

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 1 of 74

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- Boys Basketball Region 1 A Pairings](#)
- [3- Charles Mix County Fatal Crash](#)
- [4- NSU Women's Basketball](#)
- [5- NSU Men's Basketball](#)
- [6- Sunday Extras](#)
- [24- Gov. Noem's Weekly Column](#)
- [25- Sen. Thune's Weekly Column](#)
- [26- Rep. Johnson's Weekly Column](#)
- [27- Rev. Snyder's Column](#)
- [29- EarthTalk - Floodwaters](#)
- [30- SD Search Light: On its second try, civics exceptionalism bill goes stealth](#)
- [31- SD SearchLight: In CPAC speech, Trump predicts 'losing World War III' if he is not elected](#)
- [33- Weather Pages](#)
- [37- Daily Devotional](#)
- [38- Subscription Form](#)
- [39- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [40- News from the Associated Press](#)



Sunday, Feb. 25

Open Gym:
Grades JK-8 2:00-3:30 [Students accompanied by adults] Grades 6-12 3:30-5:00
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.
First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.; Choir, 6 p.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's at 9 a.m. and Zion at 11 a.m.; Sunday School at 9:45 a.m.
United Methodist: Worship at Conde, 8:30 a.m.; and at Groton, 10:30 a.m.; Coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:30 a.m.

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

Monday, Feb. 26

Senior Menu: Chicken tetrazzini, carrots, pineapple tidbits, bread stick.
School Breakfast: Pancake on stick.
School Lunch: Pork chops, peas.
Senior Citizens Meet at the Groton Community Center with potluck at noon.
Planning and Zoning Board Meeting, 6 p.m.
Pantry Open 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

Tuesday, February. 27

Senior Menu: Hamburger cabbage roll hot dish, corn, pears, muffin.
School Breakfast: Scones.
School Lunch: Chicken legs, mashed potatoes.
Boys Region 1A
Thrift Store open 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.
Food Pantry open 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.
United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

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

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 2 of 74

Class A - Region 1

Boys Basketball Region 1 A Pairings

#1 - Groton Area High School

	1 Groton Area	16-4	2/27 6:00 PM CT
	8 Redfield	1-19	

#2 - Groton Area High School

	4 Waubay/Summit	14-6	2/27 7:30 PM CT
	5 Aberdeen Ronc...	13-7	

#3 - Milbank Armory Gym

	2 Milbank	15-5	2/27 6:00 PM CT
	7 Sisseton	3-17	

#4 - Milbank Armory Gym

	3 Tiospa Zina	13-7	2/27 7:30 PM CT
	6 Webster Area	8-12	

#5 -

#1 WINNER	3/1 TBD
#2 WINNER	

SODAK 16 QUALIFIER



#6 -

#3 WINNER	3/1 TBD
#4 WINNER	

SODAK 16 QUALIFIER

Seed Points Averages (calculated Feb. 23)

#1 Groton Area 44.050 - #2 Milbank 42.900 - #3 Tiospa Zina 42.250 - #4 Waubay/Summit 42.050 - #5 Aberdeen Roncalli 41.950 - #6 Webster Area 39.500 - #7 Sisseton 36.750 - #8 Redfield 34.450

Charles Mix County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash
Where: 37582 285th St., 2 miles east of Geddes, SD
When: 2:23 a.m., Saturday, February 24, 2024

Driver 1: Male, 57, fatal injuries
Vehicle 1: 2014 Chevrolet Equinox
Seatbelt Use: No

Charles Mix County, S.D.- A 57-year-old man died early this morning in a single vehicle crash in Charles Mix County.

The name of the person involved has not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 2014 Chevrolet Equinox was traveling west on 285th Street, about two miles east of Geddes, SD, when the vehicle entered the north ditch where it hit an approach and went airborne then rolled several times. The driver died as a result of his injuries. He was not wearing a seatbelt.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol is investigating the crash. All information released so far is only preliminary.

The Highway Patrol is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 4 of 74

NSU Women's Basketball

Wolves Drop to Wildcats to End the Regular Season

Wayne, Neb. – The Northern State University women's basketball team fell against Wayne State, 67-65 in midday action. Through 40 minutes of play, the contest saw five score ties and two lead changes. The Wolves dropped to the Wildcats in the final seconds of the game.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 65, WSC 67

Records: NSU 20-8 (16-6 NSIC), WSC 7-18 (4-18 NSIC)

Attendance: N/A

HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern State notched 17 points in the first quarter, 14 in the second, 17 in the third, and 17 in the fourth. They tallied 30 points in the paint, 29 rebounds, 17 points off of turnovers, 15 assists, 13 bench points, and eight second chance points.

The Wolves shot well in the contest, shooting 44.8 % from the floor, 44.4 % from the 3-point arc and 71.4 % from the free throw line.

Alayna Benike led the team with 16 points while shooting 45.5 % from the floor and 57.1 % from beyond the 3-point arc.

Rianna Fillipi was second on the team with 15 points along with a team lead of eight assists and six rebounds.

Morgan Fiedler and Deontee Smith both hit double figures with 11 points each.

In addition, Smith connected on 83.3 % of shots from the floor while also leading the team off the bench.

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Alayna Benike: 16 points, 2 assists 57.1 3-point %

Rianna Fillipi: 15 points, 8 assists, 6 rebounds, 3 steals

Morgan Fiedler: 11 points, 1 assist, 50.0 3-point %

Deontee Smith: 11 points, 3 rebounds, 3 assists, 83.8 FG %

UP NEXT

Northern State clinched the number three seed in the NSIC Tournament. The NSIC Tournament is set to begin March 2nd from the Sanford Pentagon in Sioux Falls. The Wolves received the first round bye and will wait to find out their opponents after the first round of the tournament next week.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 5 of 74

NSU Men's Basketball

Northern State Falls to Wayne State in NSIC Finale

Wayne, Neb. – The Northern State University men's basketball team closed out the regular season on Saturday, falling on the road at Wayne State. The Wolves were unable to find a groove offensively, while the Wildcats saw 34 points come off the bench.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 60, WSC 75

Records: NSU 10-18 (8-14 NSIC), WSC 16-13 (9-13NSIC)

Attendance: 501

HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern trailed for a majority of the contest, scoring 27 points in the first and 33 in the second to Wayne's 39 and 36

NSU shot 35.2% from the floor, 24.0% from the 3-point line, and 88.9% from the foul line

They scored 22 points in the paint, 14 points off the bench, 12 points off turnovers, and 11 second chance points

The Wildcats out-rebounded the Wolves 37-24 and Northern added 12 assists, six made 3-pointers, five steals, and one block

Jackson Moni and Michael Nhal led the team with 19 and 11 points respectively

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL LEADERS

Jackson Moni: 19 points, 7 rebounds, 2 assists

Michael Nhal: 11 points, 8 rebounds

Andrew Bergan: 9 points, 2 rebounds

UP NEXT

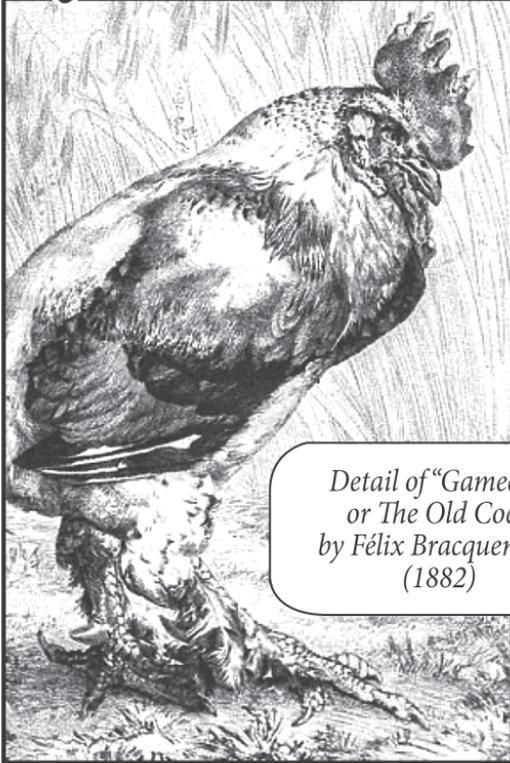
The Wolves earned the 11th seed in the NSIC Men's Basketball Tournament and will face Winona State on Wednesday, February 28 at 6 p.m. on the road. Full fan information will be released on nsuwolves.com later this evening.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 6 of 74



THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE

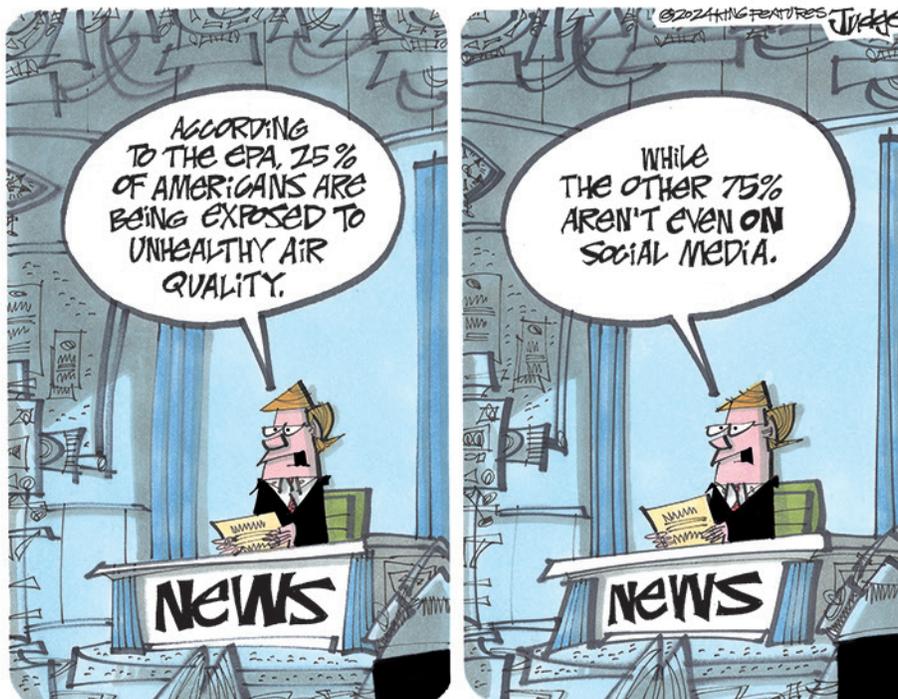


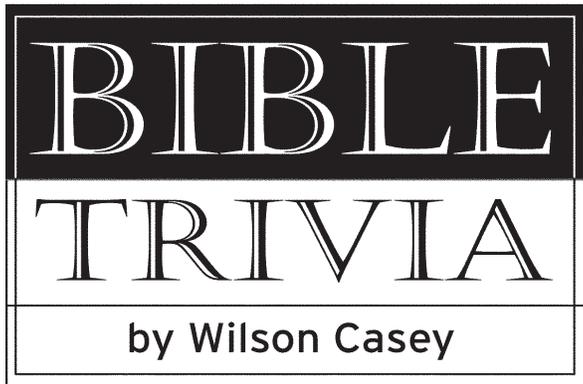
Detail of "Gamecock
or The Old Cock"
by Félix Bracquemond
(1882)

...Those who stood by came up and said to Peter, "Surely you also are one of them, for your speech betrays you." Then he began to curse and swear, saying, "I do not know the Man!" Immediately a rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." So he went out and wept bitterly.

MATTHEW 26: 73-75

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1. Is the book of Simon (KJV) in the Old or New Testament or neither?

2. How many chosen men of Israel did Saul take with him to the wilderness of Ziph to search for David? *12, 100, 200, 3000*

3. From 1 Samuel 3, whose voice did Samuel think it was when he first heard God calling him? *Jonathan, Saul, Ahiah, Eli*

4. The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any ...? *Tongue, Knife, Two-edged sword, Wit*

5. From Genesis 26, where did Isaac stay when there was a famine in the land? *Gerar, Endor, Sychar, Lydda*

6. What insect was a plague on the Egyptians? *Wasp, Locust, Flea, Cockroach*

ANSWERS: 1) Neither, 2) 3000, 3) Eli, 4) Two-edged sword, 5) Gerar, 6) Locust

Hardcore trivia fan? Visit Wilson Casey's subscribersite at www.patreon.com/triviaguy.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 8 of 74



FLASH GORDON

YEARS AGO, I REALIZED THE EARTH WAS DOOMED -- AND BELIEVED I ALONE COULD AVERT IT.

IN MY MANIA, I DRAGGED TWO YOUNG PEOPLE INTO MY SUICIDE MISSION TO ANOTHER PLANET.

BUT DALE AND FLASH -- THEIR BRAVERY HAS SAVED OUR WORLD, NOW GALAXIES AWAY.

AND UNTIL MY FINAL SYNAPSE DARKENS AND DIES, I WILL DO ALL I CAN TO PROTECT THEM.

I AM DR. HANS ZARKOV, SHE'S DALE ARDEN, AND OUR FRIEND FLASH ROTS IN PRISON FOR A MURDER HE DIDN'T COMMIT-- UNLESS WE CAN PROVE HIS INNOCENCE.

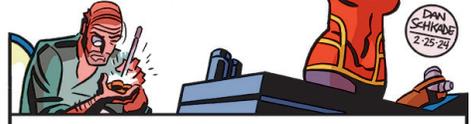


WE BELIEVE AZURA, WITCH-QUEEN OF THE CAVERNS OF KIRA, IS SOMEHOW RESPONSIBLE.



THE PALACE DRONE FOOTAGE LEADING UP TO THE CRIME GIVES US NOTHING WE CAN USE...

...SO, WITH MY LEG STILL BROKEN, IT FALLS TO DALE TO INFILTRATE THE KIRAN AMBASSADORIAL SUITE IN SEARCH OF EVIDENCE.



SHE DONS FLASH'S SHIELD SHIRT AS I MODIFY THE DRONE TO LET ME SEE WHAT SHE SEES.

INSIDE THE SUITE, SHE FINDS GENERAL KAHL TORTURING SOMEONE ON AN AGONY WHEEL...



...WHILE IN KAHL'S QUARTERS, SHE SPIES A MYSTERIOUS MACHINE.



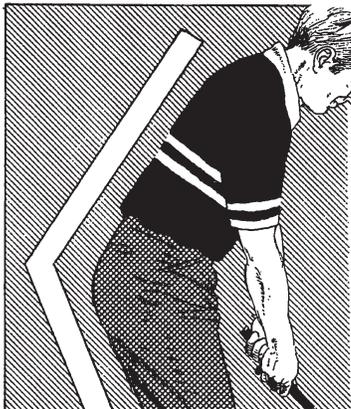
SHE LINGERS SO I CAN TRY TO IDENTIFY IT...

...WHEN SUDDENLY, THE WITCH-QUEEN STRIKES.



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Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS



TO ESTABLISH THE CORRECT POSTURE AT ADDRESS, BEND FROM THE HIPS WITH YOUR BACK STRAIGHT SO THAT YOUR ARMS HANG STRAIGHT DOWN AS YOU LIGHTLY GROUND THE CLUB BEHIND THE BALL.

JM



FLEX YOUR KNEES SLIGHTLY, AND SET YOUR LEFT ARM AND THE CLUB SHAFT IN A STRAIGHT LINE FROM YOUR LEFT SHOULDER TO THE BALL.

AVOID TENSION ABOVE THE WAIST, AND FEEL "SPRINGY" BELOW IT.

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High Troponin Levels Follow After Bout of Food Poisoning

DEAR DR. ROACH: I am a 77-year-old male who apparently suffered a case of food poisoning. I say apparently because no cause was ever discovered for the uncontrollable vomiting and diarrhea that lasted for a whole day and recurred briefly the following morning.

A trip to the emergency room involved many tests, but nothing turned up except a troponin level well over 0.04 ng/mL, which prompted an angiogram that didn't reveal any problems with my heart. What else might have caused my high troponin level? — Anon.

ANSWER: A troponin level is a standard blood test usually used to evaluate patients for heart attacks. However, newer, highly sensitive assays have proven that tiny levels of troponin may be detected in nearly everybody.

A level above 0.04 ng/mL is often used as the cutoff for the "normal" range, but depending on the assay and population studied, a few healthy people may have levels above this. People with heart attacks may have troponin levels in the hundreds or thousands. The higher the troponin level, the more muscle damage there is.

The fact that your coronary arteries don't show any blockages is very good news. Other types of heart damage may also cause a high troponin level, including inflammation of the heart (myocarditis) and heart failure. Also, critical illnesses can cause high troponin levels (at much higher levels than you may

have had) in people who don't have heart blockages. (A median of 0.57 ng/mL was found in people with septic shock.)

I found a long list of reported causes behind elevated troponin levels, but gastroenteritis was not on the list. I suspect your body was working so hard to fight off the infection without enough fluid that your heart needed more oxygen-carrying blood than it got, leading to tiny amounts of injury to the heart muscle despite normal heart arteries. You can lose a lot of fluid with vomiting and diarrhea, and people at age 77 don't have as much reserve as they did when they were younger.

DEAR DR. ROACH: I'm a 56-year-old male who never had the chicken pox. When the first of my children was born, I had blood tests done to see if I'd ever been exposed. I had not, so I received the chicken pox vaccine in case my children were to expose me.

Twenty-five years later, many friends and colleagues have either received the shingles vaccine or have had a shingles outbreak. My question to you is: Since I've never had chicken pox, do I still need the shingles vaccine? — D.S.S.

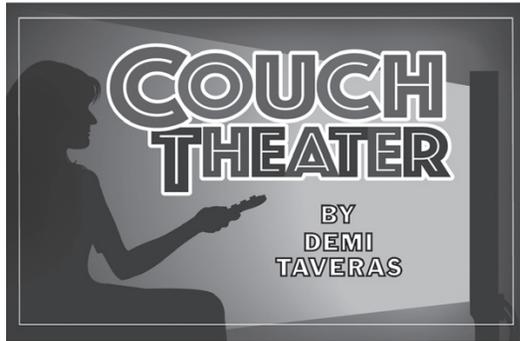
ANSWER: Yes, the shingles vaccine is still recommended. Shingles is a recurrence of the chicken pox virus. The vaccine you got was a live but weakened form of chicken pox. It has a lower risk of causing shingles than getting the actual chicken pox, but there is still a risk.

Shingles is so bad that the vaccine is absolutely worth it, in my opinion. Even people who have had the old one-shot vaccine (Zostrix), as well as those who don't recall having had chicken pox, should get the new two-dose vaccine (Shingrix), which is not a live virus. It's better to just get the vaccine than doing blood testing in people who don't recall getting chicken pox as a child.

Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email questions to ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 10 of 74



Emma Stone stars in "Poor Things."

Courtesy

of MovieStillsDB

"Poor Things" (R) -- The second most-nominated film (11 nominations) for this year's Academy Awards is finally available to rent on Feb. 27! Emma Stone (who has already secured a Golden Globe win for Best Actress this year) transforms into Bella Baxter for her second feature film with director Yorgos Lanthimos ("The Favourite"). Bella

is a young woman in Victorian London who gets resurrected by a mad scientist (Willem Dafoe) following her suicide. But even after the experiment successfully revives her, Bella's brain and body aren't synchronized, so she navigates the odd world around her in an almost childlike state as she begins an entirely new, empowering chapter in her life. Mark Ruffalo, also nominated for Best Supporting Actor, co-stars as Duncan Wedderburn, along with appearances from Ramy Youssef, Jerrod Carmichael and Margaret Qualley. (Amazon Prime Video)

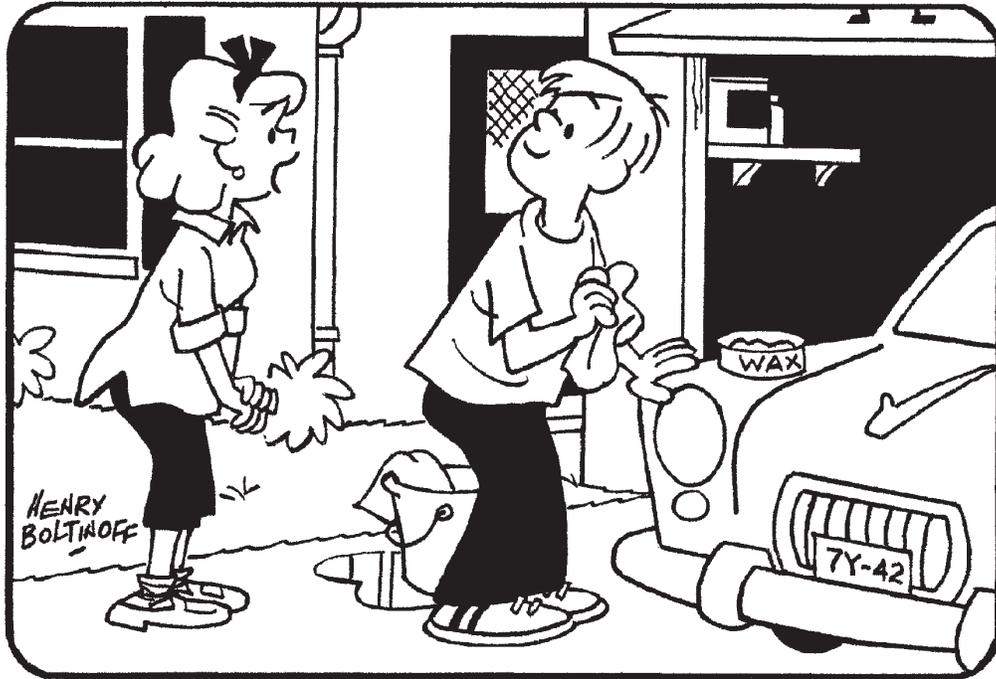
"The Color Purple" (PG-13) -- Almost 40 years after Steven Spielberg and Quincy Jones collaborated to bring Alice Walker's 1982 novel to life, a new musical adaptation of "The Color Purple" hailing from the producers (and Oprah Winfrey) hit the big screen once again and is available now for viewers to stream on their small screens. The 2023 version features quite a talented cast to tell Celie's profound and heart-breaking story, including Fantasia Barrino, Taraji P. Henson, Danielle Brooks, Colman Domingo, Halle Bailey and many more. "American Idol" winner Barrino takes on the role of Celie in her feature film debut, while Henson portrays jazz singer Shug. Even though some controversy ensued about the film's subpar working conditions, which were rightfully pointed out by Henson, she also stated that she hopes the focus remains on "this beautiful film." (Max)

"Beautiful Wedding" (R) -- The sequel to the rom-com "Beautiful Disaster" has arrived, although it's a bit unclear who really wanted it since the first film received terrible reviews. Alas, director Roger Kumble persisted to continue bringing Jamie Mcguire's "Beautiful" book series to life. Dylan Sprouse and Virginia Gardner reprise their roles as Travis Maddox and Abby Abernathy, respectively, picking up right where the first film left off. Travis and Abby wake up after a crazy night in Vegas to find out that they are now newlyweds, even though they've only just begun dating. At first, they try to accept the situation, even jetting off to Mexico for their honeymoon with some friends. But as their honeymoon drags on and the two face their first challenges as a couple, Travis and Abby start contemplating an annulment. Will these two make it in the end? See for yourself! The film's out now to rent. (Apple TV+)

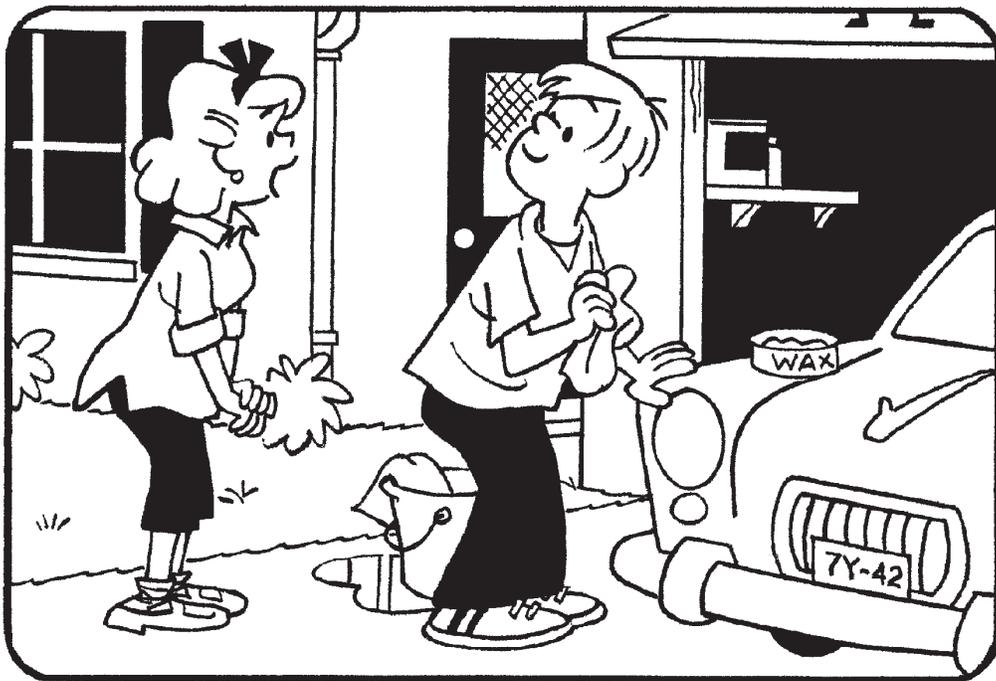
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HOCUS-FOCUS

BY
HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



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Differences: 1. Bumper is different. 2. Shelf is lower. 3. Window is different. 4. Wax is moved. 5. Neckline is different. 6. Doorknob is added.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 13 of 74



by
Jo Ann
Derson

* Soak your metal tools in Coca-Cola when they get gummed up. It does a great job of loosening the gunk, and after a few hours in a Coke bath, you can almost just brush stuff right off. Makes you wonder about drinking it, but whatever works!

