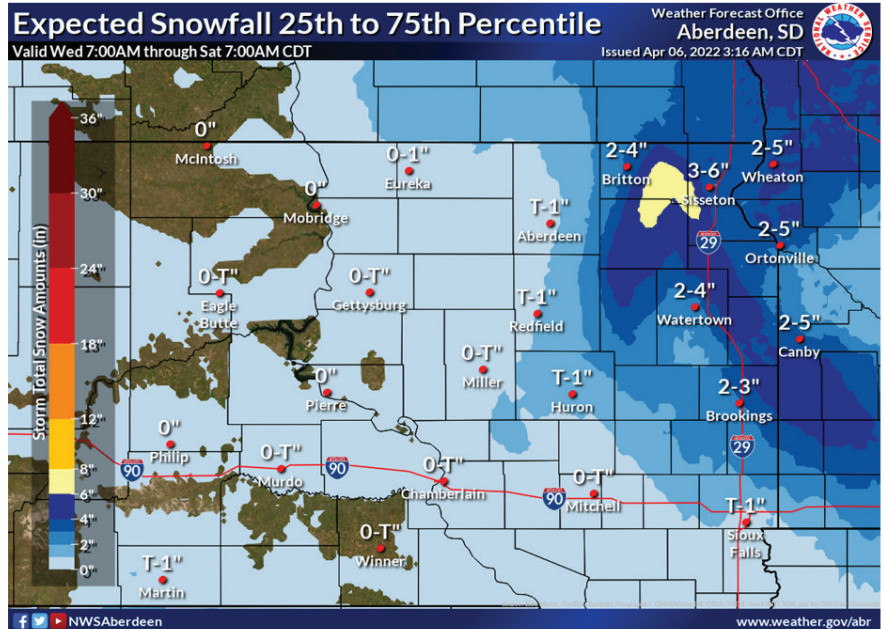


## Snow Potential Today-Thursday Night

April 6, 2022  
4:35 AM

### Overview

- Accumulating snow Today - Thursday
- Strong winds and snowfall may cause travel related impacts, especially over the Sisseton Hills and adjacent areas.
- Graphic indicates forecast snowfall Today - Thursday night



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Accumulating snowfall can be expected today through Thursday, mainly in northeastern South Dakota and western Minnesota. Strong northwesterly winds of 25 to 40 mph with higher gusts will combine with the snowfall to create travel-related impacts.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 7 of 73

## Today in Weather History

April 6, 1959: Dust storms impacted much of the state of South Dakota beginning on the 6th and on into the 7th. The preceding drought period had left a little moisture in the soil, so the fall-plowed fields in exposed locations eroded severely. Strong winds on the 6th and 7th lifted the loose soil, creating areas of blowing dust. In the localities, visibility was less than a quarter mile for short periods. Some observers stated that it was the worst dust event since the 1930s.

April 6, 2006: Severe thunderstorms the morning of the 6th produced large hail up to 1.75 inches in diameter near Miller in Hand County. Later on, heavy rains of 3 to 6 inches fell causing flash flooding across parts of Spink, Clark, and Day counties. Many county and township roads were flooded with several of the roads damaged or thoroughly washed out. Areas around Frankfort, Doland, Turton, Conde, Crandall, Raymond, Butler and Bristol were most affected. Many roads were closed. Also, several basements were flooded, and sewers were backed up.

April 6, 2008: An area of low pressure moving across South Dakota spread heavy snow of 6 to 15 inches across much of central, north central, and northeast South Dakota. Also, strong winds gusting to 25 to 40 mph caused some blowing and drifting snow. Many activities were canceled and roads became treacherous. Many vehicles went into the ditch, and several accidents also occurred. Snowfall amounts included, 6 inches at Mission Ridge, Isabel, Mellette, and Britton, 7 inches at Faulkton, Andover, Columbia, Timber Lake, and Eureka, 8 inches at Bath, Selby, Mobridge, and Leola, 9 inches at Hosmer, 10 inches at Ipswich, 11 inches at Mound City, and 6 miles east of Hayes. Locations with a foot or more of snow included 12 inches at Roscoe and Elm Lake, 13 inches at Eagle Butte, Onaka, and 23 miles north of Highmore, and 15 inches at Bowdle.

1909: American explorer Robert Peary and five others reached what they determined to be the North Pole on this day. Historical analysis suggests he fell a few miles short of achieving his goal. Click [HERE](#) for more information from the History.com.

1936 - A tornado outbreak in the Deep South resulted in a total of 446 deaths and eighteen million dollars damage. It was a "Tale of Two Cities". During the evening of the 5th a tornado hit Tupelo MS killing 216 persons, injuring 700 others, and causing three million dollars damage. The next morning the paths of two tornadoes met about 8:30 AM and cut a swath four blocks wide through Gainesville GA killing 203 persons, injuring 934, and causing thirteen million dollars damage. Eight to ten feet of debris filled the streets following the storm. At least 70 persons died in the Cooper Pants Factory, the greatest tornado toll of record for a single building. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1973: On this date through the 8th, a major spring snowstorm dumped 11.6 inches of snow across Denver, Colorado. Most of the heavy wet snow of 10.1 inches fell on the 7th when temperatures remained in the 20s. The low temperature of 5 degrees on the 8th was a new record low for the date and the lowest for so late in the season.

1983 - The temperature at Denver, CO, dipped to a record cold seven degrees above zero. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Rain and melting snow caused flooding from New England to Ohio. Flooding in the Merrimack Valley of Massachusetts was the worst in fifty years, causing forty-two million dollars damage. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A powerful storm produced wind gusts to 75 mph around Chicago, IL, and wind gusts to 92 mph at Goshen IN. The high winds created twenty-five foot waves on Lake Michigan. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

2007: In Cleveland, Ohio on the 6th to the 9th:

The opening-season series between the Indians and Minnesota Twins is wiped out by a snowstorm and a cold snap. The Indians led 4-0 when their home opener Friday on the 6th was called off by umpires because of heavy snow. The grounds crew who tried to make the field playable with backpack blowers and brooms spent more time on the field than the players during nearly three hours of stoppages. About a foot of snow remained on the ground Monday afternoon the 9th.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 8 of 73

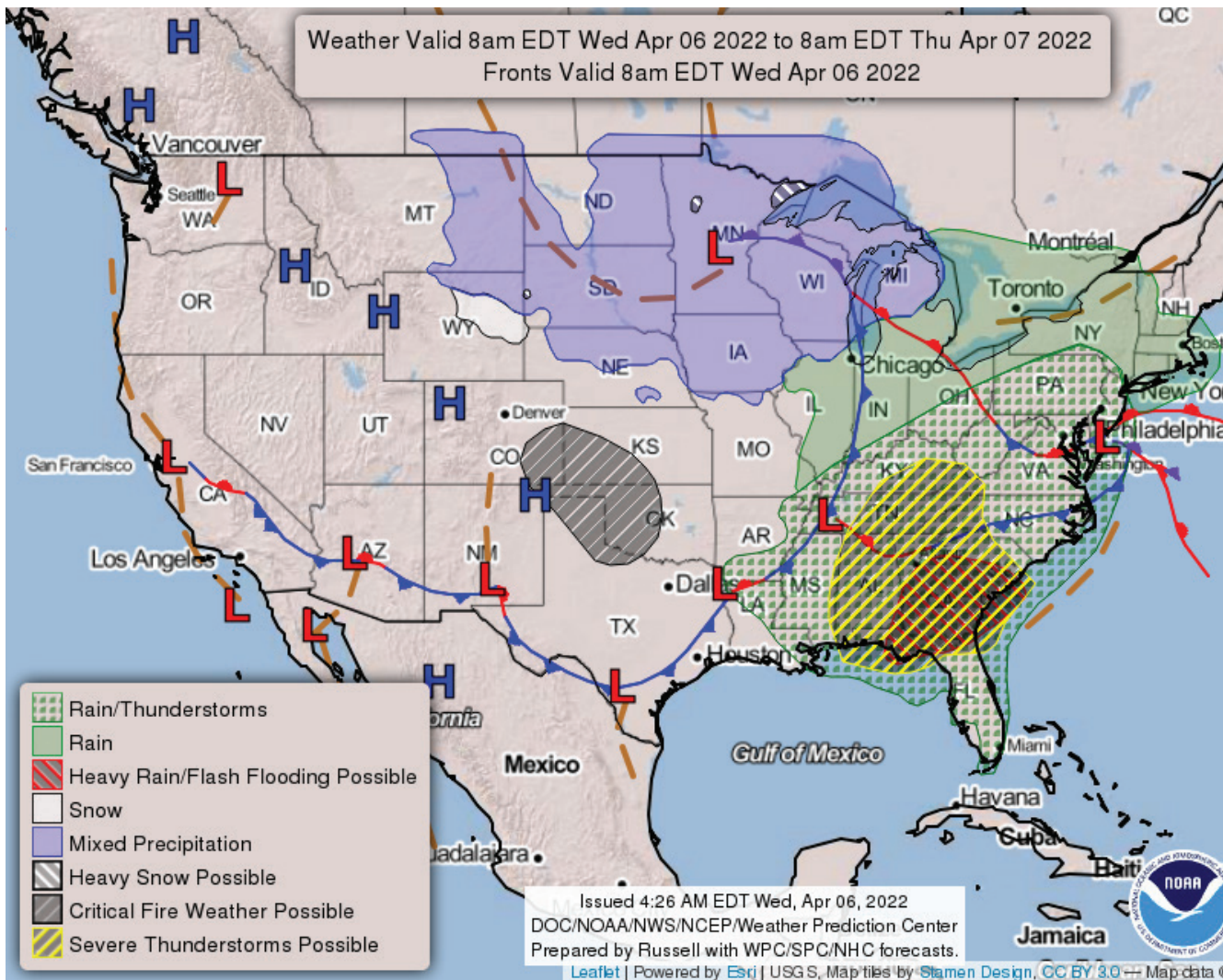
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 51 °F at 12:02 PM**  
**Low Temp: 39 °F at 3:32 PM**  
**Wind: 37 mph at 3:49 AM**  
**Precip: 0.19**

Day length: 13 hours, 07 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 85 in 1991  
Record Low: 5 in 2018  
Average High: 53°F  
Average Low: 28°F  
Average Precip in April.: 0.26  
Precip to date in April.: 0.24  
Average Precip to date: 2.32  
Precip Year to Date: 2.04  
Sunset Tonight: 8:08:19 PM  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:59:16 AM





# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 9 of 73



## WHO CARES FOR THE LONELY?

Some time ago, the body of a man was found in a deserted building in New York. In his pocket was a note that read, "I'm nobody. Nobody cares for me. I'm like a peanut inside of a shell on the walkway in Yankee Stadium. So, I decided to stomp on myself once and for all."

There is no feeling that runs so deep, is so acute or more widespread than loneliness. The feeling of being abandoned or uncared for or unloved is one that grips the souls of far too many - even the Christian.

We read a story in the Bible about a man who had been forced to run and hide from others to save his life. Years later he wrote, "Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for me." His words are all too familiar, and his feelings universal.

But notice: He looked around, but he did not look up. Had he "looked up" he could have discovered someOne who cared deeply for him, was looking for him and loved him. This One not only cares, but He did something to show us that He cares.

The Bible states that "Since God did not even spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, won't He also give us everything else?"

Remember the stories of Noah in the ark, Job in the pile of ashes, Moses being hid in a basket, Jonah in the belly of a fish, Daniel in the lions' den and Paul in prison?

God carefully cared for them, and He will also carefully care for us!

Remember: "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Prayer: In moments of loneliness, Lord, we look upward and find Your outstretched arms waiting for us. What a blessing! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Look and see, there is no one at my right hand; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life. Psalm 142:4

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 10 of 73

## 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

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 11 of 73

## The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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## Groton Daily Independent

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



## News from the Associated Press

### SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Tuesday:

Mega Millions

22-43-60-63-64, Mega Ball: 18, Megaplier: 2

(twenty-two, forty-three, sixty, sixty-three, sixty-four; Mega Ball: eighteen; Megaplier: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$81 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$246 million

### South Dakota's Noem issues 'critical race theory' order

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem on Tuesday issued an executive order instructing the Department of Education to review teacher trainings, content standards and other educational materials to ensure they are devoid of "divisive concepts" on race, resorting to her gubernatorial power after a bill she touted as banning so-called critical race theory from K-12 classrooms failed to pass the Legislature this year.

The Republican governor cast the order as restricting critical race theory from classrooms, but its power is limited to the Department of Education, which produces content standards, teacher trainings and other material for South Dakota public schools. School boards set much of their own policy and curricula.

"Our children will not be taught that they are racists or that they are victims, and they will not be compelled to feel responsible for the mistakes of their ancestors," Noem said in a statement announcing the order that lists six "divisive concepts" about race.

The Associated School Boards of South Dakota, which criticized Noem's bill as unnecessary and unclear during the legislative session, declined to immediately comment on the order.

A Republican-controlled Senate committee last month rejected Noem's bill, and some lawmakers on the committee suggested Noem should use the power of her office to influence the state's education content standards rather than push a law banning certain ideas from classrooms.

The ACLU of South Dakota accused Noem of "skirting" the legislative process by issuing the order when a similar proposal was already rejected by the Legislature. Jett Jonelis, the organization's advocacy manager, said in a statement that the move was "a subversion of our entire democratic process."

The bill drew hours of debate this year, both from those who championed it as a repudiation of critical race theory and critics who said it would silence and sanitize the most painful truths of U.S. history.

Sen. Troy Heinert, a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe who was the lone Democrat on the Senate committee that rejected Noem's bill, worried that the order would ban the teaching of atrocities against Native American tribes in the state's history, as well as "perpetuate" racism in the state.

As Noem pitched the bill in the Legislature, she insisted it would not water down historical facts like the Wounded Knee Massacre. She said Tuesday the order's intent was to ensure history lessons include "both our triumphs and our mistakes."

But Heinert asserted that the state continues to grapple with racism, pointing to a recent social media comment from the owner of a Rapid City hotel saying she wanted to ban Native Americans from the premises. He said Noem's order would stifle desperately-needed conversations about race.

"This is nothing more than political theater at its finest," Heinert added.

During the last year, critical race theory has morphed from an obscure academic discussion point on the left into a political rallying cry on the right. And as Noem has positioned herself for reelection and a potential 2024 White House bid, she has used the concept as a campaign talking point.

Her campaign on Tuesday also released a video of her touting the success of a separate bill that bans the state's public universities from using training and orientation material that compels people to feel "discomfort" based on their race.

"Going forward, critical race theory cannot be taught in our universities," Noem said in the video of her speaking at a town hall event.

But that's a false claim. In fact, the bill specifically states it does not apply to university courses.

Even her policy advisor, Allen Cambon, pointed that out in March as he pressed a skeptical Senate committee to endorse it.

"You can teach a class on (Critical Race Theory), you can even offer a training that teaches (Critical Race Theory)," Cambon told senators, adding that the bill keeps public universities from requiring any trainings that teach the concept or compelling students to endorse it.

## Man shot at Rapid City hotel last month has died, police say

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A man who was shot at a Rapid City hotel last month has died of his injuries, according to police.

Myron Pourier, 19, of Porcupine was shot March 19 at the Grand Gateway Hotel and died Sunday at a hospital. His alleged assailant is being held on \$1 million cash bond at the Pennington County Jail.

He is charged with aggravated assault and committing a felony while armed. Chief Deputy State's Attorney Lara Roetzel says her office will reconsider charges in the wake of Pourier's death.

Rapid City police officers were dispatched to the hotel about 4:30 a.m. that Saturday after a report of a disturbance. Once on scene, they were notified a gun had been fired in one of the rooms. Police then found Pourier and rendered first aid.

After interviews with witnesses, the suspect was arrested.

Following the shooting, one of the hotel's owners said on social media that Native Americans would be banned from the hotel property. Rapid City police spokesman Brendyn Medina had said both the victim and the shooting suspect are Native American. The post drew strong reactions from Native American tribal leaders and politicians.

NDN Collective, an Indigenous-led organization, filed a federal class action civil rights lawsuit against the hotel, its owner and its parent company.

## Live updates | Moscow says talks with Ukraine are continuing

By The Associated Press undefined

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov says negotiations with Ukraine are continuing despite allegations of war crimes against civilians in the Kyiv suburb of Bucha.

Peskov said Wednesday the talks continued with Ukraine but that the Bucha revelations — which he referred to as a "staging" — had hampered talks and there was "a fairly long road ahead."

"The working process continues but it is going much more tough than we would like. Of course we would like to see more dynamism from the Ukrainian side, but the process has not been broken off and is continuing," Peskov said.

Russia retreated from areas around Kyiv and the northern cities of Chernihiv and Sumy after talks with Ukraine in Turkey last week. Ukrainian troops entering the areas found evidence of widespread killings of civilians. Russia denies any war crimes and has alleged Ukraine has faked the incidents.

Since the talks in Turkey, Russia and Ukraine's delegations have continued talks via video link.

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

- In Bucha, Ukraine, burned, piled bodies among latest horrors
- Russian setback in Kiev was memorable military failure
- Ukraine president Zelenskyy at UN accuses Russian military of war crimes
- EU proposes Russian coal ban in new sanctions

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 14 of 73

- US official: US, allies, to ban new investments in Russia
- Harvard students' site helping Ukraine refugees find housing
- Japan's top envoy brings back 20 Ukrainians from Poland
- Go to <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine> for more coverage

## OTHER DEVELOPMENTS:

**GENEVA** — The International Committee of the Red Cross says one of its teams in Ukraine has led some 500 people who fled Mariupol on their own initiative in a humanitarian convoy of buses and private cars to a safer location in the embattled country.

The ICRC says its team that has been trying to enter Mariupol since last Friday got within 20 kilometers (12 miles) of the besieged city, but security conditions made it impossible to enter. The convoy escorted the civilians from coastal Berdyansk to Zaporizhzhia, to the north.

"This convoy's arrival to Zaporizhzhia is a huge relief for hundreds of people who have suffered immensely and are now in a safer location," said Pascal Hundt, ICRC's head of delegation in Ukraine. "It's clear, though, that thousands more civilians trapped inside Mariupol need safe passage out and aid to come in."

He said the Geneva-based organization remains available as "a neutral intermediary" to help escort civilians out of Mariupol "once concrete agreements and security conditions allow it."

**BERLIN** — The aid group Doctors without Borders says its staff have witnessed an attack on a hospital in the Ukrainian city of Mykolaiv.

The group, known by its French acronym MSF, said Wednesday that a four-member team had just entered the city's cancer hospital when the area came under fire.

It quoted team leader Michel-Olivier Lacharite saying Monday's attack lasted about 10 minutes. Upon leaving the hospital the team saw several injured people and dead bodies.

Lacharite was quoted as saying the bombardment of the hospital, located in a residential area, was likely to have caused civilian casualties and called on medical facilities not to be targeted.

The group didn't provide information on which side in the war might have carried out the attack. Under international law, attacks on medical facilities and workers are deemed war crimes.

**ROME** — Italian firefighters have put out a fire at a villa on Lake Como reportedly owned by the pro-Putin Russian television personality Vladimir Solovyev, who has been hit with European Union sanctions.

An official at the Como fire station confirmed that firefighters extinguished the early morning blaze Wednesday at the villa in Menaggio, one of the picturesque towns that dot the lake in northern Italy.

He said police were investigating the fire as a suspected act of protest. The villa was under renovation and the blaze involved tires at the site, said the official who declined to be identified by name, citing official policy.

Italian daily Corriere della Sera and news agency LaPresse said the villa was owned by Solovyev, a presenter on state run Channel One.

According to the EU list of sanctions, Solovyev is "known for his extremely hostile attitude towards Ukraine and praise of the Russian government." The EU says he was targeted because of his support for "actions or policies which undermine the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine."

Italian carabinieri are investigating.

**LONDON** — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has accused Russia of using hunger as a weapon of war by deliberately targeting Ukraine's essential food supplies.

In an address to Irish lawmakers Wednesday, Zelenskyy said Russian forces "are destroying things that are sustaining livelihoods" including food storage depots, blocking ports so Ukraine could not export food and "putting mines into the fields."

"For them hunger is also a weapon, a weapon against us ordinary people," he said, accusing Russia of

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 15 of 73

"deliberately provoking a food crisis" in Ukraine, a major global producer of staples including wheat and sunflower oil.

He said it would have international ramifications, because "there will be a shortage of food and the prices will go up, and this is reality for the millions of people who are hungry, and it will be more difficult for them to feed their families."

Zelenskyy spoke by video to a joint session of Ireland's two houses of parliament, the latest in a string of international addresses he has used to rally support for Ukraine.

**BRUSSELS** — A senior European Union official says the bloc's member countries should think about ways of offering asylum to Russian soldiers willing to desert Ukraine battlefields.

European Council president Charles Michel on Wednesday expressed his "outrage at crimes against humanity, against innocent civilians in Bucha and in many other cities."

He called on Russian soldiers to disobey orders.

"If you want no part in killing your Ukrainian brothers and sisters, if you don't want to be a criminal, drop your weapons, stop fighting, leave the battlefield," Michel, who represents the bloc's governments, said in a speech to the European Parliament

Endorsing an idea previously circulated by some EU lawmakers, Michel added that granting asylum to Russian deserters is "a valuable idea that should be pursued."

**ATHENS**, Greece — Greece has joined a list of European countries expelling Russian diplomats, with the foreign ministry announcing on Wednesday it had declared 12 diplomats unwelcome.

The ministry said it had declared 12 members of Russian diplomatic and consular missions accredited to Greece as "personae non gratae," and that the Russian ambassador had been informed.

It did not specify which diplomats were being expelled or state a reason, beyond citing that the move was carried out in accordance with international treaties.

**NICOSIA**, Cyprus — Cyprus' foreign minister says a second batch of food, medicine and other articles in combination with last month's package that have been dispatched to Ukraine are the most humanitarian aid the east Mediterranean island nation has ever sent abroad.

Foreign Minister Ioannis Kasoulides said Wednesday the second batch is already on its way to the war-torn country through the European Union's civil protection mechanism. It also includes items such as tents and sleeping bags. The total quantity of aid sent to Ukraine is about 215 metric tons (237 tons).

Citizens' Commissioner Panayiotis Sentonas said contributions came from ordinary citizens, private businesses, the Cyprus Red Cross and the government.

**BERLIN** — Germany's foreign minister has accused Russia of spreading disinformation to justify its war in Ukraine.

Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said Wednesday that "as Russian tanks destroy Ukrainian cities, the Kremlin's propaganda machine is censoring news, restricting social media, spreading disinformation and punishing those who dare to speak the truth."

She said the aim was "both clear and cynical: to demoralize the courageous people of Ukraine while keeping Russians in the dark."

Baerbock spoke in a video message to a conference on disinformation organized by her ministry at which participants also cited examples of Russian efforts to stoke resentment in Europe against refugees from Ukraine.

**LONDON** — Intel says it is suspending all its business operations in Russia, becoming the latest foreign company to leave because of Moscow's war in Ukraine.

"Effective immediately, we have suspended all business operations in Russia," the U.S. chipmaker said

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 16 of 73

late Wednesday.

The company had already suspended shipments to customers in Russia and neighboring ally Belarus after the war broke out.

Intel said it's working to support its 1,200 employees in Russia and has put in place "business continuity measures" to reduce disruption to its global operations, though it didn't provide details.

"Intel continues to join the global community in condemning Russia's war against Ukraine and calling for a swift return to peace," it said in a statement.

**BEIJING** — China says the reports and images of civilian deaths in the Ukrainian town of Bucha are "deeply disturbing" and is calling for an investigation.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said Wednesday that China supports all initiatives and measures "conducive to alleviating the humanitarian crisis" in the country and is "ready to continue to work together with the international community to prevent any harm to civilians."

The killings in Bucha may serve to put further pressure on Beijing over its largely pro-Russian stance and attempts to guide public opinion over the war.

China has called for talks while refusing to criticize Russia over its invasion. It opposes economic sanctions on Moscow and blames Washington and NATO for provoking the war and fueling the conflict by sending arms to Ukraine.

Zhao's remarks echo those the previous day of China's ambassador to the United Nations, Zhang Jun, who called for an investigation, describing the reports and images of civilian deaths in Bucha as "deeply disturbing."

**VATICAN CITY** — Pope Francis has kissed a battered Ukrainian flag that was brought to him from the Ukrainian city of Bucha and called again for an end to the war.

Francis welcomed a half-dozen Ukrainian children up to the stage of the Vatican audience hall at the end of his Wednesday general audience and gave them each a giant chocolate Easter egg. He urged prayers for them and for all Ukrainians.

"The recent news from the war in Ukraine, instead of bringing relief and hope, brought testimony of new atrocities, like the massacre in Bucha, even more horrendous cruelty carried out against civilians, defenseless women and children," the pope said. "They are victims whose innocent blood cries up to the sky and implores that this war be stopped, and that the weapons be silenced. Stop disseminating war and destruction."

He told the crowd: "These children had to flee to arrive in a safe place. This is the fruit of war."

The pontiff held up a grimy Ukrainian flag that he said had arrived the previous day at the Vatican from Bucha, where evidence has emerged of what appears to be intentional killings of civilians during the city's occupation by Russian troops.

Kissing it, he said: "This flag comes from the war, from that martyred city Bucha ... Let us not forget them. Let us not forget the people of Ukraine."

**BUDAPEST, Hungary** — Hungary's Foreign Ministry summoned the Ukrainian ambassador on Wednesday after days of the two countries' officials trading barbs over Hungary's position on the war.

Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto wrote in a social media post on Wednesday that "we condemn military aggression, we stand by Ukraine's sovereignty," but that "this is not our war, so we want to and will stay out of it."

