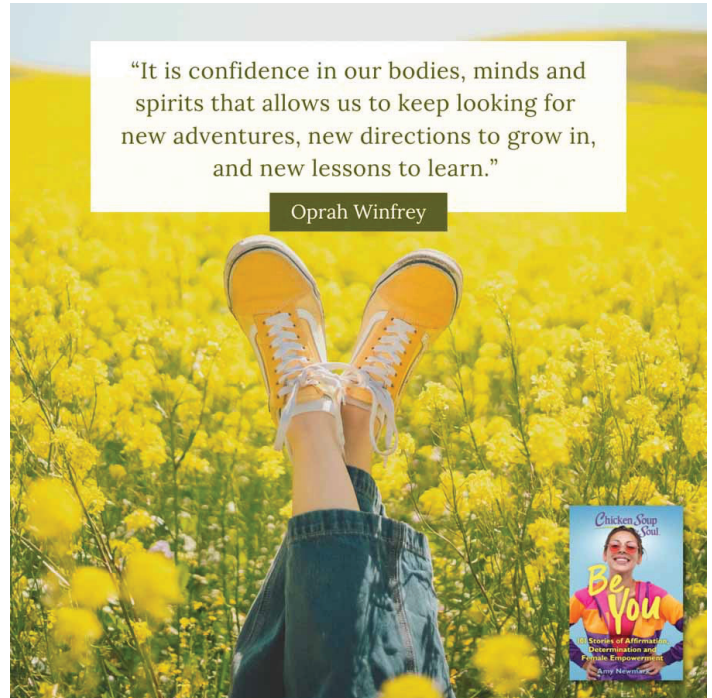


# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 1 of 72

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- Newsweek Bulletin](#)
- [3- HS Baseball team beats Elkton, WIN](#)
- [6- Weekly Vikings Recap](#)
- [7- That's Life by Tony Bender](#)
- [8- Prairie Doc: "It's Always Construction Season for the Body"](#)
- [9- SD News Watch: Long-held rural values at odds in South Dakota gun range debate](#)
- [16- EarthTalk - Musk on desalination](#)
- [17- SD SearchLight: Medicare denial for Alzheimer's drugs sparks push for congressional action](#)
- [21- SD SearchLight: Congressional Roundup: Rounds works across the aisle on housing](#)
- [23- Weather Pages](#)
- [27- Daily Devotional](#)
- [28- 2023 Community Events](#)
- [29- Subscription Form](#)
- [30- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [31- News from the Associated Press](#)



## Groton Community Calendar

### Monday, May 8

School Breakfast: Cook's choice for rest of year.

School Lunch: Zita pasta, bake corn.

Senior Menu: Goulash, green beans, garlic toast, Acini Depepi fruit salad.

The Pantry, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Girls Golf at Milbank, 10 a.m.

Track Meet at Webster Relays. Varsity starts at 10 a.m.; junior high at 3 p.m.

FFA Banquet, 6:30 p.m.

School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.

Senior Citizens meet at the Groton Community Center, 1 p.m..

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6 p.m.

### Tuesday, May 9

School Lunch: Hamburgers, fries.

Senior Menu: Chicken fried steak, mashed potatoes and gravy, oriental blend vegetables, peaches, whole wheat bread.

The Pantry, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Ladies Aid LWML, 1 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Church Council, 7 p.m.

**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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# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 2 of 72

## The Bulletin

by Newsweek

JANUARY 24, 2023

### World in Brief

testify in his own defense in the E. Jean Carroll defamation suit.

- At least 27 people have died after a fire broke out at a gold mine in a remote region of Arequipa, southern Peru, in what is said to be the worst mining tragedy in the country in decades.
- At least 22 people have died after a boat carrying about 50 people capsized off in the southern state of Kerala, India. Rescue efforts are underway.
- *Scream VI* and *The Last of Us* were big winners at the 2023 MTV Movie and TV Awards, which became the first big awards to air during a screenwriters' strike. Tom Cruise was awarded the best performance for *Top Gun: Maverick*, while *The Kardashians* won best docu-reality show.
- South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol is calling officials for steps to bolster security economic cooperation with Japan as the countries take steps to put behind wartime tensions to counter threats posed by North Korea.
- Scientists are warning of aggravating adverse weather as Vietnam reported a record-high temperature of 111.38 degrees, forcing people to stay indoors and workers to start their day earlier than usual.
- In the ongoing war in Ukraine, several people were injured after Russia launched fresh large-scale strikes on Kyiv ahead of its Victory Day holiday on May 9. The U.N. nuclear watchdog said that the situation around Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant is "increasingly unpredictable and potentially dangerous" as Russia evacuates residents from the contested area around the facility.

### WHAT TO WATCH IN THE DAY AHEAD

- Inflation numbers will be in focus this week, which could provide clues on whether the Federal Reserve will raise interest rates again next month.
- The 107th Pulitzer Prize winners and nominated finalists — honoring significant achievements in American journalism, drama, letters, and music — will be announced by Administrator Marjorie Miller at 3 p.m. ET.

# GDILIVE.COM

**School Board Meeting**  
**Monday, May 8, 2023**  
**7 p.m.**

## **Groton Area Tigers Varsity Walks Away Victorious Over Elkton Blue Sox Varsity in High-Scoring Game, 13-6**

The base paths were crowded today for both offenses in a high-scoring game where Groton Area Tigers Varsity came out on top against Elkton Blue Sox Varsity, 13-6.

Groton Area Tigers Varsity secured the victory thanks to seven runs in the first inning. Groton Area Tigers Varsity batters contributing to the big inning included Colby Dunker, Cade Larson, Dillon Abeln, Braxton Imrie, and Brevin Flihs, all driving in runs in the inning.

Groton Area Tigers Varsity fired up the offense in the first inning, when Dunker drew a walk, scoring one run.

Elkton Blue Sox Varsity scored three runs in the fifth inning. Ryan Krog and Ashton Neill each had RBIs in the frame.

Bradin Althoff earned the victory on the hill for Groton Area Tigers Varsity. The pitcher surrendered four runs on six hits over four and two-thirds innings, striking out eight. Logan Ringgenberg threw two and a third innings in relief out of the bullpen.

Eliot Erickson toed the rubber for Elkton Blue Sox Varsity. Erickson lasted one inning, allowing four hits and seven runs. Colt Beck, Jack Stein, and Krog each contributed in relief for Elkton Blue Sox Varsity.

Groton Area Tigers Varsity totaled 13 hits. Althoff, Larson, Flihs, and Tate Larson each collected multiple hits for Groton Area Tigers Varsity. Althoff led Groton Area Tigers Varsity with three hits in four at bats.

Elkton Blue Sox Varsity had nine hits in the game. Erickson and Krog all managed multiple hits for Elkton Blue Sox Varsity. Erickson went 3-for-4 at the plate to lead Elkton Blue Sox Varsity in hits.

## **Groton Area Tigers Varsity Takes the Game Over Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern in a Blow-Out Victory, 8-2**

Groton Area Tigers Varsity had no trouble on offense today, winning big over Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern 8-2.

Groton Area Tigers Varsity opened up scoring in the first inning, when Cole Simon singled on a 0-2 count, scoring one run.

Ryan Groeblichhoff led the Groton Area Tigers Varsity to victory on the mound. The righthander went six innings, allowing one run on three hits and striking out 16. Tate Larson threw one inning in relief out of the bullpen.

Quinton Fischbach took the loss for Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern. The pitcher allowed five hits and six runs over three innings, striking out six and walking one.

Simon led Groton Area Tigers Varsity with two hits in four at bats.

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 4 of 72

## Groton Area Tigers Varsity **13 - 6** Elkton Blue Sox Varsity

📍 Away 📅 Sunday May 07, 2023

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	R	H	E
GRTN	7	1	0	2	1	2	0	13	13	4
ELKT	1	0	0	0	3	2	0	6	9	3

### BATTING

Groton Area Tigers	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
B Flihs (3B, SS,...	5	0	2	3	0	0
C Simon (CF)	3	1	1	0	1	0
N Morris (3B)	1	0	0	0	0	1
B Althoff (P, LF, RF)	4	4	3	0	1	1
L Ringgenberg (R...	3	1	1	0	0	0
C Simon (RF)	1	2	0	0	0	0
C Dunker (LF)	2	1	0	1	1	0
C McInerney (LF)	0	0	0	0	0	0
C Larson (C)	2	0	2	4	2	0
T Larson (1B)	4	2	2	0	0	0
D Abeln (SS, CF,...	4	1	1	2	0	0
B Imrie (2B)	3	1	1	1	0	1
K Antonsen (2B)	1	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>

**2B:** C Larson, B Flihs, B Althoff, **3B:** B Flihs, **TB:** C Simon, C Larson 3, L Ringgenberg, D Abeln, B Imrie, T Larson 2, B Flihs 5, B Althoff 4, **CS:** C Simon, **HBP:** L Ringgenberg, **SB:** C Simon 2, **LOB:** 5

### PITCHING

Groton Area	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
B Althoff	4.2	6	4	2	3	8	0
L Ringgenb...	2.1	3	2	2	2	2	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>

Elkton Blue Sox Val	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
E Erickson (P, 2B)	4	2	3	0	1	0
C Beck (2B, P, 3B,...	5	2	1	1	0	0
J Timm (C)	2	1	1	1	1	1
R Krog (SS, P)	4	1	2	3	0	1
L Schindler (CF)	3	0	0	0	1	1
A Neill (1B)	4	0	1	1	0	3
J Stein (LF, P, 3B)	3	0	1	0	1	1
E Warren (RF)	1	0	0	0	0	1
S Schuurman (RF)	3	0	0	0	0	1
G Neill (3B, LF)	3	0	0	0	1	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>

**2B:** R Krog, E Erickson, **TB:** J Timm, J Stein, R Krog 3, E Erickson 4, C Beck, A Neill, **HBP:** J Timm, **SB:** C Beck, **LOB:** 11

Elkton Blue S	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
E Erickson	1.0	4	7	7	4	0	0
C Beck	3.0	5	3	3	0	1	0
J Stein	2.0	3	3	2	1	0	0
R Krog	1.0	1	0	0	0	3	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 5 of 72

Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern **2 - 8** Groton Area Tigers Varsity

📍 Home 📅 Sunday May 07, 2023

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	R	H	E
WRNR	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	6	2
GRTN	4	0	2	0	2	0	X	8	8	1

## BATTING

Warner-Ipswich-N	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
D Fischbach (SS)	4	1	1	0	0	3
D Bakeburg (CF)	4	0	1	0	0	1
A Remily (1B)	3	0	1	0	0	2
T Wiedebush (1B)	1	0	1	0	0	0
N Fischbach (RF)	1	0	0	1	2	1
T Gosch (RF)	1	0	1	1	0	0
Q Fischbach (P)	2	0	0	0	0	2
D Ward (P)	2	0	0	0	0	1
X Kadlec (LF)	2	0	0	0	0	2
J Schmidt (LF)	2	0	0	0	0	1
L Fischbach (3B, C)	2	0	0	0	1	1
A Bishop (C)	1	0	0	0	0	1
G Ratigan (3B)	1	0	0	0	0	0
G Lane (2B)	2	1	1	0	1	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>16</b>

**TB:** A Remily, D Bakeburg, T Gosch, D Fischbach, T Wiedebush, G Lane, **HBP:** A Bishop, **LOB:** 10

## PITCHING

Warner-Ipswi	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
Q Fischbach	3.0	5	6	2	1	6	0
D Ward	3.0	3	2	2	1	2	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>

**L:** Q Fischbach, **P-S:** Q Fischbach 66-43, D Ward 40-26, **WP:** Q Fischbach 2, D Ward 2, **HBP:** Q Fischbach, **BF:** Q Fischbach 18, D Ward 13

Groton Area Tigers	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
B Flihs (3B)	4	1	1	0	0	2
C Simon (CF)	4	1	2	1	0	2
B Althoff (1B)	3	2	1	0	0	0
T Larson (DH, P)	4	2	0	0	0	0
L Ringgenberg (RF)	3	1	1	0	0	2
C Dunker (LF)	2	1	1	2	1	1
C Larson (C)	3	0	1	1	0	0
D Abeln (SS)	2	0	1	1	1	0
B Imrie (2B)	3	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>

**2B:** C Larson, **TB:** L Ringgenberg, B Althoff, C Larson 2, C Dunker, D Abeln, C Simon 2, B Flihs, **HBP:** B Althoff, **SB:** C Simon, B Flihs, **LOB:** 5

Groton Area 1	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
R Groebling...	6.0	3	1	1	4	16	0
T Larson	1.0	3	1	1	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>0</b>

**W:** R Groeblinghoff, **P-S:** R Groeblinghoff 107-68, T Larson 14-10, **WP:** R Groeblinghoff, **HBP:** R Groeblinghoff, **BF:** R Groeblinghoff 27, T Larson 6



## Weekly Vikings Recap - Undrafted Free Agents

By Jack & Duane Kolsrud

With the Minnesota Vikings only making six picks in last week's NFL Draft, the team made a concerted effort to sign some of the most coveted prospects that went undrafted. In total, the Vikings signed 15 undrafted players this past week. Most of these players will likely not make the final roster come September, and many of them are honestly just on the Vikings as of now so the team has enough players for all their offseason practices. However, there are two players in this undrafted group that fans should keep an eye on as they have a legitimate shot to make the Vikings' final 53-man roster and even make major contributions to the team this year.

Andre Carter II - Edge Rusher (Army)

With the rumors swirling around Za'Darius Smith not wanting to remain in Minnesota, some experts thought the Vikings needed to address the edge rusher position in this year's draft. Surprisingly, the Vikings waited until after the draft to do so by signing Andre Carter II, the undrafted edge rusher out of Army. Carter, who stands 6'6" was ranked on the consensus draft board as the 101st overall player in this year's draft. Based on that ranking, Carter should have gone in the late third round.

Carter's fall out of the draft can be likely chalked up to his disappointing 2022 season at Army. In 2021, Carter was a star at Army with an impressive 15.5 sacks, the second most sacks in the country that year. However, Carter's performance dipped massively in 2022 as he was able to only make a total of 3.5 sacks. Carter's lack of production in 2022, along with his skinny frame for an edge rusher, made Carter fall entirely out of the draft. However, if the Vikings can find a way to bulk up Carter, he could become a useful edge rusher for the Vikings in the future.

Ivan Pace Jr. - Inside Linebacker (Cincinnati)

Ivan Pace Jr. was one of the most unique players coming into this year's draft. Standing at only 5'10", he is quite undersized for the inside linebacker position. However, Pace makes up for his lack of size through his athleticism and aggression. What makes Pace so unique is the way he played the inside linebacker position in college. In today's NFL, inside linebackers are asked to cover wide receivers and tight ends more than they have before. Rarely are inside linebackers asked to blitz the quarterback on pass plays. However, that's what made Pace so impressive in college. In his lone season at Cincinnati, Pace blitzed so often on pass plays that he ended with a staggering nine sacks on the season.

Coming into this year's draft, the consensus draft board had Pace ranked as the 153rd overall player, in other words, a 5th-round ranking. However, given Pace's lack of size and that the inside linebacker position has started to lose value in the current NFL, NFL teams did not value Pace enough to take him in the draft and Pace went surprisingly undrafted.

With the departure of Eric Kendricks this offseason, the starting inside linebacker duo for the Vikings will likely be Jordan Hicks and Brian Asamoah. After that, the position group is slim and Pace has a legitimate chance to be the third inside linebacker on the depth chart come September. With Brian Flores as the new defensive coordinator, the Vikings might get creative with how they use Pace, should he make the final roster.

Here is the full list of undrafted players who signed with Minnesota:

OL Alan Ali, TCU

DT Calvin Avery, Illinois

ILB Abraham Beuplan, Marshall

OLB Andre Carter II, Army

OL Jacky Chen, Pace

CB C.J. Coldon, Oklahoma

ILB Wilson Huber, Cincinnati

WR Cephus Johnson, Southeastern Louisiana

WR Malik Knowles, Kansas State

ILB Ivan Pace, Jr., Cincinnati

K Jack Podlesny, Georgia

TE Ben Sims, Baylor

WR Thayer Thomas, N.C. State

CB NaJee Thompson, Georgia Southern

CB Jaylin Williams, Indiana

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 7 of 72

## Are we going to trust the government to potty train us?

Fargo Forum columnist Jim Shaw wrote last week, "To paraphrase Gerald Ford, our long statewide nightmare is over. The North Dakota Legislature has adjourned."

This one was a doozy, one for the ages, inanely focused on culture wars, leaving critical funding issues for the very end of the session.

A faction of self-righteous busybodies declared war on librarians, doctors, teachers, parents, school lunches, and the LGBTQ community. Was any letter of the alphabet was left unscathed? Certainly not P.

They imported a contrived national culture war agenda to solve problems that don't exist. Job security, I guess. In the end, SWAT teams didn't descend on libraries over the placement of National Geographic, but there's an obsession over bathrooms and who can use them.

Are we really going to trust the government to potty train us?

Any guy who's gone to a concert or a nightclub has watched women invade the restroom. No one blinks. People have been negotiating this for years without legislation. When we drank beer out on the prairie, boys to the front, girls to the rear, and somebody would always press the brake pedal just for fun.

I've done the math on this, and it seems to me that anyone in "the wrong bathroom" is going to be in a stall. (We'll pause for some of you to sort through that.) Isn't that the dignified solution? Stalls? Separate showers? Co-ed facilities are common in Europe, and we've had unisex, family bathrooms for ages and no one died.

What are we so afraid of? Someone please cite the long list of North Dakota bathroom crimes. It's nonexistent. The last big regional bathroom arrest involved an Idaho Republican in the Minneapolis airport. When they say, "Don't squeeze the Charmin, in Minnesota, they're serious.

It's just silly, and that's how we look to the nation. There was a time when we wanted less government and personal privacy. You know, personal responsibility, local control, freedom, and all of that. Or was that just for T-shirts and bumper stickers?

The reality is, parents, doctors, teachers, school boards, county and city governments, typically know what's best for them, their families, and their communities. When will we learn that one-size, cookie-cutter solutions often cause more issues than they solve?

Maybe I'm naive, but I trust my librarian, Larry Flynt, to keep the bodice-busters under the counter in a brown paper wrapper, and school administrators to sort out bathroom concerns, and let's face it, it's custodians who get solve the real problems. Gosh, no one's ever legislated plungers and yet, we figured it out all by ourselves without Big Bathroom Brother.

Meanwhile, with the rest of the country mocking North Dakota Legislative Luddites, we're spending millions to promote the state and recruit workers to fill 30,000 workplace vacancies. Famously, it was recently reported, we snagged nine. Nine people showed up to work as a result of millions spent.

Talk about mixed messaging. One corner shouts, "We're Legendary!" while others demand you to drop your pants before you get to the bathroom. Along with armed guards, perhaps we'll post licensed psychiatrists outside the door who'll make you complete a psychological profile to make sure you're not gay and therefore attracted to the general population inside. Then which bathroom must you use? Defecation's never been more complicated. Used to be, the only concern was if there was paper on the spool.

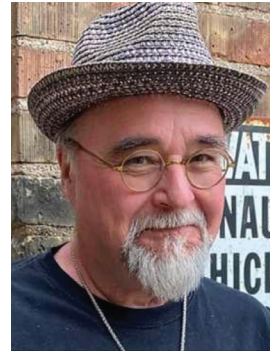
It's silly. Mean and unproductive.

What if we sent a different message? What if—and I know this might require constitutional changes—every resident got an oil rebate check every year just like Alaskans? Imagine every family member receiving \$2,000 just for living here. Instead, we keep giving Big Oil tax cuts for no reason. Folks, they're only here because we've got oil. Duh.

What if we significantly paid down higher education and healthcare costs for residents? Incentivize North Dakota citizenship! Cuz, you know the weather isn't working for us. Unless, maybe, we put a snowmobile in every garage.

Legislators need to seriously consider the messages they're broadcasting to the world. The citizens of this once-great state are overwhelmingly kind, openminded, and far more progressive than those who purportedly represent us. Let's reflect that. Let that be our message.

Make North Dakota Great Again.



**That's  
Life**  
by Tony Bender

## "It's Always Construction Season for the Body"

Like a car racing along the interstate, exiting onto a highway, and finally reaching the family farm along a dusty gravel road, our blood circulates inside our bodies. There are the major blood vessels, such as the aorta running out of the heart, and there are the tiny capillaries allowing blood cells one at a time to carry oxygen and nutrients to all the cells in our bodies. The network of capillaries is so complex it is estimated there are over 40 billion in one person, and if stretched out in a single line they would cover over 100,000 miles.



Based on Science, Built on Trust



**Andrew Ellsworth, MD.**

Our blood is made up of a mix of liquids and solids. The liquid, plasma, is composed of water, salts, and proteins. The solids include red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets. In general, the red blood cells deliver oxygen and carry away carbon dioxide, the white blood cells help fight infections, and the platelets help form clots if you get a cut.

Bone marrow is the spongy material inside our bones that helps make new blood cells, which only last so long. Red blood cells last about 120 days, platelets last 6 days, and white blood cells may last less than a day or much longer.

As with any stretch of road, accidents happen. The blood cells can become clogged, causing a stroke in the brain or a heart attack in the heart. Sometimes what goes wrong is a problem of overproduction causing a cancer of the blood. Leukemia is a cancer of the white blood cells, lymphoma is a cancer of the tissues that produce and carry white blood cells, and multiple myeloma is a cancer of plasma proteins. A cancer of too many red blood cells is called polycythemia vera.

While some cancers often cause the growth of a solid tumor, the overproduction of blood cells may be harder to detect. Symptoms are often vague, including fatigue, weakness, night sweats, bone pain, weight loss, frequent infections, enlarged lymph nodes, and other nonspecific symptoms.

Advancements in cancer therapies have made large strides in the treatment of blood cancers. Besides chemotherapy and radiation therapies, treatments can include stem cell transplants, immunotherapies, and targeted therapies which are more specific on the molecular level to what is being overproduced. Immunotherapies include modifying T cells to recognize and attack cancer cells.

The complexities of the human body are endless and amazing. Part of the wonder is how the cells in our bodies are constantly growing and being replaced. Just like our highway system, there is always construction.

Andrew Ellsworth, M.D. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices family medicine in Brookings, South Dakota. Follow The Prairie Doc® at [www.prairiedoc.org](http://www.prairiedoc.org) and on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show based on science, built on trust for 21 seasons, most Thursdays on SDPB and streaming live on Facebook most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.





## Long-held rural values at odds in South Dakota gun range debate

Bart Pfankuch

South Dakota News Watch

An effort to build a huge gun range and shooting complex north of Rapid City has created divisiveness and hard feelings between two of South Dakota's most iconic populations.

The values run deep and histories stretch long among people in the two groups – those devoted to hunting and shooting, and rugged ranchers who have run cattle on the same rangelands for generations – but they are at odds on the gun range issue.

Other players include a well-heeled business owner who's a frequent donor to the governor and the dominant Republican Party and a family that runs a rural Bible ranch for children.

It has all the makings of an epic battle that has raged for more than two years and will likely cause consternation that lingers long after the first rifle round is fired.

"We have a big stake in this," said rancher Joe Norman, who lives closest to the proposed gun range site. "This is about our quality of life, and our livelihood."

So far, no dirt has been turned on the proposed South Dakota Shooting Sports Complex.

It would include 175 shooting lanes and be the largest gun range in the state and possibly the nation. The project was proposed by the

South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Department with strong support by Gov. Kristi Noem.

### Setbacks delay shooting range project for now

Supporters say the complex will fill a great need for a formal shooting range in the Rapid City area, where hunting and shooting is popular. They say it will provide a safe, well-managed venue for children and adults to learn hunter safety, practice safe shooting skills and help uphold the state's legacy of gun ownership. Backers say the range will also provide a training site for military and law enforcement and generate millions in local economic revenue.

But neighbors say the project will bring unwanted noise, traffic, pollution and possibly crime to their remote, rural region. A few opponents say the project is being driven by political concerns and is being pushed by people seeking to make a buck on the backs of longtime rural South Dakota residents.

Others, including some state lawmakers, have questioned the process GFP has used to generate support and funding for the project, arguing that the agency has not answered all their questions about the range or adequately addressed neighbor concerns.

The agency is well along in planning. It hoped to break ground in May 2023 and finish construction in

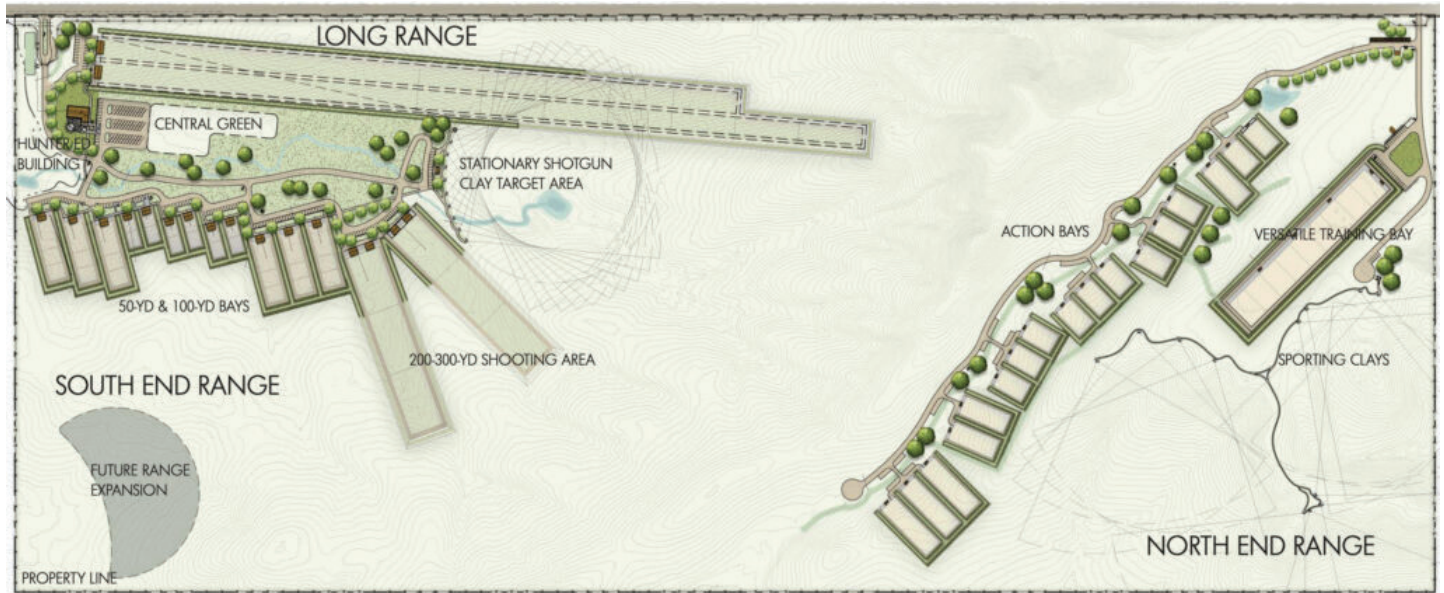


**Joe Norman stands outside his ranch home in western Meade County on a quiet day in April. Norman is fighting a state government plan to open a large gun range across the road from his property that he says will bring near-constant sounds of gunfire into his rural lifestyle.** Photo: Bart Pfankuch, South

Dakota News Watch

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 10 of 72



**A map of what the proposed gun range of Rapid City would look like.** (Photo: GFP)

2024. GFP has purchased 400 acres for the site, generated an environmental impact statement, received permission from the Meade County Commission and raised nearly \$3 million in private funds to build the range. GFP hopes to raise \$7 million in donations, possibly tap federal and agency funds to pay the rest of the construction costs and use GFP money to staff the range.

