

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 1 of 90

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- Newsweek Bulletin](#)
- [3- Story on Groton Area Bus Drivers](#)
- [5- Groton Citywide Spring Cleanup Ad](#)
- [6- SD Newswatch: New nonprofit aims to help S.D. businesses sell overseas](#)
- [11- Ringgenberg, two relay teams are winners at Miller Track Meet](#)
- [12- SD Searchlight: 'More precipitation, more drought: Rosebud Sioux Tribe to implement climate adaptation plan](#)
- [13- SD Searchlight: Noem touts \\$7.9 million investment in apprenticeships as part of workforce shortage solution](#)
- [14- SD Searchlight: Biden administration warns U.S. House GOP debt limit bill would slash education](#)
- [16- SD Searchlight: U.S. House GOP plan would expand work requirements for food aid for older adults](#)
- [18- Weather Pages](#)
- [22- Daily Devotional](#)
- [23- 2023 Community Events](#)
- [24- Subscription Form](#)
- [25- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [26- News from the Associated Press](#)

## Groton Community Calendar

**Wednesday, April 26**

Senior Menu: Meat loaf, scalloped potatoes, creamed peas, honey fruit salad, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Hashbrown pizza.

School Lunch: Chicken strips, sweet potato puffs.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 6 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Bible Study, 2:45 p.m.

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Book Study with Lindsey Tietz, 4 p.m.; Confirmation, 4 p.m.

**Postponed to May 10:** Baseball, Softball, T-Ball Parent Meeting at the Groton Legion, 7:30 p.m.

High School Baseball: Miller at Groton, 5:30 p.m. (V/JV)

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

**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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**Thursday, April 27**

Senior Menu: Beef stew, biscuit, tossed salad, rainbow sherbert.

School Breakfast: Oatmeal.

School Lunch: Hot dogs, baked beans.

**Cancelled:** Girls Golf Meet at Redfield Golf Course, 10 a.m.

Middle School Spring Concert, 7 p.m.

Track at Milbank, 3:30 p.m.

**Friday, April 28**

Senior Menu: Chicken pasta salad, grape juice, breadstick, apple crisp.

School Breakfast: Cereal.

School Lunch: Mac and cheese, peas.

**Cancelled:** Track at Webster Area, 10 a.m.

## The Bulletin

by Newsweek

JANUARY 24, 2023

### World in Brief

tion, a Fox News whistleblower who is suing the network has confirmed.

- Fox News has seen a significant drop in its ratings following the departure of Tucker Carlson, with rival networks Newsmax and MSNBC receiving a boost in viewership share against the under-fire network.

- Zoey Zephyr, the transgender Montana Representative who sparked a wave of protests after she was barred from speaking on the state's House floor by GOP lawmakers, says she is likely to either be censured or expelled when lawmakers decide her fate during a session at 1 p.m.

- Chief Justice John Roberts has announced that he will not testify at an upcoming Senate hearing on Supreme Court ethics.

- In the ongoing war in Ukraine, the number of daily Russian casualties has dropped by 30% in April compared to March, according to U.K. intelligence, which claimed the decrease was tied to the end of Russia's winter offensive. Elsewhere, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said he is planning to take his country out of the International Criminal Court after it issued an arrest warrant against Vladimir Putin for alleged war crimes.

### What to Watch in the Day Ahead

- Oversight of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) will be the focus of a U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary hearing scheduled to begin this morning. ATF Director Steven Dettelbach is expected to testify as committee members assess the agency's policy on federal firearms licenses and its pistol brace rule, among other issues.

- The president of the American Federation of Teachers is expected to testify on the impacts of pandemic-era school closures at a House subcommittee hearing this afternoon. Another subcommittee hearing scheduled for this afternoon is expected to focus on unaccompanied minors crossing the U.S.-Mexico border and the policies that committee members say "enable the exploitation of those children."

- The Islamic State militant behind the 2021 bombing at the Kabul airport that killed 13 U.S. service members and at least 170 Afghans was killed himself in "recent weeks" by Taliban fighters, according to U.S. officials.

- The United Nations envoy to Sudan has warned that there is "no unequivocal sign" that either side of the ongoing conflict in the country is "ready to seriously negotiate."

- The DOJ has requested access to recordings which allegedly contain evidence of Republican senator Ted Cruz discussing plans to block the certification of the 2020 elec-



**Joann Donley, Don Donley, Damian Bahr, Butch Farmen, Joel Guthmiller, Randy Hjernstad, Deb Tietz, Adam Franken.** (Photo compliments of Kristi Peterson, Assistant Business Manager and yearbook advisor.)

## Challenging Driving for School Bus Drivers

by Dorene Nelson

Melting snow and brown grass turning green are promising signs of spring, but even these welcome signs don't mean that all is great and perfect for the seven school bus drivers for the Groton Area School District.

Obviously during the winter months with deep snow banks, windy conditions, and poor visibility, driving can be difficult for even the most experienced drivers. Driving a school bus full of school-age children can be even more challenging!

According to the Groton bus drivers, this job would be impossible without great communication with the parents. The parents call the bus drivers to let them know whether the road is open or not and if they will bring their children to the bus or all the way into Groton.

All of the bus drivers mentioned that good cooperation, communication, and help from the parents were the key to this vital job of delivering the children to school safely every day!

Two of Groton's bus drivers, Debbie Tietz and Randy Hjernstad, have a combined total of over 70 years of driving children to school every day!

New to the bus transportation business is Manager Damian Bahr. "I also share driving the bus route to Claremont and Houghton with Mike Nehls," Bahr said.

"Prior to becoming the transportation manager, I had been in law enforcement for twenty-one years, primarily as an investigator," he explained. "Due to the nature of the job, I'd receive phone calls at all hours of the day or night!"

"The biggest problem I had with this is the irregular hours, interrupting my kids' birthday parties, Christmas celebrations, etc.," Bahr listed. "My time with my family was never guaranteed!"

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 4 of 90

"I really appreciate the regular hours that I have here," he admitted. "I'm in charge of seven bus routes with five full time and three part-time drivers. I am sure there are many reasons for bus driver shortages, but the main cause is the extra difficulty in securing a CDL license which every school bus driver needs."

"The Groton Area School District buses drive a total of 451 miles a day in four counties (Brown, Marshall, Spink, and Day), providing transportation for 234 students," Bahr listed.

"Damian and I have the longest route of eighty-eight miles but pick up only eighteen students, the fewest number of any other route," explained Mike Nehls. "Damian makes the morning run while I do the afternoon trip."

Don Donley, the industrial technology teacher, has driven a school bus for the Groton school district since 1971, with a break when teachers

weren't allowed to drive. "However, when the ever-present shortage of available drivers became apparent," Donley explained, "I was soon asked to drive again and have ever since."

"My route is to stop at the gas station at Bath Corner where I pick up several passengers," he said. "Then I go north to Mallard Pass and south to Sperry Lane and pick up children from additional families."

"I drive the school bus for about 2 dozen students every day," Donley smiled. "I rather enjoy the chance to drive in the country and help out any way I can."

Adam Franken, the ag teacher/FFA advisor, has been a route driver for about ten years. "I've always driven the bus for the cross country events and for FFA but added this route to my list of daily responsibilities, sharing the job with Butch Farnen."

"I make the after-school drive while Adam does the morning one," explained Butch Farnen. "That arrangement gives both of us the opportunity to do our regular jobs with the school."

"I pick up approximately twenty-three students in Pierpont and in the Olson addition on the north edge of Groton," Franken listed. "This winter has been particularly challenging with no end in sight!"

"Deep snow, strong winds, and poor visibility are major issues, of course, but now that the snow is melting, an even bigger issue is water over the roads," he explained.

Joel Guthmiller, the 4th grade teacher, started driving school bus in 2016. "I enjoy the chance to get outside for a while every day," he admitted. "My route to Ferney and Conde takes about one hour and twenty minutes."

"About seventy per cent of my route is on State and County roads, making it a bit easier," Guthmiller explained. "However, ice and visibility are still a problem, even when the road is plowed. The time of day makes a lot of difference too."

"If there is ever a problem between students on my bus, it is usually between siblings," he said. "I just make them sit on separate seats."

"The key to being a successful bus driver is pretty much the same as being a successful teacher in the classroom: be flexible and have open lines of communication with the parents."

Joann Donley, the bus driver on the Columbia route, picks up an average of forty students every day. "It's been a challenging year," Joann smiles, "but with the help of the farmers in the area, most of the kids get picked up at their homes. However, about ten of them had to have their parents meet me in Columbia or on nearby roads. Although most of their roads had been opened wide enough for cars, there wasn't enough room for the bus!"

"This is my first year of full time bus driving," she stated. "Before that I did either a morning or an evening route, but not both. I really enjoy the kids and consider it a privilege to be with them!"

"One thing that impresses me the most is when the older students bring things with them on the bus to entertain the younger children for the long ride home," Joann smiled. "For example, a third grader recently brought a tea set with little crackers as treats for the littlest kids."

Deb Tietz, the bus driver for the Bristol and Andover areas, has been driving school bus for the Groton School System for 48 years, the longest bus driver tenure in the system. "I don't plan on retiring any time soon," she admits. "I love these kids, just like I did their parents and maybe even some of their grandparents as well!"

"I drive seventy-three miles a day and pick up thirty-five students," Tietz listed. "The roads I drive on

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 5 of 90

are usually in pretty good shape due to help from the farmers and County and State plows."

"The weather and roads have been bad this year, but not any different than some other years before," she admits. "Besides if the roads are blocked or not open wide enough for my bus, the parents bring the kids to me and the bus."

"In addition to the regular bus route, I drive the activity buses for the basketball and football games," Tietz explained. "I love to watch these games anyway. I also drive the bus for summer school."

Randy Hjernstad is the driver in the Verdon and Stratford areas. He is accompanied by his daughter Shelby who serves as his "bus monitor" by answering the phone during his route drive to get any last minute changes in pick-ups and/or locations.

"The parents on my route keep the roads cleaned and open for me," Hjernstad explained. "They are great people to work with and help me as much as possible, even now that many of the roads are flooded."

"One father even opens the road by going six miles each way just to make it possible for the bus to get through," he stated. "Some of the parents meet me and the bus; others will take their kids all the way to Groton."

"I drive fifty-five miles during my entire route and pick up twenty-eight children," Hjernstad listed.

In addition to the bus drivers, having a trustworthy dispatcher is another vital link in maintaining a smooth school bus operation. Lois Krueger is at the bus shop from 6 a.m. to 8 am. every school morning. If the students need a change in their transportation, the parents can call Lois at the bus shop, and she will deliver the message via two-way radio.

Having dependable substitute bus drivers is another important part of this whole complex system. Groton's substitutes are Brett Schwan, Joe Schwan, Jason Frost and Loren Bahr.

## Groton Citywide 2023 Spring Cleanup

### April 29-May 5

**ALL ITEMS NEED TO BE DROPPED OFF  
BEFORE 10AM ON 5/5/23!!**



Bring anything you wish to dispose of to the City Shop-10 E Railroad Ave starting April 29<sup>th</sup>.

Please place items in the appropriate pile.

**RESIDENTIAL ONLY!!**

Keep Metal, Tires, Paint, Batteries & Chemicals Separate

**Pickup can be arranged for  
Monday, May 1<sup>st</sup> to Friday, May 5<sup>th</sup> ENDING AT 10AM  
by calling City Hall 397-8422.**



## New nonprofit aims to help S.D. businesses sell overseas

Bart Pfankuch

South Dakota News Watch

TEA, S.D. – Alisa Turner can readily remember the trepidation she felt a decade ago when her company made its first international sale to a Cabela's retail store in Canada.

Turner is a co-owner and CEO of Ruff Land Kennels in Tea, which makes industry-leading, one-piece molded plastic kennels.

At the time, the company wanted to build on its domestic business and expand beyond the border. Turner laughs about the process now but recalls how nerve-racking it was. She and co-owner Lyle Van Kalsbeek paused before signing the documents to enter international trade relations with America's neighbor to the north.

"Lyle said to me, 'You better hope you have that right, because you're signing that and it's a federal offense punishable by jail time if anything is wrong,'" Turner recalled. "I didn't sleep for weeks hoping it would cross the border – and that I wouldn't go to prison."

Turner, Van Kalsbeek and third co-owner Doug Sangl have since become relative experts at selling their kennels and other pet-carrying accessories overseas. Their continued foray into international trade is one driver of a recent growth spurt that has seen Ruff Land's annual revenues climb from \$11 million in 2021 to \$16 million in 2022 to an expected \$23 million in 2023.

The team broke into the international market on their own, mostly through resourcefulness, dedication and a large dose of trial and error.

Starting this week, a new statewide nonprofit group called South Dakota Trade hopes it can make it far easier for other Rushmore State businesses to do business with international markets and generate new revenues and jobs along the way.

### **International trade association funded in part by state and federal money**

The new public-private nonprofit trade association will be funded and supported by the Governor's Office of Economic Development and through association members and other South Dakota entities already engaged in business development.



**Ruff Land Kennels CEO Alisa Turner sits behind her desk at their office in Tea, S.D., as two of her office dogs provide continued inspiration for more innovations at the company.** (Photo: Bart Pfankuch, South Dakota News Watch)

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 7 of 90

The group's staff of three full-time and two part-time employees will cooperate with numerous partners inside and outside state government to develop a roadmap for both farm and non-farm businesses to expand into foreign markets.



**Luke Lindberg**

Luke Lindberg, president and CEO, said the group will use a wide range of existing resources and create new procedures to support South Dakota businesses on two basic levels:

- Help them find foreign markets where their products are wanted and to then take advantage of those selling opportunities.
- Find international buyers who might be interested in purchasing products made by South Dakota businesses and then arrange those commercial connections.

"Our main function is export promotion, and our core goal when we wake up in the morning will be, 'How do we sell more South Dakota products and services around the world?'" Lindberg said.

"That's really our desire – to build that culture of international trade, and get into new business or market segments that haven't thought about this in a while — or ever."

GOED declined an interview request from South Dakota News Watch.

South Dakota Trade will also use funding from the State Trade Expansion Program, an arm of the federal U.S. Small Business Administration that has provided \$200 million to states to expand foreign trade.

## **South Dakota was 1 of 2 states without an international trade office**

The state and other industry groups, such as Elevate Rapid City, have done a good job of promoting international trade in South Dakota, especially in the agricultural industry, Lindberg said. But the state has fallen behind others in the level of efforts made and number of resources available to help businesses expand into domestic markets, he said.

South Dakota is home to the International Trade Center, run by Rock Nelson of Sioux Falls, which serves as an online hub for some export assistance. But until now, South Dakota was one of only two states without a formal international trade office, which has undoubtedly led to missed business opportunities, Lindberg said. Nelson will now be a staff member of South Dakota Trade.

"If you look at the non-ag data, our exports have been largely flatlined over the last decade. ... We have not seen a growth in real dollars particularly and maybe even negative growth in international exports in South Dakota," said Lindberg, recently a top official at the Export-Import Bank of the United States who is also the son-in-law of U.S. Sen. John Thune, R-South Dakota.

"There is definitely room for us to get better in those export areas."

## **State's total global exports were \$6.7 billion in 2021**

According to data supplied by the trade group, South Dakota in 2012 had \$5.3 billion in total global exports, which included \$3.8 billion in agricultural sales and \$1.5 billion in manufacturing sales. Those annual figures remained flat and even fell during 2015-2019 but have risen to \$6.7 billion total in 2021.

Food and kindred products were the largest export category in manufacturing with \$680 million in sales in 2021, while soybeans were the top agricultural export product with \$1.3 billion in sales in 2021.



**Ruff Land Kennels of Tea, S.D., uses high-tech machines to rotationally mold its industry-leading one-piece kennels for pets.**

(Photo: Bart Pfankuch, South Dakota News Watch)

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 8 of 90

Recent surveys have shown that more than 40% of American small businesses have the opportunity at hand to expand into overseas markets, Lindberg said. Other data show that about 95% of global market opportunities exist outside the U.S., he said.

One immediate goal of the new trade group will be to target 20 South Dakota businesses to enter into an "Export 101" course that will provide them with a blueprint to fast-track efforts to expand into foreign markets, Lindberg said.

Once the number of exporters and exports increase in South Dakota, it should create a platform for potentially rapid growth in the number of businesses that are capable of selling overseas and an increase in interest among other countries to buy products made in the state.

Beyond finding new markets for their products, the group expects to provide South Dakota businesses with expertise in marketing, compliance, transportation and logistics related to international sales, Lindberg said. The group just learned it had received \$175,000 in Small Business Association State Trade Expansion Program (STEP) funds, which can be used over the next 18 months to provide grants to South Dakota businesses trying to expand international sales, Lindberg said.

North Dakota office serving as a model for South Dakota effort

The North Dakota Trade Office, led by executive director Drew Combs, is largely serving as a model for what Lindberg hopes to accomplish in South Dakota.



**A map hangs in the office of Alisa Turner, CEO of Ruff Land Kennels, that includes pins in each location of the company's sales, and now includes a separate map of Canada.** (Photo: Bart Pfankuch, South Dakota News Watch)

— “ —

There's always enough money to go around, and especially if it's our sister state, we're eager to work together.

— ” —

North Dakota Trade Office  
executive director Drew Combs

A portrait of Drew Combs, executive director of the North Dakota Trade Office. He is a middle-aged man with short hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and light blue tie. He is smiling slightly and looking directly at the camera. The background is a solid yellow color.

"To a person just starting out or who's not familiar with the global marketplace, it's scary," Combs said. "If there's a buyer in Spain who wants to buy your widgets, how does that work? What do I need to do to get that guy his container of widgets?"

Combs said expanding international trade is a 24/7 job that requires a wide range of efforts to grow markets and sales opportunities. His group formed in the early 2000s and regularly visits trade shows, maintains contacts with international buyers from around the world and has an extensive database of U.S. producers and foreign buyers.

Back home, the group provides training and expertise to North Dakota businesses that want to enter or grow foreign trade. "We give classes and can walk them



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 9 of 90



**A dog sits in a kennel made by Ruff Land Kennels, which recently won an award for its ventures into selling products to international customers.** (Photo: Courtesy Ruff Land Kennels)

through the process and legal hurdles, through import/export and customs," he said. "There's a vast array of resources we can tap into."

## **'You were kind of missing the boat a little down there'**

Though he seeks to provide opportunities for all types of businesses, Combs said any Midwestern trade agency will naturally focus on the agriculture and energy industries.

"If people can't eat, there's a problem," he said. "The world is relying on this region to help feed everybody, because you can't grow wheat in the desert or the jungle."

Combs said he has been happy to help South Dakota get its foreign trade office up and running and to provide guidance and advice, even though the two states may be competitors on some level.

Making contacts in the international trade community and creating relationships with key decision makers is a large part of what the trade group does to help businesses in North Dakota but also in other states that work collaboratively to expand U.S. exports on a larger scale, he said.

For instance, a customer from Asia who has purchased precious metals from North Dakota in the past recently contacted Combs to ask about buying agricultural products, which deepened their relationship and enabled Combs to shift those sales to businesses in another state.

"He was looking for chickens, and we don't have chickens in North Dakota, but I hooked him up with some chicken guys I know," Combs said.

Both neighboring states will benefit when the new

South Dakota Trade association becomes active, Combs said.

"You were kind of missing the boat a little down there, and we're excited you guys came on board," he said. "There's always enough money to go around, and especially if it's our sister state, we're eager to work together."

## **Simplifying an international trade process that can be intimidating**

As Turner recently talked about the new trade association in her office at the Ruff Land headquarters in Tea, two dogs slept on the floor and other canines scampered about the warehouse. Ruff Land's facility produces durable kennels that safely carry pets in vehicles or on trucks and are designed to last for years and protect animals even in rough travel conditions.

The new trade group could be a valuable resource for many South Dakota businesses that aren't aware of international opportunities or which might be intimidated by the complexity of the process, she said.

"I definitely think what we did is replicable, and that there needs to be something to help guide people because I was flying in the dark at first," Tuner said. "I really think there's a huge opportunity for an organization like this to help, especially for small businesses, to get out there into new markets."

While foreign sales still make up only 3% of Ruff Land's annual sales, expanding into overseas markets has been as invigorating as it has been challenging, Turner said.

The rapid rise in sales has allowed the company to invest in building a strong future for the company that had five employees 10 years ago now has 26 people on staff. It also fuels the employment of a dozen

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 10 of 90



**Lyle Van Kalsbeek and Alisa Turner, both part owners of Ruff Land Kennels in Tea, S.D., stand proudly in their new \$2 million building that was part of a recent expansion.**

(Photo: Bart Pfankuch, South Dakota News Watch)

In March, the federal Small Business Administration named Ruff Land the 2023 Small Business Exporter of the Year in South Dakota.

"Each time I see a new international sale from our website, I just jump up and down," said Turner. "I want everybody to have the opportunity to have one of our kennels and to have safety for their pets, no matter where in the world they live."

— This article was produced by South Dakota News Watch, a non-profit journalism organization located online at [sdnewswatch.org](http://sdnewswatch.org).

or so other employees at other molding businesses.

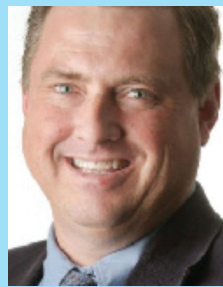
## **Technology helps manufacturing and international sales**

In the past two years, Ruff Land underwent a \$2 million building expansion, added two new molding machines valued at \$1 million, spent \$1.6 million on new molds and bought a \$260,000 robot that will cut ventilation holes in kennels to enable employees to avoid repetitive motion work.

The company also recently invested in a computer program that allows foreign customers to buy kennels and accessories in their own monetary unit and pay for shipping and duties based on their specific location.

As Turner and her colleagues have gained experience, Ruff Land has landed international sales in Japan and Ecuador, and recently added South Korea and Switzerland to its foreign sales roster. Turner recently took a class on working with companies in Australia and plans to attend an Aussie trade show in the fall.

## **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.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 11 of 90

## Ringgenberg, two relay teams are winners at Miller Track Meet

Groton Area's track team won three events at the Miller Invitational meet held Tuesday. The boys 4x200m relay team, the girls SMR1600m relay team both were winners, as was Logan Ringgenberg in the shot put.

### Boy's Results

100 Meters: 12. Korbin Kucker, 12.11

400 Meters: 4. Andrew Marzahn, 55.39; 17. Gage Sippel, 58.55PR

800 Meters: 6. Blake Pauli, 2:20.58; 10. Tristin McGannon, 2:22.77; 17. Jacob Lewandowski, 2:30.64

1600 Meters: 10. Jayden Schwan, 5:32.83, 31. Nicolas Fernandez, 6:28.70

110m Hurdles: 16. Caden McInerney, 20.73

300m Hurdles: 11. Colby Dunker, 47.36; 14. Caden McInerney, 50.26

4x100 Relay: 2. (Keegen Tracy, Ryder Johnson, Korbin Kucker, Teylor Diegel), 46.28

4x200 Relay: 1. (Keegen Tracy, Ryder Johnson, Andrew Marzahn, Teylor Diegel), 1:36.86

4x800 Relay: 2. (Keegen Tracy, Cole Simon, Lane Tietz, Jacob Lewandowski), 8:59.03

SMR 1600m: 5. (Ryder Johnson, Lane Tietz, Andrew Marzahn, Cole Simon), 3:58.21

Shot Put: 1. Logan Ringgenberg, 42-01.50; 3. Holden Sippel, 39-11.00; 4. Caleb Hanten, 39-08.00

Discus: 8. Logan Ringgenberg, 110-00; 19. Caleb Hanten, 94-06; 29. Holden Sippel, 86-09

High Jump: 9. Tate Larson, 5-04.00

Long Jump: 5. Jacob Zak, 18-08.50; 18. Tristin McGannon, 16-01.25

Triple Jump: 5. Jacob Zak, 38-02.00; 18. Tristin McGannon, 30-10.25

### Girl's Results

800 Meters: 6. Ashlynn Warrington, 2:49.98

1600 Meters: 12. Faith Traphagen, 6:08.95; 19. Ashlynn Warrington, 6:28.31; 23. Elizabeth Fliehs, 6:41.50

100m Hurdles: 7. Mckenna Tietz, 19.02; 9. Talli Wright, 19.15

300m Hurdles: 4. Mckenna Tietz, 53.43; 5. Talli Wright, 54.09; 12. Hannah Sandness, 59.55

4x100 Relay: 2. (Kennedy Hansen, Jerica Locke, Rylee Dunker, Laila Roberts), 54.59

4x200 Relay: 2. (Jerica Locke, Kennedy Hansen, Kella Tracy, Laila Roberts), 1:53.69

4x800 Relay: 3. (Kella Tracy, Faith Traphagen, Taryn Traphagen, Rylee Dunker), 10:40.91

SMR 1600m: 1. (Jerica Locke, Laila Roberts, Kella Tracy, Taryn Traphagen) 4:40.62

Shot Put: 5. Emma Kutter, 30-10.00; 9. Faith Fliehs, 27-04.00; 36. Kayleigh McGannon, 21-00.50

Discus: 23. Faith Fliehs, 66-11; 35. Emma Kutter, 58-04

High Jump: 6. Anna Fjeldheim, 4-04.00; 9. Emerlee Jones, 4-02.00

Long Jump: 3. Aspen Johnson, 14-11.00; 7. Sydney Leicht, 14-00.00PR Groton Area; 9. Anna Fjeldheim, 13-06.50

Triple Jump: 2. Aspen Johnson, 32-09.00; 12. Emerlee Jones, 28-02.00PR Groton Area



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### **More precipitation, more drought: Rosebud Sioux Tribe to implement climate adaptation plan**

**BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - APRIL 25, 2023 5:09 PM**

Steam rose from snow puddles hours after melting across southwestern South Dakota over Easter weekend.

Deer are changing their migration patterns because of drought; magpies have nearly disappeared from the prairie, Native American elders observe.

This is the shifting landscape of the Rosebud Reservation, home of the Sicangu Lakota Oyate, or the Rosebud Sioux Tribe.

Scientists with the North Central Climate Adaptation Science Center in Colorado partnered with the tribe for a multi-year study of how the reservation's environment will change in the next century.

The changes threaten the tribe's economy, such as ranching cattle and bison, and tribal members' lives with worsening storms like the December 2022 storms that killed six people, including a 12-year-old child. The changes prompted the tribe and scientists to create a Climate Adaptation Plan, which was released in 2022 and will be implemented beginning this year.

The plan urges the tribe to expand food sovereignty and local processing facilities, promote habitat conservation, plant trees and native plants, and build a climate center, among other recommendations.

"Each generation born is responsible for the next seven generations," said Phil Two Eagle, executive director of the Sicangu Lakota Treaty Council and leader of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe climate change working group. "The Lakota concept of a generation is 72 years, so if you multiply that by seven that's 504 years we are responsible for today."

What do scientists predict will happen?

The Rosebud Sioux Tribe was awarded a nearly \$1.7 million federal grant in 2022 to implement the adaptation report and build the Sicangu Climate Center. The center will track environmental changes and store data. Tribal leaders expect it'll be operational within five years.

But already, preliminary findings highlight the urgency to act, Two Eagle said.

The region is seeing a steeper increase in precipitation than the rest of the world, yet hotter temperatures and worsening droughts in the summer with higher potential of wildfires.

In the last 30 years, only six years saw annual precipitation totals less than the 20th century average on the reservation, said Robin O'Malley, retired director of the North Central Climate Adaptation Science Center who worked on the report, during a webinar presentation.

That's leading to the steam rising from puddles, or evapotranspiration, which is when moisture is evaporated from the ground and air. It's happening "to a degree not seen before," O'Malley said, and it's leading to wet springs and falls but dry summers.

"The notion of drought just being a lack of water is no longer how we think about it," O'Malley said. "It's a combination of lack of water at higher temperatures and lower relative humidity that actively sucks water out of the air."

Precipitation changes will change what grows in the area, O'Malley added. The report suggests the grassland will shift to a shrub-covered landscape, which will affect not only what grows in the area but what livestock and wildlife can survive.

## Protecting the Oyate

Once the climate center is operational, that'll give Rosebud Sioux "bulletproof" and "court-quality" data to defend their rights as a sovereign nation and gain partnerships, O'Malley said, including water right claims.

"We've seen people come after the resources the tribes have before and take them away, so they need to be watchful of that," he added.

The report highlights the risk to communities and Indigenous culture and knowledge. Paula Antoine, director of the Sicangu Oyate Land Office, is encouraging tribal members to forage and harvest native plants, such as sage, to encourage growth. Such plants and medicine central to Lakota culture must be protected and their importance documented, she said.

The tribe has also been in the process of planting thousands of trees in the last few years, following a series of 2012 fires that burned over 45,000 acres of forested land in the southwestern part of the reservation.

Proposals in the report include ensuring all homes have reliable sources of heating and cooling, improving substandard housing and considering rooftop solar energy. It also encourages the tribe to strengthen food sovereignty and produce energy in the community to sustain its own grid — "produce what we consume," according to Two Eagle.

"We're thinking about the survival of our people, protecting our lives and property — our homes, our land, our water, our resources," he said.

While the Rosebud Sioux Tribe is the first tribal nation in the region to create a climate adaptation plan, the tribe plans to share its knowledge with other tribes in South Dakota and other governmental entities, Antoine said.

"Just because we have a reservation boundary or a state or county boundary, doesn't mean climate change is going to stop there," Antoine said. "We need to work together and combine our efforts to help the people of our region and help our neighbors."

*Makenzie Huber is a lifelong South Dakotan whose work has won national and regional awards. She's spent five years as a journalist with experience reporting on workforce, development and business issues within the state.*

## Noem touts \$7.9 million investment in apprenticeships as part of workforce shortage solution

**BY: JOHN HULT - APRIL 25, 2023 3:29 PM**

SIoux FALLS — Employers willing to build or expand apprenticeship programs in South Dakota will soon have a shot at a larger pool of state funding.

During a stop at Howe Inc., Gov. Kristi Noem announced the addition of \$7.9 million in apprenticeship grants to be distributed over three years through the Start Today South Dakota program. Howe is among the businesses that have already used program funding to launch state-accredited apprenticeship programs.

New employers in the program could get up to \$15,000 to cover start-up costs; existing partners are eligible for up to \$10,000.

The move is the latest of several administrative and legislative efforts to address the workforce troubles that accompany South Dakota's historically low unemployment rate. The money will come from existing workforce development funds, Noem said.

There are 25,000 open jobs in the state, and Noem said South Dakota is expected to see another 3,000 job openings a year through 2030.

"The state that has the workers will be the state that will be successful, that will be more stable during recessions," Noem said. "We'll have a more successful economy."

Employers like Howe that choose to offer apprenticeship programs shoulder the costs of training, program setup and apprentice management. Noem said the money, available through the state Department of Labor, is meant to help offset those costs.

In order to be a registered apprenticeship, the participating employer must pay at least minimum wage

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 14 of 90

and provide instruction beyond typical on-the-job training. Apprentices work with one or more experienced employees as they move toward licensure in their chosen field.

The department will work with employers on program eligibility and setup, according to Labor Secretary Marcia Hultman, who said her team had been "bursting at the seams" to talk about it in the runup to Tuesday's announcement.

"They're literally ready to talk to employers today if they have questions," Hultman said.

The department will hold a statewide webinar on the funding program from 2-3 p.m. Central on May 10, she said. More information is online.

Dan Erikson of Howe began as an apprentice 10 years ago in fire protection. He's since moved up to become the company's fire protection service manager, and helped set up the Department of Labor-accredited apprenticeship program.

Working with apprentices is now one of Erikson's most gratifying tasks at the Sioux Falls-based company.

"They're the future," said Erikson, whose company joined the apprenticeship program in 2022. "They're the ones who are going to take over for us."

Ashley Kingdon-Reese of Independent Health Solutions used startup funding for several years in a row to create a path to licensure for home health aides, behavioral health aides and community health workers. Apprenticeship programs help get employees into homes and jobs more quickly, she said, while giving those employees hands-on experience.

"There really are no downsides," Kingdon-Reese said.

Tuesday's funding announcement comes one day after Noem inked an executive order encouraging state hiring managers to consider life experiences alongside college degrees when reviewing applicants for state jobs, and a few weeks after a Noem-backed bill to recognize some out-of-state professional licenses for new residents was signed into law.

*John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux falls Argus Leader.*

## Biden administration warns U.S. House GOP debt limit bill would slash education

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - APRIL 25, 2023 3:10 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona on Tuesday said House Republicans' debt limit proposal would cut vital education programs and harm vulnerable students across the U.S., such as those who are low income or have a disability.

"It would be taking us backwards," Cardona said on a call with reporters.

U.S. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy's plan would lift the nation's borrowing capacity by \$1.5 trillion or suspend it through March.

It would also set discretionary spending levels during the upcoming fiscal year to last year's levels, meaning at least \$130 billion in spending reductions to federal agencies.

McCarthy, a California Republican, plans to put the bill on the House floor as soon as Wednesday for a vote, and the administration stepped up its criticism in advance.

The White House said in a Tuesday statement that President Joe Biden would veto the proposal, calling it "a reckless attempt to extract extreme concessions as a condition for the United States simply paying the bills it has already incurred." Biden has said debt limit legislation should not be tied to spending reductions.

Even if the bill is passed in the House, it's highly unlikely to gain the 60 votes needed to move past the legislative filibuster in the Senate, where Democrats hold a slim majority.

At least 26 million students who are low income would see Title I funding levels for their schools drop, and more than 7 million students with disabilities would be affected by cuts in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Cardona said.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 15 of 90

He added that those cuts are equivalent to eliminating 60,000 teachers for low-income students and eliminating 48,000 teachers and related services providers from the classroom for students with disabilities.

