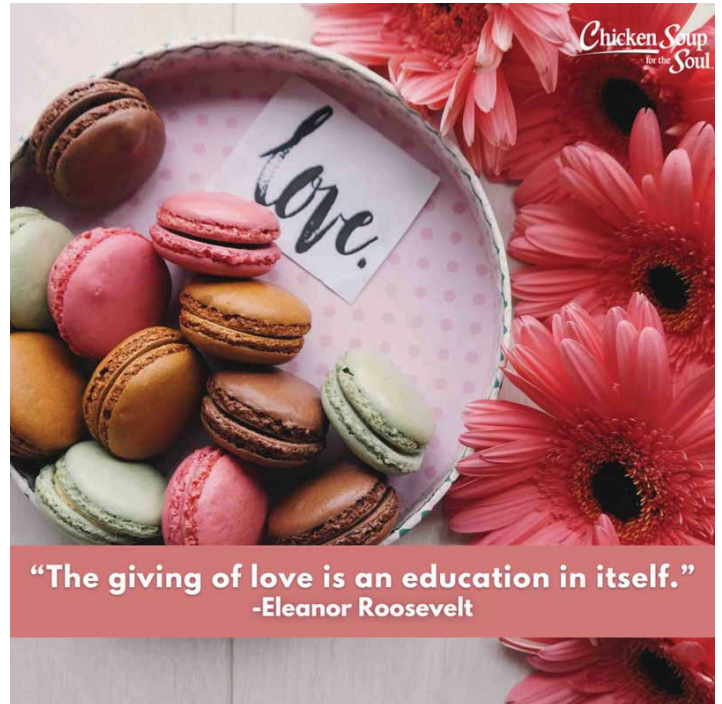


Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 1 of 82

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [1- Help Wanted](#)
- [2- SoDak16 Pairings](#)
- [3- We the People column: "Affirmative Action in Universities: Has it a Future?"](#)
- [5- Volleyball team advances to SoDak16](#)
- [6- SD News Watch: Tension between governor and GOP-led Legislature stalls \\$200 million workforce housing program](#)
- [10- Students asked to lead sportsmanship initiative](#)
- [11- Recruiting charge leads to work on clarifying SDHSAA policies](#)
- [12- Dog License Ad](#)
- [13- SD Searchlight: Public access fight draws state into court with townships](#)
- [17- No. 11 Turnquist Leads Wolves in Opening Duels from Oklahoma](#)
- [19- South Dakota Average Gas Prices](#)
- [20- Drought Monitor](#)
- [21- Weather Pages](#)
- [25- Daily Devotional](#)
- [26- 2022 Community Events](#)
- [27- Subscription Form](#)
- [28- News from the Associated Press](#)



Fall back

AP

Daylight saving ends at 2 a.m. Sunday. Before bed on Saturday, set your clocks back one hour.



SATURDAY CLEANER NEEDED IN FERNEY, SD, 830 am to 130 pm, \$16 an hour. Must be dependable and be willing to work around customers coming into the family owned business. Please call Stephanie at 605-381-1758. (1102.1109)

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 Community Calendar

Saturday, Nov. 5

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Sunday, Nov. 6

Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:45 a.m.

St. John's worship, 9 a.m.; Zion Lutheran worship, 11 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.; Choir, 7 p.m.

UMC: Conde Worship with communion, 8:30 a.m.; coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship with communion, 10:30 a.m.; Sunday School after children's sermon during worship.

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



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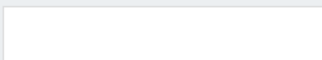
Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 2 of 82

SoDak16 Pairings

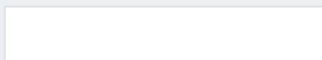
Class A - SoDak 16

#1 - Plankinton

 1 Wagner	30-3	11/8 7:00 PM CT
 16 Winner	12-19	



STATE QUALIFIER





STATE QUALIFIER

#5 - Madison High School Gym

 5 Sioux Falls Christian	29-5	11/8 6:00 PM CT
 12 Redfield	19-12	

#2 - James Valley Christian School

 2 Miller	31-2	11/8 5:30 PM CT
 15 Groton Area	14-14	





STATE QUALIFIER



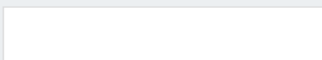
STATE QUALIFIER

#6 - Centerville School

 6 Dakota Valley	25-7	11/8 7:00 PM CT
 11 Baltic	21-5	

#3 - Corn Palace

 3 Elkton-Lake Be...	29-3	11/8 6:00 PM CT
 14 Lakota Tech	23-9	



STATE QUALIFIER



STATE QUALIFIER

#7 - Harding County School Gymnasi...

 7 Belle Fourche	31-6	11/8 6:00 PM MT
 10 Mobridge-Pollo...	26-6	

#4 - Stanley County High School

 4 Rapid City Christian	29-6	11/8 5:00 PM CT
 13 Elk Point-Jeffer...	23-9	




STATE QUALIFIER



STATE QUALIFIER

#8 - McCook Central School District

 8 Hamlin	26-4	11/8 7:00 PM CT
 9 Platte-Geddes	26-7	

Seed Point Averages

#1 Wagner 45.452 - #2 Miller 45.419 - #3 Elkton-Lake Benton 45.300 - #4 Rapid City Christian 45.000 - #5 Sioux Falls Christian 44.781 - #6 Dakota Valley 44.667 - #7 Belle Fourche 44.457 - #8 Hamlin 44.357 - #9 Platte-Geddes 43.935 - #10 Mobridge-Pollock 43.400 - #11 Baltic 43.208 - #12 Redfield 42.241 - #13 Elk Point-Jefferson 42.167 - #14 Lakota Tech 41.367 - #15 Groton Area 40.269 - #16 Winner 38.448

We the People

The South Dakota Humanities Council is making available a weekly column -- "We the People" -- that focuses on the U.S. Constitution. It is written by David Adler, who is president of The Alturas Institute, a non-profit organization created to promote the Constitution, gender equality, and civic education.



By David Adler

"Affirmative Action in Universities: Has it a Future?"

By David Adler

The controversial use by college admission committees of an applicant's race was the subject of a five-hour hearing before the U.S. Supreme Court this week in cases involving Harvard University and the University of North Carolina. The lengthy oral argument brought to a fever pitch the long-simmering question of the constitutionality of race-conscious programs—affirmative action policies—that were upheld in the Court's landmark ruling in 1978 in *Regents of University of California v. Bakke*.

The Supreme Court has repeatedly affirmed the use of race as a factor in the admissions practices of the nation's colleges and universities. But affirmative action programs have suffered declining public support in the four decades since the *Bakke* ruling was handed down. The Court, firmly controlled by six strong conservative Justices, seems poised to strike down the practice that, to many Americans, represents for historically disadvantaged minorities the most effective entryway to the nation's elite universities and the leadership opportunities that accrue to graduates of those schools.

Lost in the roiling waters of the debate on affirmative action has been understanding of what the Court actually ruled in *Bakke*.

The Court, in a 5-4 opinion written by Justice Lewis Powell, appointed to the High Bench by President Richard Nixon, rejected the use of "quotas," but found constitutional under the 14th Amendment's Equal Protection Clause the use of an applicant's race as one of several factors that admission committees may consider.

Justice Powell rejected the concept of a "benign" racial classification. He wrote that the burden of providing remedies for past racial discrimination could not constitutionally be placed on the shoulders of individuals who had no part in that discrimination.

But the Court approved the use of race as one factor—"race plus 1"—in a university's admissions policy for the purpose of promoting diversity in its student body. Race, Justice Powell explained, is relevant to diversity, principally because societal discrimination has made race relevant to a student's views and experiences. It is permissible, Powell noted, that a student's race may be a decisive factor in a particular case. How important a student's race may be in the admissions process may depend on "some attention to numbers," that is, the number of minority students already admitted.

The Court, in 2003, in *Grutter v. Bollinger*, in an opinion authored by Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, appointed by President Ronald Reagan, embraced the *Bakke* ruling. Indeed, the Court applied the "strict scrutiny" doctrine and approved the approach employed by the University of Michigan's law school. Justice O'Connor wrote that diversity represented a "compelling governmental interest," one that sought to "achieve that diversity which has the potential to enrich everyone's education and thus make a law school class stronger than the sum of its parts."

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 4 of 82

The educational benefits that flow from diversity, O'Connor emphasized, were indeed compelling. Several amicus curiae briefs, including those filed by American corporations, stressed the invaluable importance to their employees of experiencing a racially diverse student body.

This required, the Court observed, particular attention to the inclusion of students from groups that have been historically discriminated against, such as African Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans, who, without this commitment, might not be represented in the student body in meaningful numbers.

The goal of the school was to enroll a "critical mass" of students from these underrepresented groups in order, as Justice O'Connor wrote, to "ensure their ability to make unique contributions to the character of the Law School."

The future of affirmative action admissions programs in the nation's universities is unclear. Advocates of affirmative action programs, first introduced at the federal level by President Lyndon Johnson in the mid-1960s, have emphasized that the programs are but "temporary," that is, lasting long enough to overcome the historic practice of racial discrimination.

For her part, Justice O'Connor, in the 2003 Grutter opinion, stated: "We expect that 25 years from now, the use of racial preferences will no longer be necessary to further the interest approved today." Dissenters in that case—Justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas—along with Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Stephen Breyer, who joined the majority, agreed that race conscious admission programs must have a "logical end point." Justice Ginsburg rightly pointed out that nobody can anticipate the future with any certainty. Thus, the 25-year goal could be only a "hope" and not "firmly forecast."

For those who hope for a race-neutral nation—one in which law and society truly are color blind—the question, always, is one of the means to the end. Thus, we ask: if affirmative action in college admission policies is still necessary to overcome the impact of historic practices of race discrimination in higher education, should Supreme Court Justices worry about deadlines, that is, whether achievement of that goal requires 25 or 35 or 45 years? If that, indeed, is the goal, shouldn't the answer be: as long as it takes?

David Adler is president of The Alturas Institute, a non-profit organization created to promote the Constitution, gender equality and civic education. This column is made possible with the support of the South Dakota Humanities Council, South Dakota Newspaper Association and this newspaper.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 5 of 82



Groton Area Volleyball Team Advances to SoDak16

Groton Area upset top seeded Aberdeen Roncalli in the second game of the postseason round. They are pictured with the game ball from the final Region 1A match and will now play Miller on Tuesday in the SoDak16. That match is set 5:30 p.m. at James Valley Christian High School. Pictured in back, left to right, are Abby Fjeldheim, Head Coach Chelsea Hanson, Assistant Coach Jenna Strom, Marlee Tollifson, hallyn Foertsch, Jasmine Schinkel, Hollie Frost, Emma Kutter, Faith Traphagen, Rylee Dunker, Anna Fjeldheim, and Assistant Coach Carla Tracy; in front, left to right, are Elizabeth Flihs, Chesney Weber, Talli Wright, Laila Roberts, Aspen Johnson, Carly Guthmiller, Jaedyn Penning, Jerica Locke, Sydney Leicht, Lydia Meier and Tevan Hanson. (Photo by Brittany Frost)

Good Luck Lady Tiger Volleyball Team on Tuesday from these GDILIVE.COM Sponsors!

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WATCH THE MATCH ON TUESDAY, 5:30 P.M.,
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SODAK16 AT JAMES VALLEY CHRISTIAN

SoDak16



Listen to the awesome play-by-play commentary with Justin Hanson and Ryan Tracy!

Tension between governor and GOP-led Legislature stalls \$200 million workforce housing program

Bart Pfankuch

South Dakota News Watch

The sometimes strained relationship between Republican Gov. Kristi Noem and the GOP-led Legislature has led in part to delayed implementation of a \$200 million program aimed at building critical workforce housing in South Dakota.

In a series of emails sent to South Dakota News Watch, the Republican governor and a prominent GOP senator each blamed the other for the failure of the program to launch on time.

The loan and grant program that was supposed to begin disbursing funds for housing infrastructure in summer 2022 is on hold at least until the next legislative session in 2023 or possibly beyond that.

In an email to News Watch, Gov. Noem's office blamed the GOP leadership in the state Senate for refusing to work with her on the bill that authorized the spending, for changing her initial plan and instead concocting a "scheme" that put the program's goals in jeopardy.

"We are disappointed but not surprised" the program has stalled, the governor's email stated. "Rather than work with Governor Noem on this plan, Senate leadership preferred to draft their own scheme. Many legislators assured the Governor that this scheme would work, and she took them at their word and signed their bill. Unfortunately, we have now seen that this scheme did not work as Senate leadership stated it would, and the \$200 million is lying dormant."

News Watch shared the governor's statements with Sen. Lee Schoenbeck, R-Watertown, who is president pro tempore in the Senate. In a subsequent email to News Watch, Schoenbeck placed blame for the stalled funding program on Noem.

"There's nothing wrong with the law," Schoenbeck wrote. "To accommodate the Governor's complaints and so she will drop both of her threats to sue [the South Dakota Housing Development Authority], we have drafted a bill. If [the governor] dropped her threats, money could go out now."

Schoenbeck declined to respond to a follow-up email seeking clarification of his statements about threats or complaints by the governor.

The governor's office then denied that Noem used threats of any kind to derail the program.

"The Governor's concerns about this legislation have been laid out clearly and publicly in multiple letters to the Housing Authority and to the legislature," Noem wrote in an email to News Watch sent by her spokesman Tony Mangan. "The Board is independent from the Governor's oversight; therefore, Governor Noem has no legal authority over how the Board uses or does not use these dollars. The Governor has made no threats whatsoever and any allegation is false."



Despite numerous housing projects in the works in South Dakota, including this upscale apartment complex in Summerset, the state is thousands of homes short in trying to satisfy demand for workforce housing. Photo: Bart

Pfankuch, South Dakota News Watch



Lee Schoenbeck

Broton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 7 of 82

The squabbling between Noem and Senate leaders over the housing funds is not the first time the governor has sparred with legislative leaders from her own political party.

Earlier this year, she battled with conservative Republicans in the House of Representatives over which branch of government — the executive or legislative — should have control over disbursement of hundreds of millions of federal dollars the state received during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the session, some of Noem's key legislative proposals on abortion, critical race theory and COVID-19 vaccine exemptions were derailed by the GOP-led Legislature. In 2021, Noem openly criticized the Legislature for not supporting changes to a bill regarding transgendered players in youth sports. And Noem has publicly fought a war of words with Republican Speaker of the House Spencer Gosch, R-Glenham, who Noem said does not like her for some reason.

"I'm screwed either way, no matter what I say," the governor said at one point. She later added: "He's looking for a reason to blame me for everything."

Lost construction season

Delaying delivery of the \$200 million for a year or more is bad news for communities that are in great need of workforce housing, and for people trying to find a place to live in South Dakota, said Julie Johnson, an Aberdeen attorney who lobbies the Legislature on behalf of a number of mostly nonprofit housing agencies. The program would use \$150 million in state money and \$50 million in federal funds for loans and grants to developers who agree to build workforce housing in big cities and small towns across the state.

"We missed a whole construction season, and that's a big deal because you don't do a lot of infrastructure development in the winter," she said.

Johnson said her clients see major value in the program's ability to pay for infrastructure such as streets, water lines and sewers for a number of types of housing in South Dakota, ranging from workforce housing to senior housing to rehabilitation of existing older homes with aging or inadequate infrastructural components. A recent state report noted that South Dakota needs about 10,000 more homes due to growth, and added that a lack of housing is holding back businesses from expanding in the state. None of the money in the program was designated for construction of homes, only for infrastructure to expedite home construction.

"A little bit of this money goes a long way across South Dakota in helping various kinds of housing efforts right now," Johnson said.

The workforce housing problem exists across the state but is most acute in the state's largest city of Sioux Falls, according to Debra Owen, vice president of government relations for the Sioux Falls Chamber of Commerce.

According to data from the city, Sioux Falls is home to 36% of the state workforce, has seen about 23,000 new residents from 2015-2020, and has 43% of the open jobs in the state. Meanwhile, city officials estimate Sioux Falls will need 7,000 more housing units to accommodate growth before 2025 at a time when affordable housing has fallen by 15% overall.

"If you're coming to Sioux Falls for the first time, you're going to see houses being put up all over the place, but a lot of those houses are being built for people who moved here two or more years ago," Owen said. "We don't have any houses for people who are moving in now or next year, so the need is pretty great here as far as where can we find housing with good prices for these people to come to our city to live."



A recent report indicated South Dakota was in need of 10,000 new housing units to accommodate steady growth across the state.

Photo: Bart Pfankuch, South Dakota News Watch

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 8 of 82



Gov. Kristi Noem

Owen said chamber members in Sioux Falls stand ready to provide input into the process next legislative session to fine-tune the infrastructure funding program so it can be implemented as soon as possible.

"We're all disappointed to some extent, but we understand the process can be a little slow," Owen said. "We're still moving forward with the tools that we've got, and we'll continue to work with the governor and legislature to find a path forward so all of our state can benefit from those dollars."

Lack of clarity in legislation

On a basic level, the concerns that led to the delay of the housing program centered around who would disburse the funds and what type of housing the program would support.

The program was announced as a priority by Noem in her 2022 budget address, and the bill to provide for the funding originated in her economic development office.

Initially, Noem wanted the Governor's Office of Economic Development to review applications and make funding awards, but the state Senate amended the measure late in the 2022 session to allow the independent South Dakota Housing Development Authority to manage the program. The amended bill that authorized the program, House Bill 1033, also transferred the \$150 million in state funds to the Housing Opportunity Fund for disbursement, and transferred the \$50 million in federal funds to the housing authority with some restrictions, according to Lorraine Polak, director of the housing authority.

Polak said the language in the final bill was unclear on whether the funds were supposed to be targeted to housing for low-income or moderate-income residents.

Throughout the legislative process, supporters of the program did not want to restrict the program funding for low- to moderate-income housing only.

Backers argued that workforce housing is not necessarily income-targeted housing and that the fund should not be limited to providing infrastructure for housing only income-qualified residents. The funding mechanism for the program was contained in House Bill 1033 during the 2022 legislative session.

As a result of the confusion around the intent of the legislation, the authority board voted this summer to delay implementation of the entire funding program until it received further clarification on intent from the Legislature, Polak wrote.

"The SDHDA Board of Commissioners determined that SDHDA could not appropriately administer the transferred funds without further clarification by the South Dakota Legislature," Polak wrote to News Watch in an email.

Polak said the housing authority was aware of Noem's concerns but was never threatened with legal action in any way.

"Governor Noem noted concerns as to the uncertainty regarding the funding, and the application of the targeting restrictions ... in her signing memorandum," Polak wrote in an email. "The Governor did not threaten to sue SDHDA, but pointed out that the uncertainty of HB 1033 creates risks for SDHDA and those seeking grants or loans."

Polak said the authority received several applications from developers seeking some of the \$50 million in federal funds, but alerted those applicants that the program was on hold.

Noem had telegraphed her concerns over how the money would be used in a bill-signing memo in March in which she said she was willing to sign the measure but was worried about the legality of disbursing funds for workforce housing from a fund typically used for income-targeted housing.

Noem also raised concerns in the memo that the housing authority was not in a position to disperse funds designated solely for infrastructure development and not for construction of actual dwellings.

Johnson said her clients believe that the housing authority, and not the Governor's Office of Economic Development, is the best agency to manage and distribute the workforce housing funds.

"The housing authority has considerable expertise in meeting the state's housing needs and using the resources available," Johnson said. "They have a lot of expertise in this and the GOED essentially does

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 9 of 82

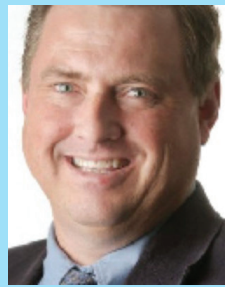
not do housing except for a couple big projects. The language the GOED uses, and the language that developers all over the state use, are very different, because I think we're talking very different housing needs out there."

Regardless of who or which institution is to blame for the stalled housing program, the Legislature and governor need to regroup and pass a workable measure in 2023 so developers can begin using the money to get homes built in South Dakota, said Rep. Roger Chase, R-Huron, a major supporter of the housing program.

"We have to get clarification on who's going to be running the program, how it's going to be run, if it's intended for low income or for all different types of housing projects in all South Dakota communities," Chase said. "I was hoping we could get this done to where funds could go out year this year, and that's why it's important for us to get started on this so we're ready to go in the beginning of session so we don't lose next year's construction season."

— This article was produced by South Dakota News Watch, a non-profit journalism organization located online at SDNewsWatch.org.

ABOUT BART PFANKUCH



Bart Pfankuch, Rapid City, S.D., is the content director for South Dakota News Watch. A Wisconsin native, he is a former editor of the Rapid City Journal and also worked at newspapers in Florida. Bart has spent more than 30 years as a reporter, editor and writing coach.

Students asked to lead sportsmanship initiative

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. Newspaper Association

PIERRE — At some South Dakota schools, students are taking the lead in trying to get better sportsmanship at athletic contests.

During a discussion on Wednesday of the association's initiative to increase sportsmanship among players, coaches and fans, members of the South Dakota High School Activities Association's board of directors heard a message recorded by grade school students at Hoven.

"You are our role models," the young narrator tells the fans. "We see and hear everything you say and do. Please refrain from making any negative comments."

The message also asks for respect for game officials and ends with this piece of advice: "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all."

"If second and third graders can figure it out," SDHSAA Assistant Executive Director Jo Auch said of sportsmanship, "why can't adults figure it out?"

The association reached out to the state's student councils to get them involved in the sportsmanship effort. The message from Hoven, as well as one from students at Hitchcock-Tulare, can be found on the association's website.

Auch said the association hopes to make some sort of progress on increasing sportsmanship before the start of the basketball season.

"We know that everybody's an expert in basketball, as they are in every sport," Auch said. "Our officials are, quite honestly, tired of it."

Auch noted an effort in Lead/Deadwood in which visiting teams are greeted by a welcome banner and gifts for the visiting players. "Little things like that go long way."

During the fall sports season, schools were asked to recognize sports officials as part of an Officials' Appreciation Week. Auch said that took many forms, from announcements at games to photos with the teams to flowers and gift cards.

"I think it's just a kind gesture on our part and a very easy way to say thanks for what you guys do," Auch said, noting that there would be appreciation weeks Jan. 23 to 28 for officials in winter sports and April 10 to 15 for officials in spring sports.

The efforts to promote sportsmanship are needed as board members learned that ejections from games have increased dramatically this year. SDHSAA Assistant Executive Director Randy Soma said there were 30 ejections in the entire school year last year. This year, in just the fall sports, there have been 58 ejections.

Last year the ejections were seven in boys' basketball, 10 in boys' soccer, four in boys' wrestling and nine in football. So far this year there have been 24 in boys' soccer, 25 in football, three in girls' soccer, three ejected coaches and three ejected fans.

"We have really taken it to another level," Soma said, noting that these are just the ejections that have been reported to the SDHSAA office.

Infractions that lead to ejections in games include illegal hits in football, language, talking back to officials and fighting.

"It starts with our coaches and our kids," Soma said. "Our kids have to be respectful and so do our coaches."

SDHSAA Executive Director Dan Swartos said the staff would try to work out a best practices plan for school districts to use when they have to remove an unruly fan from the stands.

Soma, a former athletic director in Brookings, knows how difficult it is to confront a fan. "It's a hard situation, as an athletic director, to walk up to somebody you know in the stands and get them removed."

Recruiting charge leads to work on clarifying SDHSAA policies

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. Newspaper Association

PIERRE — The South Dakota High School Activities Association board of directors is considering adding more specific language to its policy against recruiting student athletes from one school to another.

“We had a charge of recruiting this year,” said SDHSAA Executive Director Dan Swartos, noting that it was the first one in his six years with the association.

While the association had a policy against the recruitment of athletes, there was nothing specific spelled out as to what sort of inducements were prohibited and what sort of punishment would await a school that was guilty of recruitment.

Swartos told the board at its meeting Wednesday that the changes being proposed could be voted on by the member schools as a constitutional amendment or treated like an interpretation of the rule and be endorsed by the board.

The more specific language prohibits school personnel or booster clubs from making special arrangements that provide a student or a student’s family with benefits not offered to other students. Those could include jobs or housing for parents, residential location offers, promises of playing time, financial aid to parents or students, or any benefit not sanctioned by SDHSAA guidelines.

The proposal board members saw also spelled out ways schools or individuals may try to exert undue influence on student athletes through calls, emails, texts, letters, cards or questionnaires designed to persuade the athlete to switch schools. This includes invitations to summer camps or open gyms.

The new language spells out the penalties for schools and coaches guilty of recruiting. They include suspension of the school from regular season and post-season activities, suspension of the coach from all coaching duties or the banning of parents/alumni/supporters from attendance at sanctioned activities.

In the past “there wasn’t anything specifically laid out for the coach or the school that was doing the recruiting,” Swartos said.

There’s nothing the association can do, Swartos explained, if an employer offers a sweetheart deal to an athlete’s parents that induces them to move to that community.

According to state rules, students are allowed to transfer one time. It can be tough, Swartos said, to discern the motivation for that transfer.

“It’s really, really hard to figure that out if it’s something that they’re allowed to do,” Swartos said.

Board members will study the new language and discuss it at their meeting in January.



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SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>



ENVIRONMENT JUSTICE

Public access fight draws state into court with townships

Local governments erase invisible routes hunters use to access public land

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - SATURDAY NOVEMBER 5, 2022 4:20 AM

Deer hunters Bill Berry and Kyle Battell recently attempted to access public land in the rolling hills and rugged backcountry north of Wall.

But the parcels of public land were surrounded by privately owned land – creating something hunters call a “landlocked parcel.” That’s the case with many public acres west of the Missouri River.

Berry and Battell knew that, but they thought they could reach their destination by way of a 66-foot-wide public path called a “section line.” The lines – drawn by surveyors in settlement days – divide the state into a checkerboard of square-mile sections. Like many West River big-game hunters, Berry and Battell were using a GPS to identify and stay on the section lines they thought would guide them to the landlocked hunting grounds.

But they say they were intercepted by a neighboring landowner, Patrick Trask, who pulled up in his pickup truck and accused them of trespassing and poaching.

“He was trying to threaten us to get out of there,” Berry said. “We didn’t want any problems.”

Section lines are easy to find in rural eastern South Dakota because many of them are roads or two-track trails with barbed-wire fences on either side. But those identifiers are less common west of the Missouri River, where some terrain is too rough for straight roads and fences.

Berry and Battell say they’ve been confronted and bullied off landlocked public West River parcels multiple times, and even had to leave behind a deer they killed.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 14 of 82

Trask and other landowners who pay for the right to graze livestock on the landlocked public parcels claim they have the right to control access, according to Berry and Battell.

The state Department of Game, Fish and Parks, which enforces hunting laws, says that's illegal. The GF&P says private landowners cannot unilaterally close off public land to hunting.

But in this case, Trask had convinced the Elm Springs Township Board of Supervisors to vacate almost all the section lines in the township, blocking access to the landlocked public parcels.

The state Office of School and Public Lands owns the landlocked parcels. The office is challenging Elm Springs in court, as well as a similar action in neighboring Smithville Township.

The state alleges in the lawsuits that it's "aggrieved" by the townships' actions because the state needs the section lines for access to its property.

The Attorney General's Office, which is handling the lawsuit for the state, declined requests for an interview because of a policy against discussing pending litigation.

Welcome to Elm Springs Township

Trask ranches 11,091 acres in Elm Springs. He declined to speak on the record without permission from the lawyers representing the township, Bill and John Taylor. The law firm did not reply to interview requests.

According to court documents, however, Trask asked the Elm Springs Township supervisors to vacate the section lines. Trask's daughter, Julie, the township clerk, prepared and submitted the paperwork on the Township's behalf.

Court documents in the lawsuit against Smithville Township do not say when or why supervisors there decided to vacate their section lines.

The Elm Springs resolution cites "theft and vandalism" as reasons for vacating its section lines because...

"In the recent months we have had an increase in the number of unidentified vehicles carrying strangers from every walk of life ... we feel that it is of utmost importance to enact some measures to help protect us from the liability of strangers who wantonly go where they please with no regard for property rights or the potential downside effects of irresponsible behavior.

"These same vehicles could also be carrying a host of drugs and drug paraphernalia, which is becoming commonplace, but is most unwelcome here (both the drugs and the subculture)."

The resolution continues with a seven-point list of concerns, including increased wildfire potential, "urban traffic and out-of-state wanderers," "playgrounds for druggies," safety regarding "total strangers," livestock health, and squatters "living in filth and squalor leaving a trail of mess and destruction."

Meade County Sheriff Ron Merwin does not recall landowners reporting squatting, theft, vandalism or drug use by people traveling along section lines there.

The department does get occasional calls from landowners reporting hunters who leave cattle gates open and wander off section lines and onto private property, Merwin said.

Invisible highways

Custer County State's Attorney Tracy Kelley is not involved in the Elm Springs or Smithville litigation, but she has experience with local government decisions to vacate section lines. The Elm Springs and Smithville cases could be based on a state law, she said. The law says, "No board of county commissioners or board of supervisors may vacate a section-line highway that provides access to public lands or public waters embracing an area of not less than forty acres."

The landlocked public parcels in question are larger than 40 acres.

Kelley said Custer County has vacated section lines before, but it's rare, and it's typically only one section line at a time for a specific reason.

"I'm not aware that Custer County ever vacated a section line that would access public land, but the statute is very clear," Kelley said. "I think vacating a section line should be an exception, not the rule."

Kelley said section lines exist for public travel.

"A section line is a public right of way," she said. "The purpose of a section line is so you can maintain access to other parcels and lands."