But the GFP has suffered setbacks.

The Legislature in 2022 rejected a bill to provide \$2.5 million in state funding. And in late April 2023, the GFP was forced to pause the project when its call for bids attracted only one offer – a \$19 million bid by Scull Construction Service of Rapid City that was more than double the \$9 million estimated cost.

GFP has rejected the bid and will seek new bids in the coming months, a spokesman told News Watch.

## **Few gun ranges near Rapid City**

The GFP said the project could generate more than \$3 million in new shooting-related revenue and be used to promote safe gun use by individuals and families with children.

As designed on paper, the shooting complex would be built on 400 acres of open prairie east of Elk Vale Road in Meade County, about 12 miles north of a fast-growing section of Rapid City. The complex would include three separate firing ranges up to 1,200 yards long, with 175 individual shooting bays and a hunter education building set amid a plaza with parking and restroom facilities.

GFP officials declined interview requests for this article, but GFP Director Kevin Robling told a legislative committee in 2022 there is a shortage of safe, managed shooting ranges in the Rapid City area. He said shooting enthusiasts are forced now to use unofficial sites that are marred by trash and unsafe behaviors.

Robling said the range will provide recreation opportunities for families, youth groups and individuals who want to safely uphold the state's tradition of hunting and shooting.

The range would have areas where archers can practice, shotgun shooters can hone their trap skills, and it may host air-gun users who want to engage in their hobby.

"We're a pro-gun state, and gun owners want a safe, secure, controlled environment to shoot," Robling testified. "We view this project as a celebration of South Dakota's outdoor heritage and what lies ahead. ... We have an amazing opportunity in front of us."

The complex would also provide training opportunities for law enforcement and military personnel from the National Guard and nearby Ellsworth Air Force base, he said.





## Noise and safety protections planned for gun range

Robling said the agency has gone to great lengths to inform and work with neighbors.

He told lawmakers the range includes sound-muffling features and will have berms to ensure no bullets leave the site. The state has also taken significant steps to protect the land and water from lead or other contaminants, he said.

During legislative debate, the project was backed by representatives of the National Rifle Association and other shooting and hunting groups.

Sen. David Johnson, lead sponsor of the \$2.5 million state funding proposal, said the complex would serve a large age range of shooters and provide a top-notch recreational opportunity for both hunters and gun enthusiasts who spend millions on their sport.

"This bill is about first-time gun users, it's about kids, it's about youth who are sponges

**A flowing stretch of Elk Creek runs not far to the south of the proposed gun range and shooting complex proposed for Meade County 12 miles north of Rapid City.** (Photo: Bart Pfankuch, South Dakota News Watch)

as we all know for gaining wisdom through training in safe firearm use," said Johnson, a Republican from Rapid City.

"It's about kids who want to learn about the great recreation of the outdoors and such a deeply respected tradition and heritage here in the state of South Dakota. It's about men and women, boys and girls who are outdoor enthusiasts."

## Ranch families near proposed gun range upset about project

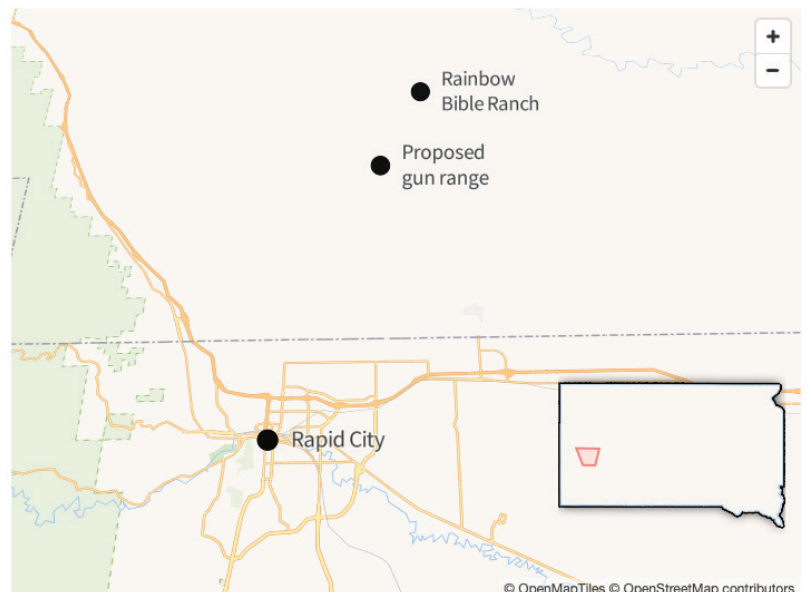
But the project and the way it has evolved have angered the handful of ranch families who raise cattle and other livestock on land their families have owned and operated since the late 1800s.

Even as he sees the need for a West River gun range, Norman, the nearest rancher, said there's no way that the shooting complex — which could attract dozens of people firing rifles, handguns and shotguns for eight hours a day in winter and more than 10 hours a day in the summer — will be a good neighbor.

Such a large, loud shooting facility located amid gravel roads where every vehicle is trailed by a plume of dust doesn't belong in an area where families want to raise their kids, run their ranches and eventually retire in peace, quiet and relative solitude, Norman said.

"My wife and I aren't against a gun range, we're just against the location," said Norman, whose home is about a mile from the shooting site and whose ranch land abuts the range boundary.

Proposed gun range north of Rapid City



# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 12 of 72

— “ —  
We view this project as a celebration of South Dakota's outdoor heritage and what lies ahead. ... We have an amazing opportunity in front of us.

— ” —  
South Dakota GFP  
Director Kevin Robling



The Norman family settled their Meade County ranch lands in 1881 and Joe and his family now run 700 cattle on those 7,600 acres. During legislative testimony in 2022, Norman asked lawmakers how they would like to have a shooting range within sight and sound of their homes after a long week of work.

“You want to get home and spend a nice weekend at your house with your spouse, so you turn your phone off and your email, and you start to enjoy your Saturday when at eight in the morning, gunfire starts,” said Norman, 67. “And not just one shot — they have 175 bays in their project, so you could have 175 shooters at once, and for eight hours. But you think, ‘I’m OK,’ and then it starts again on Sunday, and for eight hours or maybe 11 hours a day.”

Norman said the project also has many unanswered questions, including the fact there is no water source on site for drinking or fire protection, that rural roads

may fail under much heavier traffic and that staffing could be as low as one person at a sprawling shooting complex.

## **Bible camp operators have concerns about range**

Larry Reinhold and his family run the Lonetree Ranch horse and cattle farm and operate the Rainbow Bible Ranch on a site along Elk Vale Road about three miles north of the shooting range location.

Reinhold said GFP officials have told him his operations won't be affected by the gun range, but he has serious concerns nevertheless. The family raises Hereford cattle and quarter horses on about 4,000 acres that was homesteaded by their ancestors in the early 1900s.

The Reinhold family has run the Bible ranch for children ages 6 to 18 for more than 40 years. Part of the experience is the peace and quiet that are provided to visitors who come to camp out, explore nature, learn about agriculture and expand their spirituality, Reinhold said.

Bible campers sleep under the stars, fish and swim, go horseback riding and see a rodeo, and even shoot .22 rifles during their stay.

“There's an awful lot of people who do not have the privilege of experiencing the natural setting that we are able to enjoy in western South Dakota,” Reinhold said. “That's what is so appealing for the families that send their kids here. South Dakota has something to be very thankful for and grateful for ... the quiet, the beauty and openness, that's what we live here for, and that's what we provide to the kids, and why would we want to impede that?”

Reinhold said he's disappointed in the level of communication about the project provided by GFP, which he says has been minimal. He said the fact that a massive gun range is being proposed for a site close to a Bible ranch shows that “somebody didn't do their homework.”

Reinhold said that even if the range gets built and his ranch is within earshot of frequent gunfire, he will continue to provide the best possible experience for the roughly 450 children who visit during the summer and others who come year-round for daylong events, evening barbecues or live nativity scenes.

“I plan to keep on going until the Lord says I'm done,” he said.

## **Support mixed among elected officials**

GFP tried repeatedly during the 2022 legislative session to obtain direct state financial support for the gun range but came up short.

Senate Bill 175, which would have provided \$2.5 million for the project, passed the Senate 28-7 but failed in a House committee and then on the House floor.

While House members acknowledged the need for a West River range, many sympathized with neigh-



# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 13 of 72

bor concerns over noise and intrusion on their operations and lifestyles.

Rep. Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls, chaired the House Committee on Appropriations, which voted to kill the bill after a substantial public hearing. Karr said the proposal "didn't pass the sanity check" because of a lack of ongoing funding for the project once it is completed. Another factor was the limited state staffing coupled with a proposal to rely significantly on volunteers.

Karr also criticized GFP for bringing the funding proposal well after it had plans for the project underway. He said it appeared the funding bill was brought before lawmakers "to give (GFP) that credibility to silence" opponents.

Karr added: "It seems like there's been a lot of communication breakdowns and misunderstandings of what this thing looks like and what its intrusiveness would be."

The bill was eventually brought to the full House of Representatives where it failed 39-30, then was revived for a second vote that fell 35-34.

The Meade County Commission passed a gun range ordinance to make way for the proposed range, voted to move a section line and in March 2023 gave final permit approval.

Commissioner Gary Deering told News Watch he cast the lone vote against the permit because he shared concerns with landowners that the project would encroach on their businesses and lifestyles.

But Deering said he expects GFP will do a good job in building and managing the range and continue to work with ranchers in the area to address their concerns.

## Opponent sees political motivations behind gun range

Norman, the lifelong rancher, has campaign signs for Republican candidates tucked inside his barn and is a big supporter of the Black Hills Stock Show. Still, he questions the motivations of Noem and Rapid City businessman Jim Scull, namesake of Scull Construction Service.

Noem, he said, wants the massive range to use as part of her platform to build a national profile among conservatives and potentially seek higher office. The governor recently spoke at a national NRA event and noted that her granddaughter who's younger than 2 years old already owns a shotgun and rifle.

"She wants to build the largest gun range in the United States, and that's what this is all about for her," Norman said.

Noem declined a request for an interview.

Her spokesman, Ian Fury, told News Watch that the governor's support for the range is not related to politics. Instead, he said, it is part of her longstanding efforts to support gun ownership and the culture and history of shooting sports in South Dakota.

"Growing up in South Dakota, shooting sports were a big part of how I was raised," Noem wrote in a government report on the project. "Our residents and our visitors should have access to quality shooting ranges where they can learn safe and responsible use of firearms."

Noem said it would be GFP's finest outdoor shooting range and "provide opportunities so that generations to come can learn to love shooting sports just as I did."



**Joe Norman and his family have 700 cows on the 7,600-acre Meade County ranch that has been in his family since the 1880s, but which is now facing the prospect of a large state-run gun range and shooting complex just across a rural road from his property line.** (Photo: Bart Pfankuch, South Dakota News Watch)



# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 14 of 72

And yet, Diane Norman, Joe Norman's wife, wonders if Noem would want a large gun range near the land where her family still farms and raises livestock.

"Gov. Noem grew up on a ranch, and I wonder if she realizes this is being put near ranches just like hers," Diane Norman said. "There's so, so many generations of ranchers out here, and it's supposed to be our state's No. 1 industry. But we're not getting any support on this."

"Why would anyone want to spend \$19 million to get kids to shoot when that's such a problem these days?"

## Businessman hopes to help children

Scull is influential in the West River business and civic community, and has donated to numerous local charities and causes.

He did not return a phone call seeking comment from News Watch.

Norman said Scull is seeking to benefit financially from the shooting range and is using his political connections to push the project forward. Norman's suspicions rose in March 2023 when Scull Construction Service submitted the only bid to build the range, which included a \$17.2 million basic bid and another \$1.9 million in add-ons that included a shotgun bunker and solar array.

Though Scull never owned the land where the range would be built, he did locate and help broker the sale of the land from a private owner to the South Dakota Parks and Wildlife Foundation, which then sold the land to the state for \$900,000, according to Kristina Coby, executive director of the foundation, and GFP meeting records.

Scull and his family are frequent donors to political candidates and causes, giving thousands to Noem's campaigns for Congress and governor, as well as to state and national GOP political action committees, according to state and federal election records.



**Children who attend the Rainbow Bible Ranch in Meade County engage in a variety of activities, including horseback riding, that the camp operator worries could be affected by a proposed state-run gun range nearby.** (Photo: Courtesy Rainbow Bible Ranch)

“South Dakota has something to be very thankful for and grateful for ... the quiet, the beauty and openness ... and why would we want to impede that?”

Larry Reinhold, operator of Rainbow Bible Ranch

Scull testified before a state Senate committee in 2022 that he supports the project because it would provide a safe place to shoot for dozens of disadvantaged children who participate in the annual South Dakota Youth Hunting Adventures, a charitable youth outdoors group Scull helped found and continues to operate.

"I'm a passionate supporter," Scull told the Senate Appropriations Committee. "We've never had a range and I've pushed this for years. ... We have to have a place for these kids to go."

Scull is retired but retains minority ownership of the construction company that has built numerous iconic structures in Rapid City and beyond, according to his son, Andy Scull, president of Scull Construction Services.

In an interview with News Watch, he referred questions about the bid package to GFP.

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 15 of 72

Andy Scull said accusations about the business and his father are “100 percent untrue,” though he did not elaborate.

## **GFP committed to completion**

Fury, Noem’s spokesperson, said the fact GFP rejected the bid by Scull Construction Services shows there are no political forces at work.

The higher-than-expected bid is indicative of a larger trend in which both government and private construction project costs have risen rapidly in recent years due to higher material and labor costs, he said.

Fury said GFP has indicated it will break the project and the bidding process into smaller segments and get it going in stages.

Nick Harrington, a spokesperson for GFP, told News Watch in an email that the agency began to explore building a West River gun range in 2019. GFP considered the Meade County site “ideal” for the range, he said.

Harrington did not indicate the reason the Scull bid was rejected but noted that GFP will re-bid the project and continue to work with stakeholders to make it a reality.

“GFP is committed to building the South Dakota Shooting Sports Complex, which will serve all of South Dakota and its visitors,” he wrote.

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



**Meade County rancher Joe Norman points to the area behind his ranch where a huge gun range has been proposed and which would allow shooting by dozens of people for at least eight hours every day.**

Photo: Bart Pfankuch, South Dakota News Watch



## **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.



## EARTHTALK ™

Dear EarthTalk: Why is Elon Musk so blasé about the world running out of water, especially after decades-long droughts and rising temperatures?

-- P. Dirksen, Omaha, NE

The billionaire entrepreneur and CEO of SpaceX, Tesla and Twitter recently commented on Bill Maher's show Real Time that "desalination is absurdly cheap," going on to say that since the surface of the planet is 70 percent water, he isn't worried about running out anytime soon. But Musk's optimism on this topic is countered by environmental leaders who believe that water scarcity is a pressing global issue.

Desalination is the process of removing salt and other minerals from seawater or brackish water to produce fresh water. The most common method is reverse osmosis, which involves forcing seawater through a membrane that filters out the salt and other impurities. While its cost has decreased in recent years, it is still more expensive than other sources of fresh water such as collecting rainwater and pumping water from underground aquifers. Desalination costs also vary depending on factors such as location, energy costs and the size of the plant. In some cases, desalination can be prohibitively expensive.

However, it is true that the world has plenty of water in its oceans and other water bodies. According to the United Nations, 97 percent of the world's water is in the oceans (and as such, salty), while just three percent is freshwater. And of that three percent, two-thirds is frozen in glaciers and polar ice caps, leaving only a small fraction of the world's water available for human use.

Water scarcity is a pressing global issue, particularly in regions that experience drought or have limited access to fresh water sources. According to the World Health Organization, around 2.2 billion people lack access to safe drinking water, and this number is expected to increase as a result of climate change and population growth. Desalination can be a viable solution to water scarcity in some regions, particularly those with access to seawater or brackish water sources. However, it is not a panacea, and there are several challenges and limitations associated with it.

One of the biggest challenges of desalination is its energy consumption. Desalination plants require a significant amount of energy to operate, typically electricity. This can be a significant barrier in regions with limited access to affordable energy sources or that rely on fossil fuels for energy production.

Another challenge of desalination is its environmental impact. Desalination can have negative impacts on marine ecosystems and generate greenhouse gases. The intake of seawater can harm marine life, and the discharge of brine back into the ocean can create high-salinity plumes that can harm marine ecosystems.

Musk's optimism most likely stems from bullishness on transitioning to renewable energy. Once we can deploy large scale solar collection facilities at the site of desalination plants, the greenhouse gas and energy cost downsides of desalination mostly disappear. While such a scenario has only been a dream in recent decades, recent advances in technologies may bring about large scale desalination facilities all over the world in the next few decades.



**Caption: Elon Musk thinks we can bring the costs of desalination so low that water shortages will be a thing of the past within decades.** Credit:

Ignacio Ferre Pérez, FlickrCC.



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Medicare denial for Alzheimer's drugs sparks push for congressional action

**Patients, families want access to FDA-approved treatments**

BY: JOHN HULT - MAY 7, 2023 7:00 AM

Deaths from Alzheimer's disease jumped 177% in South Dakota between 2000 and 2019, and the state's mortality rate is higher than the national average.

Those are some of the reasons Jon Carroll went to Washington, D.C., recently to decry an action by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). The agency decided that Medicare will not cover two treatments approved by the Food and Drug Administration in January to treat the disease — thus far the only two drugs shown to slow cognitive decline for Alzheimer's patients.

That's not the main reason he told his story to Congress on behalf of the South Dakota chapter of the Alzheimer's Association.

Carroll's call to action is personal, as he lost his wife Viola to Alzheimer's in 2017, when she was 62 years old. He hopes some of the 250,000 people denied coverage for the drugs so far get the chance to spend more time with their loved ones before they begin to lose touch.

"They've finally got something that helps, and you can't get it," said Carroll, of Sioux Falls. "I would have given anything to have eight more months with my wife before she began the decline."

The decision not to cover an FDA-approved medicine unless patients are part of a clinical trial is "unprecedented," according to the association.

The out-of-pocket cost for the drugs, Lecanemab and Aduhelm, is more than \$26,000 a year unless patients are part of a clinical trial. Each was granted accelerated approval by the FDA, an approach that's been used in recent years to speed certain drugs to market. Medicare has spent billions on drugs with accelerated approval, but placed restrictions on the Alzheimer's treatments.



**Activists gather in Washington, D.C., to call on Medicare to cover two Alzheimer's drugs approved by the Food and Drug Administration.** (Courtesy of Alzheimer's Association of South Dakota)



The issue has sparked calls for answers from two-thirds of South Dakota's congressional delegation. Sen. Mike Rounds has been particularly vocal on the issue.

The drugs are expensive and only help at the onset of Alzheimer's, he told South Dakota Searchlight, but "there's a good possibility that there would be a real improvement in quality of life" if Medicare were to reverse itself and cover the treatments.

### South Dakota issue

Rounds was part of a bipartisan group of 20 U.S. senators to sign a letter to Medicare administrators on Feb. 17 demanding answers on the agency's refusal to cover the new drugs for all patients.

About 13 million Americans will live with the disease by 2050, the letter says. It also notes that Alzheimer's and dementia "cost the nation \$321 billion" in 2022 alone.

The decision not to cover treatments unless the patient is part of clinical trials is especially troubling for smaller states, the senators wrote.

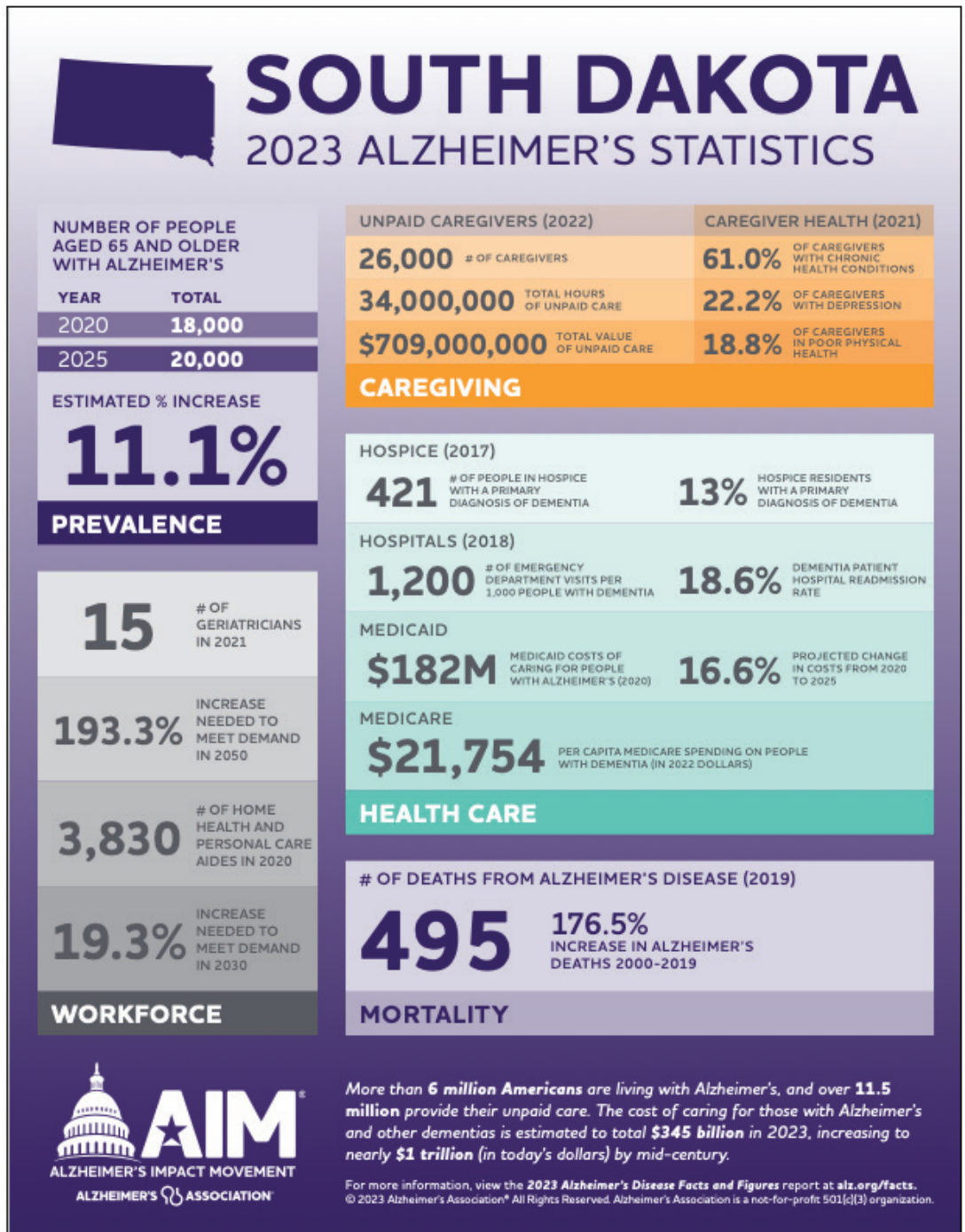
"This decision creates a barrier to care for older Americans, especially individuals living in rural and underserved areas," the letter says.

That's a meaningful distinction for South Dakota, according to Thomas Elness, head of the state chapter of the Alzheimer's Association.

Around 11% of South Dakota seniors have the disease, with 26,000 caregivers putting in around 34 million hours of unpaid care annually.

The FDA approval of the first drugs that can help would be "revolutionary" news, Elness said, but for the Medicare coverage decision.

"It's shocking and ap-





# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 19 of 72

pulling that finally, after a decade of highly targeted research and investments, that we'd have these treatments and not have them available," he said.

Rounds tweeted about the issue in February. Rep. Dusty Johnson told South Dakota Searchlight that he wants to understand why the drugs aren't covered.

"I have asked CMS to clarify why they are putting up barriers to access life-saving drugs and look forward to hearing their rationale," Johnson said in a prepared statement. "If research continues to show improvement in Alzheimer's patients, I hope CMS reverses course and continues to allow these critical drugs to be given to our most vulnerable."

Sen. John Thune, through a spokesman, declined to comment on the situation.

## Limitations, concerns

The new drugs do not cure Alzheimer's. They also come with caveats about possible side effects and timing, and some researchers have questioned their value.

Clinical trials have shown that the drugs have the potential to help patients with early-stage Alzheimer's disease, which needs confirmation through PET scans or spinal taps.

Each drug targets the plaques that kill neurons in the brains of Alzheimer's patients. But that approach has been subject to scrutiny by researchers, who questioned the relative value of the positive effects. Skeptics were concerned that the cost or potential side effects of clearing plaques from the brain would outweigh the potential benefits. The drugs' approval was met with controversy, both for the price and the manner of its approval.

Aduhelm, and later Lecanemab, were granted "accelerated approval" by the FDA, meaning their approval was fast-tracked based on expected clinical benefits. The typical approval process takes several years and requires clearer proof of patient benefits.

