

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 1 of 102

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- Governor Noem to Testify on Capitol Hill](#)
- [2- Governor Noem Now Accepting Applications for Fall Interns](#)
- [3- Newsweek Bulletin](#)
- [4- US Department of Labor orders South Dakota helicopter ambulance service to reinstate mechanic who reported safety concerns, filed FAA complaint](#)
- [5- Baseball Scores](#)
- [6- We the People: Why Congress May Impose Ethics Code on Supreme Court Justices](#)
- [7- Rounds Seeking Fall 2023 Internship Applications](#)
- [8- Veteran's Affairs Column](#)
- [9- School Board Agenda](#)
- [10- Transit Fundraiser Ad](#)
- [11- Chamber June Meeting](#)
- [12- SD News Watch: Is proposed abortion amendment 'far more extreme' than Roe v. Wade?](#)
- [18- Weekly Round\[s\] Up](#)
- [19- SD News Watch: Volatile, costly international visa program strains SD's tourism industry](#)
- [21- SD Search Light: Bizarre legal debate shows it's time to talk about the death penalty](#)
- [22- SD Search Light: On a record day in D.C. for smoke pollution, U.S. Senate panel debates wildfire strategy](#)
- [25- Weather Pages](#)
- [29- Daily Devotional](#)
- [30- 2023 Community Events](#)
- [31- Subscription Form](#)
- [32-- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [33- News from the Associated Press](#)

## Groton Community Calendar

### Friday, June 9

Senior Menu: Chicken pasta salad, grape juice, breadstick, apple crisp.  
Olive Grove: Spring Fundraiser, 7 p.m.  
Jr. Legion hosts Mobridge, 5 p.m. (2)

### Saturday, June 10

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

### Groton Daily Independent

PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

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

*"Your child's life will be filled with fresh experiences. It's good if yours is as well."*

-Dr. Margaret Rutherford



Legion hosts Milbank, 2 p.m. (2)  
U12BB at Sisseton Tourney  
U8 R/B Groton Tourney  
U10BB W/B at Columbia, 6:30 p.m. (2)

### Sunday, June 11

United Methodist: Pastor Brandon and Ashley going away party. Conde worship, 8:30 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship, 10:30 a.m.

Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.

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

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.

St. John Lutheran worship, 9 a.m.; Zion at 11 a.m.

### Monday, June 12

School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.

Senior Menu: Meatballs, mashed potatoes with gravy, peas and carrots, tropical fruit, whole wheat bread.

United Methodist: PEO meeting (outside group),

## **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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## Governor Noem to Testify on Capitol Hill

PIERRE, S.D. – Governor Noem will testify before the United States House of Representatives Committee on Natural Resources on Thursday, June 15, in favor of HR 3397. This bill would require the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to abandon the proposed rule on “Conservation and Landscape Health.”

“Washington bureaucrats don’t know how to manage land better than the South Dakotans who have been stewarding it for centuries. But Joe Biden’s Administration is pursuing a regulatory land grab,” said Governor Kristi Noem. “Their proposed rule will result in poorly managed federal lands, which will devastate conservation and management efforts, harm our wildlife, slow economic growth, and endanger public safety.”

The Bureau of Land Management’s proposed rule elevates conservation practices as a “use” within the Federal Land Policy and Management Act multiple-use framework without Congressional authority. BLM intends to pursue this through so-called conservation leases for both protection and restoration activities. This proposed rule would fundamentally change the way multiple use and sustained yield mandates are carried out.

Governor Mark Gordon of Wyoming will also be testifying. Governor Noem has previously worked with Governor Gordon on several issues pertaining to land management, such as the Biden Administration’s overregulation of the Black Hills timber industry.

The Biden Administration could use this proposed rule change to determine currently permitted activities on BLM lands are incompatible with a conservation lease or areas identified as “intact landscapes.” This could include loss of grazing, energy production, and recreation – all of which are essential to the South Dakota way of life.

HR 3397 was introduced by Congressmen John Curtis (R-UT), Dan Newhouse (R-WA), and Russ Fulcher (R-ID).

## Governor Noem Now Accepting Applications for Fall Interns

PIERRE, S.D. – Governor Kristi Noem is now accepting applications for the Governor’s Office Fall 2023 Internship Program.

Student interns will work with staff on various projects based on interests and strengths. Additional duties include aiding the governor’s general counsel, constituent services team, and communications team. Interns will help conduct policy research, prepare policy briefings, and staff events. The internship program provides students first-hand experience with the State government and the functions of the governor’s office.

College students who would like to be considered for an internship should submit a resume, cover letter, and letter of recommendation to [brad.otten@state.sd.us](mailto:brad.otten@state.sd.us). Application should be submitted by Friday July 7, 2023.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 3 of 102

## The Bulletin

by **Newsweek**

JANUARY 24, 2023

### World in Brief

health warnings, causing flight delays, and prompting residents to limit their outdoor time.

President Joe Biden and U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak announced a new economic agreement, the "Atlantic Declaration," between the nations and vowed to support Ukraine during their first joint appearance since the U.K. leader took office.

Restaurant chain Cracker Barrel is the latest to face boycott calls by conservative activists in response to the firm's post in support of Pride Month and its LGBT alliance.

French President Emmanuel Macron and his wife Brigitte travel to a hospital treating children who suffered injuries in a knife attack at a park in the Alps. All four children are said to be in stable condition.

In the ongoing war in Ukraine, Russia's forces have suffered a huge spike in troop losses as Ukraine's long-anticipated counteroffensive kicks off, figures released by Kyiv's military suggest. Kyiv has urged operational silence on its counteroffensive to recapture its occupied territories. .

### TALKING POINTS

"I'm proposing the 28th Amendment to the United States Constitution to help end our nation's gun violence crisis. The American people are sick of Congress' inaction. The 28th will enshrine 4 widely supported gun safety freedoms -- while leaving the 2nd Amendment intact," California Governor Gavin Newsom tweeted alongside a video urging support for his proposed 28th Amendment.

"They are all fallacies promoted with the perfidious intention to justify the unprecedented intensification of the blockade, the destabilization and aggression toward Cuba and to deceive public opinion in the United States and the world," Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister Carlos Fernández de Cossío said in a statement denying reports that China plans to establish a spying facility in Cuba..

### WHAT TO WATCH IN THE DAY AHEAD

The North Carolina GOP Convention taking place in Greensboro this weekend is attracting some of the top candidates running for the 2024 GOP presidential nomination. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis is scheduled to address the convention this evening, while former President Donald Trump and former Vice President Mike Pence will each deliver remarks on Saturday.

Georgia is hosting its state GOP Convention today and Saturday in Columbus, as well. GOP 2024 presidential candidates Vivek Ramaswamy and former Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson are expected to attend. Former President Donald Trump is expected to address the convention Saturday afternoon.

The Western Conservative Summit is also taking place this weekend in Denver, Colorado. The speaker list for this year's event includes GOP presidential candidates Larry Elder, the conservative radio host from California, and former Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson.

A White House Pride celebration initially postponed due to poor air quality is now expected to take place Saturday on the South Lawn. President Joe Biden will host the event with singer Betty Who.

The 2023 Belmont Stakes takes place Saturday at Belmont Park in Elmont, New York. The race is scheduled to begin shortly after 7 p.m. ET.

Donald Trump's attorney Alina Habba said she is "embarrassed to be a lawyer" following news of Trump's indictment, saying he is the target of "selective prosecution." Read more about the indictment below.

Businessman Nate Paul, who is at the center of allegations that led to the historic impeachment of Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, was arrested by the FBI and booked into the Travis County jail, in Austin, Texas.

Drifting smoke from Canadian wildfires continues to trigger air quality alerts across parts of the U.S., prompting

## **US Department of Labor orders South Dakota helicopter ambulance service to reinstate mechanic who reported safety concerns, filed FAA complaint**

**Avera Careflight also ordered to pay mechanic \$55K in back wages, damages**

SIoux FALLS, SD – A federal whistleblower investigation found a South Dakota-based helicopter ambulance servicer retaliated against a mechanic who reported safety concerns and filed a complaint with the Federal Aviation Administration.

The U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration examined the mechanic's complaint against Avera Careflight in Sioux Falls – a division of Avera McKennan – after the company terminated their employment. OSHA found that the company's actions violated the Wendell H. Ford Aviation Investment and Reform Act for the 21st Century, and ordered them to reinstate the mechanic. In addition, OSHA directed Avera Careflight to pay the employee more than \$30,600 in back wages and \$25,000 in damages and to remove negative reports from their personnel record.

OSHA's investigation found the Aberdeen-based mechanic reported concerns with the safety of a helicopter on July 21, 2022, and continued to discuss safety matters with their supervisor and the manufacturer's national technical representative over the period of several months. During that time, the mechanic's supervisor reprimanded them repeatedly for raising concerns and speaking to technical representatives. Believing the issues was unresolved, the mechanic filed an FAA complaint on Sept. 2, 2022 and the company terminated them on Sept. 29, 2022.

Federal law protects employees who refuse to perform work assignments when they reasonably believe these assignments would cause them to violate aviation safety regulations.

"Employees must be able to freely exercise their legal rights regarding workplace safety without fear of retaliation by their employer," explained OSHA Regional Administrator Jennifer S. Rous in Denver. "The outcome of this investigation and the action on the mechanic's behalf underscores the department's commitment to protecting workers' rights."

The company and the former employee may file objections or request a hearing with the department's Office of Administrative Law Judges within 30 days of receiving the agency's order.

OSHA enforces the whistleblower provisions of the AIR21 and more than 20 other statutes protecting employees who report violations of various workplace safety and health, airline, commercial motor carrier, consumer product, environmental, financial reform, food safety, health insurance reform, motor vehicle safety, nuclear, pipeline, public transportation agency, railroad, maritime, securities, tax, criminal antitrust and anti-money laundering laws. For more information on whistleblower protections, visit OSHA's Whistleblower Protection Programs webpage.

## **Groton Legion Post 39 Drops Game to Redfield Post 92, Clay Kiser After Late Score**

Thursday's game against Redfield Post 92, Clay Kiser was a heartbreaker for Groton Legion Post 39, as they lost the lead late in an 8-4 defeat. The game was tied at four with Redfield Post 92, Clay Kiser batting in the bottom of the sixth when Keaton Rohfls singled on a 3-2 count, scoring three runs.

Redfield Post 92, Clay Kiser opened up an early lead in the second inning when Owen Osborn singled on a 1-2 count, scoring one run.

In the bottom of the fifth inning, Redfield Post 92, Clay Kiser tied things up at four when Kellan Hurd singled on a 1-0 count, scoring one run.

Peyton Osborn was the winning pitcher for Redfield Post 92, Clay Kiser. The righthander lasted five innings, allowing five hits and four runs while striking out seven. Eli Morrissette threw two innings in relief out of the bullpen.

Bradin Althoff took the loss for Groton Legion Post 39. The pitcher allowed six hits and four runs over four and two-thirds innings, striking out five.

Braxton Imrie, Brevin Flihs, Logan Ringgingberg, Ryan Groeblichhoff, and Althoff all had one hit to lead Groton Legion Post 39.

Redfield Post 92, Clay Kiser tallied 12 hits on the day. Camden Osborn, Nolan Gall, and Morrissette each racked up multiple hits for Redfield Post 92, Clay Kiser. Osborn led Redfield Post 92, Clay Kiser with three hits in four at bats. Redfield Post 92, Clay Kiser stole six bases during the game as two players stole more than one. Osborn led the way with three.

## **4-Hit Day for Flihs Leads Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion Past Redfeild Clay Kiser Jr. Legion 17U**

Brevin Flihs did the opposing team no favors on Friday, picking up four hits over four at bats and leading Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion to a 15-1 win over Redfeild Clay Kiser Jr. Legion 17U. Flihs tripled in the first, singled in the second, singled in the third, and tripled in the fourth.

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion secured the victory thanks to eight runs in the fourth inning. Caden Mcinerney, Jarrett Erdmann, Flihs, Braxton Imrie, Karsten Flihs, and Nicholas Morris each had RBIs in the big inning.

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion got on the board in the first inning. Korbin Kucker singled on a 0-1 count, scoring two runs.

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion tallied eight runs in the fourth inning. Mcinerney, Erdmann, Flihs, Imrie, Flihs, and Morris each had RBIs in the frame.

Kellen Antonsen earned the victory on the pitcher's mound for Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion. The hurler lasted four innings, allowing three hits and one run while striking out two and walking one.

Elliot Komraus took the loss for Redfeild Clay Kiser Jr. Legion 17U. The bulldog surrendered 15 runs on ten hits over four innings, striking out three.

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion racked up ten hits on the day. Flihs and Imrie each managed multiple hits for Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion. Flihs went 4-for-4 at the plate to lead Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion in hits.

## We the People

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



By David Adler

### Why Congress May Impose Ethics Code on Supreme Court Justices

Rising calls for Congress to enact new ethical standards for the Supreme Court, sparked by recent revelations that Justice Clarence Thomas failed to disclose financial transactions, have generated a debate on whether the legislative branch possesses constitutional authority to impose a code of conduct on the judiciary.

The divide is familiar. With some prominent exceptions, Republicans object to the creation of an ethics code, invoking separation of powers concerns and asserting interference with judicial power and activity. Democrats argue that ethics standards represent an effective means of protecting the nation from judicial misconduct and potential conflicts of interest that may influence the Justices.

This debate would be better informed by an understanding of two constitutional provisions that authorize congressional enactment of an ethics code for Supreme Court Justices. In short, the Necessary and Proper Clause vests in Congress the authority to enact an ethics code as a means of exercising its power under the Impeachment Clause.

The Impeachment Clause—Article II, section 4—grants to Congress the sole authority to determine whether the acts of the President, Vice-President and "all civil officers," including federal judges and Justices, warrant impeachment. Offenses justifying impeachment fall into the familiar categories of treason, bribery, and high crimes and misdemeanors.

In Federalist 65, Alexander Hamilton described impeachments as a "bridle in the hands of the legislature." In 1833, Justice Joseph Story, the most scholarly of Justices, paraphrased the impeachment practice in England, from which the Framers of the Constitution borrowed in creating the Impeachment Clause. Story wrote that "judges and other magistrates have not only been impeached for bribery, and acting grossly contrary to the duties of their office, but for misleading their sovereign by unconstitutional opinions and for attempts to subvert the fundamental laws, and introduce arbitrary power."

The Framers' drafting of the Impeachment Clause was influenced by the long, drawn-out impeachment trial of Warren Hastings, which was underway as delegates sat in Philadelphia. The trial was spearheaded by Edmund Burke, champion of the colonists' revolution against England.

Burke asserted that Hastings had governed "arbitrarily" because he was "a giver and receiver of bribes. In short, money is the beginning, the middle, and the end of every kind of act done by Mr. Hastings." Hastings was being impeached as well for "governing arbitrarily," the classic impeachable offense and for "betraying the trust" of the public which, Burke explained, meant he was guilty of "abusing power."

The constitutional authority of Congress to articulate, define, measure and ultimately punish acts deserving of impeachment is not different than the exercise of its power to legislate on many other constitutionally granted powers, including interstate commerce, war, foreign affairs and collection of taxes, each of which has been facilitated by use of the Necessary and Proper Clause.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 7 of 102

The Necessary and Proper Clause—Article I, section 8, paragraph 18—vests in Congress broad authority “to make Laws which shall be necessary and proper” to execute its powers “and all other Powers vested by this Constitution in the Government of the United States.” In context, the “Sweeping Clause” affords Congress the authority to enact an ethics code for Supreme Court Justices.

In the landmark case *McCulloch v. Maryland* (1819), Chief Justice John Marshall wrote the Court’s unanimous opinion upholding the congressional law creating a national bank under the Necessary and Proper Clause for the purpose of enforcing its power to “lay and collect taxes.” The Constitution makes no mention of a national bank, but Marshall said it is for Congress to identify the means it wishes to employ to carry out its authority to lay and collect taxes.

Congress enjoys the same discretion under the Impeachment Clause. It is free to choose the means—creation of an ethics code—for identifying parameters of conduct, including details of what behavior is prohibited. Congress has an institutional interest in enforcing its catalogue of constitutional powers governing impeachment and clearly has the authority to insist on reporting requirements and financial disclosures by Supreme Court Justices. The legislative imposition of such duties assists Congress in determining the commission of bribery, betrayal of trust and arbitrary behavior.

Some have asserted that congressional imposition of a code of ethics violates separation of powers and interferes with the exercise of judicial power. A code of ethics, however, has no direct impact on the Court’s disposition of cases before it. The Court, in *Morrison v. Olson* (1988), upheld against the claim of interference with executive power the Ethics in Government Act, which created an independent counsel. Chief Justice Rehnquist held that no separation of powers concern existed since the law did not interfere with the “core duties” of the president. Similarly, a legislatively drafted ethics code represents no interference with the exercise of judicial power.

Unless those who object to a code of ethics for Supreme Court Justices also object to a code for federal district court judges, there is no clear reason why lower court judges should be subject to more rigorous principles of behavior than members of the highest court in the land. To place in the Supreme Court the ultimate authority to say what the law is, without accountability for its behavior beyond the Impeachment Clause, is to ignore the value of accountability and invite corruption.

## Rounds Seeking Fall 2023 Internship Applications

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Mike Rounds (R-S.D.) is currently accepting applications from college students to serve as interns during the fall semester. Positions are available in his Washington, D.C. office and his state offices in Aberdeen, Pierre, Rapid City and Sioux Falls. Fall internships typically run from August to December, but dates can be tailored to specific schedules. Interns will receive a stipend, and the office works closely with all universities to meet the criteria necessary for interns to receive college credit.

“Our internship program is an incredible opportunity for students to experience a deeper understanding of the political process,” said Rounds. “Interns are crucial to our office operations both in South Dakota and in D.C. The program is open to students from all areas of discipline, not just political science. I encourage interested college students to apply for the upcoming fall internship.”

Intern duties include researching bills, tracking legislation, attending committee hearings and briefings, handling constituent correspondence and providing support in all areas of the office to Rounds and his staff. Internships can also be tailored to an intern’s specific interest areas when possible.

Interested students can apply at <https://www.rounds.senate.gov/internships>. The application deadline is July 14, 2023. For more information, please call Rebecca Herman at (605) 336-0486.



**Greg Whitlock,  
Secretary  
South Dakota  
Department of  
Veterans Affairs**

## Honoring Those That Made the Ultimate Sacrifice

South Dakota's Fallen Hero Bridge program dedicates state bridges to South Dakotans who made the ultimate sacrifice while serving their country or were classified as missing in action.

These men and women went to war and met their destiny in far off lands and battlefields. There is nothing more important for us to do than to ensure their sacrifices are remembered and their legacy lives on.

They need to be remembered as heroes who chose to serve and risk their lives. Heroes who were struck down in the pursuit of something bigger than them-

selves. Heroes that are forever deserving of our respect, admiration, and remembrance.

These brave warriors who fell in battle were often young and brimming with promise. They had a sense of energy, optimism, and hope.

For the greater good of our nation, they knowingly marched into harm's way. They put everything on the line to ensure our future, even though it meant endangering their own. The veterans we dedicate these bridges to did not just give us their lives, they gave us their futures. Most had more life ahead of them than behind them. Many did not experience their college graduation, their wedding, or the birth of their first child.

The men and women we honor through these bridges were American soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and coast guardsmen who sought service when times were troubled – when American values were challenged.

We are committed to preserving their memories. I ask everyone to participate in one of the 12 bridge dedications scheduled in 2023 in remembrance of South Dakota's fallen heroes.

To learn more about South Dakota's fallen heroes bridge dedication program, visit the SDDVA website at SD Department of Veterans Affairs.

Let us never stop educating the next generation about the price that has been paid for their freedom.

Greg Whitlock, Secretary  
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 9 of 102

## GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT #06-6 School Board Meeting June 12, 2023 – 7:00 PM – GHS Library Conference Room

### AGENDA:

1. Call to Order with members present. Approve agenda as proposed or amended.

### POTENTIAL CONFLICTS DISCLOSURE PURSUANT SDCL 23-3

### CONSENT AGENDA:

1. Approval of minutes of May 8, 2023 school board meeting.
2. Approval of May 2023 District bills for payment.
3. Approval of May 2023 Financial Report, Agency Accounts, and Investments.
4. Approval of May 2023 School Lunch Report.
5. Approval of May 2023 School Transportation Report.
6. Authorize request of 2023-24 newspaper quotes with due date of 4:00 PM on July 10, 2023.
7. Authorize request of 2023-24 energy quotes (fuel/diesel/gas) with due date of 4:00 PM on July 10, 2023.
8. Authorize Business Manager to publish 2023-24 Groton Area School District Budget with 8:00 PM public hearing set for July 10, 2023.
9. Approve open enrollment #24-03.
10. Approve open enrollments #24-14 and 24-15.

### OLD/CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. Open Forum for Public Participation...in accordance with Board Policy & Guidelines.
2. Second reading and adoption of recommended Job Descriptions for School Nurse and Athletic Director.
3. Administrative Reports: (a) Superintendent's Report; (b) Principal's Reports; (c) Business Manager Report

### NEW BUSINESS:

1. Discussion and any necessary action regarding FY2024 Property/Liability insurance [Royce Erdmann].
2. Discussion and/or action regarding 2023-2024 music trip [Mrs. Yeigh].
3. Approve resignation from Adam Franken, Ag Teacher/FFA Advisor with liquidated damages.
4. Authorize Business Manager to apply for credit cards from Dacotah Bank.
5. Declare items surplus.
6. Review and discuss report from JLG Architects regarding 1969 Gym.
7. Executive session pursuant SDCL 1-25-2(2) student issue, SDCL 1-25-2(4) negotiations and SDCL1-25-2(1) personnel.
8. Act on open enrollment #24-12.
9. Approve 2023-2024 GASA Negotiated Agreement and amended auxiliary staff work agreements.
10. Approve 2023-2024 Administrative Negotiated Agreement and signed contracts.
11. Issue 2023-2024 Salaried Auxiliary Staff agreements.

### ADJOURN

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 10 of 102



## **Groton Transit Fundraiser**

**Thursday, June 15, 2023**

**5 p.m. to 7 p.m.**

**Groton Community Center**

**\*\*\* Groton Transit Fundraiser will be held at the**

**Groton Community Center  
109 N. 3rd St. - one block east of  
Groton Transit \*\*\***

**Let us do the cooking for you!  
Burgers, Brats, Beans, Watermelon,  
Chips and the famous Mini Donuts!!**

**\* Food \* Fund \* Door Prizes \***

**FREE WILL OFFERING**

*Please join us and help  
support the Groton Transit!*

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 11 of 102

## Groton Chamber of Commerce June 7, 2023

- Individuals present: Carol Kutter, April Abeln, Ashley Bentz and Kellie Locke.
- Minutes from the previous meeting were approved on a motion by Locke and seconded by Bentz. All members voted aye.
- Treasurer's report was given. Dacotah Bank checking account balance is \$40,906.98. \$2,059.40 is currently in the Chamber Bucks account. Report was approved by Locke and seconded by Abeln. All members voted aye.
- Thank you notes were received from the Groton Chamber Scholarship winners and Enrich Groton SoDak, Inc.
- Email motion by Locke and seconded by Bentz was made on 5/17/23 to pay the \$100 sponsorship to the Groton Baseball/ Softball Foundation for livestreaming Big League baseball games. All members voted aye.
- A new sponsorship sign is being made for the Baseball Complex as ours was ruined and/or lost.
- A Facebook post was done highlighting our involvement in the Lit Drop asking individuals to post selfies with our rack cards with #eatshopbuylocal57445. Post will be shared each month and boosted for \$50 August 1 with a winner drawn at random on September 1 . Winner will win \$50 in Chamber Bucks.
- T-shirt order forms are currently boosted on Facebook and are due July 1.
- Motion by Bentz and seconded by Locke to donate \$500 to Enrich Groton SoDak, Inc. for the park sound system. All members voted aye.
- Motion by Abeln and seconded by Bentz to donate \$50 Chamber Bucks, a tumbler and shirt as a giveaway basket for the water tower ribbon cutting event 7/20/23. All members voted aye.
- Motion by Abeln and seconded by Locke to donate a new t-shirt as a prize for drawings at the Sip and Shop event (7/20/23) and Family Fun Night (8/10/23). All members voted aye.
- Abeln will work on compiling the SD Magazine ad for the Sep/Oct edition prior to June 30th deadline.
- Chamber member, Katelyn Nehlich was able to donate \$300 to the Chamber through Dacotah Bank's Give Where We Live program. Motion by Abeln and seconded by Locke to add this donation to our Main Street bench fund. All members voted aye.
- Motion by Locke and seconded by Bentz to donate a \$50 Chamber Bucks and tumbler giveaway basket for the Olive Grove Spring Fundraiser on 6/9/23. All members voted aye.
- Abeln stated that she will complete the Groton Chamber Annual Report and 990N.
- Next Meeting is July 5th at City Hall @ noon BYOL
- Upcoming events
- 06/09/2023 OGGC Spring Fundraiser
- 06/10/2023 U8 Youth Baseball Tourney
- 06/15/2023 Transit Fundraiser at the Community Center 4-7pm (Thursday Mid-June)
- 06/16/2023 SDSU Alumni & Friends Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 12pm Shotgun Start
- 06/17/2023 Groton Triathlon 9am-12pm
- 06/24/2023 Avantara Summer Event
- 06/24/2023 U10 Youth Baseball Tourney
- 06/25/2023 U12 Youth Baseball Tourney
- 06/29/2023 JVT Blood Drive at the Community Center 11am-7pm
- 07/04/2023 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Registration 10am Start
- 07/09/2023 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
- 07/20/2023 Pro Am Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 07/20/2023 Ribbon Cutting at the New Water Tower 11:30am
- 07/20/2023 Open House light lunch sponsored by IMEG at City Hall 12-1:30pm
- 07/20/2023 Summer Downtown Sip & Shop 5-8pm
- 07/21/2023 Ferney Open Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Start
- 07/26/2023 Groton Golf Association Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove Golf Course 11:30am-1pm

## Is proposed abortion amendment 'far more extreme' than Roe v. Wade?

Stu Whitney

South Dakota News Watch

It's no coincidence that South Dakotans are well-versed in direct democracy. The state was the first in the nation to adopt an initiative and referendum process in 1898, giving citizens the power to propose and approve laws under which they live.

Petition-fueled constitutional amendments were added in 1972, a more weighty process that some conservative legislators view as a political "end around" for progressive causes in a state where Republicans control the executive and legislative branches.

While initiated measures can be repealed by the state Legislature or referred to the ballot for reconsideration, initiated amendments are entrenched in the state constitution and can only be reversed through court challenges or a superseding amendment.

The stakes are high, in other words, especially on an issue such as abortion, a complex and ongoing legal and moral debate with deep political divisions in South Dakota.

Dakotans for Health, a grassroots organization that pushes for progressive policy change through petition efforts, is collecting signatures for a proposed 2024 amendment that would enshrine abortion rights in the South Dakota Constitution.

If passed by voters, it would supersede a 2005 state trigger law enacted last summer when the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade with its ruling in Dobbs vs. Jackson's Women's Health Organization, leaving it up to the states to determine reproductive rights.

The South Dakota trigger law makes it a Class 6 felony for anyone "who administers to any pregnant female or prescribes or procures for any pregnant female" a means for an abortion, except to save the life of the mother.

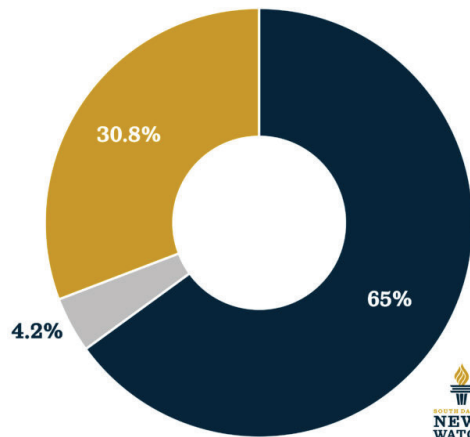
Dakotans for Health founder Rick Weiland thinks the time is right for an abortion amendment because of the unsettled nature of South Dakota's ban. Women now cross the border into neighboring states to obtain abortion pills. And questions remain about the legal interpretation of "life of the mother" in state law.



**Pro-choice supporters gather at Fawick Park in Sioux Falls in 2022.** (Photo: Argus Leader)

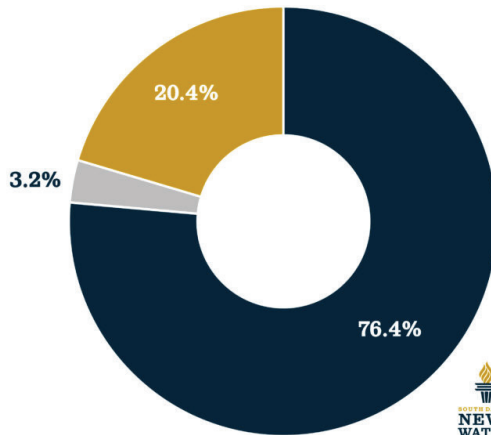
Do you support or oppose having the legality of abortion in South Dakota decided by voters in a statewide referendum?

- Support
- Not sure
- Oppose



Do you support or oppose allowing legal abortion in cases of rape or incest?

- Support
- Not sure
- Oppose



"With Roe v. Wade, at least there was a framework that provided some reasonable guardrails on both sides of the issue," Weiland said. "It's like the wild, wild West right now."

### News Watch poll showed support for referendum on abortion

The petition drive has galvanized an equally passionate opposition movement, with anti-abortion groups wary of allowing the issue to reach the ballot. South Dakotans rejected near-total abortion bans by statewide vote in 2006 and 2008.

A News Watch-sponsored poll of 500 registered voters in July 2022 by Mason-Dixon Polling & Strategy showed that a majority (57%) of respondents support allowing legal access to abortion medications in the state.

Nearly two-thirds (65%) said they support having a statewide referendum to determine South Dakota's laws regarding reproductive rights.

More than three-fourths (76%) of those polled support allowing legal abortion in cases of rape and incest, an exception not currently allowed under South Dakota law.

That public support of abortion rights with restrictions is reflected in other GOP-controlled states.

In Kansas, which former President Donald Trump won with 56% of the vote in 2020,

voters overwhelmingly rejected a 2022 constitutional amendment that would have allowed the Republican-led Legislature to tighten restrictions or ban abortion outright, with 59% voting against the amendment.

### Is abortion amendment 'far more extreme' than Roe v. Wade?

In South Dakota, the abortion measure's most public opponent is state Rep. Jon Hansen, a Republican from Dell Rapids.

He serves as vice president of South Dakota Right to Life and co-chair of the Sioux Falls-based Life Defense Fund, which has the stated goal of fighting against "this deadly constitutional amendment at every step."

Hansen has encouraged volunteers to stand next to Dakotans for Health petition circulators and "explain to the public how radical this amendment is and encourage our fellow citizens not to sign the petition."

Hansen, a lawyer, has also criticized the wording of the proposed amendment, claiming that it's "far more extreme than Roe v. Wade itself."

Weiland and others pushed back on that statement by claiming that the amendment uses the same trimester framework as Roe, the landmark 1973 ruling in which the Supreme Court held that the Constitution protected a woman's right to an abortion prior to the viability of the fetus.

The proposed South Dakota ballot amendment prevents the state from regulating "the abortion decision and its effectuation" during the first trimester (1 to 13 weeks). During the second trimester (14 to 26 weeks), the state could regulate "the abortion decision and its effectuation only in ways that are reasonably related to the physical health of the pregnant woman." After the end of the second trimester (when the fetus becomes viable), abortion could be regulated or prohibited except to preserve "the life or health" of

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 14 of 102



**Gala Byrun, of Sioux Falls, volunteered in July 2021 with a national pro-life organization to quietly protest outside the Planned Parenthood clinic in Sioux Falls.** (Photo: News Watch file photo)

were required to tell patients that women who undergo abortion procedures could experience depression and suicidal thoughts and that the procedure would “terminate the life of a whole, separate, unique, living human being.”

These state restrictions were not permissible under *Roe v. Wade*.

They were passed after *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, a 1992 Supreme Court ruling that upheld the basic tenets of *Roe* but overturned the trimester framework and used a more flexible standard as to whether state-imposed restrictions were constitutional.

Based on this, supporters can be taken literally when they say the proposed abortion amendment is an attempt to codify *Roe v. Wade*, according to Hannah Haksgaard, a professor at the University of South Dakota Knudson School of Law

“The proposed amendment is very closely aligned with the original *Roe v. Wade* framework,” Haksgaard told News Watch. “The language mimics the trimester framework of *Roe v. Wade* and nothing in this amendment indicates any abortion rights more extreme than that.”

Dakotans for Health does not dispute the assertion that the proposed amendment allows greater abortion access than existed under post-*Casey* laws in many states, including South Dakota.

## **Should mental health be part of abortion ban exception?**



**Jon Hansen**

Hansen also contends that the amendment, if passed, would allow abortions “up to nine months” because of the measure’s language. After the second trimester, the state would be permitted to regulate or prohibit abortion “except when abortion is necessary, in the medical judgment of the woman’s physician, to preserve the life or health of the pregnant woman.”

Hansen notes that the phrase “or health” could include mental health, “however severe or however mild,” and that “preserve” means to keep something as it is.

“So the abortion amendment isn’t even about abortion to relieve existing mental health issues,” he wrote on Twitter. “The abortion amendment legalizes late-term abortion up to the point of birth if the stated reason is to avoid stress, anxiety, or adjustment issues, however mild, even before these issues ever occur.”

Mental health conditions account for more than 20% of pregnancy-related deaths in the United States, according to data from Maternal Mortality Review Committees and reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The criteria for mental health included suicide and overdose/poisoning related to substance abuse.

the mother.

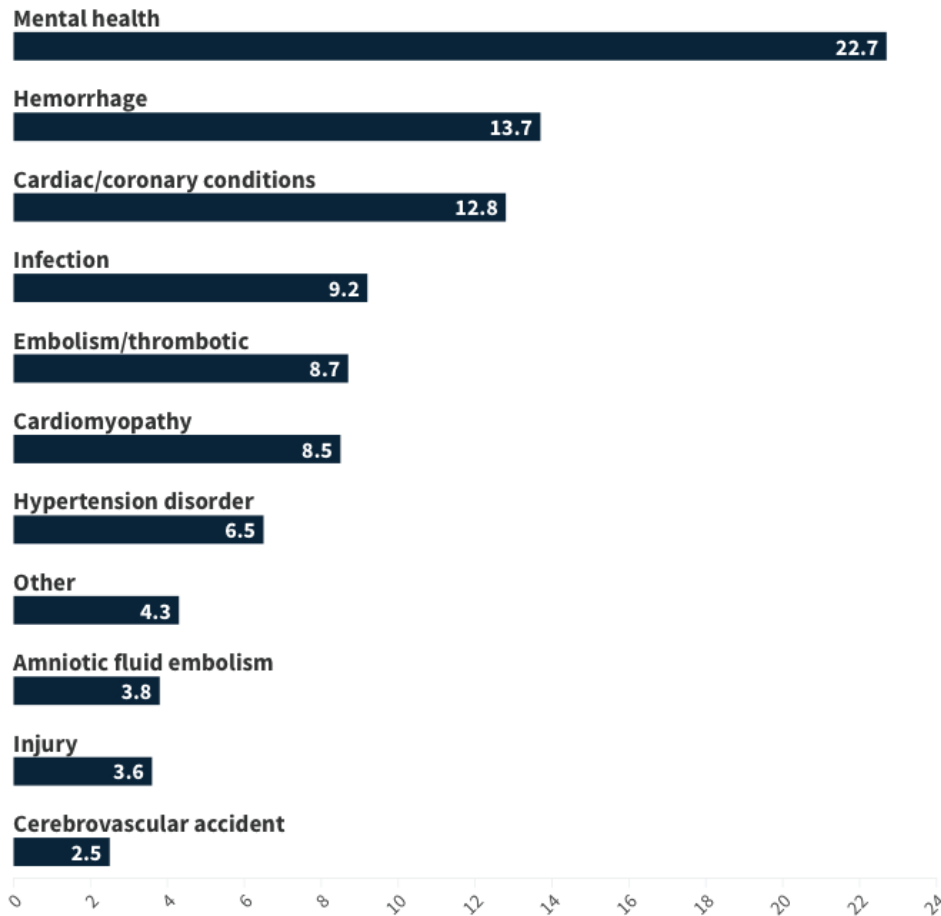
Hansen, who sent a statement to News Watch via email but didn’t agree to an interview, did not respond directly when asked what specific elements of the amendment are more extreme than *Roe v. Wade*.

## **Restrictions added after Supreme Court’s Casey ruling**

In public statements, Hansen pointed to a lack of “safety protections” such as parental notification, waiting periods and informed consent.

In South Dakota, before *Dobbs*, informed consent meant that doctors

## Underlying causes of pregnancy-related deaths (2017-19)



Source: Maternal Mortality Review Committees (2017-19) • Graphic: Michael Klinski / SD News Watch

## CDC: 1% of abortions in 2020 happened after 21 weeks

Most states with health exceptions limit those exceptions to physical health concerns such as “serious risk of substantial and irreversible impairment of a major bodily function” (Arizona, Florida, Ohio, Wyoming, Indiana) or risk of “serious, permanent impairment of a life-sustaining organ” (Kentucky and Louisiana).