And they are vital for avoiding landlocked situations, Kelley said.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 15 of 82

"You want to make sure that the public has access, and so whether there's a highway there or not, even if it's unimproved, the public has a right – unless a section line is vacated – to traverse that section line," she said.

Section lines are also sometimes used for infrastructures such as pipes, power lines, and roads.

Private access to public land

A report published by the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership says there are nearly 200,000 acres of landlocked federal public land in South Dakota, mostly West River (the study does not consider state-owned land).

Some surrounding landowners leverage landlocked public parcels for private hunting, according to public hunting advocate Josh Soholt.

"A lot of these people are setting up outfitting companies, and these landowners are taking paying guests onto land that we all pay for, to profit off state-managed animals, with exclusive access to these grounds that we fund," Soholt said.

James Schade, former South Dakota deputy commissioner of school and public lands, said that's illegal.

"A landowner who leases it from the state for whatever purpose, pasture or whatever, they're barred from renting it or charging hunters to go access it, because it's not their land to give access to," Schade said. "Everybody ignores that."

Some private outfitters operate in Elm Springs and Smithville townships.

Pat Trask's brother, Tom, runs Dakota Trophy Adventures on ranchland in Elm Springs Township. And Dakota Safaris operates in Smithville Township.

Terry Mayes was a state trooper in Meade County through the late 1960s and early '70s. He said some of the township residents have a history of animosity toward GF&P.

"During that time, most of those landowners were of the opinion that they owned the wildlife, all the wildlife – that the wildlife did not belong to the public," Mayes said. "And that is more or less the crux of this entire argument going back historically."

When the two hunting outfitters were one operation, the owners were caught giving their customers resident landowner tags if a customer was unable to draw an out-of-state tag, according to former GF&P Secretary John Cooper.

That resulted in an undercover operation by the GF&P and charges against the outfitter. Pat and Tom Trask were not directly involved.

The bigger picture

Landowners circumventing the law to limit public access isn't new, Cooper said.

Cooper recalled an instance of a commercial goose-hunting operator north of Pierre who learned about a law prohibiting hunting within 660 feet of livestock. He built a pen for his bulls a half-mile long and 30 feet wide.

"He did that obviously not for a major ranching project, but to keep people off of that section line that he didn't want people on," Cooper said.

Even with a clear route for access, hunters and land managers can run into issues, according to former GF&P conservation officer John Wrede.

There's an 8,300-acre landlocked parcel of national forest land in the southern Black Hills that can be accessed by the public only via the Mickelson Trail or section lines, for example.

According to Wrede, a couple of landowners along the trail were notorious for slashing tires in the parking lot of the trailhead at Minnekahta Junction. He said those landowners occasionally wouldn't even let the Forest Service in for management purposes. Wrede said those reports slowed in recent decades.

Creating more access

There are ways to create better public access to landlocked parcels.

Lori "Chip" Kimball, South Dakota Bureau of Land Management field manager, said one way is an easement in which the government buys access from the surrounding landowner. Another option is to purchase the property outright. A third option is an exchange of property – swapping some of the public lands for

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 16 of 82

private land to create access.

Some hunters would rather see the state leverage existing rules.

The state's section line laws mean South Dakota is well positioned to create affordable, clear access to landlocked parcels, according to advocate Josh Sohlt.

"South Dakota, you have the legal pieces in place with section lines and right-of-way law," he said. "The state could step in and make it a little bit more formal, maybe creating a little parking area with some signage that fleshes out that, 'Yes, you can access through here and make your way from point A to point B to go utilize this ground that we all own.'"

The current hurdles keep some hunters from bothering with landlocked parcels, according to Kingsbury County outdoorsman Jacob Janas.

"Nobody knows whether or not you can access it, and the best answer in most cases of this is, 'get landowner permission,'" he said. "Well, every hunter in the state knows how well getting landowner permission goes."

Many landowners are happy to grant a hunter access to landlocked parcels, according to West River rancher Steve Livermont. He said it comes down to respect.

"People have got to realize that hunting is a privilege and not a right," he said. "People out here own private property. That's one of the basic principles that our country is founded on."



JOSHUA HAIAR

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

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 17 of 82

No. 11 Turnquist Leads Wolves in Opening Duals from Oklahoma

Editor's Note: Kelby Hawkins is a GHS graduate and is wrestling on the NSU team. He wrestling at 165.

Edmond, Okla. – The No. 17 Northern State University wrestling team opened the 2022-23 season with a win over Carl Albert State and a loss to No. 4 Central Oklahoma. The Wolves tallied 13 match wins, including nine extra point victories, between the two duals.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 47, CAS 3

Final Score: NSU 3, UCO 30

NSU Record: 1-1

HOW IT HAPPENED vs. CARL ALBERT STATE

· The Wolves won ten of the 12 wrestled matches versus the Carl Albert Vikings with seven bonus point wins

· Brenden Salfrank kicked off the dual with a victory by fall at 3:43 over James Peach; he led 5-0 prior to the pin

· After a loss at 133 pound, Robert Coyle III bounced back with his own victory by fall at 2:37, downing RT Noel in the first period after holding an 8-1 lead

· No. 11 Wyatt Turnquist added a pin of his own at 2:19 in the first period over Kayson Kenney

· Devin Bahr suited up for his first match with the Wolves, defeating Alec Capehart by fall at 1:11

· With the first technical fall of the evening, Kelby Hawkins took the 165 pound match over Caden Warren with a score of 18-2 in the third period

· Tyson Lien added three points for Northern with a 2-1 decision over Cayden Felts

· No. 6 Treyton Cacek tallied the Wolves third first period pin of the match, defeating Josiah Rhodes at 2:31

· No. 3 Cole Huss held a 7-1 lead in the 197 pound bout, ultimately recorded an injury win over Hunter Hall

· George Bolling closed out the scoring matches for the Wolves with a 9-4 victory over Emmett Bivens

· In the 174 pound extra match, Tyler Voorhees notched an 18-0 technical fall at 4:15 in the second with a takedown, 14 nearfall points, and a reversal

MATCH RESULTS

Wt	Summary	CAS	NSU
125	Brenden Salfrank (Northern State) over James Peach (Carl Albert State) (Fall 3:43)	0	6
133	Thaddeus Long (Carl Albert State) over Teagan Block (Northern State) (MD 10-2)	4	0
141	Robert Coyle III (Northern State) over RT Noel (Carl Albert State) (Fall 2:37)	0	6
149	#11 Wyatt Turnquist (Northern State) over Kayson Kenney (Carl Albert State) (Fall 2:19)	0	6
157	Devin Bahr (Northern State) over Alec Capehart (Carl Albert State) (Fall 1:11)	0	6
165	Kelby Hawkins (Northern State) over Caden Warren (Carl Albert State) (TF 18-2 6:47)	0	5
174	Tyson Lien (Northern State) over Cayden Felts (Carl Albert State) (Dec 2-1)	0	3
184	#6 Treyton Cacek (Northern State) over Josiah Rhodes (Carl Albert State) (Fall 2:31)	0	6
197	#3 Cole Huss (Northern State) over Hunter Hall (Carl Albert State) (Inj. 3:16)	0	6
285	George Bolling (Northern State) over Emmett Bivens (Carl Albert State) (Dec 9-4)	0	3
157E	Jaden Two Lance (Carl Albert State) over Tyson Stoebner (Northern State) (TF 20-5 7:00)	0	0
174E	Tyler Voorhees (Northern State) over Matthan Mason (Carl Albert State) (TF 18-0 4:15)	0	0
	Bench Control	-1.0	
	Final Score:	3	47

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 18 of 82

HOW IT HAPPENED vs. #4 CENTRAL OKLAHOMA

- Northern trailed 10-0 through the first three bouts
- No. 11 Turnquist matched up against the No. 3 wrestler in the country at 149 pounds in Brik Filippo; the pair battled with Turnquist bringing home a 6-4 decision win
- The Wolves were unable to seal another victory, battling to five decision losses and one technical fall
- Both Izaak Hunsley and Marshall VanTassel added wins in the 157 and 197 pound extra matches
- Hunsley defeated Brady DeArmond by injury default after leading 2-0 and VanTassel tallied a 9-3 decision victory over Kohl Owen

MATCH RESULTS

Wt	Summary	UCO	NSU
125	Studd Morris (Central Oklahoma) over Landen Fischer (Northern State) (Dec 4-2)	3	0
133	Dylan Lucas (Central Oklahoma) over Teagan Block (Northern State) (MD 12-2)	4	0
141	Nate Keim (Central Oklahoma) over Robert Coyle III (Northern State) (Dec 7-1)	3	0
149	#11 Wyatt Turnquist (Northern State) over #3 Brik Filippo (Central Oklahoma) (Dec 6-4)	0	3
157	#10 Gabe Johnson (Central Oklahoma) over Devin Bahr (Northern State) (Dec 10-7)	3	0
165	Ty Lucas (Central Oklahoma) over Kelby Hawkins (Northern State) (Dec 8-3)	3	0
174	Hunter Jump (Central Oklahoma) over Tyson Lien (Northern State) (Dec 5-2)	3	0
184	Anthony Des Vigne (Central Oklahoma) over #6 Treyton Cacek (Northern State) (Dec 8-2)	3	0
197	#1 Dalton Abney (Central Oklahoma) over #3 Cole Huss (Northern State) (Dec 4-1)	3	0
285	Braden Morgan (Central Oklahoma) over George Bolling (Northern State) (TF 15-0 4:22)	5	0
157E	Izaak Hunsley (Northern State) over Brady DeArmond (Central Oklahoma) (Inj. 0:40)	0	0
197E	Marshall VanTassel (Northern State) over Kohl Owen (Central Oklahoma) (Dec 9-3)	0	0
Final Score:		30	3

UP NEXT

The Wolves remain on the road next Thursday at Saturday versus Concordia Moorhead and at the Dakota Wesleyan Open. Northern State will face the Cobbers at 7 p.m. on Thursday from Moorhead.

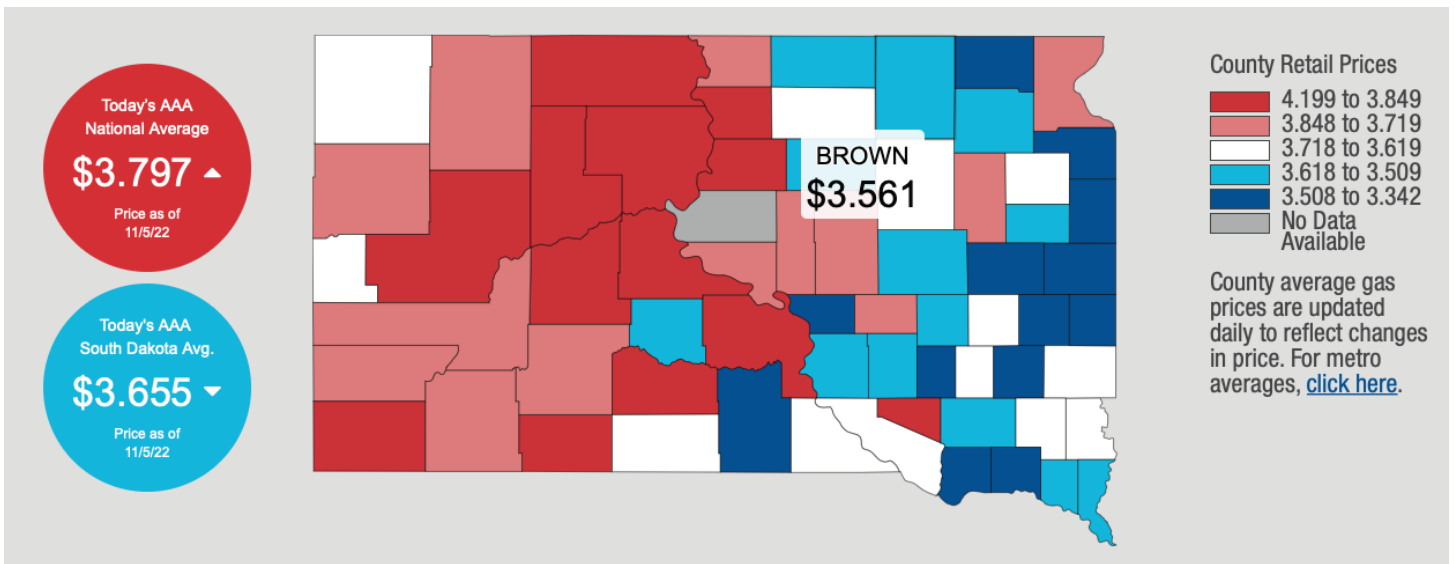
Broton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 19 of 82

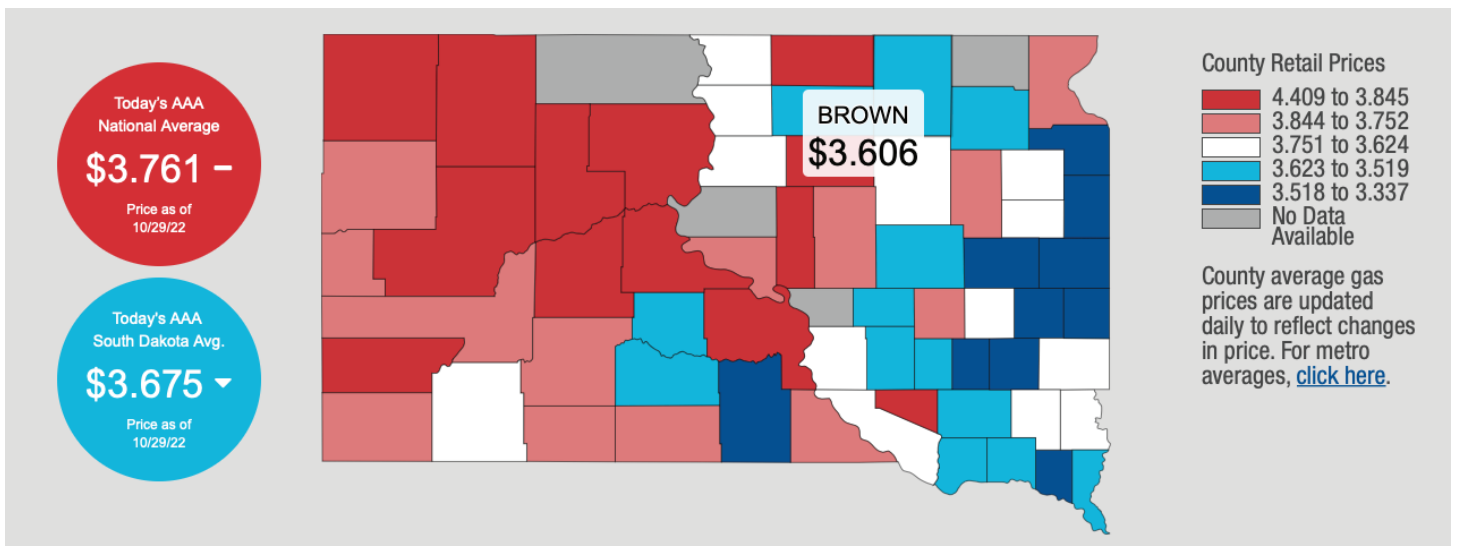
South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$3.655	\$3.857	\$4.320	\$5.163
Yesterday Avg.	\$3.668	\$3.840	\$4.328	\$5.173
Week Ago Avg.	\$3.675	\$3.864	\$4.343	\$5.233
Month Ago Avg.	\$3.710	\$3.846	\$4.308	\$4.631
Year Ago Avg.	\$3.321	\$3.421	\$3.759	\$3.522

This Week



Last Week



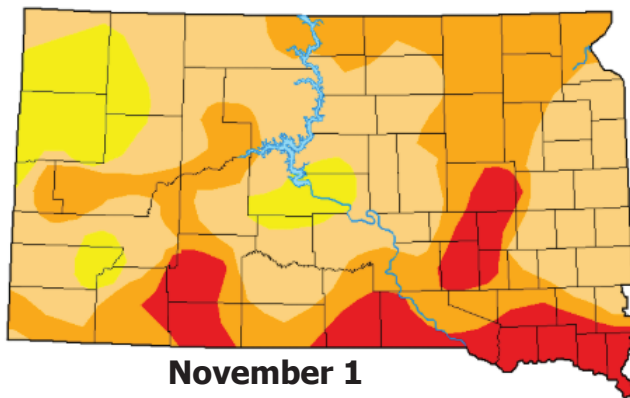
Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 20 of 82

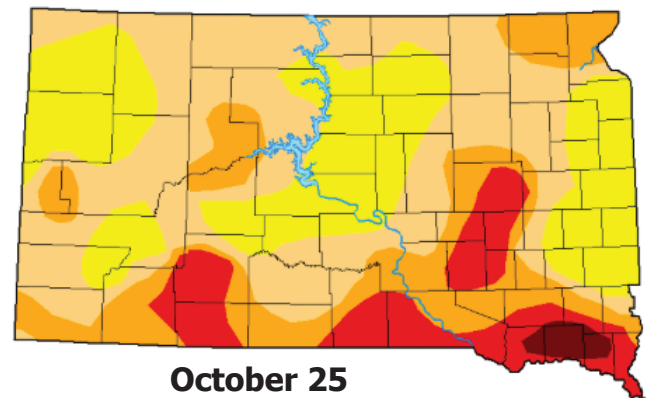
Drought Classification



Drought Monitor



November 1



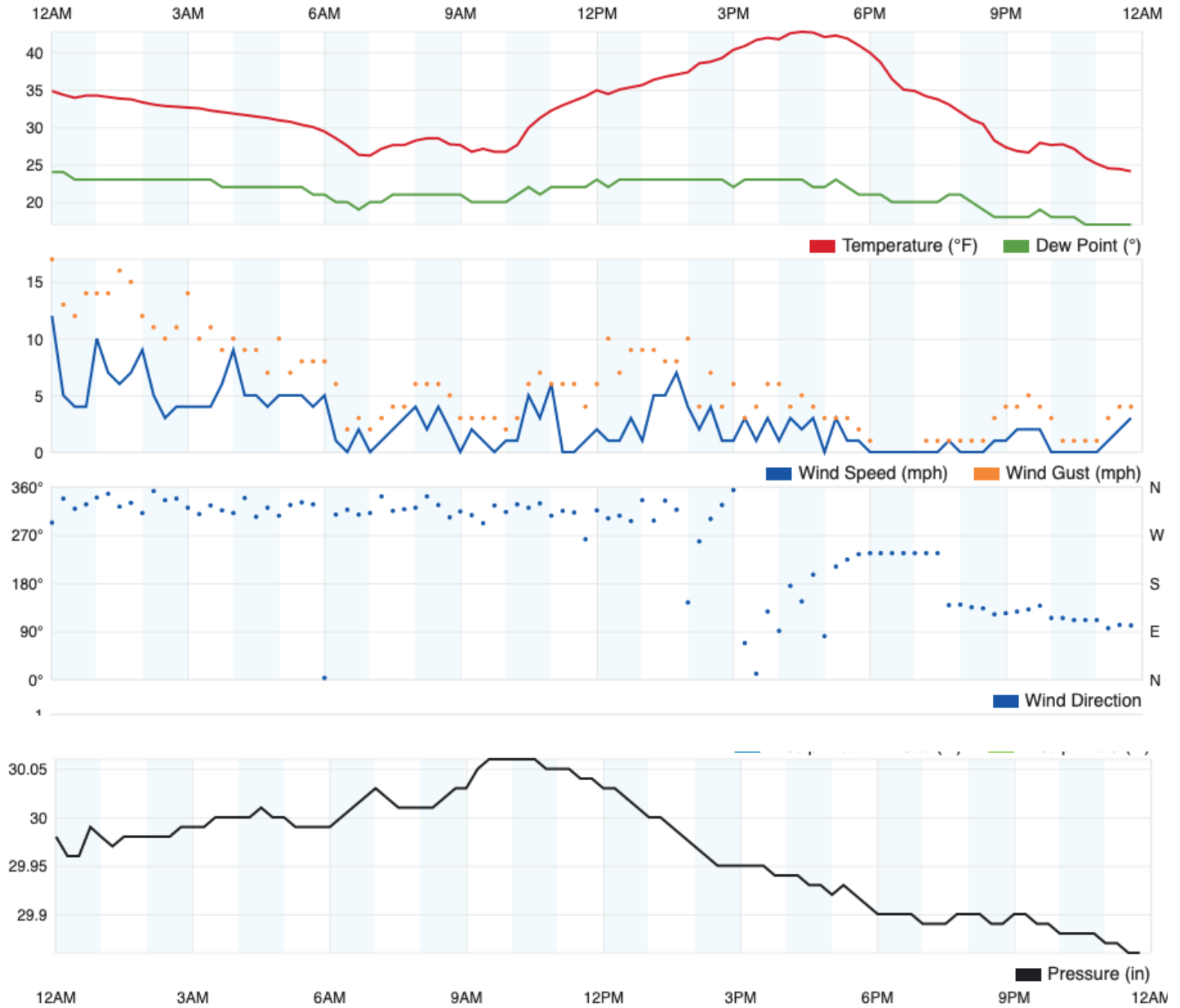
October 25

Temperatures were well above normal over the northern and eastern portion of the High Plains and below normal in the west. Temperatures were 8-10 degrees above normal in the Dakotas and 2-4 degrees above normal in Nebraska and northern Kansas. Portions of Wyoming, Colorado and western Nebraska were cooler than normal with temperatures 2-4 degrees below normal. It was quite the dry week in the region as there were only a few pockets of rain in southeast South Dakota, northeast Nebraska and into north-central Kansas. Flash drought conditions are impacting the region, especially in the Dakotas where warm, dry and windy conditions have provide ideal harvest conditions but have started taking a toll on the region. In the Dakotas, a broad expansion of severe drought conditions took place this week. Moderate drought also expanded in eastern South Dakota and into southern portions of the state. Continued dryness over Kansas, where portions of southwest Kansas had their driest October on record, allowed for the expansion of extreme and exceptional drought this week. On the plains of Colorado, moderate drought and abnormally dry conditions continue to expand.

Groton Daily Independent

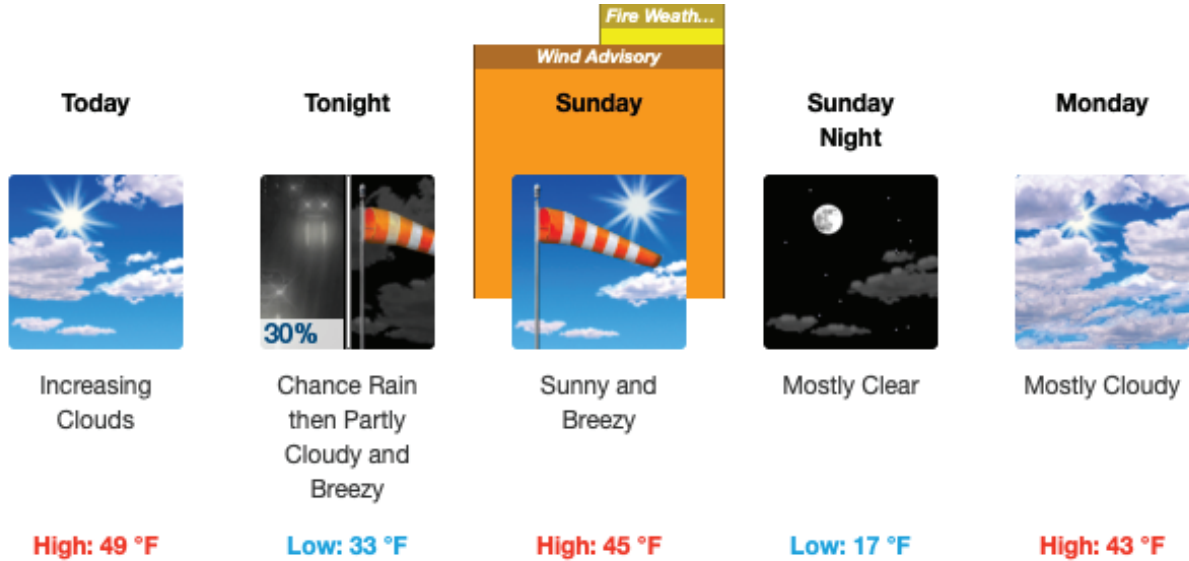
Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 21 of 82

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Broton Daily Independent

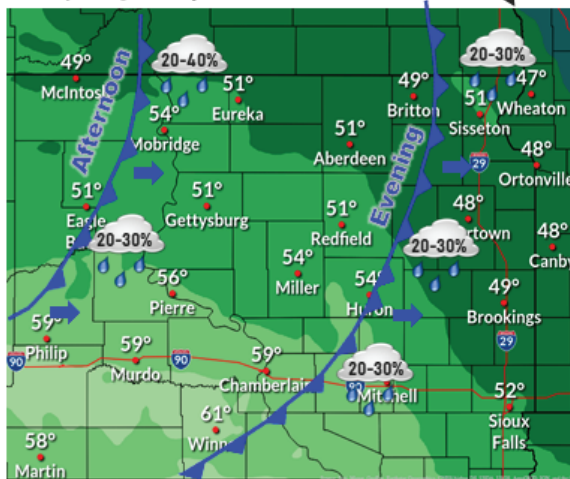
Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 22 of 82



High to Very High Fire Danger Through Monday

An approaching strong low pressure system will yield breezy to windy conditions this afternoon through Sunday. **Any fires that ignite would spread easily** due to the dry air and fuels also in place, **particularly on Sunday**.

Wind Gust and Direction Forecast, Saturday - Monday
Today's High Temperature Forecast, Sat Nov 5th



	11/5 Sat				11/6 Sun				11/7 Mon					
	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	1am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm
Aberdeen	20	25	25	22	23	29	32	37	41	44	45	41	22	18
Britton	16	24	26	25	26	29	31	36	45	47	48	45	26	21
Eagle Butte	23	24	23	30	39	45	45	40	41	44	45	37	17	15
Eureka	24	29	26	24	31	33	35	41	41	46	46	45	24	18
Gettysburg	24	25	23	22	28	33	35	38	41	41	44	40	20	19
Kennebec	17	21	20	17	24	29	29	29	29	32	35	29	15	12
McIntosh	25	30	32	33	37	40	43	45	48	52	48	45	24	16
Milbank	9	14	17	16	23	26	29	32	38	43	43	40	24	20
Miller	20	22	22	22	26	25	28	35	37	40	43	38	20	14
Mobridge	23	25	24	25	30	35	36	37	38	43	43	39	22	15
Murdo	17	21	22	23	24	33	33	31	31	30	33	25	13	14
Pierre	14	17	18	18	22	26	26	29	29	33	36	31	14	9
Redfield	17	22	23	18	23	24	26	31	35	43	43	37	17	15
Sisseton	13	17	21	21	28	29	29	37	45	45	46	44	29	25
Watertown	12	18	21	21	23	25	25	32	38	41	41	41	25	21
Webster	16	22	24	24	26	30	31	38	45	48	51	47	29	24
Wheaton	10	13	16	16	21	22	25	31	35	39	40	39	24	16

National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

*Table values in mph
**Created: 4 am CDT Sat 11/5/2022
***Values are maximums over the period beginning at the time shown.