That process hasn't stopped Medicare from covering treatments approved in that accelerated fashion before. Medicare has paid billions for accelerated approval cancer drugs like Keytruda and Opdivo.

Those costs have come under scrutiny. One study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association last year found that Medicare had covered \$224 million to pay for such drugs to treat conditions the FDA later learned were not improved upon by their use.

Even when the treatments have been effective, the price is significant. Another 2022 study found that Medicare and Medicaid had pumped \$1.8 billion into accelerated approval treatments by 2019.

## Rounds: Penny-wise and pound-foolish

Medicare administrators have said little publicly about the decision not to cover the Alzheimer's treatments, but Rounds said concerns about immediate cost gloss over the long-term value of coverage. The agency responded to the senators in late February.

"While they're trying to be penny-wise, they might very well be pound-foolish in that Alzheimer's right now is costing us, I think they've indicated, even the last couple of years, close to a third of a trillion dollars a year," Rounds said.

Much of that money goes to cover long-term care coverage in assisted living facilities and nursing homes, so Rounds argues that encouraging the continued development of similar drugs by covering the first two



**Sen. Mike Rounds, R-South Dakota, speaks during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on Capitol Hill on Sept. 28, 2021, in Washington, D.C.** (Photo by Patrick Semansky-Pool/Getty Images)

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 20 of 72

made available would ultimately reduce costs.

The CMS response to the senators' letter didn't address their concerns, Rounds said. The letter says "there is not yet evidence meeting the criteria for reconsideration" for Medicare, and that further studies may produce such evidence.

"Which is another way of telling us to pound sand," Rounds said.

All the cost considerations swirling around the medicines, Rounds said, distract from what he sees as the most important point for most Americans: The drugs could have a meaningful impact on the lives of the afflicted and their families.

"The sooner we get these new drugs out and get the improvements going, along with the quality of life improvements for people that have this disease, the better off we're all going to be," Rounds said.

## Personal impact

That's what matters most to Carroll. Near the end of her life, Jon Carroll said, he would ask his wife to bring him a screwdriver, but she might bring him a bowl or a spoon. She'd wander off in public or holler outside the house, prompting well-being checks from police. He sometimes found himself flagging down strangers to ask them to check on his wife when she'd be in a public restroom for a concerning period of time.

When things got difficult for the Carrolls, Jon could do little more than keep track of and care for Vi.

Given how widespread the disease has become, Carroll said, the drug coverage issue ought to be a concern for everyone.

"If you don't get aware of the issues now, you're not going to have time to think about it when someone you love gets Alzheimer's," Carroll said.

That's a message Jack and Mary Mortenson of Sioux Falls want people to take to heart, as well. The disease is a drag on caregivers, particularly those who remain in the workforce as they care for their family members, and the economy.

Jack is in an early stage of Alzheimer's, but he's already noticed changes.

"It's been a slow regression of what I can think and do. I'm still doing very well, but there's a whole lot of stuff I used to do that I can no longer do," Mortenson said.

He's always been a problem-solver, a person who could find a way to fix things around the house. Mary Mortenson said they'd never hired a plumber, electrician or any other sort of contractor until recently. Jack used to apply those skills to build sets for Harrisburg High School theater performances or in his work as a videographer.

Alzheimer's has changed that.

Until recently, he had three big tool cabinets at HHS. One day he came in to see that one of them was unlocked. He asked around to find out who might have opened them, but the only other person with a key said no one but Jack had been there.

He misses his work with students, but he said he felt like he had no choice but to leave the set work behind.

"We're working with power tools and that kind of stuff, and I didn't want the kids to get hurt because I wasn't doing things right," he said. "So I gave up that really fine job, and it's been just downhill from there ... I'm just slowly losing the ability to do a lot of things that I used to do."

Mary Mortenson struggles to understand why Medicare won't let patients make the call on the drugs that could help families like theirs.

"This may be something that Jack and his doctor would choose, or it may be something he and his doctor would choose not to use," Mary Mortenson said. "But that shouldn't be dependent on whether it's available or not. And so our position is Medicare needs to pay for this medicine, like it pays for every other medicine that the FDA approves."

*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.*

## Congressional Roundup: Rounds works across the aisle on housing

**Thune, Johnson also propose bipartisan legislation**

**BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - MAY 6, 2023 10:30 AM**

*EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the latest installment in a series of periodic updates on the activities of South Dakota's congressional delegation.*

Sen. Mike Rounds, R-South Dakota, joined with fellow Senate Banking Committee member Tina Smith, D-Minnesota, to introduce legislation this week that would "improve rural housing programs, cut red tape and increase the accessibility of affordable housing," according to a news release from Rounds' office.

The news release said the legislation would be "one of the most significant reforms of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Housing Service in years."

"As we face an affordable housing crisis across the nation, I look forward to working with my colleagues to get these important, bipartisan updates signed into law," Rounds said.

For the past year, Rounds and Smith have held hearings, met with stakeholders and visited with constituents in their states about hurdles within the Rural Housing Service, which offers programs to build or improve housing and essential community facilities in rural areas. The legislation proposes improvements and updates to the Rural Housing Service to create and preserve affordable housing opportunities.

Specifically, according to Rounds, the bill would:

- Fix a longstanding problem for properties that were financed by the USDA decades ago and now have maturing mortgages, by making it easier for nonprofits to acquire those properties.
- Expand an existing USDA pilot program, in partnership with Native Community Development Financial Institutions, to provide home loan assistance to Native American borrowers.
- Bring the USDA's method of determining incomes in line with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's practices.
- Modernize the USDA's foreclosure process to cut red tape, better protect homeowners and make certain USDA-owned properties stay affordable.
- Update the rules for a home repair loan program to make it less burdensome to get smaller loans.
- Make investments in technology so the USDA can process loans more quickly and with less staff time spent on paperwork or manual data entry.



**Sen. Mike Rounds, R-South Dakota, speaks to reporters outside of the Senate Chambers during a vote in the U.S. Capitol on March 14, 2023, in Washington, D.C.** (Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images)

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 22 of 72

## **MMIW awareness**

On Friday, Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota, joined a bipartisan group of House colleagues to introduce a resolution that would designate a National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

The resolution aims to raise awareness about the disproportionate violence Native American women experience and the lack of updated statistics on the national level, as well as insufficient resources committed to the issue.

Four in five American Indian and Alaska Native women experience violence in their lifetime, and American Indian women living on reservations face murder rates more than 10 times the national average. A news release from Johnson cited the South Dakota Attorney General's 2021 Crime Report, showing 31.6% of murder victims and 37.1% of kidnapping/abduction victims in the state were American Indian or Alaska Natives, despite those groups making up less than 10% of the state's population.

"These statistics are unacceptable," Johnson said. "I'm proud to shine a light on these tragedies and will continue to advocate for vulnerable Native populations."

## **Athlete pay and taxes**

Sen. John Thune, R-South Dakota, and Sen. Ben Cardin, D-Maryland, introduced legislation this week that would prohibit individuals and organizations from receiving a charitable tax deduction for contributions that compensate college or incoming college athletes for the use of their name, image and likeness (often referred to as "NIL").

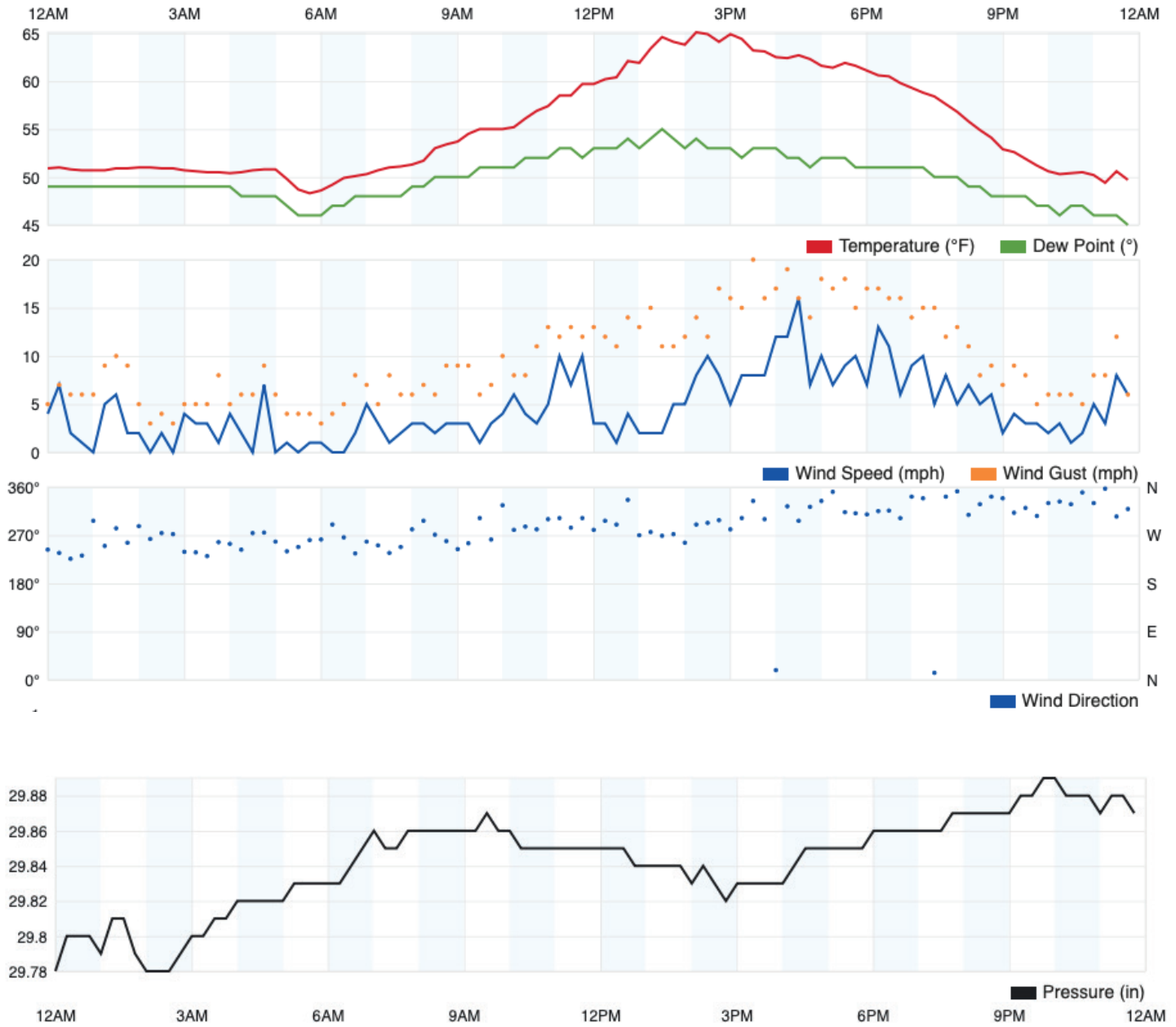
"College athletes have the ability to benefit from opportunities related to their own name, image and likeness, but outside organizations and collectives should not be able to write contributions off their taxes that are being used to compensate athletes," Thune said. "This bipartisan legislation would prohibit these entities from inappropriately using NIL agreements to reduce their own tax obligations."

Educational institutions would be exempt from the legislation.

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 23 of 72



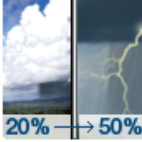


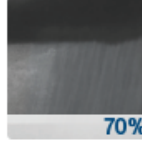

## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs










# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 24 of 72

Today	Tonight	Tuesday	Tuesday Night	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday
						
20%	20%	20% → 50%	40%	30%	70%	70%
Slight Chance Showers and Patchy Fog	Slight Chance Showers then Mostly Clear	Slight Chance Showers then Chance T-storms	Chance T-storms	Partly Sunny then Chance Showers	Showers Likely	Showers Likely
High: 64 °F	Low: 42 °F	High: 70 °F	Low: 52 °F	High: 78 °F	Low: 57 °F	High: 75 °F



## Outlook for the Work Week

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
				
<i>Isolated</i>	<i>Scattered</i>	<i>Scattered</i>	<i>Mostly showers with a few thunderstorms.</i>	<i>Mostly showers with a few thunderstorms.</i>
<b>HIGHS:</b> 60 to 70°	<b>HIGHS:</b> 65 to 75°	<b>HIGHS:</b> 75 to 80°	<b>HIGHS:</b> 70 to 75°	<b>HIGHS:</b> 65 to 75°

*Showers and thunderstorms. A few stronger storms possible on Wednesday.*

*Updated: 5/8/2023 3:37 AM Central*



National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

An active weather pattern is expected for the upcoming week, with several rounds of showers and thunderstorms. Temperatures will be mild, with highs mostly in the 70s, with a few 80s possible.

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 25 of 72

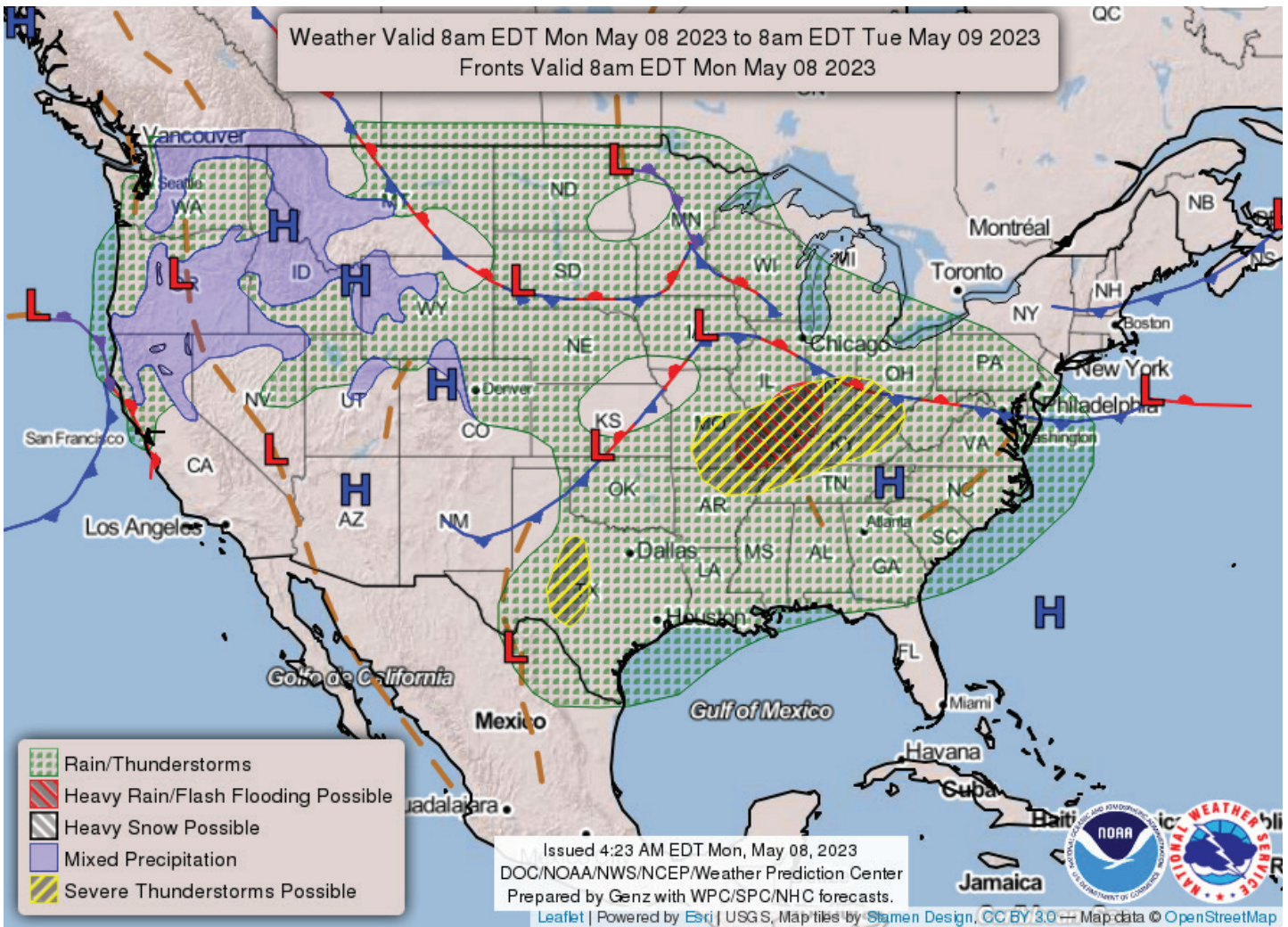
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 66 °F at 2:26 PM**  
**Low Temp: 48 °F at 5:48 AM**  
**Wind: 20 mph at 3:27 PM**  
**Precip: : 0.00**

Day length: 14 hours, 40 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 105 in 1934  
Record Low: 22 in 1945  
Average High: 67  
Average Low: 41  
Average Precip in May.: 0.87  
Precip to date in May.: 0.87  
Average Precip to date: 4.84  
Precip Year to Date: 6.59  
Sunset Tonight: 8:48:59 PM  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:07:28 AM





# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 26 of 72

## Today in Weather History

May 8, 1934: Pierre recorded its' earliest 100 degrees when the high temperature reached 103 degrees. Mobridge also reached 103 degrees, which is the earliest yearly date for the city Mobridge.

May 8, 1965: The strongest tornado recorded in South Dakota tracked across eastern Tripp County. It was part of a larger tornado outbreak in Nebraska and South Dakota during the afternoon through late evening hours.

May 8, 1986: Thunderstorms produced torrential rainfall of two to four inches over much of central and eastern South Dakota. The very heavy rains caused extensive flooding with Walworth and Potter Counties reporting the most damage. In those counties, most roads were under water. Several bridges and roads were also washed out in that area. The heavy rain washed out the dam at Lake Byre in Lyman County, which produced water waist deep in Kennebec. The city of Kennebec lost their sole source of water when the dam broke. Cow Creek in Lyman County also flooded and broke a part of a dam, causing minor property damage. Rain continued to fall into the morning hours on the 9th. Some two-day rainfall totals include; 4.33 inches in Kennebec; 4.21 in Shelby; 3.91 at 4 miles west of Mellette; 3.30 in Gettysburg; 3.06 in Blunt; 2.99 in Eureka; 2.75 at 2 NNW of Mobridge; 2.70 inches 2 miles south of Ashton and in Britton.

May 8, 1995: Flooding caused by snowmelt from two significant snowstorms in April continued throughout May. The flooding was aggravated by widespread torrential rains, especially from the early morning of the 8th through the early morning of the 9th. Rainfall amounts ranged from one to four inches. Some higher rainfall amounts include; 5.50 inches at Wakpala, 4.50 at Chelsea and Leola, 4.20 at Ipswich, 4.10 inches 12 north of McLaughlin, and 3.91 inches at Aberdeen. A worker was injured near Claremont when the train derailed due to the weakening of the rail-bed caused by high water. The extensive flooding continued to cause road damage and many road closures.

1784: Deadly hailstorm in South Carolina hits the town of Winnsborough. The hailstones, measuring as much as nine inches in circumference, killed several persons, and a great number of sheep, lambs, and birds.

1902: On May 7th, Martinique's Mount Pelee began the deadliest volcanic eruption in the 20th century. On this day, the city of Saint Pierre, which some called the Paris of the Caribbean, was virtually wiped off the map. The volcano killed an estimated 30,000 people. Click [HERE](#) for more information from the History.com.

1979: Widespread damage occurred in the Tampa Bay area. The 19 tornadoes reported are the most in one day in Florida history. Three people drowned in Pinellas County where flooding was most severe. Rainfall amounts of 18 inches in 24 hours were reported with 12.73 inches falling at Tampa, FL; with 7.84 inches of that in just six hours. Worst hit was the Polk County community of Auburndale where a tornado made a direct hit on the Auburndale School. Flying debris hurt only eight students. An 83-year-old woman was killed as she hid in an unreinforced concrete block storage shed. 98 trailers were damaged or destroyed, and 40 people were injured.

2003: This was the second of three consecutive days with strong to violent tornadoes around Oklahoma City. A violent F4 tornado that affected Moore, Oklahoma City, Midwest City and Choctaw took on a path very similar to the 5/3/1999 devastating tornado. This particular storm back in 2003 affected areas from Newcastle and Moore to Del City and Choctaw. Although over 130 people were injured, there were no fatalities.

2009: A deadly derecho squall line crosses far southern Illinois at midday devastating the Carbondale area on its way across a 1,200-mile swath of terrain covering sections of nine states. Hundreds of homes and businesses are damaged or destroyed in Kansas, Kentucky, Illinois, Kentucky, and Missouri. The wind gusts to 106 mph in the Carbondale area with sustained winds measured at up to 90 mph. In southern Illinois, the storm system peels siding and roofs off homes and other buildings, blowing out car windows and tearing up trailer parks.

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 27 of 72

Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### PAST, PRESENT OR FUTURE?

A formal banquet for important individuals was scheduled in Washington. General Jimmy Doolittle decided to invite Charles Lindbergh, the famous pilot, to join the celebration. He wanted to recognize him for his outstanding accomplishments.

After a moment's thought, Lindbergh said to Doolittle, "It seems to me that life is full of so many worthwhile opportunities that I do not want to spend a lot of time celebrating the past."

Paul wisely said to his friends, "I choose to focus all my energies on one thing: I will forget the past and look forward to serving You until the end of my race when I receive my prize: heaven!" Paul never looked at his past, only his future in Christ!

Too often we look at what we have done or where we have been and neglect to realize where we, as Christians, are going. We all have betrayed, disappointed and abandoned our Savior at one time or another. However, we must let go of the past. God has forgiven us, so we must stay focused on our relationship with Him today and do what we can do to serve Him faithfully and lovingly until He greets us in heaven.

Prayer: Help me, Savior, to realize that the past is gone and that the life I live now is to please You. Free us from our past and help us to live in the NOW! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. Philippians 3:13-14



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

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 28 of 72

## 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

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 29 of 72

## The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 30 of 72



## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.05.23

16 18 28 42 43 11

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$83,000,000**

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 6  
DRAW: Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.06.23

13 20 42 43 46 1

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$2,750,000**

NEXT 17 Hrs 6 Mins 12  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.07.23

3 6 7 19 42 2

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

NEXT 16 Hrs 36 Mins 12  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.06.23

2 9 10 14 32

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$51,000**

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 6  
DRAW: Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.06.23

1 9 20 21 55 11

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

NEXT 17 Hrs 5 Mins 13  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.06.23

31 39 47 51 53 6

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$97,000,000**

NEXT 17 Hrs 5 Mins 13  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

## News from the Associated Press

### **ASEAN leaders to tackle regional crises at tropical resort**

By EDNA TARIGAN and ANDI JATMIKO Associated Press

LABUAN BAJO, Indonesia (AP) — A picturesque tourist destination will host crisis-weary Southeast Asian leaders with sun-splashed tropical islands, turquoise waters brimming with corals and manta rays, seafood feasts, and a hillside savannah crawling with Komodo dragons.

The sunshiny setting is a stark contrast to the seriousness of their agenda.

Indonesian President Joko Widodo picked the far-flung, rustic harbor town of Labuan Bajo as a laidback venue to discuss an agenda rife with contentious issues. These include the continuing bloody civil strife in Myanmar and the escalating territorial conflicts in the South China Sea between fellow leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

The 10-nation regional bloc and its member states will meet for three days starting Tuesday, with the growing rivalry between the United States and China as a backdrop.

U.S. President Joe Biden has been reinforcing an arc of alliances in the Indo-Pacific region to better counter China over Taiwan and the long-seething territorial conflicts in the strategic South China Sea which involve four ASEAN members: Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam. Indonesia, this year's ASEAN chair, has also confronted Chinese fishing fleets and coast guard that have strayed into what Jakarta says was its internationally recognized exclusive economic zone in the gas-rich Natuna Sea.

Widodo, who's in his final year on the world stage as he reaches the end of his two-term limit, said ASEAN aims to collaborate with any country to solve problems through dialogue.

That includes Myanmar where, two years after the military power grab that forced out Aung San Suu Kyi's administration and sparked a bloody civil strife, ASEAN has failed to rein in the violence in its member state. A five-point peace plan by ASEAN leaders and the top Myanmar general, which calls for an immediate stop to killings and other violence and the start of a national dialogue, has been disregarded by Myanmar's ruling military.

ASEAN stopped inviting Myanmar's military leaders to its semiannual summits and would only allow non-political representatives to attend. Myanmar has protested the move.

In an additional concern involving Myanmar, Indonesian officials said Sunday that 20 of their nationals, who were trafficked into Myanmar and forced to perform cyber scams, had been freed from Myanmar's Myawaddy township and brought to the Thai border over the weekend. During the summit, ASEAN leaders planned to express their concern over such human trafficking schemes in a joint statement, a draft copy of which was obtained by The Associated Press.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said her country, as ASEAN chair, has tackled the Myanmar crisis in a non-adversarial way.

"Colleagues certainly know that in the early stages of its leadership, Indonesia decided to take a non-megaphone diplomacy approach," Marsudi said. "The aim is to provide space for the parties to build trust and for the parties to be more open in communicating."

Widodo's choice of a seaside venue with stunning sunrises and sunsets and the sound of birds chirping all day complements that approach.

The Indonesian leader also hoped the high-profile ASEAN summit would put Labuan Bajo and outlying islands, dotted with white-sand beaches and even a rare pink-sand beach, under the global tourism spotlight.

"This is a very good moment for us to host the ASEAN summit and showcase Labuan Bajo to the world," said Indonesian President Joko Widodo, who flew in Sunday with his wife to a red-carpet welcome flanked by military honor guards and dancing villagers with flower-filled headwear.

But there are a few hitches.

The far-flung fishing town with only three traffic lights and about 6,000 residents is acutely short of hotels for ASEAN's swarm of diplomats, delegates and journalists. Many had to arrange to share rooms.

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 32 of 72

Unlike the more popular Bali resort island or the bustling concrete jungle of a capital Jakarta, which has hosted international conclaves in upscale hotels and convention centers, Labuan Bajo is a far smaller town that a visitor could cross from end to end with a brisk two-hour walk. There are no public buses, and villagers mostly move around by walking, riding scooters or driving private cars.

A small team of local technicians with hard hats were flown in to lay cables and expand internet connections at the venues on short notice.

On Sunday, Labuan Bajo's small airport was jampacked with visitors. Teams of diplomats and journalists arrived to welcome streamers announcing the upbeat summit motto, "ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth."

