

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 1 of 72

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- WIC Program Announces New Income Guidelines](#)
- [3- New flag erected at City Hall](#)
- [5- Air conditioning assistance available in South Dakota](#)
- [6- Weather Pages](#)
- [10- Daily Devotional](#)
- [11- 2022 Community Events](#)
- [12- Subscription Form](#)
- [13- News from the Associated Press](#)

June 23

Senior Menu: Honey glazed chicken, parsley buttered potatoes, mixed vegetables, ambrosia salad, whole wheat bread.

10 a.m.: Reading Time at Wage Memorial Library

5:00 p.m.: Legion hosts Lake Norden, 1 game

7 p.m.: Jr. Legion hosts Lake Norden, 1 game

5:30 p.m.: Jr. Teeners at Warner, DH

7:30 p.m.: U12 at Doland, 1 game

6:30 p.m.: U10 at Doland, 1 game (R/W)

5:30 p.m.: U8 at Doland, 1 game (R/B)

6 p.m.: U8 SB hosts Claremont, 1 game

7 p.m.: U10 SB hosts Claremont, 1 game

June 24

Senior Menu: BBQ beef sandwich, potato salad, carrots and peas, seasonal fresh fruit.

6 p.m.: U8 SB hosts Clark, DH

6 p.m.: T-Ball Scrimmage

June 25

SEAS Confession: 3:45-4:15 p.m., SEAS Mass: 4:30 p.m.

U10 Tourney in Groton

June 26

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

**Groton Daily Independent**

**PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445**

**Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460**



U12 Tourney in Groton

U8 Tourney in Milbank

10:15 a.m.: Groton vs. Watertown Yellow

Finals begin at 12:45

June 27

Senior Menu: Chicken Alfredo, broccoli, spinach salad, Mandarin oranges, bread stick.

Noon.: Senior Citizens meet at the Groton Community Center, potluck dinner

5:30 p.m.: Jr. Teeners host Britton, DH

5:30 p.m.: U10 at Webster, DH (R/B)

6 p.m.: U8 at Webster, DH (R/W)

6 p.m.: U10 SB hosts Britton, DH

6 p.m.: U8 SB hosts Britton, DH

5:30 p.m.: Jr. Legion at Milbank, DH

June 28

Elementary Library Open 9-11 (Reading time 10 a.m.)

Senior Menu: Swiss steak, mashed potatoes, stewed tomatoes, apricots, whole wheat bread.

**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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# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 2 of 72

## WIC Program Announces New Income Guidelines

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Department of Health’s (DOH) Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program strives to ensure that families have the resources needed to be healthy and strong. On June 1, 2022, WIC income guidelines were updated.

WIC is a special supplemental nutrition program, funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, provided at no cost to eligible moms, infants, and children. Its goal is to offer education on healthy eating, nutrition, and breastfeeding, make referrals to other services, and help improve health by providing nutritious foods to supplement diets.

If your family income does not exceed the following amounts for the size of your family, you could qualify for WIC:

Family Size	185% of the Federal Poverty Level	Family Size	185% of the Federal Poverty Level
1	\$25,142	6	\$68,802
2	\$33,874	7	\$77,534
3	\$42,606	8	\$86,266
4	\$51,338	9	\$94,998
5	\$60,070	10	\$103,730

To find out if you or your children are eligible for the WIC Program and to apply online go to <https://sdwic.org/eligibility/>. Or you can call for an appointment at your local WIC Office/Community Health Services Office. Offices can be found under the county listings in your phone book or on the web at <http://sdwic.org/locations/>.

DOH continues its efforts to mitigate the effects of the formula shortage. Department staff members remain in communication with WIC vendors (primarily grocery stores) across the state who are critical partners in the delivery of WIC benefits. Additionally, the Department communicates directly with physicians to help them find formula for their patients. Families can call the HelpLine Center at 211 to locate food distribution sites in their area that may have formula. If WIC families or others have questions or concerns, they can reach out to our community health offices located in 74 communities across the state or contact their provider directly. As more information becomes available, it can be found online at [sdwic.org](http://sdwic.org) or [doh.sd.gov](http://doh.sd.gov).

WIC is an equal opportunity provider. More information about the program is available at <http://sdwic.org/>.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 3 of 72



**Doug Hamilton and Paul Kosel finish putting the hardware on the rope on the new flag pole at City Hall.** (Photo by April Abeln)

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 4 of 72



**The new flag flying at City Hall.** (Photo by April Abeln)

## Air conditioning assistance available in South Dakota

PIERRE – As temperatures in South Dakota rise with the start of summer, the Department of Social Services (DSS) is reminding the public of an important initiative.

DSS offers assistance with repair and replacement of air conditioning systems to eligible South Dakotans who own their home and who are eligible for the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program.

Eligibility for Energy Assistance is based on the number of people and income of everyone in the home. To apply for energy assistance and help with repair and replacement of air conditioning systems that are not working or not working properly, visit <https://dss.sd.gov/economicassistance/energyassistance/> or your local Community Action Agency at <https://dss.sd.gov/economicassistance/communityassistance.aspx>.

Air conditioner repair and replacement is based on a first-come basis, and the payments are made to the energy supplier.

Four Community Action Programs administer the air conditioner repair and replacement program for DSS and cover every county in the state:

Inter-Lakes Community Action – Ph: 605-256-6518 ([www.interlakescap.com](http://www.interlakescap.com)) serves Brookings, Clark, Codington, Deuel, Grant, Hamlin, Kingsbury, Lake, McCook, Miner, Minnehaha, and Moody counties.

Grow South Dakota - Ph: 605-698-7654 (<https://www.growsd.org/>) serves Beadle, Brown, Campbell, Day, Edmunds, Faulk, Hand, Hughes, Hyde, McPherson, Marshall, Potter, Roberts, Spink, Stanley, Sully, and Walworth counties.

Rural Office of Community Services - Ph: 605-384-3883 ([www.rocsinc.org](http://www.rocsinc.org)) serves Aurora, Bon Homme, Brule, Buffalo, Charles Mix, Clay, Davison, Douglas, Gregory, Hanson, Hutchinson, Jerauld, Jones, Lincoln, Lyman, Mellette, Sanborn, Todd, Tripp, Turner, Yankton, and Union counties.

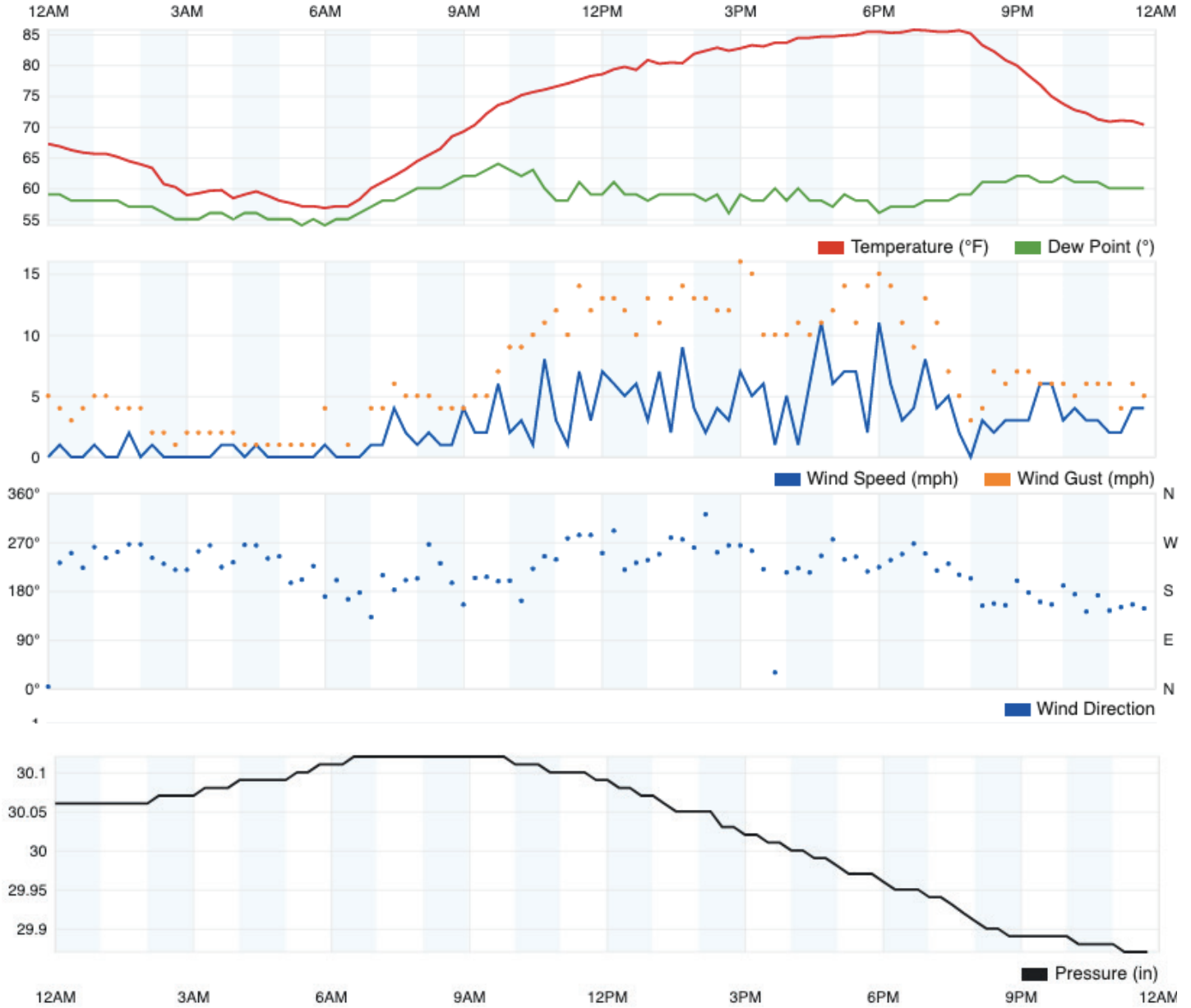
Western South Dakota Community Action - Ph: 605-348-1460 ([www.wsdca.org](http://www.wsdca.org)) serves Bennett, Butte, Corson, Custer, Dewey, Fall River, Haakon, Harding, Jackson, Lawrence, Meade, Perkins, Oglala Lakota, Pennington, and Ziebach counties.

DSS also provides energy assistance to help low-income South Dakotans pay for home heating costs. Applications may be submitted any time for the upcoming winter.

# Groton Daily Independent


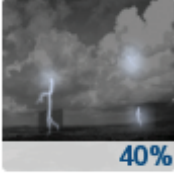

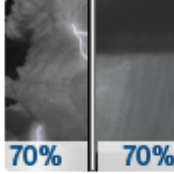

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 6 of 72

## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 7 of 72

Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
				
Sunny then Slight Chance T-storms	Chance T-storms	Mostly Sunny then Chance T-storms	T-storms Likely then Showers Likely	Mostly Sunny then Mostly Sunny and Breezy
High: 95 °F	Low: 68 °F	High: 92 °F	Low: 62 °F	High: 77 °F

## Severe Storms Possible Through Friday



### WHEN

Marginal Risk: This evening into tonight  
Slight Risk: Friday afternoon and evening

### WHAT

Isolated severe storms possible this afternoon and evening. These storms could produce large **hail up to quarter size** and **wind gusts up to 60 mph**. Locally heavy rainfall will be possible

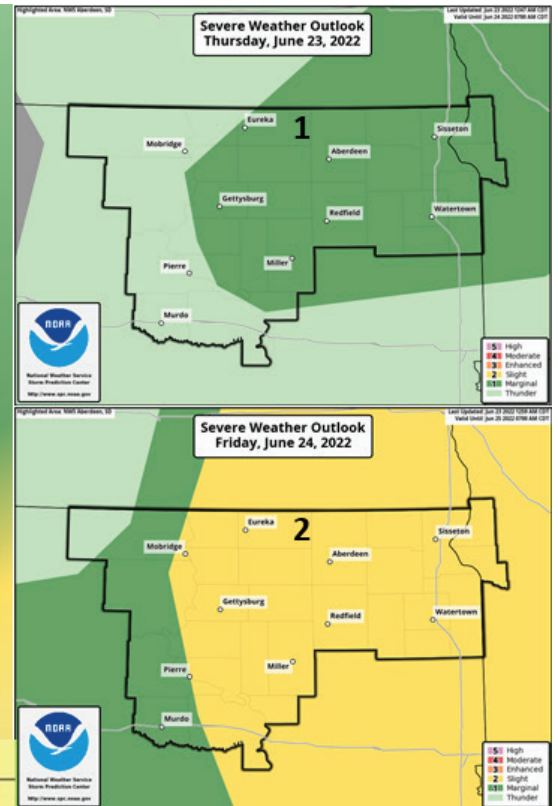
Scattered severe storms possible Friday afternoon and evening with the main threats being **quarter size hail**, **wind gusts 60mph+**, and **isolated tornadoes (low threat)**. Locally heavy rainfall will be possible

### ACTION

Monitor the weather and have a plan of action if severe weather approaches your area



<b>MARGINAL</b> Isolated Severe Storms Possible	<b>SLIGHT</b> Scattered Severe Storms Possible
--	---



Showers and storms are expected to spread across the area this evening into tonight with another round of showers and thunderstorms Friday afternoon and evening. A few of these storms could become strong to severe this afternoon/evening with better chances on Friday. Make sure to monitor the weather and have a plan of action if severe weather approaches.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 8 of 72

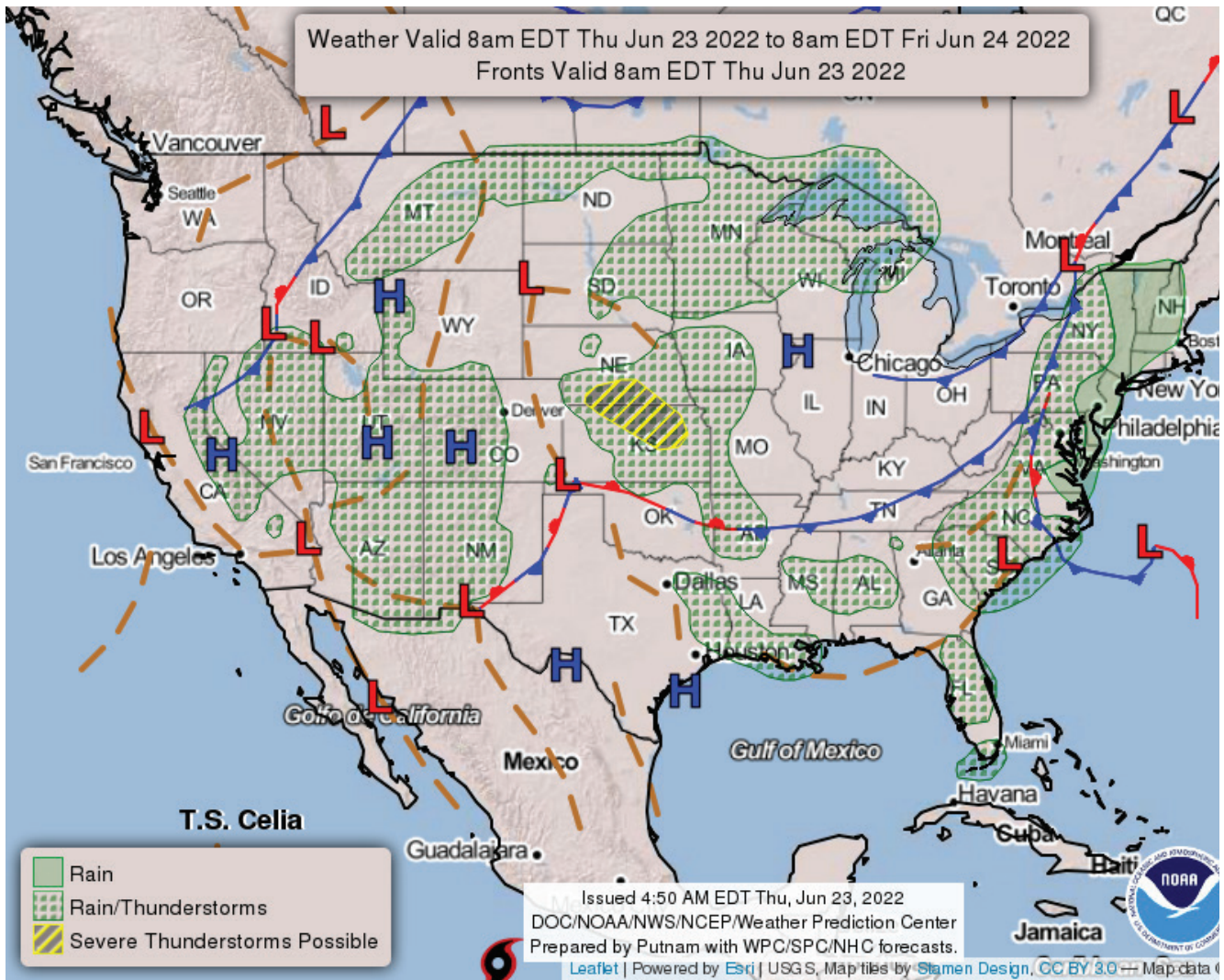
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 86 °F at 6:46 PM**  
**Low Temp: 57 °F at 5:55 AM**  
**Wind: 19 mph at 3:33 PM**  
**Precip: 0.00**

Day length: 15 hours, 44 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 104 in 1911  
Record Low: 33 in 1942  
Average High: 82°F  
Average Low: 57°F  
Average Precip in June.: 2.83  
Precip to date in June.: 0.22  
Average Precip to date: 10.08  
Precip Year to Date: 11.38  
Sunset Tonight: 9:26:44 PM  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:42:59 AM





## Today in Weather History

June 23, 1914: A destructive, estimated F3 tornado moved east across Altamont Township in Brown County. All buildings were destroyed on at least four farms. A man was killed trying to keep his family from being blown out of a shallow cellar.

Another storm moved east from the southeastern part of Watertown to north of Goodwin. Over 200 homes were heavily damaged at Watertown by both an estimated F2 tornado and downburst winds. Barns were destroyed on three farms east of Watertown. The estimated cost was at \$200,000.

June 23, 2002: A powerful supercell thunderstorm produced six tornados from eastern McPherson County and across northern Brown County during the evening hours. The first tornado to touchdown was a brief F0, and occurred 6.4 miles northeast of Leola and resulted in no damage. The second tornado was an F1 and touched down 8.5 miles northeast of Leola and crossed over into Brown County where it dissipated 9 miles northwest of Barnard. This tornado brought down many trees and a barn and caused damage to the siding and the roof of a farmhouse in McPherson County. A third weak satellite F0 tornado occurred following the dissipation of the second tornado and resulted in no damage. A fourth, stronger F3 tornado developed 6 miles west of Barnard and moved east before dissipating 3 miles southeast of Barnard. This tornado brought down some high power lines along with a support tower and tossed a pickup truck 100 yards into a group of trees. The pickup truck was totaled. The tornado caused extensive damage to two farmhouses, several farm buildings, and farm equipment. One farmhouse lost the garage and had many trees completely snapped off down low and debarked. The fifth tornado developed 5 miles southeast of Barnard and became a violent F4 tornado. This tornado caused damage to one farmhouse, several outbuildings, trees, and equipment as it moved northeast and strengthened. The tornado then completely demolished two unoccupied homes, several outbuildings, along with destroying or damaging some farm equipment before dissipating 7.6 miles northeast of Barnard. The sixth tornado was a weak satellite F0, which occurred with this violent tornado and caused no damage. The F4 tornado was the first recorded in Brown County and one of few recorded in South Dakota. The total estimated property loss exceeded a million dollars.

1902 - The temperature at Volcano Springs, CA, soared to 129 degrees to set a June record for the U.S. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders)

1944: The deadliest and strongest tornado in the state of West Virginia occurred on this day. The Shinnston Tornado that ravaged a path of destruction from Shinnston to Cheat Mountain, then on to Maryland and ending in Pennsylvania in the Allegheny Mountains, is the only twister to produce F4 damage in West Virginia. This tornado killed 103 people.

1957 - A few miles west of Fort Stockton TX, softball size hail injured 21 persons unable to find shelter, mostly farm laborers. Some livestock were killed. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A massive hailstorm hit eastern Colorado causing an estimated 60 to 70 million dollars damage. At La Junta, CO, hail as large as softballs caused 37 million dollars damage. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thirty-four cities reported record high temperatures for the date. The reading of 90 degrees at Bluefield, WV, equalled their record for the month of June. The record high of 104 degrees at Billings, MT, was their thirteenth of the month. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Six cities in the High Plains Region reported record low temperatures for the date, including Sheridan, WY, with a reading of 38 degrees. Showers and thunderstorms in the eastern U.S. deluged New Castle County, DE, with 2.5 inches of rain in one hour. (The National Weather Summary)

2010: An F2 tornado destroyed approximately 50 homes and caused damages estimated to be \$15 million in Midland, Ontario. 12 people were reported to be injured. Ontario provided immediate provincial assistance of up to \$1 million to aid in cleanup and repairs.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 10 of 72



## Fatherly Advice

There is no shortage of advice in today's world. We can discover endless resources in the exploding number of self-help books and magazines, radio and TV shows. No matter where we look or what we listen to, someone has some formula to solve our problems, enrich our lives, make us more attractive, add years to our lives, and make us wealthy.

Solomon, apart from his Proverbs, also offered insight on how to live life well in some of his other writings. And, at the end of his life he wrote, "Of making many books there is no end...all has been heard, and here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep His commandments." In these few words, he went back to the beginning of his reign when his father, David, gave him some "fatherly advice" – "Solomon, be strong, act like a man, and observe what the Lord your God requires."

There are, as mentioned earlier, many sources and resources on how to live life. But the advice we find here is different. After reflecting on his life and reviewing his successes and failures, he summed up the essence of life: "Life, apart from God, is meaningless."

David, "a man after God's own heart," offered his son, Solomon, a man who would one day be recognized as "the wisest man who ever lived" the formula for success.

God's wisdom, however, only has value if followed. As long as Solomon followed the advice of his father, David, God honored and blessed him. And, nothing since then has changed.

If we follow the advice of our Heavenly Father as He presents it in His Word, He will honor and bless us, guide us and guard us, too!

Prayer: To accept and live by Your requirements, Father, is easier said than done. But, with Your power, it is possible if we trust in Your strength, not ours.. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Today's Bible Verse: Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them. Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body. Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. Ecclesiastes 12:12-13

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 11 of 72

## 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  
-6/20/2022 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  
10/01/2022 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm  
10/07/2022 Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am  
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

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 12 of 72

## The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 13 of 72

## News from the Associated Press

### Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined  
Black Hills Pioneer. June 17, 2022.

Editorial: Storm damage can't dampen neighborly spirit

Northern Hills residents watched Sunday's storm moving east toward the Belle Fourche area before it unleashed its devastation.

Butte County residents watched it come straight for them. And as tornado and severe thunderstorm warnings sounded, many took refuge in their basements, or in the basements of friends and neighbors.

Baseball-sized hail and buckets of rain fell on the area. As residents left the shelter of their homes, most found at least some damage. Many saw the aftermath of what they heard – windows shattered by hail, trees and branches snapped or uprooted, and rain-sodden homes.

Cleanup, salvage, and boarding up of windows began. It wasn't just homeowners doing the cleanup. Neighbors fortunate enough to escape severe damage helped those less fortunate. Families and friends from nearby communities drove into the storm-damaged area to lend a hand.

Have a tree down in your yard? It probably was bucked up in short order by someone with a chainsaw.

Don't have a ladder to reach windows to board up? Likely one was set up at your home soon after and many times, it was the ladder owner up on the rungs hanging plywood or plastic sheeting.

And speaking of plywood, election signs made for the June 7 primary election were recycled when they were donated to the Belle Fourche Police Department to serve as window covering. Police helped elderly residents in need of hanging the plywood. Pioneer staffers saw signs for Tom Brunner placed over broken windows, and even "Rest easy with Hammock" signs from Dayle Hammock's 2020 re-election bid for District 31 House of Representatives. Perhaps the residents with those signs over their windows can indeed rest a little better knowing their broken windows are covered.

One thing is for certain; we can all rest a little easier knowing we live in a region where your neighbor is just that, and not just someone you live next to.

Your neighbor is someone who can help you out when called upon, and quite often, they don't even need to be called. They are there with tools in hand and supplies in tow.

That doesn't apply to just this spring thunderstorm. Consistently, neighbors help neighbors throughout the year, shoveling or plowing snow, charging that dead car battery, watching our kids while we run an errand, or letting us borrow that cup of sugar.

Time and time again we hear of ranchers who, at their own cost, take their haying equipment to a neighbor's field to cut and bale hay when the landowner is unable to.

They help each other out at brandings and so many other ranch activities.

It isn't just rainbows that appear following a storm. It is also that neighborly spirit. And we are truly thankful for that.

Yankton Press & Dakotan. June 20, 2022.

Editorial: It's Time To Lift Food Tax In South Dakota

Current projections indicate South Dakota will see a nice surplus for fiscal year 2022 when those books close June 30.

And with that, it may be time for this state to finally embrace an idea that has been proposed for nearly 30 years and has recently been picking up steam: lifting the state's regressive tax on food.

According to a report last week, the state's revenues as of May were up \$171.3 million so far for the fiscal year that began last July 1, representing a 9.6% increase from 2021. South Dakota Finance Commissioner Jim Terwilliger said the biggest gains have been the sales and use tax (+12%) and the state lottery (+9.4%), according to KELO.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 14 of 72

If that rate holds up through June, it will mark the 11th straight fiscal year that state revenue has exceeded projections. Last year, the state was able to tuck \$86 million into its reserve, WNAX reported.

Which brings us to the food tax, the repeal of which picked up momentum last session when, in the state House, several Republicans joined Democrats in voting to lift the state's 4.5% tax on food purchases. The vote was 47-22, indicating broad support for an idea that has been swatted down by legislators since the 1990s and rejected by voters in 2004. However, the state Senate nixed the measure 22-9, then didn't appoint a conference committee to deal with the proposal, thus killing it.

During last year's House debates, it was estimated that the repeal would cost the state — or, if you will, save South Dakota consumers — about \$82 million.

"The money is there. We can do this," argued Rep. Jon Hansen, R-Dell Rapids. "It is prudent. It is responsible."

But to no avail.

South Dakota is one of just 13 states that taxes food items. It's considered regressive because it particularly hits lower-income households harder.

With South Dakota's economy humming along — albeit with the help of COVID relief funds — it would seem time to finally lift this tax and give consumers a break.

It's one that is particularly needed now, with inflation raising prices around the world and the Russian invasion of Ukraine further destabilizing the world's food supply.

As Rep. Scott Odenbach, R-Spearfish, put it last winter. "If not now, when? If not us, who?"

Granted, there are uncertainties regarding the future — there always are — but lifting the food tax can reduce some of the burden on taxpayers, who will likely in turn spend that money on other items or services and add more to the state sales revenue. (This is particularly true among lower-income households, which generally have little choice but to spend that money, thus providing their own form of economic stimulus.)