* If you get the Sunday newspaper, you likely get coupons. Perhaps there are others who would enjoy any coupons you don't use rather than your recycling them. Ask your neighbors and friends.

* To make a cottage cheese dip, blend it in your food processor until smooth and add your dip flavoring packet or season with flavors as you would sour cream.

* "You can use a thermos to keep soup warm as a lunch option. Just get a clean funnel for use in the kitchen. You

can use it to add soup to the thermos. It makes a good alternative to mix up your lunch options, especially in cold weather. Before you fill the thermos with your hot food, fill it with boiling water and let it sit for a good five minutes. Then empty out the water just before filling. The food will stay hot longer." -- E.D. in Wisconsin

* If you have a smartphone (or just a cellphone that takes pictures), here's a novel way of keeping track of printed information: Snap a quick pic. This works for store hours (get the store name in the picture with the hours), receipts, sales advertisements for reference when shopping and much much more. You can delete the photo when you are done.

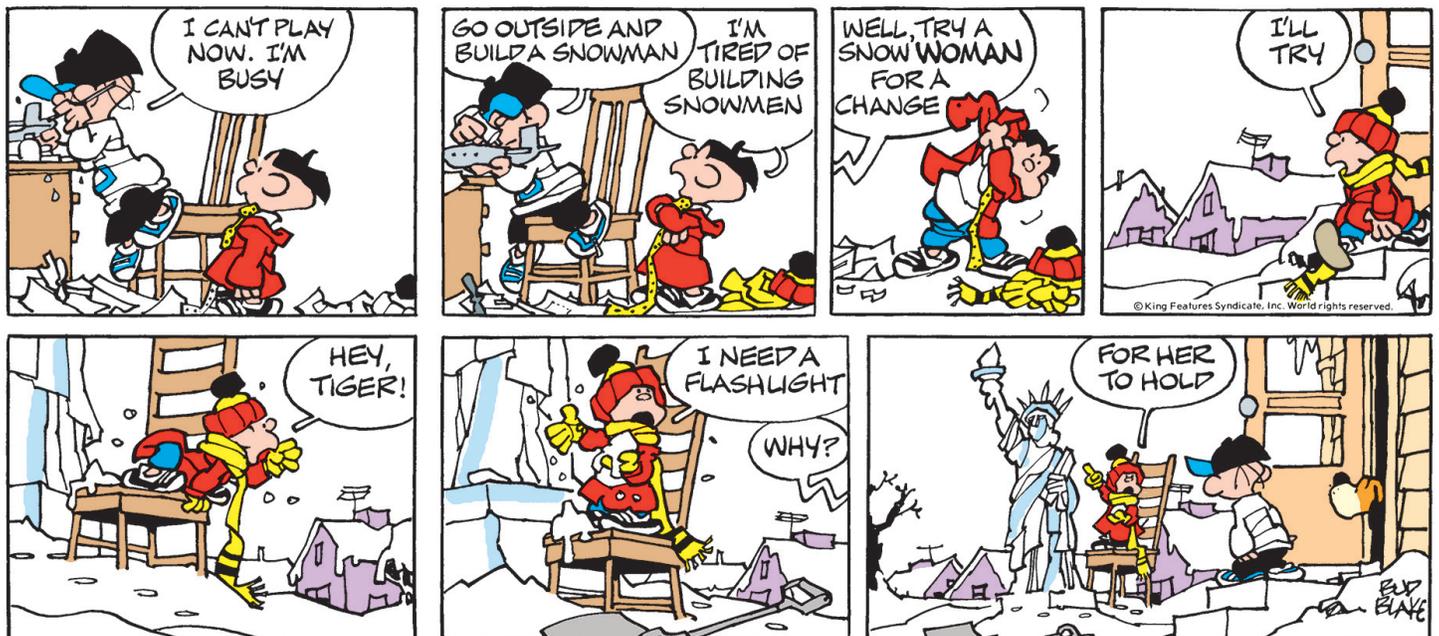
* If you have a tablecloth that is stained, you might be able to salvage it into napkins or a table runner. You can edge it with a pretty and complementary fabric to spice things up a little.

Send your tips to Now Here's a Tip, 628 Virginia Drive, Orlando, FL 32803.

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TIGER

by BUD BLAKE



Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 14 of 74

King Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Not so hot?
- 5 Dog tags, e.g.
- 8 Quick look
- 12 Antioxidant berry
- 13 French vineyard
- 14 Impetuous
- 15 Dungeon's quality
- 17 Actress Rae
- 18 Small batteries
- 19 Detroit hooper
- 21 Like a neglected lawn
- 24 Coop group
- 25 Within (Pref.)
- 26 Foppish behavior

1	2	3	4		5	6	7		8	9	10	11
12					13				14			
15				16					17			
			18				19	20				
21	22	23				24						
25					26					27	28	29
30				31					32			
33			34						35			
			36					37				
38	39	40					41					
42					43	44				45	46	47
48					49				50			
51					52				53			

- 30 Caustic cleaner
- 31 Loud
- 32 Dean's list stat
- 33 Writer Steel
- 35 Three- — sloth
- 36 Barn birds
- 37 Travesty
- 38 "Jane Eyre" author
- 41 Tofu source
- 42 Chicago's Mayor Lightfoot
- 43 Hanging loosely
- 48 Location

- 49 Swiss canton
 - 50 Roasting spot
 - 51 Church song
 - 52 Domino spot
 - 53 Harvest
- DOWN**
- 1 Bankroll
 - 2 Obamacare acronym
 - 3 Scooted
 - 4 Japanese emperor
 - 5 Frosts a cake
 - 6 Hosp. workers
 - 7 Hitchcock forte
 - 8 Overly proper
 - 9 Bridge position
 - 10 Canadian gas brand
 - 11 "Star Trek II" villain
 - 16 Aye undoer
 - 20 "500" race
 - 21 Use a blowtorch
 - 22 New Age singer
 - 23 Genesis garden
 - 24 Salutes
 - 26 Prettified
 - 27 Composer Stravinsky
 - 28 Detail, briefly
 - 29 Created
 - 31 Salamander
 - 34 Sea off Sicily

- 35 "Fearless" singer Swift
- 37 Boating hazard
- 38 Humdrum
- 39 "Gilmore Girls" daughter
- 40 Utah city
- 41 Use scissors
- 44 "Exodus" hero
- 45 "— had it!"
- 46 Museum-funding org.
- 47 Econ. measure

— King Crossword —

Answers

Solution time: 23 mins.

W	A	R	M		I	D	S		P	E	E	K
A	C	A	I		C	R	U		R	A	S	H
D	A	N	K	N	E	S	S		I	S	S	A
			A	A	S		P	I	S	T	O	N
W	E	E	D	Y		H	E	N	S			
E	N	D	O		D	A	N	D	Y	I	S	M
L	Y	E		N	O	I	S	Y		G	P	A
D	A	N	I	E	L	L	E		T	O	E	D
			O	W	L	S		F	A	R	C	E
B	R	O	N	T	E		S	O	Y			
L	O	R	I		D	A	N	G	L	I	N	G
A	R	E	A		U	R	I		O	V	E	N
H	Y	M	N		P	I	P		R	E	A	P

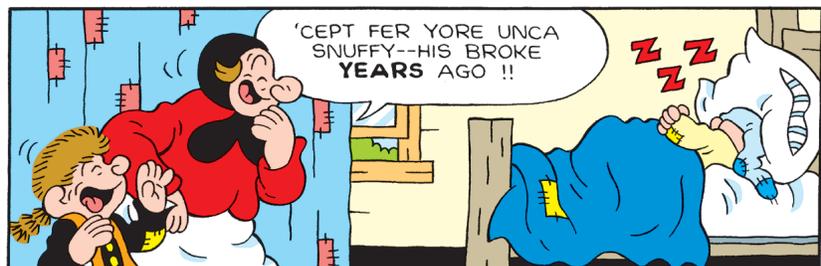
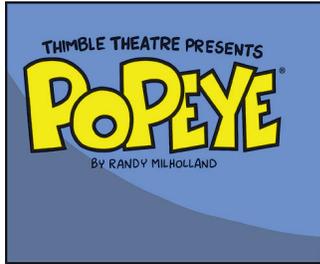
Out on a Limb

by Gary Kopervas



Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 16 of 74



Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 17 of 74



ROGER IS NOT PLEASED THAT HIS ULTIMATE COMPETITOR FOR THE GRAND PRIZE SHOULD BE VAL AND GAWAIN'S CHAMPION. THIS MUST BE MORE THAN COINCIDENCE, AND HE IS A BIT WORRIED.



"I AM NOT SURE THAT AN UNKNOWN DESERVES TO FACE ME," HE SNIPES. AT THOSE WORDS, THE MASSES PEASANTRY ERUPTS IN DERISIVE CATCALLS, AND ROGER SUDDENLY FEELS A LITTLE BIT OF CONTROL SLIPPING AWAY.

IN FRONT OF THE AROUSED CROWD, LITTLE OX DOES HIS PART TO WHIP UP A FRENZY. THE DOWNTRODDEN PEASANTS DO NOT NEED MUCH ENCOURAGEMENT...



The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



SENIOR NEWS LINE

by Matilda Charles

Play the Piano for Brain Health

I've been reading in too many places about taking steps to hold off memory and cognitive impairment, so I've paid attention to some of the ideas we can use to keep our brains active.

One idea that's been very enticing is playing the piano and using that as a protective factor against dementia and impairment.

When I began my hunt for a piano, I quickly realized that space would be a major consideration, never mind the expense of a real piano. However, there are smaller electronic pianos, and I bought one: a Yamaha Piaggero NP-12. I've placed it on a board between two two-drawer file cabinets to avoid the additional cost of the metal stand and seat. It only has 61 keys, rather than the standard 88, but it's enough and fits into the space I have and only weighs 11 lbs.

It's a great little piano even for those who've played before (it's touch sensitive, for those who know about these things). It has buttons to select between the sound of piano, electronic piano, organ, strings and harpsichord, with a built-in metronome and volume dial.

If you're interested in such a piano, hunt around the internet or call music stores in your area. Be sure to order the wall plug adapter as well, so you don't have to worry about batteries.

If you don't already play, consult YouTube online for beginner lessons for seniors on video. Ask at a music store, rec center or college music department about signing up for beginner lessons to get you started. If you don't have sheet music, look on the internet for free music you can print out (try pianosongdownload.com), or check garage sales or even the library.

Even if the first songs you learn are along the lines of "Mary Had A Little Lamb," it's a step in the right direction for brain health.

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Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 19 of 74

1. On a 1963 episode of the TV sitcom "Mister Ed," Ed (the horse) hit an inside-the-park home run off of what Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher?

2. Basketball Hall of Famer James Worthy spent his entire playing career from 1982-94 with what NBA team?

3. NASCAR drivers Dick Trickle, Dave Marcis, Alan Kulwicki, Matt Kenseth, Paul Menard and Danica Patrick were all born in what U.S. state?

4. What sports and fitness society was created in the Soviet Union in 1923?

5. Name the two defensive linemen for the Dallas Cowboys who were named co-MVPs of Super Bowl XII.

6. What publication, promoted as "The IN YOUR FACE Basketball Magazine," launched in 1994?

7. Before the 1994 season, the Los Angeles Dodgers traded what future Hall of Fame pitcher to the Montreal Expos for second baseman Delino DeShields?



by Ryan A. Berenz

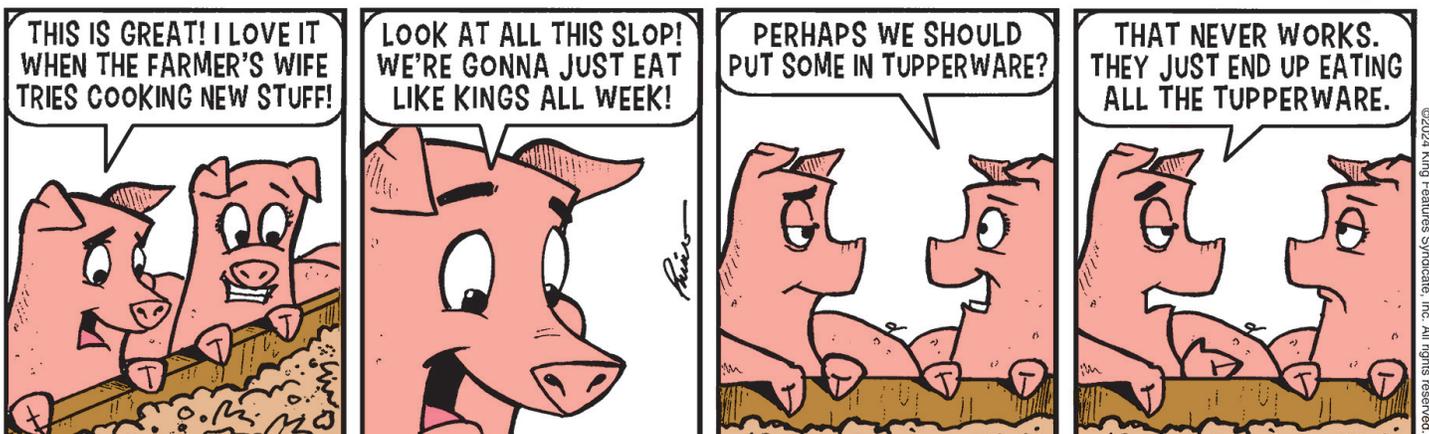
Answers

1. Sandy Koufax.
2. The Los Angeles Lakers.
3. Wisconsin.
4. Dynamo.
5. Harvey Martin and Randy White.
6. SLAM.
7. Pedro Martinez.

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Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps





Cat Walking -- Beneficial or Not?

DEAR PAW'S CORNER: I have a neighbor who puts both of her cats on leashes and walks them through the neighborhood each day. Shouldn't they be outside on their own, prowling and doing cat stuff? Sign me -- Concerned Cat Mom in Providence, Rhode Island

DEAR CONCERNED: As long as the cats aren't distressed by the leash, I don't see a problem.

Some cats are completely uninterested in exploring the world outside, and some are downright fearful of it. And that's totally fine.

Others, however, want to be outside every chance they get.

Letting cats wander outside puts them at risk of being struck by a car, attacked by wildlife or feral cats, or contracting an illness. Cats can be a menace to other creatures, so much so that there's evidence they are impacting the bird population. Songbirds are already under threat from climate change and bird flu (which spreads just as easily among wild birds as it does on chicken farms), so adding another predator to the list is not a good thing.

Putting a cat on a leash (and in a harness, rather than a collar) is a great way to help them explore while keeping them safe. It's also helpful when taking your cat on long car trips -- they can stretch their legs safely at rest stops.

For those who'd like to try walking their cat, buy a harness that fits your cat. Cats won't like the harness at first; put it on and just let them get used to it while you hold the leash loosely. Make it a positive experience with lots of treats. Once they start exploring comfortably with the harness on, walk around with them, guiding them. Don't tug on the leash or drag them. Pick them up if they won't move, but always keep it positive.

Send your tips, comments or questions to ask@pawscorner.com.

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Strange BUT TRUE

By Lucie Winborne

* A double rainbow occurs when sunlight is reflected twice inside a raindrop. Look closely, and you'll see that the colors of the secondary rainbow appear in reverse order.

* In an 897 A.D. event known as the Cadaver Synod, Pope Stephen VI had the corpse of a previous pontiff, Formosus, exhumed, perched on a throne and questioned about his "crimes," which were mostly about being on the wrong side of a political struggle.

* Blood makes up about 8% of your total body weight.

* Floccinaucinihilipilification -- one of the longest words in the English language -- is the act of estimating that something is worthless.

* According to a Japanese study, looking at cute animal pictures can boost your focus.

* We hate to break it to you, but Wendy's chocolate Frosty is actually half chocolate and half vanilla, because owner Dave Thomas thought an all-chocolate treat would be too overpowering when paired with the chain's burgers and fries.

* At the Gettysburg reunion in 1913, two men purchased a hatchet, walked to the site where their regiments had fought, and buried it.

* An Oscar trophy has a raw value of about \$600.

* In a move that many may appreciate, if not take the trouble to emulate, a British man changed his name to Tim Pppppppppprice to make it harder for telemarketers to pronounce.

* A 1907 ad campaign for Kellogg's Corn Flakes offered a free sample of cereal to any customer who would wink at their grocer.

* The cubicle derives its name not from its shape, but from the Latin "cubiculum," meaning bedchamber.

* It once took 27 hours to create a single Peeps Marshmallow Chick. Today, it takes six minutes.

Thought for the Day: "Very often, a change of self is needed more than a change of scene." -- A.C. Benson

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The Garden Bug

Late winter garden tasks



Preparing for spring gardening can include taking a soil sample to your county extension office (or purchasing an at-home testing kit) to learn what nutrients may need to be purchased and integrated into your soil before planting.

Treading across the earth while it is still wet can lead to soil compaction; this impedes root growth and affects water drainage during the growing season. Plan walkways throughout your planting areas using stones, mulch or gravel.

If soil "heaving" has exposed your in-ground perennials and bulbs and temps are still very cold, protective mulch should stay in place over them and may need to be supplemented. - Brenda Weaver

Source: [thespruce.com](https://www.thespruce.com)



by Freddy Groves

\$5 Million in Housing Grants for Special Needs Veterans

The Department of Veterans Affairs has done the final math for 2023, and the number of homeless veterans who found permanent housing has passed the initial goal. The total now stands at 46,000 veterans who were helped.

At the same time, the VA hooked up with 40,000 veterans to get them the resources they need to find housing and worked to ensure that 95% of housed veterans can stay that way.

All this is part of the Housing First program. The theory is that getting a veteran into a home first is crucial, then to be followed up with the services needed to ensure the continued housing. Part of that includes education, legal help, health care and jobs training. Veterans who are part of the Housing First program generally find housing more quickly, in 35 days as opposed to 223 days on average.

Now, having the final 2023 number of 46,000 veterans put into housing, the VA has announced funding in the amount of \$5 million in grants (renewable for a second year) to help the special needs group of homeless veterans (mentally ill, the elderly, women, the terminally ill and those with children). The Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem Program gives the cash to community groups that handle both temporary transitional housing and case management, hooking them up with services, permanent housing and access to VA benefits.

There are only 16 of the special needs grant recipient groups that can apply for a share of that \$5 million. The list of grantees indicates that each group concentrates on only one category of the special needs list, with the Chronically Mentally Ill group having a slight edge over the other categories. The actual awarding of the funds will run from October 2024 to September 2026, with applications needing to be received by April 15, 2024.

Veterans who are either homeless or in danger of becoming homeless can go online to www.va.gov/homeless or call 877-4AID-VET (877-424-3838) to get help.

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Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 23 of 74

Wishing Well®

4	3	7	6	8	2	6	3	5	3	4	3	8
L	C	O	A	F	L	D	I	B	R	I	C	A
2	5	2	6	3	7	3	7	3	7	2	7	3
O	E	V	A	U	T	M	H	S	E	E	R	T
4	7	6	2	7	5	4	3	5	8	3	2	7
F	S	Y	O	H	A	E	A	L	M	N	F	E
3	2	8	4	3	5	8	5	3	6	3	8	6
C	L	I	I	E	E	L	A	S	T	C	Y	O
8	5	4	3	8	4	8	3	8	7	6	4	3
P	D	S	H	R	F	O	A	S	L	R	U	N
5	6	3	6	8	3	4	5	8	7	2	7	4
E	E	G	M	P	E	L	R	E	P	U	Y	L
6	8	2	6	7	6	8	7	6	2	6	2	2
E	R	X	M	O	B	S	U	E	U	R	R	Y

HERE IS A PLEASANT LITTLE GAME that will give you a message every day. It's a numerical puzzle designed to spell out your fortune. Count the letters in your first name. If the number of letters is 6 or more, subtract 4. If the number is less than 6, add 3. The result is your key number. Start at the upper left-hand corner and check one of your key numbers, left to right. Then read the message the letters under the checked figures give you.

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1. LITERATURE: In the children's book, what is Doctor Dolittle's special talent?
2. ART: Who painted the work titled "Starry Night"?
3. FOOD & DRINK: Which vegetable is commonly used to make pickles?
4. MUSIC: What is pop singer Taylor Swift's favorite number?
5. MEDICAL: What is a common name for lachrymation?
6. BUSINESS: When was the Chia Pet invented?
7. U.S. PRESIDENTS: Who was the first American to win a Nobel Prize?
8. HISTORY: The Aztec civilization emerged in which modern-day country?
9. TELEVISION: Who played the character Michael Scott on TV's "The Office"?
10. GEOGRAPHY: The volcano Mount Vesuvius overlooks which modern-day Italian city?

Answers

1. He can talk with animals.
2. Vincent van Gogh.
3. Cucumbers.
4. 13.
5. Tears or crying.
6. 1977 (Chia Guy).
7. Theodore Roosevelt, the Nobel Peace Prize.
8. Mexico.
9. Steve Carell.
10. Naples.

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South Dakota Governor

Kristi Noem



South Dakota: *Under God, the People Rule*

The Freedom to Be Secure – and How to Keep it

In my State of the State Address, I talked about the Freedom to be secure. We are so fortunate to live in a nation where we have many Freedoms, including the Freedom to feel secure in our own communities. Unfortunately, that security is now being threatened. And today, we are even more at risk of having our security ripped out from under us than ever before.

I've called the national security crisis happening at our Southern Border right now a warzone many times, and I will continue to do so. It is undeniably true. We have dangerous criminals and terrorists flowing into our country each and every day. Joe Biden and so-called "Border Czar" Kamala Harris continuously refuse to take action, forcing the states to take matters into their own hands.

What do you do when you have a warzone on your hands? You send soldiers.

Two years ago, I was the first governor in America to send my National Guard soldiers to the Southern Border. This week, I announced that we will be deploying troops from one of the top National Guards in the nation to secure our border for the fifth time. South Dakota's finest will be in Texas helping to build the border wall and keep our country secure. I am proud of them for their dedication to this cause, and I am incredibly grateful to them for answering the call to serve their state and nation.

Just a few weeks ago, after I briefed a joint session of the South Dakota legislature on the dire situation at our Southern Border, they became the first legislature in America to pass a joint resolution expressing their support for securing the border.

The drugs coming into our country because of this open border are a risk to every single family in America. We are seeing the effects right here in South Dakota. Fentanyl is flowing into our country at a rapid pace – and when combined with the "zombie drug" xylazine, it makes an already deadly drug even deadlier. I was proud to sign a bill this legislative session to classify xylazine at a Schedule III controlled substance. This new law will keep South Dakotans safe, secure, and healthy.

We have surpassed ten million illegal immigrants living in the United States today. If we were to create a state of just those illegal immigrants, it would be the tenth largest state in America. And as we keep learning more about the people entering our country, it's clear that our Freedom to be secure is at risk.

A large number of the people crossing our Southern Border are military-aged, Chinese men. This is no coincidence. The Chinese-owned app TikTok is promoting videos that point people to holes in the fencing along our border. The Chinese Communist Party is literally providing individuals with step-by-step instructional videos on how to enter the U.S. illegally.

China is our biggest external threat. I recognized that – it's why I was the first to ban TikTok on state government devices in the state of South Dakota. Many other states followed our lead. Congress followed our lead. And, surprisingly enough, Joe Biden even followed our lead – TikTok is banned on devices in the White House right now.

In South Dakota, we are continuing to lead where the federal government is letting America down. My priority is, and always will be, the people of this great state.

South Dakotans will never have their Freedom to be secure taken away from them – not on my watch.

John Thune
U.S. SENATOR - SOUTH DAKOTA



RS Needs to Do More to Protect Taxpayer Data

In 2022, Congress passed the No TikTok on Government Devices Act. As its name suggests, this law bans TikTok on government devices due to the significant security risks that the app poses. This was an important step to protect sensitive data and government networks, but a recent report indicates that the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has not fully complied with the law.