Outside the airport named after the Komodo dragons, traffic quickly built up under the brutal noontime sun.

When the sun rose Monday morning, workers were still cementing some roadsides around the venues — a day before the summit opening.

Andre Kurniawan, who works at a dive center in Labuan Bajo, said the infrastructure developments would be a boon for Labuan Bajo villagers. "We were isolated from some areas before and now they are open and the areas are getting better. I hope that Labuan Bajo can be a better tourist town in the future," he said.

Azril Azahari, chair of an association of Indonesian academic experts on tourism, told the AP that Labuan Bajo was not ready and apparently was chosen to host the summit on short notice. "The hotel facilities and the lodging have become a problem. There is a ship being used for accommodation and it's not a lodging ship," he said.

Welcoming visitors to her coffee shop ahead of the summit, Suti Ana said even though it wasn't the best time for Labuan Bajo to host, ASEAN would boost local businesses. "But we cannot wait, so this is the time," she said.

Choosing the small port town was not a bad idea, Azril said, if it came with adequate planning and government investments in infrastructure.

Located on the western tip of Flores island in southern Indonesia, Labuan Bajo, aside from its beaches and diving and snorkeling spots, has been better known as the gateway to the Komodo National Park — a UNESCO World Heritage site and the only place in the world where Komodo dragons, the world's largest lizards, are found in the wild.

Environmentalists and tourism analysts fear that a wider public interest could put further stress on the already endangered Komodo dragons. Only about 3,300 were known to exist as of 2022.

"If more people come, sooner or later the Komodo dragons cannot breed in peace, this can be a problem," Azahari said, citing longstanding fears that the Komodos could face extinction without full protection.

Despite the odds, Indonesian officials said they would do everything to successfully and safely host the ASEAN summit in Labuan Bajo.

"If there's any commotion along the way, that will be a big stain on the nation's dignity," Edistasius Endi, the regent of Labuan Bajo's West Manggarai district, said in a statement.

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Associated Press journalists Jim Gomez and Achmad Ibrahim contributed to this report.

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Find more of AP's Asia-Pacific coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/asia-pacific>

## Turkey's opposition denounces fairness of vote under Erdogan

By ANDREW WILKS Associated Press

ISTANBUL (AP) — As Turkey heads for presidential and parliamentary elections at the weekend that are shaping up to be the strongest challenge to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in his 20 years as leader, complaints are growing about the fairness of the vote.

Turkey's opposition has long said that the country's elections are played out on an unlevel playing field, claims often backed by international observers.

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 33 of 72

Media coverage stands out as the most obvious example of where Erdogan enjoys an advantage over his opponents, but factors such as the use of state resources while campaigning and the questionable interpretation of electoral law also feature.

Some 90% of Turkey's media is in the hands of the government or its backers, according to Reporters Without Borders, ensuring overwhelming airtime for the president. Only a handful of opposition newspapers remain in print, most having transitioned to online-only editions.

During April, Erdogan received nearly 33 hours of airtime on the main state-run TV station, according to opposition members of the broadcasting watchdog. His presidential opponent, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, received 32 minutes.

The main opposition party, the Republican People's Party, or CHP, last month launched legal action against broadcaster TRT for failing to screen its campaign video.

"Unfortunately, the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation has moved away from being an impartial and objective institution and has turned into the Tayyip Radio and Television Corporation," CHP lawmaker Tuncay Ozkan said.

The remaining independent media also face increasing restrictions. Last month, broadcasting authority RTUK fined independent channels Fox News, Halk TV and TELE1 over news and commentary deemed a breach of regulations. Ilhan Tasci, an opposition-appointed RTUK member, said in all three cases the stations had been accused of criticizing or questioning ruling-party actions.

In a statement following the last presidential and general elections in 2018, observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe noted that Erdogan and his ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) enjoyed "an undue advantage, including in excessive coverage by government-affiliated public and private media outlets."

The government's reach has also been extended over social media, where many opposition voices have retreated.

A "disinformation" law introduced in October allows a jail sentence of up to three years for spreading false information "with the sole aim of creating anxiety, fear or panic among the public."

Sinan Aygul, the only journalist to be prosecuted under the new law, was handed a 10-month prison term in February. He is currently free while appealing the case.

"The real aim is to silence all dissident voices in society," said Aygul, chair of the journalists association in Bitlis, southeastern Turkey. It is "a law that targets anyone who expresses an opinion. It targets not only individuals but also media organs," he said.

The ill-defined law creates crimes from "basic journalistic activities," Aygul said, adding that it could be used during the elections to target groups seeking to protect ballot box security who use social media to highlight abuses.

"If there is going to be fraud in the election, all opposition channels will be silenced by using this law," he said.

The imposition of a state of emergency over the 11 provinces hit by February's earthquake has also raised concerns about how the polls will be conducted in the region. A U.N. report published April 11 said at least 3 million people had relocated from their homes in the quake zone, many of them heading to other parts of Turkey.

However, just 133,000 people from the earthquake region have registered to vote outside their home provinces, the head of the Supreme Election Council said last month. Ahmet Yener added that election officials are overseeing preparations, including polling stations at temporary shelters.

In 2018, a nationwide state of emergency imposed following a 2016 coup attempt was in place until shortly before the election, which the OSCE said restricted the media and freedoms of assembly and expression.

Erdogan has stepped up his public appearances, which are closely followed by most TV channels, and uses these official duties to attack his rivals. Attending a ceremony on the Friday of Eid al-Fitr last month to mark renovations to Istanbul's Blue Mosque, he accused the opposition of "working with terrorist groups."

The previous evening, the leaders of four political parties allied to the AKP were present for an event to



# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 34 of 72

launch the delivery of Black Sea natural gas, despite none holding any government position.

Other large projects that were rolled out ahead of the vote include Turkey's first nuclear power reactor built by Rosatom, the Russian state nuclear energy company, and several defense developments.

Critics also point to the bending of election law to allow government ministers to stand as parliamentary candidates while remaining in office, despite legal requirements to the contrary.

The election board, meanwhile, has previously faced criticism for siding with AKP objections during elections.

In the 2019 local polls, the victorious opposition mayoral candidate for Istanbul was forced to face a rerun following AKP complaints of ballot irregularities. Results from district and city council votes, which were collected in the same boxes and favored the AKP, were not questioned.

Adem Sozuer of Istanbul University's law faculty told the opposition Cumhuriyet newspaper that voters had lost confidence in the election authorities. "There is widespread suspicion in a significant part of society that elections will be rigged," he said.

## Horse deaths cast shadow as Triple Crown shifts to Preakness

By GARY B. GRAVES AP Sports Writer

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — A raging thunderstorm that washed out activities Sunday morning at Churchill Downs symbolized the dark clouds hanging over the Triple Crown after a troubling string of horse deaths.

Seven horses have died following injuries at the track since April 27, including Derby entrant Wild On Ice. Freezing Point and Chloe's Dream were euthanized after injuries before Saturday's Kentucky Derby that was ultimately won by Mage. Four sustained catastrophic leg injuries, two succumbed suddenly from causes yet to be determined and another sustained a neck injury after flipping in the paddock.

This spate of incidents comes four years after more than 30 horses died at Santa Anita racetrack in California. Those deaths shook up the industry and resulted in safety reforms such as the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act (HISA), which established a similarly lettered organization that set uniform safety and doping rules for thoroughbreds. A set of regulations are scheduled to take effect May 22.

The question for now is how the stunning occurrence of fatal injuries at the cathedral of horse racing affects the sport during its height of visibility with the Preakness and Belmont Stakes following over the next month. And, how horse racing responds.

"Everyone in the industry wants to make racing as safe as possible," Hall of Fame trainer Todd Pletcher said Sunday. "And even in situations like that where right now everyone is doing everything they can to make sure the horses are going out there in the safest possible conditions, we still had two fatal breakdowns yesterday. It's something as a trainer that keeps you up at night."

Churchill Downs said in a statement Saturday night that it is working with the Kentucky Horse Racing Commission and Horseracing Integrity and Safety Authority to investigate each death. A subsequent statement from the HISA organization said Chloe's Dream and Freezing Point "passed all inspections without incident" while being observed in the paddock and post parade.

An examination of factors including necropsies, preexisting health conditions, training sessions and inspection of track surfaces will take several weeks. Racetrack surface expert Mick Peterson, who has worked with Churchill Downs since 2008 and was once retained by HISA, said Sunday that the surface was consistent.

The director of the University of Kentucky's racetrack safety program added that the evaluation is ongoing to keep the track condition uniform and make needed improvements.

"We've got to look at every factor on that and get it so that we reduce the risk further and further and further to protect them," Peterson said. "But we need to learn more in order to understand whether this consistency is going to get us to the safety we need. And we need to keep improving it."

Concerns still hovered over the 149th Derby, which went off with the field reduced to 18 horses following five scratches in the days leading up. That list of defections included Pletcher-trained Forte, the initial favorite, on Saturday morning because of a bruised foot.

"I think he would have performed well (Saturday)," the trainer said. "Unfortunately, that wasn't an option."

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 35 of 72

Lying ahead for many trainers and ownership is whether to run horses in the Preakness on May 20 in Baltimore. The Triple Crown's second jewel is shorter at 1 3/16th mile but occurs just two weeks after the Derby compared to the typical one-month layoff.

Ramiro Restrepo, Mage's part-owner and a bloodstock agent, will watch the colt's workouts this week and consult trainers and other owners before deciding his immediate plans.

His colt's safety and well-being is always the priority, particularly after a tragic week of loss with the animals they're devoted to.

"We take care of them more than we take care of our children," said Restrepo, who expressed condolences to stables that have lost horses. "But we had a confidence in how the horse had been responding. So, we can only control what's in our barn and what's in front of us."

\_\_\_ AP sports: <https://apnews.com/hub/sports> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Sports](https://twitter.com/AP_Sports)

## War shadows Victory Day, Russia's integral holiday

By The Associated Press undefined

Victory Day, Russia's most important secular holiday, lauds two tenets that are central to the country's identity: military might and moral rectitude. But the war in Ukraine undermines both this year.

The holiday falling on Tuesday marks the 78th anniversary of Germany's capitulation in World War II after a relentless Red Army offensive pushed German forces from Stalingrad, deep inside Russia, all the way to Berlin, about 2,200 kilometers (1,300 miles).

The Soviet Union lost at least 20 million people in the war; the suffering and valor that went into the German defeat have been touchstones ever since.

However, many regions have canceled their May 9 observances because of concerns the events could be targets for Ukrainian attacks. Moscow's famed Red Square military parade will go ahead following Russia's claim of an attempted Ukrainian drone attack on the Kremlin, whose spires loom next to the parade venue.

For all the fearsome armaments that will growl through the square, Russia's failure to make gains in Ukraine spoils the image of its army's indomitability.

After seizing sizable parts of the neighboring country in the opening weeks of the invasion, the Russian campaign saw an abandoned attempt to enter Kyiv, retreats in northern and southern Ukraine, and an inability to take Bakhmut, a small city of questionable value, despite months of exceptionally gruesome fighting.

President Vladimir Putin, in his speech during the parade, is sure to praise the Red Army's determination to wipe out Nazism and to repeat his assertion that Russia is taking the moral high ground by fighting an alleged Nazi regime in Ukraine, a country with a Jewish president.

But the missiles that rain down on Ukrainian civilian targets have drawn worldwide condemnation of Russia, while the Western countries that made common cause with Moscow to defeat Nazi Germany send billions of dollars' worth of weapons to Ukraine.

Analysts are divided on whether the May 3 drone incident at the Kremlin was a genuine attack or a "false flag" concocted to justify increasing the ferocity of Russia's missile barrages in Ukraine. Either explanation risks undermining the sense of security among Russians already rattled by attacks, likely committed by Ukraine or by domestic opponents, that have risen sharply in recent weeks.

Two freight trains derailed this week in bomb explosions in the Bryansk region that borders Ukraine. Notably, the region's authorities did not blame Ukraine, which could be an attempt to whitewash the Ukrainian capability to carry out sabotage.

But Bryansk authorities claimed in March that two people were shot and killed when alleged Ukrainian saboteurs penetrated the region. The region also has come under sporadic cross-border shelling, including last month, when four people were killed.

Three prominent supporters of the war in Ukraine also were killed or injured on their home turf elsewhere in Russia. A car-bombing last week in the Nizhny Novgorod region that officials blamed on Ukraine and the United States severely injured nationalist novelist Zakhar Prilepin and killed his driver.

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 36 of 72

Last year, Darya Dugina, a commentator with a nationalist TV channel, died in a car bombing outside Moscow, and authorities alleged Ukrainian intelligence was behind the April death in St. Petersburg of prominent pro-war blogger Vladlen Tatarsky, who was killed when a bomb inside a statuette he was handed at a restaurant party exploded.

Amid the heightened security worries, authorities also canceled one of Victory Day's most notable observances, the "Immortal Regiment" processions in which throngs of citizens take to the streets holding portraits of relatives who died or served in World War II.

The processions carry an air of genuine emotion, in sharp contrast to the obedient stone-faced soldiers who march across Red Square during the tightly regimented military parades that change little from year to year.

Although the processions are moving and impressively large, authorities "thought that the risks were becoming prohibitive," said Russian analyst Dmitry Oreshkin, now at the Free University in Riga, Latvia. "If some kind of drones fly there, penetrate through the impenetrable border ... then why can't they drop something on this column?"

## UN urges Afghanistan's Taliban to end floggings, executions

RAHIM FAIEZ Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — A U.N. report on Monday strongly criticized the Taliban for carrying out public executions, lashings and stonings since seizing power in Afghanistan, and called on the country's rulers to halt such practices.

In the past six months alone, 274 men, 58 women and two boys were publicly flogged in Afghanistan, according to a report by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, or UNAMA.

"Corporal punishment is a violation of the Convention against Torture and must cease," said Fiona Frazer, the agency's human rights chief. She also called for an immediate moratorium on executions.

The Taliban foreign ministry said in response that Afghanistan's laws are determined in accordance with Islamic rules and guidelines, and that an overwhelming majority of Afghans follow those rules.

"In the event of a conflict between international human rights law and Islamic law, the government is obliged to follow the Islamic law," the ministry said in a statement.

The Taliban began carrying out such punishments shortly after coming to power almost two years ago, despite initial promises of a more moderate rule than during their previous stint in power in the 1990s.

At the same time, they have gradually tightened restrictions on women, barring them from public spaces, such as parks and gyms, in line with their interpretation of Islamic law. The restrictions have triggered an international uproar, increasing the country's isolation at a time when its economy has collapsed — and worsening a humanitarian crisis.

Monday's report on corporal punishment documents Taliban practices both before and after their return to power in August 2021, when they seized the capital of Kabul as U.S. and NATO forces withdrew after two decades of war.

The first public flogging following the Taliban takeover was reported in October 2021 in the northern Kapisa province, the report said. In that case, a woman and man convicted of adultery were publicly lashed 100 times each in the presence of religious scholars and local Taliban authorities, it said.

In December 2022, Taliban authorities executed an Afghan convicted of murder, the first public execution since they took power the report said.

The execution, carried out with an assault rifle by the victim's father, took place in the western Farah province before hundreds of spectators and top Taliban officials.

Zabihullah Mujahid, the top government spokesman, said the decision to carry out the punishment was "made very carefully," following approval by three of the country's highest courts and the Taliban supreme leader, Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada.

There has been a significant increase in the number and regularity of judicial corporal punishment since November when Mujahid repeated comments by the supreme leader about judges and their use of Islamic



law in a tweet, the report said.

Since that tweet, UNAMA documented at least 43 instances of public lashings involving 274 men, 58 women and two boys. A majority of punishments were related to convictions of adultery and "running away from home," the report said. Other purported offenses included theft, homosexuality, consuming alcohol, fraud and drug trafficking.

In a video message, Abdul Malik Haqqani, the Taliban's appointed deputy chief justice, said last week that the Taliban's Supreme Court has issued 175 so-called retribution verdicts since taking power, including 79 floggings and 37 stonings.

Such verdicts establish the right of a purported victim, or relative of a victim of a crime to punish or forgive the perpetrator. Haqqani said the Taliban leadership is committed to carrying out such sentences.

After their initial overthrow in the U.S. invasion of 2001, the Taliban continued to carry out corporal punishment and executions in areas under their control while waging an insurgency against the U.S.-backed former Afghan government, the report said.

UNAMA documented at least 182 instances when the Taliban carried out their own sentences during the height of their insurgency between 2010 and August 2021, resulting in 213 deaths and 64 injuries.

Many Muslim-majority countries draw on Islamic law, but the Taliban interpretation is an outlier.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has called a Taliban ban on women working an unacceptable violation of Afghan human rights.

On April 5, Afghanistan's Taliban rulers informed the United Nations that Afghan women employed with the U.N. mission could no longer report for work. Aid agencies have warned that the ban on women working will impact their ability to deliver urgent humanitarian help in Afghanistan.

The Taliban previously banned girls from going to school beyond the sixth grade and women from most public life and work. In December, they banned Afghan women from working at local and non-governmental groups — a measure that at the time did not extend to U.N. offices.

Under the first Taliban regime from 1996 to 2001, public corporal punishment and executions were carried out by officials against individuals convicted of crimes, often in large venues such as sports stadiums and at urban intersections.

## Fire deep in gold mine in southern Peru kills 27 workers

LIMA, Peru (AP) — A fire broke out deep in a gold mine in southern Peru and killed at least 27 workers during an overnight shift, Peruvian authorities reported.

The Yanaquihua mining company said in a statement that 175 workers had been safely evacuated after the accident, which happened late Friday or early Saturday. It said the 27 dead worked for a contractor that specializes in mining.

Government officials said the cause of the fire was under investigation. Some news reports said preliminary investigations indicated an explosion might have been set off by a short circuit in a part of the mine about 100 meters (330 feet) below the surface.

Relatives of the victims were brought by buses to the mine in Yanaquihua in the Arequipa region, where they were briefed by security agents. Some sat in front of posters at the entrance to the mine to wait for the bodies of their loved ones.

Marcelina Aguirre said her husband was among the dead. She said he had told her there were risks at the mine.

"We are very worried, very sad we are, to lose a husband, leaving two abandoned children," she said.

The Public Ministry of Arequipa's Fiscal District said investigators were working to clarify what happened. "During the investigation, the Prosecutor's Office will determine the cause of the tragic event and the responsibilities of those involved," its statement said.

## Teacher appreciation? Try better pay, more governors say

By MARC LEVY Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — As schools across the country struggle to find teachers to hire, more governors are pushing for pay increases, bonuses and other perks for the beleaguered profession — with some vowing to beat out other states competing for educators.

Already in 2023, governors in Georgia and Arkansas have pushed through teacher pay increases. Ahead of Monday's start of national Teacher Appreciation Week, others — both Republican and Democratic — have proposed doing the same to attract and retain educators.

More than half of the states' governors over the past year — 26 so far — have proposed boosting teacher compensation, according to groups that track it. The nonprofit Teacher Salary Project said it is the most it has seen in nearly two decades of tracking.

"Today we have governors left and right from every political party and then some who are addressing this issue because they have to," said founder and CEO Ninivé Caligari. "We've never seen what we are seeing right now. Never."

In Idaho, Gov. Brad Little is aiming to raise the state's average starting salary into the nation's top 10. In Delaware, Gov. John Carney said competition for teachers is more intense than ever and a pay increase is necessary to "win the competition with surrounding states."

It's not clear how far pay raises will go toward relieving the shortages, though, and some teachers say it is too little, too late to fix problems that are years in the making.

Blame for teacher shortages has fallen on underfunding after the Great Recession, tight labor markets, lackluster enrollments in colleges and programs that train teachers and teacher burnout inflamed by the travails of the COVID-19 pandemic.

There has been no mass exodus, but data from some states that track teacher turnover has shown rising numbers of teachers leaving the profession over the past couple years.

Shortages are most extreme in certain areas, including the poorest or most rural districts, researchers say. Districts also report particular difficulties in hiring for in-demand subjects like special education, math and science.

Meanwhile, teacher salaries have fallen further and further behind those of their college-educated peers in other fields, as teachers report growing workloads, shrinking autonomy and increasingly hostile school environments.

Magan Daniel, who at 33 just left her central Alabama school district, was not persuaded to stay by pay raises as Alabama's governor vows to make teacher salaries the highest in the Southeast. It would take big increases to match neighboring Georgia, where the average teacher salary is \$62,200, according to the National Education Association.

Fixing teachers' deteriorating work culture and growing workloads would be a more powerful incentive than a pay raise, she said.

She recalled, for instance, her principal asking her to make copies and lesson plans last fall while she was on unpaid maternity leave. Difficulty getting substitutes puts pressure on teachers who need time off for emergencies, she said, and spending nights and weekends on paperwork siphoned the joy out of teaching.

"I would not go back just for a higher salary," Daniel said.

In Oklahoma, Joshua Morgan, 46, left his rural district a year ago because after 18 years he was still earning under \$47,000. Oklahoma's governor is talking about awarding performance bonuses, but Morgan said he would only go back to teaching for substantially more money — like \$65,000 a year.

The national average public school teacher salary in 2021-22 increased 2% from the previous year to \$66,745, according to the NEA, the nation's largest teachers union. Inflation peaked around 9% at the time.

For new recruits, the math of paying for a college education is grim: The national average beginning teacher salary was \$42,845 in 2021-22, according to the NEA. Teachers do often qualify for public service loan forgiveness, which forgives their student debt after they've made 10 years of monthly payments.

Besides fewer teachers getting certified, the "teacher pay penalty" — the gap between teacher salaries and their college-educated peers in other professions — is growing.

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 39 of 72

It reached a record 23.5% in 2021, with teachers earning an average 76.5 cents for every dollar earned by other college-educated professionals, according to the Economic Policy Institute, a nonpartisan think tank.

It has been widening for decades, researchers say. For men, it is 35% and for women it is 17% — reflecting the gender pay gap seen across the U.S. economy.

For Rachaele Otto and other Louisiana teachers, the prospect of a \$3,000 salary increase proposed by the governor might be appreciated. But at roughly \$200 a month after taxes, it's not enough to keep a teacher who feels burned out or demoralized, Otto said.

"I know there are teachers willing to take pay cuts to leave the profession," said Otto, 38, a science teacher in a rural Louisiana district. "If you double the salary, maybe that would change their thinking."

Sylvia Allegretto, a senior economist who studies teacher compensation for the Center for Economic and Policy Research, called salary promises by governors one-time "Band-Aids" that barely keep up with inflation.

"You're kind of chipping away at the margins," Allegretto said. "You're not fixing the problem, generally."

For governors, raising teacher pay may be good politics, but raising it across the board may have little long-term impact. Getting better data on where the shortages are and then targeting raises — or bigger raises — to those areas will help more, researchers say.

Research shows a pay raise will have at least some effect on retaining teachers, said Ed Fuller, a Penn State associate professor who studies teacher quality and turnover. What is difficult to research, Fuller said, is the effect a raise has on a college student's decision to enter a teacher preparation program — and take on debt.

Some districts haven't waited for governors and legislatures to act.

Kentucky's biggest school district, Jefferson County in Louisville, gave a 4% raise last year and the board approved another raise of 5% to start this coming July. It also started giving an annual \$8,000 stipend to teachers who work with higher-need students.

Superintendent Marty Pollio wants the district to be the highest paying in Kentucky, calling the teacher shortage "a real crisis and a growing crisis."

In Pennsylvania, the William Penn School District is offering signing bonuses for long-term subs and holding its first-ever teachers job fair.

Superintendent Eric Becoats said a teacher told him they can move to neighboring districts and make \$10,000 more — something the relatively small and poor district cannot compete with right now.

Some teachers also tell him they will retire or leave the profession if they can.

Morgan said a major change in salary is required to overcome a major change in how teachers now view a profession where they once expected to stay until they retired.

"That's not how the world works anymore," Morgan said. "I'm seeing more educators, especially the younger ones, coming in and saying, 'I'm not willing to put up with this.'"

Brooke Schultz, a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative, contributed to this report. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues. Data reporter Sharon Lurye also contributed from New Orleans.

Follow Marc Levy on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/timelywriter>

## Why so many mass killings? Families, experts seek answers

By STEFANIE DAZIO and LARRY FENN Associated Press

More than five years after his son was gunned down in the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history, Richard Berger still asks why.

Why Stephen Berger was killed the day after celebrating his 44th birthday. Why the gunman rained



# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 40 of 72

bullets over the Las Vegas Strip in 2017, turning a country music festival into a bloodbath. Why the massacre's death toll didn't shock U.S. leaders into doing more to prevent that kind of violence from happening again and again.

Why?

"It's just a hole in our hearts," Berger said. "We just don't know, and we just don't know what to say."

For the Bergers, the families of the other 59 victims in Vegas — and relatives and friends of countless others slain in mass killings across the country in the years since — the questions loom just as large now as when the crimes happened. Yet the carnage continues.

Over the first four months and six days of this year, 115 people have died in 22 mass killings — an average of one mass killing a week. That includes the bloodshed Saturday at a Dallas-area mall where eight people were fatally shot.

The total represents the highest number of mass-killing deaths this early in the year since at least 2006, an Associated Press data analysis shows, and the deaths were already happening at a record pace before the horror unfolded in Texas.

Experts point to a few contributing factors: a general increase in all types of gun violence in recent years; the proliferation of firearms amid lax gun laws; the effects of the coronavirus pandemic, including the stress of long months in quarantine; a political climate unable or unwilling to change the status quo in meaningful ways; and an increased emphasis on violence in U.S. culture.

Such explanations are little comfort not only to the families ripped apart by the killings but to Americans everywhere who are reeling from the cascading, collective trauma of mass violence.

This year's killings have happened in different ways, from family and neighborhood disputes to school and workplace shootings to explosions of gunfire in public spaces. They've taken place in rural as well as urban settings. Sometimes people knew their killers; sometimes they did not.

The bloodbaths are defined by the FBI as mass killings when the events involve four or more fatalities within 24 hours, not including the perpetrator. The Associated Press and USA Today have tracked and compiled extensive data on these violent attacks in partnership with Northeastern University.

The Las Vegas shooter's motive remains unknown, even now. The high-stakes gambler was apparently angry over how the casinos were treating him despite his high-roller status, but the FBI has never uncovered a definitive reason for the slaughter, which ended with more lives lost than in any single mass killing in decades.