South Dakota's solid financial picture — which our leaders love to brag about — doesn't mean a whole lot if lawmakers are unable or unwilling to put those benefits to good use for the people. This would be an ideal place to start, would it not?

## SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

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

Dakota Cash

03-06-17-28-29

(three, six, seventeen, twenty-eight, twenty-nine)

Estimated jackpot: \$80,000

Lotto America

03-13-33-37-45, Star Ball: 10, ASB: 2

(three, thirteen, thirty-three, thirty-seven, forty-five; Star Ball: ten; ASB: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$16,120,000

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: 312,000,000

Powerball

06-10-31-48-56, Powerball: 12, Power Play: 3

(six, ten, thirty-one, forty-eight, fifty-six; Powerball: twelve; Power Play: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$335,000,000

## South Dakota Gov. Noem gets emphatic win with AG's removal

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The South Dakota Senate's decision this week to remove Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg from office was an emphatic victory for Gov. Kristi Noem, whose hard-driving effort to oust

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 15 of 72

her fellow Republican likely sealed his fate even as some GOP lawmakers backed him.

Noem, who has sprung to national prominence within the party and is widely considered a potential 2024 White House contender, began pushing Ravensborg to step down within days after he struck and killed a pedestrian with his car in September 2020. He refused but was removed Tuesday through impeachment proceedings, with the Senate voting to convict the first-term Republican and then — unanimously — prohibiting him from holding public office again.

Noem pressed impeachment through the Republican-controlled Legislature, providing crucial support on an effort that at times faced razor-thin vote margins. Though her aggressive approach riled some lawmakers, Ravensborg's ouster allows Noem to name his replacement, discredit a one-time adversary who had investigated her and claim political independence because she held a fellow Republican accountable.

Noem celebrated the impeachment conviction Tuesday on Twitter, saying "a dark cloud" over the attorney general's office had been lifted.

"It is now time to move on and begin to restore confidence in the office," Noem said.

She has endorsed Ravensborg's predecessor, Marty Jackley, for the Republican nomination for attorney general, but it's not clear whether he will be her choice to fill the job temporarily until the candidate elected in November is sworn-in. Noem and Jackley ran a biting primary campaign for governor in 2018, and their mutual endorsement came as a surprising development as the House evaluated the merits of impeachment earlier this year.

Noem could wait to name the interim attorney general until after Saturday, when the South Dakota Republican Party decides its nominee for the November election.

The votes against Ravensborg in the GOP-dominated Senate showed that senators didn't believe his account of the crash. Ravensborg had told a 911 dispatcher the night of the crash that he might have struck a deer or other large animal and has said he didn't know he struck a man — 55-year-old Joseph Boever — until he returned to the scene the next morning.

Noem's advocacy for Ravensborg's removal — and his refusal to step down — roiled state politics that are overwhelmingly dominated by Republicans.

After Ravensborg was quietly pressured to take a "leave of absence" by Noem's chief of staff three days after the crash and later faced public calls from the governor for his resignation, he showed an increasing willingness to disrupt the political establishment by taking up investigations into the governor and those aligned with her.

In an April letter sent to House lawmakers on the eve of the impeachment vote, Ravensborg said he would not resign in part because his office "has multiple ongoing investigations into the Governor's alleged activities and people associated with her."

Ravnsborg made a pair of complaints to the state's Government Accountability Board, which evaluates ethics complaints against state government officials. The board is set to meet Monday as it weighs whether to investigate both Noem's use of state airplanes to attend political events and her interference in a state agency that had denied her daughter a real estate appraiser license.

"The friction between the governor and Ravensborg possibly led Ravensborg to be more diligent of a watchdog of the governor's office," said Jon Schaff, a political science professor at Northern State University who closely watches Statehouse politics.

Even impeachment proceedings gave Ravensborg reason to investigate Noem's circle. When an organization created to promote the governor's agenda sponsored billboards attacking lawmakers for not supporting Ravensborg's impeachment, his office probed whether the organization broke campaign finance laws.

Before the crash, the attorney general's office had also launched an investigation into the state's richest man, T. Denny Sanford, for potential possession of child pornography. While Noem refused to distance herself from Sanford and accepted several donations from him on behalf of the state totaling more than \$100 million, Ravensborg continued to evaluate charges against Sanford.

The attorney general's office last month indicated it would not pursue state charges against Sanford.

The timing rankled Republican lawmakers who were supportive of Ravensborg and pointed out it came

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 16 of 72

as Ravensborg was forced to take a leave of absence pending the Senate impeachment trial.

"The Denny Sanford case just mysteriously went away," said Republican House Speaker Spencer Gosch, who clashed with the governor during impeachment proceedings.

The governor received sharp criticism from some Republicans for goading an impeachment investigation committee forward, as well as in 2021 releasing videos of Ravensborg's interviews with criminal investigators while a trial was pending.

"She does not want anyone who won't bend to her will," said Gosch, who recently lost a primary legislative race when the governor supported his opponent, Sen. Bryan Breitling. "It cost the state of South Dakota and it cost the Republican Party."

The House committee that Gosch oversaw recommended against impeachment, but Noem was not deterred. Her administration pressed lawmakers to vote for impeachment, and two articles of impeachment passed by a single vote in the Republican-controlled House.

The Senate's vote on the first impeachment charge — committing crimes causing Boever's death — passed Tuesday without a vote to spare. The Senate convicted him on the second charge with a comfortable margin, then unanimously voted to permanently bar him from holding state office.

Schaff, the political science professor, said the vote showed both a "victory of the facts" brought by the prosecution and a "political victory" for Noem.

Nick Nemeč, Boever's cousin who has also pressed for Ravensborg's ouster in the Legislature where he once held a seat as a Democrat, said he was grateful Noem fought for Ravensborg's removal.

"Gov. Noem is a polarizing figure," he said. "There's a lot of stuff she says and does that I disagree with wholeheartedly, but I'm sure glad she was on our side on this issue."

## US coach makes dramatic rescue of artistic swimmer at worlds

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) — Andrea Fuentes prevented a tragedy at the swimming world championships with her quick reaction.

The United States coach knew something was wrong when she saw artistic swimmer Anita Alvarez sink motionless to the bottom of the pool during a solo free routine on Wednesday.

The fully clothed Fuentes dived in. She swam to the unresponsive Alvarez, put her arms around her, and lifted her to the water's surface, where another person helped get her out of the pool.

Alvarez, a two-time Olympian, had fainted.

"It was her best performance ever, she just pushed through her limits and she found them," Fuentes joked.

Alvarez, who was immediately given medical attention, was feeling much better on Thursday.

"Anita has been evaluated by medical staff and will continue to be monitored. She is feeling much better and using today to rest," USA Artistic Swimming told The Associated Press in a statement.

"Watching yesterday's medical emergency of 2x Olympian Anita Alvarez and subsequent rescue by coach Andrea Fuentes was heartbreaking for our community. She gave an exceptional solo performance and competed brilliantly in four preliminary and three final competitions across six days."

Alvarez finished seventh in Wednesday's individual final.

"Whether or not she will swim in the free team final on Friday ... will be determined by Anita and expert medical staff," USA Artistic Swimming said.

Fuentes also said Alvarez was doing much better in an Instagram post.

"The doctors checked all vitals and everything is normal: heart rate, oxygen, sugar levels, blood pressure, etc... all is okay," Fuentes wrote. "We sometimes forget that this happens in other high-endurance sports. Marathon, cycling, cross country... we all have seen images where some athletes don't make it to the finish line and others help them to get there. Our sport is no different than others, just in a pool, we push through limits and sometimes we find them."

## Russians focus firepower to seize 2 villages in east Ukraine

By JOHN LEICESTER and DAVID KEYTON Associated Press



# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 17 of 72

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The Russian military expanded its grab of territory in eastern Ukraine on Thursday, capturing two villages and vying for control of a key highway in an offensive that could cut supply lines and encircle some frontline Ukrainian forces, British and Ukrainian military officials said.

Britain's defense ministry said that Ukrainian forces had withdrawn from some areas near the city of Lysychansk, the latest major battlefield in Russian President Vladimir Putin's war against Ukraine, to avoid the possibility of being encircled as Russians sent in reinforcements and concentrated their firepower in the area.

Ukraine's General Staff said Russian forces took control of the villages of Loskutivka and Rai-Oleksandrivka, and were trying to capture Syrotyne outside Sievierodonetsk, the administrative center of the Luhansk region.

"The enemy is burning everything out in a bid to encircle the Ukrainian group of forces," Luhansk Gov. Serhiy Haidai told The Associated Press.

"The Russians are advancing without trying to spare the ammunition or troops, and they aren't running out of either," Haidai said. "They have an edge in heavy artillery and the number of troops."

"Part of the Luhansk region still remains under Ukrainian control, defying the Russians and causing their fury and desire to burn it to the ground," he added.

For weeks, Russian forces have pummeled Sievierodonetsk with artillery and air raids, and fought the Ukrainian army house-to-house. Ukrainian forces remain holed up at the Azot chemical plant on the city's edge, where about 500 civilians were also sheltering.

Haidai said the Ukrainian soldiers were using the plant's sprawling underground structures, but noted that "the shelling has intensified and even concrete shelters can't withstand the bombardment." The Russians are using their entire arsenal — heavy artillery, tanks, aircraft," he added.

The Russians were also pressing their offensive on Lysychansk, which is located on a steep river bank facing Sievierodonetsk.

Haidai said that Lysychansk was also facing a relentless Russian artillery barrage, which killed at least one civilian and wounded three others in the last 24 hours. The governor noted that the Russians concentrated over 100 multiple rocket launchers to "pummel entire blocks."

"The Russian army is 'liberating' Sievierodonetsk from life and workplaces," he said in a sarcastic reference to Russia's stated goal of the "liberation" of Donbas.

The U.K. Ministry of Defense noted in its intelligence assessment Thursday that Russian forces have likely advanced more than five kilometers (three miles) towards the southern approaches of Lysychansk since Sunday.

"Some Ukrainian units have withdrawn, probably to avoid being encircled," the statement said. "Russia's improved performance in this sector is likely a result of recent unit reinforcement and heavy concentration of fire."

Ukraine's military said the Russians were also moving to overtake the hills overlooking a highway linking Lysychansk with Bakhmut, to the southwest, in an attempt to cut the supply lines of Ukrainian forces.

Haidai said the Bakhmut-Lysychansk highway wasn't being used because of heavy Russian shelling and the Ukrainian forces are getting supplies via an alternative route.

Following a botched attempt to capture the Ukrainian capital in the early stage of the invasion on Feb. 24, Russian forces have shifted focus to Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland of Donbas, where the Ukrainian forces have fought Moscow-backed separatists since 2014.

The Russian military currently controls about 95% of the Luhansk region, and about half of the neighboring Donetsk region of Donbas.

Asked about prospects for a political settlement, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters Thursday that "it's possible after Ukraine meets all the Russian demands," adding that "Ukraine knows perfectly well what they are."

The Kremlin has previously demanded that Ukraine accept Russia's sovereignty over the Crimean Peninsula, which Moscow annexed in 2014, and acknowledge the independence of the separatist regions in

the east. Moscow also has noted that Ukraine should recognize the situation on the ground, an apparent reference to other land gains that Russia has made in Ukraine's south where it captured the Kherson region and part of the Zaporizhzhia region.

#### OTHER DEVELOPMENTS:

— A Ukrainian politician and TV personality says an online fundraising pitch aimed to help Ukraine buy three offensive drones has already drummed up \$10.4 million dollars — in just 24 hours.

Serhiy Prytula credited "amazing" support among Ukrainians after his charitable foundation launched the appeal for \$15 million a day earlier for the purchase of the Bayraktar drones like those that Ukrainian forces have already used to defend against Russian invaders.

He tweeted: "4,6m \$ to go. The People's Bayraktar project is already a nationwide crowdfunding. Let's turn it into international!"

## Afghans bury dead, dig for survivors after quake kills 1,000

By EBRAHIM NOROOZI Associated Press

GAYAN, Afghanistan (AP) — Villagers rushed to bury the dead Thursday and dug by hand through the rubble of their homes in search of survivors of a powerful earthquake in eastern Afghanistan that killed at least 1,000 people. The Taliban and the international community that fled their takeover struggled to bring help to the disaster's victims.

Under a leaden sky in Paktika province, which was the epicenter of Wednesday's magnitude 6 earthquake, men dug a line of graves in one village, as they tried to lay the dead to rest quickly in line with Muslim tradition. In one courtyard, bodies lay wrapped in plastic to protect them from the rains that are hampering relief efforts for the living.

The quake was Afghanistan's deadliest in two decades, and officials said the toll could rise. An estimated 1,500 others were reported injured, the state-run Bakhtar News Agency said.

"They don't have anything to eat, they are wondering what they can have to eat, and it is also raining," a Bakhtar reporter said in footage from the quake zone. "Their houses are destroyed. Please help them, don't leave them alone."

The disaster heaps more misery on a country where millions already faced increasing hunger and poverty and the health system has crumbled since the Taliban retook power nearly 10 months ago amid the U.S. and NATO withdrawal. The takeover led to a cutoff of vital international financing, and most of the world has shunned the Taliban government.

How the international humanitarian community, which has pulled back significant resources from the country, will be able to offer aid and whether the Taliban government will allow it to remain in question. In a rare move, the Taliban's supreme leader, Haibatullah Akhundzadah, pleaded for help from the world Wednesday — but a U.N. official said the government had not requested that the world body mobilize international search-and-rescue teams or obtain equipment from neighboring countries.

"We ask from the Islamic Emirate and the whole country to come forward and help us," said a survivor who gave his name as Hakimullah. "We are with nothing and have nothing, not even a tent to live in."

The full extent of the destruction among the villages tucked in the mountains was slow in coming to light. The roads, which are rutted and difficult to travel in the best of circumstances, may have been badly damaged in the quake, and landslides from recent rains have made some impassible. Though just 175 kilometers (110 miles) directly south of the capital, Kabul, some villages in hard-hit Gayan District took a full day's drive to reach.

Walls and roofs of dozens of homes in the district collapsed in the quake, and villagers said whole families were buried under the rubble. Associated Press journalists counted some 50 bodies in the area alone, as people laid out their dead in front of their houses and in their courtyards.

Much of the rubble was too large for people to move with their hands or shovels. They said they hoped large excavators would make it out their remote homes. For now, there was only one bulldozer in the area.

While modern buildings withstand magnitude 6 earthquakes elsewhere, Afghanistan's mud-brick homes

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 19 of 72

and landslide-prone mountains make such quakes more dangerous. Shallow earthquakes also tend to cause more damage, and experts put the depth of Wednesday's at just 10 kilometers (6 miles).

Rescuers rushed in by helicopter — and AP journalists also saw ambulances in the quake zone on Thursday — but wider relief effort could be hindered by the exodus of many international aid agencies from Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover last August. Moreover, most governments are wary of dealing directly with the Taliban.

Still, officials from several U.N. agencies said the Taliban were giving them full access to the area.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid wrote on Twitter that eight trucks of food and other necessities from Pakistan arrived in Paktika. He also said Thursday that two planes of humanitarian aid from Iran and another from Qatar had arrived in the country.

Obtaining more direct international help may be more difficult: Many countries, including the U.S., funnel humanitarian aid to Afghanistan through the U.N. and other such organizations to avoid putting money in the Taliban's hands.

In a news bulletin Thursday, Afghanistan state television made a point to acknowledge that U.S. President Joe Biden — their one-time enemy — offered condolences over the earthquake and had promised aid. Biden on Wednesday ordered the U.S. international aid agency and its partners to "assess" options for helping the victims, a White House statement said.

The death toll reported by Bakhtar was equal to that of a quake in 2002 in northern Afghanistan. Those are the deadliest since 1998, when an earthquake that was also 6.1 in magnitude and subsequent tremors in the remote northeast killed at least 4,500 people.

Wednesday's quake was centered in Paktika province, about 50 kilometers (31 miles) southwest of the city of Khost, according to neighboring Pakistan's Meteorological Department.

In neighboring Khost province's Speray district, which also sustained serious damage, men stood atop what once was a mud home. The quake had ripped open its timber beams. People sat outside under a makeshift tent made of a blanket that blew in the breeze.

Survivors quickly prepared the district's dead, including children and an infant, for burial. Officials fear more dead will be found in the coming days.

"It is hard to gather all the exact information because it is mountainous area," said Sultan Mahmood, Speray district's chief. "The information that we have is what we have gathered from the residents of these areas."

## 1/6 panel to hear of Trump's pressure on Justice Department

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Jan. 6 committee will hear from former Justice Department officials who faced down a relentless pressure campaign from Donald Trump over the 2020 presidential election results while suppressing a bizarre challenge from within their own ranks.

The hearing Thursday will bring attention to a memorably turbulent stretch at the department as Trump in his final days in office sought to bend to his will a law enforcement agency that has long cherished its independence from the White House. The testimony is aimed at showing how Trump not only relied on outside advisers to press his false claims of election fraud but also tried to leverage the powers of federal executive branch agencies.

The witnesses will include Jeffrey Rosen, who was acting attorney general during the Jan. 6, 2021, assault on the U.S. Capitol. Three days earlier, Rosen was part of a tense Oval Office showdown in which Trump contemplated replacing him with a lower-level official, Jeffrey Clark, who wanted to champion Trump's bogus election fraud claims.

In a written statement prepared for the committee and obtained by The Associated Press, Rosen says the Justice Department had been presented with no evidence of fraud that could have affected the outcome of the election and therefore did not participate in any Trump campaign efforts to overturn the results, instead insisting on an orderly transfer of power.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 20 of 72

"Some argued to the former president and public that the election was corrupt and stolen," Rosen's statement says. "That view was wrong then and it is wrong today, and I hope our presence here today helps reaffirm that fact."

Two other former department officials, Rosen's top deputy, Richard Donoghue, and Steven Engel, are also scheduled to testify. Both warned Trump at the White House meeting that they'd resign and that many of the department's lawyers would follow if he replaced Rosen with Clark.

"You could have a situation here, within 24 hours, you have hundreds of people resigning from the Justice Department," Donoghue has said he told Trump. "Is that good for anyone? Is it good for the department? Is it good for the country? Is it good for you. It's not."

Only then did Trump relent. The night, and later his Republican administration, ended with Rosen still in power.

The hearing is the fifth this month by the House committee investigating the run-up to the insurrection at the Capitol, when Trump loyalists stormed the building as lawmakers were certifying the results of the election won by Democrat Joe Biden. Witnesses have included police officers attacked at the Capitol as well as lawyers, a television executive and local election officials who all resisted demands to alter results in Trump's favor.

The committee last week presented videotaped depositions of former Attorney General William Barr, who castigated Trump's fraud claims as "bull—," "bogus" and "idiotic" and resigned after failing to convince the president of that.

Thursday's hearing will focus on what happened next as Rosen, Barr's top deputy, took over the department and found himself immediately besieged by Trump's demands for Justice Department action.

In one phone conversation, according to handwritten notes taken by Donoghue and made public by lawmakers last year, Trump directed to Rosen to "Just say the election was corrupt and leave the rest to me and the R. Congressmen."

Around that time, Trump was introduced by a Republican congressman, Rep. Scott Perry of Pennsylvania, to Clark, who'd joined the department in 2018 as its chief environmental lawyer and was later appointed to run its civil division. Clark was earlier subpoenaed by the committee to give a deposition but will not be among the witnesses Thursday.

Clark, according to statements from other Justice Department officials, met with Trump despite being ordered not to by bosses at the department and presented himself as eager to aid the president's efforts to challenge the election results. A report released last year by the Senate Judiciary Committee that painted Clark as a relentless advocate for Trump included a draft letter pushing Georgia officials to convene a special legislative session to reconsider the election results.

Clark wanted the letter sent, but superiors at the Justice Department refused.

The situation came to a head on Jan. 3, 2021, a Sunday, when Clark informed Rosen in a private meeting at the Justice Department that Trump wanted to replace him with Clark as acting attorney general. Rosen, according to the Senate report, responded that "there was no universe I could imagine in which that would ever happen" and that he would not accept being fired by a subordinate.

Rosen then contacted the White House to request a meeting. That night, Rosen, Donoghue and Engel, along with Clark, gathered with Trump and top White House lawyers for a contentious, hours-long Oval Office meeting about whether the president should follow through with his plans for a radical leadership change at the department.

According to testimony given by Rosen, Trump opened the meeting by saying, "One thing we know is you, Rosen, aren't going to do anything to overturn the election."

Donoghue and Engel made clear to Trump that they and large numbers of other Justice Department officials would resign if Trump fired Rosen. White House lawyers said the same. Pat Cipollone, then the White House counsel, said the letter that Clark wanted to send was a "murder-suicide pact."

"Steve Engel at one point said, 'Jeff Clark will be leading a graveyard. And what are you going to get done with a graveyard,' that there would be such an exodus of the leadership," Donoghue told the Senate Judiciary Committee. "So it was very strongly worded to the president that that would happen."

Donoghue also sought to dissuade Trump from believing that Clark had the legal background to do as the president wished since he was not a criminal prosecutor at the department.

"And he kind of retorted by saying, 'Well, I've done a lot of very complicated appeals and civil litigation, environmental litigation, and things like that,'" Donoghue said. "And I said, 'That's right. You're an environmental lawyer. How about you go back to your office, and we'll call you when there's an oil spill.'"

## WHO considers declaring monkeypox a global health emergency

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer

LONDON (AP) — As the World Health Organization convenes its emergency committee Thursday to consider if the spiraling outbreak of monkeypox warrants being declared a global emergency, some experts say WHO's decision to act only after the disease spilled into the West could entrench the grotesque inequities that arose between rich and poor countries during the coronavirus pandemic.

Declaring monkeypox to be a global emergency would mean the U.N. health agency considers the outbreak to be an "extraordinary event" and that the disease is at risk of spreading across even more borders. It would also give monkeypox the same distinction as the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing effort to eradicate polio.

Many scientists doubt any such declaration would help to curb the epidemic, since the developed countries recording the most recent cases are already moving quickly to shut it down.

Last week, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus described the recent monkeypox epidemic identified in more than 40 countries, mostly in Europe, as "unusual and concerning." Monkeypox has sickened people for decades in central and west Africa, where one version of the disease kills up to 10% of people. In the epidemic beyond Africa so far, no deaths have been reported.

"If WHO was really worried about monkeypox spread, they could have convened their emergency committee years ago when it reemerged in Nigeria in 2017 and no one knew why we suddenly had hundreds of cases," said Oyewale Tomori, a Nigerian virologist who sits on several WHO advisory groups. "It is a bit curious that WHO only called their experts when the disease showed up in white countries," he said.

Until last month, monkeypox had not caused sizeable outbreaks beyond Africa. Scientists haven't found any major genetic changes in the virus and a leading adviser to WHO said last month the surge of cases in Europe was likely tied to sexual activity among gay and bisexual men at two raves in Spain and Belgium.

To date, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has confirmed more than 3,300 cases of monkeypox in 42 countries where the virus hasn't been typically seen. More than 80% of cases are in Europe. Meanwhile, Africa has already seen more than 1,400 cases this year, including 62 deaths.

David Fidler, a senior fellow in global health at the Council on Foreign Relations, said WHO's newfound attention to monkeypox amid its spread beyond Africa could inadvertently worsen the divide between rich and poor countries seen during COVID-19.

"There may be legitimate reasons why WHO only raised the alarm when monkeypox spread to rich countries, but to poor countries, that looks like a double standard," Fidler said. He said the global community was still struggling to ensure the world's poor were vaccinated against the coronavirus and that it was unclear if Africans even wanted monkeypox vaccines, given competing priorities like malaria and HIV.

"Unless African governments specifically ask for vaccines, it might be a bit patronizing to send them because it's in the West's interest to stop monkeypox from being exported," Fidler said.

WHO has also proposed creating a vaccine-sharing mechanism to help affected countries, which could see doses go to rich countries like Britain, which has the biggest monkeypox outbreak beyond Africa — and recently widened its use of vaccines.

To date, the vast majority of cases in Europe have been in men who are gay or bisexual, or other men who have sex with men, but scientists warn anyone in close contact with an infected person or their clothing or bedsheets is at risk of infection, regardless of their sexual orientation. People with monkeypox often experience symptoms like fever, body aches and a rash; most recover within weeks without need-

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 22 of 72

ing medical care.

Even if WHO announces monkeypox is a global emergency, it's unclear what impact that might have.

In January 2020, WHO declared that COVID-19 was an international emergency. But few countries took notice until March, when the organization described it as a pandemic, weeks after many other authorities did so. WHO was later slammed for its multiple missteps throughout the pandemic, which some experts said might be prompting a quicker monkeypox response.

"After COVID, WHO does not want to be the last to declare monkeypox an emergency," said Amanda Glassman, executive vice president at the Center for Global Development. "This may not rise to the level of a COVID-like emergency, but it is still a public health emergency that needs to be addressed."

Salim Abdool Karim, an epidemiologist and vice chancellor at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, said WHO and others should be doing more to stop monkeypox in Africa and elsewhere, but wasn't convinced that a global emergency declaration would help.

"There is this misplaced idea that Africa is this poor, helpless continent, when in fact, we do know how to deal with epidemics," said Abdool Karim. He said that stopping the outbreak ultimately depends on things like surveillance, isolating patients and public education.

"Maybe they need vaccines in Europe to stop monkeypox, but here, we have been able to control it with very simple measures," he said.

## **EXPLAINER: Why Sri Lanka's economy collapsed and what's next**

By KRISHAN FRANCIS and ELAINE KURTENBACH Associated Press

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — Sri Lanka's prime minister says the island nation's debt-laden economy has "collapsed" as it runs out of money to pay for food and fuel. Short of cash to pay for imports of such necessities and already defaulting on its debt, it is seeking help from neighboring India and China and from the International Monetary Fund.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, who took office in May, was emphasizing the monumental task he faces in turning around an economy he said is heading for "rock bottom."

Sri Lankans are skipping meals as they endure shortages, lining up for hours to try to buy scarce fuel. It's a harsh reality for a country whose economy had been growing quickly, with a growing and comfortable middle class, until the latest crisis deepened.

### **HOW SERIOUS IS THIS CRISIS?**

Tropical Sri Lanka normally is not lacking for food but people are going hungry. The U.N. World Food Program says nearly nine of 10 families are skipping meals or otherwise skimping to stretch out their food, while 3 million are receiving emergency humanitarian aid.

Doctors have resorted to social media to try to get critical supplies of equipment and medicine. Growing numbers of Sri Lankans are seeking passports to go overseas in search of work. Government workers have been given an extra day off for three months to allow them time to grow their own food. In short, people are suffering and desperate for things to improve.

### **WHY IS THE ECONOMY IN SUCH DIRE STRAITS?**

Economists say the crisis stems from domestic factors such as years of mismanagement and corruption, but also from other troubles such as a growing \$51 billion in debt, the impact of the pandemic and terror attacks on tourism, and other problems.