A recent inspector general report revealed that 2,800 mobile devices used by IRS Criminal Investigation employees and computers assigned to those employees can access TikTok. The inspector general also found that the IRS has not updated its "Bring Your Own Device" program, which shockingly allows IRS employees to use personal devices for business purposes. That means that IRS employees who are accessing sensitive taxpayer information on their personal devices are also potentially accessing TikTok. Worse still is that the IRS won't commit to complying with recommendations to resolve the personal device issues until October 2024.

As the lead Republican on the Subcommittee on Taxation and IRS Oversight, holding the IRS accountable is an obligation I take very seriously. In response to this troubling report, I recently sent a letter to the IRS commissioner requesting information about the agency's compliance with the No TikTok on Government Devices Act, the IRS's "Bring Your Own Device" program, and the security of taxpayer information being accessed on personal devices. TikTok's close ties to the Chinese Communist Party and their troubling data practices are reasons to be concerned about the app being loaded onto or accessible on a device that also deals with taxpayer and government data. This warrants swift action by the IRS to comply with the law and protect Americans' data.

Unfortunately, this is only the latest issue in the IRS's troubling history of mishandling taxpayer information. In the last few years alone, the IRS has inadvertently posted confidential information from 120,000 taxpayers on its website, destroyed 30 million unprocessed tax documents, and tens of thousands of Americans' tax information was stolen by an IRS contractor and wound up in the hands of the left-leaning news site ProPublica.

The American people should be able to trust that when they file their taxes with the IRS, their personal information is safe. I will continue to hold the IRS accountable for its handling of taxpayer information and ensure the agency is adequately protecting Americans' information.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 26 of 74



CONGRESSMAN
DUSTY JOHNSON
Representing **SOUTH DAKOTA** at large



Safety and Security

BIG News

This week, I voted to impeach Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas. His willful and systemic refusal to follow the laws set by Congress to secure the southern border has created a national security and safety crisis in communities across America, including South Dakota. We have not seen a domestic crisis of this magnitude from a department's making before. America is less safe because of the drugs and increased crime from illegal immigrants coming across the border. Congress had to act. I hope the Democrat-controlled Senate takes the impeachment seriously and the Administration takes notice and takes steps to secure the border.

BIG Idea

I met with Community Healthcare Association of the Dakotas and Horizon Health Care to talk about federal funding for health centers that support underserved populations, the 340B drug pricing program, and the importance of telehealth. They awarded me the Distinguished Community Health Center Advocate award for my actions in Congress to support Community Health Centers.

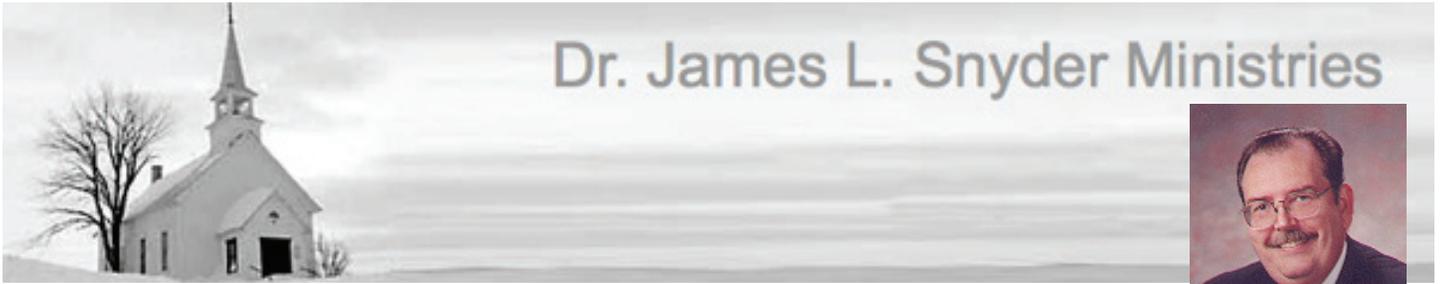
BIG Update

Recently, the Biden Administration proposed a ban on new permits for new domestic liquified natural gas (LNG) exports. This is another decision the President made in an effort to advance his climate agenda, but the decision fails to recognize American-made energy is actually cleaner than energy from countries like Russia and Iran. Prohibiting new exports will force our allies to rely on dirtier energy from these adversarial countries, bolstering the economies of enemies instead of ours. Increasing exports could add as much as \$73 billion to the U.S. economy and support 453,000 jobs by 2040, but with Biden's ban, we lose all of that growth opportunity.

This week, I supported the Unlocking Our Domestic LNG Potential Act when it passed the House so we can continue to grow our LNG exports, ensuring America and our allies can remain energy secure.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 27 of 74



Ice Cream Solves A Lot Of My Problems



Like everybody else, I face problems almost every day. Or maybe I should say, my problem faces me.

Every Monday, when I get up, I say to myself, "How many problems will I have this week? How many will I solve?" Unfortunately, myself never replies back.

Problems are part of life, but it's tough for me to get used to problems. Every time I almost solve one problem, two or three new ones pop up. There are times when I hesitate to get up on a Monday morning.

Recently, I discovered something related to my problems. No matter my problems or where they come from, I have discovered that a bowl of ice cream solves most of them.

This is a recent discovery for me. I only wish I would've known it 50 years ago. Since I know it now, I will use it for my benefit. The more problems I have, the more ice cream I need.

Discovering that ice cream is my comfort food has really made a lot of difference in my life. And it has taken me quite a while to get The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage to understand this about me.

She knows much about me, even more than I know about myself. But this one thing about ice cream is relatively new, and she hesitates to acknowledge it.

Whenever a problem pops up, I usually get frustrated and bent out of shape trying to figure out how to deal with it. Sometimes I do figure it out, but more often, I do not. Then I discovered something that has changed my attitude for all time.

That discovery is that ice cream is a way of helping me deal with a problem that I might have. Oh boy, this has been a learning curve for me.

I discovered this not too long ago when I faced a problem I just didn't know how to take. I was driving down the street when I noticed a relatively new ice cream store on my right side. Looking at it, I thought to myself, "What will it hurt if I stop and have some ice cream?"

I pulled into the parking lot, walked over, entered the store, and ordered some ice cream. I looked at the menu for a while to order the right ice cream. I saw some mint chocolate chip ice cream on the menu. I haven't had mint chocolate chip ice cream, for I can't remember how long ago. So I ordered it, took it to the table, sat down, and began working on it.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 28 of 74

I was only three bites in when it finally occurred to me that I wasn't even thinking about my problem at that time. All I was thinking about was how delicious this ice cream was. This mint chocolate chip ice cream was so delicious I couldn't think of anything else.

When I finished my mint chocolate chip ice cream dish, I couldn't remember my problem. Unfortunately, when I got in my car and started driving away, the problem finally came back to me. But when it did, it didn't seem as serious as it did before the ice cream. Something had happened.

It's not every day that I learn something new about myself, but this was one of those days.

I don't know how many kinds of ice cream there are, but I have worked it out so that every problem I face is associated with some flavor of ice cream.

The harder the problem, the darker the ice cream. If I have vanilla ice cream, that means I have a very easy problem to solve. But if I have a really difficult problem, I must have chocolate fudge ice cream.

When I got home that evening, I updated The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage on my discovery.

"Guess what I learned about myself today," I said with a big smile.

Looking at me, she said, "I give up; what did you learn about yourself today that I don't already know?"

Clearing my throat, I said, "I have learned that I need ice cream to deal with any problem that comes my way."

"Well," she said sarcastically, "that's one good excuse to get your ice cream."

"Oh, no," I said enthusiastically, "I really mean that ice cream helps me solve my problems."

I tried to explain to her that every flavor of ice cream helps me solve a particular problem. I'm not sure she believed me, but I was going to prove that that was true.

Later that evening, after supper, we watched TV in the living room, and then she went out into the kitchen. When she returned, she had a bowl of chocolate fudge ice cream, and looking at me, she said, "I'm not sure if this is chocolatey enough to fix your problem tonight."

Munching on my ice cream I thought of a Bible verse. Philippians 4:6-7, "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Nobody can live without problems. That's just life. But, as a Christian, I have a special resource called prayer. My prayer connects me with God's peace "which passeth all understanding."

There is no problem that in anyway compromises God's peace that He has for me.

EARTHTALK ™

Dear EarthTalk: In the aftermath of flood, we often hear about the immediate dangers of rising waters—drowning, swift currents and submerged vehicles. But what about the less visible threats? Specifically, do floodwaters contain toxic chemicals?

-- Wil Hanson, Huntington, CT

Floodwaters are indeed treacherous, and their murky depths harbor more than just debris and silt. While the immediate risks of drowning and physical injury are apparent, the invisible hazards lurking within floodwaters can pose long-term health threats.

One of the unseen dangers in flooding is chemical contamination. Floodwaters aren't merely brown from dirt; they can also carry a cocktail of noxious pollutants. These contaminants originate from various sources. Household waste from cleaning agents, pesticides and other household chemicals can seep into floodwaters. In industrial zones, toxic gases like methane and sulfur dioxide may escape. Also, industrial chemicals like benzene and butadiene—known carcinogens—can get into the water. Agricultural fertilizers, pesticides and liquid waste from farms also get in to the chemical soup. And as floodwaters scour soil and backyards, they unearth heavy metals like lead, mercury, and cadmium. These can persist in the water, posing risks to human health. In regions near coal-fired power plants, floodwaters may carry coal ash waste. This waste contains carcinogenic compounds like arsenic, chromium and mercury.

Besides outright pollutants, floodwaters contain bacteria and lead to wound infections. If you have cuts or abrasions, wash them with soap and clean water. Also, floodwater can cause skin rashes and irritation. Swallowing or coming into contact with contaminated water can lead to stomach ailments. Puncture wounds or those contaminated with feces need prompt attention. Tetanus boosters may be necessary. Less common but worrisome are Leptospirosis and Melioidosis, bacterial infections that can occur after exposure to contaminated water.

The most important thing to do is to stay out of floodwater whenever possible. If you come into contact with floodwater, wash the affected area with soap and clean water. Launder clothes contaminated by flood or sewage water in hot water and detergent. If you must enter floodwater, wear rubber boots, gloves and goggles. Also bear in mind that floodwaters may hide sharp objects, so be cautious to prevent injuries.

Many of us will be faced with floodwaters as global warming increases and causes more frequent and stronger storms. "Changes in the environment have already increased flooding across the United States, particularly in coastal and low-lying areas," reports the non-profit First Street, which created an online tool that makes it easy for Americans to find their home's risk. "As these trends continue into the future, 8.2 million more Americans will be at risk, and the damage and cost of flooding will continue to add up."

Indeed, floodwater is more than just a murky inconvenience—it carries a hidden burden of toxins. Remember: Even when the waters recede, the risks may linger for months. If your region is vulnerable, make sure you know how to keep yourself and loved ones safe in the event of a flood where you live.

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Floodwaters are indeed treacherous, and their murky depths harbor more than just debris and silt. Credit: Steeleman204, FlickrCC.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

COMMENTARY

On its second try, civics exceptionalism bill goes stealth

DANA HESS

FEBRUARY 24, 2024 8:41 AM

According to some South Dakota lawmakers, college students need a big, fat lesson in civics. By "civics" they mean a lesson in the greatness of America. That lesson keeps getting closer to a reality as House Bill 1213 makes its way through the Legislature.

HB 1213 would create a civic engagement center at Black Hills State University. The center would "provide undergraduate students with the foundation to succeed as lifelong citizens and future leaders in political, economic and civic life." It would do this with classes and programs, civic-focused events, experiential learning and civic programming.

The bill's sponsor, Rep. Scott Odenbach, a Spearfish Republican, brought similar legislation last year. That bill, which twice missed passage in the House by just one vote, called for the creation of the Center for Exceptionalism at BHSU. "Exceptionalism" is a buzzword in conservative circles, calling for the teaching of United States history with an emphasis on its superiority when compared with other nations.

Last year's bill called for specific actions from the Center for Exceptionalism that included creating K-12 curriculum that would "balance critical thinking with love of country." That version of the center would also have developed public university courses comparing communist countries with western democracies and comparing socialist economies with free-market economies.

(For those of you keeping score at home, last year I predicted that Odenbach's failed bill would be resurrected.)

In testimony before the House Education Committee, Odenbach said this year's version takes a more "generalist" approach. Another word he might have used for this year's bill is "vague." By scrapping "exceptionalism" and being light on specifics, Odenbach may believe that his civics lesson plan has a greater chance of passage. He could be right. So far, it has made its way unanimously through both the House Education and House Appropriations committees, and through the House of Representatives on a vote of 63-5.

However, the vague nature of the legislation falls away when lawmakers start talking about what this year's version of the center will do. Speaking in favor of the bill, Rep. Tony Venhuizen, a Sioux Falls Republican, said students need to know "why America is an affirmative good." Rep. Fred Deutsch, a Florence Republican, said students need to "learn about the greatness of our democracy." That sounds remarkably like the "exceptionalism" label that Odenbach is trying to avoid this time.

In his testimony, Odenbach said the center he is proposing would work in conjunction with the Center for Public History and Civic Engagement at Northern State University. This duplication of services seems to fly in the face of what the Legislature was trying to accomplish only a few years ago.

In 2020, Sen. Ryan Maher sponsored Senate Bill 55, which was originally an attempt to require BHSU and the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology to share administrations. In a 2020 interview, the Isabel Republican said his legislation didn't go far enough. He also wanted to combine the administrative services of NSU, Dakota State University and South Dakota State University.

As often happens in the Legislature, Maher didn't get exactly what he wanted. Instead of combined ad-

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 31 of 74

ministrative services at two Black Hills universities, he got a task force assembled to study the operations and functions of institutions of higher education. The task force was to seek efficiencies in the Board of Regents system, including a review of the duplication of program offerings.

Members of the task force took their job seriously with six meetings of the full task force and 20 sub-committee meetings generating a report that tallies more than 60 pages. The report's executive summary offered 35 different areas where the BOR system might find savings.

It should be noted that Maher is the prime Senate sponsor of the new attempt to create a BHSU center for the study of civics. It looks like, in some cases, a duplication of services in higher education is warranted.

HB 1213's vague wording is matched only by its vague funding. It was originally pitched as needing \$880,000 and three full-time employees. In the House Appropriations Committee that was dropped to \$200,000 with the equally vague explanation that it was now a "scaled back version."

While they are scaling things back, appropriators may want to look to the example of the center that already exists at NSU. Administrators there seemed to have been able to create that center using existing resources, without going to the Legislature for a special appropriation. Perhaps lawmakers should take the \$880,000 or \$200,000 and invest it in the center that already exists, upholding the standards of the task force that sought to stamp out the duplication of services and programs.

Odenbach may be taking a subtler approach this time, but his efforts are still built on the notion that just taking a class in government or history isn't enough. Somehow students have to be taught to appreciate that government and savor the best parts of its history.

Odenbach's bill goes to the Senate next. Let's hope lawmakers in that chamber can see HB 1213 for what it is, a stealth attempt to slip exceptionalism into the college curriculum.

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

In CPAC speech, Trump predicts 'losing World War III' if he is not elected

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - FEBRUARY 24, 2024 5:56 PM

Former President Donald Trump painted a bleak picture Saturday of what would happen to the United States should voters reelect Joe Biden to the Oval Office in November.

The front-runner in the 2024 GOP presidential primary, who made similar predictions ahead of the 2020 presidential election, told attendees at the Conservative Political Action Conference — known as CPAC — just outside Washington, D.C., that only he could provide America a better outcome.

Trump spoke as voters in South Carolina went to the polls there in the state's presidential primary, which Trump is expected to win over his last major challenger, former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, though Haley has vowed to stay in the race through Super Tuesday.

"They'll soon have us losing World War III. We won't even be in World War III, we'll be losing World War III with weapons the likes of which nobody has ever seen before," Trump told attendees at the conference, an annual gathering of conservatives. "These are the stakes of this election. Our country is being destroyed. And the only thing standing between you and its obliteration is me. It's true."

Trump didn't discuss any bills he would attempt to pass if sent back to the White House or executive actions he'd pursue, though he did say he would seek to enact the "largest deportation in the history of our country" and drill for more fossil fuels.

"The first and most urgent action when we win will be the sealing of the border, stopping the invasion, drill baby drill, send Joe Biden's illegal aliens back home," Trump said. "We'll do all of those things and we're gonna have to do them fast because no country can sustain what's happening in our country."

Trump rebuked the prosecutors that have brought civil and criminal cases against him since he lost the last presidential election.

That includes a case tied to the role Trump played inciting his supporters to attack the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, as lawmakers inside counted Electoral College votes to certify Biden as the winner of the presidential election. Trump has asked the U.S. Supreme Court to delay the start of his trial in federal

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 32 of 74

district court in the District of Columbia on charges he tried to subvert the election, as he pursues his claims of presidential immunity.

"We have to break out of the nightmare that we're in," Trump said. "And we have it in the grasp to make America richer and safer and stronger and prouder and more beautiful than ever before."

Border security

Trump continued his campaign theme of disparaging undocumented immigrants traveling to the United States, saying that they are "destroying" the country.

"We have a border problem that's 20 times worse than what we had in 2016," Trump said. "And we'll solve that one too. But it's gonna have to be very strong action and it's gonna have to happen fast before our country is just totally overwhelmed."

The Pew Research Center reported that the U.S. Border Patrol had 250,000 encounters with migrants crossing the Southern border in December 2023, the highest monthly total on record. Pew noted the numbers of encounters slowed in 2020 due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Maca Casado, director of Hispanic Media for Biden-Harris 2024, said in a written statement that Trump has "consistently demonized Latinos for his political gain."

"Just days ago, we learned about Donald Trump's plan to deploy combat soldiers to build mass detention camps and round up immigrants like cattle — and he thinks he can make a play for the Latino vote at CPAC of all places?" she said.

Trump claimed that if he were still president, the Hamas terrorist attacks on Israel wouldn't have happened and that Russia would have never invaded Ukraine, starting off the war that's lasted two years.

"The attack on Israel would have never happened. Remember, Iran was broke. They were broke," Trump said. "Ukraine would have never happened. I talked to (Russian leader Vladimir) Putin a lot and got along with him well."

Looking to general election

Trump also sought to rally his base during the speech, saying that the general election in November is crucial for him and his supporters.

"For hardworking Americans, November 5 will be our new liberation day; but for the liars and cheaters and fraudsters and sensors and imposters, who have commandeered our government, it will be their judgment day," Trump said.

"When we win, the curtain closes on their corrupt reign and the sun rises on a bright new future for America," he added. "That's what we have to have. I believe it's our last chance."

Trump mentioned the South Carolina Republican primary toward the end of his nearly 90-minute speech, saying that if he lost, he was going to blame the organizers of CPAC for having him give a speech the same day as voters were heading to the polls. He also called out a CPAC host, Mercedes Schlapp, who was director of strategic communications in the White House during the Trump administration.

"So now I'm going to the place I'm supposed to be, I'm going to South Carolina," Trump said. "I'm supposed to be there."

"And if I do poorly, I'm gonna blame, I'm gonna blame Mercedes. Forget about that. I'm gonna blame Mercedes," Trump said. "Because I am supposed to be there and I'm not there. And if I do poorly, I'm blaming everybody in this audience. But I think we're going to do okay. And I just want to thank everybody."

Biden-Harris 2024 Rapid Response Director Ammar Moussa said in a written statement on Trump's CPAC speech that during Trump's four years in office "America lost more jobs than any president in modern history, women in more than 20 states have lost the freedom to make their own health care decisions because Trump overturned Roe, and the MAGA wing of the Republican Party lost their damn minds putting Trump's quest for power over our democracy."

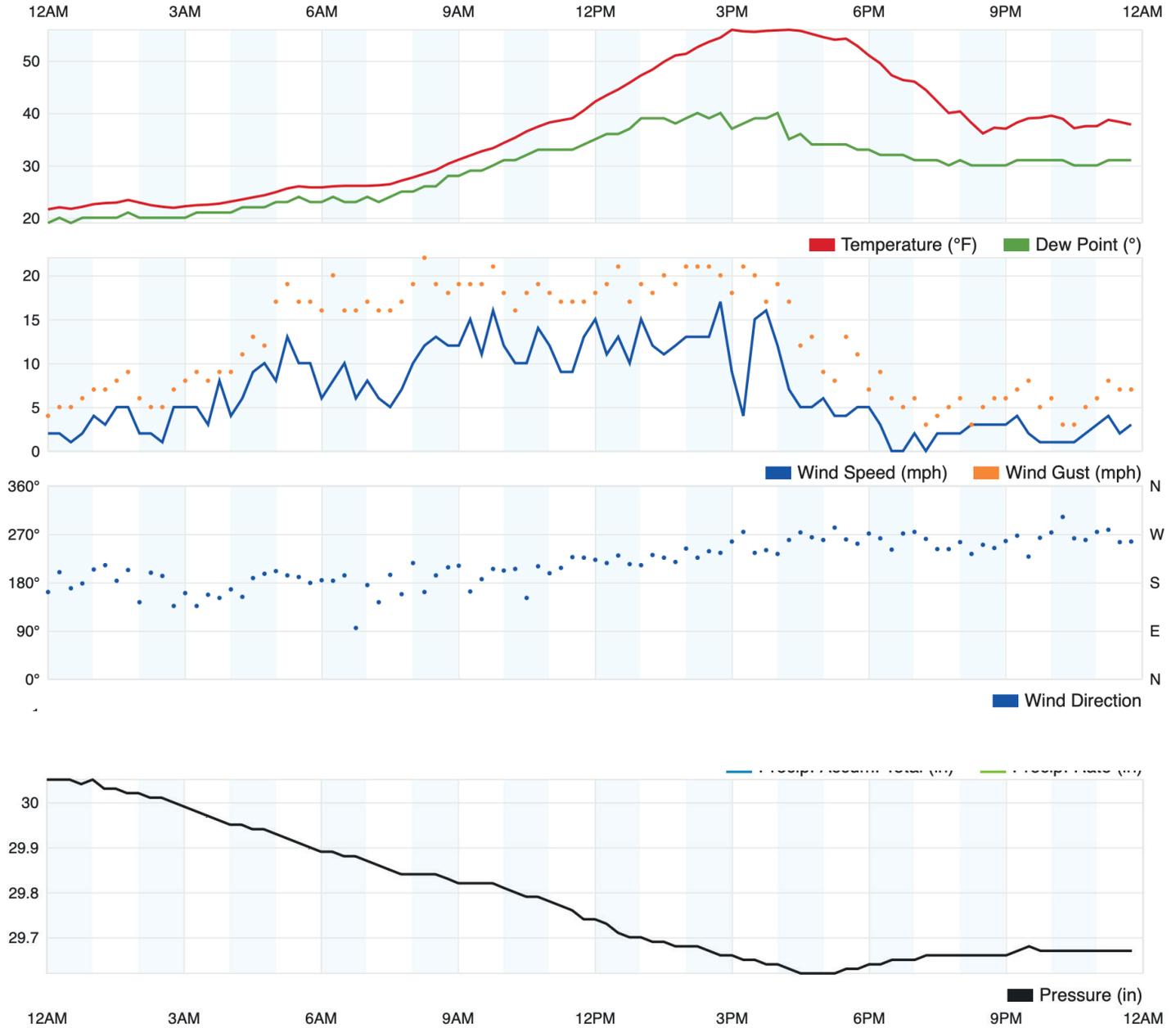
"America already had the opportunity to choose if they wanted another four years of hell with Donald Trump's chaos, division, and crazy — they said no — and will again in November."

Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

Groton Daily Independent

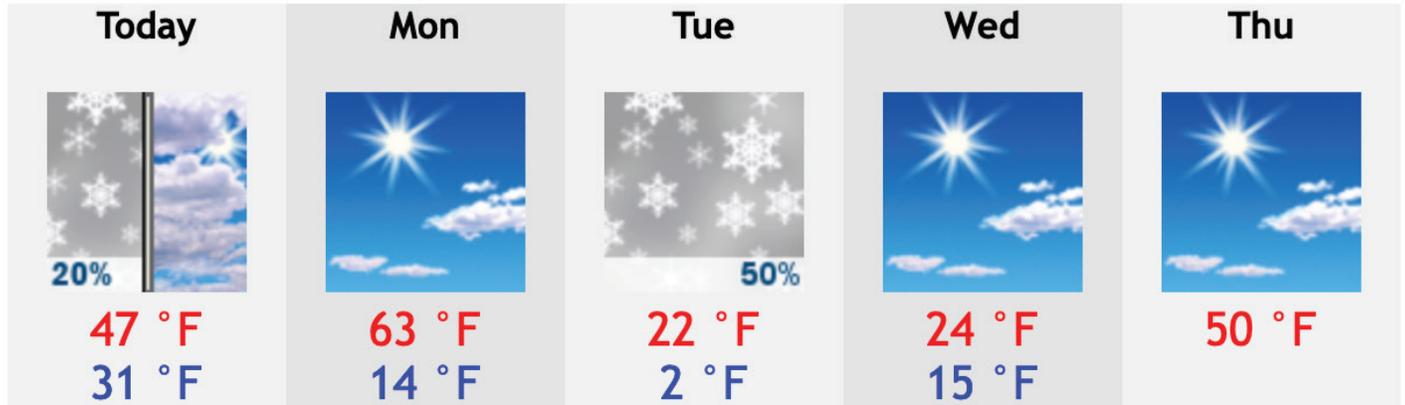
Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 33 of 74

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 34 of 74



3 Day Outlook

Today



42 to 60°

Monday



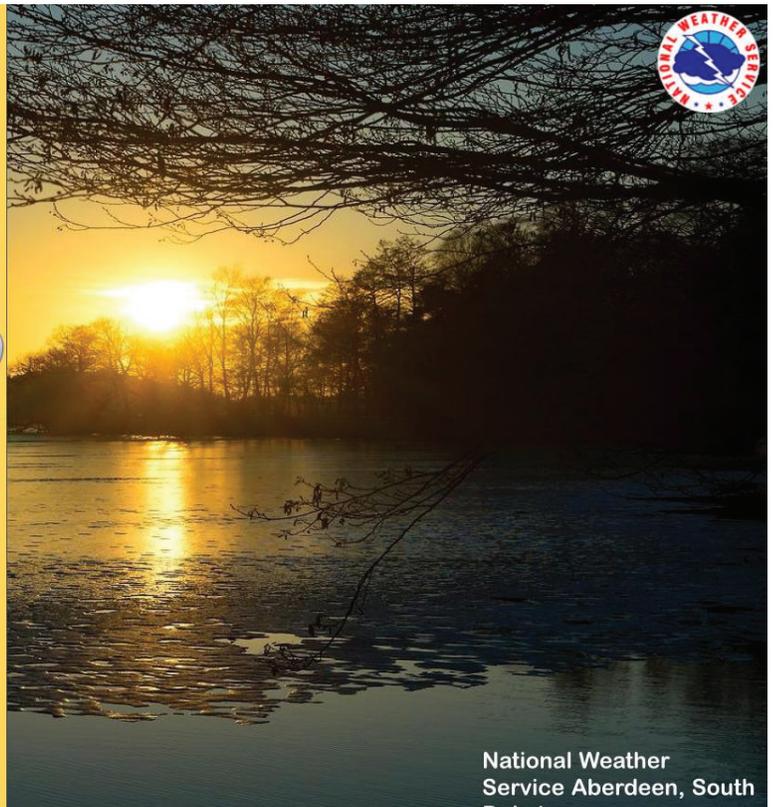
59 to 67°

Tuesday



30-40s° ↓

- Light rain/snow showers (15-20%) today across parts of northern and northeastern SD
- Record to near record highs Monday
- **40+** degree drop from Monday to Tuesday
 - 20-55% chances of light snow pushing northwest to southeast late Monday into Tuesday behind an arctic cold front
 - Wind gusts up to 50 mph



National Weather Service Aberdeen, South Dakota

Light rain/snow showers (15-20%) possible along the ND/SD border today. To start out the week on Monday, highs will be well above average in the 60s as we could see near record to record highs. Fast forward 24 hours later into Tuesday, a strong arctic cold front will sweep southeast bringing along with it a 20-55% chance for light snow, gusty winds up to 50mph, and a 40 degree temperatures drop!

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 35 of 74

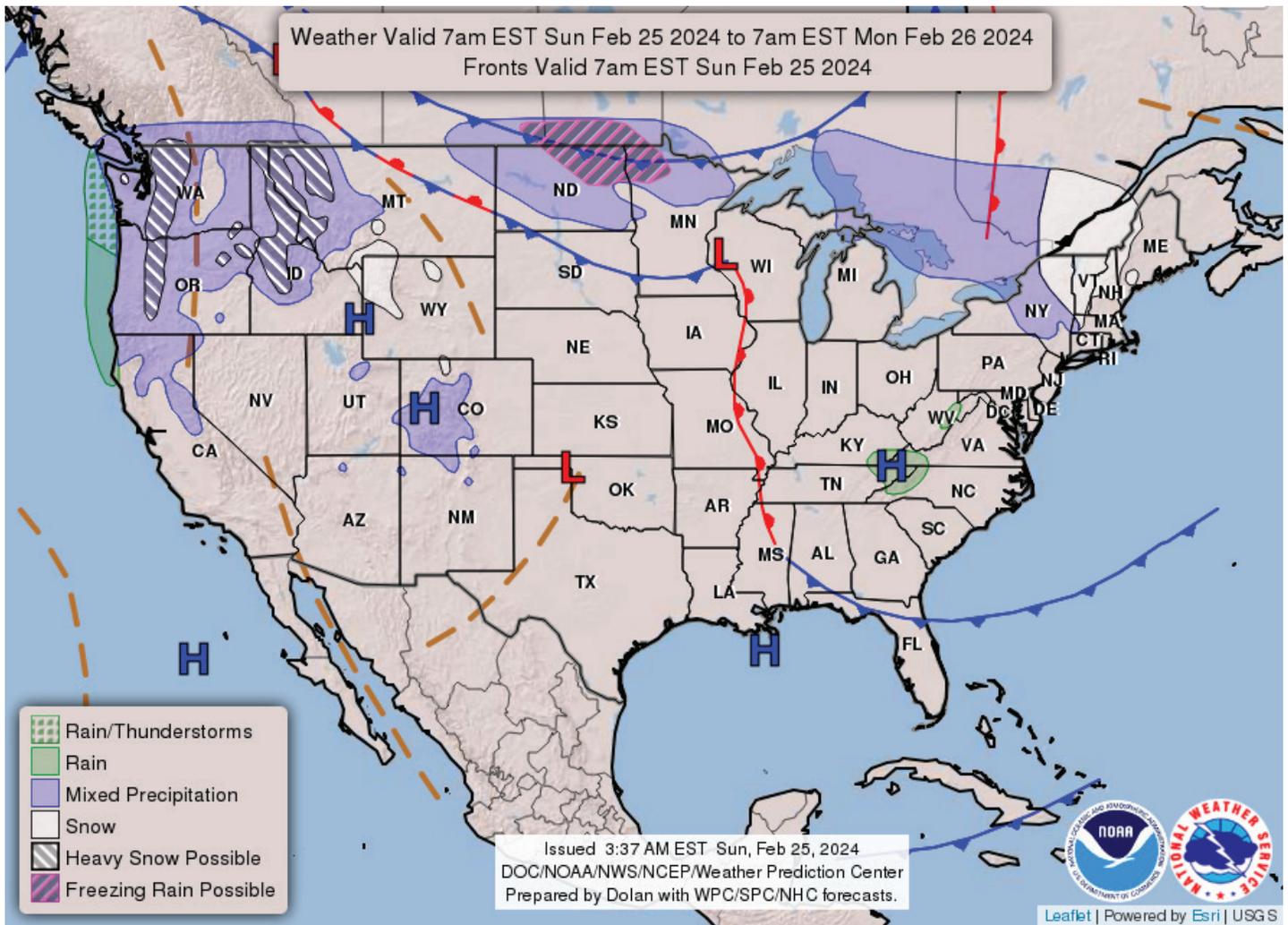
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 56 °F at 3:07 PM
Low Temp: 22 °F at 12:00 AM
Wind: 23 mph at 8:52 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 10 hours, 58 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 70 in 1958
Record Low: -29 in 1919
Average High: 32
Average Low: 10
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.54
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.07
Average Precip to date: 1.09
Precip Year to Date: 0.07
Sunset Tonight: 6:14:34 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:14:37 am



Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 36 of 74

Today in Weather History

February 25, 1987: Six to thirty inches of snow fell on this date in 1987 across much of western and central South Dakota. Three to six inches of snow fell in the northeast part of South Dakota. Some of the most significant snowfall amounts reported were 30 inches at Phillip, 26 inches at Murdo, and Timber Lake, with 15 inches at Rapid City. Numerous accidents occurred in the western and central sections of the state. Many roads were closed, including Interstate 90, for most of the 27th. Slippery roads were a significant factor in the vehicle injuries of three women on Highway 12, six and one-half miles east of Ipswich, in the late afternoon of the 27th. The storm began on the 24th and lasted until the 28th.

February 25-March 1, 1998: An incredible amount of snow falls on Lead, South Dakota, from February 25 through March 01, 1998. The official storm total was 114 inches for the five days. Click [HERE](#) for more information from the National Weather Service Office in Rapid City, South Dakota.

February 25, 2000: Unusual February severe thunderstorms produced nickel to quarter size hail in Lyman and Hand counties on this date in 2000.

1914: Heavy snow fell over a good portion of South Carolina and North Carolina on February 24-26, 1914. Snowfall amounts include 18 inches near Society Hill, SC, 14 inches in Fayetteville, NC, 13 inches at Darlington, SC, 11.7 inches at Columbia, SC, 8.1 inches at Charlotte, SC, and 7.2 inches at Greensboro, NC, and 7.0 inches at Raleigh, NC.

1934: An outbreak of six tornadoes killed nineteen in Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. The hardest-hit areas were Bowden, GA, and Shady Grove, AL. An estimated F4 tornado damaged or destroyed 90 homes, many in the Shady Grove community. One home in Lauderdale County, Mississippi, was picked up, thrown 400 feet, and blown to bits. Six family members were killed in the house. Three deaths occurred in two homes, and one preacher was killed during services.

1991: Black rain fell over southeastern Turkey for 10-hours, causing panic among people. The black rain resulted from soot from burning oil fields in Kuwait.

2010: A powerful nor'easter spread significant snow and windy conditions across the Middle Atlantic region from Thursday, February 25 into Friday, February 26. An area of low pressure developed off the Carolina coast late Wednesday night, February 24, and then strengthened as it tracked northward to near Long Island, New York, by Thursday evening. As low pressure aloft deepened over the Mid-Atlantic coast Thursday night into Friday, the surface low retrograded and moved westward into northern New Jersey and southern New York. By February 27, the low pushed into southern New England and gradually weakened over the weekend. Strong wind gusts were measured throughout the Middle Atlantic region due to this coastal storm. Some of the highest wind gusts recorded include 62 mph measured at Cape May, New Jersey; 52 mph at the Atlantic City Marina; 51 mph at the Mount Pocono Airport and Lewes, Delaware; and 50 mph at Dover Air Force Base. In addition, wind gusts of 40 mph or higher were recorded in Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Allentown. Considerable blowing and drifting snow resulted, especially from the Poconos eastward into northern New Jersey. Snow drifts as high as 3 to 5 feet were seen across portions of Warren and Sussex counties in New Jersey. Total accumulations of 20 inches or more were recorded from Morris and Sussex counties in New Jersey, westward into Monroe County, Pennsylvania. In addition, a band of 12 to 18 inches of snow accumulation was measured from Warren and Morris counties in New Jersey westward to Lehigh County, Pennsylvania. In addition to snow that accumulated during the daytime on Thursday, many locations across the region experienced a heavier burst of snow with gusty winds Thursday night into early Friday, thanks to additional moisture wrapped around the low-pressure system. Some areas saw snowfall rates of 1 to 2 inches per hour, mainly from northern New Jersey and into the Poconos. Central Park ended the month with 36.9 inches of snow, making this the snowiest month since records began in 1869.

2017: An EF1 tornado was confirmed in Goshen and Conway County, MA. This tornado was the first-ever recorded in February for M.A. since records began.

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

OUR NEEDS FROM HIS RICHES

An architect designed a cluster of office buildings around a central green area. After they were built, he called a landscape architect and asked him to plant grass in the field among the buildings.

Puzzled, the landscape architect asked, "But where do you want me to allow space for the walks?"

"Don't worry about that. Just plant the grass," said the architect.

A few months later, the buildings were filled with occupants. As the people walked from one building to another, they made pathways in the grass. The architect then decided it was time for the walkways.

"Do you see those paths created by the people?" he asked the landscape architect.

"Yes," came the reply.

"That is where I want you to place the walks," said the architect. "It was important for me to see the needs of the people going from one building to another before we located the walks."

That's the way our Lord works. When we have a need, He is ready to respond to us from His perspective, His plan, and His riches. He sees our needs before we do.

When we are afraid, He will increase our faith. When we grieve, He will give us His comfort and compassion. When we are overcome with problems, He will give us His solutions. When we are troubled, He will give us His peace. Whatever our need, He can meet it!

Prayer: Help us, Lord, to trust You completely for all that we need. We have the promise of Your Word, that if we ask, You can and will meet our every need. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:19



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

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 38 of 74

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Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 39 of 74



WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.23.24

4 6 40 41 60 11

MegaPlier: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$563,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.24.24

10 19 30 33 52 10

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$3,360,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.24.24

14 21 28 33 35 18

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 5 Mins 42 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.24.24

5 7 18 20 27

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.24.24

5 6 16 34 35 17

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
02.24.24

3 8 40 53 58 3

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$391,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 40 of 74

News from the  Associated Press

Saturday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Harrisburg 58, Brandon Valley 56
Sioux Falls Lincoln 61, Rapid City Stevens 59
Sioux Falls Washington 57, Rapid City Central 34
Spearfish 57, Brookings 54
Sturgis Brown 65, Yankton 58

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Brandon Valley 60, Harrisburg 46
Rapid City Central 48, Sioux Falls Washington 44
Rapid City Stevens 57, Sioux Falls Lincoln 22
Spearfish 64, Brookings 51
Yankton 50, Sturgis Brown 30

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

Mayo puts up 23 in South Dakota State's 77-72 victory against St. Thomas

By The Associated Press undefined

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — Zeke Mayo had 23 points in South Dakota State's 77-72 win against St. Thomas on Saturday.

Mayo also added five rebounds for the Jackrabbits (17-12, 10-4 Summit League). Charlie Easley added 17 points while shooting 6 for 12 (1 for 4 from 3-point range) and 4 of 4 from the free throw line, and he also had four steals. Matthew Mims and Luke Appel both added 11 points.

The Tommies (17-12, 7-7) were led by Carter Bjerke, who posted 16 points. St. Thomas also got 16 points from Drake Dobbs. Raheem Anthony also put up 13 points, six rebounds, four assists and three steals.

Holt's game-winner leads South Dakota past Oral Roberts, 77-76

By The Associated Press undefined

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — Bostyn Holt led South Dakota with 25 points, including the game-winning layup with five seconds remaining, and the Coyotes knocked off Oral Roberts 77-76 on Saturday.

After Holt capped the scoring, Oral Roberts called a timeout before Issac McBride missed a layup to end it.

Holt also had five rebounds for the Coyotes (11-18, 4-10 Summit League). Lahat Thioune added 19 points while shooting 8 of 15 from the field and 3 for 3 from the line, and he also had nine rebounds. Kaleb Stewart was 4-of-9 shooting (2 for 4 from 3-point range) to finish with 10 points.

McBride finished with 19 points for the Golden Eagles (11-17, 5-10). DeShang Weaver added 13 points for Oral Roberts. In addition, Jailen Bedford finished with 12 points and six rebounds. The loss is the sixth straight for the Golden Eagles.

Holt scored 10 points in the first half and South Dakota went into halftime trailing 38-32.

Belarusians vote in tightly controlled election amid opposition calls for its boycott

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — Polls opened Sunday in Belarus' tightly controlled parliamentary and local elections that are set to cement the steely rule of the country's authoritarian leader, despite calls for a boycott from the opposition, which dismissed the balloting as a "senseless farce."

President Alexander Lukashenko, who has ruled Belarus with an iron hand for nearly three decades and on Sunday announced that he will run for the presidency again next year, accuses the West of trying to use the vote to undermine his government and "destabilize" the nation of 9.5 million people.

Most candidates belong to the four officially registered parties: Belaya Rus, the Communist Party, the Liberal Democratic Party and the Party of Labor and Justice. Those parties all support Lukashenko's policies. About a dozen other parties were denied registration last year.

Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who is in exile in neighboring Lithuania after challenging Lukashenko in the 2020 presidential election, urged voters to boycott the elections.

"There are no people on the ballot who would offer real changes because the regime only has allowed puppets convenient for it to take part," Tsikhanouskaya said in a video statement. "We are calling to boycott this senseless farce, to ignore this election without choice."

Sunday's balloting is the first election in Belarus since the contentious 2020 vote that handed Lukashenko his sixth term in office and triggered an unprecedented wave of mass demonstrations.

Protests swept the country for months, bringing hundreds of thousands into the streets. More than 35,000 people were arrested. Thousands were beaten in police custody, and hundreds of independent media outlets and nongovernmental organizations were shut down and outlawed.

Lukashenko has relied on subsidies and political support from his main ally, Russia, to survive the protests. He allowed Moscow to use Belarusian territory to send troops into Ukraine in February 2022.

The election takes place amid a relentless crackdown on dissent. Over 1,400 political prisoners remain behind bars, including leaders of opposition parties and renowned human rights advocate Ales Bialiatski, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2022.

The opposition says the early balloting that began Tuesday offers fertile ground for the vote to be manipulated, with ballot boxes unprotected for five days.

Election officials said Sunday that over 40% of the country's voters cast ballots during early voting, from Tuesday to Saturday. Turnout stood at 43.64% by 9 a.m. on Sunday, an hour after polls formally opened, according to the Belarusian Central Election Commission.

The Viasna Human Rights Center said students, soldiers, teachers and other civil servants were forced to participate in early voting.

"Authorities are using all available means to ensure the result they need — from airing TV propaganda to forcing voters to cast ballots early," said Viasna representative Pavel Sapelka. "Detentions, arrests and searches are taking place during the vote."

Speaking during Tuesday's meeting with top Belarusian law enforcement officials, Lukashenko alleged without offering evidence that Western countries were pondering plans to stage a coup in the country or to try to seize power by force. He ordered police to beef up armed patrols across Belarus, declaring that "it's the most important element of ensuring law and order."

After the vote, Belarus is set to form a new state body — the 1,200-seat All-Belarus Popular Assembly that will include top officials, local legislators, union members, pro-government activists and others. It will have broad powers, including the authority to consider constitutional amendments and to appoint election officials and judges.

Lukashenko was believed a few years ago to be considering whether to lead the new body after stepping down, but his calculus has apparently changed, and he announced on Sunday that he will run in next year's presidential election.

"Tell (the opposition) that I will run. And the more difficult the situation, the more actively they will disturb

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 42 of 74

our society... the more strain they put on you, myself and society, the sooner I will run in these elections," the strongman leader told reporters as he cast his ballot in the Belarusian capital, according to state media.

For the first time, curtains were removed from voting booths at polling stations, and voters were banned from taking pictures of their ballots. During the 2020 election, activists encouraged voters to photograph their ballots in a bid to prevent authorities from manipulating the vote in Lukashenko's favor.

Belarusian state TV aired footage of Interior Ministry drills in which police detained a purported offender who was photographing his ballot and others who created an artificial queue outside a polling station.

Belarus for the first time also refused to invite observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to monitor the election. Belarus is a member of the OSCE, a top trans-Atlantic security and rights group, and its monitors have been the only international observers at Belarusian elections for decades.

Since 1995, not a single election in Belarus has been recognized as free and fair by the OSCE.

The OSCE said the decision not to allow the agency's monitors deprived the country of a "comprehensive assessment by an international body."

"The human rights situation in Belarus continues to deteriorate as those who voice dissent or stand up for the human rights of others are subject to investigation, persecution and frequently prosecution," it said in a statement.

Observers noted that authorities have not even tried to pretend that the vote is democratic.

The election offers the government an opportunity to run a "systems test after massive protests and a serious shock of the last presidential election and see whether it works," said Artyom Shraibman, a nonresident scholar at the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center. "The parliament will be sterile after the opposition and all alternative voices were barred from campaigning. It's important for authorities to erase any memory of the protests."

Israeli media report progress on reaching a temporary truce in Gaza and a hostage-prisoner exchange

By TIA GOLDENBERG, WAFAA SHURAFU and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Mediators are making progress on an agreement for a weeklong cease-fire between Israel and Hamas and the release of dozens of hostages held in Gaza as well as Palestinians imprisoned by Israel, Israeli media reported Sunday.

Israel's War Cabinet met to discuss the proposal late Saturday, but there was no official word on what they had decided. Several Israeli media outlets, citing unnamed officials, said it tacitly approved the deal and that Israel would send a delegation to Qatar for further discussions.

Hamas says it has not yet been involved in the latest proposal developed by the United States, Egypt and Qatar, but the reported outline largely matches its earlier demands for the first phase of a truce. Hamas' top political leader, Ismail Haniyeh, was in Cairo last week.

Israel is meanwhile developing plans for expanding its offensive to the southernmost city of Rafah, on the Gaza-Egypt border, where more than half the territory's population of 2.3 million have sought refuge in squalid tent camps, packed apartments and overflowing shelters. Aid groups have warned of a catastrophe and the U.S. and other allies of Israel have said it must avoid harming civilians.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he'll convene the Cabinet this week to "approve the operational plans for action in Rafah," including the evacuation of civilians.

A senior official from Egypt, which along with Qatar is a mediator between Israel and the Hamas militant group, said Saturday that the draft cease-fire deal includes the release of up to 40 women and older hostages in return for up to 300 Palestinian prisoners, mostly women, minors and older people.

The Egyptian official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the negotiations, said the proposed six-week pause in fighting would include allowing hundreds of trucks to bring desperately needed aid into Gaza every day, including the northern half of the besieged territory. He said that both sides agreed to continue negotiations during the pause for further releases and a permanent cease-fire.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 43 of 74

The prime minister's office did not respond to a request for comment on the War Cabinet's discussions or the Israeli media reports.

Negotiators face an unofficial deadline of the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan around March 10, a period that often sees heightened Israeli-Palestinian tensions.

Hamas has said it will not release all of the remaining hostages until Israel ends its offensive and withdraws its forces from the territory, and is also demanding the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, including senior militants — conditions Netanyahu has vehemently rejected.

But an earlier proposal from Hamas outlined an initial phase that resembles the reported draft agreement, indicating the two sides might be able to converge on a temporary cease-fire.

Israel declared war after the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on southern Israel, in which militants killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took around 250 hostages. More than 100 hostages were released in a cease-fire and exchange deal in November. Around 130 remain in captivity, a fourth of whom are believed to be dead.

Families of the hostages have followed the fits and starts of the negotiations with hope and anguish.

"It feels like Schindler's list. Will he be on the list or not?" Shelly Shem Tov, the mother of Omer, 21, who is held captive, told Israeli Army Radio of her son's chances of being freed in an emerging deal.

Israel responded to the attack with a massive air and ground offensive that has driven around 80% of Gaza's population from their homes, putting hundreds of thousands at risk of starvation and the spread of infectious disease. The Health Ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza says 29,606 Palestinians have been killed since the start of the war, two-thirds of them women and children.

The ministry's death toll doesn't distinguish between civilians and combatants. Israel says its troops have killed more than 10,000 militants, without providing evidence.

The war has devastated the territory's health sector, with less than half of hospitals even partially functioning as scores are killed each day in Israeli bombardment.

At the Emirates Hospital in Rafah, three to four newborns are placed in each of its 20 incubators, which are designed for just one. Dr. Amal Ismail said two to three newborns die in a single shift, in part because many of their families live in tents in rainy, cold weather.

"No matter how much we work with them, it is all wasted," she said. "There is no health improvement because of the conditions of living in a tent."

Netanyahu has vowed to fight until "total victory," but is under intense pressure at home to reach a deal with Hamas to free the hostages. Police used a water cannon to disperse anti-government protesters in Tel Aviv late Saturday, and 18 people were arrested. Others protested in Jerusalem.

Vigils held nationwide for nonbinary Oklahoma teenager who died following school bathroom fight

The Associated Press undefined

EDMOND, Okla. (AP) — Vigils took place across the nation on Friday and Saturday for an Oklahoma teenager who died the day after a fight in a high school bathroom in which the nonbinary student claimed to be a target of bullying.

Nex Benedict, a 16-year-old Oklahoma student who identified as nonbinary and used they/them pronouns, got into an altercation with three girls in an Owasso High School bathroom who were picking on Benedict and some friends. The girls attacked Benedict for pouring water on them, the teen told police in a video released Friday.

Benedict's mother called emergency responders to the family home the day after the fight, saying Benedict's breathing was shallow, their eyes were rolling back and their hands were curled, according to audio released by Owasso police.

Vigils for Benedict were held at locations including Boston, Minneapolis and Huntington Beach, California. Others were held or planned in several states including Washington, New Jersey, New York and Texas.

Kanan Durham, executive director of Pride at the Pier, said during the Huntington Beach event on Friday

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 44 of 74

that "this single moment cannot be the only way that we honor Nex."

"This is a lot for all of us," Durham said in a report by KABC-TV. "This community has experienced grief like this so many times before."

At a vigil Saturday in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, the president of TahlEquality said Benedict's death was traumatic and the rights group arranged for licensed therapists to be available at the event.