Contributing to 2023's steady drumbeat of death: the grisly murder-suicide in Utah that left five children, their parents and their grandmother dead just days into the new year; the fatal shooting of six people, including three 9-year-old children, at an elementary school in Nashville; back-to-back rampages in California at dance studios and mushroom farms; and the mall shooting in Allen, Texas, on Saturday, when authorities say a gunman stepped out of a car and immediately started firing at people.

Yet while these tragic events garner an outsize amount of attention in the news media and the public's mind, they represent only a tiny fraction of overall gun deaths.

Far more frequent are fatal shootings involving fewer than four people and deaths from domestic violence. And then there are the suicides, which make up more than half of the 14,000 gun deaths so far this year, according to the Gun Violence Archive, which monitors news media and police reports to compile data.

Still, mass killings spark the deepest fear in most people's hearts.

"People around the country all send their kids to schools — and they worry about if they send their kid to school, are they going to get shot?" said Daniel Webster, a professor at the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions.

The fact is, though they are less common than other gun deaths, the mass killings keep happening — 20 years after Columbine, 10 years after Sandy Hook, five years after Las Vegas, and less than one year after massacres at a supermarket in Buffalo, New York, and an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas.

Which leads back to the same haunting question: Why?

People who study such violence are also perplexed by the sustained pace of the brutality.

"We have plenty of examples of things that seem to be at the breaking point in this country," said

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 41 of 72

Katherine Schweit, a former FBI executive who created the agency's active shooter protocol after Sandy Hook. "When I was asked to work on this in 2013, I didn't ever imagine 10 years later I'd still be working on the same thing."

It will take years — if it's even possible — for researchers to pinpoint what's behind the drastic increase in gun violence. Advocates say there are measures that could perhaps avert such crimes — firearms reform and weapons bans among them — but note there is little appetite on Capitol Hill to implement them.

"I think the United States has a relationship with guns unlike any other country in the world," said Kelly Drane, research director for the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence. "These events are a consequence of our failure to put in place prevention measures."

President Joe Biden, an ardent advocate of stronger gun control, is frustrated with Congress' unwillingness to pass a ban on some semi-automatic rifles in the face of the powerful gun lobby led by the National Rifle Association. The NRA did not return an online request for comment.

Lawmakers did pass what, for them, marked a milestone gun violence bill that toughens background checks for the youngest buyers, keeps firearms from more domestic violence offenders and helps states use red-flag laws that enable police to ask courts to take deadly weapons away from people who show signs they could turn violent. Biden signed the bill into law last year.

The legislation and other measures have done little to slow the pace of violence or alleviate the nation's pain, which has been further exacerbated by the pandemic, climate change and the racial reckoning after George Floyd's murder by police.

"These tragedies compounded one after the other, making it almost too much to bear," said Roxanne Cohen Silver, a psychology professor at the University of California, Irvine, who studies coping with traumatic life events.

The mass killings, Silver noted, "are just another tragedy on top of all of these other psychological and emotional challenges."

Stephen Berger's father, Richard, is now 80. He spends his days with his grandchildren — one is a soccer goalie who reminds him of Steve, who had a passion for basketball. Their family awards annual athletic scholarships at Stephen's high school.

Berger watches the teenagers as they approach the next phase of their young lives, flush with promise and full of life. But his own son is dead, and five years later he's still left wondering:

Why?

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Associated Press Writer Darlene Superville in Washington contributed to this report.

## **The Frenchie becomes a favorite — and a dog-show contender**

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The United States' new favorite dog breed — the comical, controversial French bulldog — has never won the nation's pre-eminent dog show.

Yet here, at an ambling trot, comes Winston. The Frenchie with NFL connections is a strong contender at this week's Westminster Kennel Club dog show, less than two months after the release of rankings showing that his kind has become the country's most prevalent dog breed.

Frenchies' rise has been stunning: from 83rd most popular to No. 1 in three decades. It also has been dogged by concerns about their health, debate over the ethics of breeding, denunciations of a gold-rush-like market with ever more "exotic" variations, and a recent spate of high-profile and sometimes fatal robberies.

If all that says something about these stumpy-snouted, pointy-eared, deep-chested, quizzical little bulldogs, what does it say about the culture that loves them?

**THEIR MEDIA IMAGE IMPACTS THEIR POPULARITY**

"Just like humans, dogs get characterized for what they can do, but more importantly what they can symbolize," says Cameron Whitley, a Western Washington University sociology professor and the chair-elect of the American Sociological Association's Animals and Society section. Whitley argues that breeds'

has said it's exploring ways to improve flat-faced dogs' well-being.)

Dr. Carrie Stefaniak has seen French bulldogs with breathing difficulties in her practice in Glendale, Wisconsin. She urges would-be owners to understand the breed's health risks and the potential expense of treatment. She emphasizes researching breeders carefully.

But she's quick to add that Frenchies can flourish.

"The general public talks about the unhealthy ones," Stefaniak says, "but we don't often hear about the 13-year-olds that are still out there, doing great, or the ones that are doing agility or taking long hikes."

Her own two French bulldogs do both those things.

New York-based Associated Press journalist Jennifer Peltz has covered the Westminster dog show since 2013.

## **SUV driver hits crowd at Texas bus stop near border; 8 dead**

By VALERIE GONZALEZ and MICHAEL GONZALEZ Associated Press

BROWNSVILLE, Texas (AP) — The death toll has risen to eight after an SUV slammed into a crowd of people waiting for a bus Sunday outside a migrant shelter in the border city of Brownsville, Texas. At least 10 others were injured, police said, as they prepared to arrest the hospitalized driver.

With no bench at the unmarked city bus stop, some of the victims were sitting on the curb around 8:30 a.m. when the driver hit them, surveillance video from the Bishop Enrique San Pedro Ozanam Center showed. Brownsville police investigator Martin Sandoval, who confirmed the latest death Sunday evening, said police did not know whether the collision was intentional.

Shelter director Victor Maldonado said the SUV ran up the curb, flipped and continued moving for about 200 feet (60 meters). Some people walking on the sidewalk about 30 feet (9 meters) from the main group were also hit, Maldonado said. Witnesses detained the driver as he tried to run away and held him until police arrived, he said.

"This SUV, a Range Rover, just ran the light that was about 100 feet (30 meters) away and just went through the people who were sitting there in the bus stop," said Maldonado, who reviewed the shelter's surveillance video.

Victims struck by the vehicle were waiting for the bus to return to downtown Brownsville after spending the night at the overnight shelter, said Sister Norma Pimentel, executive director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley.

Most of the victims were Venezuelan men, Maldonado said. Brownsville has seen a surge of Venezuelan migrants over the last two weeks for unclear reasons, authorities said. On Thursday, 4,000 of about 6,000 migrants in Border Patrol custody in Texas' Rio Grande Valley were Venezuelan.

The driver was taken to the hospital for injuries sustained when the car rolled over, Sandoval said. There were no passengers in the car, and police didn't immediately know the driver's name or age, Sandoval said Sunday afternoon.

Sandoval said there are three possible explanations for the collision: "It could be intoxication; it could be an accident; or it could be intentional. In order for us to find out exactly what happened, we have to eliminate the other two.

"He's being very uncooperative at the hospital, but he will be transported to our city jail as soon as he gets released," Sandoval said. "Then we'll fingerprint him and (take a) mug shot, and then we can find his true identity."

Police retrieved a blood sample and sent it to a Texas Department of Public Safety lab to test for intoxicants.

The surge in the number of migrants this week has prompted Brownsville commissioners to indefinitely extend a declaration of emergency during a special meeting Thursday.

"We don't want them wandering around outside," Pedro Cardenas, a city commissioner, said Sunday after the crash. "So, we're trying to make sure they're as comfortable as they can be so they don't have



# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 43 of 72

to go out and look for anywhere else.”

Brownsville has long been an epicenter for migration across the U.S.-Mexico border, and it has become a key location of interest for next week's end to pandemic-era border restrictions known as Title 42. The Ozanam shelter is the only overnight shelter in the city and manages the release of thousands of migrants from federal custody.

Maldonado said the center had not received any threats before the crash, but did afterward.

“I've had a couple of people come by the gate and tell the security guard that the reason this happened was because of us,” Maldonado said.

About 2,500 migrants have crossed through the river daily into Brownsville in the past few days, Cardenas said. He said the Border Patrol is aware of the city's capacity of 1,000 at their processing area near the crossing point and a downtown building where city employees and volunteers guide migrants on how to purchase bus or plane tickets to their final destinations. The city is considering expanding services to accommodate needs in the coming days, Cardenas said.

While 80% of people released from federal custody leave the same day, the city's emergency management official said, a bottleneck has formed over the past few days.

“Most of the people coming across don't want to stay in Brownsville, but we don't have enough buses for them to buy their ticket to leave,” Cardenas said. “Some are waiting for family members.”

The Ozanam shelter can hold 250, but many who arrive leave the same day. In the last several weeks, an uptick in border crossings prompted the city to declare an emergency as local, state and federal resources coordinated enforcement and humanitarian response.

“In the last two months, we've been getting 250 to 380 a day,” Maldonado said.

While the shelter offers migrants transportation during the week, they also use the city's public transportation.

Rochelle Garza, president of the Texas Civil Rights Project, said in a statement shared Sunday afternoon: “I hope that today serves as a wake up call, and that state officials will begin investing in a humanitarian response that might have helped the people who were impacted by this morning's tragedy.”

U.S. Rep. Vicente González said Sunday that local officials are in communication with the federal government about the crash.

“We are all extremely sad and heartbroken to have such a tragedy in our neighborhood,” he said.

Valerie Gonzalez reported from McAllen, Texas. Travis Loller contributed to this report from Nashville, Tenn.

## Congress eyes new rules for tech: What's under consideration

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Should TikTok be banned? Should younger children be prevented from engaging with social media? Can the government make sure private information is secure? What about brand new artificial intelligence interfaces? Or should users be regulating themselves, leaving the government out of it?

Tech regulation has been gathering momentum on Capitol Hill amid concerns about China's ownership of TikTok and as parents are growing increasingly worried about the effects of social media on a post-pandemic mental health crisis. Noting that many young people are struggling, President Joe Biden said in his February State of the Union speech that “it's time” to pass bipartisan legislation to impose stricter limits on the collection of personal data and ban targeted advertising to children.

“We must finally hold social media companies accountable for the experiment they are running on our children for profit,” Biden said.

Lawmakers have introduced a slew of bipartisan bills to regulate tech, and it's one of the few major policy issues where Republicans and Democrats generally align, boosting hopes for compromise in a split Congress.

Still, any effort to take on the mammoth industry would face major obstacles. Technology companies have aggressively fought any federal interference, and they have operated for decades now without strict

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 44 of 72

federal oversight, making any new rules or guidelines that much more complicated.

A look at some of the areas of potential regulation:

## CHILDREN'S SAFETY

Several House and Senate bills would try to make social media, and the internet in general, safer for children who will inevitably be online. Lawmakers cite numerous examples of teenagers who have taken their own lives after cyber bullying or died engaging in dangerous behavior encouraged on social media.

In the Senate, at least two competing bills are focused on children's online safety. Legislation by Sens. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., and Marsha Blackburn, R-Tenn., approved by the Senate Commerce Committee last year would require social media companies to be more transparent about their operations and enable child safety settings by default. Minors would have the option to disable addictive product features and algorithms that push certain content.

The idea, the senators say, is that platforms should be "safe by design." The legislation, which Blumenthal and Blackburn reintroduced last week, would also obligate social media companies to prevent certain dangers to minors — including promotion of suicide, disordered eating, substance abuse, sexual exploitation and other illegal behaviors.

A second bill introduced last month by four senators — Democratic Sens. Brian Schatz of Hawaii and Chris Murphy of Connecticut and Republican Sens. Tom Cotton of Arkansas and Katie Britt of Alabama — would take a more aggressive approach, prohibiting children under the age of 13 from using social media platforms and requiring parental consent for teenagers. It would also prohibit the companies from recommending content through algorithms for users under the age of 18.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., has not weighed in on specific legislation but told reporters on Tuesday, "I believe we need some kind of child protections" on the internet.

Critics of the bills, including some civil rights groups and advocacy groups aligned with tech companies, say the proposals could threaten teens' online privacy and prevent them from accessing content that could help them, such as resources for those considering suicide or grappling with their sexual and gender identity.

"Lawmakers should focus on educating and empowering families to control their online experience," said Carl Szabo of NetChoice, a group aligned with Meta, TikTok, Google and Amazon, among other companies.

## DATA PRIVACY

Biden's State of the Union remarks appeared to be a nod toward legislation by Sens. Ed Markey, D-Mass., and Bill Cassidy, R-La., that would expand child privacy protections online, prohibiting companies from collecting personal data from younger teenagers and banning targeted advertising to children and teens. The bill, also reintroduced last week, would create a so-called "eraser button" allowing parents and kids to eliminate personal data, when possible.

A broader House effort would attempt to give adults as well as children more control over their data with what lawmakers call a "national privacy standard." Legislation that passed the House Energy and Commerce Committee with wide bipartisan support last year would try to minimize data collected and make it illegal to target ads to children, usurping state laws that have tried to put privacy restrictions in place. But the bill, which would have also given consumers more rights to file lawsuits over privacy violations, never reached the House floor.

Prospects for the House legislation are unclear now that Republicans have the majority. House Energy and Commerce Chairwoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., has made the issue a priority, holding several hearings on data privacy. But the committee has not yet moved forward with a new bill.

## TIKTOK BAN/CHINA

Lawmakers introduced a raft of bills to either ban TikTok or make it easier to ban it after a combative March House hearing in which lawmakers from both parties grilled TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew over his company's ties to China's communist government, data security and harmful content on the app.

Chew attempted to assure lawmakers that the hugely popular video-sharing app prioritizes user safety and should not be banned due to its Chinese connections. But the testimony gave new momentum to the efforts.

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 45 of 72

Soon after the hearing, Missouri Sen. Josh Hawley, a Republican, tried to force a Senate vote on legislation that would ban TikTok from operating in the United States. But he was blocked by a fellow Republican, Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul, who said that a ban would violate the Constitution and anger the millions of voters who use the app.

Another bill sponsored by Republican Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida would, like Hawley's bill, ban U.S. economic transactions with TikTok, but it would also create a new framework for the executive branch to block any foreign apps deemed hostile. His bill is cosponsored by Reps. Raja Krishnamoorthi, D-Ill., and Mike Gallagher, R-Wis.

There is broad Senate support for bipartisan legislation sponsored by Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Mark Warner, D-Va., and South Dakota Sen. John Thune, the No. 2 Senate Republican, that does not specifically call out TikTok but would give the Commerce Department power to review and potentially restrict foreign threats to technology platforms.

The White House has signaled it would back that bill, but it is unclear if it will be brought up in the Senate or if it could garner support among House Republicans.

TikTok has launched an extensive lobbying campaign for its survival, including by harnessing influencers and young voters to argue that the app isn't harmful.

## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

A newer question for Congress is whether lawmakers should move to regulate artificial intelligence as rapidly developing and potentially revolutionary products like AI chatbot ChatGPT begin to enter the marketplace and can in many ways mimic human behavior.

Senate leader Schumer has made the emerging technology a priority, arguing that the United States needs to stay ahead of China and other countries that are eyeing regulations on AI products. He has been working with AI experts and has released a general framework of what regulation could look like, including increased disclosure of the people and data involved in developing the technology, more transparency and explanation for how the bots arrive at responses.

Schumer said any eventual regulation should "prevent potentially catastrophic damage to our country while simultaneously making sure the U.S. advances and leads in this transformative technology."

The White House has been focused on the issue as well, with a recent announcement of a \$140 million investment to establish seven new AI research institutes. Vice President Kamala Harris met Thursday with the heads of Google, Microsoft and other companies developing AI products.

## 'My career of 280 years': Biden jokes off 2024 age concerns

By SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Joe Biden served in the Senate for 270 years. He used to be three years older than his sister Valerie, but now has 20 years on her. And the fourth U.S. president — whom Biden affectionally calls "Jimmy" Madison — is a good friend.

All kidding aside, the 80-year-old Biden will tell you, he is at the end of his career, not the beginning. He's been doing this for a long time. And he's gotten a "hell of a lot of wisdom" over those years, making him deserving of a second term.

As Biden, the oldest president in U.S. history, embarks on his reelection campaign, he is increasingly musing aloud about his advanced age, cracking self-deprecating jokes and framing his decades in public life as a plus, hoping to convince voters his age is an asset rather than a vulnerability.

In short, he's trying to own it.

"I stand here humbled being the first sitting president of the United States to have an opportunity to speak at Ebenezer Sunday service," Biden said in January at the historic Atlanta church where Martin Luther King, Jr. was the co-pastor. "You've been around for 136 years. I know I look like it, but I haven't."

The octogenarian president's comments about his age can be serious, woven into broader remarks and often used to underscore a broader point.

When Biden told the Irish parliament last month that he has never been more optimistic about the future,



# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 46 of 72

he notably added, "And I'm at the end of my career, not the beginning."

"The only thing I bring to this career after my age — as you can see how old I am — but is a little bit of wisdom," Biden continued to the approving crowd. "I come to the job with more experience than any president in American history. It doesn't make me better or worse, but it gives me few excuses."

Other times, Biden — his mood buoyed by a crowd full of supporters, whether among Democratic lawmakers or at a lively union hall — is often speaking off-the-cuff, eager to make the audience laugh by poking a little fun at himself. At the annual White House Correspondents' Dinner on April 29, Biden made his age an early — and frequent — punchline.

"You guys were founded 122 years ago — that's not when I got endorsed," Biden told a crowd of machine operators and engineers with the International Union of Operating Engineers in Accokeek, Md., in April. He referenced "my career of 280 years here" at a Black History Month reception before being interrupted by laughter, and at an Air Force event last month, Biden noted that President Dwight Eisenhower addressed the first class of the Air Force Academy more than six decades ago but that "I wasn't there ... no matter what the press says."

Whether deliberate or candid, it's nonetheless a strategy that evokes how Ronald Reagan defused questions about his age — then 73 — during the 1984 campaign. In a debate against 56-year-old Democrat Walter Mondale, Reagan pledged he would not make age an issue nor "exploit, for political purposes, my opponent's youth and inexperience."

Biden is "doing exactly what he should be doing. He's embracing it, he's having fun with it, he's doing exactly what Ronald Reagan did — injecting humor and self-deprecation into it," said Michael LaRosa, a former press secretary for first lady Jill Biden who also worked on the president's 2020 campaign. "By saying the quiet part out loud, everyone is in on the joke. He knows his age, and he's not pretending to be somebody he's not. And that's the most important quality in a candidate."

The president could also find himself with a general election challenger nearly as old as he is, potentially neutralizing the issue of his own age. Donald Trump, the leading Republican candidate, is 76 years old, although voters have shown less concern about his age and sharpness compared to that of Biden, according to some polls. Trump, for his part, insists the issue is "not age" — it's Biden's mental acuity.

Former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, struggling to gain traction in the still-forming GOP primary field, has consistently made Biden's age a centerpiece of her campaign — even going as far as saying he may not make it to the end of his second term, when he'll be 86 years old.

Biden's personal doctor said after the president's most recent physical exam in February that Biden "remains a healthy, vigorous 80-year-old male, who is fit to successfully execute the duties of the Presidency."

Still, the public remains wary about Biden's capacity to do his job. A majority — 57% — of voters in last year's midterm elections said they did not think Biden "has the mental capability to serve effectively as president," according to AP VoteCast, an extensive survey of the 2022 electorate. Forty-one percent of voters said Biden did.

About 9 in 10 Republicans, along with about 2 in 10 Democrats, said they thought Biden doesn't have the mental capability to serve as president. Among Democrats, though, voters under 45 were roughly twice as likely as older voters to say they thought Biden doesn't have the mental capability, 27% vs. 13%.

An April poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research showed a notable chasm between the percentage of Democrats who approve of Biden's job performance — 78% — and those who wanted him to run again, which was at just 47%. Interviews with poll respondents suggested that the gulf was due in big part to the president's age.

Biden's aides have long dismissed such concerns. To counter the age questions, his reelection campaign is likely to stress his accomplishments to highlight his fitness to do the job, while underscoring the with-age-comes-experience argument that Biden himself likes to make.

"Part of President Biden's argument for reelection is that he has decades of experience," said Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del. "I think if he can balance the occasional self-deprecating joke with showing the kind of agility, engagement, casual approach to this issue that he did at the correspondents' dinner, that he did in the State of the Union, that he has in meetings with small groups of senators in public and in private,

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 47 of 72

popularity depends less on their traits than on their portrayal in media and pop culture.

Indeed, a 2013 study found no indication that longer lifespans, better behavior or other desirable characteristics make a dog breed more sought-after. One of the authors, Western Carolina University psychology professor Hal Herzog, also has observed that parabolic spikes in dog breeds resemble those in baby names, hit songs and other boom-and-bust commodities of pop culture. In short, they're canine memes.

"The dogs have become a form of fashion," says Herzog, who wrote a book about human attitudes and conduct toward animals.

French bulldogs have a colorful, centuries-long history involving English lacemakers, the Parisian demi-monde and Gilded Age American tourists who brought the dogs home. (One even died in the 1912 sinking of the Titanic. ) But the breed's U.S. heyday soon ended.

Then Americans got a fresh look at Frenchies in the current century. They turned up on domesticity maven Martha Stewart's TV show, then in narrative series and movies (such as "Modern Family" and "Due Date"), ads (including Super Bowl spots for Skechers in 2012 and Bud Light this year) and the social media accounts of celebrity owners (Lady Gaga, Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson and many more).

French bulldog fans point to attributes beyond camera-readiness to explain the dogs' appeal. They boast easy-care coats, modest exercise needs, an apartment-friendly size and a demeanor memorably described as "a clown in the cloak of a philosopher."

Yet that hasn't translated into wins at Westminster, where each dog is judged against an ideal for its own breed, not against others.

Still, longtime breeder and French Bull Dog Club of America spokesperson Patty Sosa posits that Frenchies "might have been out-flashed" by showier-looking breeds, such as poodles. (Labrador retriever partisans harbored similar theories during the 31 years their breed topped the popularity charts; it's still winless at Westminster.)

Winston, however, came within a whisker of the trophy last year, taking runner-up to the first bloodhound ever to win. The Frenchie later won another prominent competition, the National Dog Show in Philadelphia in November. He heads into Westminster Monday as one of the show world's most-winning dogs (the top prize will be awarded Tuesday night).

If a pooch can get a competitive edge through osmosis, the cream-colored 4-year-old probably has. He lives with part-owner Morgan Fox, a Los Angeles Chargers defensive end, when not on the show circuit with handler and part-owner Perry Payson.

Moreover, Winston "has the structure, he has the outline, he has the head, and he has the movement" of a winner, says Sosa. "And by God, he has the attitude."

## PEOPLE WORRY ABOUT THEIR HEALTH

While applauding Winston's success, she says Frenchie folk have mixed feelings — one part joy, one part misgivings — about seeing the dogs get any more recognition.

Longtime breeders who adhere to health testing and other guidelines feel that Frenchie fever already has attracted opportunistic, slapdash people producing anything-goes, possibly unhealthy pups. There's concern that "we're losing the battle with education and just promoting a well-bred dog," Sosa said.

Some veterinarians also are worried for Frenchies — all of them.

Partly because of their pushed-in, wrinkly faces, the animals are susceptible to breathing, eye, and other problems. While other breeds also have predispositions and mixed-breed dogs can be a question mark, recent research in Britain suggested Frenchies' health is "largely much poorer" than that of other canines.

The British Veterinary Association has "strongly" recommended against buying any flat-faced dogs, and the Dutch government has prohibited breeding very short-snouted canines. In the U.S., the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association — a professional group with a focus on animal welfare advocacy — wants "to counter the dramatic increase in demand" for push-faced dogs, partly by discouraging their use in advertising.

"Owners who really love these dogs don't understand how much the dogs are suffering," says the group's education director, Dr. Lorna Grande. (The broader American Veterinary Medical Association, meanwhile,

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 48 of 72

I think that's an asset."

In a new MSNBC interview last week, Biden again dismissed concerns about his age, saying, "I have acquired a hell of a lot of wisdom and know more than the vast majority of people."

Biden's advisers also note that his age surfaced as an issue in the 2020 campaign and did not derail his path to the White House. Some of his more nominal challengers in that year's Democratic presidential primary, such as former Housing and Urban Development secretary Julian Castro and former Ohio Rep. Tim Ryan, made veiled references to Biden's age and mental acuity, but that did not gain traction among other candidates. (One of them, Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., is older than Biden.)

Biden has conceded in the past that his age is a legitimate issue for voters, and said shortly after his reelection announcement that he took a "hard look" at that before he formalized his decision to run for a second term.

"If I guess how old I am, I can't even say the number. It doesn't -- it doesn't register with me," he said at a news conference with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol last month. "But the only thing I can say is that one of the things that people are going to find out — they're going to see a race, and they're going to judge whether or not I have it or don't have it."

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Associated Press writer Hannah Fingerhut contributed to this report.

## Source: Investigators examine ideology of Texas gunman

By JAKE BLEIBERG, MICHAEL BALSAMO and JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

ALLEN, Texas (AP) — Federal officials are looking into whether the gunman who killed eight people at a Dallas-area mall expressed an interest in white supremacist ideology Sunday as they work to discern a motive for the attack, a law enforcement official told The Associated Press. The official cautioned the investigation is in its early stages.

Federal agents have been reviewing social media accounts they believe were used by Mauricio Garcia, 33, and posts that expressed interest in white supremacist and neo-Nazi views, said the official, who could not discuss details of the investigation publicly and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity.

Garcia also had a patch on his chest when he was killed by police that read "RWDS," an acronym for the phrase "Right Wing Death Squad," which is popular among right-wing extremists and white supremacy groups, the official said.

In addition to reviewing social media posts, federal agents have interviewed family members and associates of Garcia to ask about his ideological beliefs, the official said. Investigators are also reviewing financial records, other online posts they believe Garcia made and other electronic media, according to the official.

Allen Police Chief Brian Harvey declined Sunday evening to answer questions from the AP, saying of the investigation, "we actually don't have a lot."

The Texas Department of Public Safety identified Garcia as suspected of killing eight people at a Texas outlet mall, a day after the attack turned an afternoon of shopping into a massacre.