No such declaration exists with the proposed amendment in South Dakota, keeping in line with the original Roe wording, which Hansen sees as a weakness of the proposal.

“We cannot allow abortion through nine months of pregnancy to be written into our state’s founding document,” he said in a video on the Life Defense Fund website. “The results would be completely devastating to life in our state.”

Fewer than 1% of U.S. abortions in 2020 took place at 21 weeks or later, according to CDC abortion surveillance data, compared with 93.1% up to 13

weeks and 5.8% at 14-20 weeks.

Medication abortion, through the use of pills, currently accounts for 54% of abortions in the United States, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a reproductive health organization.

## Legislature declined to moderate South Dakota trigger law

Under current South Dakota law, abortion is banned “unless there is appropriate and reasonable medical judgment that performance of an abortion is necessary to preserve the life of the pregnant female.”

The legal uncertainty surrounding the wording of that exception, and possible fallout for doctors and patients, became an issue during the 2023 legislative session.

A bill sponsored by Rep. Taylor Rehfeldt, a Sioux Falls Republican and certified registered nurse anesthetist, would have defined “preserving the life of the pregnant female” as meaning “at serious risk of death” or in danger of “substantial and irreversible physical impairment of one or more major bodily functions.”

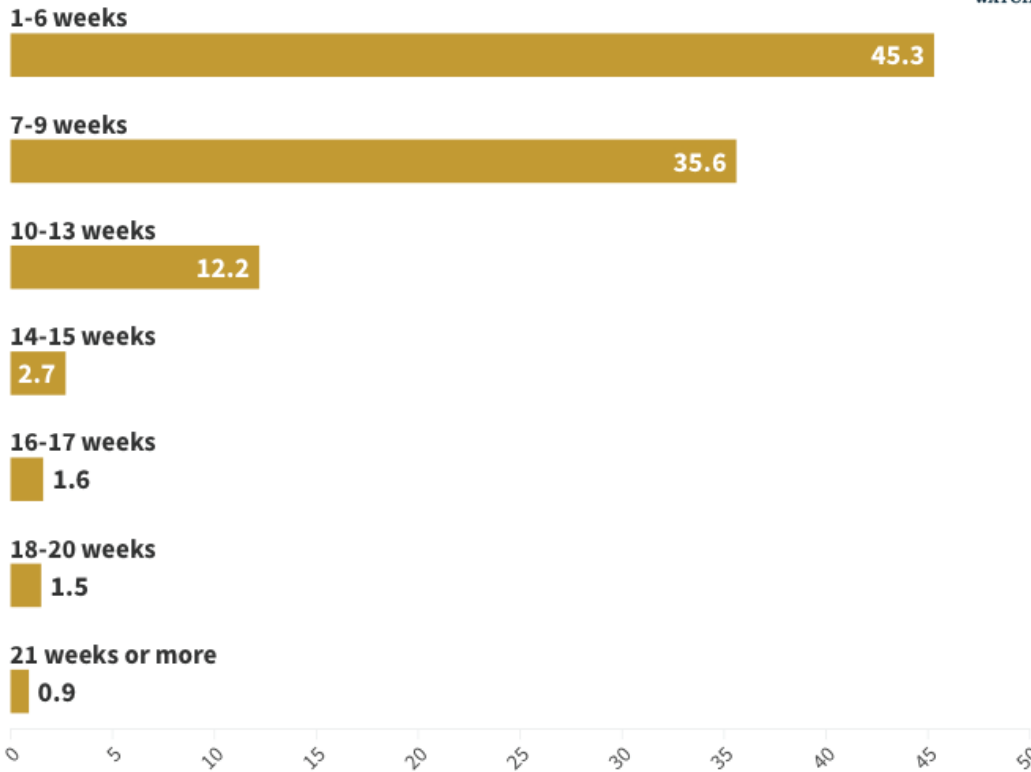
Rehfeldt, who declined an interview request, tabled her own bill in committee after facing backlash from anti-abortion factions of the Republican caucus.

“I would have never thought that the idea of preserving the life of the mother would be debatable,” Rehfeldt said during a February hearing, “or even considered not pro-



Taylor Rehfeldt

## Most abortions occur before 10 weeks of pregnancy



Source: CDC • Graphic: Michael Klinski / SD News Watch

life by some who would think that being pro-life could mean that we do not protect women, that we are not willing to provide clarification for doctors who have given their lives to care for not just one but two patients.”

Weiland calls the “abortion through nine months” warning a scare tactic not based on reality.

### Weiland: Legislature could take up the issue in 2024

Weiland said the failure to advance that bill points to the “zero tolerance” approach by Hansen and other state GOP leaders.

Hansen has criticized leaving “life or health” abortion decisions up to medical professionals because the physician will

“likely ... be an abortionist like those from Planned Parenthood, whose business and profits are derived from performing abortions.”

Planned Parenthood didn’t respond to an interview request for this story.

The South Dakota State Medical Association doesn’t comment on citizen initiatives until they qualify for the ballot. But the association stated after the Dobbs decision that “our position remains that an abortion is a personal health and medical decision to be made by a qualified physician and patient.”

Weiland referred to Hansen’s hardline stance as out of touch with voters and post-Dobbs scenarios in South Dakota.

He raised the possibility that there will be another attempt to “soften” the state’s trigger law during the 2024 legislative session in anticipation of the proposed amendment making the ballot in November of that year.

“The question is whether there’s enough support within the Republican caucus in Pierre to moderate the law. And I would submit that the answer is no,” Weiland said.

### S.D. voters have twice rejected near-total abortion bans

Dakotans for Health needs to collect a minimum of 35,017 signatures by May 7, 2024, to place the abortion amendment on the ballot. The goal is to submit 60,000 or more to ensure that ballot access isn’t foiled by invalidated signatures or other technicalities.

If the group makes the ballot, which Weiland expects to do, it wouldn’t be the first time South Dakotans have gone to the polls to determine state abortion laws.

In 2006, legislators passed a law to ban all abortions except those done to save the life of a pregnant woman. Then-Gov. Mike Rounds signed it, but opponents gathered enough signatures to refer it to the ballot, where it was defeated with more than 55% percent of the vote.



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 17 of 102

Two years later, voters rejected by a margin of 55% to 45% a ballot initiative that would have banned all abortions in the state except in cases of rape or incest or "to preserve the health or life of the woman."

## Battle between direct and representative democracy



**Rick Weiland, shown in 2014**

Since the Dobbs decision threw the abortion question back to the states, a new battleground exists between representative democracy, with red state legislatures looking to ban or restrict abortion, and direct democracy, with pro-choice groups sponsoring petition drives to expand abortion rights in the 26 states that have initiative processes.

The fact that constitutional amendments passed by voters supersede state statutes in most cases has sparked efforts by some Republicans to raise the threshold for petitions needed to make the ballot or percentage of votes required to pass.

When it became clear that Medicaid expansion would be on the South Dakota ballot in 2022, Hansen joined a group of Republicans who tried to orchestrate a preemptive strike with Amendment C. It would have required a 60% vote for ballot measures that raise taxes or spend \$10 million in general funds in their first five years.

The fact that 67% of voters rejected Amendment C on a GOP-friendly June primary ballot was viewed as a message from South Dakota voters to stay away from the state's first-in-the-nation initiative process.

"Just when you think voters aren't paying attention, they surprise you," said Weiland, who saw Medicaid expansion later pass with 56% support. "I have to admit I was somewhat surprised that (Amendment C) went down

in such a blaze of glory."

## Red state legislatures attempt to curtail 'direct democracy'

Voters in Ohio face a similar decision in an August 2023 special election after Republicans passed a resolution to raise the voting threshold for constitutional amendments from a simple majority to 60% in response to abortion-related initiatives. The measure would also double the number of counties where signatures must be collected.

In North Dakota, the Legislature placed a constitutional amendment on the 2024 ballot to add restrictions to the ballot measure process, including a single-subject rule, which South Dakota adopted in 2018. It would increase the signature threshold and require constitutional amendment initiatives to be approved in both a primary and general election.

Republican-led efforts to raise the voting threshold for constitutional amendments fell short in Missouri, Oklahoma, Idaho and Florida during the 2023 legislative sessions. In Florida, initiated amendments already require 60% support to pass, and the failed bill would have raised that threshold to two-thirds.

In Missouri, where Republicans tried and failed to raise the threshold from a simple majority to 57%, state GOP leaders warned that if the threshold was not raised, an effort to allow abortions will be approved by voters.

That concern is shared by some Republican legislators in South Dakota, where attempts to restrict the state's initiative process have largely been unsuccessful, whether at the ballot or in the courtroom.

"I don't know why it should be so scary," said Weiland of the direct democracy tradition. "If you believe in democracy, if you believe in majority rule, why would you be throwing up roadblocks to prevent people from circulating a petition to let the people decide at the ballot box? I mean, that's America, right?"

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



### ABOUT STU WHITNEY

Stu Whitney is an investigative reporter for South Dakota News Watch. A resident of Sioux Falls, Whitney is an award-winning reporter, editor and novelist with more than 30 years of experience in journalism.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 18 of 102



**May 29 - June 4, 2023**

We had a crazy week out here to welcome us back to DC after our Memorial Day in-state work period. As I'm sure you've heard by now, much of our time was spent waiting on a debt ceiling vote in the House. It ultimately came to the Senate floor on Thursday, where we voted on a series of amendments before passing the bill just before midnight. More on that vote later. In the moments between, we stayed busy with our usual meetings, hearings and reading all 99 pages of the Fiscal Responsibility Act and each amendment proposed. All that and more in my Weekly Round[s] Up:

South Dakota groups I visited with: Students from Brandon Valley High School who were visiting DC this past week and Dr. Barbara Szczerbinska, who serves on the board of the Sanford Underground Research Facility (SURF) in Lead.

I also had the opportunity to welcome a group of South Dakota veterans to DC this past Wednesday morning. All 83 veterans on board were part of a Midwest Honor Flight and were visiting Washington for the day to see the memorials that honor and recognize their service to our country.

Meetings this past week: Christine Abizaid, Director of the National Counterterrorism Center; Alex Karp, CEO of Palantir; Jerome Powell, Chairman of the Federal Reserve; Dr. Christopher Scolese, Director of the National Reconnaissance Office; Bryan Palma, CEO of Trellix; and Dr. Robert Soofer, Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense.

Topics discussed: National security, SURF's research in South Dakota and developments in the AI field.

Votes taken: 14 – Almost all of these were related to the debt limit deal, including 11 amendments that we voted on in rapid succession before passing the final bill on Thursday evening. I voted yes to pass this bill.

The Fiscal Responsibility Act is far from perfect. Neither side in the negotiation got exactly what they wanted. However, it's important to note that this final agreement is a result of divided government. Unlike last Congress, with a Democrat majority in both the House and the Senate and a Democrat president, we now have a Republican majority in the House. This means that the President had to negotiate with Speaker McCarthy and ultimately make concessions on what otherwise would likely have been a "clean" raise of the debt ceiling – allowing our country to spend more money without cutting any spending in return.

Hearings: Two – I had one hearing in the Select Committee on Intelligence and one in the Banking committee.

Legislation introduced: I reintroduced the Veterans Health Care Freedom Act with Sen. Marsha Blackburn (R-Tenn.) this past week. This legislation would allow veterans enrolled in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health system to receive care through a local community provider. You can read more about the specific provisions of this legislation here.

My staff in South Dakota visited: Aberdeen, Brookings, Sioux Falls, Vermillion and Yankton.

Steps taken this week: 58,871 steps or 27.11 miles.



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### **Volatile, costly international visa program strains SD's tourism industry**

**Labor shortage pushes small businesses to use international workers: 'We couldn't do it with American workers'**

**BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JUNE 8, 2023 6:11 PM**

*EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first of two stories examining the challenges some South Dakota businesses face as they attempt to hire international workers. The next story will examine challenges in the agricultural industry.*

Janet Boyer estimates she spent over \$40,000 arranging housing for international workers and transporting them to the Black Hills before she opened her doors for the tourist season this year.

Over 70 international workers cover cooking, serving and cleaning between her and her son's four restaurants at Mt. Rushmore Brewing Co. and the Begging Burro.

The workers are here on visas, which are documents that allow foreigners to be in the United States temporarily. In Boyer's case, her workers are on the H-2B visa program, which is a seasonal program for non-agriculture workers employed by U.S. businesses that will "suffer impending irreparable harm" because they can't find local workers. Other South Dakota businesses rely on H-2A seasonal visas for agricultural workers; J-1 seasonal visas for college students; and TN professional visas through the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Hiring H-2B workers costs well above what it would cost to hire U.S. workers, Boyer said. But she doesn't see another option — with the unemployment rate at a historically low 1.9% in South Dakota and fewer adults working second jobs, she can't find local workers.

The H-2B program awarded her 41 international visa workers to meet seasonal demand at the restaurants this summer, and she has 30 other international workers returning from past seasons. That, paired with the 10 high school students she was able to find and hire from the Custer area this summer, isn't a full staff and will barely cover the tourism season, she said.

She worries she won't get enough traffic this summer to cover costs incurred from the visa program. She made just enough last year.

"My business is in jeopardy," she said. "Going along and barely making it doesn't cover the breakdown of equipment or any remodeling that might need to be done. Barely making it doesn't let me invest in the company."

#### **How the system works**

The federal government requires H-2B workers be paid wages higher than the minimum wage and the same as American workers, so Boyer pays her visa workers between \$12 and \$16 an hour depending on the position.

While transportation is required, Boyer voluntarily offers housing for her workers and charges them \$10 a day "because there is not housing in South Dakota."

"We don't want to gouge these people. They're up here working their butts off for their families," Boyer said. "I want their kids to go to good schools and live in safe neighborhoods and have food on their tables. The whole purpose of this program is to help people out — they help us out and make the Black Hills shine."

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 20 of 102

The H-2B program, which started in 1987, allows up to 66,000 international worker visas to fill seasonal job needs across the country each fiscal year. Workers can stay in one place for six months before moving to another part of the country to fill peak needs — such as Florida or Arizona during the winter.

Boyer has been using the seasonal visa program for years. She and other South Dakota businesses rely on foreign worker programs, especially for the tourism industry. South Dakota businesses were awarded just under 2,000 H-2B workers this year.

But those South Dakota businesses competed for H-2B slots ahead of this year's season — facing off against carnivals, fishing boats in Alaska, bed and breakfasts in Maine, golf courses, landscapers, and seasonal construction needs across the country.

Not every business gets the workers they ask for from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, which uses a lottery drawing system to prioritize businesses. That creates a volatile, uncertain and stressful system for owners like Boyer, because they don't know until a few weeks before the season starts if they have enough workers to fill demand.

## Federal solutions sought

Some members of Congress have been pushing for additional H-2B workers for years, including South Dakota Sens. John Thune and Mike Rounds. Rounds most recently joined a group of senators in early 2022 to call for about 65,000 additional visas, which resulted in the Department of Homeland Security and Department of Labor issuing a temporary increase of that amount in late 2022 for the remainder of fiscal year 2023.

Rep. Dusty Johnson, South Dakota's lone House member, said Congress should make it harder for people to enter the country illegally while acknowledging delays and bureaucracy are keeping H-2B visa workers from filling workforce needs.

He doesn't see immigration or worker visa reform agreements between parties happening until the executive branch partners with congressional Republicans to secure the border.

"It's become increasingly unworkable over the last few years and it's an area ripe for Congress to find some improvements," Johnson said. "A government process that is this onerous, nonsensical and burdensome doesn't do anyone any favors."

Immigration and workforce needs have been a challenge for decades in the United States, said Nathan Sanderson, executive director for the South Dakota Retailers Association. The "political pushing and pulling" trickles down to the visa program and local businesses.

"The number one limiting factor for economic growth in South Dakota is workforce," Sanderson said. "It's difficult to put a number on it, but businesses in South Dakota could utilize thousands, tens of thousands of workers if they were available."

And Sanderson doesn't see a solution coming from Washington, D.C., soon. While the federal government expanded the number of H-2B workers for this year, "those Band-Aids aren't very good," Sanderson said.

"It's expensive both in dollars and time to try and navigate the various visa programs out there," Sanderson said. "It's not ideal. A lot of businesses aren't able to make it because they don't have the workers, and that's absolutely a factor that impacts the economic climate of South Dakota."

## Employers get creative to fill staff

Ramkota Companies, which operates the Custer State Park resorts in the Black Hills along with the Clubhouse Hotel and Suites and Ramkota Hotels across the state, received just over 60% of the H-2B workers the business applied for this year.

Ramkota President and CEO Josh Schmaltz said it'll be "enough to get by." Without receiving H-2B workers, the company's Custer State Park restaurants would have to restrict the number of customers to the amount that the limited staff can handle, he explained.

"Someone might walk into the restaurant and see six empty tables but be told they can't be seated for another 20 minutes," Schmaltz said hypothetically. "There's a lot of planning and strategy you have to take into consideration when you run short staffed while still maintaining a level of service and quality of product our guests deserve."

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 21 of 102

Since Ramkota took over as concessionaire at Custer State Park in 2007, the company has always relied in some part on H-2B workers. The first year, the company employed roughly 175 H-2B workers out of an employee pool of 300.

Over time, Schmaltz was able to lower that number to 60 H-2B workers by hiring more domestic workers. This year, however, Ramkota applied for 80 H-2B workers but only received 50. The company employs another 60 or so international college students through another program and about 150 American workers.

"If we want to operate at normal levels at normal hours and meet the expectations of today's travelers, we couldn't do it with American workers," Schmaltz said. "We absolutely need that H-2B program to fill these seasonal jobs."

Wall Drug heavily relies on seasonal guest workers because "just getting help in general has been a struggle," said HR director Anne Jo Spotted Bear. The tourist stop hires as many local employees as possible and fills in the gaps with international workers.

The business uses the J-1 visa program more than H-2B workers. J-1 is an international student program, allowing college students to stay in the United States during their summer break and work a seasonal job. They return to their home country after three or four months of work, Spotted Bear explained, which makes the program more limiting than the six months H-2B workers have. There is no limit for how many J-1 visas can be granted each year.

Spotted Bear estimates about 30% of the Wall Drug staff during the summer months are J-1 workers, about 10% are H-2B workers and the rest are American workers.

Wall Drug was able to help fill its worker needs with H-2B this summer, but the business doesn't always "win the lottery."

"It's a gamble; you might get all your workers, some or none," Spotted Bear said. "Almost every other year something happens where we don't get some or we get none. We've had two of the last five years where we've gotten all the H-2B workers we've requested."

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

## **COMMENTARY**

### **Bizarre legal debate shows it's time to talk about the death penalty**

**DANA HESS**

Read the next paragraph and see if it doesn't seem like the plot of a dystopian science fiction novel in which the future is going horribly wrong. Or maybe it's the plot of a social satire in which society has gone horribly, well, wrong.

Lawyers are arguing over the future of a young man accused of murder to decide if he has the mental acuity to qualify for the death penalty. In other words: Is he smart enough to be executed by the state? Prosecutors want to get an answer from the South Dakota Supreme Court since the laws on that sort of thing are vague. They're doing this before, yes, you read that right, before the man's conviction for murder.

It seems like overkill, pardon the pun, to worry so much about the execution of a prisoner before achieving a conviction. It's difficult to understand why there's such a rush. When the death penalty is involved, justice is seldom swift. A recent South Dakota Searchlight story about the plight of Amir Beaudion Jr. highlights all the lawyering going on for a penalty that's rarely used in South Dakota.

Some states use the death penalty early and often. That hasn't been the case in South Dakota where the death penalty was first used on March 1, 1877, when Jack McCall was hanged for killing Wild Bill Hickok. In the 146 years since then, the death penalty has been used in South Dakota 19 times. The most recent was on Nov. 4, 2019, with the execution of Charles Rhines for the murder of Donovan Schaeffer.

Although it is seldom used in this state, the death penalty can be a topic of debate. In the 2016 legisla-

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 22 of 102

tive session, a bill to abolish the death penalty got a lengthy hearing by the Senate State Affairs Committee. The bill's main sponsor was Vermillion Republican Arthur Rusch, a former circuit court judge. In his role as judge, Rusch carried out a jury's verdict and sentenced Donald Moeller to die for the murder of 9-year-old Becky O'Connell.

It was clear that Rusch was still feeling the emotional effects of sentencing another man to die. He also noted the cost to counties that host a death penalty case, explaining that if death is on the line, the sitting judge will make sure that the defendant has a first-class defense.

A proponent of the bill was Rep. Timothy Johns, a Republican from Lead who had also served as a circuit court judge. Johns noted the irony of a pro-life state like South Dakota having a death penalty. Former state Attorney General Roger Tellinghuisen spoke in favor of the bill, noting that while he backed the death penalty as a young prosecutor he came to believe that it wasn't a deterrent for criminals.

Speaking against the bill was Marty Jackley, who was then and is once again the state's attorney general. He explained that the penalty is used only against the most deserving criminals. Also speaking against the bill was Lynette Johnson, the wife of corrections officer Ronald Johnson, who was beaten to death by Rodney Berget and Eric Robert. Robert was executed in 2012; Berget in 2018.

After lengthy testimony, the committee rejected the bill and South Dakota's death penalty lives on to this day. But, like any relic, it is rarely taken out and used.

A recent op-ed in the Washington Post was written by two former governors of Alabama, one Republican and one Democrat. They both presided over executions during their tenures as governor and now have come to regret it. They noted research by the Death Penalty Information Center that says one person on death row is exonerated for every 8.3 executions. That means that the wrong judgment is levied about 12% of the time. If those numbers hold true through the ages, that means there's a statistical chance that two of the people executed in South Dakota were not guilty.

The death penalty gets more of a workout in Alabama than it does in South Dakota. In Alabama, 167 people are on death row. In South Dakota, there's one. The lone inmate on death row, still fighting his conviction in the courts, is Briley Piper, convicted of murder in 2000.

Consider the ever-mounting cost of Piper's court battles. Include the fact that South Dakota's death penalty obviously wasn't a big enough deterrent to keep Piper from participating in the murder of Chester Allan Poage. It all adds up to a rarely used law that isn't worth having on the books.

South Dakota banned the death penalty in 1915 only to bring it back in 1939. With only one prisoner on death row, it may be time to consider banning it again. If nothing else, a new ban would squelch the oddball debate about whether a man with an I.Q. of 60, who has yet to be convicted of murder, should be eligible for a state execution.

*Dana Hess spent more than 25 years in South Dakota journalism, editing newspapers in Redfield, Milbank and Pierre. He's retired and lives in Brookings, working occasionally as a freelance writer.*

## On a record day in D.C. for smoke pollution, U.S. Senate panel debates wildfire strategy

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - JUNE 8, 2023 5:02 PM

As smoke from Canadian wildfires caused the most hazardous air conditions on record in the Washington, D.C., area on Thursday, members of the U.S. Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee said that Congress should lift federal firefighter pay and encourage logging to reduce the risk of future blazes.

"Smoke from the wildfires burning right now in Canada has been affecting the skies, as you can see outside," committee Chairman Joe Manchin III, a West Virginia Democrat, said. "And if you've been outside, you can sure taste it."

Administration officials at the hearing, which was scheduled before massive fires in southeastern Canada drifted to major East Coast cities this week, appealed for more funding for federal wildland firefighters.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 23 of 102

Members of both parties on the committee also pushed for allowing more logging to reduce fire risk in overgrown forests.

Several members of the panel commented on the timing of the hearing as a haze descended on the nation's capital. The meeting was scheduled before smoke moved into East Coast cities, creating eerie images and putting more than 100 million people in the U.S. under Air Quality Index alerts, according to a White House fact sheet.

While smoky conditions are more common in the Western U.S. and Canada, the more densely populated East Coast is rarely affected. Smoke this week has lingered from New England to North Carolina.

Some members from Western states said the experience should help people in Washington and New York understand common conditions in Western summers.

"I think America is waking up — at least on the East Coast — to this problem," Washington state Democrat Maria Cantwell said. "And we certainly have known all about it on the West Coast for some time now."

"It's really appropriate to be holding this hearing," Idaho Republican Jim Risch said. "For those of you who live on the East Coast, welcome to our air in the West. This is common. I don't remember a summer in Boise when we haven't had smoke."

In a written statement, President Joe Biden called the smoke "another stark reminder of the impacts of climate change."

Biden has sent U.S. firefighting personnel and equipment to help with the fires, especially in Quebec, he said. He also spoke Wednesday with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to offer more support, he said.

The president said the U.S. Transportation Department was watching impacts on commercial flights.

In addition, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency was monitoring air quality in affected areas. Biden noted citizens can see readings at the ZIP code level at [airnow.gov](http://airnow.gov) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was updating public health guidance.

## **Firefighter 'pay cliff'**

Biden has also pushed for a permanent pay raise for federal wildland firefighters.

The bipartisan infrastructure law that he championed and signed in 2021 included a two-year raise, but agencies are now facing a "pay cliff," Jeffrey Rupert, the director of the U.S. Interior Department's Office of Wildland Management, told the Senate panel.

"The bill funding is estimated to run out at the end of this fiscal year," Rupert said. "That could have a devastating effect on not only our firefighter morale, but certainly our ability to recruit and retain firefighters."

More than 4,000 firefighters at Interior received a boost in pay from the infrastructure law's temporary supplement, Rupert said. Interior employs more than 5,000 wildland firefighters, making it the second-largest federal firefighting workforce behind the U.S. Forest Service's 10,000 firefighters.

The Forest Service aspires to hire nearly 1,000 more firefighters in the next fiscal year, Jaelith Hall-Rivera, the agency's deputy chief of state, private, and tribal forestry, said at the hearing.

Having the supplemental pay expire "would be absolutely catastrophic," Hall-Rivera told Nevada Democrat Catherine Cortez Masto. A union representing Forest Service workers has said as many as 30% to 50% of Forest Service firefighters would leave to find better wages elsewhere, Hall-Rivera said.

## **'Let's harvest' forests**

But some Republicans said the administration has already spent too much ineffectively and indicated they opposed further funding increases, saying federal efforts should instead be on overhauling policy to allow more tree harvesting.

"It is unsustainable to keep throwing more and more money and resources at suppression without dramatically increasing mitigation," ranking Republican John Barrasso of Wyoming said. "America's wildfire crisis will continue to escalate until our forests are properly managed. Our forests are overgrown and they are unhealthy."

Barrasso did say wildland firefighters "have been asked to do too much for too little in return" and should be "fully supported and compensated."

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 24 of 102

House Natural Resources Chairman Bruce Westerman, a Republican from Arkansas, used similar critiques of the Biden administration's approach in a June 2 statement on the approaching 2023 fire season.

"It is encouraging to see that President Biden and some in his administration are recognizing the need for forest management," Westerman said. "Until we make these long-term changes, land managers will continue having to sacrifice ounces of prevention for pounds of cure, all of which costs more and more money while doing nothing to mitigate the underlying issues."

Barrasso said Thursday more trees should be removed from overgrown forests. Crowded forests can fuel more intense fires that spread more rapidly.

Hall-Rivera and Wyoming interim State Forester Kelly Norris agreed that forests should see more "active management," which includes cutting down some trees.

Manchin, a centrist Democrat, agreed, saying that overgrown forests should be used for timber products. "Let's harvest," he said near the end of the hearing. "It doesn't cost anything. We make money and we solve both problems."

## Climate connection

Forest overgrowth, the product of a century of aggressive fire suppression, has contributed to worsening wildfires, experts say.

A changing climate, largely the product of carbon emissions from fossil fuels and other sources, has also worsened conditions.

Periods of lengthy, extreme drought have dried forests, Rupert said. Drier trees are more susceptible to fire.

"That absolutely is a huge part of driving these catastrophic megafires that we're experiencing," he said. U.S. Sen. Martin Heinrich, a Democrat from New Mexico, which saw record wildfires last year, said effects of the drier climate are noticeable.

"There are times when there's more moisture in a two-by-four at Home Depot than there is in a standing live ponderosa pine in our forests in New Mexico," he said.

Heinrich also said he supported active management, but said to be effective, such treatments should focus on removing smaller trees that can be "ladder" fuels and leave the large standing trees that sequester carbon.

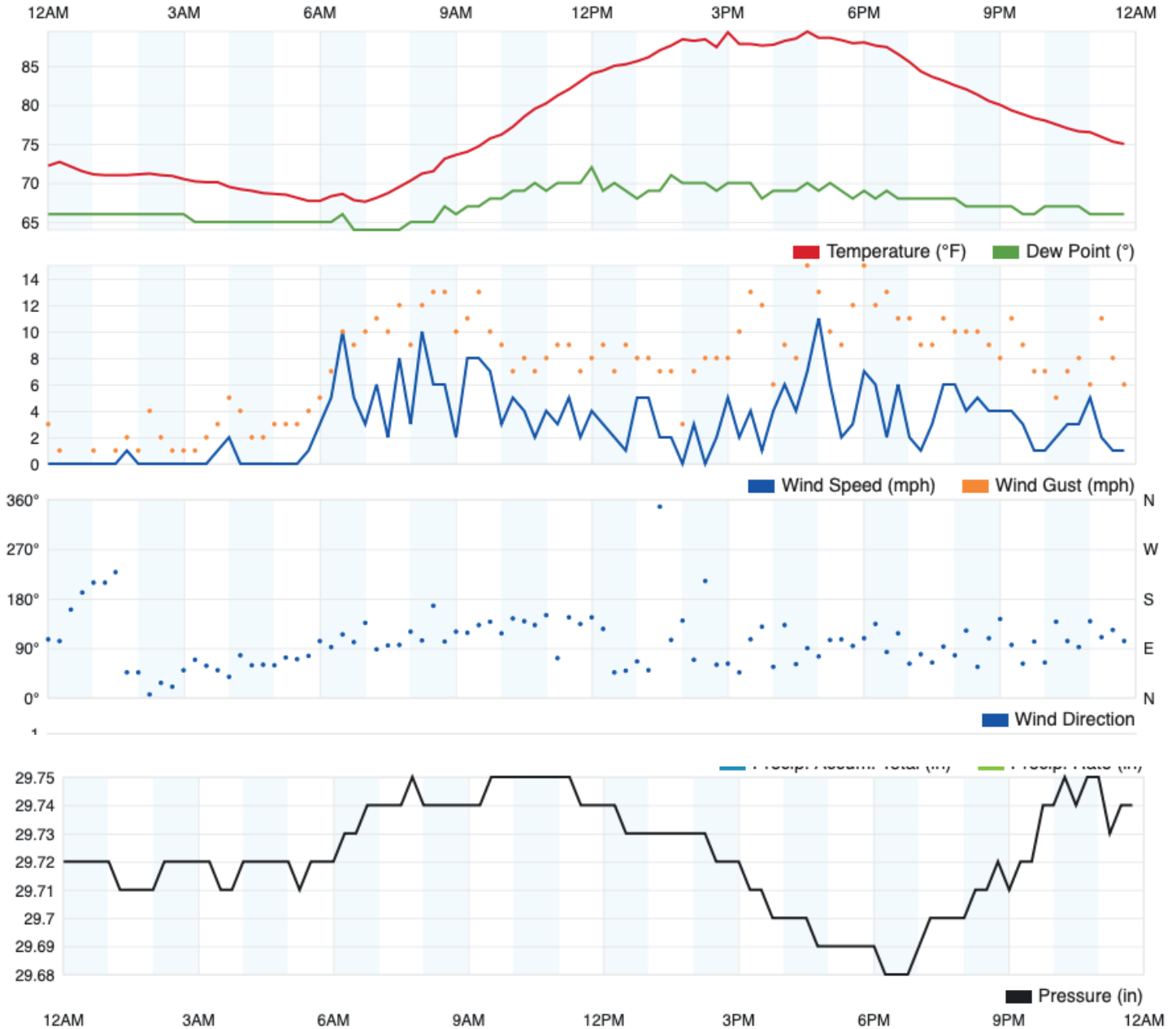
*Jacob covers federal policy as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Based in Oregon, he focuses on Western issues. His coverage areas include climate, energy development, public lands and infrastructure.*



# Groton Daily Independent








Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 25 of 102

## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



# Broton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 26 of 102

Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
 50%	 40%	 20%				
Chance T-storms	Chance T-storms	Slight Chance T-storms and Breezy	Mostly Clear and Breezy	Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny
High: 83 °F	Low: 61 °F	High: 78 °F	Low: 52 °F	High: 76 °F	Low: 49 °F	High: 82 °F



## A Nice Cool Down Expected This Weekend

June 9, 2023  
4:59 AM

### Maximum Temperature Forecast

	6/9	6/10	6/11	6/12	6/13	6/14	6/15	6/16
	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
Aberdeen	84	79	77	83	85	89	86	82
Britton	82	77	74	79	86	87	87	77
Brookings	80	76	73	77	84	86	86	80
Chamberlain	91	78	78	81	86	89	88	85
Clark	79	75	72	77	83	85	86	83
Eagle Butte	85	75	75	78	82	85	81	81
Ellendale	80	76	75	81	83	87	83	78
Eureka	82	76	76	80	86	87	82	78
Gettysburg	84	77	75	78	84	86	82	82
Huron	86	80	78	82	88	90	90	88
Kennebec	89	76	76	80	84	87	85	86
McIntosh	79	73	73	77	82	85	82	79
Milbank	81	80	75	80	86	88	85	81
Miller	84	76	75	78	84	87	85	85
Mobridge	85	79	78	82	87	89	84	84
Murdo	89	73	74	78	82	86	87	84
Pierre	92	81	80	83	88	91	87	84
Redfield	84	78	77	80	86	89	90	83
Sisseton	83	79	75	81	87	89	85	79
Watertown	80	77	74	78	85	87	87	80
Webster	80	75	72	77	83	85	84	76
Wheaton	82	79	75	81	87	89	85	79

\*Table values in °F



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

After one more day of scattered showers and thunderstorms, a cold front's passage southward through the region will signal the beginning of drier and cooler conditions over central and northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota for Saturday and Sunday and Monday.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 27 of 102

## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 90 °F at 4:43 PM

Low Temp: 68 °F at 5:56 AM

Wind: 15 mph at 4:44 PM

Precip: : 0.41 this morning

Day length: 15 hours, 39 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 100 in 2016

Record Low: 33 in 1915

Average High: 79

Average Low: 54

Average Precip in June.: 1.02

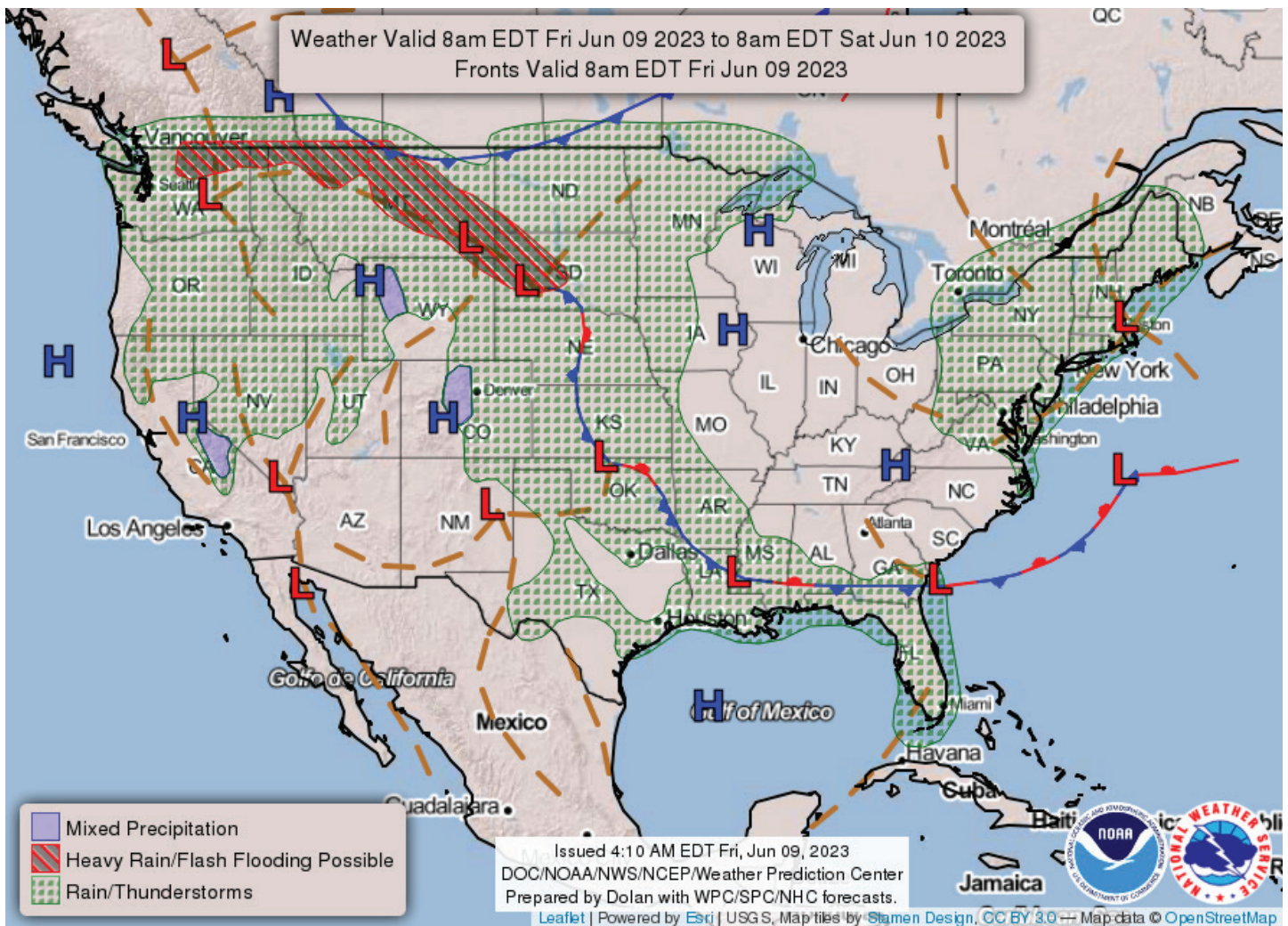
Precip to date in June.: 0.52

Average Precip to date: 8.27

Precip Year to Date: 8.42

Sunset Tonight: 9:21:10 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:41:57 AM



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 28 of 102

## Today in Weather History

June 9, 1957: Southwest of Faulkton, one of four funnel clouds finally touched down and cut an unusual path to the northeast. One home was reduced to "matchsticks and tidbits." The tornado strength was an F3.

