

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 1 of 76

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [1 Death Notice: Leslie Dohman](#)
- [2- Newsweek Bulletin](#)
- [3- SD West Nile Virus Update \(as of July 26\):](#)
- [4- Avantara Help Wanted Ad](#)
- [5- Columbia Fest Ad](#)
- [6- Weekly Round\[s\] Up](#)
- [7- POET/CoBank donate to Foundation for Concession Stand](#)
- [8- Groton Girls Golf Awards](#)
- [9- SD SearchLight: Economic projections questioned during second day of carbon pipeline hearing](#)
- [11- SD SearchLight: 54,000 South Dakotans disenrolled in Medicaid unwind; 52,000 expected to be eligible with expansion](#)
- [12- SD SearchLight: Help for new mothers proves more popular than state can handle](#)
- [13- SD SearchLight: 'Is there evidence of extraterrestrial life? Congress tries to figure it out](#)
- [16 - Weather Pages](#)
- [21- Daily Devotional](#)
- [22- 2023 Community Events](#)
- [23- Subscription Form](#)
- [24- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [25- News from the Associated Press](#)

## Thursday, July 27

St. John's Lutheran Church Vacation Bible School  
Senior Menu: Spaghetti with meat sauce, tossed salad with dressing, apple juice, mandarin oranges, whole wheat bread.  
Amateur District in Groton

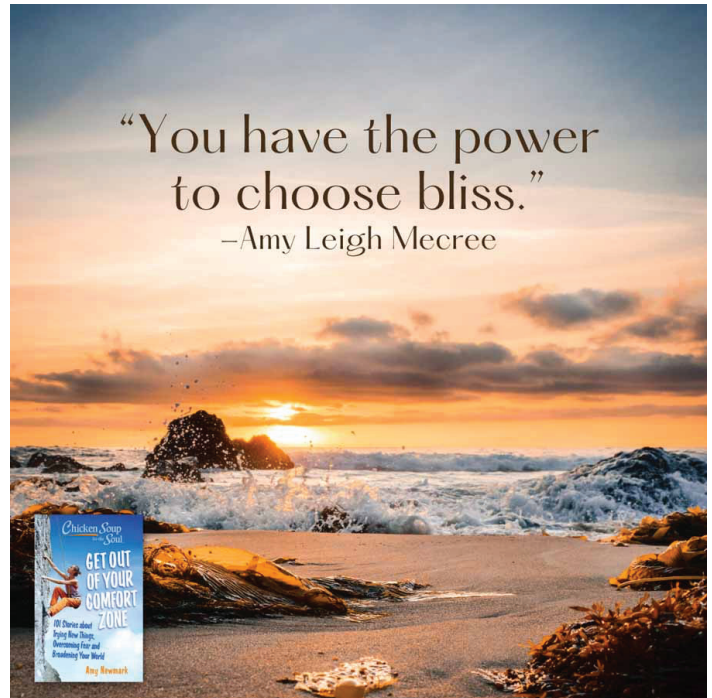
## Friday, July 28

Senior Menu: Ham salad croissant, tomato spoon salad, pineapple tidbits, cookie.  
Olive Grove: BAE Tournament  
State Legion Tournament in Redfield

## Saturday, July 29

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.  
Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. ago 1 p.m.  
State Legion Tournament in Redfield

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



“You have the power  
to choose bliss.”

—Amy Leigh McCreary

## Sunday, July 30

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 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.

United Methodist: Conde worship at 8:30 a.m., coffee hour 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship at 10:30 a.m.  
State Legion Tournament in Redfield

## Death Notice: Leslie Dohman

Private services for Leslie Dohman, 91, of Groton will be held at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church, Groton. Father Greg Tschakert will officiate. Burial will follow in Union Cemetery under the direction of Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.

## **OPEN:** Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.  
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# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 2 of 76

## The Bulletin by Newsweek

JULY 24, 2023

### World in Brief

final at the Women's World Cup. Meanwhile, Portugal knocked Vietnam out of the World Cup with a 2-0 win.

The Federal Reserve raised interest rates by a quarter-point and Chair Jerome Powell left the door open for another hike in September, saying the labor market and economy need to cool further for inflation to drop to Fed's 2% target.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis said he would consider Democrat Robert F. Kennedy Jr. for a position in his administration if he wins the 2024 presidential election.

North Korea's Kim Jong Un showed Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu Pyongyang's latest weapons, including banned ballistic missiles. Shoigu and a Chinese delegation are in Pyongyang to mark the 70th anniversary of the end of the Korean war.

Prince Harry suffered a setback in his legal war against the U.K. tabloid press after a judge threw out his allegations that Rupert Murdoch-owned newspaper The Sun hacked his phone.

In the ongoing war in Ukraine, reports that Kyiv's military has begun to refresh its troops along the front lines in southern Ukraine could spell trouble for battered Russian forces in the coming weeks, the Institute for the Study of War said..

### TALKING POINTS

"The mission of the Olympic Games is to unite the entire world in peaceful competition. In our fragile world, with conflicts, divisions, and wars rising, we need this unifying power more than ever. The Olympic Games must always build bridges. The Olympic Games must never erect walls. Imagine: You may say we are dreamers. But we are not the only ones," International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach said while invoking John Lennon's "Imagine" during a press conference marking one year until the Paris 2024 Summer Olympics.

### WHAT TO WATCH IN THE DAY AHEAD

Second-quarter U.S. GDP figures are due at 8:30 a.m. ET. Economists expect the initial estimate to show that the economy grew at 2.2%, moderately higher than the 2% reported in the first quarter. Initial jobless claims and pending home sales are also on the economic calendar.

Intel is expected to deliver positive quarterly results after posting one of its biggest quarterly losses in the last earnings season. Analysts are wary about the long-term sustainability of Intel's positive performance as artificial intelligence begins to dominate the tech space. Amazon, Mastercard, McDonald's, Ford, and Mondelez are among other major companies set to report results.

President Joe Biden will receive a briefing on the extreme heat across the U.S. and deliver remarks on his administration's efforts to combat climate change.

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni is scheduled to visit Biden at the White House, where the two leaders plan to discuss a series of topics including ongoing support for Ukraine and coordination on China.

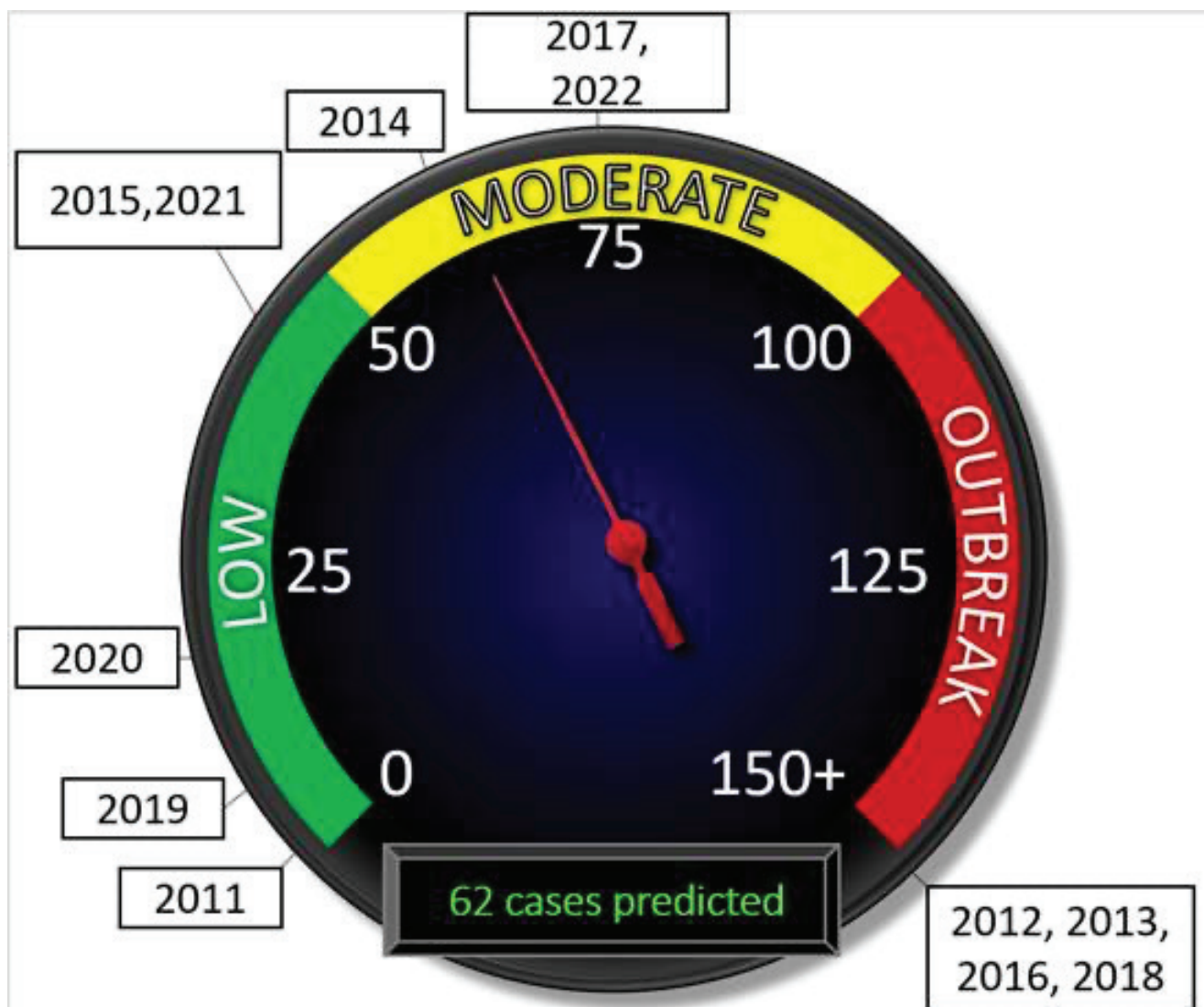
Former Vice President Mike Pence is scheduled to deliver a keynote speech about his faith at the Napa Institute's annual summer conference in northern California.

## SD West Nile Virus Update (as of July 26):

6 human cases reported (Beadle, Campbell, Hughes, Jerauld, Minnehaha, Sanborn)  
7 counties with positive mosquito pools (Beadle, Brown, Brookings, Codington, Hughes, Lincoln, Minnehaha)

US WNV (as of July 25): 69 cases (AR, AZ, CA, GA, IA, KS, LA, MD, MO, NE, NM, SC, SD, TX, WV, WY)

WNV Prediction Model – Total Number of Cases Projected for 2023, South Dakota (as of July 26)





## AVANTARA



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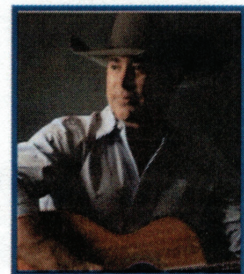
**2<sup>ND</sup> ANNUAL  
COLUMBIA FEST  
& PARKS DEDICATION  
“A BLAST FROM THE PAST”  
JULY 29, 2023**



**COME FOR A FULL DAY OF FUN!**

- 10:00 AM.....PARADE!**
- 10:00 AM - 3:00 PM.....Vendors**
- 11:00 AM.....Parks Dedication**
- 12:00 - 3:00 PM.....Ballgames**
- 3:00 - 4:00 PM.....Home Run Derby**
- 4:00 - 5:00 PM.....Harry Luge Performs**
- 5:00 PM.....Duck Race**
- 6:00 - 8:00 PM.....Karaoke**
- 9:00 PM.....Harry Luge**

**Lots of GREAT ENTERTAINMENT, DELICIOUS FOOD and FUN ACTIVITIES. Bring your lawn chairs and picnic blanket.**



# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 6 of 76

July 17 - 23, 2023



Welcome back to another Weekly Round[s] Up! We've made it to what is scheduled to be our last week in session before our August in-state work period. I say it's tentative because we never know what might get added to our calendar at the last minute – last summer, we had an all-night vote-a-rama on the

reconciliation bill that saw 39 floor votes in less than 24 hours. As we look ahead to this week, here's a recap of what we did last week:

South Dakota groups I visited with: Chairman Peter Lengkeek of the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe; Tomorrow's Ag Leaders; South Dakota Corn Growers Association; and students from Sioux Falls Roosevelt High School and Marion High School.

I also had the opportunity to attend an event on the Lower Brule Reservation to commemorate the completion of Phase 1 of their shoreline stabilization project. The Lower Brule Sioux Tribe has dealt with serious shoreline erosion since the completion of the Big Bend Dam in 1964. In FY2020, we acquired \$9.3 million through one of our appropriations requests to help complete Phase 1 of this project. This funding helped restore 53 acres of wetland habitat and will help to protect their natural resources for years to come.

Meetings this past week: Abdulla Al Khalifa, Ambassador of Bahrain to the United States; Reema Bandar Al Saud, Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to the United States; Thomas Kurian, CEO of Google Cloud; Dr. Renee Wegrzyn, Director of the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H); Gen. C.Q. Brown, current Chief of Staff of the Air Force and nominee to be Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Don Graham, former publisher of the Washington Post; and Lt. Gen. Stephen Whiting, Commander of Space Operations Command. This past week, we hosted President Isaac Herzog of Israel to speak at a joint session of Congress.

We also had our weekly Senate Prayer Breakfast, where Senator Alex Padilla of California was our speaker.

Met with South Dakotans from: Brandon, Bridgewater, Britton, Faulkton, Fort Thompson, Gettysburg, Groton, Hamill, Harrisburg, Herreid, Kimball, Madison, Marion, Miller, Mitchell, Oldham, Pierre, Redfield, Revillo, Selby, Sioux Falls and Watertown.

Topics discussed: The upcoming Farm Bill, funding for our military programs and the United States' relationship with Israel.

Votes taken: 9 – Many of these were on amendments to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for this fiscal year. We're anticipating many more votes on amendments to the NDAA this week, hopefully ultimately passing this annual, bipartisan legislation by the end of the week.

Hearings: 4 – I had one hearing in the Select Committee on Intelligence, one in the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) and one in the Senate Banking Committee. We had one hearing in the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, where we heard from the leaders of two tribes in South Dakota: President Frank Star Comes Out of the Oglala Sioux Tribe and Chairman Ryman LeBeau of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe.

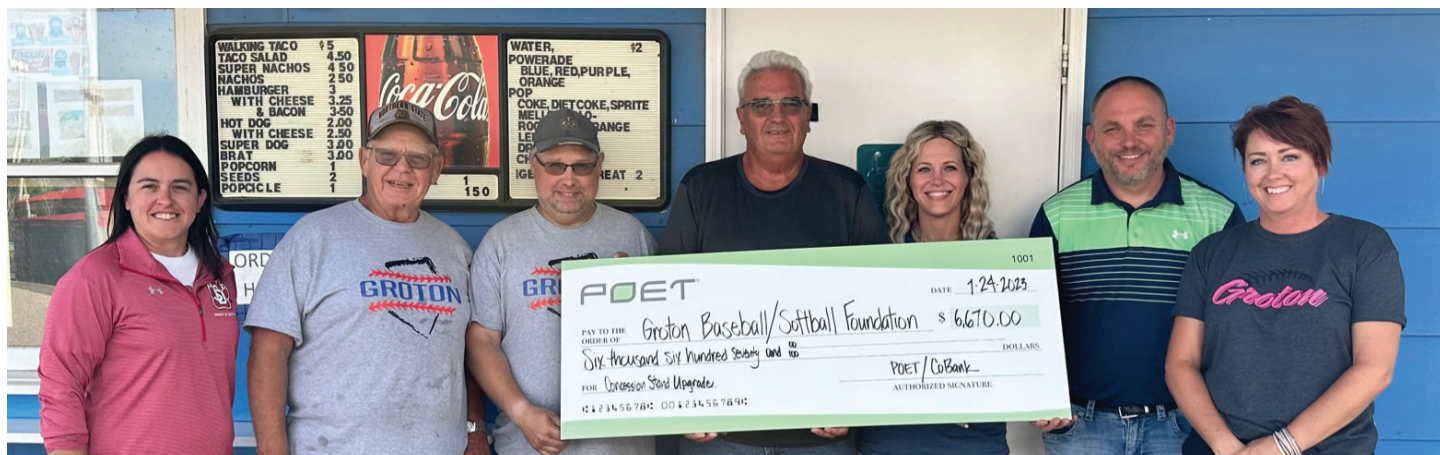
Classified briefings: 4 – I had one classified briefing with SASC's Strategic Forces Subcommittee and one with the Select Committee on Intelligence. I also had our bi-weekly cyber education seminar and a classified meeting with Susanna Blume, DOD's Director of Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation.

My staff in South Dakota visited: Belle Fourche, Brant Lake, Britton, Chester, Madison, North Sioux City, Rapid City, Sioux Falls, Sisseton, Spearfish and Watertown.

Steps taken this week: 39,246 steps or 18.29 miles

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 7 of 76



**Pictured left to right are Jackie Iverson, Chuck Padfield, Randy Padfield, Doug Hamilton, Jess Freeland, Jason Wambach and Jessica Kroll. (Courtesy Photo)**

## **POET/CoBank donate to Foundation for Concession Stand**

POET Grain and CoBank are excited to throw the first pitch toward a new expansion project for the Groton Baseball/Softball Foundation. This complex has seen many improvements over the years but has been missing the last piece of the puzzle. With the addition of a new concession stand and bathroom, Groton will have the opportunity to improve their event space and hold larger tournaments more comfortably in the future. The donation of \$6,670 will be a great start toward this project coming to life. POET Grain and CoBank are proud to be part of the ultimate goal of maintaining a strong program for our youth for many years to come! Wambach and Freeland presented the check to members of the Groton Baseball/Softball Foundation.

## Groton Girls Golf Awards



**Carlee Johnson** was the most improved for the year. (Courtesy Photo)



**Carly Guthmiller** was the top medalist for the year. (Courtesy Photo)





## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Economic projections questioned during second day of carbon pipeline hearing

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JULY 26, 2023 8:15 PM

FORT PIERRE — The economic benefits of a proposed carbon capture pipeline came under scrutiny Wednesday during the second day of a permit hearing before state regulators at the Casey Tibbs Rodeo Center.

The project would create about 430 jobs in South Dakota during the construction phase, 20 jobs during operation, and \$1.3 million in sales and gross receipts taxes during initial construction. That's according to Jonathon Muller, a private economics and policy consultant. He testified about the economic benefits of the project before the state's three elected public utilities commissioners.

Muller testified that landowners would receive about \$10,200 per impacted acre, factoring in easement payments for the right of way and crop damage payments.

"Unquestionably, it will increase personal income, employment, and output in South Dakota," Muller said.

Jared McEntaffer is CEO of Dakota Institute, a nonprofit economic research organization that conducted an economic impact study on the pipeline. His study suggests the ethanol industry could grow, creating demand for up to 15% more corn if the state approves both of the carbon capture pipeline projects proposed to cross South Dakota. The other project is scheduled for a permit hearing in September.

"Based on our findings," McEntaffer said, "yeah, it would have positive economic impacts."

Brian Brinkman is the manager of the Valero ethanol plant in Aurora, which hopes to connect to the pipeline. He testified that not going forward with the project would leave the plant behind competitors.

"Low carbon fuels have better value," Brinkman said. "If we don't do this, other plants will."

The proposed 1,300-mile, approximately \$3 billion Heartland Greenway pipeline is proposed by Navigator CO2. The pipeline would link 21 ethanol plants (including three in South Dakota) and several fertilizer plants across five states. The project would include 111.9 miles of pipeline in eastern South Dakota, crossing five counties. The estimated cost of the South Dakota portion of the project is \$142 million. An additional \$37 million would be spent on capture facilities.

The pipeline would capture carbon dioxide emitted by the plants and transport it in liquefied form for underground storage in Illinois, or for commercial and industrial uses. The project would be eligible for up to \$1.3 billion in annual federal tax credits, which are intended to help fight climate change by incentivizing the removal of heat-trapping carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

#### Pushing back on economic projections

Commissioners and attorneys representing landowners critically examined the validity of the economic projections.

Brian Jorde, representing landowners, said the studies did not consider alternative carbon sequestration methods, like buying only sustainably grown corn for the production of ethanol.

"I thought about it," said Muller. "It's not in the report."

Jorde criticized the Iowa-centric focus of Muller's study, its reliance on data provided by Navigator or other sources, and Muller's contract with the pipeline company to conduct the study.

"Yeah, I produce studies and people pay for them and use them however they like," Muller said.

Jorde also attacked Muller's study for not taking into account the impact on future land values from the loss of business and housing developments, or the money spent by opponents to pay for lawyers or to

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 10 of 76

attend hearings.

In an attempt to make his point, Jorde asked Muller if the money paid to a widow upon the death of her spouse is a "net economic gain."

"It may be an economic benefit. I'd have to know what her husband was like," Muller said, drawing some laughs.

Craig Schaubman farms near Aberdeen and attended the hearing in opposition to the project, even though it's the other pipeline — proposed by Summit Carbon Solutions — that would cross his land.

Schaubman said he has new development popping up all around his property. He's concerned about how a hazardous pipeline would impact the value of the property — potentially steering away would-be developers.

"Real estate is all about location, location, location," Schaubman told South Dakota Searchlight. "So a study that doesn't take into play future development and expansions, it's just like, come on. On our farm, we have a responsibility to ensure the best opportunities for future generations."

Commissioner Gary Hanson said he's not sold that the markets coveted by the ethanol industry, like California, are interested in the product. He cited the state's mandate to replace gas-powered vehicle sales with electric vehicles and said he's skeptical of some of the findings in the economic reports.

Kristen Edwards, a commission staff member, asked if Muller factored in the tax implications of the right-of-way payments to landowners.

"I did not," Muller replied.

Near the end of Muller's testimony, Commissioner Kristie Fiegen cited questions about the data and asked him, "What can commissioners rely on?"

Muller replied that regardless of potential flaws, the point of the study is that it's impossible to spend billions "and not have tremendous economic outcomes."

When pressed by commissioners and Jorde about the accuracy of the Dakota Institute report, McEntaffer replied that no study factors in everything.

"We had to stop somewhere, so to speak," McEntaffer said.

Jorde then asked McEntaffer where the corn would come from to feed the potential 15% higher demand for corn his analysis cites.

"We're not turning 15% more land into corn, are we?" Jorde asked.

"I don't think so," McEntaffer replied. He said the new corn would likely come from increased yields with genetics. He said the state produced 660 million bushels of corn in 2022, and the ethanol industry would need 590 million bushels (about 90% of all the corn currently produced in South Dakota) to meet the demand created by both the pipeline projects seeking permits in the state.

"The amount of corn produced in the state is already sufficient," McEntaffer said.

## Safety discussed

Mark Hereth, the managing director of a pipeline consulting firm called Blacksmith Group, testified that pipelines are a safe way to transport liquified carbon dioxide, and the plan proposed by the company would meet federal regulatory requirements.

Opponents have concerns about carbon dioxide plumes from potential pipeline leaks. In 2020, a leak in a carbon pipeline in Mississippi caused the evacuation of about 200 people and sent 45 to the hospital.

Hereth acknowledged that "accidents happen," but said that's why any project should include planning for those "rare incidents."

Jorde pushed back, asking Hereth about the Pipeline Safety Trust, a nonprofit promoting pipeline safety, which has declared carbon capture pipelines too unregulated and generally unsafe.

"I disagree with that," Hereth said.

## Navigator's hearing continues

The Heartland Greenway pipeline is one of two proposed carbon capture pipelines that would pass through the state. But unlike the other project proposed by Summit Carbon Solutions, Navigator CO2 has not yet leveraged eminent domain — a court process to gain access to land when an agreement can't be

reached with the landowner.

When pressed by Jorde during the first day of the hearing, Navigator CO2 would not rule out eminent domain.

"We strive to not go down that path," said Jeff Allen, founding member and chief financial officer of the company.

Navigator has thus far struck access agreements — called "easements" — with about 30% of the owners of land the pipeline would cross.

Wednesday's proceeding was the second of nine days of scheduled testimony and deliberation. Thursday is scheduled to continue with more testimony and cross-examination of Navigator's witnesses. Testimony from the opponents is scheduled for next week.

Hearings for the other pipeline, proposed by Summit Carbon Solutions, are scheduled to begin Sept. 11.

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

## **54,000 South Dakotans disenrolled in Medicaid unwind; 52,000 expected to be eligible with expansion**

**BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JULY 26, 2023 6:38 PM**

Roughly 54,000 South Dakotans have lost Medicaid coverage since the end of pandemic protections in March.

At the same time, 52,000 South Dakotans are estimated to be eligible for enrollment in a voter-approved Medicaid expansion that took effect on July 1, state officials told legislators at an appropriations meeting Wednesday in Pierre. Voters approved the expansion in November.

Medicaid is a federal-state health insurance program for low-income people. Between 5 million and 14 million people across the country were expected to lose Medicaid coverage during the "unwinding" of continuous enrollment requirements that were imposed by the federal government during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation.

South Dakota was one of five states that began culling April 1, the earliest date possible. Other states decided to wait until May, June, July and even October.

Some South Dakotans kicked off Medicaid have faced a kind of whiplash: seeking private coverage in the months before expanded Medicaid took effect, and then turning around to reapply this month.

But state officials told legislators those individuals would have had to reapply for expanded Medicaid no matter what. It's a discussion legislators have had with the state Department of Social Services many times, said Rep. Linda Duba, D-Sioux Falls. Duba added that appropriators don't expect as many South Dakotans to enroll in expanded Medicaid as DSS predicted.

"I'm expecting for them to make it as seamless as they can for the people they're unwinding to re-enroll," Duba told South Dakota Searchlight.

Department of Social Services Deputy Secretary and Chief of Operations Brenda Tidball-Zeltinger told legislators that the department has seen an uptick in applications. Although the department will not have July expansion enrollment data until mid-August, she said about 1,700 people applied for Medicaid in June who would be eligible for expanded Medicaid.

"We won't know for another few months how many of those 54,000 who lost coverage will re-enroll," Tidball-Zeltinger said.

DSS has helped re-enroll those who applied early and were eligible for expansion, she added.

South Dakota finished fiscal year 2023 at the end of June with an average yearly Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program enrollment around 146,000 — peaking at nearly 154,000 in March and ending around 123,500. Roughly 115,000 South Dakotans were enrolled in Medicaid and CHIP in March 2020 when

COVID-19 was first detected in the state. CHIP provides health coverage to eligible children through both Medicaid and separate CHIP programs.

In a separate presentation to legislators, Bureau of Finance and Management Commissioner Jim Terwilliger said the drop in Medicaid enrollment likely contributed to a surplus of cash in the state's general fund.

The state DSS did not spend \$34.6 million of its fiscal year 2023 budget, primarily due to less caseloads and less use of medical services, Terwilliger said. The Department of Human Services didn't spend another \$24.4 million due to similar reasons in long term care services.

"Over the last three years, we've dealt with quite a bit of volatility, which has made it pretty challenging to budget for," Terwilliger said.

Terwilliger expects that budgeting will be easier in the coming years.

Unspent general fund dollars contributed to the fiscal year-end budget surplus of \$96.8 million.