Much of the public's ire has focused on President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his brother, former Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa. The latter resigned after weeks of anti-government protests that eventually turned violent.

Conditions have been deteriorating for the past several years. In 2019, Easter suicide bombings at churches and hotels killed more than 260 people. That devastated tourism, a key source of foreign exchange.

The government needed to boost its revenues as foreign debt for big infrastructure projects soared, but

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 23 of 72

instead Rajapaksa pushed through the largest tax cuts in Sri Lankan history, which recently were reversed. Creditors downgraded Sri Lanka's ratings, blocking it from borrowing more money as its foreign reserves sank. Then tourism flatlined again during the pandemic.

In April 2021, Rajapaksa suddenly banned imports of chemical fertilizers. The push for organic farming caught farmers by surprise and decimated staple rice crops, driving prices higher. To save on foreign exchange, imports of other items deemed to be luxuries also were banned. Meanwhile, the Ukraine war has pushed prices of food and oil higher. Inflation was near 40% and food prices were up nearly 60% in May.

## WHY DID THE PRIME MINISTER SAY THE ECONOMY HAS COLLAPSED?

Such a stark declaration might undermine any confidence in the state of the economy and it didn't reflect any specific new development. Wickremesinghe appeared to be underscoring the challenge his government faces in turning things around as it seeks help from the IMF and confronts criticism over the lack of improvement since he took office weeks ago. He's also fending off criticism from within the country. His comment might be intended to try to buy more time and support as he tries to get the economy back on track.

The Finance Ministry says Sri Lanka has only \$25 million in usable foreign reserves. That has left it without the wherewithal to pay for imports, let alone repay billions in debt.

Meanwhile the Sri Lankan rupee has weakened in value by nearly 80% to about 360 to \$1. That makes costs of imports even more prohibitive. Sri Lanka has suspended repayment of about \$7 billion in foreign loans due this year out of \$25 billion to be repaid by 2026.

## WHAT IS THE GOVERNMENT DOING ABOUT IT?

Wickremesinghe has ample experience. This latest is his sixth term as prime minister.

So far, Sri Lanka has been muddling through, mainly supported by \$4 billion in credit lines from neighboring India. An Indian delegation was in the capital Colombo on Thursday for talks on more assistance, but Wickremesinghe warned against expecting India to keep Sri Lanka afloat for long.

"Sri Lanka pins last hopes on IMF," said Thursday's headline in the Colombo Times newspaper. The government is in negotiations with the IMF on a bailout plan. Wickremesinghe said Wednesday he expects to have a preliminary agreement with the IMF by late July.

The government also is seeking more help from China. Other governments like the U.S., Japan and Australia have provided a few hundred million dollars in extra support.

Earlier this month, the United Nations began a worldwide public appeal for assistance. So far, projected funding barely scratches the surface of the \$6 billion the country needs to stay afloat over the next six months.

To counter Sri Lanka's fuel shortage, Wickremesinghe told The Associated Press in a recent interview that he would consider buying more steeply discounted oil from Russia to help tide the country through its crisis.

## 3 summits offer test of Western unity, dominated by Ukraine

By GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Three consecutive summits over the next week will test Western resolve to support Ukraine and the extent of international unity as rising geopolitical tensions and economic pain cast an increasingly long shadow.

On Thursday and Friday, European Union leaders will meet in Brussels to consider officially making Ukraine a candidate for membership. From Sunday to Tuesday, the Group of Seven leading economic powers will hold their annual summit in Germany. And right after that, NATO leaders will gather in Madrid, with a standoff over the membership hopes of Finland and Sweden looming large.

The 27 EU nations appear on course to give Ukraine a much-needed morale boost in the face of Russia's invasion. However, prospects of NATO countries quickly breaking down Turkey's opposition to the Nordic

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 24 of 72

countries' membership look uncertain at best.

In between, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz hopes for a united front on long-term support for Ukraine, fighting climate change and global hunger at a time of raging inflation and increasing fuel insecurity when he welcomes the leaders of the G-7 — the U.S., Germany, France, Italy, the U.K., Canada and Japan, plus the EU — to the Bavarian Alps.

"Now is the time when (those) all around the world who defend democracy and freedom, human rights and liberal society must stand together," Scholz said before the summits.

"Freedom has its price, democracy has its price, solidarity with friends and partners has its price, and we are prepared to pay this price," he said, acknowledging that sanctions against Russia also are causing some pain at home. Support for Ukraine will continue "as long as Ukraine needs our support," he said.

Making Ukraine a candidate to join the EU now appears assured after initial doubts among some members about moving so fast. The European Commission, the bloc's executive arm, recommended the step last week, shortly after the leaders of France, Germany, Italy and Romania visited Kyiv and backed its bid.

According to several EU diplomats who spoke on condition of anonymity about closed-door discussions before the summit, Ukraine will receive the required unanimous approval.

"We will give a very clear direction," one diplomat said. "It will be a bit like an engagement before marriage."

It's likely to be a long engagement — years, even decades. Among other things, Ukraine will have to implement reforms regarding the rule of law and fighting corruption.

Ukraine also is expected to dominate the G-7 summit at an idyllic, tried-and-tested Alpine venue. U.S. President Joe Biden and the other leaders will gather at the secluded Schloss Elmau luxury hotel where Germany hosted its last G-7 summit in 2015.

Finance ministers from the G-7 last month agreed to provide \$19.8 billion in economic aid to Ukraine to help keep basic services functioning and prevent tight finances from hindering its defense against Russian forces.

At Elmau, Scholz wants to consider the longer-term outlook and a global strategy for its rebuilding, including what a "Marshall plan for Ukraine" could look like. The leaders will also take stock of how well their sanctions against Russia are working.

The G-7 leaders also are expected to discuss how to get Ukraine's food exports moving again and the wider issue of global food security.

In efforts to broaden the summit's reach, Germany has invited leaders from Senegal, South Africa, India, Indonesia and Argentina — a choice meant to reflect their regional influence and the importance of "resilient democracy." German officials appear hopeful of gradually bringing such countries closer to Western views on sanctions against Russia.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is set to join the G-7 leaders and the Tuesday-Thursday NATO meeting by video link. It wasn't immediately clear on the eve of the EU summit whether Zelenskyy would also appear there.

Senior U.S. administration officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity to preview the summits, said Ukraine would be at the very front of conversations next week, and that the U.S. and allies would unveil new proposals to increase pressure on Russia while minimizing spillback on allies, and to bolster support for Ukraine.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has billed the 30-nation military alliance's summit as a "historic" opportunity to strengthen it in the face of Russian aggression against Ukraine.

Greater troop commitments to the bloc's eastern flank bordering Russia and its ally, Belarus, are expected. The alliance's 10-year Strategic Concept is likely to put a new emphasis on checking Chinese military ambitions, which U.S. officials have warned are spreading beyond Asia and into Africa.

But the summit also promises to highlight differences. Turkey is stalling the quick admission of Sweden and Finland, pressing for both to change their stance on Kurdish rebels that Turkey considers terrorists.

Sweden and Finland are invited to Madrid, but it isn't clear that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan



# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 25 of 72

will budge anytime soon. A senior German official, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with department rules, said Berlin is confident a solution can be found but "in view of the historic dimension, it isn't a catastrophe if we need a few more weeks."

After returning from a trip to Finland, Latvia and Turkey with a bipartisan delegation from the Senate Intelligence Committee, U.S. Sen. Angus King said on Tuesday that it was too early to say whether a resolution could be reached soon, but it probably won't be done by Madrid.

While Ukraine has dominated the runup to the summits, leaders have other priorities too.

At the G-7, Scholz hopes to get his guests on board his proposal for an international "climate club." He has said he aims to use Germany's presidency to turn the G-7 into the "nucleus" of such a club, which would be open to all.

Last month, G-7 ministers announced that they will aim to largely end greenhouse gas emissions from their power sectors by 2035 and targeted a "highly decarbonized road sector by 2030." And they recognized for the first time the need to provide developing countries with additional financial aid to cope with the loss and damage caused by global warming.

Activists hope for something more concrete.

Ugandan activist Vanessa Nakate said the leaders must "reaffirm their commitment to ending overseas fossil fuel finance," amid worries that they will backslide amid a scramble to secure alternatives to Russian gas.

## European Union leaders set to grant Ukraine candidate status

By SAMUEL PETREQUIN Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — European Union leaders on Thursday are set to grant Ukraine candidate status to join the 27-nation bloc, a first step in a long and unpredictable journey toward full membership that could take many years to achieve.

Making the war-torn country a contender now seems to be a done deal after leaders were initially divided on how fast they could move to embrace the war-torn country's bid that was launched only a few days after Russia launched its invasion on Feb. 24.

According to several EU diplomats who spoke on condition of anonymity before the summit in Brussels, Ukraine will receive the unanimous approval that is required for the launch of discussions.

The EU's 27 nations have been united in backing Ukraine's resistance to Russia's invasion, adopting unprecedented economic sanctions against Moscow. However, leaders were initially divided on how quickly the EU should move to accept Ukraine as a member, with the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark among the most skeptical.

But Ukraine's bid got a boost last week when the EU's executive arm, the European Commission, gave its seal of approval based on Ukraine's answers to a questionnaire received in April and early May.

Ukraine received another shot in the arm when the leaders of France, Germany, Italy and Romania visited the country and vowed to back its candidacy.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he spoke with a total of 11 EU leaders on Wednesday, following calls with nine the day before, in another indication of how important EU candidacy is for Ukraine. He said the meeting in Brussels will be an "historic session of the European Council."

EU candidate status doesn't give an automatic right to join the bloc, though, and doesn't provide any security guarantees.

For Ukraine, the start of accession discussions will depend on how the war-torn country will be able to meet essential political and economic conditions.

To be admitted, potential newcomers need to demonstrate that they meet standards on democratic principles, and they must absorb about 80,000 pages of rules covering everything from trade and immigration to fertilizers and the rule of law.

To help countries with candidate status, the bloc can provide technical and financial assistance throughout negotiations, but can also decide to revoke the status if the required reforms aren't implemented.

European officials have said that Ukraine has already implemented about 70% of the EU rules, norms and standards, but has also repeatedly pointed out corruption and the need for deep political and economic reforms.

It's unlikely that accession talks could start before next year, with the prospect that the war could drag on for a very long time adding to the uncertainty.

"Considerable efforts will be needed, especially in the fight against corruption and the establishment of an effective rule of law," Belgian Prime minister Alexander De Croo said. "But I am convinced that it is precisely the (post-war) reconstruction of Ukraine that will provide opportunities to take important steps forward."

Leaders will also debate Thursday a recommendation for the European Commission to grant Moldova — a tiny, non-NATO country that borders Ukraine — EU candidate status. The stalled enlargement process to include Western Balkans countries in the bloc is also on their agenda.

## Germany faces gas supply 'crisis,' declares alarm level

By FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Germany activated the second phase of its three-stage emergency plan for natural gas supplies Thursday, saying Europe's biggest economy faces a "crisis" and warning that storage targets for the winter are at risk due to dwindling deliveries from Russia.

The government said the decision to raise the level to "alarm" follows the cuts to Russian gas flows made since June 14 and surging energy prices exacerbated by the war in Ukraine. The third and highest stage is the "emergency" level.

"The situation is serious, and winter will come," Economy Minister Robert Habeck said in a statement.

"The reduction in gas supplies is an economic attack on us by (Russian President Vladimir) Putin," he said. "We will defend ourselves against this. But our country is going to have to go down a stony path now."

Russia last week reduced gas flows to Germany, Italy, Austria, the Czech Republic and Slovakia just as European Union countries are scrambling to refill storage of the fuel used to generate electricity, power industry and heat homes in the winter. Russia's state-owned energy giant Gazprom blamed a missing part sent to Canada for repairs for the cutbacks through the Nord Stream 1 pipeline running under the Baltic Sea to Germany — Europe's major natural gas pipeline.

It comes on top of gas shutoffs to Poland, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, France and the Netherlands in recent weeks.

Germany's government said current gas demands are being met and its gas storage facilities are filled to 58% capacity — higher than at this time last year. But the goal of reaching 90% by December won't be possible without further measures, it said.

"Even if we can't feel it yet: we are in a gas crisis," Habeck said.

He said Germany would not react to the situation by keeping all supplies it receives to itself and cutting off neighboring countries. Instead, the government was urging industry and residents in Germany to reduce their consumption as much as possible.

"The prices are already high, and we need to be prepared for further increases," Habeck said. "This will affect industrial production and become a big burden for many producers."

To reduce demand, the government plans to hold auctions that would see large industrial consumers receive money if they relinquish their contracts.

Since declaring the first phase of its emergency plan in March, Germany and other countries have been trying to get additional gas from European neighbors such as the Netherlands and Norway as well as liquefied natural gas from producers in the Gulf and further afield.

To the horror of environmentalists, the government also announced Sunday that it would increase the burning of more polluting coal and reduce gas use for electricity production.

The government said it had informed European partners of the move in advance.

## Airport chaos: European travel runs into pandemic cutbacks

By KELVIN CHAN and MIKE CORDER Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Got European travel plans this summer? Don't forget to pack your passport, sunscreen and plenty of patience.

Liz Morgan arrived at Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport 4 1/2 hours before her flight to Athens, finding the line for security snaking out of the terminal and into a big tent along a road before doubling back inside the main building.

"There's elderly people in the queues, there's kids, babies. No water, no nothing. No signage, no one helping, no toilets," said Morgan, who is from Australia and had tried to save time Monday by checking in online and taking only a carry-on bag.

People "couldn't get to the toilet because if you go out of the queue, you lost your spot," she said.

After two years of pandemic restrictions, travel demand has roared back, but airlines and airports that slashed jobs during the depths of the COVID-19 crisis are struggling to keep up. With the busy summer tourism season underway in Europe, passengers are encountering chaotic scenes at airports, including lengthy delays, canceled flights and headaches over lost luggage.

Schiphol, the Netherlands' busiest airport, is trimming flights, saying there are thousands of airline seats per day above the capacity that security staff can handle. Dutch carrier KLM apologized for stranding passengers there this month.

London's Gatwick and Heathrow airports are asking airlines to cap their flight numbers. Discount carrier easyJet is scrapping thousands of summer flights to avoid last-minute cancellations and in response to caps at Gatwick and Schiphol. North American airlines wrote to Ireland's transport chief demanding urgent action to tackle "significant delays" at Dublin's airport.

Nearly 2,000 flights from major continental European airports were canceled one week this month, with Schiphol accounting for nearly 9%, according to data from aviation consultancy Cirium. A further 376 flights were canceled from U.K. airports, with Heathrow accounting for 28%, Cirium said.

It's a similar story in the United States, where airlines canceled thousands of flights over two days last week because of bad weather just as crowds of summer tourists grow.

"In the vast majority of cases, people are traveling," said Julia Lo Bue-Said, CEO of the Advantage Travel Group, which represents about 350 U.K. travel agents. But airports are suffering from staff shortages, and it's taking a lot longer to process security clearances for newly hired workers, she said.

"They're all creating bottlenecks in the system," and it also means "when things go wrong, that they're going drastically wrong," she said.

The Biden administration scrapping COVID-19 tests for people entering the U.S. is giving an extra boost to pent-up demand for transatlantic travel. Bue-Said said travel agents her group represents reported a jump in U.S. bookings after the requirement was dropped this month.

For American travelers to Europe, the dollar strengthening against the euro and the pound is also a factor, because it makes paying for hotels and restaurants more affordable.

At Heathrow, a sea of unclaimed luggage blanketed the floor of a terminal last week. The airport blamed technical glitches with the baggage system and asked airlines to cut 10% of flights at two terminals Monday, affecting about 5,000 passengers.

"A number of passengers" may have traveled without their luggage, the airport said.

When cookbook writer Marlena Spieler flew back to London from Stockholm this month, it took her three hours to get through passport control.

Spierer, 73, spent at least another hour and a half trying to find her luggage in the baggage area, which "was a madhouse, with piles of suitcases everywhere."

She almost gave up, before spotting her bag on a carousel. She's got another trip planned to Greece in a few weeks but is apprehensive about going to the airport again.

"Frankly, I am frightened for my well being. Am I strong enough to withstand this?" Spieler said by email.

In Sweden, lines for security at Stockholm's Arlanda Airport have been so long this summer that many

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 28 of 72

passengers have been arriving more than five hours before boarding time. So many are showing up early that officials are turning away travelers arriving more than three hours before their flight to ease congestion.

Despite some improvements, the line to one of the checkpoints stretched more than 100 meters (328 feet) Monday.

Four young German women, nervous about missing their flight to Hamburg while waiting to check their bags, asked other passengers if they could skip to the front of the line. Once there, they bought fast-track passes to avoid the long security queue.

Lina Wiele, 19, said she hadn't seen quite the same level of chaos at other airports, "not like that, I guess," before rushing to the fast-track lane.

Thousands of pilots, cabin crew, baggage handlers and other aviation industry workers were laid off during the pandemic, and now there's not enough of them to cope with the travel rebound.

"Some airlines are struggling because I think they were hoping to recover staffing levels quicker than they've able to do," said Willie Walsh, head of the International Air Transport Association.

The post-pandemic staff shortage is not unique to the airline industry, Walsh said at the airline trade group's annual meeting this week in Qatar.

"What makes it difficult for us is that many of the jobs cannot be operated remotely, so airlines have not been able to offer the same flexibility for their workforce as other companies," he said. "Pilots have to be present to operate the aircraft, cabin crew have to be present, we have to have people loading bags and assisting passengers."

Laid-off aviation workers "have found new jobs with higher wages, with more stable contracts," said Joost van Doesburg of the FNV union, which represents most staff at Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport. "And now everybody wants to travel again," but workers don't want airport jobs.

The CEO of budget airline Ryanair, Europe's biggest carrier, warned that flight delays and cancellations would continue "right throughout the summer." Passengers should expect a "less-than-satisfactory experience," Michael O'Leary told Sky News.

Some European airports haven't seen big problems yet but are bracing. Prague's Vaclav Havel international airport expects passenger numbers to swell next week and into July, "when we might experience a lack of staffers, especially at the security checks," spokeswoman Klara Diviskova said.

The airport is still short "dozens of staffers" despite launching a hiring campaign at the start of the year, she said.

Labor strife also is causing problems.

In Belgium, Brussels Airlines said a three-day strike starting Thursday will force the cancellation of about 315 flights and affect some 40,000 passengers.

Two days of strikes hit Paris' Charles de Gaulle airport this month, one by security staff and another by airport personnel who say salaries aren't keeping pace with inflation. A quarter of flights were canceled the second day. Some Air France pilots are threatening a strike Saturday, warning that crew fatigue is threatening flight security, while airport personnel vow another salary-related strike July 1.

Still, the airport problems are unlikely to put people off flying, said Jan Bezdek, spokesman for Czech travel agency CK Fischer, which has sold more holiday packages so far this year than before the pandemic.

"What we can see is that people can't stand waiting to travel after the pandemic," Bezdek said. "Any problems at airports can hardly change that."

## The AP Interview: Estonian PM says don't play down Russia

By DASHA LITVINOVA and HARRIET MORRIS Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas has told The Associated Press that the West shouldn't underestimate Russia's military capabilities in Ukraine, saying Moscow is in it for the long haul as the war enters its fifth month.

Kallas said in an interview Wednesday that Europe should ensure that those committing war crimes and attempted genocide are prosecuted, noting that Russian President Vladimir Putin escaped punishment for

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 29 of 72

annexing the Crimean Peninsula in 2014 and supporting an insurgency in eastern Ukraine's Donbas region that killed over 14,000 people even before this year's war began.

"I've heard talks that, you know, there is no threat anymore because they have exhausted themselves. No, they haven't," she said of the Russian military, which failed to take Kyiv in the early stages of the war and is now concentrating its firepower in the east.

"They have plenty of troops still who can come (to fight) — They are not counting the lives that they are losing. They are not counting the artillery that they are losing there. So I don't think that we should underestimate them in the longer term to still keep this up," Kallas said, despite the low morale and corruption troubling Moscow's forces.

Kallas praised the unity that Europe has shown in punishing Russia for the invasion that began Feb. 24, even though she said it was clear from the beginning that it would be "more and more difficult over time" to hang together.

"First, we did the sanctions that were relatively easy. Now we move to sanctions that are much more difficult. But so far, we have managed to get the unity, even if we have different opinions," she said in the interview in Stenbock House, a government building where she has her office and holds Cabinet meetings..

"This is normal for democracy. We debate, we discuss, and then we get to the solution. So far, it has been a negative surprise to Putin that we are still united," Kallas said.

She said she was hopeful that Ukraine will be granted candidate status for the European Union at the bloc's upcoming summit in Brussels, despite the initial divisions over it. The EU's executive arm, the European Commission, threw its weight behind Ukraine's candidacy last week.

Some countries "were very skeptical two months ago," Kallas said, but now there are "different signals coming from different member states ... that they are on board."

Estonia, which shares a 294-kilometer (about 180-mile) border with Russia, has taken a hard-line stance over Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Kallas has criticized other European leaders for talking to Putin and has advocated for isolating Moscow completely, leaving the decision on how to end the war up to Ukraine.

As the war has dragged on, some in the West have suggested reaching a negotiated peace deal with Russia — even if it meant that Ukraine would give up territory. Kallas has warned against it.

In her comments to the AP, she pointed out that this is exactly what happened after Moscow annexed Crimea, backed the separatists in the industrial Donbas and seized territory in the former Soviet republic of Georgia.

"For us, it is important to not make that mistake again like we did in Crimea, Donbas, Georgia," she said. "We have done the same mistake already three times saying that, you know, negotiations, negotiated peace is the goal. ... The only thing that Putin hears from this is that 'I can do this because no punishment will follow.'

"And every time, every next time will be with more human suffering than the last one was," she added.

In Ukraine, those committing war crimes and "conducting or trying to conduct genocide" should be prosecuted.

Sanctions against Russia will take effect over time, she said, and one just needs to have "strategic patience."

Kallas defended criticism that the sanctions appear to hurt ordinary Russians while failing to deter Putin so far.

"And I still think that, you know, the effects should be felt by the Russian population as well, because if you look, the support for Putin is very high," she said.

Kallas added that Russian soldiers are bragging about war crimes they commit "to their wives and to their mothers. And if the wives and mothers say that 'This is OK what you are doing there' ... I mean, this is also the war that Russia and Russian people are holding up in Ukraine," she said.

On the domestic front, the 45-year-old Kallas is fighting for her political future as Estonia's two-party government led by her center-right Reform Party fell apart early June as she kicked out junior partner Center Party following disputes over welfare and spending issues amid rampant inflation in the Baltic nation.

Earlier this month, Kallas who has led the Reform Party since 2018 and became Estonia's first female

prime minister in January 2021, started coalition talks with two other parties and they are expected to reach a coalition deal by early July.

If not, Kallas will face the grim prospect of governing a weak one-party minority government until the next general election scheduled for March.

## 'A movement not a moment': NHL focuses on racial diversity

By STEPHEN WHYNO AP Hockey Writer

Anson Carter remembers watching in high school as some of his friends abandoned hockey for being "too white" as he forged ahead, eyes set on a pro career. By the time he reached the National Hockey League, dreadlocks were flowing out from underneath his helmet as he skated.

"It wasn't, 'Well, he might be Black, we're not really sure, we don't really know,'" he said, a note of pride in his voice. "You knew that I was Black."

As one of the few Black players in the NHL at the time, his presence during a career that spanned from 1996-2007 didn't go unnoticed to those friends in Toronto. They told him their kids are playing hockey.

"That makes me more proud than even playing in league myself because they're like, 'You played, so why shouldn't my kids play?'" Carter said. "To see that change with the way my friends would think, it's an amazing thing."

Fifteen years since Carter hung up his skates, the NHL has taken what it sees as significant strides to improve diversity on the ice and in the stands, a long overdue pursuit aimed at expanding hockey's footprint globally and closing the popularity gap with other leagues in the U.S. Raising minority participation in management, coaching and officiating is part of a long-term plan executives hope changes the very face of hockey in the coming years.

"Anybody that expects us to wave a magic wand and have these things happen immediately as opposed to over time, they don't understand how real change works," said Kim Davis, who joined the NHL as executive VP of social impact, growth and legislative affairs in late 2017. "What I'm encouraged by is the fact that our owners and our leaders of our 32 clubs and at the NHL level are committed to this. People are leaning into this. They understand that this is, as I often say, a movement not a moment and it's going to take us time to make the change. But we're already seeing it."

Davis said there are currently 54 active players who are Arab, Asian, Black, Latino or Indigenous, which would make up roughly 7% of the league. While the NHL does not keep official statistics on the racial makeup of team rosters, that is a significant increase over when Carter played.

This postseason has been a showcase of that diversity with several minority players at the forefront.

Nazem Kadri, who is of Lebanese descent, has been one of Colorado's most influential players and scored the overtime winner in Game 4 of the final Wednesday that put the Avalanche one victory away from the Stanley Cup, while Pierre-Edouard Bellemare, who is Black and from France, is an important newcomer for Tampa Bay in its bid for a three-peat. New York Rangers fan favorite Ryan Reaves and defenseman K'Andre Miller, as well as Edmonton star Evander Kane, who are Black, were all playing in the conference finals.

"There is that little kid at home right now who's going to be able to watch a game and go, 'Look!'" Bellemare said. "Because, naturally you're trying to mimic somebody that you can see yourself in."

Richard Lapchick, director of the University of Central Florida's Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport, said having Black stars in hockey is "going to also increase the speed with which young Black kids might start to take up hockey." Putting players like Kadri and Reaves front and center in marketing campaigns is just one of several avenues that have to be successful to see meaningful growth.

The push for more diversity in front office hires has so far featured more success with women than people of color. Carter and Davis both pointed to the Dallas Stars' recent hire of Al Montoya as director of community outreach as a tangible step forward after his involvement in the NHL's player inclusion committee — one of several established in the wake of Akim Aliu's revelation in 2019 he was the victim of racist language by a coach in the minors and the racial reckoning in the U.S. that began in 2020.

Montoya recently wrote on a notepad, "Enduring change doesn't happen over time" and shares with

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 31 of 72

Carter the theory that more diverse front offices will lead to the same kind of change on the ice.

"It's one thing to hire just to make a hire and you don't want to do that," said Montoya, a retired goaltender who was the first Cuban American and first Spanish-speaking player in the NHL. "You want to have the best. Diverse minds bring diverse perspective, and that leads to a great product. I always use the concept of you don't want all right-handed players on the ice. The same goes for the office. You don't want everyone that thinks the same."

Carter compares it to the days when European players were stereotyped as soft or when U.S. college players were overlooked because they didn't go the junior hockey route in Canada. The NHL has undoubtedly become a better product since their widespread integration.

"It has become normal to see diverse players playing on the ice because they're getting normalized in the front office," Carter said. "And people might not be like, 'If that guy's got dreads and he's playing, we're not really sure if he's serious about playing hockey or going to be a rapper,' if you've got a Black person like myself or in a front office or a part of a management team."