June 9, 1968: A brief F2 tornado moved northeast from 6 miles northeast of Britton. Barns were destroyed, and trees were uprooted on three farms. Two cars were picked up and thrown into a ditch. One person in a car was hospitalized. Damage was estimated at \$150,000 to property and another \$80,000 to crops.

June 9, 1972: A steady flow of warm moist air near the surface fed storms and anchored them against the Black Hills for six to eight hours. A flash flood killed 238 people in the Rapid City area after as much as fifteen inches of rain fell over the eastern Black Hills.

1953 - A tornado hit the town of Worcester MA killing ninety persons. The northeastern states usually remain free of destructive tornadoes, however in this case a low pressure system, responsible for producing severe thunderstorms in Michigan and Ohio the previous day, brought severe weather to New Hampshire and central Massachusetts. The tornado, up to a mile in width at times, tracked 46 miles through Worcester County. It mangled steel towers built to withstand winds of 375 mph. Debris from the tornado fell in the Boston area, and adjacent Atlantic Ocea. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1966: Hurricane Alma made landfall over the eastern Florida panhandle becoming the earliest hurricane to make landfall on the United States mainland.

1972 - A cloudburst along the eastern slopes of the Black Hills of South Dakota produced as much as 14 inches of rain resulting in the Rapid City flash flood disaster. The rains, which fell in about four hours time, caused the Canyon Lake Dam to collapse. A wall of water swept through the city drowning 237 persons, and causing more than 100 million dollars property damage. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Lightning struck Tire Mountain near Denver CO, destroying two million tires out of a huge pile of six million tires. Thunderstorms spawned three tornadoes around Denver, and a man was killed at Conifer CO when strong thunderstorm winds lifted up a porch and dropped it on him. A thunderstorm near Compton MD produced two inch hail, and high winds which destroyed twenty barns and ten houses injuring five persons. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from North Carolina to the Central Gulf Coast Region. Hail in North Carolina caused more than five million dollars damage to property, and more than sixty million dollars damage to crops. Hail three and a half inches in diameter was reported at New Bern NC. Thunderstorms in the Central High Plains produced eighteen inches of hail at Fountain CO. The temperature at Del Rio TX soared to an all-time record high of 112 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Severe weather abated for a date, however, showers and thunderstorms continued to drench the eastern U.S. with torrential rains. Milton, FL, was deluged with 15.47 inches in 24 hours. Record heat and prolonged drought in south central Texas left salt deposits on power lines and insulators near the coast, and when nighttime dew caused arcing, the city of Brownsville was plunged into darkness. (The National Weather Summary)

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 29 of 102

Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### THE FOUR "T'S" OF LIFE

Writing in his diary, a young man predicted his future: "Someday I'm going to do something special with my life. I will become famous!"

Years later, an old man said to his family, "I could have done great things with my life, but I didn't. I am so sorry. I wish I had. I am a failure."

What a tragic disclosure! The old man now talking was once the young man dreaming

God gives each of us a limited number of days, a select number of skills, and with them the ability to do something honorable. None of us know the number of our days or the length of our life. Some of us never develop the skills God has given us. Many do not invest the talents God has given them wisely, wasting their lives on the frivolous unaware of God's gifts.

An important question to ask ourselves every day is this: "What am I going to do with the time, the talents and treasures God has given me today?" For this day may be our last.

We have no assurance of tomorrow. We may lose the skills that we have through a tragedy or our treasures may be taken from us without warning. When we attach our lives to God's power and His plan, we will have no regrets. Our lives will honor God and bless others.

Prayer: Teach us, Lord, to be faithful to You and to make the most of all You have given us. May we take Your gifts, invest them wisely, and do what honors You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take. Proverbs 3:5-6



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

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 30 of 102

## 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

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 31 of 102

## The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 32 of 102



## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:  
06.06.23

6 12 23 29 57 4

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$240,000,000**

NEXT 15 Hrs 55 Mins 3  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:  
06.07.23

9 12 21 22 26 9

All Star Bonus: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$3,700,000**

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 55  
DRAW: Mins 3 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
06.08.23

12 32 38 42 46 6

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

NEXT 15 Hrs 25 Mins 3  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
06.07.23

1 19 20 22 24

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$90,000**

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 55  
DRAW: Mins 3 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
06.07.23

29 44 55 62 66 7

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

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 54  
DRAW: Mins 3 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:  
06.07.23

16 21 29 53 66 2

Power Play: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$308,000,000**

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 54  
DRAW: Mins 4 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)



## News from the Associated Press

### **A dam collapses and thousands face the deluge — often with no help — in Russian-occupied Ukraine**

By ILLIA NOVIKOV, YURAS KARMANAU and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — For days, the Ukrainian teenager has waited in the attic, just down the street from the cemetery of her flooded town, marking time with her 83-year-old grandfather and two other elderly people and hoping for help to escape the deluge of a catastrophic dam collapse.

But help is slow in coming to Oleshky, a Russian-occupied town across the Dnieper River from the city of Kherson with a prewar population of 24,000, according to those stranded and their desperate Ukrainian rescuers. Russian forces are taking rescuers' boats, they say. Some say the soldiers will only help people with Russian passports.

"Russian soldiers are standing at the checkpoints, preventing (rescuers) from approaching the most-affected areas and taking away the boats," said one volunteer, Yaroslav Vasiliev. "They are afraid of saboteurs, they suspect everyone."

So 19-year-old Yektarina But and the three elderly people with her simply wait, along with thousands of others believed to be trapped by floodwaters spread across 600 square kilometers (230 square miles) of the Kherson region. About two-thirds of the flooded areas are in territory occupied by Russia, officials said.

The group in the attic have no electricity, no running water, no food. The battery on But's cellphone is dying.

"We are afraid that no one will know about our deaths," she said in a brief cellphone interview, her voice trembling.

"Everything around us is flooded," she said. "There is still no help." Her grandfather, who had suffered a stroke, was running out of medicine, she said. One woman with her, a neighbor's grandmother, could not move on her own.

Others have been turned away from rescue.

Viktorina Mironova-Baka said she has been in touch from Germany with relatives stuck in the flooded region.

"My relatives said that Russian soldiers were coming up to the house today by boat, but they said they would only take those with Russian passports," she told The Associated Press. Her grandmother, aunt and more than a dozen other people are taking shelter in the attic of a two-story house.

Details of life in Russian-occupied Ukraine are often unclear. The AP could not independently verify reports of boat seizures or that only Russians were being evacuated, but the account is in line with reporting by independent Russian media.

It's a sharp contrast to Ukrainian-controlled territory flooded by the dam collapse. Authorities there have aggressively evacuated civilians and brought in emergency supplies. On Thursday, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy traveled to the area to assess the damage. Russian President Vladimir Putin "has no plans at the current moment" to visit affected Moscow-occupied areas, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told journalists.

This region has suffered terribly since Russia invaded Ukraine early last year, enduring sometimes-relentless artillery and missile attacks.

The latest disaster began Tuesday, when the Kakhovka hydroelectric dam, roughly 80 kilometers (50 miles) upstream from Oleshky, collapsed, sending torrents of water down the Dnieper River and across the war's front lines.

Officials say more than 6,000 people have been evacuated from dozens of inundated cities, towns and villages on both sides of the river. But the true scale of the disaster remains unclear for a region that was once home to tens of thousands of people.

Officials on both sides indicated that about 16 people were known to have died, but the figures could not be independently verified. Oleshky's Ukrainian mayor, Yevhen Ryshchuk, said corpses were floating

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 34 of 102

to the surface.

Many of the survivors are homeless, and tens of thousands are without drinking water.

The floods ruined crops, displaced land mines, caused widespread environmental damage, and set the stage for long-term electricity shortages.

Ukraine says Russia destroyed the dam with explosives. Russia accuses Ukraine of destroying it with a missile strike.

A drone flown Wednesday by an AP team over the dam's wreckage revealed none of the scorch marks or shrapnel scars typical of a bombardment. The bulk of the dam itself is now submerged, and The AP images offered a limited snapshot, making it difficult to rule out any scenario. The dam also had been weakened by Russian neglect and water had been washing over it for weeks. It had been under Russian control since the invasion in February 2022.

Compounding the tragedy, Russia has been shelling areas hit by the flooding, including the front-line city of Kherson. On Thursday, Russian shelling echoed not far from a square in Kherson where emergency crews and volunteers were dispensing aid. Some evacuation points in the city were hit, wounding nine people, according to Ukrainian officials.

Russia claims that the Ukrainians also have been shelling flood-hit areas that Moscow controls. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov praised the "selfless work" of Russian emergency teams helping victims of the flooding, noting that they have been working under constant Ukrainian shelling.

"People who suffered from the flooding have been killed by the shelling, including a pregnant woman," Peskov said.

The floodwaters have irrevocably changed the landscape downstream, and shifted the dynamic of the 15-month-old war.

Ryshchuk, the Oleshky mayor, said that by Thursday afternoon water levels were beginning to fall, but roughly 90% of the city remained flooded.

Ryshchuk fled after Russian forces tried to force him to collaborate, but he remains in close contact with people in and around the city.

Russia says it is helping the region's civilians. Moscow-appointed regional Gov. Vladimir Saldo claimed over 4,000 people had been evacuated from the flood zones. He shared a video showing empty beds in shelters prepared for evacuees.

Ryshchuk dismisses such talk.

He said some people trying to leave flooded areas were forced back by Russian soldiers who accused them of being "waiters" — people waiting for Ukraine to reclaim control of the region.

Others, who called the Russian-controlled emergency services, were told they would have to wait for help, he said.

"That's it," he said. "Yesterday, some Russians came in the morning, took a few people off the roofs, filmed a video, and left. That's everything they have done as of today."

The help that made it through has been scattered.

Ukrainian military footage, for instance, showed their forces dropping a bottle of water from a drone to a boy trapped with his mother and sister in the attic of their home near Oleshky. Ukrainian soldiers later evacuated the family and their pets to the city of Kherson, National Police reported.

Much of the help is being organized by volunteers communicating on the encrypted app Telegram. Messages about stranded people, often trapped on the roofs of their houses, appear in these groups every few minutes. Most are posted by relatives in safer areas.

Just one of these volunteer groups has a map showing over 1,000 requests to locate and rescue people, mostly in Oleshky and the nearby town of Hola Prystan.

A woman helping with one of the groups, who spoke on condition her name not be used for fear of reprisals from the Russian occupiers, shared a message with an AP journalist.

"We were looking for a person named Serhii Borzov," the message read. "He was found. Unfortunately, dead. Our condolences to the relatives."

Karmanau reported from Tallinn, Estonia. Arhirova reported from Warsaw, Poland.

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

## **Giant inflatable ducks make a splash in Hong Kong as pop-art project returns after 10 years**

By KANIS LEUNG Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Two giant inflatable ducks made a splash in Hong Kong's Victoria Harbor on Friday, marking the return of a pop-art project that sparked a frenzy in the city a decade ago.

The two 18-meter-tall yellow ducks by Dutch artist Florentijn Hofman resemble the bath toys many played with in their childhood. Shortly after their launch, dozens of residents and tourists flocked to the promenade near the government headquarters in Admiralty to snap photos of the ducks.

Hofman said he hopes the art exhibition brings joy to the city and connects people as they make memories together.

"Double duck, double luck," he said. "In a world where we suffered from a pandemic, wars and political situations, I think it is the right moment to bring back the double luck."

The inflatable ducks will stay in Hong Kong for about two weeks.

Many Hong Kongers at the promenade recalled the happiness his work brought to the shopping district of Tsim Sha Tsui in 2013. Some were excited to see a pair of ducks on Friday instead of just one duck like the earlier exhibition.

Among the visitors was artist Laurence Lai, who brought paint brushes to make watercolors of the ducks. Lai said the city was full of negative vibes in recent years during the COVID-19 pandemic and that it's time for the city to move on.

"With life returning to normal, the ducks can bring back some positivity," the 50-year-old said.

Shenzhen resident Eva Yang and her young daughters were also happy to see the ducks, saying they made their sightseeing in Hong Kong more memorable.

"They're spectacular," Yang said.

In 2013, residents and tourists packed streets near the Tsim Sha Tsui pier to catch a glimpse of Hofman's duck.

That duck's stint in Hong Kong unintentionally turned political on the social media platform Weibo around the anniversary of Beijing's Tiananmen crackdown in 1989. Chinese censors blocked searches for the term "big yellow duck" after netizens shared an image in which the tanks in the iconic "Tank man" image were replaced with a line of oversized giant rubber ducks.

Hofman's rubber ducks have been on a world tour since 2007.

## **Child victims of stabbing attack in France in critical but stable condition, president visits**

PARIS (AP) — France's president traveled Friday to the side of families traumatized by the savage stabbings of four very young children, all said to be in stable condition after emergency surgery, while investigators worked to unravel the motives of a Syrian man taken into custody.

President Emmanuel Macron and his wife Brigitte traveled together to a hospital treating three of the four children who suffered life-threatening knife wounds in Thursday's still unexplained attack in and around a play park in the Alpine city of Annecy.

Macron's prime minister, Elisabeth Borne, said all four children — aged between 22 months and 3 years — underwent surgery and "are under constant medical surveillance."

"Their situation is stable," she said.

Government spokesman Olivier Veran, a medical doctor by training, said two of the children remain in critical condition.

Most of the children were rushed after the attack to a hospital in the French Alpine city of Grenoble — the first stop for Macron and his wife on Friday morning. They did not speak to reporters as they went inside.

The fourth injured child was being treated in Geneva, in neighboring Switzerland.

Two of the four children are French and the other two were tourists — one British, the other Dutch.

Two adults also suffered knife wounds — life-threatening for one of them, authorities said. One of the adults was injured both with a knife and by a shot fired by police as they were detaining the suspected attacker.

The suspect, a 31-year-old Syrian with refugee status in Sweden, remains in custody. Psychiatrists are evaluating him, Veran said.

The helplessness of the young victims and the savagery of the attack sickened France, and drew international condemnation.

French authorities said the suspect had recently been refused asylum in France because Sweden had already granted him permanent residency and refugee status a decade ago.

Lead prosecutor Line Bonnet-Mathis said the man's motives were unknown but did not appear to be terrorism-related. He was armed with a folding knife, she said.

## **Philippines evacuates people near Mayon Volcano, where more unrest indicates eruption may be coming**

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — Philippine troops, police and rescue workers began forcibly evacuating residents near Mayon Volcano on Friday as its increasing unrest indicated a violent eruption of one of the country's most active volcanoes is possible within weeks or days.

The area within a 6-kilometer (3.7-mile) radius of Mayon's crater is supposed to be off-limits due to possible volcanic emissions, lava flows, rockfalls and other hazards. But many poor villagers have built houses and tended farms in Mayon's danger zone over the years.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said an evacuation of residents from the permanent danger zone was underway and promised to provide aid to the displaced until the crisis ended.

"Right now, what we are doing is preparing and moving people away from the area so that, should the time come, I hope it doesn't happen...we're ready," Marcos told reporters. "But unfortunately science tells us that may happen because the lid or the cap on top of the lava is slowly rising."

Authorities had raised the alert level for the volcano in northeastern Albay province Thursday after superheated streams of gas, debris and rocks cascaded down its upper slope, indicating activity below the surface that could precede a hazardous eruption.

Conditions have advanced a little bit more Friday, although lava hasn't started to flow, Marcos said.

The numbers of residents being evacuated weren't immediately available.

A tourist draw for its picturesque conical shape, 2,462-meter (8,077-foot) Mayon last erupted violently in 2018, displacing tens of thousands of villagers.

Government volcano experts raised the alert level around Mayon to the third of a five-step warning system Thursday after detecting an increasing number of rockfalls and at least two volcanic earthquakes in recent days.

Six brief volcanic gas and ash emissions streamed down the volcano's southern gullies about 2 kilometers (1.2 miles) from the crater Friday. Numerous rockfalls and thin ash and steam plumes that drifted south were also observed, the government volcanology institute said.

Mayon is at "a relatively high level of unrest as magma is at the crater and hazardous eruption is possible within weeks or even days," the institute said in its latest update Friday morning.

Mayon is one of the most restive of two dozen active volcanoes across the Philippines.

Officials also were closely monitoring Taal Volcano south of Manila and Mount Kanlaon on central Negros island due to renewed signs of restiveness.

A number of villages in three towns near Taal suspended classes Wednesday due to thick smog emanating from the volcano and residents were advised to limit outdoor activities and wear masks for protection.

The Philippines lies along the Pacific "Ring of Fire," the area around the ocean rim where tectonic plates

meet that is prone to earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. A long-dormant volcano, Mount Pinatubo, blew its top north of Manila in 1991 in one of the biggest volcanic eruptions of the 20th century, killing hundreds of people.

## **A little white pill, Captagon, gives Syria's Assad a strong tool in winning over Arab states**

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — A little white pill has given Syrian President Bashar Assad powerful leverage with his Arab neighbors, who have been willing to bring him out of pariah status in hopes he will stop the flow of highly addictive Captagon amphetamines out of Syria.

Western governments have been frustrated by the red-carpet treatment Arab countries have given Assad, fearing that their reconciliation will undermine the push for an end to Syria's long-running civil war.

But for Arab states, halting the Captagon trade is a high priority. Hundreds of millions of pills have been smuggled over the years into Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Arab countries, where the drug is used recreationally and by people with physically demanding jobs to keep them alert.

Saudi Arabia has intercepted large shipments of pills hidden in crates of fake plastic oranges and in hollowed out pomegranates — even pills crushed and molded to look like traditional clay bowls.

Analysts say Assad likely hopes that by making even limited gestures against the drug he can gain reconstruction money, further integration in the region and even pressure for an end to Western sanctions.

The vast majority of the world's Captagon is produced in Syria, with smaller production in neighboring Lebanon. Western governments estimate the illegal trade in the pills generates billions of dollars.

The United States, Britain and European Union accuse Assad, his family and allies, including Lebanon's militant Hezbollah group, of facilitating and profiting from the trade. That has given Assad's rule a massive financial lifeline at a time when the Syrian economy is crumbling, they say. The Syrian government and Hezbollah deny the accusations.

Syria's neighbors have been the biggest and most lucrative market for the drug. As the industry flourished, experts say Damascus in recent years saw Captagon as more than just a cash cow.

"The Assad regime realized that this is something they can weaponize for political gain ... and that's when production started being on a large scale," said Karam Shaar, a senior fellow at Washington-based New Lines Institute.

Stopping the trade has been a top demand of Arab countries in their talks with Syria on ending its political isolation. Syria was readmitted last month from the Arab League, from which it was suspended in 2011 because of Assad's brutal crackdown on protesters. On May 20, Assad received a warm welcome at the Arab League summit in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

A possible sign of the behind-the-scenes trade-offs came on May 8, when airstrikes in southern Syria reduced the home of a well-known drug kingpin to rubble. Merhi al-Ramthan, his wife and six children were killed. Another strike destroyed a suspected Captagon factory outside the city of Daraa, near the Jordanian border.

Jordan was likely behind the strike, with Assad's consent, say activists and experts. The strike came one day after the Arab League formally re-admitted Syria, a step Jordan helped broker.

"Assad gave assurances that he would stop the regime from supporting and protecting smuggling networks," a former brigadier general of Jordan's intelligence service, Saud Al-Sharafat, told The Associated Press. "For example, he facilitated the disposal of al-Ramthan."

Jordan, he said, sees the Captagon trade as "a threat to both security and communal peace."

In public comments, Jordan's foreign minister, Ayman Safadi, refused to confirm or deny whether his country was behind the airstrikes but said it was willing to take military action to curb drug smuggling.

Arab states, many of which had backed the rebels trying to oust Assad, say they share the goal of pushing him to make peace. Ahead of the Jeddah summit, Jordan hosted a meeting of top diplomats from Syria,

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 38 of 102

Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Egypt, and the long agenda included setting a roadmap for peace talks and the return of millions of Syrian refugees.

But it was on Captagon where the gathering made the most progress. Syria pledged to clamp down on smuggling, and a regional security coordination committee was agreed on. Days later, Syrian state media reported that police quashed a Captagon smuggling operation in the city of Aleppo, discovering 1 million pills hiding in a pickup truck.

Jordan has intensified surveillance along the Syrian border in recent years and has raided drug dealers. Jordanian troops killed 27 suspected smugglers in a fierce gun battle in January.

Smuggling routes have made untangling drug networks more difficult. A member of an Iraqi militia told the AP that militias in Iraq's desert Anbar province, which borders Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, have been crucial for Captagon smuggling. He spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the media.

Syrian lawmaker Abboud al-Shawakh denied the government profits from the drug trade and insisted authorities are trying vigorously to crack down on smuggling.

"Our country is used as a regional transit route as there are border crossings out of the state's control," al-Shawakh told the AP. He alleged that only armed opposition groups are involved in Captagon dealing.

Syrian opposition groups are believed by many observers to have some involvement in drug smuggling. Western governments, however, accuse Assad's relatives and allies of a direct role in Captagon production and trade and have imposed sanctions on a string of individuals close to Assad.

While Assad may be willing to move against some parts of the drug trade, he has little incentive to crush it completely without winning something in return from Arab states, al-Sharafat said.

A Saudi official denied reports that Riyadh had offered billions of dollars to Damascus in exchange for a crackdown. But he added that whatever the kingdom might offer Syria would be less costly than the damage that Captagon has caused among Saudi youth. He spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

The U.S. and other Western governments fear that the Arab states' normalization with Syria undermines attempts to push Assad to make concessions to end Syria's conflict. They want Assad to follow a peace roadmap outlined in U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254, passed unanimously in 2015, which calls for talks with the opposition, rewriting the constitution and U.N.-monitored elections.

So far, the resolution has gone nowhere. Since it passed, Assad regained control over previously lost territory, confining the opposition to a small corner of the northwest. His grip on power now seems solid, though much of the north and east remains out of his hands, held by U.S.-backed Syrian Kurdish fighters.

Shaar said Assad might use the Captagon card to try to get the U.N. resolution shelved.

Other concessions, like the lifting of Western-led sanctions, would be harder for him to win. While Gulf Arab states won't be able to directly inject cash into Assad's government with the sanctions in place, Shaar said they could funnel money through U.N.-led projects in government-held Syria to get action from Assad against Captagon.

"He will be politicking with Gulf states," Shaar said.

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Associated Press writers Bassem Mroue in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and Qassim Abdul-Zahra in Baghdad, contributed to this report.

## Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis woos GOP Christian voters but stays tight-lipped on his own Catholic faith

By TIFFANY STANLEY Associated Press

GREENVILLE, S.C. (AP) — As Ron DeSantis wrapped up a 12-stop campaign tour that began in an Iowa evangelical church and ended here in a South Carolina convention center, dozens of pastors met backstage to pray for the presidential candidate. Later, to the 1,500 people in the auditorium, DeSantis closed out his stump speech with a paraphrased Bible verse: "I will fight the good fight, I will finish the race, and I

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 39 of 102

will keep the faith.”

The governor’s religious rhetoric and hard-charging policies are at the center of his outreach to white evangelicals — an important voting bloc in the early GOP nominating contests. And yet, when it comes to his own Catholicism, the culture warrior is much more guarded, rarely mentioning the specifics of his faith and practice.

“I don’t think he’s a wear-your-religion-on-your-sleeve kind of guy,” said Brian Burch, president of CatholicVote, a conservative advocacy organization that hosted a rally for DeSantis last fall.

Burch argues DeSantis’ policies are the true measure of his faith, from Florida’s six-week abortion ban to a spate of laws targeting LGBTQ+ rights and gender-affirming care: “Perhaps a good Scripture reference that may describe him is, ‘By their fruits you shall know them.’”

DeSantis officially entered the presidential race last month and is the leading alternative to former President Donald Trump, who remains the dominant force in the GOP for now. But if the Florida governor captures the Republican nomination and takes on Joe Biden, two Catholic presidential candidates will face off for the first time in U.S. history.

Both have publicly clashed with Catholic bishops: DeSantis over immigration and the death penalty; Biden over abortion and LGBTQ+ rights. The current president, though, speaks often about being Catholic. He is known to wear a rosary and is regularly photographed attending Mass in D.C. and on the road — in contrast to DeSantis, who is intensely private about his personal life.

He’s “nominally Catholic,” according to a New York Times essay from the conservative writer Nate Hochman, who later joined the DeSantis campaign. Last year, Hochman wrote that DeSantis is “politically friendly to conservative Christians. But he rarely discusses his religion publicly and almost never in the context of politics.”

The campaign did not respond directly to questions about Hochman’s essay or where the DeSantises go to church in Tallahassee. A spokesperson for Never Back Down, the DeSantis super PAC, did not have information about the governor’s current church attendance.

Maria Sullivan, a supporter who lives in DeSantis’ former congressional district, remembers worshipping regularly with DeSantis and his wife Casey at Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Church when they still lived in Northeast Florida. “He’s a very low-key man, not looking for attention, just there with his family,” she said, recalling them at 7 a.m. Mass with young children in tow.

Sullivan said she attended the baptism of DeSantis’ older daughter at the church. The large, active parish was also a polling place in 2018, and where DeSantis cast his own ballot when he was first elected governor.

DeSantis grew up Catholic. He attended Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic School in Dunedin, Florida, and according to his political memoir, he was expected at church every Sunday. He noted in his book that his mother’s family is so Catholic she counts a nun and a priest among her siblings.

His uncle, a parish priest in Ohio, figures into another of the few religious anecdotes that DeSantis shares for laughs on the campaign trail. After his first inauguration, his uncle baptized their son at the governor’s mansion, using water that the DeSantises had collected from the Sea of Galilee on a congressional trip to Israel. The punchline is that custodial staff threw out the plastic water bottle afterwards, not knowing its holy contents.

It’s during the rare instances when DeSantis talks about trials and tragedy that he gives his most revealing faith responses. He has spoken of the power of prayer in helping his family through his wife’s breast cancer diagnosis and treatment. In March, he agreed with the journalist Piers Morgan when asked if he leaned on his faith after his sister’s death at age 30 from a pulmonary embolism.

“You start to question things that are unjust, like ‘Why did this have to happen?’” DeSantis said. “And you just have to have faith that there’s a plan in place, trust in God, there’s no guarantee that you’re going to have a life without challenges and without heartbreak and that’s just a function of being human.”

In his stump speeches, though, DeSantis sticks to general God-and-country fare, occasionally referencing the Bible and often in ways bolstering his warrior persona, such as telling audiences to “put on the full armor of God.” One of his ads released last year, which was a take on a 1978 Paul Harvey speech, played

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 40 of 102

images of DeSantis while repeating the phrase, "So God made a fighter."

"He deals in vague platitudes about faith and so on, and he very much downplays his Catholicism," said Cary McMullen, a retired journalist and former religion editor of The Ledger in Lakeland, Florida.

In 1960, when anti-Catholic sentiment was more prevalent, then-candidate John F. Kennedy gave a landmark speech to a group of Protestant ministers, pledging he would not take orders from the Catholic Church if elected. For his part, DeSantis has already been willing to defy the Catholic hierarchy on policy.

El Paso Bishop Mark Seitz said DeSantis' recent flights of migrants — taken to California from a Catholic Church shelter at the Texas border — are "reprehensible" and "not morally acceptable."

In 2022, DeSantis attended Mass and met with most of Florida's Catholic bishops during their annual lobbying days in Tallahassee. The bishops urged him to reconsider his immigration policies, in particular his objection to unaccompanied minors, which the Catholic Church cares for in one of its Florida shelters.

"It was a frank exchange," said Miami Archbishop Thomas Wenski, the highest-ranking Catholic official in the state.

DeSantis doubled down in opposition after the meeting, which devolved into competing press conferences by him and Wenski and ended with a DeSantis spokesperson saying the archbishop lied. (DeSantis said it was "disgusting" for Wenski to equate today's immigrant children with Cuban minors who came to Florida 60 years ago. Wenski mistakenly inferred DeSantis said recent unaccompanied minors were "disgusting.")

DeSantis skipped the annual event with the bishops this year while traveling to promote his book in advance of launching his presidential campaign.

The Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops has praised the DeSantis administration on its anti-abortion, school choice and anti-LGBTQ+ policies, while criticizing its support of the death penalty.

No political party is "totally consistent with the gamut of our Catholic interests," Wenski said.

"Biden makes a bigger deal of his Catholicism than DeSantis does," Wenski added, noting "it gives all us bishops heartburn because of his radical abortion stance."

For now, the DeSantis team appears to be focusing their faith outreach on white evangelicals, who vote overwhelmingly Republican. Catholics, on the other hand, are swing voters and not a lock for either party. Never Back Down, the DeSantis super PAC, has brought on senior adviser David Polyansky in part to coordinate grassroots faith outreach — efforts he also led for Ted Cruz, who won the 2016 Iowa caucus thanks to evangelicals.

Bob Vander Plaats, head of The Family Leader and a coveted evangelical endorsement in Iowa, was impressed when he and his wife had lunch with the DeSantis in Tallahassee recently. Asked if the governor talked about his own Catholic faith, Vander Plaats demurred: "No, we really didn't get into a lot of that, other than what we believe are our core values."

Likewise, John Stemberger, an influential evangelical leader in Florida, said he has not discussed the governor's Catholic faith with him, but he has prayed over him before his inauguration. Stemberger's organization, the Florida Family Policy Council, recently gave DeSantis its top award at the group's annual gala.

In the long history of Christian U.S. presidents, many candidates from both parties have shared personal faith stories. Those heartfelt professions used to be integral to courting evangelical voters, but Stemberger said they matter less now than policy.

"So many times, we've seen somebody who says they have faith but then their policy decisions don't reflect what we believe would be the traditional values that come from that faith," Stemberger said.

Trump also has changed the calculus. The man that he has dubbed "DeSanctimonious" offers fewer scandals and far more religious literacy than Trump, who still won over a record number of evangelical voters. Even if DeSantis doesn't share his personal faith journey as easily as Mike Pence or Tim Scott, he still can appeal to conservative Christians.

"You don't have to be Pat Robertson in order to win those votes because Trump isn't," said Michael Binder, a political scientist at the University of North Florida.

After the rally in Greenville, a group of four friends — all previously Trump supporters — said DeSantis won them over that evening.

"He's more palatable," said Tom O'Shields from Easley, S.C. "Mr. DeSantis seems to have what those



Christian voters are going to want without the baggage of Mr. Trump.”

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## **FBI arrests Texas businessman linked to impeachment of state Attorney General Ken Paxton**

By JAKE BLEIBERG and PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — The FBI on Thursday arrested a businessman at the center of the scandal that led to Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton’s historic impeachment, a move that came amid new questions about the men’s dealings raised by financial records the Republican’s lawyers made public to try to clear him of bribery allegations.

Nate Paul, 36, was taken into custody by federal agents and booked into an Austin jail in the afternoon, according to Travis County Sheriff’s Office records. It was not immediately clear what charges led to his arrest, but the records showed he was being held on a federal detainer for a felony.

Paul’s arrest followed a yearslong federal investigation into the Austin real estate developer — a probe that Paxton involved his office in, setting off a chain of events that ultimately led to his impeachment last month.

Lawyers for Paul did not immediately respond to requests for comment. One of Paxton’s defense attorneys, Dan Cogdell, said he had no additional information on the arrest. The FBI declined to comment, and a spokesman for federal prosecutors in West Texas did not respond to inquiries.

FBI agents examining Paul’s troubled real estate empire searched his Austin offices and palatial home in 2019. The next year, eight of Paxton’s top deputies reported the attorney general to the FBI on allegations of bribery and abusing his office to help Paul, including by hiring an outside lawyer to examine the developer’s claims of wrongdoing by federal agents.

The allegations by Paxton’s staff prompted an FBI investigation, which remains ongoing, and are central to articles of impeachment overwhelmingly approved by the GOP-led state House of Representatives.

On Wednesday, Paxton’s defense team showed a packed room of journalists a bank statement that included a 2020 wire transfer purportedly showing him, and not a donor, paying more than \$120,000 for a home renovation.

The wire transfer was dated Oct. 1, 2020 — the same day Paxton’s deputies signed a letter informing the head of human resources at the Texas attorney general’s office that they had reported Paxton to the FBI.

The \$121,000 payment was to Cupertino Builders, whose manager was an associate of Paul, state corporation and court records show.

The company did not incorporate as a business in Texas until more than three weeks after the transaction took place. A company of the same name was formed in Delaware in April of that year, although public filings there do not make clear who is behind it.

Last year a court-appointed overseer for some of Paul’s companies wrote in a report that Cupertino Builders was used for “fraudulent transfers” from his business to Narsimha Raju Sagiraju, who was convicted of fraud in California in 2016. The report described Sagiraju as Paul’s “friend.”

Paul, who also employed a woman with whom Paxton acknowledged having an extramarital affair, has denied bribing Paxton. In a deposition, Paul described Sagiraju as an “independent contractor” and said he didn’t remember how they first met.

The timing of the payment — and the identity of who was paid for renovations at Paxton’s home in Austin — was not publicly known before his new legal team held a news conference Wednesday in which they put financial documents on a projector screen while criticizing the impeachment. They were first reported by The Wall Street Journal.

Tony Buzbee, a prominent Houston attorney who was hired by Paxton over the weekend and led the

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 42 of 102

news conference, said by email Thursday that receipts “clearly demonstrate” Paxton paid for the repairs. He did not address questions about the timing of the payments or Cupertino Builders.

“Without any evidence the politicians leading this sham impeachment falsely accused General Paxton of not paying for the repairs to his home. That is a lie,” Buzbee said.

Since becoming just the third sitting official in Texas history to be impeached, Paxton has attacked the proceedings as politically motivated and rushed, saying he was never given the chance to rebut the accusations in the state House.

“We have the receipts,” Buzbee told reporters Wednesday as the documents flashed onscreen. “This is the type of evidence we tried to offer them once we found out this foolishness was going on.”

Paxton is temporarily suspended from office pending the outcome of a trial in the Texas Senate that is set to begin no later than Aug. 28. The jury will be the members of the 31-seat Senate; one of them, Paxton’s wife, Sen. Angela Paxton, has not said whether she will recuse herself.

The Paxtons purchased the Austin house in 2018. When it was remodeled two years later, Paxton’s former staff alleged in court documents, Paul “was involved in” the work.

Among the 20 articles of impeachment are accusations that Paxton used the power of his office to help Paul over unproven claims of an elaborate conspiracy to steal \$200 million of the developer’s properties. The FBI searched Paul’s home in 2019, but he has not been charged and his attorneys have denied wrongdoing.

The city has no record of building permits from the time of the renovations. A different Austin contractor — not Cupertino Builders — received a federal grand jury subpoena in 2021 for records related to work on Paxton’s home that started in January 2020.

Cupertino Builders was formed in October 2020 and dissolved less than two years later, according to Texas corporation records. Its manager was Sagiraju, who said in a deposition for an unrelated case that he did “consulting” work for Paul’s business and had an email address with Paul’s company.

Sagiraju acknowledged that he served prison time for securities fraud and grand theft in California before moving to Austin, according to a transcript of the deposition. He said he was first introduced to Paul by a mutual friend before his prison term and they later did “a few projects” together.

A lawyer for Sagiraju did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Paxton was separately indicted on securities fraud charges in 2015, though he has yet to stand trial. \_\_\_\_\_

Bleiberg reported from Dallas. Associated Press journalists Adam Kealoha Causey in Dallas and Derek Karikari in New York contributed.

## Pat Robertson united evangelical Christians and pushed them into conservative politics

By BEN FINLEY, PETER SMITH and DEEPA BHARATH Associated Press

NORFOLK, Va. (AP) — Pat Robertson united tens of millions of evangelical Christians through the power of television and pushed them in a far more conservative direction with the personal touch of a folksy minister.

His biggest impact may have been wedding evangelical Christianity to the Republican party, to an extent once unimaginable.

“The culture wars being waged today by just about all the national Republican candidates — that is partly a product of Robertson,” said veteran political analyst Larry Sabato, director of the University of Virginia Center for Politics.

Robertson died Thursday at the age of 93.

Robertson’s reach exploded with the rise of cable in the late 1970s. He galvanized many viewers into a political force when he unsuccessfully ran for president in 1988.