*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.*

## Help for new mothers proves more popular than state can handle

**Health Department pulls back on marketing as waiting lists grow**

**BY: JOHN HULT - JULY 26, 2023 4:45 PM**

A recently expanded state program that connects new mothers to a personal nurse already has a waiting list in at least one of the South Dakota counties it serves.

The Department of Health's Bright Start program grew from a handful of counties to near-statewide over the past year, thanks in part to an influx of federal funding. The program has proven more popular than the department was prepared for in terms of staffing.

First-time moms who qualify based on income guidelines can receive in-home visits from nurses who provide pre- and postnatal medical advice. It's modeled in part on the work of a national nonprofit organization called Nurse-Family Partnership that aims to improve the health of mothers and children in multiple states. The nonprofit offers guidance to state and local governments on best practices in their own versions of the program.

The benefits of offering personal care and guidance to at-risk moms are typically measured in terms of maternal and child health, but some research has shown value for years down the line. Last year, the city council in Billings, Montana, voted to deposit public safety dollars from taxes generated by legal marijuana sales into its nurse-family partnership programs. The local school district superintendent argued for an expansion as an early bulwark against the kind of school-age misbehavior that can morph into criminal behavior as children grow.

Bright Start nurses offer advice and guidance to pregnant women, and may continue visiting with new moms for up to two years following childbirth.

The state hired a Sioux Falls marketing firm last year to help with the rollout of the expanded program, but Department of Health Secretary Melissa Magstadt said her agency has pulled back on marketing because "we know we can't absorb" all the families that want to sign up.

The program has drawn greater-than-expected interest, especially in Pennington and Beadle counties, she said.

In Huron, "we're full, and there's 61 more people who want in," Magstadt said.

South Dakota lawmakers signed off on a \$2.5 million Bright Start funding expansion during the 2022 legislative session, with around half the money coming from the federal government. At a January 2022 budget hearing, Health Department officials noted that Bright Start had about 600 annual participants statewide prior to expansion. The number was expected to grow to 1,150 during the expansion, at a total annual cost of \$4.7 million.

The department did not immediately respond to a request for information on current participation levels.

Magstadt's mention of the program came Tuesday during a meeting of the Legislature's Government Operations and Audit Committee in Pierre. The committee heard from Magstadt on a host of Health De-

partment performance measures, including infant mortality, vaccination, breastfeeding and obesity rates. Magstadt framed the waiting list situation for Bright Start as a positive, since the program can improve outcomes for families.

"I'm glad that people are using it," Magstadt said. "Because at this point, all of the things that we've talked about are things that can be impacted by good prenatal care and access to health care."

Even so, the interest in the program took the department aback. Sen. Reynold Nesiba, D-Sioux Falls, asked Magstadt how the department intends to address the backlog, but she said the only immediate step is scrambling to keep up until more money becomes available through the Legislature.

"We've got to take a really good problem to have and redirect some resources towards it," Magstadt said. "So in the short term, I'm maneuvering around a little bit and trying to look a little more efficiently."

The secretary said the agency is likely to see a shortfall in funding as a result, and encouraged lawmakers to fill the gap next session.

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

## Is there evidence of extraterrestrial life? Congress tries to figure it out

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - JULY 26, 2023 6:08 PM

WASHINGTON — During an otherworldly hearing on Capitol Hill Wednesday, lawmakers and witnesses launched accusations that the Pentagon is stonewalling Congress and the public from information about unidentified anomalous phenomena, more often referred to as UFOs.

That includes a 2014 encounter when a "dark gray or black cube inside a clear sphere" traveled within 50 feet of two U.S. fighter jets off the coast of Virginia, according to witness testimony.

The enigma brought together both Democratic and Republican lawmakers on a GOP-led U.S. House Oversight and Accountability subcommittee in imploring high-ranking military and intelligence officials to clear the air on potential malevolent activity, clandestine military weapons development, or even the existence of extraterrestrial life.

"The lack of transparency regarding UAPs has fueled wild speculation and debate for decades eroding public trust in the very institutions that are meant to serve and protect them, as is evidenced by the large amount of people we have here," said Wisconsin GOP Rep. Glenn Grothman, chair of the Subcommittee on National Security, the Border and Foreign Affairs.

"We must demand transparency from the Department of Defense, our intelligence community and our defense industry on the UAP work," Grothman said in his opening statement.

The discovery in February of a Chinese surveillance balloon hovering over Montana days after it entered U.S. airspace above Alaska heightened anxiety and attention about UAPs, traditionally referred to as unidentified flying objects. The balloon traversed the contiguous U.S. and was shot down by the U.S. military off the coast of South Carolina. China's government denied the craft's spying capabilities.

Lawmakers on the oversight panel displayed wide-ranging skepticism, raising conjecture and questions about possible involvement from defense contractors, cover-ups of crash sites and debris, and harassment and intimidation of both military and commercial pilots who report sightings.

"Pilots have reported encounters for years. Because of the stigma around reporting these incidents, we still don't have a complete picture of actually what's going on, particularly as our witnesses will testify on the civilian side," subcommittee ranking member Robert Garcia of California said.

But Pentagon officials say they take the public interest in UAPs "seriously."

"The Department is fully committed to openness and accountability to the American people, which it must balance with its obligation to protect sensitive information, sources, and methods. DoD also com-

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 14 of 76

mitted to timely and thorough reporting to Congress," Sue Gough, Defense Department spokesperson, said in a written response to States Newsroom.

## Unexplained encounters

Retired U.S. Navy Cmdr. David Fravor recounted for the panel his high-profile story, now declassified, of when he and other F-18 Super Hornet jet pilots in 2004 witnessed a white object in the shape of a "Tic Tac" mint or "propane tank" hovering over choppy whitewater off the Southern California coast on a clear, calm day.

As he and fellow pilots flew within a half mile of the object, "it rapidly accelerated and disappeared right in front of our aircraft. Our wingman, roughly 8,000 feet above us, also lost (sight of it). We immediately turned to investigate the whitewater only to find that it was also gone," Fravor testified.

The crew soon got word from air controllers that the object had traveled 60 miles in less than a minute. Crews watching the radar had detected objects in prior weeks descending "rapidly" from 80,000 feet to 20,000 feet and then hovering for hours before going straight back up, Fravor told the panel.

The object "was far superior in performance to my brand new F/A-18F and did not operate with any of the known aerodynamic principles that we expect for objects that fly in our atmosphere," Fravor said in his testimony.

Beyond a debrief, Fravor said no further investigation of the incident occurred.

Ryan Graves, former U.S. Navy F-18 pilot and current executive director of Americans for Safe Aerospace, told the panel that UAP sightings became an "open secret" among aircrew stationed near Virginia Beach, Virginia.

After an upgrade to their radar system, service members began detecting tracks with infrared sensors, which they initially dismissed as software glitches until the pilots physically corroborated the objects, Graves testified.

A "pivotal incident" occurred in 2014 during an air combat training mission 10 miles off the coast of Virginia Beach, Graves said. That's when pilots in Graves' squadron saw a clear sphere with a gray cube inside hovering "motionless against the wind" at the GPS location and altitude where the training was to begin.

"The jets, only 100 feet apart, were forced to take evasive action. They terminated the mission immediately and returned to base. Our squadron submitted a safety report, but there was no official acknowledgement of the incident and no further mechanism to report the sightings," Graves testified.

The 2022 National Defense Authorization Act required the Office of the Director of National Intelligence to begin submitting annual reports about UAPs to Congress. The initial report was published in January.

NASA announced in June 2022 that the agency would begin studying UAPs from "a scientific perspective," focusing on identifying current data and how best to collect data in the future.

The 2022 defense policy bill also triggered the Pentagon to establish the All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO) in coordination with the ODNI to investigate UAP near military installations.

Gough says the Pentagon "welcomes the opportunity to speak with any former or current government employee or contractor who believes they have information relevant to the historical review."

"These individuals are still obligated to protect classified information and may not disclose classified information to the media, the public, or anyone who does not have proper access to such information, including the appropriate clearance level and need-to-know. These lifelong obligations extend to a public congressional hearing," Gough said.

"There is no impediment to AARO receiving all UAP-related information, past or present, regardless of level or origin of classification. By law, AARO may receive all UAP-related information, at all levels of classification, regardless of whether the original classification authority for such information is within DoD or the Intelligence Community," Gough continued.

Defense Department officials also maintain there is no evidence to support many theories discussed during the hearing.

In response to claims made during the hearing that secret defense contracts could be related to UAP investigations, or that service members have been injured while examining crash sites, Gough said the

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 15 of 76

Pentagon "has not discovered any verifiable information to substantiate claims that any (government) programs regarding the possession or reverse-engineering of extraterrestrial materials have existed in the past or exist currently."

## House members flock to hearing

The high-profile hearing attracted the participation of several House members who do not officially sit on the subcommittee.

Members waived onto the panel for the headline-grabbing event included GOP Reps. Tim Burchett and Andy Ogles of Tennessee, Anna Paulina Luna and Matt Gaetz of Florida, Eric Burlison of Missouri, and Democratic Reps. Jamie Raskin of Maryland and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York.

Republican 2024 presidential race candidate Vivek Ramaswamy released a statement Wednesday urging the panel to ask whether the government has evidence of extraterrestrial life, find and reveal the names of officials with first-hand knowledge of UAP crash sites, and probe whether private corporations are involved in UAP programs.

"This is an issue of government transparency. We can't trust a government that does not trust its people," said Burchett. "We're not bringing little green men or flying saucers into the hearing. ... We're here to uncover the facts."

Burchett told Fox News Live on Sunday that he is "100%" certain the federal government is covering up information about unidentified objects.

Democrat Rep. Jared Moskowitz of Florida asked David Grusch, a former Department of Defense task force member, about the existence of satellite imagery of UAP.

"I personally reviewed both what we call overhead collection and from other strategic and tactical platforms that I could not even explain prosaically. I have a degree in physics by the way," testified Grusch, a former National Reconnaissance Office representative on the Defense Department's Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena Task Force.

"I'm aware that you guys have not seen these reports unfortunately, and I don't know why," he continued.

Lawmakers said they will continue to push the administration to improve transparency and reduce stigma for both military and commercial pilots who report sightings.

"It shouldn't take the potential for nonhuman origin to bring us together," Moskowitz said.

The White House did not respond to a request for comment.

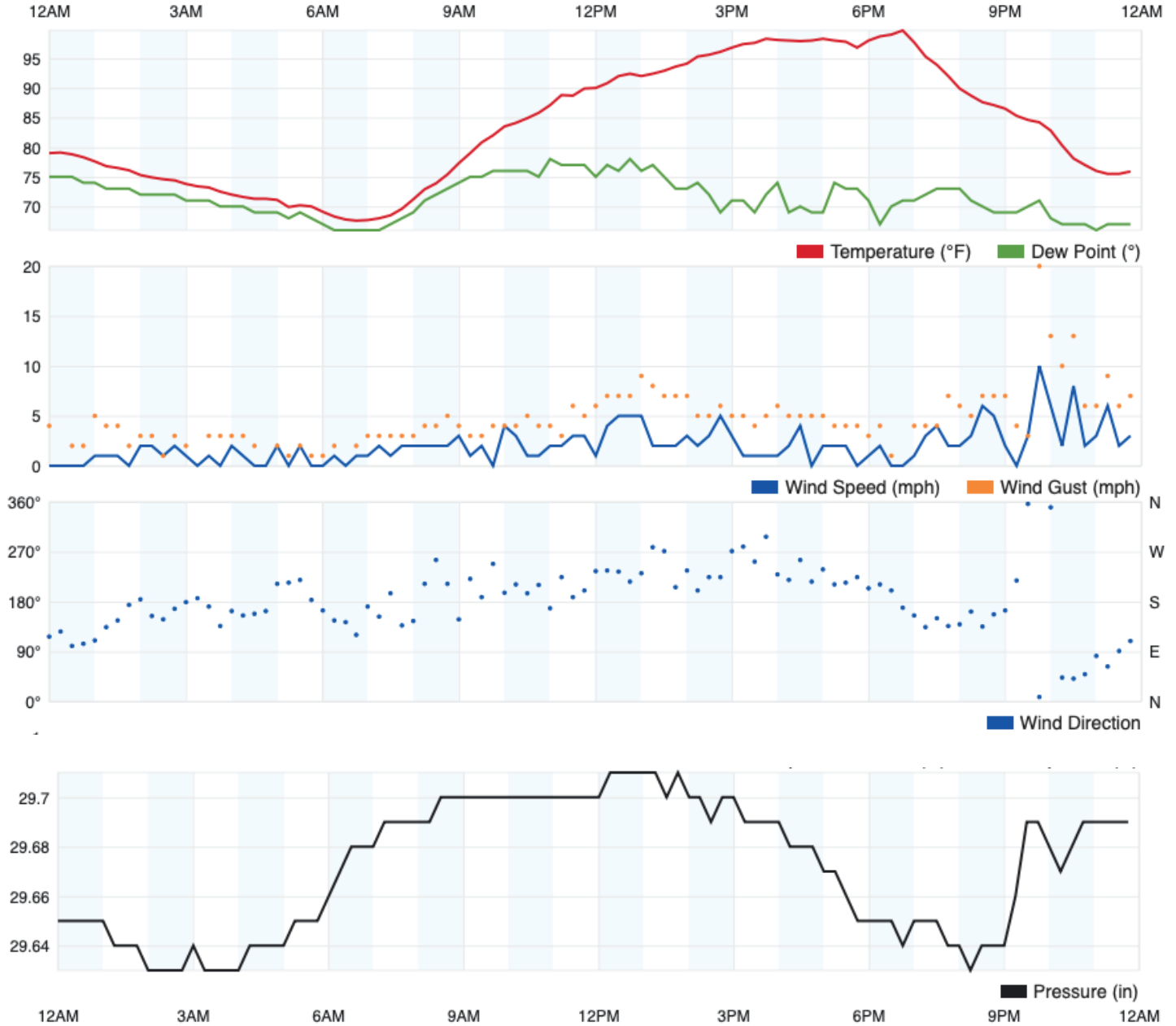
The Director of National Intelligence referred all inquiries to the Defense Department.

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

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 16 of 76




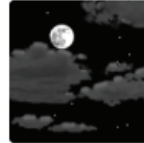

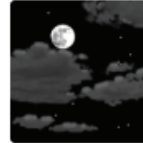

## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs





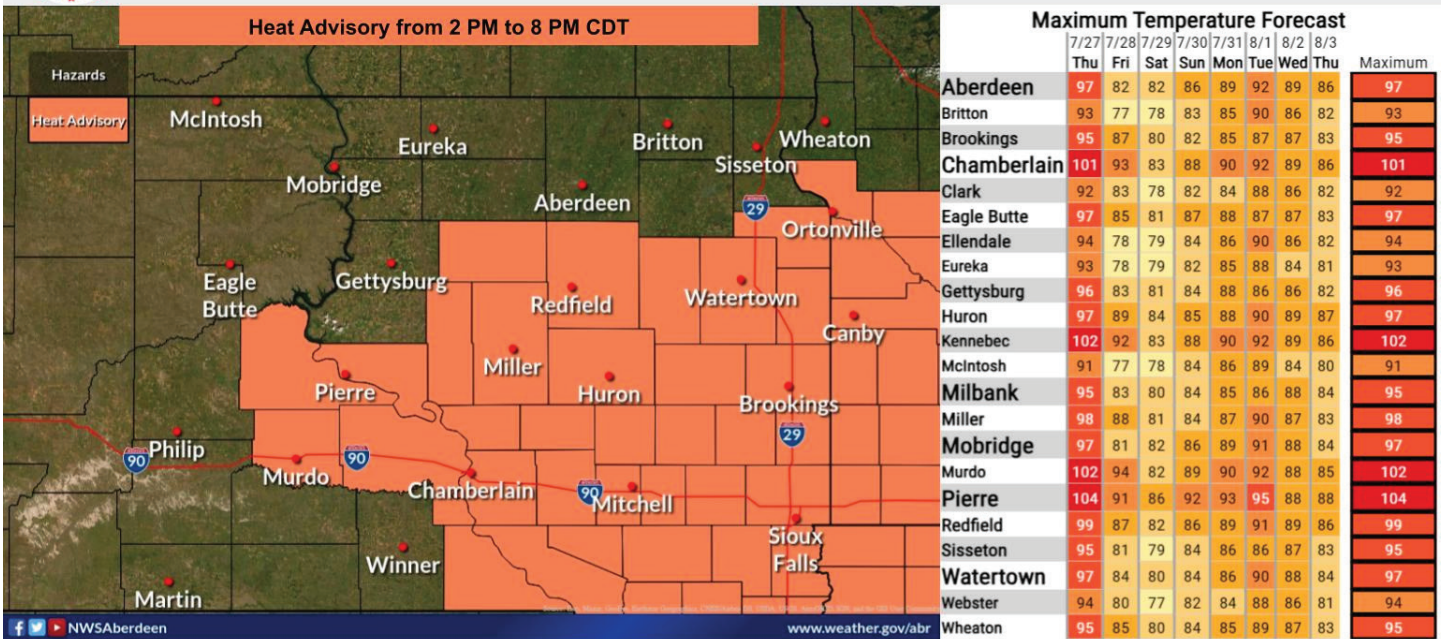
# Broton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 17 of 76

Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
						
Hot	Partly Cloudy	Chance T-storms 30%	Partly Cloudy	Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Slight Chance Showers 20%
High: 97 °F	Low: 64 °F	High: 85 °F	Low: 58 °F	High: 80 °F	Low: 57 °F	High: 85 °F



## Hot Today With "Cooler" Temps Friday Into The Weekend



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

One more day of the excessive heat and humidity before temps start to cool back down to around average Friday and Saturday. Warmer air moves in Sunday into next week.

# Broton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 18 of 76



## Severe Threat Today

July 27, 2023  
4:44 AM

### Timing/Location

Isolated storms (10 to 15%) are possible this afternoon and evening. A few of these storms could become strong to severe, mainly east of the James River.

### Tornado Potential

**Very Low**    Low    Medium    High

### Max Hail Size

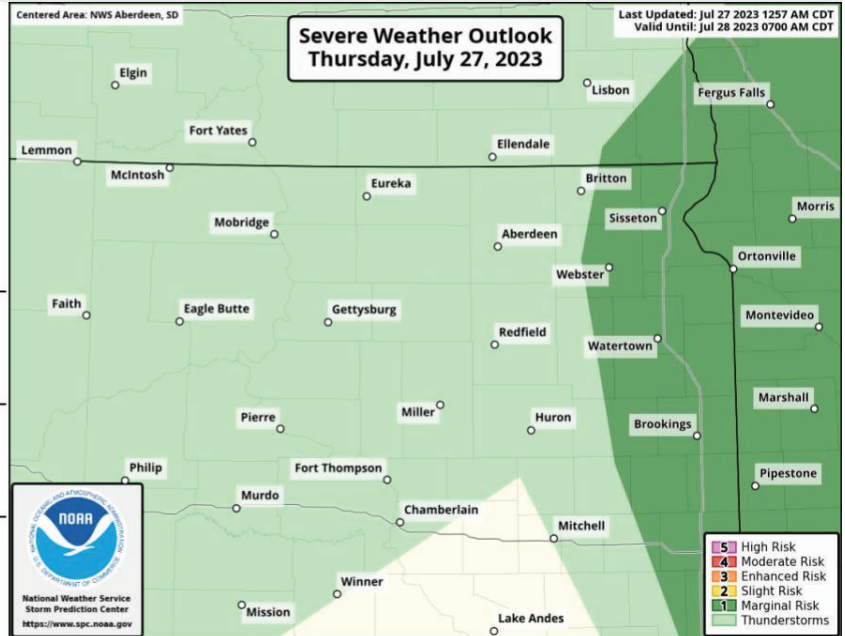
**Dimes**    **Quarters**    Golfball    Baseball

### Max Wind Speed

**< 60 mph**    60-70 mph    70-80 mph    > 80mph

### Heavy Rain/Flooding Potential

**Very Low**    Low    Medium    High



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

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Isolated (10-15%) thunderstorms this afternoon and evening. A few of these storms could become strong to severe, mainly east of the James River.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 19 of 76

## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 100 °F at 6:46 PM

Low Temp: 68 °F at 6:41 AM

Wind: 20 mph at 9:44 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 14 hours, 59 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 110 in 1931

Record Low: 41 in 2013

Average High: 85

Average Low: 60

Average Precip in July.: 2.76

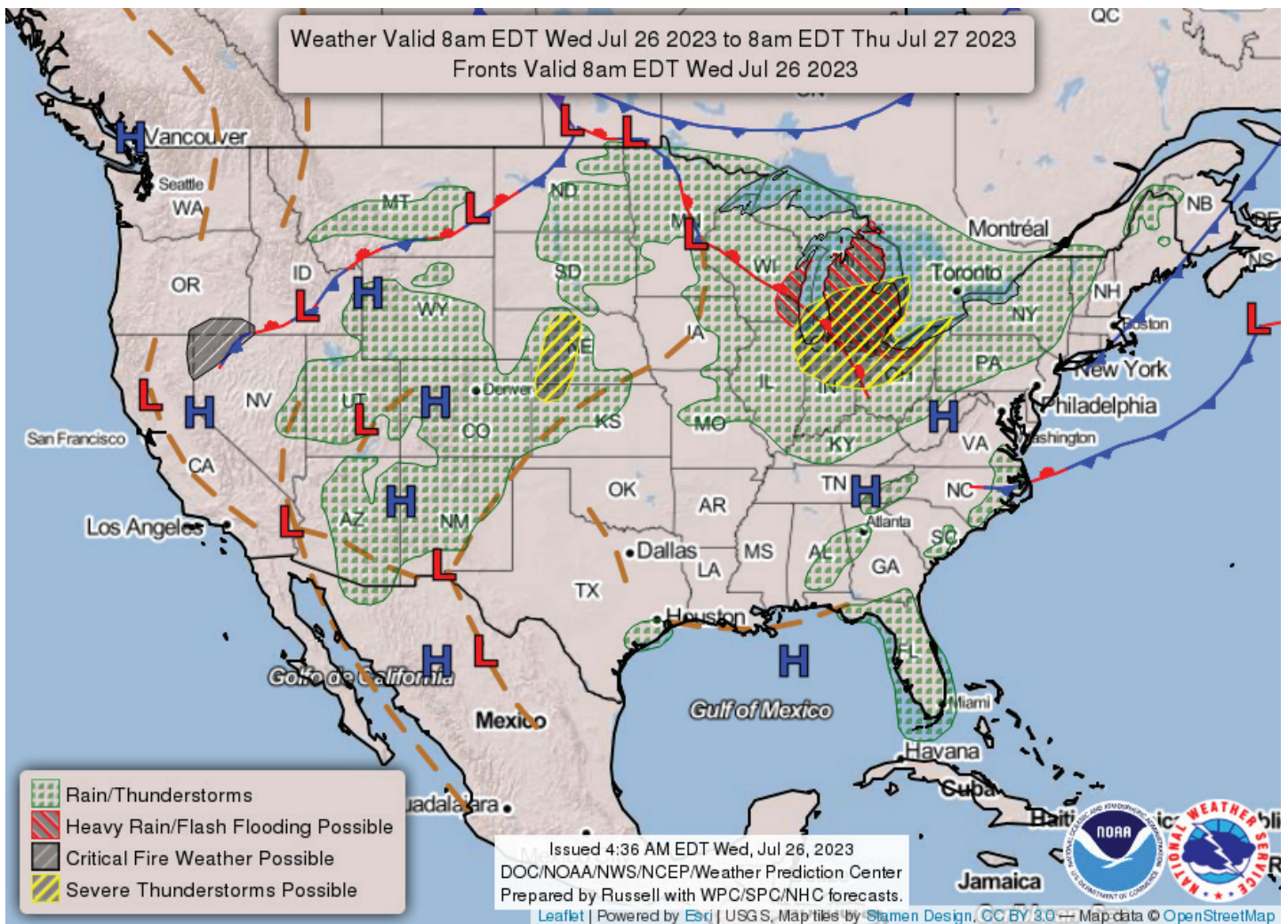
Precip to date in July.: 1.32

Average Precip to date: 13.77

Precip Year to Date: 12.67

Sunset Tonight: 9:08:36 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:10:24 AM



# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 20 of 76

## Today in Weather History

July 27, 1999: Golf ball size hail and high winds destroyed hundreds of acres of crops on a farm southeast of Ipswich. Golf ball size hail and high winds caused extensive damage to the Richland Wesleyan Church and the pastor and associate pastor home. The hail poked numerous holes in the siding and shingles of the buildings and broke many windows. Several cars were damaged, and a large tree was also downed. An F1 tornado snapped large branches of an oak and drove them into the ground. The tornado knocked down approximately five headstones in a small cemetery and took a roof off a small outbuilding. It destroyed an empty grain bin, moved a grain auger 50 feet, and took off several large doors on a machine shed. The tornado also knocked down or snapped off numerous large trees in shelter belts and destroyed a barn and several outbuildings just north of Chelsea.

July 27, 2001: An F1 tornado damaged homes, public buildings, trees, and power lines in the town of Lennox, Lincoln County. The American Legion building had its entire front facade ripped off, and its windows shattered. Several vehicles near the building sustained significant damage from flying debris, and one was lifted and dropped partly onto another vehicle. Damage to homes included holes in permanent siding, several roofs heavily damaged, windows were broken, fences blew down, garages damaged including at least one destroyed. Damage to public buildings included the pump house at the water tower being destroyed, the roof at the water plant was damaged, flag poles next to the ambulance building were broken, and an overhead door at the fire station was torn off. A fire truck at the fire station was damaged, and the window air conditioner was blown out along with some ceiling tiles inside. Power was lost to much of the city for at least an hour and a half because of the downed power lines.

1819: A hurricane affected the coast from Louisiana to Alabama. New Orleans was on the fringe of the storm and suffered no severe damage. Ships at the Balize experienced a strong gale for 24 hours that only grounded three ships. Lakes Pontchartrain and Borgne rose five to six feet during the storm, with farms along the lakes flooded by the storm tide. Forty-one lives were lost on the U.S. Man of War schooner Firebrand, a 150-ton gunship, while it lay off the west end of Cat Island. At least 43 people died in all.

1926: A destructive Category 4 hurricane struck Nassau during the evening hours on the 25th. The hurricane passed just east of Cape Canaveral early on the 28th and made landfall near present-day Edgewater, Florida.

1943: A "surprise," Category 2 Hurricane moved ashore near Galveston, Texas. Due to World War II, all news underwent censorship, including any weather reports making this the surprise storm. The hurricane killed 19 people and caused millions of dollars in damages. Of particular note, Lieutenant Colonel Joe Duckworth and Lieutenant Ralph O'Hair flew an AT-6 Texan into the eye of the hurricane, becoming the first flight into the eye of the storm.

1989: Thunderstorms produced locally heavy rains in the southwestern U.S. Yuma, Arizona experienced their most severe thunderstorm of record. Strong winds, with unofficial gusts as high as 95 mph, reduced visibilities to near zero in blowing dust and sand. Yuma got nearly as much rain in one hour as is typically received in an entire year. The storm total of 2.55 inches of rain was a record 24-hour total for July. Property damage due to flash flooding and high winds was in the millions.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 21 of 76

Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### JUST ASK

During a lull in the Spanish-American War of 1898, Colonel Teddy Roosevelt went to a nurse named Clara Barton. Politely he said, "I have men who are sick and wounded in my regiment. They need the delicious treats that you of the Red Cross have. I'm ready to pay for them out of my own pocket."

