

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 1 of 70



- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [3- West Hanson Township Land Auction](#)
- [4- Groton Prairie Mixed Bowling Leagues](#)
- [4- GFP Commission Holds March Meeting](#)
- [6- The Groton Chamber announces Hwy 12 electronic sign ad winners!](#)
- [7- South Dakota Average Gas Prices](#)
- [8- Drought Monitor](#)
- [9- SD Search Light: Gevo trumpets cash on hand, growth potential for sustainable jet fuel in earnings call](#)
- [11- SD Search Light: We know what the timber industry needs, but what can the Black Hills provide?](#)
- [12- SD Search Light: Thune, Rounds vote yes as U.S. Senate approves spending package hours before deadline](#)
- [15- SD Search Light: Know what an APR margin is? If you have credit card, it's likely driving up your interest rate](#)
- [17- Weather Pages](#)
- [21- Daily Devotional](#)
- [22- Subscription Form](#)
- [23- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [24- News from the Associated Press](#)

Saturday, March 9

State GBB Tournament at Brookings
Thrift Store open 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.

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



Sunday, March 10

Spring ahead for Daylight Savings Time
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, 9 a.m.; 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.; Confirmation Sunday, 9:30 a.m.; Sunday school, 9:30 a.m.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

© 2024 Groton Daily Independent

1440

In partnership with smartasset™

Partial Shutdown Averted

The US Senate, by a vote of 75-22, passed a \$460B package of six spending bills to fund a group of federal agencies through the end of the fiscal year on Sept. 30, avoiding a partial government shutdown hours before a midnight deadline. The measure passed the House earlier this week by a vote of 339-85.

The package provides funding for agriculture, energy, housing, transportation, veterans, and other programs while making cuts to other lines, including the FBI and the Environmental Protection Agency. Congress has another two weeks until March 22 to pass a second tranche of six spending bills to fund other parts of the federal government, including the military and homeland security, through Sept. 30. See a breakdown of 2024 federal spending so far here.

In other Capitol news, former US Rep. George Santos announced he is running in the GOP primary in New York's 1st Congressional District. Santos, who was expelled from Congress last year, faces a September trial for 23 federal charges, including money laundering and identity theft.

US economy adds 275,000 jobs in February, exceeding expectations.

The latest figure marks the third straight month of job gains above 200,000 and is the 39th consecutive month of gains overall. Economists had estimated roughly 200,000 jobs for the month. The unemployment rate in February rose to 3.9% from 3.7% in the previous month. Average hourly earnings rose 0.1% month-over-month and 4.3% year-over-year.

US jury convicts ex-Honduran president on drug trafficking charges.

Former Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández, 55, was found guilty of conspiring with drug traffickers and using his military and national police to import more than 1 million pounds of cocaine into the US since 2004. He was also found guilty of possessing and conspiring to possess weapons, including machine guns. Hernández, who faces up to life in prison, was the first elected Latin American leader to be tried in the US.

Pentagon report finds no evidence of UFO visits, hidden spacecraft.

The Defense Department released findings from a congressionally ordered review of decades of classified government programs related to unidentified anomalous phenomena, commonly known as UFOs. The report concluded there was no verifiable evidence of any sightings representing extraterrestrial activity, no extraterrestrial craft or bodies were recovered, and no program was authorized to reverse-engineer extraterrestrial technology. Read the report here.

FDA approves weight-loss drug Wegovy for reducing cardiovascular risks.

Adults with obesity and heart disease will now be able to use Novo Nordisk's Wegovy as a treatment for reducing cardiovascular risks. It is the first such approval from the Food and Drug Administration for a weight loss drug. The approval comes after a five-year study found Wegovy led to a 20% reduction in heart attacks, strokes, and cardiac arrest for obese patients over the age of 45 who have heart disease.

'Dragon Ball' creator and Japanese manga artist Akira Toriyama dies.

Toriyama died March 1 of a blood clot in his brain, according to an announcement Friday. Toriyama created "Dragon Ball" in 1984, which follows main character Son Goku, a martial arts trainee who goes on a journey in search of magical dragon balls to protect Earth from aliens. It has been considered one of the greatest manga series ever made (manga are comics or graphic novels from Japan) and was turned into several animated series, films, and video games.

Why 1440? The printing press was invented around the year 1440, spreading knowledge to the masses and changing the course of history. More facts: In every day, there are 1,440 minutes. We're here to make each one count.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 3 of 70

Former President Donald Trump posts \$91.6M bond in defamation case.

The bond allows Trump to cover \$83.3M in damages that a jury awarded to writer E. Jean Carroll last month as he seeks to appeal the case. Carroll had accused Trump of making comments damaging to her reputation after she alleged he sexually abused her in the 1990s. The bond, once approved, will prevent Carroll's attorneys from collecting the damages from Trump while the appeal process plays out.

Humankind(ness)

Today, we're sharing a story from reader Natalie H. in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

"Last week my 10-year-old daughter had set up a lemonade stand on our corner to catch folks coming home from work, doing their evening walk, etc. She was serving a lady and her kids when a couple came up and stood waiting. I was talking to the lady and her kids so my daughter started waiting on the other couple. They asked, 'how much?' My daughter said it was \$1. The man then reached in his pocket and pulled out \$100 bill and told her no change. We were so shocked. And they just kinda disappeared in the commotion that followed. She was so excited."

158 +/- ACRE LAND AUCTION

WEST HANSON TWP., BROWN CO., SD

We will offer at Public Auction the following land located from Groton SD, (Intersection of Hwy 12 & Hwy 37) 8 miles south on Hwy 37 & 3 miles west on 141st St. Watch for auction signs on:

THURSDAY, MARCH 14th, 2024 SALE TIME: 11:00 A.M.

Auctioneer's Note: This auction presents the opportunity to purchase 158 +/- acres of productive tillable land located in West Hanson Twp., Brown Co., SD. The farm is free for possession for the 2024 crop year. This auction will be held live on-site w/online bidding available.

This 158 +/- acres of land, according to FSA information, has 156.85 +/- cropland acres and is made up of predominately Class II soils with a Surety AgriData soil productivity index of 76.8. Per FSA information, this farm has a soybean base of 78.6 acres and a PLC yield of 25 bu., and a wheat base of 78.6 acres and a PLC yield of 35 bu. There is approximately 40 +/- acres that are planted to winter wheat and this crop will go to the new buyer(s).

Legal Description: SE ¼ of Sec. 28, T-122-N, R-61-W, West Hanson Twp., Brown Co., SD

For additional information, terms, drone video, aerial, soil & plat maps and FSA-156EZ, please visit www.burlagepeterson.com, or contact Auctioneers.

MAKE PLANS TO ATTEND THIS AUCTION AND COME PREPARED TO BUY!

TERMS: Visit burlagepeterson.com for full sale terms. Possession for 2024.

Gary and Sharon Van Riper Charitable Remainder Annuity Trust – Owners
First Bank & Trust – Trustee

BURLAGE PETERSON AUCTIONEERS & REALTORS, LLC
Land Brokers – Auctioneers – Realtors – Farm Managers
Office@burlagepeterson.com or 605-692-7102
317 4th Street, Brookings SD | www.burlagepeterson.com

**BURLAGE
PETERSON**
Auctioneers & Realtors, LLC.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 4 of 70

Groton Prairie Mixed Bowling League Week #16 Results

Team Standings: Coyotes – 6, Jackelopes – 5, Chipmunks – 5, Shihtzus – 4, Cheetahs – 3, Foxes – 1

Men's High Games: Brad Waage – 229, Mike Siegler – 192, John Sippel – 187

Women's High Games: Vicki Walter – 182, Hayley Merkel – 156, Sue Stanley – 154

Men's High Series: Brad Waage – 595, Mike Siegler – 510, John Sippel – 502

Women's High Series: Vicki Walter – 497, Sue Stanley – 449, Darci Spanier 404

Week 16 Fun Game – 2 Strikes in same Frame – Coyotes and Jackelopes with 10!

GFP Commission Holds March Meeting

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) Commission held their March Meeting at the Pierre Missouri Avenue Center March 7-8.

The Commission welcomed new commissioner Travis Theel, of Rapid City. Theel replaces Chuck Spring.

Wildlife Proposals

Custer State Park Coyote Hunting Season

The Commission proposed to extend the Custer State Park Coyote Hunting Season to start November 1 and continue through April 30.

The Commission also proposed to remove closure of season from one-half hour after sunset to one-half hour before sunrise and allow coyote hunting throughout the day and night.

Small Game Hunting Seasons

The Commission proposed to lengthen the quail, partridge, and grouse seasons to Jan 31, aligning these seasons closing date with the close of the pheasant season.

The Commission proposed to remove the word "common" in the snipe season hunting rules, allowing for the take of all species of snipe.

The Commission also asked the department to explore increasing options for rabbit and squirrel hunters and will have additional discussions regarding the rabbit and squirrel seasons at their April meeting.

The Commission took no action on several small game hunting seasons meaning the following seasons have no changes to the current season structure in administrative rule:

Pheasant;

Crow; and,

Mourning Dove.

August Management Take

The Commission made no changes to the proposal to remove Aurora, Beadle, Bon Homme, Brookings, Clay, Davison, Hanson, Hutchinson, Jerauld, Kingsbury, Lake, Lincoln, McCook, Miner, Minnehaha, Moody, Sanborn, Turner, Union, and Yankton counties from the August Management Take Hunting season unit.

Nonresident Waterfowl

The Commission made no changes to the proposal to add additional licenses to the Nonresident Waterfowl hunting seasons. The additions include:

Adding 210 licenses to the 10-day statewide, NRW-00B area;

Adding 50 licenses to the 3-day NRW-00V area; and,

Adding 55 licenses to the 3-day NRW-00Z area.