The next year, he created the deeply influential Christian Coalition. He sought to “influence and impact the trajectory of the Republican Party and turn it into a pro-life, pro-family party,” said Ralph Reed, who ran the coalition in the 1990s and now chairs the Faith & Freedom Coalition.

The Christian Coalition helped fuel the “Republican Revolution” of 1994, which saw the GOP take control

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 43 of 102

of the U.S. House and Senate following the 1992 election of President Bill Clinton.

The son of a U.S. senator and a Yale Law School graduate, Robertson made political pronouncements that appalled many, particularly in his later years, placing the ultimate blame for the 9/11 attacks on various liberal movements. He claimed to have participated in prayer to keep a hurricane away from his Virginia base.

"Even Pentecostals, and I've known a lot, they're not usually going to go that far," said Grant Wacker, professor emeritus of Christian history at Duke Divinity School.

When he ran for president, Robertson pioneered the now-common strategy of courting Iowa's network of evangelical Christian churches. He finished in second place in the Iowa caucuses, ahead of Vice President George H.W. Bush.

Robertson later endorsed Bush, who won the presidency. Pursuit of Iowa's evangelicals is now a ritual for Republican hopefuls, including those seeking the White House in 2024.

Reed pointed to former Vice President Mike Pence and Sen. Tim Scott as examples of high-ranking Republicans who are evangelical Christians.

"It's easy to forget when you're living it every day, but there wouldn't have been a single, explicit evangelical at any of those levels 40 years ago in the Republican Party," Reed said.

Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network started airing in 1961 after he bought a bankrupt UHF television station in Portsmouth, Virginia. His long-running show "The 700 Club" began production in 1966.

Robertson coupled evangelism with popular reruns of family-friendly television, which was effective in drawing in viewers so he could promote "The 700 Club," a news and talk show that also featured regular people talking about finding Jesus Christ.

He didn't rely solely on fundraising like other televangelists. Robertson broadcast popular secular shows and ran commercials, said David John Marley, author of the 2007 book "Pat Robertson: An American Life."

"He was the one who made televangelism a real business," Marley said.

Robertson had a soft-spoken style, talking to the camera as if he was a pastor speaking one-on-one and not a preacher behind a pulpit.

When viewers began watching cable television in the late 1970s, "there were only 10 channels and one of them was Pat," Reed said.

His appeal was similar to that of evangelist Billy Graham, who died in 2018 after a career with a towering impact on American religion and politics, said Wacker, of Duke Divinity School.

"He really showed a lot of pastors and other Christians across this country how impactful media can be — to reach beyond the four walls of their churches," said Troy A. Miller, president and CEO of the National Religious Broadcasters.

When he ran for president in 1988, Robertson's masterstroke was insisting that 3 million followers sign petitions before he would decide to run, Robertson biographer Jeffrey K. Hadden told The AP. The tactic gave Robertson an army.

"He asked people to pledge that they'd work for him, pray for him and give him money," Hadden told the AP in 1988.

When he was working on the book as a graduate student in George Washington University in the late 1990s, Marley got unfettered access to Robertson's presidential campaign archives and saw a campaign plagued by internal strife.

"But, he put a lot of effort into his presidential campaign," Marley said, adding that Robertson worked for at least two years to lay the groundwork for his presidential run.

Robertson relished his role as a "kingmaker" and liaison of sorts between top Republican leaders such as Ronald Reagan and evangelical Christians.

"That ended with George W. Bush, who was able to have that conversation on his own," Marley said.

During his 1998 interview with Robertson, Marley said he saw the preacher as someone who was as comfortable with his failings as he was with his accomplishments.

"I saw someone who absolutely at peace with himself," Marley said.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 44 of 102

we're looking at transportation generally, the money is better spent on those systems that people actually use, which in California is roads and highways."

Transit officials are making their pitch by appealing not just to regular riders but also to drivers who could face much more congested traffic if other options are gone. According to Bay Area Rapid Transit, almost twice as many people travel at rush hour under the Bay Bridge by train than over it by car.

Supporters have turned to creative marketing — even staging a mock funeral for transit last weekend in Oakland.

"We're doing our best but not sure what is possible at this point," said Vinita Goyal, executive director of San Francisco Transit Riders, a nonprofit advocacy group.

Legislative leaders have pledged to reject Newsom's \$2 billion in cuts and make it OK for agencies to use some of that money for operations. State Sen. Scott Wiener, a Democrat who represents San Francisco, said that's still not enough.

"In every community in California, there are people who rely on the bus, and they are not the most powerful people. They tend to be lower income. They tend to be nonwhite. They tend to be disproportionately seniors or students," Wiener said. "Why on Earth we would for a minute contemplate allowing these systems to fall apart is beyond me."

San Francisco resident Gabriel Goffman bought his condo last year because it was on three bus lines. One has already closed due to budget constraints and another is on the chopping block.

"I moved here with three buses, and now it's like, 'How many are going to be back?'" said Goffman, 35.

Newsom and state lawmakers have until the end of June to agree to a budget for the new fiscal year that begins July 1. It's possible the negotiations for what to do about public transit agencies could drag on into the fall.

Janno Lieber, chair and CEO of New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority — the nation's largest public transit system — said state leaders saw there was no choice but to save the subway stations, which he called as vital to the city's survival as "air and water."

"Transit is literally existential for New York," Lieber said. "We could see that the federal money was going to run out in '24, and we couldn't allow us to enter into a new fiscal year (not knowing) if we were going to have to massively cut service, fire a bunch of people or dramatically raise fares."

California Assemblymember Phil Ting, a Democrat from San Francisco and chair of the powerful Assembly Budget Committee, questions whether public transit agencies in his state have adequately prepared for the loss of federal funding. He said further state money should come with conditions.

"On the one hand, they're raising the alarms. There's a fiscal cliff," Ting said. "But if you look at their business operations, it's business as usual, which is just not acceptable."

Backers of more money for California transit say its cities don't need to be as reliant on the service as a place like New York to make it a worthy investment for a state that's considering the environmental and economic benefits of reducing automobile traffic.

"This is culture. It takes a long time to change," California state Sen. Ben Allen said. "One way to assure it doesn't catch on is by letting the system fail."

McMurray reported from Chicago.

## Supreme Court voting rights ruling stuns minority voters, who hope it expands their representation

By GARY FIELDS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — This week's Supreme Court decision ordering Alabama to redraw its congressional districts was seen by many minority lawmakers and voting rights activists as a stunning victory with the potential to become a major stepping stone for undoing political maps that dilute the strength of communities of color.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 45 of 102

Hank Sanders, a former Alabama state lawmaker who has long been politically active in the state, knew there would be a decision since the court heard arguments in the case last fall. He was not anticipating being happy with the outcome, given that previous rulings of the conservative-leaning court had essentially gutted some of its most important provisions.

"I was afraid they were going to go ahead and wipe out section 2," he said, referring to the part of the Voting Rights Act at stake in the Alabama case.

He was at his law office Thursday in Selma, scene of one of the most pivotal moments in the Civil Rights Movement, when news of the 5-4 ruling in favor of Alabama's Black voters was announced.

"It was a surprise that was good for my day," he said.

How the decision will affect similar lawsuits against political maps drawn in other states is unclear, although voting rights groups say the ruling provides firm guidance for lower courts to follow.

The court majority found that Alabama concentrated Black voters in one district, while spreading them out among the others to make it much more difficult to elect more than one candidate of their choice. Alabama's Black population is large enough and geographically compact enough to create a second district, the judges found. Just one of its seven congressional districts is majority Black, in a state where more than one in four residents is Black.

Similar maps have been drawn in other states, primary by Republican-controlled legislatures.

Kareem Crayton, the Brennan Center's senior director for voting and representation, called the court's decision "a welcome surprise" and said challenges to the maps in Louisiana and Georgia were the most similar to the Alabama case.

While it was considering the Alabama case, the Supreme Court had placed a hold on a lower court ruling in Louisiana allowing creation of a second majority-Black district. That's now likely to be lifted. A federal judge last year also ruled that some of Georgia's U.S. House and state legislative districts likely violated the Voting Rights Act, but he had allowed the districts to be used in the 2022 elections because it was too close to the election to redraw them.

Maps in all three states could have to be redrawn for the 2024 elections.

Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards, a Democrat, said in a statement that the court's action reaffirmed his own belief that Louisiana's map, which was drawn by the Republican-controlled Legislature, violated the law.

"As I said when I vetoed it, Louisiana's current congressional map violates the Voting Rights Act," he said. "Louisiana's voting population is one-third Black. We know that in compliance with the principles of the Voting Rights Act, Louisiana can have a congressional map where two of our six districts are majority Black."

Rep. Troy Carter, a Black Democrat representing Louisiana's lone district that is majority Black, said the Legislature should immediately convene to draw a second majority-minority district.

"This Supreme Court ruling is a win not just for Alabamians but for Louisianans as well," Carter said in an emailed statement. "Rarely do we get a second chance to get things right — now Louisiana can."

In Georgia, Bishop Reginald Jackson, a plaintiff in one of the lawsuits challenging the state's congressional map, said he was ecstatic when he heard the news about the ruling and hopes it will boost their case.

He said he became involved in the lawsuit amid concerns that the state's Black population had increased while the number of Black congressional representatives had decreased with the last round of redistricting.

"So how could you have less Black representation when you have more Blacks moving into the state than before?" said Jackson, who presides over 534 African Methodist Episcopal churches in Georgia with over 90,000 parishioners

The Alabama case, along with pending lawsuits in Georgia and Louisiana, means Black voters will likely have an opportunity to elect candidates in three additional districts, said Marina Jenkins, executive director of the National Redistricting Foundation, one of the organizations that has spearheaded voting rights challenges in the states.

She said litigation in Texas by other plaintiff groups could mean additional seats there where minority voters "have the opportunity to elect candidates of their choice that don't exist now."

Texas state Rep. Victoria Neave Criado, a Democrat who chairs the Mexican American Legislative Caucus,

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 46 of 102

said the case was a "major win for voting rights."

She said following recent decisions by the current court in other areas she considers fundamental, such as last year's overturning of the constitutional right to abortion, she was concerned about the direction the justices would take with voting rights and was relieved to see Thursday's outcome.

"As we are seeing the Latino community rise in many ways, we want to ensure that Latino power is translated into Latino political power," Neave Criado said.

Latinos and whites share an equal proportion of the Texas population, about 40% each, according to 2022 Census figures.

Nina Perales, vice-president of litigation with the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, said the ruling closes the door on Texas using arguments similar to those made by Alabama as the cases there go forward. Perales leads the litigation for a similar case out of Texas, which is based on the redistricting maps created in 2021.

In addition to the Voting Rights Act challenge to Texas' congressional districts, similar section 2 claims have been brought against numerous voting districts used for state legislatures and local governments around the country.

Attorney Mark Gaber argued a case this week alleging Washington's state legislative districts diluted the voting strength of Hispanic residents and will be arguing a similar case next week involving Native Americans and North Dakota's state legislative districts. He thinks Thursday's ruling will strengthen the case.

In Alabama, the question is what happens next. Steve Marshall, the state's Republican attorney general, said in a statement that he expects to continue defending the challenged map in federal court, including at a full trial.

The Rev. Murphy Green, a resident of Montgomery, said he is just glad to get to the first step with the court decision.

"I was surprised, especially when I think of the makeup of the court," he said, praising God for sending the Legislature back to "the drawing board and making it mandatory that they create a second Black congressional district."

He said the five Supreme Court justices in the majority must have looked at the map and the state's population and decided "it looked ridiculous to those judges, as well."

Rep. Terri Sewell, the lone Democrat in Alabama's congressional delegation, said she expects the case will be sent back to the three lower court judges who unanimously agreed the lines drawn by the Legislature likely violated the federal law. Sewell, who is Black, fully expected the new districts to be in place in time for the 2024 elections.

Whatever the process for drawing the new lines, "They're going to have to follow the ruling of the court," she said, noting that a revamped congressional map would also mean her district is redrawn.

"It's a small price to pay to carve up my district in order to be able to have two majority minority districts," she said.

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Associated Press writers Ayanna Alexander in Washington; Christina A. Cassidy in Atlanta; Sara Cline in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Acacia Coronado in Austin, Texas; David A. Lieb in Jefferson City, Missouri; and Kevin McGill in New Orleans contributed to this report.

## **Delayed justice: 3 states remove all time limits on child sex abuse lawsuits**

By DAVID SHARP Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — Ann Allen loved going to church and the after-school social group led by a dynamic priest back in the 1960s.

The giggling fun with friends always ended with a game of hide and seek. Each week, the Rev. Lawrence Sabatino chose one girl to hide with him. Allen said when it was her turn, she was sexually assaulted, at

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 47 of 102

age 7, in the recesses of St. Peter's Catholic Church.

"I don't remember how I got out of that cellar and I don't think I ever will. But I remember it like it's yesterday. I remember the smells. The sounds. I remember what he said, and what he did," she said.

Allen, 64, is one of more than two dozen people who have sued the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland, Maine, over the past year, seeking delayed justice since lawmakers allowed lawsuits for abuse that happened long ago and can't be pursued in criminal courts either because of time limits or evidence diminishing over time.

More survivors are pursuing cases as states increasingly consider repealing time limits for child sex crime lawsuits. Vermont was the first state to remove the limits in 2019, followed by Maine in 2021 and Maryland this year.

Michigan, Rhode Island and Massachusetts are poised to take action before their legislative sessions end this summer.

"The momentum is irreversible," said Marci Hamilton, CEO of CHILD USA, a think tank aiming to prevent child abuse and neglect.

In April, Maryland lifted time limits on child sexual abuse lawsuits against institutions less than a week after the attorney general detailed decades of abuse of more than 600 children by over 150 priests associated with the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

Other states, meanwhile, have briefly removed the statute of limitations on lawsuits for childhood abuse. More than 9,000 lawsuits were filed when New York set aside time limits for two years.

Across the country, those lawsuits have targeted churches, summer camps, scout groups and other institutions accused of enabling pedophiles or turning a blind eye to wrongdoing.

More states eliminating the limits would help achieve justice and prevention, according to advocates who say survivors tend to keep the trauma to themselves, backed by new research suggesting survivors typically come forward in their 50s.

"More and more people come forward as they realize that they're not alone," said Michael Bigos, one of Allen's attorneys, whose law firm has brought 25 lawsuits since last June and is evaluating more than 100 additional potential cases, including about 65 targeting the Portland diocese.

In his law offices, Allen looked at a photo of herself at her first communion at St. Peter's, which serves what was once Portland's Little Italy neighborhood and hosts a popular street party each summer.

The photo was taken after the assault. Her joy and exuberance are gone. "When I look at it, I see a pretty damaged child," she said.

Sabatino quickly became part of the fabric of St. Peter's when he arrived in 1958 after leaving another church where parents reported to police that he had sexually abused their 6-year-old daughter. The priest was warned by the Diocese of Portland not to engage with children or play games, but was soon doing both.

Parishioners, including Ann Allen's family, invited him into their homes. He visited her family's beach house.

Allen thought she was lucky when she was selected to hide with him. But the abuse became a dark secret she carried for decades.

She never considered telling her parents. Allen said she didn't think anyone would believe her.

As a school principal in California, Allen was protective of children, especially those who reported abuse. She would try to help them and say the right things — things she wished had been done for her. Then, she went home to "curl up in a ball," she said.

But her secret came bubbling back when she returned to Maine and had to confront her past, she said.

Robert Dupuis tells a similar story.

He was 12 years old in 1961 when he was abused by the Rev. John Curran in Old Town, a riverside city in Maine. Decades later, he sought help from Alcoholics Anonymous when his marriage was in jeopardy. He acknowledged the abuse in group therapy, at around age 55, and the revelation changed his life.

"It healed me and it freed me from holding back," the 74-year-old said.

His marriage and friendships have improved, he said. Now, he encourages others who have been abused to come forward.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 48 of 102

Most of Maine's newly filed civil lawsuits target the Diocese of Portland, accusing leaders of ignoring accusations against priests like Sabatino and Curran, or simply moving them to new parishes, allowing the abuse to continue.

Diocese officials concluded that allegations against Sabatino and Curran were credible. Both have long since died.

Maine removed its time limits in 2000 to sue over childhood sexual abuse, but not retroactively, leaving survivors without recourse for older cases. Changes in 2021 allowed previously expired civil claims. The Legislature also is considering easing the statute of limitations on criminal charges for sexual assaults of children.

The Portland diocese contends survivors had ample time to sue and it's unconstitutional to open the door to new litigation, which could lead to requests for damages of "tens of millions of dollars."

A judge rejected the arguments. The diocese has appealed to the state supreme court. An attorney and a spokesperson for the diocese both declined comment.

For Patricia Butkowski, it was 1958 when her family alerted police that she said Sabatino assaulted her at a parish in Lewiston. After the diocese transferred him to Portland, Allen and others became victims.

"I'm now at 70 feeling emotions and allowing myself to feel emotions that I never knew I had. Anger is at the top of it. I'm like a volcano spewing and there's just so many emotions, and anger at the church," she said.

Butkowski, who now lives in Oklahoma City, wants the church to apologize and acknowledge the wrongs done to her and others so she can "hopefully regain some sort of faith before I die," she said.

"What was done to me by the priest damaged my soul," she said. "I don't have a soul anymore. It's broken."

Follow David Sharp on Twitter @David\_Sharp\_AP.

## Judge weighs challenge to gag order in University of Idaho killings

By GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

A judge overseeing the case against Bryan Kohberger, charged with killing four University of Idaho students last fall, is set to hear arguments Friday over a gag order that largely bars attorneys and other parties in the case from speaking with news reporters.

A coalition of more than 30 media organizations has challenged the order, saying it violates the Constitution's guarantees of free speech and a free press, as has a lawyer for one of the victim's families. But prosecutors and the defendant's lawyers insist it's needed to prevent prejudicial news coverage that could damage Kohberger's right to a fair trial.

"It remains appropriate to have an Order reminding lawyers and their agents of the rules of engagement in this country and that we try cases in court, not in the press," one of Kohberger's attorneys, Jay Weston Logsdon, wrote in a memo to the court this week.

Kohberger, 28, is charged with four counts of first-degree murder and burglary in connection with the stabbing deaths in Moscow, Idaho, on Nov. 13, 2022. Second District Judge John C. Judge entered not guilty pleas on his behalf last month. Prosecutors have not said if they will seek the death penalty.

The bodies of Madison Mogen, Kaylee Goncalves, Xana Kernodle and Ethan Chapin were found at a rental home across the street from the University of Idaho campus. The slayings shocked the rural Idaho community and neighboring Pullman, Washington, where Kohberger was a graduate student studying criminology at Washington State University.

The case has garnered widespread publicity, and in January Latah County Magistrate Judge Megan Marshall issued a "nondissemination" order barring attorneys, law enforcement agencies and others associated with the case from talking with the press or issuing statements unless they are quoting directly from a court document.

The Idaho Supreme Court in April declined to vacate the gag order, saying the news organizations,



Smith reported from Pittsburgh and Bharath from Los Angeles. Associated Press reporters Holly Meyer in Nashville and David Bauder in New York contributed.

## **Car-obsessed California seeks to follow New York's lead and save public transit**

By JEFF McMURRAY and ADAM BEAM Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Sadaf Zahoor has bucked California's car culture by never owning one, yet she and other residents who rely on public transit worry its bleak financial outlook could soon leave them standing at empty train stations and bus stops.

The agencies running the public transit systems, particularly in San Francisco and Oakland, California, where Zahoor lives, have been living off billions of dollars in federal aid that will soon expire.

Ridership plummeted by as much as 94% during the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving a gaping budget deficit. Fare box revenues have rebounded a bit, but with more people working from home, some systems haven't returned to even half their previous levels.

The transit agencies have asked Democrats who control California's government to rescue them, much like Democrats in New York recently did with a \$227 billion spending plan. The request is proving to be a much tougher sell in the nation's most populous state, where majestic mountain highways and seas of suburban single-family homes have made it far more automobile-reliant than much of the Northeast.

"If there were any sort of major changes, that would definitely affect my ability to get to work," said Zahoor, 36, who figures she would have to team up with friends to buy a group car because she couldn't afford one on her own.

The California Transit Association says transit agencies will have a collective shortfall of about \$6 billion over the next five years. The state, which relies heavily on taxes paid by wealthy people, is projected to have a \$31.5 billion budget deficit this year amid a struggling stock market and layoffs in the tech industry.

Instead of bailing out public transit agencies, Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom has proposed slashing \$2 billion from their infrastructure funding to help balance the books.

H.D. Palmer, spokesperson for the California Department of Finance, said Newsom's proposed budget cuts to numerous agencies "were necessary to address the shortfall" but that the governor has pledged to restore the money if revenues rebound next year.

Bay Area Rapid Transit has warned if the state doesn't help out, it could force the agency to stop running after 9 p.m. and on weekends, while limiting regular service to just one train per hour.

Activists for transit say scaling back services is sure to only exacerbate the problem.

"It's kind of like the chicken and the egg," said Stephanie Lotshaw, acting executive director at TransitCenter, an advocacy group for public transportation systems across the U.S. "If you disinvest in it, then people won't use it. But if you invest in it, arguably more people will use it because it actually becomes a service that's usable."

The pandemic was particularly damaging to Bay Area Rapid Transit because as much as 70% of its revenue came from fares — far higher than most other transit systems, said Janice Li, president of the transit system's board of directors. Los Angeles, the nation's second-largest city, relies less on public transit than San Francisco, although voters have expressed support for it in recent years.

At the very least, Li said, California legislators should pass a stopgap measure to keep transit afloat until the 2026 election, when local voters could decide whether to pay more.

"We are not asking for the world, and we are not asking for the world indefinitely, either," Li said.

The White House has said states have flexibility to redirect some of the federal money typically used for road construction and repairs to transit operations, but many drivers call that a non-starter.

"We have the highest gas tax in the nation, and our roads are still in very poor condition," said Jon Coupal, president of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association, a California group opposing tax hikes. "If

including The Associated Press, should have first asked the lower court to lift the order. The justices did not weigh in on whether the gag order violates First Amendment rights.

The news organizations subsequently did ask the lower court to revoke the order, and Judge scheduled arguments for Friday. The media coalition says that while it respects the defendant's right to a fair trial under the Sixth Amendment, the court should not have issued a gag order without evidence that right would be infringed by their ability to speak with attorneys involved in the case.

"Intervenors agree that there has been, and will continue to be, great publicity surrounding this case," the coalition's attorneys wrote. "But publicity alone is not prejudicial. ... The State's and Mr. Kohberger's failure to present any evidence of prejudicial news coverage, and the Court's failure to consider alternative measures, means the competing constitutional rights here were improperly balanced and the Gag Order should be vacated."

Shanon Gray, an attorney for the Goncalves family, has also asked the judge to lift the gag order, saying he should be allowed to speak on the family's behalf.

Gag orders that prohibit journalists from writing about certain cases are considered to be severely problematic under the First Amendment. But the U.S. Supreme Court and other appeals courts have upheld some that prohibit attorneys, police or others involved in a case — those with privileged information about it — from speaking with reporters to begin with, as a way to avoid influencing potential jurors or otherwise jeopardizing a defendant's right to a fair trial.

## Trump indicted in classified documents case in a historic first for a former president

By ERIC TUCKER, JILL COLVIN and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Donald Trump has been indicted on charges of mishandling classified documents at his Florida estate, a remarkable development that makes him the first former president in U.S. history to face criminal charges by the federal government that he once oversaw.

The Justice Department was expected to make public a seven-count indictment ahead of a historic court appearance next week in the midst of a 2024 presidential campaign punctuated by criminal prosecutions in multiple states.

The indictment carries unmistakably grave legal consequences, including the possibility of prison if Trump's convicted.

But it also has enormous political implications, potentially upending a Republican presidential primary that Trump had been dominating and testing anew the willingness of GOP voters and party leaders to stick with a now twice-indicted candidate who could face still more charges. And it sets the stage for a sensational trial centered on claims that a man once entrusted to safeguard the nation's most closely guarded secrets willfully, and illegally, hoarded sensitive national security information.

The Justice Department did not immediately confirm the indictment publicly. But two people familiar with the situation who were not authorized to discuss it publicly said that the indictment included seven criminal counts. One of those people said Trump's lawyers were contacted by prosecutors shortly before he announced Thursday on his Truth Social platform that he had been indicted.

Within minutes of his announcement, Trump, who said he was due in court Tuesday afternoon in Miami, began fundraising off it for his presidential campaign. He declared his innocence in a video and repeated his familiar refrain that the investigation is a "witch hunt."

The case adds to deepening legal jeopardy for Trump, who has already been indicted in New York and faces additional investigations in Washington and Atlanta that also could lead to criminal charges. But among the various investigations he faces, legal experts — as well as Trump's own aides — had long seen the Mar-a-Lago probe as the most perilous threat and the one most ripe for prosecution. Campaign aides had been bracing for the fallout since Trump's attorneys were notified that he was the target of the investigation, assuming it was not a matter of if charges would be brought, but when.

Appearing Thursday night on CNN, Trump attorney James Trusty said the indictment includes charges

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 51 of 102

of willful retention of national defense information — a crime under the Espionage Act, which polices the handling of government secrets — obstruction, false statements and conspiracy.

The inquiry took a major step forward last November when Attorney General Merrick Garland, a soft-spoken former federal judge who has long stated that no one person should be regarded as above the law, appointed Jack Smith, a war crimes prosecutor with an aggressive, hard-charging reputation to lead both the documents probe as well as a separate investigation into efforts to subvert the 2020 election.

The case is a milestone for a Justice Department that had investigated Trump for years — as president and private citizen — but had never before charged him with a crime. The most notable investigation was an earlier special counsel probe into ties between his 2016 campaign and Russia, but prosecutors in that probe cited Justice Department policy against indicting a sitting president. Once he left office, though, he lost that protection.

The indictment arises from a monthslong investigation into whether Trump broke the law by holding onto hundreds of documents marked classified at his Palm Beach property, Mar-a-Lago, and whether Trump took steps to obstruct the government's efforts to recover the records.

Prosecutors have said that Trump took roughly 300 classified documents to Mar-a-Lago after leaving the White House, including some 100 that were seized by the FBI last August in a search of the home that underscored the gravity of the Justice Department's investigation. Trump has repeatedly insisted that he was entitled to keep the classified documents when he left the White House, and has also claimed without evidence that he had declassified them.

Court records unsealed last year showed federal investigators believed they had probable cause that multiple crimes had been committed, including the retention of national defense information, destruction of government records and obstruction.

Since then, the Justice Department has amassed additional evidence and secured grand jury testimony from people close to Trump, including his own lawyers. The statutes governing the handling of classified records and obstruction are felonies that could carry years in prison in the event of a conviction.

Even so, it remains unclear how much it will damage Trump's standing given that his first indictment generated millions of dollars in contributions from angry supporters and didn't weaken him in the polls.

The former president has long sought to use his legal troubles to his political advantage, complaining on social media and at public events that the cases are being driven by Democratic prosecutors out to hurt his 2024 election campaign. He is likely to rely on that playbook again, reviving his longstanding claims that the Justice Department — which, during his presidency, investigated whether his 2016 campaign had colluded with Russia — is somehow weaponized against him.

Trump's legal troubles extend beyond the New York indictment and classified documents case.

Smith is separately investigating efforts by Trump and his allies to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election. And the district attorney in Georgia's Fulton County is investigating Trump over alleged efforts to subvert the 2020 election in that state.

Signs had mounted for weeks that an indictment was near, including a Monday meeting between Trump's lawyers and Justice Department officials. His lawyers had also recently been notified that he was the target of the investigation, the clearest sign yet that an indictment was looming.

Though the bulk of the investigative work had been handled in Washington, with a grand jury meeting there for months, it recently emerged that prosecutors were presenting evidence before a separate panel in Florida, where many of the alleged acts of obstruction scrutinized by prosecutors took place.

The Justice Department has said Trump repeatedly resisted efforts by the National Archives and Records Administration to get the documents back. After months of back-and-forth, Trump representatives returned 15 boxes of records in January 2022, including about 184 documents that officials said had classified markings on them.

FBI and Justice Department investigators issued a subpoena in May 2022 for classified documents that remained in Trump's possession. But after a Trump lawyer provided three dozen records and asserted that a diligent search of the property had been done, officials came to suspect even more documents remained.

The investigation had simmered for months before bursting into front-page news in remarkable fashion last August. That's when FBI agents served a search warrant on Mar-a-Lago and removed 33 boxes containing classified records, including top-secret documents stashed in a storage room and desk drawer and commingled with personal belongings. Some records were so sensitive that investigators needed upgraded security clearances to review them, the Justice Department has said.

The investigation into Trump had appeared complicated — politically, if not legally — by the discovery of documents with classified markings in the Delaware home and former Washington office of President Joe Biden, as well as in the Indiana home of former Vice President Mike Pence. The Justice Department recently informed Pence that he would not face charges, while a second special counsel continues to investigate Biden's handling of classified documents.

But compared with Trump, there are key differences in the facts and legal issues surrounding Biden's and Pence's handling of documents, including that representatives for both men say the documents were voluntarily turned over to investigators as soon as they were found. In contrast, investigators quickly zeroed on whether Trump, who for four years as president expressed disdain for the FBI and Justice Department, had sought to obstruct the inquiry by refusing to turn over all the requested documents.

Tucker reported from Washington. Colvin reported from Des Moines, Iowa.

## **Speaker McCarthy eyes new commission to tackle nation's debt, but many Democrats are wary**

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Speaker Kevin McCarthy is studying the history books and considering the appointment of a mix of lawmakers and business leaders as he lays the groundwork for a new commission to tackle the nation's growing debt.

McCarthy is fresh off his biggest political victory since becoming speaker in January. He got the White House to negotiate on a bill that suspends the debt ceiling into January 2025 while also producing a projected \$1.5 trillion in deficit savings over the coming decade. But the legislation only focused on a sliver of the federal spending that occurs each year and excluded programs such as Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid that account for the majority of government spending and are the biggest drivers of the debt.

McCarthy has embraced the idea of establishing a new fiscal commission to find additional deficit reduction. While similar commissions have notched success in the past, the most recent ones failed to muster enough support for Congress to take up their recommendations. The speaker has asked Rep. Garret Graves, R-La., to work with him on the issue, which follows Graves' work as one of the lead debt ceiling negotiators in talks with the White House.

"I'm studying different angles to see what would best work, some with members. And should I bring in some people from the outside so you have some modern people in the business world that have taken companies and looked at them in a way to streamline and modernize for efficiencies?" McCarthy said. "I think that combination would work well, but right now I'm spending a lot of time on how to put that together."

Many analysts say it will take a combination of spending cuts and tax hikes to meaningfully change the country's financial trajectory. But therein lies the problem: Many Republicans won't entertain tax increases of any kind, and many Democrats won't consider benefit cuts.

McCarthy refused to accept any tax increases as part of the debt ceiling talks. And when asked if he had any such red lines for the debt commission, McCarthy said he currently is focused on getting the structure of the commission right, but added that the revenue coming into government coffers, about 19.2% of gross domestic product last year, is at the high end of the 50-year average.

Democrats are treading warily. "I'm not sure what he envisions, but I look forward to having that discussion," said Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y. "I have no idea what the contours of the commission

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 53 of 102

would even look like, so it's hard for me to comment up or down at this point."

The landmines confronting the commission are legion. Even if McCarthy can get something through the House, the commission's clout would be diminished without Senate participation and White House buy-in. And any findings from the effort could come during a presidential election year — an unfavorable political climate for a proposal that is likely to ask for some sacrifice from the voting public.

McCarthy said one thing he could do as speaker would be to bring up recommendations from the debt commission one at a time rather than in one fell swoop.

"I could do it kind of like in a BRAC," McCarthy said, referring to the various Base Realignment and Closure rounds initiated by the Defense Department to reduce excess infrastructure. "I could bring it directly to the floor, no amendments, you vote it up or vote it down and see what passed, see what doesn't."

"You can do section by section so people don't get hung up on everything," he said.

Rep. Steve Womack, R-Ark., said he likes the idea of a commission.

"We need to get as much of the politics out of it as we can and just give us the facts," Womack said. "... And the facts are that 70% of this whole federal budget is on autopilot right now."

Womack said he isn't calling for Congress to "cut a lot of these programs, but we do have to make these programs sustainable in the future."

On the Senate side, Sen. John Thune, the No. 2-ranking Republican, gave the commission concept his endorsement, saying "we got to start taking this stuff on."

"I think that makes all the sense in the world. Let's get the best experts in the room and figure out what's the best way to fix these issues, make these programs sustainable and see if we can't do something to address deficits and debt in a meaningful way," Thune said.

But Sen. Ron Wyden, the Democratic chair of the Senate Finance Committee, said he sees it as a way for Republicans to pursue "ideological trophies."

"Everything I've heard about it, it's a prescription for trouble," Wyden said, adding, "They're looking at a glide path to reduce benefits."

The most recent efforts to reduce deficits through the recommendations of a commission ended in failure.

In 2010, there was the Simpson-Bowles commission, led by co-chairs Alan Simpson and Erskine Bowles. They drafted a plan that mixed painful cuts to safety-net programs with big tax increases even while cutting top rates on individuals and corporations to 28% from 35%. It also would have hiked Social Security's retirement age and scaled back popular tax deductions for health insurance and mortgage interest.

The committee's recommendations gained the support of most of its members, but fell three votes short of the 14-vote threshold required to send the package to Congress for an up-or-down vote.

Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, a member of the Simpson-Bowles panel, said the commission failed because a better mechanism was needed to ensure the recommendations were voted on by Congress. He said he continues to believe a commission is the best way to tee up for Congress the "tough political decisions" on the \$31 trillion-plus debt.

Following Simpson-Bowles, Congress approved legislation the next year that established a Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction. But the so-called "supercommittee" failed after two months of work to produce a deficit-cutting plan of at least \$1.2 trillion.

Part of the legislation establishing the supercommittee also put into place a backup plan — the enactment of across-the-board cuts to both defense and non-defense programs should it fail. Those cuts eventually began in March 2013. But subsequent Congresses routinely blunted the impact of the automatic cuts by upping the limits on discretionary spending.

## Panthers rally, top Golden Knights 3-2 in OT in Game 3 of Stanley Cup final

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Sports Writer

SUNRISE, Fla. (AP) — Overtime. Season basically on the line. The Florida Panthers keep finding ways to flourish in those moments.

And for the first time, they've won a game in the Stanley Cup Final.

Carter Verhaeghe snapped a wrist from the slot high into the back of the net 4:27 into overtime and the Panthers rallied to beat the Vegas Golden Knights 3-2 on Thursday night in Game 3. Vegas still leads the title series 2-1, but Florida has life and found a way to turn overtime into its favorite time once again.

"We're the Cats," said Verhaeghe, after his fourth career playoff overtime goal. "We have whatever lives we have, but it's awesome. It shows how great our team is and the guys on our team have no quit in them."

The Panthers are 7-0 in these playoffs in OT — actually winning more games in extra sessions than they've won in regulation.

"We don't know how we're going to get there," said Matthew Tkachuk, who tied the game with 2:13 left in regulation. "But we're going to do everything we can to get there."

Tkachuk gave Florida a chance, and the Panthers won their first title-series game in seven tries. Florida had to fend off a power play to start overtime, and Verhaeghe got the winner with Tkachuk providing some traffic in front of the net.

"I had a little bit of time to walk in and shoot," Verhaeghe said. "I'm so happy it went in."

Game 4 is Saturday night.

"There's a little bit of collective confidence," said Florida coach Paul Maurice, whose teams are 19-7 in overtime games over his playoff career.

Sergei Bobrovsky stopped 25 shots for Florida. Adin Hill made 20 saves for Vegas, but got beat on the only shot that came his way in overtime.

"Normally that's a shot that we're going to give up, get the save and move on," Vegas coach Bruce Cassidy said. "It wasn't like an odd-man rush through the middle so I didn't mind the way we defended it. ... I mean, they've got good players. They're going to make some plays."

Brandon Montour also scored for Florida, which pulled Bobrovsky down 2-1 late in the third for the extra attacker and Tkachuk — who left for parts of the first and second periods after taking a big hit and needing to be cleared by the NHL's concussion protocol program — made that move pay off when he tied the game.

His goal breathed life into a very nervous building. But the Panthers were furious — and replays showed they had a case — when Gustav Forsling was sent to the box with 11.2 seconds remaining for tripping. Florida survived that scare, and a few minutes later, had life in the series again.

"Nobody cares how we got here," Tkachuk said. "It's a 2-1 series."

The odds are still long, but the Panthers at least have a bit more statistical hope now. Of the previous 55 teams to trail 2-1 at this point of the Stanley Cup Final, 11 have actually rallied to hoist the trophy.

It's improbable, sure. So are the Panthers, who were the eighth seed in the Eastern Conference, were down 3-1 to Boston in Round 1, were 133 seconds away from trailing this series 3-0 — and now have tons of reasons for optimism.

"We found our legs a little bit," Florida's San Reinhart said.

Jonathan Marchessault and Mark Stone had power-play goals for Vegas.

Marchessault's goal was his 13th in his last 13 playoff games, his fourth of this series and his third with the man advantage.