"Not for a million dollars," came the reply. "All you have to do is to ask."

Salvation is like that. We cannot buy it or earn it, work to attain it, nor expect to inherit it from a parent or relative. We must ask for it with sincerity and the simple faith of a small child.

When offered a gift, we must accept it if we want to receive it. God's salvation, through Jesus Christ, is like that. It is offered to us as His gift. But, we must ask for it if we want to receive it. Even the faith to accept His salvation is a gift. But we must ask for it to receive it.

Perhaps the most concise definition of how a person is saved is contained in the words: "By grace are you saved through faith - which is a gift from God." Our salvation comes from God's grace and our trust in what He did for us through His Son. As Christians, we live and die depending on God's grace, that includes His love, mercy, faith, salvation, and hope.

Prayer: Father, we are grateful for the gift of Your grace. In faith, we reach out to You, trusting in Your Word and Your salvation. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Scripture For Today: God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. Ephesians 2:8-9



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

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 22 of 76

## 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
- 08/10/2023 Family Fun Fest, 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.
- 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

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 23 of 76

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# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 24 of 76



## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:  
07.25.23

3 5 6 44 61 25

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$910,000,000**

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 7  
DRAW: Mins 31 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:  
07.26.23

4 8 25 36 42 8

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$6,490,000**

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 22  
DRAW: Mins 31 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
07.26.23

4 15 32 34 38 15

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

NEXT 15 Hrs 37 Mins 31  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
07.26.23

1 6 15 30 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$20,000**

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 37  
DRAW: Mins 31 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
07.26.23

31 43 51 60 69 13

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

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 6  
DRAW: Mins 31 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:  
07.26.23

3 16 40 48 60 14

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$60,000,000**

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 6  
DRAW: Mins 31 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)



## News from the Associated Press

### Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined  
Yankton Press & Dakotan. July 25, 2023.

Editorial: Regents Decide To Freeze Tuition Again

South Dakota's Board of Regents made the best call last week in deciding to seek a tuition freeze for state public universities for the coming year.

It would mark the fourth consecutive year that the regents have frozen tuition. This move would cost the state an estimated \$14.3 million.

The regents opted to make this their top priority for the new budget, supplanting the proposed system-wide civic engagement center, which is tied in principle to the state Board of Education Standard's adoption of the controversial new social studies standards. That story has been well chronicled and remains a subject of serious debate.

The tuition freeze is vital because, frankly, it sets the stage for most everything else.

In adopting the stance, the regents said it was important to keep South Dakota tuition rates financially competitive with other states in the region. That must certainly stand as an important consideration.

It also acknowledges that the student loan debt issue is a real one for many people, and with student loan debt reduction still uncertain, efforts by the regents and the state to hold down the costs can offer a little help on the front end.

Other budgetary matters supported by the regents — and besides the civic engagement center, which was moved to the second tier of priorities due to a lack of consensus, according to Regent Jeff Partridge — include, among other items, the expansion of the Teacher Apprenticeship Pathway and creating a Center for Quantum Information Science and Technology. These steps would also bolster the state's higher-education offerings, thus making them more attractive as well as competitively priced.

Ultimately, it comes down to this: Whatever quality of education is offered by the state's universities won't mean a lot if students aren't attending these schools. Making higher education here affordable and attractive, especially in an age when student loan debt is a crisis, is imperative, and it will likely remain so for a long time to come.

END

### Kyiv launches a major push against Russian forces, officials and analysts say

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine has launched a major push to dislodge Russian forces from the country's southeast as part of its weeklong counteroffensive, committing thousands of troops to the battle, according to Western and Ukrainian officials and analysts.

The surge in troops and firepower has been centered on the region of Zaporizhzhia, a Western official said late Wednesday.

The official was not authorized to comment publicly on the matter and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Fighting has intensified in recent weeks at multiple points along the 1,500-kilometer (930-mile) front line as Ukraine deploys Western-supplied advanced weapons and Western-trained troops against the Russian forces who invaded 17 months ago.

The counteroffensive is a massive military operation, which likely was months in preparation. Military planners need to orchestrate supplies of ammunition, food, medical supplies and spare parts to the front line. It faces deeply entrenched Russian defenses featuring minefields, trenches and anti-tank obstacles.

Ukrainian officials have been mostly silent about battlefield developments since they began early coun-

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 26 of 76

teroffensive operations, though Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Maliar said troops are advancing toward the city of Melitopol in the Zaporizhzhia region.

Though that movement could be a tactical feint, and both governments have used disinformation to gain battlefield advantages, such a maneuver would be in line with what some analysts had predicted.

They envisioned a counteroffensive that would try to punch through the land corridor between Russia and the Russian-annexed Crimean peninsula, moving towards Melitopol, which is close to the coast of the Azov Sea.

That could split Russian forces into two halves and cut off supply lines to the units that are located further to the west. Russia currently controls the whole Sea of Azov coast.

The intense fighting is taking place in areas in the south and east of Ukraine, far from the capital Kyiv, and it was not possible to verify either side's claims.

The Institute of Study of War, a Washington-based think tank, reported that Ukrainian forces launched "a significant mechanized counteroffensive operation in western Zaporizhzhia region" on Wednesday, adding that they "appear to have broken through certain pre-prepared Russian defensive positions."

It cited Russian sources, including the Russian Ministry of Defense and several prominent Russian military bloggers.

But a Moscow-appointed head of the partially occupied Zaporizhzhia region, Yevgeny Balitsky, said Ukrainian forces on Thursday morning tried unsuccessfully to break through Russian defenses in the area.

Kyiv's forces "suffered significant losses and pulled back to (their) positions," Balistky said.

However, in what appeared to be a precautionary move, Russia's Federal Security Service, known as the FSB, on Thursday prohibited civilian access to the Arabat Spit in Crimea, a narrow strip of land that links the annexed peninsula to the partially occupied Kherson region. The Kherson region is a key gateway to Crimea

The open-ended ban is needed to contain security threats, the FSB said in a statement quoted by Russia's state news agency RIA Novosti.

U.S. officials, who have provided Kyiv with weapons and intelligence, declined to comment publicly on the latest developments, though they have previously urged patience as Ukraine seeks to grind down Russian positions.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said during a visit to Papua New Guinea that Kyiv's effort to retake land seized by Russia since its February 2022 full-scale invasion would be "tough" and "long," with successes and setbacks.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said "an intense battle" is taking place but declined to provide details.

"We believe that tools, the equipment, the training, the advice that many of us have shared with Ukrainians over many months puts them in good position to be successful on the ground in recovering more of the territory that Russia has taken from Ukraine," Blinken said during a visit to New Zealand.

Meanwhile, a missile strike on Ukraine's southern Odesa region killed one civilian and further damaged the region's port infrastructure, in the latest attack since Moscow broke off a grain export agreement, Odesa Gov. Oleh Kiper reported Thursday.

The attack used Kalibr cruise missiles launched from the Black Sea, he said.

The Ukraine Air Force of Ukraine said Thursday it intercepted 36 Russian missiles launched from Tu-95MS strategic bombers.

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Aamer Madhani in Washington D.C., Rod McGuirk in Canberra, Australia and Nick Perry in Wellington, New Zealand contributed.

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

## Church sex abuse revelations are unwelcome distraction as Pope Francis visits scandal-hit Portugal

By BARRY HATTON Associated Press

LISBON, Portugal (AP) — When a panel of experts read aloud some of the harrowing accounts they had collected from recently discovered victims of child sex abuse in the Portuguese Catholic Church, the country's senior bishops squirmed in the auditorium's front-row seats.

During a live television broadcast, the experts reported in February that at least 4,815 boys and girls had been abused since 1950, most aged 10-14.

Before the stunning findings, senior Portuguese church officials had maintained there had been only a handful of cases of clergy sex abuse. They lost even more credibility with a response so clumsy and hesitant that victims were inspired to form Portugal's first survivor advocacy group to press for compensation.

Pope Francis will wade into the quagmire of Portugal's reckoning with its legacy of clergy abuse and cover-up when he arrives in Lisbon next Wednesday to participate in World Youth Day, the international Catholic youth rally. While there is no mention of the scandal on the pontiff's official agenda, he is expected to meet with victims during his visit.

Francis will also visit the shrine at Fatima, a rural Portuguese town that is one of the Catholic Church's most popular pilgrimage destinations. In 1917, three Portuguese shepherd children reported seeing visions of the Virgin Mary above a tree there, a singular event of 20th century church history.

Antonio Grosso, who says he was sexually abused at a former religious shelter for boys in Fatima in the 1960s, chafes at the contrast in the church's approach.

Church officials "don't believe what victims tell them, but they do believe little children who say they've been listening to the lady above (a tree)," the 70-year-old retired bank employee says.

Portugal is the latest country to confront decades of abuse by priests and cover-ups by bishops and religious superiors. Yet Portuguese church leaders seem to have learned little from their fellow bishops in the U.S., Europe and Latin America who faced similar crises.

Since the report's release, the Portuguese hierarchy has flip-flopped over the possible — and still unresolved — issue of payment of reparations to victims. It has balked at suspending active members of the clergy named in the report.

Anne Barrett Doyle of BishopAccountability.org, a U.S. group that maintains an online archive on abuse in the Catholic Church, said Portugal's bishops had expected the independent commission would help them restore trust by revealing the history of abuse and cover-up while allowing them to "apologize, give assurances of reform, and move on."

"Their plan backfired terribly," she said in an email. "With its finding of nearly 5,000 victims and its startling claim of accused priests still in ministry, the commission turned out to be more independent than the bishops bargained for ... It was a disastrous miscalculation."

With the shocking results, church authorities at first argued that possible reparations were a matter for the courts, which in Portugal are backlogged and notoriously slow to reach decisions, often taking many years. Lisbon Cardinal Manuel Clemente said the church would do only what courts determined it must do.

"Everything that can be done in accordance with the law will be done according to the law," Clemente explained. "But don't expect us to do anything else, because we can't do anything else."

He and other officials also remarked that under Portuguese law, the perpetrator is liable for any compensation payments — not the institution to which that person belongs.

Clemente said it would be "insulting" to offer reparations to victims. Furthermore, he and other church officials claimed that none of the victims in an online questionnaire created by the commission of experts said they were seeking reparations. The commission told The Associated Press that's not true.

By April, the church had softened its position, saying it didn't rule out reparations. It promised to "make help available" for victims and said if convicted perpetrators couldn't pay, the church would. Officials have not elaborated on those plans.

Clemente also claimed the Independent Committee for the Study of Child Abuse in the Catholic Church,

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 28 of 76

a group of experts set up by Portuguese church authorities, had handed the church just a list of names of alleged abusers that was not backed up by factual evidence.

That comment irked the experts, who said they took pains to ground their findings and provide supporting documentation, including witness statements admissible in court.

Also, church authorities said active clergy named as alleged abusers could be suspended from their duties only after due legal process where they could present their defense, presumably in a courtroom. Officials, under public pressure, later suspended four of the two dozen priests identified in the report.

The church promised last March to build a memorial to the victims that would be unveiled during the World Youth Day celebrations. A few weeks before the pope's arrival, in another embarrassment, it scrapped that plan and said vaguely that something would be done later.

Grosso, the abuse victim, says he and others were so "outraged and deeply upset" by the church's response that they created a lobby group, called the Silenced Heart Association, to help victims obtain reparations. The group is also to provide psychological support and pro bono legal aid.

Grosso's personal journey has taken him from would-be priest studying as a child at a Portuguese seminary to co-founder of the first church sex abuse victim association in Portugal. As a child, he says, he enjoyed Mass so much that he re-enacted it at home.

But between the age of 10 and 12, studying away from home, Grosso says he was sexually abused first by a priest and later by a Franciscan friar.

Wracked by guilt and trauma, for 10 years he never spoke to anyone about what had happened. As a teen, he had episodes of "rage, humiliation, shame," he says. The upshot: a boy who wanted to be a priest became an adult atheist.

Only as a young adult did he begin to broach the subject with friends. He told his girlfriend, who became his wife. They had two daughters.

When Grosso publicly recounted his story in a 2002 Portuguese magazine interview, having felt encouraged to do so by revelations of church sex abuse emerging around the world, his then 27-year-old daughter Barbara sent him a handwritten letter. He has kept it folded up in his wallet for the past two decades. The letter salutes his courage and tells him his daughter is proud of him. Reading it aloud, he tears up.

He feels moved to act now, he says, because the church reacted with "contempt" to the torment of victims and is still trying to cover up the truth. He would like to see Pope Francis speak about the issue while in Portugal.

The church in Portugal has apologized for the abuse. It is working with Portugal's main victims' support association and is establishing procedures and tailoring its responses to sex abuse in the church. Staff at the World Youth Day are receiving specific training on how to prevent and spot abuse.

The problem, however, extends far beyond Portugal, says Barrett Doyle.

Portugal's reckoning lags behind what has already happened in the United States, Australia, France and Germany, she said, but is on a par with the church responses in Spain and Poland and most countries in South America, Central America, and Africa.

"In other words, and sadly, the Portuguese hierarchy is not an outlier; it's representative," she said.

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Helena Alves contributed to this report.

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## **Biden looks to provide relief from extreme heat as record temperatures persist**

By CHRIS MEGERIAN, DREW COSTLEY and MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With millions of Americans facing broiling heat across the Southwest, President Joe Biden on Thursday plans to announce new steps to protect workers, improve weather forecasts and make drinking water more accessible, the White House says.

He'll be joined by the leaders of the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre described the heat wave as "a difficult time" and said Biden was treating climate change with "the urgency it requires."

The Democratic president is directing the Department of Labor to increase inspections of potentially dangerous workplaces such as farms and construction sites. He also wants heightened enforcement of heat safety violations.

As part of the initiative, the department will issue a hazard alert notifying employers and employees about ways to stay protected from extreme heat, which has killed 436 workers since 2011, according to federal statistics.

The Biden administration plans to spend \$7 million to develop more detailed weather predictions to anticipate extreme weather like heat waves, plus \$152 million to boost drinking water infrastructure and climate resilience in California, Colorado and Washington.

The mayors of Phoenix and San Antonio, two cities that have suffered from the heat waves, are expected to participate in the White House event virtually.

Phoenix has seen at least 26 days in a row of temperatures exceeding 110 degrees. Maricopa County, where the city is located, reported recently that there were 18 heat-associated deaths between April 11 and July 15. Another 69 deaths remain under investigation. There were 425 heat-associated deaths in the county last year.

San Antonio saw 15 straight days of 100-plus degrees. At least 13 deaths in Texas have been blamed on the extreme heat.

Thursday's announcement follows other steps that the Biden administration has taken to adapt to increasing threats from extreme heat. Among those it is highlighting:

The Department of Labor is developing a standard for how workplaces deal with heat. The proposed rule by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration would require employers to provide adequate water and rest breaks to outdoor workers, as well as medical services and training to address signs and symptoms of heat-related illness. OSHA is holding meetings this summer to hear comments on how the heat standard would affect small businesses.

To keep low-income populations cool, the Department of Health and Human Services expanded its Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program to provide more access to air conditioning and cooling centers such as libraries, senior centers or other public buildings. The Environmental Protection Agency also has provided assistance to help communities develop cooling centers within schools.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has been helping cities and towns map "heat islands" with dense buildings and fewer trees, and the Department of Agriculture issued guidance for creating more tree canopy coverage, which helps with cooling environments.

In addition, the administration launched a website called heat.gov with interactive maps, weather forecasts and tips for keeping cool amid record-breaking heat.

More than 100 members of Congress, led by Democratic Reps. Greg Casar and Sylvia Garcia of Texas and Judy Chu of California have called on the administration to implement the new heat standard for outdoor workers as quickly as possible.

"We know extreme weather events such as heat waves are becoming more frequent and more dangerous due to climate change. Urgent action is needed to prevent more deaths," the lawmakers wrote in a letter Monday.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 30 of 76

The United Farm Workers and other groups also called on OSHA to immediately issue a nationwide rule protecting outdoor workers after farm worker deaths this month in Florida and Arizona.

"Farm workers need and deserve the access to shade, water and paid breaks," said UFW President Teresa Romero. "How many more workers will we let dangerous heat and callous employers kill before this nation acts?"

Douglas Parker, assistant Labor secretary for occupational safety and health, called heat illness prevention a top priority. As OSHA works toward a final rule, the agency is enhancing enforcement efforts "to make sure employers and workers understand the dangers of heat illness and how to prevent it," Parker said in a statement.

Casar, a freshman lawmaker from Austin, staged a "thirst strike" on Tuesday outside the U.S. Capitol, forgoing water breaks for nearly nine hours, to protest a new Texas law that bans local governments from requiring water breaks and other safety measures for outdoor workers. Casar called the law "insane" and accused Republican Gov. Greg Abbott of being "on the wrong side of history." Republican lawmakers and other supporters of the law say it eliminates a patchwork of local regulations that are burdensome to businesses, and they say it won't stop workers from taking breaks.

At least 42 workers died in Texas between 2011 and 2021 from environmental heat exposure, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

"Democrats are going to stand up for common sense and for working people," Casar said.

Ladd Keith, an assistant professor at the University of Arizona who studies heat policy and governance, said the record-breaking heat much of the nation is experiencing "is very much in line with climate change projections." While not surprising, "they're certainly a continuation of a concerning trend of climate impacts that we've seen," he said.

Despite the recent headlines, rising temperatures have typically not received the same level of attention as other climate risks, such as flooding and wildfires, Keith said.

"Heat has just not been a topic at the national level or local level that we've even considered addressing until the last couple of years," he said.

However, Keith said the administration has ramped up its focus because of searing weather events, such as the heat dome in the Pacific Northwest in 2021 that prompted record temperatures and dozens of deaths across the region.

OSHA fined a Florida farm supervisor last month for exposing workers to excessive heat after a worker from Mexico died at a farm in Parkland, Florida. Investigators determined the worker's death could have been prevented if a labor contractor had followed established safety practices regarding heat-related hazards.

Costley reported from New Orleans.

## **Mutinuous soldiers say they've taken Niger. The government says a coup won't be tolerated**

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

NIAMEY, Niger (AP) — People in Niger awoke to a divided country Thursday after mutinous soldiers claimed to have ousted the president. But the government said it will never accept their rule and has called for the population to reject it.

"There was an attempted coup, but of course we cannot accept it," Minister of Foreign Affairs Hassoumi Massoudou told news network France 24 in an interview Thursday.

"We call on all Nigerien democratic patriots to stand up as one to say no to this factious action that tends to set us back decades and block the progress of our country," he said. He also called for the president's unconditional release and said talks were ongoing.

President Mohamed Bazoum was elected in 2021 in the West African nation's first peaceful, democratic transfer of power since its independence from France in 1960. He thwarted a coup attempt days before he was sworn in.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 31 of 76

Threats to his leadership undermine the West's efforts to stabilize Africa's Sahel region, which has been overrun with coups in recent years. Mali and Burkina Faso have had four coups since 2020, and both are being overrun by extremists linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group. United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Niger in March, seeking to strengthen ties with a country where extremists have carried out attacks on civilians and military personnel but the overall security situation was not as dire as in neighboring nations.

On Wednesday morning, members of the presidential guard surrounded the house of Bazoum with him and his wife inside and detained him.

The mutinous soldiers, who call themselves the National Council for the Safeguarding of the Country, took to state television and announced they had seized control because of the deteriorating security and bad economic and social governance of the nation's 25 million people. They said all institutions had been suspended and security forces were managing the situation, and urged external partners not to interfere. The attempted coup was allegedly sparked by the head of the presidential guard, General Tchiani, who the president had planned to relieve from his position, Niger analysts say.

According to someone close to the president who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak about the situation, the president has not and will not resign and is safe in his residence.

"The hard-won achievements will be safeguarded. All Nigeriens who love democracy and freedom will see to it," Bazoum tweeted early Thursday morning.

It's unclear how much support the coup leaders have from the rest of the security forces, but support for Bazoum among the population and political parties appears strong. In a statement Wednesday, a group of Nigerien political groups said the situation was "suicidal and anti-republican madness."

"Our country, faced with insecurity, terrorism and the challenges of underdevelopment, cannot afford to be distracted," it said.

Benin President Patrice Talon, head of the Economic Community of West African State, is expected to lead talks as part of mediation efforts.

In an interview with the Associated Press in December, Bazoum said that while there's always the possibility of a coup when armies fail to secure a nation against extremists, Niger had the situation under control. "We are doing well in managing our own situation," he said.

For many Western countries, Niger was seen as the last hope for partnership in the region with anti-French sentiment that led to a pivot from French forces in Mali to the Russian mercenary group Wagner, founded by millionaire businessman Yevgeny Prigozhin. Wagner is believed to be making inroads in Burkina Faso as well.

There is concern that a potential new regime in Niger would take a page from those countries' playbooks and worsen instability.

The international community strongly condemned the coup Thursday.

French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna tweeted that France is concerned about the events in Niger and following the situation closely. France "firmly condemns any attempt to take power by force," the minister tweeted.

The European Union's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, tweeted that Niger is "an essential partner" for the EU in the Sahel and that the region's "destabilization would serve no one's interests." He reaffirmed the EU's full support of Bazoum.

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Associated Press reporters Tracy Brown in Washington and John Leicester in Paris contributed.

## As e-bikes proliferate, so do deadly fires blamed on exploding lithium-ion batteries

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The explosion early on a June morning ignited a blaze that engulfed a New York City shop filled with motorized bicycles and their volatile lithium-ion batteries. Billowing smoke quickly killed four people asleep in apartments above the burning store.

As the ubiquity of e-bikes has grown, so has the frequency of fires and deaths blamed on the batteries that power them — sparking a push to better regulate how the batteries are manufactured, sold, reconditioned, charged and stored.

Consumer advocates and fire departments, particularly in New York City, are urging the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission to establish national safety standards and confiscate imports that don't comply with regulations at the border, so unsafe e-bikes and poorly manufactured batteries can be taken off the streets and out of homes.

The matter comes under discussion when the commission convenes a public hearing Thursday in Washington.

"We've been sounding the alarm for months," New York City Mayor Eric Adams said a day after an exploding battery ignited the Chinatown e-bike shop fire last month. "We need real action, not only on the state level, but on the federal level."

With some 65,000 e-bikes zipping through its streets — more than any other place in the U.S. — New York City is the epicenter of battery-related fires. There have been 100 such blazes so far this year, resulting in 13 deaths, already more than double the six fatalities last year.

Nationally, there were more than 200 battery-related fires reported to the commission — an obvious undercount — from 39 states over the past two years, including 19 deaths blamed on so-called micromobility devices that include battery-powered scooters, bicycles and hoverboards.

New York's two U.S. Senators, Democrats Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand, introduced legislation last month that would set mandatory safety standards for e-bikes and the batteries that power them.

Because mandatory standards don't exist, Schumer said, poorly made batteries have flooded the U.S., increasing the risk of fires.

Earlier this year, New York City urgently enacted a sweeping package of local laws intended to crack down on defective batteries, including a ban on the sale or rental of e-bikes and batteries that aren't certified as meeting safety standards by an independent product testing lab.

The new rules also outlaw tampering with batteries or selling refurbished batteries made with lithium-ion cells scavenged from used units.

Meanwhile, New York City officials also announced they had received a \$25 million federal grant for e-bike charging stations across the city — which fire marshals hope will reduce the risk of fires.

These aren't typical fires, said New York City Fire Commissioner Laura Kavanagh. The batteries don't smolder; they explode.

"When they fail, they fail quite spectacularly," said Kavanagh, who will speak at Thursday's forum and advocate for national safety standards and stronger measures against possibly dangerous devices. "Once one of these ignites, there is a huge volume of fire, often so much so that the person in their home can't get out and the firefighters can't get in to get them."

Such was the case in April when two siblings, a 7-year-old boy and his 19-year-old sister, died when a scooter battery ignited a fire in Queens.

Because of the fire hazard, some residential buildings have banned e-bikes. Last summer, the New York City Housing Authority sought to prohibit tenants in all of its 335 developments from keeping or charging e-vehicles in their units, only to back down a few months later after protests from delivery workers.

Use of motorized bicycles grew dramatically in the city during the COVID-19 pandemic as homebound people turned more to food delivery workers for meals and groceries.

With the rash of fires, delivery workers like Lizandro Lopez say they are now more mindful about pre-



cautions.

"As soon as the battery is charged, I disconnect it. You shouldn't leave it charging for too long," Lopez told The Associated Press in Spanish, "because if you leave it on there too long, that's when you can cause a fire."

Los Deliveristas Unidos, which represents app-based delivery workers in the New York area, estimates that fewer than 10% of e-bikes sold in the city have been deemed safe by a third-party evaluator, such as UL Solutions, a product testing company that certifies safety compliance for a host of electrical products, including Christmas lights and televisions.

E-bike batteries rely on the same chemistry to generate power as the lithium-ion batteries in cellphones, laptops and most electric vehicles — products that were initially prone to overheating.

Tighter regulations, safety standards and compliance testing drastically reduced the risk of fires in such devices, according to Robert Slone, the senior vice president and chief scientist for UL Solutions.

The same can happen with e-bike batteries, he said, if they are made to comply with established safety standards.

"We just need to make them safe, and there is a way to make them safe through testing and certification," Slone said, "given the history that we've seen in terms of fires and injuries and unfortunately, deaths as well — not just in New York, but across the country and around the world."

In London, the fire brigade says lithium batteries are the city's fastest growing fire risk, with one fire erupting about every two days. Last year, there were a total of 116 fires involving e-bikes and e-scooters. At least one death has been attributed this year to an overheated battery.

In San Francisco, there have been at least 21 battery fires so far this year — compared with just 13 battery-related fires in 2017, according to an analysis by the San Francisco Chronicle.

Last year, some 1.1 million e-bikes were imported into the U.S., according to the Light Electric Vehicle Association, an industry group. In 2021, more than 880,000 e-bikes came into the country — about double from the year before and triple the number in 2019.

Many of the batteries now on the road are aftermarket products that are cheaply made and popular with delivery workers because of their lower prices.

"But that product is so cheap because it hasn't gone through those design and testing. ... It doesn't meet a standard, so that's why they're inexpensive," said Matt Moore, the general and policy council for the PeopleForBikes Coalition, which will also take part in the forum. "Even if there was a regulation, there will still be the ability of foreign sellers and manufacturers to send these products into the United States."

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Associated Press video journalist Ted Shaffrey and video producer Vanessa A. Alvarez contributed to this report.

## **Army fire kills a 14-year-old, Palestinians say, as an Israeli minister visits flashpoint holy site**

By TIA GOLDENBERG and ISAAC SCHARF Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli military fire killed a 14-year-old Palestinian in the occupied West Bank, Palestinian health officials said Thursday, as an extremist Israeli Cabinet minister visited a sensitive Jerusalem holy site that has been a frequent flashpoint for violence between Israel and the Palestinians.