These additions fall within the 5% yearly increases allowed in statute.

Bighorn Sheep Hunting Season

The Commission also reviewed recommendations to add one bighorn sheep license to the Custer State Park Unit, and four licenses to the Hell Canyon Unit for the 2024 and 2025 bighorn sheep hunting seasons.

The Commission amended the Bighorn Sheep hunting season to remove hunting unit BHS-BH1, which includes those portions beginning at Highway 385 and the Pennington County line, then south of Highway 385 to Sheridan Lake Road, then east on Sheridan Lake Road to Highway 79 in Rapid City, then north on Highway 79 to the Pennington County line. This proposal would then expand the unit boundary for

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 5 of 70

BHS-BH4 to include the former boundaries of BHS-BH1 and those portions of Pennington County west of Interstate 90, Elk Vale Road. and Highway 79.

The recommendations would allow for the following license allocations:

Custer State Park: 4

BH2: 3

BH3: 0

BH4 8

This recommendation would also allow for one bighorn auction license, for a total of 16 licenses available for the 2024 and 2025 hunting seasons.

Custer State Park Bison Hunting Seasons

The Commission proposed to allow the use of archery equipment during the Custer State Park trophy and non-trophy bison harvest season.

The Commission also proposed to decrease the allowable hunting days for trophy bison from three to two. Hunters typically fill their tags within two days, and this change will allow increased opportunity for scheduling hunts.

The Commission also proposed to increase the number of trophy bison licenses available from eight license to 10 and non-trophy bison licenses from 15 to 20. This would result in a total of 11 trophy bison licenses, including the one license available through the Hunt for Habitat raffle.

Elk Hunting Seasons

The Commission reviewed recommendations for the following license allocations for the 2024 elk hunting seasons:

Custer State Park: 16 resident "Any Elk" licenses, including 1 raffle "Any Elk" license, and 0 "Antlerless Elk" licenses;

Black Hills Archery: 192 resident "Any Elk" licenses and 90 resident "Antlerless Elk" licenses;

Black Hills Firearm: 570 resident "Any Elk" licenses and 730 "Antlerless Elk" licenses; and,

Prairie Elk: 126 resident "Any Elk" licenses and 210 "Antlerless Elk" licenses.

Tree Stands and Trail Cameras

The Commission proposed to expand requirements on trail camera placement, tree stand placement and construction on Walk-In-Areas and all private lands leased by the Department for public hunting access.

The proposal will allow a user to label these with either their name and address, name and phone number, or their GFP customer identification number. Individuals would need to obtain permission to use trail cameras on private land leased for hunting access by GFP.

Time Restrictions for Use of State Park Systems and Public Lands

The Commission proposed to clarify that Oahe Downstream Recreation Area and West Shore Lakeside Use Area, and other areas north of Fort Pierre, observe the Central Time zone. This clarifies that while these areas are technically located within the Mountain Time zone, they operate on the Central Time zone as that is what the communities in which they are associated with operate.

Public Comment Opportunity and Upcoming Meeting

To hear the discussion on any of the topics on the agenda, audio from the meeting is available through South Dakota Public Broadcasting and will soon be available on the GFP website as part of the meeting archive.

To see these documents in their entirety, visit gfp.sd.gov/commission/information.

To be included in the public record and to be considered by the Commission, public comments must include a full name and city of residence and be submitted by 11:59 p.m. CT, March 31.

The next GFP Commission meeting will be held in Pierre at the Matthews Training Center, April 4-5.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 6 of 70

The Groton Chamber announces Hwy 12 electronic sign ad winners!

Last month, the Groton Chamber announced winners of the 2 ad spots on the electronic sign located on Hwy 12. This week, those advertisement spots were updated by Service Signs. Winner of the east ad spot was MGGQ Consulting LLC, owned by Jackie Krueger, a resident of Groton. Winner of the west ad spot was the Groton Area School District. Winners were drawn from members that paid their 2024 dues prior to February 1st.



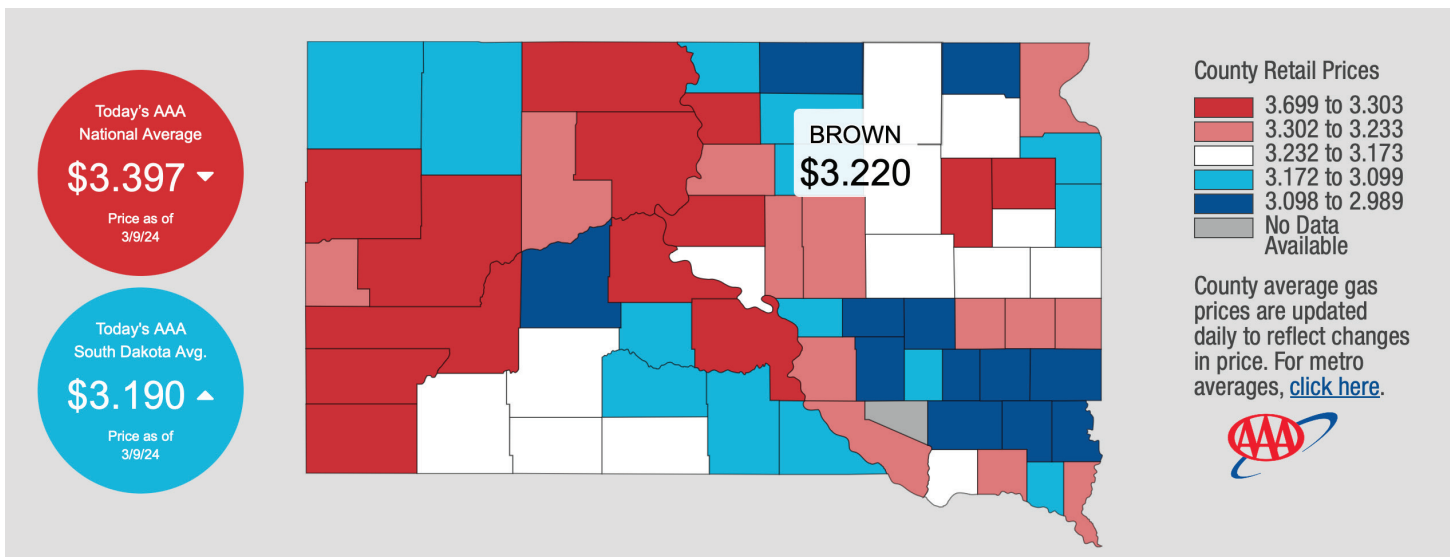
Broton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 7 of 70

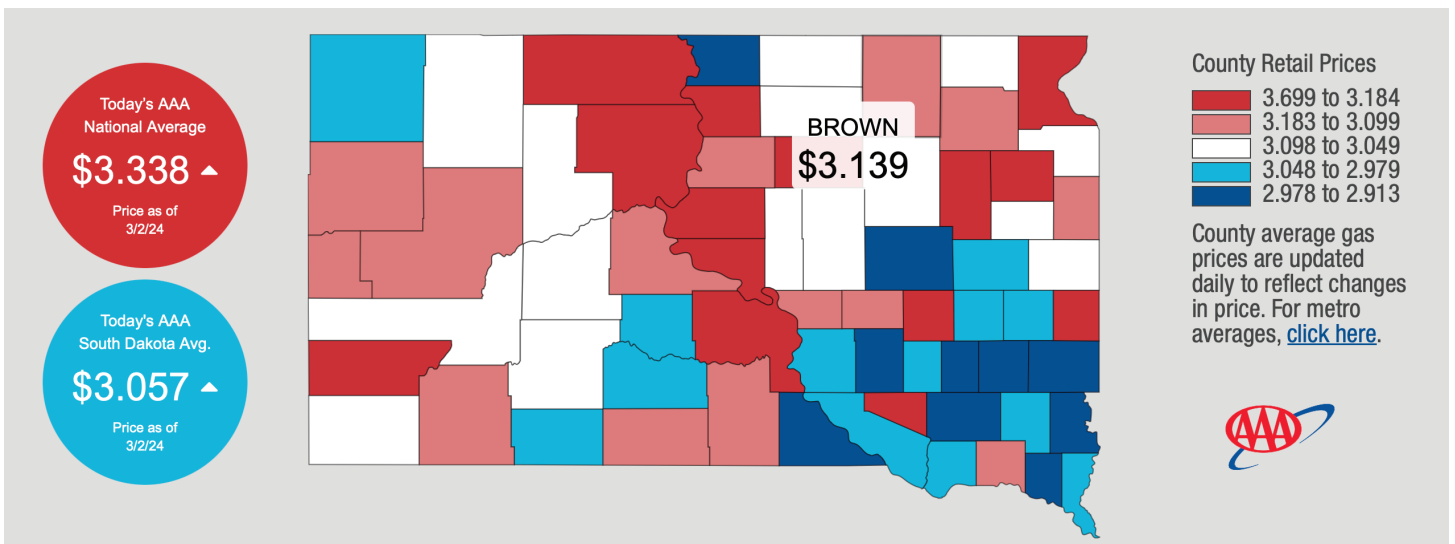
South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$3.190	\$3.349	\$3.783	\$3.714
Yesterday Avg.	\$3.185	\$3.335	\$3.765	\$3.720
Week Ago Avg.	\$3.057	\$3.208	\$3.673	\$3.717
Month Ago Avg.	\$2.822	\$2.985	\$3.469	\$3.578
Year Ago Avg.	\$3.338	\$3.500	\$3.952	\$4.158