As if all that wasn't enough, there was a little history in there as well. Vegas joined the 1980 New York Islanders as the only team with at least two power-play goals in three consecutive games in the Cup final. And Marchessault became the third player in the last 35 years to score in each of the first three games of a title series — joining Steve Yzerman in 1997 with Detroit and Jake Guentzel with Pittsburgh in 2017.

But it wasn't enough to give Vegas a 3-0 lead in the series.

"I didn't mind our game," Cassidy said. "They made a play in overtime. ... Sometimes that happens to

you.”

## AROUND THE RINK

Florida’s 0-6 record in Stanley Cup Final games before Thursday was well short of the record for franchise futility in the title series. St. Louis lost its first 13 games in the Cup final. ... Before Thursday, Florida’s last home game in the title series was June 10, 1996, when Uwe Krupp scored in the third overtime for a 1-0 win as Colorado finished off a four-game sweep of the Panthers for the Cup. ... Miami Dolphins quarterback Tua Tagovailoa was in the crowd, as was NBA great Charles Barkley, and former Dolphins star Dan Marino was the celebrity drummer to welcome the Panthers onto the ice.

AP NHL Playoffs: <https://apnews.com/hub/stanley-cup> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Sports](https://twitter.com/AP_Sports)

## **In this youth baseball league, fans who mistreat umpires are sentenced to do the job themselves**

By DAN GELSTON AP Sports Writer

DEPTFORD, N.J. (AP) — Back in Mudville, when mighty Casey took an unheeded pitch for a strike, there went up a muffled roar: “Kill him! Kill the umpire!” shouted someone on the stand.”

Even in 1888, well before pitch clocks, \$17 beers and instant replay, a common thread for the fans in baseball’s most epic poem was how much they loved to threaten umpires.

These days, 135 or so years after writer Ernest Lawrence Thayer’s renowned verse, one Little League in New Jersey is taking a hands-on approach. Its target: those watching 10- and 11-year-olds play baseball who curse at the volunteers behind the plate.

You want some of this? they’re saying. Well, come get some. In Deptford, the umpire recruiting slogan sign may as well read: If you can’t berate them, join them.

The April Facebook post hardly seemed like national news at the time for league president Don Bozzuffi. He’d lost patience when two umpires resigned after persistent spectator abuse. So he wrote an updated code of conduct.

It specified: Any spectator deemed in violation would be banned from the complex until three umpiring assignments were completed. If not, the person would be barred from any Deptford youth sports facilities for a year.

In G-rated terms (unlike the ones that will get you tossed), the mandate just wants helicopter parents to calm the heck down. No 9-year-old will remember, as an adult, being safe or out on a bang-bang play at first. But how deep would be the cut of watching dad get tossed out of the game and banished for bad behavior?

The league doesn’t want to find out. “So far, it’s working like I’d hoped and just been a deterrent,” the 68-year-old Bozzuffi said.

The problem, though, isn’t limited to Deptford and its handful of unruly parents.

Outbursts of bad behavior at sporting events for young people have had frightening consequences for officials at all youth levels. Pick a town, any town, and there are adults assaulting referees or chasing umpires into parking lots looking for a fight, all available on the social feed of your choice.

The videos pop up almost weekly: inane instances of aggressive behavior toward officials. Like in January, when a Florida basketball referee was punched in the face after one game. Or last month, when an enraged youth baseball coach stormed a baseball field in Alabama and wrestled an umpire to the ground. Other adults and kids tried to break up the melee that took place in a game — at an 11-and-under tournament.

Jim McDevitt has worked as a volunteer Deptford umpire for 20 years. But he turns 66 this month and won’t call games much longer. He wonders where the next generation of officials will come from, especially when the job description includes little pay and lots of crap.

Youth officiating is in crisis. According to a 2017 survey of by the National Association of Sports Officials, nearly 17,500 referees surveyed said parents caused the most problems with sportsmanship at 39%.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 56 of 102

Coaches came in at 29% and fans at 18%.

Barry Mano founded the association four decades ago to advocate for youth officials. Mano, whose brother Mark was an NBA referee, has watched fan conduct become "far worse" than he could have imagined.

"Sports is simply life with the volume turned up," Mano says. "We've become louder and brasher. We always want a second opinion on things. That's where the culture has gone. I don't think we're as civil as we used to be toward each other, and it plays out in the sporting venues."

In Deptford, things seem to be working — at least in attracting non-mandatory umps. Bozzuffi says that since his rule grabbed national headlines, three umpires have joined the league. More volunteers want to be trained.

And those who might get sentenced to umping? McDevitt puts it less delicately. "We'll see how their sphincter feels when they have to make a tight call and the parents are all screaming and hollering at them."

The Deptford Little League playoffs, a time when tensions rise, are under way, and Bozzuffi has urged his umps to show restraint. Bozzuffi, who has served as league president for 14 years and been connected to the league for 40, doesn't want any fan to get ejected. He just wants to get them thinking.

Because in a culture where violence visits schools, churches, movie theaters, clubs and many social gathering spots, the irate fan pressed against the fence spewing four-lettered tirades at the ump could easily escalate.

"People are just a little bit more sensitive to it," said Sherrie Spencer, a lifelong Deptford resident who had two sons and grandsons play. She has noticed an uptick in abusive language to umpires through the years. "Now," she says, "you have things that are going on in our world that people are more fearful when you see someone getting upset like that."

Part of the problem is this: Thanks to technological advances, perfection in baseball can sometimes seem more attainable than ever.

In the major leagues, computers and their precision have become a vital part of baseball's fabric. Gone are the days when a manager like Billy Martin or Earl Weaver would burst out of the dugout and kick up a cloud of dirt, curse a blue streak and maybe even walk away with a base or chuck one into the outfield over a missed call.

Blow one now? The manager barely reacts, asking for a replay review while a command center makes the dispassionate final call. Oh, and robo umps are coming. They're already calling the shots in the minor leagues, with computerized strike zones that leave no room for argument. Where's the messiness, the fallibility, the human emotion steeped in baseball tradition? Where's the fun of baseball in umpire perfection?

That's not the way some parents see it. For many, every "safe!" when the tag is missed, every called strike on a pitch below the knees is another reason to blow a fuse in a youth sports culture full of hefty fees and travel teams that have already heightened financial and emotional attachment and encouraged a sense of parents as constituents who have a right to be heeded.

That's why Deptford is experimenting with its attempt at preventative medicine. This is interdicting the parents before the kids get older. This is, at its core, potential assault prevention.

It's getting attention all the way up the youth baseball chain. Little League President Stephen D. Keener had this to say: "We applaud the volunteers at Deptford Township Little League for coming up with a creative, fun solution to shine a light on the importance of treating everyone with respect, on and off the Little League field."

OK. But here's the fine print.

Beyond the headlines that suggest Fuming Father No. 1 is going to get the call from the bleachers and suddenly start ringing up strike three, there's this: It's too much effort. The risks! The potential safety problems! The insurance!

Bozzuffi and the town's mayor teach a three-hour safety certification class each offender must complete before receiving an assignment. Rookie umps must pass a background check and complete an online concussion course. After all that, a qualified umpire would be stationed next to the replacement ump to



ensure accuracy and fairness.

It hasn't happened — yet.

"The first person that we have to do this to, nobody is else is going to challenge this," Bozzuffi said. "Nobody wants to go through all this."

So for now, at least on a recent weeknight in Deptford, parents, grandparents and friends, were on their best behavior. They cheered. They clapped. They caught up with neighbors.

They groused a bit, too. While other Little League officials across America reached out to Bozzuffi for input into their own policies, some fans in Deptford are sick of the perception that's it's a town full of baseball bullies.

One fan waved off an interview request because he "didn't want to hear anymore about how bad we all are." Parent Dawn Nacke found it unfair that the town was labeled as "obnoxious parents when we're just caring about our kids."

"We know that they ump for free," she said, "but sometimes bad calls are made and they cost us the game."

Has she ever been guilty of popping off too much?

"Mouthy, yes. But we all have to bite our tongues over here because of the new rule," she said. "I just have to keep my mouth shut more. Scared me straight. I'm more angry that they call us obnoxious parents. That really upset me when I read it in the news. But this is their rule and I'm going to follow it."

Just the way Deptford drew it up.

Follow Philadelphia-based AP Sports Writer Dan Gelston on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/apgelston>

## Trump charged over classified documents in 1st federal indictment of an ex-president

By ERIC TUCKER, JILL COLVIN and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Donald Trump said Thursday that he was indicted for mishandling classified documents at his Florida estate, a remarkable development that makes him the first former president in U.S. history to face criminal charges by the federal government that he once oversaw.

The indictment carries unmistakably grave legal consequences, including the possibility of prison if he's convicted.

But it also has enormous political implications, potentially upending a Republican presidential primary that Trump had been dominating and testing anew the willingness of GOP voters and party leaders to stick with a now twice-indicted candidate who could face still more charges. And it sets the stage for a sensational trial centered on claims that a man once entrusted to safeguard the nation's most closely guarded secrets willfully, and illegally, hoarded sensitive national security information.

The Justice Department did not immediately confirm the indictment publicly. But two people familiar with the situation who were not authorized to discuss it publicly said the indictment included seven criminal counts. One of those people said Trump's lawyers were contacted by prosecutors shortly before he announced on his Truth Social platform that he had been indicted.

Within 20 minutes of his announcement, Trump began fundraising off it for his 2024 presidential campaign. He declared his innocence in a video and repeated his familiar refrain that the investigation is a "witch hunt." He said he planned to be in court Tuesday afternoon in Miami, where a grand jury had been meeting to hear evidence as recently as this week.

The case adds to deepening legal jeopardy for Trump, who has already been indicted in New York and faces additional investigations in Washington and Atlanta that also could lead to criminal charges. But among the various investigations he faces, legal experts — as well as Trump's own aides — had long seen the Mar-a-Lago probe as the most perilous threat and the one most ripe for prosecution. Campaign aides had been bracing for the fallout since Trump's attorneys were notified that he was the target of the investigation, assuming it was not a matter of if charges would be brought, but when.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 58 of 102

Appearing Thursday night on CNN, Trump attorney James Trusty said the indictment includes charges of willful retention of national defense information — a crime under the Espionage Act, which polices the handling of government secrets — obstruction, false statements and conspiracy.

The case is a milestone for a Justice Department that had investigated Trump for years — as president and private citizen — but had never before charged him with a crime. The most notable investigation was an earlier special counsel probe into ties between his 2016 campaign and Russia, but prosecutors in that probe cited Justice Department policy against indicting a sitting president. Once he left office, though, he lost that protection.

The inquiry took a major step forward last November when Attorney General Merrick Garland, a soft-spoken former federal judge who has long stated that no person should be regarded as above the law, appointed Jack Smith, a war crimes prosecutor with an aggressive, hard-charging reputation to lead both the documents probe as well as a separate investigation into efforts to subvert the 2020 election.

The indictment arises from a monthslong investigation into whether Trump broke the law by holding onto hundreds of documents marked classified at his Palm Beach property, Mar-a-Lago, and whether he took steps to obstruct the government's efforts to recover the records.

Prosecutors have said that Trump took roughly 300 classified documents to Mar-a-Lago after leaving the White House, including some 100 that were seized by the FBI last August in a search of the home that underscored the gravity of the Justice Department's investigation. Trump has repeatedly insisted that he was entitled to keep the classified documents when he left the White House, and has also claimed without evidence that he had declassified them.

Court records unsealed last year showed federal investigators believed they had probable cause that multiple crimes had been committed, including the retention of national defense information, destruction of government records and obstruction.

Since then, the Justice Department has amassed additional evidence and secured grand jury testimony from people close to Trump, including his own lawyers. The statutes governing the handling of classified records and obstruction are felonies that could carry years in prison in the event of a conviction.

It remains unclear how much it will damage Trump's standing given that his first indictment generated millions of dollars in contributions from angry supporters and didn't weaken him in the polls. But no matter what, the indictment -- and legal fight that follows -- will throw Trump back into the spotlight, sucking attention away from the other candidates who are trying to build momentum in the race.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, a Trump opponent in the primary, condemned the indictment on Twitter, saying it represented "the weaponization of federal law enforcement."

The former president has long sought to use his legal troubles to his political advantage, complaining on social media and at public events that the cases are being driven by Democratic prosecutors out to hurt his 2024 election campaign. He is likely to rely on that playbook again, reviving his longstanding claims that the Justice Department — which, during his presidency, investigated whether his 2016 campaign had colluded with Russia — is somehow weaponized against him.

Trump's legal troubles extend beyond the New York indictment and classified documents case.

Smith is separately investigating efforts by Trump and his allies to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election. And the district attorney in Georgia's Fulton County is investigating Trump over alleged efforts to subvert the 2020 election in that state.

Signs had mounted for weeks that an indictment was near, including a Monday meeting between Trump's lawyers and Justice Department officials. His lawyers had also recently been notified that he was the target of the investigation, the clearest sign yet that an indictment was looming.

Though the bulk of the investigative work had been handled in Washington, with a grand jury meeting there for months, it recently emerged that prosecutors were presenting evidence before a separate panel in Florida, where many of the alleged acts of obstruction scrutinized by prosecutors took place.

The Justice Department has said Trump repeatedly resisted efforts by the National Archives and Records Administration to get the documents back. After months of back-and-forth, Trump representatives

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 59 of 102

returned 15 boxes of records in January 2022, including about 184 documents that officials said had classified markings on them.

FBI and Justice Department investigators issued a subpoena in May 2022 for classified documents that remained in Trump's possession. But after a Trump lawyer provided three dozen records and asserted that a diligent search of the property had been done, officials came to suspect even more documents remained.

The investigation had simmered quietly for months until last August, when FBI agents served a search warrant on Mar-a-Lago and removed 33 boxes containing classified records, including top-secret documents stashed in a storage room and desk drawer and commingled with personal belongings. Some records were so sensitive that investigators needed upgraded security clearances to review them, the Justice Department has said.

The investigation into Trump had appeared complicated — politically, if not legally — by the discovery of documents with classified markings in the Delaware home and former Washington office of President Joe Biden, as well as in the Indiana home of former Vice President Mike Pence. The Justice Department recently informed Pence that he would not face charges, while a second special counsel continues to investigate Biden's handling of classified documents.

But compared with Trump, there are key differences in the facts and legal issues surrounding Biden's and Pence's handling of documents, including that representatives for both men say the documents were voluntarily turned over to investigators as soon as they were found. In contrast, investigators quickly zeroed on whether Trump, who for four years as president expressed disdain for the FBI and Justice Department, had sought to obstruct the inquiry by refusing to turn over all the requested documents.

Tucker reported from Washington. Colvin reported from Des Moines, Iowa.

## Lawyers blame ChatGPT for tricking them into citing bogus case law

By LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Two apologetic lawyers responding to an angry judge in Manhattan federal court blamed ChatGPT Thursday for tricking them into including fictitious legal research in a court filing.

Attorneys Steven A. Schwartz and Peter LoDuca are facing possible punishment over a filing in a lawsuit against an airline that included references to past court cases that Schwartz thought were real, but were actually invented by the artificial intelligence-powered chatbot.

Schwartz explained that he used the groundbreaking program as he hunted for legal precedents supporting a client's case against the Colombian airline Avianca for an injury incurred on a 2019 flight.

The chatbot, which has fascinated the world with its production of essay-like answers to prompts from users, suggested several cases involving aviation mishaps that Schwartz hadn't been able to find through usual methods used at his law firm.

The problem was, several of those cases weren't real or involved airlines that didn't exist.

Schwartz told U.S. District Judge P. Kevin Castel he was "operating under a misconception ... that this website was obtaining these cases from some source I did not have access to."

He said he "failed miserably" at doing follow-up research to ensure the citations were correct.

"I did not comprehend that ChatGPT could fabricate cases," Schwartz said.

Microsoft has invested some \$1 billion in OpenAI, the company behind ChatGPT.

Its success, demonstrating how artificial intelligence could change the way humans work and learn, has generated fears from some. Hundreds of industry leaders signed a letter in May that warns "mitigating the risk of extinction from AI should be a global priority alongside other societal-scale risks such as pandemics and nuclear war."

Judge Castel seemed both baffled and disturbed at the unusual occurrence and disappointed the lawyers did not act quickly to correct the bogus legal citations when they were first alerted to the problem by Avianca's lawyers and the court. Avianca pointed out the bogus case law in a March filing.

The judge confronted Schwartz with one legal case invented by the computer program. It was initially described as a wrongful death case brought by a woman against an airline only to morph into a legal claim about a man who missed a flight to New York and was forced to incur additional expenses.

"Can we agree that's legal gibberish?" Castel asked.

Schwartz said he erroneously thought that the confusing presentation resulted from excerpts being drawn from different parts of the case.

When Castel finished his questioning, he asked Schwartz if he had anything else to say.

"I would like to sincerely apologize," Schwartz said.

He added that he had suffered personally and professionally as a result of the blunder and felt "embarrassed, humiliated and extremely remorseful."

He said that he and the firm where he worked — Levidow, Levidow & Oberman — had put safeguards in place to ensure nothing similar happens again.

LoDuca, another lawyer who worked on the case, said he trusted Schwartz and didn't adequately review what he had compiled.

After the judge read aloud portions of one cited case to show how easily it was to discern that it was "gibberish," LoDuca said: "It never dawned on me that this was a bogus case."

He said the outcome "pains me to no end."

Ronald Minkoff, an attorney for the law firm, told the judge that the submission "resulted from carelessness, not bad faith" and should not result in sanctions.

He said lawyers have historically had a hard time with technology, particularly new technology, "and it's not getting easier."

"Mr. Schwartz, someone who barely does federal research, chose to use this new technology. He thought he was dealing with a standard search engine," Minkoff said. "What he was doing was playing with live ammo."

Daniel Shin, an adjunct professor and assistant director of research at the Center for Legal and Court Technology at William & Mary Law School, said he introduced the Avianca case during a conference last week that attracted dozens of participants in person and online from state and federal courts in the U.S., including Manhattan federal court.

He said the subject drew shock and befuddlement at the conference.

"We're talking about the Southern District of New York, the federal district that handles big cases, 9/11 to all the big financial crimes," Shin said. "This was the first documented instance of potential professional misconduct by an attorney using generative AI."

He said the case demonstrated how the lawyers might not have understood how ChatGPT works because it tends to hallucinate, talking about fictional things in a manner that sounds realistic but is not.

"It highlights the dangers of using promising AI technologies without knowing the risks," Shin said.

The judge said he'll rule on sanctions at a later date.

## **Biden, Sunak vow to stick together on Ukraine, deepen cooperation on clean energy transition, AI**

By AAMER MADHANI and SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden and British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Thursday reiterated their commitment to help Ukraine repel Russia's ongoing invasion, while agreeing to step up cooperation on challenges their economies face with artificial intelligence, clean energy, and critical minerals.

The leaders said the "first of its kind" agreement—what they are calling the "Atlantic Declaration"—will serve as a framework for the two countries on the development of emerging technologies, protecting technology that is critical to national security and other economic security issues.

"We will put our values front and center," Biden said as the two leaders started talks in the Oval Office. He later added at a joint news conference that the agreement will help both nations "adapt and upgrade our partnership to ensure our countries remain on the cutting edge of a rapidly changing world."

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 61 of 102

As part of the declaration announced Thursday, the two sides will kick off negotiations on the use of minerals from the U.K. that are critical in the production of electric vehicles that are eligible for U.S. tax credits. The administration has also opened talks with the European Union and forged a deal with Japan that allow certain critical raw materials for EVs to be treated as if they were sourced in the United States.

Allies have raised concerns about incentives in the Inflation Reduction Act favoring the North American auto industry. The legislation — one of Biden's key policy victories — invests some \$375 billion to transition the United States to cleaner cars and energy sources.

Biden and Sunak have already had four face-to-face meetings since Sunak became prime minister in October, but the talks in Washington offered the two leaders a chance for their most sustained interaction to date.

Sunak reflected on the significant conversations their respective predecessors have had over the years in the Oval Office and acknowledged that both he and Biden were facing their own daunting moment. The visit to Washington is Sunak's first since becoming Britain's prime minister in October.

"Our economies are seeing perhaps the biggest transformation since the Industrial Revolution as new technologies provide incredible opportunities, but also give our adversaries more tools," Sunak said.

The 15-month-old Russian invasion of Ukraine was high on the agenda. The U.S. and U.K. are the two biggest donors to the Ukraine war effort and play a central role in a long-term effort announced last month to train, and eventually equip, Ukrainian pilots on F-16 fighter jets.

Biden reiterated confidence that Congress would continue to provide Ukraine funding as needed despite some hesitation among Republican leaders at the growing cost of the war for American taxpayers.

"The U.S. and the U.K. have stood together to support Ukraine," Biden said at the start of their meeting.

Sunak also made the case to Biden for U.K. Defense Minister Ben Wallace to succeed outgoing NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, who is set to end his term leading the 31-member alliance in September. Stoltenberg is slated to meet with Biden in Washington on Monday, and leaders from the alliance are set to gather in Lithuania on July 11-12 for their annual summit.

Asked if it was time for a U.K. leader for NATO, Biden said "it may be" but "that remains to be seen."

"We're going to have to get a consensus within NATO," he said.

Biden also reflected that the two countries have worked through some of the toughest moments in modern history side-by-side, recalling the meetings that Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt held in the White House.

"You know Prime Minister Churchill and Roosevelt met here a little over 70 years ago and they asserted that the strength of the partnership between Great Britain and the United States was strength of the free world," Biden told Sunak. "I still think there's truth to that assertion."

Sunak is keen to make the U.K. a key player in artificial intelligence, and announced that his government will gather politicians, scientists and tech executives for a summit on AI safety in the fall.

He said it was vital to ensure that "paradigm-shifting new technologies" are harnessed for the good of humanity.

"No one country can do this alone," Sunak said Wednesday. "This is going to take a global effort."

Biden said the challenges that comes with the advancement of AI technology are "staggering."

"It is a limitless capacity and possibility but we have to do it with great care," said Biden, who added that he welcomed the U.K.'s leadership on the issue.

Sunak's visit comes as U.S. and British intelligence officials are still trying to sort out blame for the breaching of a major dam in southern Ukraine, which sent floodwaters gushing through towns and over farmland. Neither Washington nor London has officially accused Russia of blowing up the Kakhovka hydroelectric dam.

Sunak said Wednesday that U.K. intelligence services are still assessing the evidence, but "if it does prove to be intentional, it will represent a new low ... an appalling barbarism on Russia's part."

"Russia throughout this war has used as a deliberate active strategy to target civilian infrastructure," he told broadcaster ITV in Washington.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 62 of 102

The two sides looked to demonstrate that the U.S.-U.K. relationship remains as strong as ever despite recent political and economic upheaval in the U.K. Sunak is one of three British prime ministers Biden has dealt with since taking office in 2021, and the administrations have had differences over Brexit and its impact on Northern Ireland.

Nonetheless, there's a sense in the Biden administration that the U.S.-U.K. relationship is back on more stable footing after the sometimes choppy tenure of Boris Johnson and the 45-day premiership of Liz Truss.

"I think there's a sense of relief to some degree, not just in the White House, but throughout Washington, that the Sunak government has been very pragmatic and maintained the U.K.'s robust commitment to Ukraine and to increasing defense spending," said Max Bergmann, director of the Europe, Russia and Eurasia program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. He added that with Sunak, there's also been "somewhat of a return to pragmatism" on economic issues and relations with the European Union post-Brexit.

Sunak at the press conference sought to hammer home that the U.K. remains "as reliable an ally as ever."

"I know some people have wondered what kind of partner Britain would be after we left the EU," Sunak said. "I'd say judge us by our actions."

Biden invited Sunak to stay at Blair House, the official presidential guest residence on Lafayette Square. Before the U.S. government purchased Blair House in 1942, foreign leaders visiting the president often stayed at the White House.

In a lighter moment, the president began telling the story of how in the pre-Blair House days Churchill wandered toward the president's family quarters in the wee hours to rouse the sleeping Roosevelt for conversation. First lady Eleanor Roosevelt was said to have cut off Churchill before he could make it to the president.

"Don't worry," Sunak interjected. "You won't see me bothering you and the first lady."

—  
Associated Press writers Jill Lawless in London and Matthew Lee in Washington contributed to this report.

## 'Dollarization' of North Korean economy, once vital, now potential threat to Kim's rule

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Before fleeing North Korea in 2014, Jeon Jae-hyun kept U.S. dollars as a store of value and used Chinese yuan to make everyday purchases at markets, restaurants and other places. He used the domestic currency, the won, only occasionally.

"There were not many places to use the won, and we actually had little faith in our currency," Jeon said during a recent interview in Seoul. "Even the quality of North Korean bills was awful as they often ripped when we put them in our pockets."

North Korea has tolerated the widespread use of more stable foreign currencies like U.S. dollars and Chinese yuan since a bungled revaluation of the won in 2009 triggered runaway inflation and public unrest.

The so-called "dollarization" helped ease inflation and stabilize exchange rates, enabling leader Kim Jong Un to establish a stable hold on power after he inherited that role in late 2011. But the trend poses a potential threat to Kim as it has undermined his government's control over money supply and monetary policies.

The isolation of the pandemic badly hurt the North's economy but still gave Kim a chance to solidify social controls by restricting market activities and limiting influence from capitalist, democratic South Korea. Now, observers say Kim is trying to roll back use of the dollar and yuan to tighten his grip on power as the North grapples with pandemic-related hardships, longstanding U.N. sanctions and tensions with the U.S.

"He has no other choice but to strengthen the command economy as he's been locked in confrontations with the U.S. while maintaining a border shutdown," said Lim Eul-chul, a professor at Kyungnam University's Institute for Far Eastern Studies in Seoul. "The current direction of the North's economy is controlling markets in a stronger manner so there are still limits in demands for dollars."

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 63 of 102

It's unclear what Kim would do, since banning use of dollars and yuan could backfire by just confusing and angering the public, experts say. North Koreans are likely resisting attempts by authorities to take their foreign currency given the low level of public trust in the government's economic policies, said Choi Ji-young, an analyst at Seoul's state-funded Korea Institute for National Unification.

The shift to using dollars and yuan came amid economic turmoil and a famine in the 1990s that crumbled the state rationing system, prompting the emergence of capitalist-style markets.

The 2009 revaluation of the won led to even wider use of foreign currencies. To try to reassert control over nascent markets, authorities limited the amount of old bills that citizens could exchange with new North Korean won, wiping out much of their household savings. Realizing the local currency was unreliable, many began storing their savings in dollars and yuan.

Jeon, a former official from the northern North Korean city of Hyesan, had two boxes of North Korean won notes totaling 2 million won at his house in 2009, about what it would cost then to buy 60-80 smuggled, second-hand Japanese TVs. Most of that money became worthless since the authorities only allowed residents to exchange up to 200,000 won (about \$60-70 at the time) per household in old bills for new money.

"My money was all gone. I was extremely frustrated and embarrassed but couldn't do anything in protest," Jeon said. "I saw many people crying and heard others fled to South Korea."

The yuan has since become the most-used and preferred currency for savings in areas near the North's border with China. The dollar has emerged as the most saved currency and the second most-used currency after the won in southern regions, according to surveys of defectors.

Jeon said he used the yuan to buy clothes, rice and other daily necessities, eat out or pay bribes to bosses. Most of his savings were stored in yuan and dollar bills. He kept a small amount of North Korean won for occasions like donating money to village campaigns to support military units.

Paek H.O, who defected from the northeastern North Korean town of Musan in 2018, said she used the yuan to buy expensive goods and the won for cheap items such as sodas, vegetables and bread sold at markets. About 50 professional money changers operated in Musan, she said.

"Using foreign currency is officially illegal but few ran into troubles or got arrested for using it," said Paek, 47. She asked that her first name be identified using initials, citing worries for the safety of relatives in North Korea.

There are two exchange rates for the won -- an artificially high one set by the government and another set by the market that experts say more clearly reflects actual economic conditions in the country.

The won had stabilized at around 8,000 per dollar since 2012-2013 but suddenly sharply strengthened in 2020 when North Korea sealed its borders to guard against COVID-19. According to North Korea monitoring groups, the won was trading on the street at about 6,700-7,000 per dollar in late 2020; 4,600-7,200 in 2021; and 5,200-7,500 in the first half of 2022. Later in 2022 it dropped back to about 8,000 won per dollar.

The won's value soared during the pandemic likely because demand for dollars and yuan fell due to the border closures and tighter controls on use of foreign currency. Such controls appear to have been enforced inconsistently though a lack of information from the secretive North makes it virtually impossible to get clear details.

Jeon said his relatives in Hyesan told him in phone calls that they weren't allowed to use foreign currency in 2021 but could last year. Paek said her sisters in Musan told her last year that they were using the yuan.

Kang Mi-Jin, a defector who runs a company analyzing North Korea's economy, said people in nearly 20 regions across North Korea voluntarily stopped using foreign currency in 2021 during a campaign against "anti-socialist elements" due to worries about possible punishment. Citing her contacts inside North Korea, Kang said the North Koreans also held onto foreign currency as a safe haven.

The return of exchange rates to pre-pandemic levels likely reflects revived demand for foreign currency amid speculation North Korea might soon lift its COVID-19 restrictions. But many experts say less foreign currency is in circulation and the government is likely intervening to control exchange rates in markets.

"Dollarization can't be a long-term government policy as it's like relinquishing sovereignty over monetary

policy, though it's still true that it helped the North's economy stabilize and grow for the (earlier) years of Kim Jong Un's rule," said Lim Soo-ho, an analyst at the Institute for National Security Strategy, a think tank run by South Korea's spy agency.

He said Kim's government is likely "very carefully" examining whether to fully reopen the borders since an abrupt, full-fledged resumption of imports would push the value of the dollar against the won sharply higher, making imported goods more expensive.

Son Kwang Soo, an analyst at the Seoul-based KB Research in Seoul, said the North may be trying to keep the exchange rate in a narrow band of around 8,000 won per dollar.

Defectors say an attempt to end use of dollars and yuan would likely just cause chaos.

"Kim Jong Un will eventually leave 'dollarization' as it used to be. If he bans the use of foreign currency by ordinary citizens, the country's monetary circulation would be disrupted," Kang said. "My contacts in North Korea told me it's even hard to find some North Korean bills now."

## **New York lawmakers pass bill that considers reparations for slavery**

By MAYSOON KHAN Associated Press/Report for America

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — New York would create a commission to consider reparations to address the lingering, negative effects of slavery under a bill passed by the state Legislature on Thursday.

"We want to make sure we are looking at slavery and its legacies," said state Assemblywoman Michaele Solages before the floor debate. "This is about beginning the process of healing our communities. There still is generational trauma that people are experiencing. This is just one step forward."

The state Assembly passed the bill about three hours after spirited debate on Thursday. The state Senate passed the measure hours later, and the bill will be sent to New York Gov. Kathy Hochul for consideration.

New York is following the lead of California, which became the first state to form a reparations task force in 2020. That group recommended a formal apology from the state on its legacy of racism and discriminatory policies and the creation of an agency to provide a wide range of services for Black residents. They did not recommend specific payments amounts for reparations.

The New York legislation would create a commission that would examine the extent to which the federal and state government supported the institution of slavery. It would also address persistent economic, political and educational disparities experienced by Black people in the state today.

According to the New York bill, the first enslaved Africans arrived at the southern tip of Manhattan Island, then a Dutch settlement, around the 1620s and helped build the infrastructure of New York City. While the state Legislature enacted a statute that gave freedom to enslaved Africans in New York in 1817, it wasn't implemented until 10 years later.

"I'm concerned we're opening a door that was closed in New York State almost 200 years ago," said Republican state Assemblymember Andy Gooddell during floor debates on the bill. Gooddell, who voted against the bill, said he supports existing efforts to bring equal opportunity to all and would like to "continue on that path rather than focus on reparations."

In California, the reparations task force said in their report that the state is estimated to be responsible for more than \$500 billion due to decades of over-policing, mass incarceration and redlining that kept Black families from receiving loans and living in certain neighborhoods. California's state budget last year was \$308 billion. Reparations in New York could also come with a hefty price tag.

The commission would be required to deliver a report one year after their first meeting. Their recommendations, which could potentially include monetary compensation for Black people, would be non-binding. The legislature would not be required to take the recommendations up for a vote.

New York Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, who is the first Black person to hold the position, called the legislation "historic."

Heastie along with the governor and legislative leader in the state Senate would each appoint three qualified members to the commission.



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 65 of 102

Other state legislatures that have considered studying reparations include New Jersey and Vermont, but none have yet passed legislation. A Chicago suburb in Evanston, Illinois, became the first city to make reparations available to Black residents through a \$10 million housing project in 2021.

On the federal level, a decades-old proposal to create a commission studying reparations has stalled in Congress.

Some critics of reparations by states say that while the idea is well-intentioned, it can be misguided.

William Darity, a professor of public policy and African and African American Studies at Duke University said even calling them reparations is "presumptuous," since it's virtually impossible for states to meet the potentially hefty payouts.

He said the federal government has the financial capacity to pay true reparations and that they should be the ones responsible.

"My deeper fear with all of these piecemeal projects is that they actually will become a block against federal action because there will be a number of people who will say there's no need for a federal program," Darity said. "If you end up settling for state and local initiatives, you settle for much less than what is owed."

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Associated Press Writer Sophie Austin in Sacramento, California contributed to this report.

Maysoon Khan 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. Follow Maysoon Khan on Twitter.

## **Under house arrest, fake heiress Anna 'Delvey' Sorokin launches podcast to rehab public image**

By JOHN CARUCCI Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — It's a weekday afternoon and Anna Sorokin is on house arrest in a New York apartment building that has been condemned as imminently perilous to life. So she's attempting to capture outside attention and relieving her boredom in the most quotidian way: starting a podcast.

"So many people became famous for bad things and were able to kind of segue it into something different," she recently told The Associated Press in her East Village apartment.

"The main theme of my podcast is productive rule-breaking," she said of "The Anna Delvey Show."

For now, she wants to reimagine her public image to shake her reputation of being a con artist and a scammer.

"I'm on 24/7 house arrest. I'm only allowed to leave for my parole check-ins, my ICE check-ins and for medical emergencies," she said. Behind her is a life-size cutout of her likeness — created by artist Kenny Schachter — which, like Sorokin herself, is wearing an ankle monitoring device.

Going by the name Anna Delvey, she posed as a German heiress and lied about having a \$67 million trust fund in order to apply for loans, run up debts and secure a historic building for a private arts club. She falsely claimed to be the daughter of a diplomat or an oil baron. Arrested in late 2017, she was convicted in 2019 on multiple counts of larceny and theft for bilking banks, hotels and wealthy New Yorkers out of \$275,000.

She was sentenced to four to 12 years in prison. After serving three years in prison though — about half of which was at Rikers Island jail complex — Sorokin, a German citizen, was detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Later, she was released after posting a \$10,000 bond in the fall to home confinement, pending a deportation hearing.

Now she's taking advantage of her time at home by launching a weekly podcast series that she hopes will tell her side of the story, featuring various expert and celebrity guests. Sorokin's conversations with Julia Fox, "Pharma Bro" Martin Shkreli and Ottessa Moshfegh will be on upcoming episodes, according to Reunion Audio, the podcast company, who have also said she is interviewing Emily Ratajowski though her team has not confirmed that.

Sorokin's fraud case became the basis for the Emmy-nominated Netflix series "Inventing Anna," based

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 66 of 102

on a New York magazine story. Sorokin, played by three-time Emmy winner Julia Garner, said she was a consultant on the show, but didn't have "any control" over the final product.

"For me to say I'm rehabilitated would be to admit something was wrong with me to begin with. Like, I was just young. I made some mistakes," she said. "I'm trying to learn from them. My case, my criminal case is on direct appeal."

"Inventing Anna" was inspired by real-life events, but every episode included a disclaimer that the story was true except for the parts that were made up.

"I know some of the stuff like definitely did not happen," Sorokin said. "But it's not really up to me to sit here and go over the series piece-by-piece, because it's literally a Shonda Rhimes interpretation."

While Sorokin was jailed, her fanbase grew — even organizing a "Free Anna Delvey" art show that included some of her drawings, as well as works by other artists. Since then, she has attempted to sell pencil drawings for up to \$25,000.

The podcast gives her the opportunity to take back some control over the narrative, and it's something she's thought about doing for some time.

"I wanted to start recording in jail, actually over the jail phone because, you know, there are some rappers who record whole albums while being incarcerated. I was like, 'Why not record a podcast?'" Sorokin said.

She was never able to do it, because it was "logistically difficult" to record episodes, according to the podcast company.

As far as her time behind bars, Sorokin called prison a "transformative experience," saying that she's no longer the person who was arrested in 2017.

"It's been five years, a bit more than five years since I got arrested. So, I just like — I changed. I learned so much," she said. Dressed in a white blouse, her signature black-ribbon tie and dark slacks, her ankle bracelet is clearly visible.

She lifts her pants leg to show it off and even explains how it works.

"Sometimes you see the banks all operate the biggest fraud on a huge scale, but like if you bounce, I don't know, a \$500 check, then (it's) fraud," Sorokin said.

This week, Sorokin's guest on "The Anna Delvey Show" was model and rocker Julia Cumming of the New York City band, Sunflower Bean.

During a discussion about what makes a real New Yorker, Cumming says Sorokin's impact in the city qualifies her.

"You are the first person I've ever hung out with under house arrest," she said. "So that's a huge accomplishment."

Sorokin agreed that she didn't know anyone under house arrest either.