The NHL in July is set to release its first demographic study and report on diversity, equity and inclusion, which Davis said will clearly show demographics are shifting around the league in terms of representation. Lapchick said the NHL for the first time is working with him on a racial and gender report card, which could yield results in six months or so.

"It also provides us with a baseline so that we can measure and hold ourselves accountable to the future," Davis said. "We'll look at the youth participation and the number of kids of color in our First Shift programs in Canada and our Learn to Play programs. We're seeing that the pipeline of kids moving into elite pathways is increasing. All of these indicators are moving in the right direction, and that's what we want. We want these indicators to be pointing in the right direction."

Those grassroots efforts to grow the game in Black, Latino and other underrepresented communities — a smart business move for any league — has been going on for a long time. Lapchick points out that despite Major League Baseball's decades of efforts and financial investments, there are fewer Black players now than ever before, and understands that's a challenge for hockey, as well.

"It's an expensive sport — it's not that accessible," Lapchick said. "So, it's an uphill battle on that level."

Carter, who heads the player inclusion committee and is a Turner Sports analyst, is in regular contact with representatives from USA Hockey and other organizations to continue work on those efforts, which include the Pittsburgh Penguins last year establishing the Willie O'Ree Academy that offers Black players free instruction. The Penguins also launched a hockey diversity program run by former Jamaican national team captain Jaden Lindo and worked to open the first rink in Pittsburgh city limits in decades.

"It's that kind of intentional work that has to continue to happen at every single level in all of our markets that's going to really move the dial on all of these things," Davis said.

That dial isn't at zero. According to Davis, women make up 40% of NHL fans and 25% of the overall number are people of color. The work now is about building off that for the future, with the next steps in Carter's mind involving more minority representation in front office and ownership roles.

"We're moving in the right direction," he said. "That's going to happen with time as you get more candidates brought to the table. You're going to see it happening slowly but surely."

## Gas prices sting US workers who depend on their cars

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

DETROIT (AP) — High gas prices have Wallace Reid looking for a new career.

Reid, who drives for Uber and Lyft in New York, fills up his Lexus at least three times a week. He pays around \$95 each time, about double what he was paying last year. To make up for that, he's driving more often, but he's also applying for other jobs that wouldn't require his car.

"It's more hours, more stress," he said. "New York City is not an easy city to work and it's affecting our lives."

Reid isn't alone. Millions of Americans who rely on their cars for work are changing their habits, signing

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 32 of 72

up for carpools or even ditching their cars for bicycles as gas prices recently hit \$5 per gallon for the first time ever. This week, it's averaging \$4.95 per gallon nationwide, up from \$3.06 per gallon a year ago, according to AAA.

Some help could be on the way. On Wednesday, President Joe Biden asked Congress to suspend federal gas taxes for three months, which would shave 18.4 cents per gallon off the price of gas. He also called on states to suspend their own gas taxes.

But in the meantime, gas is straining budgets.

Jace Shoemaker-Galloway agonized over whether to charge more for Paws and Whiskers Sitters, her pet-sitting business in Macomb, Illinois. She visits as many as 10 houses each day and fills up her 2018 Mazda CX-3 almost every week. One recent fill-up cost her nearly \$50.

This month, she finally acted. She contacted her clients and told them she was removing the 10% discount she has always given to repeat customers.

Shoemaker-Galloway, who is also a children's book author, said her customers were understanding. But she worries that gas prices will cut into her business in other ways.

"The cost isn't just impacting my bottom line," she said. "Because the price of everything is so expensive, people are cutting back on non-essentials, which means pet-sitting and book sales."

In a normal summer, Orvilia Nieto might do some traveling in the RV she lives in in Lytle, Texas. But that might not happen this year. She is struggling to fill the tank of her 2008 Ford Expedition SUV so she can get to her job at a T.J. Maxx distribution center in San Antonio, about 20 miles away.

Nieto and her co-workers trade tips on where gas is cheapest. She sometimes carpools or fills her tank only halfway, which still costs her more than \$50. But she feels lucky. A handful of colleagues on her shift, which ends at 2:30 a.m., ride their bikes home in the dark.

"It's been a rough road," she said. "If we lived in the city it would be easier, could take the bus, but at the end of the shift at 2:30 in the morning, what bus line is available?"

Jill Chapman, a senior performance consultant with Insperity, a Texas-based human resources and recruitment company, said gas prices and commute lengths are increasingly a sticking point with job candidates. Chapman said companies may want to consider temporary bonuses, incentives for public transit or gas cards to help their employees.

"A business owner needs to acknowledge that there is stress associated with rising gas prices," Chapman said.

David Lewis, the CEO of Operations Inc., a Norwalk, Connecticut-based human resources consulting company, remembers handing out gas cards to his employees in 2009 when gas prices topped \$4 per gallon. But this time he won't be doing that because employees have another option: working from home.

"This is an unwelcome development for those companies that are trying to get people back to the office," Lewis said. "It is one more reasonable reason why those employees are pushing back."

Lewis has around 100 employees in Norwalk. Before COVID, 85% of them were in the office at least two days a week. Now, maybe 25% of them are. Lewis — and many of his clients — would like to see employees in the office more but say gas prices are a huge barrier.

"If you are the company that requires everyone to come in all the time, you're a pariah," he said.

Psychology professor Brian Cesario used to live within walking distance of the college where he teaches. But last year, he moved 55 miles away to Hopewell Junction, New York, so he could afford a larger home for his growing family.

Cesario taught remotely even before the pandemic and assumed he would continue doing so. But last fall, his college began requiring him to drive to campus twice a week, a commute that now costs him \$240 in gas each month. Cesario said he doesn't make enough to compensate for that, so he's looking for a fully remote job outside of academia.

For those who must commute, there can be options. On Tuesday, Uber announced it was bringing back discounted shared rides in nine U.S. cities this summer, including New York, Los Angeles and Chicago. Organizations that link carpoolers — like one run by the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments in



# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 33 of 72

the Detroit area — say they are seeing significantly more participants.

Some are even finding solutions in their own garage. Pame Viens and her husband — both histotechnologists who prepare tissue at medical facilities — switched vehicles because his commute is longer. Now, he's driving her 2016 Volkswagen Passat and she's driving his 2022 Dodge Ram.

"I'm only 5'1." I hit my forehead on the side mirror," she said with a laugh. "But I'm getting used to it."

But others say they simply have to hustle harder. Brian Scheall, an Uber driver in Tampa, Florida, pays \$75 every time he fills up his Volkswagen Atlas.

"You can make money but you have to work, work, work," said Scheall. He recently took a side job driving some customers from Florida to Virginia for some extra cash.

Uber says it understands drivers are feeling the pinch from high gas prices, and it added a 45-cent to 55-cent surcharge on all trips in March to help soften the blow. But both Reid and Scheall say gig companies should be doing much more.

"It makes no difference at all. It's like a grain of sand," Reid said of the surcharge.

## Kadri scores in OT in return, Avs move to brink of title

By FRED GOODALL AP Sports Writer

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — The Colorado Avalanche are on the brink of their first Stanley Cup title since 2001, thanks to Nazem Kadri's overtime goal.

Even if the two-time defending champion Tampa Bay Lightning don't believe it should have counted.

Kadri scored at 12:02 of the extra period to give Colorado a 3-2 victory in Game 4 of the Stanley Cup Final and move the Avalanche within a win of their first championship in over two decades.

Without specifically saying Tampa Bay felt Colorado had too many men on the ice for the winning goal, Lightning coach Jon Cooper suggested the goal should not have been allowed.

"We're all in this together. Players, coaches, refs, everybody. But this one is going to sting much more than others," Cooper said.

"It's going to be hard for me to speak. ... I'll speak with you (Thursday). You're going to see what I mean when you see the winning goal," Cooper added. "And my heart breaks for the players. Because we probably still should be playing."

The NHL released a statement saying the penalty is a judgement call that can be made by the on-ice officials. Each of the four officials said they did not see a too many men on the ice situation on the winning play. The call is not subject to video review.

Back in the lineup after being sidelined since June 4 with a thumb injury, Kadri skated in on Andrei Vasilevskiy and slipped a shot under the goaltender's right arm to give Colorado a 3-1 series lead.

"That was a huge win. A resilient win," said Kadri, who had been sidelined since being injured during Game 3 of the Western Conference final against Edmonton.

"I've been waiting for this my whole life," the Colorado center added. "I figured it was time to join the party."

The Avalanche outshot the Lightning 11-3 in the extra period. Vasilevskiy stopped Logan O'Connor on a breakaway, and Colorado had a shot clang off the post and another hit the crossbar before Kadri ended it.

Game 5 is Friday night in Denver, where Colorado won the first two games of the series and are 7-2 this postseason.

Anthony Cirelli scored 36 seconds into the game and Victor Hedman also scored in regulation for the Lightning. They took a 2-1 lead into the third period.

Nathan MacKinnon scored on a second-period power play for Colorado, and Andrew Cogliano tied it early in the third.

Darcy Kuemper, pulled from Game 3 after giving up five goals in a 6-2 loss, stopped 37 shots and had an assist of the winning goal for the Avalanche.

Vasilevskiy finished with 35 saves. He has rebounded from allowing 11 goals in Games 1 and 2 to limit the high-scoring Avalanche to five the past two games.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 34 of 72

The Lightning are trying to become the first team to win at least three straight Stanley Cup titles since the New York Islanders won four in a row from 1980-83. The Avalanche last hoisted the Cup in 2001.

The Lightning have rebounded from playing poorly in Games 1 and 2 to make it interesting by neutralizing Colorado's speed, limiting the Avalanche's scoring opportunities and turning up the pressure on Kuemper, who was barely tested when he faced just 16 shots in a 7-0 blowout in Game 2.

Cirelli's goal was the fastest in a Stanley Cup Final since 2006, and the Lightning set the tone for another busy night for Kuemper by outshooting the Avalanche 17-4 in the opening period. Two of Colorado's shots came while skating short-handed, killing off Tampa Bay's first power play of the night.

MacKinnon's first goal of the series — 12th of the playoffs — erased Colorado's early deficit at 5:17 of the second period. The Avalanche pulled even again when Cogliano, assisted by Nico Sturm and Darren Helm, scored on a deflection less than three minutes into the third.

## INJURIES

Kadri returned to the lineup after missing four games. He had been out since injuring his thumb when he was boarded by Evander Kane in Game 3 of Colorado's sweep of Edmonton in the Western Conference final.

Kane received a major penalty and was suspended a game.

## HELPING HANDS

Mikko Rantanen and Cale Maker assisted on MacKinnon's goal, giving both of them 20 this postseason — a franchise record for a single playoff year. Peter Stastny had 19 with Quebec in 1985.

## After year of violence, US schools try to tame tensions

By JOCELYN GECKER Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — The first week of school was supposed to mark a triumphant return to classrooms at San Francisco's Everett Middle School after more than a year of distance learning.

But as computer science teacher Yesi Castro-Mitchell welcomed a class of sixth graders last fall, a student started punching her, again and again.

Castro-Mitchell wrapped her arms around her head and hoped for the blows to stop. She remembers the stunned silence in her classroom as other students witnessed the assault. The teacher suffered a concussion, a dislocated jaw, chipped teeth and hearing loss in her left ear that now requires a hearing aid.

Across America, one of the nation's most difficult academic years was also one of the most violent. Experts who track school behavior nationwide said fights and other aggressive behavior, including shootings, appear to have increased. Now, with students heading out on summer break, schools are taking stock of what went wrong and how to fix it.

At Everett, many of this year's problems were no different than before the pandemic, but "they were absolutely greater in severity, intensity and frequency," said Cris Garza, a teacher at Everett for eight years and the teachers' union representative.

In addition to the attack on the teacher, fights broke out almost daily among students, according to several teachers and parents. One brawl left a student hospitalized for at least two days. In other incidents, packs of students would barge into classrooms, disrupting lessons and sometimes destroying school property.

Educators and psychologists say the pandemic contributed to the volatility in schools by causing a surge in student mental health problems, trauma at home, a lack of socializing opportunities, and a shortage of teachers and counselors that reduced adult supervision and guidance.

There is no national data that tracks school fights and assaults, but education officials across the country say violence erupted more often and more fiercely.

"Without doubt, we are hearing across the board that schools are experiencing significantly more crises related to school violence and emotional behavioral crises," said Sharon Hoover, co-director of the National Center for School Mental Health at the University of Maryland School of Medicine.

The same issues are likely to resurface in the fall, she said, if struggling adolescents don't get the help and structure they need.

Students at Everett felt the pandemic's effects acutely. About 70% of the school's 600 students are Latino,

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 35 of 72

many are English learners and most are economically disadvantaged. Many lost parents or grandparents to COVID-19 or lost their homes because families couldn't pay rent, said school social worker Bridget Early.

Castro-Mitchell said nobody warned her that her attacker had a history of behavioral problems. After the assault, the teacher transferred to another school but left before the end of the year as she struggled with PTSD.

Several Everett staff members complained that a pandemic rule intended to improve air circulation had the unintended effect of inviting misbehavior. Teachers were not allowed to close and lock classroom doors, and groups of students who skipped class would roam the halls and burst into other classes in session.

Reports from members of the National Association of School Resource Officers suggest there were more weapons on school campuses, more assaults and more fist fights across the country, said Mo Canady, the group's executive director.

The Clark County School District in Las Vegas, one of the country's largest, has said it will provide teachers with panic buttons after an increase in violence, including an April attack on a teacher that left her unconscious in her classroom. The district's police chief, Mike Blackeye, said the 2021-22 school year was the busiest in his department's 40-year history.

Hoover said when the pandemic hit, young people in particular lost what gave their lives structure: They were cut off from going to school and isolated from peers.

Many schools have tried to address the underlying causes.

When students returned to Savanna High School in Anaheim, California, it was "fight after fight after fight," said Penny Hatzis, the school's lead counselor. The school hired a specialist in restorative justice, which emphasizes mediation over punishment, although they are looking for more balance with discipline next year. In October, they used grant money to open a "relaxation room," where students could talk to a mental health counselor.

"We got it open, and we saw a humongous decline in fights and discipline issues. It was night and day," Hatzis said. The school also held support groups for students who suffered loss, LGBTQ+ students and others — sometimes several in one day.

A freshman at Savanna, Clara Oliver, struggled with anxiety that intensified when she returned to in-person school and found it difficult to carry out face-to-face conversations with classmates. For her, the relaxation room became a refuge. Eventually talking to people became easier.

"The room would give us a break from everything," she said. "When we were stressed out about school, we would just go to that room. There was someone to talk to, there were snacks, there were fidget toys and card games. We could relax, then go back to class and continue our day."

At Everett, school officials attempted a "January reset," with new strategies to bring students together, efforts to make lessons more fun and more social-emotional work with kids, Early said.

But they couldn't pull it off. As elsewhere, the omicron-led surge of the coronavirus sidelined educators, deepening a staffing crisis at the school where there was already a shortage of security guards and substitutes.

"In a year where mental health was more important than ever," Early said, she spent most of her time "putting out fires." She frequently served as a substitute.

Parents worried about their children's safety and encouraged them to steer clear of danger zones.

"My son did not usually use the bathrooms. He would wait until school was over," said Dheyana Calahorrano, mother of a seventh grader who had no science teacher, no music teacher and no gym teacher for several months.

Principal Esther Fensel resigned at the end of the school year and did not respond to interview requests.

A spokesperson for the San Francisco Unified School District, Laura Dudnick, said Everett, like many other schools, struggled with the rise of student mental health challenges and staffing shortages.

During the year, she said the district hired an additional security guard, increased substitute coverage and required students to lock up cellphones during class.

Next year, Early said, the school will open a grant-funded wellness center with an on-site therapist and

other staff to focus on students' social and emotional needs.

"What all kids need, especially kids who experience trauma, is consistency and stability," Early said. "We could not provide that for them the whole year."

## Feds: Ghislaine Maxwell deserves at least 30 years in prison

By LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — British socialite Ghislaine Maxwell should spend at least 30 years in prison for her role in the sexual abuse of teenage girls over a 10-year period by her onetime boyfriend, financier Jeffrey Epstein, prosecutors said Wednesday in written arguments.

Prosecutors said she should serve between 30 years and 55 years in prison, reflecting the federal sentencing guidelines. They made their recommendations to the judge who will preside over a sentencing hearing on Tuesday in Manhattan federal court.

The 60-year-old Maxwell was convicted in December of sex trafficking and other crimes after a month-long trial that featured testimony from four women who said they were abused in their teens.

Defense lawyers said in a sentencing submission last week that she should spend no more than five years in prison and shouldn't pay for Epstein's crimes, since he was the mastermind and principal abuser and "orchestrated the crimes for his personal gratification." Epstein took his own life in 2019 in jail as he awaited a Manhattan federal sex trafficking trial.

But prosecutors said Maxwell played an "instrumental role in the horrific sexual abuse of multiple young teenage girls" between 1994 and 2004 at some of Epstein's palatial residences. They called her crimes "monstrous."

"As part of a disturbing agreement with Jeffrey Epstein, Maxwell identified, groomed, and abused multiple victims, while she enjoyed a life of extraordinary luxury and privilege. In her wake, Maxwell left her victims permanently scarred with emotional and psychological injuries," prosecutors wrote.

"That damage can never be undone, but it can be accounted for in crafting a just sentence for Maxwell's crimes," they added.

Prosecutors also urged the judge to reject Maxwell's pleas for leniency on the grounds that she has suffered in extraordinary ways in jail while awaiting trial and afterward. Defense lawyers said she has faced death threats and harsh conditions that have caused her to lose hair and weight.

Maxwell's appearance at trial proved those claims were wrong, prosecutors said, adding: "The defendant is perfectly healthy, with a full head of hair."

They said Maxwell "has enjoyed remarkable privileges as a high-profile inmate that vastly exceed the benefits accorded to the average inmate. It is unsurprising that a woman who had led a life of incredible luxury should complain about her life as a prisoner, but that fact does not come close to meriting leniency at sentencing, much less the extraordinary degree of leniency the defendant seeks."

Prosecutors also attacked claims by Maxwell's lawyers that she suffered "a credible death threat" in jail, saying that an internal probe of the purported threat revealed that an inmate remarked to someone in passing something to the effect of: "I'd kill her if someone paid me a million dollars." As a result, they said, someone who overheard the remark reported it and the inmate was moved from the housing unit.

They also cited what they described as Maxwell's "complete failure to address her offense conduct and her utter lack of remorse. Instead of showing even a hint of acceptance of responsibility, the defendant makes a desperate attempt to cast blame wherever else she can."

Maxwell's efforts to cast aspersions on the motives of the government for prosecuting her and her claim that she is being held responsible for Epstein's crimes are "absurd and offensive," prosecutors said.

"Maxwell was an adult who made her own choices. She made the choice to sexually exploit numerous underage girls. She made the choice to conspire with Epstein for years, working as partners in crime and causing devastating harm to vulnerable victims," they said.

Prosecutors said nearly all of the \$22.5 million in assets that Maxwell claimed in a bail proposal that was never granted was given to her by Epstein.

"The defendant's access to wealth enabled her to present herself as a supposedly respectable member

of society, who rubbed shoulders with royalty, presidents, and celebrities. That same wealth dazzled the girls from struggling families who became the defendant and Epstein's victims," prosecutors said.

The sentencing submission also included quotes from letters written to the judge by women who testified during the trial, including Kate, an ex-model from Great Britain who said "the consequences of what Ghislaine Maxwell did have been far reaching for me."

"I have struggled with, and eventually triumphed over, substance use disorder. I have suffered panic attacks and night terrors, with which I still struggle. I have suffered low self esteem, loss of career opportunities. I have battled greatly with feeling unable to trust my own instincts, in choosing romantic relationships," she wrote.

## Sound off! Trumpet is 1st bloodhound to win Westminster show

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

TARRYTOWN, N.Y. (AP) — Now this hound has something to toot his horn about.

A bloodhound named Trumpet won the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show on Wednesday night, marking the first time the breed has ever snared U.S. dogdom's most coveted best in show prize.

Rounding the finalists' ring with a poised and powerful stride, Trumpet beat a French bulldog, a German shepherd, a Maltese, an English setter, a Samoyed and a Lakeland terrier to take the trophy.

"I was shocked," said handler, co-breeder and co-owner Heather Helmer, who also goes by Heather Buehner. The competition was stiff, "and sometimes I feel the bloodhound is a bit of an underdog."

After making dog show history, does Trumpet have a sense of how special he is?

"I think he does," his Berlin Center, Ohio-based handler said.

After his victory, Trumpet posed patiently for countless photos, eventually starting to do what bloodhounds do best — sniff around. He examined some decorative flowers that had been set up for the pictures, not appearing to find anything of note.

Winston, a French bulldog co-owned by NFL defensive lineman Morgan Fox, took second in the nation's most prestigious dog show.

"I'm just so proud of him and the whole team," Fox said by text afterward.

Fox, who was just signed by the Los Angeles Chargers and has played for the Los Angeles Rams and the Carolina Panthers, got Winston from his grandmother, Sandy Fox. She has bred and shown Frenchies for years.

Morgan Fox grew up with one and says that as he watched Winston mature, he knew the dog was a winner in both appearance and character. He went into Westminster as the top-ranked dog in the country.

"He's a joy to be around," Fox said by phone before Winston's award. "He always walks around with as much of a smile on his face as a dog can have."

The seven finalists also included Striker, a Samoyed that also made the finals last year; River, a big-winning German shepherd; MM the Lakeland terrier; Belle the English setter, and a Maltese that clearly was aiming for stardom: Her name is Hollywood.

After topping the canine rankings last year, Striker has lately been hitting a few dog shows "to keep his head in the game," said handler Laura King.

What makes the snow-white Samoyed shine in competition? "His heart," said King, of Milan, Illinois.

"His charisma shows when he's showing," and he vocally complains when he's not, she said.

While he was quiet in the ring, an Alaskan Malamute provided a yowling — cheering? — soundtrack for a semifinal round featuring the Samoyed and other breeds classified as working dogs.

The competition drew more than 3,000 purebred dogs, ranging from affenpinschers to Yorkshire terriers. The goal is to crown the dog that most represents the ideal for its breed.

Usually held in winter at New York City's Madison Square Garden, the show moved to the suburban Lyndhurst estate last year and this year because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Some dogs, such as golden retrievers, faced dozens of competitors just to win their breed and move on to the semifinals. Others were among few representatives of rare breeds.

Ooma was the only Chinook that showed up. The sled-pullers are the official dog of the state of New

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 38 of 72

Hampshire, but they're rare nationwide.

"I would love to see a couple more" in the Westminster ring, said Ooma's breeder, owner and handler, Patti Richards of West Haven, Vermont. "Without people who will show and breed, we're in danger of losing our breed."

Even for hopefuls that didn't come away with a ribbon, the event was an opportunity to showcase dogs and all they can do.

Bonnie the Brittany is owner-handler Dr. Jessica Sielawa's first show dog, and their teamwork extends beyond the ring.

Bonnie accompanies Sielawa to work at her chiropractic practice in Syracuse, New York, where "she's really helped people with their emotional stress," Sielawa said.

She plans to get her show dog certified as a therapy dog, too.

## Fin-tastic! Growing 'mermaiding' subculture makes a splash

By KRISTEN GELINEAU Associated Press

SYDNEY (AP) — There was a pivotal moment in Queen Pangke Tabora's life that eclipsed all others: It was the moment, she says, when she first slid her legs into a mermaid tail.

For the transgender Filipina woman approaching middle age, seeing her legs encased in vibrant, scaly-looking neoprene three years ago was the realization of a childhood dream. And it marked the beginning of her immersion into a watery world where she would find acceptance. The former insurance company worker described the experience of gliding under water, half-human and half-fish, as "meditation in motion."

"The feeling was mermai-zing," Tabora said one recent morning while lounging in a fiery red tail on a rocky beach south of Manila, where she now teaches mermaiding and freediving full-time. "The world outside is really noisy and you will find peace under water. ... It's a good skill in the real world, especially during the pandemic."

Across the world, there are thousands more merfolk like her — at its simplest, humans of all shapes, genders and backgrounds who enjoy dressing up as mermaids. In recent years, a growing number have gleefully flocked to mermaid conventions and competitions, formed local groups called "pods," launched mermaid magazines and poured their savings into a multimillion-dollar mermaid tail industry.

On a planet plagued by war, disease and social upheaval, many merfolk have found life in the water a refuge. Perhaps Sebastian, the ornery crab in the 1989 film "The Little Mermaid," said it best in his warning to land-loving mermaid Ariel: "The human world, it's a mess. Life under the sea is better than anything they got up there!"

Away from the critics and chaos of life on land, mer-world is the kinder, gentler and more joyful alternative to the real world. It is also a world, merfolk say, where you can be whoever and whatever you want.

That openness attracts some transgender people who empathize with Ariel's agony of being trapped in a body that feels wrong. It is also inspiring to merfolk like Che Monique, the Washington, D.C.-based founder of the Society of Fat Mermaids, which promotes body-positive mermaiding.

"I'm a 300-pound Black mermaid in America over 35, and hopefully that tells somebody they can do whatever they want to do," says Monique, whose group sells shirts that read 'Fat mermaids make waves' and 'Gender is fluid under the sea.' "Sure, on the one hand it is really silly, but I've watched it change people's lives."

After all, the ocean is vast, she notes, and most of the planet is covered in water. So why not dive in?

"I think there's room under the sea for all of us," Monique says.

The lure of mermaiding is clear from the Montreal home of Marielle Henault, which is stuffed to the gills with mermaid tails.

They line her clothes rack and drawers, are squeezed into suitcases and drip from plastic storage tubs, ready for sale by the 31-year-old AquaMermaid CEO to "mers" the world over. About 20 tails belong to Henault herself.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 39 of 72

"When you put your mermaid tail on at the beach or pool, you become a superstar," says Henault, whose company runs mermaiding schools across Canada and the United States. "Kids and adults, everybody's happy to see a mermaid!"

When mermaiding first started to catch on, most tails for sale were custom-made silicone creations that weigh up to 23 kilograms (50 pounds), cost upwards of \$6,000 and take a surprising amount of time and lubricant to wrestle into. But over the past few years, the increasing availability of cheaper, lighter fabric options — some of which sell for less than \$100 — has transformed the mermaiding community from an exclusive enclave for privileged professionals into an achievable dream for the wider public.

As mermaiding went mainstream, glamorous photos of mermaids resplendent in glitzy tails began gaining traction on social media, further fuelling mer-mania. An obsession with "The Little Mermaid" is common among merfolk, and there is anticipation of a fresh wave of mermaiding interest when a live action reboot of the film is released next year.

Swimming in the tails takes practice, and requires a piece of equipment long used by freedivers called a monofin — a single fin into which both feet are inserted. A mermaid's mastery of the dolphin kick is key, along with equalization techniques to alleviate ear pressure under water.

PADI, SSI and NAUI, the world's major scuba diving certification organizations, now offer mermaid courses. There's even a World Mermaid Championship, last held in China in 2019, which featured 70 mermaids flip-ping and posing in a giant glass tank before a panel of pensive judges.