Updated: 11/5/2022 5:24 AM Central

An approaching strong low pressure system will create breezy to windy conditions this afternoon through Sunday, thus leading to potential critical fire weather conditions on Sunday. A Wind Advisory and a Fire Weather Watch have been issued across north central and portions of northeastern South Dakota for these threats. Light rain showers are possible (20 to 30 percent chance) along a cold front as it moves through the area this afternoon and evening, otherwise the best chance for meaningful moisture arrives Tuesday through Thursday.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 23 of 82

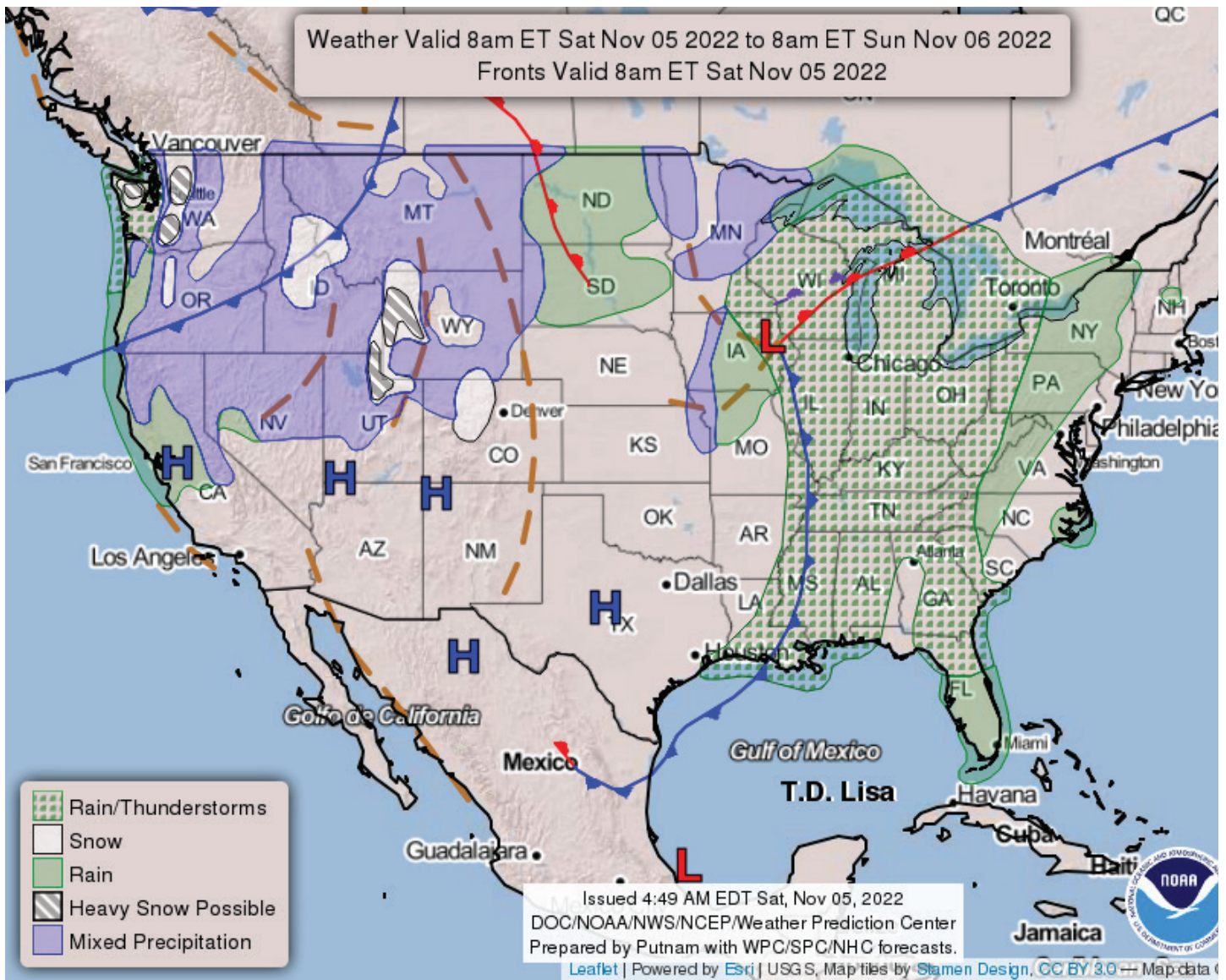
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 43 °F at 4:36 PM
Low Temp: 23 °F at 11:54 PM
Wind: 16 mph at 1:24 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 59 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 76 in 2016
Record Low: -6 in 2003
Average High: 48°F
Average Low: 24°F
Average Precip in Nov.: 0.17
Precip to date in Nov.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 20.64
Precip Year to Date: 16.50
Sunset Tonight: 6:15:47 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:17:35 AM



Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 24 of 82

Today in Weather History

November 5th, 1959: A strong cold front brought near blizzard conditions and bitterly cold temperatures. As a result, high temperatures in many locations only reached the upper teens. Some daytime highs include; 19 degrees in Pierre and Waubay; 18 degrees in Aberdeen, Faulkton, Kennebec, Pollock, and Roscoe; 17 degrees in Eureka, Gettysburg, Mobridge, and Watertown; and 15 degrees in Timber Lake and near McIntosh. Some record or near-record lows also occurred near midnight on the 5th. Some lows include; 2 degrees in Aberdeen; 1 degree near McIntosh; 0 degrees in Timber Lake and Pollock; and 2 degrees below zero in Kennebec.

1894: A significant snowstorm impacted New England on November 5th through 6th. It formed off the New Jersey coast on the 5th and passed east of Connecticut with rapidly increasing heavy rain, snow, and high winds. The heavy snow and high winds caused significant damage to trees and brought down telegraph poles by the hundreds. As a result, all southern New England's telegraph and telephone services were crippled, and fallen poles and trees delayed railroad trains.

1894 - The famous Election Day snowstorm occurred in Connecticut. As much as a foot of wet snow fell, and the snow and high winds caused great damage to wires and trees. Winds gusted to 60 mph at Block Island RI. (David Ludlum)

1961 - Strong Santa Ana winds fanned the flames of the Bel Air and Brentwood fires in southern California destroying many homes. At 10 PM the Los Angeles Civic Center reported a temperature of 74 degrees along with a dew point of 5 degrees. On the 6th, Burbank reported a relative humidity of three percent. (The Weather Channel)

1977 - A slow moving storm produced five to nine inch rains across northern Georgia causing the Toccoa Dam to burst. As the earthen dam collapsed the waters rushed through the Toccoa Falls Bible College killing three persons in the dorms. Thirty-eight persons perished at a trailer park along the stream. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Low pressure off the California coast produced stormy weather in the southwestern U.S. Flash flooding stranded 8000 persons in the Death Valley National Park of southern California. Thunderstorms over southern Nevada produced dime size hail and wind gusts to 68 mph around Las Vegas. Unseasonably mild weather in the northeastern U.S. was replaced with snow and gale force winds. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988: An F1 tornado touched down south of Altoona near Hollidaysburg. Several homes were damaged with roofs torn off and broken windows, numerous trees were toppled, and garages and other outbuildings were destroyed.

1988 - A powerful low pressure system produced high winds from the Great Plains to New England, and produced heavy snow in northern Wisconsin and Upper Michigan. Winds gusted to 64 mph at Knoxville TN, and reached 80 mph at Pleasant Valley VT. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Temperatures warmed into the 80s across much of Texas. Highs of 86 degrees at Abilene, Fort Worth and San Angelo were records for the date. (The National Weather Summary)

1991: Nearly 3,000 individuals were killed in the Philippines when Tropical Storm Thelma produced massive flooding on this day. The storm was the second major disaster of the year as Mount Pinatubo violently erupted on June 12th.

2002 - Severe thunderstorms moved across southeastern Alabama and the Florida panhandle, producing wind damage and several tornadoes. A tornado struck the Alabama town of Abbeville killing 2 people and injuring 25 (Associated Press).

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 25 of 82

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

THE THOUGHT OF ETERNITY

There was no one to write about it, and actually, nothing to write about. There was no calendar to record the number of days or years or even centuries or ages. It was a beginning without a beginning and the only Person there was God. He needed no one and was in need of nothing.

But He chose to create the heavens and the earth. And with no pre-existing materials or anyone to help Him, it was the power of His words that brought everything into existence that is or ever will be.

When He said, "Let us make the man," we know what happened: He formed man's body from the "dust" of the ground. And we know that this "dust" is a combination of all of the various chemical elements that make up the physical body of a man.

Our bodies did not "evolve." Our bodies were "built" by God from the earth that He created. God also breathed the breath - or the spirit - of life into that body. At that moment, "man" became a living soul.

We do much to take care of our bodies. Each day we are reminded of the cost of "healthcare" and how very important it is for us to take proper care of our bodies. But we seem to have forgotten the words of Jesus: "What good," He asked, "will it be for someone to gain the whole world and forfeit their soul?" Why is this an important question?

Our Psalmist said: "When You take away their breath they die and return to the dust." But not the soul.

Prayer: We thank You Lord, for Jesus, Your Son and our Savior, who gave His life for us to live for You forever. You have always had a plan for us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: When You take away their breath they die and return to the dust. Psalm 104:29



We all need the encouragement, comfort, and peace that comes through God's grace. Our daily devotionals, known as Seeds of Hope, have been a means through which thousands of people have experienced this grace. Each devotional comes from God's Word and we pray this good "seed" finds good soil in your heart. Our aim is that the Seeds of Hope will be a great source of daily encouragement to you and that God will use them to draw you near to Him

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 26 of 82

2022-23 Community Events

- 07/21/2022: Pro Am Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
07/22/2022: Ferney Open Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Start
07/24/2022: Moonlight Swim at the Swimming Pool 9-11pm for 9th grade to age 20
07/27/2022: 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
No Date Set: 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)
09/11/2022: 6th Annual Doggie Day at the Swimming Pool 3-5pm
09/11/2022: Couples Sunflower Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 10 a.m.
09/02-04: 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
11/13/2022: Snow Queen Contest
11/19/2022: 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
12/10/2022: Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-12pm
01/29/2023 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am-1pm, Community Center
01/29/2023 85th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
04/01/2023 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)
04/22/2023 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
04/23/2023 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)
05/06/2023 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
05/29/2023 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
07/04/2023 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Registration, 10am Start (4th of July)
07/09/2023 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
09/09/2023 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
10/31/2023 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)
10/31/2023 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
11/23/2023 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 27 of 82

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Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 28 of 82

News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) _ These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Friday:

Mega Millions

02-20-47-55-59, Mega Ball: 19, Megaplier: 2

(two, twenty, forty-seven, fifty-five, fifty-nine; Mega Ball: nineteen; Megaplier: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$154,000,000

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: 1,500,000,000

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

PREP FOOTBALL=

All Nations Football Conference=

Class A Championship= Todd County 72, Red Cloud 26

Class B Championship= Lower Brule 46, Tiospa Zina Tribal 0

SDHSAA Playoff-Semifinal=

Class 9A=

Gregory 41, Lyman 6

Warner 63, Harding County/Bison Co-op 20

Class 9AA=

Parkston 36, Elkton-Lake Benton 8

Wall 26, Hamlin 13

Class 9B=

Herreid/Selby Area 62, Irene-Wakonda 30

Hitchcock-Tulare 48, DeSmet 0

Class 11A=

Dell Rapids 44, Sioux Falls Christian 26

West Central 24, Beresford 20

Class 11AA=

Pierre 59, Yankton 31

Tea Area 44, Aberdeen Central 7

Class 11AAA=

Harrisburg 42, Sioux Falls O'Gorman 21

Sioux Falls Jefferson 45, Sioux Falls Lincoln 20

Class 11B=

Elk Point-Jefferson 47, Hot Springs 14

Winner 46, McCook Central/Montrose 6

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

Sioux Falls Lincoln def. Rapid City Central, 25-14, 25-20, 25-6

Sioux Falls Washington def. Rapid City Stevens, 20-25, 25-16, 25-12, 25-19

Some high school volleyball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

'Slow day:' Guard emails don't match Noem border 'war' talk

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem described the U.S. border with Mexico as a "war zone" last year when she sent dozens of state National Guard troops there, saying they'd be on the front lines of stopping drug smugglers and human traffickers.

But records from the Guard show that in their two-month deployment, the South Dakota troops didn't seize any drugs. On a handful of occasions, they suspected people of scouting for lapses in their patrols, but mission logs don't contain any confirmed encounters with "transnational criminals." And a presentation from the deployment noted that Mexican cartels were assessed to be a "moderate threat" but were "unlikely" to target U.S. forces.

Some days, the records show, the troops had little if anything to do.

"Very slow day. No encounters. It has been 5 days since last surrender," wrote one Guard member whose name was redacted from a situation report created as the deployment neared its end in September 2021.

For Noem, who is up for reelection Tuesday amid speculation she could be a 2024 White House contender, the deployment was an eye-catching jump into a political fight more than 1,000 miles (1,609 kilometers) from her state. Noem justified the deployment — and a widely criticized private donation to fund it — as a state emergency. Dangerous drugs, she said, made their way to South Dakota after coming over the southern border.

But the documents obtained by Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington through an open records request cast doubt on whether the deployment was effective at stopping drug trafficking, even as Noem claimed that Guard members "directly assisted" in stopping it.

Most drugs don't come through unwatched expanses of the border or the Rio Grande where the Guard members were stationed, said Victor Manjarrez, a former Border Patrol senior officer who is now a professor of criminal justice at the University of Texas at El Paso. They are smuggled into the United States at established border checkpoints, he said.

South Dakota Guard members were stationed at observation posts where they parked Humvees or other military vehicles alongside the Rio Grande. They watched for groups of migrants to report to Border Control, which would then take them into custody. On several occasions, they reported groups of hundreds of people migrating, and at one point, a Guard member performed CPR on a child who had drowned.

During the two-month deployment, the Guard logged 204 people who were turned back to Mexico and 5,000 others who were apprehended by the Border Patrol to evaluate for asylum claims. Those apprehensions were a small fraction of the over 162,000 encounters Border Patrol reported during July and August in the Rio Grande Valley Sector — the 34,000-square-mile swathe where the Guard was stationed.

"Like any operation there are going to be busy days and some slow days, that is expected in all operations," Marshall Michels, a spokesman for the South Dakota Department of the Military, said in an email response to questions on the records from AP.

Noem last year joined with seven other Republican governors to harden the border through Texas's Operation Lone Star. The state-backed mission sought to discourage migrants by making arrests under Texas laws.

The mission gave Republicans occasion to deride President Joe Biden's border policies, but the operation has not curbed the number of people crossing the border. It has also faced criticism for being a rushed mission that gave members little to do while potentially running afoul of federal law.

Noem's decision to send 48 Guard members was met with particularly harsh criticism because she covered most of its cost with a \$1 million donation from a Tennessee billionaire who has often donated to Republicans. Top brass from the National Guard Bureau and an aide to South Dakota U.S. Sen. John Thune, a fellow Republican, questioned what legal authority the state had to accept a donation to fund the deployment, the recently released emails show.

CREW (Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington) sued the South Dakota Guard and the U.S. Army after they refused a Freedom of Information Act request for records on the deployment and communication between the National Guard, the governor's office and the Department of Defense. Under that

legal pressure, the agencies turned over the documents, which CREW shared with The Associated Press.

Noah Bookbinder, CREW's president, said they wanted to bring transparency to a donation that he called "a particularly craven example of how money can drive not just politics but how governments operate and how military forces can be used."

Congress later banned such private donations for Guard deployments.

Noem's administration has insisted that the National Guard, with its military training, was best-suited to tackle what she called "a national security crisis."

"It literally is a war zone," she told reporters this July.

Noem's office referred questions on the deployment to a statement last year when she called Biden's border policy an "utter disaster" that facilitated illegal border crossings and said that Mexican cartels were using the surge in migrants as a "distraction for their criminal activities."

"The scope of the drug smuggling and human trafficking taking place has been made clear to us, and it is staggering," she said.

During the two-month deployment, Guard members reported spotting 11 people they deemed to be scouting for lapses in surveillance. On another occasion recorded in the logs, Guard members pointed flashlights at five people with backpacks crossing the Rio Grande who then retreated. Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Marlette, the head of South Dakota's Guard, later told a South Dakota legislative committee they were likely carrying drugs.

Those were the only times the Guard members reported suspected drug trafficking. The South Dakota National Guard said it accomplished its mission by supporting Texas's Operation Lone Star and referred questions on its success to the Texas National Guard.

Texas's 17-month operation has recorded 21,000 criminal arrests with most of those resulting in felony charges, Gov. Greg Abbott's office recently reported. The Texas National Guard also said it has been responsible for 470,000 migrant detections, apprehensions and turnbacks, as well as the construction of 114 miles of fencing and barriers.

Jenkins brings years of experience to young Purdue squad

By MICHAEL MAROT AP Sports Writer

David Jenkins Jr. made a checklist for what he wanted on his final stop on a six-state basketball journey: face top competition, find a new challenge, play for a coach with an impeccable resume and experience something completely different.

Purdue filled all of those desires and the Boilermakers are ready to start this season with a well-traveled 6-foot-1 guard.

"It was a hard decision because it's out of my comfort zone," said Jenkins, who calls Las Vegas home. "I could have gone somewhere close, but I think you're more successful when you step out of your comfort zone. And it's an easier transition when you have guys who are humble with low egos and coaches who care."

Getting acclimated to new teammates, new coaches and a new environment has become old hat for this 24-year-old.

After attending high school in Washington state and prep school in Kansas, Jenkins started his college career at South Dakota State. Two years later, he was off to UNLV, where he earned a bachelor's degree in communications. He relocated to Utah last season and will pursue a master's degree in West Lafayette, Indiana.

Through it all, Jenkins has had just about every conceivable basketball experience.

He appeared in the NCAA Tournament after being selected the 2017-18 Summit League freshman of the year and breaking the Jackrabbits' freshman scoring record (565 points). He averaged 19.7 points on South Dakota State's NIT-bound team as a sophomore.

Jenkins sat out the next season because of the NCAA's old transfer rules, but earned third-team all-conference honors at UNLV all while enduring back-to-back losing seasons with the Runnin' Rebels (12-15

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 31 of 82

in 2020-21) and Utes (11-20 in 2021-22).

Jenkins enters this season with a career average of 14.9 points. He has 323 3-pointers, a 41.3% shooting percentage beyond the arc and is 133 points away from joining the 2,000-point club — albeit on four different campuses.

Here, though, Jenkins is finding a home in a new role.

After starting 83 of 125 games, he's expected to provide depth behind Purdue's highly touted freshman backcourt of Fletcher Loyer and Braden Smith, and brings the kind of voice and perspective few can match on this young roster. The Boilermakers open play Tuesday against Milwaukee.

"He knows a lot but obviously he doesn't know how Purdue does it — though he's doing a good job picking that up," fourth-year guard Brandon Newman said. "He brings toughness at the point guard spot. Everybody knows he can shoot the ball. He's an older guy so he should be vocal, he should be helping out younger guys, inexperienced guys."

That may be the biggest benefit for Purdue, which has three new starters and only five players who appeared in 10 or more games last season. But coach Matt Painter is not changing the expectations for his team, which has three Big Ten regular-season titles, one tourney title and a reputation for being an annual conference contender and Top 25 regular over the past decade. =

Painter views Jenkins as a versatile piece, capable of contributing on and off the court who can provide a stabilizing presence if and when things get tough. Plus, he has a penchant for making big shots, even game-winning shots.

"I really like someone who's played a lot of games," Painter said. "He's put the ball in the basket, and he's had a lot of different experiences — he's been at four schools in six years, and I think he's really going to help us and give us that scoring punch."

Jenkins said he's a natural talker.

"It's just my personality to talk and be a part of it," Jenkins said. "Obviously, I'm old so I've been a part of every team ever. I've also seen the good side of it, when teams are really good and the chemistry and camaraderie you have. You're so connected on and off the court, I think that carries over on the court. It's essential to being on a really good team."

He also prides himself on some of the traits Boilermakers fans embrace — diving for loose balls, playing defense, excelling at multiple positions and eagerly lacing up his sneakers in front of the Mackey Arena faithful.

But there's one other reason Jenkins picked Purdue.

"I really feel like I can win a national championship here and that's something I want to be a part of," he said. "Learning from someone like (Painter) I think can really help me with my future endeavors and guys with low egos and I just felt that was something I wanted to be part of."

1 dead, dozens hurt as tornadoes hit Texas and Oklahoma

By JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

POWDERLY, Texas (AP) — Tornadoes tore through parts of Texas and Oklahoma on Friday, killing at least one person, injuring dozens of others and leaving dozens of homes and buildings in ruins.

Tornadoes hit hard in McCurtain County, Oklahoma, in the southeastern corner of the state and Gov. Kevin Stitt toured the town of Idabel on Saturday morning, according to state Department of Emergency Management spokesperson Keli Cain.

"There's a lot of damage," Cain said. "There are well over 100 homes and businesses damaged from minor damage to totally destroyed."

Cody McDaniel, the county's emergency manager, confirmed one death elsewhere in the county although he did not immediately provide details and did not immediately return phone calls Saturday morning.

The small town of about 7,000 had a church, medical center and a school torn apart and Stitt had said earlier that search and rescue teams were being sent to the town.

"Praying for Oklahomans impacted by today's tornadoes," Stitt tweeted.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 32 of 82

Keli Cain of the Oklahoma Emergency Management Office said at least three other counties were also hit by storms, with flash flooding in some areas.

The National Weather Service said tornadoes also were reported in Texas and Arkansas and a storm system was heading toward Louisiana.

In Texas, authorities in Lamar County said at least 50 homes were damaged or destroyed and 10 people were treated at one hospital, including two with critical injuries. No deaths were immediately reported.

Terimaine Davis and his son were huddled in the bathtub until just before the tornado barreled through Friday, reducing their home in the town of Powderly to a roofless, sagging heap.

"We left like five minutes before the tornado actually hit," Davis, 33, told The Associated Press. "Me and my son were in the house in the tub and that was about the only thing left standing."

In their driveway Saturday morning, a child's car seat leaned against a dented, grey Chevrolet sedan with several windows blown out. Around back, his wife, Lori Davis, handed Terimaine a basket of toiletries from inside the wreckage of their house.

The couple and the three kids who live with them did not have renter's insurance, Lori Davis said, and none of their furniture survived. "We're going to have to start from scratch," she said.

They hope to stay with family until they can find a place to live.

"The next few days look like rough times," Terimaine Davis said.

Judge Brandon Bell, the county's highest elected official, declared a disaster in the area, a step in getting federal assistance and funding. Bell's declaration said at least two dozen people were injured across the county.

Powderly is about 45 miles (72 kilometers) west of Idabel and about 120 miles (193 kilometers) northeast of Dallas and both are near the Texas-Oklahoma border.

The Lamar County Sheriff's Office and Emergency Management said the tornado touched down shortly after 4 p.m. and traveled north-northeast through the communities of Hopewell, Caviness, Beaver Creek and Powderly.

Churches opened their doors to serve as shelters for those whose homes were impacted.

1,100 migrants in limbo as Italy shuts ports to rescue ships

By COLLEEN BARRY and EMILY SCHULTHEIS Associated Press

MILAN (AP) — Two German-run migrant rescue ships carrying nearly 300 rescued people were waiting off the eastern coast of Sicily on Saturday, one with permission to disembark its most vulnerable migrants while the other's request for a safe port has gone unanswered despite "critical" conditions on board.

The situation describes the chaos and uncertainty resulting from the decision by Italy's far-right-led government to close its ports to humanitarian rescue ships.

Nearly 1,100 rescued migrants are aboard four ships run by European charity organizations stuck in the Mediterranean Sea, some with people rescued as long as two weeks ago amid deteriorating conditions on board.

Both the Humanity 1 and Rise Above ships, run by separate German humanitarian groups, were in Italian waters: the Humanity 1 carrying 179 migrants has received permission to disembark minors and people needing medical care, but the Rise Above's request for port for its 93 rescued people has so far gone unanswered.

By Saturday afternoon, there was still no word on when the Humanity 1 evacuations might start, or on safe ports for the other ships.

The Humanity SOS charity challenged Italy's move to distinguish "vulnerable" migrants, saying they were rescued at sea, which alone qualifies them for a safe port under international law.

Italy's only Black lawmaker in the lower chamber, Aboubakar Soumahoro, said he would join migrants on the ship if Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni's government did not act soon to aid all those blocked at sea.

Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi said Friday that the Humanity 1 would be allowed in Italian waters only long enough to disembark minors and people in need of urgent medical care.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 33 of 82

The measure was approved after Germany and France each called on Italy to grant a safe port to the migrants, and indicated they would receive some of the migrants so Italy wouldn't bear the burden alone.

No such provisions have been offered to the other three ships, and both the Geo Barents, carrying 572 migrants, and the Rise Above have entered Italian waters without consent despite repeated requests for a safe port. The Ocean Viking with 234 migrants remained in international waters, south of the Strait of Messina.

"We have been waiting for 10 days for a safe place to disembark the 572 survivors," Juan Mattias Gil, the head of mission for the Geo Barents said. Operation chief Riccardo Gatti said besides suffering from skin and respiratory infections, many on board were stressed by the prolonged period at sea.

SOS Humanity, which operates Humanity 1, alone said it had made 19 requests for a safe port, all unanswered. The boat is carrying 100 unaccompanied minors as well as infants as young as 7 months.

Italy's new far-right-led government is insisting that countries whose flag the charity-run ships fly must take on the migrants. Speaking at a news conference late Friday, Piantedosi described such vessels as "islands" that are under the jurisdiction of the flag countries.

Infrastructure Minister Matteo Salvini, known for his anti-migrant stance as interior minister from 2018-19, cheered the new directive that he signed along with Italy's defense and interior ministers.

"We stop being hostage to these foreign and private NGOs that organize the routes, the traffic, the transport and the migratory policies," Salvini said in a Facebook video.

Nongovernmental organizations stridently oppose that interpretation, and say they are obligated by the law of the sea to rescue people in distress, no matter how they learn of their plight, and that coastal nations are obligated to provide a safe port as soon as feasible.

"The Italian Minister of Interior's decree is undoubtedly illegal," says Mirka Schaefer, advocacy officer at SOS Humanity. "Pushing back refugees at the Italian border violates the Geneva Refugee Convention and international law."

Most have traveled via Libya, where they set off in unseaworthy boats seeking a better life in Europe, often being subjected to torture by human traffickers along the way.

While the humanitarian-run boats are being denied a safe port, thousands of migrants have reached Italian shores over the last week, either on their own in fishing boats or rescued at sea by Italian authorities.

The situation on the Rise Above was particularly desperate, with 93 people packed aboard the relatively small 25-meter boat. Spokeswoman Hermine Poschmann described a "very critical situation that ... led to very great tensions" on board, because passengers saw land and didn't understand why they weren't docking.

The head of mission on the vessel, Clemens Ledwa, demanded a port of safety immediately, citing also bad weather and the limited capacity of the small ship.

"This is not a wish. This is everyone's right," he said Friday night.

Vocabulary of voting: A glossary guide to the 2022 midterms

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — What's behind some of the notable nomenclature facing voters trying to decipher the who/what/why/when/where of casting their ballots this year?

Here are some key terms to know ahead of the midterm elections:

ADVANCE VOTING

The term "advance voting" is preferred in states where voters have several options to vote before Election Day. It can mean a few different things: mail-in ballots, absentee ballots and early, in-person voting.

ABSENTEE BALLOTS

Voters who can't go to the polls on Election Day itself often vote absentee, getting a ballot — either by mail or in-person — and casting it ahead of time. Twenty-seven states and the District of Columbia offer "no-excuse" absentee voting. This means that any voter can request and cast an absentee or mail ballot without providing a reason.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 34 of 82

AP VOTECAST

First used in 2018, AP VoteCast is a survey of the American electorate conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago for Fox News and The Associated Press. VoteCast is not an exit poll.

CANVASSING THE VOTE

After votes are cast, officials check lists of voters against the number of ballots cast and research any discrepancies, which often are due to clerical errors or mistakes.

CERTIFICATION

Votes also have to go through the certification process at the local and then state levels, either involving a board composed of statewide officials such as the secretary of state and governor, or solely the secretary of state. Hawaii is the only state where certification is overseen by a nonpartisan chief election official appointed by a bipartisan commission. In 45 states, the local boards that handle election certification are either party-controlled or commissions where the members are elected on a partisan basis, according to research by the advocacy group Election Reformers Network.

EARLY RETURNS

As votes are cast and counted across the country, they are tabulated and reported, before races themselves are called. Early returns often do not provide an accurate reflection of the ultimate outcome, especially in states that take days or weeks to count votes cast in advance and provisional ballots.

EXIT POLLS

In the U.S., exit polling is a survey of voters conducted by the National Election Pool — a network of broadcasters — using a methodology based on in-person interviews at polling places.

'LATE EARLIES'

Some advance ballots don't get turned in or received until Election Day. These "late earlies," as they're known in states like Arizona, can often lead to vote counts taking several days to complete in some places, although the state does permit both ballot processing and counting prior to poll close.

MAIL VOTING

Eight of the states that offer no-excuse absentee voting automatically mail a ballot to every eligible voter, without necessitating a request or application. That doesn't mean that there aren't in-person polling locations, too, but most people in these places vote by mail.

MAJORITY & PLURALITY

A majority is more than half the votes cast; a plurality is the largest number of votes, but less than a majority. In states like Georgia, where a candidate needs a majority to win, runoff elections may be necessary to determine who ultimately wins a contest.

OVERVOTE AND UNDERVOTE

An overvote is when a voter selects too many candidates in a given race. Conversely, an undervote means that a voter hasn't made a selection for each office on the ballot, leaving some blank.

POLL MONITORS/POLL WATCHERS/CITIZEN OBSERVERS

The terms poll monitors, poll watchers and citizen observers are interchangeable, and they can be partisan or nonpartisan. Nonpartisan poll watchers are trained to monitor polling places and local election offices that tally the votes, looking for irregularities or ways to improve the system. Partisan poll watchers are those who favor particular parties, candidates or ballot propositions and monitor voting places and local election offices to ensure fairness to their candidates or causes. Since the 2020 election, a handful of states passed laws limiting the restrictions that local election officials can place on poll watchers, giving them greater access to ballot counting and processing.

POLL WORKERS

Distinct from poll monitors or observers, poll workers are the people — many times volunteers — manning voting locations on Election Day.

PROVISIONAL BALLOTS

Called "challenge" or "affidavit" ballots in some states, provisional ballots are required by the federal Help America Vote Act of 2002 to ensure that voters' choices aren't discounted due to administrative er-

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 35 of 82

ror. Voters are given a provisional ballot when there is some uncertainty about their eligibility, like a name not appearing on voter rolls. In most places, provisional ballots are kept separate from other ballots until after the election, when an election board decides if the voter was indeed eligible, and therefore whether the vote should be counted.

RACE CALL

AP calls winners of elections in the United States based on an analysis of the vote count, polling research and other data. An AP race call is not a projection; AP only makes race calls when it is determined that a trailing candidate has no path to overtake a leading candidate.

RANKED CHOICE VOTING

In this electoral system, voters rank their choice of candidate by ordered preference, with those rankings used to determine a winner in the event no candidate wins a majority of ballots on which they appear as voters' first preference. If a candidate wins over 50% in the first round, it's over. If not, round two starts with the candidate who got the fewest votes in the first round being eliminated. If the eliminated candidate was your vote then your next choice gets your vote in this round.

Only a handful of states use ranked-choice voting now, but its use is being debated in other places.

SPOILT BALLOT/BALLOT SPOILING

A ballot is considered spoiled when officials have deemed it invalid, for reasons deliberate or not, and therefore not to be included in vote totals. In some places, like Wisconsin, the rarely used practice of ballot spoiling has been challenged in court, in circumstances when a voter submits an absentee ballot, then voids the original ballot and votes again.

SUPERMAJORITY

A requirement that a proposal or candidate gain a level of support that exceeds the threshold of a standard 50% plus 1 majority.

TOO EARLY TO CALL

Races in which the vote count is active and ongoing and a winner is not yet clear are "too early to call." That includes races in which the vote count may take several days.