The plan would also require states to return unspent pandemic funding, much of which went to helping schools reopen. Pandemic funding also provided mental health services for students.

"During the pandemic, students with disabilities were amongst the hardest impacted by the disruption of learning," Cardona said.

## State-by-state cuts

The Department of Education released a state-by-state breakdown of cuts to education-related programs in the GOP plan.

For example, in Florida, funding for mental health in schools would be cut by \$19 million and nearly half a million students with disabilities would have reduced support from programs and teachers.

A senior Department of Education official said the cuts in the debt relief plan also would make it harder for students to afford higher education.

Across the nation, it would mean an elimination of Pell Grants for about 80,000 students and more than 6 million Pell Grant recipients would have cuts of about \$1,000 each annually, the administration said. Grants are tied to family income.

The Republican proposal would also nullify the executive order Biden issued last year to cancel federal student loan debt.

For example, in Idaho, 79,000 approved applicants with federal student loan debt would not receive relief, according to the Department of Education.

The bill would also prevent the agency from finalizing its income-driven repayment program, which sets a monthly repayment plan based on the borrowers' income.

Biden's executive order on student loans would cancel up to \$10,000 in federal student debt for borrowers earning up to \$125,000 annually, or up to \$250,000 for married couples, with the boost to \$20,000 in forgiveness for Pell Grant recipients.

The program only applies to current borrowers, not future ones, and income levels for the 2020 and 2021 tax years would be considered. Those who have private student loans are not eligible.

But the policy is currently on hold from taking effect due to two lawsuits, one from six Republican attorneys general and another by two student loan borrowers who do not qualify for the program.

The Department of Education has collected more than 24 million applications for the relief program, but had to stop due to an injunction.

The Supreme Court will make a decision on the policy in the coming months.

Regardless of the outcome, the Department of Education announced that the pandemic-era pause on federal student loan repayments will lift on June 30, and those borrowers will be required to begin repayments either after the Supreme Court's decision or 60 days after the June deadline.

## South Dakota impact

According to the U.S. Department of Education, House Republicans' debt limit proposal would:

Cut Title I funding in South Dakota by about \$14 million, affecting schools serving low-income children and impacting an estimated 50,000 students.

Reduce supports for up to 22,000 children in South Dakota with disabilities.

Slash Title IV, Part A funding for South Dakota schools by about \$1.5 million, affecting educators' abilities to address students' mental health challenges.

Eliminate up to \$20,000 of student loan relief from each of 46,000 applicants across South Dakota.

Reduce the maximum Pell Grant award for college by nearly \$1,000 and eliminate grants for 200 South Dakota students.

*Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her areas of coverage include politics and policy, lobbying, elections and campaign finance.*

## U.S. House GOP plan would expand work requirements for food aid for older adults

**Idea gains traction in bill introduced by SD congressman**

**BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - APRIL 25, 2023 1:50 PM**

WASHINGTON — Hundreds of thousands of low-income Americans could face higher barriers to food assistance under the U.S. House Republican plan to cut spending while temporarily lifting the debt limit, advocates say.

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy's Limit, Save, Grow Act proposes returning discretionary spending to fiscal 2022 levels in exchange for raising the nation's borrowing limit, often called the debt ceiling, by \$1.5 trillion — but only through March 31, 2024, at the latest.

McCarthy's bill would expand the additional work requirements for certain Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, recipients who do not have children. The idea has gained traction in a bill recently introduced by Rep. Dusty Johnson, a South Dakota Republican.

As the law stands now, all recipients of federal nutrition aid ages 16 to 59 must either be looking for work, enrolled in a SNAP employment training program, or pulling in wages equivalent to 30 hours per week at the federal minimum wage.

Some exceptions exist, for example, for people who already have a job, are physically or mentally unable, or are caring for a child under 6.

Additional work requirements come into play for able-bodied adults ages 18 to 49 who do not have dependents. They must work for pay, attend a training program or volunteer 80 hours a month — though some states can waive these requirements depending on unemployment figures and other factors.

Those in that age range who don't meet the work requirements, and cannot secure an exemption, can only receive SNAP benefits, formerly called food stamps, for three months over a three-year period.

McCarthy's proposal aims to raise that age window to 55, beefing up work rules for a slim population of SNAP beneficiaries who are already subject to the program's baseline requirements.

The SNAP age adjustment, plus proposed expanded work requirements for other low-income benefit programs — including Medicaid, which provides health insurance, and Temporary Cash Assistance for Needy Families, which assists families with children — could cut \$100 billion and \$120 billion in government spending over the next ten years, according to respective analyses from the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget and Moody's Analytics.

That's a tiny fraction of the roughly \$4.5 trillion McCarthy's bill is estimated to save over the next decade, according to the CRFB and Moody's.

Those in favor of expanding the work requirements for adults without dependents ages 50 to 55, like the libertarian think tank the CATO Institute, acknowledge it's a "small part of the savings from the Republican plan."

"But it is important to begin reining in bloated entitlements, and adjusting eligibility to encourage work is a good place to start," wrote Chris Edwards, with the CATO Institute.

### **Advocates say no to the change**

But advocates for older adults and anti-hunger campaigns are speaking out against the proposed age adjustment, citing several reasons.

According to an AARP 2020 research survey, 9.5 million SNAP recipients are 50 or older.

Roughly a million of those recipients are between 50 and 55, the left-leaning Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimates in its analysis of McCarthy's proposal.

AARP and the CBPP argue that raising the work requirement age will only place barriers in the way of a demographic that already faces age discrimination when applying for jobs, among other existing discriminatory hiring practices.

The CBPP's state-by-state breakdown, based on 2019 figures, shows that anywhere from thousands to tens of thousands of SNAP beneficiaries fit into the 50 to 55 age range across each of the 50 states,



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 17 of 90

District of Columbia and U.S. territories.

Further, the CBPP warns that McCarthy's proposal would strip some narrow exemptions for able-bodied adults without dependents who need benefits beyond the three-month window.

"Recognizing the harshness of the time limit and its inability to adjust for unexpected or unique circumstances, Congress allowed states to exempt a small percentage (about 12 percent) of people subject to the time limit," the analysis read. "States can use these discretionary exemptions in cases when, for example, someone faces a sudden hardship like car trouble or has recently been released from prison or treatment for substance use disorder."

Adding to its arguments, the CBPP also points to the math that another portion of McCarthy's plan — to repeal funding passed in 2022 to beef up Internal Revenue Service tax collections — roughly cancels out the savings of enforcing new work requirements on SNAP, Medicaid and TANF recipients.

Moody's and the Committee for a Responsible Budget respectively calculate that repealing the IRS funding will eventually cost the government \$100 billion to \$114 billion over the next decade.

Another argument against the SNAP changes: Advocates repeatedly spotlight research finding little evidence that expanded work rules are effective.

Two recent studies found work requirements did not improve employment or earnings, and at the same time cut people who could have qualified from accessing food benefits.

"Work requirements do not get people out of poverty. Seventy-five percent of SNAP recipients with children who are not disabled or elderly already work. They are just underemployed or underpaid," Heather Reynolds, of Notre Dame University's Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities, told a Senate Committee on Agriculture subcommittee on April 19.

"Our solution must be to give them programs that work towards upward mobility and are proven to be successful, so they can feed their families and live a life outside of poverty," she continued.

## **GOP squabbles**

In response to McCarthy's plan, Democrats on the House Committee on Appropriations say the bill will hurt families, seniors and workers with its host of proposed cuts.

Moody's concludes that under the legislation nondefense discretionary spending could fall to its lowest levels since the 1960s.

The slim House Republican majority means McCarthy can only afford to lose a handful of votes from his own party.

But some think his expansion of work rules on low-income benefits programs does not go far enough.

"An essential element to get my vote for any increase in the debt limit would be enacting work requirements starting in fiscal year 2024 – NOT 2025 as the legislation is currently written. Otherwise, it's a no vote from me," GOP Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida posted to Twitter Monday.

Gaetz was among the GOP holdouts in January who demanded McCarthy tie spending cuts to a debt ceiling increase in exchange for their support in getting McCarthy the speaker's gavel.

Meanwhile, Senate Democrats, who hold a razor-thin majority in the upper chamber, and President Joe Biden say they will stand firm on passing what they call a "clean" debt ceiling bill — meaning raising the nation's borrowing limit without touching spending.

The U.S. hit its \$31.4 trillion borrowing limit on Jan. 19, triggering the U.S. Treasury Department to employ "extraordinary measures," or special accounting maneuvers, to continue paying the nation's bills.

The X-date — the date when Treasury, despite the maneuvers, runs out of cash needed to pay the bills on time — may arrive as early as June, according to Moody's.

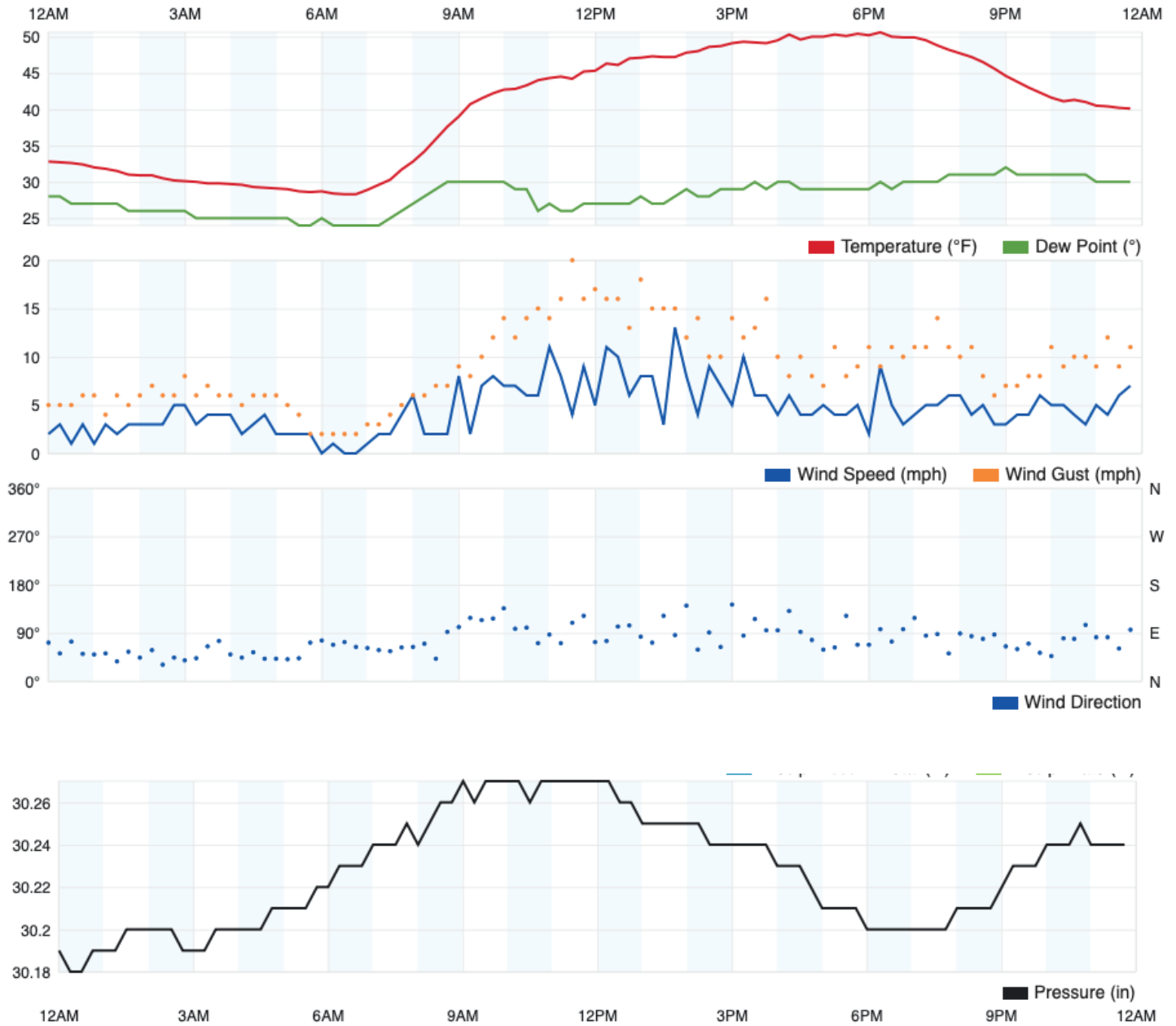
McCarthy is banking on a House vote this week. After Friday, the House is out until May 9.

*Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.*

# Groton Daily Independent






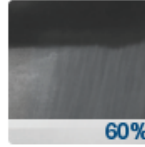

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 18 of 90

## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 19 of 90

Today	Tonight	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday
						
Mostly Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Partly Sunny then Chance Showers and Breezy	Slight Chance T-storms then Slight Chance Showers	Mostly Cloudy then Chance Showers	Showers Likely and Windy	Chance Showers and Breezy
High: 50 °F	Low: 32 °F	High: 62 °F	Low: 34 °F	High: 61 °F	Low: 35 °F	High: 49 °F



## Temperatures 10 to 15° Higher Today

April 26, 2023  
4:23 AM

### Maximum Temperature Forecast

	4/26 Wed	4/27 Thu	4/28 Fri	4/29 Sat	4/30 Sun
Aberdeen	68	63	54	58	53
Britton	60	59	50	53	48
Eagle Butte	68	63	54	60	55
Eureka	68	59	53	58	53
Gettysburg	68	62	53	58	53
Kennebec	72	69	58	64	58
McIntosh	67	60	53	58	53
Milbank	64	64	53	55	50
Miller	69	68	54	60	53
Mobridge	71	63	57	62	56
Murdo	71	68	57	63	58
Pierre	74	70	59	65	60
Redfield	67	66	54	59	53
Sisseton	62	62	52	55	50
Watertown	64	66	52	55	48
Webster	60	61	49	53	47
Wheaton	56	60	52	52	48

## Today: Highs in the 60s to low 70s

Thin broken line of showers (30% chance) to develop over north central SD by mid afternoon, before sinking across south central and northeastern SD and west central MN in the evening.



Expect temperatures to be 10 to 15 degrees above what was experienced Tuesday. Unsettled weather continues, with off and on showers and even some thunderstorms. A thin broken line of showers (around 30 percent of measurable rain) will develop over north central SD by mid afternoon, before sinking across south central to northeastern SD and west central MN this evening.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 20 of 90

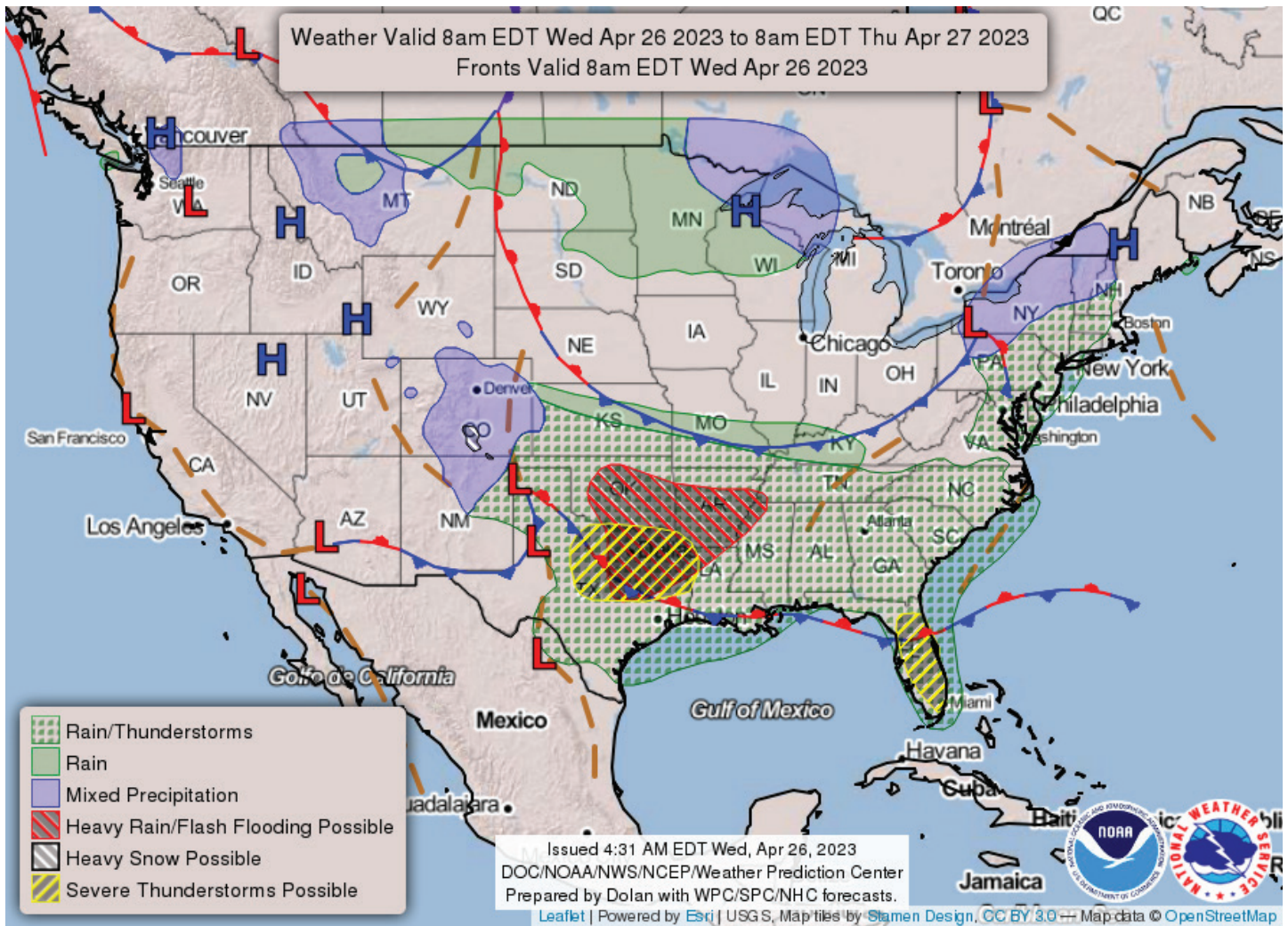
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 51 °F at 5:08 PM**  
**Low Temp: 28 °F at 6:24 AM**  
**Wind: 20 mph at 11:22 AM**  
**Precip: : 0.00**

Day length: 14 hours, 07 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 86 in 1952  
Record Low: 20 in 1931  
Average High: 63  
Average Low: 35  
Average Precip in April.: 1.54  
Precip to date in April.: 1.67  
Average Precip to date: 3.60  
Precip Year to Date: 5.60  
Sunset Tonight: 8:33:49 PM  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:24:58 AM



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 21 of 90

## Today in Weather History

April 26, 1986: Intense thunderstorms swept across southeast South Dakota, southwest Minnesota, and northwest Iowa. Baseball size hail fell in a 15-mile wide swath from near Pickstown to Scotland, South Dakota. The large hail caused extensive damage to windows, roofs, siding, and vehicles in the path of the storm. Wind gusts of 70 to 80 mph and rain amounts of 2 or more inches in a short period (including 5 inches at Centerville) were reported in southeast South Dakota. Several tornadoes moved across northwest Iowa including one that ran across part of Lyon County destroying several farmsteads. Another tornado moved through Lyon County, Iowa into Nobles County, Minnesota damaging, at least, 16 separate farms. Another tornado touched down briefly on the south side of Okebena in Jackson County destroying or damaging several houses.

April 26, 1991: During a severe thunderstorm event, large hail fell over parts of Brown, Spink, Hand, and Buffalo Counties. Both Brown and Hand Counties received hail up to 1.75 inches in diameter.

April 26, 2008: An area of low-pressure brought widespread heavy snow of 6 to 20 inches to most of northeast South Dakota for much of the 25th and into the early morning hours of the 26th. The precipitation began as light freezing rain in the early morning across parts of the area before changing to all snow by mid-morning. As the low-pressure area intensified, snowfall rates and the north winds also increased. The heavy snow combined with the high winds created widespread visibility problems along with large snowdrifts. Snowfall amounts included, 6 inches at Andover, Britton, Gann Valley, and 15 miles south of Miller, 8 inches at Roy Lake, 9 inches at Clark, Big Stone City, Hillside Colony, and Sisseton, 10 inches 7 miles south of Bristol, and 11 inches at Hayti. Locations with a foot or more of snowfall included 12 inches at Wilmot, Webster, and Waubay, 13 inches at Milbank, 15 inches at Castlewood, 16 inches near Victor, and near Summit, 17 inches at Clear Lake, 19 inches at Watertown, and 20 inches at Bryant.

Some automobiles went into the ditch along with many other vehicles damaged in accidents. Many stranded motorists had to abandon their cars in the hardest hit areas. Travel was not advised across the entire region. A school bus slid into a ditch east of Castlewood with no injuries occurring. Interstate-29 was closed from 3 pm the 25th until 3 pm on the 26th from Brookings north to the North Dakota border. Also, South Dakota State Highway 12 was closed from Webster to the Minnesota line from the afternoon of the 25th until the late morning of the 26th. Most counties affected by the storm opened emergency shelters when Interstate 29 was closed to house stranded motorists. Also, many schools were closed across the area.

The very heavy snow set several records across the area. The 19 inches at Watertown broke its all-time 24-hour snowfall record of 16 inches. Both Victor and Clear Lake had their second-highest snowfall ever recorded in a 24 hour period. Watertown, along with several other locations in northeast South Dakota, received near-record or record snowfall for April. In fact, Watertown's 29.5 inches of snow for April was almost their average seasonal snowfall.

1884: Tornadoes were hard to capture on old cameras with their hard to use glass plate negatives. The first recorded photograph of a tornado was taken on this date by A.A. Adams near Garnett, Kansas.

1978: An unusually strong occluded front swept out of the Gulf of Alaska and produced the first April thunderstorm of record at Fairbanks. Pea-size hail fell northeast of Fairbanks from thunderstorms whose tops were less than 8000 feet.

1986: The Chernobyl nuclear power station in Kiev Ukraine suffered a massive explosion. The radioactive cloud of particles and gas carried westward and northwestward, contaminating large areas of Europe in the following week.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 22 of 90

Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### LET GOD MAKE THINGS RIGHT

Resentments fill hearts and control minds. They are easy to collect and store in dark crevices deep inside while we wait for the right moment to "settle a score." It is amazing how much more room we seem to have for resentments than we do for love. Perhaps it is because we want to be like God and set standards and pass judgment on what others do to us. It seems like we want to be the prosecutor, then the jury, become the judge, and finally the executioner.

If we could ever look at this "getting even" objectively, it might amaze us. Unless there is an accepted way to measure a wrong, it is impossible to know the appropriate method to apply to "get even." It might be too little, or too much, and rarely "just right."

For example: What are we to do if someone treats us or a loved one unfairly? Or speaks a lie or half-truth about us? Maybe exaggerate our faults? Refuse to pay back the money we loaned them? Try to ruin our reputation? Have you been ridiculed for an honest mistake? Someone perhaps, may have sold us an inferior product, then refused to honor their service contract.

Most of our "getting even" are subjective and devised to achieve what we think and feel is appropriate. However, in God's Word we are warned not to do that!

"Do not say, 'I'll pay you back for this wrong!' Wait for the Lord, and He will avenge you." One translator inserts the word "expectantly" after the word "wait." In other words, "You know that this is up to God, and He, in His impeccable timing, will come to your aid." God is our Savior and Redeemer and He will do what is right in His eyes - not our eyes.

There is a warning in Genesis that demands our attention: "Far be it from you (to do the work of God)! Will not the Judge of all the earth do what is right?"

We must never assume God's responsibilities! Never!

Prayer: Father, "getting even" is a natural, normal thing to want to do. But it is never the right thing to do. Help us to turn vengeance over to You for You are the Judge! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Do not say, 'I'll pay you back for this wrong!' Wait for the Lord, and He will avenge you. Proverbs 20:22



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

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 23 of 90

## 2023 Community Events

- 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)
- 01/31/2023-02/03/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Drop Off 6-9pm, Community Center
- 02/04/2023-02/05/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Sale 1-5pm, Community Center
- 02/25/2023 Littles and Me, Art Making 10-11:30am, Wage Memorial Library
- 03/25/2023 Spring Vendor Fair, 10am-3pm, Community Center
- 04/01/2023 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
- 04/06/2023 Groton Career Development Event
- 04/08/2023 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)
- 06/16/2023 SDSU Alumni and Friends Golf Tournament
- 06/17/2023 Groton Triathlon
- 07/04/2023 Couples Firecracker Golf Tournament
- 07/09/2023 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
- 07/26/2023 GGA Burger Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 08/04/2023 Wine on Nine 6pm
- 08/11/2023 GHS Basketball Golf Tournament
- 09/09/2023 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
- 09/10/2023 Couples Sunflower Golf Tournament
- 10/14/2023 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
- 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)
- 12/02/2023 Tour of Homes & Holiday Party
- 12/09/2023 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9-11am

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 24 of 90

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# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 25 of 90



## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:  
04.25.23

8 29 46 47 48 12

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$38,000,000**

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 5  
DRAW: Mins 9 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:  
04.24.23

6 8 15 16 31 5

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$2,500,000**

NEXT 16 Hrs 5 Mins 9  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
04.25.23

17 28 33 40 42 15

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$7,000/week**

NEXT 15 Hrs 35 Mins 9  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
04.22.23

7 11 18 25 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$36,000**

NEXT 16 Hrs 5 Mins 9  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
04.24.23

9 18 24 30 58 15

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$10,000,000**

NEXT 16 Hrs 4 Mins 9  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:  
04.24.23

19 21 55 66 68 3

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$37,000,000**

NEXT 16 Hrs 4 Mins 10  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

## News from the Associated Press

### **Cosmetic to critical: Blue states help trans health coverage**

By CLAIRE RUSH Associated Press/Report for America

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — For most of her life in New Mexico, Christina Wood felt like she had to hide her identity as a transgender woman. So six years ago she moved to Oregon, where she had readier access to the gender-affirming health care she needed to live as her authentic self.

Once there, Wood, 49, was able to receive certain surgeries that helped her transition, but electrolysis, or permanent hair removal, wasn't fully covered under the state's Medicaid plan for low-income residents. Paying out-of-pocket ate up nearly half her monthly income, but it was critical for Wood's mental health.

"Having this facial hair or this body hair, it doesn't make me feel feminine. I still look in the mirror and I see that masculine person," she said. "It's stressful. It causes anxiety and PTSD when you're having to live in this body that you don't feel like you should be in."

That is likely about to change. Oregon lawmakers are expected to pass a bill that would further expand insurance coverage for gender-affirming care to include things like facial hair removal and Adam's apple reduction surgery, procedures currently considered cosmetic by insurers but seen as critical to the mental health of transitioning women.

The wide-ranging bill is part of a wave of legislation this year in Democratic-led states intended to carve out safe havens amid a conservative movement that seeks to ban or limit gender-affirming care elsewhere, eliminate some rights and protections for transgender people and even bar discussion of their existence in settings such as classrooms.

More than a half-dozen states, from New Jersey to Vermont to Colorado, have passed or are considering bills or executive orders around transgender health care, civil rights and other legal protections. In Michigan, for example, Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer last month signed a bill outlawing discrimination on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation for the first time in her state.

"Trans people are just being used as a political punching bag," said Rose Saxe, deputy director of the American Civil Liberties Union's LGBT and HIV Project. "Denying this health care doesn't make them not trans. It just makes their lives much harder."

Gender-affirming care includes a wide range of social and medical interventions, such as hormone treatments, counseling, puberty blockers and surgery.

Oregon's bill would bar insurers and the state's Medicaid plan from defining procedures like electrolysis as cosmetic when they are prescribed as medically necessary for treating gender dysphoria. It also would shield providers and patients from lawsuits originating in states where such procedures are restricted.

"We're actually very committed to accessibility of coverage. Because you can say something is legal, but if it's not truly affordable or accessible, that is not a full promise," said Democratic state Rep. Andrea Valderrama, the bill's chief sponsor.

Access to procedures such as electrolysis is also necessary as a matter of public safety, said Blair Stenvick, communications manager for the LGBTQ+ advocacy group Basic Rights Oregon.

"Facial hair can be a trigger for harassment," Stenvick said, and being able to present as a woman "helps folks to not get targeted and identified as a trans person and then attacked."

The bill has sparked fervent debate, with hundreds of people submitting written testimony both for and against it and an emotionally charged public hearing at the Capitol in Salem last month that went on for several hours. The Democratic-controlled House is expected to vote on the bill Monday over Republican opposition before it heads to the Senate, which is also dominated by Democrats.

Oregon's measure mirrors a nationwide trend in Democratic-led states.

Shield protections similar to what is being proposed in Oregon have been enacted this year in Colorado, Illinois, New Jersey and New Mexico, and other bills are awaiting the signatures of Govs. Jay Inslee in Washington and Tim Walz in Minnesota. California, Massachusetts and Connecticut passed their own mea-

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 27 of 90

tures last year. They largely bar authorities from complying with subpoenas, arrest warrants or extradition requests from states that have banned gender-affirming treatments.

Meanwhile a measure passed last month by lawmakers in Maryland would expand the list of procedures covered by Medicaid, and Democratic Gov. Wes Moore has said he plans to sign it.

And lawmakers in Nevada's Democratic-held Legislature are also pushing to expand gender-affirming health care and develop policies regarding the treatment of transgender prisoners, among other things.

The series of bills face an uncertain fate under Republican Gov. Joe Lombardo, who has shied away from the anti-transgender rhetoric and policy proposals that fellow GOP officeholders and candidates across the country have embraced. Lawmakers have just over a month to vote on them before the legislative session ends in June. But regardless of their outcome, an open debate over transgender health care protections in the important swing state promises to further heighten national attention on the issue.

"They know that this is not a political stunt," state Sen. Melanie Scheible, the bill's sponsor and member of Nevada's newly formed LGBTQ+ Caucus, said of the governor's office. "I'm not trying to give them a bill to veto just so I can complain about it later."

Some opponents of gender-affirming health care say they're concerned that young people may undergo certain physical transition procedures that are irreversible or transition socially in settings such as schools without their parents' knowledge.

Advocates for gender-affirming health procedures counter that they can be, literally, a matter of life or death.

Kevin Wang, medical director for the LGBTQI+ Program at Swedish Health Services in Seattle, said such care alleviates the depression, anxiety and self-harm seen in patients with gender dysphoria. Studies show that transgender people, particularly youth, consider and attempt suicide at higher rates than the general population.

"These are not aesthetic procedures," Wang said. "Accessing these services can be absolutely life-saving because we're preventing future harm."

Some legal experts, however, warn that laws that protect gender-affirming care but lack strong enforcement mechanisms or funding to investigate violations may not result in meaningful change.

For example, Oregon already bars insurance companies from discrimination on the basis of gender identity. And the state agency overseeing health insurance rules already requires companies to cover procedures deemed medically necessary by a doctor to treat gender dysphoria and bars them from defining them as cosmetic.

But insurers have rarely faced major consequences for violations, said Ezra Young, a civil rights attorney and visiting assistant professor of law at Cornell Law School.

"Where's the task force that's going to enforce the law?" Young said. "Where are the lawyers that are going to do this? Where is the funding to educate insurance adjusters that they can't do this?"

"If you're leaving it to relatively poor transgender people to litigate a case in court ... that's not a meaningful remedy."

Christina Wood, the transplant to Oregon, said she was lucky to have had the resources and ability to move to a state where she could more easily complete her transition, compared with other states that have fewer protections.

"It's scary to live in this world right now. But ... I'm not going to back down, and I'm going to advocate for people in my situation," Wood said.

"I never had a voice when I was younger. Christopher never had a voice. Christina has a voice. And so that's what I plan to do."

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Associated Press writers Gabe Stern in Carson City, Nevada, Joey Cappellitti in Lansing, Michigan, and Brian Witte in Baltimore contributed to this report.

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Rush and Stern are corps members for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms

to report on undercovered issues.

## Intensity of clashes eases amid Sudan truce, residents say

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

KHARTOUM, Sudan (AP) — Sudanese in the capital of Khartoum and the neighboring city of Omdurman reported sporadic clashes early Wednesday between the military and a rival paramilitary force but said the intensity of fighting had dwindled on the second day of a three-day truce.

Many residents of the capital emerged from their homes to seek food and water, lining up at bakeries or grocery stores, witnesses said. Some inspected shops or homes that had been destroyed or looted during the fighting. Others joined the tens of thousands who have been streaming out of the city in recent days.

"There is a sense of calm in my area and neighborhoods," said Mahasen Ali, a tea vendor who lives in Khartoum's southern neighborhood of May. "But all are afraid of what's next." She said that despite the relative lull, the sound of gunfire and explosions could still be heard in the city.

Clashes were centered in more limited pockets of Khartoum and Omdurman, residents said, mainly around the military's headquarters and the Republican Palace, the seat of power. An exchange of fire rattled the upscale Kafouri neighborhood, where many fighters from the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces are deployed.

Also on Wednesday, the military said Sudan's former autocratic ruler Omar al-Bashir was being held in a military-run hospital, giving its first official statement on his location since the fighting erupted. An attack on the prison where al-Bashir and many of his former officials had been held, raised questions over his whereabouts and allegations he was freed.

In a statement, the military said al-Bashir, former Defense Minister Abdel-Rahim Muhammad Hussein and other former officials had been moved to the military-run Aliyaa hospital before clashes broke out across the country. Al-Bashir was ousted in 2019 amid a popular uprising. Both al-Bashir and Hussien are wanted by the ICC on charges of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes related to Darfur conflict.