This Week



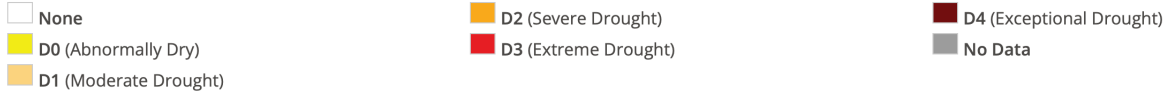
Two Weeks Ago



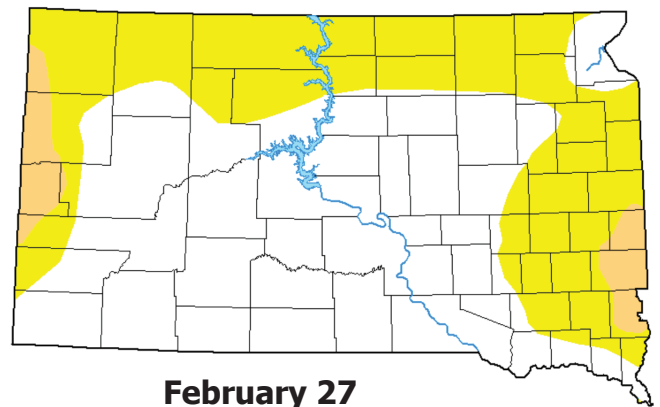
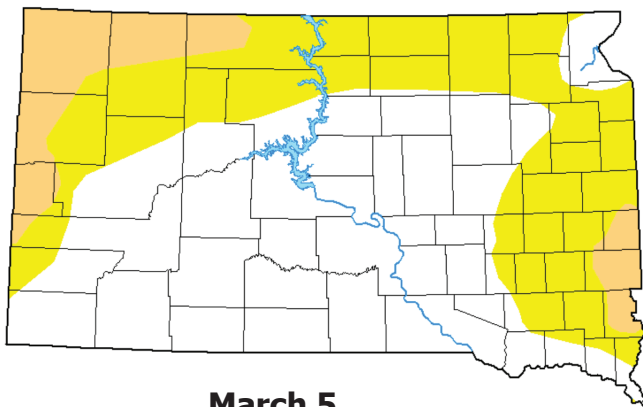
Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 8 of 70

Drought Classification



Drought Monitor



Mostly dry weather occurred in the Great Plains portion of the High Plains region this week. Temperatures in the region ranged from mostly 5-10 degrees warmer than normal for far eastern Wyoming and Colorado and most of Kansas, Nebraska and South Dakota, to near or below normal temperatures in North Dakota, western Colorado and western Wyoming. Some of the mountainous parts of the region received significant snowfall, especially in west-central and northwest Wyoming and in the Medicine Bow Mountains in northern Colorado and south-central Wyoming. Improving snowpack levels led to reductions in coverage of moderate and severe drought and abnormal dryness in these areas, though improvements were more limited in southern Wyoming, where grass fires were reported west of Cheyenne recently and only light snow amounts were reported in the high plains west of Laramie. Given short-term dryness and high recent evaporative demand, abnormal dryness and moderate drought were expanded in northwest South Dakota, southwest North Dakota, and adjacent southeast Montana.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Gevo trumpets cash on hand, growth potential for sustainable jet fuel in earnings call

Colorado company hopes to succeed in emerging market with flagship Lake Preston project

BY: JOHN HULT - MARCH 8, 2024 5:42 PM

Converting ethanol to jet fuel is the cheapest and simplest way to help airlines across the U.S. hit their carbon reduction targets, according to the head of a Colorado-based firm that hopes to build a zero-emissions fuel production plant in Lake Preston.

Gevo Chief Executive Officer Patrick Gruber delivered that message Thursday on an earnings call, the same day Gov. Kristi Noem signed bills into law that could help clear a path for a carbon pipeline critical to the future of the \$1 billion-plus Net Zero-1 project.

Opponents of the pipeline have questioned Gevo's financial stability and the feasibility of its plans, pointing to the company's low stock price and its current lack of large-scale production facilities.

On Thursday, Gruber repeated a line that he and other executives have used several times in public forums since the release of a business update in January.

"We believe Gevo is undervalued, given our balance sheet and growth potential," he said. "We plan to address that first through execution and second by getting our message out."

The company ended the fourth quarter with \$375.6 million in cash, Gruber told investors, and will invest up to \$175 million in its sustainable jet fuel plans this year.

Gruber touted an analysis from McKinsey Global Institute requested by the company to "challenge our assumptions" on the market possibilities for its approach to sustainable aviation fuel. The analysis concluded that ethanol, as opposed to other potential feedstocks for low- or no-carbon jet fuel, would have a competitive advantage in the emerging marketplace.

Just one U.S. company currently produces such fuel, in its case using beef tallow to refine the product. Major airlines have committed to incorporating more of it into their fuel streams in hopes of hitting their own carbon reduction targets, but the ultimate source material for creating that sustainable fuel is an open question.

The McKinsey report, Gruber said, "reaffirmed that the NZ1 plant design would be expected to deliver the lowest cost of carbon abatement."

"Think of it as more carbon reduction per gallon," Gruber said during the earnings call. "That means more carbon abatement per gallon, more bang for the buck, if you will. All of this should result in a competitively priced product for customers and less burden on consumers and taxpayers."

Gruber also pointed to the profitability of Gevo's renewable natural gas facility in Iowa, which sold more than 90,000 mBTUs of gas in the fourth quarter. He also talked about the growth potential for Verity, a software startup from Gevo that tracks the carbon footprint of individual farm fields as a way to prove carbon abatement to regulators, customers and investors.

The initial target market for Verity in the U.S. is estimated to be about \$1.5 billion to \$3 billion, Gruber said, citing the McKinsey report.

Gevo did not offer a copy of the full report, as such analyst reports contain details that could guide investors and thereby create liability for analysts. The information and cost comparisons in the report are included in a corporate presentation on Gevo's website.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 10 of 70

Gevo and carbon pipelines

Gevo's facility would be among the nearly 60 Midwestern ethanol facilities that hope to connect to a multistate, \$8 billion carbon capture pipeline proposed by Iowa-based Summit Carbon Solutions. Ethanol production emits carbon dioxide, a contributor to climate change. The pipeline would capture it and send it to North Dakota for underground storage, an activity incentivized with federal tax credits.

Summit was denied a permit from the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission after a similar project, the now-scuttled Navigator CO2 Ventures, failed to earn commission approval. Summit has stated its intention to reapply.

The 2024 legislative session that ended Thursday saw a host of proposals on pipeline permitting, siting and eminent domain, the legal process by which a company can take private land for a project that would benefit the public. Three measures passed in the final days of session.

Debate on carbon pipelines has plugged along for about two years, initially colored by Summit and Navigator's proposals and the role of carbon sequestration for the future of Midwestern ethanol. Gevo's Net-Zero 1 project, described by Gov. Noem as the largest economic development project in South Dakota history, became a larger part of 2024 discussions on pipelines last fall, when it began to stress the importance of the pipeline to its own ambitions.

Gevo's earnings call was scheduled for Thursday long before lawmakers passed and Noem signed three bills that aim to simplify the process for pipeline permitting but also write landowner protections into state law and require annual payments to counties.

Gevo owns 240 acres of land in the Lake Preston area for its flagship project. The facility would produce ethanol and convert it to jet fuel, but Gevo has yet to begin building as it awaits a \$950 million federal loan guarantee.

To get that guarantee for a South Dakota project, Gruber told South Dakota Searchlight last month, Gevo needs to connect to the carbon capture pipeline. Doing so would reduce the carbon intensity score of the plant and make it eligible for per-gallon carbon reduction credits from the federal government.

Gevo also aims to build a wind farm to power the plant to reduce the carbon footprint of its fuel, and plans to pay farmers a premium for corn grown using a set of carbon friendly practices, including low- or no-till farming.

"Our NZ-1 needs good corn, but ... we're getting our low (carbon intensity) scores from wind power, from how we've done production of natural gas, and of course, the (carbon capture and sequestration pipeline)," Gruber said.

Critics question carbon market

All public companies are required to disclose any potential risk factors for investors in their annual reports to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

The legally required risk sections of Gevo's annual reports point to factors applicable to companies engaged in the pursuit of profits for unproven industries like sustainable aviation fuel production.

"We do not expect to achieve profitability during the foreseeable future and may never achieve it," Gevo's 2022 annual report reads in the legally required risk disclosure section.

That exact verbiage appears in its 2023 annual report, filed with the SEC just moments before the company's earnings call. The company lost \$98 million in 2022 and \$59.2 million in 2021.

The listed risks also include competition from more well-established companies, market acceptance of its products and a host of other potential pitfalls.

While the Iowa gas plant is profitable and the company has other avenues for growth outside of sustainable aviation fuel, Gruber made it clear on the call that the company's financial goals and the future of Net-Zero 1 are one in the same.

"The main mission of Gevo is to get the NZ1 operating," Gruber said.

One week ago, Gevo filed a report with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission noting that it is at risk of being delisted from the NASDAQ exchange, as its stock has traded below \$1 for more than 30

days. If the price stays below \$1 for 180 days, it will be delisted.

On the earnings call, one analyst asked Gruber about the “perceived risk” of changes to carbon credits in the event of a change in presidential administrations.

Carbon credits for sustainable jet fuel are built into President Joe Biden’s Inflation Reduction Act. Conservative organizations have called on former President Donald Trump to repeal that law if he wins the White House in November. On the floor of the South Dakota House of Representatives and South Dakota Senate, lawmakers opposed to the pipeline bills talked about carbon abatement as a sham.

At one point, for example, Spearfish Republican Rep. Scott Odenbach said he rejects the notion that carbon is a risk and not “plant food.” Sen. Al Novstrup railed against the use of taxpayer money for sequestration projects that he argued will have no impact on the climate.