TOO CLOSE TO CALL

Races in which the vote count has reached its primary conclusion – all outstanding ballots save provisional and late-arriving absentee ballots have been counted – without a clear winner are "too close to call." AP formally declares a race "too close to call" via our election reporting system and in our news report.

Musk's past tweets reveal clues about Twitter's new owner

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

He may be good with rockets and electric cars, but don't turn to Elon Musk for public health predictions. "Probably close to zero new cases in US too by end of April," the world's richest man tweeted about COVID-19 in March 2020, just as the pandemic was ramping up.

It's one of many tweets that offer a glimpse into the mind of Twitter's new owner and moderator in chief. Playful, aggressive and sometimes reckless, Musk's past tweets show how he has used social media to tout his businesses, punch back at critics and burnish his brand as a brash billionaire who is unafraid to speak his mind.

Musk joined Twitter in 2009 and now has more than 112 million followers — the third most of any account after former president Barack Obama and Canadian singer Justin Bieber. He had long mused about purchasing the platform before the \$ 44 billion deal was finalized last week.

Musk hasn't detailed the changes he intends to make at Twitter, though he wasted no time in making widespread layoffs. But he has said he wants to make Twitter a haven for free speech. He's said he disagrees with the platform's decision to ban ex-President Donald Trump for inciting violence ahead of the Jan. 6, 2021 assault on the U.S. Capitol.

"I hope that even my worst critics remain on Twitter, because that is what free speech means," Musk tweeted earlier this year when he announced his intention to buy the platform.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 36 of 82

As the CEO of Tesla and SpaceX, Musk uses his Twitter account to make business announcements and promote his enterprises. He muses about technology and trade, but has also posted jokes about women's breasts and once compared Canada's prime minister to Hitler. He regularly weighs in on global events, as he did in March 2020 when he tweeted that "The coronavirus pandemic is dumb."

That same month, he tweeted that children were largely immune from the virus and predicted that cases would soon disappear.

Musk has also used his Twitter account to weigh in on other big news events — with mixed results.

This fall, Musk infuriated leaders in Ukraine when he went on Twitter to float a potential peace deal. Under Musk's plan, Russia would get to keep Crimea, which it seized from Ukraine in 2014, and Ukraine would have to drop its plans to join NATO.

Musk also suggested that people living in other areas illegally annexed by Russia should vote on whether Russia or Ukraine should get control over the territories — a move that Ukraine supporters said would reward Russia for its illegal aggression.

"The danger here is that in the name of 'free speech,' Musk will turn back the clock and make Twitter into a more potent engine of hatred, divisiveness, and misinformation," said Paul Barrett, a disinformation researcher and the deputy director of New York University's Stern Center for Business and Human Rights.

Stern singled out Musk's comments about Ukraine as particularly concerning. "This is not going to be pretty," he said.

Just days after purchasing Twitter Musk waded into yet another firestorm when he posted a link to an article advancing a bizarre conspiracy theory about the attack on the husband of U.S. Speaker Nancy Pelosi. The article suggested that Paul Pelosi and his assailant were lovers, even though authorities said the suspect confessed to targeting the speaker and did not know her husband.

Musk later deleted the tweet without explanation.

Musk has long used the megaphone of his Twitter account to punch back at critics or people he opposes, such as when he attacked a diver working to rescue boys trapped in a cave in Thailand by calling him a "pedo," short for pedophile. The diver had previously mocked Musk's proposal to use a sub to rescue the boys. Musk, who won a defamation suit filed by the diver, later said he never intended "pedo" to be interpreted as "pedophile."

Three days before Elon Musk agreed to buy Twitter, the world's richest man tweeted a photo of Bill Gates and used a crude sexual term while making a joke about his belly.

Earlier this year he criticized the Twitter executive in charge of the platform's legal, policy and trust divisions. In response to his tweets about the executive, many of Musk's followers piled on with misogynistic and racist attacks, in addition to calls for Musk to fire her when his purchase of Twitter was approved.

Musk fired the executive on day one.

Musk's use of Twitter has at times led to problems for his own companies. In one August 2018 tweet, for instance, Musk asserted that he had the funding to take Tesla private for \$420 a share, although a court has ruled that it wasn't true. That led to an SEC investigation that Musk is still fighting.

Last year another federal agency, the National Labor Relations Board, ordered Musk to delete a tweet that officials said illegally threatened to cut stock options for Tesla employees who joined the United Auto Workers union.

Those tweets helped cement Musk's reputation as a brash outsider. But that doesn't mean he is equipped to run a social media platform with more than 200 million users, said Jennifer Grygiel, a Syracuse University professor who studies social media. Grygiel has assigned Musk's tweets as reading material for students.

"Look at the feed: It's all over the place. It's erratic. At times it's pretty extreme," Grygiel said. "It paints him as some sort of rebel leader who will take control of the public square to save it. That is a myth he has constructed."

California tenants rise up, demand rent caps from city halls

By JANIE HAR Associated Press

ANTIOCH, Calif. (AP) — Kim Carlson's apartment has flooded with human feces multiple times, the plumbing never fixed in the low-income housing complex she calls home in the San Francisco Bay Area suburb of Antioch.

Her property manager is verbally abusive and calls her 9-year-old grandson, who has autism, a slur word, she said. Her heater was busted for a month this winter and the dishwasher has mold growing under it. But the final straw came in May: a \$500 rent increase, bringing the rent on the two-bedroom to \$1,854 a month.

Carlson and other tenants hit with similarly high increases converged on Antioch's City Hall for marathon hearings, pleading for protection. In September, the City Council on a 3-2 vote approved a 3% cap on annual increases.

Carlson, who is disabled and under treatment for lymphoma cancer, starts to weep imagining what her life could be like.

"Just normality, just freedom, just being able to walk outside and breathe and not have to walk outside and wonder what is going to happen next," said Carlson, 54, who lives with her daughter and two grandsons at the Delta Pines apartment complex. "You know, for the kids to feel safe. My babies don't feel safe."

Despite a landmark renter protection law approved by California legislators in 2019, tenants across the country's most populous state are taking to ballot boxes and city councils to demand even more safeguards. They want to crack down on tenant harassment, shoddy living conditions and unresponsive landlords that are usually faceless corporations.

Elected officials, for their part, appear more willing than in years past to regulate what is a private contract between landlord and tenant. In addition to Antioch, city councils in Bell Gardens, Pomona, Oxnard and Oakland all lowered maximum rent increases this year as inflation hit a 40-year high. Other city councils put the issue on the Nov. 8 ballot.

Leah Simon-Weisberg, legal director for the advocacy group Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment, says local officials can no longer pretend supply and demand works when so many families are facing homelessness. In June, 1.3 million California households reported being behind on rent, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

The situation in working-class Antioch — where more than half the population is Black or Latino — illustrates how tenuous even a win for tenants can be.

The two council members who voted in favor of rent stabilization are up for re-election Tuesday, with one of them, Tamisha Torres-Walker, facing a former council member she narrowly beat two years ago. The local newspaper endorsed Joy Motts and called Torres-Walker, who was homeless as a young adult, polarizing.

Mayor Lamar Thorpe, who provided the third vote, faces sexual harassment allegations by two women, which he denies. They are part of a progressive Black majority.

If either member loses her seat, the rent ordinance could be repealed.

The two council members who voted no are both in the real estate industry, and not up for re-election.

A once largely white suburb, Antioch has become more politically liberal as Black, Latino and low-income residents forced out of San Francisco and Oakland moved in. Advocates tried for years to mobilize tenants, but it took the shockingly high rent-hike notices and the expiration of a statewide eviction moratorium in June to get movement.

Outraged tenants jammed into council chambers describing refrigerators pieced from spare parts and washing machines that reeked of rotten eggs. They spoke of skipping meals, working multiple jobs and living in constant terror of becoming homeless, sleeping in their car and washing their children with bottled water.

"We saw a lot of fear, a lot of desperation," said Rhea Laughlin, an organizer with First 5 Contra Costa, a county initiative that focuses on early childhood. But, she said, she also saw people summon the courage "to go before council, to rally, to march, to speak to the press and be exposed in a way that I think

tenants were too afraid to do before, but now really felt they had little to lose.”

Teresa Farias, 36, said she was terrified to speak in public but she was even more afraid that she, her husband and their three children, ages 3 to 14, would have to leave their home. When the family received a \$361 rent increase notice in May, she called the East County Regional Group, a parent advocacy organization supported by First 5. They told her to start knocking on doors and talk to her neighbors.

“I really don’t know where my strength came from, to be able to speak in public, to be able to speak in front of the City Council ... to ask them to help us with this issue,” she said in Spanish outside her home at the Casa Blanca apartments.

California’s tenant protection law limits rent increases to a maximum 10% a year. But many types of housing are exempt, including low-income complexes funded by government tax credits and increasingly owned by corporations, limited liability companies or limited partnerships.

The tenants who flooded City Council meetings drew largely from four affordable-housing complexes, including sister properties Delta Pines and Casa Blanca, where an estimated 150 households received large rent increases in May. The properties are linked to Shaoul Levy, founder of real estate investment firm Levy Affiliated in Santa Monica.

The rent increases never took effect, rescinded by the landlord as the City Council moved toward approving rent stabilization. Levy did not respond to emails seeking comment.

Council member Michael Barbanica, who owns a real estate and property management company, called the rent hikes outrageous, but said the city could have worked with the district attorney’s office to prosecute price-gouging corporate landlords.

Instead, the rent cap penalizes all local landlords, some of whom are now planning to sell, he said.

“They’re not the ones doing 30-40-50% increases,” Barbanica said, “yet they were caught in the crossfire.”

But, Carlson said, the city needs to pass even more tenant protections. The apartment complex is infested with roaches and her neighbors are too scared to speak up, she said.

Her apartment has flooded at least seven times in the eight years she’s lived there, she said, flipping through cellphone photos of her toilet and bathtub filled with dark yellow-brown water. In October 2020, she slipped from water pouring down from the upstairs apartment and dislocated her hip.

She has never been compensated, including all the gifts lost when the apartment flooded with water on Christmas Eve 2017. Two months later, in February 2018, feces and urine bubbled from the tub and toilets.

“We got two five-gallon buckets and a bag of plastic bags brought to us and we had to (urinate and defecate) in those buckets for five days because the toilets were blown off the floor,” Carlson said.

The toilets still gurgle, indicating blockage. That’s when she shuts off the water and waits for plumbers to clear the backup.

Tenant organizer Devin Williams grew up in Antioch after his parents moved out of San Francisco in 2003, part of a migration of Black residents leaving city centers for cheaper homes in safer suburbs. The 32-year-old is devastated that the same opportunity is not available to tenants like Carlson now.

“People have a responsibility to make sure people have habitable living conditions,” he said. “And their lives are just being exploited because people want to make money.”

Russia cafe blaze north of Moscow kills 13, injures 5

MOSCOW (AP) — A fire in a large cafe in the Russian city of Kostroma killed 13 people and injured five others on Saturday, local authorities said.

The governor of the Kostroma region, Sergei Sitnikov, said 13 people died in the fire and five more were slightly injured. Kostroma, a riverside city of 270,000, is 340 kilometers (210 miles) north of Moscow.

The blaze erupted in the early hours after someone apparently used a flare gun, according to the authorities. The Russian state news agency RIA Novosti reported that a brawl erupted in the cafe shortly before the fire, but it wasn’t immediately clear if it had anything to do with the flare gun.

Russia’s Investigative Committee, which investigates major crimes, said a suspect had been detained for allegedly firing the flare gun and that the cafe’s director also was being held.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 39 of 82

Rescuers were able to evacuate 250 people. The roof of the cafe collapsed during the fire, which engulfed an area of 3,500 square meters (more than 37,000 square feet). Firefighters spent five hours battling the blaze, and a dozen residents of nearby residential buildings were evacuated as a precaution.

Ikhtiyar Mirzoyev, a member of the regional legislature and owner of the cafe, promised assistance to those affected by the fire.

It wasn't the first time that pyrotechnics caused a deadly fire at a recreational venue in Russia. In 2009, more than 150 people were killed in a blaze at the Lame Horse nightclub in the city of Perm that erupted after a performer set off fireworks.

Influencers debate leaving Twitter, but where would they go?

By ALEXANDRA OLSON and MARYCLAIRE DALE Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Pariss Chandler built a community for Black tech workers on Twitter that eventually became the foundation for her own recruitment company.

Now she's afraid it could all fall apart if Twitter becomes a haven for racist and toxic speech under the control of Elon Musk, a serial provocateur who has indicated he could loosen content rules.

With Twitter driving most of her business, Chandler sees no good alternative as she watches the uncertainty play out.

"Before Elon took over, I felt like the team was working to make Twitter a safer platform, and now they are kind of not there. I don't know what's going on internally. I have lost hope in that," said Chandler, 31, founder of Black Tech Pipeline, a jobs board and recruitment website. "I'm both sad and terrified for Twitter, both for the employees and also the users."

Those qualms are weighing on many people who have come to rely on Twitter, a relatively small but mighty platform that has become a digital public square of sorts for influencers, policy makers, journalists and other thought leaders.

Musk, the CEO of Tesla and SpaceX, took over Twitter last week in a \$44 billion deal, immediately making his unpredictable style felt.

Just days later, he had tweeted a link to a story from a little-known news outlet that made a dubious claim about the violent attack on Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's husband at their California home. He soon deleted it, but it was a worrying start to his tenure for those concerned about the spread of disinformation online.

Musk has also signaled his intent to loosen the guardrails on hate speech, and perhaps allow former President Donald Trump and other banned commentators to return. He tempered the thought after the deal closed, however, pledging to form a "content moderation council" and not allow anyone who has been kicked off the site to return until it sets up procedures on how to do that.

Yet the use of racial slurs quickly exploded in an apparent test of his tolerance level.

"Folks, it's getting ugly here. I am not really sure what my plan is. Stay or go?" Jennifer Taub, a law professor and author with about a quarter million followers, said Sunday, as she tweeted out a link to her Facebook page in case she leaves Twitter.

For now, Taub plans to stay, given the opportunity it provides to "laugh, learn and commiserate" with people from across the world. But she'll leave if it becomes "a cesspool of racism and antisemitism," she said in a phone call.

"The numbers are going down and down and down," said Taub, who has lost 5,000 followers since Musk officially took over. "The tipping point might be if I'm just not having fun there. There are too many people to block."

The debate is especially fraught for people of color who have used Twitter to network and elevate their voices, while also confronting toxicity on the platform.

"As a user of Twitter — as a power user in a lot of ways — it has had a great utility and I'm very concerned about where people go to have this conversation next," said Tanzina Vega, a Latina journalist in New York who once received death threats on Twitter but also built a vital community of friends and sources there.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 40 of 82

A software engineer, Chandler hoped to counter the isolation she felt in her white-dominated field when she tweeted out a question and a selfie four years ago: "What does a Black Twitter in Tech look like? Here, I'll go first!" The response was overwhelming. She now has more than 60,000 followers and her own company connecting Black tech workers with companies large and small.

She also received hate message and even some death threats from people accusing her of racism for centering Black technologists. But she also had connections with Twitter employees who were receptive to her concerns. Chandler said those employees have either left the company or are no longer active on the platform.

Chandler's company also uses Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn but none can replicate the type of vibrant community she leads on Twitter, where people mix professional networking and light bantering.

Instagram and TikTok are fueled more by images than text exchanges. Facebook is no longer popular with younger users. LinkedIn is more formal. And although some developers are trying to rush out alternative sites on the fly, it takes times to develop a stable, user-friendly site that can handle millions of accounts.

Joan Donovan, an internet scholar who explores the threat that disinformation poses to democracy in her new book, "Meme Wars," said it's not clear if Twitter will remain a safe place for civic discourse. Yet she called the networks that people have built there invaluable — to users, to their communities and to Musk.

"This is the exact reason that Musk bought Twitter and didn't just build his own social network," Donovan said. "If you control the territory, you can control the politics, you can control the culture in many ways."

In his first few hours at the helm, Musk fired several top Twitter executives, including chief legal counsel Vijaya Gadde, who had overseen Twitter's content moderation and safety efforts around the globe. And he dissolved the board of directors, leaving him accountable, at least on paper, only to himself. On Friday, Twitter began widespread layoffs.

European regulators immediately warned Musk about his duty under their digital privacy laws to police illegal speech and disinformation. The U.S. has far more lax rules governing Twitter and its 238 million daily users. But advertisers, users and perhaps lenders may rein him in if Congress does not first tighten the rules.

"If the advertisers go and the users go, it may well be that the marketplace of ideas sort of sorts itself out," said Cary Coglianese, an expert on regulatory policy at the University of Pennsylvania law school.

That could leave Twitter to be just another magnet for extremists and conspiracy theorists — a concern driving some to urge their network of friends to stay, in order to counter those narratives.

Chandler said she can only "walk on eggshells" and take a wait-and-see approach.

"I'm personally going to stay on Twitter until there is really not a reason to stay anymore. I don't know what the future holds, I'm kind of hoping for some sort of miracle," she said. "For now, I won't be going anywhere."

Walker, Warnock offer clashing religious messages in Georgia

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — One candidate in Georgia's Senate contest warns that "spiritual warfare" has entangled America and offers himself to voters as a "warrior for God." But it isn't the ordained Baptist minister who leads the church where Martin Luther King Jr. once preached.

It's Republican Herschel Walker, the sports icon who openly questions the religious practices of Democratic Sen. Raphael Warnock, who calls himself "a pastor in the Senate" and declares voting the civil equivalent of prayer.

Both men feature faith as part of their public identities in a state where religion has always been a dominant cultural influence. But they do it in distinct ways, jousting in moral terms on matters from abortion, race and criminal justice to each other's personal lives and behavior.

Their approaches offer a striking contrast between political opponents who were raised in the Black church in the Deep South in the wake of the civil rights movement.

"It's two completely different visions of the world and what our biggest problems actually are," said the

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 41 of 82

Rev. Ray Waters, a white evangelical pastor in metro Atlanta who backs Warnock in Tuesday's election.

How religious voters align could help decide what polls suggest is a narrow race that will help settle which party controls the Senate the next two years. According to Pew Research, about 2 out of 3 adults in Georgia consider themselves "highly religious."

Warnock, 53, preaches a kind of social justice Christianity that echoes King, the slain civil rights leader who also led Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta.

The senator embraces the Black church's roots in chattel slavery and Jim Crow segregation. From the pulpit, he acknowledges institutional racism and calls for collective government action that addresses inequities and other social ills. He often notes his arrests as a citizen protester advocating for health insurance expansion in the same Capitol where he now works as a senator.

"I stand up for health care because it's a human right," Warnock said. "Dr. King said that of all the injustices, health care inequality is the most shocking and the most inhumane."

Walker talks, too, of society's shortcomings, but the 60-year-old points to the expansion of LGBTQ rights, renewed focus on racism and "weak" politicians, who, he says, "don't love this country." He has called for a national ban on abortions but has faced accusations from two former girlfriends who said he pressured them into terminating pregnancies and paid for their procedures. He has said the claims are lies.

It's a culturally conservative pitch tied to individual morals rather than collective responsibility and effectively holds that the United States is a Christian country. That aligns Walker with the mostly white evangelical movement that has shaped the modern Republican Party.

Those approaches, varied in substance and style, are traced through the two rivals' biographies.

Warnock, the son of Pentecostal ministers, pursued a similar educational path as King. Both attended Morehouse College, a historically Black campus in Atlanta. Warnock followed that with Union Theological Seminary in New York, a center of progressive Christian theology. Now with more than a decade in one of the nation's most famous pulpits, he sometimes quotes Scripture at length and peppers his arguments with Latin references.

"I believe a vote is a kind of prayer for the world we desire ... and that democracy is the political enactment of the spiritual idea that each of us was created, as the scriptures tell us, in the 'Imago Dei' — the image of God," Warnock told a group of Jewish supporters last month.

At the same event, during observances of the Jewish New Year, Warnock noted a passage often used as part of Rosh Hashanah fasting. "Is this the fast that the Lord is looking for," he said, "that you would loose the chains of injustice and you would set the oppressed free, that you would feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger." Offering the citation — Isaiah 58:6 — he called it "a favorite of mine."

Walker also is a Pentecostal pastor's son and now attends nondenominational Bible churches. A star high school athlete in rural Georgia, his football prowess took him in 1980 to the University of Georgia, a secular public campus that was then overwhelmingly white. Walker never graduated, though he claims otherwise.

He talks often of Jesus, typically as a figure of "redemption" rather than a guide for public policy.

"Let me acknowledge my Lord and savior Jesus Christ, because it's said if you don't acknowledge him, he won't acknowledge you," Walker said at his lone debate with Warnock. "When I come knocking, I want him to let me in."

Many Walker events open with prayers, some led by other Black conservative evangelicals. Yet Walker's scriptural and theological references are scattershot, usually nonspecific allusions as part of broadsides against Warnock and "wokeness."

On transgender rights, Walker has said: "I can't believe we're discussing what is a woman. That's written in the Bible. ... We got to not let them fool us with all those lies."

At a "Women for Herschel" event in August, Walker suggested Warnock is anti-American, and he alluded to the biblical story of the Hebrew God expelling dissident angels from heaven. "It's time for us to kick those people who don't like America, kick 'em out of office," he said, concluding to his largely white audience: "Don't let anyone tell you you're racist."

On abortion, he said directly to Warnock on the debate stage: "Instead of aborting those babies, why are you not baptizing those babies?"

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 42 of 82

It's a compelling argument for voters such as Wylene Hayes, a 76-year-old retired schoolteacher in Cumming. "You can just tell Herschel is a man of strong faith, and just humble," she said. "I don't have anything against Sen. Warnock, but I do question how he can be a pastor and support abortion."

Warnock counters that he supports abortion access because "even God gives us a choice," while Walker's position would grant "to politicians more power than God has."

Waters said Walker's collective argument is targeted squarely at white suburban Christians like those he led for decades before moving closer to the Atlanta city center, where he saw more problems to fix and people to help. "It seems to me the central issues in wokeness are ... compassionate habits that are a lot of what Jesus said to do," Waters said.

Warnock largely sidesteps Walker's attacks. He has recently begun framing Walker as "not fit" for the Senate because of Walker's "lies" about his business record and allegations of violence against his ex-wife. The closest Warnock comes to questioning Walker's faith is to say redemption requires that a person "confess ... and be honest about the problem."

"I will let him speak for himself," Warnock said. "I am engaged in the work I've been doing my whole life."

The Rev. Charles Goodman, an Augusta pastor and friend of Warnock, said it's not new for outspoken Black pastors, especially those with a more liberal theology, to be tarred as dangerous and anti-American.

"They called Dr. King a 'communist,' and now it's 'radical' and 'socialist,'" Goodman said. "Dr. Warnock loves this country. There will always be tensions between our aspirational views of the country versus our struggle trying to get to that place. He's a very hopeful minister, and he's always going to speak truth to power and live in that tension."

Private school vouchers open faith options for kids of color

By GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO and CHEYANNE MUMPHREY Associated Press

MILWAUKEE (AP) — On break in the hallway between St. Marcus Lutheran Church and its attached school, eighth grader Anii Kinepoway had no hesitation in explaining what she's learned to love best here — the good Lord and good grades.

"I like knowing there's somebody you can ask for help if you need it. Somebody is there and looking over you," she said of her newly found faith, while proudly wearing the tie indicating her academic honors.

Anii's mother could only afford this educational opportunity because of school choice programs, which 94% of St. Marcus' 1,160 students in Milwaukee also use.

"It has changed our lives for the better," said Wishkub Kinepoway, a Native American and African American single mom. "She says, 'I really love St. Marcus because I don't have to pretend I'm not smart.'"

School choice is one of many education issues that have become a partisan battleground, bringing parents to the polls this fall. One core question is how widely, if at all, taxpayer money should pay for private school tuition, instead of only financing public schools. Critics say such programs weaken public schools, whose costs remain high even if students transfer, taking some state funding with them.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated tensions. Public schools often were closed longer than private ones, and extended online learning has been linked to major learning losses.

But many low-income parents in neighborhoods like Milwaukee's predominantly African American north side or Latino south side say voucher programs — introduced here three decades ago — are the only way their children can attend faith-based institutions. They say those schools teach structure and values in ways public ones are often too overwhelmed to do.

"It's a huge difference because it's a support in faith and in values," said Lorena Ramirez, whose four children attend St. Anthony, walking distance from home on Milwaukee's south side. "I was looking for a school that would help me."

St. Anthony is one of the country's largest Catholic schools — 1,500 students on five campuses who are 99% Latino and almost entirely covered by public funding, said its president, Rosana Mateo. It was founded by German immigrants 150 years ago, just like St. Marcus.

Until the 1960s, urban parochial schools could count on financing from flourishing parishes and cheap

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 43 of 82

payroll costs, since nuns often taught for free. Without those supports, schools started charging substantial tuition, now up to \$8,000-\$9,000 per academic year — unaffordable for most working-class families.

“Our neediest students should have the opportunity to go to private schools,” said Mateo, a former deputy superintendent in Milwaukee’s public schools.

The expansion and politicization of voucher programs, however, is “no longer targeting really poor kids” but rather “disproportionately helping middle-class, white students,” said Gary Orfield, an education professor and co-director of the Civil Rights Project at the University of California, Los Angeles. His research found students of color have lower test scores and graduation rates when attending low-quality private schools, because most vouchers programs don’t allow for transportation to higher-performing ones.

While urban, faith-based schools don’t necessarily outperform all public ones on test scores, their students enjoy better civic outcomes, from college graduation rates to lower drug use, said Patrick Wolf, a professor of education at the University of Arkansas.

“They contribute more to the community than just educating the kids,” Wolf said.

In Omaha, Nebraska — a state Wolf called a “school choice desert” — three Catholic schools in danger of closing formed a foundation.

They’ve raised millions of dollars to serve nearly 600 children, 93% of them students of color and all in need of financial assistance, said the Rev. Dave Korth, foundation president and pastor at one of the related parishes.

Reliable public funds would keep the schools sustainable for parents who choose them “not because of political hot-button things. They simply want their kids in faith-based environments because they believe they’ll be better citizens,” Korth said.

Arizona is at the other end of the school choice spectrum — against strong opposition, its governor signed one of the country’s broadest voucher system expansions, allowing every parent to use public funds for private tuition or other education costs.

One such parent is Jill Voss, who’s using tuition assistance to send her three children to Phoenix Christian School PreK-8, where she’s the athletic director and physical education teacher. She’s an alumna, as are her parents and grandparents, who were among the first students when the school opened in 1959.

“A lot of the reason we chose Phoenix Christian was because of our family and just knowing my kids were getting a good Christian foundation to their schooling,” Voss said. “Church and having a church family is important to us.”

Diamond Figueroa, a sixth grader who attends Phoenix Christian thanks to financial assistance just like 98% of her schoolmates, said she wasn’t always comfortable in public school, even though more students there were also Hispanic.

“Everyone here is so much nicer and welcoming,” she said. “I am not afraid to ask questions.”

It is broad spiritual values rather than specific denominational practices that parents and educators find helpful in preventing the fights and other aggressive behavior that have recently plagued schools.

“Say there’s a dispute between two kids ready to go to blows,” said Ernie DiDomizio, the principal of St. Catherine School, citing an example from that morning when students were fighting over sneakers. The Catholic school in Milwaukee has 130 students, most African American and all enrolled through choice programs. “At that moment, we prayed for grace and acceptance. In public schools, you can’t do that.”

For recent immigrants, especially from Latin America, where Catholic traditions are more visible in public life, faith-based schools help maintain cultural ties.

Learning Mexican folkloric dances at St. Anthony, for instance, helps her children feel more at home with their family’s culture, Ramirez said. The public schools where she first sent her oldest “don’t teach much about cultures. Here there are all kinds, and nobody is discriminated.”

One of her daughter’s fifth-grade classmates, Evelyn Ramirez, likes St. Anthony’s lesson that God “made the world with good people and not just mean people.”

Catholic schools historically played a major role in integrating Hispanic immigrants in American culture, especially when public schools were segregated, said Felipe Hinojosa, a professor of Latino politics and

religion at Texas A&M University.

Continued racial divisions of many urban neighborhoods affect school performance. St. Marcus is the only school — out of 14 in the area that are 80% low-income and 80% African American — where more than 20% of students are proficient in reading, said St. Marcus superintendent Henry Tyson.

“Parents send their kids to St. Marcus because they’re frustrated with schools where their kids are failing,” Tyson said. “We want kids to know they’re redeemed children of God. It’s transformative for their sense of self.”

When she enrolled at St. Marcus last year, Anii was unfamiliar with the prayers and school uniform.

“On the first day ... I stood there looking around, feeling awkward and out of place. ... Now I can do my own thing in my relationship with God,” she said, before rushing back to math class.

Power blackouts across Ukraine amid Russian shelling

By ANDREW MELDRUM Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine’s state electricity operator on Saturday announced blackouts in Kyiv and seven other regions of the country in the aftermath of Russia’s devastating strikes on energy infrastructure.

The move comes as Russian forces continue to pound Ukrainian cities and villages with missiles and drones, inflicting damage on power plants, water supplies and other civilian targets, in a grinding war that is nearing its nine-month mark.

Russia has denied that the drones it has used in Ukraine came from Iran, but the Islamic Republic’s foreign minister on Saturday for the first time acknowledged supplying Moscow with “a limited number” of drones before the invasion. Hossein Amirabdollahian claimed, however, that Tehran didn’t know if its drones were used against Ukraine and stated Iran’s commitment to stopping the conflict.

Ukrenergo, the sole operator of Ukraine’s high-voltage transmission lines, initially said in a an online statement Saturday that scheduled blackouts will take place in the capital and the greater Kyiv region, as well as several regions around it — Chernihiv, Cherkasy, Zhytomyr, Sumy, Poltava and Kharkiv.