The relative reduction of fighting Wednesday was a rare moment of easing for the millions of Sudanese who have been caught in the crossfire ever since the forces of the country's two top generals went to war with each other on April 15. The fighting has pushed the population to a near breaking point, with food growing more difficult to obtain, electricity cut off across much of the capital and other cities and many hospitals shut down.

In a country where a third of the population of 46 million already needed humanitarian assistance, multiple aid agencies have had to suspend operations. The U.N. refugee agency said it was gearing up for potentially tens of thousands of people fleeing into neighboring countries.

Still, it was not clear how long the relative calm would last. A series of short cease-fires the past week have either failed outright or brought only intermittent lulls, enough for dramatic evacuations of hundreds of foreigners by air and land. The two generals, army chief Abdel Fattah Burhan and RSF commander Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, have so far ignored calls for negotiations to end the crisis and have seemed determined to crush each other.

At least 459 people, including civilians and fighters, have been killed, and over 4,000 wounded since fighting began, the U.N. health agency said, citing Sudan's Health Ministry. The Doctors' Syndicate which tracks civilian casualties, said at least 295 civilians were killed and 1,790 others injured.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned that their power struggle is not only putting Sudan's future at risk, "it is lighting a fuse that could detonate across borders, causing immense suffering for years, and setting development back by decades."

Guterres cited reports of armed clashes across the country, with people fleeing their homes in Blue Nile and North Kordofan states and across Western Darfur as well. Joyce Msuya, the assistant secretary-general for humanitarian affairs, told the Security Council "there have been numerous reports of sexual and gender-based violence."

Msuya said the U.N. has received reports "of tens of thousands of people arriving in the Central African

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 29 of 90

Republic, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, and South Sudan.”

The 72-hour cease-fire announced by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken was to last until late Thursday night. Many fear that fighting will only escalate once evacuations of foreigners, which appeared to be in their last stages, are completed.

Bus stations in the capital have been packed with people camping out, waiting for a spot on a bus. Drivers increased prices, sometimes tenfold, for routes to the border crossing with Egypt or the eastern Red Sea city of Port Sudan. Fuel prices have skyrocketed. Tens of thousands more have fled to calmer provinces near Khartoum.

At the Arqin border crossing into Egypt, crowds of people waiting to get through spent the night in the open desert. “The crossing point is overwhelmed and authorities on both sides don’t have the capacity to handle such a growing number of arrivals,” said Moaz al-Ser, a teacher waiting at the crossing with his wife and three children.

In the capital, Dr. Bushra Ibnauf Sulieman, a Sudanese-American physician who headed the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Khartoum, was stabbed to death outside his home, the Doctors’ Syndicate said. He had practiced medicine for many years in the United States, where his children reside, but had returned to Sudan to train doctors.

The World Health Organization, meanwhile, expressed concern that one of the warring parties had seized control of the central public health laboratory in Khartoum, where samples of polio, measles and cholera are stored. Dr. Nima Saeed Abid, the WHO representative in Sudan warned that after staff was expelled and power cut, it was not possible to properly manage the biological materials.

Burhan and Dagalo rose to power after a popular uprising in 2019 prompted the generals to remove Sudan’s longtime autocratic ruler Omar al-Bashir. Sudanese since have been trying to bring a transition to democratic rule, but in 2021 Burhan and Dagalo joined forces in a coup that purged a transitional government.

They fell out now amid tensions over a new rough plan to re-introduce civilian rule. Both the military and the RSF have a long history of brutalizing activists and protesters as well as other rights abuses.

## When told of Kishida attack, safety chief kept eating eel

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan’s public safety chief has come under fire for his remark that he enjoyed eel rice so much that he kept eating after his agency informed him of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida’s narrow escape from a pipe bomb attack two weeks ago.

Koichi Tani, chair of the National Public Safety Commission for Kishida’s Cabinet, told a governing party gathering Tuesday that he had the local delicacy in front of him for lunch when the phone rang.

“I was told that we can eat delicious unagi (eel) rice bowl there, and I was really looking forward to it,” Tani told party lawmakers. “Just as I was going to dig into it, I got a call from the National Police Agency saying something was thrown at the prime minister in Wakayama,” Tani said.

“But I fully savored and finished ... my unadon (eel rice bowl),” he said, beaming.

Tani was in the Shimanto area in the southwestern prefecture of Kochi during the attack — about 250 kilometers (150 miles) southwest of Wakayama, where a man threw an explosive device at Kishida as the prime minister was about to make a campaign speech to cheer a local governing party candidate. Kishida was unharmed and the suspect arrested.

The attack on the prime minister came less than a year after former leader Shinzo Abe was killed while delivering a campaign speech. The assassination investigation found holes in police security and led to reinforcement of dignitary protection. Experts, however, said the attack on Kishida raised questions if any lessons were learned from the Abe case.

Tani’s eel comment immediately sparked criticisms and concern at Parliament and on social media about Japan’s public safety as the country makes its final preparations for the Group of Seven summit that Kishida will host May 19-21 in Hiroshima. During a parliamentary session, some opposition lawmakers demanded

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 30 of 90

Tani's dismissal.

"As head of the National Public Safety Commission, (Tani) lacks sense of urgency," said Jun Azumi, an executive of the main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan. "Isn't this a negative for the prime minister to have such a person as chief executive responsible for Japan's security?"

But Kishida said Tani handled his duties adequately and that he wanted the public safety chief to stay on.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno also defended Tani. He said the public safety chief, who was in Kochi as the disaster prevention minister, juggled both duties and gave adequate instructions to officials responding to the explosion in Wakayama.

"I also contacted Minister Tani and once again told him to carry out his duties firmly," Matsuno said.

Tani later Wednesday told reporters he wanted to highlight eel as a local delicacy of the area he visited, but that he had "poorly expressed myself in my brief comment and might have caused misunderstanding — and I must take it seriously."

"With the G-7 summit coming up, I'm aware of the importance of protecting Japan's public safety, and I will carry out my duty with a sense of alertness," Tani added.

Kishida told a group of foreign media journalists last week that he planned to improve security before G-7.

Tani is the latest member of Kishida's government to come under fire over controversial remarks. In November, then-Justice Minister Yasuhiro Hanashi resigned after saying his low-profile job only makes news when he places a stamp approving a death penalty. In February, a Kishida aide was dismissed after making homophobic remarks that he didn't want to live next door to or see LGBTQ+ people.

Associated Press video journalist Haruka Nuga contributed to this report.

## US, Filipino forces show power in drills amid China tensions

By JIM GOMEZ AND AARON FAVILA Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO, Philippines (AP) — American and Filipino forces pummeled a ship with a barrage of high-precision rockets, airstrikes and artillery fire in their largest war drills on Wednesday in Philippine waters facing the disputed South China Sea that would likely antagonize China.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. watched the American show of firepower from an observation tower in the coastal town of San Antonio in northwestern Zambales province — the latest indication of his strong backing of the Philippines' treaty alliance with the U.S.

Marcos has ordered his military to shift its focus to external defense from decades-long anti-insurgency battles as China's increasingly aggressive actions in the South China Sea become a top concern. The shift in the Philippine defense focus falls in sync with the Biden administration's aim of reinforcing an arc of alliances in the Indo-Pacific region to better counter China.

China has angered the Philippines by repeatedly harassing its navy and coast guard patrols and chasing away fishermen in the waters close to Philippine shores but which Beijing claims as its own. The Philippines has filed more than 200 diplomatic protests against China since last year, including at least 77 since Marcos took office in June.

Sitting beside U.S. Ambassador MaryKay Carlson and his top defense and security advisers, Marcos used a pair of binoculars, smiling and nodding, as rockets streaked into the blue sky from the U.S. High Mobility Artillery Rocket System, or HIMARS, a multiple rocket and missile launcher mounted on a truck that has become a crucial weapon for Ukrainian troops battling Russian invasion forces.

The coastal clearing in front of Marcos resembled a smoke-shrouded war zone, which thudded with artillery fire as AH-64 Apache attack helicopters flew overhead.

A private light plane flew by during the exercises, briefly interrupting them, and was asked to move away, said Col. Mike Logico, a Philippine military spokesman for the drills. Fishermen have been advised to stay away from the area.

"This training increased the exercise's realism and complexity, a key priority shared between the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the U.S. military," Lt. Gen. William Jurney, commander of U.S. Marine Corps

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 31 of 90

Forces, Pacific, said.

"Together we are strengthening our capabilities in full-spectrum military operations across all domains," said Journey, the U.S. director for the annual joint exercises called Balikatan, Tagalog for "shoulder-to-shoulder."

About 12,200 U.S. military personnel, 5,400 Filipino forces and 111 Australian counterparts were taking part in the exercises, the largest since Balikatan started three decades ago. The drills have showcased U.S. warships, fighter jets as well as Patriot missiles, HIMARS and anti-tank Javelins, according to U.S. and Philippine military officials.

The ship targeted by the allied forces was a decommissioned Philippine navy warship, which was towed about 18 to 22 kilometers (11 to 14 miles) out to sea.

Smaller floating targets, including empty drums tied together, were also used as targets to simulate a battle scene where a U.S. Marine Corps command and control hub enabled scattered allied forces to identify and locate enemy targets then deliver precision rocket and missile fire.

Philippine military officials said the maneuvers would bolster the country's coastal defense and disaster-response capabilities and were not aimed at any country. China has opposed military drills involving U.S. forces in the region in the past as well as increasing U.S. military deployments, which it warned would ratchet up tensions and hamper regional stability and peace.

Washington and Beijing have been on a collision course over China's increasingly assertive actions to defend its vast territorial claims in the South China Sea and Beijing's goal of annexing Taiwan, by force if necessary.

Taiwan's Defense Ministry said on Monday that China's Shandong aircraft carrier group was also conducting training 120 nautical miles (222 kilometers) southeast of the island's southernmost tip.

In February, Marcos approved a wider U.S. military presence in the Philippines by allowing rotating batches of American forces to stay in four more Philippine military camps. That was a sharp turnaround from his predecessor Rodrigo Duterte, who feared that a larger American military footprint could antagonize Beijing.

China strongly opposed the move, which would allow U.S. forces to establish staging grounds and surveillance posts in the northern Philippines across the sea from Taiwan and in western Philippine provinces facing the South China Sea, which Beijing claims virtually in its entirety.

China has warned that a deepening security alliance between Washington and Manila and their ongoing military drills should not harm its security and territorial interests or interfere in the territorial disputes.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry has said that such military cooperation "should not target any third party and should be conducive to regional peace and stability."

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Gomez reported from Manila. Associated Press journalist Joael Calupitan contributed to this report.

## **No one is driving this taxi. What possibly could go wrong?**

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — I won't forget the first time I took a ride in a car without anyone sitting in the driver's seat.

It happened one night last September when a Chevy Bolt named Peaches picked me up outside a San Francisco bar. Our ensuing half-hour ride together produced, at first, a titillating display of technology's promise. Then an unexpected twist made me worry that the encounter had turned into a mistake I would regret.

Peaches and I were getting along great for most of our time together as the car deftly navigated through hilly San Francisco streets similar to those that Steve McQueen careened through during a famous chase scene in the 1968 film "Bullitt." Unlike McQueen, Peaches never exceeded 30 miles per hour (48 kilometers per hour) because of restrictions imposed by state regulators on a ride-hailing service operated by Cruise, a General Motors subsidiary, since it won approval to transport fare-paying passengers last June.

It was all going so smoothly that I was starting to buy into the vision of Cruise and Waymo, a self-driving

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 32 of 90

car pioneer spun off from a Google project that is also trying launch a ride-hailing service in San Francisco.

The theory fueling the ambition is that driverless cars will be safer than vehicles operated by frequently distracted, occasionally intoxicated humans — and, in the case of robotaxis, be less expensive to ride in than automobiles that require a human behind the wheel.

The concept does sound good. And the technology to pull it off is advancing steadily, just like other artificial intelligence applications such as chatbots that can write college-level essays and produce impressive pieces of art within seconds.

But when something goes awry, as it did near the end of my encounter with Peaches, that sense of astonishment and delight can evaporate very quickly.

DESTINATION: UNCERTAIN

As we approached my designated drop-off location near the Fairmont Hotel — where presidents have stayed and Tony Bennett first sang “I Left My Heart In San Francisco” — Peaches advised me to gather my belongings and prepare to get out of the car.

While I grabbed my bag as the robotaxi appeared to be pulling over to the curb, Peaches suddenly sped up and — inexplicably — started driving away in the opposite direction.

After seeing the dashboard display screen indicating I was now somehow an estimated 20 minutes away from my destination, I grew frantic. I asked Peaches what was going on. There was no response, so I used a feature on Cruise’s ride-hailing center that enables a passenger to contact a human in a call center.

The Cruise representative confirmed that Peaches had gotten confused, apologized and assured me the robotaxi had been reprogrammed to get me to my original destination.

Indeed, the car did seem to be headed back to where I requested. Then it started doing the old same thing again, making me wonder whether Peaches might like me a little too much to let me go. Feeling more like I was stuck on Mr. Toad’s Wild Ride at Disneyland than riding in an artificially intelligent car, I contacted Cruise’s call center. Peaches, they told me apologetically, seemed to be malfunctioning.

Suddenly, Peaches came to a halt right in the middle of the street. I bolted from the Bolt, marooned several blocks away from my destination shortly before 10 p.m.

Fortunately, I know my way around San Francisco, so I walked the rest of the way to where I needed to be. But what if this had happened to tourists? Would they know where to go? How would they feel being forced to walk around a strange neighborhood in a big city late at night?

MAYBE DON’T STOP HERE

When I discussed the incident during an interview for a recent story about robotaxis, Cruise CEO Kyle Vogt apologized and assured me the problem had been fixed.

Sure enough, I was picked up and dropped off at my designated destinations in rides I took with another Associated Press reporter in two different Cruise robotaxis — one named Cherry and the other Hollandaise — on a mid-February night in San Francisco. But Cherry chose to drop us off at a bus stop just as a bus was trying to pull up to pick up a bunch of passengers. They weren’t happy about their ride on mass transit being delayed; they began jeering us.

My experience apparently isn’t isolated. The San Francisco County Transportation Authority has raised a red flag about robotaxis making unexpected, prolonged stops in the middle of streets and identified other problems that threaten to cause headaches and potentially imperil public safety.

Earlier this month, Vogt revealed that Cruise had voluntarily recalled the software in 300 robotaxis after one of them rear-ended a bus in San Francisco and declared the problem that led to the fender-bender had been fixed. Not long after that, five Waymo vehicles blocked traffic after becoming disoriented in San Francisco’s famously foggy conditions and coming to a stop.

And my experience with Peaches? Whenever I reminisce about that ride, I am also reminded of another trip to New York that I took two days after the robotaxi couldn’t deliver me to my destination.

After I landed at JFK Airport, I hopped into an old-fashioned taxi driven by a fellow named Talid. I remember having a pleasant conversation with Talid, who chuckled as I recounted what happened with Peaches. At the end of the ride, Talid dropped me off at Grand Central Terminal, as I had requested. Then



his cab drove off — with, of course, a human still behind the wheel.

Michael Liedtke covers technology for The Associated Press. Follow him on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/liedtkeSFC>

## Sudanese abroad try to extend a lifeline and aid back home

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — With her homeland now a conflict zone, rest does not come easily for Dr. Sara Abdelgalil. She is anxious about family still in Sudan that she can't reach. Her sleepless mother paces the floor above her with worry. And her phone buzzes at all hours with text messages seeking medical advice from thousands of miles away.

Abdelgalil is a pediatrician in Norwich, England, but Sudan is her "first home," and she has become part of a lifeline of doctors providing long-distance support to the people living in a state of chaos and terror as fighting rages outside their homes.

"We don't sleep well because we're expecting the worst," said Abdelgalil, who texts relatives each morning to make sure they're still alive. "I'm trying not to panic as much as I can."

For some of the roughly 50,000 Sudanese people in the United Kingdom, a sense of helplessness over a situation that seems to have no end in sight has been replaced by a sense of duty. Some are trying to help family, friends — even strangers — who are sheltering from urban combat between two military factions threatening to tear the country apart.

Fighting that began April 15 has claimed more than 420 lives, including at least 291 civilians, and wounded at least 3,700. Food is scarce and expensive, hospitals have been shelled and are near collapse, water has been cut off in places, and power and internet outages have left people in the dark and unable to stay informed and in touch.

Even from 3,000 miles (5,000 kilometers) away, the Sudanese diaspora community has been involved in events back home. In 2019, many supported a popular uprising that forced the military's removal of longtime autocrat Omar al-Bashir. Now, they are trying to do whatever is possible despite obstacles.

On Sunday, dozens of Sudanese staged a loud and lively demonstration outside Britain's Ministry of Defense to draw attention to what their families are facing. As runners passed by in the home stretch of the London Marathon, a little girl and woman with microphones chanted, "Peace and justice for Sudan!" while others held signs saying, "Stop the war in Sudan," and "No to all the generals."

Attorney Abobaker Adam said they want to get the U.K. and international community to help stop the fighting between the Sudanese military, commanded by Gen. Abdel Fattah Burhan, and the Rapid Support Forces paramilitary group, led by Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo.

"If we don't stop this war, people who can survive ... the bullets could die because of the lack of food, lack of water," Adam said. "The danger is there. We have to do everything."

The fighting by the rival factions has been widely condemned by foreign governments who want a return to negotiations. European, North American, African, Mideast and Asian countries have evacuated diplomats and other citizens in a sign that they expect the situation to worsen.

From afar, there's only so much that can be done.

Typically, families abroad send money home, but that's not possible when banks are shut down. Many shops also are closed and people are terrified to leave their homes.

"These generals are fighting for their own ego and their own interest and what they are doing is not in the best interest of the Sudanese people," Adam said, referring to Burhan and Dagalo.

Sudan's Doctors for Human Rights is trying to train colleagues in the battleground how to recognize and record human rights violations and get word out to the international community, said Dr. Husam El-mugamar.

Internet outages have increased anxiety for Sudanese abroad seeking updates on their loved ones. Abdelgalil worries when she doesn't see that her WhatsApp message was received. When they talk by phone, the fear is palpable in their voices that the conflict is nearby.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 34 of 90

"You can hear the explosions," Onaheed Ahmed said of calls with a niece she's trying to get out of Khartoum. "Like the actual house is shaking, the apartment is shaking and it's really clear on the phone. You can hear the bullets, you can hear all the grenades."

El-mugamar said his brother and sister, their families and a visiting friend were trapped in their house for days. A bullet whistled through a window one day and ricocheted around an empty room. A few days later, soldiers took up positions outside the home, but his family didn't dare look outside to see which faction it was, taking cover in the cellar.

Everyone has heard stories of people caught in the crossfire while trying to get food or flee the violence. "We have reports of civilians dying every day," said Bassil Elnaiem, who is unsure how much longer he'll be able to reach grandparents and cousins in Sudan. "We're just worried that it could be one of our loved ones that's the next victim of this war."

Abdelgalil is trying to juggle her need to stay in touch with family and friends in Sudan and helping others there, with raising a 12-year-old son and working full-time as a doctor.

She also is working to try to fight disinformation and hate speech online, circulating a peace petition to the U.N. Security Council and fielding urgent text messages to provide medical advice a continent away.

She had just gone to bed Sunday when a notification alert arrived around midnight from a mother who said her 1-year-old had fallen earlier in the evening. Abdelgalil texted questions until she was able to realize the toddler was in pain but didn't need immediate care. To her relief, the mother texted later in the morning to say the child was better.

One of the WhatsApp groups Abdelgalil belongs to discussed the heartbreaking case of a 9-year-old diabetic girl who died because her parents — afraid to leave home — waited too long to get insulin.

She has tapped into a medical network to direct parents to the nearest clinic or pharmacy in Sudan and provide the parents of a vomiting child a formula to make a rehydration solution.

"When they say to me, 'Thank you' and they send me 'thank you' message with hands together, I just feel like at least I've done something," Abdelgalil said, "even to save them from going outside and being shot."

## Belarusians wary of being drawn into war with Ukraine

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — For Ruslan, an engineer in the Belarus capital of Minsk, Russia's war in neighboring Ukraine suddenly seemed closer than ever when a conscription office recently sent him a summons for military training.

It's part of an effort that will see thousands of men in Belarus attend drills amid fears that the staunch Moscow ally could be drawn into the fighting.

"They are telling us that Belarus won't enter the war against Ukraine, but I hear Russian warplanes roar over my house heading to the Machulishchi air base outside Minsk," the 27-year-old told The Associated Press in a telephone interview. He asked not to be fully identified out of concern for his personal safety.

"Russian troops are already in Belarus, and I see the country gradually being turned into a military barracks," he said. "Everybody fears that they won't allow Belarusians to keep watching the war from a distance for too long."

Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko has welcomed thousands of Russian troops to his country, allowed the Kremlin to use it to launch the invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022, and offered to station some of Russia's tactical nuclear weapons there. But he has avoided having Belarus take part directly in the fighting — for now.

Analysts and political opponents say that further involvement over Ukraine could rekindle public anger against him and erode his iron-fisted grip on power that has lasted for nearly 29 years.

Lukashenko, who meets regularly with Russian President Vladimir Putin, has relied on the Kremlin's political and economic support to survive months of protests, mass arrests and Western sanctions following an election in 2020 that kept him in power and was widely seen at home and abroad as rigged.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 35 of 90

Russia's invasion is deeply unpopular in Belarus, which shares a 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) border with Ukraine and has many citizens with family or personal ties there.

"The Belarusians don't see any sense in this war," said Svyatlana, a 54-year-old manager in Luninets, near the border. She asked not to be identified by her full name for her own security.

A new Belarusian air defense unit was formed recently in the city, she said, and "war fears have increased" as troop numbers have grown.

Belarusian military analyst Aliaksandr Alesin said that if the country's 45,000-member army is sent into Ukraine, there might be "mass refusals to follow orders."

He said Lukashenko won't do it "because he fears to stir up discontent among the military, who could turn their weapons in a different direction."

While agreeing to station some of Russia's tactical nuclear weapons in his country, Lukashenko cast the move as protection against what he described as NATO's aggressive plans and Western plots against his government.

"They don't bomb countries with nuclear weapons," Lukashenko said recently.

The construction of storage facilities for tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus will be finished by July 1, Putin said. Russia already has modified Belarusian warplanes to carry nuclear weapons and given its ally Iskander short-range missiles that can be fitted with a nuclear warhead. It also has trained Belarusian crews to operate the planes and missiles armed with nuclear weapons.

During the Cold War, Belarus hosted about two-thirds of Moscow's arsenal of nuclear-tipped intermediate range missiles, Alesin said, adding that dozens of Soviet-era storage sites can still be used for such weapons. Soviet nuclear weapons stationed in Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan were moved to Russia under a U.S.-brokered deal after the USSR's collapse in 1991.

"Belarus was a Soviet nuclear fortress, and now Putin and Lukashenko have decided to not only restore but to strengthen it," Alesin told AP. "From Belarus, Russian nuclear-tipped missiles could reach Ukraine, the entire territory of Poland, the Baltics and part of Germany, and this 'Belarusian nuclear balcony' will rattle Western politicians' nerves for a long time to come."

Opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who challenged Lukashenko in the 2020 election after her activist husband was jailed, told AP that hosting Russian nuclear weapons would turn the Belarusian people into hostages.

"The deployment of Russian nuclear weapons will make Belarus a target in case of an escalation and seriously jeopardize Belarusians' lives," said Tsikhanouskaya, who fled the country after the election and has become a fierce critic-in-exile of Lukashenko. "The two dictators have gone too far in their war games, and it will only lead to the toughening of Western sanctions."

Those sanctions have crippled the Belarus economy, which shrank by a record 4.7% last year. Lukashenko hopes a 70% surge in trade with Russia last year will soften the impact and expects Belarus will profit from Moscow's orders for electronics and other high-tech components for weapons systems.

Alesin said Moscow is providing Minsk "with cheap energy and loans and opens up its vast market in exchange for the opportunity to control the Belarusian military infrastructure."

Some of the 300,000 Russian reservists called up last fall by Putin as part of his partial mobilization are being trained on firing ranges in Belarus. Lukashenko has said 500 officers are helping train the Russians, who are camped next to Belarusian barracks.

But this growing involvement in Belarus for the Kremlin war efforts is fomenting widespread resentment, said Belarusian political analyst Valery Karbalevich.

"A broad guerrilla movement has evolved in Belarus with its members blowing up railway tracks and Russian warplanes and attacking Russian and Belarusian official websites," Karbalevich said. "Belarus' transformation into a Russian military hub and its gradual drawing into the war has caused public discontent, forcing Lukashenko to escalate repressions."

BYPOL, an organization of former military and security officers who oppose Lukashenko, claimed responsibility for a February drone attack on a Russian A-50 early warning and control aircraft at the Machulishchi air base near Minsk. Authorities said they detained a suspect alleged to be behind the attack, along with

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 36 of 90

30 others who were charged with terrorism and could face capital punishment if convicted.

Raids across the country have resulted in 300 other arrests on suspicion of links to the guerrillas, according to the Viasna human rights center.

BYPOL leader Aliaksandr Azarau told AP that if Belarus enters the war in Ukraine, it would provide a boost for his group, which grew out of the 2020 election protests.

"If small Belarus starts getting coffins from Ukraine, it will inevitably stir up protests that the authorities barely managed to stifle with mass repressions," he said. "Lukashenko reasonably worries that entering the war would lead to a sharp rise of the guerrilla movement."

When Putin launched the invasion, Russian troops rolled into Ukraine from Belarus in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to capture Kyiv, only 90 kilometers (about 55 miles) to the south. Parts of western Ukraine, including railway hubs of Lviv and Lutsk that are key conduits for Western weapons, also could be vulnerable to a potential incursion from Belarus.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy recently visited border guards in the northwestern Volyn region, urging vigilance against a possible incursion from Belarus.

"We haven't seen any preparations in Minsk, and Lukashenko so far has resisted being drawn into a war with Ukraine, but the situation may change as Belarus is getting increasingly militarized," said Ukrainian military analyst Oleh Zhdanov. "Lukashenko is ready to give Putin whatever he wants — except the Belarusian soldiers. But we aren't blind and Kyiv is seriously worried about a sharp increase in the Russian military presence in Belarus."

Karbalevich, the Belarusian analyst, said that while Lukashenko probably will remain reluctant to enter the war, Moscow could dangle the threat of another incursion into Ukraine from Belarus to force Kyiv to keep a significant number of troops on the border.

"The poorly motivated and weak Belarusian military army wouldn't make much of a change on the battlefield, but the Kremlin needs to keep showing Kyiv and the West that the Belarusian threat remains," he said. "It's more convenient for Putin to use Minsk as a military hub while maintaining the constant threat of Belarus entering the war to keep the pressure on Ukraine." \_\_\_\_\_

Follow AP's coverage of the war in Ukraine at <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine-war>

## As Assad returns to Arab fold, Syrians watch with hope, fear

By ABBY SEWELL Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Syrians living on opposite sides of the largely frozen battle lines dividing their country are watching the accelerating normalization of ties between the government of Bashar Assad and Syria's neighbors through starkly different lenses.

In government-held Syria, residents struggling with ballooning inflation, fuel and electricity shortages hope the rapprochement will bring more trade and investment and ease a crippling economic crisis.

Meanwhile, in the remaining opposition-held areas of the north, Syrians who once saw Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries as allies in their fight against Assad's rule feel increasingly isolated and abandoned.

Turkey, which has been a main backer of the armed opposition to Assad, has been holding talks with Damascus for months — most recently on Tuesday, when the defense ministers of Turkey, Russia, Iran and Syria met in Moscow.

And in recent weeks, regional heavyweight Saudi Arabia — which once backed Syrian rebel groups — has done an about-face in its stance on the Assad government and is pushing its neighbors to follow suit. Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan visited Damascus last week for the first time since the kingdom cut ties with Syria more than a decade ago.

The kingdom, which will host a meeting of the Arab League next month, has been coaxing other member states to restore Syria's membership, although some holdouts remain, chief among them Qatar. The League is a confederation of Arab administrations established to promote cooperation among its members.

A 49-year-old tailor in Damascus who gave only his nickname, Abu Shadi ("father of Shadi") said he hopes the mending of ties between Syria and Saudi Arabia will improve the economy and kickstart reconstruction

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 37 of 90

in the war-battered country.

"We've had enough of wars — we have suffered for 12 years," he said. "God willing, relations will improve with not just the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia but with all the Gulf countries and the people will benefit on both sides. There will be more movement, more security and everything will be better, God willing."

In the country's opposition-held northwest, the rapprochement is a cause for fear. Opposition activists took to social media with an Arabic hashtag translating to "normalization with Assad is betrayal," and hundreds turned out at protests over the past two weeks against the move by Arab states to restore relations with Assad.

Khaled Khatib, 27, a worker at a non-governmental organization in northwest Syria, said he is increasingly afraid that the government will recapture control of the remaining opposition territory.

"From the first day I participated in a peaceful demonstration until today, I am at risk of being killed or injured or kidnapped or hit by aerial bombardment," he said. Seeing the regional warming of relations with Damascus is "very painful, shameful and frustrating to the aspirations of Syrians," he said.

Rashid Hamzawi Mahmoud, who joined a protest in Idlib earlier this month, said the Saudi move was the latest in a string of disappointments for the Syrian opposition.

"The (U.N.) Security Council has failed us — so have the Arab countries, and human rights and Islamic groups," he said.

Syria was ostracized by Arab governments over Assad's brutal crackdown on protesters in a 2011 uprising that descended into civil war. However, in recent years, as Assad consolidated control over most of the country, Syria's neighbors have begun to take steps toward rapprochement.

The overtures picked up pace since a deadly Feb. 6 earthquake in Turkey and Syria, and the Chinese-brokered reestablishment of ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which had backed opposing sides in the conflict.

The Saudi-Syria rapprochement is a "game changer" for Assad, said Joseph Daher, a Swiss-Syrian researcher and professor at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy.

Assad could potentially be invited to the next Arab League summit, but even if such an invitation isn't issued for May, "it's only a question of time now," Daher said.

Government officials and pro-government figures in Syria say the restoration of bilateral ties is more significant in reality than a return to the Arab League.

"The League of Arab States has a symbolic role in this matter," Tarek al-Ahmad, a member of the political bureau of the minority Syrian National Party, told The Associated Press. "It is not really the decisive role."

George Jabbour, an academic and former diplomat in Damascus, said Syrians hope for "Saudi jobs ... after the return to normal relations between Syria and Saudi Arabia."

Before 2011, Saudi Arabia was one of Syria's most significant trading partners, with trade between the countries reaching \$1.3 billion in 2010. While economic traffic did not halt altogether with the shuttering of embassies, it dropped off precipitously.

However, even before the warming of diplomatic relations, trade had been on the uptick, particularly after the 2018 reopening of the border between Syria and Jordan, which serves as a route for goods going to and from Saudi Arabia.

The Syria Report, which tracks the country's economy, reported that Syria-Saudi trade had increased from \$92.35 million in 2017 to \$396.90 million in 2021.

Jihad Yazigi, editor-in-chief of the Syria Report, said the restoration of direct flights and consular services following the current Saudi-Syrian rapprochement could bring some further increase in trade.

But Syrians who are looking to Saudi Arabia as a "provider of finance either through direct investment in the Syrian economy or through funding of various projects, especially concessionary loans for infrastructure projects," may be disappointed, he said. Such investments will be largely off limits for now because of U.S. and European sanctions on Syria.

Even in the opposition-held areas, some greeted the normalization with a shrug.

Abdul Wahab Alaiwi, a political activist in Idlib, said he was surprised by the Saudi change in stance, but

"on the ground nothing will change ... because the Arab countries have no influence inside Syria," unlike Turkey, Russia, Iran and the U.S., all of which have forces in different parts of the country.

He added that he does not believe Damascus will be able to meet the conditions of a return to the Arab League or that Turkey and Syria would easily come to an agreement.

Mohamad Shakib al-Khaled, head of the Syrian National Democratic Movement, an opposition party, said Arab countries had never been allies to the "liberal democratic civil movements" in the Syrian uprising but threw their support behind "factions that took a radical Islamic approach."

The Syrian government, on the other hand had "genuine allies who defended it," he said, referring to the intervention by Russia and Iran that turned the tide of the war.

But in the end, he said, "No one defends a land except its people."

Associated Press writers Albert Aji in Damascus, and Ghaith al-Sayed in Idlib, Syria, contributed to this report.

## Singapore executes man for coordinating cannabis delivery

By ZEN SOO Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Singapore on Wednesday executed a man accused of coordinating a cannabis delivery, despite pleas for clemency from his family and protests from activists that he was convicted on weak evidence.

Tangaraju Suppiah, 46, was sentenced to death in 2018 for abetting the trafficking of 1 kilogram (2.2 pounds) of cannabis. Under Singapore laws, trafficking more than 500 grams of cannabis may result in the death penalty.

Tangaraju was hanged Wednesday morning and his family was given the death certificate, according to a tweet from activist Kirsten Han of the Transformative Justice Collective, which advocates for abolishing the death penalty in Singapore.

Although Tangaraju was not caught with the cannabis, prosecutors said phone numbers traced him as the person responsible for coordinating the delivery of the drugs. Tangaraju had maintained that he was not the one communicating with the others connected to the case.

At a United Nations Human Rights briefing Tuesday, spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani called on the Singapore government to adopt a "formal moratorium" on executions for drug-related offenses.

"Imposing the death penalty for drug offences is incompatible with international norms and standards," said Shamdasani, who added that increasing evidence shows the death penalty is ineffective as a deterrent.

Singapore authorities say there is a deterrent effect, citing studies that traffickers carry amounts below the threshold that would bring a death penalty.

The island-state's imposition of the death penalty for drugs is in contrast with its neighbors. In Thailand, cannabis has essentially been legalized, and Malaysia has ended the mandatory death penalty for serious crimes.