Itamar Ben-Gvir's visit to the disputed hilltop compound comes as Israel and the Palestinians are locked in a year-and-a-half long bout of fighting and could enflame already surging tensions. It also drew condemnation from neighboring Jordan and from Palestinians who view such visits as provocative. The site is revered by Jews and Muslims, and the competing claims lie at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Early Thursday, the Palestinian Health Ministry said 14-year-old Fares Sharhabil Abu Samra was killed by Israeli fire in the West Bank town of Qalqilya. The Israeli military said Palestinians threw rocks and firebombs at troops, who responded by firing into the air. It said the incident was being reviewed.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 34 of 76

Ben-Gvir was joining what will likely to be hundreds of Jews visiting the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound to mark the Jewish holiday of Tisha B'Av, a day of mourning and repentance when Jews reflect on the destruction of the First and Second Temples, key events in Jewish history.

"This is the most important place for the people of Israel which we must return to and show our rule," Ben-Gvir said in a video released by his office, with the golden Dome of the Rock in the background.

The Palestinian Authority's Jerusalem Affairs Ministry warned that the government and extremists like Ben-Gvir would "push things toward religious war" by "provoking the feelings of Muslims all over the world." The Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said it considered Ben-Gvir's visit to the sacred compound as an attempt to impose Israeli sovereignty over the site.

Jordan, which acts as a custodian over the site and has a peace agreement with Israel, said such visits along with other Israeli steps in Jerusalem "threaten to trigger new cycles of violence."

Ben-Gvir, a former West Bank settler leader and far-right activist who years ago was convicted of incitement and supporting a Jewish terror group, now serves as Israel's national security minister, overseeing the country's police force.

Thursday was Ben-Gvir's third known visit to the contested site since becoming a minister in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right government. The site, known to Jews as the Temple Mount, is the holiest site in Judaism, where the biblical Temples once stood. Today, it is home to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the third-holiest site in Islam.

Police said they had arrested or detained 16 people for violating "visitation regulations" at the site. Under longstanding arrangements, Jews are permitted to visit the site, but not to pray there. But in recent years, a growing number of Jewish visitors have begun to quietly pray, raising fears among Palestinians that Israel is plotting to divide or take over the site. Ben-Gvir has long called for increased Jewish access.

His visit could enflame already surging tensions between Israel and the Palestinians, who have been engaged in months of fighting that have sparked the worst violence in nearly two decades in the West Bank.

Since early last year, Israel has been staging near-nightly raids into Palestinian areas which it says are meant to stamp out militancy and thwart future attacks. More than 160 Palestinians have been killed in the fighting this year, according to a tally by The Associated Press.

The military says most of those killed have been militants. But stone-throwing youths protesting the incursions and others not involved in the confrontations have also been killed. At least 26 people have been killed in Palestinian attacks against Israelis since the start of 2023.

Israel captured east Jerusalem, where the holy compound lies, along with the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians seek those territories for a future independent state, with east Jerusalem as its capital. Israel annexed east Jerusalem in a move unrecognized by most of the international community and considers the city its undivided, permanent capital.

Netanyahu's government, consisting of ultranationalists and West Bank settlement supporters like Ben-Gvir, has intensified steps to solidify Israel's hold on territories that Palestinians seek for a future state, angering Israel's top ally, the United States, and dimming hopes for Palestinian statehood.

Goldenberg reported from Tel Aviv, Israel. Associated Press writers Isabel DeBre in Jerusalem and Omar Akour in Amman, Jordan, contributed to this report.

## Accused of bomb threats they say they didn't make, family of Chinese dissident detained in Thailand

By HUIZHONG WU, TIAN MACLEOD JI and JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — When Gao Peng landed in Thailand on July 3, he was not expecting to be accused of making bomb threats, to be put on an EU travel blacklist, or to see his mother and 16-year-old sister detained and threatened with deportation back to China.

But bomb threats made in his and his mother's names against airports, luxury hotels and the Chinese embassy in Bangkok derailed the family's plan to seek asylum in the Netherlands, where Gao Peng's father

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 35 of 76

moved three years ago. The threats appear to be part of Beijing's increasingly sophisticated efforts to harass Chinese dissidents living overseas and their families.

While parts of the story told by Gao Peng and his father, Gao Zhi, couldn't be independently confirmed, their predicament echoes accounts by other Chinese dissidents abroad, who believe Chinese authorities are making bomb threats in their names to control their political activities.

William Nee, research and advocacy coordinator at a coalition of rights organizations known as Chinese Human Rights Defenders, said that the bomb threats appear to be a new tactic that manipulates other governments into acting against Chinese dissidents.

"Obviously, public authorities may take such a threat seriously," he said. "It's hard for them to have the context to understand that it is a preposterous allegation."

Bomb threat allegations led the Netherlands to revoke visa approvals for Gao's family, and put his wife and son on an EU travel blacklist that kept them in Thailand until their visas expired. Thai police have not confirmed whether they are investigating the bomb threats.

## AN OFFER OF ASYLUM, AND A MYSTERIOUS BARGAIN

Gao Zhi was not a prominent dissident. Until early 2020, he was a migrant factory worker who'd learned to evade China's censorship systems to use Twitter, now called the X platform, where he followed human rights activists and posted calls for the overthrow of the Communist Party.

Gao got asylum in the Netherlands and moved there in January 2020.

Back home, police questioned Gao's family twice, but the pressure felt manageable at first.

That changed when Gao attended a rally organized by his friend Wang Jingyu, a more prominent dissident, on the June 4 anniversary of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre.

On June 15, police came to the home of Gao's wife, Liu Fengling, and demanded her cellphone. When she refused, they forced her into a chair, scratching her wrist in the tussle, and took it.

When Liu told her husband what happened, he urged her to leave China.

Dutch officials told Gao his family could get emergency visas at the Dutch embassy in Bangkok, where Chinese citizens can get visas on arrival.

But before the family left China, someone claiming to work for the country's Ministry of Public Security contacted Gao, according to undated screenshots he shared with the AP.

The person proposed a deal: if Gao promised to tone down his rhetoric and influenced Wang to give fewer interviews, the government would help reunite his family. Otherwise, Liu would be prevented from leaving China.

After speaking to Wang, Gao agreed.

The Associated Press was not able to verify the screenshots independently, and the ministry did not reply to a request for comment.

Liu and her daughter, Gao Han, traveled to Bangkok on June 27, followed on July 3 by the couple's son.

Gao Peng said he didn't know why they were going to Thailand. His parents had never told him why his father left China, although he was aware there was some trouble with the police.

## DISSIDENTS AND FAMILIES FACE BOMB THREAT ACCUSATIONS OVERSEAS

The day after Gao Peng arrived in Thailand, someone called his mother and accused him of making bomb threats.

According to a recording made by Liu, the man identified himself as Wang Mingsen, a consular official at the Chinese embassy in Bangkok. "He said he wants to put a bomb at the embassy, because his father has been persecuted in China," Wang said.

When reached by the AP, Wang said "This situation, we don't have any information we can share with you."

Gao Peng said that his family tried to report the bomb threats to police, but it took until July 9 to find an officer who spoke Chinese.

He told them threats had been called in to hotels across the country, including Phuket's Ritz Carlton and JW Marriott hotels, and rooms in many of the same hotels had been booked under Gao Peng and his mother's names. The officer said it was probably a scam and they should just not pick up the phone.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 36 of 76

A receptionist at the Marriott hotel in Phuket said they would ask their marketing team to provide comment. A resort under the Ritz-Carlton brand in Phuket said they hadn't received any threats.

The accusations frightened Gao Peng, he said. "But I was also very indignant, because they're accusing me and smearing me, I can't accept that."

Wang Jingyu, the Netherlands-based activist, and at least three other people linked to him have also described bomb threats made in their names. Wang said he was questioned by Dutch police, who eventually concluded that the threats were sent from IP addresses in Hong Kong and China, and gave him a document clearing his name.

A Chinese journalist living in Germany and a Dutch journalist who interviewed Wang also had bomb threats called into hotels where bookings were made in their names.

Bob Fu, a U.S.-based activist who helped Wang when he was detained in Dubai, said that he now has to alert both local and federal law enforcement every time he travels because of bomb threats.

## PLAN DERAILED AS FAMILY FACES DEPORTATION

Bomb threats also stopped Gao Zhi from buying airline tickets for his wife and son. When he tried, airline websites refused, saying they were on an EU "safety blacklist."

The Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Service told him that bomb threats had been sent to European airports in their names, and helped remove them from the blacklist, but the back and forth took days.

Amid the delay, Liu and her daughter's visas expired on July 11. The next day, Thai police came to the family's hotel and took the two women into custody.

Around the same time, the Dutch government informed Gao that it had revoked his family's visas, writing in an e-mail seen by the AP that Thai police had informed Dutch immigration authorities that they were investigating the family for bomb threats, and that the family had confessed and volunteered to go back to China.

The Dutch immigration service declined to comment, saying they do not discuss individual cases. The Royal Thai Police did not respond to a request for comment.

Liu was charged with overstaying a visa, according to the lawyer, Waritsara. Her daughter has not been charged.

Thailand has a record of deporting dissidents and refugees back to China, sometimes at the request of the Chinese government.

"It's well understood that there is Chinese pressure in Thailand ... so there's quite a bit of pressure on Chinese activists and asylum seekers in Thailand," said Nee.

Thai police told Waritsara that the Chinese embassy had expressed a special interest in the case.

Gao Zhi's Telegram contact promised to help, and told him to send his son to Huai Khwang police station in Bangkok, where he would receive a report ending the investigation. The police did not issue the report, Gao Peng said, but did return the family's cell phones.

Thai immigration officials also refused to extend Gao Peng's visa, mentioning a police warrant according to a recording he made, but he has not been detained.

What's next for the family is uncertain.

The Dutch government told Gao Zhi that if his son can get UNHCR refugee status and the family reaches the Netherlands, they can get visas.

Gao Zhi is spending his days writing to the Dutch and Thai governments to plead for his family.

"I thought I was saving them," he said. "I didn't think I was sending them into a Thai jail."

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Wu reported from Taipei, Taiwan

## Mutinuous soldiers claim to have overthrown Niger's president

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

NIAMEY, Niger (AP) — Mutinous soldiers claimed to have overthrown Niger's democratically elected president, announcing on state television late Wednesday that they have put an end to the government over the African country's deteriorating security.

The soldiers said all institutions had been suspended and security forces were managing the situation. The mutineers urged external partners not to interfere.

The announcement came after a day of uncertainty as members of Niger's presidential guard surrounded the presidential palace and detained President Mohamed Bazoum. There was no immediate indication of whether the mutiny was supported by other parts of the military. It was unclear where the president was at the time of the announcement or if he had resigned.

"This is as a result of the continuing degradation of the security situation, the bad economic and social governance," air force Col. Major Amadou Abdramane said on the video. Seated at a table in front of nine other officers, he said aerial and land borders were closed and a curfew was imposed until the situation stabilized.

The group, which is calling itself National Council for the Safeguarding of the Country, said it remained committed to its engagements with the international and national community.

Earlier Wednesday, a tweet from the account of Niger's presidency reported that members of the elite guard unit engaged in an "anti-Republican demonstration" and unsuccessfully tried to obtain support from other security forces. It said Bazoum and his family were doing well but that Niger's army and national guard "are ready to attack" if those involved in the action did not back down.

The commissions of the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States described the events as an effort to unseat Bazoum, who was elected president two years ago in the nation's first peaceful, democratic transfer of power since its independence from France in 1960.

Threats to Bazoum's leadership would undermine the West's efforts to stabilize Africa's Sahel region, which has been overrun with coups in recent years. Mali and Burkina Faso have had four coups since 2020, and both are being overrun by extremists linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Niger in March, seeking to strengthen ties with a country where extremists have carried out attacks on civilians and military personnel but the overall security situation was not as dire as in neighboring nations.

During a stop in New Zealand on Thursday, Blinken repeated the U.S. condemnation of the mutiny against Niger's president and said his team was in close contact with officials in France and Africa.

Blinken added that he had spoken with Bazoum on Wednesday, saying that he "made clear that we strongly support him as the democratically elected president of the country."

Ulf Laessing, head of the Sahel program at the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, said the mutiny was a "nightmare scenario for Western powers who had betted on Bazoum and Niger as new security anchor for the Sahel."

"It remains to be seen whether this is the last word. Parts of the army are probably still loyal to Bazoum. They benefited much from equipment and training as part of foreign military assistance," Laessing said.

Before the announcement, hundreds of people took to the streets of the capital, Niamey, and chanted "No coup d'etat" while marching in support of the president. Multiple rounds of gunfire that appeared to come from the presidential palace dispersed the demonstrators and sent people scrambling for cover, according to an Associated Press reporter at the scene.

"We are here to show the people that we are not happy about this movement going on, just to show these military people that they can't just take the power like this," protester Mohammed Sidi said. "We are a democratic country, we support democracy and we don't need this kind of movement."

The international community strongly condemned the attempted seizure of power.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who spoke to Bazoum in the afternoon to express "his full support and solidarity," issued a strong condemnation of the mutineers late Wednesday.

"He is deeply disturbed by the detention of President Mohamed Bazoum and is concerned for his safety

and well-being," said Guterres' spokesman, Stéphane Dujarric.

Guterres urged the immediate release of Bazoum without any conditions and called for "an immediate end to all actions undermining democratic principles in Niger," the spokesman added.

The governments of France and the United States also voiced concern and urged the participating guardsmen to change course. Bazoum's administration has made Niger a key Western partner in the fight against Islamist extremism in Africa's Sahel region.

"We strongly condemn any effort to detain or subvert the functioning of Niger's democratically elected government, led by President Bazoum," White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said. "We specifically urge elements of the presidential guard to release President Bazoum from detention and refrain from violence."

Nigerian President Bola Tinubu, who was selected this month as the ECOWAS Commission's chairman, said the regional bloc's leadership would resist any attempt to unseat Niger's government.

"It should be quite clear to all players in the Republic of Niger that the leadership of the ECOWAS region and all lovers of democracy around the world will not tolerate any situation that incapacitates the democratically elected government of the country," Tinubu said in a statement he issued in Abuja. "We will do everything within our powers to ensure democracy is firmly planted, nurtured, well rooted and thrives in our region."

Associated Press writers Chinedu Asadu in Abuja, Nigeria, and Edith M. Lederer at the United Nations contributed to this report.

## **Sinéad O'Connor, gifted and provocative Irish singer-songwriter, dies at 56**

By SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Sinéad O'Connor, the gifted Irish singer-songwriter who became a superstar in her mid-20s and was known as much for her private struggles and provocative actions as for her fierce and expressive music, has died at 56.

"It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of our beloved Sinéad. Her family and friends are devastated and have requested privacy at this very difficult time," the singer's family said in a statement reported Wednesday by the BBC and RTE. No cause was disclosed.

She was public about her mental illness, saying that she was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. O'Connor posted a Facebook video in 2017 from a New Jersey motel where she had been living, saying that she was staying alive for the sake of others and that if it were up to her, she'd be "gone."

When her teenage son Shane died by suicide last year, O'Connor tweeted there was "no point living without him" and she was soon hospitalized. Her final tweet, sent July 17, read: "For all mothers of Suicided children," and linked to a Tibetan compassion mantra.

Recognizable by her shaved head and with a multi-octave mezzo soprano of extraordinary emotional range, O'Connor began her career singing on the streets of Dublin and soon rose to international fame.

She was a star from her 1987 debut album, "The Lion and the Cobra," and became a sensation in 1990 with her cover of Prince's ballad "Nothing Compares 2 U," a seething, shattering performance that topped charts from Europe to Australia and was heightened by a promotional video featuring the gray-eyed O'Connor in intense close-up.

She was a lifelong non-conformist — she said she shaved her head in response to record executives pressuring her to be conventionally glamorous — but her political and cultural stances and troubled private life often overshadowed her music.

A critic of the Roman Catholic Church well before allegations of sexual abuse were widely reported, O'Connor made headlines in October 1992 when she tore up a photo of Pope John Paul II while appearing on NBC's "Saturday Night Live" and denounced the church as the enemy.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 39 of 76

The next week, Joe Pesci hosted "Saturday Night Live," held up a repaired photo of the Pope and said if he had been on the show with O'Connor he "would have gave her such a smack." Days later, she appeared at an all-star tribute for Bob Dylan at Madison Square Garden and was immediately booed. She was supposed to sing Dylan's "I Believe in You," but switched to an a cappella version of Bob Marley's "War," which she had sung on "Saturday Night Live."

Although consoled and encouraged on stage by her friend Kris Kristofferson, she left and broke down, and her performance was kept off the concert CD. (Years later, Kristofferson recorded "Sister Sinead," for which he wrote, "And maybe she's crazy and maybe she ain't/But so was Picasso and so were the saints.")

She also feuded with Frank Sinatra over her refusal to allow the playing of "The Star-Spangled Banner" at one of her shows and accused Prince of physically threatening her. In 1989 she declared her support for the Irish Republican Army, a statement she retracted a year later. Around the same time, she skipped the Grammy ceremony, saying it was too commercialized.

In 1999, O'Connor caused uproar in Ireland when she became a priestess of the breakaway Latin Tridentine Church — a position that was not recognized by the mainstream Catholic Church. For many years, she called for a full investigation into the extent of the church's role in concealing child abuse by clergy. In 2010, when Pope Benedict XVI apologized to Ireland to atone for decades of abuse, O'Connor condemned the apology for not going far enough and called for Catholics to boycott Mass until there was a full investigation into the Vatican's role.

"People assumed I didn't believe in God. That's not the case at all. I'm Catholic by birth and culture and would be the first at the church door if the Vatican offered sincere reconciliation," she wrote in the Washington Post in 2010.

O'Connor announced in 2018 that she had converted to Islam and would be adopting the name Shuhada' Davitt, later Shuhada Sadaqat — although she continued to use Sinéad O'Connor professionally.

"Her music was loved around the world and her talent was unmatched and beyond compare," Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar said in a statement on social media.

O'Connor was born on Dec. 8, 1966. She had a difficult childhood, with a mother she alleged was abusive and encouraged her to shoplift. As a teenager she spent time in a church-sponsored institution for girls, where she said she washed priests' clothes for no wages. But a nun gave O'Connor her first guitar, and soon she sang and performed on the streets of Dublin, her influences ranging from Dylan to Siouxsie and the Banshees.

Her performance with a local band caught the eye of a small record label, and, in 1987, O'Connor released, "The Lion and the Cobra," which sold hundreds of thousands of copies and featured the hit "Mandinka," driven by a hard-rock guitar riff and O'Connor's piercing vocals. O'Connor, then 20 and pregnant, co-produced the album.

"I suppose I've got to say that music saved me," she said in an interview with the Independent newspaper in 2013. "I didn't have any other abilities, and there was no learning support for girls like me, not in Ireland at that time. It was either jail or music. I got lucky."

"Nothing Compares 2 U" received three Grammy nominations and was the featured track on her acclaimed album, "I Do Not Want What I Haven't Got," which helped lead Rolling Stone to name her Artist of the Year in 1991.

"She proved that a recording artist could refuse to compromise and still connect with millions of listeners hungry for music of substance," the magazine declared.

O'Connor's other musical credits included the albums, "Universal Mother" and "Faith and Courage," a cover of Cole Porter's "You Do Something to Me," from the AIDS fundraising album "Red Hot + Blue," and backing vocals on Peter Gabriel's "Blood of Eden." She received eight Grammy nominations and in 1991 won for best alternative musical performance.

O'Connor announced she was retiring from music in 2003, but continued to record new material. Her most recent album was "I'm Not Bossy, I'm the Boss," released in 2014 and she sang the theme song for Season 7 of "Outlander."

The singer married four times; her union to drug counsellor Barry Herridge, in 2011, lasted just 16 days. O'Connor had four children: Jake, with her husband John Reynolds; Roisin, with John Waters; Shane, with Donal Lunny; and Yeshua Bonadio, with Frank Bonadio.

In 2014, she said she was joining the Irish nationalist Sinn Fein party and called for its leaders to step aside so that a younger generation of activists could take over. She later withdrew her application.

Singer Tori Amos was among the many musicians who paid tribute to O'Connor on Wednesday, calling her "a force of nature."

"Such passion, such intense presence and a beautiful soul, who battled her own personal demons courageously," Amos said. "Be at peace dear Sinead, you will forever be in our hearts."

**EDITOR'S NOTE** — This story includes discussion of suicide. The U.S. suicide and crisis lifeline is available by calling or texting 988. There is also an online chat at 988lifeline.org. In the U.K., the Samaritans can be reached at 116 123.

## **Bluffing or not, Putin's declared deployment of nuclear weapons to Belarus ramps up saber-rattling**

By The Associated Press undefined

Sometime this summer, if President Vladimir Putin can be believed, Russia moved some of its short-range nuclear weapons into Belarus, closer to Ukraine and onto NATO's doorstep.

The declared deployment of the Russian weapons on the territory of its neighbor and loyal ally marks a new stage in the Kremlin's nuclear saber-rattling over its invasion of Ukraine and another bid to discourage the West from increasing military support to Kyiv.

Neither Putin nor his Belarusian counterpart, Alexander Lukashenko, said how many were moved — only that Soviet-era facilities in the country were readied to accommodate them, and that Belarusian pilots and missile crews were trained to use them.

The U.S. and NATO haven't confirmed the move. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg denounced Moscow's rhetoric as "dangerous and reckless," but said earlier this month the alliance hasn't seen any change in Russia's nuclear posture.

While some experts doubt the claims by Putin and Lukashenko, others note that Western intelligence might be unable to monitor such movement.

Earlier this month, CNN quoted U.S. intelligence officials as saying they had no reason to doubt Putin's claim about the delivery of the first batch of the weapons to Belarus and noted it could be challenging for the U.S. to track them.

Unlike nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missiles that can destroy entire cities, tactical nuclear weapons for use against troops on the battlefield can have a yield as small as about 1 kiloton. The U.S. bomb in Hiroshima in World War II was 15 kilotons.

The devices are compact: Used on bombs, missiles and artillery shells, they could be discreetly carried on a truck or plane. Aliaksandr Alesin, an independent Minsk-based military analyst, said the weapons use containers that emit no radiation and could have been flown into Belarus without Western intelligence seeing it.

"They easily fit in a regular Il-76 transport plane," Alesin said. "There are dozens of flights a day, and it's very difficult to track down that special flight. The Americans could fail to monitor it."

Belarus has 25 underground facilities built during the Cold War for nuclear-tipped intermediate-range missiles that can withstand missile attacks, Alesin said. Only five or six such depots could actually store tactical nuclear weapons, he added, but the military operates at all of them to fool Western intelligence.

Early in the war, Putin referenced his nuclear arsenal by vowing repeatedly to use "all means" necessary to protect Russia. He has toned down his statements recently, but a top lieutenant continues to dangle the prospect with terrifying ease.

Dmitry Medvedev, the deputy head of Russia's Security Council who served as a placeholder president



# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 41 of 76

in 2008-12 because Putin was term-limited, unleashes near-daily threats that Moscow won't hesitate to use nuclear weapons.

In a recent article, Medvedev said "the apocalypse isn't just possible but quite likely," and the only way to avoid it is to bow to Russian demands.

The world faces a confrontation "far worse than during the Cuban missile crisis because our enemies have decided to really defeat Russia, the largest nuclear power," he wrote.

Many Western observers dismiss that as bluster.

Putin seems to have dialed down his nuclear rhetoric after getting signals to do so from China, said Keir Giles, a Russia expert at Chatham House.

"The evident Chinese displeasure did have an effect and may have been accompanied by private messaging to Russia," Giles told The Associated Press.

Moscow's defense doctrine envisages a nuclear response to an atomic strike or even an attack with conventional weapons that "threaten the very existence of the Russian state." That vague wording has led some Russian experts to urge the Kremlin to spell out those conditions in more detail and force the West to take the warnings more seriously.

"The possibility of using nuclear weapons in the current conflict mustn't be concealed," said Dmitry Trenin, who headed the Moscow Carnegie Center for 14 years before joining Moscow's state-funded Institute for World Economy and International Relations.

"The real, not theoretical, perspective of it should create stimuli for stopping the escalation of the war and eventually set the stage for a strategic balance in Europe that would be acceptable to us," he wrote recently.

Western beliefs that Putin is bluffing about using nuclear weapons "is an extremely dangerous delusion," Trenin said.

Sergei Karaganov, a top Russian foreign affairs expert who advises Putin's Security Council, said Moscow should make its nuclear threats more specific in order to "break the will of the West" and force it to stop supporting Ukraine as it seeks to reclaim Russian-held areas in a grinding counteroffensive.

"It's necessary to restore the fear of nuclear escalation; otherwise mankind is doomed," he said, suggesting Russia establish a "ladder" of accelerating actions.

Deploying nuclear weapons in Belarus was the first step, Karaganov said, with perhaps a follow-up of warning ethnic Russians in countries supporting Ukraine to evacuate areas near facilities that could be nuclear targets.

If that doesn't work, Karaganov suggested a Russian nuclear strike on Poland, alleging Washington wouldn't dare respond in kind to protect a NATO ally, for fear of igniting a global war.

"If we build the right strategy of intimidation and even the use of it, the risk of a retaliatory nuclear or any other strike on our territory could be reduced to a minimum," he said. "Only if a madman who hates his own country sits in the White House would America risk to launch a strike 'in the defense' of the Europeans and draw a response, sacrificing Boston for Poznan."

The Moscow-based Council of Foreign and Defense Policies, a panel of leading military and foreign policy experts that includes Karaganov, denounced his comments as "a direct threat to all of mankind."

While pro-Kremlin analysts floated such scenarios, Lukashenko, the Belarusian leader, says hosting Russian nuclear weapons in his country is meant to deter aggression by Poland.

He claimed a number of nuclear weapons were flown to Belarus without Western intelligence noticing, with the rest coming later this year. Officials in Moscow and Minsk said the warheads could be carried by Belarusian Su-25 ground attack jets or fitted to short-range Iskander missiles.

Giles, of Chatham House, said the deployment was about "cementing Putin's control over Belarus" and did not offer Moscow any military advantage over placing them in Russia's Baltic exclave of Kaliningrad that borders Poland and Lithuania.

The West should recognize this as a ploy "that has far more to do with Russia's ambitions for Belarus than any genuine impact on European security beyond that," Giles said. Some observers question whether the deployment to Belarus has even happened.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 42 of 76

Miles Pomper, a senior fellow at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies at the Middlebury Institute, challenged Lukashenko's claim that nuclear weapons were covertly flown to Belarus. They are normally moved by rail, he said, and there are no signs of "the support elements that you would see that would go with shipments of weapons."

Others note Russia could have deployed the weapons without adhering to protocols used in the 1990s, when Moscow wanted to show the West its nuclear arsenal was secure amid economic and political turmoil.

Belarusian military analyst Valery Karbalevich said keeping such details secret could be a Kremlin strategy of "applying permanent pressure and blackmailing Ukraine and the West. The unknown scares more than certainty."

Alesin, the Minsk-based analyst, argued that U.S. and NATO may play down the deployment of nuclear weapons to Belarus because they pose a threat the West finds difficult to counter.