Hungary's government has refused to supply weapons to Ukraine or allow their transfer across the Hungarian-Ukrainian border, and has fought against applying sanctions on Russian energy imports.

That position has prompted criticisms of Hungary's government by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who on Monday said in an address on Ukrainian television that Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban would need to choose between Moscow and "the other world" of the West.



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 17 of 73

Orban, who won a landslide victory in Hungarian elections on Sunday, in a victory speech depicted Zelenskyy as one of the opponents he and his right-wing party had defeated.

On Tuesday, Szijarto called on Ukrainian leaders to "stop insulting Hungary and to take note of the will of the Hungarian people."

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — Norway is beefing up its police and intelligence work, chiefly in the northern part of the country, which has a nearly 200-kilometer (124-mile) land border with Russia, and wants to spend 100 million kroner (\$11.5 million) on it.

Norway's domestic intelligence service considers the intelligence threat from Russia in the Scandinavian country to have increased, Justice Minister Emilie Enger Mehl said Wednesday.

The money would be spent on staff and equipment. The government also wants to exert more control over Svalbard, a Norwegian archipelago in the Arctic with a Russian settlement. Under a 1920 treaty, Norway has sovereignty over Svalbard, but other signatory countries have rights to exploit its natural resources — coal.

The governor of Russia's Kursk region on the border with Ukraine said Wednesday that Russian border guards were fired at with mortars on Tuesday.

Governor Roman Starovoit said on the messaging app Telegram that the border guards returned fire and that there were "no casualties or destruction" on the Russian side as a result of the incident.

The Ukrainian military has not yet commented on the allegation, and it could not be independently verified.

LONDON — British defense officials say 160,000 people remain trapped in the besieged city of Mariupol, where Russian airstrikes and heavy fighting are continuing.

The Ministry of Defense said in an intelligence update Wednesday that those in the city have "no light, communication, medicine, heat or water." It accused Russian forces of deliberately preventing humanitarian access, "likely to pressure defenders to surrender."

Repeated attempts by the International Committee of the Red Cross to get a humanitarian convoy into the southern port city have failed. Ukraine's Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said Russian forces stopped buses accompanied by Red Cross workers from traveling to Mariupol, which had a pre-war population of about 400,000. She said Russian troops allowed 1,496 civilians to leave the Sea of Azov port on Tuesday.

ANKARA, Turkey — Turkey says it shares the pain of the Ukrainian people over the "horrifying" images that emerged from towns near Kyiv and is calling for an independent investigation.

A statement from Turkey's Foreign Ministry on Wednesday stopped short, however, of blaming Russia or describing the atrocities as a war crime.

Turkey has been measured in its criticism of Russia as it tries to balance its close relations with both Moscow and Kyiv. The country has hosted officials from the two countries for talks in a bid to end the war.

"The images of the massacre ... are horrifying and sad for humanity. We share the pain of the Ukrainian people," the statement read.

"The targeting of innocent civilians is unacceptable. It is our basic expectation that the issue is subjected to an independent investigation, that those responsible are identified and are held accountable," it said.

Scenes that have emerged from Bucha, Irpin and other Ukrainian towns liberated by Ukrainian forces have led to accusations of war crimes and demands for tougher sanctions against Russia.

The ministry statement said Turkey would continue its efforts to end such "shameful scenes for humanity and to ensure peace as soon as possible."

LVIV, Ukraine - Russian forces overnight struck a fuel depot and a factory in Ukraine's Dnipropetrovsk region, and the number of casualties remains unclear, the region's Governor Valentyn Reznichenko said Wednesday on the Telegram messaging app.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 18 of 73

"The night was alarming and difficult. The enemy attacked our area from the air and hit the oil depot and one of the plants. The oil depot with fuel was destroyed. Rescuers are still putting out the flames at the plant. There is a strong fire," Reznichenko wrote.

In the eastern Luhansk region, Tuesday's shelling of Rubizhne city killed one and injured five more, Governor Serhiy Haidai said Wednesday on Telegram.

The Russian military continues to focus its efforts on preparing for an offensive in Ukraine's east, according to a Wednesday morning update by Ukraine's General Staff, with the aim "to establish complete control over the territory of Donetsk and Luhansk regions."

Parts of the two regions have been under control of Russia-backed rebels since 2014 and are recognized by Moscow as independent states.

BUCHAREST, Romania — Police in the Romanian capital say a car has crashed into the gate of the Russian Embassy, bursting into flames and killing the driver.

Police in Bucharest say the sedan rammed into the gate at about 6 a.m. Wednesday but did not enter the embassy compound.

Video of the aftermath showed the car engulfed in flames as security personnel ran through the area.

According to police, firefighters who arrived at the scene were able to put the fire out but the driver died at the scene.

There was no immediate information on a possible motive or other details.

## Ex-Trump officials urge Texas to declare border 'invasion'

By ACACIA CORONADO and PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — Former Trump administration officials are pressing Texas Gov. Greg Abbott to declare an "invasion" along the U.S.-Mexico border and give thousands of state troopers and National Guard members sweeping new authority to turn back migrants, essentially bestowing enforcement powers that have been a federal responsibility.

The urging comes as the Republican governor prepares to announce Wednesday "unprecedented actions" to deter migrants coming to Texas after the Biden administration announced last week it will end the use of a public health law that has limited asylum to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

It is unclear whether Abbott, who is up for reelection in November and is already installing more border barrier and allowing troopers to arrest migrants on trespassing charges, supports the aggressive proposals former Trump officials are pushing. Abbott did not elaborate on what steps he will announce Wednesday.

Border Patrol officials say they are planning for as many as 18,000 arrivals daily once the health policy, known as the Title 42 authority, expires in May. Last week, about 7,100 migrants were coming a day to the southern U.S. border.

But the way former Trump immigration officials see it, Texas and Arizona can pick up where the federal government leaves off once the policy ends. Their plan involves a novel interpretation of the U.S. Constitution to have the National Guard or state police forcibly send migrants to Mexico, without regard to immigration laws and law enforcement procedures. Border enforcement has always been a federal responsibility, and in Texas, state leaders have not been pushing for such a move.

Tom Homan, the former acting director for Immigration and Customs Enforcement under Trump, said at a border security conference in San Antonio last week he had spoken with Abbott but gave no indication about whether the two-term governor supported the idea.

"We've had discussions with his attorneys in his office, 'Is there a way to use this clause within the Constitution where it talks about invasion?'" Homan said during the Border Security Expo.

Homan on Tuesday described the response from Abbott's office, which he said took place about three months ago, as "non-committal but willing to listen."

In Arizona, Republican Gov. Doug Ducey has also been under pressure within his party to declare that the state is being invaded and use extraordinary powers normally reserved for war. But Ducey, who is

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 19 of 73

term-limited and not on the ballot in 2022, has not embraced the theory and has avoided commenting directly on it.

Arizona Attorney General Mark Brnovich, a Republican, issued a legal opinion in February declaring that Ducey has the power to use National Guard troops and state law enforcement to forcibly send migrants back. Brnovich is locked in a tough Republican U.S. Senate primary in which border security is a top issue.

Driving the effort on the right is the Center for Renewing America, a conservative policy think tank led by former Trump administration officials. It includes Ken Cuccinelli, an immigration hard-liner and former Homeland Security official under Trump. He argued that states are entitled to defend themselves from immediate danger or invasion, as it is defined by the "invasion clause," under the "states self-defense clause."

While speaking Tuesday to a conservative talk radio station, Abbott's remarks about constitutional authority were in relation to Congress, which he said had the only power to reduce the flow of migrants.

"We'll be taking unprecedented action," Abbott told radio station KCRS. "Congress has to stop talking about it, has to stop complaining about it, has to stop going to the border and looking at it. Congress has to take action, just like Texas is taking action."

Asked if he considered what was happening on the Texas border "an invasion," Abbott did not use those words but said he would be discussing it Wednesday.

Cuccinelli said in practice, he envisions the plan would look similar to the enforcement of Title 42, which circumvented U.S. obligations under American law and international treaty to provide asylum. He said he has not spoken with Abbott and said the governor's current sweeping border mission, known as Operation Lone Star, has put little dent in the number of people crossing the border. The mission has also drawn criticism from Guard members over long deployments and little to do, and some arrests have appeared to have no connection to border security.

"Until you are actually returning people to Mexico, what you are doing will have no effect," Cuccinelli said.

Emily Berman, who teaches constitutional law at the University of Houston, said the "invasion clause" cited by proponents is tucked into a broader constitutional assurance that the U.S. must defend states from invasion and domestic violence. Additionally, she said, the "state self-defense clause" says states cannot engage in warlike actions or foreign policy unless invaded.

Berman said she hasn't seen the constitutional clauses used since the 1990s, when the courts ruled that they did not have jurisdiction to decide what qualified an invasion, but believed that one could only be done by another governmental entity.

For example, Berman said, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia can be qualified as one because it is an outside government breaching another country's boundaries with the use of military force.

"Just because the state says that it is an invasion that doesn't necessarily make it so, it is not clear to me what additional legal authority that conveys on them," Berman said, adding that state officials can enforce state laws, but the line is drawn at what the federal law allows.

U.S. Rep. Henry Cuellar, a Democrat whose district includes the Texas border, has criticized the Biden administration over border security and ending Title 42. But he does not support states trying to use new powers that would let them "do whatever they want."

"I think it should be more of a partnership instead of saying, 'Federal government, we don't think you're doing enough, and why don't we go ahead and do our own border security?'" he said.

## Russian media campaign falsely claims Bucha deaths are fakes

By AMANDA SEITZ and ARIJETA LAJKA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As gruesome videos and photos of bodies emerge from the Kyiv suburb of Bucha, Kremlin-backed media are denouncing them as an elaborate hoax — a narrative that journalists in Ukraine have shown to be false.

Denouncing news as fake or spreading false reports to sow confusion and undermine its adversaries are tactics that Moscow has used for years and refined with the advent of social media in places like Syria.

In detailed broadcasts to millions of viewers, correspondents and hosts of Russian state TV channels said

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 20 of 73

Tuesday that some photo and video evidence of the killings were fake while others showed that Ukrainians were responsible for the bloodshed.

"Among the first to appear were these Ukrainian shots, which show how a soulless body suddenly moves its hand," a report Monday on Russia-1's evening news broadcast declared. "And in the rearview mirror it is noticeable that the dead seem to be starting to rise even."

But satellite images from early March show the dead were left out on the streets of Bucha for weeks. On April 2, a video taken from a moving car was posted online by a Ukrainian lawyer showing those same bodies scattered along Yablonska Street in Bucha. High-resolution satellite images of Bucha from commercial provider Maxar Technology reviewed by The Associated Press independently matched the location of the bodies with separate videos from the scene. Other Western media had similar reports.

Over the weekend, AP journalists saw the bodies of dozens of people in Bucha, many of them shot at close range, and some with their hands tied behind them. At least 13 bodies were located in and around a building that residents said was used as a base for Russian troops before they retreated last week.

Yet Russian officials and state-media have continued to promote their own narrative, parroting it in newspapers and on radio and television. A top story on the website of a popular pro-Kremlin newspaper, Komsomolskaya Pravda, pinned the mass killings on Ukraine, with a story that claimed "one more irrefutable proof that 'the genocide in Bucha' was carried out by Ukrainian forces."

An opinion column published Tuesday by the state-run news agency RIA Novosti surmised that the Bucha slayings were a ploy for the West to impose tougher sanctions on Russia.

Analysts note it isn't the first time in its six-week-old invasion of Ukraine that the Kremlin has employed such an information warfare strategy to deny any wrongdoing and spread disinformation in a coordinated campaign around the globe.

"This is simply what Russia does every time it recognizes that it has suffered a PR setback through committing atrocities," said Keir Giles, senior consulting fellow with the Russia and Eurasia program at the Chatham House think tank. "So the system works almost on autopilot."

Before the war, Russia denied U.S. intelligence reports that detailed its plans to attack Ukraine. Last month, Russian officials tried to discredit AP photos and reporting of the aftermath of the bombing of a maternity hospital in the Ukrainian port city of Mariupol, which left a pregnant woman and her unborn child dead.

The photos and video from Bucha have set off a new wave of global condemnation and revulsion.

After his video appearance Tuesday at the U.N. Security Council, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy enumerated the killings in Bucha by Russian troops and showed graphic video of charred and decomposing bodies there and in other towns. Russian U.N. Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia dismissed them as staged.

Across social media, a chorus of more than a dozen official Russian Twitter and Telegram accounts, as well as state-backed media Facebook pages, repeated the Kremlin line that images and video of the dead were staged or a hoax. The claims were made in English, Spanish and Arabic in accounts run by Russian officials or from Russian-backed news outlets Sputnik and RT. The Spanish-language RT en Español has sent more than a dozen posts to its 18 million followers.

"Russia rejects allegations over the murder of civilians in Bucha, near Kiev," an RT en Español post said Sunday.

Several of the same accounts sought to discredit claims that Russian troops carried out the killings by pointing to a video of Bucha Mayor Anatoliy Fedoruk, taken March 31, in which he talked about the suburb being freed from Russian occupation.

"He confirms that Russian troops have left Bucha. No mentioning of dead bodies in the streets," top Russian official Mikhail Ulyanov tweeted Monday.

But Fedoruk had publicly commented on the violence before the Russian troops left in an interview with Italian news agency Adnkronos on March 28, where he accused them of killings and rapes in Bucha.

In an AP interview March 7, Fedoruk talked about dead bodies piling up in Bucha: "We can't even gather up the bodies because the shelling from heavy weapons doesn't stop day or night. Dogs are pulling apart

the bodies on the city streets. It's a nightmare."

Satellite images by Maxar Technologies while Russian troops occupied Bucha on March 18 and 19 back up Fedoruk's account of bodies in the streets, showing at least five bodies on one road.

Some social media platforms have tried to limit propaganda and disinformation from the Kremlin. Google blocked RT's accounts, while in Europe, RT and Sputnik were banned by tech company Meta, which also stopped promoting or amplifying Russian-state media pages on its platforms, which include Facebook and Instagram.

Russia has found ways to evade the crackdown with posts in different languages through dozens of official Russian social media accounts.

"It's a pretty massive messaging apparatus that Russia controls — whether it's official embassy accounts, bot or troll accounts or anti-Western influencers — they have many ways to circumvent platform bans," said Bret Schafer, who heads the information manipulation team at the Alliance for Securing Democracy, a nonpartisan think tank in Washington.

## Shanghai to allow parents to stay with COVID-infected kids

By KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Following a public uproar, Shanghai is allowing at least some parents to stay with children infected with COVID-19, making an exception to a policy of isolating anyone who tests positive.

The announcement came as China's largest city remained in lockdown and conducted more mass testing Wednesday following another jump in new cases.

A top city health official said at a news conference that parents can apply to stay with children with "special needs" and accompany them if they fully comprehend the health risks and sign an agreement.

The parents must wear masks, dine at a different time than their children, avoid sharing items with them and strictly follow all regulations, said Wu Qianyu of the Shanghai Municipal Health Commission. She did not define what qualifies as "special needs."

Her announcement followed Chinese state media reports a day earlier that an isolation site set up at the Shanghai New International Expo Center was accepting children with parents. The city has opened sprawling isolation centers for tens of thousands of people to isolate the growing number of positive cases.

Reports that parents were being separated from their infected children had sparked a wave of protest online last weekend, fueled by photos showing several children in each cot with no parents in sight.

Shanghai reported 17,077 new cases detected over the previous day, all but 311 of them in people who showed no symptoms. Under China's zero-COVID approach, the city requires all those who test positive to be held in designated locations for observation, along with their close contacts.

The latest cases bring Shanghai's total to around 90,000 in an outbreak that began last month. No deaths have been ascribed to the outbreak driven by the omicron BA.2 variant, which is much more infectious but also less lethal than the previous delta strain. Two deaths have been reported in another ongoing outbreak in Jilin province in China's northeast.

An official from the EU Chamber of Commerce in China joined a growing chorus of criticism of the Shanghai lockdown, which has disrupted daily life and commerce in a major financial and business center.

"We see a severe shortage of living necessities, particularly fresh vegetables, and citizens are unable to get their deliveries via their apps," said Bettina Schoen-Behanzin, chair of the chamber's Shanghai chapter.

While some residents are receiving food supplies from their district government, she said that "a kind of black market" has developed charging "rocket-high prices" for fruits and vegetables.

"Another really big fear is ending up in one of those mass central quarantine sites," Schoen-Behanzin said in an online event for member companies and journalists.

Others complained earlier about shortages of medical workers, volunteers and beds in the isolation wards. More than 38,000 health workers from 15 provinces have been sent to Shanghai to help with the mass testing and other needs.

Beijing is also tightening measures after 11 cases were detected in the Chinese capital in recent days.

Authorities closed down a shopping and office center in the busy Wangjing district and are requiring those arriving in the city to report to their place of work or residence within 12 hours and undergo a COVID-19 test within 72 hours. They must undergo another test within 48 hours of returning to their place of work.

Despite growing public frustration and concerns about the economic effects, China says it is sticking to its hard-line "zero-tolerance" approach mandating lockdowns, mass testing and the compulsory isolation of all suspected cases and close contacts.

While China's vaccination rate hovers around 90%, its domestically produced inactivated virus vaccines are seen as weaker than the mRNA vaccines such as those produced by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna that are used abroad, as well as in the Chinese territories of Hong Kong and Macao. Vaccination rates among the elderly are also much lower than the population at large, with only around half of those over 80 fully vaccinated.

## West set to toughen sanctions on Russia; Ukraine urges more

By ADAM SCHRECK Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Western governments prepared Wednesday to toughen sanctions against Russia and send more weapons to Ukraine, after President Volodymyr Zelenskyy pointedly accused the world of failing to end Moscow's invasion of his country and what he said was a campaign of murders, rapes and wanton destruction by Russian forces.

In scarred and silent streets of ruined towns around Ukraine's capital, investigators collected evidence documenting what appeared to be widespread killings of civilians. Specialists cleared mines from devastated towns near Kyiv that Russian troops have left, as Moscow regrouped its forces for a new assault on Ukraine's east and south at the end of the war's sixth week.

In Andriivka, a small village about 60 kilometers (40 miles) west of the capital, two police officers from the nearby town of Makariv came to identify a dead man, whose body was left in a field, next to tracks of a Russian tank left in the area.

Capt. Alla Pustova said officers had found 20 bodies in Makariv area in the last two days, as investigators work to understand the scale of atrocities they say retreating Russian forces committed around the capital.

Zelenskyy said that civilians had been tortured, shot in the back of the head, thrown down wells, blown up with grenades in their apartments and crushed to death by tanks while in cars. He told the U.N. Security Council on Tuesday that those responsible should immediately be brought up on war crimes charges in front of a tribunal like the one established at Nuremberg after World War II.

"There is no security," he told the body. "So where is the peace that the United Nations was created to guarantee?"

Ukrainian authorities have said the bodies of at least 410 civilians have been found in towns around Kyiv, and the Ukrainian president challenged the U.N. to kick Russia off the Security Council and "do everything that we can do to establish peace." Barring that, he told the council: "Dissolve yourself."

Thwarted in their efforts to take the capital and forced to withdraw to Belarus or Russia to regroup, President Vladimir Putin's forces are now pouring into Ukraine's industrial eastern heartland of the Donbas, where the Ukraine military has said is bracing for a new offensive.

Overnight, Russian forces attacked a fuel depot and a factory in Ukraine's Dnipropetrovsk region, just west of the Donbas, the region's governor, Valentyn Reznichenko, said on the messaging app Telegram early Wednesday. He said the oil depot was destroyed. The number of casualties was unclear.

In the Luhansk region, which lies in the Donbas, shelling of Rubizhne on Tuesday killed one person and wounded five more, regional governor Serhiy Haidai said on Telegram.

Parts of Luhansk and the other Donbas region of Donetsk have been under control of Russia-backed rebels since 2014 and are recognized by Moscow as independent states. So far, Ukrainian forces have held back Russian troops pushing into the area but remain outnumbered in both troops and equipment, Zelenskyy said in a video address to his country late Tuesday.

Over the past few days, grisly images of civilians apparently killed by Russian forces in Bucha and other

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 23 of 73

towns before they withdrew from the outskirts of Kyiv have caused a global outcry. Western nations have expelled scores of Moscow's diplomats and are expected to roll out more sanctions Wednesday amid a flurry of meetings of NATO, Group of Seven and European Union diplomats.

Measures will include a ban on all new investment in Russia, a senior U.S. administration official said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the upcoming announcement.

The EU's executive branch, meanwhile, proposed a ban on coal imports from Russia, worth an estimated 4 billion euros (\$4.4 billion) per year. It would be the first time the 27-nation bloc has sanctioned the country's lucrative energy industry over the war, though it may stop short of cutting off Russia's lucrative oil and gas exports to Europe.

Zelenskyy said Western sanctions must go much further.

"After the things the world saw in Bucha, sanctions against Russia must be commensurate with the gravity of war crimes committed by the occupiers," he said in his late-night address.

He said Western leaders would be judged harshly "if after this, Russian banks are able to function as usual; if after this, goods are able to flow into Russia as usual; if after this, European Union countries will pay Russia for energy as usual."

Russia has insisted its troops have committed no war crimes.

Moscow's U.N. ambassador, Vassily Nebenzia, said "not a single local person" suffered from violence while Bucha was under Russian control. Using to a tactic Russian officials have often relied on in the face of accusations of atrocities, he said scenes of bodies in the streets were "a crude forgery" staged by the Ukrainians.

In the still largely empty streets of Bucha, dogs wandered among ruined buildings and burned military vehicles. Officials snapped photos of the corpses before gathering some of them.

Associated Press journalists in Bucha counted dozens of corpses in civilian clothes and interviewed Ukrainians who told of witnessing atrocities. Many of the dead seen by AP journalists appeared to have been shot at close range, and some had their hands bound or their flesh burned.

High-resolution satellite imagery from Maxar Technologies showed many of the bodies laid in the open for weeks while Russian forces were in the town.

The dead in Bucha included a pile of six charred bodies, as witnessed by AP journalists. It was not clear who they were or how they died. One body was probably that of a child, said Andrii Nebytov, head of police in the Kyiv region.

The AP and the PBS series "Frontline" have jointly verified at least 90 incidents during the war that appear to violate international law. The chief prosecutor for the International Criminal Court at The Hague opened an investigation a month ago into possible war crimes in Ukraine.

Elsewhere in Ukraine, a passerby in the besieged southern city of Mykolaiv stopped briefly to look at the bright blossoms of a shattered flower stand lying among bloodstains, the legacy of a Russian shell that killed nine people in the city's center. The onlooker sketched the sign of the cross in the air, and moved on.

British defense officials, meanwhile, said Wednesday that 160,000 people remain trapped by Russian air strikes and heavy fighting in the besieged southern port city of Mariupol, scene of some of the worst suffering of the war.

The Ministry of Defense intelligence update said the city has "no light, communication, medicine, heat or water." It accused Russian forces of deliberately preventing humanitarian access, "likely to pressure defenders to surrender."

Ukraine's Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said Russian forces stopped buses accompanied by Red Cross workers from traveling to the city, which had a pre-war population of over 400,000. She said Russian troops allowed 1,496 civilians to leave the Sea of Azov port on Tuesday.

## Macron leads polls but turnout a big question in French vote

By SYLVIE CORBET The Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — President Emmanuel Macron is the clear favorite in France's presidential race Sunday yet

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 24 of 73

a big unknown factor may prove decisive: an unprecedented proportion of people say they are unsure who to vote for or don't intend to vote at all, bringing a large dose of uncertainty to the election.

The pro-European centrist is still comfortably leading in the polls. His main challenger, far-right leader Marine Le Pen, appears on the rise in recent days. Both are in good position to reach the presidential runoff on April 24, which would make them replay the 2017 election that Macron won handily.

There's "no certainty," Macron warned during his first big rally on Saturday near Paris.

"Don't believe in polls or commentators who would sound definitive and tell you that ... the election is already done, that everything is going to be all right," he told his supporters. "From Brexit to so many elections, what seems unlikely can happen!"

Scenarios for the this year's second round vote show that Le Pen has significantly narrowed the gap with Macron compared to 2017 —when she lost with 34% support to his 66%.

Polls still place her behind Macron, but much closer, apparently showing the wisdom of her longstanding strategy to soften her rhetoric and image — allowing her to capture the anti-Macron vote as well as far-right support.

In recent days, Macron's campaign has also hit a speed bump dubbed "the McKinsey Affair," named after an American consulting company hired to advise the French government on its COVID-19 vaccination campaign and other policies. A new French Senate report questions the government's use of private consultants and accuses McKinsey of tax dodging. The issue is energizing Macron's rivals and dogging him at campaign stops.

Many in Macron's camp fear that his supporters may not go to polling stations because they already think he will win, while those angry at his policies will make sure to vote.

"Of course I have concerns," said Julien Descamps, a 28-year-old member of Macron's party, stressing that some people in his entourage "don't know what to do."

"They are not fully convinced by Macron, but if they reject the extremes, they should vote for him," he said.

Macron called on voters to get mobilized against both France's far-right and the far-left. "Don't boo at them, fight their ideas," he said.

In third position according to the polls is far-left figure Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who has increased his support but still is a distance behind Le Pen. Another far-right candidate, Eric Zemmour, and conservative contender Valérie Pécresse are amid other key challengers. Sunday's first round will qualify the two top candidates for the runoff.

The presidential election is the one that is attracting French voters the most.

Yet the turnout has decreased from 84% in 2007 to about 78% in 2017, and studies show that abstention may be higher than five years ago. In particular, young and working-class people appear less certain to go to the polls than retirees and upper-class voters.