Singapore executed 11 people last year for drug offenses. One case that spurred international concern involved a Malaysian man whose lawyers said he was mentally disabled.

The Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network condemned Tangaraju's execution as "reprehensible."

"The continued use of the death penalty by the Singaporean government is an act of flagrant disregard for international human rights norms and casts aspersion on the legitimacy of Singapore's criminal justice system," the statement said.

Relatives and activists had sent letters to Singapore's President Halimah Yacob to plead for clemency. In a video posted by the Transformative Justice Collective, Tangaraju's niece and nephew appealed to the public to raise concerns to the government over Tangaraju's impending execution.

An application filed by Tangaraju on Monday for a stay of execution was dismissed without a hearing Tuesday.

"Singapore claims it affords people on death row 'due process', but in reality fair trial violations in capital

punishment cases are the norm: Defendants are being left without legal representation when faced with imminent execution, as lawyers who take such cases are intimidated and harassed," said Maya Foa, director of non-profit human rights organization Reprieve.

Critics say Singapore's death penalty has mostly snared low-level mules and done little to stop drug traffickers and organized syndicates. But Singapore's government says that all those executed have been accorded full due process under the law and that the death penalty is necessary to protect its citizens.

British billionaire Richard Branson, who is outspoken against the death penalty, had also called for a halt of the execution in a blog post, saying that "Singapore may be about to kill an innocent man."

Singapore authorities criticized Branson's allegations, stating that he had shown disrespect for the Singaporean judicial system as evidence had shown that Tangaraju was guilty.

## Asa Hutchinson to formally launch 2024 campaign in Arkansas

By ANDREW DeMILLO and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

BENTONVILLE, Ark. (AP) — Asa Hutchinson, the former two-term Republican governor of Arkansas, will formally launch his campaign for president Wednesday with a kickoff in his hometown of Bentonville.

The stalwart conservative, who announced in a television interview earlier this month that he intended to run, is a former congressman and official in President George W. Bush's administration.

Hutchinson has been a rare figure among announced or expected GOP presidential hopefuls in his willingness to criticize former President Donald Trump, calling for him to drop out of the 2024 race instead of seeking another term in the White House.

The 72-year-old has said Trump should step aside because his legal troubles, including criminal charges in New York, are a distraction. And while Trump has fixated his campaign messages around his false claims about the 2020 election he lost, Hutchinson has said voters need a candidate who is not focused on the past.

Former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley, entrepreneur and "Woke, Inc." author Vivek Ramaswamy and radio host Larry Elder are also in the Republican race. They, along with expected and potential candidates like Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, former Vice President Mike Pence and U.S. Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina, have largely avoided criticizing Trump and have at times defended him.

While some of the other contenders who served in Trump's administration struggled to carve out distance from Trump, Hutchinson has been able to draw from his lengthy resume in government and roots in America's heartland.

His announcement Wednesday will be in the tree-lined town square of Bentonville, the birthplace of Walmart. The city of nearly 57,000 people in the northwest part of the state is where Hutchinson first served as a city attorney starting in 1977 and where he first ran for office with an unsuccessful bid for local prosecutor.

The former governor told The Associated Press that he plans to introduce himself to the country on Wednesday and announce some policy initiatives. Hutchinson, the former head of the Drug Enforcement Administration and former undersecretary of the Department of Homeland Security, said he will emphasize his background in law enforcement.

"Law enforcement experience is very important in addressing the needs of our country and saving lives," Hutchinson said.

Hutchinson is launching his bid a day after President Joe Biden formally announced his reelection campaign with a video portraying the race as one against "MAGA extremists," a reference to Trump's "Make America Great Again" slogan. Hutchinson said both the former and current presidents aren't focused on the future.

"It seems to me we've got two candidates in the race who are focused on the past," he said.

Hutchinson's second term as governor ended in January, but he's been a defining figure of Arkansas politics for more than four decades.

He was elected to the U.S. House in 1996, winning election to a seat his older brother, Tim, had held

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 40 of 90

for two terms.

Asa Hutchinson was one of the House managers prosecuting the impeachment case against President Bill Clinton starting in 1998. He stayed in the House until 2001, when he resigned to serve in the Bush administration.

After the 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, Hutchinson was selected by the National Rifle Association to lead a task force to study school safety and recommended putting armed guards at every school in the country.

He was elected governor in 2014 and while in office signed a series of income tax cuts and restrictions on abortion, including an outright ban on the procedure that became effective when the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in 2022. Hutchinson later said he wished that the measure had included exceptions for pregnancies resulting from rape or incest, but didn't push for lawmakers to add those exemptions after the court ruling.

He drew criticism from conservatives and Trump in 2021 when he vetoed a bill that would have banned gender-affirming care for children. Hutchinson signed other restrictions regarding transgender children but said the ban went too far and should have focused on surgeries. The state's Republican-controlled Legislature overrode his veto, though the ban has been temporarily blocked by a judge.

Hutchinson supported many of Trump's policies but began to break with him over his lies about the 2020 presidential election. Hutchinson, who prosecuted white supremacists as a U.S. attorney, has also criticized Trump for dining with white nationalist leader Nick Fuentes and the rapper Ye, who has praised Adolf Hitler and spread anti-semitic conspiracy theories.

Hutchinson said his disagreements with the former president go further than that. He criticized Trump for the peace deal he negotiated with the Taliban in 2020 and for high government spending in his administration.

"He was a big spender," Hutchinson said. "He's one of the reasons that we added to our national debt and our deficit."

Hutchinson has also shown a willingness to criticize some of his other rivals, telling the AP that he disagrees with the way DeSantis has sparred with Disney after the company opposed legislation DeSantis signed in Florida barring school instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity.

"It seems very Trumpian to me as to how he's approached it," Hutchinson said. "I don't think government ought to be punishing the private sector because we don't like what they say."

Hutchinson said that he doesn't like the positions Disney has taken, but that DeSantis' approach sets a bad precedent.

"If a business takes a conservative position, do you want a left-leaning government punishing them? That's not conservative policy," Hutchinson said.

Hutchinson's successor in Arkansas is Trump's former press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders.

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Price reported from New York.

## **She got \$0 from condo sale. Supreme Court weighs fairness**

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Geraldine Tyler, now 94, lost her one-bedroom condo in Minneapolis over \$2,300 in unpaid taxes, plus interest and penalties. Hennepin County sold the apartment for \$40,000 and kept every penny.

Tyler's lawyers say the county violated constitutional protections against having property taken without "just compensation" and excessive fines. The Supreme Court, which hears arguments Wednesday, will decide.

Minnesota is among roughly a dozen states and the District of Columbia that allow local jurisdictions to keep the excess money, according to the Pacific Legal Foundation, which is representing Tyler at the Supreme Court.



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 41 of 90

At least 8,950 homes were sold because of unpaid taxes and the former owners received little or nothing in those states between 2014 and 2021, according to Pacific Legal, a not-for-profit public interest law firm focused on property rights.

Other states are: Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, Oregon and South Dakota, the group said.

There has been no explanation about why Tyler stopped paying her property taxes when she moved from the condo, where she had lived since 1999, to an apartment building for older people in 2010. She moved for "health and safety" reasons, Pacific Legal said.

The county said in court papers that Tyler could have sold the property and kept whatever was left after paying off the mortgage and taxes, refinanced her mortgage to pay the tax bill or signed up for a tax payment plan.

Instead, she did nothing for five years, the county said, until after authorities followed state law and sold the condo. The county wrote: Tyler believes "the Constitution required the State to serve as her real estate agent, sell the property on her behalf, and write a check for the difference between the tax debt and the fair market value."

Lower courts sided with the county before the justices agreed to step in.

Minnesota and a handful of states and government associations are backing the county, warning that a Supreme Court ruling could tie the hands of local governments that rely on property taxes.

But the bulk of support in court filings is with Tyler, including AARP, business groups, real estate interests and other people who have gone through experiences similar to hers.

A Massachusetts man described his ongoing fight with authorities over a tax bill of \$900 on a property he says is worth at least \$330,000 in a beach town on Cape Cod Bay. In a filing from New York, property tax attorney David Wilkes and legal services groups wrote that New York's rules "excessively takes far more than what is due to the government and go well beyond an appropriate deterrent to those homeowners who would ignore a tax delinquency."

The Biden administration told the court that Tyler's claim that her property was taken without just compensation, in violation of the 5th amendment, is the stronger of her arguments. The justices should reject the claim that Minnesota's law violates the 8th amendment's prohibition on excessive fines, Solicitor General Elizabeth Prelogar wrote.

Not until 2019 did the Supreme Court rule that the "excessive fines" clause applied to the states as well as the federal government.

A decision in Tyler v. Hennepin County, Minnesota, 22-166, is expected by late June.

## 2024 race won't be like 2020. That's good and bad for Biden

By WILL WEISSERT and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — No honking geese are likely to interrupt his speeches this time.

As President Joe Biden seeks a second term, he won't have to depend on glitchy Zoom connections, or deliver remarks in largely vacant theaters with attendees in chairs ringed by circle markings on the floor to ensure enough social distancing. His advisors won't scrutinize the 1918 flu outbreak for clues on pandemic-era voting.

With the country increasingly back to normal, Biden can fly to crowded campaign events on Air Force One, make policy announcements from the Rose Garden and shape not only the presidential race but global affairs with his actions.

Just as the 2024 campaign will be vastly different from the coronavirus-marred 2020 edition, Biden won't be able to hold on to the White House by running in the same way he won it three years ago. Virtual events offered from a basement rec room he converted into a studio in his Delaware home and avoiding travel for months at a stretch won't cut it this time.

A return to more typical campaign rhythms presents both opportunities and potential challenges for Biden. Lockdowns made the 2020 campaign far less grueling, so much so that Donald Trump frequently ac-

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 42 of 90

cused Biden, now 80, of ignoring voters. But avoiding crowds also often made it harder for Biden to ignite supporter enthusiasm. He also averted the kind of spontaneous interactions with the public and the press that led to memorable gaffes in the past, but sometimes created endearing moments.

"If any presidential candidate benefited from the virtual mold of 2020, it was Joe," said Democratic strategist Nicole Brener-Schmitz. "But he's shown over the course of his presidency that he's perfectly capable of the travel and the rallies and the events and the town halls. There shouldn't be any concern about there being a 'normal' campaign and the American public going, 'Oh no.'"

Biden advisers say that among the many societal changes wrought by the pandemic, campaigning changed too. Voters adapted to using different platforms to engage with politics and candidates. Biden's team also notes that the president is the only successful national candidate so far in that new environment, and his advisers aim to build on the lessons of 2020, finding novel ways to deliver the most effective message to individual voters.

Biden himself likely won't miss campaigning online. When giving one of his first virtual addresses in March 2020, he lost his place in his prepared remarks and gestured awkwardly to staff standing out of frame. Two months later, as Biden virtually addressed members of the Asian American and Pacific Islanders Victory Fund, a more jarring off-camera distraction came from the Canada geese clustered around a pond in his back yard.

"If you hear them honking away, they're cheering," Biden joked.

Though the production quality improved over time, Biden's online presentations were often overshadowed by what Trump was doing — so much so that Biden's campaign resorted to creating a short-lived podcast. They also studied balloting during the 1918 midterm elections, when turnout dropped amid the flu pandemic.

Even after he resumed in-person campaigning with social distance circles, drive-in rallies and other small events in battleground states, Biden almost always returned each night to sleep at home in Delaware. This time, it would be Air Force One carrying him back to the White House or Delaware.

One downside of 2020, aides say, was Biden's inability to meet people on the campaign trail. Even with Secret Service protection, brief one-on-one time will now be possible — but that also increases the likelihood that Biden will say something he regrets.

In December 2019 a man in New Hampshire suggested Biden was too old and also raised questions about the then-candidate's son's overseas business ties. Biden called him a "damned liar" and suggesting a pushup contest — reminiscent of times his verbal blunders as vice president made some in the Obama White House blanch.

Biden was also at his weakest during in-person campaigning early in 2020. Despite joining the race as the perceived frontrunner, he lost the first three Democratic primary contests and only clinched his party's nomination after the pandemic took hold.

He offered a mainstream agenda that appealed to Democratic moderates early, but moved to the left as the general election approached — promising sharp federal spending increases on health care, social programs and the environment while boosting domestic manufacturing and the nation's crumbling infrastructure.

With Democrats controlling Congress through last year, Biden fulfilled many such promises. But he's shifted to the center more recently, which some progressives say will alienate the Democratic base.

"Unless he's hermetically sealed and doesn't want to talk to anybody under 30, he's going to be asked, 'Gee, you said the last time you ran for president dot, dot, dot. What's up with that?'" said Norman Solomon, national director of RootsAction.org, a progressive group that championed the "Don't Run Joe" campaign attempting to convince Biden to forgo seeking a second term.

Pandemic aside, the 2020 campaign was unique in unfolding as a summer of protests decrying police brutality and racial injustice erupted after George Floyd's killing. Biden was unable to get Congress to approve major criminal justice reform, leaving some Black activists disillusioned that more wasn't done on that issue or to protect voting rights nationwide.

An Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll last week found the president's 58%

impoverished population might moderate their behavior.

But relations between the U.S. and the Taliban have deteriorated further since they imposed draconian new measures banning girls from school and excluding women from working for international aid and health agencies.

However, a line of communication still exists between the two sides, led by the U.S. special envoy for Afghanistan, Tom West. West's contacts are primarily with Taliban officials in Kabul and not with the group's more ideological wing based in Kandahar.

The U.S. decision to withdraw all troops fueled the swift collapse of the Afghan government and military, which the U.S. had supported for nearly two decades, and the return to power of the Taliban. In the aftermath, President Joe Biden directed that a broad review examine "every aspect of this from top to bottom" and it was released earlier this month.

The Biden administration in the publicly released version of the review largely laid blame on President Donald Trump for the deadly and chaotic 2021 withdrawal, which was punctuated by the suicide bombing at Abbey Gate.

News of the killing came on the same day that Biden formally announced he will seek a second term as president, offering a reminder of one of the most difficult chapters of his presidency. The disastrous drawdown was, at the time, the biggest crisis that the relatively new administration had faced. It left sharp questions about Biden and his team's competence and experience — the twin pillars central to his campaign for the White House.

White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said Tuesday the U.S. has "made clear to the Taliban that it is their responsibility to ensure that they give no safe haven to terrorists," whether from al-Qaida or the Islamic State.

"We have made good on the President's pledge to establish an over-the-horizon capacity to monitor potential terrorist threats, not only from in Afghanistan but elsewhere around the world where that threat has metastasized as we have done in Somalia and Syria," Kirby said in a statement.

Yet Rex said the administration has not done enough to take responsibility for what happened at Abbey Gate.

"I feel like this is the administration trying to get the pressure off of them for accountability by saying that we're holding ISIS accountable for our kids' death," Rex said.

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Associated Press writers Tara Copp and Ellen Knickmeyer contributed to this report.

## **In a growing India, some struggle to prove they are Indians**

By SHEIKH SAALIQ and SHONAL GANGULY Associated Press

MURKATA, India (AP) — Krishna Biswas is scared. Unable to prove his Indian citizenship, he is at risk of being sent to a detention center, far away from his modest hut built of bamboo wood that looks down on fields lush with corn.

Biswas says he was born in India's northeastern Assam state. So was his father, almost 65 years ago. But the government says that to prove he is an Indian, he should furnish documents that date back to 1971.

For the 37-year-old vegetable seller, that means searching for a decades-old property deed or a birth certificate with an ancestor's name on it.

Biswas has none, and he is not alone. There are nearly 2 million people like him — over 5% of Assam's population — staring at a future where they could be stripped of their citizenship if they are unable to prove they are Indian.

Questions over who is an Indian have long lingered over Assam, which many believe is overrun with immigrants from neighboring Bangladesh.

At a time when India is about to overtake China as the most populous country, these concerns are expected to heighten as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government seeks to use illegal immigration and fears of demographic shift for electoral gains in a nation where nationalist sentiments run deep.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 44 of 90

approval rating among Black adults was down sharply from the roughly 9 in 10 who approved of Biden over his first months in office.

Only about half of Democrats polled said they wanted Biden to run again, but 81% said they'd at least probably support him in next year's general election. Among Black adults, though, the enthusiasm lagged: Only 41% said they want him to run and 55% said they were likely to support him in the general election.

Questions about the 80-year-old Biden's physical stamina, meanwhile, will be more pronounced this time, as Biden would be 86 at the conclusion of a second term.

Aides concede that the travel and rigors of a normal presidential campaign are brutal, but not compared to the demands of the presidency, with its jam-packed intercontinental trips and middle-of-the-night wake-up calls to respond to global crises. And for much of the next year, Biden will be most intently focused on his day job, with his advisers arguing that being an effective president makes the case better than anything else for another four years in the White House.

Democrats also note that, unlike 2020, when lockdowns saw the party and its top outside supporters abandon knocking on doors and other in-person activities to mobilize their base voters, such efforts will be back this time.

Lee Saunders, president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, which has 1.4 million members nationwide, said voter mobilization efforts have run continuously since the pandemic eased. Those helped Democrats to a surprisingly strong midterm election showing, are already under way for 2024, he said, and are focusing on the legislative achievements of Biden and his party.

"We just have to talk about those victories. All of us collectively: labor and allies, and the White House, and our friends on the Hill and our governors and our state reps and our mayors," Saunders said.

Biden's team has concentrated most on running again against Trump. Even a rematch wouldn't feel like 2020, though, since Biden will be the incumbent. That worries Solomon, who said the Biden White House has been "exuding complacency" by insisting that Biden can top Trump again in 2024.

"These refrains coming out of the White House, 'Oh, he beat Trump before, he can beat him again,'" Solomon said. "This time, Biden is gonna represent the status quo as an incumbent. That's a fundamental problem."

But Brener-Schmitz noted that the incumbent always has an advantage, being able to tap into Democrats' nationwide supporter base and infrastructure, allowing the president to concentrate on connecting personally with voters.

She added: "This is where Joe Biden thrives."

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Associated Press Writer Hannah Fingerhut contributed to this report.

## Montana transgender lawmaker faces censure or expulsion

By AMY BETH HANSON and SAM METZ Associated Press

HELENA, Mont. (AP) — Montana Republican leaders will vote Wednesday on censuring or expelling lawmaker Zoey Zephyr, a transgender state representative who has been silenced in the House since last week after telling colleagues that if they voted for a bill to ban gender-affirming medical care for transgender children they would "have blood on their hands."

On Tuesday night, Zephyr tweeted a letter she received from House leaders informing her of the plan to consider disciplinary action against her during Wednesday's session.

"I've also been told I'll get a chance to speak," Zephyr tweeted. "I will do as I have always done — rise on behalf of my constituents, in defense of my community and for democracy itself."

Montana's House speaker canceled Tuesday's floor session without explanation, the latest development in a standoff over whether Montana Republicans will let the lawmaker from Missoula speak unless she apologizes for her remarks last week on a gender-affirming care ban proposal.

Much like events in the Tennessee Statehouse weeks ago — where two lawmakers were expelled after participating in a post-school shooting gun control protest that interrupted proceedings — Zephyr's pun-

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 45 of 90

ishment has ignited a firestorm of debate about governance and democracy in politically polarizing times.

"Republicans are doubling down on their agenda of running roughshod over Montanans' rights — to free expression, to peaceful protest, to equal justice under the law," House Minority Leader Kim Abbott said of the plan to discipline Zephyr.

Zephyr's remarks, and the Republican response, set off a chain of events that culminated in a rally outside the Capitol at noon Monday and seven arrests later that afternoon when protesters packed into the gallery at the Statehouse brought House proceedings to a halt while chanting "Let her speak." The scene galvanized both those demanding she be allowed to speak and those saying her actions constitute an unacceptable attack on civil discourse.

Such a protest won't be allowed to happen on Wednesday. Republican leaders said in the letter sent to Zephyr that the gallery will be closed "to maintain decorum and ensure safety."

Speaker Matt Regier did not take questions on Tuesday or explain why lawmakers were not returning to the floor, but in a brief statement called the disruptions a "dark day for Montana."

"Currently, all representatives are free to participate in House debates while following the House rules," Regier told reporters. "The choice to not follow the House rules is one that Rep. Zephyr has made. The only person silencing Rep. Zephyr is Rep. Zephyr. The Montana House will not be bullied."

Republican Rep. Casey Knudsen, the chair of the House Rules committee, said Tuesday's cancellation gave leadership time to respond to Monday's events. Abbott said she saw leadership's decision to cancel as giving lawmakers "some time to regroup."

Under Regier's leadership, the House has not allowed Zephyr to speak since last week when she said that those who voted to ban gender-affirming care for young people would have "blood on their hands." He and other Republicans said the remark was far outside the boundaries of appropriate civil discourse and demanded she apologize before being allowed to participate in legislative discussions.

The events have showcased the growing power of the Montana Freedom Caucus, a group of right-wing lawmakers that has spearheaded the charge to discipline Zephyr. The caucus re-upped its demands and rhetoric Monday. In a statement they said that Zephyr's decision to hoist a microphone toward the gallery's protesters amounted to "encouraging an insurrection."

Although several protesters resisted law enforcement officers trying to arrest them on Monday, Abbott pushed back at characterizing the activity as violent. She acknowledged it was disruptive, but called the demonstration peaceful. She said public protests were a predictable response to a lawmaker representing more than 10,000 constituents not being allowed to speak and questioned bringing in officers in riot gear to handle the chanting protesters.

"It was chanting, but it absolutely was not violent," she said. "Sometimes extreme measures have a response like this."

There were no reports of damage to the building and lawmakers were not threatened.

On Monday, Zephyr said the seven arrested were "defending democracy" and in an earlier speech said that the sequence of events that followed her remarks illustrated how they had struck a chord with those in power.

"They picked me in this moment because I said a thing that got through their shield for a second," she told a crowd of supporters gathered on the Capitol steps near a banner that read "Democracy dies here."

She said she does not intend to apologize and argued that her "blood on your hands" remark accurately reflected the stakes of such bans for transgender kids.

This story has been corrected to show that Rep. Casey Knudsen is not a member of the Montana Freedom Caucus.

## Taliban kill mastermind of suicide bombing at Kabul airport

By FARNOUSH AMIRI, MATTHEW LEE, AAMER MADHANI and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press WASHINGTON (AP) — A ground assault by the Taliban killed the Islamic State militant who spearheaded

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 46 of 90

the August 2021 suicide bombing at the Kabul airport that left 13 U.S. troops and about 170 Afghans dead during the chaotic U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, U.S. officials said Tuesday.

Initially, neither the U.S. — nor apparently the Taliban — were aware that the mastermind was dead. He was killed during a series of battles early this month in southern Afghanistan between the Taliban and the Islamic State group's affiliate, according to several officials.

But in the past few days, U.S. intelligence confirmed "with high confidence" that the Islamic State leader had been killed, a senior administration official said. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters.

Late Tuesday night, Pentagon press secretary Brig. Gen. Patrick Ryder issued a statement confirming that the plotter had been killed by the Taliban. "The United States was not involved in this operation," Ryder said.

Over the weekend, the U.S. military began to inform the parents of the 11 Marines, the sailor and the soldier who were killed in the blast at Abbey Gate, and they shared the information in a private group messaging chat. The father of one of the Marines said the death of his son's killer brings little comfort.

"Whatever happens, it's not going to bring Taylor back and I understand that," Darin Hoover, the father of Staff Sgt. Darin Taylor Hoover, said in a phone call with The Associated Press. "About the only thing his mom and I can do now is be an advocate for him. All we want is the truth. And we're not getting it. That's the frustrating part."

Hoover said he and his son's mother, Kelly Henson, have spent the past year and a half grieving his death and praying for accountability from the Biden administration for the handling of the withdrawal.

He added that the Marines provided only limited information to him and did not identify the Islamic State leader or give the circumstances of his death. U.S. officials declined to provide many details because of sensitivities in the intelligence gathering.

The administration official said it was their "moral responsibility" to let the victims' families know that the "mastermind" and "person most responsible for the airport attack" had been taken off the battlefield. The official added that intelligence officials determined that the leader had "remained a key plotter and overseer" for the group.

Several officials said the U.S. played no role in the killing and did not coordinate at all with the Taliban. The administration official called the Taliban action "significant" and said the U.S. only learned of the operation through its "over the horizon" intelligence capabilities.

Hoover is among a group of 12 Gold Star families that have kept in touch since the bombing, supporting one another and sharing information through the messaging chat. The chat was created by Cheryl Rex, the mother of Marine Lance Cpl. Dylan Merola, who died in the blast.

Rex, who has been a vocal critic of the Biden administration's handling of the withdrawal, told the AP it was through the chat group that they were informed late Monday about the killing as they awaited official confirmation from U.S. military officials.

The fallen service members were among those screening the thousands of Afghans frantically trying on Aug. 26, 2021, to get onto one of the crowded flights out of the country after the brutal Taliban takeover. The scene of desperation quickly turned into one of horror when a suicide bomber attacked. The Islamic State group claimed responsibility.

The blast at Abbey Gate came hours after Western officials warned of a major attack, urging people to leave the airport. But that advice went largely unheeded by Afghans desperate to escape the country in the last few days of an American-led evacuation before the U.S. officially ended its 20-year presence.

The Afghanistan-based offshoot of the Islamic State — called Islamic State-Khorasan — has up to 4,000 members and is the Taliban's most bitter enemy and top military threat. The group has continued to carry out attacks in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover, especially against the country's minority groups.

After the Trump administration reached a 2020 deal with the Taliban to withdraw U.S. troops from Afghanistan and the Biden administration followed through on that agreement in 2021, there had been hope in Washington that the Taliban's desire for international recognition and assistance for the country's

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 47 of 90

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party has promised to roll out a similar citizenship verification program nationwide even though the process in Assam has been put on hold after a federal audit found it flawed and full of errors.

Nonetheless, hundreds of suspected immigrants with voting rights in Assam have been arrested and sent to detention centers the government calls "transit camps." Fearing arrest, thousands have fled to other Indian states. Some have died of suicide.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This story is part of an ongoing series exploring what it means for the 1.4 billion inhabitants of India to live in what will be the world's most populated country.

Millions of people like Biswas, whose citizenship status is unclear, were born in India to parents who immigrated many decades ago. Many of them have voting cards and other identification, but the state's citizenship registry counts only those who can prove, with documentary evidence, that they or their ancestors were Indian citizens before 1971, the year Bangladesh was born.

Modi's party, which also rules Assam, argues the registry is essential to identify people who entered the country illegally in a state where ethnic passions run deep and anti-immigrant protests in the 1980s culminated in the massacre of more than 2,000 immigrant Muslims.

"My father and his brother were born here. We were born here. Our kids were also born here. We will die here but not leave this place," Biswas, said on a recent afternoon at his home in Assam's Murkata village, near the banks of the Brahmaputra River.

The Biswas family has 11 members, of whom the citizenship of nine is in dispute. His wife and mother have been declared Indian by a foreigners' tribunal that decides on citizenship claims. Others, including his three children, his father and his brother's family, have been declared "foreigners."

It makes no sense to Biswas, who wonders why would some be considered to have settled in the country illegally and others not, even though they all were born in the same place.

The family, like many others, has not pleaded their case before the tribunal or higher courts due to a lack of money and the arduous paperwork required in the process.

"If we cannot be Indian then just kill us. Let them (the government) kill my whole family," he said.

The registry was last updated in 2019 and excluded both Hindus and Muslims, but most critics view it as an attempt to deport millions of minority Muslims.

They say the process would become even more exclusionary if Modi's party resurrects a controversial citizenship bill that grants citizenship to persecuted believers who entered India illegally from neighboring countries, including Hindus, Sikhs and Christians, but not Muslims. The nationwide citizenship bill was introduced in 2019, but led to widespread protests across India for singling out Muslims, forcing the government to put it on the backburner.

Supporters of the registry say it is essential to protect the cultural identity of Assam's indigenous people, arguing that those who entered illegally are taking away their jobs and their land.

"The influx of illegal foreigners from Bangladesh is a threat to the identity of the indigenous people of Assam. We cannot stay like a second class citizen under illegal Bangladeshis. It is a question of our own existence," said Samujjal Bhattacharya, who has been part of a movement in Assam against illegal immigration.

Fearing a possible loss of citizenship, scores of people in Assam have killed themselves, leaving a trail of devastation among families.

When Faizul Ali was sent to a detention center after being declared a "foreigner" in late 2015, his family members feared they would be next. The prospect of being thrown in jail drove his son to take his own life. His brother tried to save him but drowned in the process. A year later, Ali's other son hanged himself.

Ali was released on bail from the detention center in 2019. He died in March, leaving behind his wife, a mentally ill son, two daughter-in-laws and their children. They all live in a single room house made of corrugated tin in Muslim majority Bahari village. All have been declared "foreigners."

Unable to make ends meet, Ali's wife, Sabur Bano, has taken to begging. She can't afford firewood for

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 48 of 90

cooking and uses discarded clothes she collects from streets as burning material.

"I am a citizen of this country. I am 60 years old. I was born here, my children were brought up here, all my belongings are here. But they made me a foreigner in my own land," she said, wiping tears from the hem of her white sari.

Others are still waiting for their loved ones after they were arrested.

On a recent morning, Asiya Khatoon boarded a rickshaw and traveled nearly 31 kilometers (19 miles) from her home to a detention center in Assam's town where her husband has been held since January.

"They (police) just came and picked up my husband saying he is a Bangladeshi," the 45-year-old said, before hurriedly walking toward the detention center circled by a vast perimeter of walls and watchtowers with security cameras and armed guards.

In her hands was a crinkled plastic bag. It carried a green T-shirt, trousers and a cap she wanted to give her husband.

## **Bud Light fumbles, but experts say inclusive ads will stay**

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

Bud Light may have fumbled its attempt to broaden its customer base by partnering with a transgender influencer. But experts say inclusive marketing is simply good business — and it's here to stay.

"A few years from now, we will look back on this 'controversy' with the same embarrassment that we feel when we look back at 'controversies' from the past surrounding things like interracial couples in advertising," said Sarah Reynolds, the chief marketing officer for the human resources platform HiBob, who identifies as queer.

On April 1, transgender influencer Dylan Mulvaney posted a video of herself cracking open a Bud Light on her Instagram page. She showed off a can with her face on it that Bud Light sent her — one of many corporate freebies she gets and shares with her millions of followers.

But unlike the dress from Rent the Runway or the trip to Denmark from skincare brand Ole Henriksen, the backlash to the beer can was fast and furious. Three days after Mulvaney's post, Kid Rock posted a video of himself shooting cases of Bud Light. Shares of Bud Light's parent, AB InBev, temporarily plunged.

This week, Anheuser-Busch — AB InBev's U.S. subsidiary — confirmed that Alissa Heinerscheid, its vice president of marketing, and her boss, Daniel Blake, are taking a leave of absence. The company won't say when they will return or whether they're being paid.

For some, the partnership went too far at a time when transgender issues — including gender-affirming health care and participation in sports — are a divisive topic in state legislatures.

"Whether the issue is trans people or anything else, the majority of consumers are pretty vocal about the fact they don't want brands lecturing them or stuffing politics or social issues down their throat," said John Frigo, the head of digital marketing for Best Price Nutrition. "If you sell beer, just make beer and leave it at that."

But others — including Heinerscheid herself — say reaching out to younger and more diverse consumers is crucial. According to a 2021 Gallup poll, 21% of people in Generation Z identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, compared to 3% of Baby Boomers. Gallup has also found that younger consumers are the most likely to want brands to promote diversity and take a stand on social issues.

"I had a really clear job to do when I took over Bud Light. And it was, this brand is in decline. It's been in decline for a very long time. And if we do not attract young drinkers to come and drink this brand, there will be no future for Bud Light," Heinerscheid said last month in an episode of Apple's "Make Yourself at Home" podcast.

Bud Light and Mulvaney declined requests to talk to The Associated Press for this story.

Bud Light has long been America's best-selling beer. But its U.S. sales are down 2% so far this year, part of a long-running decline as younger consumers flock to sparkling seltzers and other drinks, according to Bump Williams Consulting. Those sales declines accelerated rapidly in April. The week ending April 15, Bud Light's sales dropped 17% compared to the same week a year ago. Meanwhile, rivals Miller Lite and



Coors Lite both saw their sales jump more than 17%.

Marketing experts say it's possible Bud Light's experience will cause other brands to rethink using transgender people in their advertising. Joanna Schwartz, a professor at Georgia College and State University who teaches a course on LGBTQ+ marketing, said companies will still want to reach transgender consumers and their supporters, but might shift to social media and more targeted ads.

"They're walking an extremely fine line. They want to appeal to everyone, but that includes people who don't like each other," Schwartz said of Bud Light.

Still, Schwartz said, there are plenty of brands that have successfully featured transgender or non-binary people in their marketing. In 2016, Secret deodorant ran an ad featuring a transgender woman in a bathroom stall, debating whether to walk out and face other women at the sink. Pantene shampoo has run ads and short films supporting transgender people in 2021 as part of its Hair Has No Gender project. And Coca-Cola's 2018 Super Bowl ad featured young people using different pronouns to describe themselves.

Thomas Murphy, an associate professor of branding at Clark University, said he tells brands that want to be inclusive to run ads with real people who can talk about the company's efforts.

"They can have employees who say, 'I love Bud Light. I have worked here for 20 years, there are inclusive programs and I came here because I wanted a company that would embrace me,'" he said. "Who couldn't see and hear that person and say, 'What a great company?'"

Instead, Bud Light wound up alienating even transgender customers because it didn't support Mulvaney after the boycott calls began, Schwartz said. Anheuser-Busch CEO Brendan Whitworth issued a statement on April 14 but it didn't specifically mention the controversy.