Trump, however, extended the tax credits that Summit Carbon Solutions aims to cash in on. Gruber told investors that “carbon value is political,” but said he’s confident that both sides of the aisle see the importance of the economic development that accompanies it. He also pointed to New Mexico, which recently became the fourth state to enact a clean fuel standard, as proof that carbon capture will maintain its place in the U.S. economy for the foreseeable future.

“It looks like there’s more than enough carbon value in the marketplace to accommodate variations of things that might change to some degree,” Gruber said.

COMMENTARY

We know what the timber industry needs, but what can the Black Hills provide?

DAVE MERTZ

The traditional way logging happens in the Black Hills National Forest is through timber sales. The U.S. Forest Service designates areas available for logging, and companies bid for the right to purchase and harvest the timber.

On Saturday in Spearfish, there was a forestry roundtable discussion about the reduced levels of timber sales in recent years.

U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota, invited two of his fellow congressmen, Doug LaMalfa, R-California, and Austin Scott, R-Georgia. Johnson also invited two Forest Service officials, Regional Forester Frank Beum and Black Hills National Forest Forest Supervisor Shawn Cochran. The panel was rounded out with timber industry representatives and the South Dakota state forester.

After introductions, the panel quickly turned to grilling the two Forest Service officials. I am familiar with LaMalfa from watching him in congressional hearings. He can come across as combative, and he was all of that. Scott was also aggressive. It is not clear to me why these two were on this panel. They have absolutely no familiarity with the Black Hills. It appeared that they were there to browbeat the Forest Service. Johnson participated in these tactics as well.

At issue was why the Black Hills National Forest plans to sell only 63,000 CCF (1 CCF equals 100 cubic feet) of timber this fiscal year. The timber industry representatives said they need 120,000 CCF to survive as they exist today. Beum said that with budget limitations and 76 employee vacancies, 63,000 CCF is all the Forest Service can do. He also stated that to get to 120,000 CCF, the forest would need an additional \$20 million of funding.

Much of the hour and a half revolved around blaming the Forest Service for not selling more timber and for being ineffective. This came from three members of Congress, which doesn’t exactly have a stellar record of getting things done. When will they pass a budget?

Repeatedly, panelists stated what the timber industry needs. Never was there any concern for what level of timber harvesting the forest needs. Only toward the end did the elephant in the room finally get discussed — that there are no longer enough sawtimber-size trees left on the forest to support the capacity

of the timber industry as it exists today. (A tree big enough to qualify as sawtimber is one that's at least 9 inches in diameter when measured at a point 4.5 feet above the ground.)

Large wildfires in the early 2000s, the mountain pine beetle epidemic and the associated aggressive timber harvesting to address it all led to a major reduction in sawtimber-sized trees across the forest. This has impacted how many trees can now be sustainably logged on an annual basis, and this will continue for a good while into the future. Acceptance of that is the key to finding solutions.

Beum explained that the Forest Service is conducting an inventory of the forest at a cost of \$2 million with LiDAR, an aerial survey method that uses pulses of laser light to determine the presence, shape and distance of objects in great detail. Never before has this been done on an entire national forest. This will provide a 3D map of the forest down to individual trees, and give a very clear picture on how many sawtimber-size trees remain on the forest. This issue has been in dispute, because the timber industry discounts the numerous studies that show there is a problem.

At one point, Johnson thought the timber sustainability issue could be resolved with simple math. He asked Ben Wudtke, of the Black Hills Forest Resource Association, a timber industry group, about the growth rate of the forest. Wudtke said it's 2.5%. Johnson did some rough math and declared that there is no problem with the timber inventory or sustainability. He failed to take into account the long-term average mortality (rate of tree death) of 1%, and also that the whole forest is not available for timber harvesting for a variety of reasons — including the presence of non-forested areas such as meadows, terrain that's too steep and rugged, restrictive land designations such as wilderness and recreation areas, access problems, etc. He should actually read the Forest Service's General Technical Report, which goes into great detail on these issues.

Beum said the Forest Service is subsidizing the rail transport of logs from California and Oregon to the Spearfish and Hulett, Wyoming, mills. Something like this has never occurred before. There was no appreciation expressed.

Scott asked about the revenues generated by timber sales, and Cochran had to explain that since the Forest Service is now primarily using service stewardship contracts to help the timber industry find places to work, the Forest Service is not making any money. In fact, the Forest Service is paying private loggers to harvest timber in an area where the cost of logging exceeds the value of the timber. For example, the Topaz Timber Sale is costing the Forest Service \$3.5 million to log 550 acres on steep ground that otherwise wouldn't get logged south of Sturgis. The timber operator gets the logs at no cost, in return for some service work. Clearly, the Forest Service is doing some extraordinary things to assist the timber industry.

Instead of seeking solutions, it appeared that this roundtable was more of an ambush. The two Forest Service participants showed up in good faith only to be interrogated. What was the point of all this other than some people enjoying seeing the Forest Service get beat up? No solutions were found that I could tell.

Dave Mertz retired from the Black Hills National Forest in 2017 as the forest's natural resource officer. Over the course of his career, he was a forester, silviculturist, forest fire management officer and a fire staff officer.

Thune, Rounds vote yes as U.S. Senate approves spending package hours before deadline

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - MARCH 8, 2024 7:26 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. senators on Friday cleared a bipartisan spending package for President Joe Biden's signature, completing work on half of the annual bills that were supposed to become law by Oct. 1.

The \$468 billion spending legislation rolls together the Agriculture-FDA, Commerce-Justice-Science, Energy-Water, Interior-Environment, Military Construction-VA and Transportation-HUD spending bills into a so-called "minibus."

The House voted 339-85 on Wednesday to approve the 1,050-page spending package that was released Sunday.

The Senate vote of 75-22 (including yes votes from South Dakota Republicans John Thune and Mike

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 13 of 70

Rounds) followed hours of delay as conservative GOP senators pressed to make changes to the legislation that were ultimately rejected. Any changes to the bill would have required it go back to the House for approval, likely leading to a funding lapse when a stopgap spending law expired at midnight on Friday.

The six bills are just part of the equation Congress must solve before the next funding deadline of March 22, when the other six bills, which are much more challenging and include a higher price tag, come due.

Those include Defense, Financial Services and General Government, Homeland Security, Labor-HHS-Education, Legislative Branch and State-Foreign Operations.

Senate complaints

Senate debate on this spending package was broadly bipartisan, though several conservative GOP senators argued the spending levels were too high and it didn't do enough to rein in the Biden administration.

They also said the earmarks in the bills should be removed.

Senate Appropriations Chair Patty Murray, a Washington state Democrat, said during floor debate Friday the bill includes important priorities like the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children or WIC, housing assistance, environmental protection programs and veterans health care.

"This first package is evidence that we can get things done when everyone is focused on what can actually help folks back at home and what can actually pass in a divided government," Murray said.

"This isn't the package I would have written on my own," Murray added. "But I am proud that we have protected absolutely vital funding that the American people rely on in their daily lives."

Senate Appropriations ranking member Susan Collins, a Maine Republican, rebuked some of her colleagues for making statements about the process and having the opportunity to amend the legislation that weren't true.

She reiterated that the spending panel, made up of 29 senators from both parties, debated and approved all dozen of the full-year bills last summer on broadly bipartisan votes. The full Senate then spent nearly two months last fall debating a package that included three of the bills in this final package.

"The Ag and FDA bill, the MilCon-VA bill and the Transportation-HUD bill were brought to the Senate floor," Collins said. "So to say, as one of my colleagues did, that there was no opportunity for amendments and debate is flat out wrong. Those bills were on the floor for about seven weeks. We had 40 amendments. So I would urge my colleagues to stop playing with fire here."

Collins added the Senate Appropriations Committee held 50 public hearings on the budget requests from various departments and agencies before it drafted the original dozen government funding bills.

Utah Republican Sen. Mike Lee spoke against approving the package, in part, because of all the spending that House and Senate lawmakers were able to direct to projects back home, known as earmarks.

"Just days ago, we saw the text of this legislation in its entirety. We saw that it contained, among other things, more than 600 pages of earmarks totaling over 6,000 earmarks," Lee said. "It spends a lot of money. It's significant legislation. Whether you love it or hate it, you can't dispute the fact that the legislation does a lot of things in government. It funds a lot of things in government."

FBI, ATF see spending cuts

The bill includes funding for the departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Energy, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Justice, Transportation and Veterans Affairs.

Smaller agencies, — like the Army Corps of Engineers, Environmental Protection Agency, Food and Drug Administration, National Aeronautics and Space Administration or NASA, National Science Foundation and military construction projects — are also funded in the package.

Dozens of accounts throughout the six bills will need to account for spending cuts that range from mild to significant.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation as well as the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, both of which have been the subject of Republican ire during the Biden administration, are seeing their funding cut.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 14 of 70

The FBI will get \$32 million less and the ATF will get \$47 million less for salaries and expenses. The Interior-Environment spending bill would see a cut of \$1.5 billion to about \$38.5 billion for fiscal 2024. Alaska Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski, ranking member on the spending subcommittee, said Friday that negotiating the bill was especially challenging given those constraints.

"When you have cuts of that nature, it really does require some very difficult funding choices," Murkowski said.

Appropriators, she said, looked to address "the most pressing needs within the bill" to ensure there were "meaningful reductions that are able to help us meet the terms under the Fiscal Responsibility Act."

The payments in lieu of taxes program or PILT, which provides states with large swaths of federal public lands with funding to make up for taxes they would otherwise receive if that land were private, received full funding, Murkowski said.