Later in the day, however, the company released an update saying that scheduled outages for a specific number of hours aren’t enough and instead there will be emergency outages, which could last an indefinite amount of time.

Ukraine has been grappling with power outages and disruption of water supplies since Russia started unleashing massive barrages of missile and drone strikes on the country’s energy infrastructure last month.

Moscow has said those came in response to what it alleged were Ukrainian attacks on Crimea, the region that Russia illegally annexed in 2014. Ukraine has denied those allegations.

Meanwhile, Russian shelling of Ukrainian regions continued into the early hours of Saturday.

About 40 shells were fired overnight at the city of Nikopol, Dnipropetrovsk Gov. Valentyn Reznichenko said on Telegram. The Russian forces targeted the city and the areas around it from heavy artillery. Two fires broke out, and more than a dozen of residential and utility buildings, as well as a gas pipeline, were damaged, the official said.

Elsewhere in the region, the Ukrainian forces shot down a drone and another projectile, according to Reznichenko.

In the southern Mykolaiv region, the overnight shelling of rural areas damaged several houses, but didn’t cause any casualties, Mykolaiv Gov. Vitali Kim said on Telegram.

The Russian forces also fired missiles at the southeastern Zaporizhzhia region, which has been illegally annexed by Moscow and large parts of which remain occupied. According to regional Gov. Oleksandr Starukh, the attack took place shortly after midnight and damaged buildings of three businesses, as well as a number of cars.

In the eastern Donetsk region, also annexed and partially occupied by Russia, eight cities and villages have been shelled, including Bakhmut, Avdiivka and Porkovsk.

Russian-installed authorities in Donetsk reported an attempt on the life of a Moscow-appointed judge of the region’s Supreme Court. Alexander Nikulin, who was on a judicial panel that in June sentenced

to death two Britons and a Moroccan fighting on the Ukrainian side, has been hospitalized with gunshot wounds and is in grave condition, Kremlin-backed officials said.

According to Ukraine's presidential office, at least three civilians were killed and eight others were wounded over the past 24 hours by Russian shelling of nine Ukrainian regions, where drones, missiles and heavy artillery were used.

In the Russian-occupied Kherson region, where a Ukrainian counteroffensive is underway, the Russian military continue to abduct local residents, the presidential office said, with the most recent cases taking place over the past 24 hours.

Medicare enrollees warned about deceptive marketing schemes

By AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Mailers designed to look like official government forms. Buses sporting scam pitches for Medicare websites. TV commercials featuring celebrities who encourage people to sign up for Medicare plans that do not always include their current doctors.

With Medicare's open enrollment underway through Dec. 7, health experts are warning older adults about an uptick in misleading marketing tactics that might lead some to sign up for Medicare Advantage plans that do not cover their regular doctors or prescriptions and drive up out-of-pocket costs.

"It's a very complicated environment where people are receiving information from companies that are also selling them plans," said Gretchen Jacobson at the Commonwealth Fund, a health care think tank. "It's important we find a way to protect and inform consumers."

Business is booming in the Medicare Advantage plan marketplace, which offers privately run versions of the government's Medicare program for people who are 65 and older or have disabilities. Competition for customers is fierce, with insurers turning to marketing agencies and brokers in an effort to help stick out among dozens of plans offered through the program.

Staff at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services are on the trail. They are secretly shopping for plans by calling the numbers linked to some online, TV and newspaper ads placed by these marketing firms, according to an agency memo sent to insurers last month. Already, the operation has turned up insurance agents who were using inaccurate information to sell plans. In some cases, ads or agents have overstated the benefits that enrollees would get and the money they would save in the new plans.

The government agency, known as CMS, can issue warning letters and, in some cases, small civil fines for violations.

"CMS is concerned about the marketing practices of all entities, including Third-Party Marketing organizations," Kathryn A. Coleman, director of the agency's Medicare Drug and Health Plan Contract Administration Group, wrote in the letter.

The agency reported a spike in complaints last year around misleading Medicare Advantage ads, receiving nearly 40,000 compared to 15,000 in 2020. Data is not yet available for this year.

Democrats on the Senate Finance Committee released an investigative report this past week showing that several states also reported an increase in complaints around deceptive marketing schemes in 2021.

In Ohio, for example, older adults received mailers resembling federal government tax forms that featured promises of bigger Social Security checks if they enrolled in a new Medicare Advantage plan. State officials also reported that a bus was designed to look like an official Medicare bus, but displayed an advertising link to an insurance broker.

Nationwide TV ads, too, have misled some customers, the committee's report found.

One ad, featuring a former NFL football player, failed to tell viewers that plans vary by ZIP code or that some providers will not be in network — meaning higher out-of-pocket costs for consumers — while promising to "add money back to your Social Security check."

The committee surveyed 15 states about complaints about Medicare Advantage marketing, finding that 9 of 10 states that tracked such complaints saw an increase in reports from 2020 to 2021.

"It is unacceptable for this magnitude of fraudsters and scam artists to be running amok in Medicare and

I will be working closely with CMS to ensure this dramatic increase in marketing complaints is addressed," said the committee chairman, Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore.

In the memo last month, the government agency said it had reviewed thousands of complaints, finding "numerous issues." It is also requiring that insurance agents and brokers record enrollment calls with clients so they can be reviewed if complaints are lodged. CMS said insurance companies are responsible for the material published on their behalf by agents, brokers or marketing companies they contract with.

In Georgia, state officials are tracking an increase in marketing around the plans and say they are fielding more calls from people who are worried about the plans they enrolled in, said Christine Williams of the State Health Insurance Assistance Program. In some cases, callers have said they enrolled in a plan that didn't allow them to see their providers.

She said people who are enrolling in Medicare Advantage should ask brokers or agents how doctors, prescriptions and services, including dental or vision care, are covered by the plans they are selling. Every state also offers counselors to help people navigate the enrollment process.

"Really ask specific questions," Williams said.

Biden's alliance with the left has worked, but will it last?

By FARNOUSH AMIRI and SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Joe Biden wasn't progressives' first choice for the White House in 2020. And he wasn't their second or third, either.

But defying expectations, liberal Democrats have emerged as the president's most loyal allies in Congress during his first two years in office, helping to pass a massive COVID-19 relief package, a historic investment in American infrastructure and billions of dollars to combat climate change.

Their alliance was as fruitful as it was unlikely. And it could soon be put to the test.

Democrats are bracing for losses in Tuesday's elections that could cost them their majorities in the House and Senate, an outcome certain to fuel questions about the party's direction as Biden considers another run for the White House. Republicans, bullish on their chances of winning back power, are preparing an onslaught of investigations into Biden's administration and are certain to try and unravel his legislative achievements.

The dynamic between Biden and the liberal flank of his party is one that lawmakers insist will end up uniting Democrats behind Biden, even as some openly say they don't want him to run for reelection and others complain the president is too prone to compromise.

"The White House is going to need allies to defend the president against the bogus investigations that Republicans may try to launch," California Rep. Ro Khanna, a former co-chair of Bernie Sanders' 2020 presidential campaign, said in an interview. "The White House is going to need Dems to be defending the White House's economic record."

The movement of progressives into the Biden camp came against long odds.

They are separated by generations and ideologies, with the 79-year-old Biden — a creature of the consensus-driven Senate who has reminisced fondly about how he was able to work even with segregationists — hailing from a party establishment often scornful of younger lawmakers of color who want bold stands on climate change, racial justice and other issues.

But once Biden emerged triumphant from the Democratic primaries and the general election in 2020, he sought party unity, forming a joint task force with the Sanders campaign to craft an agenda.

The result was a Biden wish list that looked much like the left's: sweeping COVID-19 aid, tax credits for families, free community college, universal child care, public works spending, policies to address climate change.

The White House also took care to nurture relationships with the Democrats who could have been their noisiest critics.

In the past year, either Biden or senior White House aides met with members of the progressive caucus at least a half-dozen times, most notably when the president called directly into a gathering of the group

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 47 of 82

just before the infrastructure vote last November. Biden has appeared alongside House progressives on at least seven trips to their districts in September and October.

The caucus gets plenty of attention from elsewhere in the administration, with at least 10 Cabinet members or agency heads meeting with the progressives in the past year, according to a White House official.

Its legislative affairs office assigned Alicia Molt-West, a former aide to Rep. Mark Pocan, D-Wis., to be its primary liaison to the Congressional Progressive Caucus, and she checks in almost every day. The leader of that caucus, Washington Rep. Pramila Jayapal, has had a direct line to the senior-most levels of the White House, notably chief of staff Ron Klain, and that empowered her and expanded her influence among other lawmakers on Capitol Hill.

"She's been a great partner of mine and worked really closely with me," Biden said of Jayapal at an April event in Auburn, Washington.

"One of the things that the president has said to me — and that I really feel — is that we've had his back," Jayapal, told The Associated Press. "We were the loudest and the best champions of the president's agenda and we really worked hard to make the case to the country for that agenda."

Despite some glaring exceptions, much of the progressives' wish list become law, a testament to the willingness of Democratic lawmakers to accept what was politically possible.

"Two years ago, few would have expected that we'd be able to pass the biggest climate bill in history, issue direct checks for millions of Americans, pass the first major gun safety bill in a generation and cancel up to \$20,000 of student debt," said Minnesota Rep. Ilhan Omar, a member of the caucus leadership.

Those efforts weren't without pain.

Much to their chagrin, progressives had to relent on their initial insistence that a bipartisan infrastructure bill move in tandem with a separate package on social spending that would represent the party's most ambitious priorities. Then came the spectacular collapse of Biden's negotiations with Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., just before Christmas, triggering the precise scenario progressives had long feared.

Tensions seemed to be flaring again last week, when a letter from the caucus signed by 30 lawmakers and urging Biden to engage in direct diplomatic talks with Russia over its invasion of Ukraine generated intense blowback.

As talk swirled that liberal support for arming Ukraine was now in doubt, several of the Democrats on the letter disavowed it, saying it had been signed months ago at a different time in the war. The caucus ultimately retracted the letter, all while insisting that there was no daylight between the group's position and Biden's.

Even afterward, senior White House officials were trying to tamp down anger within the party.

Klain, Biden's top aide, told at least one frustrated House Democrat who wanted to say something publicly about the letter that Democrats needed to direct their energy toward Republicans before the election rather than at each other, according to two officials who were not authorized to publicly discuss private conversations and spoke on condition of anonymity.

But rifts with the left have been the exception, not the rule, during Biden's term. Progressives, nearly certain to be reelected from deep-blue districts, are making plans for how they can use their platform in the next Congress to again push the party in a progressive direction.

"If Democrats lose some power this election, the White House and the entire party will benefit from very clear distinctions on popular issues like Social Security, and progressives are the ones who innately are more equipped to be full-throated in making the case for these popular economic priorities," said Adam Green, co-founder of the Progressive Change Campaign Committee and a former adviser to Sen. Elizabeth Warren, the Massachusetts Democrat who ran for president in 2020.

N. Korea fires more missiles as US flies bombers over South

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea added to its recent barrage of weapons demonstrations by launching four ballistic missiles into the sea on Saturday, as the United States sent two supersonic bomb-

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 48 of 82

ers streaking over South Korea in a dueling display of military might that underscored rising tensions in the region.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said that the four short-range missiles fired from a North Korean western coastal area around noon flew about 130 kilometers (80 miles) toward the country's western sea.

The North has test-fired more than 30 missiles this week, including an intercontinental ballistic missile on Thursday that triggered evacuation alerts in northern Japan, and flew large numbers of warplanes inside its territory in an angry reaction to a massive combined aerial exercise between the United States and South Korea.

The South Korean military said two B-1B bombers trained with four U.S. F-16 fighter jets and four South Korean F-35 jets during the last day of the "Vigilant Storm" joint air force drills that wraps up Saturday. It marked the first time since December 2017 that the bombers were deployed to the Korean Peninsula. The exercise involved around 240 warplanes, including advanced F-35 fighter jets from both countries.

North Korea's Foreign Ministry late Friday described the country's military actions this week as an appropriate response to the exercise, which it called a display of U.S. "military confrontation hysteria." It said North Korea will respond with the "toughest counteraction" to any attempts by "hostile forces" to infringe on its sovereignty or security interests.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the participation of the B-1Bs in the joint drills demonstrated the allies' readiness to "sternly respond" to North Korean provocations and the U.S. commitment to defend its ally with the full range of its military capabilities, including nuclear.

B-1B flyovers had been a familiar show of force during past periods of tensions with North Korea, including the North's provocative run in nuclear and long-range missile tests in 2017. But the flyovers had been halted in recent years as the United States and South Korea stopped their large-scale exercises to support the former Trump administration's diplomatic efforts with North Korea and because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The allies resumed their large-scale training this year after North Korea dialed up its weapons testing to a record pace, exploiting a divide in the U.N. Security Council over Russia's war on Ukraine as a window to accelerate arms development.

North Korea hates such displays of American military might at close range. The North has continued to describe the B-1B as a "nuclear strategic bomber" although the plane was switched to conventional weaponry in the mid-1990s.

Vigilant Storm had been initially scheduled to end Friday, but the allies decided to extend the training to Saturday in response to a series of North Korean ballistic launches on Thursday, including an ICBM that triggered evacuation alerts and halted trains in northern Japan.

Thursday's launches came after the North fired more than 20 missiles on Wednesday, the most in a single day. Those launches came after North Korean senior military official Pak Jong Chon issued a veiled threat of a nuclear conflict with the United States and South Korea over their joint drills, which the North says are rehearsals for a potential invasion.

South Korea also on Friday scrambled about 80 military aircraft after tracking about 180 flights by North Korean warplanes inside North Korean territory. The South's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the North Korean warplanes were detected in various areas inland and along the country's eastern and western coasts, but did not come particularly close to the Korea's border. The South Korean military spotted about 180 flight trails from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m., but it wasn't immediately clear how many North Korean planes were involved and whether some may have flown more than once.

In Friday's statement attributed to an unidentified spokesperson, North Korea's Foreign Ministry said the United States and South Korea had created a seriously "unstable atmosphere" in the region with their military exercises. It accused the United States of mobilizing its allies in a campaign using sanctions and military threats to pressure North Korea to unilaterally disarm.

"The sustained provocation is bound to be followed by sustained counteraction," the statement said.

North Korea has launched dozens of ballistic missiles this year, including multiple ICBMs and an intermediate-range missile flown over Japan. South Korean officials say there are indications North Korea in

coming weeks could detonate its first nuclear test device since 2017. Experts say North Korea is attempting to force the United States to accept it as a nuclear power and seeks to negotiate economic and security concessions from a position of strength.

COP27: Host resort town gives Egypt tight grip over protests

By The Associated Press undefined

SHARM EL-SHEIKH, Egypt (AP) — With turquoise seawaters and rich coral reefs, Egypt's resort town of Sharm el-Sheikh is a picturesque location for this year's United Nations global summit on climate change, known as COP27.

But behind postcard-perfect appearances, it's a tightly controlled fortress on the Red Sea. Climate activists say the restrictions will discourage protests that have been a way for the public to raise their voices at past summits.

Many working in tourism have been sent home; those who stayed need special security cards. Vacationers have been turned back at security checkpoints surrounding the town. Hotel rates have increased tenfold, pricing out many. Local workers are prevented from speaking freely with visitors.

In a country where protests are virtually banned, the government has set up a specific venue for climate protests — except no one is quite sure where it is. Notifications are required 36 hours in advance.

Egypt's Foreign Ministry did not respond to requests for comment. In past statements, officials have pledged to allow protest and participation from activists.

As COP27 approaches, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi's government has touted its efforts to make Sharm el-Sheikh a more eco-friendly city, with new solar panels and electric vehicles.

"From the beginning, there was a big question mark on the choice of Egypt as a host country," said one Egyptian activist, who was detained for over two years without trial during the government's crackdown on dissent. He spoke on condition of anonymity, fearing he could be re-arrested. "They know that the choice of Sharm means there would be no protests."

The scene is likely to be a sharp contrast to COP26 last year in Glasgow, Scotland, where some 100,000 people marched through the streets in one rally and protesters massed frequently in public squares, parks and bridges.

On Friday, a group of activists took part in a small protest calling for climate action on the African continent at a roundabout in front of the conference venue in Sharm el-Sheikh. A line of police stood by.

A group of U.N.-appointed experts has expressed concern that the environment in Egypt will not be conducive to full and open participation.

Since 2013, el-Sissi, a U.S. ally with deep economic ties to European countries, has overseen a massive crackdown, jailing thousands of Islamists, but also secular activists involved in the 2011 popular uprising. Many others have fled the country. A prominent rights activist, Alaa Abdel-Fattah, escalated his hunger strike this week, refusing also water.

Outside the Sinai Peninsula, where Sharm el-Sheikh is located, rights groups say more than 100 people have been detained the past two weeks in Cairo and other cities as security forces stepped up their presence in main squares after rumors of planned protests on Nov. 11. COP27 starts on Sunday and is expected to last through Nov. 18.

The government has repeatedly said its security measures are vital to maintaining stability in a nation of more than 104 million people after a decade of turmoil that started with the Arab Spring and was followed by years of deadly Islamic militant attacks.

For decades, Sharm el-Sheikh has been the government's favorite spot for conferences and high-level summits precisely because it is so easy to control. The 1996 Mideast peace summit attended by then-President Bill Clinton was held there.

Isolated in the desert near the Sinai's southern tip, Sharm — as it's often referred to — is a six-hour drive from the capital, Cairo. Vehicles must pass through a closely guarded tunnel under the Suez Canal, then numerous checkpoints along the highway, enabling authorities to turn back those considered undesirable.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 50 of 82

A concrete and razor-wire barrier surrounds parts of Sharm. One entrance is set into a several-story-high concrete wall, painted with a gigantic peace sign — a reference to the “City of Peace,” a nickname authorities have tried to make stick to Sharm. Large boulevards in the desert link walled resorts, with few public spaces for people to gather.

Hussein Baoumi, Amnesty International’s researcher for Egypt and Libya, called it a “dystopic city.”

“There is so much surveillance, so much control over who enters and who leaves the city, which is again an attempt to control who gets to speak to the international community,” he said.

Hotel workers say security is particularly tight for COP27 — all must obtain security clearance and since Tuesday, they have been barred from leaving their places of work or housing. Some decided to return to their hometowns until the conference ends.

“We are accustomed to restrictions, but this time it is very harsh and there were no exceptions,” said a waiter at a four-star hotel.

Security has always been high in Sharm because to the north, across the length of the peninsula, Egypt’s military has been battling a decade-old insurgency led by a local branch of the Islamic State group. In 2015, a Russian MetroJet plane crashed soon after takeoff from Sharm el-Sheikh, killing all 224 people onboard, an attack claimed by IS.

Sinai has twice been occupied by neighboring Israel: first during the Suez Crisis in 1956, which also involved France and Britain, and later in the 1967 Middle East war. It was returned to Egypt in 1982 as part of the U.S.-brokered peace deal between Egypt and Israel.

Since then, government-licensed development has helped resorts along Sinai’s southern coast become a top beach and scuba-diving destination.

The COP27 conference is taking place at Sharm’s large convention center. As in past COPs, only official U.N.-accredited delegates can enter the venue, known as the Blue Zone, which during the gathering is considered U.N. territory and subject to international law.

Another venue, the Green Zone, is for businesses, youth and civil society to hold events on the sidelines of the summit. It remains unclear where protests are meant to happen. A government COP27 website says that besides the 36-hour notification for protests inside the venue, a 48-hour notice via email is required for protests outside it.

From the few photos of the Green Zone in pro-government press, it appears to be on a section of highway or a parking area with cafeterias set up. Maj. Gen. Khaled Fouda, the provincial governor, called the site “very chic and clean” in comments to local TV last month.

“Protests are allowed, but smashing and insulting are not allowed,” he said.

The government has dispatched 500 taxis to transport COP27 attendants, Fouda said — all with cameras connected to a “security observatory” meant to monitor the drivers’ behavior.

None of this bodes well for activism, climate protest leaders say.

Greta Thunberg, a youth leader of the protest movement, has said she would not attend. “The space for civil society this year is extremely limited,” she said at a recent London event. “It will be very difficult for activists to make their voice heard.”

Cost is another factor. The recently released Egyptian activist said that many can’t afford to travel, with the cost of a plane ticket from Cairo out of reach for many amid double-digit domestic inflation.

Cristine Majeni, a youth environment volunteer from Kenya’s capital, Nairobi, scraped together thousands of dollars required for her 10-day trip, after struggling through the accreditation process.

“It’s crucial for us to be given an opportunity to take part,” she said.

Iran acknowledges sending drones to Russia for first time

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran’s foreign minister on Saturday acknowledged for the first time that his country has supplied Russia with drones, insisting the transfer came before Moscow’s war on Ukraine that has seen the Iranian-made drones divebombing Kyiv.

The comments by Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian come after months of confusing

messaging from Iran about the weapons shipment, as Russia sends the drones slamming into Ukrainian energy infrastructure and civilian targets.

"We gave a limited number of drones to Russia months before the Ukraine war," Amirabdollahian told reporters after a meeting in Tehran.

Previously, Iranian officials had denied arming Russia in its war on Ukraine. Just earlier this week, Iran's Ambassador to the U.N. Amir Saeid Iravani called the allegations "totally unfounded" and reiterated Iran's position of neutrality in the war. The U.S. and its Western allies on the Security Council have called on Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to investigate if Russia has used Iranian drones to attack civilians in Ukraine.

Even so, Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard has vaguely boasted of providing drones to the world's top powers. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has extolled the efficacy of the drones and mocked Western hand-wringing over their danger. During state-backed demonstrations to mark the 1979 U.S. Embassy takeover on Friday, crowds waved placards of the triangle-shaped drones as a point of national pride.

As he acknowledged the shipment, Amirabdollahian claimed on Saturday that Iran was oblivious to the use of its drones in Ukraine. He said Iran remained committed to stopping the conflict.

"If (Ukraine) has any documents in their possession that Russia used Iranian drones in Ukraine, they should provide them to us," he said. "If it is proven to us that Russia used Iranian drones in the war against Ukraine, we will not be indifferent to this issue."

Prison-like center puts focus on UK's response to migrants

By SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Behind wire fences in southeast England, children wave their arms and chant "freedom" to grab the attention of people on the other side. A young girl throws a bottle with a message inside. "We need your help. Please help us," the note reads.

The children are among thousands of people being held in dangerously overcrowded conditions at a closed airport serving as a processing center for migrants who recently arrived on British shores after crossing the English Channel in small boats. The situation there has reignited a heated debate about the Conservative U.K. government's treatment of asylum-seekers.

Located at the site of a former British air force base that had a short life as the civilian Manston Airport, the center in Kent was designed as a short-term processing facility housing about 1,600 newcomers. Up to 4,000 were staying there at one point this week, with some reportedly detained unlawfully for a month or more.

Independent government inspectors said they saw families sleeping on floors in prison-like conditions that presented fire and health hazards. The inspectors warned of the risk of outbreaks after cases of scabies, diphtheria and other conditions were reported.

"Welcome to the U.K.," read a headline in the Metro newspaper, accompanied by a close-up photo of young children gazing out from behind metal fences.

Facing pressure over the situation, U.K. Home Secretary Suella Braverman defended the government's policies and described the increasing number of migrants arriving via the English Channel as "an invasion on our southern coast." Her comment drew widespread condemnation.

The conditions at the center in the village of Manston has put a spotlight on wider problems in Britain's asylum system, which is struggling to cope with a record number of small boat crossings at a time when border officials are trying to clear a massive backlog of refugee applications.

"We've got this kind of perfect storm of more people coming — which the government was warned about — and added to the mix we have this huge waiting list of around 100,000 individuals who have sought asylum," said Jonathan Ellis, the policy and public affairs lead at Britain's Refugee Council. "There's a lack of political will, a lack of political focus, and therefore, (a lack of) the associated resources to really tackle this issue."

Around 40,000 people from countries that include Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq and Albania have crossed one of the world's busiest shipping lanes in dinghies and other unseaworthy boats from northern France so

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 52 of 82

far this year, hoping to start new lives in the U.K.

That's the highest number ever recorded, and it represents an exponential increase from 2018, when only 299 migrants were detected arriving in England in small boats without authorization, official data showed. Last year, there were 28,536.

Dozens of people have lost their lives attempting the passage, including 27 who died when a packed smuggling boat capsized in November 2021.

Braverman, who is known for an uncompromising approach to immigration, has blamed criminal gangs for facilitating the crossings and focused on what she called spurious claims by some of those seeking refuge.

She told lawmakers in Parliament this week to "stop pretending that they are all refugees in distress." Her harsh language has drawn criticism, including from within the governing Conservative Party. Some critics accuse Braverman of fueling anti-immigration hate.

"The government rhetoric since I arrived has been scapegoating migrants, blaming us for the problems of this country. But it's gotten a lot worse," said Hassan Akkad, a documentary maker who fled Syria in 2012 to seek asylum in the U.K.

"When you have a home secretary comparing asylum-seekers to an invading enemy, you are giving a green light to the public to attack them," added Akkad, who works with refugee charity Choose Love.

The overcrowding at the Manston center reached a breaking point this week after hundreds of people were moved there from another migrant processing center nearby that was hit with gasoline bombs. Police said the man who carried out the Oct. 30 attack and killed himself afterward was likely driven by a "hate-filled grievance."

Braverman also faced accusations that she blocked hotel bookings for asylum-seekers to ease overcrowding at Manston and ignored legal advice on the matter. She denied the claims.

Critics say government incompetence in managing Britain's asylum system extend beyond Manston and precede Braverman becoming interior minister in September. The opposition Labour Party said only 4% of asylum claims from small boat arrivals were processed last year, meaning that more than 100,000 people are in limbo waiting for their applications for protection to be considered.

The U.K. is a preferred destination in Europe for migrants who speak English or have family connections in the country. Before the coronavirus pandemic, many tried to cross from northern France by hiding in freight trucks traveling through the Channel Tunnel. COVID-19 travel restrictions and stricter security measures on the route made the hazardous sea journey a more viable way to enter the U.K.

But despite the unprecedented increase in people arriving in small boats, the U.K. receives far fewer asylum-seekers than many other European countries, including France, Germany and Italy. Last year, 48,540 people applied for British asylum, compared to 148,200 applicants in Germany and more than 103,000 in France.

A controversial deal the U.K. government struck with Rwanda in April added to its reputation of not being the most welcoming. The agreement called for deporting some asylum-seekers to the African country, where their claims would be processed and successful applicants would be allowed to stay in Rwanda. The plan was meant to deter people from entering the U.K. illegally, but no one to date has been deported because of legal challenges to the policy.

U.K. authorities have also sought to work with their French counterparts to stop the Channel crossings. The two sides engaged in tense wrangling over the issue last year, but relations appeared to improve after Liz Truss — and her successor Rishi Sunak — became prime minister.

In a call with French President Emmanuel Macron last week, Sunak said the U.K. and France were "committed to deepening our partnership to deter deadly journeys across the Channel that benefit organized criminals."

Ellis, at the Refugee Council, said authorities ultimately would need to focus less on hostile rhetoric and deterrence and more on safer routes for legitimate asylum seekers to apply for refuge.

"We need to challenge this political rhetoric that people should only come to this country through legal routes," he said. "Ostensibly that's reasonable, but for someone who's fleeing the Horn of Africa, where are they meant to go? What are those safe routes? There is none."

Thousands pack Bahrain national stadium for pope's main Mass

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

MANAMA, Bahrain (AP) — Thousands of Christians from around the Gulf packed Bahrain's sports stadium on Saturday for Pope Francis' big Mass, as he shifted the attention of his four-day visit to ministering to the Catholic community in the overwhelmingly Muslim region.

The English-language liturgy was clearly geared toward the South Asian migrant workers who make up the bulk of the Gulf's Catholics, with prayers in Malay, Tagalog and Tamil and a priest offering English translations of the pope's native Spanish homily.

Pilgrims wearing identical white caps to shade them from the morning sun waved the yellow and white flags of the Holy See as Francis looped around the Bahrain National Stadium in his popemobile before Mass. A big cheer erupted when he kissed a young girl in a bubble-gum pink dress who was brought to the vehicle.

According to the Vatican, local organizers estimated some 30,000 people attended the service. Organizers had said that passes to the event were snapped up within two days of them becoming available, with pilgrims coming from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and other Gulf countries.

"This is actually a very huge honor," said Bijoy Joseph, an Indian living in Saudi Arabia who attended. "This is like a blessing for us to be part of our Holy Father's papal Mass in Bahrain."

Francis is on the first-ever papal visit to the island kingdom the size of New York City that lies off the coast of Saudi Arabia. The primary aim was to participate in a government-sponsored interfaith conference to promote Catholic-Muslim dialogue. But for the final two days, he shifted gears to focus on ministering to the Catholic community, a minority in the country of around 1.5 million.

Most are workers from India, Pakistan, the Philippines and other South Asian countries, many of whom have left behind their families to work in Bahrain's construction, oil extraction and domestic service industries.

In his homily, Francis urged them to do good, and turn the other cheek, "even when evil is done to us."

"There will be cases of friction, moments of tension, conflicts and opposing viewpoints, but those who follow the Prince of Peace must always strive for peace. And peace cannot be restored if a harsh word is answered with an even harsher one," he said. "No, we need to 'disarm,' to shatter the chains of evil, to break the spiral of violence, and to put an end to resentment, complaints and self-pity."

Sebastian Fernandez, an Indian living in Bahrain, said he was blessed to be able to attend. "It will be a fruitful Mass and we are happy to see our pope," he said.