"We never intended to be part of a discussion that divides people," Whitworth said.

By comparison, Nike — which also faced some boycott threats after sending workout clothes to Mulvaney — supported the transgender community in an Instagram post, encouraging followers to be kind and inclusive. Nike didn't respond to requests for comment.

Manveer Mann, an associate professor of marketing at the Feliciano School of Business at Montclair State University, said Bud Light should have anticipated the backlash and had a plan in place to handle it.

Nike learned that lesson in 2018, when it featured football player Colin Kaepernick — who had protested police brutality by kneeling during the national anthem — in its ads. Mann said Nike briefly faced boycott threats, but it stood by Kaepernick and its sales quickly recovered.

Mann thinks Bud Light's sales will ultimately recover, too. But in the meantime, it's alienating everyone, she said.

"The communication from Bud Light is not clear. Is this coming from your value set or are these things just trending?" Mann said. "You have to know what your values are and what are the values of the customers you are trying to reach."

## Russia's Lavrov warns EU becoming militarized now, like NATO

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Russia's top diplomat warned Tuesday that the European Union "is becoming militarized at a record rate" and aggressive in its goal of containing Russia.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told a news conference he has no doubts that there is now "very little difference" between the EU and NATO.

Lavrov said they recently signed a declaration, which he said essentially states that the 31-member NATO military alliance will ensure the security of the 27-member EU political and economic organization.

He was apparently referring to a Jan. 19 EU-NATO declaration on their "strategic partnership" which calls Russia's Feb. 24, 2022, invasion of Ukraine "the gravest threat to Euro-Atlantic security in decades."

It calls the present moment "a key juncture for Euro-Atlantic security and stability" and urges closer EU-NATO cooperation to confront evolving security threats, saying this will contribute to strengthening security in Europe and beyond. And it encourages the fullest possible involvement of NATO members that don't belong to the EU and EU members that aren't part of NATO, but it does not state that NATO will ensure the security of the EU.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 50 of 90

Russian President Vladimir Putin has long complained about NATO's expansion, especially toward his country, and partly used that as a justification for invading Ukraine.

The Russian attack, however, sent fear through its other neighbors, and Finland joined NATO earlier this month, seeking protection under its security umbrella after decades of neutrality following its defeat by the former Soviet Union in World War II.

While NATO says it poses no threat to Russia, the Nordic country's accession dealt a major political blow to Putin.

Finland's membership doubles Russia's border with NATO, the world's largest security alliance. Sweden, an EU member, is also seeking NATO membership and is hoping for final approval soon.

NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg defiantly declared last week that Ukraine's "rightful place" is in the military alliance and pledged more support for the country on his first visit to Kyiv since the invasion. The Kremlin responded by repeating that preventing Ukraine from joining NATO is still a key goal of its invasion, arguing that Kyiv's membership in the alliance would pose an existential threat to Russia.

Ukraine is also seeking EU membership and in February its leaders pledged they would do all it takes to back Ukraine. But they offered no firm timetable for talks on joining the EU to begin, as Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had hoped.

Russia's Lavrov was asked whether the war in Ukraine was a miscalculation since Moscow strongly opposed NATO's expansion and the invasion sparked Finland's membership, with Sweden next and Ukraine hoping for a road map to join.

"NATO never had any intention of stopping," the Russian minister replied, pointing to the recent EU-NATO declaration and actions in recent years that saw non-NATO members Sweden and Finland "increasingly taking part in NATO military exercises and other actions that were meant to synchronize the military programs of NATO members and neutral states."

Lavrov said Russia was promised on several occasions that NATO would not expand, but said "those were lies."

"Unbiased assessments that our political scientists as well as those abroad made is that NATO sought to break Russia apart," he said, "but in the end it only made it stronger, brought it closer together. So, let's not make any hasty conclusions now as to what this will all end in."

## First reactions to 'The Flash,' starring Ezra Miller

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

LAS VEGAS (AP) — The words "impressive" and "awesome" were common refrains from a group of entertainment reporters who were among the first to see the upcoming DC superhero movie "The Flash."

Warner Bros. screened the film for the first time at CinemaCon Tuesday for theater owners, exhibitors and reporters attending the annual trade show and industry conference.

Reviews are embargoed until a later date — the film, the studio said, is not completely finished — but viewers were able to post reactions on social media as soon as the credits rolled.

Brian Welk of Indiewire wrote that "it played very well," pointing out that there were more than a few screams and gasps in the packed theater.

Film critic Jordan Hoffman tweeted that it was, "far more madcap than I expected. Really nailed what reading a 5-issue crossover comic book is like. Tons of Ezra Miller being zany and time paradox stuff. Nerds will lose their minds at the ending."

"The Playlist's" Greg Ellwood wrote that it was "very good" and that Miller was "great," while Scott Mantz went a step further declaring that it's "one of the very best DC movies, a perfect blend of action, heart & humor."

Erik Davis, of Fandango, wrote on Twitter that it is "tremendous" and that it is "without a doubt among the best superhero films ever made. An all-timer. Inventive storytelling, FANTASTIC action sequences, great cast. SO MANY nerdy details."

Jason Guerrasio, of Business Insider, had a more tempered reaction, writing that it is "def not the best superhero movie ever made ... but it's an impressive DC movie with lots of emotion and loads of surprises."

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 51 of 90

"The Flash," directed by Andy Muschietti, is one of the studio's biggest films of the year. In the film, Barry Allen uses his superpowers to go back in time in an attempt to change the past and save his parents. But things go awry and he finds himself stuck in a very different reality where Michael Shannon's General Zod is back and Batman is not the Batman he knows (Ben Affleck's version). Widely available trailers have already revealed that the new Batman he encounters is Michael Keaton's version.

After the box office disappointment of "Shazam! Fury of the Gods" earlier this year, the hope is that "The Flash," which reportedly carries a \$200 million budget, will reach blockbuster heights when it opens in theaters on June 16.

The long-planned standalone about The Flash/Barry Allen has also been the subject of much discussion because of its star Ezra Miller, who made headlines last year for a string of arrests and erratic behavior.

Miller was arrested twice last year in Hawaii, for disorderly conduct and harassment at a karaoke bar and then for second-degree assault. The parents of 18-year-old Tokata Iron Eyes, a Native American activist, last year filed a protection order against Miller, accusing the actor of grooming their child and other inappropriate behavior with her as a minor from the age of 12. Tokata Iron Eyes has disputed that.

Miller, who identifies as non-binary and goes by they/them pronouns, said last year that they were seeking mental health treatment.

The development of a standalone Flash movie has been in the works for almost 10 years. In one plan, announced at Comic Con in 2014, an Ezra Miller Flash movie would have hit theaters in 2018. Muschietti wouldn't even be attached to direct until 2019.

Warner Bros. has, throughout Miller's personal troubles and the shelving of "Batgirl," remained steadfast in its plans to release the "The Flash."

And though plans are already underway for a new future for DC Studios, "The Flash" has been one that the new regime of James Gunn and Peter Safran have seemed particularly excited about. Gunn said it was, "One of the best superhero films I've ever seen." And Warner Bros. Discovery president and CEO David Zaslav even boasted that Tom Cruise saw and loved the film so much that he called Muschietti himself to congratulate him.

## Harry Belafonte mourned by entertainment world, Biden, Obama

By The Associated Press undefined

NEW YORK (AP) — Reaction poured in Tuesday from heads of state, civil-rights leaders and the entertainment world following the death of Harry Belafonte at age 96. As a prominent activist, charismatic singer, Hollywood leading man, Broadway star and trailblazing Black entertainer, Belafonte's loss was felt across a wide swath of American life.

"Jill and I are saddened by the passing of a groundbreaking American who used his talent, his fame, and his voice to help redeem the soul of our Nation. Harry Belafonte was born to Caribbean parents in Harlem, New York on March 1, 1927, when segregation was the order of American society. To our Nation's benefit, Harry never accepted those false narratives and unjust boundaries. He dedicated his entire life to breaking barriers and bridging divides. ... Harry Belafonte's accomplishments are legendary and his legacy of outspoken advocacy, compassion, and respect for human dignity will endure. He will be remembered as a great American." — President Joe Biden.

"Harry Belafonte was a barrier-breaking legend who used his platform to lift others up. He lived a good life — transforming the arts while also standing up for civil rights. And he did it all with his signature smile and style. Michelle and I send our love to his wife, kids and fans." — Former President Barack Obama.

"In the spirit of (W.E.B.) Du Bois, (Paul) Robeson and many others, Harry Belafonte stood tall among them. Mr. B sang our songs, he carried our hopes and dreams. With his passing, this is not only a deep and personal loss for me, but for the people of the world who have also lost a beloved artist and humani-

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 52 of 90

tarian.” — Actor and activist Danny Glover, a longtime friend of Belafonte.

“You were a complicated father who lived one of the fullest lives in human history. I’m so grateful and lucky to have been and be so close to you. To know how much you loved me and were proud of my path. You always told me to never forget how much you love me and i am grateful you knew how much I loved hearing it. You could be harsh and terrifying, you could be strong and strategic. But when you pulled me in, close to your heart the embrace was ever lasting. You lived with purpose and we are all better for your contributions.” — Gina Belafonte, daughter of Belafonte.

“May God Have My Dear Friend Harry Belafonte At A Peaceful Rest. We Are Losing Our Giants Left And Right. We Have To Celebrate Our Elders While They Are With Us.” — Spike Lee, who directed Belafonte’s final film, 2018’s *BlackKkKlansman*.”

“Another ‘GREAT TREE’ has fallen: Harry Belafonte, a Trailblazer and Hero to us all. Thank you for your music, your artistry, your activism, your fight for civil rights and justice — especially risking your life back in the day to get money to the movement. Your being here on Earth has Blessed us all.” — Oprah Winfrey.

“Harry Belafonte was one of our nation’s most powerful voices for change. ... Like all true patriots, Harry Belafonte had the ability to see what could be and had the courage to work to realize that vision. He fought to help America live up to our highest ideals: dignity, equity, and justice for all. For years, it was my honor to call Harry a dear friend and rely on his wisdom and counsel. America has lost a giant.” — Vice President Kamala Harris.

“Harry Belafonte was a true mentor and friend. I am heartbroken to hear of his death but inspired by the long, fruitful life he led. He realized his platform gave him the ability to affect change. He used it to advance the civil rights movement and get others in his position off the sidelines. I cherished the time he would give me and others to both guide and correct us. He was a culture-changing entertainer, a history-changing activist and an unmatched intellectual. Rest in peace and power, Mr. B.” — The Rev. Al Sharpton.

“When I was a child, Harry Belafonte showed up for my family in very compassionate ways. In fact, he paid for the babysitter for me and my siblings. ... I won’t forget. Rest well, sir.” — Bernice King, daughter of The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

“You used your profile and gifts to leave a legacy of activism, of hope, dignity ... excellence. Thank you for your vision and talent. Thank you for being a beacon. You are now amongst our beautiful ancestors ... continue to guide us!” — Actor Viola Davis.

“He represented many things to us: fun calypso music, iconic acting (I came to know him as Geechie Dan in the iconic ‘Uptown Saturday Night’ as a child) — but most importantly he taught me to think in terms of ‘WE’ not ‘I.’ That stuck with me. If there is one lesson we can learn from him it is ‘what can I do to help mankind?’ Thank You Harry Belafonte!” — Musician and filmmaker Questlove.

“My friend, Harry Belafonte, was truly a man of cause, conviction and principle. Besides being a great entertainer, he was a major political activist during the Civil Rights Movement. I still remember the day in 1968 when Harry and I marched side by side on the Poor People’s March to Freedom. He will be missed and my sincere condolences go out to his family.” — Motown founder Berry Gordy.

“The passing of civil rights icon Harry Belafonte leaves a devastating void in the racial justice community. Before his rise, no entertainer had ever used the platform and resources his fame afforded him to accomplish so much. His personal and financial support was critical to every major event of the Civil Rights

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 53 of 90

Movement, from the Freedom Rides and the Birmingham Campaign to the March on Washington and the Freedom Summer of voter registration. Every American who works for racial justice takes inspiration from his unwavering commitment. — Marc H. Morial, president and chief executive of the National Urban League.

“Beyond touching millions with his inimitable charm and charisma in music, film, and theater, Mr. Belafonte devoted his life fighting for human rights and against injustice in all its forms. He was a fearless campaigner for civil rights and a powerful voice in the struggle against apartheid, the fight against AIDS, and the quest to eradicate poverty. ... At this moment of sorrow, let us be inspired by his example and strive to defend the dignity and rights of every human being, everywhere.” — Stephane Dujarric, spokesperson for United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

“Harry Belafonte was a standard bearer, in the tradition of (Paul) Robeson, for generational artistry and deeply informed & committed social & political engagement. Maybe the last of a great tribe. As smart as he was knockdown handsome. He met the moment throughout his life. What a man.” — Actor Jeffrey Wright.

“If you think about what it means to be an artist and an activist, he was literally the epitome of what that was. I don’t know people know how much he did. So gifted as an artist, as a performer, but used his platform in almost a subversive way because he would sneak messages in there — revolutionary messages — when people thought he was just singing about good times in the islands. He was always like infusing messages of protest and revolution in everything he did, and not only that, but he used his resources. He’s one of the most successful artists of his time. He used those resources to fund the civil rights movement.” — Musician John Legend, speaking at the Time100 summit.

“He was more than a singer, more than an actor and more than a man.” — Rapper and actor Ice Cube.

“Harry Belafonte didn’t just speak truth to power, he shouted it, he sang it, he made people listen to the truth. This great son of Harlem leaves behind a legacy in arts and in civil rights that has changed the world for the better.” — New York Mayor Eric Adams.

“Harry Belafonte was a man of courage who risked his life and treasure to fight those willing to murder to deny Black people our freedom to exist. He gave voice to the unsung heart songs that the common man feels but never utters. He gave voice to the voiceless. He’s an ancestor now.” — Actor Wendell Pierce.

“Thank you, Mr. B, for all of your years of mentorship, guidance, and lifetime of activism fighting for a better future for all of us.” — Former NFL star and activist Colin Kaepernick.

“Artists uniting to use their art form to make transformational change in the world ... is one of the great benefits to living a public life. Harry Belafonte exemplified this and utilized every aspect of his immeasurable talent, applying it specifically to the plight of other human beings and their civil rights.” — Actor Jamie Lee Curtis, who posted an image of a 1953 Ebony magazine cover featuring Belafonte and her parents, actors Tony Curtis and Janet Leigh.

“I am deeply sad at the loss of my very dear brother, the great Harry Belafonte. His artistic genius, moral courage and loving soul shall live forever.” — Civil rights activist and scholar Cornel West.

## **Trouble looms for Indian grain that combats climate change**

By JEMIMA RAMAN, Press Trust of India undefined  
KOCHI, India (AP) — On a tiny sliver of land in southern India, the future of an ancient grain that helps combat climate change is in doubt.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 54 of 90

An ongoing tussle in Chellanam village, a suburb of the bustling city of Kochi, which has the Arabian Sea on one side and estuaries on the other, could decide the fate of the cultivation of pokkali rice.

In many wetlands in the area, farmers have traditionally dedicated half the year to pokkali rice and the other six months to prawns. In 2022, the Fisheries Department of Kerala issued an order that farmers no longer needed to dedicate part of the year to pokkali, exacerbating a trend away from pokkali already under way. While prawns fetch more money than pokkali, a focus on them is upending a delicate ecosystem, making it difficult for farmers who want to continue with pokkali, environmental experts say.

M.M. Chandu, a 78-year-old farmer with about 0.8 hectares (a little over 2 acres), said that increasing salinity in the land from year-round prawn cultivation was degrading soil and making it more difficult for him to grow pokkali.

"Everything was ruined" when farmers were pushed away from pokkali and toward aquaculture, he said.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article is part of a series produced under the India Climate Journalism Program, a collaboration between The Associated Press, the Stanley Center for Peace and Security and the Press Trust of India.

When pokkali is grown, salt water is pushed out and farmers use rain water to irrigate their crops. Stalks from the pokkali later become food for prawns. That arrangement produces two kinds of crops and maintains natural barriers to rising seas and sequesters carbon in the soil.

"Pokkali is the oldest variety of rice in Kerala, which is at least 3,000 years old. It is also among the oldest known crops cultivated by organic farming methodologies in the world," said Francis Kalathunkal, from the Pokkali Samrakshana Samithi, a group formed in 2011 to encourage farmers to cultivate pokkali.

Kalathunkal said in the 1990s, pokkali was grown on 485 hectares (1,200 acres) in Chellanam compared to just 2 to 4 hectares (5 to 10 acres) today. Across Kerala, it's a similar story: two decades ago, pokkali was cultivated on more than 25,000 hectares (about 61,800 acres) in Ernakulam, Alappuzha and Thrissur districts compared to about 1,000 hectares (about 2,500 acres) today, according to Shan AC, president of Palliyakkal Service Cooperative Bank, which works with pokkali farmers in the production, procurement and distribution of the grains.

Pokkali is also being cultivated on experimental basis in the Sundarbans region of West Bengal, after vast tracts of paddy lands were filled with brackish water during a large cyclone in May 2021. A long grain version of pokkali is cultivated along the southwestern coastal belt of Sri Lanka.

Rice is the staple of southern and eastern parts of India, and is highly water intensive. About 3.35 cubic meters (118 cubic feet) of water are needed to grow 1 kilogram (2.2 pounds) of rice, according to India's Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices. Pokkali, by contrast, doesn't require groundwater for irrigation, as it is cultivated in low lying wetlands that are inundated with rain water.

Compared to white rice, pokkali, rich in antioxidants, requires a longer time to cook. It has a more pronounced flavor and texture, making it an acquired taste for many. Some varieties have thick or long grains, and colors range from dark brown to white.

To make pokkali enticing — both for consumers and farmers — the Rice Research Station at Kerala Agricultural University is working to develop new kinds. So far, they have come up with 11 high-yielding varieties.

Just developing more pokkali options alone will not solve the larger issues, said Dr. A.K. Sreelatha, head of the Rice Research Station.

"The biggest problem is the unavailability of skilled laborers," Sreelatha said. "The soil is so soft that the various prototypes of machines developed (to harvest it) failed."

Mahesh S, joint director at the Fisheries Department of Kerala, said a 2010 law allows the department to issue licenses for aqua farming on land that has been left fallow. If a farmer claims the land is not being used for paddy cultivation, "we will make a field visit and if we find the claim to be true, we issue a license," he said.

Because the crop floats in water, mechanized paddy cutters cannot be used. Instead, pokkali requires laborers, today mostly women, that stand in the water and cut the matured stalks manually, bundle them

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 55 of 90

and bring them to the bund.

Chathamma, another suburb of Kochi, is surrounded by a salt water lake, making it perfect for pokkali-prawn farming. Yet, Nandakumar VM is forced to leave 20 hectares (50 acres) of his 28-hectare (70-acre) holding fallow during paddy season, as he could not find enough people to help harvest.

"It is really difficult to get people to come and work these days," he said. "They don't want to stand in knee deep water — sometimes even chest deep — to harvest the stalks."

The lack of a market is yet another barrier to making money with pokkali. "This rice is known only in this region. If you go to the north of Kerala or to its hills, people do not know the benefits of pokkali," said Sreelatha.

A father-son duo, Joseph and Tom PV, who own seven acres in Chathamma, manage better, thanks to Tom's marketing efforts.

When he could not convince his father to get into year-round prawn cultivation, Tom reached a deal with him: "Grow pokkali, but leave marketing to me."

The hacks that the software engineer has come up with — add value by selling the finished rice and not just the paddy, branding and selling online — are bringing in more money.

Three years ago, the family made 60 to 80 rupees (75 cents to \$1) per kilogram. Today, thanks to processing the rice and branding, they are making between 120 and 150 rupees (\$1.46 and \$1.83).

Impressed, other farmers in Chathamma have started trying to follow the pair's footsteps, but Tom is skeptical.

"None of them know how to make money," he said.

Environmental experts say that if the Chellanam model — a focus just on prawns — wins out, it would prove unsustainable to Kerala, which comprises 13% coastal wetlands.

Usha S, founder of Thanal Agroecology Center, which does research and training on sustainable agriculture, said managing land that way in Chellanam is already having an impact. Soil has become more acidic, making it more difficult to cultivate pokkali, while sources of drinking water have become saltier.

"This has led to the fields being left fallow," she said, adding that on fallowed lands farmers don't bother fortifying tidal embankments, which leads to yet more salt.

In post graduate work at Kerala Agricultural University, Anju Sajan studied three kinds of land use: the pokkali-prawn combo, just pokkali and just prawns. She concluded that the pokkali-prawn combination produced soil most apt to store carbon, which combats climate change.

For 99-year-old matriarch, Baby Joseph Kalathungal, who has been growing pokkali since she was 17 years old, the science behind the decline in pokkali doesn't make much sense.

All she knows is that her stately home in Chellanam, which withstood the test of time for nearly a century, is corroding and her granary is empty. While her family's 1 hectare (2.5 acres) no longer produces viable yields, they still grow pokkali because they are part of a farmers' collective holding out against all-year fish farming.

"I have seen it all, but even for me what is happening now is a bit too much to digest," she said.

## Ex-New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern to join Harvard

By STEVE LeBLANC Associated Press

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. (AP) — Former New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, who led her country through a devastating mass shooting, will be temporarily joining Harvard University later this year, Kennedy School Dean Douglas Elmendorf said Tuesday.

Ardern, a global icon of the left and an inspiration to women around the world, has been appointed to dual fellowships at the Harvard Kennedy School. She will serve as the 2023 Angelopoulos Global Public Leaders Fellow and a Hauser Leader in the school's Center for Public Leadership beginning this fall.

"Jacinda Ardern showed the world strong and empathetic political leadership," Elmendorf said in statement, adding that Ardern will "bring important insights for our students and will generate vital conversations about the public policy choices facing leaders at all levels."

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 56 of 90

"You can hate Donald Trump. That's OK. But there's a time and a secret place for that. It's called a ballot box in an election. It's not here in a court of law," Tacopina told the six-man, three-woman panel. "Nobody's above the law, but no one is beneath it."

The trial stands to test Trump's "Teflon Don" reputation for shaking off serious legal problems and to reprise accounts of the type of sexual misconduct that rocked his 2016 presidential campaign as he seeks office again. Trump denies all the claims, saying they are falsehoods spun up to damage him.

The trial comes a month after he pleaded not guilty in an unrelated criminal case surrounding payments made to bury accounts of alleged extramarital sex.

Carroll's suit is a civil case, meaning that no matter the outcome, Trump isn't in danger of going to jail. She is seeking unspecified monetary damages and a retraction of Trump statements that she alleges were defamatory.

Among his comments: "She's not my type," which her lawyers say was tantamount to calling her too unattractive to assault.

Jurors — whose names are being kept secret to prevent potential harassment — range in age from 26 to 66 and include a janitor, a physical therapist and people who work in security, health care collections, a library, a high school and other settings.

They were questioned about their news-watching habits (which vary from watching "everything" to ignoring it all), political donations and support for any of a roster of right- and left-wing groups. They were asked, too, whether they used Trump's social media platform, read Carroll's former Elle magazine column and even if they'd seen Trump's former reality show "The Apprentice" — and whether any of these and other matters would make it difficult for them to be fair.

Carroll, 79, is expected to testify as soon as Wednesday that a chance encounter with Trump, 76, turned violent, and that he defamed her when responding to the rape allegations.

She says that after she ran into the future president at Manhattan's Bergdorf Goodman on an unspecified spring Thursday evening in 1996, he invited her to shop with him for a woman's lingerie gift before they teased one another to try on a bodysuit. Carroll says they ended up alone together in a store dressing room, where Trump pushed her against a wall and raped before she fought him off and fled.

Her suit argues that she was psychologically scarred by the alleged attack, and then subjected to an onslaught of hateful messages and reputational damage when Trump painted her as a liar.

"This case is Ms. Carroll's chance to clear her name, to pursue justice," Crowley said.

Tacopina countered that it was "an affront to justice."

He suggested her account of being violently raped in the Fifth Avenue store, with no one around, was preposterous. Also, Tacopina noted, there was no record that Carroll had any injuries, sought out a doctor or therapist, asked the store about surveillance video or even wrote about the alleged attack in her diary.

"It all comes down to: Do you believe the unbelievable?" he asked in his opening statement.

Jurors are also expected to hear from two other women who say they were sexually assaulted by Trump. The jury will also see the infamous 2005 "Access Hollywood" video in which Trump is heard asserting that celebrities can grab women sexually without asking.

Carroll's allegations normally would be too old to bring to court. But in November, New York state enacted a law allowing for suits over decades-old sexual abuse claims.

The Associated Press typically does not name people who say they have been sexually assaulted unless they come forward publicly, as Carroll has done.

## As epic snow melts, a California community braces for floods

By AMY TAXIN and JAE C. HONG Associated Press

LEMOORE, Calif. (AP) — Ron Caetano is packed and ready to go. His family photos and valuables are in the trailer and he's put food in carry totes. He moved the rabbits and chickens and their automatic feeders to higher ground.

He and his family and dogs could get out in less than an hour, they figure, should more heavy rain or hot weather melt so much mountain snow that gushing water overwhelms the rivers and channel that



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 57 of 90

Ardern, who was just 37 when she became prime minister in 2017, shocked New Zealanders when she announced in January she was stepping down from the role after more than 5 years because she no longer had “enough in the tank” to do it justice. She was facing mounting political pressures at home, including for her handling of the coronavirus pandemic, which was initially widely lauded but later criticized by those opposed to mandates and rules.

She said she sees the Harvard opportunity as a chance not only to share her experience with others, but also to learn.

“As leaders, there’s often very little time for reflection, but reflection is critical if we are to properly support the next generation of leaders,” she said.

Ardern’s time at the Cambridge, Massachusetts, university will also include a stint as the first tech governance leadership fellow at the school’s Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society.

The center has been an important partner as New Zealand worked to confront violent extremism online after a white supremacist gunman killed 51 people at two mosques in the city of Christchurch in 2019, Ardern said. The gunman livestreamed the slaughter for 17 minutes on Facebook before the video was taken down.

Two months after the shooting, Ardern launched the Christchurch Call with French President Emmanuel Macron. The initiative’s goal is to eliminate terrorist and violent extremist content online.

More than 50 countries joined the initiative, including the United States, Britain, Germany and South Korea, as well as technology companies like Facebook parent company Meta, Amazon, Google, Microsoft, YouTube, Zoom and Twitter.

“The Center has been an incredibly important partner as we’ve developed the Christchurch Call to action on addressing violent extremism online,” Ardern said, adding that the fellowship will be a chance not only to work collaboratively with the center’s research community, but also to work on the challenges around the growth of generative AI tools.

Jonathan Zittrain, co-founder of the Berkman Klein Center, said it’s rare for a head of state to be able to immerse deeply in a complex and fast-moving digital policy issue.

“Jacinda Ardern’s hard-won expertise — including her ability to bring diverse people and institutions together — will be invaluable as we all search for workable solutions to some of the deepest online problems,” he said in a statement.

Ardern said she planned to return to New Zealand after the fellowships.

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Associated Press writer Nick Perry contributed from Wellington, New Zealand.

## Roberts declines Senate request to testify on court ethics

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Chief Justice John Roberts has declined a request from the Senate Judiciary Committee to testify at a hearing next week on ethical standards at the court, instead providing the panel with a statement of ethics reaffirmed by the court’s nine justices.

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Dick Durbin, D-Ill., invited Roberts’ testimony last week, saying that there had been a “steady stream of revelations” regarding Supreme Court justices “falling short of ethical standards expected of other federal judges.”

The invitation came after news reports that detailed a close relationship between Justice Clarence Thomas and a conservative donor from Texas. The donor, Dallas billionaire Harlan Crow, had purchased three properties belonging to Thomas and his family in a transaction worth more than \$100,000 that Thomas never reported, according to the nonprofit investigative journalism organization ProPublica.

In a letter to Durbin on Tuesday, Roberts said he would “respectfully decline” the committee’s request.

“Testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee by the Chief Justice of the United States is exceedingly rare, as one might expect in light of separation of powers concerns and the importance of preserving judicial independence.”

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 58 of 90

Accompanying the letter to Durbin was a "Statement on Ethics Principles and Practices" signed by all nine justices describing the ethical rules they follow about travel, gifts and outside income. While the rules are not new, the statement said that the undersigned justices "today reaffirm and restate foundational ethics principles and practices to which they subscribe in carrying out their responsibilities as Members of the Supreme Court of the United States."

The statement details standards for justices' activities outside the court and describes the recusal process, which is generally up to each individual justice. It does not require any justice to say why they are recusing from a case.

Nothing about Roberts' letter or the statement attributed to all nine justices suggests that they feel chastened in any way by recent reports. But it is the first time the current membership has spoken on ethics issues as a group.

Durbin said in a statement that he was surprised because the response from the court "suggests current law is adequate and ignores the obvious."

"The actions of one Justice, including trips on yachts and private jets, were not reported to the public," Durbin said. "That same Justice failed to disclose the sale of properties he partly owned to a party with interests before the Supreme Court."

Durbin said he would proceed with the hearing, which will "review common sense proposals" to hold Supreme Court justices more accountable to ethics guidelines.

Gabe Roth, executive director of the court transparency group Fix the Court, said the justices' statements rehashed inadequate ethical standards.

"Make no mistake: Roberts' statement is nowhere near an appropriate response to the ethical failures of the current Court," Roth said in a statement.

ProPublica also revealed that Crow gifted Thomas and his wife Ginni with hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of annual vacations and trips over several decades — including international cruises on his mega-yacht, private jet flights and stays at Crow's invitation-only resort in the Adirondacks. But the 2014 real estate deal is the first public evidence of a direct financial transaction between the pair.

Ethics experts have offered conflicting views about whether Thomas was required to disclose the luxury trips funded by Crow. Thomas said in a statement that he was advised by colleagues that "this sort of personal hospitality from close personal friends, who did not have business before the Court, was not reportable."

Thomas did not name the other justices or those in the judiciary with whom he had consulted.

Last month, the federal judiciary bolstered disclosure requirements for all judges, including the high court justices, although overnight stays at personal vacation homes owned by friends remain exempt from disclosure.

The ethics statement sent to Durbin notes that the Judicial Conference's Committee on Financial Disclosure had "provided clarification on the scope of the 'personal hospitality' exemption to the disclosure rules."

The original letter from Durbin had asked Roberts or another justice to appear before the committee on May 2. He told Roberts that the scope of his testimony would be limited to the ethics rules governing justices of the Supreme Court and potential changes to those rules.

Roberts' refusal to testify is the latest hitch for Democrats on the Judiciary panel. With Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein of California absent indefinitely, the committee has a tied number of Democrats and Republicans and can't move certain judges to the floor - or presumably subpoena Roberts, if Democrats wanted to.

In declining to testify, Roberts ignored Durbin's invitation to have another justice appear instead. The last time justices met with the Senate Judiciary Committee was in October 2011, when Justices Antonin Scalia and Stephen Breyer testified.

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Associated Press writer Kevin Freking contributed to this report.

## Trump might use trial docs to scorch witnesses, DA says

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — New York prosecutors have asked a judge to bar Donald Trump from using evidence from his criminal case to attack witnesses, citing what they say is the former president's history of making "harassing, embarrassing, and threatening statements" about people he's tangled with in legal disputes.

The Manhattan district attorney's office filed court papers Monday asking Judge Juan Manuel Merchan for a protective order that would put strict guardrails around Trump's access to and use of evidence turned over by prosecutors prior to trial. That kind of evidence sharing, called discovery, is routine in criminal cases, and is intended to help ensure a fair trial.

Prosecutors want to block Trump from posting evidence to social media or providing it to third parties. They also want to restrict how he views certain sensitive material, asking that he do so only in the presence of his lawyers — and that he not be able to copy, photograph or transcribe those records.

Trump "has a longstanding and perhaps singular history of attacking witnesses, investigators, prosecutors, trial jurors, grand jurors, judges, and others involved in legal proceedings against him," Assistant District Attorney Catherine McCaw wrote.

That behavior, she said, has put "those individuals and their families at considerable safety risk."

Merchan did not immediately rule on the prosecution's request. McCaw, in her filing, asked him to schedule a hearing on the matter next week.

Email messages seeking comment were left with Trump's lawyers.

Prosecutors first raised concerns about Trump potentially weaponizing the discovery process at his April 4 arraignment on charges that he falsified records at his company as part of a broader 2016 scheme to make secret hush-money payments to bury allegations of extramarital sexual encounters. Trump has denied wrongdoing — or having extramarital affairs — and pleaded not guilty.

With Trump sitting at the defense table just feet away from her, McCaw told Merchan that a protective order was needed to "ensure the sanctity of the proceedings as well as the sanctity of the discovery materials."

At the time, McCaw said prosecutors and Trump's lawyers were close to a joint agreement with many of the restrictions prosecutors are now asking Merchan to impose. Negotiations later broke down, leading prosecutors to seek the judge's intervention.

## Ed Sheeran testifies in 'Let's Get It On' copyright suit

By DEEPTI HAJELA Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Ed Sheeran took the witness stand in a New York courtroom Tuesday to deny allegations that his hit song "Thinking Out Loud" ripped off Marvin Gaye's soul classic "Let's Get It On."

Sheeran, 32, was called to testify in the civil trial by the heirs of Ed Townsend, Gaye's co-writer on the 1973 soul classic. The family has accused the English star of violating their copyright, claiming his 2014 hit bore "striking similarities" and "overt common elements" to the famed Gaye track.

Sheeran, in a dark suit and tie, was adamant that he had come up with the song himself. His testimony was at times contentious, as he sparred during cross-examination with the plaintiff's attorney, Keisha Rice.