Garcia was fatally shot Saturday by a police officer who happened to be near the suburban Dallas mall.

A law enforcement official said investigators have been searching a Dallas motel near an interstate where Garcia had been staying. The official said police also found multiple weapons at the scene after Garcia was killed, including an AR-15-style rifle and a handgun.

Two law enforcement officials said investigators also searched a Dallas home connected to the suspect. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity in order to discuss details of an ongoing investigation.

A woman who lives three houses down from the low brick house said she saw a large group of uniformed officers go into the home Saturday between 6 p.m. and 7 p.m.

"They went in like real fast, and I seen them do that like twice," said Marsha Alexander, who said officers were still in the area when she went to bed around 9 p.m. to 10 p.m. They were gone by Sunday morning.

On Sunday afternoon, a woman named Julie was sitting on the porch of her house, next door to the one searched the day before. She declined to give her last name to an AP reporter but said she awoke



# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 49 of 72

from a nap around 6 p.m. Saturday to see four police squad cars and a large group of officers outside her neighbor's home.

She said they entered the home and were joined about an hour later by FBI agents and other people wearing plainclothes, who she also took to be law enforcement.

The woman said she did not know her neighbors well, but knew them to be "very polite, very nice people." She said the man she now understands to have been the shooter was always friendly and would wave or honk his horn as he came and went.

At about 2 p.m. Sunday, a man entered the home that was searched, but when reporters knocked on the door and waited, no one answered.

In a statement, President Joe Biden said the assailant wore tactical gear and fired an AR-15-style weapon. He urged Congress to enact tighter restrictions on firearms and ammunition.

"Such an attack is too shocking to be so familiar. And yet, American communities have suffered roughly 200 mass shootings already this year, according to leading counts," said Biden, who ordered flags lowered to half-staff.

Republicans in Congress, he said, "cannot continue to meet this epidemic with a shrug."

The shooting was the latest attack to contribute to the unprecedented pace of mass killings this year in the U.S. Barely a week before, five people were fatally shot in Cleveland, Texas, after a neighbor asked a man to stop firing his weapon while a baby slept, authorities said.

This year has seen an average of about one mass killing per week, according to a database maintained by The Associated Press and USA Today in partnership with Northeastern University.

Information about the gunman in Allen emerged as the community mourned the dead and awaited word on the seven people who were wounded. Authorities have not publicly identified those who were killed.

The wounded remained hospitalized Sunday, three in critical condition and four in fair condition, the Allen Police Department said in a statement.

John Mark Caton, senior pastor at Cottonwood Creek Church about two miles from the mall, offered prayers during a regular Sunday morning service for victims, first responders and the shoppers and employees who "walked out past things they never should have seen."

"Some of our people were there. Some perhaps in this room. Some of our students were working in those stores and will be changed forever by this," Caton said.

Caton offered similar sentiments during a Sunday night vigil at the church attended by Republican Gov. Greg Abbott, who has signed laws easing firearms restrictions following past mass shootings in Texas, and other elected leaders. Earlier that day, Abbott said on Fox News that Texas wouldn't enact gun control now.

"People want a quick solution," Abbott said. "The long term solution here is to address the mental health issue."

The attack unfolded at Allen Premium Outlets, a sprawling outdoor shopping center. Witnesses reported seeing children among the victims. Some said they also saw what appeared to be a police officer and a mall security guard unconscious on the ground.

Andria Gaither, the assistant manager at the Tommy Hilfiger clothing store, said Sunday she was at the back of the store Saturday afternoon when she saw two young girls trying to hide in a dressing room. At first, she thought they were playing. Then she heard one say shots were being fired.

Gaither looked around to see customers and the store manager running to the back of the store. Eventually, Gaither and the others ran out a back door.

"As soon as I got outside the back of the store, you could hear the shooting," Gaither said Sunday. "It was so loud. I'd never ever heard anything like that in my life. It was deafening."

Allen, about 25 miles (40 kilometers) north of downtown Dallas and with a population of about 105,000 residents, is among the Dallas-Fort Worth area's diverse suburbs. The area saw the largest Asian American growth rate of any major U.S. metro area, according to U.S. Census figures. Those statistics show Allen's population is about 19% Asian, 10% Black and 11% Hispanic.

Allen also is connected to another of Texas' recent mass shootings. Patrick Crusius lived there in 2019

before he posted a racist screed online that warned of a "Hispanic invasion" and drove to El Paso, where he opened fire at a Walmart, killing 23. Crusius, 24, pleaded guilty to federal hate crime and weapons charges in February.

Balsamo reported from Washington, and Stengle reported from Dallas. Associated Press writers Vanessa Alvarez in New York, James Vertuno in Austin, Adam Kealoha Causey in Dallas, Gene Johnson in Seattle and Rebecca Boone in Boise, Idaho, contributed to this report.

## Vida Blue, led Oakland to 3 World Series titles, dies at 73

By RONALD BLUM AP Baseball Writer

Vida Blue, a hard-throwing left-hander who became one of baseball's biggest draws in the early 1970s and helped lead the brash A's to three straight World Series titles before his career was derailed by drug problems, died Saturday, according to the team. He was 73.

Blue died at a hospital in San Francisco's East Bay area of medical complications stemming from cancer, the Oakland Athletics said. Blue had used a walking stick to assist his movement at a 50th anniversary of the 1973 A's championship team on April 16.

"He was engaging. He was personable. He was caring," ex-teammate Reggie Jackson said during an interview with The Associated Press on Sunday. "He was uncomfortable with the crowd."

Blue was voted the 1971 American League Cy Young Award and Most Valuable Player after going 24-8 with a 1.82 ERA and 301 strikeouts with 24 complete games, eight of them shutouts. He was 22 at when he won MVP, the youngest to win the award. He remains among just 11 pitchers to win MVP and Cy Young in the same year.

Blue finished 209-161 with a 3.27 ERA, 2,175 strikeouts, 143 complete games and 37 shutouts over 17 seasons with Oakland (1969-77), San Francisco (1978-81, 85-86) and Kansas City (1982-83). He appeared on the Hall of Fame ballot four times, receiving his most support at 8.7% in 1993, far short of the 75% needed.

"That Hall of Fame thing, that's something that I can honestly, openly say I wish I was a Hall of Famer," Blue told The Washington Post in 2021. "And I know for a fact this drug thing impeded my road to the Hall of Fame — so far."

A six-time All-Star and three-time 20-game winner, Blue helped pitch the Swingin' A's, as Charley Finley's colorful, mustachioed team was known, to consecutive World Series titles from 1972-74. Since then, only the 1998-2000 New York Yankees have accomplished the feat.

He became the first pitcher to start the All-Star Game for both leagues, opening for the AL in 1971 and '75 and the NL in '78.

"I remember watching a 19-year-old phenom dominate baseball, and at the same time alter my life," Dave Stewart, a four-time 20-game winner for the A's a generation later, wrote on Twitter. "There are no words for what you have meant to me and so many others."

Jackson was shocked by how much weight Blue had lost when he saw him at the 50th reunion.

"I did not recognize him," Jackson said. "I was shattered. I was shaken. That will stick with me the rest of my life."

Selected by the then Kansas City Athletics on the second round of the 1967 amateur draft, Blue made his big league debut with Oakland on July 20, 1969, about a week shy of his 20th birthday. He made four starts and 12 relief appearances, then spent most of 1970 at Triple-A Iowa.

Called up when rosters expanded, he pitched a one-hit shutout at Kansas City in his second start. In his fourth start, Blue pitched a no-hitter against Minnesota on Sept. 21, at 21 years, 55 days that made him the youngest pitcher to throw a no-hitter since the live ball era started in 1920.

"There are few players with a more decorated career than Vida Blue," the A's said in a statement. "Vida will always be a franchise legend and a friend."

He held out after his MVP season and signed a \$50,000 one-year deal. Blue didn't make his first start of

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 51 of 72

1972 until May 24 and went 6-10, mostly out of the bullpen. From 1973-76, he went 77-48 but his career World Series record was 0-3.

In 1975, he pitched the first five innings of a no-hitter against the California Angels, but was pulled early by manager Alvin Dark to rest him for the playoffs in a game finished by Glenn Abbott, Paul Lindblad, and Rollie Fingers.

Blue was among the players who assumed leadership roles on the A's and clashed with Finley.

"We were very young kids," Jackson said Sunday. "Vida was from Louisiana and Black, and me being Black, being Black in a white league and a white world, was very impactful as to how you handled yourself, how you acted, because you were always colored first."

Finley attempted in June 1976 to trade Blue to the New York Yankees for \$1.5 million and Joe Rudi and Rollie Fingers to the Boston Red Sox for \$1 million each. Kuhn vetoed the deals under the commissioner's authority to act in the "best interest of baseball." In December 1977, Kuhn stopped Finley from trading Blue to Cincinnati for \$1.75 million and minor league first baseman Dave Revering.

Blue was traded to the Giants the following March in a deal that brought Oakland seven players, including outfielder Gary Thomasson and catcher Gary Alexander.

Blue was dealt to the Royals in March 1982 and released in August 1983. He was ordered that December to serve three months in federal prison and fined \$5,000 for misdemeanor possession of approximately a tenth of an ounce of cocaine. Blue was sentenced to one year in prison but U.S. Magistrate Judge J. Milton Sullivant suspended the majority of the term.

Blue didn't play in 1984 and was suspended that July 26 by Major League Baseball through the remainder of the season for illegal drug use.

He returned to baseball with the Giants for two seasons starting in 1985. Blue was among the players ordered by baseball Commissioner Peter Ueberroth in 1985 to be subject to random drug testing for the rest of their careers.

After his 2005 arrest in Arizona on suspicion of DUI for the third time in less than six years, Blue was sentenced to six months in jail after failing to complete his probation. But he was told he could avoid incarceration by spending time in a residential alcohol treatment program.

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AP Baseball Writer Janie McCauley contributed to this report.

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AP MLB: <https://apnews.com/hub/MLB> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Sports](https://twitter.com/AP_Sports)

## Not live, MTV Movie & TV Awards rely on plenty of old clips

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — A host-less, pre-taped and muted MTV Movie & TV Awards on Sunday became the first big awards show to air during the screenwriters' strike, offering a commercial-heavy broadcast featuring lots of past recycled live clips.

"Scream VI" won the trophy for best movie, holding back competition from "Avatar: The Way of Water," "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever," "Elvis," "Nope," "Smile" and "Top Gun: Maverick." In a pre-taped response, the killer Ghostface was humble: "To all the fans that voted, you finally answered my question: What's your favorite scary movie?"

"The Last of Us" was crowned best TV show, beating the likes of "Stranger Things," "The White Lotus," "Wednesday" and "Yellowjackets." Pedro Pascal accepted the award and said he and the cast and creators were standing in solidarity with the striking writers.

Tom Cruise took home the best performance in a movie for "Top Gun: Maverick," beating Austin Butler, Florence Pugh, Michael B. Jordan and Keke Palmer. In a pre-taped response, Cruise was seen piloting a jet and thanking the fans, while also plugging his next "Mission: Impossible" film.

Jenna Ortega won best performance in a TV show for "Wednesday," beating Aubrey Plaza, Christina Ricci, Riley Keough, Sadie Sink and Selena Gomez. "Stranger Things" won for best kick-ass cast.



# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 52 of 72

"The Kardashians" won best docu-reality show, the best breakthrough performance went to Joseph Quinn of "Stranger Things," and Pascal won for best hero for "The Last Of Us." Pascal also won half the best duo prize with co-star Bella Ramsey.

Best comedic performance went to Adam Sandler, for "Murder Mystery 2," and "Scream VI" won for best fight, with Ghostface again thanking the voters: "It's about time someone finally appreciated my work."

Host Drew Barrymore had dropped out in solidarity with the Writers Guild of America — later winning best host — and the show's red carpet was rolled up. Faced with a picket from the guild, MTV scrapped the live event entirely.

While Barrymore wasn't there, she left plenty of sponsored bits, one with Cheetos popcorn and another pretending to play younger sister Skipper in the upcoming movie "Barbie." She was also in a commercial for Pluto TV and a spoof of "Wednesday." She kicked off the show reprising her role as Josie Grossie from "Never Been Kissed," trying to smooch several nominees in carefully edited comedic moments.

Jennifer Coolidge received the Comedic Genius Award on tape and gave a shoutout to striking writers, saying almost all great comedy starts with great writers.

"I stand here before you tonight side by side with my sisters and brothers from the WGA," she said. Coolidge also later won for best frightened performance for "The White Lotus."

"RuPaul's Drag Race All Stars" won for best competition series, and the recipients urged protection for drag acts, while the best kiss award went to Madison Bailey and Rudy Pankow from "Outer Banks." Many awards produced no winner's response.

MTV filled the show with dozens of old clips, like an all-star 2001 performance of "Lady Marmalade," Lizzo belting out her hit "Juice" in 2019 or Rihanna in 2002 singing "Umbrella," as well as other genius award speeches from previous winners like Melissa McCarthy, Kevin Hart and Jack Black. There was also a sneak peek from an upcoming episode of "Yellowjackets" and a clip from "Transformers: Rise of the Beasts." It was sometimes hard to determine what was new and what was old.

"Selena Gomez: My Mind & Me" was named best music documentary, "Come Back Home" in "Purple Hearts" was voted best musical moment, and Taylor Swift's "Carolina" won best song. Elizabeth Olsen in "Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness" was named best villain.

Mark Kennedy is at <http://twitter.com/KennedyTwits>

## 76ers' Harden visits with Michigan State shooting victim

By DAN GELSTON AP Sports Writer

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — James Harden sank the overtime 3-pointer that sent the 76ers to a playoff victory and instantly waved over John Hao, a paralyzed Michigan State shooting survivor who developed a long-distance FaceTime bond with Philadelphia's star guard.

Harden had just scored 42 points, removed his sneakers, signed them and handed them to his new friend.

"He brought me good vibes, good energy," Harden said.

Hao was all smiles as he looked on from the court, a needed respite from looming rehabilitation for the international student from China who attended Game 4 as Harden's guest.

Before the game, Harden leaned into Hao and got small pats on the back before resuming his pregame drills.

"You look good," Harden told Hao.

The 20-year-old Hao and his parents had been invited by Harden to attend a 76ers game once he was available to travel.

Hao recently left a Chicago rehabilitation facility where he'd been since a February shooting on the East Lansing campus that killed three students and injured five others.

Hao wore Harden's No. 1 Sixers jersey and attended the game with his parents. Hao's father also wore a Harden jersey and posed for pictures as the 76ers warmed up behind him.

Harden learned after the shooting that Hao was a fan of his and donated sneakers, money and then

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 53 of 72

called the student to offer encouragement.

"I know it's tough right now, just gotta be mentally strong," Harden said in February in video of the call. "Just think about the positive things and keep pushing. Keep fighting. I got you."

Harden also kept his promise that Hao could attend a game. The family watched the game from a club box at the Wells Fargo Center.

"When I got injured, he read the news about that, he just came to give us all the support we need," Hao told The Associated Press. "I'm so appreciative of that."

Hao said his spirits were strong and he was now a 76ers fan because of Harden.

"He taught me to keep strong," Hao said.

The shootings at Michigan State happened in February during evening classes at Berkey Hall and nearby at the MSU Union. Students across the vast campus were ordered to shelter in place for four hours — "run, hide, fight" if necessary — while police hunted for Anthony McRae, 43, who eventually killed himself when confronted by police not far from his home in Lansing.

Hao said he doesn't know what's next for him and still needs additional treatment. Hao said he was committed to graduating from Michigan State, though he may move back with his parents to China.

"I hope to get back to my normal life and rehab as soon as possible," he said.

AP NBA: <https://apnews.com/hub/NBA> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Sports](https://twitter.com/AP_Sports)

## Trump rejects last chance to testify at New York civil trial

By LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Former President Donald Trump rejected his last chance Sunday to testify at a civil trial where a longtime advice columnist has accused him of raping her in a luxury department store dressing room in 1996.

Trump, a Republican candidate for president in 2024, was given until 5 p.m. Sunday by U.S. District Judge Lewis A. Kaplan to file a request to testify. Nothing was filed.

It was not a surprise. Trump has not shown up once during the two-week Manhattan trial where writer E. Jean Carroll testified for several days, repeating claims she first made publicly in a 2019 memoir. She is seeking compensatory and punitive damages totaling millions of dollars.

The jury has also watched lengthy excerpts from an October videotaped deposition in which Trump vehemently denied raping Carroll or ever really knowing her.

Without Trump's testimony, lawyers were scheduled to make closing arguments Monday, with deliberations likely to begin on Tuesday.

After plaintiffs rested their case Thursday, Trump attorney Joe Tacopina immediately rested the defense case as well without calling any witnesses. He did not request additional time for Trump to decide to testify. Tacopina declined in an email to comment after the deadline passed Sunday.

On Thursday, Kaplan had given Trump extra time to change his mind and request to testify, though the judge did not promise he would grant such a request to reopen the defense case so Trump could take the stand.

At the time, Kaplan noted that he'd heard about news reports Thursday in which Trump told reporters while visiting his golf course in Doonbeg, Ireland, that he would "probably attend" the trial. Trump also criticized Kaplan, a Bill Clinton appointee, as an "extremely hostile" and "rough judge" who "doesn't like me very much."

On the witness stand, Carroll, 79, testified that Trump, 76, raped her in spring 1996 after they met at the entrance of the midtown Manhattan department store Bergdorf Goodman.

She said the encounter began as a fun and flirtatious outing as Trump coaxed her into helping him shop for a gift for another woman. She said they ended up in the store's desolate lingerie section, where they teased each other to try on a see-through bodysuit.

As Carroll recalled it, laughter accompanied them into a dressing room where Trump became violent,

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 54 of 72

slamming her up against a wall, pulling aside her tights and raping her before she kned him and fled the store.

In his deposition, Trump said Carroll made it up. He called it "a false, disgusting lie" delivered by a "nut job" who was trying to stoke sales of her book.

He also repeated comments he made in statements that she was not his "type."

"She's not my type and that's 100% true," he said.

And he repeated his claims in a 2005 "Access Hollywood" video in which he bragged that men who are celebrities can grab women by the genitals without asking.

"Historically that's true with stars," he said.

Carroll sued Trump in November, minutes after New York state enacted a law allowing adult sexual assault victims to sue others even if the attacks occurred decades earlier.

Carroll's attorney, Roberta Kaplan, wrote a letter to the judge Sunday to complain that Trump still has not removed April 26 posts on his social media network in which he called Carroll's allegations "a made up SCAM." And she noted that he repeated disparaging remarks about the trial three days ago in Ireland.

After the April 26 postings on Truth Social, Judge Kaplan, who is not related to Carroll's lawyer, said Trump's comments were "highly inappropriate" and expressed concern that Trump was trying to communicate to the jury "about stuff that has no business being spoken about."

The Associated Press typically does not name people who say they have been sexually assaulted unless they come forward publicly, as Carroll has done.

## Black voters backing Biden, but not with 2020 enthusiasm

BY AYANNA ALEXANDER Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — LaJoia Broughton, a 41-year-old small-business owner, considers herself a fan of President Joe Biden.

He's provided opportunities for Black-owned business while bringing integrity to the White House, she said. Her decision for 2024 is not in doubt.

"Biden has proven himself in the last few years, and I'll be voting for him in the next election," said Broughton, who owns a lobbying and public affairs firm in Columbia, South Carolina's capital city.

Destiny Humphreys is less enthusiastic. The 22-year-old senior at South Carolina State University, the state's only public historically Black college or university, or HBCU, said she's disappointed in the president, feeling his accomplishments have so far not lived up to his promises.

"Honestly, I feel like right now America is in a state of emergency. We need some real change," said Humphreys, who remains unsure about her vote in next year's election.

After a dismal start to his 2020 presidential campaign, Black voters in South Carolina rallied behind Biden, reviving his White House ambitions by driving his Democratic rivals from the race and ultimately putting him on a path to defeating then-President Donald Trump. But at the outset of Biden's reelection bid, the conflicting views among the same voters provide an early warning sign of the challenges he faces as he aims to revive the diverse coalition that proved so crucial to him before.

Black voters formed the heart of Biden's base of support and any dip in support could prove consequential in some of the most fiercely competitive states, such as Georgia, Michigan and Wisconsin. Well aware of the challenge, the Biden campaign says it's confident in its message and is planning to highlight how the president has prioritized issues that are important to Black Americans.

"The progress made in the first two years -- whether it's the historically low black unemployment rate, unprecedented funding to HBCUs, or halving the black poverty rate in half -- is all at stake in 2024," campaign spokesman Kevin Munoz said in an emailed statement. "The campaign will work hard to earn every vote, and expand on its winning 2020 coalition."

Yet there are some early signs that Biden will have work to do to generate enthusiasm among Black voters for another run.

Biden's approval rating among Black adults has fluctuated over his two years in office. As with most demographic groups, the latest Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll finds his



# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 55 of 72

58% current approval rating among Black adults sitting well below where he began. Roughly 9 in 10 Black adults approved of Biden over his first months in office.

While only about half of Democrats overall say they want Biden to run again in 2024, 81% say they would definitely or probably support him if he were the nominee. The groundswell isn't as stark among Black adults: 41% say they want him to run and only 55% say they are likely to support him in the general election.

APVoteCast, an extensive national survey of the electorate, also found that support for Republican candidates ticked up slightly among Black voters during last year's elections, even though those voters overwhelmingly supported Democrats.

South Carolina provides an early barometer on how Black voters are viewing Biden shortly after his quiet campaign launch, via a video message late last month.

After his 2020 campaign was rescued, Biden rewarded the Black voters who are decisive in South Carolina Democratic politics by moving the state to the head of the party's nominating schedule next year. He also followed through with his campaign pledge to appoint the first Black woman to the Supreme Court.

But interviews two years into his presidency with more than a dozen Black voters representing a variety of ages and backgrounds reveal mixed views, especially between older and younger voters.

Many younger voters said they aren't convinced that Biden has delivered on their most important priorities. "He wouldn't have been president without us," said Courtney McClain, a 22-year-old recent graduate of the University of South Carolina, who voted for Biden in 2020, her first presidential election.

Getting her loans forgiven, both for her bachelor's degree and a planned master's program, is a top priority for her. She applauds Biden's attempt at a college loan forgiveness program, but is frustrated that the plan is now in doubt after it was challenged in the courts by Republicans.

"So, I definitely think moving forward, if he wants to promise something as large as that, I think he should put the steps in place to make sure that he's able to go through with that before he just says it out loud," McClain said.

Biden's plan, announced last August, would have erased \$10,000 in federal student loan debt for those with incomes below \$125,000 a year, or households earning less than \$250,000, and canceled an additional \$10,000 for those who received federal Pell Grants. Its fate is uncertain after the Supreme Court last December said it would deliberate over the program's future.

Many younger voters also cited the economy, especially lowering inflation, as a top priority. Several noted a lack of enthusiasm among their peers for a second Biden run, even while acknowledging they didn't see a realistic alternative. But they wondered how lackluster support might affect turnout next year.

"For people to vote, and to be eager to vote, you have to actually want to vote for the person," said Ace Conyers, a 22-year-old at South Carolina State.

Bailey Scott, a junior at the school, said she's not excited about voting in the 2024 presidential election because people she would like to see in office won't be running.

"So I'm just going to have to pick the lesser evil," she said. "And as of right now, that does seem like Joe Biden and Kamala Harris."

Of course, many Black voters, especially those in the middle of their careers and beyond, said they already are looking forward to supporting Biden, who they say has a long history of advocating for the Black community. Laddie Howard, who owns a business making handcrafted leather goods in Sumter, just west of Columbia, said he would like to see other candidates enter the race but knows that's not realistic.

"It's going to be a battle of Biden against whoever emerges from the other side, and everything is so extreme on the other side that, you know, I can't see many options besides Biden at this point," said Howard, 52.

Tony Kinard, a Biden supporter, said the president has plenty of legislative wins to promote, including the Inflation Reduction Act, the roughly \$740 billion program to promote clean energy, reduce prescription drug costs, shore up the health insurance marketplace and tax large corporations.

He would like to see action on gun control, especially as it edges closer to his home about an hour's drive south of Columbia in rural Bamberg, where he runs Dot's Flower Shop.

"I don't like the idea of everybody being able to carry a firearm because we're having too many young people dying behind that," he said.

With divided government in Washington, additional action on access to firearms is unlikely. Still, the 67-year-old said it's clear which candidate will best support the needs of Black voters in 2024.

"I'm going to vote for Biden," he said. "We need to remember that, you know, the same where we got him in there before, we have to do the same thing by voting." \_\_\_\_\_

Associated Press writer Hannah Fingerhut in Washington contributed to this report.

\_\_\_\_\_ Associated Press coverage of race and voting receives support from the Jonathan Logan Family Foundation. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

## Deaths from Congo floods approach 400 as search continues

By JUSTIN KABUMBA Associated Press

GOMA, Congo (AP) — The death toll from floods in eastern Congo has almost doubled, reaching close to 400 people as of Sunday, according to a local official.

The administrator of the worst-affected area, the Kalehe territory of South Kivu province, told The Associated Press by phone that more bodies were recovered Sunday, including many found floating in Lake Kivu.

Administrator Thomas Bakenge said the confirmed number of dead stood at 394 but it was a provisional count since the search was continuing. More than 300 victims had been buried as of Sunday, local groups said.

Torrential rains across Kalehe territory began on Thursday evening. Rivers broke their banks, with flash floods sweeping away the majority of buildings in the villages of Bushushu and Nyamukubi, causing the huge loss of life.

Delphin Birimbi, a civic leader in Kalehe, said he understood that thousands of people remained missing. He told the AP that some doctors arrived to treat the injured but communities were pleading for more emergency assistance.

The destruction caused by the flooding hampered aid efforts, with two main roads impassable.

More than 170 victims were buried in four mass graves, Valet Chebujongo, a youth political activist helping in the rescue efforts in Kalehe, said by telephone. "Imagine, you bury them in a mass grave, without a coffin," Chebujongo said.

The Congolese government declared Monday as a national day of mourning, with flags to fly at half-staff in memory of the victims.

A delegation of government officials and lawmakers sent by Congo's president, Félix Tshisekedi, arrived in Bukavu, a city near the southern part of Lake Kivu and planned to visit the devastated area on Monday, according to a government spokesperson.