A low turnout could have a major impact on the vote, pollsters say. They note that a greater proportion of people don't know yet for whom they will vote — or whether they will vote at all.

That's the situation of managing assistant Liza Garnier, 45, who lives in the wealthy suburb of Montmency, north of Paris.

"I don't believe in what politicians say anymore. They make a lot of promises, they say candidates' words, and once in power, we are disappointed," she said. "I get the impression that more and more people think it's useless: voting for who? For what?"

Garnier feels politicians are too far away from the reality of French daily life. She said she may just pick a blank vote, even in the second round if Macron is facing Le Pen.

"I want to show I'm not happy with it," she said.

The sinking purchasing power of French families is one of voters' top concerns amid rising food and energy prices, along with social payments, security, immigration and the environment. But many feel these issues have not been addressed as much as they should in this year's campaign, partly because the war in Ukraine is overshadowing all other issues.



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 25 of 73

Kevin, a 26-year-old history and geography teacher in a public middle school who has worked in an impoverished suburb north of Paris, deplored a lack of political debate in this campaign. Describing himself as a "leftist," he said he feels "very disillusioned" by the current French political scene.

Kevin, who cannot be identified by his last name because state employees are required to be neutral ahead of elections, said he is still hesitating. But in any case, he won't vote for Macron or Le Pen, and considers a blank vote an option.

Macron, who has dedicated most of his time recently to diplomatic talks trying to end the war in Ukraine, is seeking to boost his short campaign ahead of Sunday's vote, giving several interviews in the French media and putting campaign activities on his agenda almost each day.

"Friends, you got it: It's now time for mobilization. It's now time to fight," he told supporters Saturday.

## NBA at 75: 2010s featured seismic shifts on, off the court

By PAUL NEWBERRY AP National Writer

Two of the NBA's most significant dynasties emerged in the second decade of the 2000s.

LeBron James teamed up with Dwyane Wade and Chris Bosh to form a Miami Heat super team that reached four straight finals, winning a pair of championships.

Then came the ascension of Steph Curry's fling-it-up-from anywhere Golden State Warriors, who claimed three titles of their own and shredded all conventional wisdom on how far from the basket constituted a good shot.

There were also significant developments happening away from the court.

With James, Curry and others setting the tone, NBA players increasingly led a clarion call for social justice in the 2010s.

James and Wade posed in hoodies with their Miami teammates for a dramatic picture protesting the shooting death of Florida teenager Trayvon Martin.

Chris Paul and Jamal Crawford staged a silent protest that helped lead the NBA to issue a lifetime ban against Los Angeles Clippers owner Donald Sterling over racist comments that were caught on tape.

Players across the league donned "I Can't Breathe" T-shirts -- the last words of Eric Garner before his death after being placed in a chokehold by a New York City police officer.

The players of the WNBA also stepped up their activism, from wearing shirts that proclaimed "Black Lives Matter" to kneeling during the national anthem to show solidarity with Colin Kaepernick's NFL campaign against police violence. They even campaigned against one of their owners in a U.S. Senate election.

"I will not just shut up and dribble," James said, in what could very well be the mantra of the decade. "I mean too much to so many kids that feel like they don't have a way out and they need someone to help lead them out of the situation they're in."

A decade of social activism merged seamlessly into America's racial reckoning in the summer of 2020, which again found the NBA in the middle of things.

That shouldn't have been a surprise, given the NBA has generally scored better than North America's other men's sports leagues on racial and gender equity issues.

Richard Lapchick, who issues an annual report card through The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport at the University of Central Florida, credits long-time NBA Commissioner David Stern with establishing the culture that led to a decade of activism.

Outside of Pete Rozelle, who oversaw the rise of the NFL, Stern is perhaps the most influential leader in the history of U.S. sports. He guided the NBA for three decades before giving way to Adam Silver in 2014.

Stern died on New Year's Day 2020 — one day after the end of a decade that might be his most lasting legacy.

"When he took over the league, a lot of critics and people were negative about the NBA. They said it was 'too Black,'" Lapchick recalled. "But he said, 'Let's put the best players on the court and hire the best people to run the organizations.'"

Lapchick said a conversation he had with Stern in the late 1990s was especially profound.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 26 of 73

"My goal is not only for you, nor anybody else, to not notice when we hire a Black coach," Stern told Lapchick, "but to not notice when we fire a Black coach."

Of course, it's the players who make the game.

James stood above them all in the 2010s. It didn't even matter if he had a ball in his hands.

The King was increasingly willing to speak out on divisive issues, and he dipped generously into his ample financial resources to support real change in everything from education to voter registration.

He has inspired countless young players to follow his example.

"He's just used his platform the best of anybody," Atlanta Hawks star Trae Young said. "Certainly any basketball player, maybe any athlete, just because he knows the outreach he has and he uses it to his advantage."

In a way, James was simply mimicking icons such as Bill Russell and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, who were outspoken advocates for civil rights through the 1960s and '70s.

Their influence faded with the '80s rise of Michael Jordan, who was famously quoted as saying "Republicans buy sneakers, too" -- a clear nod to commercialism over activism.

"I never thought of myself as an activist. I thought of myself as a basketball player," Jordan would say in "The Last Dance," ESPN's remarkable documentary that educated a new generation on His Airness. "Was that selfish? Probably."

In a compelling twist, Jordan is now the NBA's sole principal Black owner with the Charlotte Hornets and much more vocal on issues he once shied away from. But he missed a huge opportunity during his playing days.

"His dad was murdered," Lapchick pointed out. "He could have been talking about gun control. But he chose not to."

Jordan's successors turned their energy in a different direction, even when it put them at odds with the highest office in the land.

Former President Donald Trump spoke derisively of athlete activists such as Kaepernick and declined to invite Curry and the Warriors to White House in 2017 after they won the second of their three NBA titles over a five-year run of finals appearances.

While James' enormous skills made him Jordan's logical successor on the court, he took a decidedly different tack when it came to politically charged matters.

In almost every way, James is the anti-MJ. It's impossible to overstate the impact James had on the players around him, teammates and foes alike, and their transformation into a powerful, unified voice for change.

"I would never shut up about things that are wrong," James said. "There's no way I would ever just stick to sports, because I understand how powerful this platform is and my voice is."

Following his lead, other players are capitalizing on their power.

Young, who is only 23, helped eliminate some \$1 million in medical debt for struggling Atlanta families. He also signed on to a campaign to halt the execution of Oklahoma death row inmate Julius Jones, whose sentence was commuted by the governor.

"Knowing the platform I have and the outreach I have, if I do certain things it's going to reach other people and maybe inspire someone else to do something positive, too," Young said.

Looking back on the past decade, Lapchick believes one of the defining moments came at the start of the 2016 ESPY awards.

Normally a night for light-hearted frivolity, the ceremony began with a sobering charge from four of the NBA's biggest names: James, Paul, Wade and Carmelo Anthony.

"We cannot ignore the realities of the current state of America," Anthony said from the stage that night. "The system is broken. The problems are not new. The violence is not new. And the racial divide definitely is not new. But the urgency to create change is at an all-time high."

Paul pointed to those pioneers who came before them. It was time, he said powerfully, for today's athletes to worry about more than their scoring average.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 27 of 73

"Generations ago, legends like Jesse Owens, Jackie Robinson, Muhammad Ali, John Carlos and Tommie Smith, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Jim Brown, Billie Jean King, Arthur Ashe and countless others, they set a model for what athletes should stand for," Paul said. "So we choose to follow in their footsteps."

Their words came less than six weeks after Ali's death. In retrospect, Lapchick says, that was not coincidental.

"I think athletes knew something about Ali, knew that he was somebody who spoke out but maybe weren't sure about what," he said. "Then, with all the news stories after his death, pointing out all he did for so many decades and how he went from arguably the most unpopular person in the 1960s to one of the most popular and admired people at time of his death, that made athletes rethink what they should become."

As the decade ended and the world was struck by a new scourge -- the COVID-19 pandemic -- the players of the NBA and WNBA only grew louder.

The deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery led to massive protests not seen since the 1960s, a cause that both leagues embraced while completing their seasons in a bubble to cope with the deadly virus.

Not even the closed-off world at Disney could stifle the NBA's rank-and-file.

When Jacob Blake, a Black man, was shot by police in Kenosha, Wisconsin, a Milwaukee Bucks-led protest prompted players to walk off the court in the middle of the playoffs -- a movement that sparked similar protests in other sports and received widespread support from the NBA's largely white coaches and owners.

The players have vowed to turn symbolic gestures of the past decade into real change in the years to come, tackling crucial issues such as voting rights in response to many states changing access to the election booth.

NBA arenas were transformed into massive voting precincts during the 2020 election, allowing citizens to cast their ballots in person while maintaining social distancing guidelines amid a raging pandemic that has killed millions around the globe.

If the players have their way, that's only the start.

There's so many things on their to-do list for the next decade.

"We need to back the words up with action," Young said. "I hope the world feels the same way."

## Man arrested in Sacramento shooting had recently left prison

By ADAM BEAM Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — A wounded man arrested in connection with a Sacramento shooting that killed six people and injured a dozen more had been released from prison weeks earlier and was rejected for even earlier release after prosecutors argued he "clearly has little regard for human life," documents show.

Smiley Martin, 27, was arrested Tuesday on suspicion of possession of a firearm by a prohibited person and possession of a machine gun. Hours before Sunday's attack, Martin had posted a live Facebook video of himself brandishing a handgun, a law enforcement official told The Associated Press.

Police were trying to determine if a stolen handgun found at the crime scene was used in the massacre. It had been converted to a weapon capable of automatic gunfire. They also were trying to determine whether the gun Martin brandished in his video was used, the official told the AP. He was briefed on the investigation but was not authorized to publicly discuss details and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Martin and his brother were among those wounded when gunfire erupted near the state Capitol at about 2 a.m. Sunday as bars were closing and patrons filled the streets. More than 100 shots were unleashed in rapid-fire succession as hundreds of people scrambled to find safety. Authorities were trying to determine if a street fight outside a nightclub may have sparked the shooting.

The Sacramento County coroner identified the women killed as Johntaya Alexander, 21; Melinda Davis, 57; and Yamile Martinez-Andrade, 21. The three men killed were Sergio Harris, 38; Joshua Hoye-Lucchesi, 32; and De'vazia Turner, 29.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 28 of 73

Martin remained hospitalized and will be booked on the charges when his condition improves enough for him to be jailed, a police statement said.

His brother, Dandrae Martin, 26, was arrested Monday as a "related suspect" on suspicion of assault with a deadly weapon and being a convict carrying a loaded gun. He was not seriously wounded and made a brief appearance on the gun possession charge Tuesday in Sacramento Superior Court wearing orange jail scrubs.

Investigators believe both brothers had stolen guns and are trying to determine how they got them, the law enforcement official told the AP.

A 31-year-old man who was seen carrying a handgun immediately after the shooting was arrested Tuesday on a weapons charge, though police said his gun was not believed to be used in the crime.

Smiley Martin has a criminal history dating back to 2013. He was released from state prison in February on probation after serving two years of a 10-year sentence for punching a girlfriend, dragging her from her home by her hair and whipping her with a belt, prosecutors said.

Martin might have been released sooner, but a Parole Board rejected his bid for early release in May after prosecutors said the 2017 felony assault along with convictions for possessing an assault weapon and thefts posed "a significant, unreasonable risk of safety to the community."

Martin "clearly has little regard for human life and the law," and has displayed a pattern of criminal behavior from the time he was 18, a Sacramento County deputy district attorney wrote in a letter last year to the Board of Parole Hearings.

It wasn't clear if Smiley Martin had an attorney who could speak on his behalf.

Dandrae Martin, who was held without bail, was freed from an Arizona prison in 2020 after serving just over 1 1/2 years for violating probation in separate cases involving marijuana and aggravated assault.

Defense lawyer Linda Parisi said she doesn't know enough about the California case yet and whether she will seek his Martin's release will depend on whether prosecutors bring stiffer charges.

"If it turns out that the evidence demonstrates that this was mere presence at a scene that certainly argues more for a release," Parisi said. "If it shows some more aggressive conduct then it would argue against it. But we don't know that yet."

## Russia's failure to take down Kyiv was a defeat for the ages

By ROBERT BURNS AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Kyiv was a Russian defeat for the ages. The fight started poorly for the invaders and went downhill from there.

When President Vladimir Putin launched his war on Feb. 24 after months of buildup on Ukraine's borders, he sent hundreds of helicopter-borne commandos — the best of the best of Russia's "spetsnaz" special forces soldiers — to assault and seize a lightly defended airfield on Kyiv's doorstep.

Other Russian forces struck elsewhere across Ukraine, including toward the eastern city of Kharkiv as well as in the contested Donbas region and along the Black Sea coast. But as the seat of national power, Kyiv was the main prize. Thus the thrust by elite airborne forces in the war's opening hours.

But Putin failed to achieve his goal of quickly crushing Ukraine's outgunned and outnumbered army. The Russians were ill-prepared for Ukrainian resistance, proved incapable of adjusting to setbacks, failed to effectively combine air and land operations, misjudged Ukraine's ability to defend its skies, and bungled basic military functions like planning and executing the movement of supplies.

"That's a really bad combination if you want to conquer a country," said Peter Mansoor, a retired Army colonel and professor of military history at Ohio State University.

For now at least, Putin's forces have shifted away from Kyiv, to eastern Ukraine. Ultimately, the Russian leader may achieve some of his objectives. Yet his failure to seize Kyiv will be long remembered — for how it defied prewar expectations and exposed surprising weaknesses in a military thought to be one of the strongest in the world.

"It's stunning," said military historian Frederick Kagan of the Institute for the Study of War, who says he

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 29 of 73

knows of no parallel to a major military power like Russia invading a country at the time of its choosing and failing so utterly.

On the first morning of the war, Russian Mi-8 assault helicopters soared south toward Kyiv on a mission to attack Hostomel airfield on the northwest outskirts of the capital. By capturing the airfield, also known as Antonov airport, the Russians planned to establish a base from which to fly in more troops and light armored vehicles within striking distance of the heart of the nation's largest city.

It didn't work that way. Several Russian helicopters were reported to be hit by missiles even before they got to Hostomel, and once settled in at the airfield they suffered heavy losses from artillery fire.

An effort to take control of a military airbase in Vasylykiv south of Kyiv also met stiff resistance and reportedly saw several Russian Il-76 heavy-lift transport planes carrying paratroopers downed by Ukrainian defenses.

Although the Russians eventually managed to control Hostomel airfield, the Ukrainians' fierce resistance in the capital region forced a rethinking of an invasion plan that was based on an expectation the Ukrainians would quickly fold, the West would dither, and Russian forces would have an easy fight.

Air assault missions behind enemy lines, like the one executed at Hostomel, are risky and difficult, as the U.S. Army showed on March 24, 2003, when it sent more than 30 Apache attack helicopters into Iraq from Kuwait to strike an Iraqi Republican Guard division. On their way, the Apaches encountered small arms and anti-aircraft fire that downed one of the helos, damaged others and forced the mission to be aborted. Even so, the U.S. military recovered from that setback and soon captured Baghdad.

The fact that the Hostomel assault by the Russian 45th Guards Special Purpose Airborne Brigade faltered might not stand out in retrospect if the broader Russian effort had improved from that point. But it did not.

The Russians did make small and unsuccessful probes into the heart of Kyiv, and later they tried at great cost to encircle the capital by arcing farther west. Against enormous odds, the Ukrainians held their ground and fought back, stalling the Russians, and put to effective use a wide array of Western arms, including Javelin portable anti-tank weapons, shoulder-fired Stinger anti-aircraft missiles and much more.

Last week the Russians abandoned Hostomel airfield as part of a wholesale retreat into Belarus and Russia.

A sidelight of the battle for Kyiv was the widely reported saga of a Russian resupply convoy that stretched dozens of miles along a main roadway toward the capital. It initially seemed to be a worrisome sign for the Ukrainians, but they managed to attack elements of the convoy, which had limited off-road capability and thus eventually dispersed or otherwise became a non-factor in the fight.

"They never really provided a resupply of any value to Russian forces that were assembling around Kyiv, never really came to their aid," said Pentagon spokesman John Kirby. "The Ukrainians put a stop to that convoy pretty quickly by being very nimble, knocking out bridges, hitting lead vehicles and stopping their movement."

Mansoor says the Russians underestimated the number of troops they would need and showed "an astonishing inability" to perform basic military functions. They vastly misjudged what it would take to win the battle for Kyiv, he says.

"This was going to be hard even if the Russian army had proven itself to be competent," he said. "It's proven itself to be wholly incapable of conducting modern armored warfare."

Putin was not the only one surprised by his army's initial failures. U.S. and other Western officials had figured that if the invasion happened, Russia's seemingly superior forces would slice through Ukraine's army like a hot knife through butter. They might seize Kyiv in a few days and the whole country in a few weeks, although some analysts did question whether Putin appreciated how much Ukraine's forces had gained from Western training that intensified after Putin's 2014 seizure of Crimea and incursion into the Donbas.

On March 25, barely a month after the invasion began, the Russians declared they had achieved their goals in the Kyiv region and would shift focus to the separatist Donbas area in eastern Ukraine. Some suspected a Putin ploy to buy time without giving up his maximalist aims, but within days the Kyiv retreat was in full view.

Putin may yet manage to refocus his war effort on a narrower goal of expanding Russian control in the Donbas and perhaps securing a land corridor from the Donbas to the Crimean Peninsula. But his failure in

Kyiv revealed weaknesses that suggest Russia is unlikely to try again soon to take down the national capital. "I think they learned their lesson," said Mansoor.

## **In Bucha, Ukraine, burned, piled bodies among latest horrors**

By OLEKSANDR STASHEVSKYI and CARA ANNA Associated Press

BUCHA, Ukraine (AP) — One blackened body had arms raised in supplication, the face contorted in a horrible scream. The skull of another had a bullet hole in the left temple. The small blackened foot of a child could be seen in the tangle of charred bodies piled together in Bucha, the town outside of Kyiv where graphic evidence of killings and torture has emerged following the withdrawal of Russian forces.

The six burned and blackened corpses were just the latest gruesome scene to emerge from Bucha as world leaders push for Russia to be held accountable, including for possible war crimes.

It was not clear who the people were or under what circumstances they were killed.

The pile of bodies, seen by Associated Press journalists Tuesday, was just off a residential street, near a colorful and empty playground, visible to passersby as they warily went outdoors to collect aid.

In a house nearby, the twisted and bloody body of a young man who had been shot to death lay in the basement entrance. At least four other bodies lay strewn in the street, one with the eye gouged out, apparently by a bullet.

"It's horrible," said Ukrainian Interior Minister Denys Monastyrsky at the scene, which included other journalists. The minister said Russian President Vladimir Putin should "go to hell."

Andrii Nebytov, head of police in the Kyiv region, noted one of the charred bodies was a child.

The AP has seen dozens of dead bodies around Bucha, where Russian forces withdrew in the past week. The images, which included some with their arms bound, have horrified the world. Many victims appeared to have been shot at close range, some in the head. At least two had their hands tied.

High-resolution satellite imagery from Maxar Technologies showed that many of the bodies had been lying in the open for weeks, during the time that Russian forces were in the town.

Ukrainian officials have said the bodies of at least 410 civilians have been found in towns around Kyiv that were recaptured from Russian forces in recent days. The Ukrainian prosecutor-general's office has described one room discovered in Bucha as a "torture chamber."

The grisly images of battered and burned corpses left out in the open or hastily buried has led to calls for tougher sanctions against the Kremlin, especially a cutoff of fuel imports from Russia. Germany and France reacted by expelling dozens of Russian diplomats, suggesting they were spies, and U.S. President Joe Biden said Putin should be tried for war crimes.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy this week left Kyiv for his first reported trip since the war began nearly six weeks ago to see for himself what he called the "genocide" and "war crimes" in Bucha.

The chief prosecutor for the International Criminal Court at The Hague opened an investigation a month ago into possible war crimes in Ukraine.

## **House to vote on contempt for Scavino, Navarro in 1/6 probe**

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House will vote Wednesday on whether to hold former Trump advisers Peter Navarro and Dan Scavino in contempt of Congress after their monthslong refusal to comply with subpoenas from the House committee investigating the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol.

If approved as expected, the criminal referrals will be sent to the Justice Department, which would decide whether to prosecute.

Navarro, 72, a former White House trade adviser, was subpoenaed in early February over his promotion of false claims of voter fraud in the 2020 election that the committee believes contributed to the attack.

Scavino, a communications aide, was with Trump the day of the attack on the Capitol and may have "materials relevant to his videotaping and tweeting" messages that day, the committee said.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 31 of 73

While the contempt efforts may not yield any new information for the committee — any prosecutions could drag for months or years — they are an effort by the nine-member panel to signal that witnesses will suffer consequences if they don't cooperate or at least appear for questioning. The panel has already been remarkably effective at gaining testimony, conducting more than 800 witnesses in the nine months since it was created.

This will be the third time the panel has sent contempt charges to the House floor. The first two referrals, sent late last year, were for former White House chief of staff Mark Meadows and former Trump ally Steve Bannon.

Navarro cited executive privilege when declining to testify, saying the committee "should negotiate this matter with President Trump." He added, "If he waived the privilege, I will be happy to comply."

But the Biden administration has already waived executive privilege for Navarro, Scavino and former national security adviser Michael Flynn, saying it was not justified or in the national interest for them to withhold their testimony.

Executive privilege was developed to protect a president's ability to obtain candid counsel from his advisers without fear of immediate public disclosure, but it has limits. Courts have traditionally left questions of whether to invoke executive privilege up to the current White House occupant. The Supreme Court earlier this year rejected a bid by Trump to withhold documents from the committee.

In its subpoena for Scavino last fall, the committee cited reports that he was with Trump the day before the attack, during a discussion about how to persuade members of Congress not to certify the election for President Joe Biden.

A lawyer for Scavino did not return multiple messages from the AP seeking comment.

The contempt referral against Bannon resulted in an indictment, with a trial set to start in July. The Justice Department has been slower to decide whether to prosecute Meadows, much to the frustration of the committee.

"It's the committee's hope that they will present it to a grand jury," Rep. Bennie Thompson, the committee's chairman, told reporters Tuesday. "Obviously, the Meadows case is still outstanding. We don't really know where that is, other than we've done our work."

He added, "The firewall goes up from our standpoint, and DOJ uses its systems to take it from there."

Lawmakers are interviewing dozens of individuals a week as they inch closer to public hearings in late spring. In the last week alone, the committee interviewed Trump's daughter Ivanka Trump and her husband, Jared Kushner. Both were key White House advisers who had substantial access to the former president.

Thompson suggested more witnesses could still be held in contempt in the weeks ahead even as the committee looks to wrap up the investigative portion of their work in the next two months.

"The question here — is there someone who just patently ignored the subpoena for the committee and will we then determine is worthy of going forward, or have we gotten other information that negates the necessity to," he said.

One person the committee has not yet approached for testimony is former Vice President Mike Pence. And Thompson said lawmakers may not need to speak directly to him.

Aides close to Pence have already testified to the panel, including Marc Short, who was at the Capitol on Jan. 6 and accompanied Pence as he fled his post presiding over the Senate.

Trump publicly and privately pressured Pence to reject Biden's 2020 election win as part of his ceremonial role overseeing the electoral count, but Pence rebuffed him, noting he had no such power to change the outcome. Rioters who stormed the Capitol were incensed by Pence's decision and called for his hanging as they breached the building.

## **Analysis: 3 GOP senators buck party to back Biden court pick**

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — By announcing they will vote to confirm Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson as the first Black woman to the Supreme Court, three Republican senators are marking the historical moment by

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 32 of 73

building legacies of their own.

Every senator has a voice, and some choose to use theirs. The three Republican senators — Susan Collins, Lisa Murkowski and Mitt Romney — have broken with their party at critical junctures, despite the political risks of standing alone.

The three said separately that they don't expect to agree with all of Jackson's rulings from the bench. President Joe Biden's nominee to replace retiring Justice Stephen Breyer will likely join the liberal wing of the high court, and is not expected to tilt its 6-3 balance toward conservatives. But the senators also indicated the Harvard-educated judge is more than just likable, well-qualified and possessing the judicial temperament to do the job. They said she is deserving of confirmation.

As the other Republican senators line up to oppose Jackson, the support from the three outliers gives Biden the bipartisan backing he was seeking for the historic choice, but may do little to shield them from the blowback of party leaders and activists back home.

The votes from Collins, Murkowski and Romney also serve as a rejection of the soft-on-crime attacks leveled at Jackson, some tapping into dangerous conspiracy theories, reminiscent of racist arguments senators made against the first Black nominee to the court, Thurgood Marshall, a half century ago.

Voting for the "historic nomination," Murkowski said it was not only worth the political risk, but a rejection of a Senate process that "is growing worse and more detached from reality."

It's a measure of the nation's polarizing times that what could be seen as a milestone for the country — the first time in the court's 233-year history it won't be made up of mostly white men — has devolved into another bitter, grievance-laden, political brawl.

Jackson's nomination is advancing through procedural hurdles, including another vote Tuesday, and is on a glide path to confirmation in the Senate by week's end.

While Democrats hold a narrow majority in the 50-50 chamber, with Vice President Kamala Harris able to break a tie, her vote is unlikely to be needed.

"The confirmation of the nation's first Black woman to the highest court in the land will resonate for the rest of our nation's history," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said Tuesday as he launched the weeklong procedural steps toward confirmation.

It wasn't always guaranteed that Jackson, who was confirmed by the Senate to be a federal appellate judge just a year ago, would win over Republicans this time.

One key Republican, Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, who voted to confirm her for the lower court, led the opposition during the Senate Judiciary Committee hearings on her nomination.