In response to video footage played in the courtroom that showed the musician segueing on stage between the two songs, Sheeran said it was "quite simple to weave in and out of songs" that are in the same key.

"I'd be an idiot to stand on a stage in front of 20,000 people and do that," Sheeran said about the accusation that he copied songs.

Earlier in the day, a lawyer for Townsend's heirs, Ben Crump, had told jurors that the merging of the two songs was tantamount to "a confession."

"We have a smoking gun," he said of the concert footage showing Sheeran flipping between the two songs.

Crump said the case was about "giving credit where credit is due."

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 60 of 90

Sheeran looked on as his lawyer, Ilene Farkas, insisted that Sheeran and a co-writer, Amy Wadge, wrote their song independently and did not steal from Townsend and Gaye.

She said they "created this heartfelt song without copying 'Let's Get It On.'"

The chord progression and basic building blocks in Sheeran's song are frequently used, and didn't appear first in "Let's Get It On," his lawyer said.

"Let's Get It On" has been heard in countless films and commercials and garnered hundreds of millions of streams, spins and radio plays since it came out in 1973. "Thinking Out Loud" won a Grammy for song of the year in 2016.

The lawsuit was filed in 2017. The trial is expected to last up to two weeks.

Townsend, who also wrote the 1958 R&B doo-wop hit "For Your Love," was a singer, songwriter and lawyer. He died in 2003.

Kathryn Townsend Griffin, his daughter, is the plaintiff leading the lawsuit.

"I think Mr. Sheeran is a great artist with a great future," she said in her testimony, adding that she didn't want it to get to this point of the case. "But I have to protect my father's legacy."

## Colorado becomes 1st to pass 'right to repair' for farmers

By JESSE BEDAYN Associated Press/Report for America

DENVER (AP) — Sitting in front of a hulking red tractor, Democratic Gov. Jared Polis signed a bill Tuesday making Colorado the first state to ensure farmers can fix their own tractors and combines with a "right to repair" law — which compels manufacturers to provide the necessary manuals, tools, parts and software.

Colorado, home to high desert ranches and sweeping farms on the low-and-level plains, took the lead on the issue following a nationwide outcry from farmers that manufacturers blocked them from making fixes and forced them to wait precious days for an official servicer to arrive — delays that imperiled profits.

While their increasingly high-tech tractors or combines sit impotent, a hailstorm could decimate a crop or a farmer could miss the ideal planting window, farmers said.

"Farmers have had to wait three or four weeks to get repairs done to equipment when they can do repairs themselves. That's just unfathomable," said Bill Midcap, whose son is a fifth-generation rancher on Colorado's eastern plains.

Lawmakers in at least 10 other states have introduced similar legislation, including in Florida, Maryland, Missouri, New Jersey, Texas and Vermont.

Colorado has taken the lead, but Democratic Rep. Brianna Titone, the bill's sponsor, and Dan Waldvogle, director of the Rocky Mountain Farmers Union, said it's a potential launch pad for other states and even at the federal level where discussions about similar legislation are already underway.

The legislation advanced through long committee hearings, having been propelled forward mostly by Democrats even though a Republican lawmaker co-sponsored the bill. The proposal left some GOP lawmakers stuck between their farming constituents pleading for the ability to repair their equipment and the manufacturers who vehemently opposed it.

Manufacturers and dealerships raised concerns that providing tools and information to farmers would allow equipment owners to illegally crank up the horsepower and bypass emissions controls — putting operator safety and the environment at risk.

Opponents also worried that compelling companies to share more detailed information necessary for repairs could expose proprietary information.

"Forcing a business to disclose trade secrets, software and jeopardize consumer safety is poor public policy," said Republican state Rep. Matt Soper, adding that it will stifle tech innovation.

Manufacturer John Deere did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

At the signing ceremony Tuesday afternoon, under a light drizzle of rain, Polis said: "This bill will save farmers and ranchers time and money and support the free market in repair" before exclaiming, "first in the nation!"

Behind the governor and arrayed farmers and lawmakers sat a red Steiger 370 tractor owned by a farmer

named Danny Wood. Wood's tractor has flown an American flag reading "Farmers First," and it been one of two of his machines to break down, requiring long waits before servicers arrived to enter a few lines of computer code or make a fix Wood could have made himself.

Polis and Titone climbed inside the tractor for a photo as the ceremony ended.

The bill's proponents acknowledged that the legislation could make it easier for operators to modify horsepower and emissions controls. But they argued that farmers are already able to tinker with their machines, and doing so would remain illegal.

The law falls into the broader "right to repair" campaign, which has picked up steam across the country and applies to a range of products, from iPhones to hospital ventilators. Independent mechanics and car owners have access to tools and parts because of a 2014 memorandum of understanding signed by the automotive industry.

Two years ago, President Joe Biden directed the Federal Trade Commission to beef up its right-to-repair enforcement.

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Bedayn is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

## Neighborhood fights Haiti gangs after vigilante killings

By EVENS SANON Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — Armed with machetes, bottles, and rocks, residents in the hilly suburbs of Haiti's capital fought back against encroaching gangs Tuesday, a day after a crowd burned 13 suspected gangsters to death in a gruesome outburst of vigilante violence.

Tired of relying on an understaffed police department, scores of men in the Canape Vert neighborhood of Port-au-Prince spent the night on roofs and patrolled entrances of their community blocked with big trucks spray-painted with the words, "Down with gangs."

"We are planning to fight and keep our neighborhood clean of these savages," Jeff Ezequiel, a 37-year-old mechanic, told The Associated Press. "The population is tired and frustrated."

The makeshift brigade is the latest example of growing attempts by Haitians to fight gangs on their own. Earlier this year, people elsewhere in Port-au-Prince and in the central Artibonite region, which has been hit by heavy gang violence, have lynched several suspected gang members.

Until now, Canape Vert and nearby Turgeau — the site of a major hotel chain and a local university — had largely avoided the gang-fueled violence that has been consuming the capital and surrounding areas since the July 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse. The United Nations estimates that gangs now control up to 80% of Port-au-Prince.

"Gang expansion into areas previously considered safe...has been alarming," according to a U.N. Security Council report released on Tuesday.

Reported killings from January to March 31 have risen by more than 20% compared with the last quarter of 2022, and 637 kidnappings have been reported so far this year, an increase of 63% compared with the last three months of 2022, the report stated.

Meanwhile, Haiti's National Police has 1.2 officers per 1,000 inhabitants in this country of more than 11 million people.

"The police remain under resourced and face overwhelming odds in their struggle to keep gangs from tightening their grip on the country," the U.N. report said.

On Monday, U.N. Secretary General António Guterres urged the immediate deployment of an international armed force to Haiti — a request Haiti's prime minister first made in October last year — and warned in a report that violence in Port-au-Prince "has reached levels comparable to countries in armed conflict."

More than 130,000 Haitians have fled their neighborhoods as gangs break into homes, kill and rape residents in a fight to control more territory, and nearly 40% of them are now living in makeshift shelters

lacking basic services, according to the U.N.

But on Tuesday, many in Canape Vert returned to their homes after temporarily fleeing the area on Monday when the 13 suspected gang members were killed.

"There's nowhere to run," said Samuel, 25, who declined to give his last name out of fear of being killed. "We have to stand and fight back. If there has to be a war, I will be part of it, because authorities are not taking responsibility and are letting everyone die under their eyes."

He was walking back to his home Tuesday along with other residents, including Sandra Jenty, 26, who took shelter under her bed with her 4-year-old son on Monday night, losing control of her bladder as gunshots rang out in her neighborhood before she fled around dawn.

"It felt like they were shooting inside of my house," she said. "I'm not hurt by the grace of God."

She cradled her son as they walked back to their house, with Jenty confident that the makeshift neighborhood brigade would protect them. Meanwhile, authorities dragged one body of a suspected gang member along the pavement and into a van for removal. It was one of 13 suspected gang members who had been killed with rocks and sticks and burned to death with gasoline-soaked tires.

At one checkpoint in Turgeau, more than a dozen masked men with machetes stood guard. They declined to speak to the AP and warned that no images of them be taken.

It's a movement that resident Reynald Jean Pierre, 30, said he supports, adding that he was "willing to die" to protect his neighborhood from gangs.

"People are being kidnapped, people are being raped, people are being extorted, but we are not going to let it happen under our watch," he said. "We don't have another home to go to."

The U.N. said Haitian police estimate that there are seven major gang coalitions in the country and some 200 affiliated groups.

Residents believe that the 13 suspected gang members who were killed by the crowd Monday were members of the Kraze Barye gang, which translates to "Breaking Barriers."

Ezequiel dismissed concerns about possible retribution by gangs for Monday's killings, adding that he was saddened by the slayings of the young men he said could have been doing something productive for society.

"We won this fight, but the war is not over," he said. "We are going to continue searching for gangs, and if they are still hiding, we are going to get them and make sure they don't leave alive."

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Associated Press reporter Dánica Coto in San Juan, Puerto Rico contributed.

## Trial opens in E. Jean Carroll's rape lawsuit against Trump

By JENNIFER PELTZ and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A nearly 30-year-old rape claim against Donald Trump went to trial Tuesday as jurors in the federal civil case heard a former advice columnist's allegation of being attacked in a luxury department store dressing room. The former president says nothing happened between them.

E. Jean Carroll will testify that what unfolded in a few minutes in a fitting room in 1996 "would change her life forever," one of her lawyers, Shawn Crowley, said in an opening statement.

"Filled with fear and shame, she kept silent for decades. Eventually, though, silence became impossible," Crowley said. And when Carroll broke that silence in a 2019 memoir, the then-president "used the most powerful platform on Earth to lie about what he had done, attack Ms. Carroll's integrity and insult her appearance."

Trump — who wasn't in court but hasn't ruled out testifying — has called Carroll a "nut job" who fabricated the rape claim to sell her book. Defense attorney Joe Tacopina told jurors Tuesday that her story was wildly implausible and short of evidence.

He accused her of pursuing the case for money, status and political reasons, urging the jurors from heavily Democratic New York to put aside any animus they themselves might hold toward the Republican ex-president and ex-New Yorker.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 63 of 90

surround their tight-knit, rural Central California community and give it its name, the Island District.

"The water is coming this way," said Caetano, who started a Facebook group to help organize his neighbors. "I am preparing for the worst and praying for the best and that's all we can do."

After more than a dozen atmospheric rivers dumped epic rain and snowfall on California, a reservoir that stores water upstream is expected to receive three times its capacity in the coming months. Caetano and his neighbors in the tree-lined Island District, home to a school, pistachio orchards and horse ranches about halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco, could soon be marooned by rising rivers or flooded out.

Water managers are concerned that the spring snowmelt in the Sierra Nevada will be so massive that the north fork of the Kings River won't be able to contain it and carry it toward the Pacific Ocean. Much of the water also is being channeled into the river's south fork, which winds through the area near the small city of Lemoore to fill a vast basin.

More than a century ago, that basin was an enormous body of freshwater known as Tulare Lake, the largest west of the Mississippi River. It would grow in winter as snowmelt streamed down from the mountains. But over time, settlers dammed and diverted waterways to irrigate crops, and the lake went dry. Now, Tulare Lake reappears only during the rainiest years, like this one, covering what is now a vast swath of farmland with water.

Today, paved roads vanish beneath the lake's lapping waves and utility poles and trees jut out above the water, vestiges of land-living put on hold. Fields that typically grow wheat, tomatoes, and other crops lie underneath.

David Merritt, general manager for the Kings River Conservation District, said the Pine Flat Reservoir about 50 miles (80 kilometers) upstream can hold up to 1 million acre feet of water, but is expected to receive more than 3 million acre feet this spring from the melting snow. Officials have been forced to increase the flow of water out of the reservoir to make space for more, Merritt said.

"Once we're at capacity, now you're putting a lot of stress on those conveyance channels," Merritt said. "It's a very fast moving stream and it's very deep right now."

Island District residents have revived a decades-old network of neighbors for the first time since 1983 to assist each other in the event of a crisis. The last time the Island Property Protection Association activated, there was no such thing as text messages or even emails to quickly spread the word, said Tony Oliveira, a former county supervisor and the network's administrator.

In a week, more than 200 people volunteered to help neighbors through the network, and the group's website received more than 4,000 hits.

"It's going to be four months of holding our breath," Oliveira said.

The winter rains were welcomed by California's parched cities and desperate growers, who have been grappling with intense drought for the past several years. The state has long tended toward wet and dry periods, but scientists at University of California, San Diego's Scripps Institution of Oceanography have said they expect climate change will lead to drier dry years and wetter wet years.

What will determine how communities fare now is how quickly the weather heats up. If temperatures remain cool, snow will melt slowly, with water gradually flowing from the mountains. But a hot spell could send massive amounts of water churning through rivers that could potentially overflow, officials said. A beaver or a squirrel that tears a hole in a levee could also bring trouble.

Rising temperatures this week have many residents on edge. Park officials announced plans to temporarily close part of Yosemite National Park starting Friday due to the threat of flooding. Reservations for campgrounds and lodging in eastern Yosemite Valley will automatically be canceled and refunded.

Michael Anderson, California's state climatologist, said water inflows into some reservoirs are expected to double though he doesn't expect the warming trend to cause immediate flooding in residential areas.

But in the coming weeks and months that could change. Gov. Gavin Newsom visited the reemerged lake Tuesday and said the worst is likely yet to come as more water reaches the basin.

"Where we're standing likely will be underwater in a matter of weeks, if not months," he said. "That's very sobering."

It isn't the first time Kings County, home to 150,000 people in the fertile San Joaquin Valley, has faced these challenges.

Many longtime residents recall when Tulare Lake reappeared 40 years ago. Officials believe crops will remain under water much longer this time due to the massive snowpack, said Dusty Ference, executive director of the Kings County Farm Bureau. To date, more than 60,000 acres of farmland (242 square kilometers) have flooded, he said.

It also returned on a smaller scale in 1997, said Nicholas Pinter, associate director of the University of California, Davis Center for Watershed Sciences. He said the lake has always fluctuated in size due to California's highly-variable water cycle, and farmers have long known there would be periods like this.

"It has been an engineering problem all along," he said. "This is a bathtub with no drain."

Near the lake, the city of Corcoran, which is home to 22,000 people including 8,000 state prisoners, began emergency construction to raise a levee that protects the community. The water behind the levee is already at 178 feet (54 meters), just 10 feet (3 meters) below the top. Officials want to raise the levee another 3.5 feet (1 meter), city officials said.

"If that water rises above that amount, we will have water coming into our city and we will be in a critical situation," said Greg Gatzka, Corcoran's city manager.

In the Island District, residents don't have a levee to protect them. They snap photos of wooden sticks placed near waterways to gauge water levels and banks and post them online to keep others informed. They're helping place sandbags on elderly neighbors' property and paying close attention to reports from water and county officials, and from each other.

Oliveira, whose family has lived in the area for generations, said he remembers moving cattle and horses when the rains came in 1983, and will do the same this time, if necessary.

"We're farmers. We have bulldozers and backhoes, we have trailers. We can bring things to bear sometimes faster than the public agencies can," Oliveira said. "The people who live in the Island are just kind of those neighbors taking care of neighbors."

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Taxin reported from Orange County, California.

Associated Press climate and environmental coverage receives support from several private foundations. See more about AP's climate initiative here. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

## Jury to deliberate in major Jan. 6 case against Proud Boys

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The seditious conspiracy case against former Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrio and four lieutenants went to the jury on Tuesday after dozens of witnesses over more than three months in one of the most serious cases to emerge from the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.

The jury will begin deliberating Wednesday to decide whether the onetime Proud Boys national chairman and four co-defendants are guilty of seditious conspiracy for what prosecutors allege was a desperate plot to keep President Donald Trump in the White House after the Republican lost the 2020 election.

Prosecutors in Washington have shown jurors hundreds of messages exchanged by Proud Boys in the days leading up to Jan. 6 that show the far-right extremist group peddling Trump's false claims of a stolen election and trading fears over what would happen when President Joe Biden took office.

Defense attorneys say there was no conspiracy and no plan to attack the Capitol. They've sought to portray the Proud Boys as an unorganized drinking club whose members' participation in the riot was a spontaneous act fueled by Trump's election rage.

A lawyer for Tarrio sought to push the blame onto Trump in his closing argument, telling jurors on Tuesday that the Justice Department is making Tarrio a scapegoat for the former president.

Defense lawyer Nayib Hassan noted Tarrio wasn't in Washington on Jan. 6, 2021, having been banned from the capital after being arrested on allegations that he defaced a Black Lives Matter banner. Trump, Hassan argued, was the one to blame for extorting a crowd outside the White House to "fight like hell."



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 65 of 90

"It was Donald Trump's words. It was his motivation. It was his anger that caused what occurred on January 6th in your beautiful and amazing city," Hassan told jurors. "It was not Enrique Tarrío. They want to use Enrique Tarrío as a scapegoat for Donald J. Trump and those in power."

Tarrío, a Miami resident, was tried alongside four other Proud Boys: Ethan Nordean, Joseph Biggs, Zachary Rehl and Dominic Pezzola. They could face up to 20 years in prison if convicted of seditious conspiracy, a Civil War-era charge that can be difficult to prove.

Tarrío is one of the top targets of the Justice Department's investigation of the riot, which temporarily halted the certification of Biden's election win.

Trump has denied inciting any violence on Jan. 6 and has argued that he was permitted by the First Amendment to challenge his loss to Biden. The former president is facing several civil lawsuits over the riot and a special counsel named by Attorney General Merrick Garland is also overseeing investigations into efforts by Trump and his allies to overturn the results of the election.

A prosecutor told jurors on Monday during the first day of closing arguments that the Proud Boys were ready for "all-out war" and viewed themselves as foot soldiers fighting for Trump as the Republican spread lies that Democrats stole the election from him.

"These defendants saw themselves as Donald Trump's army, fighting to keep their preferred leader in power no matter what the law or the courts had to say about it," said the prosecutor, Conor Mulroe.

Nordean, of Auburn, Washington, was a Proud Boys chapter president. Biggs, of Ormond Beach, Florida, was a self-described Proud Boys organizer. Rehl was president of a Proud Boys chapter in Philadelphia. Pezzola was a Proud Boys member from Rochester, New York.

Tarrío is accused of orchestrating an attack from afar even though he wasn't in Washington that day. Police arrested him two days before the riot on charges that he burned a church's Black Lives Matter banner during an earlier march in the city. A judge ordered Tarrío to leave Washington after his arrest.

Defense attorneys have argued that there is no evidence of a conspiracy or a plan for the Proud Boys to attack the Capitol. Tarrío "had no plan, no objective and no understanding of an objective," his attorney said.

Pezzola testified that he never spoke to any of his co-defendants before they sat in the same courtroom after their arrests. Defense attorney Steven Metcalf said Pezzola never knew of any plan for Jan. 6 or joined in any conspiracy with the Proud Boys leaders.

"It's not possible. It's fairy dust. It doesn't exist," Metcalf said.

Mulroe, the prosecutor, told jurors that a conspiracy can be an unspoken and implicit "mutual understanding, reached with a wink and a nod."

The foundation of the government's case, which started with jury selection in December, is a trove of messages that Proud Boys leaders and members privately exchanged in encrypted chats — and publicly posted on social media — before, during and after the deadly Jan. 6 attack.

Another prosecutor, Nadia Moore, said the Proud Boys did more than just talk about their goal of keeping Trump in office. They marched to the Capitol and helped stop the certification of the Electoral College vote, she told jurors.

"These men aren't here because of what they said. They're here because of what they did," Moore said Tuesday.

Norm Pattis, one of Biggs' attorneys, described the Capitol riot as an "aberration" and told jurors that their verdict "means so much more than January 6th itself" because it will "speak to the future."

"Show the world with this verdict that the rule of law is alive and well in the United States," Pattis said.

The Justice Department has already secured seditious conspiracy convictions against the founder and members of another far-right extremist group, the Oath Keepers. But this is the first major trial involving leaders of the far-right Proud Boys, a neo-fascist group of self-described "Western chauvinists" that remains a force in mainstream Republican circles.

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This version corrects that jury selection in the trial began in December, not January.

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Follow the AP's coverage of the U.S. Capitol insurrection at <https://apnews.com/hub/capitol-siege>.

## With Olympic goals, pro dreams, Chicago boxer maps gold path

By ANDREW SELIGMAN AP Sports Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — As a promising young boxer, Olympic hopeful Theon Davis knows how to bob and weave. He has also had to learn how to juggle.

The 21-year-old Davis might be working his cashier shift at a Circle K any given night. Some mornings, he can give 2-year-old daughter Harmony a kiss and get one in return as he drops her off at daycare.

Just about every day, he's dripping pools of sweat. He spends hours sparring and hitting the bags and lifting weights and running laps around a basketball court at a recreation center in Garfield Park, the neighborhood on Chicago's West Side where he grew up.

It's a grueling routine. He has no doubts about it.

"I was born to do this," he says.

Davis, ranked No. 3 at 176 pounds by USA Boxing, was one of 470 fighters with dreams big and small who added their names to a piece of history this spring. They entered the 100th edition of the Chicago Golden Gloves tournament, a storied event that counts Joe Louis, Sonny Liston and Muhammad Ali -- when he was Cassius Clay -- as past champions.

This year's setting for the largest and longest-running non-national boxing tournament in the United States was Cicero Stadium, a rec center with quite the history. Al Capone used to hold court in a banquet room that looks straight out of Bavaria with original cypress beams and sconces. The building has tunnels, now sealed, from the Prohibition era.

The fights were up one flight in the creaky gym, where the vibe was decidedly old school. Boxers crowded into a corner to find out their opponent on a handwritten schedule.

For Davis, the march to the championship fight was expected. When the opening bell rang, he hustled to the middle of the ring, eager steps on a challenging path he hopes takes him to boxing's biggest stages.

### GOLDEN HOPES

Davis and other fighters can chase big money and fame in boxing without the Golden Gloves. But those two words still carry prestige.

Recent winners in Chicago include former WBC lightweight champion David Diaz and Michael Bennett, who both grew up in the city and competed in the Olympics. A women's division was added in 1994.

Chicago Tribune sports editor Arch Ward, credited with creating baseball's All-Star game 90 years ago, started the boxing tourney in 1923 with 424 fighters from around the city. The goal was to sell newspapers. It became wildly popular and dozens of regions still run Golden Gloves tournaments, with nationals every year including next month's event in suburban Philadelphia.

Like boxing in general, the Chicago event has faded a bit from the headlines. It has gone from Soldier Field and Chicago Stadium to smaller venues in and around the city.

For 19-year-old Julian Lugo of Rockford, Illinois, it's still important. He has Olympic hopes of his own, and he came away from this tournament with the title at 139 pounds.

"It's important to me because I want to get my name out there," says Lugo, who started boxing when he was 9. "I want (the boxing community to know) who I am."

Davis has been training for four years under George Hernandez at the Garfield Park Fieldhouse, a near-century-old facility with a gold-leafed dome and ornate two-story rotunda. It is a bit rough around the edges these days, like the neighborhood it serves.

The boxing gym — down a hallway in a room that was once a police department — is hardly a fancy operation. Some floor tiles are chipped. The paint is, too, in spots.

It's not unusual for Hernandez, a 70-year-old Vietnam veteran and the sort of good-humored and no-nonsense character that would fit in a "Rocky" movie, to pay out of pocket for equipment that isn't donated so his boxers can be on more level footing with their competition.

He bought a 24-by-24-foot ring to replace the smaller one supplied by the Chicago Park District. And

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 67 of 90

through a connection with Floyd Mayweather Jr.'s company, he got the red canvas with "Mayweather Promotions" in the center donated.

Hernandez has been involved in the sport as an amateur fighter and trainer since the 1960s. He says thousands of boxers — male and female — have passed through the program at Garfield Park in the 36 years he's been running it. That includes Olympians and pros like Bennett, and Davis could soon join that list.

Hernandez screams "Push! Push!" as Davis and other fighters run laps in the bowels of the fieldhouse for 45 minutes in late March.

"If you're not in shape, you're either gonna get in shape or die trying," Hernandez says.

A garbage pail is placed in one corner in case, well, you know. It gets plenty of use. To cool down, they play basketball. The next few hours are spent upstairs in the boxing gym, hitting the bags and lifting weights. Other days, they spar.

"This gym, it kept me away from everything bad that happens in Chicago," Davis says.

## SUCSESSES, GRIM REMINDERS

The walls are lined with pictures and banners and posters and newspaper clippings documenting the successes of boxers who have come through the program. There are sobering reminders, too.

The gloves, Chicago flag trunks and vest above the center of the ring belonged to Ed Brown, a promising welterweight from the neighborhood who died at age 25 in December 2016 after being shot while sitting in a parked car with his sister following a late workout. Hernandez, who considered Brown the son he never had, hung the gear following his funeral.

At least 48 of the fighters to pass through the program have wound up dead. Hernandez stopped counting a few years ago. He used to display photos and funeral programs and newspaper obits on a wall but eventually ran out of room, so he keeps them in a drawer.

"This is the other side that people don't talk about," Hernandez says. "We're a boxing gym, blah, blah, blah. No. But for everyone that we don't save, look at all the ones that (we do)."

Davis lives with his mother, Donna Weatherly, in the Belmont Cragin neighborhood, about five miles from the gym. He uses his bike and public transportation to get to the fieldhouse and his job, which is five miles in a different direction from home. Weatherly says Harmony, who turns 3 next month, stays with them three to five nights a week. It's not easy, but they manage.

Davis grew up in a three-bedroom apartment in Garfield Park with his mother, twin sister and older half-brother and half-sister. The fieldhouse was a big part of his childhood, from summer camp to sports leagues.

"When I went to work, I just always had him signed up for some type of activity," says Weatherly, a Chicago Transit Authority bus driver.

Davis started training for boxing to get in shape to play college football, but he didn't have the grades for that. When he found out he was going to be a father, he decided to stay home. Family, work and boxing keep him busy.

"I'm not the only one with a child to look out for, care for," Davis says. "I'm not the only one that wants better for themselves. That's the main thing that's on my mind. I'm sure it's on their minds, too. It's a conversation we always have — this is what we want for ourselves and what we want out of this game of boxing. Boxing is not forever. All good things are gonna come to an end. We're trying to stay on course, keep our mind on the positives."

The title bout for Davis pitted him against Eduardo Camacho, representing Chicago's Unanimous Boxing Gym. As the third round came to a close, Davis raised one arm as he danced away from his opponent and then raised the other, confident victory was his. Confirmation came moments later, with a split decision giving him the championship.

Davis was all smiles afterward. Hernandez seemed relieved. Both said the fight was closer than it needed to be.

Hernandez needled his protégé for showboating, saying, "You need to look good, you had to have flowers on you."

"Nah," Davis replied. "It wasn't about looking good. I was trying to have some fun."

## Past Fox firings carry lessons for network after Carlson

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Before ousting Tucker Carlson, Fox News had twice fired wildly popular hosts — and both times the network recovered better than the stars it cut loose.

Fox's dismissals of Glenn Beck in 2011 and Bill O'Reilly in 2017 offer lessons in what the post-Carlson fallout might be. Carlson was let go on Monday, less than a week after Fox agreed to pay Dominion Voting Systems \$787 million for airing bogus claims of voter fraud following the 2020 election.

Fox's two most popular programs last year — Carlson's being one of them — were the replacements for Beck and O'Reilly.

"It seems like the parts are interchangeable," said SiriusXM and CNN personality Michael Smerconish. "They've built a machine over there that seems to function even when the pistons are replaced."

Still, Carlson's ability to connect with supporters of former President Donald Trump could benefit him wherever he lands.

Beck was a sensation at Fox during the first term of former President Barack Obama. He spun intricate conspiracy theories before it was fashionable and sparked an advertising boycott after saying Obama had a "deep-seated hatred for white people." Viewers flocked to his marginal time slot, 5 p.m. Eastern, in numbers that rivaled prime time.

There were signs that Beck was fading when then-Fox News chief Roger Ailes cut him loose in April 2011. Ailes famously told The Associated Press at the time: "Half of the headlines say he's been canceled. The other half say he quit. We're pretty happy with both of them."

Beck was hailed as an elder statesman when Carlson brought him on as a guest last month on the night Trump was indicted, where he predicted the U.S. would be at war with Russia, China and Iraq by 2025.

Ailes replaced Beck with a panel show, "The Five," with four conservative pundits and one liberal kicking around the stories of the day. In 2022, the show averaged 3.4 million nightly viewers — more than Beck at his peak — and was the top-rated cable news show of the year, the Nielsen company said.

O'Reilly's "no spin zone" was essentially the face of Fox News for several years before he was fired in April 2017 following an investigation into harassment allegations.

He was replaced by Carlson, a cable news journeyman whose angry, grievance-based program made him the most influential voice in cable news. His ideas were echoed by many Republican politicians and there was talk of him being a future candidate, too.

O'Reilly now hosts a podcast and Beck has the sixth-most popular radio talk show in the country, but neither has the influence they had when they were on Fox, said Michael Harrison, publisher of Talkers magazine.

At Fox, the platform is king, Harrison said, not the on-air personalities.

While Fox has shed big-name hosts with little damage in the past, the ouster of Carlson comes at a precarious moment for the network, said Nicole Hemmer, a Vanderbilt University professor and author of "Partisans: The Conservative Revolutionaries Who Remade American Politics in the 1990s."

Carlson was the person there who best excelled at exciting the base of the Republican Party, she said. Smerconish noticed the number of callers to his own talk show who said they would miss Carlson's ability to challenge groupthink.

"If Carlson now begins attacking Fox as 'corporate media' that despises its Trump-supporting viewers, he could cause the network to begin bleeding viewers" as it briefly did after the 2020 election, Hemmer said. Carlson hasn't talked about his firing, and didn't return a query from the AP on Tuesday.

Carlson heavily embraced some conspiracy theories, particularly surrounding the Jan. 6, 2021 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. His opposition to U.S. involvement in the Ukraine War received such notice that Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov brought up Carlson's firing at the United Nations on Tuesday.

"It's curious news," Lavrov said. "What is this related to? One can only guess, but clearly, the wealth of views in the American information space has suffered as a result."

The day he was fired, Carlson was nearly invisible on the Fox News prime-time lineup that he used to dominate.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 69 of 90

"We're not talking about Tucker," former colleague Sean Hannity said in one of the two very brief mentions of Carlson's name on Fox News on Monday night. In contrast, his ouster was the lead story on ABC, CBS and NBC evening newscasts.

Fox hasn't discussed its reasons for cutting ties with Carlson. But as the Dominion case illustrated, the spread of conspiracy theories has made Fox legally vulnerable. A new host who reflects the Fox audience's conservative philosophy but is less controversial could also be more popular with advertisers and thus more lucrative.

"People are creatures of habit," conservative talk show host Erick Erickson said. "Fox will offer another host who speaks into the audience's concerns. There'll be a dip, just like after O'Reilly, but I expect the host will be competent enough to earn the audience's trust quickly."

Carlson was named to replace O'Reilly on the day O'Reilly was fired. It may take some time for Carlson's replacement to be known: Fox took a year, using guest hosts, before naming Jesse Watters as its 7 p.m. host last year. Watters was an immediate hit, and Fox learned that the audience likes to be part of the selection process.

It makes Watters an obvious candidate to move from 7 to 8 p.m., as Carlson did in replacing O'Reilly.

In addition to Beck and O'Reilly, other people who have left Fox in recent years — Megyn Kelly, Shepard Smith, Chris Wallace — haven't reached the same heights elsewhere in terms of audience interest.

Will Carlson, who turns 54 next month, have another act in media?

"Every one of the journalists who left re-emerged in diminished positions," Smerconish said. "I expect that will be the same with him. I think he will have a better shot than the others, but I don't think he will be at the level he was on Friday night."

## First Republic Bank stock plunges as depositors flee

By KEN SWEET AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — First Republic Bank's stock plunged Tuesday after it said depositors withdrew more than \$100 billion during last month's crisis, with fears swirling that it could be the third bank to fail after the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank.

The San Francisco bank said late Monday that it was only able to stanch the bleeding after a group of large banks stepped in to save it by depositing \$30 billion in uninsured deposits. But investors remained deeply skeptical on what path forward exists for First Republic either as an independent firm or as an acquisition target. The bank likely will have lower profits for years, and if the bank is bought, any purchase would come with an immediate loss to any buyer.

The bank says it plans to sell off unprofitable assets, including the low interest mortgages that it provided to wealthy clients. It also announced plans to lay off up to a quarter of its workforce, which totaled about 7,200 employees at the end of 2022.

"With still a large level of uncertainty in outcomes and expected losses beyond the next year, we recommend investors sell shares as the outlook appears largely unclear," Citi analyst Arren Cyganovich said in a note to clients.

First Republic has struggled since the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank in early March, as investors and depositors have grown increasingly worried that the bank may not survive as an independent entity for much longer. The bank's stock closed down 49% at \$8.10, a fraction of the price it was a year ago when it traded for roughly \$170 a share.

Before the failure of Silicon Valley Bank, First Republic had a banking franchise that was the envy of most of the industry. Its clients, mostly the rich and powerful, rarely defaulted on their loans. The bank made much of its money making low-cost loans to the rich, which reportedly included Meta Platforms CEO Mark Zuckerberg.

But its franchise became a liability when bank customers and analysts noted that the vast majority of First Republic's deposits, like those in Silicon Valley and Signature Bank, were uninsured — that is, above the \$250,000 limit set by the FDIC. If First Republic were to fail, its depositors would be at risk of not

getting all their money back.

First Republic reported first-quarter results Monday that showed it had \$173.5 billion in deposits before Silicon Valley Bank failed on March 9. On April 21, it had deposits of \$102.7 billion, which included the \$30 billion the big banks deposited. It said since late March, its deposits have been relatively stable.