"The Belarusian nuclear balcony will hang over a large part of Europe. But they prefer to pretend that there is no threat, and the Kremlin is just trying to scare the West," he said.

If Putin decides to use nuclear weapons, he may do it from Belarus in hopes that a Western response would target that country instead of Russia, Alesin said.

The political opposition to Lukashenko warns that such a deployment turns Belarus into a hostage of the Kremlin.

While Lukashenko sees such weapons as a "nuclear umbrella" protecting the country, "they turn Belarus into a target," said exiled opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who tried to unseat the authoritarian leader in a 2020 election widely viewed as fraudulent.

"We are telling the world that preventative measures, political pressure and sanctions are needed to resist the deployment of nuclear weapons to Belarus," she said. "Regrettably, we haven't seen a strong Western reaction yet."

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Yuras Karmanau in Tallinn, Estonia, Jill Lawless in London and Ellen Knickmeyer in Washington contributed.

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## Elon Musk wants to turn tweets into 'X's'. But changing language is not quite so simple

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Elon Musk may want to send "tweet" back to the birds, but the ubiquitous term for posting on the site he now calls X is here to stay — at least for now.

For one, the word is still plastered all over the site formerly known as Twitter. Write a post, you still need to press a blue button that says "tweet" to publish it. To repost it, you still tap "retweet."

But it's more than that.

With "tweets," Twitter accomplished in just a few years something few companies have done in a lifetime: It became a verb and implanted itself into the lexicon of America and the world. Upending that takes more than a top-down declaration, even if it is from the owner of Twitter-turned-X, who also happens to be one of the world's richest men.

"Language has always come from the people that use it on a day-to-day basis. And it can't be controlled, it can't be created, it can't be morphed. You don't get to decide it," said Nick Bilton, the author of "Hatching Twitter: A True Story of Money, Power, Friendship, and Betrayal" about Twitter's origins.

Twitter didn't start out as Twitter. It was "twtr" — without vowels, which was the trend in 2006 when the platform launched and SMS texting was wildly popular. The iPhone only came out in 2007.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 43 of 76

Twitter co-founder Evan Williams “went one day and purchased the vowels, two vowels for essentially \$7,500 each,” when he bought the URL for twitter.com from a bird enthusiast, Bilton said.

At the beginning, people didn’t “tweet” — it was “I’m going to twitter this,” Bilton recalled. But “twit-tered” doesn’t roll off the tongue and “tweet” soon took over, first in the Twitter office, then San Francisco, then everywhere.

We’ve been tweeting for well over a decade. World leaders, celebrities and athletes, dissidents in repressive regimes, propaganda trolls, sex workers and religious icons, meme queens and actual queens. Former president Donald Trump’s incendiary use of the bird app quickly punted “tweet” into near-constant headlines during his presidency. People who never signed up for Twitter knew what the word meant.

For now, we still tweet, retweet and quote tweet, and sometimes — perhaps not often enough — delete tweets. News sites embed tweets in their stories and TV programs scroll them. No other social network has a word for posting that’s entered the vernacular like “tweet” — though Google did the same for “googling.”

The Oxford English Dictionary added “tweet” in 2011. Merriam-Webster followed in 2013. The Associated Press Stylebook entered it in 2010.

“Getting into the dictionary is an indication that people are already using it,” said Jack Lynch, a Rutgers University English professor who studies the history of language. “Dictionaries are usually pretty tentative or cautious about letting new words in, especially for new phenomena, because they don’t want things to be just a flash in the pan.”

As Twitter grew into a global communications platform and struggled with misinformation, trolls and hate speech, its friendly brand image remained. The blue bird icon evokes a smile, like the Amazon up-turned-arrow smile — in contrast to the X that Musk has imposed.

Martin Grasser was two years out of art school when Twitter hired him for the logo redesign in 2011. His wasn’t the first bird logo for Twitter, but it would be the most enduring.

“They knew they wanted a bird. So we weren’t starting completely over, but they wanted it to be on par with Apple and Nike. That was really the brief,” he said.

Twitter launched Grasser’s design in May 2012; the company went public on Wall Street later that year.

One early in-house design shown to Grasser looked like “a flying goose with a tail. It looked kind of like a dragon. It was crazy,” he said. Jack Dorsey, another co-founder (and twice-CEO) wanted something simpler.

The bird represented a vision of Twitter as a friendly place “where everyone can weigh in and chat,” Grasser said.

“The round form evokes a sense of optimism, the bird even being sort of turned upward, as corny as that sounds, I think is different than a bird flying down or flat,” he said. “We wanted to give it this idea of like soaring.”

The word “Twitter” itself is playful, as is “tweet.” This was no accident, Bilton said.

Other names that floated as the platform started out included “Status” and “Friend Stalker.”

It was Noah Glass, another co-founder who never quite got the credit he deserved for his role in hatching Twitter, who had the winning idea.

Glass, Bilton said, “had been thinking about like heartbeats and emotions. He was going through a divorce and he literally went through the dictionary word by word until he came across the word twitter. And he just knew instantly that was it.”

“He was one of the four founders who had the emotional intelligence to be able to understand that this was about connecting with humans,” Bilton said. “It was inviting, it was emotional. It was about connecting with humans and your friends and your loved ones.”

Musk began his quest erasing Twitter’s corporate culture and image in favor of his own vision as soon as he took over the company in October 2022. He lost three-quarters of the company’s staff through firings, layoffs and voluntary departures, auctioned off furniture and décor, and upended policies on hate speech and misinformation. The rebranding to X was no surprise.

Twitter’s rebranding is rooted in ambition that Musk began to pursue nearly a quarter century ago after he sold his first startup, Zip2, to Compaq Computer. He set out to create a one-stop digital shop for

finance called X.com — an “everything” service that would provide bank accounts, process payments, make loans and handle investments.

He has not given up on the dream. Twitter is now X, falling in line with Musk’s other X-named brands, SpaceX and Tesla’s Model X. Not to mention his young son, whom he calls “X.”

His goal for X is to turn it into an “everything” app — for video, photos, messaging, payments and other services, although he has given few details. For now, X.com is still, essentially Twitter.com, even as the blue bird and other playful tidbits start to disappear.

“There used to be a saying inside Twitter that Twitter was the company that couldn’t kill itself. I think that still rings true, whether it’s called Twitter or X,” Bilton said.

“I think that it’s kind of become a fabric of society. And even Elon Musk may not be able to break it.”

—  
AP Technology Writers Matt O’Brien in Providence, Rhode Island, and Michael Liedtke contributed to this story.

## How many transgender and intersex people live in the US? Anti-LGBTQ+ laws will impact millions

By REBECCA BOONE and JEFF MCMILLAN Associated Press

New laws targeting LGBTQ+ people are proliferating in GOP-led states, but often absent from policy decisions is a clear understanding of how many people will be directly affected.

There has been relatively scant data collected on the number of LGBTQ+ residents in the U.S., particularly intersex people — those born with physical traits that don’t fit typical definitions for male or female categories. That means lawmakers are often writing laws without the same kind of baseline information they might have for other demographic groups.

“We can’t study the impact without knowing the population,” said Christy Mallory, legal director of the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law. The Williams Institute is a think tank that researches sexual orientation and gender identity demographics to inform laws and public policy decisions.

Here’s a look at what we know and what we don’t know about the number of people in the U.S. who are LGBTQ+ or intersex.

### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Legislative decisions to ban transgender women and girls from playing school sports often fail to consider the impact on intersex students.

A new Kansas law defines a person’s sex as male or female, based on what it calls the “biological reproductive system” identified at birth, leaving no room for nonbinary or intersex people — and ignoring the existence of transgender Kansans.

Meanwhile, conversations about gender-affirming care bans, were at times clouded by a discredited 2018 study that claimed kids might experience gender dysphoria because of peer influence. This led to erroneous suggestions that the number of trans people was inflated.

Arguments based on the discredited study helped gender-affirming care bans pass in Georgia, Idaho and elsewhere.

“Social media and social pressures that are put on our youth, and I do think that could play into this a little bit,” said Idaho Republican Sen. Doug Ricks during a statehouse debate earlier this year. “It’s difficult. And the conflicting testimony about the studies — there’s good arguments that validate those, and others that disvalidate that.”

While most states’ bans on gender-affirming care have attempted to carve out exceptions for people who are born intersex, they could still make it harder for intersex people to receive medical care, said Erika Lorshbough, executive director of InterACT, an advocacy group that works to advance the rights of children born with intersex traits. Physicians and other medical practitioners who treat intersex people might be confused by the laws or unsure about their potential liability, especially if an intersex patient also

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 45 of 76

identifies as LGBTQ+, Lorshbough said.

## HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE INTERSEX?

Most advocacy groups estimate that 1.7% percent of people are born intersex — the equivalent of about 5.6 million U.S. residents. That estimate is based on a review published in the American Journal of Human Biology that looked at four decades of medical literature from 1955 to 1998. The estimate includes people with extra or missing sex-linked chromosomes, and those born with other physical variations that don't fit into categories of "male" or "female."

Intersex people are born with at least one of about 40 naturally occurring variations relating to their genitalia, internal reproductive organs, chromosome patterns or hormones.

Not all intersex people are identified at birth, and those who are may still be listed as either "male" or "female" on their birth certificate. That's because only about 16 states currently allow a gender marker designation other than "male" or "female" on birth certificates, and not all hospitals have intersex-affirming policies.

Some intersex characteristics might not be evident until puberty or later — in fact, sometimes a person doesn't know they are intersex until they seek treatment for infertility or undergo other unrelated medical procedures. Others might only find out if they run across medical records from their childhood, because many intersex infants and children are subjected to surgeries and treatments without their consent to make their bodies conform to categories of male or female, according to the American Academy of Family Physicians. Since 2018, the AAFP has opposed medically unnecessary genital surgeries performed on intersex children.

"Some people never know they're intersex if they have what we think of as a milder variation," said Lorshbough. "And there are plenty of folks with variations in sex characteristics who don't identify as intersex, and these issues impact them equally. It's all about consent and autonomy."

Hospitals aren't required to track information about how many babies are born with intersex characteristics, and there has never been a nationwide survey on intersex status done by the U.S. Census Bureau, National Institutes of Health or another government agency that normally collect demographic data, said Lorshbough.

That means there isn't enough data to calculate a definitive population number.

## HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE LGBTQ+?

There are more than 13 million people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender in the U.S. ages 13 and older, including about 300,000 young people and 1.3 million adults who identify as transgender, according to the Williams Institute. Nearly half of them live in states without protections from discrimination at work, in school, in housing, public accommodations and credit.

Polling by KFF and The Washington Post shows that there are nearly 2 million people nationwide who identify as transgender or trans, representing less than 1% of all adults. The poll found that most trans adults are younger than 35 years old, and the vast majority — nearly 8 in 10 — say that transitioning made them more satisfied with their life. Two-thirds of trans adults say they realized they were trans in childhood, and about one-third said they began to understand when they were 10 years old or younger.

The U.S. Census did not add questions about sexual orientation and gender identity until 2021, though it did begin collecting data about households led by same-sex couples in the 2010 census. The 2021 U.S. Census Household Pulse Survey found that 0.6% of responding adults described themselves as transgender and 1.7% described themselves as neither male, female nor trans.

The same Census survey found that 4.4% of adult respondents thought of themselves as bisexual, 3.3% said they were gay or lesbian, and 88.3% said they were straight. Around 2% said they were "something else" or that they didn't know.

## ARE MORE PEOPLE IDENTIFYING AS LGBTQ+ NOW?

It's difficult to tell. Efforts to quantify the number of LGBTQ+ people, including intersex people, in the U.S.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 46 of 76

were scarce until the last few decades, and stigma likely prevented some from disclosing their identities. There is some overlap between the groups; intersex people are included in the plus sign in the LGBTQ+ acronym, and some intersex people also identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or queer.

From their demographic studies in 2017 and 2022, The Williams Institute noted a slight increase in the number of young people identifying as transgender, but Mallory said additional research will give a more accurate picture.

"This kind of data collection on transgender status is very new for youth," and some of the increase could be because more states are asking about transgender status during surveys of high school students, Mallory said. "But you know, some of it is probably youth feeling more comfortable identifying as trans."

Boone reported from Boise, Idaho, and McMillan from Philadelphia.

## Trump once condemned the Jan. 6 rioters. Now he's become one of their biggest supporters

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The day after Jan. 6, 2021, then-President Donald Trump denounced the rioters who violently stormed the Capitol building, breaking through barricades, battling law enforcement and sending members of Congress — who were set to formally certify his reelection loss — running for their lives.

"Like all Americans, I am outraged by the violence, lawlessness and mayhem," he said in a video, condemning what he called a "heinous attack."

That condemnation was delayed and only offered amid widespread criticism — including from fellow Republicans — for his role in sparking the mayhem. But 2 1/2 years later, any sign of regret or reprimand from Trump has vanished as he prepares to face federal criminal charges for his efforts to overturn the 2020 election.

Now the early but commanding front-runner in the 2024 Republican presidential primary, Trump regularly downplays the violence, lionizes the rioters as patriots and spreads false claims about who was involved. He has not only vowed to pardon a "large portion" of Jan. 6 defendants if he wins a second term, but he has also fundraised for them, befriended their families and collaborated on a song that became a surprise iTunes hit.

"They were there proud, they were there with love in their heart. ... And it was a beautiful day," Trump said at a recent CNN town hall. When asked if he had any regrets about his actions that day, Trump voiced no remorse and instead seemed most concerned about the lack of attention paid to his crowd size.

"Jan. 6: It was the largest crowd I've ever spoken to," he said.

Trump was always reluctant to condemn the actions of supporters spurred by his lies of a stolen election. As the violence unfolded, Trump ignored the desperate pleas of aides and allies to denounce the rioters and ask them to stand down. And when he did speak out, hours later, his response was tepid: He said he loved the rioters and shared their pain.

Trump's evolution began at a time when he was garnering relatively little mainstream media coverage. And it echoed the efforts of some Republicans in Congress, who had tried to recast the mob as nonviolent despite reams of video footage, public testimony and accounts from members of Congress, journalists and Capitol Police officers, 140 of whom were injured that day.

It also coincided with a broader shift in public opinion. Polling from Monmouth University showed that between March and November 2021, Republicans grew increasingly likely to say the anger that led to the Capitol attack was justified, with 54% saying the anger was either fully or partially justified in the fall — up from 40% that spring.

The Pew Research Center also found that, between March and September 2021, Republicans grew less likely to say it was important for law enforcement agencies to find and prosecute the rioters. Only 57% said that it was very or somewhat important in the fall, down from about 8 in 10 six months earlier.

That was when, in an interview with Fox News Channel's Laura Ingraham, Trump claimed the rioters had

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 47 of 76

posed “zero threat” to the lawmakers who had assembled in the Capitol to certify the Electoral College vote — even though the mob tried to breach the House chamber.

“Look, they went in — they shouldn’t have done it. Some of them went in, and they’re hugging and kissing the police and the guards, you know, they had a great relationship,” he said.

In fact, many of the protesters violently clashed with police as they stormed the building, smashing windows and ramming through doors. Some brandished weapons; others wore tactical gear. Dozens of officers were severely injured.

By that time, many of Trump’s supporters had already painted Ashli Babbitt, one of five people who died during or immediately after the riot, as a martyr unjustly killed by police,

Babbitt was fatally shot by an officer while trying to climb through the broken window of a barricaded door as Capitol Police scrambled to evacuate members.

That summer, Trump began to publicly demand the release of the shooter’s identity, despite the officer being cleared of wrongdoing by two federal investigations.

“Who shot Ashli Babbitt?” Trump asked repeatedly.

Trump called Babbitt “an innocent, wonderful, incredible woman” in an interview with Fox News and described his supporters that day in glowing terms, claiming that there had been a “love fest between the Capitol police and the people that walked down to the Capitol.”

“They were peaceful people. These were great people. The crowd was unbelievable,” he said. “And I mentioned the word ‘love.’ The love — the love in the air, I’ve never seen anything like it.”

That fall, Trump taped a video that was played at an event commemorating what would have been Babbitt’s birthday in which he demanded “justice” for her and her family.

In January 2022, Trump first publicly dangled the prospect of pardons for the Jan. 6 defendants at a rally in Texas.

“If I run and if I win, we will treat those people from Jan. 6 fairly,” he told the crowd. “And if it requires pardons, we will give them pardons because they are being treated so unfairly.” At that point, more than 670 people had been convicted of crimes related to the attack, including some found guilty of seditious conspiracy and assaulting police officers.

In September 2022, Trump told conservative radio host Wendy Bell that he was helping some of the defendants, though aides declined at the time how or how much he had contributed.

“I’m financially supporting people that are incredible, and they were in my office actually two days ago. It’s very much on my mind,” he said. “It’s a disgrace what they’ve done to them. ... Contributions should be made.”

Days later, Trump held a rally in Pennsylvania that included remarks from Cynthia Hughes, the founder of the Patriot Freedom Project, whose nephew was convicted for storming the Capitol. Geri Perna, whose nephew died by suicide while awaiting sentencing after pleading guilty to riot-related charges, also spoke.

Later that month, the former president called into a small rally held outside a Washington jail where Jan. 6 defendants have been held, led by Micki Witthoeft, Babbitt’s mother.

“We’re with you. We’re working with a lot of different people on this. And we can’t let this happen,” he said via cellphone held up to a microphone.

Trump’s support has only intensified since he formally launched his third campaign.

Earlier this year, he collaborated on “Justice for All,” a song that features a choir of Jan. 6 defendants singing “The Star-Spangled Banner,” recorded over a prison phone line and overlaid with Trump reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Trump featured the song at the first official rally of his 2024 campaign, standing with his hand on his heart as a music video featuring violent footage of the riot played behind him on two giant screens.

In June, he spoke at a Patriot Freedom Project fundraiser to support the defendants that was held at his Bedminster, New Jersey, club.

“They’ve been made to pay a price that is very unfair, in many cases,” he said, according to video of his remarks.

Trump also recorded a video played at the group’s holiday fundraising event in Washington and hosted

a dinner for family members of Jan. 6 defendants at Mar-a-Lago in March.

"He is very concerned for these families," Hughes said after the event.

An Associated Press review of social media posts, voter registrations, court files and other public records found that the mob was overwhelmingly made up of longtime Trump supporters, including GOP officials, donors and far-right militants.

But that hasn't stopped Trump from falsely claiming that others were responsible for the attack, including antifa and Black Lives Matter. Last weekend on his social media site, Trump amplified messages claiming that Jan. 6 had been a "staged riot" orchestrated by the government.

Trump was still in charge of the government at the time.

Associated Press writer Linley Sanders contributed to this report.

## California Gov. Gavin Newsom offers to help negotiate Hollywood strike

By ADAM BEAM Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California Gov. Gavin Newsom has contacted all sides of the strikes that have hobbled Hollywood, his office said Wednesday, offering to help broker a deal to restart an industry that is crucial to keeping the state's economy humming amid signs of weakness.

So far, neither studio executives nor actors and writers have shown formal interest in bringing Newsom to the negotiating table, said Anthony York, Newsom's senior adviser for communications. But York said both Newsom and senior members of his administration have been in touch with all sides as the two strikes stretch deeper into the summer blockbuster season.

"It's clear that the sides are still far apart, but he is deeply concerned about the impact a prolonged strike can have on the regional and state economy," York said. He further noted "thousands of jobs depend directly or indirectly on Hollywood getting back to work," including crew, staff and catering.

The last time the writers went on strike more than a decade ago, the 100-day work stoppage cost the state's economy an estimated \$2 billion. The economic hit could be even bigger this time around now that actors have joined the picket lines. The strikes come after Newsom signed a state budget that included a more than \$31 billion deficit in part because of a slowdown in the tech sector, another one of the state's key industries.

The writers have been on strike since May, and the actors joined them earlier this month. Both unions have concerns about how they will be paid in an age where fewer people are paying to go to the movies or watch cable TV in favor of streaming services. And they are worried how the rise of artificial intelligence will affect the creative process of how movies and TV shows are made and who is paid to make them.

The Democratic governor first offered to help mediate a deal in May, shortly after the writers strike began, saying he was sympathetic to their concerns about streaming and artificial intelligence.

Now in his final term in office, Newsom has worked hard to boost his national profile as he sets his sights on life after the governor's office. He is widely considered a future presidential contender, though he has said he has no plans to run. Any role for Newsom to help end strikes halting one of the country's most recognizable industries could bolster his status on the national stage.

Labor actions have lit up California this summer, and it has become common for politicians and their allies to step in to broker deals. New Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass, for example, helped negotiate an end to a strike by Los Angeles school staff. Acting Biden administration Labor Secretary Julie Su, a former California labor leader, helped reach an end to a contract dispute at Southern California ports.

Asked about Newsom's involvement, Bass spokesman Zach Seidl said in a statement that "this is a historic inflection point for our city. ... We continue to engage with labor leaders, studio heads, elected leaders and other impacted parties to arrive at a fair and equitable solution."

York declined to say who Newsom has spoken with, either on the unions' side or the studios. Representatives for the Screen Actors Guild – American Federation of Television and Radio Artists and the Alliance



of Motion Picture and Television Producers declined to comment.

Hollywood isn't just a major economic driver in California — it's also a fundraising powerhouse for mostly Democratic candidates, including Newsom. In 2021, when Newsom was facing a recall election that could have removed him from office, Netflix co-founder Reed Hastings donated \$3 million to help defeat it. He has received smaller contributions from executives at Disney, Sony and Lionsgate. Prominent directors and producers like Stephen Spielberg and Chuck Lorre have also donated to his campaigns.

Newsom's relationships with some of Hollywood's most powerful executives could potentially help him in any negotiations over the strikes as he continues to advocate for the causes of the workers. Newsom also has a connection to Hollywood through his wife, Jennifer Siebel Newsom, who used to be an actor and is now a documentary director.

Also this year, Newsom signed a law to extend tax credits for movie and television productions. The big change is that those tax credits will be refundable, meaning if a movie studio has credits that are worth more than what it owes in taxes, the state will pay the studio the difference in cash.

Associated Press reporter Michael R. Blood contributed from Los Angeles.

## Senate GOP leader McConnell briefly leaves news conference after freezing up midsentence

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell briefly left his own press conference Wednesday after stopping his remarks midsentence and staring off into space for several seconds.

McConnell approached the podium for his weekly press conference and began speaking about the annual defense bill on the floor, which he said was proceeding with "good bipartisan cooperation." But he then appeared to lose his train of thought, trailing off with a drawn-out "uh."

The Kentucky senator then appeared to freeze up and stared vacantly for around 20 seconds before his colleagues in Republican leadership, who were standing behind him and could not see his face, grabbed his elbows and asked if he wanted to go back to his office.

He did not answer, but slowly walked back to his office with an aide and Wyoming Sen. John Barrasso, a former orthopedic surgeon who is the No. 3 Republican in the Senate. After sitting down in his office for several minutes, McConnell later returned to the press conference and answered questions from the press.

McConnell, 81, was out of the Senate for almost six weeks earlier this year after falling and hitting his head after a dinner event at a hotel. He was hospitalized for several days, and his office later said he suffered a concussion and fractured a rib. His speech has sounded more halting in recent weeks, prompting questions among some of his colleagues about his health.

When he returned to answer questions, McConnell said he was "fine." Asked if he is still able to do his job, he said, "Yeah."

McConnell's office declined to say whether he was seen by a doctor after the episode.

After the press conference, Barrasso told reporters he "wanted to make sure everything was fine" and walked McConnell down the hall to his office.

Barrasso said he has been concerned since McConnell was injured earlier this year, "and I continue to be concerned."

But asked about his particular concerns, Barrasso said: "I said I was concerned when he fell and hit his head a number of months ago and was hospitalized. And I think he's made a remarkable recovery, he's doing a great job leading our conference and was able to answer every question the press asked him today."

Walking out of his office Wednesday evening, McConnell again told reporters he was fine. He said President Joe Biden had called him.

"The president called to check up on me, and I told him I got sandbagged," McConnell joked, referencing a quote from Biden in June after he tripped over a sandbag and fell while onstage at the U.S. Air Force

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 50 of 76

Academy graduation.

First elected to the Senate in 1984, McConnell became the longest-serving Senate party leader in history in January. He was easily reelected to his leadership post that same month, despite a challenge from Florida Sen. Rick Scott.

Still, several Republicans, including No. 2 Republican Sen. John Thune of South Dakota and Barrasso, are seen as waiting in the wings to someday replace him.

Texas Sen. John Cornyn, who is also seen as a potential candidate to succeed McConnell, told reporters after the episode, "I support Senator McConnell as long as he wants to serve as leader."

McConnell had polio in his early childhood and he has long acknowledged some difficulty as an adult in climbing stairs. In addition to his fall in March, he also tripped and fell four years ago at his home in Kentucky, causing a shoulder fracture that required surgery.

The Republican leader is one of several senators who have been absent due to health issues this year. Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein of California, 90, was out of the Senate for more than two months as she recovered from a bout of shingles. And Sen. John Fetterman, D-Pa., 53, took leave for several weeks to get treatment for clinical depression.

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Associated Press writers Kevin Freking and Lisa Mascaro contributed to this report.

## **Ocean currents vital for distributing heat could collapse by midcentury, study says**

BY DREW COSTLEY AP Science Writer

A system of ocean currents that transports heat northward across the North Atlantic could collapse by mid-century, according to a new study, and scientists have said before that such a collapse could cause catastrophic sea-level rise and extreme weather across the globe.

In recent decades, researchers have both raised and downplayed the specter of Atlantic current collapse. It even prompted a movie that strayed far from the science. Two years ago the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said any such catastrophe is unlikely this century. But the new study published in Nature Communications suggests it might not be as far away and unlikely as mainstream science says.

The Atlantic meridional overturning circulation is a vital system of ocean currents that circulates water throughout the Atlantic Ocean, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. It's a lengthy process, taking an estimated 1,000 years to complete, but has slowed even more since the mid-1900s.

A further slowdown or complete halting of the circulation could create more extreme weather in the Northern Hemisphere, sea-level rise on the East Coast of the United States and drought for millions in southern Africa, scientists in Germany and the U.S. have said. But the timing is uncertain.

In the new study, Peter and Susanne Ditlevsen, two researchers from Denmark, analyzed sea surface temperatures in the North Atlantic between 1870 and 2020 as a proxy, meaning a way of assessing, this circulation. They found the system could collapse as soon as 2025 and as late as 2095, given current global greenhouse gas emissions. This diverges from the prediction made by the Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change in 2021, which said the collapse isn't likely to occur this century.

"There are large uncertainties in this study, in many prior studies, and in climate impact assessment overall, and scientists sometimes miss important aspects that can lead to both over and underprediction of impacts," Julio Friedmann, chief scientist at Carbon Direct, a carbon management company, said in a statement. "Still, the conclusion is obvious: Action must be swift and profound to counter major climate risks."

Stefan Rahmstorf, co-author on a 2018 study on the subject, published an extensive analysis of the Ditlevsen's study on RealClimate, a website that publishes commentary from climate scientists. While he said that a tipping point for the collapse of the Atlantic meridional overturning circulation is "highly uncertain," he also called the IPCC estimate conservative.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 51 of 76

"Increasingly the evidence points to the risk being far greater than 10% during this century," he wrote, "...rather worrying for the next few decades."