Along with other Republicans, Graham saw political value in using Jackson's hearing to dredge up complaints about the partisan treatment of previous Supreme Court nominees during the Donald Trump era — from Brett Kavanaugh, who faced accusations of sexual assault from his high school years that he strenuously denied during his 2018 confirmation hearing for the Supreme Court, to Amy Coney Barrett's fervent Catholic faith.

"If we were in charge, she would not have been before this committee," Graham said about the Republican side ahead of the panel's deadlocked vote Monday. "You would have had somebody more moderate than this."

But personal political legacies can be as strong a draw for senators, who like to think of themselves as one of the 100 distinct voices in the Senate, despite the pressure party officials and others bring to bear on a vote.

Collins, Murkowski and Romney have all proven over long careers in Republican Party politics that they can be independent brokers.

They have shaped brands at home and beyond, occasionally displaying a centrist streak but also being willing to work pragmatically across the aisle with Democrats rather than reflexive opposition.

Collins, who won re-election in 2020, has long gone her own way to vote for a president's judicial nominees, regardless of the party of the president in the White House. A notable exception was Barrett, whose confirmation in October 2020 she said she could not support so close to the presidential election.

Collins expressed hope that the Senate could get back to a place where there is bipartisan support for



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 33 of 73

qualified Supreme Court nominees “because it’s important for public confidence in the court. The court is not supposed to be a politicized institution.”

Romney, the party’s 2012 presidential nominee and the only Republican senator to vote to convict Donald Trump during both trials of the former president, has emerged as a new force in the Senate, helping to broker bipartisan deals on issues like infrastructure and COVID-19 aid. He declined to back Jackson just a year ago for the lower court, but once he had a chance to meet and review her record he said she “more than meets the standard of excellence and integrity.” He would run for re-election in 2024.

Murkowski faces perhaps the most precarious political climate because she is up for re-election this year in Alaska where Republican Party leaders have censured her over voting to convict Trump in impeachment over the aftermath of the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the Capitol, among her other stances.

Alaska party leaders have endorsed Kelly Tshibaka, a Trump-backed candidate, ahead of the August primary. In the state’s new election system, the top four primary vote-getters, regardless of party affiliation, will advance to the general election where voters will rank their choices.

Yet, if anyone knows how to use political independence as a political currency, it’s Murkowski who in 2010 won a write-in campaign — voters had to write in M-u-r-k-o-w-s-k-i for Senate — after she lost the primary bid and party backing to a more conservative challenger.

Murkowski shrugged off the political attacks that could come from her decision to back Jackson as worth the risk.

“Is there any safe place in this polarized time?” she said.

## White House: US, allies to ban new investments in Russia

By AAMER MADHANI and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States and Western allies plan to pile additional sanctions on Russia on Wednesday after the emergence of troubling new evidence of war crimes in Ukraine, according to the White House. The new penalties will include a ban on all new investment in Russia.

Among the other measures being taken against Russia are greater sanctions on its financial institutions and state-owned enterprises, and sanctions on government officials and their family members, according to White House press secretary Jen Psaki.

“The goal is to force them to make a choice,” she said. “The biggest part of our objective here is to deplete the resources that Putin has to continue his war against Ukraine.”

Separately, the Treasury Department moved Tuesday to block any Russian government debt payments with U.S. dollars from accounts at U.S. financial institutions, making it harder for Russia to meet its financial obligations.

The Biden administration also announced Tuesday night that it was sending an additional \$100 million worth of military assistance to Ukraine. Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said the new equipment will meet “an urgent Ukrainian need for additional Javelin anti-armor systems.”

President Joe Biden and U.S. allies have worked together to levy a crippling of economic penalties against Russia for invading Ukraine more than a month ago, including the freezing of central bank assets, export controls and the seizing of property, including yachts, that belong to Russia’s wealthy elite. But calls for increased sanctions intensified this week in response to the attacks, killings and destruction in the Ukrainian city of Bucha.

The sanctions are intended to further Russia’s economic, financial and technological “isolation” from the rest of the world as a penalty for its attacks on civilians in Ukraine, Psaki said. That isolation is a key aspect of the U.S. strategy, which is premised on the idea that Russia will ultimately lack the resources and equipment to keep fighting a prolonged war in Ukraine.

Psaki said the administration is assessing “additional consequences and steps we can put in place” but underscored that Biden is not weighing any military action.

An increasingly desperate Russia has engaged in military tactics that have outraged much of the wider global community, leading to charges that it is committing war crimes and causing other sanctions.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 34 of 73

Still, almost all of the EU has refrained from an outright ban on Russian oil and natural gas that would likely crush the Russian economy. The U.S. has banned fossil fuels from Russia, while Lithuania blocked natural gas from that country on Saturday, becoming the first of the 27-member EU to do so. The EU executive branch on Tuesday proposed a ban on Russian coal, while Germany's government intends to end its use of Russian natural gas over the next two years.

On Monday, Biden called for his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, to be tried for war crimes and face new sanctions because of the atrocities and abuses seen around Kyiv after Russian forces pulled back from the Ukrainian capital. The corpses of what appeared to be civilians were seen strewn in yards, many of them likely killed at close range.

Biden said the U.S. and its allies would gather details for a war crimes trial, stressing that Putin has been "brutal" and his actions "outrageous."

Associated Press journalists saw dozens of bodies in Bucha on the outskirts of Kyiv. There were at least 13 bodies in and around a building that local people said Russian troops used as a base. Three other bodies were found in a stairwell, and a group of six were burned together.

Many victims seen by the AP appeared to have been shot at close range. Some were shot in the head. At least two had their hands tied. A bag of spilled groceries lay near one victim.

## **EXPLAINER: Jury mulls entrapment in Whitmer kidnap plot case**

By MICHAEL TARM AP Legal Affairs Writer

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (AP) — Jurors deliberating at the trial of four men charged with plotting to kidnap Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer must answer a key question about whether the FBI engaged in entrapment — the prohibited practice of cajoling or tricking subjects into committing crimes.

The FBI deployed undercover agents and informants in a sting that lasted months and ended in October 2020, when Adam Fox, Barry Croft Jr., Daniel Harris and Brandon Caserta were arrested. Prosecutors say the men were motivated by their hatred of government and fury over COVID-19 restrictions imposed by the Democratic governor. One witness said they hoped to prevent Joe Biden from winning the presidential election.

Here's a look at entrapment and how it has been addressed at the trial in Grand Rapids, Michigan:

### **WHAT INSTRUCTIONS WERE GIVEN TO JURORS?**

U.S. District Judge Robert Jonker explained to jurors that agents merely suggesting a kidnapping plot to the defendants wouldn't constitute entrapment. Using deception and having agents pretend to be someone they're not also isn't entrapment.

To find they were entrapped, the judge said jurors must make specific findings: That the agents or informants sought to persuade or pressure the men into agreeing to such a plot; and that the defendants showed no predisposition to commit such a crime until after the FBI came into the picture.

Predisposition is critical.

"If the defendant was already willing to commit the crime prior to first being approached ... it would not be entrapment," Jonker told jurors.

In determining predisposition, he said, "ask yourself what the evidence shows about the defendant's character and reputation." He said jurors should ask who came up with the idea to kidnap the governor.

The burden of proof was on prosecutors to show they didn't entrap the men.

### **WHAT'S THE ORIGIN OF ENTRAPMENT?**

It's a relatively new concept in U.S. law. According to a 2014 decision by Chicago's 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, a judge in 1864 mocked the idea that anyone could be entrapped by law enforcement, quoting Eve in the Bible explaining why she ate from the tree of knowledge: "The serpent beguiled me and I did eat."

"This plea has never since availed to shield crime or give indemnity to the culprit, and it is safe to say that under any code of civilized ethics ... it never will," the judge said.

However, the prohibition of entrapment emerged in the first half of the 20th century as an important

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 35 of 73

check on overzealous criminal investigators.

Courts have since grappled with how to understand predisposition.

In a 1988 landmark case, *Mathews v. United States*, the U.S. Supreme Court described someone without predisposition as “an unwary innocent” versus “an unwary criminal who readily availed himself of the opportunity to perpetrate the crime.” The latter can’t claim entrapment.

WHAT’S THE PITFALL OF ARGUING ENTRAPMENT?

Lawyers are essentially admitting to jurors that their clients did the deeds alleged in an indictment. They must surrender claims usually at the core of a defense, including that clients weren’t at the scene of the crime.

To succeed with an entrapment claim, the defense must convince jurors that — given the right amount of deceit and pressure — they, too, might acquiesce to committing a major felony. That’s a hard sell.

Entrapment defenses remain rare. After an arrest, lawyers often declare their clients were entrapped, but the risks of pursuing such a strategy usually dissuade them from arguing it at trial.

HOW DID ENTRAPMENT BECOME CENTRAL TO THIS TRIAL?

Judges usually assess before trial whether there’s a minimum level of evidence to justify an entrapment defense.

Jonker initially said he would wait until evidence was entered at trial, but abruptly changed his mind during opening statements after defense lawyers violated his instructions, repeatedly suggesting the FBI entrapped their clients.

He said he realized waiting was untenable since the defense had structured their whole strategy around entrapment. He told them they could be upfront with jurors about it.

Before delivering the entrapment instruction, Jonker rejected a prosecution request to tell jurors they can’t consider entrapment because the defense offered little to no proof of it.

HOW DID PROSECUTORS ADDRESS ENTRAPMENT?

They endeavored to show that the defendants weren’t just predisposed to going along with a kidnapping plot but that they were talking about it before the FBI sting.

In May 2020, Croft was already talking about about “hanging your governor,” Assistant U.S. Attorney Nils Kessler said in his closing. And in 2019, months before he met any agents or informants, Fox posted a video saying, “We need to use brutal force against the government.”

“This is a guy who thinks he talks directly to God for permission to kill people,” Kessler told jurors. “Do you think he wasn’t predisposed to commit this crime?”

Prosecutors also entered evidence to show the defendants took steps to carry out the plans, including scouting Whitmer’s home.

“These were people who wanted to separate themselves from people who were all talk,” prosecutor Jonathan Roth said in his opening statement.

Government witnesses included co-defendants who pleaded guilty before trial and who testified no one pressured them.

WHAT DID DEFENSE THE DEFENSE SAY?

In opening statements and closing arguments, they portrayed their clients as big-talking, pot-smoking weekend warriors, susceptible to manipulation by FBI operatives who encouraged them to speak about far-fetched schemes.

“It’s the government moving all of it,” Fox’s lawyer, Christopher Gibbons, said of the plot.

Attorney Joshua Blanchard called Croft’s remarks about hanging governors and resorting to violence “crazy talk” from a “stoned pirate” — referring to his client’s marijuana use and three-cornered hat — rather than a plan to attack Whitmer.

“I am ashamed of the behavior of the leading law enforcement agency in the United States,” Blanchard said.

Only Harris’ lawyers mounted a full presentation to jurors, including by calling Harris to testify. The others relied on cross-examination of government witnesses and closing arguments to assert entrapment.

## Storms batter aging power grid as climate disasters spread

By MATTHEW BROWN, CAMILLE FASSETT, PATRICK WHITTLE, JANET MCCONNAUGHEY and JASEN LO Associated Press

Power outages from severe weather have doubled over the past two decades across the U.S., as a warming climate stirs more destructive storms that cripple broad segments of the nation's aging electrical grid, according to an Associated Press analysis of government data.

Forty states are experiencing longer outages — and the problem is most acute in regions seeing more extreme weather, U.S. Department of Energy data shows. The blackouts can be harmful and even deadly for the elderly, disabled and other vulnerable communities.

Power grid maintenance expenses are skyrocketing as utilities upgrade decades-old transmission lines and equipment. And that means customers who are hit with more frequent and longer weather outages also are paying more for electricity.

"The electric grid is our early warning," said University of California, Berkeley grid expert Alexandra von Meier. "Climate change is here and we're feeling real effects."

The AP analysis found:

—The number of outages tied to severe weather rose from about 50 annually nationwide in the early 2000s to more than 100 annually on average over the past five years.

—The frequency and length of power failures are at their highest levels since reliability tracking began in 2013 — with U.S. customers on average experiencing more than eight hours of outages in 2020.

—Maine, Louisiana and California each experienced at least a 50% increase in outage duration even as residents endured mounting interruption costs over the past several years.

—In California alone, power losses have affected tens of thousands of people who rely on electricity for medical needs.

The AP analyzed electricity disturbance data submitted by utilities to the U.S. Department of Energy to identify weather-related outages. The analysis also examined utility-level data covering outages of more than five minutes, including how long they lasted and how often they occurred. Department officials declined comment.

Driving the increasingly commonplace blackouts are weather disasters now rolling across the country with seasonal consistency.

Winter storms called nor'easters barrel into New England and shred decrepit electrical networks. Hot summers spawn hurricanes that pound the Gulf Coast and Eastern Seaboard, plunging communities into the dark, sometimes for months. And in fall, West Coast windstorms trigger forced power shutoffs across huge areas to protect against deadly wildfires from downed equipment.

### MAINE

The power grid's fragility hit home for Lynn Mason Courtney, 78, a blind cancer survivor living in a retirement community in Bethel, Maine, a rural town of 2,500 along the Androscoggin River.

When Courtney's building lost power and heat for three days following a 2020 winter storm, the temperature inside fell to 42 degrees (6 degrees Celsius). Extended loss of heat isn't something most people are prepared for in a cold state such as Maine, she said, and one resident relied on old camping gear to try to keep warm.

"I developed hypothermia. I was dehydrated," Courtney said. "Two people on oxygen had nowhere to go. They just stayed in the apartment and hoped like hell that the power would come back on."

Winter storms left more than 500,000 without power in Maine in 2017 — more than a third of the state's population. And in recent years, the state has seen record numbers of weather-related interruptions. The state never recorded more than five per year until 2018, but in 2020 it had 12, AP's analysis found.

As with much of the nation, Maine's electrical infrastructure was built decades ago and parts are more than 50 years old, according to the American Society of Civil Engineers.

The brittle condition of the state's power grid and repeated disruptions worsened by climate change worry Courtney.

"When the power goes out, it's extraordinarily difficult and dangerous," she said. "If you're disabled, it's

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 37 of 73

scary. You're not safe."

As the planet warms, storms that threaten power reliability are likely to hit some areas harder, said Penn State University meteorology professor Colin Zarzycki.

A warmer atmosphere holds more moisture, increasing energy packed by storms no matter the season. The phenomenon produces, for example, increasingly destructive tropical hurricanes that strike the Southeast and Pacific storms that cause flooding on the West Coast.

On the East Coast, some nor'easters will convert to rainstorms as freezing weather shifts north. But those that fall as snow could be bigger than ever, Zarzycki said.

And some areas will get less snow but more sleet and freezing rain that can wreak greater damage on electrical systems, because ice-laden equipment is easier for winds to topple.

"Those really high-end nor'easters, the ones that take over CNN for days, those are going to occur with the same or increased frequency," Zarzycki said. "Where these events occur could lead to increased vulnerability, because the infrastructure is not prepared."

## LOUISIANA

The combination of at-risk infrastructure and climate change can be deadly: After Hurricane Ida knocked out power to much of coastal Louisiana last year, heat killed or contributed to the deaths of at least 21 people, local coroners reported.

In New Orleans alone, heat caused nine deaths and contributed to 10 others, according to coroner's office records. Most who died were elderly and African American. Spokesman Jason Melancon could not say which victims did not have power, but 75% of the city was still without power when most died.

David Sneed, 65, died in his wheelchair on the 12th-floor of the subsidized apartment where he'd been without power for several days after the storm hit Aug. 29.

Sneed was obese and had a cognitive impairment that made walking difficult, so he used the wheelchair most of the time, said Rev. Ken Taylor, a professor at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, where Sneed was a doctoral student.

Three days after the storm, Sneed called Taylor in near-panic and said he was unable to leave because the building's elevator was not working. So the next day, Taylor went to Sneed's apartment to bring him food and water — and it felt like 100 degrees (38 degrees Celsius), with no windows open.

When the professor returned the following day, he found the elevator was working. Sneed said he'd go down to the first floor where it was cooler. But when the reverend came back to check on him again, Sneed didn't answer.

When an apartment employee opened the door, Sneed's body was in the bedroom, slumped in his wheelchair.

"I speculate that he had rolled into his bedroom to put on some pants to go downstairs ... and the heat or his heart or a combination of the two" killed him, Taylor said. The coroner's office said Sneed died from the heat.

The financial toll of storms is huge — Louisiana's largest power company has said it will cost an estimated \$4 billion to repair damage from the hurricanes of 2020 and 2021. State regulators have approved \$3.2 billion of that, which Entergy Corp. estimates will add \$8 a month for 15 years to the average residential bill.

Problems with the grid and costs to fix them are expected to grow in coming decades, said U.C. Berkeley's von Meier.

Much of the grid was built decades ago, and the majority of power transmission facilities are now at least 25 years old. That's forced utilities to quadruple spending on the U.S. transmission system since 2000 to about \$40 billion annually, according to Department of Energy data.

Billions more will be spent, with costs passed on to consumers, but those efforts won't keep up with problems from climate change, von Meier said. "Rates will go up, reliability will go down," she said.

## CALIFORNIA

In California, widespread anger erupted in recent years as utilities such as Pacific Gas and Electric Co. imposed deliberate power outages to guard against wildfires.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 38 of 73

Almost 200 California wildfires over the past decade were traced to downed power lines that ignited trees or brush, including a record 41 blazes in 2021. Among them was a 2018 fire that ripped through the Sierra Nevada foothills town of Paradise and killed 85 people, resulting in criminal involuntary manslaughter convictions of PG&E. Another fire blamed on PG&E last year burned almost 1 million acres (390,000 hectares), 1,300 buildings and much of the Sierra Nevada town of Greenville.

Now when wind storms are forecast and the landscape is dry, utilities cut off power to hundreds of thousands of customers, sometimes for multiple days, to reduce fire risk.

Beyond closing businesses and causing food to spoil in refrigerators, outages can be life-threatening for people with health conditions whose medical equipment requires electricity.

An AP review of utility filings with California regulators found nearly 160,000 instances of power shutoffs to customers with medical needs from 2017 to 2021. PG&E was responsible for more than 80%.

"We know there has been a trade-off between safety and reliability," said PG&E Vice President Sumeet Singh. He said shutoffs were a last resort to guard against fires and that the company has reduced the number of people affected through better forecasting of hazardous weather and more localized shutdowns.

Richard Skaff, a paraplegic who is an advocate for the disabled in Northern California, said he has endured two forced outages each lasting five days over the past several years. He was fortunate to have a generator to keep his electric wheelchair powered and his house heated, but said many others with disabilities live on minimal incomes and struggle to get by during outages.

"If we're going to allow PG&E and others to de-energize the grid, if we accept that as a concept, you have to look at the implications of that first," Skaff said. "You have to determine the effects on the most vulnerable people."

PG&E and other utilities have sought to lessen the impacts by notifying people with needs in advance of shutoffs and setting up response centers where they can charge their phones or other essential devices.

Utilities also have started creating "microgrids" — local electrical networks that can disconnect from the main grid and operate independently to reduce the scope of shutoffs.

"We're very sensitive to the needs of our customers," said Southern California Edison Vice President Erik Takayesu. "We run risk calculations to ensure we're making the right decisions. But it's really hard ... Each individual customer will have their own individual experience. The best we can do is help the customer prepare."

The state utilities commission and some local officials have said the industry's efforts are insufficient for outages that can cover large portions of the state and affect numerous towns and cities.

By the end of this year, PG&E and Southern California Edison expect to have spent almost \$20 billion since 2020 on wildfire prevention. The companies are cutting back vegetation near their equipment and putting up stronger power lines. PG&E plans to bury 10,000 miles (16,000 kilometers) of lines over 10 years so they won't be exposed to falling trees.

PG&E's customers paid on average almost \$140 more last year versus the previous year to avert wildfires from their operations.

Rising electric bills because of extreme weather have outsized impact on low income households and communities of color, said John Howat, a senior energy analyst at National Consumer Law Center. These communities devote a higher proportion of their income to home energy bills, so they get hit harder than wealthier households.

Since it will take utilities many years to carry out their wildfire prevention efforts, companies will continue to use forced shutoffs to protect against wildfires.

The intentional outages help utilities avoid liability for deadly wildfires, but they amount to recurring crises for power customers who are disabled, elderly or with special needs, said Aaron Carruthers, executive director of the California State Council on Developmental Disabilities.

Unless more is done to prepare needy communities, shutoffs will continue to put lives at risk, threaten people's health and leave vulnerable people scared, Carruthers said.

Gabriela Madrigal, a 34-year-old Santa Barbara resident who needs a powered wheelchair to get around,

said she's endured perhaps a dozen preventive shutoffs by Southern California Edison over the past several years.

Madrigal — who has a debilitating, neurological condition called spina bifida — lives in low-income city housing with her mother, who is her primary caregiver.

Each time the power blinks out, it catches them off guard, Madrigal said. When the outages last hours or days, her wheelchair goes dead. The chair weighs several hundred pounds with Madrigal in it, and her mother has trouble moving it.

So when the power goes off and no one else is around to help, "we're pretty much stuck," Madrigal said. "It takes a toll on someone."

## White House: US, allies to ban new investments in Russia

By AAMER MADHANI and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

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## 2 killed in Georgia, Texas as damaging storms strike South

By RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

SAVANNAH, Ga. (AP) — Violent storms killed at least two people, one in Georgia and another in Texas, on Tuesday as hail, strong winds and tornadoes tore across the South, where authorities warned a second day of dangerous weather of violent weather could follow.

A woman died Tuesday evening in Pembroke, Georgia, where a suspected tornado ripped part of the roof from the Bryan County courthouse, destroyed the entrance to a local government building across the street and damaged homes in nearby neighborhoods, said Matthew Kent, a county government spokesman.

Kent said several others were injured in the county 30 miles (48 kilometers) west of Savannah. He said the death occurred in one of the damaged neighborhoods, but had no further details.

In eastern Texas, W. M. Soloman, 71, died when storm winds toppled a tree onto Solomon’s home in Whitehouse, about 100 miles (160 kilometers) southeast of Dallas, Whitehouse Mayor James Wansley said. Officials said trees fell on at least four homes there.

More than 50,000 homes and businesses were without power Tuesday night from eastern Texas to South Carolina. The outages came on a day when the National Weather Service issued a nonstop stream of tornado warnings for hours as the storm system tore across Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina.

In southeast Georgia, Gage Moore, 23, was driving home from work Tuesday evening on Interstate 16 in the county where Pembroke is located when his fiance called saying she heard tornado sirens. About two minutes later, Moore said, he looked up to see a towering twister looming to the left of the highway.

Moore said he pulled over and stopped his car behind an overpass, then took cellphone video of the funnel cloud churning across the interstate.

“Everybody started slamming on brakes all around me,” Moore said. “I could actually feel my truck shaking back and forth and hear the roar of it passing by.” He added: “Thankfully we all stopped and left a huge gap in the interstate where it crossed.”

Afterward, Moore continued his commute home. He said he could tell where the twister crossed the highway because of the mangled exit sign and damaged trees left behind. “Some were bent and some were broken,” Moore said, “the tops were broken out of them.”

In South Carolina, Allendale County Manager William Goodson said a tornado, captured in a video on social media, caused damage in his rural county, but exactly how much and whether there were any injuries were unknown.

“I know we have buildings damaged and power lines down,” Goodson said.

Debate also was delayed for nearly an hour in the South Carolina legislature after the state House chamber was evacuated for a tornado warning for Columbia. The legislation being debated would require athletes to compete with the gender listed on their birth certificates.

The weather service said it was sending survey teams to examine potential tornado damage in Wetumpka, Alabama. Lightning struck a flea market in the north Alabama community of Lacey’s Spring, causing a fire that gutted the building, news outlets reported.

Fallen trees and limbs closed a stretch of highway for hours in Newton County, Mississippi. As storms pushed into Georgia, a large tree fell and crashed through the roof of Marie Jordan’s home in metro Atlanta, coming down in the living room, kitchen and garage.

“It just took everything,” Jordan told WSB-TV. “For years and years, I have watched that tree.”



Elsewhere in Texas, one person was injured when the storms swept through Johnson County, about 40 miles (65 kilometers) southwest of Dallas. Brittaney Deaton said she became trapped in an RV trailer behind her family's home after the trailer flipped over. She said her stepfather got injured trying to free her.

"I was screaming on the phone. I couldn't get out. I was terrified," Deaton told KDFW-TV. "And I felt like I was just trapped, like it was going to roll with me in it. And I just thank God that I got out."

The threat of damaging weather will move further north on Wednesday, forecasters said, with severe storms possible across an area stretching from western Alabama to the western tip of the Carolinas. More than 10 million people in metro areas including Atlanta; Birmingham; and Chattanooga, Tennessee, will be at risk, the Storm Prediction Center said.

Springtime often brings strong storms to the Southeast. The region has faced a barrage of weather recently that included a tornado last month in metro New Orleans, where one person died, and storms that killed at least two people in the Florida Panhandle last week.

## Zelenskyy at the UN accuses Russian military of war crimes

By OLEKSANDR STASHEVSKYI and EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

BUCHA, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy accused the Russians of gruesome atrocities in Ukraine and told the U.N. Security Council on Tuesday that those responsible should immediately be brought up on war crimes charges in front of a tribunal like the one established at Nuremberg after World War II.

Over the past few days, grisly images of what appeared to be intentional killings of civilians carried out by Russian forces in Bucha and other towns before they withdrew from the outskirts of Kyiv have caused a global outcry and led Western nations to expel scores of Moscow's diplomats and propose further sanctions, including a ban on coal imports from Russia.