"When you don't have a tax base in your state because so much of your state is occupied as federal land — where do you generate that tax base to provide for the needs of local communities, whether it's county roads or public safety or schools?" Murkowski said. "Well, PILT helps with that."

The EPA, funded within that bill, will drop to \$9.2 billion after receiving \$10.1 billion during the last fiscal year. That represents nearly a 10% cut.

"What we attempted to do within this budget is to prioritize funding for those programs that result in concrete actions to improve the quality of the environment across the country," Murkowski said of the EPA portion. "And I think we tried to ensure that the mission moved forward in a way that does, again, allow for that protection of the environment, but recognizing that there are many areas within the EPA budget that we could look to reduce."

Numerous other agencies, including the National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management, would see their annual appropriations cut under the bill.

WIC increase

Programs that generally garner bipartisan support had their budgets increased for fiscal year 2024.

The USDA will see its funding rise by \$383 million to a total of \$22.3 billion. Several of the accounts within that bill were singled out for specific spending boosts, including the Agriculture Research Service, the Food Safety and Inspection Service and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children or WIC.

Numerous other USDA accounts are seeing reductions in their budget authority. The National Institute of Food and Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and Agricultural Marketing Service will all need to account for millions less in spending than they currently have.

The Energy Department would see a \$1.8 billion increase in spending, bringing its total budget to \$50.2 billion. That money would go toward its defense activities, like the National Nuclear Security Administration, and its non-defense programs, such as nuclear energy research, development and demonstration.

Military Construction would increase to \$18.7 billion, which would go toward housing, child development centers and the NATO Security Investment Program.

Medical care at the Department of Veterans Affairs would receive \$121 billion in funding, an increase of \$2.3 billion compared to its current funding levels. That money would be divvied up between numerous initiatives, including veterans homelessness programs, mental health, rural health care and women's health care.

The Federal Aviation Administration would get an increase of more than \$1 billion, bringing its total allocation to more than \$20 billion.

Senate Democrats wrote in a summary of the bill that funding "will allow the FAA to continue its air traffic controller hiring surge by adding 1,800 new controllers, improving training facilities at the air traffic controller academy, and addressing the reliability of critical IT and telecommunications legacy systems."

Thousands of earmarks

The package includes more than 6,600 earmarks totaling \$12.655 billion, according to two people familiar with the list. All the approved earmarks as well as senators' original requests for funding can be found here.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, a Kentucky Republican, didn't request any earmarks in these six spending bills, but Speaker Mike Johnson, a Louisiana Republican did.

The Barksdale Air Force Base will receive \$7 million for major construction on the 307 Bomb Wing Medical Facility Addition due to an earmark he sponsored alongside Louisiana GOP Sens. Bill Cassidy and John Kennedy.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, received about 170 earmarks through these six bills, many co-sponsored with fellow New York Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand.

House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries, of New York, received 15 earmarks for projects.

Murray secured funding for nearly 60 projects, ranging from \$11 million for the planning and design of an aircraft regional services facility at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island to \$552,000 for a community violence prevention program in Burien, Washington, to \$3 million for public safety radio network improvements in Okanogan County.

Several of Murray's funded projects were requested alongside fellow Washington state Democratic Sen. Maria Cantwell.

Collins received more than 165 funded community projects throughout these six spending bills, many of which were co-sponsored with Maine independent Sen. Angus King.

The Collins earmarks include \$2.9 billion for the town of Brownfield Public Safety Building, \$90,000 for the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault for sexual assault expert witness and attorney training, nearly \$7.8 million for the Maine Department of Marine Resources for Woodland Dam Fish Passage Replacement and \$7.4 million for the National Guard to complete a vehicle maintenance shop in Saco, Maine.

Know what an APR margin is? If you have credit card, it's likely driving up your interest rate

BY: CASEY QUINLAN - MARCH 8, 2024 6:00 AM

You've probably heard of junk fees, as well as credit card late fees – the onerous banking fees you may incur as a credit card consumer.

But there's a lesser-known factor that could be driving up your credit card costs and placing your household at risk of further debt, as total U.S. credit card balances now stand at a staggering \$1.13 trillion – a record high.

This driver of high interest rates is known as the annual percentage rate margin – APR margin for short – and it is the additional interest credit card companies tack on beyond the prime rate. Banks use the prime rate, which is considered a stand-in for the cost of lending. So the APR margin is how credit card companies drive up their profits. Combined with the prime rate, this is your total credit card interest rate, known as the APR.

APR margin rates have reached an all-time high, according to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. The agency says this rise in the APR margin has contributed to roughly half of the swelling of credit card interest rates over the past decade.

The consumer watchdog agency says a deceptive credit card shopping process and lack of competition in consumer credit markets only exacerbates the problem.

On Feb. 29, the agency issued guidance to law enforcement and regulators on credit cards and other consumer products. The agency provided information on deceptive user experiences and potential anti-competitive business practices in the credit card industry. The bureau added that it is still working on a public-facing tool for consumers that would make it easier to compare credit card interest rates.

Between 2015 and 2022, the average APR margin increased 1.6 percentage points for someone with an excellent credit score – 800 or above – despite no rise in late payments. The cost of an excess APR

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 16 of 70

margin to the average credit card holder in 2023 totaled more than \$250, the agency said.

One of the problems with this rise in APR margins is that it can “push consumers into persistent debt,” and possibly even delinquency, the brief stated. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau defines “persistent debt” as charges for interest and fees that are more than half the payment amount within a year.

At the same time, consumers have been hit by changes in the federal funds rate, which is set by the Federal Reserve, and influences the prime rate used by banks, contributing to higher credit card rates. The Fed hiked interest rates starting in March 2022 and the central banking system began to hold rates steady late last year. Despite these changes, the watchdog agency says more attention should be paid to the rising APR margin.

“That margin is what’s been going up over the years. The CFPB says the interest rate on your credit card is going up, not because of the Fed rate, but because the margin that they slap on top of the index rate has been increasing over the years,” said Chi Chi Wu, senior attorney at the National Consumer Law Center.

In February 2022, consumers paid a 16.17% interest rate compared to November 2023, when they paid a 22.75% interest rate on credit cards, according to the Fed. In the last few months of 2023, delinquency rates increased 8.5% for credit card balances and rose for all age groups.

“This signals increased financial stress, especially among younger and lower-income households,” said Wilbert van der Klaauw, an economic research advisor at the New York Fed.

Part of the problem with these high interest rates is that consumers don’t have enough options, there is a lack of transparency on rates when shopping for credit cards, and current regulations aren’t up for the task of reining them in, Wu said. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau also pointed to consolidation of the credit card market and less transparency from banks on interest rates when consumers shop. The top 10 issuers for credit cards make up more than four-fifths of credit card loans.

Wu said people also shop on rewards rather than on interest rates because consumers don’t have enough information on rates.

“Why do people shop on rewards? Is it just that they’re so much more valuable? Well, no. You can’t shop on interest rates,” she said. “You have to look at the credit card registration and you try to look at what the interest rate is.”

Banks may provide a range of interest rates or multiple possible rates but the consumer won’t know what the interest rate is going to be until after they have already applied because it will be based on their credit score, Wu explained. That allows banks to increase the rate to something as high as 28%, she said. Meanwhile, the credit card rewards are the least regulated aspects of credit cards.

Customers can’t rely on the law to stop banks from charging very high interest rates because there isn’t a limit on interest rates in the Credit Card Accountability Responsibility Disclosure (CARD) Act, a federal law passed in 2009. Many state laws don’t protect credit card consumers in this way either and companies are often chartered in states that don’t have strong usury caps or any usury caps, such as South Dakota and Delaware. These companies don’t have to follow the usury law of the state they’re doing business with customers in — only the state they’re chartered in, Wu explained.