Henault, who competed at the world championship, hopes to help get mermaiding to the Olympics, potentially as a demonstration sport. Multiple "Merlympics" events have been held in Europe and the U.K. in recent years.

Last weekend, masses of merfolk swarmed the streets of New York for the annual Coney Island Mermaid Parade. And mermaid conventions ("Mercons") are now held globally. Last month, more than 300 merfolk from across the U.S. and Canada attended the California Mermaid Convention, which was, as convention co-founder Rachel Smith described it, "a three-day 'shell-ebriation' of everything mermaid." It was also, according to fellow co-founder Ashley Rastad, "'Dolphin-ityly' a good time!" (Note: the mermaid community is awash in puns.)

For most merfolk, it's all a little tongue-in-cheek. But it's also enormously meaningful. Floating in the Sacramento pool where fellow attendees of the California convention had gathered, Merman Maui summed up the importance of the community this way: "I have a new family with all these people."

"Life is so much better when you learn to have just a little bit of fun, or a lot bit of fun, because we all believe in magic at some point," Maui says. "A lot of times, life can get pretty dull and boring. So why not just enjoy every aspect of it that you can?"

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Mermaiding can give you the chance to become someone different. But it can also give you the chance to become more like yourself.

Mermaid Nymphia grew up as a male-presenting child of the 1990s, and gender norms dashed her dream of dressing up as her idol, Ariel. Years later, as an adult transgender woman, her dream was finally realized when her mother helped her sew her first mermaid costume.

Nymphia would later discover a diverse community of like-minded mers online, and, on the suggestion of her mother, turned her lifelong obsession into a profession. The Los Angeles-based Nymphia has since appeared at everything from children's parties to corporate events, and in 2019 served as a trans merfolk ambassador at the California Mermaid Convention.

The transformation theme of fish to human in "The Little Mermaid" is inspiring to a subsection of the LGBTQ community, Nymphia says.

"With transgender and nonbinary merfolk, they often connect with that mentality where you're not quite sure which world you belong in, but you're able to be this alluring creature of the sea and live as your most authentic self," Nymphia says. "I know a lot of people who have found their gender identity, myself included, through mermaiding."

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 40 of 72

In the Philippines, Tabora also applauds the inclusiveness of the mermaid community.

"You can accommodate young people, straight men and gays, older people," says Tabora, whose mermaiding school is called DIVERSity by SeaReynang Pengki. "Everyone can be a mermaid!"

She, too, found a connection between her personal transformation and the mer-world. For her, it is all about evolution — her own, and the ocean's.

"As transgender, it's a transition," Tabora says. "It's like in the sea, everything evolves. The fish evolve, the coral evolves."

Dalestair Kidd, whose "mersona" is Mermaid Salacia: South Australia's Sea Witch, found the mermaiding community reassuringly accepting when Kidd came out as transgender and nonbinary.

"It doesn't matter who you are, we all share this love of the ocean," says Kidd, the proud winner of Mercon Australia's 2017 Miss Congeniality "Sandra Bull-Shark" award. "You can pick a name if your birth name doesn't suit you. You don't have to be whatever you were assigned at birth. You can pick your pronouns. ... And that's OK, because fish don't care about pronouns!"

Merfolk acknowledge their almost-utopia is occasionally rocked by stormy seas. As mermaiding's popularity has risen, so too has the prevalence of creeps known as "merverts," and scam artists who sell non-existent tails, says Kelly Hygema, creator of the Facebook group "Mermaids Beware: Scammers, Merverts, & More."

"Being mermaids, it's a predominantly women-dominated hobby and profession... so of course that does attract attention from strangers on the Internet," says Hygema, who lives on the Caribbean island of St. Thomas. "Most of the time it's just creepy comments, like they want to see you without the tail on or hold your breath underwater."

Hygema advises merfolk to always have a trusted companion, or "mertender," while performing in a tail. "With your legs bound, you can't really run away, so it's important to have that set of legs there to make sure you're OK," she says.

The tails have also raised safety concerns with several consumer groups. A 2018 study of 25 children by the Royal Life Saving Society of Western Australia found that a majority experienced an average decrease in their swimming ability of 70% while using mermaid fins and 60% while using tails. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission said it has received three reports of incidents involving mermaid tails over the past four years, the most serious of which resulted in a 5-year-old girl being hospitalized after she tucked her arms inside the tail along with her legs and became trapped underwater.

All the more reason why proper training is key, says Lauren Metzler, founder of Sydney Mermaids. Metzler received her advanced mermaid certification this month with a goal of teaching rookie merfolk how to avoid sinking to the seabed.

Dawn is nearing in the Sydney beachside suburb of Manly as Metzler strolls down to the harbour and slips into a shimmering pink and turquoise tail. She scoots backward along the sand and into the chilly grey-blue water, drawing a few amused grins from commuters heading toward the nearby ferry to the city.

"Some people have a coffee in the morning to wake up, some people have a mermaid swim," Metzler says with a laugh as she glides through the water, her skin adorned with sparkly sequins. "This tail is so fun to swim in!"

And at its core, this is what it's all about for many merfolk: Fun. There is a strong need, especially after COVID-related lockdowns, to simply play and enjoy creativity, Metzler says.

"The more we open up our imagination and accept everyone for how they are, it makes it more of a beautiful experience," she says. "The sky — or ocean floor — is the limit of what you can do with mermaiding."

## Teen's miraculous survival in Florida collapse finds purpose

By ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON The Associated Press

SURFSIDE, Fla. (AP) — Jonah Handler's miraculous rescue from one of the deadliest building collapses in U.S. history might seem to have an obvious parallel, given his name.

The teenage boy fell from the 10th floor of the beachfront condo tower that collapsed a year ago in



# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 41 of 72

Surfside, Florida, killing 98 people, including his mother. He landed in a crevice, trapped inside a pocket amid fallen concrete. A man who had been walking his dog saw Jonah's hand waving from the rubble and got help.

For his father and others, the rescue brings to mind the Old Testament tale of the prophet Jonah, swallowed by a whale sent by God to save him from drowning.

"Plucked from the jaws of death," Neil Handler said in an interview with The Associated Press. "I truly believe that God puts people in situations that help us build character."

Now, Handler is sharing his son's journey to physical and mental recovery as they start a foundation to help families and first responders dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder, like Jonah.

Handler said he decided to start the charity in memory of Jonah's mother, Stacie Fang, after seeing the pain in the eyes of the people who pulled his son from the rubble.

Images of a first responder carrying Jonah on his shoulders offered hope to rescuers and the world as the search and rescue mission extended for 14 days. He was one of only three survivors. Fang died after being taken to a hospital, becoming the first victim identified by authorities. The family immediately requested privacy and Handler declined interviews until recently.

Jonah's father had kept the aftermath of the collapse private to protect his son, who is now 16.

The boy spent five days in the hospital, suffering from compression fractures in his back, and was in a brace for two months. He started therapy to cope with his loss and trauma. When thunderstorms roll in, Handler said, he gets frightened.

"Every doctor, every psychiatrist I spoke to said that he's no different than a combat veteran who just came back from war," Handler said.

He said Jonah, a high school baseball player, went back to class and was treated like a "regular kid" to return to a sense of normalcy.

Often, the father tries to keep things light. On a recent day, they were going through a list of unclaimed items recovered from the debris. Handler was looking for jewelry he knew was important to Fang, such as a ring passed down from her father. Jonah, on the other hand, was looking at the signed baseballs.

"He said, 'I didn't know so many kids in my building liked baseball,'" Handler said. "He goes, 'Do you think we can get them?'"

The day before the collapse, Jonah and his mother had returned home from seeing her brother, who was visiting Palm Beach County from New York.

Handler and Fang had separated but had a good co-parenting relationship, and he suggested letting Jonah spend the night at his place nearby so she could go see her boyfriend. Handler said Fang told him they would just stay put because they were tired.

"I think about that a lot," Handler said.

The call came at 2 a.m., as he slept. It was Jonah, asking where he was and whether he had heard the collapse. Handler, who lives two buildings north, rushed over on foot but was unprepared for the scene of destruction.

"It was surreal. Dust in the air, a pile of just debris, a building sheared in half, and I have no idea where his mom is," he said.

The building had pancaked, floor atop floor, to form a 40-foot-high (12-meter-high) heap of rubble. The passer-by who had heard Jonah's voice climbed through a pile of glass and rebar in his flip-flops and saw the boy's hand waving before he left to get help.

The cause of the collapse remains under investigation by the National Institute of Standards and Technology in a process that could take years. But the building had a long history of maintenance problems and questions have been raised about the quality of its original construction.

A Florida judge gave initial approval last month to a settlement of more than \$1 billion to families who lost loved ones in the collapse, for which Handler praised attorneys because he said it helps relatives avoid years of court battles. A hearing Thursday, the day before the anniversary of the collapse, may finalize the settlement.

Finding a new normal for Jonah and his father has come with its challenges, but Handler said the boy was on board with starting the charity in honor of his mother.

The foundation called Phoenix Life Project will have its inaugural gala the day after the anniversary of the collapse and will include families of victims and first responders who dug through the rubble.

"These guys saved my kid's life. I am forever indebted to them," Handler said.

The father said that sometimes he feels powerless and finds it hard to discern what is typical behavior for a 16-year-old boy and how much is affected by what he suffered.

"Not only did he survive a collapsed building falling around him, he lost his mom, and he's got the survivor's guilt. So it's a whole mess of stuff that he's dealing with," he said.

Handler said he doesn't believe his son surviving the devastation was an accident.

"I don't think it was luck. I really believe he's a miracle. I believe he was chosen for something," he said.

## **Congress alleges 'shadow' probe by Commanders owner Snyder**

By BEN NUCKOLS AP Sports Writer

Washington Commanders owner Dan Snyder conducted a "shadow investigation" that sought to discredit former employees making accusations of workplace sexual harassment, hired private investigators to intimidate witnesses, and used an overseas lawsuit as a pretext to obtain phone records and emails, according to a document released by a House committee Wednesday.

The Committee on Oversight and Reform is investigating the Commanders' workplace culture following accusations of pervasive sexual harassment by team executives of women employees. It released the memo ahead of a hearing Wednesday in Washington that featured testimony from NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell, appearing remotely from New York.

Snyder was invited to testify but declined, citing overseas business commitments and concerns about due process. The committee chairwoman, Rep. Carolyn Maloney, D-N.Y., announced during the hearing that she plans to issue a subpoena to compel a deposition from Snyder next week.

The 29-page memo alleges Snyder tried to discredit the people accusing him and other team executives of misconduct and also tried to influence an investigation of the team conducted for the NFL by attorney Beth Wilkinson's firm.

Snyder's attorneys presented the NFL with a 100-slide PowerPoint presentation including "private text messages, emails, phone logs and call transcripts, and social media posts from nearly 50 individuals who Mr. Snyder apparently believed were involved in a conspiracy to disparage him," the committee said.

In a statement, a spokesman for Snyder characterized the report and the hearing as "a politically charged show trial" and said Congress should not be investigating "an issue a football team addressed years ago."

Goodell told the committee that the team's culture has transformed as a result of the Wilkinson probe and that "Dan Snyder has been held accountable." Asked by Rep. Rashida Tlaib, D-Mich., whether he would remove Snyder as owner, Goodell said, "I don't have the authority to remove him."

An NFL owner can only be removed by a three-quarters majority vote of fellow owners.

The NFL fined the team \$10 million last year and Snyder stepped away from its day-to-day operations after Wilkinson presented her findings to Goodell. However, the league did not release a written report of Wilkinson's findings, a decision Goodell said was intended to protect the privacy of former employees who spoke to investigators.

Attorneys Lisa Banks and Debra Katz, who represent more than 40 former team employees, again called on Goodell to release a report from the Wilkinson probe, calling it "stunning and disheartening" to hear him say Snyder has been held accountable.

"Today, the committee released a damning report demonstrating that Snyder and his lawyers also surveilled and investigated complainants, their lawyers, witnesses and journalists, which Goodell knew about and did nothing to address," Banks and Katz said in a statement.

When announcing the discipline against Snyder, the NFL said none of the people accused of sexual harassment still worked for the Washington franchise. But two separate accusations of sexual harassment

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 43 of 72

by Snyder himself have since surfaced.

Former employee Tiffani Johnston told the committee that Snyder groped her at a team dinner and tried to force her into his limousine, which Snyder denies. And The Washington Post reported Tuesday that a woman accused Snyder of sexually assaulting her on a team plane in 2009, resulting in a \$1.6 million settlement.

Goodell acknowledged Wednesday that he was aware of the 2009 allegation and that Snyder did not inform the league at the time, which is a violation of the NFL's personal conduct policy.

Johnston's allegation prompted the NFL to hire former Securities and Exchange Commission chairwoman Mary Jo White to conduct a new investigation of Snyder and the team, and the league plans to release her findings to the public.

Maloney has introduced legislation to curb the use of workplace nondisclosure agreements and to offer protections for employees whose professional images are used inappropriately. Among the accusations against the Commanders are that team employees produced a video of lewd outtakes from a photo shoot involving the cheerleading squad.

According to the memo, Snyder used a defamation lawsuit against an obscure online media company based in India as a pretext to subpoena emails, phone records and text messages from former employees who spoke to The Washington Post about workplace harassment. The subpoenas were unusually broad, and many of the people targeted "had no plausible connection" to the Indian media company, the committee said.

The committee also alleged that Snyder sought to blame former team president Bruce Allen for the problems with Washington's workplace culture and that Snyder's lawyers provided Wilkinson and the NFL with 400,000 emails from Allen's account, highlighting specific ones they deemed "inappropriate." Some email exchanges with Allen included homophobic and misogynistic comments by Jon Gruden, which were leaked to reporters last fall and prompted Gruden's resignation as coach of the Las Vegas Raiders.

Witnesses also told the committee that Snyder sent private investigators to their homes and offered them hush money. The NFL was aware of Snyder's use of private investigators, according to documents obtained by the committee, but the practice continued, witnesses said.

Another new allegation came from David Pauken, the team's former chief operating officer, who told the committee in a deposition released Wednesday that Snyder directly ordered the firings of a female front-office employee for having a sexual relationship with a coach and two cheerleaders for having sex with a player. He also said the men involved were not disciplined.

Republicans on the committee accused Democrats of going after an NFL team to distract from more pressing issues and exceeding the scope of the committee's mission.

"A core responsibility of this committee is to conduct oversight of the executive branch, but this entire Congress, Democrats have turned a blind eye to the Biden administration," said Kentucky GOP Rep. James Comer, the committee's ranking member. "Instead, the Oversight committee is investigating a single private organization for workplace misconduct that occurred years ago."

Asked by Rep. Ralph Norman, R-S.C., what authority the committee had to investigate an NFL team, Maloney responded, "We have authority to investigate anything and everything."

"Anything and everything," Norman said. "That's a total embarrassment."

Maloney tried to clarify that comment in her closing remarks, saying the committee was authorized "to investigate anything within Congress' legislative power."

Commanders coach Ron Rivera issued a statement late Wednesday night, distancing himself from the team's past.

"These investigations into inappropriate workplace issues pre-dates my employment," said Rivera, who was hired in 2020. "I cannot change the past, but I would hope that our fans, the NFL and Congress can see that we are doing everything in our power to never repeat those workplace issues. And know that our employees are respected, valued and can be heard."

## Ghastly shootings, political forces align to prompt gun deal

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The country has long endured a numbing succession of mass shootings at schools, places of worship and public gathering places. None forced Congress to react with significant legislation — until now.

Last month, a white shooter was accused of racist motives in the killings of 10 Black people in a supermarket in Buffalo, New York. Another gunman killed 19 students and two teachers at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas.

The slayings of shoppers and school children just 10 days apart — innocents engaged in every day activities — helped prompt a visceral public demand for Congress to do something, lawmakers of both parties say. Bargainers produced a bipartisan gun violence bill that the Senate is moving toward approving later this week, with House action expected sometime afterward.

Here's a look at the confluence of factors that helped to produce a compromise.

### REPUBLICAN MOTIVATION

This is an election year. Republicans are favored to take over the House, now narrowly controlled by Democrats, and have a solid chance of capturing the 50-50 Senate.

To reinforce their chances, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., knows they need to attract moderate voters like suburban women who will decide competitive races in states like Arizona, Georgia, Nevada and North Carolina.

Taking steps aimed at reducing mass shootings helps the GOP demonstrate it is responsive and reasonable — an image tarnished by former President Donald Trump and the hard-right deniers of his 2020 election defeat.

Underscoring the focus he prefers, McConnell lauded the gun agreement by pointedly telling reporters Wednesday that it takes significant steps to address “the two issues that I think it focuses on, school safety and mental health.”

The bill would spend \$8.6 billion on mental health programs and over \$2 billion on safety and other improvements at schools, according to a cost estimate by the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office. The analysts estimated its overall cost at around \$13 billion, more than paid for by budget savings it also claims.

But it also makes the juvenile records of gun buyers aged 18 to 20 part of background checks required to buy firearms, bars guns for convicted domestic abusers not married to or living with their victims and strengthens penalties for gun trafficking. It finances violence prevention programs and helps states implement laws that help authorities temporarily take guns from people deemed risky.

### DEMOCRATS WANT MIDDLE GROUND, TOO

The measure lacks stronger curbs backed by Democrats like banning the assault-style rifles used in Buffalo, Uvalde and other massacres and the high-capacity ammunition magazines those shooters used.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said Wednesday that this time, Democrats decided they would not “hold a vote on a bill with many things we would want but that had no hope of getting passed.” That's been the pattern for years.

Democratic Sens. Chris Murphy of Connecticut and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, and Republican Sens. John Cornyn of Texas and Thom Tillis of North Carolina, led negotiators in talks that lasted four weeks. Their accord is Congress' most important gun violence measure since the now-expired assault weapons ban enacted in 1993.

For almost 30 years, “both parties sat in their respective corners, decided it was politically safer to do nothing than to take chances,” Murphy told reporters. He said Democrats needed to show “we were willing to put on the table some things that brought us out of our comfort zone.”

### GUN RIGHTS VOTERS

Gun rights defenders are disproportionately Republican, and the party crosses them at its own risk. Trump, possibly gearing up for a 2024 presidential run, issued a statement calling the compromise “the first step in the movement to TAKE YOUR GUNS AWAY.”

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 45 of 72

McConnell took pains to say that the measure “does not so much as touch the rights of the overwhelming majority of American gun owners who are law-abiding citizens of sound mind.”

Even so, the National Rifle Association and other pro-gun groups oppose the compromise in what will be a test of their influence.

Supporting this legislation may not doom Republicans with pro-gun voters.

McConnell and Cornyn have talked about GOP polling showing that gun owners overwhelmingly back many of the bill’s provisions. And those voters are likely to be angry about sky-high gasoline prices and inflation and could vote Republican anyway.

## WINS FOR BOTH SIDES

Around two-thirds of the Senate’s 50 Republicans are expected to oppose the gun measure. But congressional approval would be a GOP win by hindering Democrats from using gun violence in their campaigns, said Republican pollster Neil Newhouse. “Taking this off the table as a potential issue for Democrats puts the focus squarely back on inflation again and the economy,” Newhouse said.

Not so, says Democratic pollster Geoffrey Garin. He said approval will let Democrats tout an accomplishment running Congress and demonstrate they can work across party lines. Democrats can still campaign against Republicans for opposing tougher measures like assault weapons curbs, issues where “Democrats clearly have the high political ground,” Garin said.

Fourteen Republicans including Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska voted Tuesday to move the legislation a step toward passage. It is probably telling that she and Indiana Sen. Todd Young were the only two facing reelection this fall. Three are retiring and eight including McConnell, Cornyn and Tillis don’t run again until 2026.

## WHAT LAWMAKERS HEARD

Senators say they’ve been struck by a different mood back home.

No. 2 Senate Democratic leader Richard Durbin of Illinois said some people he’s long known told him that “maybe it’s time to take my kids out of this country,” which he called incredible. “That they would even consider that possibility tells you how desperate families are” after the recent shootings.

“What I heard for the first time was, ‘Do something,’” Murkowski said. “And it wasn’t, ‘Ban this, do that,’ it was, ‘Do something.’”

That wasn’t true for everyone. Republican Sen. Steve Daines of Montana, where guns are widely popular, said of his constituents, “They want to make sure their Second Amendment rights are defended,” the constitutional provision that lets people keep firearms.

## **Andrew Gillum, once a Florida governor candidate, indicted**

By BRENDAN FARRINGTON Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Andrew Gillum, the 2018 Democratic nominee for Florida governor, has been indicted on 21 federal charges including conspiracy and wire fraud for funneling donations through third parties back to himself for personal use, prosecutors said Wednesday.

The U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Florida said Gillum, 42, is also charged with making false statements to the Federal Bureau of Investigation for claiming he didn’t receive or ask for anything from two undercover agents posing as developers. The undercover agents offered gifts and money in exchange for support for projects.

Sharon Janet Lettman-Hicks, 53 and the owner of a communications company, is a codefendant on the wire fraud charges for funneling money to Gillum in the form of paychecks, U.S. Attorney Jason R. Coody said in a statement.

Prosecutors said the pair “conspired to commit wire fraud, by unlawfully soliciting and obtaining funds from various entities and individuals through false and fraudulent promises and representations that the funds would be used for a legitimate purpose.”

Gillum, in a statement released through his lawyers, denied the charges.

“Make no mistake that this case is not legal, it is political. Throughout my career I have always stood up

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 46 of 72

for the people of Florida and have spoken truth to power," the statement said. "There's been a target on my back ever since I was the mayor of Tallahassee. They found nothing then, and I have full confidence that my legal team will prove my innocence now.

He made his first appearance in federal court Wednesday afternoon, entering the courtroom shackled at the ankles and wrists. He and Lettman-Hicks pleaded not guilty to all charges. A trial date was set for Aug. 16. Both were released without bail with instructions not to leave the Northern District of Florida without permission.

Gillum met with undercover FBI agents posing as developers while he was mayor and during his campaign for governor. His associates sought donations from the agents, and suggested ways to provide money without listing them as political contributions, including paying for a fundraising dinner, according to the indictment.

The agents were asked to contribute \$100,000 to Gillum's campaign and said the money could be given to a private company in order to keep the agents' names out of campaign finance documents. The agents said they would want favorable consideration on development projects and were told that wouldn't be a problem, according to the indictment.

The agents also met with Gillum in New York City and paid for his hotel, food and drink, a boat ride and a ticket to see "Hamilton," according to the indictment.

Later, other FBI agents interviewed Gillum and asked if he had contact with the undercover agents. Gillum told them that he never asked for or received anything from the "developers," and stopped communicating with them after they tried to link contributions to support for their projects, the indictment said.

An individual not named in the indictment donated \$250,000 to Gillum's political committee, but only \$100,000 was put toward the campaign. Gillum and Lettman-Hicks said most of the remaining money was going to a voter education program, knowing the service wouldn't be provided, according to the indictment.

Instead, the money went to Lettman-Hicks' company. She kept some and funneled the rest back to Gillum in several payments ranging from nearly \$3,600 to \$10,000 each.

It's the latest trouble for Gillum, who lost to Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis in a race that required a recount. Gillum fell 32,464 votes short of being elected out of more than 8.2 million ballots cast.

Gillum served as mayor of Tallahassee before running for governor. He won a crowded Democratic primary against better funded candidates with 34.4% of the vote, stunning political observers. The charismatic politician won over the hearts of hardcore Democratic activists and ran a strong grassroots campaign.

After losing, Gillum was still seen as a rising star in Democratic politics and was hired as a CNN analyst.

Then, in March 2020, Gillum was found intoxicated and unconscious in a hotel room with two men, including one who works as a male escort. Two days later he entered a rehabilitation center, and later did a television interview in which he said he's bisexual.

An attorney for Gillum's codefendant Lettman-Hicks didn't immediately respond to a message seeking comment from The Associated Press.

## Decades later, 'Torso Killer' charged in killing at NY mall

By MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

MINEOLA, N.Y. (AP) — More than five decades after Diane Cusick's lifeless body was discovered in the parking lot of a mall on New York's Long Island, authorities have linked her death to the so-called "Torso Killer," a serial killer already convicted in 11 other killings.

The suspect, Richard Cottingham — believed to be one of America's most prolific serial killers — was arraigned Wednesday on a second-degree murder charge in connection with Cusick's 1968 killing. From a hospital bed in New Jersey, where he's already serving a life sentence for other killings, Cottingham pleaded not guilty.

While he has claimed he was responsible for up to 100 homicides, authorities in New York and New Jersey have officially linked him to only a dozen so far, including Cusick's death. He has been imprisoned since 1980, when he was arrested after a motel maid heard a woman screaming inside his room. Authorities

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 47 of 72

found her alive but bound with handcuffs and suffering from bite marks and knife wounds.

Cottingham asked to be arraigned Wednesday by video feed from the New Jersey hospital because he was in poor health, bedridden and not ambulatory, Judge Caryn Fink said. He needed his lawyer, Jeff Groder, to repeat the judge's questions several times because he has difficulty hearing, Groder said.

"He is a violent predator and no matter how he looks today in a hospital bed he was not always a feeble older man," Nassau County District Attorney Anne Donnelly said in an interview with The Associated Press. "He was a young 22-year-old when he committed the murder of Ms. Cusick. He was strong, stronger than these women were, and he was violent."

Authorities believe Cusick, 23, left her job at a children's dance school and then stopped at the Green Acres Mall in Nassau County to buy a pair of shoes when Cottingham followed her out. Detectives believe he pretended to be a security guard or police officer, accused her of stealing and then overpowered the 98-pound (44-kilogram) Cusick, Nassau County Police Detective Capt. Stephen Fitzpatrick said.

She was "brutally beaten, murdered and raped in that car," Fitzpatrick said. The medical examiner concluded that Cusick had been beaten in the face and head and was suffocated until she died. She had defensive wounds on her hands and police were able to collect DNA evidence at the scene. But at the time, there was no DNA testing.

Police interviewed dozens of people, retraced her steps and never stopped hunting for her killer. But the trail went cold.

"The police did a great job looking for any leads they could find. "They spoke to hundreds of people at the Green Acres Mall to see if anyone had seen Diane," Donnelly said. "Unfortunately, the trail went cold and the case went cold."

Cottingham was working as a computer programmer for a health insurance company in New York at the time of Cusick's death. He was convicted of murder in both New York and New Jersey in the 1980s, though the law at the time didn't require people convicted to submit DNA samples, as it does now. His DNA was taken and entered into a national database in 2016 when he pleaded guilty to another murder in New Jersey.

In 2021, police in Nassau County received a tip that a suspect who might be responsible for killings in the county, just east of New York City, was locked up in New Jersey. They began running DNA tests again on cold cases and came up with a match to Cottingham.

Cottingham also led police to believe he was responsible for the death by providing some information about the case, including telling detectives he was near a drive-in theater, which was next to the mall at the time. But he stopped short of confessing directly to Cusick's death, Donnelly said.

"He didn't lay out a full admission. What he laid out was baby steps along the way that we were able to put together with the help of the police department to fill in that story," she said.