Seth Borenstein contributed from Washington, DC.

Follow Drew Costley on Twitter: @drewcostley.

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## Trump wants to see Biden impeached, and other Republicans are quick to pile on

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump wants to see President Joe Biden impeached, and the former president's allies in Congress and his 2024 GOP presidential rivals are eager to join that fight as his own legal challenges mount.

Trump's chief opponent, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, this week said the House Republicans "are absolutely within their rights" to consider an impeachment inquiry against Biden. Former U.N. ambassador Nikki Haley, also running for president, said Republicans would be "justified to do it." And House GOP leaders aligned with Trump are foreshadowing what's ahead.

"House Republicans will leave no stone unturned," said Rep. Elise Stefanik of New York, the fourth-ranking House GOP leader and a top Trump ally, who is sometimes mentioned as a potential vice presidential pick.

This week, the prospect of impeaching Biden over the business dealings of his son, Hunter Biden, emerged from the far corners of the GOP's right flank to the mainstream in the Republican Party.

Speaker Kevin McCarthy announced on Fox News that the House may open an impeachment inquiry into Biden, and expanded on his plans at a Tuesday press event at the Capitol.

Behind closed doors Wednesday, however, the Republican speaker told GOP colleagues it's early in the impeachment process, and McCarthy acknowledged there's still much that is unknown about Joe Biden and whether he had any awareness or involvement in his son's business deals that would arise to an impeachable offense.

"The speaker went through what we know and what we don't know," said Rep. Tom Cole, R-Okla., a seasoned lawmaker and committee chairman.

"There's a lot we don't know — we don't know if any money went directly to President Biden or not," Cole said, explaining the message to the House GOP. "That's what they do the investigations about."

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., said McCarthy also told them if it comes to a Biden impeachment inquiry, he's going to ask that "you be with me on this."

Greene, a Trump ally backing impeachment, said no one rose during the private meeting to object.

By putting Biden on notice that the House is considering an inquiry, the Republicans are elevating a once rare congressional check on executive power — the formal impeachment charges over high crimes and misdemeanors — into yet another tool being wielded in party politics.

It's a political escalation, urged on by Trump, after his own two impeachments. The prospect of a Biden impeachment inquiry also comes as Trump faces mounting legal cases, including a potential federal indictment in the investigation led by Special Counsel Jack Smith over his efforts to overturn the election in the run-up to the Jan. 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol.

Trump is the only president in U.S. history that has been twice impeached — first in 2019 over his phone call urging Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to dig up dirt on the Bidens or risk losing U.S. military aid, and again in 2021 in the aftermath of the Jan. 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol by Trump supporters trying to overturn Biden's election.

Now, as the Republican party's frontrunner for the nomination to take on Biden in 2024, Trump has long

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 52 of 76

seethed over his impeachments at the hands of House Democrats. McCarthy has suggested the Trump impeachments could be expunged, as proposed by Stefanik and Greene. But Trump wants Biden to face similar impeachment charges.

"They impeach me over a 'perfect' phone call, and they don't impeach Biden," Trump posted online in capital letters this week, calling the current president "corrupt."

Last week, at a Fox News town hall in Iowa, Trump expressed similar complaints asking: "Why aren't they impeaching Biden? ... Why isn't he under impeachment?"

House Republicans in various committees are probing the Bidens and suggesting the president may have been aware or involved in his son Hunter Biden's work, particularly when the younger Biden served on the board of the Ukrainian energy firm Burisma.

The Republicans in Congress point to testimony from two IRS whistleblowers who testified last week the Justice Department slow-walked their investigation into Bidens, a claim the agency rejects. The Republicans also publicly released what the FBI says is unverified information from a confidential informant alleging Burisma payments to the Bidens as bribes, though other documents show a top company official disputing any payments were made.

Hunter Biden had agreed to plead guilty to misdemeanor charges of tax evasion stemming from a federal investigation, but the deal unraveled Wednesday when a judge raised questions about it.

"I've seen enough. We need a special counsel who has jurisdiction over any and all Biden family investigations," Chris Christie, another Trump rival in the 2024 race, said on social media.

The White House has declined to engage in specific questions about any House GOP impeachment inquiry against Biden.

"They can do whatever it is that they wish to do, but we're going to stay focused," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said earlier this week, pointing to the "real priorities that the American families care about."

Biden himself has repeatedly said that he does not talk with his son about his overseas business dealings.

As Hunter Biden appeared in court Wednesday, the press secretary issued a statement: "As we have said, the president, the first lady, they love their son, and they support him as he continues to rebuild his life."

Not all Republicans are on board with the House's plans to consider an impeachment inquiry, but those who object may face political retribution from Trump.

Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell said Wednesday he understands House Republicans may be incentivized to launch an impeachment inquiry after Trump was impeached twice when Democrats had control of the chamber.

But the Kentucky Republican warned fellow Republicans of continuing down this path.

"Impeachment ought to be rare rather than common," said McConnell, who has long endured Trump's ire and hasn't spoken to him since the month before the Capitol attack. "I think this is not good for the country when we have repeated impeachment."

Trump this week singled out other Republican senators, including John Cornyn of Texas and Mitt Romney of Utah, who had expressed their reluctance to launch impeachment proceedings.

House Democrats have declared the effort to impeach Biden political extremism and signaled they will oppose it.

"I'm very well aware of how important it is to follow the facts and the evidence before you reach any conclusions — and the Republicans are doing the reverse," said Democratic Rep. Dan Goldman of New York, a chief prosecutor in the House's first impeachment of Trump in 2019.

"What they are talking about now is pure political retribution that is not based on facts and evidence," he said, adding that's "abusing the impeachment power of the Congress."

\_\_\_ Associated Press writer Jill Colvin contributed to this report.

## Federal Reserve raises rates for 11th time to fight inflation but gives no clear sign of next move

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Federal Reserve raised its key interest rate Wednesday for the 11th time in 17 months as part of its ongoing drive to curb inflation. But it provided little guidance about when — or whether — it might hike rates again.

Wednesday's move raised the Fed's benchmark short-term rate from roughly 5.1% to 5.3% — its highest level since 2001. Coming on top of its previous hikes, the Fed's latest action could lead to further increases in the costs of mortgages, auto loans, credit cards and business borrowing.

Speaking at a news conference, Fed Chair Jerome Powell was noncommittal about any expectations for future rate hikes. Since it began raising rates in March 2022, the Fed has often telegraphed its upcoming action. This time, though, Powell said the Fed's policymakers may or may not raise rates again at their next meeting in September.

"It is certainly possible that we will raise rates again at the September meeting," he said. "And I would also say it's possible that we would choose to hold steady at that meeting."

Powell sent a mixed message about whether he thinks the Fed will eventually need to further raise rates or instead just keep the current level of rates in place for a prolonged period.

"It was about as clear as mud, and I think that was the point," said Diane Swonk, chief economist at accounting giant KPMG. "They don't want to declare victory too soon. They know inflation moves in fits and starts."

Powell acknowledged that the economy has proved surprisingly resilient despite the Fed's rapid rate hikes, with growth continuing and companies still adding jobs. He also revealed that the Fed's staff economists no longer foresee a recession. In April, the minutes of the central bank's March meeting had said that staff economists envisioned a "mild" recession later this year.

And he said he still thinks that a "soft landing" — in which inflation would fall back to the Fed's 2% target, without causing a deep recession — is still possible.

"My base case is that we will be able to achieve inflation moving back down to our target without the kind of really significant downturn that results in high levels of job losses," the Fed chair said. "We do have a shot at a soft landing."

Though inflation has reached its slowest pace in two years, Wednesday's hike reflects the concern of Fed officials that the economy is still growing too fast for inflation to fall back to their 2% target. With consumer confidence hitting its highest level in two years, Americans keep spending — crowding airplanes, traveling overseas and flocking to concerts and movie theaters. Most crucially, businesses keep hiring.

Year-over-year inflation in June was 3%, according to the government, down sharply from a peak of 9.1% in June 2022. Yet a "core" inflation measure that is preferred by the Fed, which excludes volatile food and energy costs, was still up 4.6% in May from a year earlier.

Powell said he welcomed, in particular, a milder-than-expected report on inflation for June. But he said additional such data would be needed to show that inflation is declining in a sustained way.

"We're going to be careful about taking too much signal from a single reading," he said.

The key question swirling around the Fed is whether Wednesday's increase will or won't be its last. Powell made clear that the fight against inflation isn't over. The Fed's rate hikes, he said, have "not been restrictive enough for long enough" to exert their full effect.

"We want core inflation to be coming down," Powell said. "Core inflation is still pretty elevated. And so we think we need to stay on task."

He stressed that the Fed's policymakers will assess a range of incoming economic data in determining what action, if any, to take at their next meeting. When the officials last met in June, they signaled that they expected to raise rates twice more. By the time they meet again Sept. 19-20, Powell noted, they will have much more data in hand: Two more inflation reports, two reports on hiring and unemployment and updated figures on consumer spending and wages.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 54 of 76

Some economists think the Fed might decide to forgo a rate increase in September before weighing a possible hike at its meeting in November.

In recent weeks, several Fed officials have said they worry that the still-brisk pace of job growth will lead workers to demand higher pay to make up for two years of inflationary prices. Sharp wage gains can perpetuate inflation if companies respond by raising prices for their customers.

At the same time, the steady easing of inflation pressures has lifted hopes that the Fed can bring down inflation without a recession.

Durable consumer spending has been a key driver of growth. Many Americans still have savings stemming from the pandemic, when the government distributed stimulus checks and people saved by spending less on travel, restaurants and entertainment.

And hiring has remained healthy, with employers having added 209,000 jobs in June and the jobless rate reaching an ultra-low 3.6%. That's about where it was when the Fed began raising rates in March 2022 — a sign of economic resilience that almost no one had foreseen.

Some Fed officials, including Christopher Waller, an outspoken member of its Board of Governors, and Lorie Logan, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, have said they think the cumulative effects of the previous rate hikes have already been baked into the economy. With inflation still above the Fed's target, they think additional hikes may be needed to further slow price pressures.

Some analysts caution that the drop in year-over-year inflation from roughly 9% to 3% was the relatively easy part. Getting it down to the Fed's 2% target will be harder and take longer.

Other experts say they think the recent mild inflation readings can be sustained. Rental cost increases, which have already fallen, should drop further as more apartment buildings are completed.

Though the Fed began tightening credit before central banks in many other developed countries did, most others are now following suit. The European Central Bank is expected to announce its own quarter-point rate hike on Thursday. Though inflation has declined in the 20 countries that use the euro, it remains higher there than in the United States.

The Bank of Japan is expected to keep its policies unchanged when it meets next week even though prices there are creeping higher after roughly two decades of declining prices. The Bank of England has been among the most aggressive in Europe, having raised its key rate last month by a half-point to a 15-year high of 5%. Year-over-year inflation in the U.K. reached a painful 8.7% in May.

## **Ohio officer fired after letting his police dog attack a surrendering truck driver**

By PATRICK ORSAGOS, BRUCE SHIPKOWSKI and SAMANTHA HENDRICKSON Associated Press  
COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — A police officer in rural Ohio was fired Wednesday after he released his police dog on a surrendering truck driver despite state troopers telling him to hold the K9 back.

The Circleville Police Department said Ryan Speakman "did not meet the standards and expectations we hold for our police officers" and his termination is "effective immediately." His firing comes a day after the department said he was on paid administrative leave, which is standard during use-of-force investigations.

The town's civilian police review board has found Speakman didn't violate department policy when he deployed the dog, Wednesday's police statement said, adding that the review board doesn't have the authority to recommend discipline.

Department officials said they would have no further comment on the matter "at this time" since it's a personnel matter. Messages seeking comment from Speakman were not immediately returned.

The Ohio Patrolmen's Benevolent Association, a police union Speakman belongs to, said Wednesday it had filed a grievance on his behalf and that he was fired without just cause.

Speakman, who joined the Circleville department in February 2020, deployed his police dog following a lengthy pursuit on July 4 involving the Ohio State Highway Patrol. The episode was captured on a police body camera.

Troopers tried to stop a commercial semitruck that was missing a mudflap and failed to halt for an

inspection, according to a highway patrol incident report. The nearby Circleville Police Department was called in to assist.

The 23-year-old truck driver, Jadarius Rose of Memphis, Tennessee, initially refused to get out of the truck and later defied instructions to get on the ground, according to the incident report and the body cam video. Rose eventually got on his knees and raised his hands in the air.

The body camera video shows Speakman holding back the K9, and a trooper can be heard off-camera repeatedly yelling, "Do not release the dog with his hands up!" However, Speakman deploys the dog and it can be seen in the video attacking Rose, who yells "Get it off! Please! Please!"

Rose was treated at a hospital for dog bites.

He was charged with failure to comply, and hasn't responded to an email sent Monday seeking comment. Attorney Benjamin Partee, who is representing Rose, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

It's not clear why he refused to stop for police. Rose is Black, and Speakman is white. Rose told The Columbus Dispatch that he couldn't talk about why he didn't stop. But when asked about the video, told the newspaper: "I'm just glad that it was recorded. What you saw is what, pretty much, happened."

Audio recordings of 911 calls show Rose told emergency dispatchers that the officers pursuing him were "trying to kill" him and he didn't feel safe pulling over. He also said he was confused about why the officers were trying to stop him and why they had their guns drawn after he briefly stopped the truck before driving away.

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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.

## **Hunter Biden's plea deal on hold after federal judge raises concerns over the terms of the agreement**

By CLAUDIA LAUER, RANDALL CHASE and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — The plea deal in Hunter Biden's criminal case unraveled during a court hearing Wednesday after a federal judge raised concerns about the terms of the agreement that has infuriated Republicans who believe the president's son is getting preferential treatment.

Hunter Biden was charged last month with two misdemeanor crimes of failure to pay more than \$100,000 in taxes from over \$1.5 million in income in both 2017 and 2018 and had been expected to plead guilty Wednesday after he made an agreement with prosecutors, who were planning to recommend two years of probation. Prosecutors said Wednesday Hunter Biden remains under active investigation, but would not reveal details.

U.S. District Court Judge Maryellen Noreika, who was appointed by President Donald Trump, raised multiple concerns about the specifics of the deal and her role in the proceedings. The plan also included an agreement on a separate gun charge — Biden has been accused of possessing a firearm in 2018 as a drug user. As long as he adhered to the terms of his agreement, the gun case was to be wiped from his record. Otherwise, the felony charge carries 10 years in prison.

The overlapping agreements created confusion for the judge, who said the lawyers needed to untangle technical issues — including over her role in enforcing the gun agreement — before moving forward.

"It seems to me like you are saying 'just rubber stamp the agreement, Your Honor.' ... This seems to me to be form over substance," she said. She asked defense lawyers and prosecutors to explain why she should accept the deal. In the meantime, Hunter Biden pleaded not guilty to the tax charges.

The collapsed proceedings were a surprising development in the yearslong investigation, and a resolution that had been carefully negotiated over several weeks and included a lengthy back-and-forth between Justice Department prosecutors and Biden's attorneys.

The plea deal was meant to clear the air for Hunter Biden and avert a trial that would have generated

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 56 of 76

weeks or months of distracting headlines. But the politics remain as messy as ever, with Republicans insisting he got a sweetheart deal and the Justice Department pressing ahead on investigations into Trump, the GOP's 2024 presidential primary front-runner.

Trump is already facing a state criminal case in New York and a federal indictment in Florida. Last week, a target letter was sent to Trump from special counsel Jack Smith that suggests the former president may soon be indicted on new federal charges, this time involving his struggle to cling to power after his 2020 election loss to Joe Biden.

Republicans claim a double standard, in which the Democratic president's son got off easy while the president's rival has been unfairly castigated. Congressional Republicans are pursuing their own investigations into nearly every facet of Hunter Biden's dealings, including foreign payments.

"District Judge Noreika did the right thing by refusing to rubberstamp Hunter Biden's sweetheart plea deal," said House Oversight Committee chairman Rep. James Comer, R-Ky. "But let's be clear: Hunter's sweetheart plea deal belongs in the trash."

Wednesday's hearing quickly veered into confusion, with Hunter Biden at one point answering "yes" when asked if he was pleading guilty of his own free will, before later pulling back in moving forward with the plea.

The judge said she was concerned about a provision in the agreement on the gun charge that she said would have created a role for her where she would determine if he violated the terms. She argued such a role doesn't exist for judges; the lawyers said they were only asking for the court to play a factfinding role as a neutral party in determining if a violation happened.

"We wanted the protection of the court," Biden's attorney Chris Clark said.

She also raised concerns that the agreement included a non-prosecution clause for crimes outside of the gun charge.

The attorneys appeared to squabble over the deal's terms, too, retreating to their corners to discuss the issues, before they met at the prosecutors' table and, at one point, could be heard yelling at each other. "Well, we'll just rip it up!" Clark was heard shouting.

The Justice Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The judge also asked Biden to be more specific about his business relationships and to discuss his substance use issues as she combed through the plea agreement. She asked him to name the Ukrainian and Chinese entities referred to without name in the agreement.

She also asked him the last time he used alcohol or drugs and whether he was currently receiving treatment.

Biden answered June 1, 2019, and said he was not currently in treatment, though he did say he was in an anonymous support program for his substance abuse issues.

"Hunter Biden is a private citizen, and this was a personal matter for him," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said. "As we have said, the president, the first lady, they love their son, and they support him as he continues to rebuild his life. This case was handled independently, as all of you know, by the Justice Department under the leadership of a prosecutor appointed by the former president, President Trump."

President Biden, meanwhile, has said very little publicly, except to note, "I'm very proud of my son."

\_\_\_ Long reported from Washington. Associated Press writers Lindsay Whitehurst and Darlene Superville contributed to this report.

## **UK jury acquits Kevin Spacey of sexual assault charges based on allegations by 4 men over 20 years**

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — A jury in London acquitted Kevin Spacey of sexual assault Wednesday after the Oscar winner's star turn as a witness in his own defense spared him a possible prison term and offered him hope of a career comeback after six years without a job.

Tears rolled down Spacey's cheeks as the final "not guilty" verdict was read. The Oscar winner looked at



# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 57 of 76

the jury, placed his hand over the lapel of his blue suit and pink shirt, and mouthed "thank you." It was his 64th birthday.

"I imagine that many of you can understand that there's a lot for me to process after what has just happened today," a humbled Spacey said outside Southwark Crown Court after thanking a handful of jurors in the lobby. "I am enormously grateful to the jury for having taken the time to examine all of the evidence and all of the facts carefully before they reached their decision."

Spacey's two days of testimony culminated with him choking up as he spoke of his six years without work since the sex abuse allegations against him surfaced in 2017.

"My world exploded," Spacey testified. "There was a rush to judgment and before the first question was asked or answered, I lost my job, I lost my reputation, I lost everything in a matter of days."

Three men accused Spacey of aggressively grabbing their crotches, describing him as "vile" and a "slippery, snaky" predator. A fourth, an aspiring actor, said he awoke to the actor performing oral sex on him after falling asleep or passing out in Spacey's London apartment where he had gone for career advice and a beer.

Spacey said he was a "big flirt" who had consensual flings with men and whose only misstep was touching a man's groin while making a "clumsy pass."

Defense lawyer Patrick Gibbs said three of the men were liars and that their encounters had been "reimagined with a sinister spin." He accused them of hopping on a #MeToo "bandwagon" in the hope of striking it rich. Two of the men have sued Spacey.

Prosecutor Christine Agnew called Spacey a "sexual bully" who preyed on younger men. She said he was shielded by a "trinity of protection" — he knew men were unlikely to complain; they wouldn't be believed if they did complain; and if they did complain, no action would be taken because he was powerful.

Spacey had faced nine charges, including multiple counts of sexual assault and one count of causing a person to engage in penetrative sexual activity without consent. Jurors deliberated for 12.5 hours over three days before reaching their verdict.

Spacey had viewed the London case as a chance for redemption, telling German magazine Zeit last month that there were "people right now who are ready to hire me the moment I am cleared of these charges in London."

During deliberations, jurors asked Justice Mark Wall to summarize the testimony of a man who said the actor grabbed his crotch so forcefully while he was driving to a gala at Elton John's that he almost ran off the road.

In a cameo appearance, the rock star and his husband, David Furnish, testified by video from Monaco and offered a timeline that cast doubt on the driver's account. They said Spacey didn't attend the White Tie & Tiara Ball the year the man said, but had been a surprise guest three or four years earlier in 2001.

That was significant because the man said he had begun working with Spacey in the early 2000s and suffered from unwanted fondling for years. He said the incident in the car was the final straw and he avoided the star afterwards.

The accusations dated from 2001 to 2013 and included a period when Spacey — after winning Academy Awards for "The Usual Suspects" and "American Beauty" — had returned to the theater. He served as artistic director of the Old Vic Theatre in London for most of that time.

The men came forward after an American actor accused Spacey of sexual misconduct as the #MeToo movement heated up in 2017.

One of the men called his encounter with Spacey "completely traumatic and life-ruining." One said he sought solace by working out and drinking more. Several said they couldn't bear to watch productions starring the actor.

With the confidence of a seasoned performer, Spacey took his seat in the witness box in what had to be the smallest stage of his career — a laminated oak desk at the front of a brightly lit courtroom.

He spoke in the warm, rich, calming voice that most audiences would instantly recognize. When pressed by Agnew, he did not take the menacing, cold tone of some of his characters, but maintained his composure and showed only flashes of indignation delivered with a flourish.

Asked about grabbing the genitals of a man backstage at a charity event, he snapped: "Absolute bollocks!" As laughter rose in the gallery, Agnew retorted: "That's exactly where you did grab him, isn't it?" "Really?" Spacey said as he looked up at Wall in disbelief.

He then denied the act and later dismissed the prosecution case as weak.

Jurors laughed and smiled at parts of his testimony and Wall occasionally had to rein him in when he strayed into seemingly irrelevant anecdotes.

Spacey sounded like a regular guy at times, speaking of how he liked to smoke marijuana but was incapable of rolling a joint, and acknowledging that he sought sex during lonely periods, quipping "welcome to life." He said being promiscuous does not make him a bad person.

At other moments, he illustrated his life as an award-winning actor. He talked about performing in high school with Val Kilmer, buying the most expensive Mini Cooper ever at Elton John's charity gala, and how he taught Judi Dench to play table tennis while filming "The Shipping News" and later bought her a ping pong table.

Gibbs said Spacey was "monstered" on the internet and became toxic in the entertainment industry.

Spacey was booted from the runaway Netflix success, "House of Cards," and his scenes in "All the Money in the World," were scrubbed and he was replaced by Christopher Plummer. Aside from some small projects, he has barely worked as an actor in six years.

The court victory is his second since he beat a \$40 million lawsuit last fall in New York brought by "Star Trek: Discovery" actor Anthony Rapp.

Prosecutors in Massachusetts dropped charges when the alleged victim suddenly refused to testify.

Los Angeles prosecutors declined to bring charges after the death of a massage therapist who said Spacey forced him to touch the actor's genitals during a rub down at Spacey's home in Malibu in 2016.

Spacey said that being out of work had left him with bills he's still paying.

An arbitrator in LA ordered Spacey to pay nearly \$31 million to the makers of "House of Cards" for violating his contract by sexually harassing crew members.

Spacey can now resume his career "without a stain on his character" said Mark Stephens, a London media lawyer.

"These were allegations made at the height of the #MeToo allegations in Hollywood, and out of an abundance of caution, essentially Kevin Spacey was canceled by Hollywood," Stephens said. "I suspect he'll be snapped up by Hollywood producers desperate to get on and make new movies."

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Associated Press reporter Jill Lawless and Cristina Jaleru contributed to this report.

## **Pedestrians scatter as fire causes New York construction crane's arm to collapse and crash to street**

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ and KAREN MATTHEWS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A towering construction crane caught fire high above the West Side of Manhattan on Wednesday morning, causing its long arm to snap off, smash against a nearby building and plummet to the street as people ran for their lives on the sidewalk below.

Several people suffered minor injuries in the collapse, but no one died, New York City Mayor Eric Adams said.

"As you can see from the debris on the street, this could have been much worse," the Democrat said at a news conference, noting that the street at that hour of the morning is often filled with pedestrians, cars and buses.

The crane was operating 45 stories up when its engine compartment caught fire at around 7:25 a.m., authorities said. Photos and videos on social media show flames bursting from the crane hundreds of feet above 10th Avenue at 41st Street. The crane's arm, which was carrying a 16-ton load of concrete, dangled before breaking off.

"That weight of 16 tons is attached by a cable," said Joseph Pfeifer, first deputy commissioner for the

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 59 of 76

Fire Department of New York. "As the fire heats the cable, the cable weakens to a point where it loses its strength, and that's where the collapse occurred."

The person operating the crane tried to put out the fire as it spread but had to flee to safety, Pfeifer said.

Nine civilians experienced minor injuries in the collapse or its aftermath, according to a fire department spokesperson. Two firefighters experienced heat exhaustion and chest pains.

A worker at a nearby construction site said everyone stopped and watched as flames engulfed the top of the crane and a column of black smoke rose above buildings. Within a few minutes, firefighters were shooting water down at the blaze from a balcony of an adjacent building.

"I never seen anything like that," said Charles Pescatore, 18, a college helper on a construction site a few blocks away. "It could have killed a bunch of people."

The cause of the fire is being investigated. Authorities said they also planned to investigate the structural integrity of the residential tower, which is under construction and expected to rise to 54 stories.

The crane is owned by the New York Crane & Equipment Corp., one of the city's most widely used crane providers, officials said. The Queens-based company has been involved in other crane problems in recent years, leading to criminal charges and new safety measures around New York City's crane operations.

The company did not respond to a request for comment.

In May of 2008, a collapse of the company's tower crane killed two workers on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. The company and its owner, James Lomma, were acquitted of manslaughter and other charges; a mechanic pleaded guilty to criminally negligent homicide.

It was one of two deadly crane accidents in 2008, leading to the resignation of the city's buildings commissioner, as well as new safety measures around testing and oversight of crane operations.

Five years later, a crane owned by the company left a concrete cube dangling above a bustling pedestrian area for several hours, shutting down a major thoroughfare in Midtown Manhattan.

Delecia McInnis, a Long Island resident who saw the crane come down Wednesday, said she was surprised no one was seriously injured.

"There's so many things going on at 7 o'clock in the city, people are going to school, summer camp, there's always someone around in this area," she said.

The location is near the Port Authority Bus Terminal and an entrance to the Lincoln Tunnel, which carries auto traffic to and from New Jersey under the Hudson River. Streets surrounding the site were closed to traffic Wednesday morning.

This story has been corrected to change the spelling of witness Delecia McInnis' first name from Delicia, which is incorrect.

Associated Press writer Anthony Izaguirre in Albany, New York, contributed to this report.

## Whistleblower tells Congress the US is concealing 'multi-decade' program that captures UFOs

By NOMAAN MERCHANT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. is concealing a longstanding program that retrieves and reverse engineers unidentified flying objects, a former Air Force intelligence officer testified Wednesday to Congress. The Pentagon has denied his claims.