"It's really hard being an LGBT community member in Oklahoma nowadays because suicide ideation and suicidal thoughts happen quite a bit," Sanj Cooper told KOKI-TV, adding that the LGBT+ community also was moved to speak out after Benedict's passing.

"If anything we are impassioned, the fire in our belly has been lit up again to continue to fight," Cooper said. "If anything it doesn't oppress or keep us from our voice from being heard. If anything it makes it louder."

More than two dozen people gathered Friday at All Saints Episcopal Church in McAlester, Oklahoma, for a vigil organized by the McAlester Rainbow Connection.

Matt Blancett, who organized the vigil with the Rainbow Connection, an LGBTQ+ group, said it was important to hold a vigil in McAlester because of the murder of Dustin Parker, a transgender man, in 2020.

"It shows people that we have a community, we are here, we're not going anywhere," Blancett said.

All Saints Priest Janie Koch said it is important for people to reach out for support.

"It is very very important as the gamut of emotions are cycling to watch out for each other, to be mindful of one another," Koch said.

In audio of the call to police, Benedict's mother, Sue Benedict, said she wanted to file charges. The officer who responded can be heard in the hospital video explaining that the teen started the altercation by throwing the water and the court would view it as a mutual fight.

According to a police search warrant, Sue Benedict indicated to police on Feb. 7 that she didn't want to file charges at that time. She instead asked police to speak to officials at Owasso High School about issues on campus among students.

The Feb. 9 search warrant, which was filed with the court on Feb. 21, also shows investigators took 137 photographs at the school, including inside the girl's bathroom where the fight occurred. They also collected two swabs of stains from the bathroom and retrieved records and documents of the students involved in the altercation.

While the two-week-old warrant states that police were seeking evidence in a felony murder, the department has since said Benedict's death was not a result of injuries suffered in the fight, based on the preliminary results of the autopsy.

The police department said it does not plan to comment further on the teen's cause of death until toxicology and other autopsy results are completed.

'Oppenheimer,' Lily Gladstone win at 30th Screen Actors Guild Awards

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

"Oppenheimer" continued to steamroll through Hollywood's awards season on Saturday, winning the top prize, for outstanding cast, along with awards for Cillian Murphy and Robert Downey Jr., at the 30th Screen Actors Guild Awards.

As the Academy Awards draw closer, Christopher Nolan's blockbuster biopic — already a winner at the Golden Globes and the BAFTAs — has increasingly looked like the run-away favorite. The SAG Awards, one of the most telling Oscar predictors, will only add to the momentum for "Oppenheimer," the lead Academy Awards nominee with 13 nods.

The SAG Awards were streamed live on Netflix, a first for a major Hollywood award show. That made for some significant tweaks to the age-old traditions of such ceremonies. There were no ads. Profanity was permitted. ("Don't say anything you wouldn't say in front of Oprah," said Idris Elba.) And winners were occasionally interviewed backstage by red-carpet co-host Tan France — sometimes awkwardly, sometimes charmingly.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 45 of 74

The SAG Awards don't always signify Oscar success. Two of the last five winners from the guild ("The Trial of the Chicago 7" and "Black Panther") lost at the Academy Awards. But in the past two years, all five of the top SAG prizes — best ensemble and the four acting winners — have corresponded with the eventual Oscar winners, including the ensembles for "Everything Everywhere All at Once" and "CODA."

That could mean the SAGs offered an Oscar preview in two of the closest contests: best actor and best actress.

The night's most thrilling win went to Lily Gladstone for female actor in a leading role in Martin Scorsese's "Killers of the Flower Moon." No category has been more hotly contested, with analysts evenly split between Gladstone and Emma Stone for "Poor Things."

But Gladstone won Saturday and the crowd erupted. Stone, too, stood and vigorously applauded. More is riding on Gladstone than perhaps any other Oscar contender this year. Her win would be a first for Native Americans.

"We bring empathy into a world that so much needs it," said Gladstone. "It's so easy to distance ourselves. It's so easy to close off, to stop feeling. And we all bravely keep feeling. And that humanizes people. That brings people out of the shadows. It brings visibility."

Murphy and Paul Giamatti ("The Holdovers") have also been seen as in a neck-and-neck contest. But Murphy has now won at the SAGs, the BAFTAs and Globes, suggesting he has the clear edge heading into the Academy Awards.

Downey Jr. and Da'Vine Joy Randolph each won for their supporting performances, likewise solidifying their status as Oscar favorites.

"Why me? Why now? Why do things seem to be going my way?" said Downey Jr., accepting his first SAG Award for a film performance. "Unlike my fellow nominees, I will never grow tired from the sound of my own voice."

Randolph's performance in Alexander Payne's "The Holdovers" has been a breakthrough role for the 37-year-old actor. Now, she appears poised to win the Academy Award.

"To every actor out there still waiting in the wings for their chance, let me tell you: Your life can change in a day," Randolph said. "It's not a question of if but when. Keep going."

After more than two decades airing on TNT and TBS to dwindling viewership, Netflix acquired telecast rights to the SAG Awards in early 2023. Netflix, a dominant force for years in awards season, turned host, too.

"Personally, I can't wait to get home and have Netflix recommend this show to me based on all the other stuff that I watch myself in," joked Idris Elba, the night's de facto emcee.

The TV awards went largely to the same shows that have cleaned up at the Emmys and Golden Globes: "The Bear" (best comedy series ensemble, Jeremy Allen White, Ayo Edebiri); "Beef" (Ali Wong, Steven Yeun); and the cast of "Succession."

One exception was Pedro Pascal, who won best male actor in a drama series for "The Last of Us" over a trio of "Succession" stars.

"This is wrong for a number of reasons," said a visibly stunned Pascal. "I'm a little bit drunk. I thought I could get drunk."

This year's SAG Awards follows a grueling months-long strike in which the SAG-AFTRA union fought a bitter battle over a number of issues. Much of the work stoppage was prompted over changes in the film and TV industry brought on by streaming and a sea change led by Netflix.

"Your solidarity ignited workers around the world, triggering what forever will be remember as 'the hot labor summer,'" said Fran Drescher, president of SAG-AFTRA. "This was a seminal moment in our union's history."

The new streaming platform was sure to put even more of a spotlight on one of the most closely-watched predictors of the Academy Awards. Oscar voting wraps Tuesday.

Barbra Streisand held the audience in rapt attention while accepting a lifetime achievement award, presented by Jennifer Aniston and Bradley Cooper.

"I remember dreaming of being an actress as a teenager sitting in my bed in Brooklyn with a pint of

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 46 of 74

coffee ice cream and a movie magazine," said Streisand, who recalled being transfixed by "my first crush," Marlon Brando.

Streisand also took a moment to celebrate the Jewish pioneers of Hollywood.

"Now I dream of a world where such prejudice is a thing of the past," she said.

Saturday's show was one of Netflix's most significant forays yet into live streaming events. Netflix has previously hosted a live Chris Rock comedy special, a celebrity golf tournament and a live reunion "Love Is Blind" episode that was marred by technical difficulties. But Netflix is gearing up for more. On March 3, it will stream a live tennis event.

Inside the SAG Awards: A mostly celebratory mood for 1st show since historic strike

By KRYSTA FAURIA Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Inside the ballroom at the 30th Screen Actors Guild Awards, "Oppenheimer" was front and center literally and figuratively, snagging the night's top prize along with trophies for Cillian Murphy and Robert Downey Jr.

Ahead of this year's Academy Awards, Christopher Nolan's summer blockbuster increasingly looks like the run-away favorite. It was outshined on Saturday's awards only by reflections on the longest SAG-AFTRA strike in history last year and subsequent deal reached that ended it in November.

SAG-AFTRA National Executive Director Duncan Crabtree-Ireland gave the room a kind of pep talk before Saturday's show began, accompanied by a montage of actors speaking from the picket lines over the summer, prompting the room to erupt in cheers of support.

"We did achieve, I think, really important advances on paying actors fairly for working on streaming," Crabtree-Ireland said of the show being shown live on Netflix. "We're really one of the only shows out there that's delivering a union message and talking about how workers can support each other. So, I'm proud that Netflix is having us on their platform."

That speech, however, wasn't part of Netflix's livestream.

There was indeed a general sense of solidarity and gratitude toward their union from many in attendance, though some had less optimistic perspectives.

"I'm seeing a lot of people who are super grateful to be able to get back to work. But I'm also seeing the industry shrink a little bit and I'm starting to see jobs go away," filmmaker and actor Mark Duplass said before the show. "It's not an easy time. I'm not gonna sugarcoat it."

But most of the night was characterized by levity and camaraderie. The ballroom seemed energized by a presenter bit involving Billie Eilish signing Melissa McCarthy's face (at the comedian's request) before handing an award to "The Bear" star Ayo Edebiri.

The inside of any Hollywood awards show is a strange, starry place. Actors are typically seated at tables with their producers, directors and co-stars from the nominated film or series.

People are encouraged to remain seated, apart from designated periods throughout the show, when the room breaks out into a frenzy as celebrities rush to find friends or fellow stars they profess to be fans of, trying to get in conversations before the three-minute window closes. (Netflix's broadcast had no commercial breaks, but did build in time for impromptu schmoozing.)

Early in the night, Anne Hathaway and Emma Stone found their way to one another and were soon joined by Carey Mulligan, who ran to an empty seat between the pair and embraced Stone. (Hathaway — along with Meryl Streep and Emily Blunt — combined for an early highlight of the show, gathering onstage for a highly anticipated reunion of "The Devil Wears Prada" castmates.)

At a nearby table, director Alexander Payne poured a glass of Champagne for "The Holdovers" star Dominic Sessa, who turned 21 in October, while "American Fiction" actor Jon Ortiz was temporarily stuck outside the show after picking up two drinks for his table.

"Miss!" exclaimed Brendan Fraser across a sea of people as he sought the attention of a waiter before giving her cash pulled from his pocket. "This is for you."

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 47 of 74

While many of the main award categories heading into the Oscars seem to be all but a sure thing, a few are still up in the air, one of them being best actress.

Although Stone has collected several accolades this season, Lily Gladstone took home the best film performance by a female actor award for her performance in "Killers of the Flower Moon."

As Gladstone rushed back to her table following her emotional speech, she was embraced by her co-stars as they wiped away tears. Not long after, "The Crown" star Elizabeth Debicki, who won an award earlier in the night, rushed to Gladstone asking for a photo.

Tax-free status of movie, music and games traded online is on table as WTO nations meet in Abu Dhabi

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — Since late last century and the early days of the web, providers of digital media like Netflix and Spotify have had a free pass when it comes to international taxes on films, video games and music that are shipped across borders through the internet.

But now, a global consensus on the issue may be starting to crack.

As the World Trade Organization opens its latest biannual meeting of government ministers Monday, its longtime moratorium on duties on e-commerce products — which has been renewed almost automatically since 1998 — is coming under pressure as never before.

This week in Abu Dhabi, the WTO's 164 member countries will take up a number of key issues: Subsidies that encourage overfishing. Reforms to make agricultural markets fairer and more eco-friendly. And efforts to revive the Geneva-based trade body's system of resolving disputes among countries.

All of those are tall orders, but the moratorium on e-commerce duties is perhaps the matter most in play. It centers on "electronic transmissions" — music, movies, video games and the like — more than on physical goods. But the rulebook isn't clear on the entire array of products affected.

"This is so important to millions of businesses, especially small- and medium-sized businesses," WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said. "Some members believe that this should be extended and made permanent. Others believe ... there are reasons why it should not."

"That's why there's been a debate and hopefully — because it touches on lives of many people — we hope that ministers would be able to make the appropriate decision," she told reporters recently.

Under WTO's rules, major decisions require consensus. The e-commerce moratorium can't just sail through automatically. Countries must actively vote in favor for the extension to take effect.

Four proposals are on the table: Two would extend the suspension of duties. Two — separately presented by South Africa and India, two countries that have been pushing their interests hard at the WTO — would not.

Proponents say the moratorium benefits consumers by helping keep costs down and promotes the wider rollout of digital services in countries both rich and poor.

Critics say it deprives debt-burdened governments in developing countries of tax revenue, though there's debate over just how much state coffers would stand to gain.

The WTO itself says that on average, the potential loss would be less than one-third of 1% of total government revenue.

The stakes are high. A WTO report published in December said the value of "digitally delivered services" exports grew by more than 8% from 2005 to 2022 — higher than goods exports (5.6%) and other-services exports (4.2%).

Growth has been uneven, though. Most developing countries don't have digital networks as extensive as those in the rich world. Those countries see less need to extend the moratorium — and might reap needed tax revenue if it ends.

South Africa's proposal, which seeks to end the moratorium, calls for the creation of a fund to receive voluntary contributions to bridge the "digital divide." It also wants to require "leading platforms" to boost the promotion of "historically disadvantaged" small- and medium-sized enterprises.

Industry, at least in the United States, is pushing hard to extend the moratorium. In a Feb. 13 letter to Biden administration officials, nearly two dozen industry groups, including the Motion Picture Association, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Entertainment Software Association — a video-game industry group — urged the United States to give its “full support” to a renewal.

“Accepting anything short of a multilateral extension of the moratorium that applies to all WTO members would open the door to the introduction of new customs duties and related cross-border restrictions that would hurt U.S. workers in industries across the entire economy,” the letter said.

A collapse would deal a “major blow to the credibility and durability” of the WTO and would mark the first time that its members “changed the rules to make it substantially harder to conduct trade,” wrote the groups, which said their members include companies that combined employ over 100 million workers.

Corruption scandals cast a shadow over Portugal’s early general election and may favor populists

By BARRY HATTON Associated Press

LISBON, Portugal (AP) — The official two-week campaign period before Portugal’s early general election began on Sunday, with the country’s two moderate mainstream parties once again expected to collect the most votes but with the expected rise of a populist party potentially adding momentum to Europe’s drift to the right.

The center-left Socialist Party and center-right Social Democratic Party have alternated in power for decades. But they are unsure of how much support they might need from smaller rival parties for the parliamentary votes needed to form a government after the March 10 vote.

Corruption scandals have cast a shadow over the ballot. They have also fed public disenchantment with the country’s political class as Portugal prepares to celebrate 50 years of democracy, following the Carnation Revolution that toppled a rightist dictatorship on April 25, 1974.

The election is being held after a Socialist government collapsed last November following a corruption investigation. That case brought a police search of Prime Minister António Costa’s official residence and the arrest of his chief of staff. Costa hasn’t been accused of any crime.

Also in recent weeks, a Lisbon court decided that a former Socialist prime minister should stand trial for corruption. Prosecutors allege that José Sócrates, prime minister between 2005-2011, pocketed around 34 million euros (\$36.7 million) during his time in power from graft, fraud and money laundering.

The Social Democratic Party has also been tainted by corruption allegations.

During the recent weeks of unofficial campaigning, a graft investigation in Portugal’s Madeira Islands triggered the resignation of two prominent Social Democrat officials. The scandal erupted on the same day the Social Democratic Party unveiled an anti-corruption billboard in Lisbon that said, “It can’t go on like this.”

A housing crisis, persistent levels of low pay and unreliable public health services are other areas where the records of the two main parties are at issue.

Hot-button topics that have driven political debate and encouraged populist parties elsewhere in Europe, such as climate change, migration and religious differences, have largely been absent in Portugal’s campaign.

A five-year-old populist and nationalist party called Chega! (in English, Enough!) has made the fight against corruption one of its political banners. “Portugal needs cleaning out,” one of its billboards declares.

The party’s leader, 41-year-old lawyer André Ventura, has been riding in third place in opinion polls and could become a kingmaker if his political influence grows. His party got just 1.3% of votes in a 2019 election, but jumped to 7.3% in 2022. It could collect more than double that this time, polls suggest, if a protest vote materializes.

A key question is whether the Social Democrats will end up needing the votes of Chega! to make up a parliamentary majority after eight years in opposition.

The Socialist Party could, as in the past, forge parliamentary alliances with the Portuguese Communist

Party or Left Bloc party to take power.

Socialist leader Pedro Nuno Santos, his party's candidate for prime minister, is a lawmaker and a former minister for housing and infrastructure. Santos, 46, quit the previous government under a cloud over his handling of bailed-out flag carrier TAP Air Portugal and a dispute over the site of a new Lisbon airport.

Luís Montenegro, the 51-year-old Social Democrat leader aiming to become prime minister, has been a lawmaker for more than 20 years. He heads the Democratic Alliance, a grouping with two smaller right-of-center parties formed for the election.

Tractor protests threaten to drive the EU's green farming policies into a ditch

By RAF CASERT Associated Press

WESTROZEBEKE, Belgium (AP) — It was the puddles of green sludge left by the tires of massive tractors in western Belgium's industrial farmlands that drew the attention of biological engineer Ineke Maes.

The slime was destructive algae, the result of the excess of chemicals used by farmers to boost their crops, but at a high cost to nature. Maes had hoped the European Union's environmental policies would start to make a fundamental difference by improving exhausted soils.

In recent weeks, some of those tractors moved off the land and onto the roads, blocking major cities and economic lifelines from Warsaw to Madrid and from Athens to Brussels. Farmers were demanding the reversal of some of the most progressive measures in the world to counter climate change and protect biodiversity, arguing that the rules were harming their livelihoods and strangling them with red tape.

And the impact has been stunning.

The farmers' protests affected the daily lives of people across the 27-nation bloc, costing businesses tens of millions of euros in transportation delays. The disruption triggered knee jerk reactions from politicians at national and EU level: they committed to rolling back policies, some of them years in the making, on everything from the use of pesticides to limiting the amount of manure that could be spread on fields.

To environmentalists like Maes, who works for the Belgian Better Environment Federation umbrella group, it would almost be laughable if it were not so depressing.

"In the environmental movement, we joke that we should get tractors ourselves to make a point. Then we would be competing fair and square. The purpose should be that we get negotiations, and that we get a deal through democratic process — the rules, you know," she said. Reasoned arguments, she says, have been drowned out by the rumble of tractor engines.

And there's no end in sight.

After hundreds of tractors disrupted the EU summit in Brussels early this month at a volume that kept some leaders awake at night, farmers plan to return on Monday. They intend to be there when agriculture ministers discuss an emergency item on the agenda — the simplification of agricultural rules and a decrease in checks at farms that environmentalists fear could amount to a further weakening of standards.

The political noise level from the tractors — not to mention the loads of manure dumped outside official buildings — does get through, officials said. "That puts a bit more pressure on the ministers inside. So I would believe that ministers will be a bit more — insisting to have concrete results," said a high-level EU official, who asked not to be identified because the meeting has yet to take place.

It is this attitude that drives the environmental lobby and NGOs to distraction: knowing that scientific arguments are too often no match for the rule of the street. As a result, the EU's flagship Green Deal, that aims to make the continent carbon-neutral by 2050, is under threat.

"You really should not lose that long-term view, that vision of the future when you are working on policy," said Maes. "You should not respond to the issues of the day by simply scrapping very important rules that have been seriously discussed, considered, that have been included in environmental impact reports and so on — and that have also been democratically approved in that way."

Yet ahead of Monday's farm protest and meeting of agriculture ministers, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, for many the most powerful EU politician, insisted that she "remains fully committed

to delivering solutions to ease the pressure currently felt by our hard-working farming women and men.”

Von der Leyen’s change in emphasis comes ahead of the June 6-9 elections, when a good showing by her Christian Democrat group, the European People’s Party, will be key to keeping her at the helm of the all-powerful Commission. As her party has swayed toward putting farmers and industry first, so has she.

“It is a bit difficult putting a pin on Mrs. von der Leyen,” said Jutta Paulus, a Green member of the European Parliament. “She started off in 2019 being a climate and environment champion, more or less saying, ‘We don’t need the Greens anymore, we are green ourselves.’ And now she says: ‘Well industry called me and they are worried. So I have to do something.’”

In the wake of the tractor protests, action came fast and furious.

Early this month, von der Leyen’s Commission shelved an important anti-pesticide proposal, insisting “a different approach is needed.” She also allowed farmers to continue using some land they had been required to keep fallow to promote biodiversity. And the proposals on the table for Monday’s meeting about simplifying paperwork go in the same direction.

At the same time, a nature restoration law which was seen as another element in the Green Deal aspiration has already been watered down to appease farmers before it goes to a final legislative vote next Tuesday.

And at a national level, politicians have been bending the same way, from France to Spain and Belgium.

Flanders, in northern Belgium, has already relaxed its policy on the use of manure which was intended to limit emissions of nitrates that can harm water quality. Under pressure from multinational food manufacturers, whose processing plants dwarf even the biggest family farms in western Belgium, farmers are likely to stick with the industrial methods that exhaust soils and pollute waterways, Maes fears.

“It is mind-boggling that this whole process is now grinding to a halt,” she said.

A housing shortage is testing Oregon’s pioneering land use law. Lawmakers are poised to tweak it

By CLAIRE RUSH Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — A severe lack of affordable housing has prompted Oregon lawmakers to consider chipping away at a 1970s law that made the state a national leader in leveraging land use policy to prevent suburban sprawl and conserve nature and agriculture.

The so-called urban growth boundary, a sacred cow of Oregon’s liberal politics, helped to cement the state’s green reputation and has been “extremely influential” in its development, said Megan Horst, an urban planning professor at Portland State University.

“I can’t overstate it,” she said of the half-century-old law. “All that farmland would likely be a sea of strip malls and subdivisions, as they are pretty much anywhere else in the country.”

But interconnected homelessness and housing crises have forced exceptions to be considered by lawmakers, including Democrats who have historically defended the landmark policy.

The sole bill introduced by Democratic Gov. Tina Kotek during this year’s short legislative session is a sweeping housing package aiming to jumpstart home construction by tweaking the 1973 law, which essentially drew a circle around cities to protect farmland, forests and nature from urban encroachment.

Lawmakers have just two weeks to approve the bill before the session ends March 10.

As the longest serving speaker of the Oregon House, from 2013 to 2022, Kotek became known for her progressive agenda. But as governor, she has sought to ease restrictions for developers in a bid to advance her housing production goals.

Working to win support for the package has put her in the unusual position of having to lobby not Republicans — who largely back it — but members of her own party, many of whom voted against a similar measure last year. Kotek said she spent the seven months between legislative sessions speaking with lawmakers, housing developers and conservation groups to find a middle ground.

“We had some proposals last year that didn’t work for everyone, but we didn’t walk away. We sat down and worked on it,” she said while testifying in support of the bill, describing herself as its “chief architect”

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 51 of 74

and "chief cheerleader."

"I also know that the process means there might be amendments," she added. "But what we can't see happen is that this Legislature leaves at the end of their session without this bill."

On the ground, the anti-sprawl policy can look dramatic. At times, blocks of dense apartment complexes abruptly end and give way to thick forest or rolling fields. One side of a road can be lined with homes, while the other side features open space as far as the eye can see.

The 42-page package would, among many other things, grant a one-time exemption to the decades-old rule by allowing cities to acquire new land for the purpose of building housing. It would require 30% of new units in expansion areas to be affordable.

Currently, cities must forecast population growth over 20 years before requesting to change an urban growth boundary for new homes, businesses or industrial or public facilities. If they show the area inside their boundary won't accommodate projected needs, and identify outside land meeting a complex set of criteria, they can apply to expand.

Cities of more than 2,500 residents seeking to add more than 50 acres (20 hectares) must submit an application to a state agency for approval.

Ninety-five percent of such adjustments were approved between 2016 and 2023, according to the Department of Land Conservation & Development, the agency tasked with approvals. But many cities and developers say the rigorous evaluation and analysis requirements can be long and difficult to navigate.

"While land supply is not a barrier for all cities, it is critical for some, and the current ... process is time-consuming, cost-prohibitive, and litigious," Ariel Nelson, a lobbyist for the League of Oregon Cities, which has a neutral stance on the bill, said in written testimony.

To speed up the process, the bill before lawmakers would ease certain regulations and waive the 20-year population forecast if conditions are met. But the proposal still includes a number of restrictions largely stemming from Democrats' requests.

In order to be eligible, cities must prove they lack land as well as affordable housing. They would need to outline the history of their growth boundary in the previous 20 years and assess how much land inside the current boundary has been developed. They would also have to show that a certain percentage of households are severely cost burdened, meaning they spend more than half of their income on housing.

In most cases, cities wouldn't be able to add high-value farm or forest land.

Additionally, cities would only be able to add relatively small areas of land: cities with populations less than 25,000, for example, could only add a maximum of 50 "net residential" acres (20 hectares), which is less than one-tenth of a square mile (0.3 square kilometers). A net residential acre refers to the amount of land used to build homes, excluding streets and utilities.

The one-time exemption to urban growth boundary rules would expire in 2033.

State Sen. Deb Patterson, a member of the Environmental Caucus and the Senate's housing committee, said these guardrails made her feel comfortable supporting the bill. She was one of the Democratic lawmakers whose "no" vote killed last year's proposal.