Prosecutors are now reviewing all open cases around the same time and running DNA to see if Cottingham may have been responsible for other killings.

"Based on evidence that we have in this case, we are reviewing all murders of young females from 1967 to 1980 to see if we can put together any more cases against Mr. Cottingham," Donnelly said.

Cusick's daughter, Darlene Altman, said she was overwhelmed when she saw Cottingham on the video screen in the courtroom. Altman was just 4 when her mother was killed.

"He just had this like dead stare. I felt like he was looking right at me," Altman said. "It was creepy."

## Ravens linebacker Jaylon Ferguson dies at age 26

By NOAH TRISTER AP Sports Writer

Jaylon Ferguson, who set an FBS record for career sacks while at Louisiana Tech and then played the past three seasons in the NFL with the Baltimore Ravens, has died. He was 26.

Police said Wednesday the cause of death was still to be determined.

"On June 21, 2022, at approximately 11:25 p.m., Northern District patrol officers responded to a home in the 400 block of Ilchester Avenue for a report of a questionable death," Baltimore police said. "Once

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 48 of 72

there, officers located 26-year-old Jaylon Ferguson, unresponsive, being treated by medics. Ferguson never regained consciousness and was pronounced dead on the scene by medics. No signs of trauma was found or foul play suspected at this time."

Ferguson, nicknamed "Sack Daddy," was drafted by the Ravens in the third round in 2019 and played his whole pro career with them. He appeared in 38 games and had 4 1/2 sacks.

"Jaylon was a good-hearted, gentle person who loved his family and his team. He was a joy to talk with and be around every day," Baltimore coach John Harbaugh said. "You always wanted to see and talk to 'Ferg.' Our prayers and our help go to his family."

Born Dec. 14, 1995, in St. Francisville, Louisiana, Ferguson played high school football and basketball at West Feliciana. At Louisiana Tech, his 45 sacks were one better than another Ravens linebacker, Terrell Suggs, achieved at Arizona State.

Ferguson was a third-team AP All-American in 2018.

"The LA Tech Family mourns this morning's tragic news of the sudden death of former Bulldog great, Jaylon Ferguson," the Louisiana Tech football program tweeted. "We will remember his God-given talents on the field and his infectious personality off of it. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family and friends."

Ferguson made nine starts as a rookie for the Ravens in 2019, and he also started the team's only playoff game that season. The linebacker spent time on the COVID-19 list early last season but ended up appearing in 10 games.

"Me and 'Ferg' went through some of the same struggles when it came to making a name for ourselves in the league," linebacker Tyus Bowser said. "From that, we were able to gain an understanding and help each other build and grow as players. From the playbook, to the field — and even outside of work — we created a strong bond amongst ourselves. Whether I was having a bad day or vice versa, we encouraged each other, and that's what I appreciated most and what I'll miss about him."

The Ravens finished minicamp last week and are off until training camp. Wednesday was a tragic day for the franchise, with news breaking that both Ferguson and former defensive tackle Tony Siragusa had died.

"J Ferg' had the most genuine energy I've ever been around," safety Tony Jefferson said. "Before I left after minicamp in the locker room, he expressed how he was ready to have a big year, and I believed it was going to be his best season as a Raven. He will be watching over us, I know it, and he will bring the team closer just from his mark he left."

## Threats testimony rings familiar for election workers

By JULIE CARR SMYTH Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — This week's gripping testimony to Congress about threats to local election officials after the 2020 presidential election had a rapt audience far beyond Washington — secretaries of state and election clerks across the U.S who said the stories could easily have been their own.

Death threats, harassment and unfounded accusations have driven local election officials from their jobs, unprecedented attacks that many say threaten not just themselves but American democracy itself.

A day after the local election office in Medford, Oregon, certified the results from the 2020 election, workers found a message spray-painted on their parking lot: "Vote Don't Work. Next Time Bullets."

"We spent the rest of the day pretty much in shock that this had happened here," Jackson County Clerk Chris Walker testified during a hearing earlier this year on state legislation to protect election workers. "The noise happening around the country had hit home."

At Tuesday's hearing of the House committee investigating President Donald Trump's role in the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, a mother and daughter who were election workers in Georgia brought the sense of danger into stark relief. They testified they feared even to say their names in public after Trump wrongly accused them of voter fraud.

"There were a lot of threats wishing death upon me," said Wandrea "Shaye" Moss, the daughter.

Georgia was a center of threats to election officials as Trump and his allies challenged his loss there to Joe Biden and as Trump mounted a pressure campaign on the secretary of state to "find" enough votes



# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 49 of 72

to say he'd won.

In Gwinnett County, northeast of Atlanta, a contract worker with Dominion Voting Systems faced death threats after someone shot video of him transferring a report to a county computer. Widely shared online posts falsely claimed the young man was manipulating election data.

That led Gabriel Sterling, the chief operating officer for the Georgia secretary of state's office, to lash out angrily against the violent threats and false rhetoric in a December 2020 news conference, a moment he recalled during Tuesday's congressional hearing.

Other misinformation targeted the suburban county, including claims that an electronics recycling truck disposing of surplus equipment outside a county office was shredding election hard drives.

The "exhaustion" of that political environment combined with the coronavirus pandemic and a new voting system drove more than half of Gwinnett County's permanent election staff to resign after the 2020 election, Elections Supervisor Zach Manifold said.

After it was over, he said, "I think they just all took a deep breath and a lot of people were like, 'Yeah, I just don't think I can do this anymore.'"

He said the department has rebuilt, but lacks the institutional knowledge about elections it once had.

Similar stories can be found across the country.

In Northern California's Nevada County, a politically mixed region in the Sierra foothills east of Sacramento, a judge agreed to issue restraining orders earlier this year against residents who had charged past security into the county's election office, demanding an update on their efforts to recall members of the board of supervisors.

Crystal Roascio, the elections administrator in Carbon County, Montana, explained why the county stepped up election security during the state's June 7 primary.

"I have election judges terrified for their safety and have even had some resign from being a judge over this," Roascio said in an email.

A survey released in March by the Brennan Center for Justice at the New York University School of Law found that one in three election officials knows someone who has left a job in part because of threats and intimidation, and that one in six had experienced threats personally.

Citing the potential effect on democracy, the U.S. Department of Justice launched a task force nearly a year ago to address rising threats against election officials. Public Integrity Section Principal Deputy Chief John Keller described it in an email to The Associated Press as a "deeply disturbing trend."

The group's first prosecutions came in January with the arrests of a Texas man accused of posting death threats against a Georgia election official and a Nevada man of death threats against that state's secretary of state's office. The latter calls are alleged to have included, "I hope your children get molested. You are all going to (expletive) die."

Last week, a 42-year-old Lincoln, Nebraska, man pleaded guilty to making multiple threatening posts on Instagram last year aimed at the Colorado secretary of state.

"Do you feel safe?" Travis Ford said, according to court documents. "You shouldn't."

Jena Griswold, the secretary of state, said those making the threats are trying to stop her and others from doing their work to protect fair and free elections.

"We won't be stopped. I won't be stopped," Griswold said in an interview. "It only furthers my resolve."

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission earlier this month voted unanimously to expand use of its funding to protect election workers and officials against threats. Amid the barrage, some in Congress also are pursuing solutions.

In addition to at least a dozen bills introduced or passed at the state level, legislation introduced in Congress last year by Democrats would make it a federal crime for any person to intimidate or threaten an election worker. It was part of a larger Democratic-led effort on voting rights that cleared the House but then was stopped by a filibuster in the Senate. A separate bill that would protect election and poll workers was introduced in February.

Outlawing election threats would cover cases like some in Arizona, where officials since 2020 have fielded threatening phone calls and messages that escalated during a partisan audit of the election results in the state's largest county.

Maricopa County Recorder Stephen Richer received expletive-laden voicemails calling him "scum" and a "traitor," threatening him with citizen's arrests and telling him he would burn in hell.

One caller told him if he gave the Republican-backed contractors performing the audit any more trouble, he'd "never make it" to his "next little board meeting."

Richer said he referred some of the messages to law enforcement and deleted his Facebook account when people started using it to find and harass his wife.

Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson knows those types of threats all too well. She was among the election officials personally threatened after Trump spread his false claims of widespread election fraud.

In a statement issued after Tuesday's congressional hearing, she said election workers sign up for the job because they care about democracy. But she, her staff and many of the hundreds of local officials throughout Michigan have been targeted, resulting in "an omnipresent feeling of anxiety and dread that permeates our daily lives, and our families' lives."

## **CDC panel recommends US seniors get souped-up flu vaccines**

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Americans 65 and older should get newer, souped-up flu vaccines because regular shots don't provide them enough protection, a federal advisory panel said Wednesday.

The panel unanimously recommended certain flu vaccines that might offer more or longer protection for seniors, whose weakened immune systems don't respond as well to traditional shots.

Options include: Fluzone High-Dose, Fluvad with an immune booster, or Flublok which is made with insect cells instead of chicken eggs.

The panel's recommendations usually are adopted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and become the government's guidance for U.S. doctors and their patients. This would be the first time the government has stated a flu vaccine preference for older adults.

U.S. officials currently say that all Americans 6 months and older should get a flu vaccine every season.

Flu shots tend to be less effective than other common vaccinations, but they have often been particularly disappointing in seniors. Health officials say there is persuasive research indicating some of the new shots work better in older adults, especially at preventing flu-related hospitalizations. Studies are limited, though, and there's little research comparing the three new versions.

"These influenza vaccines are better but are not yet the home run that we would love to have," said panel member Dr. Helen Keipp Talbot of Vanderbilt University,

The new shots have caught on. About 80% of Medicare beneficiaries get the souped-up vaccines each year, mostly the high-dose one, officials said. The new versions can cost roughly three times more than standard flu shots, but they are covered by insurance programs.

Panel members said seniors should get regular flu shots if the newer ones aren't available.

Also on Wednesday, CDC officials reported the flu vaccine didn't work all that well this past winter, when most illness were caused by a flu strain that vaccines traditionally do a relatively poor job protecting against. The vaccine was 35% effective in preventing flu symptoms severe enough to require a doctor visit. It was about 44% effective in children, and lower in adults.

## **Sri Lankan prime minister: Island's economy 'has collapsed'**

By KRISHAN FRANCIS Associated Press

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — Sri Lanka's debt-laden economy has "collapsed" after months of shortages of food, fuel and electricity, the prime minister told lawmakers Wednesday in comments that underscored the country's dire situation as it seeks help from international lenders.

Ranil Wickremesinghe told Parliament the South Asian nation faces "a far more serious situation" than the shortages alone, and he warned of "a possible fall to rock bottom."

"Our economy has completely collapsed," he said.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 51 of 72

The crisis on the island of 22 million is considered its worst in recent memory, but Wickremesinghe did not cite any specific new developments. His comments appeared intended to emphasize to critics and opposition lawmakers that he has inherited a difficult task that cannot be fixed quickly.

"He's setting expectations really, really low," said Anit Mukherjee, a policy fellow and economist at the Center for Global Development in Washington.

Wickremesinghe's remarks also sent a message to potential lenders: "You can't let a country of such strategic importance collapse," said Mukherjee, who noted that Sri Lanka sits in one of the world's busiest shipping lanes.

The Sri Lankan economy is foundering under the weight of heavy debts, lost tourism revenue and other effects of the pandemic, as well as surging costs for commodities. The result is a country hurtling towards bankruptcy, with hardly any money to import gasoline, milk, cooking gas and toilet paper.

Lawmakers from the two main opposition parties are boycotting Parliament this week to protest Wickremesinghe, who became prime minister just over a month ago and is also finance minister, for failing to deliver on his pledges to turn the economy around.

Wickremesinghe said Sri Lanka is unable to purchase imported fuel due to heavy debt owed by its petroleum corporation.

The Ceylon Petroleum Corporation is \$700 million in debt, he told lawmakers. "As a result, no country or organization in the world is willing to provide fuel to us. They are even reluctant to provide fuel for cash."

The crisis has started to hurt Sri Lanka's middle class, which is estimated to be 15% to 20% of the country's urban population. The middle class began to swell in the 1970s after the economy opened up to more trade and investment. It has grown steadily since.

Until recently, middle-class families generally enjoyed economic security. Now those that never had to think twice about fuel or food are struggling to manage three meals a day.

"They have really been jolted like no other time in the last three decades," said Bhavani Fonseka, a senior researcher at the Centre for Policy Alternatives in Colombo, Sri Lanka's capital.

"If the middle class is struggling like this, imagine how hard hit the more vulnerable are," Fonseka added.

The situation has derailed years of progress toward relatively comfortable lifestyles aspired to across South Asia.

Government officials have been given every Friday off for three months to save on fuel and grow their own fruits and vegetables. The inflation rate for food is 57%, according to official data.

Wickremesinghe took office after days of violent protests over the country's economic crisis forced his predecessor to step down. On Wednesday, he blamed the previous government for failing to act in time as Sri Lanka's foreign reserves dwindled.

The foreign currency crisis has crimped imports, creating the severe shortages that also include medicine and forcing people to stand in long lines to obtain basic needs.

"If steps had at least been taken to slow down the collapse of the economy at the beginning, we would not be facing this difficult situation today. But we lost out on this opportunity. We are now seeing signs of a possible fall to rock bottom," he said.

So far, Sri Lanka has been muddling through, mainly supported by \$4 billion in credit lines from neighboring India. But Wickremesinghe said India would not be able to keep Sri Lanka afloat for long.

It also has received pledges of \$300 million to \$600 million from the World Bank to buy medicine and other essential items.

Sri Lanka has already announced that it is suspending repayment of \$7 billion in foreign debt due this year, pending the outcome of negotiations with the International Monetary Fund on a rescue package. It must pay \$5 billion on average annually until 2026.

Wickremesinghe said IMF assistance seems to be the country's only option now. Officials from the agency are visiting Sri Lanka to discuss the idea. A staff-level agreement is likely to be reached by the end of July.

"We have concluded the initial discussions, and we have exchanged ideas on various sectors," Wickremesinghe said.

Representatives of financial and legal advisers to the government on debt restructuring are also visiting the island, and a team from the U.S. Treasury will arrive next week, he said.

## Jan. 6 hearings: What we've learned, and what's next

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House committee investigating the Capitol insurrection heard from election workers and state officials on Tuesday as they described President Donald Trump's pressure to overturn his 2020 election defeat. On Thursday, the nine-member panel will hear from former Justice Department officials who refused Trump's entreaties to declare the election "corrupt."

The committee's fourth and fifth hearings, held this week, are part of an effort to show how Trump's pressure eventually shifted to Congress, where his false declarations of widespread election fraud led directly to the riot on Jan. 6, 2021, when hundreds of his supporters violently breached the Capitol and interrupted the certification of President Joe Biden's election victory.

In July, the panel will hold at least two more hearings that are expected to focus on the far-right domestic extremists who attacked the Capitol and what Trump was doing inside the White House as the violence unfolded.

### TRUMP'S PRESSURE ON STATES

State officials testified at Tuesday's hearing about the extraordinary pressure they faced from Trump after the election to try and invalidate Biden's win.

Arizona's House speaker, Rusty Bowers, testified about phone calls from Trump and his allies asking him to decertify Arizona's legitimate electors and replace them. Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger told of the now-infamous phone call when Trump asked officials there to "find 11,780" votes.

The officials did not give in.

"You are asking me to do something against my oath, and I will not break my oath," Bowers said he told Trump and his allies. He recalled lawyer John Eastman, a chief architect of Trump's plan to create slates of fake electors, telling him to "just do it and let the courts sort it out."

Bowers said he repeatedly asked Trump's team for evidence of the widespread fraud they were claiming, but they never provided it.

Raffensperger said his team investigated all of Trump's claims and went down down every "rabbit hole," finding nothing. But Trump wouldn't accept it.

### TRUMP'S PRESSURE ON PENCE

The committee's third hearing last week featured testimony from former aides to Vice President Mike Pence. The aides described the then-president's efforts to persuade Pence to veer from his ceremonial role and object as Congress counted the electoral votes on Jan. 6.

Pence concluded from the start, his former counsel Greg Jacob told the committee, that "there is no justifiable basis to conclude that the vice president has that kind of authority."

Trump did not let up, even after his supporters were breaking into the Capitol and Pence was hiding in an undisclosed location — at one point just 40 feet from the rioters, the committee said. Trump sent a tweet that afternoon saying that Pence did not have the "courage" to do what was necessary.

The committee played video of the rioters outside the Capitol calling for Pence's death.

"Donald Trump turned the mob on him," said Mississippi Rep. Bennie Thompson, the chairman of the panel.

### PUSHBACK FROM TRUMP'S AIDES

The hearings have repeatedly showed how Trump moved forward with his baseless claims of fraud even as his top advisors told them they weren't true.

The committee played video testimony from several aides who said they disagreed with the plan or tried to talk Trump out of it — even though few of them spoke out publicly at the time. Even his daughter, Ivanka Trump, said she "accepted" the conclusion of former Attorney General Bill Barr, who resigned after telling the president there was no evidence of widespread fraud.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 53 of 72

The efforts to persuade Trump started on election night, when the race was still too close to call. Lawyer Rudy Giuliani told Trump to just go ahead and declare victory. Trump campaign manager Bill Stepien said in one interview clip that he told Trump it was “way too early” for such a pronouncement. But Trump did it anyway.

“Frankly, we did win this election,” Trump said before the cameras.

The committee used video clips of testimony from Barr, who told Trump he had looked into the allegations and found no evidence that any of them were true. He said he tried convince Trump, but felt that the president was becoming “detached from reality” and had no “interest in what the actual facts were.”

## THE VIOLENCE, AND REAL LIVES UPENDED

The committee has also used the hearings to tell the stories of the people who have been hurt, either in the violence of Jan. 6 or through harassment from those who believe the election was stolen.

Capitol Police officer Caroline Edwards testified about the traumatic brain injury she suffered after being pushed to the concrete when the first rioters breached the makeshift barriers around the Capitol. She described a “war scene” out of the movies and hours of hand-to-hand combat.

“They were throwing up — I saw friends with blood all over their faces,” said Edwards, who still has not returned to the unit where she worked. “It was carnage. It was chaos.”

On Tuesday, two election workers from Georgia who became the center of false conspiracy theories tearfully testified about how it has upended their lives.

The Justice Department has debunked claims that Wandrea “Shaye” Moss and her mother, Ruby Freeman, introduced suitcases of illegal ballots and committed other acts of election fraud to try to alter the outcome — a conspiracy theory pushed by Giuliani and Trump. But Moss says she no longer leaves her house and it has affected her life “in every way” after receiving violent and racist threats from Trump’s supporters.

In video testimony, Freeman said she no longer advertises her local business with her name on it: “Lady Ruby.”

“I’ve lost my name, and I’ve lost my reputation. I’ve lost my sense of security,” Freeman said.

## WHAT’S NEXT

On Thursday, the hearing will move to another pressure campaign — Trump’s efforts to have Justice Department officials declare the election corrupt, and a scheme within the department to go after states to change the results. Former acting Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen, who took over after Barr resigned, and his deputy, Richard Donoghue, will testify about how they successfully resisted that pressure.

The two hearings after that, expected to cover domestic extremism and Trump’s actions inside the White House, will be held in July. And they may not be the last before the panel issues final reports later this year.

“We are picking up new evidence on a daily basis with enormous velocity,” said Maryland Rep. Jamie Raskin, a member of the committee. “And so we’re constantly incorporating and including the new information that’s coming out.”

Another panel member suggested they could still subpoena Pence — it’s “certainly a possibility,” said California Rep. Adam Schiff.

“We would still, I think, like to have several high-profile people come before our committee,” Schiff said.

## Afghanistan quake kills 1,000 people, deadliest in decades

By EBRAHIM NOROOZI Associated Press

GAYAN, Afghanistan (AP) — A powerful earthquake struck a rugged, mountainous region of eastern Afghanistan early Wednesday, flattening stone and mud-brick homes and killing at least 1,000 people. The disaster posed a new test for Afghanistan’s Taliban rulers and relief agencies already struggling with the country’s multiple humanitarian crises.

The quake was Afghanistan’s deadliest in two decades, and officials said the toll could rise. An estimated 1,500 others were reported injured, the state-run news agency said.

The disaster inflicted by the 6.1-magnitude quake heaps more misery on a country where millions face

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 54 of 72

increasing hunger and poverty and the health system has been crumbling since the Taliban retook power nearly 10 months ago amid the U.S. and NATO withdrawal. The takeover led to a cutoff of vital international financing, and most of the world has shunned the Taliban government.

In a rare move, the Taliban's supreme leader, Haibatullah Akhundzadah, who almost never appears in public, pleaded with the international community and humanitarian organizations "to help the Afghan people affected by this great tragedy and to spare no effort."

Residents in the remote area near the Pakistani border searched for victims dead or alive by digging with their bare hands through the rubble, according to footage shown by the Bakhtar news agency. It was not immediately clear if heavy rescue equipment was being sent, or if it could even reach the area.

At least 2,000 homes were destroyed in the region, where on average every household has seven or eight people living in it, said Ramiz Alakbarov, the U.N. deputy special representative to Afghanistan.

The full extent of the destruction among the villages tucked in the mountains was slow in coming to light. The roads, which are rutted and difficult to travel in the best of circumstances, may have been badly damaged, and landslides from recent rains made access even more difficult.

Rescuers rushed in by helicopter, but the relief effort could be hindered by the exodus of many international aid agencies from Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover last August. Moreover, most governments are wary of dealing directly with the Taliban.

In a sign of the muddled workings between the Taliban and the rest of the world, Alakbarov said the Taliban had not formally requested that the U.N. mobilize international search-and-rescue teams or obtain equipment from neighboring countries to supplement the few dozen ambulances and several helicopters sent in by Afghan authorities. Still, officials from multiple U.N. agencies said the Taliban were giving them full access to the area.

The quake was centered in Paktika province, about 50 kilometers (31 miles) southwest of the city of Khost, according to neighboring Pakistan's Meteorological Department. Experts put its depth at just 10 kilometers (6 miles). Shallow earthquakes tend to cause more damage.

The European seismological agency said the quake was felt over 500 kilometers (310 miles) by 119 million people across Afghanistan, Pakistan and India.

Footage from Paktika showed men carrying people in blankets to a waiting helicopter. Other victims were treated on the ground. One person could be seen receiving IV fluids while sitting in a plastic chair outside the rubble of his home, and still more were sprawled on gurneys. Some images showed residents picking through clay bricks and other rubble. Roofs and walls had caved in.

The death toll reported by the Bakhtar news agency was equal to that of a quake in 2002 in northern Afghanistan. Those are the deadliest since 1998, when an earthquake that was also 6.1 in magnitude and subsequent tremors in the remote northeast killed at least 4,500 people.

Wednesday's quake took place in a region prone to landslides, with many older, weaker buildings.

"The fear is that the victims will increase further, also because many people could be trapped under collapsed buildings," said Stefano Sozza, Afghanistan country director for the Italian medical aid group Emergency, which sent seven ambulances and staff to areas near the quake zone.

More than 60% of Afghanistan's population of 38 million already relies on international aid to survive.

Humanitarian agencies still operating in the country, including UNICEF, rushed supplies to the quake-stricken areas. And Pakistan said it would send food, tents, blankets and other essentials.

Obtaining more direct international help may be more difficult: Many countries, including the U.S., funnel humanitarian aid to Afghanistan through the U.N. and other such organizations to avoid putting money in the Taliban's hands.

The quake "will only add to the immense humanitarian needs in Afghanistan, and it really has to be all hands on deck to make sure that we really limit the suffering that families, that women and children are already going through," said Shelley Thakral, spokesperson for the the U.N. World Food Program in Kabul.

In the capital, Prime Minister Mohammad Hassan Akhund convened an emergency meeting at the presidential palace.

"When such a big incident happens in any country, there is a need for help from other countries," said

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 55 of 72

Sharafuddin Muslim, deputy minister of state for disaster management. "It is very difficult for us to be able to respond to this huge incident."

That may prove difficult given the international isolation of Afghanistan under the Taliban, who were toppled from power by the U.S. in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. The newly restored government has issued a flurry of edicts curtailing the rights of women and girls and the news media in a turn back toward the Taliban's harsh rule from the late 1990s.

"This does add a lot to the daily burden of survival," the U.N.'s Alakbarov said of the quake. "We are not optimistic today."

## Wisconsin Democrats face hard road in Senate, governor races

By SCOTT BAUER Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Wisconsin Democrats gathering for their annual state convention this weekend are focused on reelecting Gov. Tony Evers and defeating Republican Sen. Ron Johnson, but also know that history is against them in the midterm year and voters face high inflation, rising gas prices and growing concerns about a recession.

The extent of how tight the election may be was made clear Wednesday with the latest Marquette University Law School poll. It showed Evers slightly ahead of his Republican challengers, while Johnson about even with each of the top Democrats running against him.

But the poll also showed Republicans are more excited than Democrats about voting, a significant marker in a midterm election when turnout is lower than in a presidential year. The prospect for Johnson improved, and worsened for Evers, the lower the projected turnout in the poll.

"Turnout matters in a game of inches in a state that has had so many close elections in recent years," said Marquette pollster Charles Franklin.

And in a bad sign for incumbents, a majority of poll respondents said they felt the state was headed in the wrong direction.

Evers and Democrats know that the road ahead is a tough one — the last time a candidate for Wisconsin governor who was the same party as the president won was back in 1990 — but they believe they can overcome the headwinds.

"Whatever else is happening nationally, in Wisconsin Democrats are united and energized," said Wisconsin Democratic Party Chairman Ben Wikler. Still, the Marquette poll showed 67% of Republicans were very enthused about voting compared with 58% for Democrats.

"There's this real sense that the future of our state and that the whole country is on the line and that Democrats casting their ballots in 2022 could affect the rest of all of our lives," Wikler said.

The Marquette poll showed President Joe Biden's approval rating at 40%, with 57% disapproving, his lowest marks in Wisconsin since taking office. Evers' approval rating was better at 48% while 45% disapproved.

Evers is fashioning his argument for reelection around serving as a roadblock to Republicans who control the Legislature, stopping their efforts to restrict access to abortion, overhaul how elections are run and loosen gun control laws. Republicans on Wednesday ignored a special session Evers called to repeal an 1849 law making abortions illegal that could go into effect if Roe v. Wade is overturned.

Republicans argue Evers' tenure has been a failure, saying he didn't react quickly or forcefully enough to violent riots in Kenosha in the summer of 2021, he's taking credit for a tax cut Republicans wrote and he's not done enough to help the economy.

The Republicans running to take on Evers will meet in less than two months in the Aug. 9 primary.

The Marquette poll showed a tight GOP primary race. Tim Michels, a multimillionaire construction business co-owner who won the endorsement of Donald Trump, is in a dead heat with former Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch, who has been in the GOP race the longest. Michels was at 27% compared with 26% for Kleefisch, who had been leading the pack before Michels got into the race in April.

Business consultant Kevin Nicholson was at 10% while state Rep. Timothy Ramthun trailed at 3%. Nearly

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 56 of 72

a third of respondents, 32%, said they were undecided.