The bank said its profits fell 33% in the three-month period that ended March 31 from a year earlier, and revenues were down 13%.

## 'Mojave Max' tortoise emerges in Vegas; latest since 2000

LAS VEGAS (AP) — A desert tortoise that is the focus of schoolchild predictions and local lore about the start of spring has emerged from its winter burrow at a nature preserve in Las Vegas, officials said Tuesday.

Mojave Max's appearance above ground with a burrow-mate at 3:40 p.m. Monday at the Springs Preserve marked the latest date since an annual watch contest began in 2000 for the critter compared locally with Punxsutawney Phil in Pennsylvania. Phil's handlers said Feb. 2 that their groundhog predicted their spring wouldn't arrive until April.

In Las Vegas, where the threatened species' reptilian winter rest is called brumation, the earliest a Mojave Max has emerged since 2000 was a little before noon on Feb. 14, 2005. The latest had been April 17, 2012.

Three male tortoises have borne the moniker Mojave Max. Today's Max is marked with a radio transmitting device attached to his shell. The tortoise seen with Mojave Max on Monday does not have a name.

Biologists at the Springs Preserve think this year's exceptionally cold winter that brought frequent rain and abundant snow to mountains in the West also kept the desert surface cool later into the spring, preserve spokesman Tom Bradley Jr. said Tuesday.

"It's taken longer for the soil in the burrow to warm," Bradley said. "Once it finally warmed up, Max came out."

The desert tortoise is considered a keystone species and an indicator of the health of a fragile desert ecosystem.

The habits and habitat of Mojave Max are studied by children at Clark County public and private schools, where officials say more than 4,200 students in grades K-5 entered this year's contest to guess the day the tortoise would emerge. Officials said a winner of the 23rd annual contest will be announced soon.

## Mass killing of civilians by security forces in Burkina Faso

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

DAKAR, Senegal (AP) — The accounts are horrific. Women killed while carrying babies on their backs, the wounded hunted down and villagers watching the execution of their neighbors, fearing they'd be next. These are some of the atrocities allegedly perpetrated by Burkina Faso's security forces in the north of the country, according to a statement Tuesday by locals from the village of Karma where the violence took place.

It was early morning last Thursday, when people in the village in Yatenga province, awoke to a large group of armed men in military fatigues, driving motorcycles and armored pickup trucks. "Some villagers, happy to see 'our soldiers', came out of their houses to welcome them. Unfortunately, this joy was cut short when the first shots rang out, also causing the first casualties," said the statement from the villagers.

At least 150 civilians may have been killed and many others injured in the violence, said the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ravina Shamdasani, in a statement Tuesday. The U.N. is calling for a prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigation into what it called the "horrific killing of civilians".

Earlier this week, Burkina Faso's prosecutor said it had already opened an investigation into the killings, but put the death toll at 60, less than half the number estimated by the U.N. and local residents.

Jihadi fighters linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group have waged a violent insurgency in Burkina Faso for seven years. The violence has killed thousands of people and divided the country, leading to two coups last year.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 71 of 90

Since Capt. Ibrahim Traore seized power in September 2022 during the second coup, extrajudicial killings of civilians have increased, according to rights groups and residents.

This incident — one of the deadliest against civilians by security forces — comes amid mounting allegations against the military for committing abuses against those it believes to be supporting the jihadis.

Earlier this month, Burkina Faso's government announced it was opening other investigations into allegations of human rights abuses by its security forces after a video surfaced that appeared to show the extrajudicial killing of seven children in the country's north.

The Associated Press this month published its own findings about the video. AP's investigation determined that Burkina Faso's security forces killed the children in a military base outside the town of Ouahigouya.

Days before last week's attack, some 40 security sources were killed near Ouahigouya. Survivors said the soldiers accused them of being jihadi accomplices, by letting them pass through their town, according to the statement from the villagers.

One survivor of the attack, who did not want to be named for fear of reprisal, told The Associated Press that when the soldiers started shooting people indiscriminately, he grabbed the hand of his 11-year-old son and fled into this house with the rest of his family. However, the soldiers forced their way in, shooting open the door, he said.

"It was like a dream. If someone told us we wouldn't die, I wouldn't have believed it," he said. They made them sit with a group of people in the middle of the village threatening to kill them multiple times. Instead, they killed another group of people and went door to door searching for two of the injured who had fled, he said.

Since the violence, people in the community haven't been able to bury their relatives as an army roadblock prevented them reaching the village, said the statement.

The abuses will create a backlash against Burkina Faso's junta and drive people into the hands of the jihadis, say conflict analysts.

"The reported human rights abuses advance the playbook of militants, it gives them talking points against the security forces and helps their recruitment efforts in the north. This is an awful recipe of consequences," said Laith Alkhouri, CEO of Intelonyx Intelligence Advisory, which provides intelligence analysis.

## Harry Belafonte, activist and entertainer, dies at 96

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Harry Belafonte, the civil rights and entertainment giant who began as a groundbreaking actor and singer and became an activist, humanitarian and conscience of the world, has died. He was 96.

Belafonte died Tuesday of congestive heart failure at his New York home, his wife Pamela by his side, said publicist Ken Sunshine.

With his glowing, handsome face and silky-husky voice, Belafonte was one of the first Black performers to gain a wide following on film and to sell a million records as a singer; many still know him for his signature hit "Banana Boat Song (Day-O)," and its call of "Day-O! Daaaaay-O." But he forged a greater legacy once he scaled back his performing career in the 1960s and lived out his hero Paul Robeson's decree that artists are "gatekeepers of truth."

Belafonte stands as the model and the epitome of the celebrity activist. Few kept up with his time and commitment and none his stature as a meeting point among Hollywood, Washington and the Civil Rights Movement.

Belafonte not only participated in protest marches and benefit concerts, but helped organize and raise support for them. He worked closely with his friend and generational peer the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., often intervening on his behalf with both politicians and fellow entertainers and helping him financially. He risked his life and livelihood and set high standards for younger Black celebrities, scolding Jay-Z and Beyoncé for failing to meet their "social responsibilities," and mentoring Usher, Common, Danny Glover and many others. In Spike Lee's 2018 film "BlacKkKlansman," he was fittingly cast as an elder statesman

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 72 of 90

schooling young activists about the country's past.

Belafonte's friend, civil rights leader Andrew Young, would note that Belafonte was the rare person to grow more radical with age. He was ever engaged and unyielding, willing to take on Southern segregationists, Northern liberals, the billionaire Koch brothers and the country's first Black president, Barack Obama, whom Belafonte would remember asking to cut him "some slack."

Belafonte responded, "What makes you think that's not what I've been doing?"

Belafonte had been a major artist since the 1950s. He won a Tony Award in 1954 for his starring role in John Murray Anderson's "Almanac" and five years later became the first Black performer to win an Emmy for the TV special "Tonight with Harry Belafonte."

In 1954, he co-starred with Dorothy Dandridge in the Otto Preminger-directed musical "Carmen Jones," a popular breakthrough for an all-Black cast. The 1957 movie "Island in the Sun" was banned in several Southern cities, where theater owners were threatened by the Ku Klux Klan because of the film's interracial romance between Belafonte and Joan Fontaine.

His "Calypso," released in 1955, became the first officially certified million-selling album by a solo performer, and started a national infatuation with Caribbean rhythms (Belafonte was nicknamed, reluctantly, the "King of Calypso"). Admirers of Belafonte included a young Bob Dylan, who debuted on record in the early '60s by playing harmonica on Belafonte's "Midnight Special."

"Harry was the best balladeer in the land and everybody knew it," Dylan later wrote. "Harry was that rare type of character that radiates greatness, and you hope that some of it rubs off on you."

Belafonte befriended King in the spring of 1956 after the young civil rights leader called and asked for a meeting. They spoke for hours, and Belafonte would remember feeling King raised him to the "higher plane of social protest." Then at the peak of his singing career, Belafonte was soon producing a benefit concert for the bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, that helped make King a national figure. By the early 1960s, he had decided to make civil rights his priority.

"I was having almost daily talks with Martin," Belafonte wrote in his memoir "My Song," published in 2011. "I realized that the movement was more important than anything else."

The Kennedys were among the first politicians to seek his opinions, which he willingly shared. John F. Kennedy, at a time when Black voters were as likely to support Republicans as they would Democrats, was so anxious for his support that during the 1960 election he visited Belafonte at his Manhattan home. Belafonte explained King's importance and arranged for King and Kennedy to meet.

"I was quite taken by the fact that he (Kennedy) knew so little about the Black community," Belafonte told NBC in 2013. "He knew the headlines of the day, but he wasn't really anywhere nuanced or detailed on the depth of Black anguish or what our struggle's really about."

Belafonte would often criticize the Kennedys for their reluctance to challenge the Southern segregationists who were then a substantial part of the Democratic Party. He argued with Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, the president's brother, over the government's failure to protect the "Freedom Riders" trying to integrate bus stations. He was among the Black activists at a widely publicized meeting with the attorney general, when playwright Lorraine Hansberry and others stunned Kennedy by questioning whether the country even deserved Black allegiance.

"Bobby turned red at that. I had never seen him so shaken," Belafonte later wrote.

In 1963, Belafonte was deeply involved with the historic March on Washington. He recruited his close friend Sidney Poitier, Paul Newman and other celebrities and persuaded the left-wing Marlon Brando to co-chair the Hollywood delegation with the more conservative Charlton Heston, a pairing designed to appeal to the broadest possible audience. In 1964, he and Poitier personally delivered tens of thousands of dollars to activists in Mississippi after three "Freedom Summer" volunteers were murdered — the two celebrities were chased by car at one point by members of the KKK. The following year, he brought in Tony Bennett, Joan Baez and other singers to perform for the marchers in Selma, Alabama.

When King was assassinated, in 1968, Belafonte helped pick out the suit he was buried in, sat next to his widow, Coretta, at the funeral, and continued to support his family, in part through an insurance policy he had taken out on King in his lifetime.



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 73 of 90

"Much of my political outlook was already in place when I encountered Dr. King," Belafonte later wrote. "I was well on my way and utterly committed to the civil rights struggle. I came to him with expectations and he affirmed them."

King's death left Belafonte isolated from the civil rights community. He was turned off by the separatist beliefs of Stokely Carmichael and other "Black Power" activists and had little chemistry with King's designated successor, the Rev. Ralph Abernathy. But the entertainer's causes extended well beyond the U.S.

He helped introduce South African singer and activist Miriam Makeba to American audiences, the two winning a Grammy in 1964 for the concert record "An Evening With Belafonte/Makeba." He coordinated Nelson Mandela's first visit to the U.S. since being released from prison in 1990. A few years earlier, he had initiated the all-star, million-selling "We Are the World" recording, the Grammy-winning charity song for famine relief in Africa.

Belafonte's early life and career paralleled those of Poitier, who died in 2022. Both spent part of their childhoods in the Caribbean and ended up in New York. Both served in the military during World War II, acted in the American Negro Theatre and then broke into film. Poitier shared his belief in civil rights, but still dedicated much of his time to acting, a source of some tension between them. While Poitier had a sustained and historic run in the 1960s as a leading man and box office success, Belafonte grew tired of acting and turned down parts he regarded as "neutered."

"Sidney radiated a truly saintly dignity and calm. Not me," Belafonte wrote in his memoir. "I didn't want to tone down my sexuality, either. Sidney did that in every role he took."

Belafonte was very much a human being. He acknowledged extra-marital affairs, negligence as a parent and a frightening temper, driven by lifelong insecurity. "Woe to the musician who missed his cue, or the agent who fouled up a booking," he confided.

In his memoir, he chastised Poitier for a "radical breach" by backing out on a commitment to star as Mandela in a TV miniseries Belafonte had conceived, then agreeing to play Mandela for a rival production. He became so estranged from King's widow and children that he was not asked to speak at her funeral. He later sued three of King's children over control of some of the civil rights leader's personal papers, and would allege that the family was preoccupied with "selling trinkets and memorabilia."

He made news years earlier when he compared Colin Powell, the first Black secretary of state, to a slave "permitted to come into the house of the master" for his service in the George W. Bush administration. He was in Washington in January 2009 as Obama was inaugurated, officiating along with Baez and others at a gala called the Inaugural Peace Ball. But Belafonte would later criticize Obama for failing to live up to his promise and lacking "fundamental empathy with the dispossessed, be they white or Black."

Belafonte did occasionally serve in government, as cultural adviser for the Peace Corps during the Kennedy administration and decades later as goodwill ambassador for UNICEF. For his film and music career, he received the motion picture academy's Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award, a National Medal of Arts, a Grammy for lifetime achievement and numerous other honorary prizes. He found special pleasure in winning a New York Film Critics Award in 1996 for his work as a gangster in Robert Altman's "Kansas City."

"I'm as proud of that film critics' award as I am of all my gold records," he wrote in his memoir.

He was married three times, most recently to photographer Pamela Frank, and had four children. Three of them — Shari, David and Gina — became actors. He is also survived by two stepchildren and eight grandchildren.

Harry Belafonte was born Harold George Bellanfanti Jr. in 1927, in Harlem. His father was a seaman and cook with Dutch and Jamaican ancestry and his mother, part Scottish, worked as a domestic. Both parents were undocumented immigrants and Belafonte recalled living "an underground life, as criminals of a sort, on the run."

The household was violent: Belafonte sustained brutal beatings from his father, and he was sent to live for several years with relatives in Jamaica. Belafonte was a poor reader — he was probably dyslexic, he later realized — and dropped out of high school, soon joining the Navy. While in the service, he read "Color and Democracy" by the Black scholar W.E.B. Du Bois and was deeply affected, calling it the start of his political education.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 74 of 90

After the war, he found a job in New York as an assistant janitor for some apartment buildings. One tenant liked him enough to give him free tickets to a play at the American Negro Theatre, a community repertory for black performers. Belafonte was so impressed that he joined as a volunteer, then as an actor. Poitier was a peer, both of them "skinny, brooding and vulnerable within our hard shells of self-protection," Belafonte later wrote.

Belafonte met Brando, Walter Matthau and other future stars while taking acting classes at the New School for Social Research. Brando was an inspiration as an actor, and he and Belafonte became close, sometimes riding on Brando's motorcycle or double dating or playing congas together at parties. Over the years, Belafonte's political and artistic lives would lead to friendships with everyone from Frank Sinatra and Lester Young to Eleanor Roosevelt and Fidel Castro.

His early stage credits included "Days of Our Youth" and Sean O'Casey's "Juno and the Peacock," a play Belafonte remembered less because of his own performance than because of a backstage visitor, Robeson, the actor, singer and activist.

"What I remember more than anything Robeson said, was the love he radiated, and the profound responsibility he felt, as an actor, to use his platform as a bully pulpit," Belafonte wrote in his memoir. His friendship with Robeson and support for left-wing causes eventually brought trouble from the government. FBI agents visited him at home and allegations of Communism nearly cost him an appearance on "The Ed Sullivan Show." Leftists suspected, and Belafonte emphatically denied, that he had named names of suspected Communists so he could perform on Sullivan's show.

By the 1950s, Belafonte was also singing, finding gigs at the Blue Note, the Vanguard and other clubs — he was backed for one performance by Charlie Parker and Max Roach — and becoming immersed in folk, blues, jazz and the calypso he had heard while living in Jamaica. Starting in 1954, he released such top 10 albums as "Mark Twain and Other Folk Favorites" and "Belafonte," and his popular singles included "Mathilda," "Jamaica Farewell" and "The Banana Boat Song," a reworked Caribbean ballad that was a late addition to his "Calypso" record.

"We found ourselves one or two songs short, so we threw in 'Day-O' as filler," Belafonte wrote in his memoir.

He was a superstar, but one criticized, and occasionally sued, for taking traditional material and not sharing the profits. Belafonte expressed regret and also worried about being typecast as a calypso singer, declining for years to sing "Day-O" live after he gave television performances against banana boat backdrops.

Belafonte was the rare young artist to think about the business side of show business. He started one of the first all-Black music publishing companies. He produced plays, movies and TV shows, including Off-Broadway's "To Be Young, Gifted, and Black," in 1969. He was the first Black person to produce for TV.

Belafonte made history in 1968 by filling in for Johnny Carson on the "Tonight" show for a full week. Later that year, a simple, spontaneous gesture led to another milestone. Appearing on a taped TV special starring Petula Clark, Belafonte joined the British singer on the anti-war song "On the Path of Glory." At one point, Clark placed a hand on Belafonte's arm. The show's sponsor, Chrysler, demanded the segment be reshot. Clark and Belafonte resisted, successfully, and for the first time a white woman touched a Black man's arm on primetime television.

In the 1970s, he returned to movie acting, co-starring with Poitier in "Buck and the Preacher," a commercial flop, and the raucous and popular comedy "Uptown Saturday Night." His other film credits include "Bobby," "White Man's Burden," cameos in Altman's "The Player" and "Ready to Wear," and the Altman-directed TV series "Tanner on Tanner." In 2011, HBO aired a documentary about Belafonte, "Sing Your Song."

Mindful to the end that he grew up in poverty, Belafonte did not think of himself as an artist who became an activist, but an activist who happened to be an artist.

"When you grow up, son," Belafonte remembered his mother telling him, "never go to bed at night knowing that there was something you could have done during the day to strike a blow against injustice and you didn't do it."

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Former Associated Press writer Mike Stewart contributed to this report.

## How 'Perry Mason' captured 1930s Los Angeles, race divisions

By KRYSTA FAURIA Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Early in the second season finale of "Perry Mason," which aired Monday, the titular character pulls up on his motorcycle to Los Angeles City Hall and pauses for a long moment. He stares up at the edifice, as if sizing up an opponent, before walking in with hopes to intercede with a judge on behalf of his clients.

Although the scene has no dialogue, the shot of City Hall is pregnant with meaning, almost taunting the maverick lawyer for having the audacity to think he could bring about justice within such a corrupt system.

It's one of many scenes throughout the Emmy-nominated HBO drama, based on Erle Stanley Gardner's books and a prequel of sorts to the long-running show starring Raymond Burr, where 1930s Los Angeles is itself a star through the creators' use of iconic institutions, public landmarks, terrain — and racial and class divisions.

Matthew Rhys, who plays Mason, only became aware of how much attention to detail went into fashioning "LA as that kind of other character" after being "invited to the grown ups' table" as an executive producer for the second season.

And although the Welsh actor and alum of "The Americans" had previously lived in Los Angeles for six years, he said the experience made him fall in love with the city in new ways.

"They really had to eke out where those little special places were still left in LA that we could shoot. Seeing some of those last kind of hold ons of yesteryear ..." he trailed off, smiling as he reminisced about filming at longstanding institutions like Musso & Frank Grill on Hollywood Boulevard. "It was magical."

Showrunner Michael Begler echoed Rhys' comments about the production team's diligence, maintaining that their commitment to understanding LA's complex history wasn't superficial, as evidenced by their reliance on a group of historians from the University of Southern California.

"Any question that I'd have, they'd say, 'Well, did you look into this?' And then that would send me down, you know, to do a deep dive," Begler said.

Those questions could be about anything from class tensions and racial segregation to the ways people talked and the shoes they wore, explained historian William Deverell, one of the professors who worked as a consultant on the show.

"Los Angeles was growing with just remarkable velocity," he said of the Depression-era time period in which the show is set. "The big details are just making sense of a place that kind of exploded into international perspective over a very, very short period of time."

But in addition to those big details, Deverell said he and the other historians also focused on granular ones about what life in Los Angeles looked like at the time, as many of its residents were relegated to Hoovervilles as a result of the city's changing economy.

"People are both exhilarated to be here but also trying to figure the place out. And then that chaos also exacerbating all kinds of class and racial tensions," Deverell said.

One aspect of 1930s Los Angeles that he wanted to ensure was accurately portrayed was its complex racial landscape, particularly as it related to Black communities — in this reimagining of "Perry Mason," mainstay Paul Drake is a Black LAPD police officer turned private investigator, played by Chris Chalk — and the influx of migrants as a result of the Mexican Revolution.

The second season revolves around the murder of an oil scion — his profession alone emblematic of who comprised the city's elite in its 1930s economy — and the two brothers of Mexican descent accused of it. The prosecutor and press gleefully term the brothers "savages" and use "us vs. them" and other racially coded rhetoric to paint the Southern California-born young men as "others."

"Here. We've always been from here," the younger brother, Rafael, tells Mason in a jailhouse consultation.

In episode five, the brothers reveal their personal connection to the victim, Brooks McCutcheon, when they recount the tragic story of their sister's death as the family is forced from their home so McCutcheon can build a stadium in its place. The story is loosely based on the Chavez Ravine evictions, which took

place in the 1950s to pave way for what would eventually become Dodger Stadium.

"The racial restrictions pick up in neighborhoods where it's more expensive. So neighborhoods down around the LA River in this period are going to be just remarkably diverse," Deverell explained. "That's a rich, complicated story that could lend itself to caricature and kind of stock imagery. And I think they steered clear of that."

When told correctly, Rhys says, those complicated stories make for good TV.

"It was one of the only cities in America having this enormous influx of wealth because of Hollywood, but also in the midst of this enormous Depression," he said. "That backdrop would just help set up any kind of story, especially in season two, where it is about exactly that, those who have and those who have not."

But the City of Angels' role in "Perry Mason" can be attributed to more than just its ripe landscape for interesting storytelling, given that the American noir genre has become almost inseparable from its frequent Los Angeles setting.

This became apparent to Begler, who considered himself "noir illiterate" prior to signing on as a showrunner for season two and sought to learn as much as he could. He likened his journey to that of Mason, who begins the series as a bruising private eye and becomes a full-fledged lawyer in a matter of days, thanks to desperate circumstances and not-quite-licit plotting by Della Street ( Juliet Rylance, playing an updated, ambitious version of the secretary ).

"I had what Perry has in this season, which is imposter syndrome," Begler recalled of his inexperience with the genre. "I really tried to immerse myself in it. And honestly I've probably watched 100 of them since and I just love the genre now."

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Follow Krysta Fauria on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/krystafauria>

## Drug for rare form of Lou Gehrig's disease OK'd by FDA

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Food and Drug Administration regulators on Tuesday approved a first-of-a-kind drug for a rare form of Lou Gehrig's disease, though they are requiring further research to confirm it truly helps patients.

The FDA approved Biogen's injectable drug for patients with a rare genetic mutation that's estimated to affect less than 500 people in the U.S. It's the first drug for an inherited form of ALS, or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, a deadly disease that destroys nerve cells needed for basic functions like walking, talking and swallowing.

Approval came via FDA's accelerated pathway, which allows drugs to launch based on promising early results, before they're confirmed to benefit patients. That shortcut has come under increasing scrutiny from government watchdogs and congressional investigators.

The FDA is requiring Biogen to continue studying the drug in a trial of people who carry the genetic mutation but do not yet have ALS symptoms.

ALS patients hope the decision could lay the groundwork for more expedited approvals to fight the disease, which affects 16,000 to 32,000 people in the U.S. The FDA has long used accelerated approval to speed the availability of drugs for cancer and other deadly conditions.

The drug, tofersen, is designed to block the genetic messengers that produce a toxic form of protein that is thought to drive the disease in about 2% of ALS patients. Cambridge, Massachusetts-based Biogen will sell it under the brand name Qalsody. Patients receive three initial spinal injections of the drug over a two-week period, followed by a monthly dose. The most common side effects linked to the drug were pain, fatigue and increased spinal fluid.

Biogen's 100-person study failed to show that the drug significantly slowed the disease compared with a dummy treatment. Patients were tracked for more than six months using a scale that measures the decline of basic movements, including writing, walking and climbing stairs.

But those who received tofersen showed significant changes in levels of the toxic protein and a second

neurological chemical that is considered a key indicator of the disease's progression.

"The findings are reasonably likely to predict a clinical benefit in patients," the FDA said in a statement announcing the approval.

Last month an outside panel of FDA advisers voted unanimously that those changes warranted granting conditional approval while more data is gathered to confirm the drug's benefit. The same panel said Biogen's current data, including the failed patient study, wasn't strong enough to warrant full approval.

FDA regulators have the authority to pull accelerated approval from drugs that fail to live up to their expected promise, though until recently, they rarely used that power. In recent years, the FDA has stepped up efforts to force unproven drugs off the market, amid criticism that too many expensive, ineffective medications remain available for years.

At the same time, the FDA has shown increased "regulatory flexibility" in approving drugs for rare and debilitating neurological diseases, including Alzheimer's and ALS.

In September, the FDA granted full approval to another ALS drug based on one small, mid-stage study in which patients appeared to progress more slowly and survive several months longer. Normally, the FDA requires two large studies or one study suggesting a "very persuasive" improvement in survival.

Some insurers have limited access to the new drug, Relyvrio, citing its uncertain benefit and \$158,000-per-year cost.

Biogen did not announce a price for its drug Tuesday but said it will be "comparable to other recently launched ALS treatments."

The ALS Association and other patient groups hailed the approval.

"This is the second time in less than a year our community gets to celebrate the approval of a new drug to treat ALS and we have great hope for the future," said Calaneet Balas, the group's president and CEO.

Since last year's approval of Relyvrio, ALS patients and advocates have continued to press the FDA to consider more treatments for the disease. That includes an experimental stem cell treatment from tiny drugmaker Brainstorm Cell Therapeutics.

In a rare move, the FDA recently agreed to hold a public meeting on the treatment, despite previously refusing to consider the company's application, citing failed results from its principal study.

The FDA has now approved four medications for ALS, only one of which has been shown to extend life. The disease gradually destroys nerve connections needed for basic movements and — eventually — breathing. There is no cure and most people die within three to five years of diagnosis.

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Follow Matthew Perrone on Twitter: @AP\_FDWriter

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## Why is Biden announcing 2024 bid now, and what will change?

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden has formally announced he's seeking reelection. But he's also still the president, with roughly 20 months left in his term regardless of whether he wins a second one on Election Day 2024.

With Tuesday's campaign video release, Biden is following through on months of saying he intended to seek reelection. Top Democrats have remained solidly unified behind the president, despite his low approval ratings and many Americans saying they'd rather not see the 80-year-old Biden try for four more years in the White House.

But all that has meant Biden faced relatively little pressure to make his 2024 bid official. Here's a look at why he announced now and how things will, and won't, change for him going forward:

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WHY NOW?

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 78 of 90

A formal reelection announcement means the president is now allowed to raise money directly for his campaign. It's a change from his speeches at donor events benefiting the Democratic National Committee or other outside political groups that he has given since entering the White House.

Biden will spend campaign funds on salaries and logistics building out a 2024 staff and holding events outside his official presidential business. He plans to have dinner in Washington on Friday with leading Democratic donors and DNC leaders, paying special attention to those who write big checks to ensure his reelection campaign stays well funded.

Some party donors and organizers had begun grumbling about a lack of movement on the reelection front, and the announcement, followed by Friday's gathering, will allow the president to reassure them.

Another reason why Biden waited until April was that it allowed him to avoid releasing publicly how much his reelection campaign raised during the year's first quarter. That's when donors typically slow down their contributions — and some top Democratic givers wanted a break after a busy election season during last fall's midterms and before next year's presidential race kicks into high gear.

President Barack Obama waited to announce his 2012 reelection bid until early April of the previous year. Tuesday also marks the fourth anniversary of Biden's announcement of his 2020 presidential campaign.

President Donald Trump, meanwhile, first filed for reelection on Jan. 20, 2017, the day of his inauguration, and held his first campaign rally in February 2017. But his second White House campaign didn't formally kick off until June 2019 with an Orlando, Florida, rally that fell roughly four years after he first entered the 2016 presidential race.

## WHAT ABOUT HIS AGE?

Biden is the oldest president in U.S. history and would be 86 by the end of a second term. He has acknowledged that age is a "legitimate" concern but scoffed at questions about whether he will have the stamina for another campaign, much less four more years in the White House. "Watch me," he has repeatedly declared.

Voters will now get the chance to do just that — but that is unlikely to make such questions go away.

Republicans have often highlighted Biden's age, and even some Democrats have questioned whether the president is living up to promises he made during the 2020 campaign to be a "bridge" to a new generation of leadership.

One Republican running for president, former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley, has called for mental competency testing for candidates over 75 — a category that would include both Biden and Trump, who announced his own 2024 campaign in November. White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre brushed aside such testing, noting that Biden helped lead Democrats to a surprisingly strong midterm showing.

"Maybe they're forgetting the wins the president got over the past few years, but I'm happy to remind them anytime," Jean-Pierre said in February.

## WILL SEEKING REELECTION CHANGE HOW BIDEN HANDLES BEING PRESIDENT?

There won't be big changes, Biden aides insist, at least for now.

The president is still hosting South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol at the White House for a state dinner on Wednesday and planning overseas travel later this summer. As he has done in recent months, Biden also will continue to hit the road domestically to highlight legislation his administration helped push through Congress.

Biden has already visited many parts of the country, highlighting how a bipartisan public works package will help repair roads, highways, bridges, ports and train tunnels and how increased federal spending approved as part of other legislation will bolster U.S. manufacturing, lower prescription drug prices and improve broadband internet access in rural areas.

Such events often blur the line between official business and promoting the president and his party politically, and the distinction will only get murkier going forward.

Since the weeks leading up to the midterms, Biden has frequently denounced "extreme" Republicans

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 79 of 90

loyal to Trump's "Make America Great Again" movement as posing a threat to America's core democracy. It's a message he will continue to champion as the 2024 race begins heating up.

## WILL BIDEN HAVE TO COMPETE FOR THE DEMOCRATIC NOMINATION?

Probably not much.

Self-help author Marianne Williamson and anti-vaccine activist Robert F. Kennedy Jr. are the only Democrats to challenge the president. Neither of them presents the type of primary opposition that wounded previous incumbents, such as Sen. Ted Kennedy's campaign against President Jimmy Carter in 1980 or Pat Buchanan's run against President George H.W. Bush in 1992.

The DNC is so fully committed to Biden this year that it is not planning to schedule primary debates, sparing the president from sharing a stage with Williamson, Kennedy or any other potential challenger.

Also benefiting Biden is the fact that South Carolina's primary is set to replace Iowa's caucuses in leading off the Democratic primary voting next year. Biden revived his 2020 campaign after losing the first three contests with a resounding South Carolina primary victory, and he personally directed that the state go first in 2024 — solidifying his popularity among Democrats there. That may counterbalance Democrats' deep ambivalence to Biden elsewhere.

An Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll last week found that only 26% of Americans — and only about half of Democrats — said they wanted to see Biden run again. But the poll found that 81% of Democrats said they would at least probably support the president in a general election.

## WHO WILL BIDEN'S REPUBLICAN OPPONENT BE?

Trump is the 2024 Republican presidential field's early leader, setting up a potential general election rematch with Biden.

Although Trump announced his bid back in November, the rest of the 2024 Republican primary field has been slow to form around him. The only other declared GOP candidates in the race include Haley, former Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson, businessman Perry Johnson, "Woke, Inc." author Vivek Ramaswamy and radio host Larry Elder.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis is widely expected to be a leading Trump alternative but is in no hurry to announce his campaign. Also expected to join the race but not officially in yet are former Vice President Mike Pence and U.S. Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina.

Biden's political team has for months been preparing to face Trump again. But even if an alternative like DeSantis wins the GOP nomination, Biden's aides argue, many of the same criticisms about adherence to MAGA extremism apply since so many top Republicans agree with Trump on key policy and social issues.

Follow the AP's coverage of President Joe Biden at <https://apnews.com/hub/joe-biden>.

## What is a sweeper? A look at the pitch taking over MLB

By DAVID BRANDT AP Baseball Writer

PHOENIX (AP) — Bob Melvin was talking about the improvement of Padres reliever Steven Wilson, when the San Diego skipper dropped in some cool-kid lingo that's making the rounds in Major League Baseball these days.

"The sweeper's ended up being a really big pitch for him," Melvin said.

A few seconds later, Melvin was asked a simple question: What exactly is a sweeper?

Busted.

"I don't know," Melvin said, laughing. "It's new-age baseball talk. A slider's probably got a little more depth and the sweeper probably comes across a little more. I've made that joke, too. I still write it down as a slider."

Move over slider, curve, slurve and screwball, there's a new (ish) breaking ball that's all the rage in MLB: the sweeper. Angels superstar Shohei Ohtani uses it, as do Padres starter Yu Darvish, Yankees lefty Nestor

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 80 of 90

Cortes and dozens of other pitchers.

To be truthful, it's not really a new pitch, but a new term to describe a certain type of breaking ball that's been around a long time. And it's one fans are surely noticing more this season, after MLB's Statcast created a new classification for the pitch — meaning the "sweeper" is showing up on broadcasts and scoreboards just like "curveball" and "slider."

The 61-year-old Melvin might joke that he doesn't understand the "new-age baseball talk," but the veteran manager has a pretty good grasp of what makes a good sweeper. Its main movement is side-to-side, and it doesn't plunge downward like the normal slider or curveball.

Ohtani's sweeper is considered one of the best in today's game, with a good one producing around 20 inches of horizontal movement. But there are dozens of hurlers experimenting with the pitch, including Mets reliever Adam Ottavino.

The 37-year-old is actually one of the O.G.'s in the current sweeper world, throwing a variation of the pitch for the better part of 15 years.

Ottavino grew up in New York City idolizing breaking-ball pitchers like David Cone and Orlando Hernandez on the Yankees, and wanted to have his own big bender. The right-hander already had a conventional curveball, but because the ball would first rise out of his hand before dropping, it was easier for hitters to differentiate it from his other pitches.

"Some of the hitters I roomed with in the minors said if it didn't do that, maybe it would be more effective," Ottavino said. "So I tried to keep it low, changing the break from up to down to more right to left."