Cumming responded: "It's like you and Lindsay Lohan," who was under house arrest in Los Angeles more than a decade ago.

Sorokin believes her notoriety makes it's easy for her to bring guests on the show.

"I can get pretty much anybody up here," she said with brash confidence.

But there's one guest she won't be able to get: Theranos founder Elizabeth Holmes, who just began an 11-year prison sentence for overseeing a blood-testing hoax that became a parable about greed and hubris in Silicon Valley.

"I'd love to speak to Elizabeth. I definitely think she's an interesting person," Sorokin said. "I can relate a little bit more is because we're both females and have been trying to build something."

She would also consider having U.S. Rep. George Santos on the podcast, but doesn't feel she has much in common with him. The New York Republican who fabricated an identity as a rich, Wall Street dealmaker while running for Congress, and was recently charged in a 13-count indictment that included fraud, money laundering, and theft of public funds.

"I'm sure some of it is true, some of it — it's not," Sorokin said of things written about Santos.

She added: "I get so many requests to give George Santos advice, jail advice or something. I kind of stayed away from that."

So, for now, the subject of the "Inventing Anna" series waits to find out if people tune into the podcast,

available this week on all major platforms — and if her campaign to reinvent herself works.

AP journalist Anna Furman contributed reporting from Los Angeles.

## Florida woman who fatally shot neighbor appears in court, sheriff releases details of racist threats

By CURT ANDERSON Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. (AP) — A white Florida woman charged with shooting and killing her Black neighbor told detectives that she called the victim's children by racist slurs in the months leading up to the slaying, according to an arrest report released Thursday.

Susan Louise Lorincz, 58, admitted to detectives that she called the children "the n-word." One child told deputies that the night of the shooting, Lorincz "came out of her house and gave the children the middle finger" and also said this: "Get away from my house, you Black slave," according to the report.

The report from the Marion County Sheriff's Office came out shortly before Lorincz made her initial appearance in court Thursday by video. She has been charged with the first-degree felony of manslaughter with a firearm, as well as culpable negligence, battery and two counts of assault Sheriff Billy Woods said in a statement.

Lorincz appeared wearing a dark protective vest, answered the judge's questions about her finances and her attorney, an assistant public defender appointed by the judge, entered a written plea of not guilty. A bond hearing will be scheduled in the coming days.

Ajike Owens, a 35-year-old Black mother of four, was killed this week in Ocala, about 83 miles (133 kilometers) north of Orlando. Owens' mother, Pamela Dias, has said she will now raise her four young grandchildren.

Supporters of Owens' family gathered Thursday evening for a vigil outside the Ocala church where the slain woman's funeral is scheduled for Monday.

In a statement to investigators after the shooting, Lorincz was quoted saying she had problems for two years with children in the neighborhood not "respecting" her — including the victim's children, who range in age from 3 to 12 years old.

"Lorincz advised that the children of (Owens) have told her in the past they would kill her," the report said.

The day of the shooting, Lorincz told investigators she had a headache and that "neighbors were outside screaming and yelling, kids were running around" in a grassy area separating two apartment quadruplex buildings, including hers.

That night, while a few children were playing basketball, Lorincz came outside to throw a pair of roller skates at them, hitting one on the feet, according to the report. When Owens then knocked on her door, Lorincz claims that Owens threatened to kill her.

According to the sheriff's timeline, Lorincz called the department at 8:54 p.m. on the night of the shooting to say kids were threatening her and trespassing. She had previously placed "No trespassing" signs in the grassy areas, despite those being shared areas and not part of her rental. Lorincz said in court she doesn't own the property.

Many details about the case remain unclear, such as the owner of a red T-shirt that says, "She Slays This Means War" — which was found at the scene, according to the report.

While deputies were on their way, more calls came in to 911 about shots heard in the same area. At 9:04 p.m., one of Owens' children called 911 to say his mother had been shot, according to the timeline. Lorincz also called again, saying she had shot a woman through her front door. Deputies arrived about three minutes later to find Owens lying on the ground. She was pronounced dead at a hospital a half hour later.

Lorincz claimed "that Owens banged on the door so hard everything started shaking and she thought the door was going to come off," and that she panicked and said to herself "Oh my god, she's really going to kill me this time." That's when Lorincz fired a single round from her .380-caliber handgun, the report says, noting that Lorincz also had a second handgun in the home.

"Lorincz advised that she purchased the firearm for protection after an altercation with the victim," it says. During a news conference Wednesday afternoon, the victim's family, friends and community leaders joined civil rights attorney Ben Crump — who became well-known representing Trayvon Martin's family — in thanking the sheriff for making the arrest and calling for justice for Owens.

"This is not a difficult case," Crump said. He called on the state attorney's office to "zealously prosecute" the shooter.

Crump, along with Owens's mother and multiple neighbors noted during the news conference that the "feud" the sheriff spoke of was between Lorincz and neighborhood children. Neighbors said Lorincz frequently called the children vile names when they played in the grassy area outside her home.

Authorities had delayed her arrest for several days while looking into a possible "stand your ground" claim. Detectives have since said that Lorincz's actions are not justifiable under Florida law.

The sheriff has said that since January 2021, deputies responded to at least a half-dozen complaints between Owens and Lorincz in Ocala.

Associated Press writer Freida Frisaro contributed from Fort Lauderdale.

## Los Angeles county DA's office quits Twitter due to barrage of 'vicious' homophobic attacks

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

The Los Angeles county district attorney's office said Thursday it has left Twitter due to barrage of "vicious" homophobic attacks that were not removed by the social media platform even after they were reported. The account, which went by the handle @LADAOoffice, no longer exists on Twitter.

"Our decision to archive our Twitter account was not an easy one," the office said in a statement. "It came after a series of distressing comments over time, culminating in a shocking response to photographs we posted celebrating LADA's first known entry into a Pride parade."

It said its Pride parade post was met with "a barrage of vicious and offensive comments that left us deeply troubled."

The comments ranged from "homophobic and transphobic slurs to sexually explicit and graphic images," the office said, adding that they remained visible in replies to the account more than 24 hours after they were reported to Twitter.

Twitter, whose new CEO, Linda Yaccarino started on Monday, did not respond to a message for comment. Attacks on LGBTQ+ users have increased substantially since Elon Musk took over the company last fall, according to multiple advocacy groups.

The Center for Countering Digital Hate, for instance, recently identified 1.7 million tweets and retweets since the start of 2022 that mention the LGBTQ+ community via a keyword such as "LGBT," "gay," "homosexual" or "trans" alongside slurs including "groomer," "predator" and "pedophile." In 2022, in the months before Musk took over, there were an average of 3,011 such tweets per day. That jumped 119% to 6,596 in the four months after his takeover last October.

A big part of the reason is the drastic staffing cuts Musk has enacted since his takeover — there are simply not enough content moderators to handle the flood of problematic tweets that range from hate speech to graphic material and harassment. Musk has also described himself as a "free-speech absolutist" who believes Twitter's previous policies were too restricting.

In April, for instance, Twitter quietly removed a policy against the "targeted misgendering or deadnaming of transgender individuals," raising concerns that the platform is becoming less safe for marginalized groups. Musk has also repeatedly engaged with far-right figures and pushed misinformation to his 143 million followers.

Last week, Ella Irwin, Twitter's head of trust and safety, resigned after Musk criticized Twitter's handling of tweets about a conservative media company's documentary that questions medical treatment for transgender children and teens. Musk tweeted the video, which has been criticized as transphobic, to his

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 69 of 102

followers with the message, "Every parent should watch this."

Every major medical organization, including the American Medical Association, has opposed bans on gender-affirming care and supported the medical care for youth when administered appropriately. Lawsuits have been filed in several states where bans have been enacted this year.

The Los Angeles district attorney's office said Thursday it will remain active on other mainstream social media sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and TikTok but said, referring to Twitter, that it "will not be complicit and utilize a platform that promotes such hateful rhetoric."

## **A third day of smoky air gives millions in US East Coast, Canada a new view of wildfire threat**

By JENNIFER PELTZ and ROB GILLIES Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Images of smoke obscuring the New York skyline and the Washington Monument this week have given the world a new picture of the perils of wildfire, far from where blazes regularly turn skies into hazardous haze.

A third day of unhealthy air from Canadian wildfires may have been an unnerving novelty for millions of people on the U.S. East Coast, but it was a reminder of conditions routinely troubling the country's West — and a wake-up call about the future, scientists say.

"This is kind of an astounding event" but likely to become more common amid global warming, said Justin Mankin, a Dartmouth College geography professor and climate scientist. "This is something that we, as the eastern side of the country, need to take quite seriously."

Millions of residents could see that for themselves Thursday. The conditions sent asthma sufferers to hospitals, delayed flights, postponed ballgames and even pushed back a White House Pride Month celebration. The fires sent plumes of fine particulate matter as far away as North Carolina and northern Europe and parked clumps of air rated unhealthy or worse over the heavily populated Eastern Seaboard.

At points this week, air quality in places including New York, the nation's most populous city, nearly hit the top of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's air-pollution scale. Local officials urged people to stay indoors as much as possible and wear face masks when they venture out.

Such conditions are nothing new — indeed, increasingly frequent — on the U.S. West Coast, where residents were buying masks and air filters even before the coronavirus pandemic and have become accustomed to checking air quality daily in summertime. Since 2017, California has seen eight of its 10 largest wildfires and six of the most destructive.

The hazardous air has sometimes forced children, older adults and people with asthma and other respiratory conditions to stay indoors for weeks at a time. Officials have opened smoke shelters for people who are homeless or who might not have access to clean indoor air.

So what's the big deal about the smoke out East?

"The West has always burned, as has Canada, but what's important now is that we're getting these massive amounts of smoke in a very populated region, so many, many people are getting affected," said Loretta Mickley, the co-leader of Harvard University's Atmospheric Chemistry Modeling Group.

Fueled by an unusually dry and warm period in spring, the Canadian fire season that is just getting started could well become the worst on record. More than 400 blazes burned Thursday. Over a third are in Quebec, where Public Safety Minister François Bonnardel said no rain is expected until next week and temperatures are predicted to rise.

He said there have been no reports of injuries, deaths or home damage so far from the fires, but it remained unclear Thursday when more than 12,000 evacuees from various communities would be able to return. Manon Cyr, mayor of the evacuated town of Chibougamau, said she advised residents to be "Zen and patient. That's the most important."

But, she noted, the real solution will be a good dose of rain.

In neighboring Ontario, a haze hung over Toronto, Canada's most populous city, where many school recess breaks, day care center activities and outdoor recreation programs were canceled or moved inside.

U.S. President Joe Biden said Thursday that hundreds of American firefighters and support personnel

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 70 of 102

have been in Canada since May, and that he'd offered Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau "any additional help Canada needs to rapidly accelerate the effort to put out these fires." The two spoke Wednesday.

Wildfires aren't the only air-quality problems that beset major population centers around the globe.

In Beijing, for example, decades of sandstorms blowing in from the Mongolian plains have mixed with human-made pollution, sometimes making neighboring buildings invisible to one another. Commuters have even been spotted walking down streets wearing plastic bags over their heads to insulate against particulates.

Many African countries in and near the Sahara Desert, too, regularly grapple with bad air mainly because of sandstorms. Senegal, in particular, has endured years of unsafe levels of air pollution, which is causing asthma and other respiratory diseases, climate experts say.

Chemically, wildfire smoke can be more toxic than typical urban pollution, but with an asterisk: With smog, "the problem is you're in it all the time," says Jonathan Deason, an environmental and energy management professor George Washington University.

In New York City, Health Department spokesperson Pedro Frisneda said emergency rooms were seeing a "higher than usual" number of asthma-related visits from the blanket of smoke, estimating patients were in the "low hundreds."

The city public school system — the nation's largest — said Friday's classes would be conducted remotely, a decision that mostly affected high schoolers because most other pupils already had a scheduled day off. Motorists even got a break Thursday and Friday from having to move their cars for street cleaning.

In Washington, a big Pride Month celebration on the White House's South Lawn was moved from Thursday to Saturday, and a Washington Nationals-Arizona Diamondbacks game was postponed. Local officials closed public parks and suspended some road work.

Philadelphia ended trash collection early, for the sake of sanitation employees. Bridgeport, Connecticut's largest city, opened spaces usually used as hot-weather cooling centers so that residents could escape the unhealthy air.

A Chris Stapleton concert at a Syracuse amphitheater was pushed back, fireworks were canceled at Niagara Falls and racing was canceled at New York's Belmont Park two days before the famed Belmont Stakes. It wasn't yet clear whether the Triple Crown race itself might be affected; Gov. Kathy Hochul said that would depend on the air quality at the track Saturday.

And in central Pennsylvania, Country Meadows Retirement Communities temporarily closed walking areas and outdoor courtyards designated for residents in secured memory support units — "they may or may not recognize when they experience respiratory distress," explained company spokesperson Kelly Kuntz. All 2,300 residents of its 10 facilities were asked to cancel outdoor trips and strenuous outdoor activities.

"Bocce is huge," Kuntz said. "No bocce ball until this is done."

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Gillies reported from Toronto. Associated Press journalists Michael Hill in Albany, New York; Ashraf Khalil and Seung Min Kim in Washington; Gene Johnson in Seattle; Sam Mednick in Dakar, Senegal; Olga R. Rodriguez in San Francisco; Mark Scolforo in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; Ted Anthony in New York; and Shelley Adler in Fairfax, Virginia, contributed to this report.

## **As tourists flock to view volcano's latest eruption, Hawaii urges mindfulness, respect**

By JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — Hawaii tourism officials urged tourists to be respectful when flocking to a national park on the Big Island to get a glimpse of the latest eruption of Kilauea, one of the world's most active volcanoes.

Kilauea, Hawaii's second-largest volcano, began erupting Wednesday after a three-month pause.

The U.S. Geological Survey's Hawaiian Volcano Observatory on Thursday lowered Kilauea's alert level

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 71 of 102

from warning to watch because the rate of lava input declined, and no infrastructure is threatened. The eruption activity is confined to the closed area of Hawaii Volcanoes National Park.

"Out of respect for the cultural and spiritual significance of a volcanic eruption and the crater area for many kama'āina, the Hawai'i Tourism Authority urges mindfulness when planning a visit to the volcano," the agency said in a statement Wednesday night, using a Hawaiian word often used for Hawaii residents.

For many Native Hawaiians, an eruption of a volcano has a deep yet very personal cultural significance. Some may chant, some may pray to ancestors, and some may honor the moment with hula, or dance. Hawaiians ask that people keep a respectful distance.

"Don't just get out your camera and take photos. Stop and be still and take it in," said Cyrus Johnsen, a spokesperson for Hawaii County who is Hawaiian. "It's something that you can't pay for. In that moment, you are one with Hawaii."

In recognizing the sacredness of the area, he also urged visitors to not take rocks, refrain from horseplay and leave plants alone.

"A lot of plants up there are native," he said. "Just be mindful that you will leave a footprint. The idea is you leave one that's small as possible."

Word of Kilauea's lava fountains spread quickly, bringing crowds to the park. "Expect major delays and limited parking due to high visitation," said a warning on the park's website Thursday.

There was no exact count available, but officials estimated the first day and night of the eruption brought more than 10,000 people, which is more than triple the number of visitors on a normal day when Kilauea isn't erupting, park spokesperson Jessica Ferracane said.

Several thousand viewers were watching the USGS's livestream showing red pockets of moving lava Thursday morning.

"We were on social media, and we saw that it was actually going off while we're here, so we made the drive from the Kona side," Andrew Choi, visiting with his family from Orange County, California, told the Hawaii Tribune-Herald. "This feels so ridiculously lucky. We've never seen anything like this."

Park officials suggested visiting at less-crowded times before 9 a.m. or after 9 p.m.

Scientists expect the eruption to continue and remain confined to the Halemaumau crater in the park.

Early Wednesday, lava fountains were as high as 200 feet (60 meters) and decreased to 13 feet to 30 feet (4 meters to 9 meters) in the afternoon, according to the observatory.

"People here on Hawaii Island are getting a spectacular show," Mayor Mitch Roth said. "And it's happening in a safe place that was built for people to come view it."

## 'EH!POCALYPSE NOW!' Americans blame Canada as haze from northern fires continues

By ROB GILLIES Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — The front page headline of the New York Post screamed "BLAME CANADA!" The Boston Herald has "Thanks Canada," and the Dallas Morning News front page said "U.S. caught in a Canadian haze."

A thick, hazardous haze of wildfire smoke loomed over daily life this week for millions of people across the U.S. and Canada from over 400 Canadian wildfires. Canadians are unaccustomed to getting the attention of millions of Americans, let alone drawing their ire.

Americans quickly poked fun as the smoke-clogged air eerily silhouetted skylines in New York, Philadelphia and Washington.

The New York Post also used the headline "EH!POCALYPSE NOW" in reference to Canadians' frequent use of the word "Eh" and went on to say "It's the unhealthiest thing to come out of Canada since poutine." Poutine is the popular dish north of the border of french fries, cheese and gravy.

"Sorry!," Canadian meteorologist Anthony Farnell tweeted in response to the Post headline.

American composer Marc Shaiman rewrote his tongue-in-cheek song he co-wrote for the cartoon South Park, "Blame Canada."

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 72 of 102

"Blame Canada! Shame on Canada! For the fog and the smog, the haze from the blaze. The Ontario smoke that is making us choke," he sang.

Nelson Wiseman, a political scientist at the University of Toronto visiting upstate New York this week, said his wife heard an unusual theory from one American.

"A U.S. truck driver told my spouse yesterday that the wildfires are a product of Canadians caring more about protecting wildlife than managing their forests," he said.

Daniel Béland, a political science professor at McGill University in Montreal, said some people on social media quipped that, finally, Americans will know where Canada is on the map.

"My comment to a friend was, they're so excited they even got the provinces right," said Robert Bothwell, a Canadian historian.

## **Elevated walkway collapses in Texas beach city, injuring dozens**

SURFSIDE BEACH, Texas (AP) — Nearly two dozen teenagers from a summer camp were injured when an elevated walkway collapsed Thursday in a beachside city in Texas, with five flown to the hospital by helicopter.

None of the injuries were expected to be life-threatening, Brazoria County officials said. The cause of the walkway collapse in Surfside Beach, a small city on the Gulf of Mexico, about 60 miles (97 kilometers) south of downtown Houston, was under investigation.

Surfside Beach Volunteer Fire Department Assistant Chief Justin Mills said his department responded to an emergency call at 12:34 p.m. and set up landing areas for the medical helicopters.

Sharon Trower, public information officer for Brazoria County, said all of the victims were between 14 and 18 years old and from the Bayou City Fellowship summer camp. The five taken by helicopter were flown to Memorial Hermann hospital in Houston. Six were taken to local hospitals by ambulance, and about 10 more were taken to hospitals by private vehicles, Trower said.

Memorial Hermann officials and Bayou City Fellowship camp officials did not immediately respond to messages seeking comment.

Aerial video from TV station KTRK showed the walkway appears to be made from wood and leads to a building.

## **Smoke from wildfires, a fact of life in the West, catches outdoor workers off guard in the East**

By ALEXANDRA OLSON and WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — The hazardous haze from Canada's wildfires is taking its toll on people whose jobs have forced them outdoors along the U.S. East Coast even as a dystopian orange hue led to the cancellation of sports events, school field trips and Broadway plays.

Delivery workers, construction workers, farm laborers and railroad and airport employees on the West Coast have become all too familiar with the hazards that come with massive wildfires. Yet in the East a sun jaundiced by smoke is so novel, many workers had no idea what was happening.

Some, unprepared for the effects of smoke inhalation, left their jobs midday unable to carry on as the air quality worsened. Most, however, pushed through in the hopes that the skies would clear.

They haven't.

A laggardly weather system has settled over the region and the smoky blanket billowing from wildfires in Quebec and Nova Scotia continued Thursday, and may persist into the weekend.

New York City Public Schools announced Thursday that classes on Friday will switch to remote instruction. Most elementary and middle schools were scheduled to be off for a clerical day, however. In Philadelphia, the city suspended trash collection and street cleaning and repairs to protect workers from the pollution.

Some companies provided N-95 masks and allowed employees to take breaks indoors but labor rights groups pushed for more protections, replaying a years-long struggle that began in California and other



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 73 of 102

Western states.

Food delivery workers on bicycles and scooters crisscrossed the streets of New York City even though a "Code Red" alert remained in place Thursday.

Bimal Jhale, 43, tried to set out on his scooter to make deliveries for Grubhub on Wednesday afternoon but was already dizzy after working as cook in a diner that morning. By evening Jhale, father of a 5-year-old boy, had recovered somewhat and tried again.

"We are taking all these risks and still what we are making is barely enough to survive so we can't afford to miss work for even one day," said Jhale, who spoke in Hindi through a translator from the Justice for App Workers organization.

Grubhub alerted drivers that they would not be penalized if they didn't feel safe completing deliveries and reminded those with pre-existing conditions to stay inside, a company spokesperson said.

In recent years labor agencies in California, Oregon and Washington have adopted rules requiring employers to provide protection from wildfire smoke, including N95 respirators, breaks and sometimes moving operations indoors. California Gov. Gavin Newsom passed a bill in 2021 allowing farmworkers access to the state's stockpile of N95 masks.

While wildfire smoke has traveled across the continent to the East Coast in the past, conditions this week were particularly severe. There is little official guidance in the East related to wildfires and there are no such specific standards at the federal level, though employers must protect workers from wildfire smoke under general laws requiring safe work sites.

There are potential long- and short-term financial and health ramifications for workers. A study last year found that every day of exposure to drifting wildfire smoke can reduce workers' quarterly earnings by 0.1% — a toll that comes to \$125 billion a year in lost income.

"One thing that seems really clear from our research is that the effects of smoke on labor earnings or labor market incomes will extend past the days in which the smoke is bad," said Mark Borgschulte, one of the study's authors and an assistant professor in economics at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. "You can see people having heart attacks on days when air pollution is bad. That's going to affect them for a long periods of time."

Wildfire smoke contains hundreds of chemical compounds, experts note. In the short term, vulnerable people can be hospitalized and sometimes die from excessive smoke. Scientists have also linked smoke exposure with long-term health problems including decreased lung function, weakened immune systems and higher rates of flu.

Even when rules are in place, labor activists say getting companies to comply is another matter.

Tony Cardwell, president of the country's third-largest railroad union, said he has clashed with rail companies over protections for workers in California even after new wildfire rules were place. He said the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division, which represents track maintenance workers, is sending emails this week to railroads operating in the East to seek protections, including air quality monitoring and rescheduling work.

Amtrak said it made N-95 and KN95 masks available to all employees, and in areas where the air quality is considered hazardous, the company postponed non-critical work that requires employees to be outdoors. Norfolk Southern is conducting air monitoring and providing workers with N95 masks where needed, spokesperson Connor Spielmaker said.

Other companies scrambled to take similar steps.

Ground crews for Delta Air Lines are coming indoors in between aircraft turns, the time between when a plane pulls up to the gate and the next flight pushes back, said company spokesman Morgan Durrant.

Alex Kopp, safety director for The Association of Union Contractors, which represents 1,800 construction contractors, said the group was "concerned that air quality will have an effect on jobsite safety" and urged members to take precautions. But he acknowledged that "the current air quality certainly presents a new challenge."

Local 3 IBEW, an AFL-CIO affiliated union representing electrical workers in New York, said it received

reports of only two jobs sites closing Wednesday due to air quality issues despite public warnings to remain indoors, though some contractors are requiring masks.

Many workers were left to navigate the threat on their own.

Victor Aucapina, a construction worker doing a home renovation in Brooklyn, pulled his T-shirt over his nose between bites as he sat on a curb during a lunch break. Aucapina said he opted to keep his two young children home from school Wednesday but said he couldn't miss work as his family's sole breadwinner.

He was caught off guard as skies grew more yellow by lunchtime and winds carried with them the scent of burning trees.

"I didn't think it would so bad. Now I feel the smoke, the smell," said Aucapina, who added that he may bring a respirator if conditions don't improve but missing work would "be a last resort."

Wildfires of this size are so novel in the East, many workers did not immediately grasp the threat.

Warren Duckett didn't realize anything was wrong when he set out for his construction job in Washington, D.C., Wednesday morning and heard about the wildfires on the radio. Soon, one co-worker was on his way home suffering from smoke-related sinus issues, but Duckett pushed on.

"We thought it was just a foggy morning," Duckett said.

Duckett was hopeful that the skies would clear in the afternoon, but as in New York, that was not the case.

Conditions worsened in the country's capital Thursday as air quality warnings deteriorated from "Code Red," to "Code Purple."

Associated Press Writer David Koenig in Dallas and Paul Wiseman in Washington, D.C. contributed to this story. Grantham-Philips reported from Washington, D.C.

## DeSantis recruiters eyed Catholic church for migrant flights that bishop calls 'reprehensible'

By OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ and ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis' recruiters set their sights on Sacred Heart Catholic Church in the Texas border city of El Paso in search of asylum-seekers they could take from its bustling migrant shelter to California's capital on taxpayer-funded private jets.

Intentionally or not, envoys for Florida's Catholic governor and Republican presidential candidate infused an element of his own religion into his latest move on immigration, which has drawn sharp criticism from El Paso's Catholic bishop.

"Without going into the details of the politics of it, it does seem clear that they were being used not out of concern for the migrants but in an effort to make a political point," Bishop Mark Seitz told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

Seitz said many migrants arriving in the U.S. don't know the geography, including how far cities and states are from one another, and are just anxious to move on.

"If you're seeking to help a person who needs to get to a certain destination where they have a sponsor, where they have a job or something like that, that is a commendable act," Seitz said. "But if they are being moved simply in order to use them to make a political point, that is reprehensible. It is taking person who already has lost everything — everything. They have nothing, not even a nation they can really call their own because they have had to flee that nation. And then using them for your own purposes: That is not morally acceptable."

DeSantis has acknowledged that Florida paid to transport 36 mostly Venezuelan migrants from Republican-led Texas to Sacramento on charter flights last Friday and on Monday. The first group was dropped off in front of the Roman Catholic Diocese in Sacramento, also the headquarters of Catholic Charities, apparently without warning. Local advocates and officials met the second group at the airport after learning of their arrival.

The governor says they made the trip voluntarily — a claim that some migrant advocates challenge. He also says they signed waivers to that effect and that California effectively invited them with its welcoming

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 75 of 102

policies.

"I think the border should be closed. I don't think we should have any of this. But if there's a policy to have an open border, then I think the sanctuary jurisdictions should be the ones that have to bear that," DeSantis said Wednesday at an event for law enforcement officials in Sierra Vista, Arizona.

Asked about the bishop's criticism, DeSantis spokesman Jeremy Redfern said the governor's previous comments "stand on their own."

In May, DeSantis signed a law allocating up to \$12 million for migrant flights, like two that Florida funded last year from San Antonio to the pricey Massachusetts island of Martha's Vineyard.

References to the Martha's Vineyard flights have become a staple in DeSantis' presidential stump speech and often draw hearty applause from Republican primary voters. The Sacramento flights are part of a broader effort by certain Republican-led states to send migrants to Democratic-leaning parts of the country, including New York, Washington, D.C., and Chicago.

President Joe Biden is also Catholic and, like DeSantis, he has clashed with bishops, though in Biden's case over LGBTQ+ rights and abortion. In addition to immigration, DeSantis has split with bishops over the death penalty, which the governor supports and the church doesn't.

Seitz, who chairs the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' migration committee, has been bishop for a decade in heavily Catholic El Paso, which sits in one of the busiest corridors for illegal border crossings. Sacred Heart is downtown, a few blocks from Mexico.

Two men and a woman working for the Florida government recruited migrants outside Sacred Heart with promises of jobs and housing in California, said Imelda Maynard, director of legal services at Diocesan Migrant & Refugee Services Inc., which is part of the Diocese of El Paso.

A Venezuelan man said he was lured to a distant motel with his wife and four children for three days, Maynard said. He became suspicious and pulled out after being told he would have to fly separately and the rest of his family would follow on a different flight because there wasn't enough room for them to go together.

The man didn't know where the motel was, but Maynard suspects it was in Deming, New Mexico, which was where the charter flights departed for Sacramento. The family hitchhiked back to Sacred Heart.

A passenger who was on the first flight called the Venezuelan migrant to say he had been duped, Maynard said.

"Don't come. It's a scam. There are no jobs here, there is no room and board. They just dumped us in the middle of nowhere at this church and no one knows what's going on," the Venezuelan migrant recounted being told.

Sacred Heart is a well-known shelter, particularly among Venezuelans. It is indicative of the many Catholic charities along the southern border from San Diego to Brownsville, Texas, that provide food, showers, housing and transportation to migrants seeking a rest stop before leaving for their final destinations in the United States.

It is unclear if Sacred Heart was the only place that DeSantis' recruiters targeted. Maynard said she didn't know of any others.

Maynard said standing outside a shelter promising jobs that don't exist was "gross." California Gov. Gavin Newsom, DeSantis' perennial Democratic rival, has suggested it may be criminal.

"It's really dehumanizing to have someone play with you that way because no one took into account these are human beings and they were toyed with," Maynard said.

DeSantis' office has emphasized that its contractor safely delivered migrants to Catholic Charities of Sacramento Inc., which is located at the California diocese. The Sacramento charity has not responded to the AP's requests for comment.

Seitz applauded Catholic Charities' response.

"I'm inspired by the way I see people received here on the border, and, I'm hearing reports, by the way they were received in Sacramento by Catholic Charities," he said. "Catholic Charities was not informed, but they stepped up and received them, and that's the good news in all of this."

Spagat reported from San Diego.

Find more AP coverage of the immigration issue: <https://apnews.com/hub/immigration>

## The S&P 500 is in a bull market. Here's what that means and how long the bull might run

Associated Press undefined

The S&P 500 is now in what Wall Street refers to as a bull market, meaning the index has risen 20% or more from its most recent low.

Here are some answers to questions about bull and bear markets:

**WHY IT IS CALLED A BULL MARKET?**

Wall Street's nickname for a surging stock market is a bull market because bulls charge, said Sam Stovall, chief investment strategist at CFRA. In contrast, bears hibernate, so bears represent a market that's retreating.

**WHEN DID THE NEW BULL MARKET BEGIN?**

This latest bull market is considered to have begun on Oct. 13, 2022, a day after the S&P 500 closed at its most recent low of 3,577.03.

**WHY HAS THE MARKET RALLIED?**

Largely because the economy has defied predictions by not falling into a recession, at least not yet.

Markets tumbled last year on fears about how the worst inflation in decades would ravage the economy. More precisely, Wall Street got spooked by the aggressive measures the Federal Reserve took to combat high inflation.

The Fed has yanked interest rates to their highest level since 2007, up from virtually zero early last year. The aim was to drive down inflation by slowing the economy and dragging down prices for stocks, bonds and other investments. That left many investors bracing for a recession for months, but a remarkably resilient job market has kept the economy afloat.

Inflation, meanwhile, has eased off since hitting a peak last summer. That has Wall Street hoping for the Fed to soon stop hiking interest rates.

Both the Dow Jones Industrial Average and the Nasdaq are already in bull markets, having entered them in November and May, respectively.

**SO EVERYTHING'S FINE?**

Hardly. The Fed is likely still not done hiking interest rates. Even if it hold rates steady at its next meeting, which would be the first time that's happened in more than a year, the expectation among traders is for the Fed to resume hiking in July. The hope is that will ultimately be the last rate hike, but persistent inflation could upend that.

That keeps up the pressure on the overall economy and particularly on the banking and manufacturing industries, which have already shown some cracks.

Most of the gains for the S&P 500 this year have come from just a small group of stocks, which critics say is unsustainable. Apple (+30%), Microsoft (+44%) and Alphabet (+25%), the companies with the highest market values in the S&P 500, all outpaced the index. Their huge size gives their movements extra weight on the index, while nearly half the stocks in the index have dropped so far in 2023.

**HOW LONG DO BULL MARKETS TYPICALLY LAST?**

Since 1932, bull markets have lasted an average of nearly 5 years and the S&P 500 sees a gain of 177.8%. The longest bull market started in March 2009, near the end of the Great Recession, and roamed Wall Street for almost 11 years.

**WHEN WAS THE PREVIOUS BULL MARKET?**

The previous bull market started on March 23, 2020, as the market recovered from a lightning-fast bear market caused by the onset of the global pandemic. That bull market was the shortest dating back to 1932, lasting about 21 months, according to data from S&P Dow Jones Indices. Still, the S&P 500 more

than doubled (up 114.4%).

WEREN'T WE JUST IN A BEAR MARKET?

By entering a bull market, the S&P 500 effectively put an end to the bear market that began on Jan. 3, 2022. Officially, the bear market is considered to have ended on Oct. 12, 2022.

Declaring the end of a bear market may seem arbitrary, and different market watchers use different definitions, but it offers a useful marker for investors.

HOW MEAN WAS THAT BEAR?

The now-deceased bear market lasted about nine months and saw a drop of 25.4%. It was rather tame as far as bear markets go. Since 1950, the average bear market has lasted 13 months and the S&P 500 fell 34.2%. Since 1929, the average bear market has lasted 19.6 months and the S&P 500 has dropped 39.4%

## Pat Robertson, broadcaster who helped make religion central to GOP politics, dies at 93

By BEN FINLEY Associated Press

VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. (AP) — Pat Robertson, a religious broadcaster who turned a tiny Virginia station into the global Christian Broadcasting Network, tried a run for president and helped make religion central to Republican Party politics in America through his Christian Coalition, has died. He was 93.

Robertson's death Thursday was confirmed in an email by his broadcasting network. No cause was given.

Robertson's enterprises also included Regent University, an evangelical Christian school in Virginia Beach; the American Center for Law and Justice, which defends the First Amendment rights of religious people; and Operation Blessing, an international humanitarian organization.

For more than a half-century, Robertson was a familiar presence in American living rooms, known for his "700 Club" television show, and in later years, his televised pronouncements of God's judgment — usually delivered with a smile, as a gentle lament — that blamed natural disasters on gays and feminists and accused Black Lives Matter demonstrators of being anti-Christian.

Robertson was a "happy warrior" who was soft-spoken, urbane and well-read, said Ralph Reed, who ran the Christian Coalition in the 1990s.

"He was not some backwoods preacher," Reed said. "He was very enthralling, avuncular and charming. He had a great sense of humor."

The money poured in as he solicited donations, his influence soared, and he brought a huge following with him when he moved directly into politics by seeking the GOP presidential nomination in 1988.

Robertson pioneered the now-common strategy of courting Iowa's network of evangelical Christian churches, and finished in second place in the Iowa caucuses, ahead of Vice President George H.W. Bush.

His masterstroke was insisting that three million followers across the U.S. sign petitions before he would decide to run, Robertson biographer Jeffrey K. Hadden said. The tactic gave him an army.

"He asked people to pledge that they'd work for him, pray for him and give him money," Hadden, a University of Virginia sociologist, told The Associated Press in 1988. "Political historians may view it as one of the most ingenious things a candidate ever did."

Robertson later endorsed Bush, who won the presidency. Pursuit of Iowa's evangelicals is now a ritual for Republican hopefuls, including those currently seeking the White House in 2024.

Robertson started the Christian Coalition in Chesapeake in 1989, saying it would further his campaign's ideals. The coalition became a major political force in the 1990s, mobilizing conservative voters through grass-roots activities.

By the time of his resignation as the coalition's president in 2001 — Robertson said he wanted to concentrate on ministerial work — his impact on both religion and politics in the U.S. was "enormous," according to John C. Green, an emeritus political science professor at the University of Akron.

Many followed the path Robertson cut in religious broadcasting, Green told the AP in 2021. In American politics, Robertson helped "cement the alliance between conservative Christians and the Republican Party."

Marion Gordon "Pat" Robertson was born March 22, 1930, in Lexington, Virginia, to Absalom Willis Rob-

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 78 of 102

Robertson and Gladys Churchill Robertson. His father served for 36 years as a U.S. Representative and U.S. Senator from Virginia.

After graduating from Washington and Lee University, he served as assistant adjutant of the 1st Marine Division in Korea.

He received a law degree from Yale University Law School, but failed the bar exam and chose not to pursue a law career.

Robertson met his wife, Adelia "Dede" Elmer, at Yale in 1952. He was a Southern Baptist, she was a Catholic, earning a master's in nursing. Eighteen months later, they ran off to be married by a justice of the peace, knowing neither family would approve.

Robertson was interested in politics until he found religion, Dede Robertson told the AP in 1987. He stunned her by pouring out their liquor, tearing a nude print off the wall and declaring he had found the Lord.

They moved into a commune in New York City's Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood because Robertson said God told him to sell all his possessions and minister to the poor. She was tempted to return home to Ohio, "but I realized that was not what the Lord would have me do ... I had promised to stay, so I did," she told the AP.

Robertson received a master's in divinity from New York Theological Seminary in 1959, then drove south with his family to buy a bankrupt UHF television station in Portsmouth, Virginia. He said he had just \$70 in his pocket, but soon found investors, and CBN went on the air on Oct. 1, 1961. Established as a tax-exempt religious nonprofit, CBN brought in hundreds of millions, disclosing \$321 million in "ministry support" in 2022 alone.