Heavy rains in recent days have brought misery to thousands in East Africa, including in parts of Uganda and Kenya.

Flooding and landslides in Rwanda, which borders Congo, left 129 people dead earlier in the week.

## Far-right activist Ammon Bundy's latest standoff is in court

By REBECCA BOONE Associated Press

EMMETT, Idaho (AP) — A far-right activist best known for his showdowns with federal and state law enforcement officials in Oregon and Nevada is waging a one-sided standoff of a different kind after refusing to comply with court orders in an Idaho defamation lawsuit.

The lawsuit by St. Luke's Regional Health was filed more than a year ago, accusing Ammon Bundy and his close associate Diego Rodriguez of making defamatory statements against the hospital and its employees after Rodriguez's infant grandson was temporarily removed from his family and taken to St. Luke's amid concerns for his health.

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 57 of 72

Since then, Bundy has ignored court orders related to the lawsuit, filed trespassing complaints against people hired to deliver legal paperwork, and called on scores of his followers to camp at his home for protection when he learned he might be arrested on a warrant for a misdemeanor charge of contempt of court.

"We can build a defense system from here. ... This is what is going to keep us safe from all the terrible things that are going to come upon us and throughout the world," Bundy told dozens of people gathered at his home in late April, according to a video of the speech posted to Facebook.

Bundy's rhetoric is similar to how he spoke during his armed standoffs with federal law enforcement in Nevada and Oregon several years ago. But this time — despite frequent YouTube videos, far-right media interviews and a "call to action" text sent to People's Rights network members — Bundy hasn't gained the same traction. The initial gathering of dozens appears to have shrunk to a handful.

In 2016, Bundy led a 41-day armed occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge near Burns, Oregon, to protest the arson convictions of two ranchers who set fires on federal land where they had been grazing their cattle.

The 2014 Nevada confrontation was led by Bundy's father, rancher Cliven Bundy, who rallied supporters to stop officers from impounding Bundy Ranch cattle over more than \$1 million in unpaid fees and penalties for grazing livestock on government land.

Ammon Bundy was acquitted of criminal charges in Oregon, and the Nevada criminal case ended in a mistrial.

Ammon Bundy and his People's Rights organization next drew attention for a series of protests at the Idaho Statehouse over coronavirus-related measures and he was temporarily banned from the government building in 2020.

In the current lawsuit, Bundy seems to be following a "blueprint," using rhetoric similar to that used in the Oregon and Nevada standoffs to escalate the conflict, said Devin Burghart, the director of the Institute for Research and Education on Human Rights. Burghart has been hired by St. Luke's attorneys to serve as an expert witness in the defamation lawsuit.

"Bundy has attempted to take the lawsuit and make it into something larger. If he's able to take this trial and turn it into a larger confrontation, that could be very problematic," Burghart said.

Fewer people seem willing to put their own lives on hold to stay at Bundy's property this time, Burghart noted.

The in-person response may be dwarfed by online reaction. At least three witnesses in the defamation lawsuit are unwilling to testify against Bundy in court, according to court documents filed by St. Luke's, because they fear they might be harmed by Bundy's supporters.

One nurse wrote in court documents that she installed a security system in her home and was scared to wear her hospital badge outside of work. Another health professional said she repeatedly lost sleep and was traumatized because Bundy supporters accused her and others of kidnapping or harming children.

"Intimidation, defamation, doxing, trespass, threats of violence, armed 'protests' at homes and businesses and, when all else fails, armed standoffs with law enforcement — these are the weapons of choice for Ammon Bundy and his more than 60,000-member strong militia, People's Rights Network," attorneys for St. Luke's Health System wrote in a recent court filing.

Bundy, meanwhile, recently told followers that he would rather "go back to Heavenly Father" than return to jail — though contempt convictions generally carry a maximum jail sentence of five days under Idaho law.

Bundy also maintains he won't stop making the allegedly defamatory statements against St. Luke's Regional Medical Center regardless of any court ruling, because he claims his liberty is at stake.

"I believe it's my absolute right to be able to say those things," Bundy told The Associated Press in April. "The judge doesn't have the authority to take those away, they're inalienable rights."

Sheriff's deputies stopped by Bundy's property at least twice in recent weeks to serve the arrest warrant, but left when they were told Bundy wasn't home.

St. Luke's filed the defamation lawsuit in May 2022 against Bundy, his close associate Diego Rodriguez

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 58 of 72

and their various political and business entities, claiming the pair were making false statements against the company, causing millions of dollars in damages and prompting supporters to harass and intimidate staffers.

The case arose from an incident two months earlier, when Rodriguez' 10-month-old grandson was temporarily removed from family custody and taken to St. Luke's over concerns about his health. The baby was temporarily placed in the care of the state, and returned to his parents after about a week.

Bundy and Rodriguez said the child was wrongfully taken from a loving family after he began experiencing episodes of vomiting after trying solid foods. At the time, Meridian Police said medical personnel determined the child was malnourished and had lost weight, but the family maintained the child was healthy and needed to stay with his mother to breastfeed.

Bundy urged his followers to protest the hospital and at the homes of child protection service workers, law enforcement officers and others involved in the child protection case. Rodriguez wrote on his website that the baby was "kidnapped," and suggested that the state and people involved in the case were engaged in "child trafficking" for profit.

In the lawsuit, the hospital claimed that Bundy, Diego and their various political organizations orchestrated a widespread smear campaign against the hospital in order to raise their own profiles and enrich themselves. The company asked a judge to award millions of dollars in damages and to bar both men from making any statements calling the hospital officials criminals or claiming that they participate in the abuse, kidnapping, trafficking or killing of children.

Bundy, who previously said he was ignoring the court documents because he wanted the case to end quickly, has now asked to have the case moved to federal court.

This story was updated to correct the last name of Devin Burghart, who had been erroneously referred to as Burghess.

## Pariah no more? Arab League reinstates Bashar Assad's Syria

By MOHAMED WAGDY and KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — The Arab League agreed Sunday to reinstate Syria, ending a 12-year suspension and taking another step toward bringing Syrian President Bashar Assad, a long-time regional pariah, back into the fold.

Some influential league members remain opposed to reinstating Syria, chief among them Qatar, which did not send its foreign minister to Sunday's gathering. Thirteen out of the league's 22 member states sent their foreign ministers to the meeting in Cairo.

The decision represented a victory for Damascus, albeit a largely symbolic one. Given that Western sanctions against Assad's government remain in place, the return to the Arab League is not expected to lead to a quick release of reconstruction funds in the war-battered country.

Syria's membership in the Arab League was suspended early on during the country's 2011 uprising against Assad's rule that was met by a violent crackdown and quickly turned into a civil war. The conflict has killed nearly a half million people since March 2011 and displaced half of the country's pre-war population of 23 million.

Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit said in a televised statement that the decision to return Syria to the organization, which will allow Assad to take part in the group's upcoming May 19 summit, is part of a gradual process of resolving the conflict.

"This doesn't mean that the Syria crisis has been resolved, on the contrary," he said. "But it allows the Arab (states) for the first time in years to communicate with the Syrian government to discuss all the problems."

Aboul Gheit also said restoring Syria's membership in the organization does not mean all Arab countries have normalized with Damascus.

"These are sovereign decisions for each state individually," he said.



# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 59 of 72

Syrian Prime Minister Hussein Arnous claimed Sunday that Syria had been the victim of "misinformation and distortion campaigns launched by our enemies" for 12 years. He said Sunday's consultations reflected the "prestigious position" Syria holds regionally and internationally.

Opponents of Assad saw the move toward normalization as a betrayal.

"Arab states have put their own cynical realpolitik and diplomatic agendas above basic humanity," said Laila Kiki, executive director of The Syria Campaign, an international advocacy group. The move, she said, has "cruelly betrayed tens of thousands of victims of the regime's war crimes and granted Assad a green light to continue committing horrific crimes with impunity."

Sunday's decision came days after regional top diplomats met in Jordan to discuss a road map to return Syria to the Arab fold as the conflict continues to de-escalate. The next Arab League summit is to take place May 19 in Saudi Arabia.

The Arab League generally tries to reach agreements by consensus but sometimes opts for simple majorities. Sunday's session was held behind closed doors, and it was not immediately clear which countries had registered objections.

A spokesperson for Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement published by state media that normalization with Syria should be tied to a political solution to the conflict but that it "always seeks to support what will achieve an Arab consensus and will not be an obstacle to that."

Sunday's decision also includes a commitment by Arab governments to try to reach a political solution to the conflict, in line with U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254. Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq were asked by the league to follow up on developments.

The league welcomed what it said was the Syrian government's willingness to cooperate with Arab countries to resolve "humanitarian, security, and political" crises that affected Syria and the region due to the conflict, including refugees, "the threat of terrorism and drug smuggling."

Many observers had anticipated Syria's imminent return to the organization.

Arab rapprochement with Damascus accelerated after a deadly Feb. 6 earthquake that shattered parts of the war-torn country. One of the countries pushing normalization is Saudi Arabia, which once backed opposition groups trying to overthrow Assad.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Samer Shoukry said before Sunday's meeting that only an Arab-led "political solution without foreign dictates" can end the ongoing conflict. "The different stages of the Syrian crisis proved that it has no military solution, and that there is no victor nor defeated in this conflict," he said.

In recent years, as Assad regained control of most of the country with the help of key allies Russia and Iran, neighbors of Syria that hosted large refugee populations took steps towards reopening diplomatic links with Damascus. Meanwhile, two Gulf monarchies, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, reestablished ties.

The Feb. 6 earthquake that rocked Turkey and Syria was a catalyst for further normalization across the Arab world. China helped to broker a recent rapprochement between arch-rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran, which had backed opposing sides in the Syrian conflict.

Jordan last week hosted regional talks that included envoys from Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Egypt, and Syria. They agreed on a framework, dubbed the "Jordanian initiative," that would slowly bring Damascus back into the Arab fold. Amman's top diplomat said the meeting was the "beginning of an Arab-led political path" for a solution to the crisis.

The conflict in Sudan is also on the agenda, as Arab states try to stabilize a shaky cease-fire in the ongoing fighting that has killed hundreds of people over the past few weeks.

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Chehayeb reported from Beirut. Associated Press writers Abby Sewell in Beirut, Sam Magdy and Noha El Hennawy in Cairo, contributed to this report.

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 60 of 72

## 'Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3' opens to \$114 million

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

There is nothing like the promise of a chapter closing to draw people to the movie theater, especially when tied to the Marvel Cinematic Universe. This weekend, "Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3," which says goodbye to this iteration of the space misfits and its driving creative voice, director James Gunn, earned \$114 million in ticket sales from 4,450 locations in North America, according to studio estimates Sunday.

Internationally, where the film opened in 52 territories including China, "Vol. 3" earned \$168 million, giving it a \$282 million global debut.

Domestically, it's both an impressive sum for any movie and slightly less than what we've come to expect from a Marvel opening. Last year on the same weekend, "Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness," riding on the success of "Spider-Man: No Way Home," raked in \$187.4 million in its first three days in North America. And in November, "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever" also opened over \$181.3 million.

But things have come back to earth this year, at least by high-flying superhero standards. "Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania" debuted just over \$106 million on its way to \$474 million worldwide. At rival studio DC/Warner Bros., "Shazam! Fury of the Gods" only made \$133.4 million total. The question on some analysts' minds this weekend is whether it's because of the specific character or a bigger issue of "superhero fatigue."

"Guardians Vol. 3" bumped "The Super Mario Bros. Movie" out of first place after four weekends atop the charts and kicked off the summer movie season, a vital and usually profitable corridor for Hollywood that runs through Labor Day and often accounts for 40% of a year's box office.

For Comscore senior media analyst Paul Dergarabedian, it's still a solid opening for the summer season, which he said is poised to deliver the most robust profits since 2019.

"Though 'Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3's' debut may reflect a bit of audience fatigue for the reliable superhero genre, this is just the beginning for what promises to be an irresistible movie marketplace with a killer combination of appealing films for every taste and every audience demographic," Dergarabedian said.

The next major superhero movie on the schedule is DC's "The Flash," set for June 16, which has its own flurry of intrigue around it because of star Ezra Miller's legal and personal troubles.

"Guardians Vol. 3" sees the return of actors Chris Pratt, Zoe Saldana, Dave Bautista, Karen Gillan, Pom Klementieff, Bradley Cooper and Vin Diesel. Reviews have been mostly positive, but a little more divided than previous installments. And it remains difficult to compare a pre-pandemic opening such as Vol. 2's \$146 million debut (May 2017) with a post-pandemic one.

"Vol. 3" is Gunn's last Guardians/Marvel movie as he turns his focus to leading DC Studios.

"The Super Mario Bros. Movie" added \$18.6 million in its fifth weekend to take second place, bringing its domestic total to \$518.1 million. Globally, it has now surpassed \$1.1 billion.

Third place went to "Evil Dead Rise" with \$5.7 million, and in fourth place was "Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret," with \$3.4 million — both were holdovers.

Studios left the weekend mostly clear for the superhero behemoth, but Screen Gems and Sony did debut their new Priyanka Chopra Jonas romantic comedy "Love Again" (featuring Celine Dion and some new songs) in 2703 locations. It made a modest \$2.4 million to take the fifth place spot.

Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Comscore. Final domestic figures will be released Monday.

1. "Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3," \$114 million.
2. "The Super Mario Bros. Movie," \$18.6 million.
3. "Evil Dead Rise," \$5.7 million.
4. "Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret," \$3.4 million.
5. "Love Again," \$2.4 million.
6. "John Wick: Chapter 3," \$2.4 million.
7. "Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves," \$1.5 million.
8. "Air," \$1.4 million.

9. "Guy Ritchie's The Covenant," \$1.2 million.

10. "Sisu," \$1.1 million. —

Follow AP Film Writer Lindsey Bahr on Twitter: [www.twitter.com/ladbahr](https://www.twitter.com/ladbahr).

## Yellen: 'No good options' if Congress fails to act on debt

By ZEKE MILLER AP White House Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Sunday that there are "no good options" for the United States to avoid an economic "calamity" if Congress fails to raise the nation's borrowing limit of \$31.381 trillion in the coming weeks. She did not rule out President Joe Biden bypassing lawmakers and acting on his own to try to avert a first-ever federal default.

Her comments added even more urgency to a high-stakes meeting Tuesday between Biden and congressional leaders from both parties.

Democrats and Republicans are at loggerheads over whether the debt limit should even be the subject of negotiation. GOP lawmakers, led by House Speaker Kevin McCarthy of California, are demanding spending cuts in return for raising the borrowing limit, while Biden has said the threat of default shouldn't be used as leverage in budget talks.

Yellen, interviewed on ABC's "This Week," painted a dire picture of what might happen if the borrowing limit is not increased before the Treasury Department runs out of what it calls "extraordinary measures" to operate under the current cap. That time, she said, is expected to come in early June, perhaps as soon as June 1.

"Whether it's defaulting on interest payments that are due on the debt or payments due for Social Security recipients or to Medicare providers, we would simply not have enough cash to meet all of our obligations," she said. "And it's widely agreed that financial and economic chaos would ensue."

An increase in the debt limit would not authorize new federal spending. It would only allow borrowing to pay for what Congress has already approved.

Biden's White House meeting with McCarthy, House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., will be the first substantive talks between Biden and McCarthy in months.

House Republicans on April 26 passed a bill that would raise the debt limit but impose significant federal spending cuts. But those cuts are unlikely to win the support of all Republicans in the Democratic-controlled Senate, and Biden has said he will only negotiate about government spending once Congress takes the risk of default off the table.

Arizona Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, an independent who left the Democratic Party in December, encouraged Biden and McCarthy to meet each other half way.

"There's not going to be just a simple clean debt limit — the votes don't exist for that," she told CBS's "Face the Nation." "So the sooner these two guys get in the room and listen to what the other one needs, the more likely they are to solve this challenge and protect the full faith and credit of the United States of America."

Yellen was asked on ABC whether Biden could bypass Congress by citing the Constitution's 14th Amendment that the "validity" of U.S. debt "shall not be questioned." Yellen did not answer definitively, but said it should not be considered a valid solution.

"We should not get to the point where we need to consider whether the president can go on issuing debt. This would be a constitutional crisis," she said.

"What to do if Congress fails to meet its responsibility? There are simply no good options," she added.

Sen. James Lankford, R-Okla., agreed about the risks of invoking the 14th Amendment. He told ABC that the Constitution is "very clear that spending -- all those details around spending and money actually has to come through Congress."

He criticized Biden for not being willing to negotiate on spending cuts, arguing the debt limit exists to force a broader conversation on government outlays. "It's about not just debt that's incurred," the senator

said. "But it's also raising the limit of what we can continue to be able to add on this."

The 14th Amendment question was studied by Obama administration lawyers during the 2011 debt limit showdown, which informed Biden's refusal to negotiate now with Republicans on raising the debt limit. At the time, Justice Department lawyers said they did not believe the president had the unilateral power to issue new debt.

Biden, in an interview with MSNBC on Friday, was asked about the 14th Amendment proposal, saying, "I've not gotten there yet."

Republican Rep. Mike Turner of Ohio, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, and the committee's top Democrat, Connecticut Rep. Jim Himes, told CNN's "State of the Union" that the debt limit debate posed a national security threat.

"The Russians and the Chinese would seek to exploit it," Himes said. "The United States has never really come close defaulting on its debt before. So it's hard for us to imagine what that might look like."

Turner argued that Biden would bear the brunt of the responsibility. "I think if the president fails to negotiate with Congress and has continued out-of-control spending that threatens our economy, that it is a national security threat," he said.

## 150 years later, Dixon bridge tragedy among nation's worst

By JOHN O'CONNOR Associated Press

DIXON, Ill. (AP) — Gertie Wadsworth was in the arms of her grandmother that bright day when sunshine dissolved distasteful memories of a long, brutal winter. Christan Goble held the 3 1/2-year-old girl in a crowd of more than 200 on the bridge over the Rock River. After a procession down Galena Avenue from the Baptist Church on May 4, 1873, the Rev. J.H. Pratt began baptizing parishioners in the brisk, rapid current.

Then, with a sharp crack and a crescendo of shrieking spectators loaded on the pedestrian walkway in front of towering trusses, the 4-year-old bridge twisted, splintered and rolled over. Forty-six people perished, many immured by the unrelenting gridiron just below the water's surface. Along with 56 injuries, the Truesdell bridge tragedy, 150 years ago Thursday, remains the worst vehicular-bridge disaster in American history.

"It's not as though the bridge just collapsed and went straight down," says Tom Wadsworth, 70, a retired magazine editor and expert on the calamity. "It turns over on top of these people. ... As the (Chicago) Tribune said, the truss 'fell over with the weight and imprisoned the doomed in an iron cage with which they sunk and from which there was no escape.'"

Wadsworth wouldn't be telling the story had Gertie Wadsworth, his great-grandmother, not survived. Family lore holds that as Goble, 51, plunged to her death, she tossed the toddler into the river beyond the reach of the failing superstructure. The tot was rescued downstream.

Post-Civil War Dixon, 103 miles (166 kilometers) west of Chicago, was a growing city split by the formidable Rock River, a tributary of the Mississippi on which, a few miles north and a half-century later, a young Ronald Reagan would work as a lifeguard after the future president's family moved to Dixon in 1920.

For decades, wooden bridges had succumbed to raging floods. Fed-up voters in 1868 demanded an iron bridge. The city council chose Lucius Truesdell's design from 14 proposals despite the city engineer's warnings about its lack of uniformity and strength.

The \$75,000 toll bridge opened in January 1869 to great fanfare, even though — just weeks earlier — a Truesdell bridge in Elgin had collapsed. It was repaired and failed again six months later. The Truesdell design carried traffic in other Illinois cities, including Chicago.

Newspapers post-disaster dubbed Dixon's span "The Truesdell Trap" and "The Patent Wholesale Drowning Machine." It was shocking how the ironwork had slammed atop victims like a gate.

"You could look down and see their faces. They couldn't get to the surface because all that iron was on top of them," Wadsworth said. "It's frightening to look down, but to look up and to see daylight, to be only 12 inches (30 centimeters) from air?"

The location of the May 4 crowd, clumped on the west walkway, helps explain why four of five fatalities



# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 63 of 72

were women, along with many children and teenagers. Chivalrous men surrendered prime bridge viewing spots to women and girls and stepped to the bank, Wadsworth said. Boys climbed atop the trusses.

But contemporary women's fashion might also be to blame, Wadsworth theorizes. The 1870s ushered in a heavy, layered bustle at the rear of floor-length dresses supported underneath by a crinoline, a series of fabric-covered metal half-hoops.

"You're not going to win any Olympic swimming races wearing one of these things," Wadsworth said.

Drowning, referred to in news reports as "strangulation," took many. Others met an even more gruesome demise. The crisscrossed iron in the latticework pivoted like shears, slicing into victims such as 16-year-old Katie Sterling, who was so entangled it took two days to cut her free.

Several bodies were recovered miles away. Lizzie Mackey, 17, was recovered at Sterling, 14 miles (23 kilometers) downstream. The youngest victims were sisters Alpheia and Lucia Hendrix, ages 6 and 4, according to Patrick Gorman, another student of the tragedy who helped raise money in 2011 for a marker listing the names of the fatalities.

A new memorial will be dedicated at the site on Sunday, May 7.

Pratt was wracked by guilt, admitting he had detained the crowd longer than necessary to extol the benefits of "coming to Jesus." But he was a hero that day.

"He started grabbing them by the hair and by the shoulder and by the pants," Wadsworth said. "He knew what the riverbed was like. He'd walked out there many times for baptism ceremonies, so he knew how far he could get and grab people and he got 10 or 15 himself."

A century-and-a-half later, Truesdell's casualties keep it atop the worst failures of vehicular bridges in American history. The foundering of the Silver Bridge over the Ohio River from Ohio to West Virginia in 1967 also claimed 46 lives but there were nine injuries compared with 56 in Dixon.

The horrific 1981 collapse of a Kansas City hotel's pedestrian walkways resulted in 114 deaths, the most of any crumbled span in U.S. history.

Separating it from the Truesdell affair are four railroad bridge incidents, including another in Illinois. In 1887, a trestle dropped from under a train at Chatsworth, 103 miles (166 kilometers) southwest of Chicago, killing 82 passengers as cars were flung into one another like a telescope as they slammed the opposite embankment.

Like he had done in the Elgin collapse, Truesdell blamed sabotage for the Dixon failure. In a letter to a newspaper in Massachusetts, where he lived, he defended himself feebly:

"It is nearly 18 years since I began building iron bridges, and the Elgin and Dixon bridges are the only ones that have fallen, and no loss of life except at Dixon. Can as much be said of any other plan?"

\_\_\_ Follow John O'Connor at <https://twitter.com/apoconnor>

## No Mow May? Good intentions, bad approach, critics say

By JESSICA DAMIANO Associated Press

If you're reading this, chances are you've heard about the #NoMowMay movement that's been gaining steam on social media and in eco-conscious circles these past few years.

Started in 2019 by citizen scientists in the United Kingdom, the call for homeowners to abstain from mowing their lawns during the month has spread to other countries, including the U.S.

The intention is admirable: Let your grass and weeds grow and bloom to provide food and shelter for essential pollinators like bees and butterflies early in the season, when such necessities may be scarce.

Frankly, I think it's a terrible idea.

Some of those pollinators you set out to protect will likely get shredded up with the first mow of the season. Grass will no doubt get shaded by tall weeds, which can lead to fungal diseases. And weeds and invasive plants that take hold during the month won't simply disappear once the mowing commences. That might lead people to apply chemical pesticides they wouldn't otherwise use.

And what about rodents, snakes and other undesirables that also will likely avail themselves of the shelter?

Perplexed by the seemingly runaway-train popularity of the now-annual event, I called Tamson Yeh, turf

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 64 of 72

specialist with the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County in New York. "Is it me?" I asked.

"I think it's a terrible idea, too," she said. "It's such a nice slogan, but letting the grass grow high and allowing it to do its thing, and then suddenly mowing it back is really counterproductive."

Yeh sees the movement as a "feel-good, stop-gap measure, because if you want to have an impact, you need to establish a permanent cover for insects," not merely temporary housing.

"Bees tell each other where the food is, and pollinators (when they discover an unmown lawn) will remember to come back to it again and again," Yeh said. "Then on June 1st, when the food disappears, it's not good for them."

Hibernating insects have memories that span not only from day to day but from year to year, Yeh said. So she recommends planting early blooming shrubs, trees and plants to establish a permanent food source they can remember and rely on as adults when they emerge from dormancy.

Other problems with the practice, Yeh noted, include "confusing insects when the grass is suddenly low again. That gives predators the opportunity to take advantage of them."

There's also the potential to disturb a nest of bunnies when mowing, she said, calling the discovery "the most horrible experience you can have."

An all-or-nothing approach would be better. If you really want to make a difference, consider replacing the entire lawn, or part of it, with native plants or planting a wildflower meadow. Both will provide permanency for birds and pollinators while shrinking or eliminating the lawn, which frankly, has no redeeming value aside from subjective aesthetics, anyway.

When planting for beneficial insects, Yeh advises creating a corridor or path of pollen- and nectar-rich plants for migratory pollinators to travel along instead of spacing plants far apart.

Postponing fall cleanup until spring, which spawned another movement called #LeaveTheLeaves, will create safe havens for pollinators to lay their eggs and hibernate within. To allow time for them to emerge from dormancy, wait until after spring temperatures have remained above 50 degrees for an entire week before clearing away last season's plant debris.

For those set on letting their lawns go wild this month, Yeh cautions that "allowing grass to go to seed will kill it," so remove seedheads if they form.

It's also important to reintroduce mowing gradually.

"The best height for grass is 3 inches tall, but if you're mowing it down from 5 or 6 inches, do it over several sessions," she advised, adding that cutting grass by more than one-third of its height at one time can cause it to go into shock.

The gradual approach "also will give insects a chance to realize it's not a good place for them anymore," she said. Hopefully, they'll take the hint and move on to safer spaces.

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Jessica Damiano writes regular gardening columns for The Associated Press. She publishes the award-winning Weekly Dirt Newsletter. Sign up here for weekly gardening tips and advice.

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For more AP gardening stories, go to <https://apnews.com/hub/gardening>.