After the Mass, Francis was meeting with young people at the Sacred Heart school, which dates from the 1940s and is affiliated with the church of the same name that was the first Catholic Church built in the Gulf. Francis wraps up his visit Sunday meeting with priests and nuns at the church.

Biden is 'not buying' that Democrats may lose in midterms

By AAMER MADHANI and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

ROSEMONT, Ill. (AP) — President Joe Biden said Friday he was feeling "really good" about Democrats' chances in the midterm elections, even as he traveled to the Chicago area to support two House members who are facing more competitive reelection battles than expected.

"Folks, I'm not buying the notion that we're in trouble," he told the crowd at a political reception in a hotel for U.S. Reps. Lauren Underwood and Sean Casten. The Congressional Leadership Fund, a super political action committee, or super PAC, aligned with the GOP House leadership, this week announced a \$1.8 million ad buy against Casten, who represents an Illinois district that Biden won by about 11 percentage points in 2020.

Before a crowd of roughly 50 people, the president ticked off his administration's signature legislative achievements on infrastructure, climate and lowering the cost of prescription drugs, efforts he said were

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 54 of 82

achieved in collaboration with Underwood and Casten. "Sean and Lauren have been great partners with all of this across the board," he said.

Of Casten, he said, "Sean is smart, effective and is one of the most honorable men I've ever served" with. He touted Underwood's ability to work across party lines, calling her a "champion of families."

The stops outside Chicago and earlier Friday in California — and events to come in Joliet, Illinois, Pennsylvania and New York this weekend — are all part of Biden's down-to-the-minute efforts to shore up shaky ground that had once been reliably predicted to go for Democrats, in an effort to blunt the impact of projected losses in congressional seats and in governors races across the country in Tuesday's midterm elections.

"I feel really good about our chances," he told reporters as he boarded Air Force One for Illinois from Southern California. "I think we're going to keep the Senate and pick up a seat, and I think we have a chance of winning the House. So, I feel optimistic."

In Carlsbad, California, Biden toured a communications company that was expected to benefit from his push to bolster American semiconductor manufacturing. He took along embattled Rep. Mike Levin for the visit to Viasat, as the president highlighted his CHIPS and Science Act, a \$280 billion legislative package, and the work his administration has done for U.S. veterans.

"Mike's a champion for his constituents, especially veterans who live here," Biden said, noting throughout his remarks that he got signature bills passed "with Mike's help."

Levin, a two-term congressman representing a San Diego-area district that was once a Republican stronghold, is locked in a tight race with former San Juan Capistrano Mayor Brian Maryott. Biden headlined a rally Thursday night in Oceanside, California, for Levin.

Coronavirus pandemic-era supply disruptions and a dearth of domestic chip manufacturing hampered Viasat, which relies on such components for services it provides to industrial customers and the U.S. military. The company also makes a point of hiring returning veterans. Biden on Friday spoke of how the CHIPS act will help Viasat and other companies reduce their reliance on overseas chip manufacturers.

"It's a game-changer," he said of the ability to have chips readily available in the U.S.. "Thanks to this law, this company hopes to significantly grow its global business and hire more workers in the next five years."

Saturday morning he's to deliver remarks in nearby Joliet, Illinois, on Social Security and Medicare, before heading to Philadelphia to join former President Barack Obama to stump for Senate candidate John Fetterman.

From there, Biden will travel to Westchester County, just north of New York City, to campaign for Gov. Kathy Hochul, who's in a tough race with Republican Lee Zeldin.

"If we just keep fighting, keep the House and Senate, we're going to be okay, but if we lose the House and Senate, it's going to be a horrible two years," Biden said, briefly abandoning his signature optimism before adding, "The good news is I'll have the veto pen."

Twitter slashes its staff as Musk era takes hold on platform

By BARBARA ORTUTAY and MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writers

Twitter began widespread layoffs Friday as new owner Elon Musk overhauls the company, raising grave concerns about chaos enveloping the social media platform and its ability to fight disinformation just days ahead of the U.S. midterm elections.

The speed and size of the cuts also opened Musk and Twitter to lawsuits. At least one was filed alleging Twitter violated federal law by not providing fired employees the required notice.

The San Francisco-based company told workers by email Thursday that they would learn Friday if they had been laid off. About half of the company's staff of 7,500 was let go, Yoel Roth, Twitter's head of safety & integrity, confirmed in a tweet.

Musk tweeted late Friday that there was no choice but to cut the jobs "when the company is losing over \$4M/day." He did not provide details on the daily losses at the company and said employees who lost their jobs were offered three months' pay as a severance.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 55 of 82

No other social media platform comes close to Twitter as a place where public agencies and other vital service providers — election boards, police departments, utilities, schools and news outlets — keep people reliably informed. Many fear Musk's layoffs will gut it and render it lawless.

Roth said the company's front-line moderation staff was the group the least impacted by the job cuts.

He added that Twitter's "efforts on election integrity — including harmful misinformation that can suppress the vote and combatting state-backed information operations — remain a top priority."

Musk, meanwhile, tweeted that "Twitter's strong commitment to content moderation remains absolutely unchanged."

But a Twitter employee who spoke with The Associated Press Friday said it will be a lot harder to get that work done starting next week after losing so many colleagues.

"This will impact our ability to provide support for elections, definitely," said the employee who spoke on the condition of anonymity out of concerns for job security.

The employee said there's no "concrete sense of direction" except for what Musk says publicly on Twitter.

"I follow his tweets and they affect how we prioritize our work," said the employee. "It's a very healthy indicator of what to prioritize."

Several employees who tweeted about losing their jobs said Twitter eliminated their entire teams, including one focused on human rights and global conflicts, another checking Twitter's algorithms for bias in how tweets get amplified, and an engineering team devoted to making the social platform more accessible for people with disabilities.

Eddie Perez, a Twitter civic integrity team manager who quit in September, said he fears the layoffs so close to the midterms could allow disinformation to "spread like wildfire" during the post-election vote-counting period in particular.

"I have a hard time believing that it doesn't have a material impact on their ability to manage the amount of disinformation out there," he said, adding that there simply may not be enough employees to beat it back.

President Joe Biden, at a campaign event in Illinois Friday night, said: "Now what are we all worried about? Elon Musk, who goes out and buys an outfit that sends and spews lies all across the world. ... How do we expect kids to be able to understand what is at stake?"

Twitter's employees have been expecting layoffs since Musk took the helm. He fired top executives, including CEO Parag Agrawal, and removed the company's board of directors on his first day as owner.

As the emailed notices went out, many Twitter employees took to the platform to express support for each other — often simply tweeting blue heart emojis to signify its blue bird logo — and salute emojis in replies to each other.

A Twitter manager said many employees found out they had been laid off when they could no longer log into the company's systems. The manager said the way the layoffs were conducted showed a "lack of care and thoughtfulness." The manager, who spoke to the AP on the condition of anonymity out of concerns for job security, said managers were not given any notice about who would be getting laid off.

"For me as a manager, it's been excruciating because I had to find out about what my team was going to look like through tweets and through texting and calling people," the employee said. "That's a really hard way to care for your people. And managers at Twitter care a lot about their people."

A coalition of civil rights groups escalated their calls Friday for brands to pause advertising buys on the platform. The layoffs are particularly dangerous ahead of the elections, the groups warned, and for transgender users and other groups facing violence inspired by hate speech that proliferates online.

In a tweet Friday, Musk blamed activists for what he described as a "massive drop in revenue" since he took over Twitter late last week.

Insider Intelligence analyst Jasmine Enberg said there is "little Musk can say to appease advertisers when he's keeping the company in a constant state of uncertainty and turmoil, and appears indifferent to Twitter employees and the law."

"Musk needs advertisers more than they need him," she said. "Pulling ads from Twitter is a quick and painless decision for most brands."

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 56 of 82

A lawsuit was filed Thursday in federal court in San Francisco on behalf of one employee who was laid off and three others who were locked out of their work accounts. It alleges Twitter violated the law by not providing the required notice.

The Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification statute requires employers with at least 100 workers to disclose layoffs involving 500 or more employees, regardless of whether a company is publicly traded or privately held, as Twitter is now.

Twitter filed notifications late Friday in California for its offices in San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Jose. The layoffs affected 983 employees in the state, according to the filings. Twitter said it will continue to pay wages and benefits to the workers through Jan. 4 and employees were notified on Friday.

The layoffs affected Twitter's offices around the world. In the United Kingdom, it would be required by law to give employees notice, said Emma Bartlett, a partner specializing in employment and partnership law at CM Murray LLP.

The speed of the layoffs could also open Musk and Twitter up to discrimination claims if it turns out, for instance, that they disproportionately affected women, people of color or older workers.

Family, fans bid adieu to music icon Jerry Lee Lewis

FERRIDAY, La. (AP) — Family, friends and fans will gather Saturday to bid farewell to rock 'n' roll pioneer Jerry Lee Lewis at memorial services held in his north Louisiana home town.

Lewis, known for hits such as "Great Balls of Fire" and "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On," died Oct. 28 at his Mississippi home, south of Memphis, Tennessee. He was 87.

Saturday's funeral service is set for 11 a.m. at Young's Funeral Home in Ferriday, the town where he was born, family members said. A private burial will follow. At 1 p.m., a celebration of life is planned at the Arcade Theater, also in Ferriday.

Lewis, who called himself "The Killer," was the last survivor of a generation of artists that rewrote music history, a group that included Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry and Little Richard.

After his personal life blew up in the late 1950s following news of his marriage to his cousin, 13-year-old — possibly even 12-year-old — Myra Gale Brown, while still married to his previous wife, the piano player and rock rebel was blacklisted from radio and his earnings dropped to virtually nothing. Over the following decades, Lewis struggled with drug and alcohol abuse, legal disputes and physical illness.

In the 1960s, Lewis reinvented himself as a country performer and the music industry eventually forgave him. He had a run of top 10 country hits from 1967 to 1970, including "She Still Comes Around" and "What's Made Milwaukee Famous (Has Made a Loser Out of Me)."

Lewis was the cousin of TV evangelist Jimmy Swaggart and country star Mickey Gilley. Swaggart and Lewis released "The Boys From Ferriday," a gospel album, earlier this year. Swaggart will officiate at his funeral service.

In 1986, along with Elvis, Berry and others, he was in the inaugural class of inductees for the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and joined the Country Hall of Fame this year. His life and music was reintroduced to younger fans in the 1989 biopic "Great Balls of Fire," starring Dennis Quaid, and Ethan Coen's 2022 documentary "Trouble in Mind."

A 2010 Broadway music, "Million Dollar Quartet," was inspired by a recording session that featured Lewis, Elvis, Carl Perkins and Johnny Cash.

Lewis won a Grammy in 1987 as part of an interview album that was cited for best spoken word recording, and he received a lifetime achievement Grammy in 2005.

The following year, "Whole Lotta Shakin'" was selected for the Library of Congress' National Recording Registry, whose board praised the "propulsive boogie piano that was perfectly complemented by the drive of J.M. Van Eaton's energetic drumming. The listeners to the recording, like Lewis himself, had a hard time remaining seated during the performance."

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 57 of 82

Biden, Obama, Trump make final midterm push in Pennsylvania

By MARC LEVY, STEVE PEOPLES and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — Swing-state Pennsylvania is the stage for a clash of presidents on Saturday as each party's biggest stars work to energize voters just days before voting concludes in high-stakes midterm elections across the country.

Former President Barack Obama opens the day at a Pittsburgh rally with Democratic Senate hopeful John Fetterman, the Pennsylvania lieutenant governor who represents his party's best chance to flip a Republican-held Senate seat on Tuesday. Obama and Fetterman will appear alongside President Joe Biden and gubernatorial candidate Josh Shapiro later in the day in Philadelphia.

Former President Donald Trump, meanwhile, will finish the day courting voters in a working-class region in the southwestern corner of the state with Senate candidate Dr. Mehmet Oz and gubernatorial candidate Doug Mastriano.

The flurry of presidential attention on Pennsylvania underscores the stakes in 2022 and beyond for a presidential battleground state hosting pivotal elections for the U.S. Senate, House and governor on Tuesday. The Senate contest could well decide the Senate majority — and with it, Biden's agenda and judicial appointments for the next two years. The governor's race will determine the direction of state policy and control of the state's election infrastructure ahead of the 2024 presidential contest.

Polls show a close contest between Trump's preferred Senate candidate, Oz, and Biden's choice, Fetterman, in the race to replace retiring GOP Sen. Pat Toomey.

In the race for governor, Shapiro, the Democratic state attorney general, leads polls over Mastriano, a state senator and retired Army colonel who some Republicans believe is too extreme to win a general election in a state Biden narrowly carried two years ago.

And while Democrats feel good about the Pennsylvania governor's race, they enter the weekend decidedly on the defensive nationwide as voters sour on Biden's leadership amid surging inflation, crime concerns and widespread pessimism about the direction of the country.

History suggests that Democrats, as the party in power, will suffer significant losses on Tuesday.

Obama's midday appearance in Pittsburgh marks his first time campaigning in Pennsylvania this year, though the former president has been the Democratic Party's top surrogate in the final sprint to Election Day. Obama campaigned in recent days across Georgia, Michigan, Wisconsin, Nevada and Arizona before hitting Pennsylvania.

As Biden's approval numbers sag, the current president has been a far less visible presence in battleground states, though Saturday marks his third appearance in three weeks in his home state of Pennsylvania as he works to buoy Fetterman's prospects.

The White House has worried privately for weeks that concerns about Fetterman's health might undermine his candidacy.

Fetterman is still recovering from a stroke he suffered in May. He jumbled words and struggled to complete sentences in his lone debate against Oz last month, although medical experts say he's recovering well from the health scare.

Despite his challenges, Fetterman has relentlessly attacked Oz over his opposition to abortion rights and castigated the former New Jersey resident as an ultrawealthy carpetbagger who will say or do anything to get elected. Oprah Winfrey, who elevated Oz on her TV show, endorsed Fetterman on Thursday.

Oz, meanwhile, has worked to craft a moderate image in the general election and focused his attacks on Fetterman's progressive positions on criminal justice and drug decriminalization. Still, Oz has struggled to connect with some voters, including Republican voters who think he's too close to Trump, too liberal or inauthentic.

Meanwhile, Trump will hold a rally in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, to bolster Oz and Mastriano on Saturday night.

Oz barely won the GOP nomination even after getting Trump's endorsement. The former Republican president is betting that the celebrity TV doctor, who counts former first lady Melania Trump as a fan, will help Republicans win over suburban women in the crucial swing state.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 58 of 82

The event is part of a final rally blitz that will also take Trump to Florida and Ohio -- both critical presidential battleground states. He's hoping a strong GOP showing this week will generate momentum for the 2024 run that he's expected to launch in the days or weeks after polls close.

Trump has been increasingly explicit about his plans.

At a rally Thursday night in Iowa, traditionally home of the first contest on the presidential nominating calendar, Trump repeatedly referenced his 2024 White House ambitions.

After talking up his first two presidential runs, he told the crowd: "Now, in order to make our country successful and safe and glorious, I will very, very, very probably do it again, OK? Very, very, very probably. Very, very, very probably."

"Get ready, that's all I'm telling you. Very soon," he said.

The potential dynamics of the race are already spilling out into public view.

On Sunday, Trump will headline a rally in Miami, Florida, to bolster Sen. Marco Rubio, a onetime rival. Not invited: Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who is running for reelection and is widely considered Trump's most formidable challenger if both men decide to run for president.

Trump's rally schedule underscores both his undeniable popularity with the Republican base and his polarity. His aides acknowledge that Trump is best deployed in races in which candidates are trying to turn out the base.

Republicans in Westmoreland County, where Trump will speak Saturday, hope that the former president will do just that on Saturday.

"The Trump bump is still a real phenomenon," said Bill Bretz, who chairs the Westmoreland County GOP. "I'm sure that's what he's hoping to bring in, to make sure everyone is aware of the significance of those races, give a boost to both men and really drive out that Election Day vote."

Biden stumps on job growth, as voters dread inflation

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden has notched an envious record on jobs, with 10.3 million gained during his tenure. But voters in Tuesday's midterm elections are far more focused on inflation hovering near 40-year highs.

That's left the president trying to convince the public that the job gains mean better days are ahead, even as fears of a recession build.

Presidents have long trusted that voters would reward them for strong economic growth, but inflation has thrown a monkey wrench into the already difficult probability of Democrats' retaining control of the House and Senate.

Economic anxieties have compounded as the Federal Reserve has repeatedly hiked its benchmark interest rates to lower inflation and possibly raise unemployment. Mortgage costs have shot upwards, while the S&P 500 stock index has dropped more than 20% so far this year as the world braces for a possible downturn.

Biden is asking voters to look beyond the current financial pain, saying that what matters are the job gains that he believes his policies are fostering. The government reported Friday that employers added 261,000 jobs in October as the unemployment rate bumped up to 3.7%.

Roughly 740,000 manufacturing jobs have been added since the start of Biden's presidency, a figure that the president says will keep rising because of his funding for infrastructure projects, the production of computer chips and the switch to clean energy sources.

"America is reasserting itself — it's as simple as that," Biden said in a Friday speech. "We also know folks are still struggling with inflation. It's our number one priority."

Yet the president is also warning that a Republican majority in Congress could make inflation worse by seeking to undo his programs and treating payments on the federal debt as a bargaining chip instead of an obligation to honor.

His challenge is that the party in power generally faces skeptical voters in U.S. midterms and inflation

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 59 of 82

looms over the public mindset more than job growth.

"If you have a job, it's small comfort to know that the job market is strong if at the same time you feel like every paycheck is worth less and less anyway," said pollster Kristen Soltis Anderson. "Inflation is such political poison because voters are reminded every day whenever they spend money that it is a problem we are experiencing."

As Biden tries to fend off fears that inflation is causing the country to slide into a recession, his chief evidence of the economy's resilience is the continued job growth.

"As we see the economy as a whole, we do not see it going into a recession," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters in anticipation of the latest jobs report.

Going into the election, Biden and Democrats are already at a disadvantage. Voters generally favor the party out of the White House in midterms, giving Republicans an automatic leg up. When Yale University economist Ray Fair looked at past elections, his model forecast that Democrats would get just 46.4% of the national vote largely because Biden was in the Oval Office.

Fair's analysis suggests that inflation basically erased the political boost that Democrats could have gotten from strong economic growth during three quarters in 2021. Even if the economy is top of mind for many voters, the conflicting forces of past growth and high inflation cancel out each other.

This makes the Democrats' vote share roughly the same as suggested by the historical trend, Fair concluded.

But inflation compounds the obstacles for a president who has tried to convey optimism as he tours the country in the run-up to the elections. Research in social psychology and behavioral economics generally shows that people often focus on the negatives and can block out the positives.

"People pay more attention to bad news than to good news and are more likely to retain and recall bad news," said Matthew Incantalupo, a political scientist at Yeshiva University.

Incantalupo's research looks at how voters absorb economic news. When unemployment is low, as it is now, he said, voters generally think about jobs as a personal issue — rather than a systemic one involving government policies. But most think about inflation as a social problem beyond any person's control, unless that individual happens to run the Fed.

"When it is high, everyone experiences it at least a little bit, and there really is no individual way to avoid it," Incantalupo said. "Voters are going to look to government for remedies under those circumstances, and in many cases that will result in them punishing incumbents, even in the presence of other positive news about the economy."

Republican candidates have specifically said Biden's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package last year overheated the economy, causing prices to rise alongside the job gains that they claim would have happened anyway as the pandemic receded. They have also said that Biden should have loosened restrictions on oil production, in order to increase domestic output and lower gasoline prices.

House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy — who could become speaker if the GOP wins a House majority — has hammered Biden on high prices. As Biden has warned that Republicans who deny the outcome of the 2020 election are a threat to democracy, the California congressman countered that what voters care about are the costs of gas and groceries.

"President Biden is trying to divide and deflect at a time when America needs to unite — because he can't talk about his policies that have driven up the cost of living," McCarthy tweeted this past week. "The American people aren't buying it."

Still, inflation is not solely a domestic issue. After Russia invaded Ukraine, energy and food costs rose and suddenly flipped the global dynamics as inflation rose faster in parts of the world with less aggressive coronavirus relief than the U.S. Annual inflation in the euro zone is a record 10.7%, much higher than the 8.2% in the U.S.

Meanwhile, growth has slowed in China, the pace of world trade is slipping and Saudi Arabia-led OPEC+ has cut oil production in order to prop up prices. And because the Fed is raising rates to lower domestic inflation, the dollar has increased in value and essentially exported higher prices to the rest of the world.

This has left U.S. voters in the curious position of not necessarily blaming the president for inflation, even as they disapprove of his economic leadership.

An October poll by AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs captured this split. More than half of voters say that prices are higher because of factors beyond Biden's control. But just 36% approve of his economic leadership.

Nike splits with Kyrie Irving amid antisemitism fallout

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

Nike has suspended its relationship with Kyrie Irving and canceled its plans to release his next signature shoe, the latest chapter in the ongoing fallout since the Brooklyn Nets guard tweeted a link to a film containing antisemitic material.

The shoe giant announced Friday night that it will halt its relationship with Irving, who has been suspended by the Nets for what the team called a repeated failure to "unequivocally say he has no antisemitic beliefs."

The Nets made that move Thursday, banning Irving without pay for at least five games, and a day later, Nike made its decision. Those actions followed widespread criticism — from, among many others, the Anti-Defamation League and NBA Commissioner Adam Silver.

"At Nike, we believe there is no place for hate speech and we condemn any form of antisemitism," the Beaverton, Oregon-based company said. "To that end, we've made the decision to suspend our relationship with Kyrie Irving effective immediately and will no longer launch the Kyrie 8."

Irving has had a signature line with Nike since 2014.

"We are deeply saddened and disappointed by the situation and its impact on everyone," Nike said.

Irving signed with Nike in 2011, shortly after becoming the No. 1 pick in that year's NBA draft. Irving's first signature shoe was released three years later, and the popularity of the Kyrie line led to him making a reported \$11 million annually just from the Nike endorsement.

The Kyrie 8 was expected to be released in the next week. Previous models of his shoes were still for sale on the Nike website Friday night.

LeBron James of the Los Angeles Lakers, who won a title alongside Irving when they were Cleveland teammates in 2016, said his position is simple: Hate speech, in any form, can't be tolerated.

"There's no place in this world for it," James said. "Nobody can benefit from that and I believe what Kyrie did caused some harm to a lot of people."

James, who has been with Nike for the entirety of his 20-season NBA career, said he still has great fondness for Irving.

"We as humans, none of us are perfect," James said. "But I hope he understands how what he did and the actions that he took were just harmful to a lot of people."

Irving posted a tweet — which has since been deleted — last week with a link to the documentary "Hebrews to Negroes: Wake Up Black America," which includes Holocaust denial and conspiracy theories about Jews. In a contentious postgame interview session last Saturday, Irving defended his right to post what he wants.

The fallout only continued from there. The NBA put out a statement over the weekend that didn't name Irving but denounced all forms of hate speech. Fans wearing "Fight Antisemitism" shirts occupied some courtside seats at the Brooklyn-Indiana game on Monday night, a day after he took down the tweet. The Nets and coach Steve Nash parted ways Tuesday, a development that has been overshadowed by the Irving saga.

On Wednesday, Irving said he opposes all forms of hate, and he and the Nets each announced that they would each donate \$500,000 toward groups that work to eradicate it. Silver then issued a new statement calling on Irving by name to apologize, and Irving refused to give a direct answer when asked Thursday if he has antisemitic beliefs.

That, evidently, was the last straw for the Nets, who suspended him. Hours later, Irving posted an apology on Instagram for not explaining the specific beliefs he agreed and disagreed with when he posted

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 61 of 82

the documentary.

"To All Jewish families and Communities that are hurt and affected from my post, I am deeply sorry to have caused you pain, and I apologize," Irving wrote. "I initially reacted out of emotion to being unjustly labeled Anti-Semitic, instead of focusing on the healing process of my Jewish Brothers and Sisters that were hurt from the hateful remarks made in the Documentary."

A day later, Nike — which had also been criticized for not moving more swiftly — took action.

Irving becomes the second celebrity in less than two weeks to lose a major shoe deal over antisemitism. Adidas parted ways with Ye — the artist formerly known as Kanye West — late last month, a move the German company said would result in about \$250 million in losses this year after stopping production of its line of Yeezy products as well as halting payments to Ye and his companies.

For weeks, Ye made antisemitic comments in interviews and on social media, including a Twitter post that he would soon go "death con 3 on JEWISH PEOPLE," an apparent reference to the U.S. defense readiness condition scale known as DEFCON.

Irving has expressed no shortage of controversial opinions during his career. He repeatedly questioned whether the Earth was round before eventually apologizing to science teachers. Last year, his refusal to get a COVID-19 vaccine led to him being banned from playing in most of the Nets' home games.

The Nets played at Washington on Friday, winning 128-86 without Irving. The 42-point win matched the fourth-largest in Nets franchise history.

Brooklyn general manager Sean Marks said earlier Friday that Irving's apology was a step forward, but many other steps will be required before he can resume playing.

"There is going to be some remedial steps and measures that have been put in place for him to obviously seek some counseling ... from dealing with some anti-hate and some Jewish leaders within our community," Marks said. "He's going to have to sit down with them, he's going to have to sit down with the organization after this, and we'll evaluate and see if this is the right opportunity to bring him back."

AP source: Trump ally appears before Mar-a-Lago grand jury

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A close ally of former President Donald Trump who has said he was present as Trump declassified broad categories of materials has appeared before a federal grand jury after being given immunity for his testimony, according to a person familiar with the matter.

Kash Patel testified Thursday after the Justice Department granted him immunity from prosecution and after a federal judge in Washington entered a sealed order to that effect.

He had invoked his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination during an earlier appearance before the grand jury, but the Justice Department — in an apparent acknowledgment of his importance as a witness — later granted him a limited form of immunity that protects him from having his testimony used against him.

In a statement Friday issued through a spokesperson, Patel made clear that his appearance was not voluntary and denied that he had reached any sort of immunity "deal" with the Justice Department.

"Rather, his testimony was compelled over his objection through the only legal means available to the government — a grant of limited immunity," the statement said.

It was not immediately clear Friday what Patel told the grand jury.

The Justice Department is conducting a criminal investigation into the discovery of top-secret records seized in an FBI search of Trump's Florida property, Mar-a-Lago, on Aug. 8. The FBI removed more than 100 documents with classification markings during that search.

That's in addition to 15 boxes of records recovered in January by the National Archives and Records Administration, as well as more than three dozen documents with classification markings that were turned over to investigators in June.

A former Justice Department prosecutor himself, Patel is a close Trump ally and held multiple roles in his administration, including as senior director for counterterrorism at the National Security Council and

later as chief of staff to the acting defense secretary, Chris Miller.

In recent months, he has repeatedly and publicly lambasted the Justice Department's Mar-a-Lago investigation. In an appearance this week on one conservative podcast, he described himself as "all in with the boss" when asked if he'd accept the position of FBI director if Trump won in 2024.

Patel is presumably of interest to investigators because of his claims, including in a May interview with Breitbart News, that he was present as Trump declassified material even though no changes had been made to classification markings on the documents.

In that interview, Patel said, Trump "declassified whole sets of materials in anticipation of leaving government that he thought the American public should have the right to read themselves."

Trump has previously claimed that a president can declassify information "just by thinking about it" but has provided no evidence that he did so. His lawyers, notably, have stopped short of asserting that he had taken steps to declassify the material that was found at Mar-a-Lago, though they have repeatedly argued that presidents have broad authority to declassify as they please.

Patel's testimony, first reported by The Washington Post, was confirmed by a person familiar with the matter who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss an ongoing investigation. A Justice Department spokesman declined to comment.

Justice Department policy empowers prosecutors to seek a court order to compel testimony from a witness by granting immunity when that witness invokes their right against self-incrimination. Among the factors to be weighed in that decision, according to Justice Department policy, is the value of the person's expected testimony to the investigation or potential prosecution.

Separately, FBI agents in May and June interviewed a former White House lawyer in the Trump administration about Trump's handling of classified information as president, a person familiar with the matter told AP on Friday.

That lawyer, John Eisenberg, told investigators that he did not help pack the boxes that were taken to Mar-a-Lago after Trump left the White House and had no knowledge of what documents they contained. He also said he had no recollection of Trump, as Patel has asserted, broadly or unilaterally declassifying whole categories of information or doing so on the spot, the person said.

Eisenberg, who served as legal advisor to the National Security Council, told agents that though he believed a president had wide declassification authority, the scope of that power also depended in some instances on the context, statutory analysis and specific nature of the information involved, the person said.

The Post earlier reported details of Eisenberg's interviews.

FBI officials have spoken with an array of other witnesses, including a Trump aide who was seen on video moving boxes at Mar-a-Lago.

Death in US gene therapy study sparks search for answers

By LAURA UNGAR AP Science Writer

The lone volunteer in a unique study involving a gene-editing technique has died, and those behind the trial are now trying to figure out what killed him.

Terry Horgan, a 27-year-old who had Duchenne muscular dystrophy, died last month, according to Cure Rare Disease, a Connecticut-based nonprofit founded by his brother, Rich, to try and save him from the fatal condition.

Although little is known about how he died, his death occurred during one of the first studies to test a gene editing treatment built for one person. It's raising questions about the overall prospect of such therapies, which have buoyed hopes among many families facing rare and devastating diseases.

"This whole notion that we can do designer genetic therapies is, I would say, uncertain," said Arthur Caplan, a medical ethicist at New York University who is not involved in the study. "We are out on the far edge of experimentation."