"While it's not in any way shape or form a perfect bill, so much work has been done to make this a much better bill that I do believe I will be a 'yes' vote," she said.

One of her Republican colleagues on the Senate's housing committee, Sen. Dick Anderson, also supports the bill but said the boundary expansion rules were restrictive "almost to the point of not being of use."

"You should not be envisioning a Las Vegas or Phoenix style expansion, with houses galore and subdivision after subdivision," he said.

Anderson thinks other parts of the bill would be more useful in his coastal district, specifically a measure allowing cities to "swap" land currently within their boundaries, which is harder to be developed because of steep terrain or other topographical issues, with an equivalent amount of land just outside that is more suitable for residential use.

Other factors also have to be addressed in order to fully tackle the crisis, such as rising construction supply costs, a labor shortage and increasing corporate ownership of housing, housing experts say.

Lawmakers have tackled the land use law in the past, including to spur industrial growth. Most recently,

they approved a measure last year allowing the governor to designate up to eight sites for expansion to make room for semiconductor factories.

Idaho is set to execute a long-time death row inmate, a serial killer with a penchant for poetry

By REBECCA BOONE Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — For nearly 50 years, Idaho's prison staffers have been serving Thomas Eugene Creech three meals a day, checking on him during rounds and taking him to medical appointments.

This Wednesday, some of Idaho's prison staffers will be asked to kill him. Barring any last-minute stay, the 73-year-old, one of the nation's longest-serving death row inmates, will be executed by lethal injection for killing a fellow prisoner with a battery-filled sock in 1981.

Creech's killing of David Jensen, a young, disabled man who was serving time for car theft, was his last in a broad path of destruction that saw Creech convicted of five murders in three states. He is also suspected of at least a half-dozen others.

But now, decades later, Creech is mostly known inside the walls of the Idaho Maximum Security Institution as just "Tom," a generally well-behaved old-timer with a penchant for poetry. His unsuccessful bid for clemency even found support from a former warden at the penitentiary, prison staffers who recounted how he wrote them poems of support or condolence and the judge who sentenced Creech to death.

"Some of our correctional officers have grown up with Tom Creech," Idaho Department of Correction Director Josh Tewalt said Friday. "Our warden has a long-standing relationship with him. ... There's a familiarity and a rapport that has been built over time."

Creech's attorneys have filed a flurry of last-minute appeals in four different courts in recent months trying to halt the execution, which would be Idaho's first in 12 years. They have argued Idaho's refusal to say where its execution drug was obtained violates his rights and that he received ineffective assistance of counsel.

A three-judge panel of the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on Friday rejected an argument that Creech should not be executed because he was sentenced by a judge rather than a jury.

It's not clear how many people Creech, an Ohio native, killed before he was imprisoned in Idaho in 1974. At one point he claimed to have killed as many as 50 people, but many of the confessions were made under the influence of now discredited "truth serum" drugs and filled with outlandish tales of occult-driven human sacrifice and contract killings for a powerful motorcycle gang.

Official estimates vary, but authorities tend to focus on 11 deaths. Creech's attorneys did not immediately return phone calls from The Associated Press.

In 1973, Creech was tried for the murder of 70-year-old Paul Schrader, a retiree who was stabbed to death in the Tucson, Arizona, motel where Creech was living. Creech used Schrader's credit cards and vehicle to leave Tucson for Portland, Oregon. A jury acquitted him, but authorities say they have no doubt he was responsible.

The next year, Creech was committed to Oregon State Hospital for a few months. He earned a weekend pass and traveled to Sacramento, California, where he killed Vivian Grant Robinson at her home. Creech then used Robinson's phone to let the hospital know he would return a day late. That crime went unsolved until Creech later confessed while in custody in Idaho; he wasn't convicted until 1980.

After he was released from the Oregon State Hospital, Creech got a job at a church in Portland doing maintenance work. He had living quarters at the church, and it was there he shot and killed 22-year-old William Joseph Dean in 1974. Authorities believe he then fatally shot Sandra Jane Ramsamooj at the Salem grocery store where she worked.

Creech was finally arrested in November 1974. He and a girlfriend were hitchhiking in Idaho when they were picked up by two painters, Thomas Arnold and John Bradford. Creech shot both men to death and the girlfriend cooperated with authorities.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 53 of 74

While in custody, Creech confessed to a number of other killings. Some appeared to be fabricated, but he provided information that led police to the bodies of Gordon Lee Stanton and Charles Thomas Miller near Las Vegas, and of Rick Stewart McKenzie, 22, near Baggs, Wyoming.

Creech initially was sentenced to death for killing the painters. But after the U.S. Supreme Court barred automatic death sentences in 1976, his sentence was converted to life in prison.

That changed after he killed Jensen, who was serving time for car theft. Jensen's life hadn't been easy: He suffered a nearly fatal gun injury as a teen that left him with serious disabilities including partial paralysis.

Jensen's relatives opposed Creech's bid for clemency. They described Jensen as a gentle soul and a prankster who loved hunting and spending time outdoors, who was "the peanut butter" to his sister's jelly. His daughter, who was 4 when he was killed, spoke of how she never got to know him, and how unfair it was that Creech is still around when her father isn't.

Creech's supporters, meanwhile, say decades spent in a prison cell have left him changed. One death row prison staffer told the parole board last month that while she cannot begin to understand the suffering Creech dealt to others, he is now a person who makes positive contributions to his community. His execution date will be difficult for everyone at the prison, she said, especially those who have known him for years.

"I don't want to be dismissive of what he did and the countless people who were impacted by that in real significant ways," said Tewalt, the corrections director. "At the same time, you also can't be dismissive of the effect it's going to have on people who have established a relationship with him. On Thursday, Tom's not going to be there. You know he's not coming back to that unit — that's real. It would be really difficult to not feel some sort of emotion about that."

Trump wins South Carolina, easily beating Haley in her home state and closing in on GOP nomination

By MEG KINNARD and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

CHARLESTON, S.C. (AP) — Donald Trump won South Carolina's Republican primary on Saturday, easily beating former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley in her home state and further consolidating his path to a third straight GOP nomination.

Trump has now swept every contest that counted for Republican delegates, adding to previous wins in Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Haley is facing growing pressure to leave the race but says she's not going anywhere despite losing the state where she was governor from 2011 to 2017.

A 2020 rematch between Trump and President Joe Biden is becoming increasingly inevitable. Haley has vowed to stay in the race through at least the batch of primaries on March 5, known as Super Tuesday, but was unable to dent Trump's momentum in her home state despite holding far more campaign events and arguing that the indictments against Trump will hamstring him against Biden.

The Associated Press declared Trump the winner as polls closed statewide at 7 p.m. That race call was based on an analysis of AP VoteCast, a comprehensive survey of Republican South Carolina primary voters. The survey confirmed the findings of pre-Election Day polls showing Trump far outpacing Haley statewide.

"I have never seen the Republican Party so unified as it is right now," Trump declared, taking the stage for his victory speech mere moments after polls closed. He added, "You can celebrate for about 15 minutes, but then we have to get back to work."

South Carolina's first-in-the-South primary has historically been a reliable bellwether for Republicans. In all but one primary since 1980, the Republican winner in South Carolina has gone on to be the party's nominee. The lone exception was Newt Gingrich in 2012.

Trump was dominant across the state, even leading in Lexington County, which Haley represented in the state Legislature. Many Trump-backing South Carolinians, even some who previously supported Haley during her time as governor, weren't willing to give her a home-state bump.

"She's done some good things," Davis Paul, 36, said about Haley as he waited for Trump at a recent

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 54 of 74

rally in Conway. "But I just don't think she's ready to tackle a candidate like Trump. I don't think many people can."

At Haley headquarters on Saturday night, supporters waved her signs in front of a large projection screen showing Trump's speech, blocking it from view. That, of course, didn't make the defeat any less crushing.

About an hour later, Haley took the stage and said: "What I saw today was South Carolina's frustration with our country's direction. I've seen that same frustration nationwide."

"I don't believe Donald Trump can beat Joe Biden," Haley said, later adding: "I said earlier this week that no matter what happens in South Carolina, I would continue to run. I'm a woman of my word."

She said she plans to head to Michigan for its primary on Tuesday — the last major contest before Super Tuesday. Still, she faces questions about where she might be able to win a contest or be competitive.

Trump and Biden are already behaving like they expect to face off in November.

Trump and his allies argue Biden has made the U.S. weaker and point to the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan and Russia's decision to launch a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Trump has also repeatedly attacked Biden over high inflation earlier in the president's term and his handling of record-high migrant crossings at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Trump has questioned — often in harshly personal terms — whether the 81-year-old Biden is too old to serve a second term. Biden's team in turn has highlighted the 77-year-old Trump's own flubs on the campaign trail.

Biden has stepped up his recent fundraising trips around the country and increasingly attacked Trump directly. He's called Trump and his "Make America Great Again" movement dire threats to the nation's founding principles, and the president's reelection campaign has lately focused most of its attention on Trump suggesting he'd use the first day of a second presidency as a dictator and that he'd tell Russia to attack NATO allies who fail to keep up with defense spending obligations mandated by the alliance.

Haley also criticized Trump on his NATO comments and also for questioning why her husband wasn't on the campaign trail with her — even as former first lady Melania Trump hasn't appeared with him. Maj. Michael Haley is deployed in the Horn of Africa on a mission with the South Carolina Army National Guard.

But South Carolina's Republican voters line up with Trump on having lukewarm feelings about NATO and continued U.S. support for Ukraine, according to AP VoteCast data from Saturday's primary. About 6 in 10 oppose continuing aid to Ukraine in its fight against Russia. Only about a third described America's participation in NATO as "very good," with more saying it's only "somewhat good."

Haley has raised copious amounts of campaign money and is scheduled to begin a cross-country campaign swing on Sunday in Michigan ahead of Super Tuesday on March 5, when many delegate-rich states hold primaries.

But it's unclear how she can stop Trump from clinching enough delegates to become the party's presumptive nominee for the third time.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., complimented Haley while speaking to reporters at Trump's election night party in Columbia but suggested it was time for her to drop out.

"I think the sooner she does, the better for her, the better for the party," Graham said. Later, the senator was greeted with boos after Trump called him to the stage to address those gathered.

Trump's political strength has endured despite facing 91 criminal charges related to his efforts to overturn his 2020 election loss to Biden, the discovery of classified documents in his Florida residence and allegations that he secretly arranged payoffs to a porn actress.

The former president's first criminal trial is set to begin on March 25 in New York, where he faces 34 counts of falsifying business records related to hush money paid to porn star Stormy Daniels in the closing weeks of his 2016 presidential campaign.

Biden won South Carolina's Democratic primary earlier this month and faces only one remaining challenger, Dean Phillips. The Minnesota Democratic congressman has continued to campaign in Michigan ahead of the Democratic primary there, despite having little chance of actually beating Biden.

Though Biden is expected to cruise to his party's renomination, he faces criticism from some Democrats for providing military backing to Israel in its war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Some in his party sup-

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 55 of 74

port a ceasefire as the death toll in Israel's war has reached 30,000 people, two-thirds of them women and children. The war could hurt the president's general election chances in swing states like Michigan, which is home to a large Arab American population.

Takeaways from South Carolina primary: Donald Trump's Republican home field advantage is everywhere

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump trounced Nikki Haley on Saturday in the South Carolina primary, a victory that emphatically punctuated the depth and breadth of his support among Republican primary voters as he vanquished his lone remaining major opponent in her home state.

Trump did not even have to mount a vigorous campaign, making few appearances and spending relatively little money. Haley has vowed to stay in the race and planned to visit Michigan, the site of the next primary, on Sunday. But the loss further eroded the rationale for her candidacy, barring something unforeseen that would derail the former president.

Here are some takeaways from the South Carolina leg of the campaign:

ALL (REPUBLICAN) POLITICS IS NATIONAL

Haley talked up her chances in "my sweet state of South Carolina" for months. Twice elected governor, initially as a tea party candidate in 2010, she was universally known in her state, and mostly for positive reasons. She had even served as Trump's ambassador to the United Nations. Her conservative record was clear.

And yet her credentials were no match for Trump's hold on the party.

Trump has now won with ease in the Midwest, the Northeast and the South, bulldozing any regional differences that had existed in the party before his rise.

Haley talked in 2024 about her successes recruiting industry to South Carolina and signing tax cuts and voter ID laws. She promoted her international experience. She excoriated Trump as too risky, too old, too busy fending off indictments, too close to Vladimir Putin and not close enough to NATO allies. Voters were not swayed.

AP VoteCast data reflected her challenge, especially on foreign policy. The survey found that about half of South Carolina primary voters wanted the U.S. to take a less active role in the world, and about half opposed continuing aid to Ukraine in its defense against the Russian invasion. They were instead strongly aligned with Trump's vision.

Everything Haley tried reinforced the dynamics: To most Trump loyalists she sounded like just another politician offering establishment positions and trying to topple their champion.

HALEY STILL HAS ALMOST NO OBVIOUS OR EVEN LIKELY WINS

Haley repeated that she plans to stick around. The Michigan primary is Feb. 27. Haley already has campaigned there and run advertising. The big prize follows, Super Tuesday on March 5, when about a third of Republicans' 2,429 total delegates are at stake across primaries and caucuses in 15 states and one territory. Haley's campaign manager, Betsy Ankney, notes often that many states that follow South Carolina have the same open primary rules. But not all of them. And that didn't translate into a win at home anyway.

California, a majority-Democratic state, does not have open primaries. So Trump, even in a state where he's not broadly popular, will be the favorite in a Republicans-only setting. Michigan does have an open primary. But that's a state where progressives and Arab American voters are pushing voters to cast "uncommitted" ballots as a protest against President Joe Biden's approach to the Israel-Hamas war. Biden's campaign is countering. So that gives Democrats their own fight, with no incentive to cross over.

In short, if Haley couldn't win in South Carolina, her chances of victories ahead are slim. Her best shot at a victory could be in the Washington, D.C., primary next weekend, where Haley plans to make an appearance. Trump finished a distant third there behind Florida Sen. Marco Rubio and former Ohio Gov. John Kasich in 2016.

WHAT REALLY FORCES CANDIDATES TO DROP OUT

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 56 of 74

Presidential campaigns rarely end directly because of primary losses and delegates counts. They end when a candidate can't keep the lights on anymore. And sometimes donors keep giving long after the scoreboard says it's practically over.

Often, that's the case when there is a real ideological fight within a party — see Bernie Sanders in 2016, when the democratic socialist was the vessel for progressive anger at Hillary Clinton and the Democratic Party old guard. This time, for Republicans, it is a blend of personality, identity and ideology. Haley is the stand-in for all Republican check writers who loathe Trump and his version of the GOP.

And it's these anti-Trump Republicans who keep paying her campaign's bills. It isn't about delegates. So when Haley insists she is staying through to Super Tuesday, it's because she has the resources to do so. At some point, if she doesn't have a dramatic reversal, those resources will dry up.

But this campaign has a major asterisk. Trump is facing more than 90 criminal charges in multiple jurisdictions, injecting unparalleled uncertainty into the race.

SPEECHES AND SPIN ASIDE, IT'S ABOUT DELEGATES

Haley's determination aside, the ultimate numbers that matter are not on her fundraising reports. It's the delegate math. And Trump was on pace to win all 50 delegates in South Carolina, widening his lead and making it increasingly clear that he will reach the 1,215-delegate majority long before the end of the primary calendar in late spring.

VP AUDITION HOUR, FEATURING SEN. TIM SCOTT

South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott, who dropped his own presidential bid in November, enjoyed an extended spotlight in the unofficial contest to become Trump's running mate. First appointed to the Senate in 2012 by Haley, he was Trump's most visible surrogate in South Carolina, often heaping praise on a former president who can never seem to get too much validation.

Trump certainly noticed.

"He's been such a great advocate," Trump said at a Fox News town hall with Scott beside him. "He has been much better for me than he was for himself. I watched his campaign and he doesn't like talking about himself, but boy, does he talk about Trump."

Scott would give Trump loyalty and effective advocacy, without upstaging a former president who is always the headliner. Scott, as the only Black Republican in the Senate, also could appeal to Trump in his quest to increase GOP support from non-white voters.

But Trump has been known to flatter those who fawn over him, then make another choice.

THE BIDEN COALITION DID NOT SAVE HALEY

Haley never explicitly asked Democrats to help her against Trump, but she might as well have. She often reminded South Carolinians, who do not have to register by party, that the primary was open to all voters except the 125,000-plus who already had cast Democratic primary ballots Feb. 3.

She needed some of the remaining South Carolina Democrats, plus independents, to essentially give her a GOP version of the coalition Biden assembled against Trump in 2020. In a South Carolina Republican primary that would mean heavy support from wealthier, more moderate, college-educated white voters, especially around Columbia and Charleston. But Haley also needed at least some backing from Black voters in those areas and across small-town South Carolina.

It didn't happen.

Mexico president's son, presidential candidate denounce leak of phone numbers, say threats received

MEXICO CITY (AP) — The eldest son of Mexico's president and the governing party's presidential candidate said Saturday that their telephone numbers were published on social media and that they have received threats and insults. Both denounced the action.

The incident came a day after President Andrés Manuel López Obrador disclosed the phone number of a reporter for The New York Times, which published a story about a U.S. probe into claims that López took money from drug traffickers. López Obrador denied the allegations.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 57 of 74

The first to report the release of his phone number was the president's oldest son, José Ramón López Beltrán, who wrote on the X platform that he considered the action "a kind of vengeance" and said it puts his family in danger.

It wasn't immediately clear who made the number public. López Beltrán said the incident began with a letter that contained "threats and lies" directed at the president and his sons. He did not elaborate.

On Saturday, Mexico's president told reporters that it was "embarrassing for them to act that way," referring to everyone involved.

He spoke while visiting the city of Mazatlan and once again criticized The New York Times report, saying, "We are not taking a single step back in the defense of liberty and justice."

López Beltrán said it was the second time that his phone number has been published and noted he also has been harassed by cameras and drones everywhere he has lived.

López Beltrán also blamed the New York Times reporter, Natalie Kitroeff, for her phone number being made public, saying she provided the number "thinking that the president would respond to her slander."

Hours later, the presidential candidate of López Obrador's Morena party, Claudia Sheinbaum, as well as the party's secretary general, Citlalli Hernández, announced that their numbers also had been leaked and that they were receiving offensive calls and messages.

"It's obvious what they want to do, again their attacks are as crude as they are harmless," Sheinbaum said on her social media account and posted a screenshot of one of the messages she received.

The leak of the phone data was condemned by Adrián Alcalá, head of the National Institute of Transparency, Access to Information and Protection of Personal Data, an autonomous body that guarantees access to information and the protection of personal data in Mexico.

Alcalá said on his X account that the body would seek to ensure the right to the protection of personal data in Mexico.

López Obrador on Friday defended his release of Kitroeff's number despite local regulations on the protection of personal data.

"Above that law is moral authority and political authority, and I represent a country and I represent a people who deserve respect," the president said.

Alcalá objected to those comments, telling López Obrador that no one in Mexico is above the law, including the president and all other public officials.

"We regret that the Presidency does not warn how serious the disclosure of information by any person can be, especially by a journalist," Alcalá said on X.

López Obrador has questioned the need for Alcalá's agency on several occasions, and this month he presented an initiative in Congress to eliminate it and other autonomous agencies.

Biden and Utah's governor call for less bitterness and more bipartisanship in the nation's politics

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden and Utah Gov. Spencer Cox disagree on many issues but they were united Saturday in calling for less bitterness in politics and more bipartisanship.

"Politics has gotten too personally bitter," said Biden, who has practiced politics since he was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1972. "It's just not like it was." The Democratic president commented while delivering a toast to the nation's governors and their spouses at a black-tie White House dinner in their honor.

Biden said what makes him "feel good" about hosting the governors is "we have a tradition of doing things together. We fight like hell, we make sure that we get our points across. At the end of the day, we know who we work for. The objective is to get things done."

Cox, a Republican and chairman of the National Governors Association, preceded Biden to the lectern beneath an imposing portrait of Abraham Lincoln above the fireplace in the State Dining Room.

The Utah governor said the association "harkens back to another time, another era, when we did work together across partisan lines, when there was no political danger in appearing with someone from the

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 58 of 74

other side of the aisle and we have to keep this, we have to maintain this, we cannot lose this," he said.

Cox leads an initiative called "Disagree Better" that aims to reduce divisiveness. He had joked earlier in the program that he and Biden might be committing "mutually assured destruction" by appearing together at the White House since they're both up for reelection this year.

He told Biden that as state chief executives, governors "know just a very little bit of the incredible burden that weighs on your shoulders. We can't imagine what it must be like, the decisions that you have to make, but we feel a small modicum of that pressure and so, tonight, we honor you."

Biden said he remembered when lawmakers would argue by day and break bread together at night. He is currently embroiled in stalemates with the Republican-controlled House over immigration policy, government funding and aid for Ukraine and Israel.

Cox went on to say that his parents taught him to pray for the leader of the country.

"Mr. President, I want you to know that our family prays for you and your family every night," he said. "We pray that you will be successful because if you are successful that means that United States of America is successful and tonight we are always Americans first, so thank you."

Colorado Gov. Jared Polis, a Democrat who is the association's vice chairman, also offered a toast.

"We have a lot more in common and a lot more that brings us together as Americans for love of country and love of the people of our country," he said.

Vice President Kamala Harris and her husband, Doug Emhoff, were among Cabinet secretaries and White House officials who sat among the governors. The group included North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum, who in December ended his bid to become the Republican presidential nominee and challenge Biden.

Guests dined on house-made burrata cheese, an entree choice of beef braciolo or cod almandine and lemon meringue tart with limoncello ice cream for dessert.

After dinner, the program moved to the East Room for a performance by country singer Trisha Yearwood.

The governors, in Washington for their annual winter meeting, heard from Biden and Harris on Friday during a separate session at the White House.

Warren Buffett uses his annual letter to warn about Wall Street and recount Berkshire's successes

By JOSH FUNK AP Business Writer

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Warren Buffett credited his longtime partner — the late Charlie Munger — with being the architect of the Berkshire Hathaway conglomerate he has received the credit for leading and warned shareholders in his annual letter Saturday not to listen to Wall Street pundits or financial advisers who urge them to trade often.

Buffett said he always writes his letter with smart, long-term investors like his sister Bertie in mind and tries to tell them what he thinks they would like to know about Berkshire.

"She is sensible — very sensible — instinctively knowing that pundits should always be ignored," Buffett wrote about Bertie. "After all, if she could reliably predict tomorrow's winners, would she freely share her valuable insights and thereby increase competitive buying? That would be like finding gold and then handing a map to the neighbors showing its location."

Buffett told investors that Berkshire is a safe place to park their cash as long as they don't expect the "eye-popping performance" of its past because there are no attractively priced acquisition targets out there big enough to make a meaningful difference in the Omaha, Nebraska-based company's results. But he said Berkshire will be ready to swoop in with its \$167.6 billion whenever the casino-like stock market seizes up.

Investor Cole Smead of Smead Capital Management said Buffett is reassuring investors that "we'll be ready to buy things when things finally get rational" while warning about the dangers of Wall Street that "is like a denizen of thieves, and they'll sell you what they can sell you."

Munger, Buffett's longtime investing partner, died in November at age 99 — taking away one of the key sounding boards Buffett relied on over the decades as Berkshire acquired companies like See's Candy, Geico insurance, BNSF railroad and others to reshape the failing textile mill they took over in the 1960s

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 59 of 74

into the massive eclectic conglomerate Berkshire is today.

Buffett already devoted part of last year's annual letter to Berkshire shareholders to a tribute to Munger, but this year's version led off with even more praise for the revered curmudgeon's contributions to Berkshire over the years. Buffett said "Charlie was the 'architect' of the present Berkshire" who realized early on that it was better to buy wonderful businesses at fair prices.

"Charlie never sought to take credit for his role as creator but instead let me take the bows and receive the accolades," Buffett wrote. "In a way his relationship with me was part older brother, part loving father. Even when he knew he was right, he gave me the reins, and when I blundered he never – never – reminded me of my mistake."

Munger's death served as yet another reminder that Berkshire will one day have to move forward without the 93-year-old Buffett at the helm.

Berkshire has established a succession plan and said that vice chairman Greg Abel will one day replace Buffett as CEO while the company's two other investment managers will take over the stock portfolio. Abel has already overseen all of Berkshire's many noninsurance businesses since 2018, and managers at those companies say investors shouldn't worry about Abel's ability to lead the company. To a great extent, Berkshire lets its companies run themselves on a day-to-day basis while headquarters decides where to invest all the cash they generate.

Buffett told investors in his letter that Abel "in all respects is ready to be CEO of Berkshire tomorrow."

Edward Jones analyst Jim Shanahan found that comment about Abel comforting, but the question is whether he'll be ready to take advantage of a big opportunity when there is a financial panic because Abel might be afraid that his first big investment would be a dud.