## Ukraine farmers surrounded by risks, from mines to logistics

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

POTIOMKYNE, Ukraine (AP) — A grassy lane rutted with tire tracks leads to Volodymyr Zaiets' farm in southern Ukraine. He is careful, driving only within those shallow grooves — veering away might cost him his life in the field dotted with explosive mines.

Weeds grow tall where rows of sunflowers once bloomed. Zaiets' land hasn't been touched since the fall of 2021, when it was last seeded with wheat. Now, it's a minefield left by retreating Russian forces.

Zaiets eschewed official warnings and demined this patch of land himself, determined not to lose the year's harvest. He expects that 15% of his 1,600 hectares (4,000 acres) of farmland was salvaged.

Workers like Victor Kostyuk still spot mines, but he's ready to start the tractor.

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 65 of 72

"We have to do it," he says, "Why be afraid?"

Across Ukraine, the war has forced grain growers into a vicious dilemma. Farmers in areas now free from Russian occupation must decide if it's worth risking their lives to strip land of explosives before the critical spring planting season.

They have soaring production and transportation costs caused by Russia's blockade of many Black Sea ports, and several neighboring European countries imposed import restrictions on Ukrainian grain to prevent a glut.

The dual crisis is causing many farmers to cut back on sowing crops. Bottlenecks in shipping grain by land and sea are creating losses, with expectations of a 20% to 30% reduction in grain output, poorer quality crops and potentially thousands of bankruptcies next year, according to industry insiders, Ukrainian government officials and international organizations.

The "drastic reduction" of grain crops potentially threatens global food security, said Pierre Vauthier, head of the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization in Ukraine. "That is the main thing everybody eats. So that's why it is a big concern."

More than a year since Russia's invasion, the Ukrainian agriculture industry is starting to see the full impact of what's been dubbed "the breadbasket of the world," whose affordable supplies of wheat, barley and sunflower oil are crucial to Africa, the Middle East and parts of Asia where people are going hungry.

The FAO says 90% of agricultural businesses lost revenue and 12% reported lands contaminated with mines. Land planted with grain dropped last year to 11.6 million hectares (28.6 million acres) from 16 million hectares (around 40 million acres) in 2021. That's expected to fall to 10.2 million hectares (25.2 million acres) this year.

In the southern Kherson province, between the threat of missiles from the sky and mines on the ground, farmers make the same, often tragic, calculation: Take the risk and plant or lose their livelihoods.

The region is among the highest wheat-producing areas in Ukraine and the most heavily mined. Demining services are overstretched, with infrastructure and civilian homes prioritized over farms.

But growers can't wait: April and May are key planting months for corn, the autumn months for wheat. Many are switching to planting oil seeds that are less costly.

"We have nearly 40 big farmers in our area, and nearly everyone is unable to access their lands except two," said Hanna Shostak-Kuchmiak, head of the Vysokopillya administration that includes several villages in northern Kherson.

Zaiets is one, and Valerii Shkuropat from the nearby village of Ivanivka is the other.

"Our heroes," said Shostak-Kuchmiak, "who were driving their cars around picking up mines and bringing them to our deminers."

Neither farmer felt they had the choice. Both knew that without a harvest this year, they will be insolvent by next.

Everyone understands the risks, said Shkuropat, who's vast 2,500 hectares (more than 6,000 acres) of land once grew peas, barley, millet and sunflowers. He estimates that half can be planted.

Last month, one of his workers was killed and another was wounded while picking up metal missile remnants.

"If we sow, if we grow crops, people will have jobs, salaries and they will have a means to feed their families," Shkuropat said. "But if we don't do anything, we will have nothing."

Russia's blockade of Ukraine's Black Sea ports stripped the country of the advantage it once enjoyed over other grain-exporting countries. Transit costs, now four to six times higher than prewar levels, have rendered grain production prohibitively expensive.

High costs of fuel, fertilizer and quality seeds only add to farmers' woes. Most must sell their grain at a loss.

Farmers are responding by seeding less, said Andrii Vadaturskyi, CEO of Nibulon, a top Ukrainian grain shipping company.

"No one is paying attention to the fact that already 40% less wheat has been seeded (this year), and

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 66 of 72

we expect 50% less corn will be seeded in Ukraine," he said, drawing on data from 3,000 farmers.

Nibulon once paid an average of \$12 to ship a ton of grain from the southern port city of Odesa. Now it pays \$80-\$100 per ton, Vadaturskyi said,

HarvEast CEO Dmytro Skorniyakov said that his agricultural company pays almost \$110 in logistics costs to export every ton of corn.

"It covers our expenses, but doesn't give us any profit," he said.

Negotiations are underway on renewing the U.N.-brokered agreement that allows Ukrainian grain to safely leave three Black Sea ports. Shippers say the deal isn't working efficiently.

Russian inspections are causing long wait times for vessels, piling on fees and making the sea route expensive and unreliable, Ukrainian grain shippers say. Russia denies slowing inspections.

"We had some vessels which were waiting close to 80 days in the queue simply to be loaded," said Vadaturskyi of Nibulon. "Someone has to lose that money, either the buyer, owner of the vessel or trader."

Transit routes through Europe are open even as Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Hungary temporarily banned Ukrainian wheat, corn and some other products over concerns about their own farmers' profits.

But those routes are slow and costly. Shipping by sea accounted for 75% of Ukrainian grain exports at the start of the year.

Meanwhile, some farmers won't risk planting their fields.

Oleh Uskhalo's land in Potiomkyne is awash with ammunition, the vast wheat farms reduced to a graveyard of scorched equipment.

Inside a bombed-out grain shed lies piles of wheat grain — Uskhalo's entire prewar harvest — rotting under the sun.

"We can go on for another year," he said. After that, he doesn't know. He hopes for government compensation.

"I cannot send (my workers) to a field where I know mines and bombs are," Uskhalo said. "To send a person to blow themselves up? I can't do that."

He faces resistance from his employees, eager to earn wages.

"The tractor drivers, they say, 'We can go, we can sign a document stating that we take full responsibility,'" Uskhalo said.

It's too risky, he told them.

In the distance, he can see a tractor equipped with disk tillers, a type of plow. "I wonder if it's Volodymyr Mykolaiovych," he said, referring to Zaiets.

"All it takes is for one of those disks to hit a mine and that's it."

That's what happened to Mykola Ozarianskyi.

In April, the farmer took a chance: He hopped on his tractor in his village of Borozenske, in Kherson, to head to a friend's sunflower field to cut stalks.

He swerved to turn down a side farm road. He remembers the explosion, then waking up in a hospital bed with a collapsed lung and broken ribs.

Every day, he thinks of his 16 hectares (around 40 acres) of land, still unseeded.

"I will do it," he said, straining to speak while a tube drains blood from his chest. "For a farmer, not planting means death."

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

## To improve kids' mental health, some schools start later

By BROOKE SCHULTZ Associated Press/Report for America

DREXEL HILL, Pa. (AP) — In the hours before he's due at Upper Darby High School, senior Khalid Doulat has time to say prayers, help his mother or prepare for track practice.



# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 67 of 72

It's a welcome shift from last year for him and thousands of students at the school, which pushed its start time back by more than two hours — from a 7:30 a.m. start time to 9:45 a.m. One goal for the change: to ease strains on students that were more visible than ever coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I'll be honest, I've been much happier in the mornings," Doulat said. "I've been more positive, and I've come to school smiling more rather than, you know, grudging out of bed and stuff like that at 7:30."

The idea of later school start times, pushed by many over the years as a way to help adolescents get more sleep, is getting a new look as a way to address the mental health crisis affecting teens across the U.S.

For some schools, the pandemic allowed experimentation to try new schedules. Upper Darby, for one, initially considered later start times in 2019. Ultimately, it found a way to do it this year by using distance learning as a component of the school day.

As students first came back to in-person learning, many dealt with mental health struggles and behavioral issues, Upper Darby Superintendent Daniel McGarry said. Officials saw a breakdown in students respecting the authority of teachers in the classroom.

"We had a lot of those things that we were facing and we're still working our way through it; we're in a much better place," McGarry said. "I think our kids feel better. They're not 100% better." But, he said, much of the social anxiety students felt after being in online school has dissipated.

During the pandemic, soaring numbers of high school students expressed persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, with girls and LGBTQ+ youth reporting the highest levels of poor mental health and suicide attempts. It doesn't help that research suggests middle and high school students aren't getting enough sleep.

"These mental health challenges are already going to happen and then, with the absence of sleep, are much worse," said Orfeu Buxton, director of the Sleep, Health & Society Collaboratory at Penn State University. "The same with decision making, suicidal ideation, those kinds of things."

The reasons why high schools start as early as they do — many begin their day before 7:30 a.m. — are "lost to the sands of history," Buxton said. But now, he said, "everything is baked into that: traffic light patterns, bus schedules and adults' work."

Nationally, at least nine states are considering legislation related to school start times, up from four the previous year, according to the National Conference on State Legislatures. California in 2019 became the first and only state to dictate school start times.

Large school systems including Denver, Philadelphia and Anchorage, Alaska, have been looking into later start times.

It can require innovation to forge a new schedule.

At Upper Darby High, the school day technically still begins at 7:30 a.m., with students assigned coursework to be done remotely that ties into their lessons for the day. But they can use the early morning hours as they see fit — they can meet with teachers during office hours, sleep in or finish other homework. Ultimately, the work assigned for the early morning needs to be done, but when is up to students.

"I think getting more sleep is definitely helping," Elise Olmstead, a junior. "I would be more irritable throughout the day, especially later, because I have a lot of after-school things. I would just have a harder time getting through the day."

The school day still ends by 3 p.m.

Fatima Afrani, a freshman, said that when she gets home, she'll usually relax, then help her mom or do homework.

"If I'm tired I go to sleep, which was not something I was able to do last year. Last year I just had to get my homework done because there wasn't an option of being able to do it later," she said. "And so I liked that if I was tired, I could listen to my body and just let myself sleep."

Principal Matthew Alloway said educators have noticed fewer students sleeping in class. The new schedule also has allowed "kids to go to school for exactly what they need," he said. About 400 of the school's 4,250 students attend only through virtual learning — an option it offered to compete with online schools.

Critics have argued students have less instruction time in the new schedule. The original 80-minute periods have been shortened, but Alloway said that it's not as if lectures always took up the full 80 minutes.

"It was sometimes a 60-minute concentrated instructional time. But then there was time to write. There

was time to read. There was time to view a video," he said.

Other challenges wrought by the pandemic — teacher shortages, for one — have also benefitted from the schedule change, administrators said. Teachers can take care of themselves and their families in the morning. Administrators have more time to replace staffers who call out sick.

Doulat, the Upper Darby senior, said that even if students can't see the effects every day, there's been a big positive impact.

"It's such little changes in our daily lives that we don't notice it," he added. "But they slowly start building up, and we actually see the difference within our own lives."

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Brooke Schultz 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.

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## **Brazil's Amazon megaprojects threaten Lula's green ambitions**

By ELEONORE HUGHES Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — After his swearing-in ceremony on Jan. 1, Brazil's Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva walked up the ramp to the presidential palace arm in arm with Indigenous leader Raoni Metuktire, instantly recognizable by his yellow headdress and wooden lip plate.

But a major railway that would accelerate deforestation in Metuktire's ancestral land risks souring relations between the leftist leader and the chief of the Kayapó people. And it's just one of several mega-projects that activists and experts say would devastate the natural world — and seriously dent Lula's newfound image as a defender of the environment — if they proceed.

Others include an oil drilling project near the mouth of the Amazon River; a highway that would slice through some of the Amazon rainforest's most protected areas; and renewal of a giant hydroelectric dam's license.

"Lula is talking about the environment, showing preoccupation with illegal mining, demarcating Indigenous territories. He's already learned a lot, but needs to learn more. We're still very worried," said Alessandra Korap, an Indigenous leader of the Mundurucu people who recently won the Goldman Environmental Prize for work that included battling illegal mining.

Under Lula's predecessor, Jair Bolsonaro, deforestation soared to a 15-year high and environmental restrictions were weakened. The far-right leader filled key positions in environmental agencies with agribusiness allies and military officers. Indigenous peoples' rights were trampled.

After narrowly defeating Bolsonaro in last year's election, Lula has strived to put environmental protection and respect for Indigenous peoples' rights at the heart of his third term. He resumed successful pursuit of international donations for the Amazon Fund that combats deforestation, launched a military campaign to eject illegal miners from Yanomami territory, committed to ending all illegal deforestation by 2030 and restarted the demarcation of Indigenous areas.

But Lula faces difficult tests in the large infrastructure projects. While opponents regard them as catastrophic, some in Lula's Workers' Party continue to view them as essential for providing jobs and promoting growth. And Brazil, a developing nation, has heavy demand for socioeconomic benefits.

### **THE OIL-DRILLING PROJECT**

Ibama, Brazil's environmental agency, will decide in coming months whether to license drilling in one sector near the mouth of the Amazon. Approval would surely lead to drilling in the whole region, said Suely Araújo, a former Ibama head now a public policy specialist with the Climate Observatory, a network of non-profits.

"It's a matter of coherence. Lula's speeches on environmental protection and the climate crisis are bang

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 69 of 72

on point. But if oil exploration is intensified, it will mean expanding fossil fuels. There would be an inconsistency," Araújo said.

During Lula's first terms, huge offshore discoveries became a means of financing health, education and social welfare programs.

"To a large extent, this vision remains, meaning it will be very difficult to persuade the government to give up strategic projects, even when there are significant social environmental risks," said Maiara Folly, director of CIPO, a think tank focused on climate and international relations.

With existing production set to peak in coming years, there's sharp interest in securing more off Brazil's northern coast. It's a unique and biodiverse location, home to little-studied swathes of mangroves and a coral reef.

Araújo said the project risks leaks that would be carried elsewhere by strong tides.

State-run oil giant Petrobras has earmarked almost half its five-year, \$6 billion exploration budget for the area. CEO Jean Paul Prates said the first well would be temporary, and that the company has never recorded a leak in offshore drilling.

Energy Minister Alexandre Silveira said in March that the area is the "passport to the future" for development in Brazil's northern regions. Lula has used the same term to describe the earlier offshore oil discoveries.

Eighty civil society and environmental organizations, WWF Brasil and Greenpeace, have called for the license to be declined pending an in-depth study.

## THE HYDROELECTRIC DAM

The Belo Monte hydroelectric dam, a concrete colossus on the Xingu River, was planned under Lula and built by his successor, Dilma Rousseff. Supporters saw it as a way to generate jobs and add power to Brazil's grid.

Indigenous populations and environmental campaigners fiercely opposed it, and studies show its impacts have been disastrous. Civil society organizations estimate tens of thousands of people were displaced, and experts attribute a local surge of violence to lost jobs. One area of concern is the Xingu's Volta Grande, or Big Bend, which has lost much of its water. That caused the disappearance of fish -- the basis of many Indigenous populations' subsistence.

Belo Monte is back on Lula's agenda, with Ibama weighing whether to renew its license. The agency reported last summer that Norte Energia, the dam's owner, hadn't respected many of the conditions for its original license.

Local media said Norte Energia proposed to distribute 20,000 reais (about \$4,000) in compensation to nearly 2,000 fishermen.

In January, researchers in the region published a letter environmental journalism website Sumauma calling on Lula and his administration to investigate and punish crimes and injustices surrounding the dam.

"Any government really committed to conserving the Amazon and fighting the climate crisis is obliged to recognize the problems caused by Belo Monte and to fix the damage and impacts caused," the letter said.

Local populations are demanding the license be renewed only if Norte Energia agrees to use the water in a way that allows life in and around the river to be sustained.

The license was originally issued under heavy pressure from Rousseff's government, said Folly. In a March interview with Sumauma, Lula's environment minister, Marina Silva, promised that this time, "nobody is going to be coerced, as they were before, and this represents a total change."

## THE HIGHWAY

The BR-319 highway connects Porto Velho to Manaus. It was abandoned in the 1980s after falling into disuse, but the government has shown signs of wanting to repave it to facilitate the export of commodities.

Environmentalists and scientists warn that could lead to uncontrolled deforestation in the region by increasing land speculation and giving easy access to land grabbers. After Bolsonaro announced that a section of the road would be repaved, deforestation in nearby areas quickly surged, according to Brazil's national space agency.

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 70 of 72

Lula told Radio Difusora last June that he favored reconstruction, calling it important for the economies of Amazonas and Rondonia states. Ibama's president Rodrigo Agostinho told the AP in March that the agency has slowed the permitting process in order to analyze carefully.

## THE RAILWAY

Similar concerns surround a 933-kilometer (around 580 miles) railway known as Ferrograo that would move grains from the heartland toward the Tapajos River for eventual shipping abroad.

The project would mean fewer trucks moving soy and corn, and thus reduced carbon emissions. But it might also mean rising deforestation. A 2021 study from the Federal University of Minas Gerais projected deforestation of more than 230,000 hectares in Indigenous lands in Mato Grosso state by 2035 if it is completed.

The railway is on hold pending a court's ruling on the constitutionality of a law that permitted felling forest in the Jamaxim National Park to make way for its crossing.

In January, Lula's transport minister, Renan Filho, placed Ferrograo among top priority projects.

Doto Takak-Ire, who like Chief Raoni is a leader of the Kayapó, said in a column published in O Globo newspaper in March that the project would threaten the survival of 48 Indigenous peoples, and called it "the railway of Indigenous genocide".

## Kentucky GOP aims for strong matchup versus Dem Gov. Beshear

By BRUCE SCHREINER Associated Press

LIBERTY, Ky. (AP) — As Kentucky's GOP primary campaign sprints toward the finish line, some Republicans are looking ahead to the November election with an eye toward who best can reclaim the governorship — a job that the state's dominant party has struggled to hold despite its strong showing in other races.

With candidates dashing from the hills of Appalachia to the suburbs of Lexington and Louisville and rural communities out west, some of the voters they meet along the way say they are basing decisions in the May 16 primary mostly on which Republican would pose the toughest challenge to Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear, who is facing nominal party opposition.

The contest, coming a year before national elections will determine control of the presidency and Congress, is expected to send loud signals about whether Democrats can remain competitive in what has become rock-solid Republican territory.

Republican voters are handicapping a crowded pack of candidates vying for the gubernatorial nomination in hopes of confirming their party's dominant status. Leading contenders in the 12-candidate field include Attorney General Daniel Cameron, former U.N. Ambassador Kelly Craft and state Agriculture Commissioner Ryan Quarles.

The top contenders often sound alike on core GOP issues. They support gun rights, oppose abortion and demand more parental input in school policies. Those similarities have further elevated the question of who would run the best race against Beshear.

David Hines thinks Craft is the answer to that question.

"She's the best chance we've got to get him out of there," the retired highway worker said while watching Craft shake hands and chat with supporters after a lunchtime speech this past week in Liberty, a small community in a rural GOP stronghold.

Roger Monday, another retiree at the event, said Craft's tough talk on combating the spread of illegal drugs was a winning message in a state plagued by drug abuse problems.

"She doesn't mince words," he said. "I firmly believe that she will do what she says."

At a Cameron appearance in Richmond that same day, retired factory worker Gary Robinson was won over by the candidate's emphasis on conservative values and his record as attorney general of going to court to challenge policies by Beshear and President Joe Biden's administration.

"He's got backbone," Robinson said of Cameron. "We've got so many people in government today that have no backbone to stand up against things that are wrong, like the 'woke' stuff that's going on in our schools and in our government."



# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 71 of 72

Despite its victories in other statewide races and its dominance in controlling the legislature and all but one congressional seat, the Kentucky GOP has struggled to win the governorship, in part due to the staying power of the Beshear family name.

The last two Republican governors — Ernie Fletcher and Matt Bevin — lost reelection bids, in 2007 and 2019, respectively. Each time, it was a Beshear who unseated them, forging a strong political brand that, so far, has endured Republican advances elsewhere.

“Fortunately our three top candidates are very electable and in far better personal image positions than we were in 2019,” said Scott Jennings, a Kentucky-based Republican political commentator and former adviser to President George W. Bush.

Steve Beshear defeated Fletcher to begin his eight-year tenure as governor. His son, the current governor, ousted Bevin four years ago and has received consistently high voter approval ratings. Andy Beshear has presided over record economic development growth and led the state through a series of tragedies — the pandemic, tornadoes, floods and a mass shooting that killed one of his closest friends.

Democrats have delighted in the combativeness between the Craft and Cameron campaigns — and their surrogates — while accusing GOP hopefuls of tailoring messages to appeal to extremists.

After leading GOP candidates engaged in a feisty debate this past week on Kentucky Educational Television, state Democratic Chair Colmon Elridge said: “We have not seen throughout the entire GOP primary, and we did not see last night, any compelling reason to replace one of the most popular governors in the country.”

In the current GOP primary, each leading camp has trumpeted its candidate’s qualities as a party standard-bearer against the Democratic incumbent.

Cameron supporters portray him as a unifier, a point he played up in his speech in Richmond.

“Regardless of where you find yourself on the Republican ideological spectrum, I think this campaign has the ability to unify in ways that make sure that we win and retire Andy Beshear in November,” he said.

Cameron has ties to the party’s Donald Trump and Mitch McConnell orbits that transcend recent friction between the two GOP leaders. Cameron won the former president’s endorsement and is a protegee of the Senate Republican leader from Kentucky, having worked as McConnell’s legal counsel. Cameron is the state’s first Black attorney general ; defeating Beshear in November would make him the state’s first Black governor.

Quarles backers note his strong ties to rural Kentucky from his nearly two terms as agriculture commissioner and the steady flow of policy announcements from his campaign.

“I want this race to be based on who has the best ideas,” he said in the recent KET debate. “I think that we as Kentuckians deserve that in this primary.”

Craft supporters say her family’s immense wealth — and her ability to self-finance her campaign — would free her from being beholden to anyone. She is married to coal magnate Joe Craft.

“I’m not looking for a job,” she said in Liberty. “I just see a job that needs to be done.”

## Today in History: May 8, Truman announces Nazi surrender

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, May 8, the 128th day of 2023. There are 237 days left in the year.

Today’s Highlight in History:

On May 8, 1996, South Africa took another step from apartheid to democracy by adopting a constitution that guaranteed equal rights for Blacks and whites.

On this date:

In 1541, Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto reached the Mississippi River.

In 1846, the first major battle of the Mexican-American War was fought at Palo Alto, Texas; U.S. forces led by Gen. Zachary Taylor were able to beat back Mexican forces.

In 1915, Regret became the first filly to win the Kentucky Derby.

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Monday, May 8, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 304 ~ 72 of 72

In 1945, President Harry S. Truman announced on radio that Nazi Germany's forces had surrendered, and that "the flags of freedom fly all over Europe."

In 1972, President Richard Nixon announced that he had ordered the mining of Haiphong Harbor during the Vietnam War.

In 1973, militant American Indians who had held the South Dakota hamlet of Wounded Knee for 10 weeks surrendered.

In 1978, David R. Berkowitz pleaded guilty in a Brooklyn courtroom to murder, attempted murder and assault in connection with the "Son of Sam" shootings that claimed six lives and terrified New Yorkers. (Berkowitz was sentenced to six consecutive life prison terms.)

In 1984, the Soviet Union announced it would boycott the upcoming Summer Olympic Games in Los Angeles.

In 1993, the Muslim-led government of Bosnia-Herzegovina and rebel Bosnian Serbs signed an agreement for a nationwide cease-fire.

In 2003, the Senate unanimously endorsed adding to NATO seven former communist nations: Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

In 2020, the unemployment level surged to 14.7%, a level last seen when the country was in the throes of the Great Depression; the government reported that 20 million Americans had lost their jobs in April amid the economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic.

Ten years ago: A jury in Phoenix convicted Jodi Arias of first-degree murder in the 2008 death of her one-time boyfriend, Travis Alexander (Arias was later sentenced to life in prison). George Karl was named the NBA's Coach of the Year for leading the Denver Nuggets to a team-record 57-win regular season. An apparent game-tying homer by Oakland's Adam Rosales was ruled a double by umpires in the ninth inning, and the Cleveland Indians held on to beat the Athletics 4-3. Jeanne Cooper, the enduring soap opera star who had played grande dame Katherine Chancellor for nearly four decades on "The Young and the Restless," and the mother of actor Corbin Bernsen, died in Los Angeles at age 84.

Five years ago: President Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. from the nuclear accord with Iran and restored harsh sanctions; Trump had been a severe critic of the deal negotiated by the Obama administration in which Iran agreed to restrictions on its nuclear program. Gina Haspel, nominated to be CIA director, said that if confirmed, she would not undertake a detention and harsh interrogation program like the controversial one used after 9/11. (Haspel would be confirmed by a Senate vote of 54-45.) James Paxton of the Seattle Mariners pitched a no-hitter against the Blue Jays in Toronto, becoming the first Canadian to achieve that feat in his home country.

One year ago: A Russian bomb destroyed a school sheltering about 90 people in eastern Ukraine, killing as many as 60 people. The governor of Luhansk province said 30 people were rescued from the rubble of the school in the village of Bilohorivka. Jill Biden made an unannounced visit to western Ukraine, holding a surprise Mother's Day meeting with first lady Olena Zelenska to show U.S. support for the embattled nation. The summer movie season got off to a blockbuster start thanks to "Doctor Strange and the Multiverse of Madness." The superhero extravaganza grossed an estimated \$185 million in ticket sales in its first weekend in U.S. and Canadian theaters.

Today's Birthdays: Naturalist Sir David Attenborough is 97. Singer Toni Tennille is 83. Actor James Mitchum is 82. Country singer Jack Blanchard is 81. Jazz musician Keith Jarrett is 78. Actor Mark Blankfield is 75. Singer Philip Bailey (Earth, Wind and Fire) is 72. Rock musician Chris Frantz (Talking Heads) is 72. Rockabilly singer Billy Burnette is 70. Rock musician Alex Van Halen is 70. Actor David Keith is 69. Actor Raoul Max Trujillo is 68. Sports commentator/former NFL coach Bill Cowher is 66. Former New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio is 62. Actor Melissa Gilbert is 59. Rock musician Dave Rowntree (Blur) is 59. Rock singer Darren Hayes is 51. Singer Enrique Iglesias is 48. Blues singer-musician Joe Bonamassa is 46. Actor Matt Davis is 45. Actor Elyes Gabel is 40. Actor Domhnall Gleeson is 40. Actor Julia Whelan (WAY'-lan) is 39. Actor Nora Anezeder is 34.