The early-stage safety study was sponsored by the nonprofit, led by Dr. Brenda Wong at the University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School and approved by the Food and Drug Administration. The hope was

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 63 of 82

to use a gene-editing tool called CRISPR to treat Horgan's particular form of Duchenne muscular dystrophy. The rare, genetic muscle-wasting disease is caused by a mutation in the gene needed to produce a protein called dystrophin. Most people with Duchenne die from lung or heart issues caused by it.

At this point, it's unclear whether Horgan received the treatment and whether CRISPR, other aspects of the study or the disease itself contributed to his death. Deaths are not unheard of in clinical trials, which test experimental treatments and sometimes involve very sick people.

But trials involving CRISPR are relatively new. And Fyodor Urnov, a CRISPR expert at the Innovative Genomics Institute at University of California, Berkeley, said any death during a gene therapy trial is an opportunity for the field to have a reckoning.

"Step one is to grieve for the passing of a brave human soul who agreed to be basically a participant in an experiment on a human being," Urnov said. "But then, to the extent that we can, we must learn as much as we can to carve out a path forward."

FEW ANSWERS YET

A statement from Cure Rare Disease said multiple teams across the country are looking into the details of the trial and its outcome, and the company intends to share findings with the scientific community.

"It will probably be 3-4 months to come up with a full conclusion," said spokesman Scott Bauman. "At this stage of the game, saying anything is pure speculation."

The company, which is also working on 18 other therapeutics, said in its statement that the teams' work is essential not only to shed light on the study's outcome but also "on the challenges of gene therapy broadly." Meanwhile, it said, "we will continue to work with our researchers, collaborators, and partners to develop therapies for the neuromuscular diseases in our pipeline."

Bauman said the company has filed a report on death with the FDA as required. The FDA declined to release or confirm the report.

Sarah Willey, spokeswoman for Chan Medical School, said scientists there provided data to the company for the report. She later emailed to say no one there would comment further; out of respect for the family's wishes, all information would come from Cure Rare Disease. Monkol Lek, a Yale genetics expert who has been collaborating on the effort, did not respond to a request for comment. Yale spokeswoman Bess Connolly asked a reporter for context on the story but didn't respond to a follow-up email or phone call.

A crucial question is whether CRISPR played a part in Horgan's death.

The chemical tool can be used to "edit" genes by making cuts or substitutions in DNA. The tool has transformed genetic research and sparked the development of dozens of experimental therapies. The inventors of the tool won a Nobel Prize in 2020.

In this case, scientists used a modified form of CRISPR to increase the activity of a gene. The CRISPR therapeutic is inserted directly into the body and delivered to cells with a virus.

But CRISPR is not perfect.

"We know that CRISPR can miss its target. We know that CRISPR can be partially effective. And we also know that there may be issues with ... viral vectors" that deliver the therapy into the body, Caplan said. "Red flags are flying here. We've got to make sure that they get addressed very, very quickly."

Safety issues have arisen in gene therapy studies before. Late last year, Pfizer reported the death of a patient in its early-stage trial for a different Duchenne muscular dystrophy gene therapy. And in a major earlier setback for the gene therapy field, 18-year-old Jesse Gelsinger died in 1999 during a study that involved placing healthy genes into his liver to combat a rare metabolic disease. Scientists later learned that his immune system overreacted to the virus used to deliver the therapy. Many recent studies, including the Cure Rare Disease trial, use a different virus that's considered safer.

Another difference? The recent trial involved just one person — a type of trial Caplan is skeptical about.

Horgan's recent death, he said, "may make us think whether we really do like studies that are just on one person, and do we want to say: 'No, ethically, you've got to at least have a trial where you line up 5, 10, 20 people (and) you learn from the data.'"

A 'MEDICAL PIONEER'

On the company's web site, Horgan was described as a "medical pioneer" who "will be remembered as

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 64 of 82

a hero.”

In 2020, the Montour Falls, New York resident blogged that he was diagnosed with Duchenne at age 3. As a kid, he said, he loved computers — once building his own — and would play catch in the driveway with his family when he could still walk. Later in his life, he used a motorized wheelchair. He studied information science at Cornell University and went on to work at the school in the information science department.

“As I grew up and began to understand what it meant to have DMD, my fears about this disease began to grow as it began to manifest,” Horgan wrote. “There weren’t many, or any, trials available to me through the years” — until this one brought the prospect of a customized drug.

Horgan was enrolled in the study on Aug. 31. The plan was to suppress his immune system to prep his body for a one-time, gene-editing therapy delivered by IV at UMass medical school, followed by monitoring in the hospital. The company explained that the therapy is designed to increase the level of an alternate form of the dystrophin protein using CRISPR, with the goal of stabilizing or potentially reversing the progression of symptoms.

Urnov, scientific director for technology and translation at the Berkeley genomics institute, said no other trial targeted this disease using this kind of virus to deliver this particular payload with its modified form of CRISPR.

Some other gene therapy trials — such as those targeting the blood disorders sickle cell disease and beta thalassemia — involve removing stem cells from someone’s blood, using CRISPR in the lab, then putting the altered cells back into the person. The first time CRISPR was used to edit genes within the body was to address a blindness-causing mutation.

Given the “exceptional distinctness” of the Cure Rare Disease approach, Urnov said he doesn’t think Horgan’s death will have a major impact on things like using gene therapy to fix blood diseases. But he said pinpointing the exact cause will help inform scientists throughout the field.

“History teaches us that in the case of such fatalities — which have been rare — that a deep dive into what happened was critical for the field to move forward.”

Sci-fi drama ‘Westworld’ canceled by HBO after 4 seasons

LOS ANGELES (AP) — HBO has pulled the plug on “Westworld,” its Emmy-winning sci-fi drama.

The series’ cancellation came less than three months after its fourth season concluded in August. The cast included Evan Rachel Wood, Ed Harris, Jeffrey Wright, Aaron Paul and Thandiwe Newton.

Newton earned a best supporting actress Emmy in 2018, and the series received more than 50 nominations and won nine awards from the TV academy.

In a statement Friday, HBO thanked series creators and executive producers Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy for taking “viewers on a mind-bending odyssey, raising the bar at every step,” and saluted the “immensely talented” actors and crew.

In October, Nolan told The Hollywood Reporter that he hoped HBO would order a fifth season to properly end the series that debuted in 2016 as a ratings success for the cable channel. Viewership fell in the third season and again in the fourth.

Like the 1973 film that inspired it, also titled “Westworld,” the series was initially set in a Western-style amusement park that allowed guests to realize their fantasies with the help of androids. The show later broadened into a artificial intelligence vs. human global conflict.

“We’ve been privileged to tell these stories about the future of consciousness — both human and beyond — in the brief window of time before our AI overlords forbid us from doing so,” Nolan and Joy’s Kilter Films said in a statement.

Astros aim to close out World Series over Phillies in Game 6

By KRISTIE RIEKEN AP Sports Writer

HOUSTON (AP) — Dusty Baker has been here before.

It’s hard not to think of the last time the Astros’ manager was up 3-2 in the Fall Classic as he leads the team back to Houston Saturday night for Game 6 of the World Series against the Philadelphia Phillies

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 65 of 82

needing just one win for a championship.

In 2002, Baker's San Francisco Giants and big bopper Barry Bonds entered Game 6 against the Anaheim Angels up by the same margin. As the road team for the last two games of that series, the Giants squandered a five-run lead in a 6-5 loss in the sixth game before the Angels won the title with a 4-1 victory in Game 7.

Twenty years later in his third trip to the World Series, Baker is still looking for that elusive championship after a quarter-century as a major league manager. As a player, he went three times with the Dodgers, winning it all as a big-hitting left fielder in 1981.

"I don't think about the situation I'm in," Baker said of chasing the title. "Just taking a day of rest, because (if) you think about something all the time, it would drive you crazy."

With A.J. Hinch as manager, the Astros also led the Series 3-2 in 2019 against the Nationals and lost in seven games.

The 73-year-old Baker, whose contract expires at the end of the postseason, also insisted that he hasn't spent any time worrying about his future either.

"I've just learned over a period of time that, hey, you just live your life, try to do the right things, seize the moment, and enjoy as much as you can," he said. "Enjoy this ride ... I always thought, hey, when I'm supposed to win, I'm going to win. And when I'm supposed to sign a contract, I'll sign a contract. But in the meantime, I'm just going to go out there and enjoy what I have been doing for a long time."

The Astros took a lead in the series by winning the last two games. Cristian Javier and three relievers combined for the second no-hitter in Series history in Game 4 before Justin Verlander finally got his first World Series win in Game 5 thanks to a clutch homer by rookie Jeremy Peña and a terrific ninth-inning catch by Chas McCormick.

Despite a two-game skid, Philadelphia manager Rob Thomson isn't worried about his team. After all, this is the same squad, led by stars Bryce Harper and Kyle Schwarber, that overcame a 22-29 start to reach the postseason for the first time since 2011.

"We've played really good baseball," Thomson said. "I don't think there's any reason to panic. We've just got to keep doing what we're doing and concentrate on doing the little things. I always tell 'em, focus on the little things and big things will happen."

Houston will start left-hander Framber Valdez against Zack Wheeler on Saturday night in a repeat of the Game 2 matchup the Astros won 5-2.

Valdez allowed four hits and a run with nine strikeouts in 6 1/3 innings for the victory in that one. Wheeler struggled, giving up six hits and five runs — four earned — in five innings.

Wheeler is looking for a better performance Saturday to allow the Phillies to force a Game 7 Sunday night where they could try for their third title and first since 2008.

"Just try to be a stopper and give our team one more chance after (Saturday)," Wheeler said. "So (Saturday's) a must-win and I'll take pride in that. Hopefully I can go out there and give us the best chance."

After facing the hostile crowds in Philadelphia for the last three games, Baker expects to enjoy home support that will be at full tilt as the Astros try to win their second World Series. Their only title came in 2017, a crown won in Los Angeles that was tarnished by a sign-stealing scandal that rocked baseball.

The last team to win a Series at home was the 2013 Boston Red Sox. The Astros watched as the Nationals celebrated a title on their field in 2019 and again last season as the Braves beat them in six games.

"It's going to be a great, great crowd," Baker said. "They're for us. The town's for us. Tickets are at a premium because all of a sudden now everybody wants tickets. We could probably hold a couple hundred thousand if we had room."

Russian soldiers enter Kherson homes, dig in for urban war

By ANDREW MELDRUM and YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian soldiers are forcing Ukrainian civilians from their apartments in the occupied capital of the Kherson region and moving in themselves, a resident said Friday as the southern city

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 66 of 82

became a growing focus of war in Ukraine.

His account of soldiers spreading throughout the city of Kherson suggested that Russia could be preparing for intense urban warfare in anticipation of Ukrainian advances.

Russia-installed authorities in Kherson continued to urge civilians to leave the city, which lies on the western bank of the Dnieper River and has been cut off from supplies and food by Ukrainian bombardment.

Kirill Stremousov, the deputy head of the region's Kremlin-appointed administration, reiterated calls for civilians to depart for the other bank of the river. Stremousov said Thursday that Russian forces might soon withdraw from Kherson city. On Friday, he said the statement was merely an attempt to encourage evacuations.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has suggested the Russians were feigning a pullout from Kherson in order to lure the Ukrainian army into an entrenched battle. Zelenskyy called attempts to convince civilians to move deeper into Russian-controlled territory "theater."

A Kherson resident told The Associated Press that Russian soldiers were installing themselves in vacated apartments. Russian military personnel were going door to door, checking property deeds and forcing tenants to leave immediately if they can't prove ownership of apartments, he said.

"They're forcing city residents to evacuate, and then Russian soldiers move into freed-up apartments across all of Kherson," the resident, who spoke on condition that only his first name — Konstantin — was used for security reasons. "It is obvious that they are preparing for fighting the Ukrainian army in the city."

Hospitals and clinics were not serving patients in Kherson, where residents also reported problems with food supplies.

"There are almost no deliveries of food into the city, the residents are using their own stocks and are queuing to the few shops that are still open," Konstantin said.

Ukrainian military analyst Oleh Zhdanov told the AP that as part of its counteroffensive to reclaim the Kherson region, the Ukrainian army cut off the western bank of the Dnieper from supplies of weapons and food by shelling main transportation routes and ruining bridges across the river.

"The Russians understand the danger of transport routes being blocked and have practically put up with the fact that they will have to retreat from the right bank of the Dnieper," Zhdanov said. "But the Russian troops are not prepared to leave Kherson peacefully and are preparing for battles within the city. They're deploying the mobilized reservists there and new tactical battalion groups."

According to Zhdanov, the Ukrainian army has a significant advantage over the Russians in aviation and artillery on the right bank, which means that they could shell the city of Kherson and avoid a head-on clash.

"Kyiv is taking its time because the Russian resources in Kherson are evaporating, and they're getting weaker by the day, which allows the Ukrainians to accumulate forces for the main strike," Zhdanov said.

Russian forces seized Kherson city soon after invading Ukraine in late February. Russia illegally annexed the Kherson, Donetsk, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia regions of Ukraine in late September and subsequently declared martial law in the four provinces.

The Kremlin-installed regional administration in Kherson already has moved tens of thousands of civilians out of the city, citing the threat of increased shelling as Ukraine's army pursues its counteroffensive.

Ukraine's southern military spokeswoman, Natalia Humeniuk, told Ukrainian television that some Russian military personnel were disguising themselves as civilians.

Neither side's claims could be independently verified.

Elsewhere, Ukrainian officials reported shooting down drones launched by Russian forces: eight drones in the Nikopol area, which was also subjected to shelling, and another drone over the western Lviv region.

The commander of Ukraine's armed forces, Valeriy Zaluzhny, said Russian forces had "tripled the intensity of hostilities on certain areas of the front" and were carrying out "up to 80 attacks every day."

Zelenskyy's office said at least nine civilians were killed and 16 wounded by attacks in Ukraine in the last day.

In Moscow, Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed Friday that there was still a steady stream of volunteers wanting to join the Russian military, with 318,000 people already mobilized. Authorities previously

said the goal was to mobilize some 300,000 reservists.

Putin said 49,000 were already in the army on combat missions, while the rest were still being trained. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said Tuesday that 87,000 were deployed to Ukraine. The discrepancy could not be reconciled.

When Russia announced the mobilization drive in September, protests erupted in several regions and tens of thousands of Russians fled the country.

Putin also signed a law Friday permitting the military mobilization of those with expunged or outstanding convictions, including those who have recently served time for murder, robbery and drug trafficking.

On the Black Sea grain corridor, Russia agreed Wednesday to rejoin a wartime agreement brokered by the United Nations and Turkey allowing Ukrainian grain to be shipped to world markets through it. Moscow had suspended its participation in the grain deal over the weekend, citing an alleged drone attack against its Black Sea fleet in Crimea.

The Ukrainian Armed Forces said "the functioning of grain corridors continues" Friday.

As a condition for returning to the deal, Russia has demanded the grain be sent to poorer countries, arguing that most of it was ending up in richer nations. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Friday he had discussed the issue of prioritizing less developed countries for the grain shipments during a call with U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

Erdogan said he also discussed the possibility of sending the grain to nations facing famine for free, during a recent call with Putin, and the two planned further talks at a Group of 20 meeting in Bali this month.

Trump ally Tom Barrack acquitted of foreign agent charges

By TOM HAYS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump's inaugural committee chair, Tom Barrack, was acquitted of all counts Friday at a federal trial in which he was accused of using his personal access to the former president to secretly promote the interests of the United Arab Emirates.

The jury in Brooklyn deliberated three days before finding Barrack not guilty of acting as an unregistered agent of a foreign government, obstruction of justice and making false statements. Barrack had vehemently denied the charges.

Barrack, a 75-year-old California billionaire, is an old friend of Trump and chaired the Republican's inaugural committee. He was among a long line of Trump associates to face various criminal charges.

The verdict touched off a tearful celebration among Barrack and his supporters, who took group photos in the courtroom. Outside court, Barrack proclaimed, "God bless America," and said that he intended to get a drink and go see the Statue of Liberty.

He told reporters that he was thankful that the jury understood "such complex and believable facts in front of them. ... I'm proud to be an American."

One of Barrack's assistants, Matthew Grimes, was also acquitted.

Trump responded to the acquittal in a statement, calling it "Great news for our Country, Freedom, and Democracy." He said Barrack "should have never been charged or tried" and praised the jury "for their courage and understanding in coming to an absolutely correct decision."

In closing arguments this week, defense attorney Randall Jackson said Barrack made no attempt to conceal his relationships with Rashid al Malik, a businessperson from the UAE who acted as a conduit to the rulers of the oil-rich Persian Gulf state.

Al Malik was someone in a network of business connections he had cultivated throughout the Middle East, Jackson said. He also said it "makes no sense" that his client would try to infiltrate the Trump campaign on the behalf of the UAE at a time when Trump's chances of winning the presidency were considered a longshot.

"He was involved in the campaign because he's loyal to his friends — maybe to a fault," the lawyer said.

Testifying on his own behalf, Barrack revealed that "dozens" of people asked him for help in getting pardons from the former president. He also said he never sought a pardon for himself, even after he

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 68 of 82

learned he was under investigation.

Asked why, he responded, "I never did anything wrong."

Barrack, an Arabic speaker of Lebanese descent, also described efforts to arrange for Trump to meet with UAE national security adviser Sheikh Tahnoun bin Zayed Al Nahyan and other officials from more moderate governments in a selfless effort to persuade Trump to tone down his anti-Muslim rhetoric.

"I was trying to get common ground, to try to get him to step back from what he didn't believe," he said.

Barrack's acquittal was the latest setback for the Justice Department, which in recent years has stepped up enforcement of laws governing foreign lobbying.

Last month, a judge dismissed a lawsuit that sought to force casino magnate Steve Wynn to register as a foreign agent because of his alleged lobbying at the behest of the Chinese government during the Trump administration.

In 2019, lawyer Greg Craig, a Democrat, was acquitted of making a false statement to the Justice Department about work for Ukraine's government.

Trump also pardoned two allies who had been convicted of secretly lobbying the U.S. for foreign interests: former campaign manager Paul Manafort and a top fundraiser, Elliott Broidy.

Federal prosecutor Ryan Harris told jurors that Barrack schemed to become the "eyes, ears and the voice" for the Emirates as part of a criminal conspiracy to manipulate Trump's foreign policy. He leveraged his back-channel connections to get the UAE to funnel tens of millions of dollars into an office building he was developing and into one of his investment funds, Harris said.

Harris, an assistant U.S. attorney, pointed to what he characterized as a stream of shady texts and other communications that showed that Barrack was under the direction and control of Al Malik.

Barrack "marketed himself as politically connected. Someone who could open doors for the UAE. Someone who could offer access to Donald Trump. ... He was going to be their man on the inside," Harris said.

Al Malik asked Barrack "to do things for the UAE again and again," he said.

The defense called former Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin to testify there was nothing suspicious about his interactions with Barrack over Trump's stance on UAE relations. Mnuchin described Barrack as a friend who was among hundreds of businesspeople offering him "thoughts and advice" while he served in the Cabinet. In those discussions, "I would never share anything ... that I thought was confidential," he testified.

Before being indicted, Barrack drew attention by raising \$107 million for the former president's inaugural celebration following the 2016 election. The event was scrutinized both for its lavish spending and for attracting foreign officials and businesspeople looking to lobby the new administration.

Leaving the courthouse Friday, Barrack repeated assertions that he is nonpartisan.

"It's the toughest job in the world being president of the United States," he said. "No matter what party it is, whether it's Republicans or Democrats. President Biden is doing the best job he can. President Trump did the best job he could."

EXPLAINER: How impoverished N. Korea finances testing spree

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea's recent barrage of missile tests, including Wednesday's record of at least 23 launches, is raising an important question about its weapons program: How does the impoverished country pay for the seemingly endless tests?

While some experts say each North Korean launch could cost \$2 million to \$10 million, others say there is no way to estimate accurately given the North's extremely secretive nature. They say North Korea likely manufactures weapons at a much cheaper cost than other countries because of free labor and possible clandestine Chinese and Russian support.

Whichever is correct, there are no signs that North Korea's economic hardships are slowing its weapons tests. Instead, its testing spree signals that leader Kim Jong Un is determined to show he has the ability to launch nuclear strikes on South Korea and the United States in order to wrest future concessions.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 69 of 82

Here is a look at the financial dimensions of North Korea's missile tests.

HOW MUCH DOES EACH TEST COST?

North Korea launched at least 23 missiles on Wednesday and six more on Thursday, adding to its already record-breaking pace of weapons tests this year. Many were nuclear-capable ballistic missiles designed to destroy South Korean and U.S. targets.

They likely include a developmental Hwasong-17 intercontinental ballistic missile, surface-to-air missiles and a variety of short-range ballistic missiles. North Korea has a reputation for frequent missile tests, but it has never launched that many missiles in a single day.

Soo Kim, a security analyst at the California-based RAND Corporation, said the cost of a North Korean missile test could range between several million dollars to \$10 million, which would be lower than similar tests in other countries, partly because North Korean labor is cheap.

Bruce Bennet, another expert at the RAND Corporation, told Radio Free Asia that the short-range missiles Wednesday cost between \$2 million to \$3 million each and the total cost for the day was somewhere between \$50 million and \$75 million. RFA said the maximum estimate is about the amount of money that North Korea spent to import rice from China in 2019 to cover grain shortages that year.

Lee Illwoo, an expert with the Korea Defense Network in South Korea, said it's impossible for outsiders to accurately estimate weapons production costs in North Korea. "There are no ways for us to find at what cost North Korea produces certain weapons parts. They could have manufactured them by themselves, or China might have given them for free or at an extremely cheap price," he said.

In a report to the office of South Korean lawmaker Shin Won-sik in September, the state-run Korea Institute for Defense Analyses in Seoul said North Korea was estimated to have spent up to \$1.6 billion on its nuclear program since the 1970s. The report used analyses of nuclear development programs in other countries. Some observers cautioned against the use of foreign data because the North Korean government doesn't have to pay for labor or land.

HOW ARE THE LAUNCHES FUNDED?

North Korea's economic difficulties have worsened because of COVID-19, but there have been no reports of substantial social unrest or food shortages.

Its weapons development is being driven by a Soviet-style party-military complex in which the party leadership surrounding Kim Jong Un exercises full control over defense industries and faces little budgetary constraint in concentrating national resources on arms development, said Hong Min, an analyst at Seoul's Korea Institute for National Unification.

In addition to the record number of missile tests this year, there are also signs that North Korea is expanding its munition facilities in a possible attempt to mass-produce newly developed weapons, Hong said.

Soo Kim, the RAND Corporation analyst, said it is crucial to track how North Korea is financing its weapons programs despite U.S.-led economic sanctions and its own self-imposed isolation.

"This is where sanctions-violating activities, including (North Korea's) recent foray into cybercrime and cryptocurrency hacking, comes into play," she said. "And of course, having witting partners in Beijing and Moscow aid in sanctions violations also helps the regime's weapons development prosper."

Hong said Russia's war in Ukraine appears to have opened a new opportunity for North Korea amid U.S. accusations that the North is covertly shipping a "significant" number of artillery shells to Russia. Hong said in return North Korea may seek Russian technology transfers and supplies needed to expand its military capabilities.

WHAT DOES NORTH KOREA GAIN?

Each of North Korea's missile and nuclear tests gives its scientists "precious data" on weapons development and also helps cement Kim Jong Un's leadership while rattling the South Korea-U.S. alliance, said Kim Taewoo, former head of Seoul's Korea Institute for National Unification.

"Some people say we should let North Korea keep firing missiles toward the sea so that they would use

up their resources. But I would say that is an extremely naive opinion," he said.

South Korean media reported that the Hwasong-17 launch on Thursday ended in failure because it didn't follow a normal flight and crashed into the ocean after a stage separation. In an earlier test launch in March, the Hwasong-17 exploded soon after liftoff.

"The missile is under development. So it's not the time to call its launch 'a failure' and laugh at it," said Lee, the Korea Defense Network expert. "This time, the missile had a stage separation, and I think they've achieved quite a big technological progress."

North Korea has argued its missile tests are meant as a warning against a series of U.S-South Korean joint military exercises that it views as an invasion rehearsal. Given that, North Korea's testing activities are likely to continue since Washington and Seoul regularly conduct drills.

North Korea is estimated to have about 1,000 ballistic missiles, more than enough for it to continue its pressure campaign through the 2024 U.S. presidential election to try to win sanctions relief and other concessions, said Go Myong-hyun, an analyst at Seoul's Asan Institute for Policy Studies.

"What North Korea wants to demonstrate before 2024 is that its nuclear weapons arsenal is very advanced, has been completed and represents a much more significant threat than before," Go said. "It's crucial for them to maintain that threat perception with the United States and they aren't suddenly going to quiet down."

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Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 71 of 82

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'Slow day:' Guard emails don't match Noem border 'war' talk

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem described the U.S. border with Mexico as a "war zone" last year when she sent dozens of state National Guard troops there, saying they'd be on the front lines of stopping drug smugglers and human traffickers.

But records from the Guard show that in their two-month deployment, the South Dakota troops didn't seize any drugs. On a handful of occasions, they suspected people of scouting for lapses in their patrols, but mission logs don't contain any confirmed encounters with "transnational criminals." And a presentation from the deployment noted that Mexican cartels were assessed to be a "moderate threat" but were "unlikely" to target U.S. forces.

Some days, the records show, the troops had little if anything to do.

"Very slow day. No encounters. It has been 5 days since last surrender," wrote one Guard member whose name was redacted from a situation report created as the deployment neared its end in September 2021.

For Noem, who is up for reelection Tuesday amid speculation she could be a 2024 White House contender, the deployment was an eye-catching jump into a political fight more than 1,000 miles (1,609 kilometers) from her state. Noem justified the deployment — and a widely criticized private donation to fund it — as a state emergency. Dangerous drugs, she said, made their way to South Dakota after coming over the southern border.

But the documents obtained by Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington through an open records request cast doubt on whether the deployment was effective at stopping drug trafficking, even as Noem claimed that Guard members "directly assisted" in stopping it.

Most drugs don't come through unwatched expanses of the border or the Rio Grande where the Guard members were stationed, said Victor Manjarrez, a former Border Patrol senior officer who is now a professor of criminal justice at the University of Texas at El Paso. They are smuggled into the United States at established border checkpoints, he said.

South Dakota Guard members were stationed at observation posts where they parked Humvees or other military vehicles alongside the Rio Grande. They watched for groups of migrants to report to Border Control, which would then take them into custody. On several occasions, they reported groups of hundreds of people migrating, and at one point, a Guard member performed CPR on a child who had drowned.

During the two-month deployment, the Guard logged 204 people who were turned back to Mexico and 5,000 others who were apprehended by the Border Patrol to evaluate for asylum claims. Those apprehensions were a small fraction of the over 162,000 encounters Border Patrol reported during July and August in the Rio Grande Valley Sector — the 34,000-square-mile swathe where the Guard was stationed.

"Like any operation there are going to be busy days and some slow days, that is expected in all operations," Marshall Michels, a spokesman for the South Dakota Department of the Military, said in an email response to questions on the records from AP.

Noem last year joined with seven other Republican governors to harden the border through Texas's Operation Lone Star. The state-backed mission sought to discourage migrants by making arrests under Texas laws.

The mission gave Republicans occasion to deride President Joe Biden's border policies, but the operation has not curbed the number of people crossing the border. It has also faced criticism for being a rushed mission that gave members little to do while potentially running afoul of federal law.

Noem's decision to send 48 Guard members was met with particularly harsh criticism because she covered most of its cost with a \$1 million donation from a Tennessee billionaire who has often donated to Republicans. Top brass from the National Guard Bureau and an aide to South Dakota U.S. Sen. John Thune, a fellow Republican, questioned what legal authority the state had to accept a donation to fund the deployment, the recently released emails show.

CREW (Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington) sued the South Dakota Guard and the U.S. Army after they refused a Freedom of Information Act request for records on the deployment and communication between the National Guard, the governor's office and the Department of Defense. Under that

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 73 of 82

legal pressure, the agencies turned over the documents, which CREW shared with The Associated Press.

Noah Bookbinder, CREW's president, said they wanted to bring transparency to a donation that he called "a particularly craven example of how money can drive not just politics but how governments operate and how military forces can be used."

Congress later banned such private donations for Guard deployments.

Noem's administration has insisted that the National Guard, with its military training, was best-suited to tackle what she called "a national security crisis."

"It literally is a war zone," she told reporters this July.

Noem's office referred questions on the deployment to a statement last year when she called Biden's border policy an "utter disaster" that facilitated illegal border crossings and said that Mexican cartels were using the surge in migrants as a "distraction for their criminal activities."

"The scope of the drug smuggling and human trafficking taking place has been made clear to us, and it is staggering," she said.

During the two-month deployment, Guard members reported spotting 11 people they deemed to be scouting for lapses in surveillance. On another occasion recorded in the logs, Guard members pointed flashlights at five people with backpacks crossing the Rio Grande who then retreated. Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Marlette, the head of South Dakota's Guard, later told a South Dakota legislative committee they were likely carrying drugs.

Those were the only times the Guard members reported suspected drug trafficking. The South Dakota National Guard said it accomplished its mission by supporting Texas's Operation Lone Star and referred questions on its success to the Texas National Guard.

Texas's 17-month operation has recorded 21,000 criminal arrests with most of those resulting in felony charges, Gov. Greg Abbott's office recently reported. The Texas National Guard also said it has been responsible for 470,000 migrant detections, apprehensions and turnbacks, as well as the construction of 114 miles of fencing and barriers.

New this week: Radcliffe gets weird, 'Causeway' and Phoenix

By The Associated Press undefined

Here's a collection curated by The Associated Press' entertainment journalists of what's arriving on TV, streaming services and music and video game platforms this week.