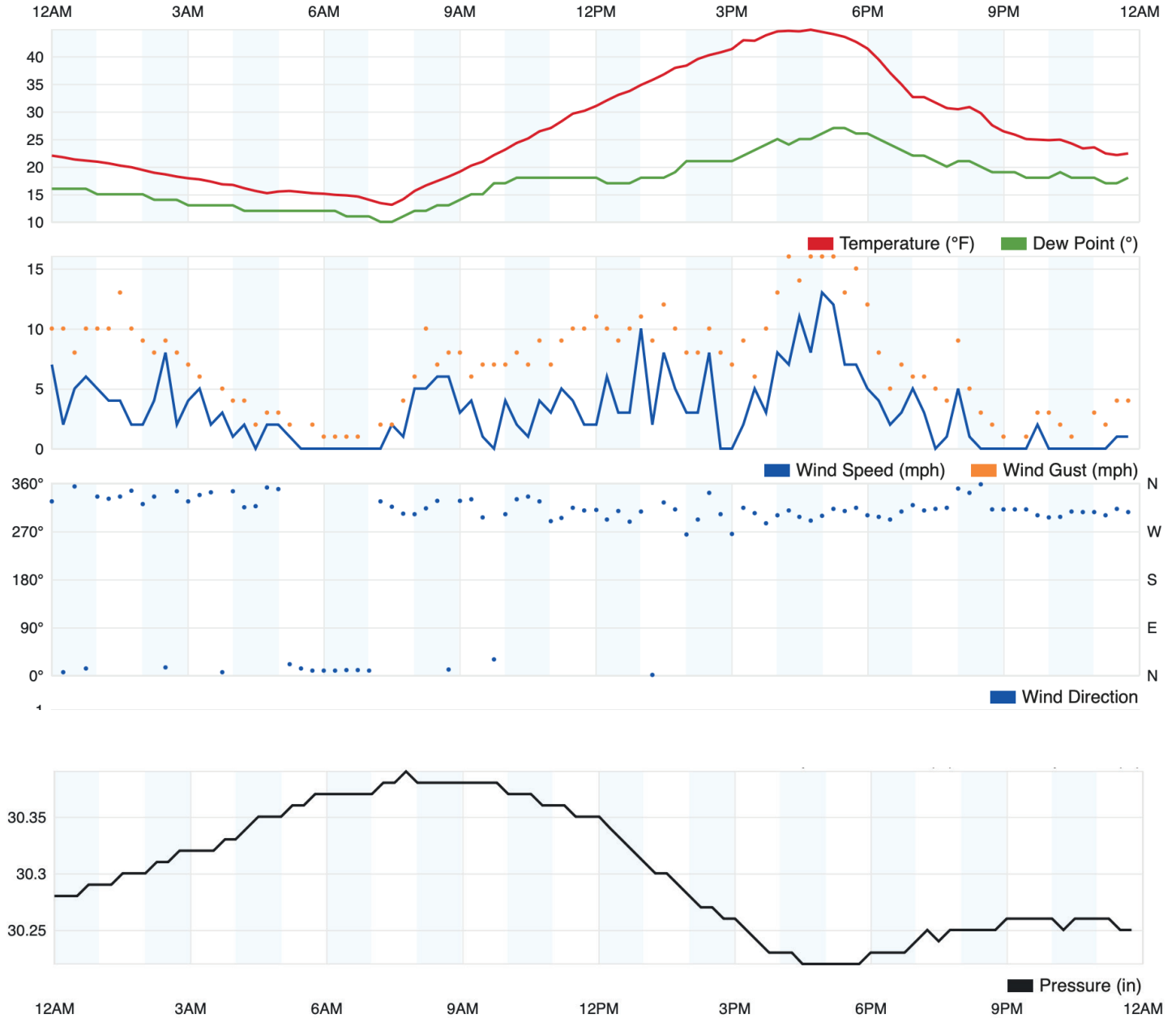
“There’s no federal law that says you can’t charge above 36% which is sort of like the cap we think should be for all small loans,” Wu said.

A Senate bill, the Veterans and Consumers Fair Credit Act, which was introduced in 2021, would have implemented this consumer protection. Ultimately, it did not pass.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 17 of 70

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 18 of 70

Today



Sunny

High: 47 °F

Tonight



Clear

Low: 22 °F

Sunday



Sunny

High: 57 °F

Sunday
Night



Partly Cloudy

Low: 27 °F

Monday



Mostly Sunny

High: 65 °F



Continued Mild & Dry

March 9, 2024
2:55 AM

Today

➤ Highs 40s east, 50s west

Sunday

➤ Highs in the 50s

Monday

➤ Highs in the 60s to near 70

Tuesday

➤ Highs around 60

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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

We continue to see mild and dry conditions, conditions that will persist well into next week.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 19 of 70

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 45 °F at 4:40 PM

Low Temp: 13 °F at 7:23 AM

Wind: 19 mph at 4:02 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 11 hours, 39 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 69 in 2021

Record -20 in 1951

Average High: 38

Average Low: 16

Average Precip in March.: 0.22

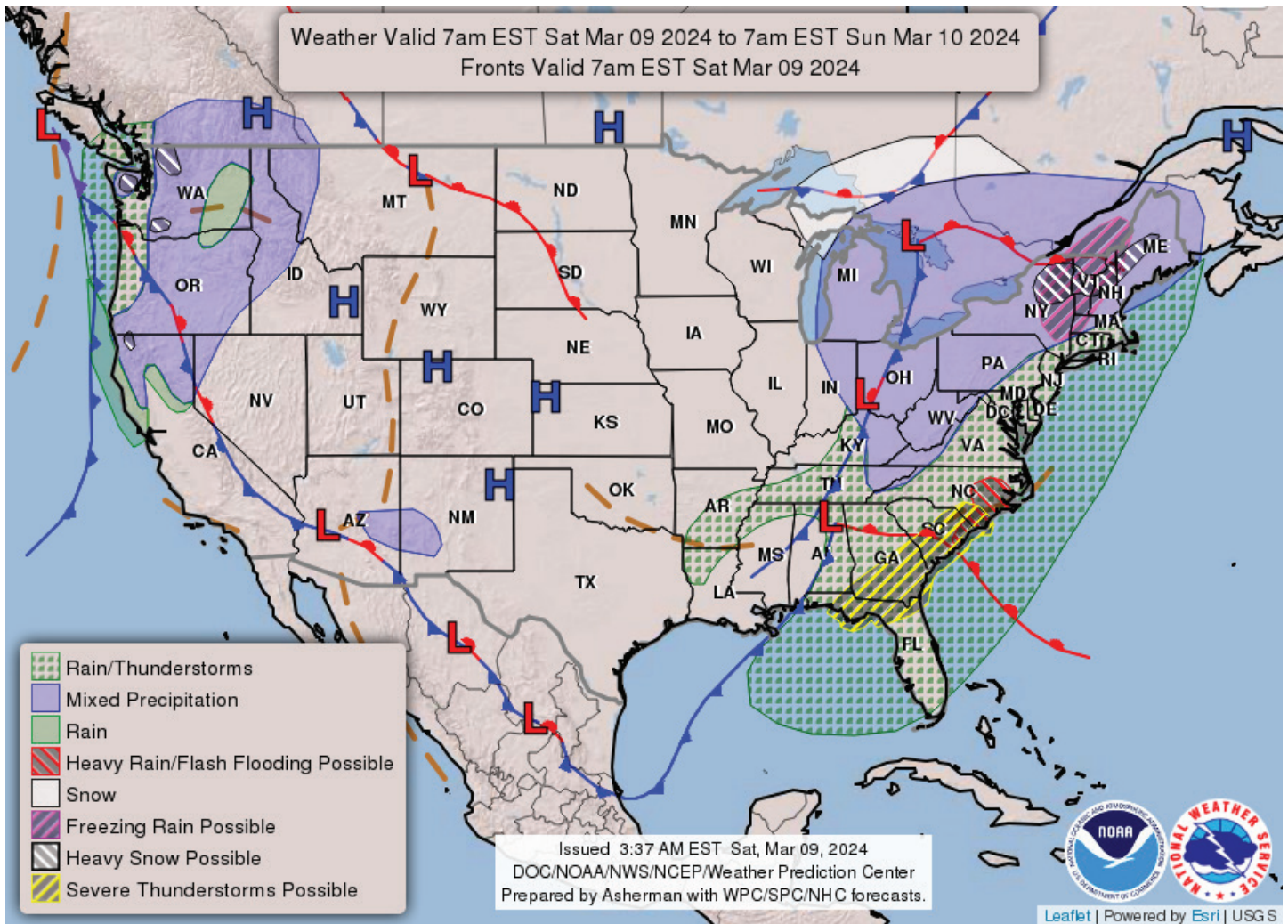
Precip to date in March: 0.01

Average Precip to date: 1.39

Precip Year to Date: 0.08

Sunset Tonight: 6:32:23 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:51:10 am



Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 20 of 70

Today in Weather History

March 9, 1993: High winds gusting more than 50 mph moved east across South Dakota behind a strong cold front. Peak wind gusts reported included 62 mph at Pierre and 49 mph at Aberdeen. High winds flipped over a mobile home on top of a car and a utility shed near The Oahe Reservoir. In addition, a semi-tractor trailer was overturned while crossing Ft. Randall Dam. An office trailer was also tipped over at the exact location.

1891: From March 9 through the 13th, a blizzard struck southern England and Wales with gale-force winds. 220 people were killed; 65 ships foundered in the English Channel, and 6,000 sheep perished. Countless trees were uprooted, and trains were buried. Up to a foot of snow and snowdrifts of 11.5 feet were reported in Dulwich, London, Torquay, Sidmouth, and Dartmouth.

1956: A whopping 367 inches of snow was measured at the Rainier Paradise Ranger Station in Washington. The snow depth was a state record and the second-highest total for the continental U.S.

1957: An earthquake measuring 8.6 struck the Aleutian Islands of Alaska. A Pacific-wide tsunami was generated that caused damage in Hawaii, but fortunately, no lives were lost. The most brutal hit was the island of Kauai, where houses were destroyed and roads washed away. Waves reached 34.1 feet high at Haena, HI.

1960 - A winter storm produced a narrow band of heavy snow from north central Kentucky into Virginia and the mountains of North Carolina. Snowfall amounts ranged from 12 to 24 inches, with drifts up to eleven feet high in western Virginia. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Gale force winds ushered arctic air into the north central U.S. Some places were 50 degrees colder than the previous day. Northeast winds, gusting to 60 mph, produced 8 to 15 foot waves on Lake Michigan causing more than a million dollars damage along the southeastern shoreline of Wisconsin. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A cold front brought high winds to the southwestern U.S. Winds in the Las Vegas Valley of Nevada gusted to 70 mph, and one person was injured by a falling tree. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Twenty-two cities in the southwestern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date. In New Mexico, afternoon highs of 72 at Los Alamos, 76 at Ruidoso, and 79 at Quemado, were records for March. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Evening thunderstorms produced severe weather in West Texas. Thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 71 mph at Lubbock, and golf ball size hail was reported at several other locations. Strong thunderstorm winds injured two persons north of the town of Canyon. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2013: A supercell over eastern Oahu in Hawaii produced 4.25" hail NW of Kailua, the largest hailstone ever recorded in Hawaii. The storm also spawned a tornadic waterspout that came ashore and caused EF-0 damage.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 21 of 70

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

CONVENIENCE OR CONVICTION

Years of struggle had finally ended for George. He completed all of his requirements to become a high school teacher. After sending out many resumes, one principal finally invited him for an interview. He looked forward to it with great excitement.