Zelenskyy, speaking via video from Ukraine to U.N. diplomats, said that civilians had been tortured, shot in the back of the head, thrown down wells, blown up with grenades in their apartments and crushed to death by tanks while in cars.

"They cut off limbs, cut their throats. Women were raped and killed in front of their children," he said. He asserted that people's tongues were pulled out "only because their aggressor did not hear what they wanted to hear from them."

Zelenskyy said that both those who carried out the killings and those who gave the orders "must be brought to justice immediately for war crimes" in front of a tribunal similar to what was used in postwar Germany.

Moscow's U.N. ambassador, Vassily Nebenzia, said that while Bucha was under Russian control, "not a single local person has suffered from any violent action." Reiterating what the Kremlin has contended for days, he said that video footage of bodies in the streets was "a crude forgery" staged by the Ukrainians.

"You only saw what they showed you," he said. "The only ones who would fall for this are Western dilettantes."

As Zelenskyy spoke to the diplomats, survivors of the monthlong Russian occupation took investigators to body after body of townspeople allegedly shot down by troops. Others simply surveyed the destruction.

In Borodyanka, northwest of Kyiv, 25-year-old, Dmitriy Yevtushkov searched the rubble of apartment buildings and found that only a photo album remained from his family's home. In the besieged southern city of Mykolaiv, a passerby stopped briefly to look at the bright blossoms of a shattered flower stand lying among bloodstains, the legacy of a Russian shell that killed nine. The onlooker sketched out the sign of the cross in the air, and moved on.

Associated Press journalists in Bucha have counted dozens of corpses in civilian clothes and interviewed Ukrainians who told of witnessing atrocities. Also, high-resolution satellite imagery from Maxar Technologies showed that many of the bodies had been lying in the open for weeks, during the time that Russian forces were in the town.

The dead in Bucha included a pile of six charred bodies, as witnessed by AP journalists. It was not clear

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 42 of 73

who they were or under what circumstances they died. One body was probably that of a child, said Andrii Nebytov, head of police in the Kyiv region. A gunshot wound to the head was visible on one.

The chief prosecutor for the International Criminal Court at The Hague opened an investigation a month ago into possible war crimes in Ukraine.

Zelenskyy stressed that Bucha was only one place and that there are more with similar horrors — a warning echoed by NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg.

Stoltenberg, meanwhile, warned that in pulling back from the capital, Russian President Vladimir Putin's military is regrouping its forces in order to deploy them to eastern and southern Ukraine for a "crucial phase of the war." Russia's stated goal currently is control of the Donbas, the largely Russian-speaking industrial region in the east that includes the shattered port city of Mariupol.

"Moscow is not giving up its ambitions in Ukraine," Stoltenberg said.

While both Ukrainian and Russian representatives sent optimistic signals following their latest round of talks a week ago, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Moscow won't accept a Ukrainian demand that a prospective peace deal include an immediate pullout of troops followed by a Ukrainian referendum on the agreement.

In televised remarks Tuesday, Lavrov said a new deal would have to be negotiated if the vote failed, and "we don't want to play such cat and mouse."

Ukrainian officials said that the bodies of at least 410 civilians have been found in towns around Kyiv that were recaptured from Russian forces and that a "torture chamber" was discovered in Bucha.

Zelenskyy told the Security Council there was "not a single crime" that Russian troops hadn't committed in Bucha.

"The Russian military searched for and purposefully killed anyone who served our country. They shot and killed women outside their houses when they just tried to call someone who is alive. They killed entire families, adults and children, and they tried to burn the bodies," he said. They used tanks to crush civilians "just for their pleasure," he said.

On Tuesday, police and other investigators walked the silent streets of Bucha. Survivors who hid in their homes during the Russian occupation of the town, many of them past middle age, wandered past charred tanks and jagged window panes with plastic bags of food and other humanitarian aid. Red Cross workers checked in on intact homes.

Many of the dead seen by AP journalists appeared to have been shot at close range, and some had their hands bound or their flesh burned.

The AP and the PBS series "Frontline" have jointly verified at least 90 incidents during the war that appear to violate international law. The War Crimes Watch Ukraine project is looking into apparent targeted attacks as well as indiscriminate ones.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the images from Bucha revealed "not the random act of a rogue unit" but "a deliberate campaign to kill, to torture, to rape, to commit atrocities." He said the reports of atrocities were "more than credible."

"Only non-humans are capable of this," said Angelica Chernomor, a refugee from Kyiv who crossed into Poland with her two children and saw the photos from Bucha. "Even if people live under a totalitarian regime, they must retain feelings, dignity, but they do not."

Chernomor is among the more than 4 million Ukrainians who have fled the country in the wake of the Feb. 24 invasion.

Russia has rejected similar accusations of atrocities in the past by accusing its enemies of forging photos and video and using so-called crisis actors.

As Western leaders condemned the killings in Bucha, Romania, Italy, Spain and Denmark expelled dozens of Russian diplomats on Tuesday, following moves by Germany and France. Hundreds of Russian diplomats have been sent home since the start of the invasion, many accused of being spies.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov called the expulsions a "short-sighted" measure that would complicate communication and warned they would be met with "reciprocal steps."

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 43 of 73

The U.S., in coordination with the European Union and Group of Seven nations, will roll out more sanctions against Russia on Wednesday, including a ban on all new investment in the country, a senior administration official said, speaking on condition to discuss the upcoming announcement.

Also, the EU's executive branch proposed a ban on coal imports from Russia, in what would be the first time the 27-nation bloc has sanctioned the country's lucrative energy industry over the war. The coal imports amount to an estimated 4 billion euros (\$4.4 billion) per year.

Just hours before the latest proposal was announced, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said that to prevent "new Buchas," the West must impose the "mother of all sanctions" — on Russian oil and gas. "A few months of tightening your belts are worth thousands of saved lives," he said.

But Western nations are divided over how far to go. While some are calling for a boycott of Russian oil and gas, Germany and others fear that such a move could plunge the continent into a severe economic crisis.

## Official: Sacramento shooting suspect seen on video with gun

By ADAM BEAM and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — A second suspect arrested Tuesday in connection with the mass shooting that killed six people in Sacramento had posted a live Facebook video of himself brandishing a handgun hours before gunfire erupted, a law enforcement official told The Associated Press.

Smiley Martin, 27, who is the brother of the first suspect taken into custody, was arrested while hospitalized with bullet wounds from the shooting in California's capital.

Martin was released from prison on probation in February after serving his term for punching a girlfriend, dragging her from her home by her hair and whipping her with a belt, prosecutors said.

Martin may have been released sooner, but a Parole Board rejected his bid for early release in May after prosecutors said the 2017 felony assault along with convictions for possessing an assault weapon and thefts posed "a significant, unreasonable risk of safety to the community."

"Martin's criminal conduct is violent and lengthy," a Sacramento prosecutor wrote in a letter obtained by AP. "Martin has committed several felony violations and clearly has little regard for human life and the law."

Authorities are trying to determine whether the weapon seen in the video was used in the shooting, said the official, who was briefed on the investigation but was not authorized to publicly discuss details and spoke to AP on condition of anonymity.

Investigators believe the brothers possessed stolen guns. They are reviewing financial documents, call records and social media messages to determine how and when they procured weapons, the official said. Authorities have searched several locations in connection with the shooting and the firearms investigation.

More than 100 shots were fired in rapid-fire succession early Sunday near the state Capitol, creating a chaotic scene with hundreds of panicked people trying desperately to reach safety. Twelve people were wounded by gunfire, including the Martin brothers.

Dandrae Martin, 26, was arrested Monday as a "related suspect" on charges of assault with a deadly weapon and being a convict carrying a loaded gun. He was not seriously wounded and made a brief appearance Tuesday in Sacramento Superior Court wearing orange jail scrubs.

Smiley Martin will be booked for possession of a firearm by a prohibited person and possession of a machine gun when his condition improves enough for him to be jailed, a police statement said.

Police were trying to determine if a stolen handgun found at the crime scene that had been converted to a weapon capable of automatic gunfire was used in the massacre.

Smiley Martin was taken to the hospital from the crime scene, police said.

"Martin was quickly identified as a person of interest and has remained under the supervision of an officer at the hospital while his treatment continues," the statement said.

Detectives and SWAT team members also found a handgun during searches of three area homes.

The shooting happened at about 2 a.m. Sunday as bars were closing and patrons filled the streets. The three women and three men killed included a father of four, a young woman who wanted to be a social worker, a man described as the life of the party, and a homeless woman.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 44 of 73

The Sacramento County coroner identified the women killed as Johntaya Alexander, 21; Melinda Davis, 57; and Yamile Martinez-Andrade, 21. The three men were Sergio Harris, 38; Joshua Hoye-Lucchesi, 32; and De'vazia Turner, 29.

Police were investigating whether the shooting was connected with a street fight that broke out just before gunfire erupted. Several people could be seen fighting in videos on a street lined with an upscale hotel, nightclubs and bars when gunshots sent people scattering.

Officers were reviewing more than 100 videos and photos sent by witnesses for possible use as evidence, police said.

A 31-year-old man who was seen carrying a handgun immediately after the shooting was arrested Tuesday on a weapons charge, though police said his gun was not believed to be used in the crime.

District Attorney Anne Marie Schubert noted Monday that Dandrae Martin was not arrested on suspicion of homicide but said more arrests were expected.

Dandrae Martin, who was held without bail, was freed from an Arizona prison in 2020 after serving just over 1 1/2 years for violating probation in separate cases involving a felony conviction for aggravated assault in 2016 and a conviction on a marijuana charge in 2018. Court records show he pleaded guilty to punching, kicking and choking a woman in a hotel room when she refused to work for him as a prostitute.

Defense lawyer Linda Parisi said she doesn't know enough about the case yet and whether she will seek Dandrae Martin's release will depend on whether prosecutors bring stiffer charges.

"If it turns out that the evidence demonstrates that this was mere presence at a scene that certainly argues more for a release," Parisi said. "If it shows some more aggressive conduct then it would argue against it. But we don't know that yet."

It wasn't clear if Smiley Martin had an attorney who could speak on his behalf.

Four of those wounded suffered critical injuries, the Sacramento Fire Department has said. At least seven of the victims had been released from hospitals by Monday.

At the scene where the chaos erupted, memorials with candles and flowers grew on the same sidewalks where people had run in terror as others lay on the ground writhing in pain.

Politicians decried the shooting, and some Democrats, including President Joe Biden, called for tougher action against gun violence.

California has some of the nation's toughest restrictions on firearms, requiring background checks to buy guns and ammunition, limiting magazines to 10 bullets, and banning firearms that fall into its definition of assault weapons.

But state lawmakers plan to go further. A bill received its first hearing Tuesday would allow citizens to sue those who possess illegal weapons, a measure patterned after a controversial Texas bill aimed at abortions.

Other proposed California legislation this year would make it easier for people to sue gun companies and target unregistered "ghost guns," firearms made from build-it-yourself kits.

## **GOP blocks Senate COVID bill, demands votes on immigration**

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans blocked a Democratic attempt Tuesday to begin Senate debate on a \$10 billion COVID-19 compromise, pressing to entangle the bipartisan package with an election-year showdown over immigration restrictions that poses a politically uncomfortable fight for Democrats.

A day after Democratic and GOP bargainers reached agreement on providing the money for treatments, vaccines and testing, a Democratic move to push the measure past a procedural hurdle failed 52-47. All 50 Republicans opposed the move, leaving Democrats 13 votes short of the 60 they needed to prevail.

Hours earlier, Republicans said they'd withhold crucial support for the measure unless Democrats agreed to votes on an amendment preventing President Joe Biden from lifting Trump-era curbs on migrants entering the U.S. With Biden polling poorly on his handling of immigration and Democrats divided on the issue, Republicans see a focus on migrants as a fertile line of attack.

"I think there will have to be" an amendment preserving the immigration restrictions "in order to move

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 45 of 73

the bill" bolstering federal pandemic efforts, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., told reporters.

At least 10 GOP votes will be needed in the 50-50 Senate for the measure to reach the 60 votes it must have for approval. Republicans could withhold that support until Democrats permit a vote on an immigration amendment.

Biden and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., want Congress to approve the pandemic bill before lawmakers leave in days for a two-week recess. Tuesday's vote suggested that could be hard.

"This is a potentially devastating vote for every single American who was worried about the possibility of a new variant rearing its nasty head within a few months," Schumer said after the vote.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said, "Today's Senate vote is a step backward for our ability to respond to this virus."

The new omicron variant, BA.2, is expected to spark a fresh increase in U.S. COVID-19 cases. Around 980,000 Americans and over 6 million people worldwide have died from the disease.

The \$10 billion pandemic package is far less than the \$22.5 billion Biden initially sought. It also lacks \$5 billion Biden wanted to battle the pandemic overseas after the two sides couldn't agree on budget savings to pay for it, as Republicans demanded.

At least half the bill would finance research and production of therapeutics to treat COVID-19. Money would also be used to buy vaccines and tests and to research new variants.

The measure is paid for by pulling back unspent pandemic funds provided earlier for protecting aviation manufacturing jobs, closed entertainment venues and other programs.

Administration officials have said the government has run out of money to finance COVID-19 testing and treatments for people without insurance, and is running low on money for boosters, free monoclonal antibody treatments and care for people with immune system weaknesses.

At the 2020 height of the pandemic, President Donald Trump imposed immigration curbs letting authorities immediately expel asylum seekers and migrants for public health reasons. The ban is set to expire May 23, triggering what by all accounts will be a massive increase in people trying to cross the Mexican border into the U.S.

That confronts Democrats with messy choices ahead of fall elections when they're expected to struggle to retain their hair-breadth House and Senate majorities.

Many of the party's lawmakers and their liberal supporters want the U.S. to open its doors to more immigrants. But moderates and some Democrats confronting tight November reelections worry about lifting the restrictions and alienating centrist voters.

Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto, D-Nev., who faces a competitive reelection this fall, declined to say whether she would support retaining the Trump-era ban but said more needs to be done.

"I need a plan, we need a plan," she said in a brief interview. "There's going to be a surge at the border. There should be a plan and I've been calling for it all along."

Shortly before Tuesday's vote, Schumer showed no taste for exposing his party to a divisive immigration vote.

"This is a bipartisan agreement that does a whole lot of important good for the American people. Vaccines, testing, therapeutics," he said. "It should not be held hostage for an extraneous issue."

Jeff Zients, head of White House COVID-19 task force, expressed the same view.

"This should not be included on any funding bill," he said of immigration. "The decision should be made by the CDC. That's where it has been, and that's where it belongs."

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which initiated the move two years ago, said earlier this month that it would lift the ban next month. The restrictions, known as Title 42, have been harder to justify as pandemic restrictions have eased.

Trump administration officials cast the curb as a way to keep COVID-19 from spreading further in the U.S. Democrats considered that an excuse for Trump, whose anti-immigrant rhetoric was a hallmark of his presidency, to keep migrants from entering the country.

Rep. Judy Chu, D-Calif., said she supported terminating Trump's curb and questioned GOP motives for seeking to reinstate it.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 46 of 73

"I find it very ironic for those who haven't wanted to have a vaccination mandate, for those who did not want to have masks in the classroom, for them to suddenly be very interested in protecting the public," she said.

But Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, said he would support a Senate COVID-19 aid bill if it included the GOP effort to retain the Trump immigration restrictions.

"Why wouldn't I?" he said in a brief interview.

## Obama's back — for a day — in White House health bill push

By ZEKE MILLER, RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR and DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With hugs, laughs and good-natured ribbing, Barack Obama on Tuesday returned to the White House for the first time in more than five years to savor the 12th anniversary of his signature health care law and give a boost to President Joe Biden's efforts to expand it.

The Affordable Care Act has survived repeated repeal attempts by Republicans.

Biden, who was Obama's No. 2 when "Obamacare" became law in March 2010, wants to extend the law's reach to even more than the current millions. He gave all the credit for the original law to the former president.

"It's because of you," Biden said after good-naturedly introducing himself as Obama's vice president. Biden said the law "shows hope leads to change," a play on Obama's "hope and change" campaign slogan.

Obama was last at the White House on Jan. 20, 2017, when he left to escort Donald Trump, the successor bent on overturning the law, to the Capitol to be inaugurated. He spent more than four hours Wednesday meeting with Biden and greeting White House staff in what was hoped would be a morale boost for the administration.

"It's good to be back in the White House. It's been awhile," he said after Vice President Kamala Harris introduced him in the East Room. Obama opened by referring to Biden as "vice president" before acknowledging that was a "set up" joke and embracing his former No. 2.

Obama said he and Biden accomplished "a lot" in their eight years but "nothing made me prouder than providing better health care and more protections to millions of people across this country."

"The ACA was an example of why you run for office in the first place," Obama said, calling it the "high point of my time here."

Biden called the Affordable Care Act the most consequential legislation since Medicare and Medicaid were created in 1965, and insisted it must be expanded to more people.

"We can do this. We should do this. We have to do this," Biden said. He said the law has been called a lot of things, "but Obamacare is the most fitting."

Biden and Obama marked the 12th anniversary of the law, which back in 2010 the then-vice president had memorably whispered to Obama was a "big (expletive) deal" -- words captured on an open microphone.

At Tuesday's event, Biden signed an executive order directing federal agencies to look for ways to continue to expand the availability and quality of affordable health care. He also highlighted ongoing efforts to close a "family glitch" in implementation of the 2010 law that his administration believes will help 200,000 more people gain affordable coverage.

Before signing the order, Biden jokingly warned Obama, "Let me remind you, it's a hot mic."

Obama warmed up the crowd with a few deadpan jokes about how things around the White House had changed under Biden, leaning into the current occupant's affinity for sunglasses and ice cream and his taste in pets.

He quipped that Secret Service agents now have to wear aviator sunglasses, the White House mess has been replaced by a Baskin-Robbins and "there's a cat running around."

"I guarantee you Bo and Sunny would have been very unhappy about it," Obama added, referencing the his family's dogs.

As for "Obamacare," the law's staying power has been enhanced by three Supreme Court victories and

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 47 of 73

the late Sen. John McCain's emphatic thumbs-down vote that took the wind out of then-President Trump's efforts to repeal and replace it.

The law was such a bugaboo in 2010 that Democrats rarely invoked it as they went into a midterm election that turned out to be, in Obama's own words, a "shellacking." Now, Democrats are hoping the political equation will work to their advantage, and that a focus on shoring up the law can help them avoid a debacle at the polls this November.

Harris, in her remarks, called on Congress to allow Medicare to negotiate prescription drug prices and to make permanent subsidies for the Affordable Care Act that were included in Biden's pandemic relief bill. Harris also called out 12 states that have not expanded eligibility for Medicaid.

Obama referred to the health care law as a "starter home" that Americans can build upon, gradually reducing the 9% share of the population that remains uninsured. The rate was nearly 15% in 2013, before the coverage provisions of the law took effect. Between the health law's Medicaid expansion and its health insurance markets, more than 30 million people are now estimated to be getting coverage.

Biden opened up the health insurance markets to anyone seeking coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic, and his coronavirus relief bill provided a significant, though temporary, increase in financial assistance. The result was a record 14.5 million people signing up for subsidized private coverage.

People tripped up by the "family glitch" are dependents of workers who have an offer of employer coverage that the government interprets as being affordable. As a rule, people with affordable employer coverage are not eligible for taxpayer-subsidized ACA plans.

But the issue with the current interpretation is that affordability is determined by the cost for employee-only coverage, and not more expensive family policies. Workers able to afford their own share may not be able to cover premiums for the entire family. So the family is cut out of ACA coverage.

A Biden administration regulation addressing the issue recently cleared White House review. The intent of the original policy was to prevent people with employer coverage from going into the health law's subsidized markets, but advocates say it has proven too restrictive.

There are more fundamental issues for the two presidents to consider as well, both policy-wise and politically.

Unless Democrats in Congress finally coalesce around a version of Biden's social legislation, his enhanced financial assistance for millions purchasing ACA plans will expire at the end of this year. A return to higher premiums would likely trigger an increase in the number of uninsured people, a problem for them and a political embarrassment for Democrats committed to expanding coverage.

The Biden legislation, which passed the House but sputtered in the Senate, also includes a mechanism for providing coverage to as many as 4 million uninsured low-income adults in states that have refused the health law's Medicaid expansion. It would deliver on Biden's campaign promise to build on existing government programs to move the U.S. closer to coverage for all.

## Zoos hiding birds as avian flu spreads in North America

By JOSH FUNK Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Zoos across North America are moving their birds indoors and away from people and wildlife as they try to protect them from the highly contagious and potentially deadly avian influenza.

Penguins may be the only birds visitors to many zoos can see right now, because they already are kept inside and usually protected behind glass in their exhibits, making it harder for the bird flu to reach them.

Nearly 23 million chickens and turkeys have already been killed across the United States to limit the spread of the virus, and zoos are working hard to prevent any of their birds from meeting the same fate. It would be especially upsetting for zoos to have to kill any of the endangered or threatened species in their care.

"It would be extremely devastating," said Maria Franke, who is the manager of welfare science at Toronto Zoo, which has less than two dozen Loggerhead Shrike songbirds that it's breeding with the hope of reintroducing them into the wild. "We take amazing care and the welfare and well being of our animals is the utmost importance. There's a lot of staff that has close connections with the animals that they care

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 48 of 73

for here at the zoo.”

Toronto Zoo workers are adding roofs to some outdoor bird exhibits and double-checking the mesh surrounding enclosures to ensure it will keep wild birds out.

Birds shed the virus through their droppings and nasal discharge. Experts say it can be spread through contaminated equipment, clothing, boots and vehicles carrying supplies. Research has shown that small birds that squeeze into zoo exhibits or buildings can also spread the flu, and that mice can even track it inside.

So far, no outbreaks have been reported at zoos, but there have been wild birds found dead that had the flu. For example, a wild duck that died in a behind-the-scenes area of the Blank Park Zoo in Des Moines, Iowa, after tornadoes last month tested positive, zoo spokesman Ryan Bickel said.

Most of the steps zoos are taking are designed to prevent contact between wild birds and zoo animals. In some places, officials are requiring employees to change into clean boots and don protective gear before entering bird areas.

When bird flu cases are found in poultry, officials order the entire flock to be killed because the virus is so contagious. However, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has indicated that zoos might be able to avoid that by isolating infected birds and possibly euthanizing a small number of them.

Sarah Woodhouse, director of animal health at Omaha’s Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium, said she is optimistic after talking with state and federal regulators.

“They all agree that ordering us to depopulate a large part of our collection would be the absolute last-ditch effort. So they’re really interested in working with us to see what we can do to make sure that we’re not going to spread the disease while also being able to take care of our birds and not have to euthanize,” Woodhouse said.

Among the precautions zoos are taking is to keep birds in smaller groups so that if a case is found, only a few would be affected. The USDA and state veterinarians would make the final decision about which birds had to be killed.

“Euthanasia is really the only way to keep it from spreading,” said Luis Padilla, who is vice president of animal collections at the Saint Louis Zoo. “That’s why we have so many of these very proactive measures in place.”

The National Aviary in Pittsburgh — the nation’s largest — is providing individual health checks for each of its roughly 500 birds. Many already live in large glass enclosures or outdoor habitats where they don’t have direct exposure to wildlife, said Dr. Pilar Fish, the aviary’s senior director of veterinary medicine and zoological advancement.

Kansas City Zoo CEO Sean Putney said he’s heard a few complaints from visitors, but most people seem OK with not getting to see some birds. “I think our guests understand that we have what’s in the best interests of the animals in mind when we make these decisions even though they can’t get to see them,” Putney said.

Officials emphasize that bird flu doesn’t jeopardize the safety of meat or eggs or represent a significant risk to human health. No infected birds are allowed into the food supply, and properly cooking poultry and eggs kills bacteria and viruses. No human cases have been found in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

## Proud Boys leader pleads not guilty to Jan. 6 charges

WASHINGTON (AP) — Proud Boys leader Henry “Enrique” Tarrío pleaded not guilty on Tuesday to charges that he remotely led a plot to stop Congress’ certification of Joe Biden’s 2020 victory.

Though he wasn’t at the Capitol during the Jan. 6, 2021, riot, prosecutors say Tarrío organized encrypted chats with Proud Boys members in the weeks before the attack, had a 42-second phone call with another member of the group in the building during the insurrection and took credit for the chaos at the Capitol.

Police had arrested Tarrío in Washington two days before the riot and charged him with vandalizing a Black Lives Matter banner at a historic Black church during a protest in December 2020. The day before the Capitol was attacked, a judge ordered Tarrío to stay out of Washington.



Tarrio's indictment said that instead of staying out of town, he met with Oath Keepers founder and leader Elmer "Stewart" Rhodes and others in an underground parking garage for about 30 minutes on Jan. 5.

His lawyers have said the evidence against Tarrio was weak and relies mostly on text messages and social media.

A judge has postponed the May 18 trial for Tarrio and five others affiliated with the far-right group.

Prosecutors sought the postponement to give them more time to assess and share with opposing lawyers new information gathered in the investigation. Some defendants in the case agreed with the postponement request.

A new trial date is expected to be picked during an April 21 hearing.

## UN: 18 nations have gone green on climate, raked in green

BY DREW COSTLEY AND SETH BORENSTEIN undefined

Proponents of clean energy and thinks tanks have long said it's possible to reduce emissions and keep an economy growing. Now the latest report from the world's top climate scientists says 18 countries have done just that, sustaining emissions reductions "for at least a decade" as their economies continued to grow.

The United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) did not name the countries, citing inconsistency in the data.