Retired Maj. David Grusch's highly anticipated testimony before a House Oversight subcommittee was Congress' latest foray into the world of UAPs — or "unidentified aerial phenomena," which is the official term the U.S. government uses instead of UFOs. While the study of mysterious aircraft or objects often evokes talk of aliens and "little green men," Democrats and Republicans in recent years have pushed for more research as a national security matter due to concerns that sightings observed by pilots may be tied to U.S. adversaries.

Grusch said he was asked in 2019 by the head of a government task force on UAPs to identify all highly classified programs relating to the task force's mission. At the time, Grusch was detailed to the National

Reconnaissance Office, the agency that operates U.S. spy satellites.

"I was informed in the course of my official duties of a multi-decade UAP crash retrieval and reverse engineering program to which I was denied access," he said.

Asked whether the U.S. government had information about extraterrestrial life, Grusch said the U.S. likely has been aware of "non-human" activity since the 1930s.

The Pentagon has denied Grusch's claims of a coverup. In a statement, Defense Department spokeswoman Sue Gough said investigators have not discovered "any verifiable information to substantiate claims that any programs regarding the possession or reverse-engineering of extraterrestrial materials have existed in the past or exist currently." The statement did not address UFOs that are not suspected of being extraterrestrial objects.

Grusch says he became a government whistleblower after his discovery and has faced retaliation for coming forward. He declined to be more specific about the retaliatory tactics, citing an ongoing investigation.

"It was very brutal and very unfortunate, some of the tactics they used to hurt me both professionally and personally," he said.

Rep. Glenn Grothman, R-Wis., chaired the panel's hearing and joked to a packed audience, "Welcome to the most exciting subcommittee in Congress this week."

There was bipartisan interest in Grusch's claims and a more sober tone than other recent hearings featuring whistleblowers celebrated by Republicans and criticized by Democrats. Lawmakers in both parties asked Grusch about his study of UFOs and the consequences he faced and how they could find out more about the government's UAP programs.

"I take it that you're arguing what we need is real transparency and reporting systems so we can get some clarity on what's going on out there," said Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md.

Some lawmakers criticized the Pentagon for not providing more details in a classified briefing or releasing images that could be shown to the public. In previous hearings, Pentagon officials showed a video taken from an F-18 military plane that showed an image of one balloon-like shape.

Pentagon officials in December said they had received "several hundreds" of new reports since launching a renewed effort to investigate reports of UFOs.

At that point, "we have not seen anything, and we're still very early on, that would lead us to believe that any of the objects that we have seen are of alien origin," said Ronald Moultrie, the undersecretary of defense for intelligence and security. "Any unauthorized system in our airspace we deem as a threat to safety."

## High school student who sat in Pence's chair during Capitol riot is sentenced to 1 year in prison

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A high school student who stormed the U.S. Capitol, assaulted a police officer and sat in a Senate floor chair reserved for the vice president was sentenced on Wednesday to one year in prison.

Georgia resident Bruno Joseph Cua was 18 when he attacked the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, making him one of the youngest people charged in the riot.

Before learning his sentence, Cua apologized for his actions and told U.S. District Judge Randolph Moss that he is ashamed of his role in a mob's "attack on democracy."

"Everything that day was just one terrible decision after another," said Cua, now 21.

Moss sentenced Cua to a prison term of one year and one day followed by three years of supervised release. The judge convicted Cua of felony charges after a trial earlier this year.

Moss told Cua that he was prepared to give him a longer prison sentence before he heard his statement in court on Wednesday. The judge said he believes Cua is truly remorseful.

"It's a tragic case for the country. It's a tragic case for you and your family," the judge told him. "There are no winners in any of this."

More than 1,000 people have been charged with Jan. 6-related crimes. Cua is one of at least six Capitol

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 61 of 76

riot defendants born in 2002, according to a spokesperson for the U.S. Attorney's office for the District of Columbia.

Cua's attorneys cited his youth as grounds for leniency. His actions on Jan. 6 "reflect his immaturity at the time and the effects that the crowd had on such a young person," defense attorneys wrote in a court filing.

Around the time of the riot, Cua was finishing online coursework to graduate from high school. Prosecutors said Cua's age is "only slightly" a mitigating factor in his favor.

"Americans who reach the age of 18 are entrusted with several important responsibilities and duties including voting, joining the military, signing a contract, and serving on a jury. In this way, the law recognizes that an 18-year-old is capable of making mature decisions," they wrote in a court filing.

Justice Department prosecutor Kaitlin Klamann said at least five Capitol riot defendants were younger than Cua on Jan. 6. Two of the five have resolved their cases and avoided prison terms. Both pleaded guilty to misdemeanor offenses and were sentenced to probation.

Cua planned his attack weeks in advance, brought weapons to the Capitol, tried to terrorize congressional staffers and was repeatedly aggressive toward police, prosecutors said.

They added, "Cua played a unique and prominent role on January 6, opening the Senate Chamber to the rioters, escalating confrontations, and leading other rioters into and through the Capitol."

Prosecutors recommended a prison sentence of four years and nine months for Cua. His lawyers asked the judge to sentence him to time served: the 40 days he spent in jail after his February 2021 arrest.

Cua said he was "scarred to my core" by his jail time. Another inmate assaulted Cua while he was jailed in Oklahoma, according to one of his lawyers.

"I did something stupid to land myself there, but it was traumatizing," Cua said.

Other young rioters have received prison terms. In March, for example, U.S. District Judge Reggie Walton sentenced Aiden Bilyard to three years and four months of incarceration. Bilyard, of Cary, North Carolina, also was 18 when he stormed the Capitol, pepper sprayed a line of police officers and used a bat to break into a Capitol conference room.

Cua and his parents drove from their home in Milton, Georgia, to Washington D.C., arriving a day before then-President Donald Trump spoke at his "Stop the Steal" rally. The Trump supporters who attacked the Capitol on Jan. 6 disrupted the joint session of Congress for certifying President Joe Biden's electoral victory.

Cua was armed with pepper spray and a metal baton — weapons given to him by his father — when rioters breached police lines on the west side of the Capitol, according to prosecutors. After climbing scaffolding, Cua entered the building through the Upper West Terrace doors and walked down a hallway toward the Senate.

"As Cua walked down the hallway, he tried to open every single office door he passed by pulling on doorknobs, pounding on the doors with his fist, and kicking the doors," prosecutors wrote.

They said Cua intended to intimidate staffers who were behind the doors as he yelled, "Hey! Where are the swamp rats hiding?"

Cua went to the third floor, where he shoved a Capitol police officer who was trying to lock doors to the Senate gallery. After the officer retreated, Cua entered the gallery, shouting "This is our house! This is our country!" Jumping onto the Senate floor, he sat in the chair for then-Vice President Mike Pence, leaned back and propped his feet up on a desk.

Then he opened a door, allowing dozens of other rioters onto the Senate floor. Before leaving, Cua rifled through desks belonging to Senators Charles Grassley, John Thune and Dianne Feinstein.

Moss decided the case against Cua without a jury in February, convicting him of obstructing the Jan. 6 congressional proceeding and assaulting a federal officer. The judge handed down the verdict after a "stipulated bench trial," a proceeding in which Cua didn't contest the facts supporting his convictions. He waived his right to a jury trial.

Prosecutors asked Moss to impose a \$23,485 fine, which equals the amount of money raised by an online fundraising campaign called "Bruno Cua: An American's Future at Stake." The website said the funds will be used for Cua's "many expenses in his pursuit of his freedom."

## Forensic scientist Henry Lee defends work after being found liable for falsifying evidence

By PAT EATON-ROBB Associated Press

Famed forensic scientist Henry Lee defended his work and reputation Wednesday after a federal judge found him liable last week in a lawsuit for fabricating evidence in a murder trial that sent two innocent men to prison for decades.

Ralph "Ricky" Birch and Shawn Henning were convicted in the Dec. 1, 1985, slaying of Everett Carr, based in part on testimony about what Lee said were bloodstains on a towel found in the 65-year-old victim's home in New Milford, 55 miles (88 kilometers) southwest of Hartford.

A judge vacated the felony murder convictions in 2020, and the men filed a federal wrongful conviction lawsuit naming Lee, eight police investigators and the town of New Milford.

U.S. District Court Judge Victor Bolden ruled last Friday that there was no evidence Lee ever conducted any blood tests on the towel. After Bolden granted a motion for summary judgement against Lee, the only outstanding issue for a jury in his case will be the amount of damages.

Tests done after the trial, when the men were appealing their convictions, showed the stain was not blood.

In a lengthy statement emailed Wednesday, Lee said he was disappointed with the ruling. He again denied fabricating evidence and suggested the traces of blood may have degraded in the 20 years between the crime and when experts for the defense tested the towel.

"I have no motive nor reason to fabricate evidence," he wrote. "My chemical testing of the towel played no direct role in implicating Mr. Birch and Mr. Henning or anyone else as suspects in this crime. Further, my scientific testimony at their trial included exculpatory evidence, such as a negative finding of blood on their clothing that served to exonerate them."

Lee also testified at trial that it was possible for the assailants to avoid getting much blood on them.

No forensic evidence existed linking Birch and Henning to the crime. No blood was found on their clothes or in their car. The crime scene included hairs and more than 40 fingerprints, but none matched the two men.

Lee is the former head of the state's forensic laboratory and now a professor emeritus at the University of New Haven's Henry C. Lee College of Criminal Justice and Forensic Sciences. He shot to fame after his testimony in the 1995 O.J. Simpson murder trial, in which he questioned the handling of blood evidence.

Lee also served as a consultant in other high-profile investigations, including the 1996 slaying of 6-year-old JonBenet Ramsey in Colorado; the 2004 murder trial of Scott Peterson, who was accused of killing his pregnant wife Laci; and the 2007 murder trial of record producer Phil Spector.

Lee's work in several cases has come under scrutiny, including in the murder case against Spector, in which he was accused of taking evidence from the crime scene.

In granting a motion for summary judgement against Lee last week, the judge ruled a jury will not have to determine whether the evidence against Birch and Henning was fabricated and can proceed directly to determining damages against the scientist. The cases against the others named in the lawsuit will go to a full trial.

Lee pointed out Wednesday that his work on the case came before Birch and Henning were identified as suspects and insisted he testified truthfully.

"I am a forensic scientist and I only present my scientific findings in the court of law," he wrote. "It is not my role to determine what evidence to introduce and what questions to ask a witness during the trial."

Judge Bolden also ruled that Lee's attorneys had failed to properly use an immunity defense that could have shielded him from damages. Connecticut Attorney General William Tong's office, which represents Lee and the troopers in the lawsuit, said Wednesday it would be filing an appeal.

"We stand by our lawyers' strong work in this case," Elizabeth Benton, Tong's spokeswoman, said. "They offered a vigorous and legally correct defense."

## Israel's top court will hear challenges to a law that weakens its power, escalating political crisis

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel's highest court said Wednesday it will hear legal challenges to a divisive new law that weakens its power, putting the country's top justices in the position of defending their own independence and escalating a political crisis that has unleashed the country's biggest protests in history.

Israeli civil society groups and others filed petitions asking the Supreme Court to strike down the law enacted Monday — the first major piece of legislation in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's broader plan to overhaul Israel's judiciary.

The opposition's legal challenges are pushing Israel toward a showdown over the foundations of its system of government.

The court faces massive public pressure to strike down the law and has an inherent interest in preserving its powers and independence. But if it does so, Netanyahu's government could ignore the ruling, setting the stage for a crisis over who has ultimate authority.

"If there is no judicial review, it means the Knesset has total power," said Amir Fuchs, senior researcher at the Israel Democracy Institute, a Jerusalem think tank.

Critics of the overhaul describe it as a blow to democracy, arguing that Israel's judiciary represents the primary check on the powers of the prime minister and his majority coalition in parliament.

The supporters of Netanyahu's far-right, ultra-Orthodox government say the law will prevent liberal, unelected judges from interfering with the decisions of elected lawmakers. They also say the court should not be able to rule on a law limiting its own authority.

"To have the court decide its own powers by itself, that's not separation of powers," Simcha Rothman, a right-wing lawmaker spearheading the overhaul, told The Associated Press. "That's not democracy."

Hundreds of thousands of Israelis have poured into the streets to protest against the plan for the past seven months.

The overhaul also has drawn concern from Israel's closest allies. The Biden administration called the outcome "unfortunate," and the European Union said Wednesday it was "following the developments in Israel closely and with concern."

The United States and EU have expressed fears that pushing through the judicial overhaul in defiance of mass popular resistance could undermine what the countries routinely describe as their shared values.

"It is important that the core values on which our partnership are based are preserved," the EU said.

Israel has no constitution, relying instead on a set of "basic laws" that enshrine rights and freedoms. The prime minister governs through a majority coalition in parliament — in effect, giving him control over the executive and legislative branches of government. As a result, the Supreme Court plays a critical oversight role, a safeguard against corruption and overtly political appointments of unqualified candidates to important jobs.

The law passed Monday strips the Supreme Court of its power to block government actions and appointments on the basis that they are "unreasonable."

The Supreme Court did not issue an injunction on Wednesday, as petitioners had asked, but said it would hear challenges to the new law after the Knesset returns from recess in September. It asked the law's defendants to submit a response at least 10 days before the preliminary hearing.

The Movement for Quality Government in Israel, a good governance group, said in its petition that the law undermines Israel's core values as a democracy, and that it was passed through a flawed legislative process.

"We will appear in the Supreme Court to defend Israeli democracy and we will do everything we can to stop the coup," Eliad Shraga, the group's chairman, said on Wednesday.

Netanyahu's allies have vowed to press forward with more judicial changes after the parliamentary recess. Another planned bill would give the parliament control over how judges are appointed.

The opposition party, Yesh Atid, along with pro-democracy groups, have filed a separate petition asking

Justice Minister Yariv Levin to convene the powerful committee that picks the nation's judges.

Both the governing coalition and the opposition traditionally are represented on the nine-member committee. But proponents of the overhaul have sought control of the committee, drawing accusations that Netanyahu and his allies were trying to stack the judiciary with cronies.

The opposition sees Netanyahu's attempts to delay the committee's formation as a backhanded way to enact part of the judicial overhaul without political consensus.

With Israel in turmoil, its credit rating was downgraded this week, with agencies warning that the fallout from the judicial overhaul could make the country less attractive to foreign investors.

"What's happening now is just a fraction of the economic damage we are set to experience in the long run," said Yannay Spitzer, economist at Israel's Hebrew University.

Associated Press writer Julia Frankel in Jerusalem contributed to this report.

## Residents are at a loss after newspaper that bound community together shuts in declining coal county

By LEAH WILLINGHAM Associated Press

WELCH, W.Va. (AP) — Months after Missy Nester ended The Welch News' 100-year run, she can barely stand to walk through the office doors of the newspaper her mother taught her to read with growing up in West Virginia's southern coalfields. It's still too painful.

The Welch News owner and publisher's desk is covered with unpaid bills and her own paychecks — a year's worth — she never cashed. Phones that used to ring through the day have gone silent. Tables covered with typewriters, awards and a century's worth of other long-abandoned artifacts are reminders that her beloved paper has become an artifact, too.

Wiping away tears, Nester said she wishes people understood why she fought so hard to protect the last remaining news outlet in her community, and why it feels like the people left behind by the journalism industry are often those who need it most.

"Our people here have nothing," said Nester, 57. "Like, can any of y'all hear us out here screaming?"

In March, the McDowell County weekly became another one of the thousands of U.S. newspapers that have shuttered since 2005, a crisis Nester called "terrifying for democracy" and one that disproportionately impacts rural Americans like her.

Residents suddenly have no way of knowing what's going on at public meetings, which are not televised, nor are minutes or recordings posted online. Even basic tasks, like finding out about church happenings, have become challenging. The paper printed pages of religious events and directories every week and that hasn't been replaced.

Local crises, like the desperately needed upgrade of water and sewer systems, are going unreported. And there is no one to keep disinformation in check, like when the newspaper published a series of stories that dispelled the rumors of election tampering at local precincts during last year's May primaries.

"It was like a heartbeat, like a thread that ran through the community," said World War II veteran Howard Wade, a retired professor specializing in Black history.

Sitting on a rocking chair in pajama pants in his ranch house at the base of lush, green hills, Wade said he hasn't read any news since the paper stopped printing. He's worried about the county history the newspaper chronicled throughout his life. At 97, he was born three years after it opened its doors in 1923.

The decline of American newspapers is well-documented. The people most impacted tend to be older, low-income and less likely to have graduated high school or college than people living in well-covered communities.

For McDowell residents, the news was still a shock. Many said they didn't realize how much they depended on the paper until it was gone.

Sarah Hall, the first Black prosecutor elected in McDowell County in the 1980s, said it's tragic when any



# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 65 of 76

community loses its newspaper. But for communities like hers, it's detrimental.

The 535-square-mile (1,385-square-kilometer) county is dominated by rugged mountain terrain, where residents live miles apart in hollers connected by winding roads and no interstate access, leaving people isolated. Cell and internet service is inconsistent — or nonexistent — and there are no locally-based radio or television stations.

"We're in a unique situation because our community is unique," she said. "We have no other substantial way of communicating."

It bothers Hall not to know about decisions county commissioners are making with taxpayer money and she misses the legal notices the paper published informing residents about developments like utility rate increases. With the school year set to start, she's worried families won't know about a ministry program in early August providing free school supplies.

For Nester and her staff of three, the grief of closing the paper has felt impossible to confront after years of sacrifices, both financial and personal. Nester took out a loan and scraped together all the money she could in 2018 to save it, the crumbling building with a caving roof, cracked walls and a 1966 Goss printing press in the basement.

The Welch News team felt buoyed as protectors of democracy in a place where people sometimes feel forgotten or overlooked by the rest of the country.

Sprawling across the Cumberland Mountains of Appalachia, McDowell County was once seen as a symbol of American progress: the self-proclaimed "Heart of the Nation's Coal Bin" was the world's largest coal producer and attracted thousands of European immigrants and Black families fleeing the Jim Crow South looking for work and a better life.

In 1950, nearly 100,000 people lived in McDowell, and a fourth of that population was Black, unconventional in the predominately white state. The county earned the moniker the "Free State of McDowell" because of the lack of segregation and unprecedented Black representation in government.

Today, 80% of the 17,850 remaining residents are white, still making it one of West Virginia's most diverse counties. It's also the poorest, with some of the lowest graduation and life expectancy rates in the nation. A third of all McDowell County residents live in poverty. The per capita income is \$15,474.

Over the years, the county lost big box stores, schools, thousands of jobs and people. But it still had its newspaper — one that tracked government spending, published elections, spelling bee and basketball game results and spreads with color photos and biographies of every member of the graduating class.

Now, because many older residents don't use the internet, they are missing crucial information the newspaper would have reported on. A pandemic-era meal service for seniors was cut, and there was no easy way to inform residents. People who relied on the obituaries have struggled keeping up with loved ones' deaths.

"Now when people die, a lot of people don't even realize they're dead," said Deputy Magistrate Court Clerk Virginia Dickerson, 79, while on a break outside her office, watching coal trucks lumber by.

Dickerson, who delivered the paper when she was growing up, said losing the paper was like "losing a family member."

"Anything that happen usually in the community and anywhere in McDowell County, it would be in that paper. Without no paper, you can't find out nothing," she said.

Paulina Breeden, who works behind the counter at the sole gas station in the neighboring community of Maybeury, said people still come in and ask about the paper. She's the one who has to inform them it's closed. They're often incredulous.

"They say, 'Oh, really? Are you serious?' I mean, they were shocked," she said.

Breeden said she trusted the information she read in The Welch News: "You hear a lot, and I know maybe in there it's not the actual truth," she said of rumors around town. "Let's just read the newspaper."

The political and socioeconomic implications of the newspaper's closure are widespread, but not always immediately visible. Although the county is now without a local news source, residents are no strangers to news coverage — often by national outlets that focus on the poverty rate, opioid use, infrastructure woes and the declining coal industry.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 66 of 76

The paper was a vital platform for residents to tell their story from their perspective — a lifeline for a community that's often been misrepresented and misunderstood.

Shawn Jenkins, a pharmacy owner who works down the street from The Welch News, said he feels national coverage of McDowell County — and West Virginia in general — is overly “political, unfair and often negative.” But he never felt that way about the local newspaper.

“I never saw anything that really raised my hackles. I thought they were pretty much center line, which is the exception these days,” he said, adding that he advertised in the paper. “I wanted them to survive.”

Before Nester took over in 2018, the paper ran summaries of local government meetings written up by a county employee. That changed when 32-year-old Derek Tyson, the paper's single reporter and editor, began covering meetings. The attention seemed to bother some local officials, who would call late at night to grumble about stories. The city of Welch declined to comment on the newspaper's closure.

Without the paper and its journalist asking questions, residents are going to find it harder to stay informed about things that matter locally, Nester said.

“I think that's unfair to the people that live in the community,” she said.

One of the major stories the paper was following for years is the work of the McDowell Public Service District, which focuses on upgrading systems in coal communities with aging infrastructure. For decades, some people in the county relied on mountain streams polluted with mine runoff because of disintegrating — or completely absent — systems. Others, like those in the majority-Black community of Keystone, lived under a boil water advisory for 10 years — a nearly unheard-of length of time — until the district replaced the water lines under two years ago.

Now, long-awaited federal support is expected to go out to communities with the passage of the historic bipartisan infrastructure act. But the paper won't be there to cover it.

The void created by the disappearance of The Welch News is being filled by cable news and social media, something that deeply concerns Tyson. Much of what he sees circulating locally on Facebook, Twitter and other social media outlets is unverified.

The newspaper used to act as a counter to that misinformation. During last year's May primary, rumors ran rampant on Facebook about election tampering after some residents arrived at long-time precincts on voting day to find their names missing from the poll books.

Tyson wrote multiple stories digging into the claims and clarifying that the confusion was caused by an issue with the West Virginia Secretary of State's voter database. Although people were forced to vote in different locations or to cast provisional ballots, all votes were counted.

During one meeting among local officials discussing the issue, a county commissioner said he believed the lack of daily news sources in the county contributed to the misinformation's spread. He credited The Welch News for its work.

When Nester was raising her three children as a single mother in the 1990s and 2000s, the county's older residents would stop by her house on surprise visits with meals and cash they'd tape to her front door. Many of the people who read the newspaper are aging, she said.

During her time at the newspaper, delivery drivers would drop off bread and milk with The Welch News at some houses, along with other essentials.

“I saw keeping the paper going as a way to repay them — or to try to — for everything they did to take care of me,” she said.

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The Associated Press receives support from several private foundations to enhance its explanatory coverage of elections and democracy. See more about AP's democracy initiative [here](#). The AP is solely responsible for all content.

## Giuliani concedes he made public comments falsely claiming Georgia election workers committed fraud

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Rudy Giuliani has conceded that he made public comments falsely claiming two Georgia election workers committed ballot fraud during the 2020 presidential race but is arguing that the statements were protected by the First Amendment.

That assertion by Giuliani, who as part of Donald Trump's legal team tried to overturn results in battleground states, came in a filing Tuesday in a lawsuit by Ruby Freeman and Wandrea "Shaye" Moss. Their lawsuit from December 2021 accused the former New York City mayor of defaming them by falsely stating that they had engaged in fraud while counting ballots at State Farm Arena in Atlanta.

The lawsuit says Giuliani repeatedly pushed debunked claims that Freeman and Moss — mother and daughter — pulled out suitcases of illegal ballots and committed other acts of fraud to try to alter the outcome of the race.

Though Giuliani is not disputing that the statements were false, he does not concede that they caused any damage to Freeman or Moss. That distinction is important because plaintiffs in a defamation case must prove not only that a statement made about them was false but that it also resulted in actual damage.

Moss told the U.S. House committee investigating the Capitol riot that her life was shattered by the false accusations. She said she received hateful and racist messages, some "wishing death upon me. Telling me that I'll be in jail with my mother. And saying things like, 'Be glad it's 2020 and not 1920.'"

Freeman said in her testimony: "There is nowhere I feel safe."

Giuliani's statement was attached to a filing arguing that he did not fail to produce evidence in the case and should not be sanctioned as Freeman and Moss had requested.

"While Giuliani does not admit to Plaintiffs' allegations, he — for purposes of this litigation only — does not contest the factual allegations," the filing said.

Giuliani political adviser Ted Goodman said in an email Wednesday that the filing was made "in order to move on to the portion of the case that will permit a motion to dismiss."

Michael Gottlieb, a lawyer for Freeman and Moss, said in an emailed statement that Giuliani is conceding "what we have always known to be true — Ruby Freeman and Shaye Moss honorably performed their civic duties in the 2020 presidential election in full compliance with the law; and the allegations of election fraud he and former-President Trump made against them have been false since day one."

Certain issues, including damages, still have to be decided by the court. Gottlieb said Freeman and Moss are "pleased with this major milestone in their fight for justice, and look forward to presenting what remains of this case at trial."

Freeman and Moss filed a motion this month alleging that Giuliani had "failed to take any steps to preserve relevant electronic evidence." They know such evidence exists because other people provided it to them, their filing says. They asked U.S. District Judge Beryl Howell in Washington to impose sanctions.

In the court filing, a lawyer for Giuliani argued that his client did not fail to preserve or destroy any electronic evidence "because all pertinent documents were seized by the government and were in their possession, custody, or control."

The federal government had executed search warrants at Giuliani's home and office in a separate case in New York and had seized his electronic devices.

The records that Moss and Freeman said were not produced "have not been in the possession of Giuliani since their seizure in April 2021," according to the court filing, and therefore it is "physically impossible" for him to have destroyed the evidence.

Moss had worked for the Fulton County elections department since 2012 and supervised the absentee ballot operation during the 2020 election. Freeman was a temporary election worker, verifying signatures on absentee ballots and preparing them to be counted and processed.

Giuliani and others alleged during a Georgia legislative subcommittee hearing in December 2020 that surveillance video from State Farm Arena showed the election workers committing election fraud. As those

allegations circulated online, the two women said, they suffered intense harassment, both in person and online. Moss detailed her experiences in emotional testimony before the members of Congress investigating the Capitol insurrection. The Jan. 6 committee also played video testimony from Freeman during the hearing in June 2022.

In a court filing that month, Giuliani asked the judge to toss the lawsuit, arguing the claims against him were barred by First Amendment protections for free speech. Howell rejected that request, allowing the lawsuit to proceed.

Justice Department special counsel Jack Smith and Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis, who are investigating efforts by Trump and his allies to overturn the 2020 election results, have both shown interest in what happened to Moss and Freeman.

Smith's team has subpoenaed Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger's office for any Election Day video from State Farm Arena. Willis sought testimony about a curious episode in which prosecutors say a woman traveled from Chicago to Georgia in January 2021 and tried to pressure Freeman into falsely confessing to committing election fraud.

The defamation lawsuit originally named right-wing cable news channel One America News Network, its owners and its chief White House correspondent for also pushing the debunked claims. They were dismissed from the suit in May 2022 after reaching an undisclosed settlement with Moss and Freeman.

## **A guide to how Paris will welcome fans and stage 32 sports at the first post-pandemic Olympics**

By GRAHAM DUNBAR and JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — The Olympics is on track to be back in business with millions of visitors coming to Paris for the 2024 Games.