Sitting across from the principal, he was asked, "In your biology classes, would you teach biology or evolution?"

Anxious to get the job, he replied, "I would teach it any way you wanted me to teach it. It really does not matter to me."

In many of his letters, Paul addressed the importance of being Christians of conviction. Writing to the church at Corinth, he boldly declared: "Be on guard! Stand fast for what you believe. Be courageous. Be strong. And everything you do must be done with love!"

No apology here! Those words are as relevant today as they were when he wrote them. The danger to compromise our faith greets us everywhere we turn. The temptation to compromise our witness when we are called upon to speak boldly for Christ is difficult when the fear of rejection overwhelms us. And, we sometimes act unlovingly towards others when acts of kindness and deeds of thoughtfulness could be essential to bringing and winning others to Christ.

Prayer: Lord, we pray that we will become strong in our faith through You. May we rely on Your strength and power to overcome the temptation to compromise. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Be on guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong. And do everything with love. 1 Corinthians 16:13-14



We all need the encouragement, comfort, and peace that comes through God's grace. Our daily devotionals, known as Seeds of Hope, have been a means through which thousands of people have experienced this grace. Each devotional comes from God's Word and we pray this good "seed" finds good soil in your heart. Our aim is that the Seeds of Hope will be a great source of daily encouragement to you and that God will use them to draw you near to Him

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 22 of 70

The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

- Black & White \$48.99/year
- Colored \$79.88/year
- Colored \$42.60/6 months
- E-Weekly* \$31.95/year

* The E-Weekly is a PDF file emailed to you each week. It does not grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City _____

State, Zip Code _____

E-mail _____

Phone Number _____

Mail Completed Form to:

Groton Independent

P.O. Box 34

Groton, SD 57445-0034

or scan and email to paperpaul@grotonsd.net

Groton Daily Independent

www.397news.com

Subscription Form

This option will grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

- 1 Month \$15.98
- 3 Months..... \$26.63
- 6 Months..... \$31.95
- 9 Months..... \$42.60
- 12 Months..... \$53.25

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City _____

State, Zip Code _____

Phone Number _____

The following will be used for your log-in information.

E-mail _____

Password _____

Pay with Paypal. Type the following into your browser window:

paypal.me/paperpaul



Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 23 of 70



WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.08.24

19 20 22 47 58 1

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$735,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.06.24

20 21 24 40 42 4

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,050,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 14 Mins 30
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.08.24

24 32 36 40 48 6

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 29 Mins 29
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.06.24

3 9 11 21 31

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 29 Mins 29
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.06.24

30 31 36 52 58 16

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 58 Mins 29
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.06.24

6 19 28 44 60 10

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$521,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 58 Mins 29
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

McBride scores 23; Oral Roberts beats South Dakota 77-62 in Summit League Tournament opener

By The Associated Press undefined

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Issac McBride had 23 points in Oral Roberts' 77-62 win over South Dakota on Friday night in the opening game of the Summit League Tournament.

Oral Roberts, the tournament's eighth-seed, advances to face top-seeded South Dakota State in Saturday's quarterfinal round.

McBride added seven assists for the Golden Eagles (12-18). Jailen Bedford added 19 points while shooting 6 for 16 (3 for 11 from 3-point range) and 4 of 4 from the free-throw line while they also had six rebounds. Kareem Thompson had 12 points and shot 4 for 8 (1 for 3 from 3-point range) and 3 of 5 from the free-throw line. The Golden Eagles stopped a six-game skid with the win.

The ninth-seeded Coyotes (12-20) were led by Kaleb Stewart, who posted 18 points and six assists. Bostyn Holt added 12 points for South Dakota. Lahat Thioune finished with 12 points.

Oral Roberts carried a slim three-point lead into halftime, as McBride led the way with nine points. Oral Roberts extended its lead to 77-59 during the second half, fueled by an 11-1 scoring run. McBride scored a team-high 14 points in the second half as his team closed out the win.

Violence is battering Haiti's fragile economy and causing food and water shortages

By EVENS SANON and DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — Rotting fruit, withered vegetables, empty water jugs and spent gas canisters now stock the stores and stands that serve Haiti's poor — a consequence of the unrelenting gang attacks that have paralyzed the country for more than a week and left it with dwindling supplies of basic goods.

The terrifying violence as anti-government gangs battle police in the streets has crippled the fragile economy and made it extremely difficult for many of the country's most vulnerable to feed themselves.

The main port in the capital, Port-au-Prince, closed down, stranding scores of containers full of food and medical supplies at a time when U.N. officials say half the country's more than 11 million inhabitants don't have enough to eat, and 1.4 million are starving.

Grocery stores in upscale parts of the capital remain stocked, but their goods are out of reach to most in a country where most people earn less than \$2 a day.

"People are desperate for water," said Jean Gérald, who was hawking blackened tomatoes and shriveled scallions on a recent day, confident they would sell quickly because food is so scarce in parts of Port-au-Prince. "Because of gang violence, people will go hungry."

Next to him were rows of empty jugs he hadn't been able to refill because the violence had forced one of the country's main bottled water operators to shut down.

Gérald noted that he was running out of things to sell because the depot where he usually buys rice, oil, beans, powdered milk and bread had been set on fire and its owner had been kidnapped.

As he spoke, gunfire echoed in the distance.

Scores of people have been killed and more than 15,000 have been forced from their homes since coordinated gang attacks began on Feb. 29 while Prime Minister Ariel Henry was in Kenya to push for the U.N.-backed deployment of a police force from the East African country to fight gangs in Haiti. A Kenyan court, however, ruled in January that such a deployment would be unconstitutional.

As the gangs rampaged through Port-au-Prince, freeing more than 4,000 inmates from the country's two biggest prisons, attacking its main airport and setting police stations on fire, Haiti's least powerful

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 25 of 70

have suffered the most.

"It's a pretty bad situation," said Mike Ballard, intelligence director at Global Guardian, a Virginia-based international security company. "The gangs are trying to fill a power vacuum."

Schools, banks and most government agencies remain closed. Gas stations have also shuttered, and the few who can afford to pay \$9 a gallon — more than twice the usual rate — have flocked to the black market.

Street vendors are slowly losing their livelihoods and wonder how they'll feed their families.

Michel Jean, 45, sat on Thursday next to the makeshift metal shack where he normally sells rice, beans, milk and toilet paper.

"If you take a look inside, there's nothing," he said, gesturing to a few cans of sardines. "I don't know how long this is going to last. I'm hoping this crisis is over, and that people can go back to their regular life."

That seems unlikely for now.

Henry, who is facing calls to resign or form a transitional council, remains unable to return home. He arrived in Puerto Rico on Tuesday after he was unable to land in the Dominican Republic, which borders Haiti. The Dominican government said he lacked a required flight plan as they closed their country's airspace with Haiti.

Meanwhile, Haitian officials extended a state of emergency and nightly curfew on Thursday as gangs continued to attack key state institutions.

"They are saying essentially that they are prepared to take over the government," said Robert Fatton, a Haitian politics expert at the University of Virginia, referring to the gangs. "I think we should take them fairly seriously."

Valdo Cene, 38, said he worries that elderly people are dying in their homes, with some people unable to venture out for food and water because gangs control their neighborhoods.

Cene used to sell propane, which many use for cooking. But he has been unable to resupply because gangs are blocking the roads and seizing control of more territory, including parts of Canaan, a community north Port-au-Prince.

"The whole area is suffering," he said. "They are not getting any water. They are not getting any propane."

Cene said he and his family are living off their remaining rice, beans, sardines and plantains, along with a handful of yams and carrots. He wonders when he'll be able to make a living again.

As more and more people are left unemployed, street vendors are selling smaller amounts of essential goods.

On a recent afternoon, Gérald poured less than a cupful of cooking oil into an old water bottle and handed it to a young boy. It was all the boy's family could afford, and not enough for Gérald to continue making a living.

"If the foreign force comes in, it will give a break to the little people like me to have a life and continue fighting for a better future," he said.

A lonely radio nerd. A poet. Vladimir Putin's crackdown sweeps up ordinary Russians

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — A lonely man jailed for criticizing the government on his ham radio. A poet assaulted by police after he recited a poem objecting to Russia's war in Ukraine. A low-profile woman committed to a psychiatric facility for condemning the invasion on social media.

President Vladimir Putin's 24 years in power are almost certain to be extended six more by this month's presidential election. That leadership has transformed Russia. A country that tolerated some dissent is now one that ruthlessly suppresses it.

Along with opposition politicians, independent journalists and human rights activists, ordinary Russians have been increasingly swept up in a crackdown reminiscent of the Soviet era. Some human rights advocates compare the scale of the clampdown to the repression from the 1960s to the 1980s, when dissidents

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 26 of 70

were prosecuted for “anti-Soviet propaganda.”

THREE YEARS IN PRISON FOR A RADIO AMATEUR

Vladimir Rumyantsev led a lonely life. The 63-year-old worked stoking the furnace at a wood-processing plant in Vologda, a city about 400 kilometers (250 miles) northeast of Moscow. He had no family apart from an estranged brother.

To entertain himself, he bought a couple of radio transmitters online and started broadcasting audiobooks and radio plays that he had liked, along with YouTube videos and podcasts by journalists critical of the Kremlin and the war in Ukraine. He also shared posts on his social network page in which independent media and bloggers talked about Russia’s attacks on civilian infrastructure in Ukraine.

Rumyantsev did not intend to reach a radio audience. According to his lawyer, Sergei Tikhonov, he listened on headphones in his own apartment.