"I have no doubt. given his operational background, that he can step in and run Berkshire today, but I don't know if he's ready to commit a huge amount of capital," Shanahan said.

CFRA Research analyst Cathy Seifert said Berkshire does have "really strong, stable, second and third tier level managers" who don't get much attention, but investors understandably want to hear more from Abel and fellow vice chairman Ajit Jain, who runs the insurance businesses. Maybe that will happen at this year's shareholder meeting in May.

Buffett also recounted how Berkshire's insurance businesses thrived last year, but its massive utilities and BNSF railroad disappointed. He also told shareholders how he never plans to sell its stakes in nearly 30% of Occidental Petroleum and 9% of five large Japanese trading houses, but he reiterated that he has no plans to buy the oil producer outright.

Berkshire's eclectic mix of businesses, combined with the strong performance of its investments, delivered a profit of \$37.57 billion, or \$26,043 per Class A share, in the fourth quarter. That's more than double the \$18.08 billion profit, or \$12,355 per Class A share, that Berkshire reported a year earlier.

But Buffett cautioned that investors should largely ignore those bottom line figures because they are swayed so much by the paper value of its investments. Instead, he has long urged investors to pay attention to Berkshire's operating earnings that exclude investments.

By that measure, Berkshire reported a 28% jump in operating earnings to \$8.48 billion, or \$5,878.21 per Class A share. That's up from \$6.63 billion, or \$4,527.06 per Class A share.

The three analysts surveyed by FactSet Research predicted that Berkshire would report quarterly operating earnings of \$5,717,17 per Class A share.

Berkshire's stock set a series of records in recent weeks, most recently peaking at \$632,820 per Class A share Friday morning as investors eagerly anticipated Buffett's letter. Buffett is revered for his remarkably successful track record and the sage advice he has offered over the decades. His annual letter is always one of the best-read reports in the business world.

Berkshire also spent \$2.2 billion repurchasing its own shares in the fourth quarter, bringing the total to \$9.2 billion for the full year.

But the cash continues to pile up to record levels at Berkshire because Buffett can't find any huge investments at reasonable prices.

One of the biggest acquisitions Berkshire did make recently was the purchase of the last 20% of the Pilot truck stop business it hadn't already bought as part of a 2017 deal. But that transaction with the Haslam family got messy last year with both Berkshire and the Haslams accusing each other of trying to manipulate Pilot's earnings to affect the price Berkshire had to pay.

The dueling lawsuits over that deal generated headlines with bribery allegations and other alleged misdeeds before being settled in January. Berkshire completed the purchase of the nation's largest truck stop operator last month for only \$2.6 billion.

Buffett didn't directly comment on that deal, but he may have been hinting at it when he recounted classic advice from 1863 urging all banks to "never deal with a rascal" that he said he's learned the wisdom of over the years.

"People are not that easy to read," Buffett said. "Sincerity and empathy can easily be faked. That is as true now as it was in 1863."

US and British strikes on Houthi sites in Yemen answer militants' surge in Red Sea attacks on ships

By LOLITA C. BALDOR and TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. and Britain struck 18 Houthi targets in Yemen on Saturday, answering a recent surge in attacks by the Iran-backed militia group on ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, including a missile strike this past week that set fire to a cargo vessel.

According to U.S. officials, American and British fighter jets hit sites in eight locations, targeting missiles, launchers, rockets, drones and air defense systems. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity in order to provide early details of an ongoing military operation.

This is the fourth time that the U.S. and British militaries have conducted a combined operation against the Houthis since Jan. 12. But the U.S. has also been carrying out almost daily strikes to take out Houthi targets, including incoming missiles and drones aimed at ships, as well as weapons that were prepared to launch.

The U.S. F/A-18 fighter jets launched from the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower aircraft carrier, which is currently in the Red Sea, officials said.

"The United States will not hesitate to take action, as needed, to defend lives and the free flow of commerce in one of the world's most critical waterways," said U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin. "We will continue to make clear to the Houthis that they will bear the consequences if they do not stop their illegal attacks."

The Houthis denounced the "US-British aggression" and vowed to keep up its military operation in response. "The Yemeni Armed Forces affirm that they will confront the US-British escalation with more qualitative military operations against all hostile targets in the Red and Arabian Seas in defense of our country, our people and our nation," it said in a statement.

The U.S., U.K., and other allies said in a statement the "necessary and proportionate strikes specifically targeted 18 Houthi targets across 8 locations in Yemen" that also included underground storage facilities, radar and a helicopter.

U.K. Defense Secretary Grant Shapps said RAF Typhoon jets engaged in "precision strikes" aimed at degrading Houthi drones and launchers. Shapps said it came after "severe Houthi attacks against commercial ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, including against the British-owned MV Islander and the MV Rubymar, which forced the crew to abandon ship." It's the fourth time Britain has joined in the U.S.-led strikes.

The strikes have support from the wider coalition, which includes Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands and New Zealand.

President Joe Biden and other senior leaders have repeatedly warned that the U.S. won't tolerate the Houthi attacks against commercial shipping. But the counterattacks haven't appeared to diminish the Houthis' campaign against shipping in the region, which the militants say is over Israel's war against Hamas

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 61 of 74

in the Gaza Strip.

"Our aim remains to de-escalate tensions and restore stability in the Red Sea, but we will once again reiterate our warning to Houthi leadership: we will not hesitate to continue to defend lives and the free flow of commerce in the face of continued threats," said the Saturday statement.

The Houthis have launched at least 57 attacks on commercial and military ships in the the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden since Nov. 19, and the pace has picked up in recent days.

"We've certainly seen in the past 48, 72 hours an increase in attacks from the Houthis," Pentagon spokeswoman Sabrina Singh said in a briefing Thursday. And she acknowledged that the Houthis have not been deterred.

"We never said we've wiped off the map all of their capabilities," she told reporters. "We know that the Houthis maintain a large arsenal. They are very capable. They have sophisticated weapons, and that's because they continue to get them from Iran."

There have been at least 32 U.S. strikes in Yemen over the past month and a half; a few were conducted with allied involvement. In addition, U.S. warships have taken out dozens of incoming missiles, rockets and drones targeting commercial and other Navy vessels.

Earlier Saturday, the destroyer USS Mason downed an anti-ship ballistic missile launched from Houthi-held areas in Yemen toward the Gulf of Aden, U.S. Central Command said, adding that the missile was likely targeting MV Torm Thor, a U.S.-Flagged, owned, and operated chemical and oil tanker.

The U.S. attacks on the Houthis have targeted more than 120 launchers, more than 10 surface-to-air-missiles, 40 storage and support building, 15 drone storage building, more than 20 unmanned air, surface and underwater vehicles, several underground storage areas and a few other facilities.

The rebels' supreme leader, Abdul Malik al-Houthi, announced this past week an "escalation in sea operations" conducted by his forces as part of what they describe as a pressure campaign to end Israel's war on Hamas.

But while the group says the attacks are aimed at stopping that war, the Houthis' targets have grown more random, endangering a vital waterway for cargo and energy shipments traveling from Asia and the Middle East onward to Europe.

During normal operations, about 400 commercial vessels transit the southern Red Sea at any given time. While the Houthi attacks have only actually struck a small number of vessels, the persistent targeting and near misses that have been shot down by the U.S. and allies have prompted shipping companies to reroute their vessels from the Red Sea.

Instead, they have sent them around Africa through the Cape of Good Hope — a much longer, costlier and less efficient passage. The threats also have led the U.S. and its allies to set up a joint mission where warships from participating nations provide a protective umbrella of air defense for ships as they travel between the Suez Canal and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.

In Thursday's attack in the Gulf of Aden, the Houthis fired two missiles at a Palau-flagged cargo ship named Islander, according to Central Command said. A European naval force in the region said the attack sparked a fire and wounded a sailor on board the vessel, though the ship continued on its way.

Central Command launched attacks on Houthi-held areas in Yemen on Friday, destroying seven mobile anti-ship cruise missiles that the military said were prepared to launch toward the Red Sea.

Central Command also said Saturday that a Houthi attack on a Belize-flagged ship on Feb. 18 caused an 18-mile (29-kilometer) oil slick and the. military warned of the danger of a spill from the vessel's cargo of fertilizer. The Rubymar, a British-registered, Lebanese-operated cargo vessel, was attacked while sailing through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait that connects the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

The missile attack forced the crew to abandon the vessel, which had been on its way to Bulgaria after leaving Khorfakkan in the United Arab Emirates. It was transporting more than 41,000 tons of fertilizer, according to a Central Command statement.

The Associated Press, relying on satellite images from Planet Labs PBC of the stricken vessel, reported Tuesday that the vessel was leaking oil in the Red Sea.

Yemen's internationally recognized government on Saturday called for other countries and maritime-protection organizations to quickly address the oil slick and avert "a significant environmental disaster."

Caribbean officials search for 2 people who were on yacht allegedly hijacked by 3 escaped prisoners

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — Authorities in the eastern Caribbean said they were trying to locate two people believed to be U.S. citizens who were aboard a yacht that was hijacked by three escaped prisoners from Grenada.

The Royal Grenada Police Force said in a statement released Friday that they were working on leads "that suggest" the two occupants of the yacht might have been killed.

"This investigation is in its infancy stage," police said.

The nonprofit Salty Dawg Sailing Association identified the owners as Ralph Hendry and Kathy Brandel. It said they were "veteran cruisers" and longtime members of the association, calling them "warmhearted and capable." A relative of Hendry didn't return a message seeking comment Saturday.

The association said a cruising skipper had contacted the association about a member's yacht, Simplicity, that was found "anchored and abandoned" off a beach on the island of St. Vincent.

"The good Samaritan had boarded the boat and noted that the owners ... were not onboard and found evidence of apparent violence," the association said in a statement Thursday.

The association said Hendry and Brandel had sailed the yacht in last year's Caribbean Rally from Hampton, Virginia, to Antigua, and were spending the winter cruising in the eastern Caribbean.

"This is a very upsetting event and details are still unconfirmed by the authorities, but this does appear to be a tragic event," said Bob Osborn, the association's president. "In all my years of cruising the Caribbean, I have never heard of anything like this."

Family members of those missing met with authorities in St. Vincent on Saturday, where they were seen boarding the yacht that was hijacked. It was being guarded by officials, one of whom was wearing latex gloves.

Hendry's family issued a statement Saturday thanking police, local coast guards and all those who helped authorities gather information.

"It means so much to us that so many people cared for Ralph and Kathy as friends and fellow cruisers that they are willing to stop and help in whatever way possible," the family said.

They also asked that all those trying to conduct independent searches to "stand down."

"The only way we feel this situation could be worse would be if anyone was hurt or endangered trying to conduct searches," the family said.

Authorities in Grenada said they had dispatched senior investigators and a forensic specialist to the nearby island of St. Vincent, where the escaped prisoners were arrested Wednesday.

The prisoners, ages 19, 25 and 30, were charged a couple of months ago with one count of robbery with violence. The eldest inmate also was charged with one count of rape, three counts of attempted rape and two counts of indecent assault and causing harm, police in Grenada said.

The three men escaped from their holding cell Feb. 18, according to police.

Authorities said a preliminary investigation suggested the three men seized the yacht at Grenada's capital, St. George's, and traveled to St. Vincent.

Western leaders rally around Kyiv to mark 2 years since Russia's full-scale invasion

By SUSIE BLANN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — President Volodymyr Zelenskyy welcomed Western leaders to Kyiv Saturday to mark the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion, as Ukrainian forces run low on ammunition

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 63 of 74

and foreign aid hangs in the balance.

Allies from the EU and the Group of Seven wealthy democracies rallied around Kyiv to express solidarity, with Zelenskyy joining a virtual G7 meeting Saturday and four world leaders traveling to Ukraine's war-weary capital.

"Two years ago, here, we met enemy landing forces with fire; two years later, we meet our friends and our partners here," Zelenskyy said as he met the dignitaries at Hostomel airfield just outside of Kyiv, which Russian paratroopers unsuccessfully tried to seize in the first days of the war.

A somber mood hangs over Ukraine as the war against Russia enters its third year and Kyiv's troops face mounting challenges on the frontline amid dwindling supplies and personnel challenges. Its troops recently withdrew from the strategic eastern city of Avdiivka, handing Moscow one of its biggest victories. And Russia still controls roughly a quarter of the country after Ukraine failed to make any major breakthroughs with its summertime counteroffensive.

Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni, Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen arrived in Kyiv shortly after a Russian drone attack struck a residential building in the southern city of Odesa, killing at least one person. Three women also sustained severe burns in the attack Friday evening, regional Gov. Oleh Kiper wrote on his social media account. Rescue services combed through the rubble looking for survivors.

Hours later, Zelenskyy's office announced the signing of 10-year bilateral security deals with Canada and Italy, with Ottawa committing to send Kyiv 3.02 billion Canadian dollars (close to 2.2 billion US dollars) in military and economic aid this year while Rome promised much-needed long-range weapons.

In a joint press conference, Meloni hailed the agreement with Kyiv and said, "We will continue to support Ukraine in what I have always deemed the just right of its people to defend itself."

"Confusing the much-banded about word 'peace' with 'surrender,' as some people do, is a hypocritical approach that we will never share," she added.

Meloni also chaired a G7 videoconference from Kyiv that produced a joint statement Saturday reaffirming world leaders' commitment to "supporting a comprehensive, just and lasting peace," tightening sanctions on Russia and sending Ukraine military and economic aid for "as long as it takes."

Von der Leyen vowed during the joint press conference that the bloc will stand with Ukraine "financially, economically, militarily, and most of all, morally, until (the) country is finally free."

At the press conference, Zelenskyy highlighted the urgency of timely arms deliveries, while pledging that Kyiv would not use weapons from allied countries to strike Russian territory. His words reflected an increasingly tense battlefield situation in eastern Ukraine, where Kyiv's troops are trying to hold back Russian advances despite a escalating ammunition shortage.

On the frontline in the eastern Donetsk region, Ukrainian soldiers pleaded for shells.

"When the enemy comes in, a lot of our guys die. ... We are sitting here with nothing," said Volodymyr, 27, a senior officer in an artillery battery.

"In order to protect our infantry ... we need a high number of shells, which we do not have now," said Oleksandr, 45, a commander of an artillery unit. The two officers gave only their first names, citing security concerns.

About 100 people gathered outside St. Sophia's Cathedral in central Kyiv Saturday, calling for the release of Azov Brigade members who were taken captive by Russia after defending the southern city of Mariupol.

Olena Petrivna, the mother of a member taken by Russian forces questioned why Russia invaded Ukraine, saying that before the war people "lived our own lives, not bothering anyone, raising our children".

The Russians, she said, tried to conquer Ukraine to teach them what to say and what language to speak but, she added, "We don't need them. We have one destiny – victory. We must win."

The war has also come to Russia. Drones hit a steel plant in the Lipetsk region in southern Russia Saturday, causing a large fire, regional Gov. Igor Artamonov said, adding there are no casualties. Independent Russian media said the Novolipetsk Metallurgical Plant is the largest steel plant in Russia. Videos shared on Russian social media showed several fires burning at the plant, and an explosion could be heard.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 64 of 74

Independent Russian news outlet Mediazona said Saturday that about 75,000 Russian men died in 2022 and 2023 fighting in the war.

A joint investigation published by Mediazona and Meduza, another independent Russian news site, indicates that the rate of Russia's losses in Ukraine is not slowing and that Moscow is losing about 120 men a day. Based on a statistical analysis of the recorded deaths of soldiers compared with a Russian inheritance database, the journalists said about 83,000 soldiers are likely to have died in the two years of fighting.

Solidarity demonstrations with Ukraine were held across Europe, including in London, Berlin and Stockholm.

In Belgrade, hundreds marched through the city center carrying Ukrainian flags. Though it has condemned the invasion of Ukraine, Serbia has not joined Western sanctions against Russia and maintains friendly relations with Moscow.

Despite a heavy crackdown on dissent, some Russians marked the anniversary by laying flowers at Moscow monuments or staging one-person protests. According to OVD-Info, a Russian rights group that tracks political arrests and provides legal aid, at least six people were detained across Russia on Saturday for holding up antiwar signs, bearing flowers in Ukraine's national colors or otherwise expressing support for Kyiv. Four more were arrested in Moscow at a demonstration calling for the return of mobilized Russian soldiers from Ukraine."

Meanwhile, millions of Ukrainians continue to live in precarious circumstances, and many others face constant struggles under Russian occupation. Most are waiting for a Ukrainian liberation that hasn't come.

Olena Zelenska, the president's wife, said Saturday that more than 2 million Ukrainian children have left the country since the war began and that at least 528 have been killed. "The war started by Russia deliberately targets children," she said.

Britain has pledged an additional 8.5 million pounds (\$10.8 million) of humanitarian aid to Ukraine, bolstering efforts to provide medical care, food and basic services to residents.

About 14.6 million people, or 40% of Ukraine's population, need assistance, with many left homeless or without adequate access to food, water and electricity, Britain's Foreign Office said in announcing the aid.

In the U.S. Congress, Republicans have stalled \$60 billion in military aid for Kyiv, desperately needed in the short term. The EU recently approved a 50 billion-euro (about \$54 billion) aid package for Ukraine meant to support Ukraine's economy, despite resistance from Hungary.

An RNC member is trying to stop the party from paying Donald Trump's legal bills

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — At least one member of the Republican National Committee is working to slow Donald Trump's attempted takeover of the organization by pushing to keep the committee neutral until Trump is officially the presidential nominee and avoid picking up his legal bills.

Two draft resolutions are being circulated by Henry Barbour, a national committeeman from Mississippi, for consideration at the RNC's upcoming March meeting in Houston. Barbour said support for the resolutions among RNC members is growing but he does not yet have the needed cosponsors, and any resolutions would ultimately be nonbinding.

The effort comes after Trump last week publicly called to replace the RNC's current leaders and install one of his senior campaign advisors and his daughter-in-law Lara Trump in top roles. Lara Trump suggested earlier in the week that GOP voters would support the committee paying her father-in-law's legal bills as he faces a raft of criminal and civil indictments.

Trump senior campaign adviser Chris LaCivita, whom the former president wants to install as the party's chief operating officer, told reporters Friday night that the RNC would not pay Trump's legal bills.

In a statement on Saturday, LaCivita said "the primary is over and it is the RNC's sole responsibility to defeat Joe Biden and win back the White House."

"Efforts to delay that assist Joe Biden in the destruction of our nation," he said. "Republicans cannot

stand on the sidelines and allow this to happen.”

One of Barbour’s proposed resolutions says that the RNC and its leadership will stay neutral throughout the presidential primary and not take on additional staff from any of the active campaigns until a candidate has the needed delegates to be the nominee.

The second resolution says the organization will not pay the legal bills of any candidate for federal or state office but will instead focus its spending on efforts directly related to the 2024 election.

“The RNC has one job. That’s winning elections,” Barbour said. “I believe RNC funds should be spent solely on winning elections, on political expenses, not legal bills.”

The RNC was paying some of Trump’s legal bills for New York cases that started while he was president, the Washington Post reported, but current Chair Ronna McDaniel said in November 2022 that the RNC would stop paying once Trump became a candidate again and started running for the 2024 presidential election.

Trump is spending millions on lawyers in civil cases and four criminal cases, but he also has legal debts that top half a billion dollars.

Former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley, who is Trump’s last major challenger in the GOP primary and facing him in her home state’s contest Saturday, said a family member or campaign manager should not be leading the RNC.

“I would hope that the people in the RNC know that they have a responsibility, a responsibility to put in people in the RNC who are going to look out in the best interest of all of the Republican Party, not just one person,” Haley said.

The resolutions were first reported by The Dispatch on Saturday.

Oaths and pledges have been routine for political officials. That’s changing in a polarized America

By JULIE CARR SMYTH and KIMBERLEE KRUESI Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — The resignation letter was short and direct.

“I can no longer be under an oath to uphold the New Constitution of Ohio,” wrote Sabrina Warner in her letter announcing she was stepping down from the state’s Republican central committee.

It was just days after Ohio voters resoundingly approved an amendment last November to the state constitution ensuring access to abortion and other forms of reproductive health care. For many, the vote was a victory after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned a constitutional right to abortion in 2022.

For Warner, a staunch abortion opponent, it meant she could no longer stand by the Ohio Constitution she had proudly sworn an oath to uphold just over a year before.

Throughout modern American history, elected officials have sworn oaths to uphold constitutions and said the Pledge of Allegiance without much controversy. In a handful of cases recently, these routine practices have fallen victim to the same political divisions that have left the country deeply polarized.

Disagreements over abortion rights, gun control and treatment of racial minorities are some of the issues that have caused several political leaders to say they cannot take an oath or recite the pledge.

Some Republicans, including Missouri Secretary of State Jay Ashcroft, a candidate for governor, point to amendments enshrining abortion rights in state constitutions. Ohio’s protections passed last fall, and advocates are proposing an initiative for the Missouri ballot this year.

Warner signed off her resignation letter, effective two days after Ohio’s vote, with a biblical reference to “the cowardly, the vile, the murderers” and more being “consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur.” She did not return messages seeking comment.

In Tennessee this month, Democratic Rep. Justin Jones declined to lead the pledge during a legislative session. He gained national attention after being one of two Black lawmakers whom Republicans briefly expelled from the state House last year after he and two other Democrats participated in a demonstration advocating for gun control from the House floor, outraging GOP members because it violated the chamber’s rules.

Tennessee House members are tapped to find a minister to lead a prayer before the start of a session

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 66 of 74

and then to lead the chamber in the pledge to the American flag. Just before he was to do so, Jones submitted a handwritten note to the House clerk that read, "I prefer not to lead the pledge of allegiance."

His refusal came as he has criticized his Republican colleagues for being racist and focusing on what he said are the wrong issues, such as targeting the LGBTQ+ community rather than addressing gun control nearly a year after six people, including three children, were killed in a school shooting in Nashville.

While another Democratic lawmaker, an Army veteran, led the pledge without commenting on Jones' refusal, Republicans quickly expressed their outrage at Jones' decision. GOP Rep. Jeremy Faison called Jones' refusal to say the Pledge of Allegiance a "disgrace."

"In my opinion, he should resign. That is an embarrassment to veterans and to people who have come before us," Faison said.

Jones, responding later to the Republican criticism, said he "couldn't bring myself to join their performative patriotism as they continue to support an insurrectionist for president and undermine liberty and justice for all."

Jones' stance recalled a similar one in 2001, when then-Tennessee Rep. Henri Brooks said she was chastised by Republican leaders for refusing to join her fellow lawmakers in the pledge. Brooks, who is Black, told media outlets at the time that she hadn't recited the pledge since being in the third grade and declined to do so because the American flag represented the colonies that enslaved her ancestors.

Earlier this year, former President Donald Trump refused to sign a loyalty oath in Illinois, a pledge that has been in place since the McCarthy era.

The part Trump left unsigned confirms that candidates "do not directly or indirectly teach or advocate the overthrow of the government" of the United States or the state or "any unlawful change in the form of the governments thereof by force or any unlawful means." Trump, who signed the voluntary oath during his presidential runs in 2016 and 2020, has yet to say why he didn't sign it this time.

He has faced a number of state lawsuits seeking to bar him from the ballot related to his role in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol, an issue that is currently before the U.S. Supreme Court.

His spokesman, Steven Cheung, did not return an email seeking comment but told news outlets in a statement in January: "President Trump will once again take the oath of office on January 20th, 2025, and will swear 'to faithfully execute the office of president of the United States and will to the best of my ability preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.'"

Unlike with the Pledge of Allegiance, declining to take an oath of office often carries the higher price of being unable to hold an elected position.

In Missouri, Ashcroft drew attention in October when he suggested he might not be able to take the oath of office as governor if voters protect a right to abortion in the state Constitution.

"Any time a statewide official is sworn in, we swear an oath to uphold the Constitution of the United States and of the state of Missouri," he told reporters after an abortion-related court hearing. "If I cannot do that, then I would have to leave my position. I cannot swear an oath and then refuse to do what I'd said I would do."

The issue also has roiled Republicans in the Missouri Senate. State Sen. Rick Brattin, head of the state's chapter of the Freedom Caucus, said if voters in November approve a proposed ballot initiative to enshrine abortion rights in the state Constitution, "You would have to swear an oath to protect and to defend the death of the unborn."

Similar concerns were expressed at the federal level in the landmark Dobbs case, which overturned Roe v. Wade.

The Foundation to Abolish Abortion argued that the high court's decision in the case would play a crucial role in how much people respected the Constitution. "American public officials are oath-bound to follow the Court insofar as the Court follows the Constitution, but not farther," the group and other abortion opponents wrote in a friend of the court brief.

Chris Redfern said the Republican concerns over adding abortion rights to a state constitution is a marked contrast to how Democrats handled a previous flashpoint. He was elected chair of the Ohio Democratic

Party in 2005 after voters inserted a ban on same-sex marriage in the state Constitution. He said he doesn't recall any of the amendment's opponents considering forgoing their oaths or resigning over it.