Ottavino also credited former Giants reliever Sergio Romo for his sweeper, saying it provided some inspiration.

"I tried to make it as big as I could and I think I stumbled onto something there," Ottavino said. "Now you see a lot more people doing it."

Ottavino's description of the sweeper is a good example of why it's such a coveted pitch. Sometimes, big breaking balls are easier for hitters to detect, so a tighter spin that looks more like a fastball is useful. Pitchers also have more advanced tools than ever to help them fine-tune the angle of the break on their pitches, including high-speed cameras that can measure the amount of spin and the axis of rotation for each pitch.

Wilson said the analytics he's seen indicate there's more swing-and-miss with the slider, but the sweeper produces more soft contact.

"It's a little bit risk vs. reward," Wilson said. "But I think it works for me."

Orioles starter Kyle Gibson was playing for the Phillies last season when pitching coach Caleb Cotham asked the right-hander if he wanted to mess around with his slider grip. The goal was to make the pitch move more left, instead of down.

Gibson proved to be a quick study. By his next game, he had a new pitch. The veteran said the grip wasn't that much different from his original slider — he moved his fingers about an inch on the baseball.

"I told the catcher, warming up against the Braves, that next start, I said, 'Hey, I'm going to throw them warming up here, and I'm going to throw them when I take the mound for the first inning. If I throw a couple good ones, then we'll throw it,'" Gibson said.

The pitch felt good on the mound, so he included it in his arsenal. He even struck out the first batter of the game on — you guessed it — a sweeper.

Is it that much different from a slider? That's debatable.

But if it works, Gibson doesn't really care about its name.

"Why it's called a sweeper, I have no idea," Gibson said. "I think maybe just because people don't want to say it's a slider with more side-to-side."

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AP Baseball Writers Janie McCauley in San Francisco and Noah Trister in Baltimore contributed to this story.

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## **FACT FOCUS: COVID vaccines are not in the food supply**

By ANGELO FICHERA Associated Press

Anti-vaccine advocates have for years used foreboding imagery of syringes to paint immunizations as dark and dangerous. But recent vaccine conspiracy theories are casting an air of fear around more mundane things — like cows and lettuce.

In widespread posts online in recent weeks, misinformation purveyors have spread an erroneous narrative that COVID-19 mRNA vaccines are being quietly added to the food supply, threatening staunch vaccine holdouts.

In some cases, users misrepresented the limited use of RNA-based vaccines in animals. In others, they distorted a company's research into using plants to grow proteins used in vaccines.

But experts confirm there are no COVID-19 vaccines in your steak or salad. Here are the facts.

**CLAIM:** COVID-19 mRNA vaccines are being added to the food supply through livestock and produce.

**THE FACTS:** COVID-19 vaccines are not being passed along through livestock or produce, and experts say that would not be an efficient way to immunize someone. A flurry of social media posts are falsely suggesting otherwise.

"The Unvaccinated Won't Be Unvaccinated for Long With mRNA in the Food Supply," reads one tweet shared thousands of times. Another asks: "Did you know they will be giving all of our livestock the covid vaccine this year?"

A TikTok video shared on Instagram, meanwhile, questions whether Whole Foods customers are unknowingly being vaccinated with "the C19 mRNA shot via food products" and shows pictures of arugula and lettuce packages.

In reality, there are no COVID-19 mRNA vaccines licensed for animals, Marissa Perry, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, told The Associated Press. She noted that the department's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service "has not approved and does not have any vaccines under trial to vaccinate livestock for COVID-19."

Some animals, particularly those in zoos considered susceptible, have received vaccines against COVID-19. But those immunizations do not rely on mRNA technology, said Suresh Kuchipudi, a veterinary scientist and chair of emerging infectious diseases at Penn State University.

In terms of vaccines more generally, there are some RNA-based vaccines licensed for animals. For example, the pharmaceutical company Merck offers a customizable vaccine against the flu and other viruses in pigs to protect a specific herd as needed. That approach predates the advent of humans' COVID-19 mRNA vaccines and the technology is not the same.

There are no mRNA vaccines for any disease being used in cattle in the U.S., the National Cattlemen's Beef Association emphasized in a recent statement addressing online misinformation. Farmers and ranchers ultimately choose which vaccines, if any, to give their animals.

Regardless, the notion that an mRNA vaccine could be transmitted to humans through eating meat is not rooted in science.

"No, it could not be transferred," Ted Ross, a professor of infectious diseases at the University of Georgia and director of the Center for Vaccines and Immunology, said in an email. He said mRNA vaccines have a very short duration in living organisms and degrades.

In addition to the mRNA breaking down quickly, it's unlikely it would survive the cooking process to hypothetically be passed along to consumers, experts said.

Additionally, regulators require something called a "withdrawal time," a minimum amount of time that must pass between a food animal getting a vaccine and entering the food chain, Alan Young, a professor of veterinary and biomedical science at South Dakota State University, recently told the AP.

There is also no evidence to support the notion that COVID-19 vaccines are being added to produce.

The TikTok video about Whole Foods homed in on a clip of a co-founder of New Jersey-based AeroFarms, an indoor vertical farming company that grows leafy greens.

But the video misrepresented the work described by AeroFarms co-founder David Rosenberg. Rosenberg was discussing early research into growing proteins that could theoretically be used for vaccines, not making edible vaccines that would be on a store shelf.

"Couldn't be further from the truth," Marc Oshima, AeroFarms co-founder and chief marketing officer, said of the claim that the company's vegetables contain a COVID-19 vaccine.

The research initiative Rosenberg discussed, which is no longer active, was part of a research and development arm of the company and separate from its commercial products, Oshima said. The farms for research and commercial products are separate spaces.

While some researchers have explored the possibility of growing edible vaccines — an appealing idea for use in countries where vaccine storage can be an issue — that concept is "far, far away from being proven," said Shawn Chen, a professor at Arizona State University's Biodesign Center for Immunotherapy, Vaccines and Virotherapy.

Chen said scientists have used plants to grow vaccines that can be extracted and used for injections. But producing edible vaccines is tricky in terms of getting the right dosage and delivering the medicine through the gut. That approach, he said, would require much more work, including trials and approvals, before it could even theoretically enter the market.

This is part of AP's effort to address widely shared misinformation, including work with outside companies and organizations to add factual context to misleading content that is circulating online. Learn more about fact-checking at AP.

## Autopsy: Parents, kids in burning Oklahoma home were shot

TULSA, Okla. (AP) — Preliminary autopsy reports show eight members of an Oklahoma family found dead inside their burning home were each shot.

The bodies of Brian Nelson, 34, his wife Brittney Nelson, 32, and their six children were found in October inside the flaming home in Broken Arrow, a Tulsa suburb. Police at the time called it a murder-suicide.

Authorities say all six children — Brian II, 13; Brantley, 9; Vegeta, 7; Ragnar, 5; Kurgan, 2; and Britannica, 1 — were found in a burning bedroom, while their parents were found in the front of the home.

The autopsy report says Brian and Brittney Nelson each suffered a gunshot wound to the head and lists the manner of death as unknown.

Four of the slain children had multiple gunshot wounds, with the eldest child, Brian Nelson II, suffering at least six.

Each child also suffered burns to their bodies, but the manner of death for each of the six is listed as homicide due to gunshot wounds.

"Broken Arrow police investigators have reviewed the medical examiner's reports in reference to the incident we reported as an octuple murder-suicide," the police department said in a statement Monday.

"We have no additional information to provide the public at this time regarding this incident," according to the statement.

Family members previously told the Tulsa World the couple was experiencing financial difficulties.

The newspaper reported Brian and Brittney Nelson had filed for bankruptcy in 2020, listing nearly \$138,000 in liabilities and about \$8,800 in assets, including nine guns.

## Fake Craigslist ad costs New Hampshire man right to vote

By KATHY McCORMACK Associated Press

CONCORD, N.H. (AP) — A New Hampshire man who posted a fake Craigslist ad for a free trailer with a legislative candidate's number on the day of the election — saying it was a joke — has lost his right to vote in the state.

Michael Drouin, 30, of Merrimack pleaded guilty Monday to creating a false document after a flood of

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 83 of 90

unwanted calls and texts jammed up the candidate's cellphone.

That's just a misdemeanor, but it still disenfranchises Drouin. Under the New Hampshire Constitution, anyone convicted of a willful violation of the state's election laws loses their right to vote in the state. His plea agreement also called for a 90-day suspended jail sentence, a \$250 fine and 250 hours of community service.

"Mr. Drouin has no right to vote in New Hampshire for federal, state, or local elections," Matthew Conley, assistant attorney general, said in an email.

He said Drouin has the right to petition the New Hampshire Supreme Court to request restoration of his voting rights.

The special election was held in April 2021 to replace Republican New Hampshire House Speaker Dick Hinch, who died of COVID-19 in December 2020.

The candidate, Bill Boyd, a Republican who went on to win, turned off his phone after receiving more than 37 phone calls or text messages in 45 minutes on the morning of the election. A complaint was filed that day by the executive director for the New Hampshire Republican Party.

"I experienced distress with my phone going on and off," Boyd said in court, WMUR-TV reported.

The attorney general's office said Drouin's actions could have cost Boyd the election and violates the law.

Drouin, a registered Democrat at the time who had voted in the election, told police "It was a joke, I meant no harm," according to an affidavit. He said he wasn't sure why he had chosen the date of the election, saying it was bad timing.

Boyd told investigators he knew Drouin through local organizations and had received a Facebook friend request from him. Boyd said he received a message from Drouin saying he had pranked him, that it was terrible timing, and that he'd like to take him to lunch to apologize.

"I want to make amends. I apologize," Drouin said in court Monday.

Drouin was originally charged with a felony, interference with election communications.

## Cuba fuel shortages prompt rationing, event cancellations

HAVANA (AP) — Cuba's fuel shortages have increased dramatically with authorities suspending activities, including a concert by the country's national symphony, as well as rationing gasoline sales and moving some universities' classes online.

Cubans have experienced shortages of all kinds of goods amid the recent economic crisis but the cancellation of activities because of fuel shortages had not been reported previously. The cancellations come following days of long lines to get gasoline at filling stations.

Experts say the lack of gasoline and diesel is not due to a lack of crude oil — Cuba produces about half of what it needs and buys the rest from other countries - but to the difficulties refining it.

"There is no lack of crude oil in Cuba," said Jorge Piñón, senior research fellow at the University of Texas at Austin's Energy Institute.

He said Venezuela is selling Cuba a similar amount of crude or even slightly more than it did last year. Cuba has also received oil from Russia, though details of these agreements are unknown.

Piñón said Cuba in April also received two tankers from Mexican state oil company Pemex carrying 300,000 barrels of crude oil each.

He blamed the shortages on technical production problems in the refineries, which were built in 1957.

Cuban authorities have not given a specific reason for the shortages, but in previous days have mentioned difficulties with "inputs," which Piñón said could refer to a shortage in Venezuela of a crude oil additive it obtains from Iran for its heavy crude before it is sent to Cuba for refining.

The fuel shortages started being critical this weekend.

On Monday afternoon, the commercial director of the state-owned Cubapetroleo, Lidia Rodríguez, warned there are low levels of "refineable crude."

Meanwhile, authorities in Villa Clara said in statement published on the government's Facebook page that fuel will only be sold to drivers of cars licensed to operate as public carriers and provide basic services,

i.e. ambulances, and vehicles used in emergencies or burials.

Universities in the provinces of Villa Clara, Holguín, Sancti Spíritus and Universidad Agraria de La Habana said that starting Monday classes will be temporarily online.

On Sunday, a concert by the Cuban National Symphony in the capital's main theater was canceled due to lack of fuel.

## Rosalind Franklin's role in DNA discovery gets a new twist

By MADDIE BURAKOFF AP Science Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The discovery of DNA's double helix structure 70 years ago opened up a world of new science — and also sparked disputes over who contributed what and who deserves credit.

Much of the controversy comes from a central idea: that James Watson and Francis Crick — the first to figure out DNA's shape — stole data from another scientist named Rosalind Franklin.

Now, two historians are suggesting that while parts of that story are accurate — Watson and Crick did rely on research from Franklin and her lab without their permission — Franklin was more a collaborator than just a victim.

In an opinion article published Tuesday in the journal *Nature*, the historians say the two different research teams were working in parallel toward solving the DNA puzzle and knew more about what the other team was doing than is widely believed.

"It's much less dramatic," said article author Matthew Cobb, a zoologist at the University of Manchester who is working on a biography of Crick. "It's not a heist movie."

The story dates back to the 1950s, when scientists were still working out how DNA's pieces fit together.

Watson and Crick were working on modeling DNA's shape at Cambridge University. Meanwhile, Franklin — an expert in X-ray imaging — was studying the molecules at King's College in London, along with a scientist named Maurice Wilkins.

It was there that Franklin captured the iconic Photograph 51, an X-ray image showing DNA's criss-cross shape.

Then, the story gets tricky. In the version that's often told, Watson was able to look at Photograph 51 during a visit to Franklin's lab. According to the story Franklin hadn't solved the structure, even months after making the image. But when Watson saw it, "he suddenly, instantly knew that it was a helix," said author Nathaniel Comfort, a historian of medicine at Johns Hopkins University who is writing a biography of Watson.

Around the same time, the story goes, Crick also obtained a lab report that included Franklin's data and used it without her consent.

And according to this story, these two "eureka moments" — both based on Franklin's work — Watson and Crick "were able to go and solve the double helix in a few days," Comfort said.

This "lore" came in part from Watson himself in his book "The Double Helix," the historians say. But the historians suggest this was a "literary device" to make the story more exciting and understandable to lay readers.

After digging in Franklin's archives, the historians found new details that they say challenge this simplistic narrative — and suggest that Franklin contributed more than just one photograph along the way.

The proof? A draft of a *Time* magazine story from the time written "in consultation with Franklin," but never published, described the work on DNA's structure as a joint effort between the two groups. And a letter from one of Franklin's colleagues suggested Franklin knew her research was being shared with Crick, authors said.

Taken together, this material suggests the four researchers were equal collaborators in the work, Comfort said. While there may have been some tensions, the scientists were sharing their findings more openly — not snatching them in secret.

"She deserves to be remembered not as the victim of the double helix, but as an equal contributor to the solution of the structure," the authors conclude.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 85 of 90

Howard Markel, a historian of medicine at the University of Michigan, said he's not convinced by the updated story.

Markel — who wrote a book about the double helix discovery — believes that Franklin got "ripped off" by the others and they cut her out in part because she was a Jewish woman in a male-dominated field.

In the end, Franklin left her DNA work behind and went on to make other important discoveries in virus research, before dying of cancer at the age of 37. Four years later, Watson, Crick and Wilkins received a Nobel prize for their work on DNA's structure.

Franklin wasn't included in that honor. Posthumous Nobel prizes have always been extremely rare, and now aren't allowed.

What exactly happened, and in what order, will likely never be known for sure. Crick and Wilkins both died in 2004. Watson, 95, could not be reached and Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, where he served as director, declined to comment on the paper.

But researchers agree Franklin's work was critical for helping unravel DNA's double helix shape — no matter how the story unfolded.

"How should she be remembered? As a great scientist who was an equal contributor to the process," Markel said. "It should be called the Watson-Crick-Franklin model."

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Science and Educational Media Group. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

## East Palestine families living in limbo months after fire

By TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

EAST PALESTINE, Ohio (AP) — Jeff Drummond spends days and nights alone in a tiny room with fake wood paneling, two small beds and a microwave atop a mini refrigerator that serves as a nightstand — his pickup truck parked just outside the door at the roadside motel where he's taken refuge since early February.

Shelby Walker bounces from hotel to hotel with her five children and four grandchildren while crews tear up railroad tracks and scoop out contaminated soil near their four-bedroom home.

Almost 3 months after a fiery Norfolk Southern train derailment blackened the skies, sent residents fleeing and thrust East Palestine into a national debate over rail safety, residents say they are still living in limbo. They're unsure how or whether to move on from the accident and worry what will happen to them and the village where they have deep family roots, friendships and affordable homes.

"I have no idea how long we can continue to do this," says Walker, while washing clothes at a laundromat.

Walker, 48, also works at a small hotel where many workers are staying, so is constantly reminded of the accident. She remembers the scorched rail tanker at her property line and a backyard flooded with water from the burn site. "Sometimes I just break down," she says.

About half of East Palestine's nearly 5,000 residents evacuated when, days after the Feb. 3 derailment, officials decided to burn toxic vinyl chloride from five tanker cars to prevent a catastrophic explosion.

Most have returned, though many complain about illnesses and worry about soil, water and air quality. Some are staying away until they're sure it's safe. Others, like Drummond, are not allowed back in their homes because of the ongoing cleanup.

The retired truck driver and Gulf War veteran misses mowing the lawn, puttering around his yard and chatting with regulars at the tavern next door.

"I have nothing here," says Drummond, sitting on an orange plastic chair outside the Davis Motel in North Lima, Ohio. "So it's trying to find something to keep yourself busy, to keep from going crazy."

### FEARING THE UNKNOWN

Norfolk Southern Railroad is paying for lodging for some families but won't say how many still are out of their homes while the railroad excavates tens of thousands of tons of contaminated soil, a process the Environmental Protection Agency expects to take another 2-3 months. The railroad also must remove toxic

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 86 of 90

chemicals from two creeks, which could take longer.

"I pledge that we won't be finished until we make it right," Norfolk Southern President and CEO Alan Shaw told an Ohio rail safety committee last week.

The railroad also handed out \$1,000 "inconvenience checks" to residents within the ZIP code that includes East Palestine and surrounding areas, but most did not qualify for further assistance and went home.

The EPA's Mark Durno says continual air monitoring at the derailment site and in the community and soil tests in parks, on agricultural land and at other potentially affected areas have not yet detected concerning levels of any contaminants.

"Nothing jumped off page for us yet," Durno says, adding that testing would continue just to be sure.

The railroad says testing shows drinking water is safe, though it's establishing a fund for long-term drinking water protection. It's also establishing funds for health care and to help sellers if their property value falls because of the accident.

But it's the unknown that worries people.

Jessica Conard, a 37-year-old speech therapist, wonders whether her boys — ages 3, 8 and 9 — will ever be able to fish in the pond separating their property from the railroad tracks. Or play at the park where the chemicals are being removed from a stream. Can they remain in the town where "generations upon generations" of family have lived?

"You want them to be able to have those memories," says Conard, who returned to East Palestine six years ago to raise her family where the sound of trains was the backdrop to her own childhood. "I just kind of feel like those memories are tainted because when you hear a train now it kind of makes you cringe."

## DEEP ROOTS

This is the kind of place where everyone seems connected to everyone else, residents say. Parents don't worry about their kids because they know other parents are looking out for them.

Summer Magness chokes up recalling how the community held benefit dinners after her eldest daughter, Samantha, suffered multiple cardiac arrests playing softball four years ago, resulting in a brain injury that left her paralyzed and unable to speak. Samantha, now 16, gets all A's, attends homecoming and still has her circle of friends.

"We couldn't have made it without them," Magness says.

Eighty-one-year-old Norma Carr raised four children in the cedar-sided 1930s duplex she moved into 57 years ago and where three generations lived together before the derailment. She knew everyone in her neighborhood, walked to church and always felt safe among friends.

For now, she's staying in a condominium 10 miles (16 kilometers) away that the railroad rented the family for six months because Carr, who has Parkinson's, fared poorly during a month in a cramped hotel room.

"I miss being able to look out the window and not see a stranger," says Carr, choking back tears.

Most of Conard's relatives work in factories and, like many here, live paycheck to paycheck, putting aside money to buy and fix up homes, she says. "I mean, this is what we strive for. It's the American dream."

She and her husband sold their first East Palestine home last year to move into their "forever home" a couple miles away, on a road named for one of her ancestors. "Then all of a sudden, overnight (the dream is) gone."

## STAY OR GO?

Small businesses like Sprinklz on Top and The Corner Store line the main drag, North Market Street, along with chains like McDonald's and Pizza Hut. The Chamber of Commerce, library and post office are there, too. Statues of bulldogs, the high school mascot, are placed throughout town.

There also are signs reflecting the hardship the village has been through: "Y'all OK?" says one. Others say "Get ready for the greatest comeback in American history."

But many wonder if they should stay or go.

For Summer Magness, it would be difficult to leave the community where her family has lived for generations. She doubts her home could sell for what it would cost to buy elsewhere. Still, she would move if she could, because the feeling of security has been upended and "the safety of my children is my only

concern.”

To stay, Carr’s daughter Kristina Ferguson, 49, says she would want independent testing and a thorough cleaning of their home. But she isn’t sure if the family will ever feel safe there again.

Ferguson also worries whether living there could affect her mother’s Parkinson’s.

“There’s ... no home in the world that is worth losing one family member over,” she says. “I know as long as we’re together we will have a home in our heart.”

Associated Press climate and environmental coverage receives support from several private foundations. See more about AP’s climate initiative here. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

## Fighter or optimist? Iowa Republicans eye Trump alternatives

By THOMAS BEAUMONT and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

CLIVE, Iowa (AP) — Many loyal Republicans in the state that kicks off the presidential nominating season are searching for a White House hopeful other than Donald Trump. There’s less consensus on what that alternative should look like.

Should a potential successor to Trump be just as pugnacious as the former president, but without the constant turmoil? Should that candidate be a next-generation inspiration with an upbeat message aimed at uniting a deeply divided country?

These questions hung over the first marquee event of the 2024 Iowa caucus campaign this past weekend, as nearly 1,000 GOP activists, party officials, volunteers and Christian conservatives crowded the floor of a suburban Des Moines event center for the Iowa Faith and Freedom Coalition’s annual spring fundraiser. Trump remained a hero to many in the crowd though interviews with nearly two dozen attendees demonstrated the opportunity — and obstacles — for those seeking to challenge him.

“There’s got to be somewhere we can get the force of a Donald Trump in a respectful tone,” said Jane Jech, 66, of Marshalltown in central Iowa.

As the 2024 GOP field begins to form, Trump is in a dominant position among Republicans in both Iowa and around the U.S. The question is whether that will continue as the field grows and messages take shape. Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson will formally unveil his campaign on Wednesday and others ranging from Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis to former Vice President Mike Pence are expected to do so in the coming months.

Iowa has a history of humbling candidates who are presumed to be early frontrunners, siding with Texas Sen. Ted Cruz over Trump in 2016 and former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum over Mitt Romney in 2012. If that tendency were to repeat itself, in this rare instance of a former president seeking a comeback, it would set off alarms for Trump.

Over boxed dinners of chicken sandwiches, the audience in Iowa heard in person from six presidential prospects including Hutchinson, Pence, South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott and businessman Vivek Ramaswamy. Notably absent were DeSantis, who was headlining the Utah Republican Party convention, and Trump, who addressed the group in a recorded video message.

“I kind of like the freshness of someone who can capture what can bring us together,” said Perry Kyle, 38, from the western Des Moines suburb of Waukee, “someone who isn’t afraid to tell it like it is, but has an uplifting message.”

First out of Kyle’s mouth was Scott, who recently announced he was forming a presidential exploratory committee. In Iowa, he offered his largest audience yet his call for optimism, reminiscent of Ronald Reagan and markedly different than Trump’s typical list of grievances.

“We must restore hope, create opportunity and protect America, the city on the hill, the beacon in the midst of the storm,” Scott said, sparking applause from the audience.

The comments resonated with Ling Yu Detrick, 29, from the eastern Des Moines suburb of Altoona. “He expresses common sense and does not come across as divisive. Trump is just too divisive.”

That doesn’t mean a swath of Iowa Republicans aren’t itching for a fighter, and see DeSantis, perhaps,

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 88 of 90

as that candidate.

DeSantis has unapologetically racked up conservative legislative achievements, including banning gender-affirming care for minors and eliminating diversity programs in colleges along with barring abortions after six weeks of pregnancy, all with a vocal contempt for Democrats.

"We will never surrender to the woke mob," DeSantis told an audience of more than 1,000 in Davenport, Iowa, last month, repeating his defiant mantra. "Our state is where woke goes to die."

DeSantis' record and tone appeal to Corey Daley, 37, from Des Moines, though he remains open to supporting Trump in the caucuses.

"We need a fighter, someone who is aggressive, otherwise you don't get nothing done," Daley said.

Similarly, Charlotte Heck, from Coon Rapids in west central Iowa, was torn between DeSantis, who is taking steps toward running, and Trump, who announced his bid for a comeback in November. Both are effective champions of conservative values, she said, but she finds Trump's personality distasteful while she is unsure of DeSantis' ability to deliver the way supporters say Trump did.

"I think I like DeSantis, but am not sure yet if he can get the job done the way we know Trump has," she said.

Heck's nod to Trump's record as president echoed throughout the audience, heavy with politically influential evangelical Christians, on Saturday. It's notable for a candidate who once supported abortion rights, spent decades boasting of his sexual exploits and faces felony indictment stemming from a hush money payment made to a porn actor who alleged having an extramarital affair with him.

But Trump's three U.S. Supreme Court nominees, who helped last year overturn *Roe vs. Wade*, the 1973 decision that had recognized a federal right to abortion, and other similar anti-abortion moves have absolved him among many.

Abortion has become an early point of debate in the preliminary stages of the 2024 campaign. Trump's position that abortion restrictions should be left to states, not the federal government, drew sharp rebuke last week from Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America, a leading abortion opposition group.

But a number of evangelical pastors in Iowa, some who opposed Trump's candidacy in 2016, have pointed to the Supreme Court and other pledges he made to the religious right where he delivered, actions Trump noted by video to applause of the audience Saturday.

"I kept my promise, recognized Israel's eternal capital and opened the American embassy in Jerusalem," Trump said during his recorded remarks, prompting applause for what many evangelical Christians see as fulfilling biblical prophecy.

For Danielle Akey, the 2024 conversation begins and ends with Trump.

"Every person needs to get out, and get out of his way," said Akey, 37, from small-town Adel, west of Des Moines. "I like other ones who are running, but he's the one who can get the job done because he has gotten the job done."

Mary Butler, 78, of Pella, Iowa said flatly, "I think he is an American hero," though even she didn't know if she could vote for him again, because of the "forces conspiring against him."

The early assessment, with more than nine months until the caucuses, comes as Trump and Scott have made their moves, while former United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley announced her candidacy in February. While DeSantis travels the country promoting a book and presses his legislative agenda ahead of a spring decision, Hutchinson plans to announce his candidacy Wednesday in his hometown of Bentonville, Arkansas.

Pence, meanwhile, has said he expects to announce his plans by June.

What seemed clear from conversations Saturday is that Hutchinson and Pence may struggle to find their place with Republicans looking for a post-Trump fighter or unifier. Hutchinson, who has said Republicans must turn the page from the Trump era, has since called for him to exit the race in light of the indictment. Pence, on the other hand, is met with respect as a devout Christian, but inspires little enthusiasm, interviews Saturday — and his polite, but muted reception — suggest.

"I don't think you'll ever see Mike Pence getting traction," said Jech, of Marshalltown. "A great guy. I



have great respect for him. But he'll never get traction. He's just too milquetoast."

## Germany arrest Syrian suspected of planning Islamist attack

BERLIN (AP) — German authorities have arrested a Syrian man on suspicion of planning to carry out an explosives attack motivated by Islamic extremism, officials said Tuesday.

Federal police said officers arrested the 28-year-old man early Tuesday in the northern city of Hamburg based on a court-issued warrant for suspected terrorism financing offenses.

Investigators say the man is suspected of trying to obtain substances online that would have allowed him to manufacture an explosive belt "in order to carry out an attack against civilian targets."

Police say the man was encouraged and supported in his action by his 24-year-old brother, who lives in the southern town of Kempten. German news agency dpa reported that the younger man was also detained.

The brothers, whose names weren't immediately released, were described by federal police as being motivated by "radical Islamist and jihadist" views.

Authorities said they had no information indicating a concrete target for the planned attack.

Police searched properties in Hamburg and Kempten, seizing large amounts of evidence including chemical substances, officials said. Some 250 officers were involved in the operation.

Germany's top security official thanked police, saying their actions "have prevented possible Islamist attack plans."

Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said the case showed that the danger of Islamic extremism remained high and pledged that German security agencies would continue to take all information about such threats seriously.

"Germany remains a direct target of Islamist terrorist organizations," she said. "Islamist-motivated lone perpetrators are another significant threat."

In a separate case, authorities in western Germany said Tuesday that they are investigating a possible extremist motive in an attack at a gym in Duisburg last week. A 26-year-old Syrian was arrested days after the attack, in which four men were seriously wounded and one of them remains in life-threatening condition.

Duesseldorf prosecutors said a review of the suspect's cellphone indicated that "there may have been an Islamist motive" behind the attack, but declined to elaborate. The man is currently being held on suspicion of attempted murder and other offenses.

## Today in History: April 26, Chernobyl nuclear plant disaster

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, April 26, the 116th day of 2023. There are 249 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 26, 1986, an explosion and fire at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine caused radioactive fallout to begin spewing into the atmosphere. (Dozens of people were killed in the immediate aftermath of the disaster while the long-term death toll from radiation poisoning is believed to number in the thousands.)

On this date:

In 1607, English colonists went ashore at present-day Cape Henry, Virginia, on an expedition to establish the first permanent English settlement in the Western Hemisphere.

In 1865, John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of President Abraham Lincoln, was surrounded by federal troops near Port Royal, Virginia, and killed.

In 1913, Mary Phagan, a 13-year-old worker at a Georgia pencil factory, was strangled; Leo Frank, the factory superintendent, was convicted of her murder and sentenced to death. (Frank's death sentence was commuted, but he was lynched by an anti-Semitic mob in 1915.)

In 1933, Nazi Germany's infamous secret police, the Gestapo, was created.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Wednesday, April 26, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 292 ~ 90 of 90**

In 1964, the African nations of Tanganyika and Zanzibar merged to form Tanzania.

In 1968, the United States exploded beneath the Nevada desert a 1.3 megaton nuclear device called "Boxcar."

In 1977, the legendary nightclub Studio 54 had its opening night in New York.

In 1984, bandleader Count Basie, 79, died in Hollywood, Florida.

In 1994, voting began in South Africa's first all-race elections, resulting in victory for the African National Congress and the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as president.

In 2000, Vermont Gov. Howard Dean signed the nation's first bill allowing same-sex couples to form civil unions.

In 2009, the United States declared a public health emergency as more possible cases of swine flu surfaced from Canada to New Zealand; officials in Mexico City closed everything from concerts to sports matches to churches in an effort to stem the spread of the virus.

In 2018, comedian Bill Cosby was convicted of drugging and molesting Temple University employee Andrea Constand at his suburban Philadelphia mansion in 2004. (Cosby was later sentenced to three to 10 years in prison, but Pennsylvania's highest court threw out the conviction and released him from prison in June 2021, ruling that the prosecutor in the case was bound by his predecessor's agreement not to charge Cosby.)

Ten years ago: Unable to ignore air travelers' anger, Congress overwhelmingly approved legislation to allow the Federal Aviation Administration to withdraw furloughs of air traffic controllers caused by budget-wide cuts known as the sequester, ending a week of coast-to-coast flight delays. Fire at a psychiatric hospital near Moscow killed 38 people; only three escaped. Country singer George Jones, 81, died in Nashville.

Five years ago: Mike Pompeo was sworn in as secretary of state, minutes after being confirmed by the Senate; he then flew immediately to Brussels for meetings at NATO headquarters. President Donald Trump's White House doctor, Ronny Jackson, withdrew his nomination to be Veterans Affairs secretary in the face of accusations of misconduct. Teachers in Arizona and Colorado converged on state capitols as they launched widespread walkouts in a bid for better pay and education funding. Four quarterbacks were chosen in the first 10 selections in the NFL draft, with the Cleveland Browns grabbing Heisman Trophy winner Baker Mayfield out of Oklahoma.

One year ago: Russia pounded eastern and southern Ukraine as the U.S. promised to "keep moving heaven and earth" to get Kyiv the weapons it needed to repel the new offensive, despite Moscow's warnings that such support could trigger a wider war. Vice President Kamala Harris tested positive for COVID-19 but exhibited no symptoms. Harvard University vowed to spend \$100 million to research and atone for its "extensive" ties with slavery.

Today's Birthdays: Actor-comedian Carol Burnett is 90. R&B singer Maurice Williams is 85. Songwriter-musician Duane Eddy is 85. Rock musician Gary Wright is 80. Actor Nancy Lenehan is 70. Actor Giancarlo Esposito is 65. Rock musician Roger Taylor (Duran Duran) is 63. Actor Joan Chen is 62. Rock musician Chris Mars (The Replacements) is 62. Actor-singer Michael Damian is 61. Actor Jet Li (lee) is 60. Actor-comedian Kevin James is 58. Author and former U.S. Poet Laureate Natasha Trethewey (TREHTH'-eh-way) is 57. Actor Marianne Jean-Baptiste is 56. Rapper T-Boz (TLC) is 53. Former first lady Melania Trump is 53. Actor Shondrella Avery is 52. Actor Simbi Kali is 52. Country musician Jay DeMarcus (Rascal Flatts) is 52. Rock musician Jose Pasillas (Incubus) is 47. Actor Jason Earles is 46. Actor Leonard Earl Howze is 46. Actor Amin Joseph is 46. Actor Tom Welling is 46. Actor Pablo Schreiber is 45. Actor Nyambi Nyambi is 44. Actor Jordana Brewster is 43. Actor Stana Katic is 43. Actor Marnette Patterson is 43. Actor Channing Tatum is 43. Americana/roots singer-songwriter Lilly Hiatt is 39. Actor Emily Wickersham is 39. Actor Aaron Meeks is 37. New York Yankees outfielder Aaron Judge is 31.