One of Robertson's innovations was to use the secular talk-show format on the network's flagship show, the "700 Club," which grew out of a telethon when Robertson asked 700 viewers for monthly \$10 contributions. It was more suited to television than traditional revival meetings or church services, and gained a huge audience.

"Here's a well-educated person having sophisticated conversations with a wide variety of guests on a wide variety of topics," said Green, the University of Akron political science professor. "It was with a religious inflection to be sure. But it was an approach that took up everyday concerns."

His guests eventually included several U.S. presidents — Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump. At times, his on-air pronouncements drew criticism.

After a devastating earthquake in 2010, he said Haitians were cursed by a "pact with the devil" made by the slaves who rebelled against French colonists centuries earlier, and in 2020, he spoke out against the Black Lives Matter movement, saying it wants to destroy Christianity. "Of course, Black lives matter," Robertson said, but the movement is "a stalking horse for a very very radical anti-family, anti-God agenda."

"To insinuate that our movement is trying to destroy Christianity is disgraceful and outright offends our Christian siblings who are a part of our movement against racial injustice," responded Patrice Cullors, a BLM co-founder.

Robertson also claimed that the terrorist attacks that killed thousands of Americans on Sept. 11, 2001 were caused by God, angered by the federal courts, pornography, abortion rights and church-state separation. Talking again about 9-11 on his TV show a year later, Robertson described Islam as a violent religion that wants to "dominate" and "destroy," prompting President George W. Bush to distance himself and say Islam is a peaceful and respectful religion.

He called for the assassination of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez in 2005, although he later apologized.

Later that year, he warned residents of a rural Pennsylvania town not to be surprised if disaster struck them because they voted out school board members who favored teaching "intelligent design" over evolution. And in 1998, he said Orlando, Florida, should beware of hurricanes after allowing the annual Gay Days event.

In 2014, he angered Kenyans when he warned that towels in Kenya could transmit AIDS. CBN issued a correction, saying Robertson "misspoke about the possibility of getting AIDS through towels."

Robertson also could be unpredictable: In 2010, he called for ending mandatory prison sentences for

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 79 of 102

marijuana possession convictions. Two years later, he said on the "700 Club" that marijuana should be legalized and treated like alcohol because the government's war on drugs had failed.

Robertson condemned Democrats caught up in sex scandals, saying for example that President Bill Clinton turned the White House into a playpen for sexual freedom. But he helped solidify evangelical support for Donald Trump, dismissing the candidate's sexually predatory comments about women as an attempt "to look like he's macho."

After Trump took office, Robertson interviewed the president at the White House. And CBN welcomed Trump advisers, such as Kellyanne Conway, as guests.

But after President Trump lost to Joe Biden in 2020, Robertson said Trump was living in an "alternate reality" and should "move on," news outlets reported.

Robertson's son, Gordon, succeeded him in December 2007 as chief executive of CBN, which is now based in Virginia Beach. Robertson remained chairman of the network and continued to appear on the "700 Club."

Robertson stepped down as host of the show after half a century in 2021, with his son Gordon taking over the weekday show.

Robertson also was founder and chairman of International Family Entertainment Inc., parent of The Family Channel basic cable TV network. Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. bought IFE in 1997.

Regent University, where classes began in Virginia Beach in 1978, now has more than 30,000 alumni, CBN said in a statement.

Robertson wrote 15 books, including "The Turning Tide" and "The New World Order."

His wife Dede, who was a founding board member of CBN, died last year at the age of 94. The couple had four children, 14 grandchildren and 24 great-grandchildren, CBN said in a statement.

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Former Associated Press reporters Don Schanche and Pam Ramsey contributed to this story.

## **Supreme Court rules in favor of Black Alabama voters in unexpected defense of Voting Rights Act**

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Thursday issued a surprising 5-4 ruling in favor of Black voters in a congressional redistricting case from Alabama, with two conservative justices joining liberals in rejecting a Republican-led effort to weaken a landmark voting rights law.

Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Brett Kavanaugh aligned with the court's liberals in affirming a lower-court ruling that found a likely violation of the Voting Rights Act in an Alabama congressional map with one majority Black seat out of seven districts in a state where more than one in four residents is Black. The state now will have to draw a new map for next year's elections.

The decision was keenly anticipated for its potential effect on control of the closely divided U.S. House of Representatives. Because of the ruling, new maps are likely in Alabama and Louisiana that could allow Democratic-leaning Black voters to elect their preferred candidates in two more congressional districts.

The outcome was unexpected in that the court had allowed the challenged Alabama map to be used for the 2022 elections, and in arguments last October the justices appeared willing to make it harder to challenge redistricting plans as racially discriminatory under the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The chief justice himself suggested last year that he was open to changes in the way courts weigh discrimination claims under the part of the law known as section 2. But on Thursday, Roberts wrote that the court was declining "to recast our section 2 case law as Alabama requests."

Roberts also was part of conservative high-court majorities in earlier cases that made it harder for racial minorities to use the Voting Rights Act in ideologically divided rulings in 2013 and 2021.

The other four conservative justices dissented Thursday. Justice Clarence Thomas wrote that the decision forces "Alabama to intentionally redraw its longstanding congressional districts so that black voters can control a number of seats roughly proportional to the black share of the State's population. Section 2

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 80 of 102

demands no such thing, and, if it did, the Constitution would not permit it.”

The Biden administration sided with the Black voters in Alabama.

Attorney General Merrick Garland applauded the ruling: “Today’s decision rejects efforts to further erode fundamental voting rights protections, and preserves the principle that in the United States, all eligible voters must be able to exercise their constitutional right to vote free from discrimination based on their race.”

Evan Milligan, a Black voter and the lead plaintiff in the case, said the ruling was a victory for democracy and people of color.

“We are grateful that the Supreme Court upheld what we knew to be true: that everyone deserves to have their vote matter and their voice heard. Today is a win for democracy and freedom not just in Alabama but across the United States,” Milligan said.

Alabama Republican Party Chairman John Wahl said in a statement that state lawmakers would comply with the ruling. “Regardless of our disagreement with the Court’s decision, we are confident the Alabama Legislature will redraw district lines that ensure the people of Alabama are represented by members who share their beliefs, while following the requirements of applicable law,” Wahl said.

But Steve Marshall, the state’s Republican attorney general, said he expects to continue defending the challenged map in federal court, including at a full trial. “Although the majority’s decision is disappointing, this case is not over,” Marshall said in a statement.

Deuel Ross, a civil rights lawyer who argued the case at the Supreme Court, said the justices have validated the lower court’s view in this case. A full trial “doesn’t seem a good use of Alabama’s time, resources or the money of the people to continue to litigate their case.”

The case stems from challenges to Alabama’s seven-district congressional map, which included one district in which Black voters form a large enough majority that they have the power to elect their preferred candidate. The challengers said that one district is not enough, pointing out that overall, Alabama’s population is more than 25% Black.

A three-judge court, with two appointees of former President Donald Trump, had little trouble concluding that the plan likely violated the Voting Rights Act by diluting the votes of Black Alabamians. That “likely” violation was the standard under which the preliminary injunction was issued by the three-judge panel, which ordered a new map drawn.

But the state quickly appealed to the Supreme Court, where five conservative justices prevented the lower-court ruling from going forward. At the same time, the court decided to hear the Alabama case.

Louisiana’s congressional map had separately been identified as probably discriminatory by a lower court. That map, too, remained in effect last year and now will have to be redrawn.

The National Redistricting Foundation said in a statement that its pending lawsuits over congressional districts in Georgia and Texas also could be affected.

Separately, the Supreme Court in the fall will hear South Carolina’s appeal of a lower-court ruling that found Republican lawmakers stripped Black voters from a district to make it safer for a Republican candidate. That case also could lead to a redrawn map in South Carolina, where six U.S. House members are Republicans and one is a Democrat.

Partisan politics also underlies the Alabama case. Republicans who dominate elective office in Alabama have been resistant to creating a second district with a Democratic-leaning Black majority, or close to one, that could send another Democrat to Congress.

The judges found that Alabama concentrated Black voters in one district, while spreading them out among the others to make it much more difficult to elect more than one candidate of their choice.

Alabama’s Black population is large enough and geographically compact enough to create a second district, the judges found.

Denying discrimination, Alabama argued that the lower court ruling would have forced it to sort voters by race and insisted it was taking a “race neutral” approach to redistricting.

At arguments in October, Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson scoffed at the idea that race could not be part of the equation. Jackson, the court’s first Black woman, said that constitutional amendments passed after the Civil War and the Voting Rights Act a century later were intended to do the same thing, make Black



Americans "equal to white citizens."

Associated Press writer Kim Chandler contributed to this report from Montgomery, Alabama.

## Knife attack at park in French Alps critically wounds 4 young children as people cry for help

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — As bystanders screamed for help, a man with a knife stabbed four young children at a lakeside park in the French Alps on Thursday, assaulting at least one in a stroller repeatedly. Authorities said the children, between 22 months and 3 years old, suffered life-threatening injuries, and two adults were also wounded.

The helplessness of the young victims and the savagery of the attack sickened France, and drew international condemnation.

A suspect, identified by police as a 31-year-old Syrian, was detained in connection with the morning attack in the town of Annecy. French authorities said he had recently been refused asylum in France, because Sweden had already granted him permanent residency and refugee status a decade ago.

Witnesses reported scenes of terror as the man roamed the park, ambushing victims with his blade.

"I said to the police, 'Shoot him, kill him! He's stabbing everyone,'" Anthony Le Tallec, a former professional soccer player who was jogging when he came across the attacker, said.

Lead prosecutor Line Bonnet-Mathis said the man's motives were unknown but did not appear to be terrorism-related. He was armed with a folding knife, she said.

She said all four children suffered life-threatening knife wounds. The youngest is 22 months old, two are age 2 and the oldest is 3, she said. Two of them are French, the other two were tourists — one British, the other Dutch, she said.

Two adults also suffered knife wounds — life-threatening for one of them, the prosecutor said. One of the adults was hurt both with the attacker's knife and later by a shot fired by police as they were making the arrest, Bonnet-Mathis said.

Video appearing to show the attack in and around a children's play park was posted on social media. The footage showed a man in dark glasses and with a blue scarf covering his head brandishing a knife, as people screamed for help.

The man appeared to shout "on name of Jesus Christ" as he waved his knife in the air, while people nearby could be heard screaming: "Police! Police!"

He slashed at a man carrying rucksacks who tried to approach him. Inside the enclosed play park, a panicked woman frantically pushed a stroller as the attacker approached, yelling "Help! Help!" and ramming the stroller into the barriers around the site in her terror.

She tried to fend off the attacker but couldn't keep him from leaning over the stroller and stabbing downward repeatedly. Afterward, the man strolled almost casually out of the park, letting himself out through a gate, with the man carrying two rucksacks still chasing after him.

French President Emmanuel Macron described the assault as an "attack of absolute cowardice."

"The nation is in shock," Macron tweeted.

Le Tallec, the ex-soccer player who witnessed the attack, said in an Instagram video that he first came across "a mother who said to me, 'Run! Run! There's someone stabbing everyone.'"

"I saw him sprinting straight for some grandpas and grandmas. And there, he attacked, he attacked the grandpa, he stabbed him."

The prosecutor said the suspect had been living in the Annecy area since last fall and had no fixed address. An ice cream seller who works in the waterside park said he'd seen the attacker there several days earlier, looking out at the lake ringed by mountains.

The suspect was a political refugee in Sweden, the prosecutor said. The Swedish Migration Agency said he was granted permanent residency in 2013. The agency did not identify the suspect but said he subse-

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 82 of 102

quently sought Swedish citizenship in 2017 and 2018, both times denied, and applied again in August 2022.

French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said the suspect entered France legally, and "for some reasons we don't really understand, he applied for asylum in Switzerland, in Italy and in France, which he didn't need to do as he already had asylum in Sweden for the past 10 years."

On Sunday, Darmanin said, the suspect "was notified he couldn't get asylum in France because he already has it in Sweden."

The attack shattered the relaxed atmosphere in the picturesque park and left visitors and local residents reeling.

Eleanor Vincent, an American author vacationing in Annecy, told The Associated Press of her shock.

"As soon as I heard the sirens and saw police running, I knew something horrible was happening," Vincent said.

Crowds stood in "absolute silence," dumbfounded as the tragedy unfolded, she said.

"As a parent who has lost a child, I know what these parents are experiencing. It's a horror beyond belief," Vincent added.

Google-owned YouTube said in a statement Thursday that it had removed and put age restrictions on some bystander-filmed footage of the attack, in accordance with its policies against graphic violence meant to shock or disgust. Facebook and Instagram parent company Meta said it was also identifying and removing any copy of or link to videos that depicted the victims of the attack.

Both YouTube and Meta said they would remove any content that praises the perpetrator.

Twitter didn't respond to requests for comment Thursday about how it's handling the videos.

In Paris, lawmakers interrupted a debate to hold a moment of silence for the victims.

The assembly president, Yaël Braun-Pivet, said: "There are some very young children who are in critical condition, and I invite you to respect a minute of silence for them, for their families, and so that, we hope, the consequences of this very grave attack do not lead to the nation grieving."

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Gregory Ros in Annecy, Thomas Adamson in Paris, Jill Lawless in London, Jan M. Olsen in Copenhagen, Nicolas Vaux-Montagny in Lyon, France and Matt O'Brien in Providence, Rhode Island also contributed.

## How 'The Flash,' many years in the works and beset by turmoil, finally reached the finish line

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

There were many stressful things about making "The Flash" and getting it to theaters. It was shot in the middle of a pandemic. There was isolation from friends and family for the 138-day shoot. There were A-list schedules to coordinate for cameos. There was a star in Ezra Miller who, after it wrapped, made headlines for legal run-ins amid a mental health crisis. And behind it all, a studio undergoing leadership changes and rethinking the whole DC Comics strategy.

But first, they had to figure out how to transport a two-ton Batmobile from Los Angeles to the U.K. amid a worldwide shortage of shipping containers in 2021.

This was not just any Batmobile, mind you. It was one of the originals from the Tim Burton movies that was needed for the grand return of Michael Keaton's caped crusader after 30 years — a major production that also involved building, from scratch, a life-size replica of the Batcave.

Director Andy Muschietti and his sister, producer Barbara Muschietti, waited nervously for its arrival worried whether it would make it in time or just be stuck in the middle of the ocean. They breathed a sigh of relief when it made it ashore, briefly celebrated and moved on to the next problem: how to get it into the Batcave at Warner Bros. Studios Leavesden. Ultimately it involved a loading it onto a modified airport cargo truck that was lifted 20 feet (6 meters) in the air and "gently rolled" onto set.

"Everything came with a little adventure," Barbara Muschietti said with a laugh in a recent interview with The Associated Press.

It's an apt if intentionally understated description of getting "The Flash" into theaters on June 16. Movie

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 83 of 102

versions of the lightning quick comic book character have been in various stages of development since the late 1980s. One scenario had Ryan Reynolds starring and David S. Goyer directing; another had George Miller setting the stage for spinoffs and standalones with Adam Brody.

Then in 2014, things started taking shape as Warner Bros. plotted out a shared universe of DC Comics films, including a standalone Flash starring Miller as Barry Allen, who would first appear in "Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice," "Suicide Squad" and "Justice League."

But even that wasn't so straightforward, with disagreements over tone and scheduling conflicts making things complicated. Several writers and directors cycled in and out of developing "The Flash," including Phil Lord and Christopher Miller, Seth Grahame-Smith, Rick Famuyiwa, Robert Zemeckis and John Francis Daley and Jonathan Goldstein, and release dates were pushed back. Ezra Miller even worked on their own treatment of a script.

The Muschiettis were finishing "It Chapter Two" when the studio approached them about "The Flash." They didn't concern themselves with the messy, marathon development history — they just wanted to figure out if this was worth several years of their life. In the story, Andy Muschietti found a compelling emotional core: The relationship between Barry Allen and his mother, who was killed when he was a child and whom he wants to go back in time to save. "Back to the Future," which is referenced quite a bit in "The Flash," was one of their favorite movies, too. They were in.

"Birds of Prey" screenwriter Christina Hobson had taken a crack at the story and come out with something that was both fun and emotional and introduced the multiverse to the DC cannon. In Barry Allen's quest to save his mother, he accidentally gets tossed into another timeline and meets a younger, different version of himself who gets swept up in the journey. It allowed for lots of possibilities, including bringing Keaton back in a movie that also had Ben Affleck's "Zack Snyder Batman."

"We all got very excited about the prospect of having Michael Keaton come back after 30 years of not knowing what Batman was up to," Andy Muschietti said. "The multiverse allowed this to happen and combine the existing characters, the existing universe, with something that seemed to have been buried in the past."

They told Keaton, who jogged to their lunch meeting in Brentwood, they wouldn't be able to do the film without him. They wanted to find his Bruce Wayne in a place people wouldn't expect. By the end of lunch, Keaton had agreed and jogged off.

"I didn't want him to be sitting near the fireplace, like staring out of a glass of whiskey," Andy Muschietti said. "I knew he was going to transform back into Batman so I needed him to be in a place that made that transformation possible in the tradition of a reluctant hero."

Keaton's Batman was also due to make a return in the standalone "Batgirl" movie which was ultimately shelved close to completion.

"The Flash" has other nostalgic nods, including an army of cameos best left unspoiled, that helps set the stage for a "universe reboot." While making the film, big leadership changes were afoot at Warner Bros. and, specifically, DC Studios, where new co-chairs and CEOs James Gunn and Peter Safran were tasked with plotting the future of the DC Universe characters, from Superman to Batman. That new vision won't officially begin until Gunn's new Superman in 2025, but he's also said that "The Flash," though technically from a previous regime, "resets the entire DC universe."

But then during the extensive post-production on "The Flash," star Ezra Miller, also started making headlines for a string of arrests and reports of erratic behavior last year. They were arrested twice last year in Hawaii, including for disorderly conduct and harassment at a karaoke bar. In January, they pleaded guilty to a charge stemming from a break-in and theft of alcohol at a neighbor's home in Vermont. They avoided jail time but paid a \$500 fine and got a year of probation, agreeing to abide by a number of conditions including continued mental health treatment.

Though some questioned whether "The Flash" should be shelved, the studio remained committed to releasing it on June 16 even without their star on the promotional circuit.

"We're in contact with them. They love the movie. They support the movie. And they're taking their

treatment very seriously," said Barbara Muschietti of Miller. "We want everybody to see this. It's great and it's special. And it has all our hearts and guts."

While early hyperbole abounded with people like Gunn calling it one of the best superhero movies he'd ever seen, reviews have indeed been mostly very positive with lots of praise for Miller's dual roles.

"What you get is this delicious odd couple," Barbara Muschietti. "You forget that they're the same actor."

There are even rumors that the Muschiettis' DC relationship will continue with future films. But right now, the focus is "The Flash."

"Let's just wait and see," Andy Muschietti said.

## Republicans set to push mail ballots, voting methods they previously blasted as recipes for fraud

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — After years of criticizing mail voting and so-called ballot harvesting as ripe for fraud, Republicans at the top of the party want to change course.

They are poised to launch aggressive get-out-the-vote campaigns for 2024 that employ just those strategies, attempting to match the emphasis on early voting Democrats have used for years to lock in many of their supporters well ahead of Election Day. The goal is to persuade voters who support GOP candidates that early voting techniques are secure and to make sure they are able to return their ballots in time to be counted, thus putting less pressure on Election Day turnout efforts.

It marks a notable shift from the party's rhetoric since 2020, when then-President Donald Trump was routinely sowing doubt about mail voting and encouraging his voters to wait and vote in-person on Election Day. As recently as last year, Republican activists peddling the stolen election narrative were telling GOP voters who received mail ballots to hold onto them and turn them in at their polling place on Election Day rather than use mail or drop boxes.

Now Trump is asking donors to chip in for his "ballot harvesting fund" — saying in a fundraising email, "Either we ballot harvest where we can, or you can say goodbye to America!"

Republicans say the shift is needed to ensure GOP victories up and down the 2024 ballot, arguing they cannot afford to give Democrats any advantage. At the same time, they acknowledge skepticism from many of their own voters conditioned by false claims of widespread voter fraud from Trump and others.

Across the country, Republican-controlled legislatures have acted against early voting — shortening windows for returning mail ballots, banning or limiting the use of drop boxes and criminalizing third-party ballot collection.

In announcing a "Bank Your Vote" initiative for 2024, Republican National Committee Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel said the party "has never said 'don't vote early,'" but acknowledged the GOP will have to work to shift voters' perceptions.

"That certainly is a challenge if you have people in your ecosystem saying, 'Don't vote early or don't vote by mail,' and those cross messages do have an impact," McDaniel told reporters Wednesday. "I don't think you're seeing that heading into 2024. I think you're seeing all of us singing from the same songbook."

The nationwide GOP plan emphasizes "in-person early voting, absentee voting, and ballot harvesting where legal," while also pledging "to fight against bad ballot harvesting laws." Republicans use the term to describe when someone else returns a mailed ballot on behalf of another voter, especially third parties that gather multiple ballots.

McDaniel emphasized she remains opposed to ballot collection, and she said the party would deploy an army of poll watchers and election monitors to reassure Republican voters that their ballots will be protected.

"Do I think it's the most secure way of voting? No," McDaniel said. "But if it's the law, we're going to have to do it just like the Democrats are."

The challenge will be providing a consistent message that reassures GOP voters.

The same day McDaniel announced her initiative, Republicans in Congress were holding a hearing con-

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 85 of 102

sidering legislation that, among other things, would ban ballot collection in the District of Columbia. GOP state lawmakers around the country have chipped away at advanced voting opportunities since 2020. Some state and local election Republicans have gone further, advocating for just a single day of voting.

After the 2020 presidential election, the movie "2000 Mules" was a popular video that made various debunked claims about mail ballots, drop boxes and ballot collection. Even the co-chair of the new GOP strategy, U. S. Rep. Byron Donalds, R-Fla., has been a critic. In November, he issued a call on social media to "End ballot harvesting."

Nonetheless, McDaniel noted that Republican presidential candidates, including Trump, have been talking about the importance of advance voting and ballot collection.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, a high-profile GOP contender, recently told a voter he planned to launch his own "ballot harvesting" effort, according to video posted online by a Washington Post reporter. DeSantis said he wasn't going to "fight with one hand tied behind my back."

The Trump and DeSantis campaigns did not respond to messages seeking details about ballot collection plans. Florida is among the mostly Republican-led states that have sought to ban or limit the practice in recent years, despite the GOP's reliance there on older, more conservative voters who prefer voting methods other than casting Election Day ballots.

Since the 2020 election, lawmakers in 31 states have introduced 124 bills that would restrict third-party ballot returns, according to data collected by the Voting Rights Lab, which tracks voting-related legislation in the states. Of those, 14 bills in 11 states have been enacted. That includes one DeSantis himself signed that makes it a felony for an individual to collect more than two mail ballots other than the person's own or one belonging to an immediate family member.

While some states are silent on the issue, 31 states allow someone other than the voter to return a ballot on behalf of another voter. Nine limit how many ballots one person can return, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. Many states limit ballot handling to a family member, household member or caregiver.

In California, efforts to lock in the early vote could be decisive next year in a string of U.S. House districts, most of them in the southern California suburbs, that are expected to play a pivotal role in determining control of the chamber. California is a Democratic stronghold, but Republicans retain pockets of strength across rural and small-town areas and the Central Valley farm belt, while the state's suburban congressional districts have yielded many tight races in recent election cycles.

As many as nine congressional seats are considered competitive, and several races will play out in districts won by President Joe Biden but where the seat is held by a Republican. Each of California's 22 million registered voters is mailed a ballot one month before Election Day.

"In any close election, the ability to capture absentee votes becomes extremely important, especially in a state like ours, where every single voter has a ballot in their home," conservative activist Jon Fleishman said.

Democrats were critical of the new GOP effort after years of messaging by Republicans against mail voting.

"Donald Trump and extremist Republicans have spent years telling lies about elections to justify their losses. That includes demonizing mail ballots and ballot collection," said Jena Griswold, Colorado's secretary of state and head of the Democratic Association of Secretaries of State. "These hypocritical extremists are only interested in spreading chaos and trying to gain power at any cost."

Top Republicans remain determined to make the case within their own ranks, said Rep. Richard Hudson, R-N.C.

"We've got to have a change of culture among Republican voters," said Hudson, who chairs the House GOP's national campaign committee. "And it's going to require us all on the same page."

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Associated Press writers Michael R. Blood in Los Angeles and Ali Swenson in New York contributed to this report.

## Before-and-after satellite images show profound toll of Ukraine dam collapse

KHERSON, Ukraine (AP) — Before-and-after images of the area downstream from a dam that collapsed Tuesday vividly show the extent of the devastation of a large, flooded swathe of southern Ukraine.

Before the Kakhovka dam on the Dnieper River broke, farm fields appear green and crossed by peaceful streets and farm roads and dotted with trees. Afterward, only metal roofs and treetops poke above the murky water. Greenhouses and homes are almost entirely submerged.

The pre-collapse satellite photos were taken in May and early June. Photos of the same area taken after the dam collapsed clearly show how much of it has become unlivable. Brown water as high as people covers much of the territory captured in the images.

Paired with exclusive drone footage of the Ukrainian dam and surrounding villages occupied by Russia, the before-and-after satellite images illustrate the profound changes wrought by the disaster.

Ukraine has warned since last October that the hydroelectric dam was mined by Russian forces, and accused them of touching off an explosion that has turned the downstream areas into a waterlogged wasteland. Russia said Ukraine hit the dam with a missile. But while the AP footage clearly shows the extent of the damage to the region, it offered a limited snapshot of the partially submerged dam, making it difficult to categorically rule out any scenario.

Experts have said the structure was in disrepair, which could also have led to its collapse.

## Lin-Manuel Miranda launches R.I.S.E. Network to improve diversity on Broadway

By GLENN GAMBOA AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — “Hamilton” creator Lin-Manuel Miranda hopes to increase diversity on Broadway and in theaters across the country with a new initiative announced Thursday.

The Representation, Inclusion and Support for Employment Theater Network – or R.I.S.E. Network, for short – is launching a directory of diverse offstage theater professionals to make it easier for them to get hired for jobs ranging from stagehands to producers and general managers.

“There has been a lot of talk since 2020 about diversity and change,” Miranda told The Associated Press, adding that the directory is coming at a “really wonderful time because theater, as a system, has learned to say the right things.”

“Now,” Miranda said, “it’s about backing that up.”

According to a 2021 report from the Asian American Performers Action Coalition, which studied Broadway shows in the 2018-2019 season, 100% of general managers and 94% of the producers were white. White actors were cast in 80% of the lead roles in musicals and 90% of the lead roles in plays.

Steps have been taken to improve diversity in the theater since then – most notably “A New Deal for Broadway” in 2021, negotiated between Black Theatre United and Broadway shows and their touring productions.

With R.I.S.E. Network, Miranda wants to make it easier for those hiring for offstage jobs to find diverse applicants.

“R.I.S.E. is really about making sure that the beautiful mosaic of people you see -- if you see a production of ‘Hamilton’ or you see a production of ‘MJ (The Musical)’ or ‘Fat Ham’ on Broadway -- is also reflected backstage, that it’s not just the folks in front of the footlights,” Miranda said, “Because there are incredibly talented practitioners and carpenters and makeup designers and wardrobe folks who also deserve that shot.”

Wilson Chin, the New York-based set and production designer behind Broadway shows “Cost of Living” and “Pass Over,” said he hopes R.I.S.E. becomes widely used by those hiring in the theater.

“People keep saying, ‘We can’t find anyone,’ but we’re out there,” said Chin, who is currently working on several projects, including “Turandot” for the Washington National Opera and the new Hunter S. Thomp-

son musical for La Jolla Playhouse. "We just have to be found. Having us all in one place is great for us to be seen."

Miranda said he got the idea for R.I.S.E. Network from director Ava DuVernay's ARRAY initiative, which features a database of women and people of color working in the film and television industries in offscreen jobs. He began working with his friend, composer Georgia Stitt, who developed *Maestra*, a directory for female composers, conductors, arrangers and other musical jobs.

The Miranda Family Fund provided the seed money to build R.I.S.E. Theater Network and will help support the directory, which is free for those looking to work and looking to hire.

Adam Hyndman, R.I.S.E. Network's project director, said it will launch Thursday with nearly 1,000 theater professionals in the directory and will look to expand after its launch.

"Theater-making exists everywhere," Hyndman said. "There is diversity in all corners of the United States and in stories that can be told. We see the sky as the limit for the user base."

Robb Nanus, executive director of the Broadway Advocacy Coalition, a nonprofit that fights racism through storytelling, said his group supports R.I.S.E. Network's efforts because it provides the connections needed to create change in theater hiring practices.

"They understand the complexities of pipeline issues, that it's not just about putting names in a database," Nanus said. "It's about understanding how to support people holistically and how to make connections between people who want to work and people looking for team members."

Charlotte St. Martin, president of The Broadway League, the trade association representing commercial theater, said she loved the idea for R.I.S.E. Network as soon as she heard it.

"There's a sincere interest by the theater community all over the United States to ensure that we diversify not only on stage, but backstage and in the audience," she said. "So this will help us do that."

St. Martin said increasing diversity in the theater not only creates more vibrant productions, but also more robust interest from audiences.

"This is good for business and the right thing to do," she said.

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Associated Press coverage of philanthropy and nonprofits receives support through the AP's collaboration with The Conversation US, with funding from Lilly Endowment Inc. The AP is solely responsible for this content. For all of AP's philanthropy coverage, visit <https://apnews.com/hub/philanthropy>.

## **AP Exclusive: Drone footage of collapsed dam shows devastation, no evidence to back Russian claims**

KHERSON, Ukraine (AP) — Exclusive drone footage of the collapsed Ukrainian dam and surrounding villages under Russian occupation showed the ruined structure falling into the flooded river, hundreds of submerged homes, greenhouses, even a church — and no evidence of an attack from above, as Russia alleges.

An Associated Press team flew a drone over the devastation on Wednesday, a day after the destruction of the Kakhovka dam on the Dnieper River.

The bulk of the dam itself is submerged, but the parts of buildings still visible above the rushing waters had no scorch marks or shrapnel scars typical of a bombardment that Russia has accused Ukraine of carrying out.

Ukraine in turn has alleged that Russian forces, who controlled the dam, blew it up from within. The AP images offered a limited snapshot, making it difficult to categorically rule out any scenario. The dam had been weakened by months of Russian neglect and water had been washing over it for weeks.

On Wednesday, the rooftops and streets in the area were devoid of people, but AP journalists could hear the howls of dogs trapped by the flooding.

The collapse of the dam in an area that Russia has controlled for over a year and the emptying of its reservoir has irrevocably changed the landscape downstream, and shifted the dynamic of the 15-month-

old war.

In the images captured by the AP, most of the dam was submerged by the rushing water. Two nearby villages under occupation, Dnipro and Korsunka, were also underwater up to the rooftops of homes and a bright blue church. The rounded shape of dozens of greenhouses was visible over the waterline.

The nearby town of Nova Kakhovka, also under occupation, was less touched by the flooding but equally devoid of people and animals. Its Ferris wheel was stopped and water lapped up a main street.

Ukraine has warned since last October that the hydroelectric dam was mined by Russian forces, and accused them of touching off an explosion that has turned the downstream areas into a waterlogged wasteland. Russia said Ukraine hit the dam with a missile. Experts have said the structure was in disrepair, which could also have led to its collapse.

There were no signs typical of a missile attack in the few remaining buildings.

The Dnieper River forms part of the front line in the war, and many people had already fled the area because of the fighting. Ukraine holds the western bank, while Russia controls the low-lying eastern side, which is more vulnerable to flooding.

Anna Lodygina, a Nova Kakhovka resident who fled last autumn, said the flooding has paralyzed the occupied town, with markets closed, and limited electricity and mobile reception. The Russian soldiers occupying her family home, just 500 meters (yards) from the river, fled after the dam collapsed and neighbors have told her water now reaches the upper floor of the two-story building.

Friends and neighbors told her the Russians pulled out themselves, but extended no help to residents, so people took matters into their own hands, finding shelter in a neighborhood farther from the river.

According to Lodygina, the historic part of the city is submerged. "Its state now is unknown," she said.

On the Ukrainian-controlled side, a Red Cross worker fielded calls from people begging for rescue from the other bank but could do little for them.

"Our telephone is burning up from calls and our phone number is not well known. Just yesterday we got at least 30 calls from occupied territories," said Mykola Tarenenko, chief of the Kherson Red Cross quick response team. "People are asking us to evacuate them because no evacuation was organized."

## Lifesaving fentanyl test strips still illegal in some states under '70s-era war on drugs law

By SAMANTHA HENDRICKSON Associated Press/Report For America

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — At Cleveland's Urban Kutz Barbershop, customers can flip through magazines as they wait, or help themselves to drug screening tests left out in a box on a table with a somber message: "Your drugs could contain fentanyl. Please take free test strips."

Owner Waverly Willis has given out strips for years at his barbershop, hoping to protect others from unwittingly being exposed to the highly potent synthetic opioid ravaging the U.S. and often secretly laced into other illegal drugs.

"When I put them out, they just fly out the door," said Willis, who proudly hands out about 30 strips a week as part of The Urban Barber Association, a Cleveland organization that provides health education to the community via local barbershops.

Nearly 18 years into his own sobriety from drugs, Willis isn't shy about making the strips available. He figures he'd be dead if fentanyl were so widely prevalent when he was using.

Fentanyl has driven overdose deaths in the U.S. since 2016, and that isn't changing as the cheaper and deadlier synthetic opioid continues to be cut into the drug supply. Approximately 75,000 of the nearly 110,000 overdose deaths of 2022 could be linked to fentanyl, according to data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Legalizing test strips could bring those numbers down, advocates say, saving lives by helping more people understand just how deadly their drugs could be.

Until this spring, use of the strips was technically illegal in Ohio. It has joined at least 20 other states whose lawmakers formally decriminalized the strips since Rhode Island became the first in 2018. Pennsyl-



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 89 of 102

vania, South Dakota, Kentucky and Mississippi also followed suit this year.

The CDC recommends fentanyl test strips as a low-cost means of helping prevent drug overdoses. They can detect fentanyl in cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin and many other drugs — whether in pills, powders or injectables.

Yet these small paper strips are still considered illegal in some states, outlawed under drug paraphernalia laws dating to the 1970s era war on drugs — long before fentanyl began seeping into the nation's drug supply. Every state but Alaska had an anti-paraphernalia law on the books by the mid-1980s, making materials used for testing and analyzing illicit substances illegal.

Increasingly, the strips are now being seen as potentially lifesaving.

Newark, Ohio, resident Rodney Olinger has used methamphetamines for eight years. The 45-year-old gets four to five fentanyl test strips weekly from the Newark Homeless Outreach, and calls them a "blessing." He credits the strips with helping ensure he and his fiancée, who also uses, stay alive.

"It's very scary," Olinger said of fentanyl. "Just a little bit could kill you."

While the strips may not prevent drug use overall, they allow testers to take a pause if a strip comes back positive, possibly encouraging them to reconsider drug use and seek help, said Sheila Vakharia with the national nonprofit Drug Policy Alliance, which seeks to shape U.S. drug policy.

"You never know if a fentanyl test strip can keep someone alive long enough so they can make that decision for themselves," she said.

The CDC says any drug that dissolves in water can be tested. The strip is dipped in the solution for about 15 seconds, set out a few minutes, and is positive for fentanyl if a single pink line appears. Two pink lines is a negative result.

The strips can often be obtained from advocacy groups, local and state health departments, or purchased online.

Where strips are illegal, the push to change the law continues.

In Kansas, lawmakers debated until April whether to legalize the strips. But there was never any debate for Kansas mother Brandy Harris, who lost her 21-year-old son Sebastain Sheahan to a fentanyl overdose in April 2022. Addicted since age 13, he was first prescribed opioids after being hit by a truck.

Friends and family knew Sheahan as "big-hearted" and "goofy" with a soft spot for abused animals. He was open about his addiction issues and had been clean three years before he died after a relapse.

Harris believes her son would still be alive if he'd had test strips showing what he was ingesting. "I do believe that if these were available, that at least one person would be saved," Harris said. "And that is the main goal -- at least one person."

Kansas' governor recently signed a bipartisan bill decriminalizing the strips starting July 1.

Montana and other states are considering similar legislation. Republican Gov. Greg Abbott of Texas recently dropped opposition to decriminalizing the strips, citing a "better understanding" of how they prevent opioid deaths.

And in Pennsylvania, Republican state Rep. Jim Struzzi lost his brother to a drug overdose in 2014 and lobbied colleagues for years to destigmatize the strips.

"Fentanyl isn't going to ask you if you're a Democrat or a Republican before it kills you," said Struzzi, who sponsored state legislation making test strips legal in January.

The shift in how political leaders view the strips has advocacy groups, health departments and outreach programs optimistic. Increased legalization opens doors for more funding, including for strips themselves and for public education campaigns.

The SOAR Initiative, a Columbus, Ohio-based nonprofit fighting overdose deaths, distributes about 5,000 strips each month, according to executive director Jessica Warner.

SOAR sends out the strips via mail to anonymous recipients, both individuals and larger distributors. Handing them out never brought legal consequences in Ohio even before.