But using figures from Global Carbon Project, which are not part of the report, The Associated Press found 19 nations where the pre-pandemic annual carbon dioxide emissions were at least 10 million metric tons less in 2019 than in 2010. They are the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, Italy, Ukraine, France, Spain, Greece, Netherlands, Mexico, Finland, Singapore, Denmark, the Czech Republic, Belgium, Poland, Romania and Sweden.

The IPCC identified three common factors for countries that have been able to decarbonize: They used less energy, transitioned away from fossil fuels to renewable energy and increased the energy efficiency of their products.

Such countries "can export a model that shows we can reduce emissions and still have high levels of well-being," said Greg Nemet, a professor of energy and public policy at the University of Wisconsin-Madison La Follette School of Public Affairs. "We can export policies that have played a role in achieving that."

While the list of countries points a way forward, it also raises questions of equity. The United States, Germany, Japan and the United Kingdom are among the largest contributors to historical carbon emissions. Their residents already have electricity and to a large degree, vehicles.

Nemet, who is also a lead author of the IPCC report, added that developed countries that have been historical contributors to climate change and have been able to decarbonize need to take a "leadership" role in helping developing countries do the same.

Historic emissions and discussions of responsibility are always discussed during U.N. climate conferences. But getting industrialized countries to agree on whether compensation for damages is warranted or how much they should pay to help poorer countries invest in green technologies, has all proved elusive.

The least developed countries in the world are estimated to have emitted just 3.3% of global greenhouse gases in 2019, Inger Andersen, executive director of the United Nations Environment Programme, pointed out in a statement to the AP. Some experts note that developing countries often are forced to borrow money at higher rates of interest than developed nations, which can make large capital projects prohibitive.

"The 18 countries that have balanced emissions reduction and economic growth are indeed examples that give us hope for the future but... all developed nations have a historic responsibility to ensure that they lean in – whether on the Paris Accord targets of delivering \$100 billion a year in climate finance, on ensuring poorer countries have access to technology and knowledge to make these shifts," or by leading, making these transitions first, she said.

Michael Grubb, a lead writer on the IPCC report and professor of energy and climate change at the University College of London, said in the report that scientists ran economic and emissions scenarios to see what would happen globally at different levels of carbon pollution reduction. In nearly every scenario

-- including the "most aggressive" ones to cut carbon emissions -- the global gross domestic product still nearly doubled by mid-century. Even in the scenario with the deepest emission cuts, GDP jumped 96%, Grubb said.

"The point is in practice, what we do in climate mitigation in macroeconomic terms is really going to be lost in the noise of the overall effectiveness of our economic policies," he said.

Grubb said the IPCC report declined to name the 18 countries because the data for some counted only carbon dioxide while for others included all greenhouse gases. Baseline years also differed. Depending on the parameters, there are more nations that reduced emissions while growing their economies, he said.

Patricia Romero-Lankao, a senior scientist at the National Renewable Energy Laboratory and lead author of the portion of the IPCC report on national and subnational policies, said she's optimistic. But she stressed how much more must be done to aid disadvantaged communities and regions in decarbonizing and repairing the impacts of climate change.

"This is not a technical problem," she said. "We need to understand what they need, what challenges they face and how we can adapt our toolset to help us respond to that."

## Oklahoma state House approves bill to make abortion illegal

By SEAN MURPHY Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — The Oklahoma House gave final legislative approval on Tuesday to a bill that would make performing an abortion a felony, punishable by up to 10 years in prison.

With little discussion and no debate, the Republican-controlled House voted 70-14 to send the bill to Republican Gov. Kevin Stitt, who has previously said he'd sign any anti-abortion bill that comes to his desk.

The bill is one of several anti-abortion measures still alive in Oklahoma's Legislature this year, part of a trend of GOP-led states passing aggressive anti-abortion legislation as the conservative U.S. Supreme Court is considering ratcheting back abortion rights that have been in place for nearly 50 years.

The Oklahoma bill, which passed the Senate last year, makes an exception only for an abortion performed to save the life of the mother, said GOP state Rep. Jim Olsen, of Roland, who sponsored the bill. Under the bill, a person convicted of performing an abortion would face up to 10 years in prison and a \$100,000 fine.

"The penalties are for the doctor, not for the woman," Olsen said.

Similar anti-abortion bills approved by the Oklahoma Legislature and in other conservative states in recent years have been stopped by the courts as unconstitutional, but anti-abortion lawmakers have been buoyed by the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to allow new Texas abortion restrictions to remain in place. The new Texas law, the most restrictive anti-abortion law in the U.S. in decades, leaves enforcement up to private citizens, who are entitled to collect what critics call a "bounty" of \$10,000 if they bring a successful lawsuit against a provider or anyone who helps a patient obtain an abortion. Several states, including Oklahoma, are pursuing similar legislation this year.

The Oklahoma bill's passage came on the same day as more than 100 people attended a "Bans Off Oklahoma" rally outside the Capitol in support of abortion rights.

"These legislators have continued their relentless attacks on our freedoms," said Emily Wales, interim president and CEO of Planned Parenthood Great Plains Votes. "These restrictions are not about improving the safety of the work that we do. They are about shaming and stigmatizing people who need and deserve abortion access."

Wales said Planned Parenthood's abortion clinic in Oklahoma has seen an 800% increase in the number of women from Texas after that state passed its new anti-abortion law last year.

The Texas law bans abortion once cardiac activity is detected, usually around six weeks of pregnancy, without exceptions in cases of rape or incest.

Also Tuesday, the Oklahoma House adopted a resolution to recognize lives lost due to abortion and urge citizens to fly flags at half-staff on Jan. 22, the day the U.S. Supreme Court legalized abortion in its landmark 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade*.

## More delays for NASA's moon rocket test, fueling stalled

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — NASA's dress rehearsal for its mega moon rocket is off until at least this weekend because of a pair of technical problems that kept stalling a fueling test.

Launch managers tried twice — once Sunday and again Monday — to load nearly 1 million gallons of fuel into the 322-foot (98-meter) rocket known as Space Launch System, or SLS. Balky fans at the launch pad thwarted the first effort, while an improperly closed valve halted the second attempt.

The countdown test is the last major milestone before the rocket's long-awaited launch debut. The Orion crew capsule atop the rocket will be hurled to the moon in a passenger-less test flight, looping around but not landing before returning to Earth. NASA is targeting June, depending on how the demo goes.

"We didn't get through everything we wanted, but certainly learned a great deal that we'll take into our next attempt," said NASA's Jim Free, who's in charge of exploration systems development.

Speaking Tuesday at the Space Foundation's annual conference in Colorado Springs, Free said the launch team will wait until SpaceX launches four private passengers to the International Space Station before taking another crack at the fueling test. Liftoff is scheduled for Friday from Kennedy Space Center, barely a mile from the pad holding the SLS rocket.

Managers declined to specify a date for the next SLS fueling attempt, but noted they would not have to start the test from scratch.

The dress rehearsal began Friday and should have lasted just two days. A severe thunderstorm resulted in four lightning strikes at the pad Saturday, but officials did not believe that caused any of the technical problems. They described the problems as nuisances — not design issues.

"The rocket is fine. The spacecraft (capsule) is fine. We've just got to get through the test and the test objectives," mission manager Mike Sarafin told reporters.

After this first moonshot in NASA's Artemis program, NASA will send a crew around the moon in 2024 and then attempt the first lunar landing by astronauts in 2025 or so. Astronauts last walked on the moon in 1972 during NASA's Apollo program.

## Ivanka Trump testifies before House Jan. 6 panel

By MARY CLARE JALONICK, LISA MASCARO and FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Ivanka Trump, former President Donald Trump's daughter and one of those closest to him during the insurrection at the Capitol, is testifying before the House panel investigating the Jan. 6, 2021, attack.

Mississippi Rep. Bennie Thompson, the committee's chairman, said Tuesday afternoon that she had been answering investigators' questions on a video teleconference since the morning and was not "chatty" but had been helpful to the probe.

"She came in on her own" and did not have to be subpoenaed, Thompson said.

Ivanka Trump, who was with her father in the White House that day, is one of more than 800 witnesses the committee has interviewed as it works to compile a record of the attack, the worst on the Capitol in more than two centuries. She the first of Trump's children known to speak to the committee and one of the closest people to her father.

Whether she gives the committee new information or not, her decision to cooperate is significant for the panel, which has been trying to secure an interview with her since late January. The nine-member panel is particularly focused on what the former president was doing as his supporters broke into the Capitol and interrupted the certification of President Joe Biden's victory.

Ivanka Trump's testimony comes less than a week after her husband, Jared Kushner, testified to the committee in a separate virtual meeting that lasted more than six hours. Members of the panel said his testimony was helpful and were hoping to further fill in the gaps with her help.

The panel is using the interviews to compile a comprehensive record and will begin to release information in the coming months as it holds public hearings and releases a series of reports on the insurrection. While

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 52 of 73

Congress doesn't have power to charge anyone with a crime, members of the panel say the objective is to create the most comprehensive record possible so nothing like it ever happens again.

Lawmakers have said they want to discuss what Ivanka Trump knew about her father's efforts, including a telephone call they say she witnessed, to pressure then-Vice President Mike Pence to reject Biden's 2020 election win as part of his ceremonial role overseeing the electoral count. Pence rejected those efforts.

The committee is also interested in any concerns she may have heard from Pence's staff, members of Congress and the White House counsel's office about Trump's pressure on Pence.

Ivanka Trump's cooperation stands in contrast with some of her father's other top advisers, several of whom have refused to cooperate as the former president has fought the probe. Trump has tried to exert executive privilege over documents and interviews, but in many cases has been overruled by courts or Biden, who has that authority as the sitting president.

The House is expected to vote this week to recommend contempt charges for Trump advisers Peter Navarro and Dan Scavino, both of whom the committee says have been uncooperative. The committee previously voted to recommend contempt charges against longtime Trump ally Steve Bannon, who defied a congressional subpoena, and White House chief of staff Mark Meadows, who ceased cooperating with the panel.

Bannon was later indicted by a federal grand jury and is awaiting prosecution by the Justice Department. The Justice Department has not taken any action against Meadows.

Other witnesses who are still close to the former president — and several who were in the White House that day — have declined to answer the committee's questions.

## **Analysis: 3 GOP senators buck party to back Biden court pick**

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — By announcing they will vote to confirm Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson as the first Black woman to the Supreme Court, three Republican senators are marking the historical moment by building legacies of their own.

Every senator has a voice, and some choose to use theirs. The three Republican senators — Susan Collins, Lisa Murkowski and Mitt Romney — have broken with their party at critical junctures, despite the political risks of standing alone.

The three said separately that they don't expect to agree with all of Jackson's rulings from the bench. President Joe Biden's nominee to replace retiring Justice Stephen Breyer will likely join the liberal wing of the high court, and is not expected to tilt its 6-3 balance toward conservatives. But the senators also indicated the Harvard-educated judge is more than just likable, well-qualified and possessing the judicial temperament to do the job. They said she is deserving of confirmation.

As the other Republican senators line up to oppose Jackson, the support from the three outliers gives Biden the bipartisan backing he was seeking for the historic choice, but may do little to shield them from the blowback of party leaders and activists back home.

The votes from Collins, Murkowski and Romney also serve as a rejection of the soft-on-crime attacks leveled at Jackson, some tapping into dangerous conspiracy theories, reminiscent of racist arguments senators made against the first Black nominee to the court, Thurgood Marshall, a half century ago.

Voting for the "historic nomination," Murkowski said it was not only worth the political risk, but a rejection of a Senate process that "is growing worse and more detached from reality."

It's a measure of the nation's polarizing times that what could be seen as a milestone for the country — the first time in the court's 233-year history it won't be made up of mostly white men — has devolved into another bitter, grievance-laden, political brawl.

Jackson's nomination is advancing through procedural hurdles, including another vote Tuesday, and is on a glide path to confirmation in the Senate by week's end.

While Democrats hold a narrow majority in the 50-50 chamber, with Vice President Kamala Harris able to break a tie, her vote is unlikely to be needed.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 53 of 73

"The confirmation of the nation's first Black woman to the highest court in the land will resonate for the rest of our nation's history," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said Tuesday as he launched the weeklong procedural steps toward confirmation.

It wasn't always guaranteed that Jackson, who was confirmed by the Senate to be a federal appellate judge just a year ago, would win over Republicans this time.

One key Republican, Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, who voted to confirm her for the lower court, led the opposition during the Senate Judiciary Committee hearings on her nomination.

Along with other Republicans, Graham saw political value in using Jackson's hearing to dredge up complaints about the partisan treatment of previous Supreme Court nominees during the Donald Trump era — from Brett Kavanaugh, who faced accusations of sexual assault from his high school years that he strenuously denied during his 2018 confirmation hearing for the Supreme Court, to Amy Coney Barrett's fervent Catholic faith.

"If we were in charge, she would not have been before this committee," Graham said about the Republican side ahead of the panel's deadlocked vote Monday. "You would have had somebody more moderate than this."

But personal political legacies can be as strong a draw for senators, who like to think of themselves as one of the 100 distinct voices in the Senate, despite the pressure party officials and others bring to bear on a vote.

Collins, Murkowski and Romney have all proven over long careers in Republican Party politics that they can be independent brokers.

They have shaped brands at home and beyond, occasionally displaying a centrist streak but also being willing to work pragmatically across the aisle with Democrats rather than reflexive opposition.

Collins, who won re-election in 2020, has long gone her own way to vote for a president's judicial nominees, regardless of the party of the president in the White House. A notable exception was Barrett, whose confirmation in October 2020 she said she could not support so close to the presidential election.

Collins expressed hope that the Senate could get back to a place where there is bipartisan support for qualified Supreme Court nominees "because it's important for public confidence in the court. The court is not supposed to be a politicized institution."

Romney, the party's 2012 presidential nominee and the only Republican senator to vote to convict Donald Trump during both trials of the former president, has emerged as a new force in the Senate, helping to broker bipartisan deals on issues like infrastructure and COVID-19 aid. He declined to back Jackson just a year ago for the lower court, but once he had a chance to meet and review her record he said she "more than meets the standard of excellence and integrity." He would run for re-election in 2024.

Murkowski faces perhaps the most precarious political climate because she is up for re-election this year in Alaska where Republican Party leaders have censured her over voting to convict Trump in impeachment over the aftermath of the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the Capitol, among her other stances.

Alaska party leaders have endorsed Kelly Tshibaka, a Trump-backed candidate, ahead of the August primary. In the state's new election system, the top four primary vote-getters, regardless of party affiliation, will advance to the general election where voters will rank their choices.

Yet, if anyone knows how to use political independence as a political currency, it's Murkowski who in 2010 won a write-in campaign — voters had to write in M-u-r-k-o-w-s-k-i for Senate — after she lost the primary bid and party backing to a more conservative challenger.

Murkowski shrugged off the political attacks that could come from her decision to back Jackson as worth the risk.

"Is there any safe place in this polarized time?" she said.

## The 6 lives lost in the Sacramento mass shooting

By ADAM BEAM and STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — A father of four. A best friend with a positive personality. A vivacious party-

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 54 of 73

goer. The six people who were killed during a mass shooting in California's capital city were remembered by their friends and family as police worked to piece together what happened.

Dozens of rapid-fire gunshots rang out early Sunday in the crowded streets of Sacramento, leaving three women and three men dead and another 12 people wounded. One of the dozen wounded is a suspect in the bloodshed.

Police have arrested two brothers in connection with the violence but authorities have not said what their alleged roles were in the shooting. Police previously said they were looking for at least two shooters but have not made clear if any suspects remained at large Tuesday.

Smiley Martin, 27, was arrested while hospitalized with serious injuries from the gunfire, Sacramento police said Tuesday morning. When his condition improves enough for him to be jailed, he will be booked for possession of a firearm by a prohibited person and possession of a machine gun.

On Monday, authorities booked Dandrae Martin, 26, as a "related suspect" on charges of assault with a deadly weapon and being a convict carrying a loaded gun. Jail records said he was held without bail and was scheduled to appear in court Tuesday.

It was not immediately clear whether the Martins have attorneys who could speak on their behalf.

Few details have been made public as investigators comb through evidence gathered from what Police Chief Kathy Lester called a complex crime scene. Witnesses have submitted more than 170 videos and photos taken during and shortly after the shooting.

On Tuesday, small memorials with candles, balloons and flowers remained near the crime scene on the outskirts of the city's main entertainment district that occurred as bars and nightclubs were closing.

The Sacramento County coroner released the identities of the six people killed. They were Johntaya Alexander, 21; Melinda Davis, 57; Yamile Martinez-Andrade, 21; Sergio Harris, 38; Joshua Hoye-Lucchesi, 32; and De'vazia Turner, 29.

## DE'VAZIA TURNER

Turner had four young children, including a 3-year-old daughter named Penelope with sticky fingers. But his bright yellow Mercedes CLS was always clean.

Born and raised in Sacramento, Turner played football from a young age until a knee injury slowed him down. He worked as a manager for an inventory company, keeping a close eye on things his mother might like and letting her know when they would go on sale.

"He was a protector," his mother, Penelope Scott, said. "Raising him as a single mom, you know, he took the role of being the man of the house. He took care of everything."

He worked out with his dad, Frank Turner, five days a week. When they weren't pumping iron, they were probably talking about cars. They both had old Buicks — Turner's was a 1973 while his dad's was a 1970 — and Turner had big plans for his. He had just ordered a new stereo and a steering wheel with a cherry wood finish.

Frank Turner said he plans to finish his son's car, including painting it to include images of De'vazia's face for his kids to see.

"I want them to see their daddy when they see that car," Frank Turner said.

De'vazia Turner had visited his mother on Saturday, eating leftover pork chops and taking a shower before briefly falling asleep on her couch. When he woke up, he said he was going out — a rarity for him, because he works so much, Scott said.

Scott woke up at around 1 a.m. and couldn't get back to sleep. She was looking at her phone when she got a call that her son had been killed.

"Your kids are supposed to bury you. You're not supposed to do that," she said. "I'm grateful that he has a legacy with his children. However, you know, he's 29. He didn't make it to 30."

The last time Frank Turner saw his son was at the auto shop where they were working on their cars. After his son's death, a friend called Frank Turner and told him the shop's security cameras had picked up their conversation.

He watched the video — a father and son spending time together on something they loved — and he cried.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 55 of 73

JOHNTAYA ALEXANDER

Alexander was just shy of turning 22 when she was killed, her father told the Los Angeles Times. Her birthday was at the end of the month.

She hoped to become a social worker who worked with children and was a doting aunt to her nieces and nephews, John Alexander told the newspaper.

His daughter's name was a combination of his own and his older sister's, he told the Times.

"She was just beginning her life," he told the newspaper, sobbing. "Stop all this senseless shooting."

MELINDA DAVIS

Davis was a "very sassy lady" who lived on the streets of Sacramento near the shooting site, The Sacramento Bee reported.

Shawn Peter, a guide with the Downtown Sacramento Partnership who had known Davis for 15 years, told the newspaper that she had been homeless and lived in the area on and off for a decade.

Officials had helped her find housing before the pandemic began but she had returned to the downtown business district in recent months, Peter said. A small bouquet of purple roses with a note saying "Melinda Rest In Peace" was left on the street in her memory.

"Melinda was a very eccentric individual, a very sassy lady," he told the newspaper. "This was her world, 24/7."

Davis was a periodic guest at Maryhouse, a daytime center for women and children experiencing homelessness, from 2016 to 2018, director Shannon Stevens said in an email to The Associated Press. Stevens recalled her as kind but someone who did not do well in crowds. She was seeking housing services at the time.

"This was a space she came to find respite from the trauma of living on the streets of our city," Sacramento Loaves & Fishes, which runs the Maryhouse program, said in a statement.

A memorial for Davis near the shooting site featured a card with messages, including one that said, "Melinda, we're sorry Sacramento failed you. You deserved better."

SERGIO HARRIS

Described by family members as the life of the party, Harris was a frequent presence at the London nightclub, which is near the shooting scene.

"My son was a very vivacious young man," his mother, Pamela Harris, told KCRA-TV. "Fun to be around, liked to party, smiling all the time. Don't bother people. For this to happen is crazy. I'm just to the point right now, I don't know what to do. I don't even feel like this is real. I feel like this is a dream."

His family members congregated at the crime scene Sunday after they hadn't heard from him for hours. Later that day, Harris was the first victim publicly identified by the coroner.

"This is a sad and terrible act of violence that took the lives of many," his wife, Leticia Harris, told KCRA-TV. "I want answers so I can have closure for my children."

YAMILE MARTINEZ-ANDRADE

Martinez-Andrade was killed in front of her best friend, according to KXTV-TV.

She was described as someone who "brought light to the room," the station reported, and had a positive outlook.

"There was never a dull moment with her. She has a beautiful heart and a beautiful mind. Everyone misses her so much," her best friend, who was not named, told KXTV-TV.

JOSHUA HOYE-LUCCHESI

Hoye-Lucchesi was born and raised in Sacramento and his survivors include his mother, his girlfriend and six young children, KCRA 3 reported.

"I never wanted kids, and if I said if I was to have a kid, I just wanted a boy. And I was blessed with a boy," Sherilyn Hoye told the TV station.

Hoye-Lucchesi's girlfriend called Hoye at 2:45 a.m. to tell her the tragic news. She later saw painful images on social media.

"It was a post of my son on the ground dead. It was sent to me through Instagram. My son was lying on the ground dead," Hoye told KCRA.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 56 of 73

A memorial with white and blue balloons, candles and two empty bottles of Hennessy was left a block from the shooting in honor of Hoye-Lucchesi. On the ground, someone wrote "Josh" in what appeared to be blue paint.

"I love and miss you. Foreva n my heart!" someone wrote in black marker on a white balloon shaped like a star. "Things will never be the same," read another balloon.

## Amazon's first US union overcomes hurdles, faces new ones

By HALELUYA HADERO and ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — When a scrappy group of former and current warehouse workers on Staten Island, New York went head-to-head with Amazon in a union election, many compared it to a David and Goliath battle.

David won. And the stunning upset on Friday brought sudden exposure to the organizers and worker advocates who realized victory for the nascent Amazon Labor Union when so many other more established labor groups had failed before them, including most recently in Bessemer, Alabama.

Initial results in that election show the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union down by 118 votes, with the majority of Amazon warehouse workers in Bessemer rejecting a bid to form a union. The final outcome is still up in the air with 416 outstanding challenged ballots hanging in the balance. A hearing to review the ballots is expected to begin in the coming weeks.

Chris Smalls, a fired Amazon worker who heads the ALU, has been critical of the RWDSU's campaign, saying it didn't have enough local support. Instead, he chose an independent path, believing workers organizing themselves would be more effective and undercut Amazon's narrative that "third party" groups were driving union efforts.

"They were not perceived as outsiders, so that's important," said Ruth Milkman, a sociologist of labor and labor movements at the City University of New York.

While the odds were stacked against both union drives, with organizers facing off against a deep-pocketed retailer with an uninterrupted track record of keeping unions out of its U.S. operations, ALU was decidedly underfunded and understaffed compared with the RWDSU. Smalls said as of early March, ALU had raised and spent about \$100,000 and was operating on a week-to-week budget. The group doesn't have its own office space, and was relying on community groups and two unions to lend a hand. Legal help came from a lawyer offering pro-bono assistance.

Meanwhile, Amazon exercised all its might to fend off the organizing efforts, routinely holding mandatory meetings with workers to argue why unions are a bad idea. In a filing released last week, the company disclosed it spent about \$4.2 million last year on labor consultants, who organizers say Amazon hired to persuade workers not to unionize.

Outmatched financially, Smalls and others relied on their ability to reach workers more personally by making TikTok videos, giving out free marijuana and holding barbecues and cookouts. A few weeks before the election, Smalls' aunt cooked up soul food for a union potluck, including macaroni and cheese, collard greens, ham and baked chicken. Another pro-union worker got her neighbor to prepare Jollof rice, a West African dish organizers believed would help them make inroads with immigrant employees at the warehouse.

Kate Andrias, professor of law at Columbia University and an expert in labor law, noted a successful union — whether it is local or national — always has to be built by the workers themselves.

"This was a clearer illustration of this," Andrias said. "The workers did this on their own."

Amazon's own missteps may have also contributed to the election outcome on Staten Island. Bert Flickinger III, a managing director at the consulting firm Strategic Resource Group, said derogatory comments by a company executive leaked from an internal meeting calling Smalls "not smart or articulate" and wanting to make him "the face of the entire union/organizing movement" backfired.

"It came out as condescending and it helped to galvanize workers," said Flickinger, who consults with big labor unions.

In another example, Smalls and two organizers were arrested in February after authorities got a com-



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 57 of 73

plaint about him trespassing at the Staten Island warehouse. The ALU used the arrests to its advantage days before the union election, teaming up with an art collective to project "THEY ARRESTED YOUR CO-WORKERS" in white letters on top of the warehouse. "THEY FIRED SOMEONE YOU KNOW," another projection said.

"A lot of workers that were on the fence, or even against the union, flipped because of that situation," Smalls said.

Experts note it's difficult to know how much of ALU's grassroots nature contributed to its victory when compared with the RWDSU. Unlike New York, Alabama 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.

There was also a grassroots element to the union drive in Bessemer, which began when a group of Amazon workers there approached the RWDSU about organizing.

At a virtual press conference Thursday held by the RWDSU following the preliminary results in Alabama, president Stuart Appelbaum said he believed the election in New York benefited because it was held in a union-friendly state and Amazon workers on Staten Island voted in person, not by mail as was done in Alabama.

Despite some friction between the two labor groups in the leadup to the elections, both have adopted a friendlier public relationship in the past few days. Appelbaum praised Smalls during Thursday's press conference, calling him a "charismatic, smart, dedicated leader." Likewise, Smalls offered the RWDSU words of encouragement after their initial election loss.