The French capital has the expert experience to stage the event and welcome guests for the first Olympics of the post-pandemic era.

That should be a relief after a chaotic lead-in to the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics and uncertainty from postponing the Tokyo Olympics in 2020 with no guarantee it would eventually happen one year later. It did, but in almost entirely empty venues.

Organizers, athletes and fans preparing for competitions in Paris — and regional French cities like Lille and Marseille, plus the far-away surfing venue of Tahiti in the South Pacific — can be confident the show will go on.

Here's a look at what we can expect from the 2024 Paris Olympics:

### **WHAT ABOUT TICKETS?**

About 10 million tickets were made available for the Paris Olympics with 329 medal events in 32 different sports spread across 18 different days of competition.

Close to 7 million have already been sold with one year to go before the opening ceremony on July 26.

The system for selling tickets has been streamlined through the organizing committee's own online sales point and a new hospitality program run by American company On Location.

Organizers are directly selling about 8 million tickets with the promise that 1 million will be available for all sports priced at 24 euros (\$26), and many more costing 50 euros (\$55) or less.

Would-be buyers had to register for the chance to be allocated tickets in the first two sales phases but the current wave is first-come, first-served for events in cities outside Paris.

That could mean seeing arguably France's two biggest stars: top NBA draft pick Victor Wembanyama in Lille and soccer great Kylian Mbappé in Marseille and Nice.

Lille, about three hours northeast of Paris, will stage all the group games in basketball at its soccer stadium. The cheapest seats at 50 euros (\$55) remain for women's games but expect now to pay 120-200 euros (\$133-\$221) to see a men's game.

Mbappé wants to play for France as one of its three overage players in what is an under-23 tournament for men, and seats for 30 euros (\$33) were available this week for its two scheduled group games

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 69 of 76

in Marseille. The first is on July 24 when Olympic events start two days ahead of the opening ceremony. Expect to pay at least 50 euros (\$55) to see France in Nice on July 27.

Soccer games will also be played in Bordeaux, Lyon, Nantes and Saint-Etienne as well as in Paris, at the Parc des Princes.

Those city authorities have an allocation of tickets among the remaining 2 million of the 10 million that also includes the hospitality program, plus the "Olympic Family" — national sponsors of Paris and global sponsors of the IOC, broadcast rights holders and sports bodies.

Hospitality prices start at 85 euros (\$94) and run to 11,000 euros (\$12,200) for a prime spot by the River Seine to see the athletes sail by in the opening ceremony.

With general tickets to that riverside ceremony already sold out, "the only way to attend these events will be through the official hospitality program," On Location said this week. That's also the case for sailing races in Marseille.

Also sold out are hospitality tickets at iconic venues for judo — staged next to the Eiffel Tower in a temporary venue and featuring one of France's greatest modern athletes, Teddy Riner — and equestrian in the gardens of the Palace of Versailles.

## IS THERE ROOM FOR EVERYONE?

Paris touted its large and diverse accommodation options — everything from campsites along the River Seine to some of the world's most famous luxury hotels — when it was bidding for the Olympics, boasting that it has "more than sufficient accommodation" to host France's first Summer Games in a century and millions of visitors.

The Paris region has France's greatest concentration of hotel accommodation, its 160,000 rooms making up one-quarter of the country's total of 640,000. Nearly 90% of Paris region hotels are classed two stars or above. Adding rented accommodation, campsites and other options, the Paris tourism office says the region has a total of 261,800 rooms for the Olympics, which is considerably more than it had in 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic.

When the pandemic ebbed, Paris once again became a top tourist destination. Visitor numbers so far this year are now very close to their pre-pandemic levels.

The city's tourism office predicts that up to 15.9 million people could visit the Paris region during the July-September period that includes the Olympics and Paralympic Games.

That would be busier than Paris has been used to since the pandemic but not ridiculously so. The tourism office expects the region will still have rooms available, predicting occupancy rates of between 56% and 76%. That would be either a little bit less or somewhat more than the 61% occupancy at the same period in 2019.

"There is not going to be an accommodation crisis. There shouldn't be people arriving and saying, 'My God, we can't find a place to stay in Paris,'" said Pierre Rabadan, City Hall's vice mayor for Olympic planning.

Many Parisians leave for summer vacations in July or August and officials expect the same to happen next year, further helping to make space.

Some Parisians are hoping to make a mint by renting out their homes. On Airbnb, many hundreds of dollars per night are being asked for apartments. In the 11th district of Paris, a 1-bedroom apartment with two beds that was asking for 99 euros (\$110) per night for four people this summer from July 26 to Aug. 2 is asking 877 euros (\$972) per night for the same period during the Olympics.

## HOW WILL OLYMPIC VISITORS GET AROUND?

The Olympics and Paris' transport network upon which the 2024 Games are relying have an intertwined history dating back over a century. The city's first Metro service, Line 1 from Porte Maillot in the west to Porte de Vincennes in the east, was opened during the 1900 Paris Olympics as part of the World Exhibition that the French capital hosted that year.

Next year, public transport is again expected to play a starring role. Organizers are counting on spectators to rely overwhelmingly on the Paris region's dense network of Metro lines, suburban trains, buses and other transport to help the Olympics reach its target of halving its carbon footprint compared to previous editions.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 70 of 76

Some of the transport promises that organizers made have fallen by the wayside.

They shelved a pledge that ticketed spectators would travel on public transport for free to competition sites in Paris and beyond, opting instead to save themselves an estimated 44.7 million euros (\$50 million).

An express train they said would whisk visitors from Paris' main international airport, Charles de Gaulle, to the center of the city in 20 minutes is not now slated to open before 2027.

Another line under construction, Metro 17, that organizers said would transport athletes in 30 minutes from the airport to their accommodation in Paris' northern outskirts also won't be ready, with a first stretch not now scheduled to open before 2026.

But a newly extended Metro service, Line 14, from Paris' second major airport, Orly, to an Olympic hub in the northern outskirts that includes the athletes village, main stadium and an aquatics center remains on schedule to open a month before the Olympics.

Transport operators are gearing up to carry between 600,000 to 800,000 Olympic visitors per day, "it's like being in a permanent rush hour," said Transport Minister Clement Beaune.

Paris' regional transport operator is promising extra trains as well as shuttle buses where needed, including for people with disabilities, for the 31 competition venues in the French capital and its surrounds.

"It's a major challenge. We've never had an operation like this," Beaune said. "We will be ready."

Paris is also using the Olympics to further its progress as an increasingly bike-friendly city, adding more lanes to its cycle network. City Hall says there will be at least 3,000 more bikes for hire and spaces to park 10,000 bikes close to venues.

## WHAT WEATHER TO EXPECT?

World record heat has been a global theme in July 2023 and the European summer does not figure to cool down next year.

Measures to control extreme heat were not much on the minds of Paris officials when bidding for the Olympics in 2017. They are now.

"Obviously since the candidacy, we have worked a lot on these subjects," organizing committee CEO Etienne Thobois said this month, "because we now realize that it's becoming a near certainty that we will have high temperatures in the summer of 2024 in Paris."

Thobois said organizers must be "very, very vigilant" to find a balance between compensating for the heat felt by athletes and workers against the need to control the games' carbon footprint.

Air-conditioning was not planned in the design of the \$1.1 billion athletes village being built in Saint-Denis, though that is not unusual for a city in central or northern Europe.

Paris temperatures have peaked at 34 degrees Celsius (93 degrees Fahrenheit) this July and often rose to 30 degrees C (86 degrees F).

When similar temperatures hit the first week of the Tokyo Olympics two years ago, the actual heat index on the field of play was higher.

On the tennis court in Tokyo, the temperatures felt like 37 degrees C (99 degrees F) and heatstroke forced Paula Badosa to retire from her women's singles quarterfinal match and leave the arena in a wheelchair.

Asked last week about a Parisian heatwave, International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach noted "we have some very good experience with our heat mitigation measures in Tokyo where we were already facing these problems."

For Tokyo, the IOC pressed World Athletics to move the marathons out of the city and seek cooler early mornings in coastal Sapporo.

The Paris marathons will start and finish in the city and take runners on uphill sections toward historic Versailles.

## HISTORIC VENUES

Students of the history of France, Paris and sports itself can feast on the places the Olympics will take them.

While the marathons will head to Versailles, equestrian events will actually be held in the grand grounds of the royal palace where Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette lived and the victors of World War I led by U.S. president Woodrow Wilson gathered in 1919 and redrew many borders on the global map.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 71 of 76

Place de la Concorde, where both Louis and Marie Antoinette were beheaded, will stage the Olympic debut of breakdancing, and other urban youth sports skateboarding, BMX freestyle and 3-on-3 basketball.

One hundred years after hosting track and field plus other sports at the 1924 Paris Olympics, Colombes Stadium in the northwest suburbs will this time stage field hockey.

Colombes is one of two 2024 Olympic venues to have staged soccer's biggest game, the men's World Cup final. Its turn was in 1938, while Stade de France saw the host nation triumph in 1998. Stade de France will stage track and field, rugby sevens and the Aug. 11 closing ceremony.

The Eiffel Tower will dominate the opening ceremony on July 26 as thousands of athletes are carried on fleets of boats along the Seine river toward the city's defining landmark.

Dunbar reported from Geneva.

AP coverage of the Paris Olympics: <https://apnews.com/hub/2024-paris-olympic-games> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Sports](https://twitter.com/AP_Sports)

## South Florida waters hit hot tub level and may have set world record for warmest seawater

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

The water temperature around the tip of Florida has hit triple digits — hot tub levels — two days in a row. Meteorologists say it could be the hottest seawater ever measured, although some questions about the reading remain.

Scientists are already seeing devastating effects from prolonged hot water surrounding Florida — coral bleaching and even the death of some corals in what had been one of the Florida Keys' most resilient reefs. Climate change has set temperature records across the globe this month.

The warmer water is also fuel for hurricanes.

Scientists were careful to say there is some uncertainty with the reading. But the buoy at Manatee Bay hit 101.1 degrees Fahrenheit (38.4 degrees Celsius) Monday evening, according to National Weather Service meteorologist George Rizzuto. The night before, that buoy showed an online reading of 100.2 F (37.9 C).

"That is a potential record," Rizzuto said.

"This is a hot tub. I like my hot tub around 100, 101, (37.8, 38.3 C). That's what was recorded yesterday," said Yale Climate Connections meteorologist Jeff Masters.

If verified, the Monday reading would be nearly 1.5 degrees Fahrenheit higher than what is regarded as the prior record, set in the waters off Kuwait three summers ago, 99.7 degrees Fahrenheit (37.6 degrees Celsius).

"We've never seen a record-breaking event like this before," Masters said.

The consequences for sea corals are serious. NOAA researcher Andrew Ibarra, who took his kayak out to the area, "found that the entire reef was bleached out. Every single coral colony was exhibiting some form of paling, partial bleaching or full out bleaching."

Some coral even had died, he said. This comes on top of bleaching seen last week by the University of Miami, when NOAA increased the alert level for coral earlier this month.

Until the 1980s, coral bleaching was mostly unheard of. But "now we've reached the point where it's become routine," Enochs said. Bleaching, which doesn't kill coral but weakens it and can lead to death, occurs when water temperatures exceed the upper 80s (low 30s Celsius), Enochs said.

Masters and University of Miami tropical meteorologist Brian McNoldy said while the hot temperatures do fit with what's happening around Florida, Monday's reading may not be accepted as a record because the area is shallow, has sea grasses in it and may be influenced by warm land in the nearby Everglades National Park.

Still, McNoldy said, "it's amazing."

The fact that two 100 degree measurements were taken on consecutive days lends credence to them,

McNoldy said. Water temperatures have been in the upper 90s in the area for more than two weeks.

There aren't many coral reefs in Manatee Bay, but elsewhere in the Florida Keys, scientists diving at Cheeca Rocks found bleaching and even death in some of the Keys most resilient corals, said Ian Enochs, lead of the coral program at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Atlantic Oceanographic and Meteorological Laboratory.

"This is more, earlier than we have ever seen," Enochs said. "I'm nervous by how early this is occurring."

This all comes as sea surface temperatures worldwide have broken monthly records for heat in April, May and June, according to NOAA. And temperatures in the north Atlantic Ocean are off the charts — as much as 9 to 11 degrees Fahrenheit (5 to 6 degrees Celsius) warmer than normal in some spots near Newfoundland, McNoldy said.

Follow AP's climate and environment coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/climate-and-environment>

Follow Seth Borenstein on Twitter at @borenbears

Associated Press climate and environmental coverage receives support from several private foundations. See more about AP's climate initiative here. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

## **Volunteers working to save nearly 100 beached whales in Australia, but more than half have died**

PERTH, Australia (AP) — Volunteers worked frantically on a second day Wednesday to save dozens of pilot whales that have stranded themselves on a beach in Western Australia, but more than 50 have already died.

Nearly 100 long-finned pilot whales, stranded themselves Tuesday on the beach by the city of Albany, on the southern tip of Western Australia, south of Perth.

They were first spotted swimming Tuesday morning near Cheynes Beach east of Albany. As the day progressed, the pod began moving closer to the beach, sparking the concern of conservation officers. By 4 p.m., a large stretch of the shoreline was covered in beached whales.

Reece Whitby, Western Australia's environment minister, said it was particularly frustrating because it's not known why the phenomenon occurs.

"What we're seeing is utterly heartbreaking and distressing," he told reporters. "It's just a terrible, terrible tragedy to see these dead pilot whales on the beach."

Fifty-two whales had perished, and volunteers are doing what they can to try and save 45 still alive, he said.

"People are committed to doing what they can to save as many whales as they can," Whitby said.

Western Australia state's Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions set up an overnight camp to monitor the whales.

Peter Hartley, a manager from the department, told the Australian Broadcasting Corp. that the volunteers were trying to get the living whales back into the water and encourage them to swim away.

"We are optimistic that we will save as many as we can," Hartley said.

The team tasked with helping the whales includes Perth Zoo veterinarians and marine fauna experts. They have been using specialized equipment, including vessels and slings.

Hundreds of volunteers also offered to help — so many that officials said they had enough registered volunteers and urged other members of the public to stay away from the beach.

Drone footage released by the department showed the whales clustering and forming into a heart shape before stranding themselves on the beach.

"This is just an amazing event," Joanne Marsh, the owner the Cheynes Beach Caravan Park told the ABC. "We've never seen anything quite like this."

Wildlife experts said the unusual behavior of the whales could be an indicator of stress or illness within



the pod. Pilot whales are highly social animals and often maintain close relationships with their pods throughout their lives.

Macquarie University wildlife scientist Vanessa Pirotta said the drone footage could suggest the whales had become disoriented, although she said the exact reasons for mass strandings remain unclear.

"The fact that they were in one area very huddled, and doing really interesting behaviors, and looking around at times, suggests that something else is going on that we just don't know," she said.

She said she thought it unlikely the whales were trying to avoid a predator.

"They often have a follow-the-leader type mentality, and that can very much be one of the reasons why we see stranding of not just one but many," Pirotta added.

The incident is reminiscent of one in September, in which some 200 pilot whales died after a pod stranded itself on the remote west coast of Tasmania, off Australia's southeastern coast.

The following month, nearly 500 pilot whales died after stranding themselves on two remote beaches in New Zealand.

## **On their own front line, Ukrainian surgeons treat waves of soldiers since the counteroffensive began**

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

DNIPRO, Ukraine (AP) — The horrors of war arrive through the night at a hospital in eastern Ukraine, a procession of stretchers bearing limp bodies whisked from the front line.

The soldiers come with bandaged limbs soaked in blood, faces blackened with shrapnel fragments and stunned eyes fixed on the ceiling, frozen in shock. Lately, they've been coming with ever-greater frequency.

"Pain!" shrieks a serviceman with a gaping thigh wound as medical workers move him to a surgical gurney.

Evacuated from trenches in the east, forests in the north and the open fields of the south, wounded soldiers begin showing up at the Mechnikov Hospital in late afternoon, and dozens more in desperate need of surgery are wheeled in before the sun rises the next day.

The surge of wounded soldiers coincides with the major counteroffensive Ukraine launched in June to try to recapture its land, nearly one-fifth of which is now under Russian control. Surgeons at Mechnikov are busier now than perhaps at any other time since Russia began its full-scale invasion 17 months ago, according to doctors at the hospital, who declined to be more specific.

In a war where casualty counts are treated as state secrets, the hospital — one of Ukraine's biggest — serves as a measurement of distant battles. When they intensify, so does the doctors' workload, which these days consists of 50 to 100 surgeries per night.

"Here, we see the worst of the front line," Dr. Serhii Ryzhenko, the hospital's 59-year-old chief doctor, says with a weary smile. "We have 50 operating rooms, and it's not enough."

The Associated Press was given rare access last week to the hospital, a 12-hour visit to witness doctors and nurses care for soldiers rushed from the battlefield to the operating room.

During the day, Mechnikov functions as a normal hospital, treating patients with cancer and other chronic diseases. But every night ushers in the same macabre routine: Wounded soldiers arrive — many unconscious — and surgeons operate. The soldiers are then sent off to recover elsewhere to create space for the next nightly deluge.

"We hold our own front line here, we understand that we must do this, we must hold on," said Dr. Tetyana Teshyna, a soft-spoken anesthesiologist wearing pink scrubs.

"It's very hard," said Teshyna, who remains calm amid the bustle in this clean, orderly hospital. She wants to say more but is summoned by a nurse. Another urgent surgery is about to start.

Ukrainian soldiers are fighting in multiple combat zones along the 1,500-kilometer (932-mile) front line, but the counteroffensive — focused in the Russian-occupied east and south of the country — has been slow going. Small units are being deployed to probe a Russian army that is deeply dug in, and minefields must be cleared before Ukrainian soldiers can attempt to root them out.

Any initial momentum from the opening phase of the counteroffensive has given way to sluggish advances.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 74 of 76

Territorial gains have been minimal, despite highly publicized Western donations of military hardware that heightened expectations of a quick Ukrainian breakthrough.

For its part, Russia has stepped up operations in the north of Ukraine, near Lyman, in the forests of Kreminna, in a possible attempt to corner Ukrainian troops there.

Ukrainian soldiers fighting along the front say the ferocity of Moscow's artillery barrages has surprised them the most, especially in the southern Zaporizhzhia region, where mine-clearing operations leave them badly exposed to enemy fire.

Oleh Halah, 22, was hit by artillery from a Russian tank near Lyman this month, injuring his stomach and legs. Straining to speak in the hospital's intensive care unit, Halah said his platoon saw the tank coming, but the artillery hit them before they could reach their grenade launcher.

"Twenty-four hours a day, constant shooting, all the time ... if not (Russian) infantry, then artillery," he said. "It doesn't stop."

Other soldiers being cared for by Mechnikov's doctors were injured while clearing mines from Russian trenches. A Belarusian fighting alongside Ukrainian soldiers who uses the call sign "Gold" was injured this way. He had been walking slowly with his unit, 5 meters (yards) per minute, when he was ambushed by a Russian soldier hiding behind a dugout.

As evening comes, the pace of activity in the trauma room picks up, with new soldiers arriving nearly every 15 minutes.

Discordant voices of doctors and other hospital staff echo in the halls, describing blood loss and case histories. Diagnoses are called out: shrapnel in the brain, a burned respiratory tract, shrapnel in the legs, a bullet in the arm; and, again, shrapnel in the brain.

Shrapnel accounts for the majority of injuries treated at Mechnikov, doctors said. Bullet wounds, less so. Wounded soldiers are typically cared for in hospitals closer to the front line and then, once stabilized, they are brought to Mechnikov, a journey that can sometimes take half a day.

Dr. Simon Sechen brings in a soldier with a wide gash in his shin. A tourniquet was applied for roughly half a day, he explained, because the soldier was trapped in a faraway trench, and it took hours to evacuate him. Sechen had tried to encourage blood flow, but it may be too late. "We did all we could to fight for his leg," he says.

The soldier is taken to the operating room, where Dr. Yakov Albayuk takes one look and determines that the leg must be amputated to save the soldier's life. "After 12 hours without blood circulation, the limb will die," Albayuk said, explaining that a tourniquet must be taken off after two hours and, if necessary, reapplied. "Because of tiny mistakes we're losing people's limbs."

For Albayuk, every wound inspected on the operating table is a raw and unvarnished account of the brutality of the fight Ukrainian soldiers face in combat: constant bombardment, hidden mines, and cunning snipers.

In this soldier's case, his wounds tell a story of bravery; he was advancing toward fire, not running away.

The amputation takes 20 minutes. Albayuk uses a surgical saw to cut through the bone. A nurse wraps up the severed limb, and it is taken away.

Nearby, a soldier lying on a stretcher in the hallway calls out for his girlfriend, Anna. He has been brought to Mechnikov so that doctors can treat complications from a leg that was amputated a few days ago at a hospital closer to the front line.

Anna rushes to his side and tells him to be strong. When he's gone, she collapses into tears.

Later, a soldier named Maksym, who was injured while fighting in the Donetsk region, awakens in the intensive care unit to the sight of his wife, and then a relieved kiss from her. She traveled with his sister when they learned Maksym had been admitted for surgery.

"I am so happy I got to see them one more time," Maksym said.

Like Ukraine itself, the Mechnikov Hospital — which is more than 200 years old — has been transformed by war over the past decade.

The hospital did not begin treating wounded soldiers until Russia's invasion in 2014, when it was not pre-

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 75 of 76

pared for the task, said Ryzhenko. Soldiers would be admitted with guts spilling out and massive amounts of blood loss. Back then, Ryzhenko saw cases he had only read about in textbooks. Today, Mechnikov is lauded for its state-of-the-art facilities and expertise — roughly 400 doctors spread across six buildings.

On Dr. Mykyta Lombrozov's operating table is a soldier who sustained a shrapnel injury on the left part of the brain. The 28-year-old neurosurgeon's elegant hands work methodically. Crushed skull pieces are removed, one by one, until he can extract the small metal fragments lodged in the soldier's brain.

It's a complicated surgery that would normally take up to four hours. The war has taught Lombrozov to finish it in 55 minutes. He does it every day, he says, sometimes up to eight times in a single 24-hour shift.

"It is very important to me, that's why I am here. That's why we all work here," Lombrozov said as he looked down at the soldier. "He is our hero."

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

## Today in History: July 27, Atlanta Olympic Park bombing

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, July 27, the 208th day of 2023. There are 157 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On July 27, 1953, the Korean War armistice was signed at Panmunjom, ending three years of fighting.

On this date:

In 1789, President George Washington signed a measure establishing the Department of Foreign Affairs, forerunner of the Department of State.

In 1866, Cyrus W. Field finished laying out the first successful underwater telegraph cable between North America and Europe.

In 1909, during the first official test of the U.S. Army's first airplane, Orville Wright flew himself and a passenger, Lt. Frank Lahm, above Fort Myer, Virginia, for one hour and 12 minutes.

In 1940, Billboard magazine published its first "music popularity chart" listing best-selling retail records. In first place was "I'll Never Smile Again" recorded by Tommy Dorsey and His Orchestra, with featured vocalist Frank Sinatra.

In 1960, Vice President Richard M. Nixon was nominated for president on the first ballot at the Republican National Convention in Chicago.

In 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed the Kerner Commission to assess the causes of urban rioting, the same day Black militant H. Rap Brown told a press conference in Washington that violence was "as American as cherry pie."

In 1974, the House Judiciary Committee voted 27-11 to adopt the first of three articles of impeachment against President Richard Nixon, charging he had personally engaged in a course of conduct designed to obstruct justice in the Watergate case.

In 1980, on day 267 of the Iranian hostage crisis, the deposed Shah of Iran died at a military hospital outside Cairo, Egypt, at age 60.

In 1981, 6-year-old Adam Walsh was abducted from a department store in Hollywood, Fla., and was later murdered.

In 1996, terror struck the Atlanta Olympics as a pipe bomb exploded at Centennial Olympic Park, directly killing one person and injuring 111. (Anti-government extremist Eric Rudolph later pleaded guilty to the bombing, exonerating security guard Richard Jewell, who had been wrongly suspected.)

In 2015, the Boy Scouts of America ended its blanket ban on gay adult leaders while allowing church-sponsored Scout units to maintain the exclusion for religious reasons.

In 2020, the world's biggest COVID-19 vaccine study began with the first of 30,000 planned volunteers helping to test shots created by the National Institutes of Health and Moderna Inc.

Ten years ago: Security forces and armed men clashed with supporters of Egypt's ousted president,

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 033 ~ 76 of 76

Mohammed Morsi, killing at least 80 people. More than a thousand inmates escaped a prison in Libya as protesters stormed political party offices across the country. Former Louisiana congresswoman Lindy Boggs died in Chevy Chase, Maryland at age 97.

Five years ago: The White House announced that North Korea had returned the remains of what were believed to be U.S. servicemen killed during the Korean War, with a U.S. military plane making a rare trip into North Korea to retrieve 55 cases of remains. The Commerce Department reported that the U.S. economy surged in the second quarter at an annual growth rate of 4.1 percent, the fastest pace since 2014. Official results showed that former cricket star Imran Khan won in Pakistan's elections, but that he would have to seek out allies to form a coalition government. A federal judge ruled that the Justice Department doesn't have the authority to withhold grants to the city of Chicago because of its policies providing sanctuary to immigrants.

One year ago: The Federal Reserve raised its benchmark interest rate by a hefty three-quarters of a point for a second straight time in its most aggressive drive in three decades to tame high inflation. The last two former Minneapolis police officers who were convicted of violating George Floyd's civil rights were sentenced in federal court. J. Alexander Kueng was sentenced Wednesday to three years and Tou Thao got a 3 1/2-year sentence. Tony Dow, who as Wally Cleaver on the sitcom "Leave It to Beaver" helped create the popular and lasting image of the American teenager of the 1950s and 60s, died at age 77.

Today's Birthdays: TV producer Norman Lear is 101. Actor John Pleshette is 81. Actor-director Betty Thomas is 76. Olympic gold medal figure skater Peggy Fleming is 75. Singer Maureen McGovern is 74. Rock musician Tris Imboden (formerly with Chicago) is 72. Actor Roxanne Hart is 69. Comedian-actor-writer Carol Leifer is 67. Comedian Bill Engvall is 66. Jazz singer Karrin Allyson is 61. Country singer Stacy Dean Campbell is 56. Rock singer Juliana Hatfield is 56. Actor Julian McMahon is 55. Actor Nikolaj Coster-Waldau (NIH'-koh-lye KAH'-stur WAHL'-dah) is 53. Comedian Maya Rudolph is 51. Rock musician Abe Cunningham is 50. Singer-songwriter Pete Yorn is 49. Former MLB All-Star Alex Rodriguez is 48. Actor Seamus Dever is 47. Actor Martha Madison is 46. Actor Jonathan Rhys (rees) Meyers is 46. Actor/comedian Heidi Gardner is 40. Actor Blair Redford is 40. Actor Taylor Schilling is 39. MLB All-Star pitcher Max Scherzer is 39. Singer Cheyenne Kimball is 33. Golfer Jordan Spieth is 30. Actor Alyvia Alyn Lind is 16.