"In the old days, before the Tea Party and then Trump, there was a seriousness about the Constitution and taking the oath on swearing-in day," said Redfern, a former state lawmaker. "Especially with the polarization that Donald Trump has brought on, I don't think that there's a respect for these kinds of instruments. There's certainly no adherence, but I don't believe that legislators really care all that much. They do know that they have to be sworn in to get paid every couple of weeks."

Israeli officials to meet on a proposed pause in Gaza while the Cabinet is set to OK a Rafah plan

By WAFSA SHURAFU and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli officials will meet Saturday night on the next steps after the latest talks with the United States, Egypt and Qatar in search of a deal on pausing the fighting in Gaza, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said.

But Netanyahu announced that he'll convene the Cabinet early next week to "approve the operational plans for action in Rafah," including the evacuation of civilians, despite widespread warnings from the international community about a military ground operation in the southern city where more than half of Gaza's population shelters. "Only a combination of military pressure and firm negotiations" would achieve Israel's aims in the war, he said.

A senior official from Egypt, which along with Qatar is a mediator between Israel and the Hamas militant group, said mediators were waiting for Israel's official response to a draft deal that includes the release of up to 40 women and older hostages held in Gaza in return for up to 300 Palestinian prisoners held by Israel, mostly women, minors and older people.

The Egyptian official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the negotiations, said the proposed six-week pause in fighting would include allowing hundreds of aid trucks to enter Gaza every day, including the northern half of the besieged territory. He said that both sides agreed to continue negotiations during the pause for further releases and a permanent cease-fire.

Negotiators face an unofficial deadline of the start of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan around March 10.

Hamas political official Osama Hamdan noted that the group wasn't at the talks, but asserted to reporters in Beirut on Friday that Israel had refused its main demands, including stopping the "aggression" and withdrawing from Gaza.

The Health Ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza said Saturday that the bodies of 92 Palestinians killed in Israeli bombardments were brought to hospitals over the past 24 hours, raising the overall toll in nearly five months of war to 29,606. The total number of wounded rose to nearly 70,000.

The ministry's death toll doesn't distinguish between civilians and combatants, but it has said that two-thirds of those killed were children and women. Israel says its troops have killed more than 10,000 Hamas fighters, but hasn't provided details.

An Israeli airstrike hit a house in Rafah, killing at least eight people, including four women and a child, health authorities said. An Associated Press journalist saw the bodies at Abu Youssef al-Najjar hospital.

"Enough, enough. Either the Israelis or us should stop. There should be a truce," said neighbor Abdul-Qader Shubeir, who described feeling lost at not being immediately able to put out the fire burning the bodies.

NEW GENOCIDE ALLEGATIONS

Brazil's president alleged Saturday that Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians, doubling down on harsh rhetoric after stirring controversy a week ago by comparing Israel's military offensive in Gaza to the Nazi Holocaust in which 6 million Jews and others perished during World War II.

Israel has pushed back against genocide claims made at the U.N.'s top court and elsewhere, saying its war targets the militant group Hamas, not the Palestinian people. It has held Hamas responsible for civil-

ian deaths, arguing that the group operates from civilian areas.

"What the Israeli government is doing is not war, it is genocide," Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva wrote on X, formerly Twitter. "Children and women are being murdered."

In response to Lula's initial comments, Israel declared him a persona non grata, summoned Brazil's ambassador and demanded an apology. Lula recalled Brazil's ambassador to Israel for consultations.

Last month, South Africa filed a landmark case with the International Court of Justice, accusing Israel of genocide against Palestinians. The court issued a preliminary order ordering Israel to do all it can to prevent death, destruction and any acts of genocide in Gaza.

Israel, created in part as a refuge for survivors of the Holocaust, has accused South Africa of hypocrisy. South Africa has compared Israel's treatment of Palestinians in Gaza with the treatment of Black South Africans during apartheid, framing the issues as fundamentally about people oppressed in their homeland.

HUNGER AND DISEASES SPREAD

Israel declared war after the deadly Oct. 7 Hamas attack on southern Israel in which militants killed about 1,200 people and took around 250 hostages. More than 100 hostages remain in captivity in Gaza.

The rising civilian death toll and worsening humanitarian crisis in Gaza have amplified calls for a cease-fire. Hunger and infectious diseases are spreading and about 80% of Gaza's 2.3 million people have been displaced, with about 1.4 million crowded into Rafah on the border with Egypt.

"There are choking, skyrocketing prices. It's terrifying. There is no source of income. The area is very overcrowded," said Hassan Attwa, a displaced man from Gaza City who now shelters in a tent on the sand in Mawasi in the south. "The garbage, may God bless you, is not collected at all. It stays piled up. It turns into a mess and clay when it rains. The situation is disastrous in every sense of the word."

In Beit Lahiya in northern Gaza, children banged on pots as part of a protest outside a closed hospital demanding more aid to the north.

Netanyahu has vowed to fight until "total victory," but is under pressure at home. Police used a water cannon to disperse anti-government protesters in Tel Aviv on Saturday night, and 18 people were arrested. Others protested in Jerusalem.

The body of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny has been handed over to his mother, aide says

By EMMA BURROWS and JOANNA KOZLOWSKA Associated Press

The body of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny has been handed over to his mother, a top aide to Navalny said Saturday on his social media account.

Ivan Zhdanov, the director of Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation, made the announcement on his Telegram account and thanked "everyone" who had called on Russian authorities to return Navalny's body to his mother.

Earlier on Saturday, Yulia Navalnaya, Navalny's widow, accused President Vladimir Putin of mocking Christianity by trying to force his mother to agree to a secret funeral after his death in an Arctic penal colony.

"Thank you very much. Thanks to everyone who wrote and recorded video messages. You all did what you needed to do. Thank you. Alexei Navalny's body has been given to his mother," Zhdanov wrote.

Navalny, 47, Russia's most well-known opposition politician, unexpectedly died on Feb. 16 in an Arctic penal colony and his family has been fighting for more than a week to have his body returned to them. Prominent Russians released videos calling on authorities to release the body and Western nations have hit Russia with more sanctions as punishment for Navalny's death as well as for the second anniversary of its invasion of Ukraine.

Navalny's mother, Lyudmila Navalnaya, is still in Salekhard, Navalny's press secretary Kira Yarmysh said on X, formerly Twitter. Lyudmila Navalnaya has been in the Arctic region for more than a week, demanding that Russian authorities return the body of her son to her.

"The funeral is still pending," Yarmysh tweeted, questioning whether authorities will allow it to go ahead "as the family wants and as Alexei deserves."

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 69 of 74

Earlier on Saturday, Navalny's widow said in a video that Navalny's mother was being "literally tortured" by authorities who had threatened to bury Navalny in the Arctic prison. They, she said, suggested to his mother that she did not have much time to make a decision because the body is decomposing, Navalnaya said.

"Give us the body of my husband," Navalnaya said earlier Saturday. "You tortured him alive, and now you keep torturing him dead. You mock the remains of the dead."

Authorities have detained scores of people as they seek to suppress any major outpouring of sympathy for Putin's fiercest foe before the presidential election he is almost certain to win. Russians on social media say officials don't want to return Navalny's body to his family, because they fear a public show of support for him.

Navalnaya accused Putin, an Orthodox Christian, of killing Navalny.

"No true Christian could ever do what Putin is now doing with the body of Alexei," she said, asking, "What will you do with his corpse? How low will you sink to mock the man you murdered?"

Saturday marked nine days since the opposition leader's death, a day when Orthodox Christians hold a memorial service.

People across Russia came out to mark the occasion and honor Navalny's memory by gathering at Orthodox churches, leaving flowers at public monuments or holding one-person protests.

Muscovites lined up outside the city's Christ the Savior Cathedral to pay their respects, according to photos and videos published by independent Russian news outlet SOTAvision. The video also shows Russian police stationed nearby and officers stopping several people for an ID check.

As of Saturday evening, at least 38 people had been detained in Russia for showing support for Navalny, according to the OVD-Info rights group that tracks political arrests.

They included Elena Osipova, a 78-year-old artist from St. Petersburg who stood in a street with a poster showing Navalny with angel wings, and Sergei Karabatov, 64, who came to a Moscow monument to victims of political repression with flowers and a note saying "Don't think this is the end."

Also arrested was Aida Nuriyeva, from the city of Ufa near the Ural Mountains, who publicly held up a sign saying "Putin is Navalny's murderer! I demand that the body be returned!"

Putin is often pictured at church, dunking himself in ice water to celebrate the Epiphany and visiting holy sites in Russia. He has promoted what he has called "traditional values" without which, he once said, "society degrades."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov rejected allegations that Putin was involved in Navalny's death, calling them "absolutely unfounded, insolent accusations about the head of the Russian state."

Musician Nadya Tolokonnikova, who became widely known after spending nearly two years in prison for taking part in a 2012 protest with her band Pussy Riot inside Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral, was one of many prominent Russians who released a video in which she accused Putin of hypocrisy and asked him to release Navalny's body.

"We were imprisoned for allegedly trampling on traditional values. But no one tramples on traditional Russian values more than you, Putin, your officials and your priests who pray for all the murder that you do, year after year, day after day," said Tolokonnikova, who lives abroad. "Putin, have a conscience, give his mother the body of her son."

Lyudmila Navalnaya said Thursday that investigators allowed her to see her son's body in the morgue in the Arctic city of Salekhard. She had filed a lawsuit at a court in Salekhard contesting officials' refusal to release the body. A closed-door hearing had been scheduled for March 4.

Yarmysh, Navalny's spokesman, said that Lyudmila Navalnaya was shown a medical certificate stating that her son died of "natural causes."

Tired of diesel fumes, these moms are pushing for electric school buses

By ALEXA ST. JOHN Associated Press

Areli Sanchez's daughter, Aida, used to be one of 20 million American kids who ride a diesel bus to school each day.

Aida has asthma. When she was little, she complained about the smell and cloud of fumes on her twice-daily trip.

"When she would come home from school or be on the bus, she got headaches and sick to her stomach. She said, 'Mami, I don't feel well, I feel dizzy,'" Sanchez said in Spanish from Las Vegas. Aida missed classes a lot when her asthma was bad. Research shows diesel exhaust exposure can cause students to miss school and affect learning.

She was admitted to the hospital for an asthma attack in second grade, and after that Sanchez began driving Aida to school.

Diesel exhaust from school buses potentially affects one-third of U.S. students, their parents and educators each day, according to federal data. It's a known carcinogen plus it contains harmful nitrogen oxides, volatile gases and particles that exacerbate lung issues. It also contributes to global warming.

Most affected by these environmental and health issues are Black, Latino, Indigenous and lower-income communities, who often rely on buses to get to school and are also more likely to suffer from asthma than other students. Some of the biggest drivers for change are parents worried about their children.

For Areli Sanchez' family in Las Vegas, things continued to deteriorate.

She felt like she had to stop working. "I didn't know when we were going to get another call from school about another asthma attack," she said.

A few years after her daughter started having problems, Sanchez saw the opportunity to get involved in the nascent movement for electric buses. They don't smell. They aren't noisy. They cost more up front, but cost less to run and can meaningfully reduce emissions, making them a climate change solution.

Now Sanchez has been making this case locally and beyond for four years, even taking a long diesel bus ride to the state capital, Carson City, to plead for funding from the legislature.

Recently she started to get some traction when the Clark County School District, her district, began to swap some of its buses for electric. These still make up only a fraction of the nearly 2,000 in the fleet, but she's optimistic.

Some similar progress is taking place throughout the nation as a sense of urgency builds around worsening air quality and environmental injustice related to the warming climate.

Children are generally more harmed by air pollution than adults because their bodies are still developing, and because they breathe in more air per body size than adults do, said University of Michigan epidemiology and public health researcher Sara Adar, who studies the link between health and school buses.

"As they're burning their fuel and as the engine is spinning, they often are releasing very, very small particles that can get deep into our lungs and cause havoc throughout the body," Adar said.

Kids also can spend considerable time around idling buses, she noted, lengthening their exposure to something that can permanently damage their health. Research has highlighted poor air quality inside older diesel school buses, too.

"It's this perpetual cycle of bad air quality," said Lonnie Portis, a policy and advocacy manager for the activist group We Act for Environmental Justice in New York City. In hard-hit, or environmental justice neighborhoods, he said, "you're removing at least some of that by putting electric school buses in the rotation."

Some school districts have switched to newer versions of diesel buses, which are more efficient and produce less pollution, as one way to reduce students' exposure. Others, especially in underfunded districts, keep their older, more polluting vehicles.

Much like Sanchez, Liz Hurtado, the mother of four children who ride the bus in Virginia Beach, Virginia,

has spent years advocating for electric buses.

Her oldest daughter also got headaches riding a diesel bus, and she'd drive her to school when she could, she said.

Now a national field manager for the grassroots group Moms Clean Air Force and active in a program dedicated to protecting Latino children's health, Hurtado appeals to school districts to buy electric buses. She schedules events for community members to see and drive electric vehicles, hosts webinars and meetings and teaches others how to reach out to legislators.

"Knowing all of the stressors and anxiety from climate change, and the fact that this is a huge burden for our children," Hurtado said. "That places a burden on us, right?"

While an electric bus isn't yet available to her, she still feels "really excited about the momentum."

Federal money is now the leading source of funding for electric school buses, and prioritizes low-income, rural or Tribal communities, which advocates see as a huge win. Most electric school buses on the road today have landed in those areas, according to WRI.

"It means that we are putting the solution closest to the problem," said Carolina Chacon, coalition manager for the Alliance for Electric School Buses, a group of nonprofit organizations that has been expanding.

Sanchez said Aida might not get to take advantage of the electric buses, since she is now 16.

"But other moms won't have to worry like I did because of the fumes," she said.

Alabama IVF ruling puts spotlight on state plans for tax breaks and child support for fetuses

By JOHN HANNA and GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — The recent Alabama Supreme Court ruling that frozen embryos are legally protected children is highlighting how support for the idea that a fetus should have the same rights as a person underpins far less dramatic laws and proposals from abortion foes across the U.S.

Lawmakers in at least six states have proposed measures similar to a Georgia law that allows women to seek child support back to conception to cover expenses from a pregnancy. Georgia also allows prospective parents to claim its income tax deduction for dependent children before birth, Utah enacted a pregnancy tax break last year, and variations of those measures are before lawmakers in at least four other states.

Including legislation that makes harming or killing a fetus a crime, several dozen proposals falling under the broad umbrella of promoting fetal rights are pending in at least 15 states, according to an Associated Press analysis using the bill-tracking software Plural.

The Alabama court decision spotlighted the anti-abortion movement's long-standing goal of giving embryos and fetuses legal and constitutional protections on par with those of the women carrying them. But abortion rights advocates see proposals granting even limited protections to embryos and fetuses as potentially having broader implications.

"Any law that applies to a human could then be deployed with regard to fetuses," said Melissa Murray, a professor at the New York University School of Law. "The whole array of statutory law and constitutional law is available."

Abortion opponents argue that proposals on income taxes or child support — or state aid to anti-abortion centers that provide services during pregnancy and after birth — are driven by compassion for vulnerable women and girls. The help could persuade some not to terminate pregnancies, abortion opponents contend, but their tax and child support proposals also would help women and girls who never consider abortion.

"The main goal is just to help provide support for mothers and families who need extra support here and then provide support to those who are also helping them, such as the pregnancy resource centers," said Lucrecia Nold, who lobbies for the Kansas Catholic Conference.

A Kansas House committee held a hearing earlier this month on the child support proposal, and a bill to allow prospective parents to claim the state's \$2,250 dependent income tax deduction before a child's birth is before a Senate committee. Lawmakers are expected to discuss both in coming weeks.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 72 of 74

Kansas is an outlier among states with Republican-controlled Legislatures because of a 2019 state Supreme Court decision declaring that the Kansas Constitution protects access to abortion as a matter of a fundamental right to bodily autonomy. Lawmakers put an amendment on the ballot to explicitly declare that the constitution doesn't grant a right to abortion — allowing them to greatly restrict or ban the procedure — but voters soundly rejected it in August 2022. It was the first of seven state votes affirming abortion rights after the U.S. Supreme Court's Dobbs decision allowing states to ban abortion.

But Kansas also has had a law since 2007 that allows people to face separate charges for crimes against fetuses, including capital murder, vehicular homicide and battery, and it hasn't been challenged. A 2013 state law declares that life begins at fertilization and "unborn children have interests in life, health and well-being that should be protected," but it's not been enforced as a limit on abortion.

Brittany Jones, an attorney and policy director for Kansas Family Voice, which opposes abortion and sought the child support measure, said the state Supreme Court didn't care about those laws when it ruled in 2019.

"This freakout — that we're trying to do something unique legally — is just hysterical," she said. "We believe that the mother and the child both have value. I won't run from that; that's true."

In questioning abortion opponents' motives for pursuing more limited measures dealing with child support or income taxes, abortion rights advocates argue that they don't represent meaningful aid for pregnant women or their families.

During the Kansas House committee hearing this month, abortion providers argued that if the state wants to help them, it should consider expanding social services, including Medicaid; improve access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive care; or mandate paid family leave. The state's budget division projected that almost 21,000 extra income tax filers could claim the dependent deduction — but the average savings would be about \$91 each.

Elisabeth Smith, state policy and advocacy director for the Center for Reproductive Rights, which fights for abortion access, called such measures "window dressing" and said they and the Alabama Supreme Court ruling are part of a coordinated anti-abortion campaign across the U.S.

"This is absolutely part of the anti's long campaign to perpetuate abortion stigma and to normalize that an embryo and a fetus are equal to a living, breathing human being walking around," Smith said.

But Mary Zieger, a law professor at the University of California, Davis, who has published six books since 2015 about the national abortion debate and its history, said states' fetal personhood measures also could influence the U.S. Supreme Court's conservative majority to consider whether the U.S. Constitution's rights apply to fetuses and embryos as a matter of history or tradition.

"And then they're going to say, 'Well, look, there's also all these states that hold this position,'" she said.

In Alabama, voters amended the state constitution in 2018 to declare that the state's public policy is "to ensure the protection of the rights of the unborn child." Justices cited that provision in separate opinions on frozen embryos.

Broad fetal rights proposals are pending in at least four states, and Vermont has one to grant rights to fetuses at the 24th week of pregnancy, though it is not likely to pass the Democratic-controlled Legislature.

Ziegler, who's working on a book about the push for fetal rights, said such broad measures are likely to be unpopular with voters who want to protect abortion access or in vitro fertilization for women who have trouble conceiving.

She said abortion foes are trying to find "unicorn" bills that advance fetal personhood without "actually making voters angry."

"There's a kind of longer game being played here in the sense that the goal is ultimately some kind of federal recognition for fetal personhood," she said.

Macron booed by French farmers who blame him for not doing enough to support agriculture

By SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — French President Emmanuel Macron was greeted with boos and whistles at the opening of the Paris Agricultural Fair on Saturday by angry farmers who blame him for not doing enough to support them.

Macron was scheduled to visit the event, which draws crowds of visitors every year. But before the official opening, several dozen protesters forced their way through security barriers and entered the site as the president was arriving.

Farmers have been protesting for months across France, including Paris, to demand better living conditions, simpler regulations and better protection against foreign competition they see as unfair.

Police in full riot gear were deployed at the Paris Agricultural Fair to prevent them from getting close to Macron, who had a planned meeting with the heads of France's main farmers' unions.

Meanwhile, protesters chanted slogans calling for Macron to "resign" and blew into whistles to show their anger.

"We won't be able to respond to the farming crisis in a few hours," Macron said. "It has taken months, years of work for those who came here to present their cattle, their work ... This fair must go well and calmly."

Three weeks ago, farmers lifted roadblocks around Paris and elsewhere around the country after the government offered more than 400 million euros (\$433 million) in aid and tax breaks.

"Anger can be expressed," Macron said, warning against any "violence."

The French president decided to meet with groups of protesters in a separate room. He promised "floor prices" will be established for each product to "guarantee farmers' income." He also said an emergency plan to financially relieve the most struggling farms will start being implemented on Monday.

Macron said a meeting will be held at the Elysee presidential palace in March to build "a plan for the future of farming" with farmers' unions and other key players in the food industry.

One farmer asked the president to say "in front the cameras you are going to give oxygen to the farmers ... Do that and I guarantee you will calm everyone down."

Macron answered: "You have grievances. You do not have a government that's completely deaf ... It's not true that nothing's been done."

He later officially inaugurated the fair, an opening delayed by several hours because of the protest.

Macron then mingled with farmers presenting their cattle and products, starting with Normandy cows and camembert cheese — while protesters could still sporadically be heard loudly whistling.

The move come as farmers across Europe are protesting against EU agriculture policies, bureaucracy and overall business conditions.

Farmers complain that the 27-nation bloc's environmental policies, such as the Green Deal, which calls for limits on the use of chemicals and on greenhouse gas emissions, limit their business and make their products more expensive than non-European Union imports.

On Friday, farmers on their tractors staged a demonstration in the streets of Paris before the Agricultural Fair.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, Feb. 25, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 244 ~ 74 of 74

Today in History: February 25

Muhammad Ali defeats Sonny Liston for first world title

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Sunday, Feb. 25, the 56th day of 2024. There are 310 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Feb. 25, 1964, Muhammad Ali (then known as Cassius Clay) became world heavyweight boxing champion as he defeated Sonny Liston in Miami Beach.

On this date:

In 1901, United States Steel Corp. was incorporated by J.P. Morgan.

In 1913, the 16th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, giving Congress the power to levy and collect income taxes, was declared in effect by Secretary of State Philander Chase Knox.

In 1919, Oregon became the first state to tax gasoline, at one cent per gallon.

In 1954, Gamal Abdel Nasser became Egypt's prime minister after the country's president, Mohammed Naguib, was effectively ousted in a coup.

In 1957, the Supreme Court, in *Butler v. Michigan*, overturned a Michigan statute making it a misdemeanor to sell books containing obscene language that would tend to corrupt "the morals of youth."

In 1973, the Stephen Sondheim musical "A Little Night Music" opened at Broadway's Shubert Theater.

In 1986, President Ferdinand Marcos fled the Philippines after 20 years of rule in the wake of a tainted election; Corazon Aquino assumed the presidency.

In 1991, during the Persian Gulf War, 28 Americans were killed when an Iraqi Scud missile hit a U.S. barracks in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.

In 1994, American-born Jewish settler Baruch Goldstein opened fire with an automatic rifle inside the Tomb of the Patriarchs in the West Bank, killing 29 Muslims before he was beaten to death by worshippers.

In 1997, a jury in Media, Pennsylvania, convicted chemical fortune heir John E. du Pont of third-degree murder, deciding he was mentally ill when he shot and killed world-class wrestler David Schultz. (Du Pont died in prison in December 2010 while serving a 13- to 30-year sentence; he was 72.)

In 2010, in Vancouver, the Canadian women beat the United States 2-0 for their third straight Olympic hockey title.

In 2013, former U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, 96, died in Hanover, New Hampshire.

In 2017, actor Bill Paxton died at age 61 from a stroke, a complication of heart surgery he'd had 11 days earlier.

In 2018, the Winter Olympics in South Korea came to an end as officials from North and South Korea shared a VIP box at the closing ceremonies with U.S. presidential adviser and first daughter Ivanka Trump.

In 2020, U.S. health officials warned that the coronavirus was certain to spread more widely in the United States; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention urged Americans to be prepared. President Donald Trump, speaking in India, said the virus was "very well under control" in the U.S.

In 2022, President Joe Biden nominated federal appeals court Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson to the Supreme Court, making her the first Black woman selected to serve on it.

Today's birthdays: Actor Ann McCrea is 93. Actor Tom Courtenay is 87. Former CBS newsman Bob Schieffer is 87. Actor Diane Baker is 86. Actor Karen Grassle is 82. Former talk show host Sally Jessy Raphael is 82. Former professional wrestler Ric Flair is 75. Humorist Jack Handey is 75. Movie director Neil Jordan is 74. Rock singer-musician/actor John Doe (X) is 71. Rock musician Dennis Diken (The Smithereens) is 67. Rock singer-musician Mike Peters (The Alarm; Big Country) is 65. Comedian Carrot Top is 59. Model and actor Veronica Webb is 59. Actor Alexis Denisof is 58. Actor Tea Leoni is 58. Actor Lesley Boone is 56. Actor Sean Astin is 53. Singer Daniel Powter is 53. Latin singer Julio Iglesias Jr. is 51. R&B singer Justin Jeffre is 51. Actor Anson Mount is 51. Comedian-actor Chelsea Handler is 49. Actor Rashida Jones is 48. Country singer Shawna Thompson (Thompson Square) is 46. Actor Justin Berfield is 38. Actors James and Oliver Phelps ("Harry Potter" movies) are 38. Actor Jameela Jamil is 38. Rock musician Erik Haager (Carolina Liar) is 37.