For now, ALU is focusing on its win. Organizers say Amazon workers from more than 20 states have reached out to them to ask about organizing their warehouses. But they have their hands full with their own warehouse, and a neighboring facility slated to have a separate union election later this month.

Organizers are also preparing for a challenging negotiation process for a labor contract. The group has demanded Amazon officials to come to the table in early May. But experts say the retail giant, which has signaled plans to challenge the election results, will likely drag its feet.

"The number one thing is going to be fighting for the contract," Smalls said. "We have to start that process right away because we know the longer drawn out the contract is, workers will lose hope and interest."

Meanwhile, some workers are waiting to see what happens.

Tinea Greenway, a warehouse worker from Brooklyn, said before the election, she felt pressured by the messages she kept hearing both from Amazon and ALU organizers, and just wanted to make the decision herself. When the time came, she voted against the union because of a bad experience she's had in the past with another union who she says didn't fight for her.

"They won," she said of the ALU. "So let's see if they live up to the agreement of what they said they were going to do."

## White House to extend student loan pause through August

By COLLIN BINKLEY and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration plans to freeze federal student loan payments through Aug. 31, extending a moratorium that has allowed millions of Americans to postpone payments during the coronavirus pandemic, according to an administration official familiar with the White House's decision-making.

Student loan payments were scheduled to resume May 1 after being halted since early in the pandemic. But following calls from Democrats in Congress, the White House plans to give borrowers additional time to prepare for payments.

The action applies to more than 43 million Americans who owe a combined \$1.6 trillion in student debt held by the federal government, according to the latest data from the Education Department. That includes more than 7 million borrowers who have defaulted on student loans, meaning they are at least 270 days late on payments.

Borrowers will not be asked to make payments until after Aug. 31, and interest rates are expected to

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 58 of 73

remain at 0% during that period.

The extension was first reported Tuesday by Bloomberg.

Democrats on education panels in the House and Senate recently urged President Joe Biden to extend the moratorium through the end of the year, citing continued economic upheaval.

Sen. Patty Murray said more time is needed to help Americans prepare for repayment and to rethink the government's existing system for repaying student debt.

"It is ruining lives and holding people back," she said in a statement last month. "Borrowers are struggling with rising costs, struggling to get their feet back under them after public health and economic crises, and struggling with a broken student loan system — and all this is felt especially hard by borrowers of color."

Murray called on the Biden administration to lift all borrowers out of default to provide a "fresh start" following the pandemic.

The decision is being made amid rising concern that large numbers of Americans would quickly fall behind if payments restarted in May.

In March, the St. Louis Federal Reserve Bank warned that resuming loan payments could place a heavy burden on borrowers who faced financial hardship during the pandemic. It said the impact would be hardest on Black families, who are more likely to rely on student loans to pay for college.

"Serious delinquency rates for student debt could snap back from historic lows to their previous highs in which 10% or more of the debt was past due," the bank said.

The Trump administration initially gave Americans the option to suspend loan payments in March 2020, and Congress made it automatic soon after. The pause was extended twice by the Trump administration and twice more under Biden.

It remains in question whether Biden will pursue widespread debt forgiveness to reduce the nation's student debt. Some Democrats in Congress have pressed Biden to use executive action to cancel \$50,000 for all student loan borrowers, saying it would jumpstart the economy and help Black Americans who on average face higher levels of student debt.

Last year, Biden asked the Education and Justice departments to review the legality of widespread debt cancellation, but no decision has been announced. Biden previously said he supports canceling up to \$10,000, but he argued it should be done through congressional action.

## At Masters, some come to see golfers, others to see gnomes

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Sports Writer

AUGUSTA, Ga. (AP) — The boxes weren't flying off the shelves. They weren't even making it onto the shelves.

The Masters has gone gnome-mad.

Yes. Gnomes. The must-have item at the Masters this year isn't any of the shirts or pullovers or caps with the tournament's logo that can only be bought by those who are lucky enough to have secured a way onto the grounds of Augusta National.

Instead, the gnome is all the rage. Just ask Tom Frettoloso, who left his house at 4 a.m. on Tuesday to get to Augusta National and was headed back to his vehicle by 8 a.m. — without having seen a single golfer take a single swing.

He had a bunch of souvenirs, including two gnomes. He wouldn't say how he got two; signage in the store said the Masters was limiting them to one per person.

"I'm self-employed and need to get to work," said Frettoloso, a house painter, who was weaving his way toward the gates while thousands of people were walking the other way onto the Augusta National grounds. "But I've gotten the gnomes just about every year. I got a ticket for the practice round and here I am and now I'm done."

Gnomes made their Masters debut in 2016 and were a quick hit, though nobody seems to remember them being as much of a phenomenon as they are this week.

There's a couple different versions of gnomes this year; the one that hundreds of people were lined up to get Tuesday morning was this year's version of a caddy, standing about a foot high, dressed in a

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 59 of 73

green-and-white striped Masters shirt, khakis, green-and-white shoes, a yellow cap and with a bag of clubs slung over his right shoulder.

Asking price at the Masters: \$49.50.

Asking price online: Most were going for somewhere between \$150 and \$500 on Tuesday, depending on where you looked. The smaller version — a mini-gnome in the traditional white Masters caddie attire — could be had for considerably less.

On Tuesday, a worker at the store tried to reload the shelf with more product. The mission was futile: Shoppers were grabbing them as soon as they went on the shelf, and sometimes right from the worker himself.

"People will buy anything," someone mused in the checkout line.

That they will, whether it's gnomes, shirts, belts, hats and anything else they can get with the Masters logo. There's countless reasons why: not everyone can get to the Masters since the ticket is among the toughest in sports, and the Masters also doesn't sell merchandise online — except for some images, the Masters Journal and the Masters Annual that recaps tournament week.

And for the record, many on-site shoppers got bad news once they got into the Masters store Tuesday. The gnomes were gone.

## War Crimes Watch: Hard path to justice in Bucha atrocities

By ERIKA KINETZ Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — The horrific images and stories tumbling out of Ukrainian towns like Bucha in the wake of the withdrawal of Russian troops bear witness to depravity on a scale recalling the barbarities of Cambodia, the Balkans, World War II.

The question now: What to do with this suffering?

With disclosures by Ukrainian officials that more than 400 civilian corpses had been discovered, a chorus has resounded at the highest levels of Western political power, calling for accountability, prosecution and punishment. On Monday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy denounced the killings as "genocide" and "war crimes," and U.S. President Joe Biden said Vladimir Putin was "a war criminal" who should be brought to trial.

But the path to holding the Russian president and other top leaders criminally responsible is long and complex, international lawyers caution.

"Certainly, the discovery of bodies which bear signs of executions -- such as gunshot wounds to the head -- presents strong evidence of war crimes," said Clint Williamson, who served as U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes Issues from 2006 to 2009.

"When victims are found with their hands bound, with blindfolds and bearing signs of torture or sexual assault, an even more compelling case is made. There are no circumstances under which these actions are permitted, whether the victims are civilians or military personnel who had been taken prisoner."

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This story is part of an ongoing investigation from The Associated Press and Frontline that includes the War Crimes Watch Ukraine interactive experience and an upcoming documentary.

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There is no reason to believe the Russians will own up to war crimes. Russia's Defense Ministry said Sunday that "not a single civilian has faced any violent action by the Russian military," and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has described the scenes outside Kyiv as a "stage-managed anti-Russian provocation."

The Associated Press and the PBS series Frontline are tracking evidence of potential war crimes committed during one of the largest conflicts in Europe since the end of World War II. As of Tuesday AP and Frontline journalists have verified 90 incidents that appear to violate international humanitarian law.

The War Crimes Watch Ukraine project includes details of apparent targeted attacks as well as indiscriminate destruction of civilian buildings and infrastructure. The AP/Frontline online database will continue to be updated as long as the conflict lasts. The goal is to provide an independent accounting of events,

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 60 of 73

apart from potentially inflated claims by advocates or misinformation spread by state-backed propaganda.

The International Criminal Court, which typically prosecutes only a handful of high-level perpetrators, has opened an investigation into atrocities in Ukraine. Ukrainian prosecutors have launched thousands of criminal investigations, while prosecutors in Poland, Germany, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, France, Slovakia, Sweden, Norway and Switzerland have opened investigations of their own. And there have been growing calls to set up a special tribunal to try Russia for the crime of aggression in Ukraine.

To build a case for war crimes, prosecutors must gather forensic and ballistic evidence, as they would in any murder case, to establish the cause and circumstances of the victims' deaths. They also need to show that the crime occurred in the context of an ongoing armed conflict, which is clearly the case of Ukraine.

To build a case for crimes against humanity, prosecutors must additionally establish that the crimes were part of widespread, systematic attacks on civilians by, for example, showing patterns of behavior in how people were killed in Bucha, Motyzhyn, Irpin and other towns.

Then comes the more difficult task of establishing who is responsible by building a chain of evidence to link the crime scene with top civilian or military leaders. The first link in that chain is often understanding which forces were present when the atrocities occurred and whose command they were under.

"If you want to look into chains of command and perpetrators, it's important to analyze and gather information about which unit is where," said Andreas Schüller, program director for International Crimes and Accountability at the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights in Berlin. "You need linkage evidence from the entire military apparatus. Documents could be leaked, or witnesses could speak up and disclose internal planning operations."

Building a case all the way to the top -- to hold Putin and other leaders individually accountable for war crimes or crimes against humanity -- will be tough, legal experts say.

"You've got to prove that they knew or they could have known or should have known," said Philippe Sands, a prominent British lawyer and professor at University College London. "There's a real risk you end up with trials of mid-level people in three years and the main people responsible for this horror -- Putin, Lavrov, the Minister of Defense, the intelligence folks, the military folks and the financiers who are supporting it -- will get off the hook."

It would be easier to nab Putin for the crime of aggression -- that is, the act of waging a ruthless, unprovoked war against another country. But the International Criminal Court doesn't have jurisdiction over Russia for the crime of aggression because Russia, like the United States, is not a signatory.

In March, dozens of prominent lawyers and politicians, including Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, launched a campaign to create a special tribunal to plug this legal hole and try Russia for the crime of aggression in Ukraine.

Negotiations are ongoing over how to actually set up such a tribunal so that it has broad legitimacy, either through an international body like the United Nations or under the auspices of a collection of individual states. The Nuremberg tribunal was established by the Soviet Union, the United States, the United Kingdom and France to hold Nazi leaders to account after World War II.

Sands, who also supports the initiative, said that whatever their legal weight, the images pouring out of Ukraine strengthen the political will needed to hold Russia accountable.

"You feel something is stirring. And I think I think that's the way the law works. The law does not lead. The law follows, and it follows realities and images and stories, and that's what causes things to happen," he said.

"The worse the horrors on the ground, the more calls I get about a crime of aggression tribunal," he added. "Governments feel intense pressure to do something."

But it may take an even bigger political shift to convict Putin in a meaningful way. Trials in absentia are not permitted at the International Criminal Court, and even if a special tribunal were set up that could try Putin in absentia, a trial without a perpetrator present might ring hollow.

"I'm really struggling to see how there is any plausible defense to the evidence we are witnessing," said Alex Batesmith, who served as a United Nations prosecutor in Kosovo and Cambodia and is now a lecturer at the University of Leeds law school. "But there's no way on earth Putin will surrender to the ICC or be

arrested and brought to the ICC without major cross-continental conflict or internal political shifts in Russia which don't seem plausible."

## Tiger Woods says he's planning to play the Masters

AUGUSTA, Ga. (AP) — Tiger Woods says, for now anyway, he's planning to play this week in the Masters, a little more than a year after nearly losing a leg in a car crash.

The five-time champion at Augusta National made the announcement Tuesday morning. He will play nine more practice holes on Wednesday before making a final decision, but will be doing so with the intention of playing Thursday.

"As of right now," Woods said, "I feel like I'm going to play."

Woods was asked if he believes he can win this week. "I do," he said.

"I can hit it just fine," Woods added. "I don't have any qualms about what I can do physically from a golf standpoint. It's now, walking's the hard part. This is not an easy walk to begin with. Now given the condition that my leg is in, it gets a little more difficult. And 72 holes is a long road. It's going to be a tough challenge and a challenge that I'm up for."

There had been plenty of signals in recent days that Woods was on the cusp of deciding it was time to play again. He came to Augusta National for a practice round last week, then returned Sunday — saying he'd be "a game-time decision" — and Monday for more. On Tuesday morning, with bad weather in the forecast, he spent plenty of time in the practice areas.

"It's great to be back," Woods said.

He's scheduled to tee off Thursday at 10:34 a.m. with Louis Oosthuizen and Joaquin Niemann. That threesome plays again Friday starting at 1:41 p.m.

Woods played in December at the PNC Challenge, a 36-hole scramble on a flat Florida course where he and his son Charlie finished second to John Daly and his son. Woods was allowed to use a cart in that event, and when those rounds were over he flatly dismissed any notion that his game was tour-ready again.

"I can't compete against these guys right now, no," Woods said on Dec. 19. "It's going to take a lot of work to get to where I feel like I can compete at these guys and be at a high level."

About 3-1/2 months later, Woods apparently feels differently. If he plays, he'll be in the Masters for the 24th time; he's finished in the top five 12 times in his previous 23 appearances.

"I love competing," Woods said. "I feel like if I can still compete at the highest level, I'm going to. And if I feel like I can still win, I'm going to play. But if I feel like I can't, then you won't see me out here."

Thursday's opening round would mark the first time Woods competes against the world's best players since Nov. 15, 2020, which was the final round of that year's pandemic-delayed Masters.

He had his fifth back surgery two months later and was still recovering from that on Feb. 23, 2021 when he crashed his SUV over a median on a suburban coastal road in Los Angeles and down the side of a hill.

Woods' injuries from that crash were so severe that doctors considered right leg amputation, before reassembling the limb by placing a rod in the tibia and using screws and pins to stabilize additional injuries in the ankle and foot.

"It's been a tough, tough year ... but here we are," Woods said.

## COVID outbreak 'extremely grim' as Shanghai extends lockdown

BEIJING (AP) — The COVID-19 outbreak in China's largest metropolis of Shanghai remains "extremely grim" amid an ongoing lockdown confining around 26 million people to their homes, a city official said Tuesday.

The director of Shanghai's working group on epidemic control, Gu Honghui, was quoted by state media as saying that the outbreak in the city was "still running at a high level."

"The situation is extremely grim," Gu said.

China has sent more than 10,000 health workers from around the country to aid the city, including 2,000 from the military, and is mass testing residents, some of whom have been locked down for weeks.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 62 of 73

Most of eastern Shanghai, which was supposed to reopen last Friday, remained locked down along with the western half of the city.

Shanghai recorded another 13,354 cases on Monday — the vast majority of them asymptomatic — bringing the city's total to more than 73,000 since the latest wave of infections began last month. No deaths have been ascribed to the outbreak driven by the omicron BA.2 variant, which is much more infectious but also less lethal than the previous delta strain.

A separate outbreak continues to rage in the northeastern province of Jilin and the capital, Beijing, also saw an additional nine cases, just one of them asymptomatic. Workers shut down an entire shopping center in the city where a case had been detected.

While China's vaccination rate hovers around 90%, its domestically produced inactivated virus vaccines are seen as weaker than the mRNA vaccines such as those produced by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna that are used abroad, as well as in the Chinese territories of Hong Kong and Macao. Vaccination rates among the elderly are also much lower than the population at large, with only around half of those over 80 fully vaccinated.

Meanwhile, complaints have arisen in Shanghai over difficulties obtaining food and daily necessities, and shortages of medical workers, volunteers and beds in isolation wards where tens of thousands are being kept for observation.

Shanghai has converted an exhibition hall and other facilities into massive isolation centers where people with mild or no symptoms are housed in a sea of beds separated by temporary partitions.

Public outrage has been fueled by reports and video clips posted on the internet documenting the death of a nurse who was denied admittance to her own hospital under COVID-19 restrictions, and infant children separated from their parents.

Circulation of footage showing multiple infants kept in cots prompted the city's Public Health Clinical Center to issue a statement saying the children were being well looked after and had been in the process of being moved to a new facility when the footage was taken.

At a virtual town hall Monday, the U.S. Consulate in Shanghai warned of possible family separations amid the lockdown, but said it had an "extremely limited ability" to intervene in such cases.

Concern is growing about the potential economic impact on China's financial capital, also a major shipping and manufacturing center. Most public transport has been suspended and non-essential businesses closed, although airports and train stations remain open and the city's port and some major industries such as car plants continue to operate.

International events in the city have been canceled and three out of five foreign companies with operations in Shanghai say they have cut this year's sales forecasts, according to a survey conducted last week by the American Chamber of Commerce. One-third of the 120 companies that responded to the survey said they have delayed investments.

Despite those concerns and growing public frustration, China says it is sticking to its hardline "zero-tolerance" approach mandating lockdowns, mass testing and the compulsory isolation of all suspected cases and close contacts.

## **EXPLAINER: Why some states still lack new voting districts**

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

Campaigns for Congress are underway for this year's elections, but lingering disagreements over the final shape of new voting districts have left some candidates — and would-be candidates — in limbo.

A few states have yet to enact new congressional districts following the 2020 census, thanks to legal challenges or party infighting.

"If you have maps struck down, or you have uncertainty, there can be a burden on individual voters," said Ben Williams, a program principal for elections and redistricting at the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Still, he said it was fairly normal to have redistricting battles lasting into April in a handful of states.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 63 of 73

Redistricting matters politically because it provides parties who control the process an opportunity to shape districts to their advantage. That could be particularly consequential in this year's midterm elections, as Democrats seek to defend a slim U.S. House majority against expected Republican gains.

A look at some states still dealing with redistricting issues:

## STATES THAT HAVE YET TO ADOPT NEW DISTRICTS

A delay in receiving Census Bureau data due to coronavirus complications caused many states to get a late start on redistricting. But internal Republican political divisions have had more to do with why a few states still haven't adopted new U.S. House districts.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, a Republican who is a potential 2024 presidential candidate, vetoed the redistricting maps passed by the GOP-led Legislature. DeSantis is pushing his own plan, which could give Republicans a shot at winning more seats than the legislative proposals and could result in two Black Democratic members of Congress losing their seats.

The Florida Legislature is to convene April 19 in a special session to take up redistricting again.

New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu, a Republican, also has pledged to veto the congressional map passed by the GOP-led Legislature. Sununu is pushing a plan that would make both of the state's two districts competitive. The Legislature's plan would tilt one district toward Republicans while solidifying the Democrats' advantage in the other.

Missouri is the only state where a new congressional map has yet to be either enacted or passed. The large Republican majorities in the state House and Senate are at odds over how aggressively to draw districts in the GOP's favor and over which communities to split while equalizing district populations.

Lawsuits in all three states have asked courts to step into the stalemates and adopt new maps.

## STATES WHERE COURTS HAVE OVERTURNED MAPS

New York recently became the latest state where a court struck down a congressional map drawn by state lawmakers — in this case, by Democrats who control the Legislature.

The Democrats' map would give them a strong majority of voters in 22 of the state's 26 congressional seats on this year's ballot while potentially costing Republicans four seats. A court invalidated the map last week and gave New York officials until April 11 to submit new districts.

But on Monday, an appeals judge put a temporary hold on the lower court ruling. A hearing is set for Thursday on whether to continue that hold.

A Maryland judge also recently struck down a congressional map that had been enacted by that state's Democratic-led General Assembly, calling it a "product of extreme partisan gerrymandering." But the General Assembly quickly passed a revised map, which Republican Gov. Larry Hogan signed Monday.

The new Maryland districts are more compact than the map originally enacted by Democrats, which could have given them a shot at sweeping all eight of the state's districts.

Courts previously blocked Republican-passed congressional maps in North Carolina and Ohio. The North Carolina Supreme Court later allowed districts drawn by court-appointed experts to be implemented for this year's elections. The state's primary was pushed back from March to mid-May.

The Ohio Supreme Court has yet to rule on whether a replacement congressional map enacted by a Republican-dominated panel is constitutional. Early voting for the May 3 primary starts Tuesday.

## LAWSUITS AFFECTING MINORITY VOTING RIGHTS

Several states face legal challenges that could extend past this year's elections.

A court panel ruled earlier this year that Alabama's Republican-led Legislature likely violated the federal Voting Rights Act by not creating a second district in which Black voters comprise close to a majority. But the U.S. Supreme Court put a hold on an order to redo those districts, allowing the May 24 primary to proceed under the Republican-passed map.

A federal judge in Georgia also allowed that state's Republican-drawn congressional districts to remain in place for this year's elections, even though he said plaintiffs appeared likely to prove in an ongoing lawsuit that certain aspects of the map violate the federal Voting Rights Act.

Lawsuits alleging that new districts unlawfully dilute the influence of minority voters also have been filed

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 64 of 73

in other states, including Arkansas, South Carolina and Texas.

Louisiana's Republican-led Legislature last week overrode a veto by Democratic Gov. John Bel Edwards to enact a congressional map that's projected to continue the GOP's strong advantage. Edwards had said lawmakers should have included a second majority-Black district among the state's six districts.

A coalition of civil rights groups has sued, alleging the Louisiana map dilutes the political power of Black voters.

## STATES WITH UNRESOLVED LEGISLATIVE DISTRICTS

Although much attention is focused on congressional redistricting, uncertainty also remains for the voting districts used by some state House, Assembly or Senate chambers.

In Ohio, for example, primary elections for state House and Senate seats have been delayed because no set of district boundaries has been settled on long enough to be used for making ballots.

A group of Republican voters had asked a federal court to force the state to use one of three sets of legislative maps approved by a GOP-led commission but rejected by the state Supreme Court. The panel of federal judges refused to do so. Because of the uncertainty, Secretary of State Frank LaRose has said the legislative primaries will have to be delayed from May until August.

Wisconsin has a new congressional map in place but not new state Assembly and Senate districts.

The U.S. Supreme Court last month overturned state legislative districts that had been enacted by that state's high court after the governor and lawmakers failed to agree on maps. Republicans had complained that the court's map — favored by Democratic Gov. Tony Evers — shifted too many people among districts to try to increase the number of districts with a majority of Black and Hispanic voters. That case is now back in the hands of the Wisconsin Supreme Court.

## Stacey Abrams reaches millionaire status before 2nd campaign

By JEFF AMY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — When Democrat Stacey Abrams first ran for Georgia governor in 2018, her lackluster personal finances and a hefty bill from the IRS gave Republicans fodder to question how she could manage a state budget when she struggled with her own debts.

As she launches a second bid this year, that's no longer an issue.

Abrams now says she's worth \$3.17 million, according to state disclosures filed in March. That's compared with a net worth of \$109,000 when she first ran four years ago.

Her rapid ascent into millionaire status corresponds with her rise in national politics. Since her 2018 defeat to Republican Brian Kemp, Abrams has become a leading voting rights activist. She was considered as a potential running mate to President Joe Biden and is widely credited with organizing voters in Georgia to help him become the first Democrat to carry the state in the presidential vote in 28 years. Along the way, she has earned \$6 million, mostly driven by \$5 million in payments for books and speeches.

That wealth has exposed her to a different line of criticism from Republicans, who hope to portray Abrams this year as an elitist out of touch with average Georgians. Garrison Douglas, a spokesperson for the national Republican Party, accused Abrams of using her campaign "as a platform for her own financial gain." During a rally in the state last month, former President Donald Trump knocked her for "living in these gorgeous multi-multi-million-dollar houses."

Abrams hasn't purchased a home for a price tag exceeding \$1 million, and Trump spends much of his year living at his lavish Mar-a-Lago resort. The leading Republicans seeking the nomination for governor — incumbent Brian Kemp and challenger David Perdue — are far wealthier than she is.

In an interview, Abrams said it was ironic for Republicans to criticize her financial success, something the party often praises as the result of hard work.

"It is remarkable to me that success is now being demonized by the Republicans," she said. "I believe in success. I believe that every person should have the opportunity to thrive. And because I had three years where I was in the private sector, I leveraged all three years, and in that time, I've done my best to not only be successful personally, but to do what I can to help Georgians."



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 65 of 73

Many politicians build their wealth after they reach high office. That's not the case for Abrams, whose loss vaulted her to a level of celebrity unusual for someone whose highest office so far is minority leader of the Georgia House of Representatives. She particularly cashed in on her status in 2021 before announcing her second bid for governor, with her income spiking to \$3.65 million.

Seth Bringman, an Abrams campaign spokesperson, said she gave 37 paid speeches in 2021, including a 12-stop fall tour of stand-alone appearances. She's written, co-written or reissued six books since 2019, with another reissue on the way later this year.

Abrams was also paid more than \$700,000 over three years as executive director of the Southern Economic Advancement Project, an affiliate of the Roosevelt Institute that seeks to improve economic equity in the South. Abrams has reported no income from Fair Fight Action, the voting rights group she founded and formerly chaired.

Abrams, who last year released a business book with a longtime business partner, also reports investments in a number of companies. Some are longtime holdings including Now Account Network Corp., which finances businesses by buying invoices. Abrams in November joined the board of Heliogen, a California company that seeks to use sunlight to concentrate heat for industrial processes, electricity generation and hydrogen fuel production. Abrams reported \$65,000 in Heliogen stock.

Kemp has a net worth of about \$8.5 million, with assets mostly in real estate he developed before running for governor. Perdue is even wealthier, reporting a net worth of \$50 million after a career in which he was CEO of corporations including Dollar General and Reebok. Kemp had an income of \$551,000 in 2021, while Perdue had an income of \$9.3 million.

Kemp criticized Abrams in 2018 for owing \$54,000 to the IRS, self-employment taxes she didn't pay on time. Abrams said then that she skipped the payments because her parents needed financial help with raising a granddaughter and medical bills.