MOVIES

— Elvis, Elton John and Freddie Mercury have all gotten the biopic treatment. Now, it's finally Weird Al's turn. In "Weird: The Al Yankovic Story," Daniel Radcliffe plays the parody pro through his life — or, at least, a version of his life. Yankovic, himself, co-wrote and co-produced "Weird," directed by Eric Appel. And, as you might expect, the "White and Nerdy" singer-songwriter fills the tale with plenty of satirical touches nodding to the usual conventions of the music biopic. Yet it's also full of surprises. In my interview with Yankovic and Radcliffe, Yankovic said "Weird" "is funny because it shouldn't exist." "Weird," Roku's first original film, streams Friday via the streaming device.

— Enola Holmes (Millie Bobby Brown) is on the case, again. The Netflix sequel "Enola Holmes 2," debuting Friday, quickly follows up the charming 2020 film that adapted Nancy Springer's book series and Arthur Conan Doyle spinoff. The sequel teams the younger Holmes with her famous older brother detective (Henry Cavill) for a multithreaded mystery that picks up some of the original's strands (Helena Bonham Carter returns as Enola's mother) while extending into the working conditions of 19th century London factories.

— In her first leading role in four years, Jennifer Lawrence stars in, and produces, "Causeway," Lila Neugebauer's drama about a U.S. soldier named Lynsey (Lawrence) rehabbing at home in New Orleans after a brain injury suffered while on tour in Afghanistan. A gentle indie about trauma and recovery, "Causeway" is lifted by the warmth of Brian Tyree Henry, who plays a local mechanic with his own painful past who befriends Lynsey. Debuts Friday, on Apple TV+. (Read AP's review.)

— AP Film Writer Jake Coyle

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 74 of 82

MUSIC

— A Boogie Wit Da Hoodie returns with his fourth studio album and it shows a lot of range. Singles from "Me vs. Myself," out Friday, include the languid "Take Shots," featuring Tory Lanez, a team up with H.E.R. for the pop-leaning banger "Playa" and working with Roddy Ricch on "B.R.O. (Better Ride Out)," with the lyrics: "I came from the bottom, I came straight out of poverty/I had to look around to see who's with me and not with me." Boogie can also be heard as the featured guest on Pink Sweat's sexy "Lay Up N' Chill," where the lyrics go: "Sippin' on that rosé really get you in your feels."

— Not many synth-pop bands get to record in the Louvre museum in Paris, but Phoenix are one of the lucky ones. Their 10-track "Alpha Zulu," set for release on Friday, was captured in a wing at the world-famous museum. The band's first album since 2017's "Ti Amo" has produced the single "Tonight," a catchy duet with Vampire Weekend's Ezra Koenig that unites the band's lovely melodies with their trademark odd lyrics: "Could I be the best to jump ahead/Your feet are hurting less with moccasins." Other singles include "All Eyes on Me" and "My Elixir" and "Winter Solstice."

— Ireland has given us so many great artists — Sinéad O'Connor, U2, Niall Horan, Hozier and Glen Hansard. Dermot Kennedy may be the nation's next big thing, judging by his second album, "Sonder." Kennedy, with his expressive voice and impassioned songs, has amassed nearly 4 billion streams across platforms and has the best-selling debut album in Ireland of this millennium, "Without Fear." The new album from the singer-songwriter is preceded by the singles "Dreamer," a piano-driven ballad, and the wistful, dace track "Something to Someone."

— AP Entertainment Writer Mark Kennedy

TELEVISION

— George Lopez's new sitcom is a family affair. In NBC's "Lopez vs. Lopez," the actor-comedian stars opposite real-life offspring, Mayan Lopez. Their fictional versions of dad and daughter are unlikely roommates with a rocky relationship. The 2002-07 comedy "George Lopez" remains one of the few Latino-led hits on TV, which continues to struggle with depicting America's second-largest ethnic or racial group behind non-Latino whites. "Lopez vs. Lopez," with Selenis Leyva and Al Madrigal in the cast, debuts 8 p.m. Eastern Friday.

— Abrupt cancellations and unresolved stories used to be a common affront to viewers. Now other platforms can come to the aid of an axed series, as is the case with "Manifest." After NBC ended its run at three seasons, it redeemed itself in repeats on Netflix and earned the chance for a proper finish. A total of 20 new episodes will be released in two parts on the streaming service, with the first half out Friday. To recap the premise: An airliner lands safely in New York after a rough flight, but the passengers' relief vanishes when they realize five years have elapsed in a few hours. Stars Melissa Roxburgh, Josh Dallas and J.R. Ramirez are back for the big reveal we want, eventually.

— With patience, even an 18th-century novel can get a TV prequel. It helps that the book at hand is "Dangerous Liaisons," an amorality tale repeatedly adapted for stage and screen, including the Oscar-winning 1988 film. In the new Starz version billed as a "bold prelude," Camille and Valmont are young, in love and in Paris as revolution looms. Alice Englert and Nicholas Denton play the pair destined to become architects of scandal and tragedy as, respectively, the Marquise de Merteuil and Vicomte de Valmont. Lesley Manville co-stars as the reigning marquise in the series debuting 9 p.m. Eastern Sunday.

— AP Television Writer Lynn Elber

VIDEO GAMES

— Most people associate video games with fast-paced, over-the-top action, but there's a huge audience out there for mellow farming sims like "Stardew Valley" and "Harvest Moon." Square Enix's "Harvestella" aims for the middle ground. Sure, you can while away hours tending to your crops and chatting with your neighbors. But there's an ever-growing threat looming over your bucolic town, and sooner or later you'll have to put down the hoe and pick up a sword. The demo promises the sort of apocalyptic showdowns Square is known for — after which, your homegrown zucchini is bound to be so much more satisfying. "Harvestella" comes out Friday, for PC and Nintendo Switch.

— Lou Kesten

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 75 of 82

From 'Enola Holmes' to 'Extraction,' Netflix bets on sequels

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

It's easy to forget that the Netflix original film department is still rather young. Five years ago, the streaming service didn't even really have one. But things move quickly in the competitive streaming world, especially when starting from scratch.

Now with a robust library of proprietary and commercially minded films and characters, Netflix is leaning into another important pillar of the movie business: Sequels.

They've dabbled before, with romantic comedies and teen-focused fare like "The Kissing Booth" and "To All the Boys I've Loved Before," but with a breakneck annual output, Netflix has now amassed enough of their own intellectual property to develop franchises in more genres, including adventure, mystery, comedy, action and thrillers, created by and starring some of the industry's biggest names.

Kicking off with "Enola Holmes 2," which is newly available to stream and sees Millie Bobby Brown back as the spirited young detective, Netflix has a slew of starry, high-profile follow-ups to some of their most successful films on the way. Later this year, "Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery" will bring Daniel Craig's Benoit Blanc back to solve a new murder case on a private Greek island. In 2023 and beyond, Chris Hemsworth will reprise his role as black ops mercenary Tyler Rake in "Extraction 2," Jennifer Aniston and Adam Sandler will reunite for "Murder Mystery 2" and Charlize Theron and Kiki Layne will be back as immortals in "The Old Guard 2."

"Our goal was always to build stories and films and characters that we can return to," said Netflix executive Kira Goldberg. "We're finally at that moment, we're feeling really good about it."

Goldberg and Ori Marmor co-head the studio film team at Netflix under global film chief Scott Stuber. Both were veterans of traditional studio filmmaking, with Goldberg having come to Netflix from Fox, where she oversaw the likes of "Bohemian Rhapsody" and "The Greatest Showman," while Marmor came from producing films like "Escape Room" and "The Green Hornet."

"We loved the idea that we could come to a studio that was starting from scratch," Marmor said. "That just doesn't happen, especially not at this scale."

In the years they've been at Netflix, they've been able to draw on relationships they've made over the years and also forged new ones with directors, writers and talent they wanted to work with. They also knew they had to play catchup with the legacy studios that had a century of intellectual property at their disposal.

"It's pretty impressive that sequels are a conversation and a reality," said Mary Parent, who produced both "Enola Holmes" movies.

The sequel was put into motion soon after it hit Netflix in September 2020, with Brown, Henry Cavill, writer Jack Thorne and director Harry Bradbeer all on board. An estimated 76 million households streamed the lively detective story in its first four weeks.

"We mobilized really quickly," Parent said. "You try not to take it for granted. And you try to raise the bar on yourself, to up the storytelling, up the stakes with everything that you loved about the first but also something new."

The sequel strategy is not so unlike that at traditional studios: They want to keep viewers coming back for familiar characters. And it's an equation that has proved effective with their most popular television shows, like "Stranger Things," "Bridgerton," "Squid Game" and "The Witcher."

There may not be a set formula or mandate around what gets another film, but most are among Netflix's most-watched originals. In their first four weeks, "The Old Guard" was seen by 78 million households and "Extraction" drew in 99 million households, according to data provided by Netflix.

"('Extraction') obviously benefited from the timing of its release, which was at the early days of the pandemic," said Mike Larocca, the co-founder and vice chairman of the Russo Brothers' AGBO Productions. "But they were very supportive of the sequel script before that. We were prepared to move quickly and they didn't wait for the performance."

Part of the Netflix equation is looking at genres that either aren't getting made at the big studio level anymore or aren't getting enough audiences at the theaters to make them worth investing in frequently,

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 76 of 82

like teen rom-coms. As a classic stunt-driven action movie, "Extraction," Larocca said, was in that "dreaded middle that was getting killed theatrically."

"People still want to see big, practical stunts and exotic locations and a really cool hero at the center," Larocca said. "I think given their model, they're able to make it at a higher budget than theatrical would have would have supported because their numbers look different."

The notable exception is "Glass Onion," as "Knives Out" did not originate at Netflix. But the streamer saw an opportunity in Rian Johnson's fun murder mystery, which was a hit at the box office, and potential in spinning out more stories anchored by Craig's shrewd detective. They shelled out \$450 million for two sequels. There is also a "Luther" film in the works, based on the hit crime series, with Cynthia Erivo, and a re-imagining of "Spy Kids," with Robert Rodriguez on board to write and direct.

"They've really succeeded in creating an environment where I think people can do their best work," Parent said. "They're there to offer support but don't create unnecessary obstacles. They don't overly micromanage, which can sometimes kill creativity. They understand the balance ... And the power of their platform is undeniable."

At Netflix, Goldberg and Marmur have also found opportunities in working cross-functionally with other departments.

"When I worked at other traditional studios, I didn't know who was in the series team. I didn't know who worked in consumer products. There was never any communication," Goldberg said. "Here, we get in a room together all the time. We strategize collectively."

Case in point: When developing the graphic novel "BRZRKR" as a live-action film with Keanu Reeves, they also committed to an anime series so he could "have the best of both worlds" since the artwork was so important to him.

"We're constantly trying to figure out how we can do things in different, innovative and cool ways," Marmur said. "It's not rare to have a conversation with a filmmaker about how their film can branch into other things."

It has been a rollercoaster year for Netflix, but they've recovered from subscriber losses in the first half of the year and were back on top with gains made in Q3. Netflix now boasts 223 million subscribers, and is once again the world's largest video streaming service. The Walt Disney Co. had briefly eclipsed Netflix in August when it reported its service had 221 million subscriptions, though there is some debate over how comparable the numbers are as Disney counts households that subscribe to its bundle package of Disney+, Hulu and ESPN+ as three separate subscriptions.

The company is also days away from launching its first ad-supported plan that debuts in the U.S. and 11 other markets in early November. The new option will cost \$7 per month in the U.S., less than half the price for Netflix's most popular \$15.50-per-month plan without commercial interruptions.

But Goldberg and Marmur say they're just concerned with putting their heads down and making great films.

"They've come so far so fast, it's incredible," Larocca said. "The legacy studios have tremendous advantages in terms of IP that they can draw from. It's fun to see them start building their own franchises. They're making big swings."

Over 120 leaders at climate talks, Egypt positive on protest

By FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — More than 120 world leaders will attend this year's U.N. climate talks and requests by environmental activists to stage a rally during the event would be responded to "positively," host Egypt said Friday.

Veteran diplomat Wael Aboulmagd, who heads the Egyptian delegation, told reporters that his country had been working for months to set the scene for "meaningful outcomes" at the two-week meeting in the Red Sea coastal resort of Sharm el-Sheikh starting Sunday.

"We have, I think about 121 maybe, and the number is growing, heads of state and government here,"

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 77 of 82

he said during an online briefing. "We hope that it will be a watershed moment." Leaders like U.S. President Joe Biden and British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak confirmed their attendance, but Aboulmagd said other major heads of state like China's Xi Jinping and India's Narendra Modi will not be going.

Aboulmagd said recent scientific reports highlighted the urgency of tackling global warming.

"Everyone is now aware of the gravity of the situation, of the enormity of the challenge, and have come here hopefully to work together," he said.

Several thorny issues will be discussed at the Nov. 6-18 talks, including further cutting greenhouse gas emissions and boosting financial aid for poor countries struggling with the impacts of climate change. It is the first such meeting held in Africa since 2016. Over 40,000 people have registered for the event.

Aboulmagd appealed to negotiators to engage constructively. "We cannot afford to waste any time," he said. "So everyone must rise to the occasion and must move away from the adversarial winner-takes-all approach that has plagued this process for too long."

Civil society groups have expressed concern that their presence at this year's talks will be restricted, citing Egypt's questionable human rights record.

But Aboulmagd said activists will get their space, with special arrangements already put in place "for those who want to organize demonstrations or protests or stand-ins."

Asked about the possibility of holding a large rally mid-way through the talks, as has traditionally happened in previous meetings, he said "that will be taken care of."

Organizers would need to submit the names of contact persons and the planned route must be agreed with city officials.

"Once a request to that effect comes, it will be responded to positively," he said.

Egypt would press diplomats to live up to the lofty pledges their leaders had made, Aboulmagd said, warning that so far these had not been translated into the negotiating rooms.

"This separation between the reality in the public sphere and what actually happens in negotiating rooms cannot continue," he said. "It is about real lives that are being lost and future lives that will be devastated" by unchecked climate change.

Powerball jackpot up to \$1.6 billion, new lottery record

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Strong sales boosted a Powerball jackpot to an estimated \$1.6 billion on Friday, making it the largest lottery prize in history.

A drawing will be held Saturday night for the Powerball prize, which hasn't been won in more than three months. That string of 39 consecutive drawings without a winner is a reflection of the tough odds of winning a jackpot, at 1 in 292.2 million.

The advertised jackpot is the prize for a winner who chooses an annuity, paid annually over 29 years. Almost all winners instead opt for the cash prize, which for Saturday night's drawing would be an estimated \$782.4 million.

The new jackpot tops the previous record prize of \$1.586 billion won in 2016 by three Powerball players in California, Florida and Tennessee.

Powerball is played in 45 states, as well as Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

US employers are hiring briskly even in face of rate hikes

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — America's employers kept hiring vigorously in October, adding 261,000 positions, a sign that as Election Day nears, the economy remains a picture of solid job growth and painful inflation.

Friday's report from the government showed that hiring was brisk across industries last month, though the overall gain declined from 315,000 in September. The unemployment rate rose from a five-decade low of 3.5% to a still-healthy 3.7%.

A strong job market is deepening the challenges the Federal Reserve faces as it raises interest rates at the fastest pace since the 1980s to try to bring inflation down from near a 40-year high. Steady hiring,

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 78 of 82

solid pay growth and low unemployment have been good for workers. But they have also contributed to rising prices.

"Employers continue to be worried that it's going to be harder to hire tomorrow than today, so that actually suggests they don't see a recession on the horizon," said Betsey Stevenson, an economist at the University of Michigan who was an economic adviser to President Barack Obama.

Stevenson noted that more than half of last month's net hiring was in industries — health care, education, restaurants and hotels, for example — that still appear to be catching up from the sharp job losses they endured during the pandemic recession. Hiring in such sectors will likely continue, she suggested, even if the economy slows.

The October jobs figures were the last major economic report before Election Day, with voters keenly focused on the state of the economy. Chronic inflation is hammering the budgets of many households and has shot to the top of voter concerns in the midterm congressional elections. Republican candidates have attacked Democrats over inflation in their drive to regain control of Congress.

The latest data offered hints that the job market might be cooling, if only gradually, as the Fed is hoping to see. Over the past three months, hiring gains have averaged 289,000, down from a sizzling monthly rate of 539,000 a year ago. Average hourly pay, on average, rose 4.7% from a year ago, a smaller year-over-year gain than in September and down from a 16-year peak of 5.6% in March.

The tick-up in the jobless rate occurred because about 300,000 Americans said they were no longer employed. The unemployment rate is calculated from a separate survey from the jobs figure and can sometimes move in a different direction in the short term.

Still, last month's wage increase will likely continue to fuel inflation pressures.

"This report was definitely strong enough to keep the Fed on track raising rates," said Jonathan Pingle, an economist at UBS.

President Joe Biden and congressional Democrats have pointed to the vigorous resurgence in hiring as evidence that their policies have helped get Americans back to work faster than the nation managed to do after previous downturns. But that message has been overtaken in the midterm political campaigns by the crushing surge of inflation, which has soured many Americans on the economy under Democratic leadership in Congress and the White House.

The October jobs report showed that job gains were widespread. Health care added 53,000, with hospitals and doctors' offices continuing to re-staff after having lost many workers at the height of the pandemic. Manufacturing added 32,000. A category that includes engineers, accountants and lawyers added 39,000.

Still, some corners of the economy have begun to flag under the weight of rising prices and much higher borrowing costs engineered by the Fed's aggressive rate hikes. Especially in industries like housing and technology, hiring has waned. Many tech companies, such as the ride-hailing firm Lyft and the payment company Stripe, have announced plans to lay off workers. Amazon says it will suspend its corporate hiring.

More broadly across the economy, though, the pace of layoffs remains unusually low. And companies in travel, restaurants, manufacturing and health care are still hiring steadily. Southwest Airlines told investors last week that it was on track to hire 10,000 employees this year, including 1,200 pilots. Laboratory Corporation of America said it plans significant hiring.

Jerry Flanagan, CEO of JDog Brands, says his company's sales are still growing and its franchisees are still hiring even after the company raised prices to cover higher fuel costs. The company employs mostly veterans to do junk hauling and carpet and floor cleaning and has about 300 outlets nationwide.

"They need laborers," Flanagan said of the company's branches. "They need people hauling the junk. They need drivers, they need carpet cleaning technicians."

Flanagan said his company would try to avoid layoffs even if the economy slows. If sales decline, workers can shift to distributing door hanger advertisements, lawn signs and other marketing.

"They're going to hold onto these people as long as they can," Flanagan said. "There's so much work out there."

Some employers are finally finding all the staff they need.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 79 of 82

This week, the Rainbow Blossom Natural Foods Markets in Louisville, Kentucky, finally filled all the jobs it had been advertising after more than a year of struggling with short staffing.

"It's a great feeling," said Summer Auerbach, co-owner of the family-owned five-store chain.

Auerbach said the economic environment appears to be shifting back toward the pre-pandemic economy. For the first time in months, for example, applicants are following up via email to check on their applications.

At a news conference Wednesday, Fed Chair Jerome Powell noted that the strong job market is feeding inflationary pressures as businesses continue to raise pay. In September, average wages rose more than 6% from 12 months earlier, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta. Pay raises can feed inflation if companies pass on at least part of their higher labor costs to their customers in the form of higher prices.

Powell spoke after the Fed announced a fourth straight three-quarter-point increase in its benchmark rate. It was the latest in a series of unusually large hikes that have heightened the risk of a recession.

Housing has absorbed the worst damage from higher borrowing costs. The Fed's rate hikes have sent average long-term mortgage rates surging to around 7%. Home sales have cratered, and once-soaring home prices have started to slow.

For now, the economy is still growing. It expanded at a 2.6% annual rate in the July-September quarter after having contracted in the first six months of the year. With inflation still painfully high and the Fed making borrowing increasingly expensive for consumers and businesses, most economists expect a recession by early next year.

Giant, sustainable rainforest fish is now fashion in America

By FABIANO MAISONNAVE Associated Press

TRES RIOS, Brazil (AP) — Sometimes you start something and have no idea where it will lead. So it was with Eduardo Filgueiras, a struggling guitarist whose family worked in an unusual business in Rio de Janeiro: They farmed toads. Filgueiras figured out a way to take the small toad skins and fuse them together, creating something large enough to sell.

Meanwhile miles away in the Amazon, a fisherman and a scientist were coming up with an innovation that would help save a key, giant fish that thrives in freshwater lakes alongside Amazon River tributaries.

The ingenuity of these three men is why you can now find a beautiful and unusual sustainable fish leather in upscale New York bags, Texas cowboy boots and in a striking image from Rihanna's Vogue pregnancy photo shoot, where a red, fish-scaled jacket hangs open above her belly. Sales provide a livable income to hundreds of Amazon families who also keep the forest standing and healthy while it protects their livelihood.

MANAGING A GIANT

The leather is a byproduct of pirarucu meat, a staple food in the Amazon that is gaining new markets in Brazil's largest cities.

Indigenous communities working together with non-Indigenous riverine settlers manage the pirarucu in preserved areas of the Amazon. Most of it is exported, and the U.S. is the primary market.

Pirarucu can grow to 3 meters (nearly 10 feet) in length. Overfishing endangered them. But things began to change when a settler fisherman, Jorge de Souza Carvalho, known as Tapioca, and academic researcher Leandro Castello teamed up in the Mamiraua region and came up with a creative way to count the fish in lakes, the giant fish's favorite habitat.

They took advantage of something special about this species: It surfaces to breathe at least every 20 minutes. A trained eye can count how many flash their red tails in a given area, arriving at a pretty precise estimate.

The government recognizes this counting method and authorizes managed fishing. By law, only 30% of the pirarucu in a particular area may be fished the following year. The result is a population in recovery in these areas, allowing for larger catches.

In the riverine communities, people eat the fish, skin and all. But in the big slaughterhouses, where the bulk of the pirarucu catch is processed, the skin was being discarded. Then tannery Nova Kaeru showed up on the scene.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 80 of 82

SHOESTRING BEGINNINGS

Thousands of miles away from the Amazon, down a hilly dirt road on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro, Nova Kaeru will process about 50,000 skins from legally-caught giant pirarucu or arapaima fish this year.

This middle-size company had an unlikely start. In 1997, Filgueiras, the guitarist, got involved in his family toad business, where the amphibians were raised for meat. He was struck by the beauty of their skin, but it was all being thrown out. He decided to try to use it, took a leather working course, and started experimenting.

"I had no financial resources. I bought a used concrete mixer and covered it with fiberglass, adapted a washing machine and started to develop the frog leather," Filgueiras told The Associated Press in his office.

He managed to transform the skin into leather, but there was a problem: It was too small. No prospective customer wanted it. Filgueiras tried to stitch it together, but the result was too ugly. So he invented a way to weld several pieces together.

His creation started to gain attention at international fairs. A few years later, with a partner, he founded Nova Kaeru tannery, specializing in exotic leather, expanding to salmon and ostrich with techniques that don't produce toxic waste.

Then one day a businessman knocked on the door with a stack of pirarucu skins and asked him to take a look.

Experimenting with the new skins, Filgueiras found he was able to fix the many holes in the pirarucu leather using the same technique he had created for the toad leather.

The first results impressed him. But in the meantime, the businessman died in an aircraft accident. With no previous experience in the Amazon — so different from its home base in Rio — the company nevertheless decided to procure pirarucu skin on its own in the vast region.

They got in touch with the people managing the fishery in Amazonas state. That network has now grown to 280 riverine and Indigenous communities, most of them in protected rainforest areas, employing some 4,000 fisher people, according to Coletivo do Pirarucu, an umbrella organization. Nova Kaeru tannery bought the skins — the first buyer the communities had — and today their most important one.

"The commercialization of the skin has been fundamental for the riverine communities," Adevaldo Dias, a riverine leader from the Medio Jurua region, told the AP in a phone interview. "It helps make the whole business viable."

The Association of Rural Producers of Carauari, from the Medio Jurua, sells each skin for \$37, an important sum in a country where the minimum wage is around \$237 per month. The money helps pay the fisherfolk, who receive \$1.60 per kilo (2.2 pounds). Dias says the ideal price should be \$1.9 per kilo of fish to cover all costs related to managing the fishing. They expect to earn that in the near future by exporting pirarucu meat.

From Medio Jurua and other regions, the pirarucu leather must travel several thousand miles by boat to Belem, where it is loaded onto trucks for another long journey to Nova Kaeru headquarters, a multiday trip. From there, it goes by plane to foreign buyers.

The pirarucu leather first made inroads in Texas, where it is used in cowboy boots. But the fashion industry is increasingly taking notice. In New York City, the luxury brand Piper & Skye has used pirarucu leather for shoulder bags, waist packs and purses that can fetch up to \$850.

"As far as the pirarucu being a food source and feeding local communities and putting food on the table for the folks in the areas where it's fished and beyond, it is not just a durable and beautiful material. It does promote circularity of the species in utilizing a material that would otherwise go to waste," Joanna MacDonald, brand founder and creative director, told the AP in a video call.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 81 of 82

Today in History: November 5, Fort Hood shooting kills 13

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Nov. 5, the 309th day of 2022. There are 56 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Nov. 5, 2009, a shooting rampage at the Fort Hood Army post in Texas left 13 people dead; Maj. Nidal Hasan, an Army psychiatrist, was later convicted of murder and sentenced to death. (No execution date has been set.)

On this date:

In 1605, the "Gunpowder Plot" failed as Guy Fawkes was seized before he could blow up the English Parliament.

In 1872, suffragist Susan B. Anthony defied the law by attempting to cast a vote for President Ulysses S. Grant. (Anthony was convicted by a judge and fined \$100, but she never paid the penalty.)

In 1912, Democrat Woodrow Wilson was elected president, defeating Progressive Party candidate Theodore Roosevelt, incumbent Republican William Howard Taft and Socialist Eugene V. Debs.

In 1940, President Franklin D. Roosevelt won an unprecedented third term in office as he defeated Republican challenger Wendell L. Willkie.

In 1964, NASA launched Mariner 3, which was supposed to fly by Mars, but the spacecraft failed to reach its destination.

In 1968, Republican Richard M. Nixon won the presidency, defeating Democratic Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey and American Independent candidate George C. Wallace.

In 1974, Democrat Ella T. Grasso was elected governor of Connecticut, becoming the first woman to win a gubernatorial office without succeeding her husband.

In 1992, Malice Green, a Black motorist, died after he was struck in the head 14 times with a flashlight by a Detroit police officer, Larry Nevers, outside a suspected crack house. (Nevers and his partner, Walter Budzyn, were found guilty of second-degree murder, but the convictions were overturned; they were later convicted of involuntary manslaughter.)

In 1994, former President Ronald Reagan disclosed he had Alzheimer's disease.

In 2006, Saddam Hussein was convicted and sentenced by the Iraqi High Tribunal to hang for crimes against humanity.

In 2007, Hollywood writers began a three-month strike, forcing late-night talk shows to immediately start airing reruns.

In 2011, former Penn State defensive coordinator Jerry Sandusky, accused of molesting eight boys, was arrested and released on \$100,000 bail after being arraigned on 40 criminal counts. (Sandusky was later convicted and sentenced to 30 to 60 years in prison for the sexual abuse of 10 boys over a 15-year period.)

Ten years ago: On the eve of the presidential election, President Barack Obama and Republican challenger Mitt Romney held rallies seven miles apart in Columbus, Ohio. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled a South Carolina sheriff's office could be held liable for attorneys' fees for stopping abortion protesters who wanted to hold up signs showing aborted fetuses.

Five years ago: A gunman armed with an assault rifle opened fire in a small South Texas church, killing more than two dozen people; the shooter, Devin Patrick Kelley, was later found dead in a vehicle after he was shot and chased by two men who heard the gunfire. (An autopsy revealed that he died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound.) President Donald Trump arrived in Japan for the start of a 12-day, five-country Asian trip. Shalane Flanagan became the first American woman to win the New York City Marathon since 1977; Geoffrey Kamworor of Kenya was the men's winner.

One year ago: A crush of fans during a performance by rapper Travis Scott at a Houston music festival left ten people dead, as people were squeezed so tightly they couldn't breathe. The House gave final congressional approval to a bipartisan \$1 trillion infrastructure plan with money for roads, bridges, ports, the power grid, broadband internet and more. Pfizer Inc. said its experimental antiviral pill for COVID-19

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, Nov. 05, 2022 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 121 ~ 82 of 82

cut rates of hospitalization and death by nearly 90% in high-risk adults.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Harris Yulin is 85. Actor Chris Robinson is 84. Actor Elke Sommer is 82. Singer Art Garfunkel is 81. Singer Peter Noone is 75. TV personality Kris Jenner is 67. Actor Nestor Serrano is 67. Actor-comedian Mo Gaffney is 64. Actor Robert Patrick is 64. Singer Bryan Adams is 63. Actor Tilda Swinton is 62. Actor Michael Gaston is 60. Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid is 59. Actor Tatum O'Neal is 59. Actor Andrea McArdle is 59. Rock singer Angelo Moore (Fishbone) is 57. Actor Judy Reyes is 55. Actor Seth Gilliam is 54. Rock musician Mark Hunter (James) is 54. Actor Sam Rockwell is 54. Actor Corin Nemec is 51. Rock musician Jonny Greenwood (Radiohead) is 51. Country singer-musician Ryan Adams is 48. Actor Sam Page is 47. Actor Sebastian Arcelus is 46. Actor Luke Hemsworth is 42. Actor Annet Mahendru (MAH'-hehn-droo) is 37. Rock musician Kevin Jonas (The Jonas Brothers) is 35. Actor Landon Gimenez is 19.