In the Senate race, the poll showed Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes at 25% and Milwaukee Bucks executive Alex Lasry at 21%. State Treasurer Sarah Godlewski trailed at 9% while Outagamie County Executive Tom Nelson was at 7%. Similar to the Republican primary poll, roughly a third of respondents, 36%, said they were undecided.

The poll of 803 registered voters was taken between June 14 and Monday and had a margin of error of plus or minus 4.3 percentage points. For questions about the Republican primary, the margin of error was 6.3 percentage points and for the Democratic primary it was 6.2 percentage points.

Evers and the Senate candidates will all speak at the convention in La Crosse this weekend, as will U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin, Attorney General Josh Kaul and other officeholders and candidates.

The Democratic convention is being held in western Wisconsin's 3rd Congressional District, which has an open seat this year due to the retirement of Democratic U.S. Rep. Ron Kind. Republicans are targeting that narrowly divided district as one they can flip.

Three Democrats running in the primary for that seat are scheduled to speak at the convention. The winner will advance to face Trump-endorsed Derrick Van Orden, who lost to Kind in 2020 and whose attendance at the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol has been a focus of criticism by Democrats.

Democrats, unlike Wisconsin Republicans, do not vote on endorsing candidates in contested primaries.

## From 'carp' to 'copi': unpopular fish getting a makeover

By JOHN FLESHER AP Environmental Writer

TRAVERSE CITY, Mich. (AP) — You're in the mood for fish and your server suggests a dish of invasive carp. Ugh, you might say. But how about broiled copi, fresh from the Mississippi River?

Here's the catch: They're the same thing.

Illinois and partner organizations kicked off a market-tested campaign Wednesday to rechristen as "copi" four species previously known collectively as Asian carp, hoping the new label will make them more attractive to U.S. consumers.

Turning carp into a popular household and restaurant menu item is one way officials hope to rein in a decades-old invasion threatening native fish, mussels and aquatic plants in the Mississippi and other Midwestern rivers, as well as the Great Lakes.

"The 'carp' name is so harsh that people won't even try it," said Kevin Irons, assistant fisheries chief with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. "But it's healthy, clean and it really tastes pretty darn good."

The federal Great Lakes Restoration Initiative is funding the five-year, \$600,000 project to rebrand the carp and make them widely available. More than two dozen distributors, processors, restaurants and retailers have signed on. Most are in Illinois, but some deliver to multiple states or nationwide.

"This could be a tremendous breakthrough," said John Goss, who led the Obama administration's effort to halt the carp invasion and worked on the renaming project. "The next couple of years are very critical for building confidence and acceptance."

Span, a Chicago communications design company, came up with "copi." It's an abbreviated wordplay on "copious" — a reference to the booming populations of bighead, silver, grass and black carp in the U.S. heartland.

Imported from Asia in the 1960s-70s to gobble algae from Deep South sewage lagoons and fish farms, they escaped into the Mississippi. They've infested most of the river and many tributaries, crowding out native species like bass and crappie.

Regulators have spent more than \$600 million to keep them from the Great Lakes and waters such as Lake Barkley on the Kentucky-Tennessee line. Strategies include placing electric barriers at choke points and hiring crews to harvest the fish for products such as fertilizer and pet food. Other technologies — underwater noisemakers, air bubble curtains — are in the works.

It would help if more people ate the critters, which are popular in other countries. Officials estimate up to 50 million pounds (22.7 million kilograms) could be netted annually in the Illinois River between the



# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 57 of 72

Mississippi and Lake Michigan. Even more are available from the Midwest to the Gulf Coast.

"Government subsidies alone will not end this war," Goss said. "Private-sector, market-driven demand for copi could be our best hope."

In the U.S., carp are known primarily as muddy-tasting bottom feeders. Bighead and silver carp, the primary targets of the "copi" campaign, live higher in the water column, feeding on algae and plankton. Grass carp eat aquatic plants, while black carp prefer mussels and snails. All four are high in omega-3 fatty acids and low in mercury and other contaminants, Irons said.

"It has a nice, mild flavor ... a pleasant surprise that should help fix its reputation," said Brian Jupiter, a Chicago chef who plans to offer a copi po'boy sandwich at his Ina Mae Tavern. The fish is adaptable to numerous cuisines including Cajun, Asian and Latin, he said.

Yet it could be a hard sell, particularly because the fish's notorious boniness makes it challenging to produce fillets many diners expect, Jupiter added. Some of the best recipes may use chopped or ground copi, he said.

Dirk and Terry Fucik, owners of Dirk's Fish and Gourmet Shop in Chicago, said they've sold carp burgers for years and offer carp meatballs, tacos and other dishes.

Span researchers considered many names — "butterfin" among them — before settling on "copi," Irons said. It sounded catchy, a tad exotic, even fun, he said.

Span conducted surveys, interviews and focus group meetings with more than 350 Illinois residents, design principal Nick Adam said.

Next step: Seeking approval from the federal Food and Drug Administration, which says "coined or fanciful" fish labels can be used if not misleading or confusing. A familiar example is "slimehead," which became a hit after its market moniker was switched to "orange roughy."

Illinois also plans to register the "copi" trademark, enabling industry groups to develop quality control procedures, Irons said.

Other regulatory agencies and scientific groups have their own policies and might not make the switch.

The American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists and the American Fisheries Society have a committee that lists fish titles, including scientific names in Latin and long-accepted common names. The panel never adopted "Asian carp" as an umbrella term for the invasive species.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service plans to stick with "invasive carp" and the four individual names, as its focus is on managing and controlling their spread, said Charlie Wooley, Midwest director. The Invasive Carp Regional Coordinating Committee, which involves numerous federal, state, local and Canadian provincial agencies, will do likewise.

They dropped "Asian carp" last year because of concern about anti-Asian bigotry.

## 'Groundhog Day' at IRS: Returns pile up, phone delays worsen

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — It's Groundhog Day at the IRS.

After digging out of a daunting backlog from 2021, the agency has an even bigger backup for this tax season than it did a year ago and its pace for processing paper returns is slowing down, according to a watchdog report released Wednesday.

The National Taxpayer Advocate, an independent watchdog within the IRS, also said taxpayers are experiencing longer wait times on the telephone, and delays in processing paper returns have been running six months to one year.

The report on taxpayer challenges, which must be submitted twice a year to Congress, comes one day after the Internal Revenue Service announced that it is on track to eliminate its 2021 backlog of tax returns this week.

The Objectives Report to Congress contains proposals for lawmakers to consider going forward.

"When I released my Annual Report to Congress six months ago, I wrote that 'Paper is the IRS's Kryptonite, and the agency is still buried in it,'" National Taxpayer Advocate Erin Collins wrote in the report. "Fast forward to this Objectives Report: It's Groundhog Day."

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 58 of 72

She added: "At the end of May, the IRS had a larger backlog of paper tax returns than it did a year ago, and its pace of processing paper tax returns was slowing."

Collins, who serves as an IRS ombudsman, said of the agency's problems: "The math is daunting."

According to the report, at the end of May the agency had a backlog of 21.3 million unprocessed paper tax returns, an increase of 1.3 million over the same time last year. The agency fell short on its goal to bring on 5,473 new employees to process returns, with just 2,056 employees hired.

Additionally, phone wait times increased to 29 minutes on average, compared with last year's 20-minute average wait time.

"That the backlog continues to grow is deeply concerning, primarily because millions of taxpayers have been waiting six months or more to receive their refunds," Collins said.

Jodie Reynolds, a spokesperson for the IRS, said the report's numbers "are neither the most accurate nor most recent figures."

"Today, the IRS is running well ahead of tax return processing compared to a year ago," Reynolds said. "The IRS continues to make substantial progress on the inventory," bringing on new contractors, shifting staff and mandating employee overtime, she said.

In a joint letter to Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., who heads the Senate Finance Committee, Treasury Deputy Secretary Wally Adeyemo and IRS Commissioner Chuck Rettig said that roughly six to eight IRS employees manually handle each paper return that is filed.

"What the agency requires to avoid a crisis like this in the future is sustained, multi-year funding to invest in overhauling antiquated technology, improving taxpayer service, and increasing voluntary compliance," the letter said.

"Those resources will be crucial to automating operations to increase efficiency."

Tony Reardon, president of the National Treasury Employees Union, said "no one feels the pressure about backlogs more than the front-line workers who have been plowing through that paperwork for months now."

"Employees working on the backlogs have been doing so at IRS facilities around the country throughout the pandemic," and have been working overtime to address the logjam.

He said the IRS is "in desperate need of more staffing, more resources and updated technology, all of which are necessary to prevent future backlogs."

The Taxpayer Advocate report said credit is due to agency leadership for the burden it carries with "an extraordinarily complicated tax code," antiquated technology, inadequate staffing and lingering challenges that have come from distributing COVID-19 related programs.

"Despite these challenges, the tax system, as a whole, has held up well during the past two years," the report said.

## **EXPLAINER: Why Russia-Lithuania tensions are rising**

By The Associated Press undefined

New tensions between Moscow and the West are rising after Lithuania decided to halt the transport of some goods through its territory to the Russian region of Kaliningrad as part of European Union sanctions on the Kremlin.

The Kremlin warns it will retaliate against the sanctions, stemming from its invasion of Ukraine, in a way that will have a "significant negative impact" on the Lithuanian people, raising fears of a direct confrontation between Russia and NATO.

A look at why tensions are rising over Kaliningrad, a part of Russia on the Baltic Sea that is separated from the rest of the country:

### **RUSSIA'S WESTERNMOST TERRITORY**

The Kaliningrad region once was part of the German province of East Prussia, which was taken over by the Soviet Union after World War II in line with the 1945 Potsdam agreement among the Allied powers. East Prussia's capital of Königsberg was renamed Kaliningrad, for Mikhail Kalinin, a Bolshevik leader.

An estimated 2 million of Germans fled the territory in the final months of World War II, and those who

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 59 of 72

stayed were forcibly expelled after hostilities ended.

The Soviet authorities developed Kaliningrad as a major ice-free port and a key center of fishing, encouraging people from other regions to move into the territory. Since the Cold War era, Kaliningrad also has served as a major base of Russia's Baltic fleet.

But since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of the Baltic countries, Kaliningrad finds itself separated from the rest of Russia by Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, now all NATO members. To the south is Poland, another NATO member.

## MILITARY BASTION

As Russia's relations with the West have soured, Kaliningrad's military role has grown. Its location has put it in the forefront of Moscow's efforts to counter what it described as NATO's hostile policies.

The Kremlin has methodically bolstered its military forces there, arming them with state-of-the-art weapons, including precision-guided Iskander missiles and an array of air defense systems.

As the region's military significance has grown, its dependence on goods coming through Poland and Lithuania has made it particularly vulnerable.

## TRANSIT HALTED

Lithuania emphasized that the ban on the movement of sanctioned goods was part of the fourth package of EU sanctions against Russia, noting it only applies to steel and ferrous metals starting on June 17.

The government in Vilnius rejected Russia's description of the move as a blockade, stressing that un-sanctioned goods and rail passengers can still move through Lithuania.

In line with the EU decision, coal will be banned in August and shipments of oil and oil products will be halted in December.

## MOSCOW MULLS A RESPONSE

Moscow formally protested the halt of shipments to Kaliningrad as a violation of Russia-EU agreements on free transit of goods to the region.

Kaliningrad Gov. Anton Alikhanov said the ban will affect up to half of all items brought into the region, including cement and other construction materials.

Nikolai Patrushev, the powerful secretary of Russia's Security Council and a close confidant of President Vladimir Putin, visited Kaliningrad on Tuesday to meet with local officials. He described the restrictions as "hostile actions" and warned that Moscow will respond with unspecified measures that "will have a significant negative impact on the population of Lithuania."

Patrushev didn't elaborate, but Alikhanov suggested that the Russian response could include shutting the flow of cargo via the ports of Lithuania and other Baltic nations.

However, Lithuania has significantly reduced its economic and energy dependence on Russia, recently becoming the first EU country to stop using Russian gas. It no longer imports Russian oil and has suspended imports of Russian electricity. The transport of most Russian transit via Lithuanian ports already has been halted under EU sanctions, but Moscow could move to restrict transit for cargo from third countries through Lithuania.

Putin will decide Russia's respond after receiving Patrushev's report.

Russia's standoff with Lithuania is part of their rocky relationship that dates back to Moscow's annexation of the country, along with Estonia and Latvia, in 1940. The three pressed their move toward independence under former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and regained it when the USSR collapsed in 1991.

## FEARS OF ESCALATION

Some in the West long have feared that Russia could be eyeing military action to secure a land corridor between its ally Belarus and the Kaliningrad region via the so-called Suwalki Gap, a 65-kilometer (40-mile) strip of land in Poland along the border with Lithuania.

The rhetoric on Russian state TV has risen to a high pitch, with commentator Vladimir Solovyov accusing the West of brinkmanship that has set the clock ticking toward World War III.

Lithuanian Defense Minister Arvydas Anusauskas warned Wednesday of the danger of Russian provocations amid the Kaliningrad tensions. "When you have a military force and they are ruled by the half-witted — I apologize for the expression — of course you can expect everything," he said, adding that Lithuania

feels confident and relies on its NATO allies.

With the bulk of Russia's military bogged down in Ukraine, any use of force in the Baltics could be beyond Moscow's conventional weapons capability.

Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas said she doesn't think there is a military threat to Lithuania, adding that Russia was trying to raise pressure on the EU to ease the sanctions.

"Russia is very good in playing on our fears so that we would, you know, step back from our decisions," Kallas said in an interview with The Associated Press.

A Russian attempt to use force against Poland or Lithuania would trigger a direct conflict with NATO, which is obliged to protect any of its members under its charter's mutual defense clause known as Article 5.

On Tuesday, U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price emphasized Washington's "ironclad" commitment to that clause, which he described as NATO's "bedrock" principle.

Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov responded by warning the EU and NATO against "dangerous rhetorical games" over Kaliningrad. "Certain influential and powerful forces in the West are doing all they can to further exacerbate tensions in relations with Russia," he said, adding that "some simply have no limits in inventing scenarios when a military confrontation with us would look inevitable."

## Protesters turn Supreme Court front into forum on abortion

By JACQUELYN MARTIN Associated

WASHINGTON (AP) — A steady stream of protesters has turned the street in front of the Supreme Court building into an open-air forum encapsulating the fierce national debate over abortion after the leak of a draft opinion suggesting the justices would overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 landmark ruling that legalized abortion nationwide.

Both supporters and foes of abortion rights have gathered during large, organized weekend marches and on weekdays when the court is scheduled to release its opinion. They march and chant; sometimes they attempt to shout the other side down.

For each, the reasons for protesting are deeply personal.

Here's what some had to say:

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Benita Lubic of Washington

A widow, Lubic was joined by her daughter Wendie Lubic, sitting in a black canvas camping chair between the U.S. Capitol and the Supreme Court, holding a handwritten sign saying, "I don't regret my abortion."

In 1968, and with three children already, Benita Lubic's IUD birth control device failed. She was allowed a medical abortion in Washington, D.C., but doctors also performed a partial hysterectomy, she believes, to ensure she would have no further pregnancies.

"I'm a senior citizen so I am way past having another child, but I do want to help younger people, particularly those who have been raped and abused, that they will be able to get an abortion," said Lubic, 86.

Wendie Lubic, 60, also had an abortion, in 1986, although she didn't tell her mother about it until years later. "We just weren't ready to get married at that time," says Wendie Lubic, who later did marry the man and they have two daughters.

Benita Lubic blames Senate Republicans for blocking the Supreme Court nomination of Merrick Garland during the final months of President Barack Obama's last term, but then fast-tracking the nomination of the newest justice, Amy Coney Barrett, after Ruth Bader Ginsburg died in September 2020, less than two months before the election.

"I'm just sorry that Ruth Bader Ginsburg isn't alive to support us," she said.

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Grace Rykaczewski of Morristown, New Jersey

With a hot pink bullhorn, matching lipstick, and pink eyeshadow, Grace Rykaczewski, 21, was in a triumphant mood at the thought of *Roe v. Wade*'s potential demise.

"Once it's overturned, for the pro-life movement this is only the beginning," said Rykaczewski, who goes

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 61 of 72

by the handle, "Pro Life Barbie" on social media. "I think the next goal is twofold. On one hand we will want to enact laws on a state level to make abortions as rare as possible. On the other hand, a goal is to make women feel like they don't need abortions anymore, to make help for women in difficult situations so there isn't even a demand for abortion anymore."

Ryaczewski is already making plans to return to the Supreme Court to celebrate if the opinion overturning *Roe v. Wade* is released.

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Rob Zaidel and Danny Drees, both of Washington

The pair joined abortion rights protesters on Saturday, May 14, outside the White House on their way to the National Mall during protests across the country.

"It's important for me, identifying as a man, to have that presence here," said Zaidel, 28. "It's important for all of us to come together, it's not just a women's issue." He said he feared that the court wouldn't stop at abortion and that gay marriage could be one of the things that's next.

Drees, 27, said, "It's important for a democracy to have equal rights for all, and this makes women and all people with uteruses less equal and have less power."

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Julia Bradley-Cook of Washington

Seven months pregnant, Bradley-Cook marched by the court with the words "No Forced Pregnancy" written across her bare belly.

"I think there is a dichotomy set up on abortion and pregnancy," she said. "It's important to show that just because we support the right to choose, doesn't mean we can't also be pregnant."

She and another pregnant friend represented the group 500 Women Scientists.

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K'Vone Cropp, and Kayla Cropp of Richmond, Virginia

The 26-year-old twin sisters came to the Supreme Court with the group Students for Life on a recent day when court rulings were announced, hoping to be there when the *Roe v. Wade* ruling came down. The group wore light blue T-shirts with the phrase, "We are the pro-life generation," emblazoned on the front.

"We aren't big talkers," said Kayla Cropp. "We are just here supporting the cause and abolishing abortion."

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Lauren McKillip and her wife Marissa McKillip of Crofton, Maryland

Marissa McKillip held their son Lincoln, 4, on her shoulders as her wife, Lauren, cradled their 2-year-old daughter, Thea, in a soft blue wrap.

"It's important for us to come here for our daughter, for our marriage, for all the things now established so that our daughter doesn't have to fight for it," said Marissa McKillip, 28.

"I think *Roe* was a foundational court case that paved the way for a lot of other things we saw happen after that like interracial marriage, and gay marriage — the government not having so much overreach into our personal lives," said Lauren McKillip, 29. "If it's overturned, we will come out again for sure, to just keep fighting, fight for what comes next."

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Sonia Glenn of Fairfax, Virginia

A green foam crown, flowing green silk dress and sash proclaiming "Abortion Liberty" transformed Sofia Glenn into the abortion rights-themed Lady Liberty.

"I can't believe somebody else is going to make decisions about my body," said the 37-year-old, who immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico 15 years ago. "I was raised as a Catholic. But I always thought it was so unfair, that religion and men, priests, have the rights to tell you what you can and cannot do with your body. It doesn't make any sense to me."

Glenn said she refers to her birth control pills as "Liberty Pills" and plans to help make the abortion pill option available for those who can't access them if *Roe v. Wade* is overturned..

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Noah Slayter of Manassas, Virginia

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 62 of 72

Slyter, 20, decided to demonstrate against abortion after being part of a family that fostered 10 children. "Those on the abortion side like to purport that those in foster care could have a terrible life. Who is to say that they'll have a terrible life? The kids sleeping in the room across from me, there's people that think they should have been killed," he said.

Slyter said opponents of abortion rights are primed for a state-by-state battle to both restrict the procedure and promote adoption and foster care options.

"Previously the movement had one battle, a national one. And now we will have 50," he said.

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Abby Thomas of Los Angeles

Wearing green and white face paint smeared on her cheeks and forehead, Thomas, 27, spent five days protesting outside the court.

"A lot of organizations are at the point where they are planning for a post-Roe world. But it's easier to fight for our rights while we still have them," she said.

Thomas said the abortion rights community was hoping for a massive backlash at the voting booth if the court rules to lift federal abortion protections.

"If it is overturned, the majority of the country supports abortion access," she said, "and I hope the majority of the country would come out, to show the Supreme Court and the Republican Party the extent they've wronged the American people."

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Tanya Ditty of Alexandria, Virginia

Ditty, 62, wore a black T-shirt with the phrase, "She prays, she votes."

A teenager when Roe v. Wade came down, she said the abortion issue should be decided not by the federal government, but by the states, "where the people closest to local government can influence their state legislators."

"We will continue to go to those statehouses, year after year, and attempt and attempt and attempt," she said. "We will stand side by side with pregnancy centers and churches that provide services. It's not true that we won't support women, we will provide avenues."

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Ekerin Shopshire of Silver Spring, Maryland

A kindergarten teacher in Montgomery County, Shopshire, 47, and a friend demonstrated outside the Supreme Court in May and later joined a small protest outside the home of one of the justices.

"We aren't being heard and that's scary," she said.

If Roe v. Wade is overturned, Shopshire saw the battle over abortion moving to the states.

"I foresee a lot of traveling, crossing of state lines to get the medical attention people may want or need. I see an increase in deaths, for women who aren't able to easily cross those state lines for the medical help they need," she said. "The back-alley abortions are going to make a comeback, that's just what's going to happen."

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Beila Kraus of Chappaqua, New York

Though still a teenager and unable to vote, Kraus convinced her parents to let her take a bus to Washington to protest for several days while staying with fellow members of the activist group Rise Up 4 Abortion Rights.

Kraus, 15, said she's deeply frustrated by her own inability to cast a vote on the issue, and fears it could take years of struggle to reverse a rollback of Roe v. Wade's abortion protections.

"Being outside the Supreme Court, for me it's representation as the people making this decision are in there. It's this image of the power that these justices hold," she said.

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Alexandra McPhee of Arlington, Virginia

McPhee came to the Supreme Court with the anti-abortion advocacy group Concerned Women for America, where she is director of government relations.

"I want to be out here to show that this is an issue that I care about that I believe is helpful for all women, all families, to have more protections for life than there are now. And this decision will make that possible," said McPhee, 29.

Christal Surowicz of Cheverly, Maryland

Surowicz, 58, wore a black judge's robe covered with red plastic coat hangers.

"I am a strong supporter of women's rights and I feel like abortion is a necessary evil. We don't think let's go out and promote abortion, but we feel it needs to be available," she said. "The ramifications for it not being available are just too much. Part of it is controlling women but it also impacts women's health."

An audiologist, Surowicz acknowledged that defenders of abortion rights face an uphill battle. "We need to elect more officials who will be supportive."

## **Title IX: Strides for women of color in sports lag under law**

By ANNIE MA and CLIFF BRUNT Associated Press

Once Tina Sloan Green took over the lacrosse program at Temple University in the years after the passage of Title IX, the landmark gender-equity law, she never stopped thinking about the girls who weren't playing.

At practices during the 1970s, Sloan Green, the first Black woman to coach a college lacrosse team, noticed neighborhood kids peering through the fences at her players as guards kept them out. And when high school athletes were welcomed on the university's fields for training camps, most were white and from predominantly white suburban schools.

"That was very, very disturbing to me to see that," she said. "And that was — that was the reality that I had to face ... Title IX was a complete help for women in sports but in my mind, there were still disparities."

For girls of color, some women's college sports, such as lacrosse, equestrian, rowing or even softball, are ones they are unlikely to be exposed to in grade school. The reasons vary, though availability and costs can be major challenges for youth programs.

Thursday is the 50th anniversary of Title IX and in the years since the landmark law was passed, profound strides have been made in women and girls' participation in sports. Women now make up 44% of all NCAA athletes, compared to just 15% in 1971, according to the Women's Sports Foundation. Nearly 3.5 million high school girls play sports, compared to less than 300,000 in 1972.

For Black women and other women of color in sports, those gains have not been equally shared, reflecting the limitations of a policy that only addresses equity on the basis of sex and gender.

"We say very often that sport is a microcosm of society," said Karen Issokson-Silver, vice president of research and education at the Women's Sports Foundation. "Whenever systemic racism occurs in the broader society, in addition to gender discrimination, it's reflected in the sport ecosystem."

An early barrier to pursuing athletic opportunities in college and beyond is as simple as exposure to the sport.

Natasha Watley, a Black woman who is a two-time Olympic medalist in softball, started playing when she was 5. She did not have a Black teammate until she was a teenager and said there were so few girls of color who played with her and went on to college teams that she could count them on one hand.

After the UCLA graduate returned from the 2008 Olympics, Watley recalled speaking to young girls about her experience.

"This one young girl I'll never forget — a young little African American girl, she raises her hand and she's like, 'Ms. Natasha, your story sounds amazing, but what is softball?'" Watley said. "She had no idea what softball was."

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, median household income in 2020 for white, non-Hispanic families was \$74,912 compared to \$55,321 for Hispanic families and \$45,870 for Black families. Factors like income contribute to a racial clustering phenomenon where women of color are overrepresented in sports like track and field that have a lower entry cost, said Courtney L. Flowers, associate professor of sport management at Texas Southern University.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 64 of 72

"Even middle class families aren't sending their kids to schools that have access to an equestrian team," she said. "We typically are pushing African American women to women's basketball and track and field because of those reasons."

The inequities carry over into leadership roles. While 34% of head coaches for women's teams are white women, just 7% are women of color. Among athletic directors, just 4% are women of color compared to 20% for white women.

Candice Storey Lee, the first Black woman to be athletic director at Vanderbilt University, said that a single policy like Title IX, without subsequent action, could not be expected to bring equity to the field.

"We know a law alone does not change behavior," she said. "You have to have people who are committed at every level to get the outcome you want. And so I wouldn't blame Title IX for that, but I would say we still have work to do in our own communities to ensure that there is access for everyone."

Those disparities in leadership and college athletic opportunities begin early in life, said Neena Chaudhry, general counsel and senior advisor for education at the National Women's Law Center. A study published by the center found that 40% of the country's public high schools are highly segregated, serving either 90% students of color or 90% white students.

At schools that predominantly serve students of color, there are far fewer opportunities to play sports, and disparities between boys and girls are more stark — 40% of high schools that predominantly serve students of color have large opportunity gaps for girls in sports, compared with 16 % of heavily white schools. The opportunity gap is the difference between the percentage of spots on teams allocated to girls and the percentage of students who are girls, with differences of more than 10 points considered a large opportunity gap.

Research shows that in addition to physical health, girls who play sports are more likely to have higher levels of self-esteem, stronger collaborative skills, and greater academic achievement. But disparate access to athletics, through both community centers and the rising cost of youth sports, makes schools a key place to engage young girls of color in athletics, Chaudhry said.

"All students are required to go to school, and that's really a place to provide opportunities that some students wouldn't otherwise get," she said. "Not everybody can afford to pay for sports outside of school ... It's really important to provide those opportunities through school equally. It's both important and it's the law."