"You can delay IRS payments. You can't delay cancer treatments," Abrams said at the time.

Abrams also had \$96,000 in student loan debt and \$83,000 in accumulated credit card debt in 2018. She only had a positive net worth because a publisher had paid a \$150,000 advance on her first nonfiction book. In that book, "Minority Leader," Abrams wrote that she borrowed at a time when "my understanding of personal finance barely scratched the surface."

She paid off her IRS debt, student loans and credit card debt in 2019. When she first ran for governor, Abrams had a paltry retirement account of less than \$5,000. Now she has more than \$725,000 in stocks and bonds.

As her financial picture has brightened, Abrams has also traded up from her old townhouse to a larger new house.

The \$975,000 property she bought just outside the Atlanta city limits near Emory University in 2020 is financed by a \$760,000 mortgage, according to Abrams' financial disclosure. She bought her parents a \$370,000, 3,300-square-foot house in suburban Atlanta in 2019, owing more than \$280,000 on a mortgage, records and disclosures show.

It's unclear how much Abrams is paying in taxes or how much she is donating to charity, although her assets include \$560,000 set aside in a "tax account." Bringman said Abrams would release her returns later this year after she files her 2021 taxes.

Kemp spokesperson Tate Mitchell said the incumbent believes the state financial disclosure is sufficient, but will provide further documentation later "if necessary." Perdue spokesperson Jenni Sweat said Perdue filled out state and federal disclosure forms and has been "transparent about his finances," but didn't directly answer whether he would release his tax returns.

Marko Klasnja, a Georgetown University professor who has studied the causes and consequences of politicians' wealth, said that "in the U.S., people don't care about wealth per se, and I don't think that they would think that's a negative, necessarily."

"I don't think this is going to hurt Abrams that much, and I think, if people know this is coming from things like book deals, they're going to be thinking about this differently than, 'She's lining her pockets

because she's on boards of corporations and things like that."

## Elon Musk joins Twitter board after amassing massive stake

By MICHELLE CHAPMAN AP Business Writer

Elon Musk is joining Twitter's board of directors a day after revealing that he'd become the social media platform's largest shareholder with a 9% stake.

The billionaire has criticized Twitter publicly about its commitment to free speech. He's also run into trouble on the platform as the CEO of Tesla after financial regulators found he had posted inaccurate information about the company.

Musk is barred from owning more than 14.9% of Twitter's outstanding stock while he sits on the board, Twitter Inc. said in a Tuesday regulatory filing.

Musk has been speaking with the company in recent weeks and Twitter CEO Parag Agrawal said in a tweet that "it became clear to us that he would bring great value to our Board."

"He's both a passionate believer and intense critic of the service which is exactly what we need on @Twitter, and in the boardroom, to make us stronger in the long-term," Agrawal wrote.

Musk said he's looking forward to working with Agrawal and the board "to make significant improvements to Twitter in coming months!"

Musk wasted no time in weighing in on one of the biggest gripes Twitter users have about the platform late Tuesday, asking in a tweet if he should add an edit button.

"Now its time to get out the popcorn and watch the developments over the coming months with Musk on the board," wrote Daniel Ives, who follows Twitter for Wedbush Securities.

Twitter's board will have 12 members with Musk. Jack Dorsey stepped down as CEO of Twitter last and his term on the board expires at an upcoming stockholders' meeting on May 25. Three other board members have terms that are set to expire but have been nominated to retain their seats.

Dorsey tweeted Tuesday that Musk and Agrawal "both lead with their hearts, and they will be an incredible team."

"I'm really happy Elon is joining the Twitter board! He cares deeply about our world and Twitter's role in it," Dorsey said.

After amassing 73.5 million Twitter shares worth a total of about \$3 billion, Musk has not spoken specifically about any Twitter rule changes he might push.

In March, Musk told his 80 million followers on Twitter that he was "giving serious thought" to creating his own social media platform.

Musk is locked into a bitter dispute with the SEC over his ability to post on Twitter. His lawyer has contended in court motions that the SEC is infringing on the Tesla CEO's First Amendment rights.

Shares of Twitter rose about 5% Tuesday.

## Director of 'Drive My Car' surprised by Oscar, popularity

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japanese director Ryusuke Hamaguchi says he was surprised by the international popularity of his Oscar-winning film "Drive My Car," but attributes it to the universality of the short story by Haruki Murakami on which it is based.

The movie centers on an actor played by Hidetoshi Nishijima who is directing a multilingual production of Chekhov's "Uncle Vanya." Still mourning the sudden loss of his wife, the actor, Kafuku, leads the cast in rehearsals in which they sit and read their lines flatly, ingesting the language for days before acting them out.

The 3-hour-long story of grief, connection and recovery won an Academy Award last month for best international feature film.

"Actually I was surprised by how widely this film has been accepted," Hamaguchi said at a news confer-

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 67 of 73

ence in Tokyo on Tuesday, his first major event since the Oscar.

While attributing its popularity to the universality of Murakami's story, Hamaguchi said the actors "put it on the screen in a very convincing way, even though I'm sure it was an extremely challenging task for them to embody Haruki Murakami's worldview."

On his part, he tried to "show some sort of hope, as Mr. Haruki Murakami does in his novels, so we can feel this character is now OK — the process of loss and coming to terms with it to move on — if not quite a full recovery," Hamaguchi said.

The "inner reality" of the characters in the story is both the charm and difficulty of turning Murakami's story into visuals, Hamaguchi said.

"Describing inner reality ... is something movies are not very good at," Hamaguchi said. So he decided not to trace the written language of the original story. "The more attractive a story is, the harder it is for visuals to surpass the images already formed in the minds of readers," he said.

Hamaguchi said he decided to visualize the core of the story — the relationship between Kafuku and his much younger driver Misaki — who has also suffered the loss of her mother in a mudslide — which gradually deepens through their conversations in his beloved red Saab, one of few colorful items in the movie.

The film combines the inner worlds of Murakami and Chekhov and reflects their similarities, Hamaguchi said.

Conversations between Kafuku and Misaki contrast with those of Vanya and Sonya in "Uncle Vanya," and when Kafuku acts as Vanya during the performance, he comes to realize his own inner words toward recovery.

"So I found 'Drive My Car' and 'Uncle Vanya' wonderfully intertwined as if they translated each other," Hamaguchi said.

Hamaguchi said he wanted to thank Murakami at the Oscar awards ceremony but missed the chance because his "thank you" after giving a long list of actors' names was misunderstood as the end of his speech.

"I still wanted to thank Murakami-san and my staff," he said.

Hamaguchi's films, which include the anthology "Wheel of Fortune and Fantasy" released last year, are acclaimed, but he was not widely known in Hollywood before an award for best screenplay at last year's Cannes Film Festival brought attention to "Drive My Car."

Hamaguchi said international audiences now see Asia as a source of interesting films, and he hopes his fellow filmmakers can create movies that can "pierce through the hearts of audiences" and live up to their expectations.

His goals for his next film? "I just want to be able to say I made one that is a little better than my previous one," Hamaguchi said.

## US airport security screening to become more gender-neutral

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. airport security procedures will become more gender-neutral, with changes to scanners used for screening and the use of an "X" for travelers going through Precheck who do not identify as male or female, the Biden administration said Thursday.

Transportation Security Administration officers will also receive new instructions on screening intended to make procedures less invasive, the Department of Homeland Security said in a statement.

They are among a series of travel-security measures announced by the department in conjunction with Transgender Day of Visibility. President Joe Biden is marking the day by advocating against what his administration terms "dangerous anti-transgender legislative attacks" that have passed in statehouses across the country.

"DHS is committed to protecting the traveling public while ensuring that everyone, regardless of gender identity, is treated with respect," Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said in the statement.

The Transportation Security Administration said it will update the PreCheck Program to include an "X" gender marker option on its application, but the agency did not provide a date. A new "X" gender marker

on U.S. passport applications begins April 11.

Later this year, TSA will begin using scanners with new technology that will replace gender-based systems and are intended to "advance civil rights and improve the customer experience."

The TSA will work with airlines to promote the acceptance of the "X" gender marker and will also update the guidance for airport security screening officers to remove gender considerations when validating documents, DHS said.

## Kansas comes back, wins NCAA title 3 years in the making

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — The Great Kansas Comeback, as it will forever be known in the history books, is about more than just one stifling, scintillating 20-minute stretch of Jayhawks basketball.

The championship KU captured Monday night traced its roots back to 2020, when the Jayhawks were a team that looked very much on track for the program's fourth national title.

Instead, it was KU's come-from-behind 72-69 victory over North Carolina on Monday that brought that fourth championship banner back to Allen Fieldhouse. The Jayhawks insisted they'd share it with the 2020 team, too.

"It's partially won for them," said coach Bill Self, who has led Kansas to two of its four titles. "Because I always thought the 2020 team was better, more equipped to do well in the NCAA Tournament."

Led by Devon Dotson and first-round NBA pick Udoka Azubuike, that 2020 team was, in fact, a team built for a championship. It was headed for a top seeding and the odds-on favorite to win it all.

It was a team that never got its chance after the COVID-19 pandemic hit and wiped away the season.

Most of the key players in Monday's title game — David McCormack (15 points), Ochai Agbaji (12), Christian Braun (12) and Jalen Wilson (15) — were on that team, too. The players who remained formed a poised, veteran group that came into the game with a mind-boggling 973 games of college experience.

If any group was built to not lose its composure when things turned bad, this group might have been it. But, boy, things sure looked bleak for the Jayhawks as the first half wound down.

Led by a dominating inside game by Armando Bacot and an 18-2 advantage in second-chance points, the Tar Heels ran off 16 straight points to take a 16-point lead. Kansas looked stuck in cement.

Self used the long halftime break to calm things down and breathe some fire into his players. He tweaked the defense, getting DaJuan Harris Jr. to apply more pressure early to UNC ballhandler R.J. Davis. Kansas clogged up passing lanes, forced the Tar Heels into rushed shots and boxed out.

That led to more running and more fast-break points (8) and turned a 16-point deficit into a six-point lead with 10 minutes left. When it was over, Kansas held on and completed the biggest comeback in title game history, surpassing Loyola Chicago's 15-point rally against Cincinnati in 1963.

"With the group of guys as experienced as this and been around and know each other so well, it's kind of hard to see us get rattled," said Kansas forward Mitch Lightfoot, who is in his sixth year of college. "Coach had a great message for us, and he challenged us to be better and to have more pride."

COVID-19 hurt Kansas last season, too. Some players fell ill right as tournament time approached. The Jayhawks went into Indianapolis as a No. 3 seed but left after only two games — the second of those a humbling 34-point blowout loss to USC.

They added Remy Martin, a transfer from Arizona State, but the rest of the group stayed the same. Martin turned into a key sixth man for the Jayhawks. On Monday, he found his shooting touch and scored 11 of his 14 points in the second half.

"They've always kept me going, and they always gave me confidence," said Martin, who struggled with injuries early in the year. "And I couldn't ask for a better group."

The other guys, Self said, simply improved as the season went on.

Agbaji adds Most Outstanding Player of the Final Four to his All-America title. McCormack played toe to toe with North Carolina's double-double machine, Bacot. The Kansas big man backed in to make a bucket for a 70-69 lead with 1:22 left. On the ensuing possession, Bacot hurt his ankle. That opened it

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 69 of 73

up for McCormack to seal the game with another close-range shot, this one over the less-sturdy Carolina defender, Brady Manek.

"Coach called the play and said we're going to throw it inside and we have trust in you and faith in you to deliver and get us a basket," McCormack said. "I just prevailed, I made the basket happen. I appreciate them for allowing me to have that opportunity."

And Kansas appreciates him.

The victory won't completely erase trouble that could be brewing back in Lawrence. There's an NCAA investigation hovering over this program, and the potential for serious penalties did not make this Kansas run any easier.

But for now, time to celebrate.

This fourth national title will not have any single player's name stamped on it, the way the '88 championship belongs to Danny Manning and the Miracles or the way '08 was a product of Mario Chalmers' late, game-tying 3.

This one, Self insisted, was more of a group effort.

Pretty big group, at that.

This group of Jayhawks wants to share it with Azubuike, who is in the NBA, and Dotson, who was on hand at the Superdome to watch Kansas pull out the win.

"To win when your team had to fight and come back the way they did and show that much grit makes this one off the charts," Self said.

He was talking about Monday.

He could've been talking about the last three seasons as well.

## 300 killed by Mali's army and foreigners, says rights group

By CARLEY PETESCH Associated Press

DAKAR, Senegal (AP) — Mali's army and foreign soldiers suspected to be Russian recently killed an estimated 300 men — some of them suspected Islamic extremist fighters but most civilians — in Moura in central Mali, Human Rights Watch said Tuesday.

It is the worst single atrocity reported in Mali's 10-year armed conflict against Islamic extremists, according to the rights group which said it interviewed several witnesses about the killings.

Russian fighters are believed to have shot dead most of those killed in Moura in late March, according to witnesses who identified the killers as white soldiers who did not speak French. Several hundred Russian mercenaries have been deployed in Mali to help fight the extremist rebels, the U.S. military confirmed in January.

In the Moura incident, Malian army troops and foreign soldiers in late March rounded up several hundred men and shot dead about 300 of them, burying many in mass graves and burning others, according to Human Rights Watch.

Mali's defense ministry reported a similar incident, saying that in the last week of March it had killed 203 "terrorists" and arrested 51 others, acting on intelligence that armed extremists were meeting in Moura.

"Abuses by armed Islamist groups is no justification at all for the military's deliberate slaughter of people in custody," said Corinne Dufka, Sahel director at Human Rights Watch. "The Malian government is responsible for this atrocity, the worst in Mali in a decade, whether carried about by Malian forces or associated foreign soldiers."

Most of those killed in Moura were from the Peul ethnic group, according to the rights group. Moura had been largely controlled by extremists linked to al-Qaida who taxed villagers and imposed strict Shariah law, according to residents.

"The Malian government should urgently and impartially investigate these mass killings, including the role of foreign soldiers," Dufka said. "For such investigations to be sufficiently independent and credible, the authorities should seek assistance from the African Union and the United Nations."

In its investigation of the killings in Moura, Human Rights Watch said its researchers spoke with 27 people

including witnesses, traders, community leaders, foreign diplomats and security analysts.

Moura, a town of about 10,000 residents in the Djenné administrative area of central Mali, has since 2015 been at the center of the conflict with extremist rebels and has seen widespread violence, abuses by all sides and the displacement of large numbers of civilians.

The killings in Moura are part of a spike in violence in recent months by extremists linked to Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and by Malian government security forces. Extremists have also killed scores of Malian security force personnel since the beginning of 2022.

Extremists from the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara are alleged to have killed hundreds of civilians in March in Mali's eastern Menaka region, which Human Rights Watch said it is investigating separately.

Since January, residents of central Mali have seen scores of foreign soldiers working with Mali's military. The foreign fighters are believed to be Russian as they do not speak French, according to several witnesses who spoke to Human Rights Watch. Mali's ruling junta announced in December that Russian trainers had arrived as part of a bilateral agreement with Russia. Shortly after Mali's junta expelled French and other European soldiers who had been assisting the battle against extremists.

The U.S. State Department said it is concerned that "many reports suggest that the perpetrators were unaccountable forces from the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group," while other reports say it was Malian forces.

"These conflicting reports illustrate the urgent need for the Malian transition authorities to give impartial investigators free, unfettered, and safe access to the area where these tragic events unfolded," the State Department said in a statement from spokesman Ned Price.

It called on Mali's transitional government to allow the U.N. mission in Mali to conduct a rigorous investigation. "Failure to provide a thorough and credible accounting of the facts and accountability will only serve to sow divisions in Malian society, undermine the credibility, legitimacy, and reputation of the FAMA (Mali's military), drive communities into the hands of violent extremist groups, and create conditions for more violence."

## **Afghan evacuees mark first US Ramadan with gratitude, agony**

By GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO and MARIAM FAM The Associated Press

LAS CRUCES, New Mexico (AP) — Sitting cross-legged on the floor as his wife and six children laid plates of fruit on a red cloth in front of him, Wolayat Khan Samadzoi watched through the open balcony door for the sliver of new moon to appear in the cloudless New Mexico sky, where the sun had set beyond a desert mountain.

Then, munching on a date, the bushy-bearded former Afghan soldier broke his first Ramadan fast in the United States — far from the Taliban threat, but also the three dozen relatives he would be marking the start of the Muslim holy month with if he was still home in Khost, Afghanistan.

A few minutes after naan was dipped into bowls of stewed okra and beans, Samadzoi, his wife and the two oldest children retired to worship on their prayer rugs. On Saturday evening, the two-bedroom apartment filled with the murmurs of their invocations.

"I pray for them, and they pray for me, they miss me," he said of his relatives back home. His cousin Noor Rahman Faqir, who is also now in Las Cruces, translated from Pashto to the simple English he learned working with American forces in Afghanistan.

As they adjust to their new communities, Afghan families evacuated to the United States as the Taliban regained power last summer are celebrating Ramadan with gratitude for their safety. Yet there's also the agony of being away from loved ones who they fear are in danger under a Taliban leadership crafting increasingly repressive orders.

From metropolitan areas with flourishing Afghan diasporas to this desert university community less than 40 miles (64 kilometers) from the Mexican border, tens of thousands of newly arrived Afghans share one predominant concern that's amplified in what should be a celebratory time: With only temporary immigration status and low-paying jobs, they feel helpless to take care of their families here and back home.

Abdul Amir Qarizada repeats several times the exact moment, 4:30 p.m., when he was ordered to take

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 71 of 73

off from Kabul's airport during the chaos of the evacuation – with no time to get his wife and five children, who are still in Afghanistan more than seven months later.

"My concern is the aircraft is safe, but my family is not safe," the former flight engineer says after Friday prayer at Las Cruces' only mosque, where he goes by bike to find some "peace."

So does Qais Sharifi, 28, who says he can't sleep with worry for his kids left behind, including a daughter born two months after he fled Afghanistan alone.

Both men break into smiles when the mosque's education director, Rajaa Shindi, an Iraqi-born professor at nearby New Mexico State University, invites them to register for the free iftar dinners held nightly in the meeting hall decorated with gold balloons spelling "Ramadan kareem" — an Arabic greeting often used to wish people a happy Ramadan.

Local congregations like the mosque and El Calvario United Methodist Church in Las Cruces, as well as the Jewish and Christian-based organizations that resettle refugees across their national networks, have been helping Afghans find housing, jobs, English-language classes, and schools for their children.

They decry the fact that most displaced Afghan families don't have permanent legal status in the United States, despite their services for the U.S. government, military or their Afghan allies during the post-9/11 Afghanistan war. That would give them access to many government benefits and an easier path to work and family reunification.

While Afghanistan's decades of war and current food shortage mean far less extravagant feasts than in many countries where Ramadan is celebrated, the familiar tastes of home are top of mind for many displaced this year. Qarizada recalls his mother's signature festive dish of bolani, a stuffed fried bread like a giant samosa.

The mother of Shirkhan Nejat still cries every time the 27-year-old makes a WhatsApp video call home from Oklahoma City, where he was resettled with his wife and the couple's baby was born. Missing his close-knit extended family at Ramadan brings "bad emotions," Nejat said, despite his gratitude for being safe.

It's such bonds, the warmth of large family gatherings around the iftar meal and the cacophony of familiar sights, sounds and smells marking the end of a day's fast that many are yearning for in America.

In Texas, Dawood Formuli misses his family's typical pre-iftar routine: His hungry father irritably asking for his food. His mother asking her husband to calm down, and Formuli, 34, telling a joke to lighten the mood and make his father laugh. His children, in another room with their many cousins, sometimes playing, sometimes fighting. "Allahu akbar," the call to prayer, spilling over from the mosque down the street.

"Every day, it's like Christmas," the former translator at the U.S. embassy in Kabul said of past Ramadans in the three-story house his family used to share with his parents, siblings and their families.

In his new apartment in Fort Worth, the call to prayer now comes from an app, not a minaret.

The transition has been especially hard for his pregnant wife, who is still learning English. Yet there are traces of the familiar in their new community: Muslim neighbors, mosques for the special Ramadan prayers, known as "taraweeh," and halal food markets.

Khial Mohammad Sultani, who the day before Ramadan was still living in an extended stay motel on the outskirts of El Paso, Texas, had to ride nearly 80 miles (128 kilometers) round trip into New Mexico in a taxi to go buy and slaughter a lamb for Ramadan.

The 37-year-old former soldier, his wife Noor Bibi, and their six children broke the second day's fast with pieces of that lamb stewed in an aromatic sauce around the one table in their duplex, newly built on a barren foothills lot unlike their house in Gardez, with its apple and pomegranate trees.

Right after iftar, four of the children got ready for their first day of school ever the next morning, another new thrill for their parents who never received a formal education.

But when it comes to faith, Sultani will continue to teach his children at home, as his father did for him.

The three oldest children – a boy, 11, and two girls, 9 and 8, with red headscarves loosely arranged over their long braids – pray in turn on a green rug that is among the family's most treasured possessions.

The family's Quran came from the military base in New Jersey where they first landed in the United

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 72 of 73

States. But Sultani's father brought this rug from his pilgrimage at Mecca after another son was killed by the Taliban, a possible fate they escaped, crossing many checkpoints as they fled Afghanistan last summer.

"We are Muslim, and a part of our faith is to thank Allah for everything," Sultani says in Dari through a volunteer translator. "As appreciation for him, we're doing this."

## Today in History: April 6, first modern Olympics begin

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, April 6, the 96th day of 2022. There are 269 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 6, 1896, the first modern Olympic games formally opened in Athens, Greece.

On this date:

In 1862, the Civil War Battle of Shiloh began in Tennessee as Confederate forces launched a surprise attack against Union troops, who beat back the Confederates the next day.

In 1864, Louisiana opened a convention in New Orleans to draft a new state constitution, one that called for the abolition of slavery.

In 1909, American explorers Robert E. Peary and Matthew A. Henson and four Inuits became the first men to reach the North Pole.

In 1917, the United States entered World War I as the House joined the Senate in approving a declaration of war against Germany that was then signed by President Woodrow Wilson.

In 1943, "Le Petit Prince" (The Little Prince) by Antoine de Saint-Exupery was first published by Reynal & Hitchcock of New York.

In 1945, during World War II, the Japanese warship Yamato and nine other vessels sailed on a suicide mission to attack the U.S. fleet off Okinawa; the fleet was intercepted the next day.

In 1954, Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy, R-Wis., responding to CBS newsman Edward R. Murrow's broadside against him on "See It Now," said in remarks filmed for the program that Murrow had, in the past, "engaged in propaganda for Communist causes."

In 1968, 41 people were killed by two consecutive natural gas explosions at a sporting goods store in downtown Richmond, Indiana.

In 1974, Swedish pop group ABBA won the Eurovision Song Contest held in Brighton, England, with a performance of the song "Waterloo."

In 2008, Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama, speaking at a private fundraiser in San Francisco, spoke of voters in Pennsylvania's Rust Belt communities who "cling to guns or religion" because of bitterness about their economic lot; Democratic rival Hillary Rodham Clinton seized on the comment, calling it "elitist."

In 2014, legendary Hollywood actor Mickey Rooney, 93, died in North Hollywood.

In 2020, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was transferred to the intensive care unit of a London hospital where he was being treated for COVID-19, after his condition deteriorated.

Ten years ago: Five Black people were shot, three fatally, in Tulsa, Oklahoma; Jake England and Alvin Watts, who admitted targeting the victims because of race, pleaded guilty to murder, and were sentenced to life in prison without parole. A Navy F18 Hornet jet whose pilots were forced to eject crashed in a spectacular fireball into a big apartment complex in Virginia Beach, Virginia; miraculously, no one died. Fang Lizhi (fahng lee-juhr), 76, who was one of China's best-known dissidents, died in Tucson, Arizona. Painter Thomas Kinkadee, 54, died in Monte Sereno, California.

Five years ago: President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping (shee jihn-peeng) opened a two-day summit at Trump's Florida beach resort. Don Rickles, the big-mouthed, bald-headed "Mr. Warmth" whose verbal assaults endeared him to audiences and peers and made him the acknowledged grandmaster of insult comedy, died at his Beverly Hills home at age 90.

One year ago: Moving up his deadline by about two weeks, President Joe Biden said every adult in the



# Groton Daily Independent

**Wednesday, April 06, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 273 ~ 73 of 73**

U.S. would be eligible for a coronavirus vaccination by April 19. Major League Baseball announced that the All-Star Game would be played at Coors Field in Denver; the game had been pulled from Atlanta because of objections to changes in Georgia's voting laws.

Today's Birthdays: Nobel Prize-winning scientist James D. Watson is 94. Actor Billy Dee Williams is 85. Actor Roy Thinnes is 84. Movie director Barry Levinson is 80. Actor John Ratzenberger is 75. Actor Patrika Darbo is 74. Baseball Hall of Famer Bert Blyleven is 71. Actor Marilu Henner is 70. Olympic bronze medal figure skater Janet Lynn is 69. Actor Michael Rooker is 67. Former U.S. Rep. Michele Bachmann, R-Minn., is 66. Rock musician Warren Haynes is 62. Rock singer-musician Black Francis is 57. Actor Ari Meyers is 53. Actor Paul Rudd is 53. Actor-producer Jason Hervey is 50. Actor Zach Braff is 47. Actor Joel Garland is 47. Actor Candace Cameron Bure (buhr-RAY') is 46. Actor Teddy Sears is 45. Jazz and R&B musician Robert Glasper is 44. Actor Eliza Coupe is 41. Folk singer-musician Kenneth Pattengale (Milk Carton Kids) is 40. Actor Bret Harrison is 40. Actor Charlie McDermott is 32.