In fact, prosecution for possessing the strips doesn't appear to be occurring anywhere in the U.S., according to Jonathan Woodruff of the Legislative Analysis and Public Policy Association, which tracks drug

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 90 of 102

laws nationwide. He said drug paraphernalia possession is a minor offense in most states and law enforcement may now be more attuned to the strips' lifesaving benefits.

Northeast of Boston, police Lt. Sarko Gergerian of the Winthrop Police Department has boxes of them stacked in his office.

Legalized in Massachusetts in 2018, the strips go into "survival kits" that his department, as part of the Community and Law Enforcement Assisted Recovery Program, gives to those struggling with substance use — as well as to recovery coaches and social workers for distribution.

Gergerian calls it a "win" when a life is saved — not the arrest of someone struggling with addiction. "Could you imagine if your kid was addicted to a substance and they weren't ready to give it up?" Gergerian posed. "We need to keep them alive. Anything else is immoral."

Kantele Franko in Columbus, Ohio, and John Hanna in Topeka, Kansas, contributed to this report.

Samantha Hendrickson 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.

## The Republican presidential field is largely set. Here are takeaways on where the contest stands

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — After a trio of new announcements this week, the Republican Party's 2024 presidential field is all but set.

A handful of stragglers may jump in later, but as of now there are at least 10 high-profile Republican candidates officially seeking their party's nomination. And with the announcement phase of the primary campaign largely over, several leading Republican contenders will gather in North Carolina this weekend to begin a more aggressive sorting period.

It will be a long road to the GOP's national convention in Milwaukee next summer when Republican delegates across the country gather to finalize their nominee to run against President Joe Biden. Surprises are guaranteed. Fortunes will change. But as of now, every Republican White House hopeful is looking up at former President Donald Trump, who is the undisputed frontrunner in the crowded contest.

Here are some takeaways on where the Republican contest stands:

### IT'S A LARGE FIELD AFTER ALL

Trump launched his campaign nearly seven months ago in an effort to scare off potential challengers. It didn't work.

As of now, the former president is running in a field that features no fewer than nine high-profile challengers. They include Mike Pence, a former vice president; four current or former governors: Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum, former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie and former Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson; Nikki Haley, the former ambassador to the United Nations and also a former South Carolina governor; U.S. Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina; biotech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy; and conservative talk show host Larry Elder, an unsuccessful candidate for California governor.

While big, the 2024 field could have been much bigger. The party's 2016 class featured 17 candidates that filled two debate stages.

Several Republicans who had taken steps to prepare for a run in 2024 ultimately bowed out. They include former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu, former Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, Texas Sen. Ted Cruz and Arkansas Sen. Tom Cotton.

Meanwhile, a handful of higher-profile Republicans are still considering a run, including former Energy Secretary Rick Perry, Miami Mayor Francis Suarez and Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin.

### IT'S TRUMP AND EVERYONE ELSE

Make no mistake: This is Trump's race to lose.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 91 of 102

The former president is dominating early primary polls, despite his extraordinary legal troubles, his continued lies about the 2020 election that fueled the Jan. 6 insurrection, and serious concerns among GOP officials about his ability to win the general election. Trump nonetheless maintains a strong grip on a significant portion of the Republican base that has yet to fall in love with an alternative.

DeSantis is Trump's strongest rival on paper, but the Florida governor has yet to outline a clear path to victory. The Florida governor is trying to out-Trump Trump by taking a harder line on immigration, abortion and other policies that tear at the nation's divides, while embracing the former president's combative style and mannerisms.

Meanwhile, Trump's team is thrilled about the sheer quantity of candidates in the race, which create a math problem that benefits Trump. It looks like 2016 all over again, when Trump won the New Hampshire primary with only 35% of the vote because the other candidates chopped up the rest of the vote.

Trump's Republican critics warned against this exact scenario over the last year, but for now, they seem incapable of stopping it.

## NO CLEAR STRATEGY TO TAKE DOWN TRUMP

Math aside, Trump's Republican rivals have yet to figure out a consistent strategy to take him down. That's not to say they haven't begun to try.

Pence told Iowa voters this week that Trump "demanded I choose between him and the Constitution," a reference to Trump's oft-repeated — and false — insistence that Pence had the authority to overturn the 2020 election. Pence called Trump's words "reckless" and said the former president endangered his family.

DeSantis, like others, has dropped many indirect jabs at Trump, focused largely on the former president's inability to serve more than one term and the GOP's "culture of losing" under his leadership since 2016. DeSantis' team also thinks they have an opportunity to out-flank Trump from the right on conservative priorities like abortion and immigration.

DeSantis shrugged off Trump's large polling advantage when asked this week in Arizona: "You don't do a poll a year out and say that's how the election runs out," he said.

Christie may be the most vocal Trump critic in the race, although he hasn't held office in more than five years.

"I'm going out there to take out Donald Trump," the former New Jersey governor told New Hampshire voters this week. "But here's why: I want to win, and I don't want him to win. ... There is one lane to the Republican nomination and he's in front of it."

Expect to see anti-Trump strategies continue to evolve this weekend in North Carolina.

## A DIVERSE FIELD

The 2024 Republican field equals the GOP's 2016 class as the most racially diverse in the party's long history.

At least four candidates of color are seeking the presidency this year: Scott and Elder are Black, while Haley and Ramaswamy are of Indian descent. For Haley and Scott in particular, race plays a central role in their pitch to voters, although all four deny the existence of systemic racism and largely oppose federal policies designed to help people based on the color of their skin.

Republican officials are hopeful that the diverse field will help the party continue its modest progress with Black voters and Latinos. Both groups still overwhelmingly support Democrats, but even small cracks in the Democratic coalition could be significant in 2024.

There is just one woman in Republican field. But there is strong diversity in the ages of the candidates: Trump is the oldest at 76, while Ramaswamy is the youngest at 37. DeSantis is just 44, while Haley and Scott are in their 50s. The rest of the candidates are in their 60s and 70s.

## RIGHT ON POLICY

With few exceptions, the Republican field has embraced hardline conservative policies on issues like abortion, immigration, gun violence and LGBTQ rights.

All of the candidates oppose abortion rights to some extent, although there are differences in the degree of their opposition and their rhetoric on the procedure. Pence and Scott have openly endorsed national abortion bans, while Trump and DeSantis have avoided taking a firm position on a federal ban so far. That

said, DeSantis this spring signed into Florida law a ban on abortions at six weeks of pregnancy, one of the nation's most restrictive policies.

The entire Republican field also opposes new limits on gun ownership, including an assault weapons ban. Most blame the nation's gun violence epidemic on mental health issues. DeSantis this spring enacted a new law that allows Florida residents to carry concealed firearms without a permit.

The Republican field has also embraced the party's recent focus on the LGBTQ community.

Haley mocked and misgendered transgender women on the campaign trail in recent weeks. Trump and DeSantis have decried gender-affirming surgeries for minors as child abuse. And Scott co-sponsored a Senate bill that would cut funding for elementary or middle schools that change a student's pronouns without first obtaining parental consent.

There appears to be some disagreement on Social Security and Medicare, however.

DeSantis, as a member of Congress, voted for a resolution that would have raised the age to qualify for Medicare and Social Security to 70. He seems to have moved away from that position since becoming the Florida governor. But Trump has seized on his rival's past position, while vowing to preserve the popular programs.

## UNCERTAINTY LOOMS

The Republican field may be settling, but major surprises in the months ahead are virtually guaranteed.

Trump's legal problems may loom largest. The former president is already facing 34 felony counts of falsifying business records related to hush-money payments made during the 2016 campaign to bury allegations that he had extramarital sexual encounters. Federal prosecutors are also currently using grand juries in Washington and Florida as part of their investigation into the possible mishandling of classified documents. And prosecutors in Georgia are investigating whether Trump broke the law while trying to overturn his 2020 election loss.

At the same time, DeSantis has only begun to be vetted on the national stage. Opponents in both parties are poring through his background for any sign of damaging information. Republican colleagues openly question his interpersonal skills. And he's quick to tangle with the media in unscripted moments on the campaign trail.

Meanwhile, major uncertainty hangs over upcoming presidential debates, which are scheduled to begin in late August. Trump, who holds a big lead in early polls, has raised the possibility of skipping the debates altogether. DeSantis has lashed out at mainstream media outlets that would play a role in hosting the televised events. And it's unclear whether lower-tier candidates could meet the relatively modest polling and fundraising thresholds.

## **After years of threats, a feud ends with a Black mom dead and her white neighbor arrested**

By CURT ANDERSON and FREIDA FRISARO Associated Press

OCALA, Fla. (AP) — A woman accused of shooting and killing a mother in front of her kids last week in a shocking end to an ongoing feud between neighbors has been arrested.

Susan Louise Lorincz, 58, who is white, was charged with manslaughter with a firearm, culpable negligence, battery and two counts of assault in the death of Ajike Owens, a Black mother of four, Sheriff Billy Woods said in a statement.

Authorities came under pressure Tuesday to arrest and charge Lorincz, who fired the gun and killed Owens in a case that has put Florida's divisive stand your ground law back into the spotlight.

In a video posted on Facebook late Tuesday night, the sheriff said this was not a stand your ground case but "simply a killing."

"Now many of you were struggling to understand why there was not an immediate arrest," the sheriff said. "The laws here in the state of Florida are clear. Now I may not like them. I may not agree with them. But however, those laws I will follow."

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 93 of 102

The video shared by the sheriff's office shows two detectives and a deputy leading Lorincz down a hallway with her hands behind her back.

Jail records show she was booked, but did not list a lawyer who could speak on her behalf. Lorincz did not attend the first court hearing on Wednesday since she's undergoing medical testing, sheriff's officials said in a statement.

During a news conference at New St. John Missionary Baptist Church on Wednesday afternoon, the victim's family, friends and community leaders joined civil rights attorney Ben Crump in thanking the sheriff for making the arrest, while calling for justice for Owens.

"This is not a difficult case," Crump said. He called on the state attorney's office to "zealously prosecute" the shooter.

Crump, along with Owens's mother and multiple neighbors noted during the news conference that the "feud" the sheriff spoke of was between Lorincz and neighborhood children, who often played in a lot outside her home. Neighbors said Lorincz frequently called the children vile names and antagonized them.

That was the case on Friday night, they said. Sheriff's deputies responded to a trespassing call and found Owens with gunshot wounds.

Before the confrontation, Lorincz had been yelling racial slurs at the children, according to a statement from Crump.

The neighborhood of single-story duplexes and quadruplexes is in the rolling hills outside of Ocala. The area is known for its thoroughbred horse farms, which surround the working-class neighborhood.

Lorincz told investigators that she acted in self-defense, and that Owens, 35, had been trying to break down her door before she fired the gun, the sheriff said. She also told them that Owens had come after her in the past, and had previously attacked her.

Sheriff Woods said the investigation, which included eyewitness statements, established that Lorincz's actions were not justifiable under Florida law.

Earlier the sheriff had said that because of the stand your ground law he couldn't make an arrest unless he could prove the shooter did not act in self-defense.

According to the sheriff's account, Owens was shot moments after going to Lorincz's apartment because she had yelled at Owens' children as they played outside. He said Lorincz had thrown a pair of skates that hit one of the children.

The sheriff's office hasn't confirmed there were slurs uttered or said whether race was a factor in the shooting.

Owens' mother, Pamela Dias, said Wednesday that her two young grandsons, ages 12 and 9, are dealing with feelings of guilt — because they were with their mom outside Lorincz's house that evening, and saw her get shot.

"Our 12-year-old blames himself for the death of his mother because he couldn't save her. He couldn't give her CPR," Dias said.

Hours before Tuesday's arrest, some three dozen protesters, most of them Black, gathered outside the Marion County Judicial Center, demanding the shooter's arrest. The chief prosecutor, State Attorney William Gladson, met with them and urged patience while the investigation continued.

"If we are going to make a case we need as much time and as much evidence as possible," Gladson said. "I don't want to compromise any criminal investigation."

In a statement late Tuesday, Crump said while Owens' family is "relieved" that an arrest has been made, they remain concerned it has taken this long because "archaic laws like Stand Your Ground exist" Crump also represented the family of Trayvon Martin who was fatally shot by George Zimmerman in central Florida in 2012.

Lauren Smith, 40, lives across the street from where the shooting happened. She was on her porch that day and saw one of Owens' young sons pacing, and yelling, "They shot my mama, they shot my mama."

She ran toward the house, and started chest compressions until a rescue crew arrived. She said there wasn't an altercation and that Owens didn't have a weapon.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 94 of 102

"She was angry all the time that the children were playing out there," Smith said. "She would say nasty things to them. Just nasty." Smith, who is white, described the neighborhood as family friendly.

The sheriff said that since January 2021, deputies responded to at least a half-dozen calls in connection with what police described as feuding between Owens and Lorincz.

"There was a lot of aggressiveness from both of them, back and forth," the sheriff said. Lorincz told investigators. "Whether it be banging on the doors, banging on the walls and threats being made. And then at that moment is when Ms. Owens was shot through the door."

Stand your ground cases are deemed justifiable five times more frequently when a white shooter kills a Black victim, according to Angela Ferrell-Zabala, executive director of Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America.

In 2017, Florida lawmakers shifted the burden of proof from a person claiming self-defense to prosecutors. Before the change in law, prosecutors could charge someone with a shooting, and then defense attorneys would have to present an affirmative defense for why their client shouldn't be convicted. Now authorities must rule out self-defense before bringing charges.

Stand your ground and "castle doctrine" cases — which allow residents to defend themselves either by law or court precedent when threatened — have sparked outrage amid a spate of shootings across the country.

In April, 84-year-old Andrew Lester, a white man, shot and injured 16-year-old Ralph Yarl, a Black teenager who rang his doorbell in Kansas City. Yarl mistakenly went to the wrong house to pick up his younger siblings. Lester faces criminal charges. At trial, he may argue that he thought someone was trying to break into his house.

Missouri and Florida are among about 30 states that have stand your ground laws.

The most well-known examples of the stand your ground argument came up in the trial of George Zimmerman, who fatally shot Trayvon Martin in 2012.

Owens' mother said she will now raise her four young grandchildren.

"I pray that God gives me the strength, the wisdom and the ability to raise these children as our daughter would have us to do," Dias said, of receiving childcare help from family and friends. "I thank God that I don't have to do it alone."

Frisaro reported from Fort Lauderdale.

## Here comes El Nino: It's early, likely to be big, sloppy and add even more heat to a warming world

By SETH BORENSTEIN and ISABELLA O'MALLEY Associated Press

An early bird El Nino has officially formed, likely to be strong, warp weather worldwide and give an already warming Earth an extra kick of natural heat, meteorologists announced.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Thursday issued an El Nino advisory, announcing the arrival of the climatic condition. It may not quite be like the others.

It formed a month or two earlier than most El Ninos do, which "gives it room to grow," and there's a 56% chance it will be considered strong and a 25% chance it reaches supersized levels, said climate scientist Michelle L'Heureux, head of NOAA's El Nino/La Nina forecast office.

"If this El Nino tips into the largest class of events ... it will be the shortest recurrence time in the historical record," said Kim Cobb, a climate scientist at Brown University. Such a short gap between El Ninos leaves communities with less time to recover from damages to infrastructure, agriculture, and ecosystems like coral reefs.

Usually, an El Nino mutes hurricane activity in the Atlantic, giving relief to coastal areas in states from Texas to New England, Central America and the Caribbean, weary from recent record busy years. But this time, forecasters don't see that happening, because of record hot Atlantic temperatures that would

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 95 of 102

counteract the El Nino winds that normally decapitate many storms.

Hurricanes strengthen and grow when they travel over warm seawater, and the tropical regions of the Atlantic Ocean are "exceptionally warm," said Kristopher Karnauskas, associate professor at the University of Colorado Boulder. So this year, NOAA and others are predicting a near-average Atlantic hurricane season.

In the past, a strong El Nino has led to record global warmth, like in 2016 and 1998. Scientists earlier this year had been saying next year is more likely to set a record heat, especially because El Ninos usually reach peak power in winter. But this El Nino started even earlier than usual.

"The onset of El Nino has implications for placing 2023 in the running for warmest year on record when combined with climate-warming background," said University of Georgia meteorology professor Marshall Shepherd.

An El Nino is a natural, temporary and occasional warming of part of the Pacific that shifts weather patterns across the globe, often by moving the airborne paths for storms. The world earlier this year got out of an unusually long-lasting and strong La Nina — El Nino's flip side with cooling — that exacerbated drought in the U.S. West and augmented Atlantic hurricane season.

What this in some ways means is that some of the wild weather of the past three years — such as drought in places — will flip the opposite way.

"If you've been suffering three years of a profound drought like in South America, then a tilt toward wet might be a welcome to development," L'Heureux said. "You don't want flooding, but certainly there are portions of the world that may benefit from the onset of El Nino."

For the next few months, during the northern summer, El Nino will most be felt in the Southern Hemisphere with "minimal impacts" in North America, L'Heureux said.

El Nino strongly tilts Australia toward drier and warmer conditions with northern South America — Brazil, Colombia and Venezuela — likely to be drier and Southeast Argentina and parts of Chile likely to be wetter, she said. India and Indonesia also tend to be dry through August in El Ninos.

While traditionally El Nino means fewer hurricanes in the Atlantic, it often means more tropical cyclones in the Pacific, L'Heureux said.

El Nino hits hardest in December through February, shifting the winter storm track farther south to the equator. The entire southern third to half of the United States, including California, is likely to be wetter in El Nino. For years, California was looking for El Nino rain relief from a decades long megadrought, but this winter's seemingly endless atmospheric rivers made it no longer needed, she said.

The U.S. Pacific Northwest and parts of the Ohio Valley can go dry and warm, L'Heureux said.

Some of the biggest effects are likely to be seen in a hotter and drier Indonesia and adjacent parts of Asia, L'Heureux said. Also look for parts of southern Africa to go dry.

On the other hand, drought-stricken countries in northeast Africa will welcome beneficial rainfall after enduring drought conditions for several years due to prolonged La Nina events, said Azhar Ehsan, associate research scientist at Columbia University.

Some economic studies have shown that La Nina causes more damages in the United States and globally than El Nino.

One 2017 study in an economic journal found El Nino has a "growth-enhancing effect" on the economies of the United States and Europe, while it was costly for Australia, Chile, Indonesia, India, Japan, New Zealand and South Africa.

But a recent study says El Nino is far more expensive globally than previously thought, putting damage estimates in the trillions of dollars. The World Bank estimated that the 1997-1998 El Nino cost governments \$45 billion.

The United States also faces hazards from El Nino despite some benefits. Ehsan noted that the increased rainfall in California, Oregon, and Washington heightens the risk of landslides and flash flooding in these areas. "While El Nino brings benefits in terms of water resource recharge, it poses certain hazards that need to be considered and managed," he added.

Borenstein reported from Washington, O'Malley from Philadelphia.

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## No homecoming for Messi as Barcelona again fails to do enough to lure him back

By TALES AZZONI AP Sports Writer

MADRID (AP) — Once again, Barcelona couldn't do enough to entice Lionel Messi.

Nearly two years after the club was forced to let Messi go against his will because of its financial struggles, Barcelona again missed out on a chance to bring the World Cup winner back.

The 35-year-old Messi announced Wednesday he would not return to Spain and instead said he was going to join Inter Miami in Major League Soccer.

There had been hopes of a reunion between the Argentina great and the Spanish club where he thrived for nearly two decades before leaving to join Paris Saint-Germain, but in the end there was only more disappointment for both sides.

Again, Barcelona's finances kept the club from luring Messi back.

The Argentine apparently wanted to return but didn't want to go through the ordeal of not knowing whether the Catalan club would be able to sign him. He said he was told the club would have to either sell other players or lower salaries, and he didn't want that to happen.

"I really wanted to come back. I was very excited to be able to return," Messi told Spanish media. "But after having experienced what I experienced and the exit I had, I did not want to be in the same situation again, waiting to see what was going to happen."

Barcelona was mired in debt when Messi left in 2021. The club couldn't make the numbers work back then as Messi was forced to wait in hopes of having his contract renewed. This time, Messi said he wasn't going to wait on others.

"I wanted to make my own decision, thinking about me and my family," Messi said.

It wasn't all about the money for Messi, who chose Inter Miami despite reportedly having a much more lucrative offer from Saudi Arabia. He said he wanted to "get out of the spotlight a bit" and focus more on his family after a "difficult time" with PSG, but made it clear that he would have returned to Barcelona if the numbers had worked.

"We were hopeful because we talked a lot and he said he wanted to come," Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez told Spanish media on Thursday. "I noticed a change in the last few days. It can't be easy to be Leo Messi. You have to be a '10' on everything. He saw that he wasn't having a good time and he didn't want that kind of pressure, it's normal."

The club deflected blame, saying that Messi decided to go to the United States because he preferred a less-demanding league so he could prioritize time with his family.

"President (Joan) Laporta understood and respected Messi's decision to want to compete in a league with fewer demands, further away from the spotlight and the pressure he has been subject to in recent years," the club said in a statement after Messi's announcement.

But Laporta again couldn't offer much to Messi even after restructuring the team's finances. He had used some of the team's future assets to revamp the current squad with players such as Robert Lewandowski, Raphinha and Jules Koundé, leaving little salary cap space to fit Messi. There wasn't going to be much room left even after the departures of former Messi teammates Sergio Busquets and Jordi Alba.

Laporta had said he would do everything possible to bring Messi back even though he acknowledged



it wasn't going to be easy. There was still hope on Monday when Messi's father, Jorge, who is also his agent, was in Barcelona and said his son had the team as his first choice. On that same day, though, the club was informed that Messi was going to join Inter Miami.

Barcelona won the league title this season for the first time since 2019, but it still struggled in the Champions League and the Europa League. The team's first title since Messi's departure had been the Spanish Super Cup in January, when it defeated rival Real Madrid in the final in Saudi Arabia.

Barcelona wished Messi "the best of luck in his new professional phase" and said it will work "to promote a proper tribute from Barça fans to honor a footballer who has been, is, and always will be beloved by Barça."

Messi arrived at Barcelona's youth squads at the age of 13 and played in 17 successful seasons with the main team, helping the Catalan club win 35 titles, including four Champions Leagues, 10 Spanish leagues and seven Copa del Reys. He won a record six Ballon d'Or awards with Barcelona as the world's top player, and remains the team's all-time leading scorer with 672 goals in 778 appearances.

Messi pledged to one day come back to Barcelona, just like he did in his tearful farewell speech two years ago.

Next time, though, it probably won't be on the field with the famed No. 10 jersey on his back.

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Tales Azzoni on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/tazzoni>

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

## **Budweiser brewer renews with FIFA to 2026 despite World Cup stadium beer ban in Qatar**

By GRAHAM DUNBAR AP Sports Writer

GENEVA (AP) — Budweiser will still be the official World Cup beer through the 2026 tournament in the United States, after brewer AB InBev renewed with FIFA on Thursday despite a troubled time with men's 2022 World Cup host Qatar.

Two days before the tournament began in Qatar, World Cup organizers withdrew a longstanding promise to let fans at stadiums buy beer with alcohol.

The move blindsided the brewer whose Budweiser brand has been the World Cup beer since the 1986 tournament.

FIFA seemed unable to protect AB InBev under pressure from Qatar in a dispute which seemed a potential breach of contract issue for soccer's world body. The conservative Muslim nation signed up to honor FIFA's commercial partners when it started bidding to be host in 2009.

Though sales of Budweiser dropped in stadiums, the global publicity over the dispute arguably boosted the brewer and left little doubt which brand was tied to the World Cup.

A renewal for the 2026 World Cup seemed a done deal even during the dispute in Doha. FIFA president Gianni Infantino said then that relations with AB InBev were good and handshakes had been exchanged before arriving in Qatar.

There was no mention of past problems Thursday in a FIFA statement confirming AB InBev would sponsor the Women's World Cup that kicks off next month in Australia and New Zealand, and the men's 2026 tournament which will be co-hosted by the U.S., Canada and Mexico and will increase to 104 games from 64.

"FIFA World Cup tournaments are the most popular sporting events in the world" AB InBev chief marketing officer Marcel Marcondes said. "We are deeply connected to the fans and to football all over the world, which is why we're excited about extending the relationship with FIFA."

The value of the renewal was not stated. The sponsorship was reported to be about \$75 million for the previous World Cup.

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

## It's 'Groundhog Day' again as 'existential' musical comedy returns to the London stage

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Well this is fitting: "Groundhog Day" is back. Again.

The story of a jaded weatherman fated to live the same day over and over began as a beloved movie, then became an award-winning stage musical. On Thursday it opens at London's Old Vic Theatre, where it had its acclaimed original run in 2016.

For writer Danny Rubin, it's the latest chapter in the three-decade journey of an idea that changed his life and added a new term to the dictionary: "Groundhog Day, noun: a situation in which the same usually negative or monotonous experiences occur repeatedly."

Rubin said he imagined weatherman Phil Connors — who wakes every morning to discover he's still covering a weather-forecasting rodent in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania — as akin to Siddhartha, the ancient prince turned wandering monk who came to be revered as the Buddha.

"It's about a human being going through life's journey," said Rubin, who came up with the original story and co-scripted the 1993 film with director Harold Ramis.

It also turned out to be a resonant metaphor for a modern-day ennui: fear of missing out, angst at getting stuck. The movie, starring a sardonic Bill Murray as Phil, quickly became a classic comedy in which generations of viewers have found deep — even spiritual — meaning. Phil can't get unstuck until he undergoes a personal transformation.

"It's totally the existential situation," said Rubin over coffee in London, where he's helping tweak the musical for its new run. "None of us know why we're here, how we got here, or what we're supposed to do. How is that any different from Phil?"

"I think that's one of the reasons it appeals to people in a very personal way. Phil's transformation is not out of our reach. It's pretty clear that the worst day of Phil's life is also the best day of Phil's life, and the only difference is Phil."

Years later, Rubin realized the story wasn't finished with him. He considered turning it into a novel before settling on a musical. At one point, Broadway giant Stephen Sondheim expressed interest in adapting it. That didn't work out, but it was a vindication of the concept.

After a long search, Rubin teamed up with composer-lyricist Tim Minchin and director Matthew Warchus, the team behind Roald Dahl-inspired hit show "Matilda: The Musical."

"When I met with Matthew, immediately (he) felt like the right partner," said Rubin. "And then I met Tim and immediately felt like the right partner. They were like me in many ways that I appreciated, including the fact that we did the whole thing on a handshake and said, 'Let's keep the business people out of it until we've written it completely and nailed down creatively the best show we can do.'"

The musical is sharply funny and musically ebullient, but doesn't shy away from darkness as Phil, in despair at realizing he is essentially immortal, tries varied ways of killing himself. The Old Vic website warns ticket-buyers that "the story ends happily but passes through some emotionally darker phases," and includes phone numbers for mental health charities.

Rubin said the creative team agreed that "it really was a journey for Phil. And so if it had to go dark, it was going to go dark, and we weren't going to rely on platitudes."

"Groundhog Day" stormed London in 2016 but had a relatively brief Broadway run the following year, despite scoring seven Tony Award nominations. One setback came when lead actor Andy Karl was injured early in the run, and, Rubin said the show was up against "many really remarkably good shows" in a bumper Broadway year.

But "Groundhog Day" keeps popping back up. The new production has made some tucks and trims that will make it easier to tour, but remains essentially the same show that won Olivier Awards for best new musical and best actor for Karl, who returns in the lead role.

It must be tempting to have another crack at Broadway, but Rubin said the team is proceeding by "baby

steps.”

“Let’s see how we’re received here,” he said.

Rubin, who lives in New Mexico and teaches screenwriting, cheerfully acknowledges that “Groundhog Day” has defined his career. A huge early success can be hard to live up to — Orson Welles never surpassed his first film, “Citizen Kane” — but he has no complaints.

“The groundhog has been very good to me,” he said.

“These things that we do, we like to think that they’re going to make some kind of effect. And you never know how a career is going to go. I could have written ‘Porky’s 3’ or 4 or 5 and had to apologize to people when I meet them at a party and they say, ‘What do you do?’

“It’s nice to be associated with something that’s so loved.”

## Haitians are dying of thirst and starvation in severely overcrowded jails

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — The emaciated inmate in black shorts lay on a thin mat in Haiti’s most notorious prison, isolated from other prisoners at Port-au-Prince’s National Penitentiary because of drug-resistant tuberculosis.

He slowly sat up to talk to a visiting reporter and more than 70 fellow tuberculosis patients gathered at the door of the neighboring cell to complain about their suffering while detained, many on minor charges like theft.

“We don’t have water!” one cried, while his fellow inmates said their food came late or not at all.

Haitian inmates are thirsty, starving and sleeping standing up because they don’t have enough room to lie down. The United Nations says 185 inmates died in Haiti last year — many of malnutrition-related diseases. This year, more than 20 have died so far. Human rights experts and attorneys expect the number to rise because gang violence has led to severe fuel and food shortages.

“I fear that a humanitarian catastrophe is coming,” said attorney Arnel Rémy, coordinator for Haiti’s Association of Lawyers for the Defense of Human Rights.

More than 80% of Haiti’s more than 11,400 inmates are being held in pre-trial detention. It could be years before they see a judge, if at all, according to human rights experts. Haitian law allows people to be held legally without charge for 48 hours but in Haiti, the law often isn’t followed.

Last year, Haiti’s government released more than 70 inmates convicted of minor offenses after several videos posted on social media showed emaciated prisoners. But such moves are rare and in the meantime, the health of inmates worsens, with some dying before they get to court.

In December, the University of Florida published a study that found that men in Haiti’s prisons were on a starvation-level diet, consuming fewer than 500 calories a day. Researchers studied more than 1,000 inmates at two prisons in Haiti, including the National Penitentiary. They also found that more than 75% were at risk for scurvy and beriberi — a lack of B1 vitamin — and noted that prisoners are not fed during lockdowns.

Some prisoners have friends or family who bring them food and drink every day, but that longstanding practice has dwindled amid a surge in gang violence that has shut down key roads and led to a scarcity of public transportation in some communities.

“No one brings me food,” said François Gausly, 50, adding that he has been in prison for four years after being accused of stealing a motorcycle, but has yet to see a judge. “I eat only once a day. Sometimes it’s rice. Sometimes it’s grits.”

A U.S. State Department report noted that arbitrary arrests are common in Haiti and that authorities often detain people on unspecified charges.

The area around Haiti’s National Penitentiary — the country’s biggest with nearly 4,000 inmates, even though it was built for 800 — has grown more dangerous: Gunshots from warring gangs ring out almost

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 100 of 102

daily, and a correctional officer was shot in late May as he left the penitentiary.

Despite the risk, about a dozen women stood outside the prison on a recent weekday holding plastic bags of food scrawled with the names of their loved ones and their prison cell number.

One woman who brought rice scooped some of it up with her hand and ate it as a corrections officer observed her: Anyone bringing food or drink is forced to taste it to avoid attempts to poison someone inside.

Among those waiting to deliver food to an inmate was 52-year-old Fenise Jean-Pierre, whose son has been in prison for eight months. He has yet to see a judge after someone accused him of killing a police officer. He was arrested two years after the killing and maintains his innocence.

Jean-Pierre said her son, 33, has lost a lot of weight, is forced to share a bucket with cellmates to relieve himself and is nursing a swollen foot.

"He has to sleep standing because there is no room where he is," she said.

That day, she brought him only one meal because it was all she could afford, and she worries about not being able to help him at all.

"The more unstable this country becomes, the less access I have to see him," Jean-Pierre said.

Inside, a group of inmates responsible for delivering the food brought by friends and family distributed the items as a song from the popular group "Racine Mapou de Azor" played in the background.

"We've been here too long without seeing a judge. We want to be sentenced or freed!" yelled one inmate who wore sunglasses.

Health through Walls, a Florida-based nonprofit that provides medical care for inmates at the National Penitentiary and other prisons across the world, gives inmates in Haiti reinforced supplements and the occasional protein shake to stave off malnutrition.

"We know the food is bad," said Dr. Edwin Prophète of the group.

Health through Walls has trained nearly 70 inmates to identify sick people within prison cells because medical staff are now barred from doing daily health rounds given the growing insecurity.

Wilfred Mexuy, the head cook at the National Penitentiary, who is serving a 15-year sentence for murder, told The Associated Press that he prepares one or two meals a day for prisoners, but that his work depends on things he can't control.

"Sometimes we have food but no power," he said, adding that the prison was once three months without electricity and that the generator broke down.

Rémy, the coordinator for the lawyers' association, said a group of attorneys have started pooling together money to buy inmates food.

"What worries us is the absence of the government, and its refusal to act quickly," he said.

Haiti's Ministry of Justice, which oversees the country's prisons, did not return a message seeking comment.

Among the newest inmates at the National Penitentiary is well-known attorney Robinson Pierre-Louis, who was secretary-general of Haiti's Bar Association and was detained last year after being accused of trying to free two men implicated in a big arms-trafficking case.

Pierre-Louis, who told the AP he was innocent, described the prison conditions as "savage" and "disgraceful."

"It's an attack on human dignity," he said. "Some are making it, but others can't survive."

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Associated Press writer Evens Sanon contributed to this report.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 101 of 102

## Today in History: June 9, Burger confirmed as chief justice

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, June 9, the 160th day of 2023. There are 205 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On June 9, 2004, the body of Ronald Reagan arrived in Washington to lie in state in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda before the 40th president's funeral.

On this date:

In 1732, James Oglethorpe received a charter from Britain's King George II to found the colony of Georgia.

In 1870, author Charles Dickens died in Gad's Hill Place, England.

In 1915, guitarist, songwriter and inventor Les Paul was born in Waukesha, Wisconsin.

In 1940, during World War II, Norway decided to surrender to the Nazis, effective at midnight.

In 1954, during the Senate Army-McCarthy hearings, Army special counsel Joseph N. Welch berated Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy, R-Wis., asking: "Have you no sense of decency, sir? At long last, have you left no sense of decency?"

In 1969, the Senate confirmed Warren Burger to be the new chief justice of the United States, succeeding Earl Warren.

In 1972, heavy rains triggered record flooding in the Black Hills of South Dakota; the resulting disaster left at least 238 people dead and \$164 million in damage.

In 1978, leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints struck down a 148-year-old policy of excluding black men from the Mormon priesthood.

In 1983, Britain's Conservatives, led by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, won a decisive election victory.

In 1986, the Rogers Commission released its report on the Challenger disaster, criticizing NASA and rocket-builder Morton Thiokol for management problems leading to the explosion that claimed the lives of seven astronauts.

In 1993, the science-fiction film "Jurassic Park," directed by Steven Spielberg, had its world premiere in Washington, D.C.

In 2020, hundreds of mourners packed a Houston church for the funeral of George Floyd, a Black man whose death during a Minneapolis arrest inspired a worldwide reckoning over racial injustice.

Ten years ago: Risking prosecution by the U.S. government, 29-year-old intelligence analyst Edward Snowden was revealed as the source of The Guardian and The Washington Post disclosures about secret American surveillance programs. Rafael Nadal became the first man to win eight titles at the same Grand Slam tournament after beating fellow Spaniard David Ferrer in the French Open final. Inbee Park birdied the third hole of a sudden-death playoff with Catriona Matthew to win the rain-delayed LPGA Championship. "Kinky Boots" was named best musical at the Tony Awards; "Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike" won best play.

Five years ago: After leaving the annual G-7 summit in Canada, President Donald Trump pulled out of a joint statement with other summit leaders, citing what he called "false statements" by the host, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Trudeau warned that he wouldn't hesitate to retaliate against new U.S. tariffs. Justify, ridden by Mike Smith and trained by Bob Baffert, won the Belmont Stakes to become horse racing's 13th Triple Crown winner and the second in the past four years. Simona Halep won her first Grand Slam trophy, beating Sloane Stephens in the women's final at the French Open.

One year ago: At its first public hearing on the matter, the House panel investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, laid the blame firmly on Donald Trump, saying the assault was not spontaneous but an "attempted coup" and a direct result of the defeated president's effort to overturn the 2020 election. The hearing included a never-before-seen 12-minute video of extremist groups leading the deadly siege and startling testimony from Trump's most inner circle. The U.S. Justice Department opened a sweeping civil rights investigation into the Louisiana State Police amid mounting evidence that the agency showed a pattern of looking the other way in the face of beatings of mostly Black men. Financial reports showed

# Groton Daily Independent

**Friday, June 9, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 323 ~ 102 of 102**

that Supreme Court justices took in \$800,000 in book royalties in the previous year, a lucrative supplement to their judicial salaries.

Today's Birthdays: Media analyst Marvin Kalb is 93. Sports commentator Dick Vitale is 84. Author Letty Cottin Pogrebin is 84. Rock musician Mick Box (Uriah Heep) is 76. Retired MLB All-Star Dave Parker is 72. Film composer James Newton Howard is 72. Mystery author Patricia Cornwell is 67. Actor Michael J. Fox is 62. Writer-producer Aaron Sorkin is 62. Actor Johnny Depp is 60. Actor Gloria Reuben is 59. Gospel singer-actress Tamela Mann is 57. Rock musician Dean Felber (Hootie & the Blowfish) is 56. Rock musician Dean Dinning is 56. Musician Ed Simons is 53. Actor Keesha Sharp is 50. Bluegrass singer-musician Jamie Dailey (Dailey & Vincent) is 48. Actor Michaela Conlin is 45. Actor Natalie Portman is 42. Actor Mae Whitman is 35. Actor Lucien Laviscount is 31.