Sloan Green, who in 1992 co-founded the Black Women in Sport Foundation, said that expanding access to young girls of color, especially between pre-kindergarten and eighth grade, is crucial. At Temple, she expanded her camps and recruiting to communities that had been overlooked, including the children in the neighborhood. Having role models that reflect girls of color and widely sharing their successes is also critical to getting girls onto the playing field, Sloan Green said.

In Southern California, Watley started the Natasha Watley Foundation to introduce girls in marginalized communities to softball, which serves about 1,000 girls each year. Beyond the cost, the main concern she hears from parents is that they aren't sure the sport would welcome their daughters. Watley said she wanted young girls to know that the sport could be a place for them to thrive, in college and beyond.

"More than anything, I wanted to make sure that girls were getting introduced to the game, that they understood that the game was for them, that it was a place for them," she said. "There are opportunities far beyond their imagination that this game can take them."

## Fishing feud at end of the world split US and UK over Russia

By JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — It's one of the world's highest-fetching wild-caught fish, sold for \$32 a pound at Whole Foods and served up as meaty fillets on the menus of upscale eateries across the U.S.

But Russia's obstruction of longstanding conservation efforts, resulting in a unilateral rejection of catch limits for the Chilean sea bass in a protected region near Antarctica, has triggered a fish fight at the bottom of the world, one dividing longtime allies, the U.S. and U.K. governments.



# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 65 of 72

The diplomatic feud, which has not been previously reported, intensified after the U.K. quietly issued licenses this spring to fish for the sea bass off the coast of South Georgia, a remote, uninhabited U.K.-controlled island some 1,400 kilometers east of the Falkland Islands.

As a result, for the first time since governments banded together 40 years ago to protect marine life near the South Pole, deep-sea fishing for the pointy-toothed fish is proceeding this season without any catch limit from the 26-member Commission on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources or CCAMLR.

The move essentially transformed overnight one of the world's best-managed fisheries into a France-sized stretch of outlaw ocean — at least in the eyes of U.S. officials threatening to bar U.K. imports from the area.

"In a world beset by conflict, the U.K. is playing a risky game," said Will McCallum, head of oceans at Greenpeace U.K. "The history of Antarctic protection is one of peaceful cooperation for the common good of humanity. Russia's consistent willingness to abuse the process cannot excuse unilateral action by other Members. We trust that countries who have previously imported South Georgia toothfish will not accept the catch of what is now an unregulated fishery."

For decades, the fishery near South Georgia was a poster child for international fisheries cooperation, one that brought together sometimes adversarial powers like Russia, China and the U.S. to protect the chilly, crystal blue southern ocean from the sort of fishing free-for-all seen on the high seas.

Last year, as tensions with the West were rising over Ukraine, Russia took the unprecedented step of rejecting the toothfish catch limits proposed by the Antarctic commission's scientists. The move was tantamount to a unilateral veto because of rules, common to many international fisheries pacts, that require all decisions to be made by unanimous agreement.

But critics say the U.K.'s response — issuing licenses without a CCAMLR-approved catch limit — is unlawful under the commission's rules and weakens the Antarctica Treaty established during the Cold War that set aside the continent as a scientific preserve. U.S. officials have also privately told their U.K. counterparts that they would likely bar imports of any toothfish caught near South Georgia, according to correspondence between U.S. fisheries managers and members of Congress seen by The Associated Press.

The fight underscores how Russia's attempts to undermine the West have extended to even obscure forums normally removed from geopolitical tussles. It also risks reviving Britain's tensions with Argentina, which invaded South Georgia in 1982 as part of its war with the U.K. over the Falkland Islands.

But the outcome couldn't be more consequential: With fish stocks across the globe declining due to overfishing, consumers are demanding greater transparency about where the filets on their plates are sourced. Central to that effort is rules-based international fisheries management on the open ocean and environmentally sensitive areas like the polar regions.

"It sets a dangerous precedent," said Evan Bloom, who for 15 years, until his retirement from the State Department in 2020, led the U.S. delegation to the CCAMLR.

"What the Russians did clearly violates the spirit of science-based fisheries management," added Bloom, who is now an expert on polar issues at the Wilson Center in Washington. "But that doesn't necessarily mean that the U.K. can act unilaterally."

Three of the four vessels authorized by the U.K. to fish near South Georgia starting May 1 belong to Argos Froyanes, a British-Norwegian company that pioneered techniques credited with dramatically reducing seabird mortality in the south Atlantic.

One of its customers is New York-based Mark Foods, the largest U.S. supplier of sea bass certified by the Marine Stewardship Council, the industry's gold standard for sustainability.

CEO Barry Markman declined an interview request but said his company would not import any product deemed illegal by U.S. authorities.

"We have been working collaboratively with U.S. officials to resolve this situation in a favorable manner," he wrote in an e-mail.

Chilean seabass — the commercial name of Patagonia toothfish — from South Georgia is sold at both

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 66 of 72

Whole Foods and Orlando-based Darden Restaurants, which operates the fine-dining chains Eddie V's and The Capital Grille. Neither company responded to a request for comment.

An official from the government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, which issued the licenses in coordination with the U.K. foreign office, said it took action so as not to give in to obstructionist tactics by Russia that it doesn't expect will end anytime soon.

The fishery is one of the best managed in the world, with catch limits set by South Georgia below even the quota recommended by the Antarctic commission. In addition, all vessels authorized to fish near the island have observers and tamper-proof electronic monitoring equipment on board.

Officials say that closing the fishery would've taken valuable resources away from research and monitoring because about 70% of the island chain's budget comes from the sale of licenses.

They point out that the population of toothfish — a bottom-dwelling species capable of living up to 50 years — almost collapsed in the days before CCAMLR due to poachers, many from the former Soviet Union, drawn to the high prices paid for the fish, which can weigh over 200 pounds. However, thanks in part to the multinational efforts of the commission, the species has bounced back.

But U.S. officials have taken a dim view of the U.K.'s actions.

Janet Coit, a senior official at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, wrote in an April 25 letter obtained by the AP that in the absence of approved protections, any fishing near South Georgia would be of "questionable legality" and have "serious implications" for the Antarctic commission.

She also stated that any shipments of fish harvested in what's known as subarea 48.3 would likely be barred from entering the U.S., a preliminary view she said was shared with the U.K. government and U.S. importers to guide their decision-making.

"We recognize that fish from this subarea has represented a substantial percentage of toothfish imports," according to the letter, which was sent to a bipartisan group of seven House members concerned about the impact of a ban on the seafood industry. "However, we are bound by our obligations under the CAMLR Convention, applicable conservation measures in force, and relevant U.S. law."

The financial hit for the seafood industry from any import ban could be significant.

Every year, the U.S. imports around 3 million pounds of MSC-certified toothfish from South Georgia, worth about \$50 million. The loss of those imports can't be easily substituted because the four other MSC-certified toothfish fisheries in the CCAMLR convention area — run by Australia, France and the Falkland Islands — are fishing at or near capacity. Overall, about 15% of the more than 12,000 metric tons of toothfish caught in the CCAMLR convention area comes from South Georgia.

Under U.S. law, fishing conducted in a way that disregards conservation measures, such as catch limits, adopted by international fishery organizations to which the U.S. is a party, is considered illegal. Vessels that engage in such activity can be denied access to U.S. ports and blacklisted within the Antarctic commission framework.

Meanwhile, the U.K. has shown no sign of backing down. Even with no conservation measure in place, it insists it will continue to operate the fishery in the conservative way it always has, basing its decisions on the quota and other guidelines proposed by commission scientists.

"Russia egregiously blocked the agreed catch limits citing spurious scientific concerns not recognized by any other member of the CCAMLR," the U.K.'s foreign office said in a statement. "The UK will continue to operate the toothfish fishery within the framework agreed by all CCAMLR Members."

## 'Heightened alert': Abortion providers brace for ruling

By SARA BURNETT Associated Press

In her first week on the job at a Philadelphia abortion clinic, Amanda Kifferly was taught how to search for bombs. About a year later, protesters blocked the entrances and exits of the The Women's Centers, at one point pulling Kifferly into something resembling a mosh pit, where they surrounded her and shoved her around.

And on the night of last winter's arguments before the U.S. Supreme Court in a case that could end the

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 67 of 72

nationwide right to abortion, people gathered outside a clinic in New Jersey with lawn chairs, a cooler and a flaming torch — a sight that brought to mind lynchings and other horrors of the country's racist past, says Kifferly, who now serves as vice president for abortion access.

Such scenes have become familiar for providers and patients across the country over the decades since the landmark 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling legalizing abortion. At times the violence has been far more severe, including bombings, arson and murders — from the 1993 killing of Dr. David Gunn outside a Florida abortion clinic to the 2015 fatal shooting of three people inside a Colorado Planned Parenthood.

Now providers and some in law enforcement worry what will come next. They're preparing for an increase in violence once the Supreme Court rules, saying there has historically been a spike when the issue of abortion gets widespread public attention, such as after a state approves new restrictions. If the decision ends *Roe v. Wade* — as a leaked draft opinion indicates may happen — they also anticipate protests, harassment and other violence to be more concentrated and intensify in states where abortion remains legal.

"We know from experience, it's not like the people protesting clinics in banned states just pack up and go home," said Melissa Fowler, chief program officer for the National Abortion Federation.

The group and the hundreds of abortion clinics it represents have been on "heightened alert" since the opinion leaked, Fowler said. The organization has staff who specialize in security on call around the clock. They go out to clinics to do drills with employees and volunteers on scenarios such as bomb threats or active shooters and advise them on things like where to position security cameras. They also conduct safety assessments at the homes of physicians, monitor online threats and consult with local law enforcement.

In some places, local police are working with clinics to try to tamp down the potential for violence. In Jacksonville, Florida, the sheriff's office said last month they would station an officer outside the clinic, and police in Little Rock, Arkansas, installed a camera atop a crane near an abortion clinic that has been the site of protests, hoping to deter bad actors.

Immediately following the leak and for days afterward, police in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, initiated extra patrols around The Women's Center location, Kifferly said.

But the relationship between clinics and local police isn't always a positive one, and clinics must weigh whether having a heavy police presence will frighten patients, Fowler said. In Kifferly's experience, how well clinics and police departments work together varies by city and state. She recalled asking an officer for help as she was assaulted outside the Philadelphia clinic, and the officer responding that she should "call 911."

NAF, which collects monthly data from its over 500 members on harassment and violence, reported a spike in incidents in 2020, the most recent year for which the group has published data. The number of death threats or threats of harm and of assault and battery both increased by more than double, and providers reported more than 24,000 incidents of hate email or internet harassment.

Abortion providers reported an uptick after Donald Trump became president, and "extremists felt like it was OK for them not to be in the shadows," Fowler said. The coronavirus pandemic seemed to exacerbate things, Kifferly said, and in all four states where The Women's Centers operates — New Jersey, Connecticut, Georgia and Pennsylvania — "we were besieged by protesters" angry that abortion clinics were open while their churches or businesses were closed.

Abortion opponents also have been targets of violence, and say they've also seen an increase in incidents since the draft opinion leaked, though the FBI in a 2020 memo described the incidents as historically "rare."

Shortly after the draft opinion became public, the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Intelligence and Analysis said the draft had made extremist violence — by people on either side of the issue — more likely.

Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America said there were more than 40 incidents of violence, intimidation and vandalism at pregnancy centers and churches in recent weeks.

In early June, a man with a gun, knife, zip ties and other items was arrested near Justice Brett Kavanaugh's home in the middle of the night. He told police he wanted to kill the justice because he was upset about the draft opinion as well as the fatal mass shooting at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 68 of 72

The court is expected to issue its ruling in the coming days or weeks.

As for what might occur next for abortion providers, much focus has been on how to provide care to people seeking it, should abortion be banned in more states. But Fowler said another concern is also front of mind: "We also need to focus on safety."

## US importing baby formula from Mexico to ease shortage

By ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration announced Wednesday that it is providing logistical support to import the equivalent of about 16 million 8-ounce baby formula bottles from Mexico starting this weekend, as part of its efforts to ease nationwide supply shortages caused by the closure of the largest U.S. manufacturing plant.

The Department of Health and Human Services is expediting the travel of trucks that will drive about 1 million pounds of Gerber Good Start Gentle infant formula from a Nestlé plant to U.S. retailers, the White House said, nearly doubling the amount imported to the U.S. to date. Cargo flights from Europe and Australia already have brought baby formula into the U.S., including two new rounds of air shipments that begin this weekend.

The White House has been working to make supply more available as it has faced pressure from parents over supply issues after regulators in February shuttered a Michigan plant run by Abbott that is the largest domestic manufacturer of baby formula over safety concerns. The plant reopened on June 4 after the company committed to additional sanitizing and safety protocols, but shuttered again more than a week ago after severe weather caused damage to the plant.

The company said it needs time to assess damage and re-sanitize the factory after severe thunderstorms and heavy rains swept through southwestern Michigan on June 13.

Last month, the Food and Drug Administration moved to ease federal import regulations to allow baby formula to be shipped to the U.S., and Biden authorized the use of the Defense Production Act to provide federal support to move formula from overseas into the U.S.

Wednesday's announcement also includes air shipments of 1.65 million 8-ounce bottle equivalents of Nestlé NAN Supremepro 2 infant formula from Germany to Texas this weekend, and 5.5 million 8-ounce bottle equivalents of Bubs infant formula in two shipments on June 26 and July 5.

The White House says that by June 26, its efforts, dubbed "Operation Fly Formula," will have brought 32 flights and almost 19 million 8-ounce bottle equivalents of infant formula into the U.S.

## Cement carbon dioxide emissions quietly double in 20 years

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Heat trapping carbon dioxide emissions from making cement, a less talked about but major source of carbon pollution, have doubled in the last 20 years, new global data shows.

In 2021, worldwide emissions from making cement for buildings, roads and other infrastructure hit nearly 2.9 billion tons (2.6 billion metric tons) of carbon dioxide, which is more than 7% of the global carbon emissions, according to emissions scientist Robbie Andrew of Norway's CICERO Center for International Climate Research and the Global Carbon Project. Twenty years ago, in 2002, cement emissions were some 1.4 billion tons (1.2 billion metric tons) of carbon dioxide.

Driven by China, global cement emissions globally have more than tripled since 1992, recently growing at a rate of 2.6% a year. It's not just that more cement is being made and used. At a time when all industries are supposed to be cleaning up their processes, cement has actually been going in the opposite direction. The carbon intensity of cement — how much pollution is emitted per ton — has increased 9.3% from 2015 to 2020, primarily because of China, according to the International Energy Agency.

"Cement emissions have grown faster than most other carbon sources," said Stanford University climate scientist Rob Jackson, who leads Global Carbon Project, a group of scientists that track worldwide climate

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 69 of 72

pollution and publish their work in peer reviewed journals. "Cement emissions were also unusual in that they never dropped during COVID. They didn't grow as much, but they never declined the way oil, gas and coal did. Honestly, I think it's because the Chinese economy never really shut down completely."

Cement is unusual compared to other major materials, such as steel, because not only does it require a lot of heat to make, which causes emissions, but the chemical process of making cement itself produces a lot of carbon dioxide, the major human-caused long-term heat-trapping gas.

The recipe for cement requires lots of a key ingredient called clinker, the crumbly binding agent in the entire mixture. Clinker is made when limestone, calcium carbonate, is taken out of the ground and heated to 2700 to 2800 degrees (1480 to 1540 degrees Celsius) to turn it into calcium oxide. But that process strips carbon dioxide out of the limestone and it goes into the air, Andrew said.

Rick Bohan, senior vice president for sustainability at the industry group Portland Cement Association, said, "in the U.S., 60% of our CO2 is a chemical fact of life... The reality is concrete is a universal building material. There is no single construction project that doesn't use some amount of concrete in it."

Cement, which is the key ingredient in concrete, is in buildings, roads and bridges.

"Each person on the planet is consuming on average more than a kilogram (2.2 pounds) of cement per day," said University of California Earth systems scientist Steve Davis. "Obviously, you're not going to, you know, Home Depot and buying a sack of cement every day. But on your behalf, the roads and buildings and bridges out there are using more than a kilogram. And that's kind of mind boggling to me."

Even though there are greener ways to make cement, cutting its emissions dramatically is so difficult and requires such a massive change in infrastructure and the way of doing business, the International Energy Agency doesn't envision the cement industry getting to zero carbon emissions by 2050. Instead there will still be emissions from cement, steel and aviation that need to be balanced out with negative emissions elsewhere, said IEA researchers Tiffany Voss and Peter Levi.

"These are hard, hard to cut," Andrew said.

But industry's Bohan said his group is certain that they can get to net zero carbon emissions by 2050, if it gets help from governments and especially cement users to accept and use green cement properly. One of several ways to make greener cement is to mix in fly ash, which is a waste product from burning coal, in place of some of the clinker and he said there's more than enough fly ash available even with coal use reductions.

IEA's Voss said the switch to green cement "is not there yet" because of technology, infrastructure and other concerns. But many in and outside the industry are working on the problem.

China is key because it produced more than half of the world's cement emissions in 2021, with India a distant second at about 9%, Andrew's data shows. The United States spewed 2.5% of the emissions from cement, ranking fifth behind Vietnam and Turkey.

"China is a huge country and its development ramped up," Andrew said. "It's driven everything."

China is not just making and using more cement, but the carbon intensity has been going up a lot lately, IEA's Voss said. That's because earlier in its development, China was using cheaper, weaker low-clinker cement and buildings and bridges were collapsing, so now the Chinese government is mandating stronger cement, Norway's Andrew said.

That's a reasonable conservatism that slows efforts at making greener cement, Davis said. People are not eager to try untested cement recipes because "these are the structural materials of our society," he said.

For example, Portland limestone cement has 10% less emissions but customers are so worried about strength they often say they are only willing to use it if they use 10% more, industry's Bohan said.

Different cement uses have specific needs, such as strength versus longevity but users often just want the strongest and most durable when they don't need it and this causes unnecessary emissions, Bohan said.

And while people talk about curtailing flying, global aviation emissions are less than half of that coming from concrete, according to Global Carbon Project. There's "flight shaming" among scientists and activists, but no building shaming, Davis said.

Cement as it ages does suck some carbon dioxide out of the air, just like trees do, in small measurable,

significant amounts, Jackson said.

"Our primary focus needs to be on fossil fuel use because that's where most emissions come from," Stanford's Jackson said. "I don't think cement is on most policymakers' radar."

Perhaps not on most, but it is on some. California, Colorado, New Jersey and New York have all passed legislation on cleaner concrete and the trend is growing.

## Climate change a factor in 'unprecedented' South Asia floods

By ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL and AL-EMRUN GARJON Associated Press

SYLHET, Bangladesh (AP) — Scientists say climate change is a factor behind the erratic and early rains that triggered unprecedented floods in Bangladesh and northeastern India, killing dozens and making lives miserable for millions of others.

Although the region is no stranger to flooding, it typically takes place later in the year when monsoon rains are well underway.

This year's torrential rainfall lashed the area as early as March. It may take much longer to determine the extent to which climate change played a role in the floods, but scientists say that it has made the monsoon — a seasonable change in weather usually associated with strong rains — more variable over the past decades. This means that much of the rain expected to fall in a year is arriving in a space of weeks.

The northeastern Indian state of Meghalaya received nearly three times its average June rainfall in just the first three weeks of the month, and neighboring Assam received twice its monthly average in the same period. Several rivers, including one of Asia's largest, flow downstream from the two states into the Bay of Bengal in low-lying Bangladesh, a densely populated delta nation.

With more rainfall predicted over the next five days, Bangladesh's Flood Forecast and Warning Centre warned Tuesday that water levels would remain dangerously high in the country's northern regions.

The pattern of monsoons, vital for the agrarian economies of India and Bangladesh, has been shifting since the 1950s, with longer dry spells interspersed with heavy rain, said Roxy Matthew Koll, a climate scientist at the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology in Pune, adding that extreme rainfall events were also projected to increase.

Until now, floods in northeastern Bangladesh were rare while Assam state, famed for its tea cultivation, usually coped with floods later in the year during the usual monsoon season. The sheer volume of early rain this year that lashed the region in just a few weeks makes the current floods an "unprecedented" situation, said Anjal Prakash, a research director at India's Bharti Institute of Public Policy, who has contributed to U.N.-sponsored study on global warming.

"This is something that we have never heard of and never seen," he said.

Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina gave a similarly grim assessment Wednesday.

"We haven't faced a crisis like this for a long time. Infrastructure must be constructed to cope with such disasters," she told a news conference in Dhaka. "The water coming from Meghalaya and Assam has affected the Sylhet region" in northeastern Bangladesh, she said, adding that there is no quick respite for the country.

Hasina said that floodwaters would recede soon from the northeast, but they would likely hit the country's southern region soon on the way to the Bay of Bengal.

"We should prepare to face it," she said. "We live in a region where flooding happens quite often, which we have to bear in mind. We must prepare for that."

A total of 42 people have died in Bangladesh since May 17 while Indian authorities reported that flood deaths have risen to 78 in Assam state, with 17 others killed in landslides.

Hundreds of thousands are displaced and millions in the region have been forced to scramble to make-shift evacuation centers.

Bangladesh, home to about 160 million, has historically contributed a fraction of the world's emissions. Meanwhile, a decade-old deal for rich nations, who have contributed more to global emissions, to give \$100 billion to poorer nations every year to adapt to climate change and switch to cleaner fuels hasn't

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 71 of 72

been fulfilled. And the money that is provided is spread too thin.

That means that countries like Bangladesh — whose GDP has risen from \$6.2 billion in 1972 to \$305 billion in 2019 — have to redirect funds to combat climate change, instead of spending it on policies aimed at lifting millions from poverty.

“This is a problem which is created by the global industrialized north. And we are paying the price for it because they have ignored their responsibility,” Prakash said.

In the hardest-hit city of Sylhet, shop owner Mohammad Rashed Ahamed has returned home with his families to see what can be salvaged from floods. Wading through knee-deep water, he said that he was worried about waters rising again. “The weather is changing ... there can be another disaster, at any time.”

He is one of about 3.5 million Bangladeshis who face the same predicament each year when rivers flood, according to a 2015 analysis by the World Bank Institute. Bangladesh is considered one of the most vulnerable to climate change and the poor are disproportionately impacted.

Parul Akhter, a poultry farmer, held on to her disabled son to save him from the floodwaters in Sylhet. But she lost her only income — her chickens — and all other belongings.

“The chicken farm was the only way for me to live. I have no other means to earn,” she said.

Mohammad Arfanuzzaman, a climate change expert at the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, said that catastrophic floods like the one this year could have wide-ranging impacts, from farmers losing their crops and being trapped in a cycle of debt to children not being able to go to school and at increased risk to disease.

“Poor people are suffering a lot from the ongoing flooding,” he said.

## Today in History: June 23, Nasser elected Egypt's president

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, June 23, the 174th day of 2022. There are 191 days left in the year.

Today's Highlights in History:

On June 23, 1888, abolitionist Frederick Douglass received one vote from the Kentucky delegation at the Republican convention in Chicago, effectively making him the first Black candidate to have his name placed in nomination for U.S. president. (The nomination went to Benjamin Harrison.)

On this date:

In 1860, a congressional resolution authorized creation of the United States Government Printing Office, which opened the following year.

In 1931, aviators Wiley Post and Harold Gatty took off from New York on a round-the-world flight that lasted eight days and 15 hours.

In 1947, the Senate joined the House in overriding President Harry S. Truman's veto of the Taft-Hartley Act, designed to limit the power of organized labor.

In 1956, Gamal Abdel Nasser was elected president of Egypt.

In 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson, Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin (ah-LEK'-say koh-SEE'-gihn) opened a three-day summit at Glassboro State College in New Jersey.

In 1969, Warren E. Burger was sworn in as chief justice of the United States by the man he was succeeding, Earl Warren.

In 1972, President Richard Nixon signed Title IX barring discrimination on the basis of sex for “any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.” (On the same day, Nixon and White House chief of staff H.R. Haldeman discussed using the CIA to obstruct the FBI's Watergate investigation. Revelation of the tape recording of this conversation sparked Nixon's resignation in 1974.)

In 1985, all 329 people aboard an Air India Boeing 747 were killed when the plane crashed into the Atlantic Ocean near Ireland because of a bomb authorities believe was planted by Sikh separatists.

In 1994, the movie “Forrest Gump,” starring Tom Hanks as a simple yet kindhearted soul and his serendipitous brushes with greatness, was released by Paramount Pictures.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, June 23, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 351 ~ 72 of 72

In 1995, Dr. Jonas Salk, the medical pioneer who developed the first vaccine to halt the crippling rampage of polio, died in La Jolla (HOY'-ah), California, at age 80.

In 2016, Britain voted to leave the European Union after a bitterly divisive referendum campaign, toppling Prime Minister David Cameron, who had led the campaign to keep Britain in the EU.

In 2020, the Louisville police department fired an officer involved in the fatal shooting of Breonna Taylor more than three months earlier, saying Brett Hankison had shown "extreme indifference to the value of human life" when he fired ten rounds into Taylor's apartment. (A second officer was also fired; Hankison was found not guilty on charges that he endangered neighbors.)

Ten years ago: Syria and Turkey desperately sought to ease tensions following an incident in which Syria shot down a Turkish reconnaissance plane, saying the plane had entered its airspace. Ashton Eaton broke the world record in the decathlon, finishing with 9,039 points at the U.S. Olympic trials in Eugene, Oregon. (Eaton later surpassed his own record with 9,045 points at the 2015 Beijing world championships.)

Five years ago: President Donald Trump signed a bill making it easier for the Department of Veterans Affairs to fire employees, part of a push to overhaul an agency struggling to serve millions of military vets. California Gov. Jerry Brown blocked parole for Charles Manson follower and convicted killer Bruce Davis.

One year ago: A 49-year-old Indiana grandmother became the first person to be sentenced in the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol; Anna Morgan Lloyd was sentenced to probation and community service and had to pay \$500 in restitution after pleading guilty to a single misdemeanor charge. A member of the Oath Keepers extremist group, Graydon Young, pleaded guilty in a conspiracy case stemming from the Jan. 6 attack, and agreed to cooperate with prosecutors. After 13 years of near silence in the conservatorship that controlled her life and money, pop star Britney Spears told a judge in Los Angeles that the conservatorship controlled by her father and others had made her feel demoralized and enslaved, and that it should come to an end. (The judge would agree to that request in November 2021.)

Today's Birthdays: Singer Diana Trask is 82. Actor Ted Shackelford is 76. Actor Bryan Brown is 75. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas is 74. Actor Jim Metzler is 71. "American Idol" ex-judge Randy Jackson is 66. Actor Frances McDormand is 65. Rock musician Steve Shelley (Sonic Youth) is 60. Writer-director Joss Whedon is 58. R&B singer Chico DeBarge is 52. Actor Selma Blair is 50. Actor Joel Edgerton is 48. Rock singer KT Tunstall is 47. Actor Emmanuelle Vaugier is 46. Singer-songwriter Jason Mraz is 45. Football Hall of Famer LaDainian Tomlinson is 43. Actor Melissa Rauch is 42. Rock singer Duffy is 38. Country singer Katie Armiger is 31.