In a letter from behind bars published by Russia’s prominent rights group OVD-Info, Rumyantsev said “tinkering with and improving” radios has been his hobby since Soviet times, and he decided to set up self-broadcasting as an alternative to Russia’s state TV, which was increasingly airing “patriotic hysteria.” To him, it seemed a better technological solution than Bluetooth speakers because the radio could reach everywhere in his apartment, he said in the letter.

But his social media activity eventually put him on the authorities’ radar, and they discovered his radio frequency. In July 2022, police arrested Rumyantsev, accusing him of “spreading knowingly false information” about the Russian army — a criminal charge authorities introduced shortly after invading Ukraine.

Rumyantsev rejected the charges and insisted on his constitutional right to freely collect and disseminate information, Tikhonov says. The law under which Rumyantsev was charged effectively criminalized any expression about the war that deviated from the Kremlin’s official narrative. In December 2022, he was convicted and sentenced to three years in prison.

Tikhonov visits Rumyantsev every so often in a penal colony about 200 kilometers away (125 miles) from Vologda and described him as “calm and resilient,” even though incarceration has taken its toll on his health.

He said Rumyantsev deliberately chose to speak out against the war and refuses to apply for parole as “it is unacceptable for him to admit guilt, even as a formality.”

Russian media reported on the case against Rumyantsev when he was in pretrial detention, and he started getting many letters of support, Tikhonov said. Some supporters put money in his prison account, while others have sent supplies — mostly food, but also books and personal hygiene items, according to the lawyer.

“In addition to making the man’s life easier, this (gave him) an understanding that he is not alone and there are many people who share the same values,” Tikhonov said.

ARREST AND VIOLENCE AFTER A POETRY RECITAL

Artyom Kamardin worked as an engineer, but poetry is his passion.

He was a regular at monthly recitals in the center of Moscow, near the monument to Soviet poet Vladimir Mayakovsky. The recitals continued even after Russia invaded Ukraine. One was billed as an “anti-mobilization” recital several days after Putin announced a partial call-up into the army in September 2022.

Kamardin, 33, recited a poem condemning Russia-backed insurgents in eastern Ukraine. The next day, police with a search warrant burst into the apartment he shared with his wife Alexandra Popova and another friend, and took the poet into custody.

Police beat Kamardin, Popova and their flatmate, and raped the poet, both his wife and his lawyer said. All three filed a formal complaint with the authorities, and the allegations were eventually investigated. The authorities concluded that police acted “within the law,” the Russian news outlet Sota reported, citing the lawyer without providing further details.

For the couple, the experience was so traumatic that they “still can’t openly talk to each other” about what happened, Popova said in an interview with The Associated Press.

In addition to Kamardin, police swept up two other poets who didn’t know him, nor each other. They charged all three with making calls undermining national security and inciting hatred. All three were con-

victed and sentenced to prison terms.

Kamardin got the longest — seven years.

"No one should be in prison for words, for poetry," Popova said. She said she believes that her husband's poem "insulted someone so much that they decided to scourge a defiant poet."

The couple got married while Kamardin was in pretrial detention.

INVOLUNTARY TREATMENT IN A PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL FOR WAR CRITICISM

Unlike dozens of other Russians convicted over speaking out against the war in Ukraine and handed prison terms, St. Petersburg resident Viktoria Petrova is spending her days in a psychiatric facility. In December, she was sentenced to six months of involuntary treatment over a social media post condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Her lawyer has said that doctors can keep Petrova there for as long as they want and extend the term indefinitely once the six months run out. So the ruling "can't be considered good news," Anastasia Pilipenko wrote in her blog on the messaging app Telegram.

Petrova was arrested in May 2022 and placed in pretrial detention over a post on Russian social network VK, in which she criticized Russian officials for what the Kremlin insists on calling "a special military operation" in Ukraine, the lawyer told Russian independent news site Mediazona.

In her Telegram blog, Pilipenko has described Petrova, 30, as "an ordinary girl" who "merely shared her thoughts on social media."

"Ordinary life, ordinary gym, a cat. Ordinary job at an unremarkable office," the lawyer wrote.

The court ordered a psychiatric evaluation of Petrova after other inmates of her pretrial detention center reported that she kept up her "antiwar propaganda," Pilipenko said in an interview with a local news outlet. These evaluations are common but in a rare turn, Petrova was declared mentally incompetent.

The lawyer argued that it wasn't true and her client's words have been misconstrued, but to no avail — Petrova was committed to a psychiatric facility.

In November, Pilipenko reported abuse by facility staff, saying that they forced a strip search of the woman by male workers, pushed her around, strapped her to the hospital bed and injected her with medication that left her unable to speak for two days.

"This should not happen to 'political (prisoners),' criminals, mentally ill people, healthy people — anyone," Pilipenko wrote on Telegram. The facility didn't comment on the allegations, but shortly after she spoke out about it, Pilipenko wrote, the abuse stopped.

Who are the Russian dissidents still serving time after Alexei Navalny died behind bars?

By DASHA LITVINOVA and KATIE MARIE DAVIES Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin is expected to secure his fifth term in power this month on the heels of opposition leader Alexei Navalny's death in prison, which devastated Kremlin critics and spurred concerns about the safety of other imprisoned dissidents.

Putin has gone from tolerating dissent to suppressing anyone who dared challenge him during his 24-year rule. Over the past decade, his government has restricted freedom of speech and assembly, targeted people considered threats to the Kremlin, and restricted access to many independent news outlets.

Most opposition politicians are in prison or exile, and the 71-year-old Russian leader faces only token contenders.

Some of the prominent dissidents in prison today are:

VLADIMIR KARA-MURZA, SERVING 25 YEARS

A prominent opposition figure, Vladimir Kara-Murza was convicted of treason in April 2023 and handed the stiffest sentence for a Kremlin critic in modern Russia.

The charges against Kara-Murza, who has been behind bars since his arrest in 2022, stem from a speech that year to the House of Representatives in Arizona, where he denounced Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The 42-year-old political activist, who started out as a journalist, was an associate of Russian opposition

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 28 of 70

leader and fierce Putin critic Boris Nemtsov, who was assassinated near the Kremlin in 2015.

In 2011 and 2012, Kara-Murza and Nemtsov lobbied for passage of the Magnitsky Act in the United States. The law was in response to the death in prison of Russian lawyer Sergei Magnitsky, who had exposed a tax fraud scheme. The law has enabled Washington to impose sanctions on Russians deemed to be human rights violators.

Kara-Murza has twice survived poisonings he blamed on Russian authorities. He has rejected the charges against him as punishment for standing up to Putin, and likened the proceedings to the show trials under Soviet dictator Josef Stalin.

Since September 2023, Kara-Murza has been serving his sentence in solitary confinement in the Siberian city of Omsk. In January, he was moved to another penal colony in the city and was put in solitary again. That move has been widely seen as an attempt to pressure a man who, even behind bars, remained a vocal critic of the Kremlin and its war in Ukraine.

ILYA YASHIN, SERVING 8 ½ YEARS

One of the few well-known Kremlin critics to stay in Russia after the start of the war, Ilya Yashin, 40, was arrested in June 2022 while walking in a Moscow park. He was sentenced to 8 ½ years in prison after he was convicted for spreading false information about Russian soldiers.

The charge stemmed from a YouTube livestream in which he talked about civilians slain in the Kyiv suburb of Bucha. After Russian forces withdrew from the area in March 2022, hundreds of corpses were found, some with their hands bound and shot at close range.

Yashin, member of a Moscow municipal council, was a vocal Navalny ally and a close associate of Nemtsov's. He is serving time in Russia's western Smolensk region.

His harsh sentence didn't silence Yashin's sharp criticism of the Kremlin. Yashin's associates regularly update his social media pages with messages he relays from prison. His YouTube channel has over 1.5 million subscribers.

"So far the authorities have failed to shut me up," he said in a letter from prison to The Associated Press in September 2022.

ANDREI PIVOVAROV, SERVING 4 YEARS

Andrei Pivovarov, 42, headed the opposition group Open Russia, which authorities declared an "undesirable" organization before it was disbanded in 2021. Days later, as he attempted to leave the country, Pivovarov was pulled off an airliner due to take off from St. Petersburg for Warsaw.

The authorities accused him of carrying out activities of an "undesirable organization." He rejected the charges as politically motivated and driven by his plans to run for a seat in the parliament in the 2021 election. While in pretrial detention, he still managed to run a campaign, but didn't get on the ballot. In July 2022, when the war in Ukraine was in full swing, Pivovarov was sentenced to four years in prison.

In a written interview conducted when he was behind bars in December 2022, Pivovarov told the AP that his sentence did not come as a surprise.

"By the summer of 2022, the political field was completely purged. Those who hadn't left ended up behind bars just like me," Pivovarov wrote.

He has been serving time in isolation in a remote penal colony in Russia's northwestern Karelia region.

LILIA CHANYSHEVA, SERVING 7 ½ YEARS

Lilia Chanysheva, the 42-year-old former head of Alexei Navalny's office in the Russian Bashkortostan region, was arrested in November 2021. A court ruling several months earlier had designated Navalny's Foundation for Fighting Corruption and its regional offices as "extremist organizations."

Following a closed-door trial, Chanysheva was sentenced to 7 ½ years in prison in June 2023 after being found guilty of calling for extremism, forming an extremist group and founding an organization that violates rights. She was also fined 400,000 rubles (about \$4,700).

Chanysheva rejects the charges as politically motivated. Russian media reported this week that the authorities are now seeking a harsher sentence of 10 years for the former activist.

OLEG ORLOV, SERVING 2 ½ YEARS

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 29 of 70

Veteran human rights campaigner Oleg Orlov was convicted by a Moscow court for “repeatedly discrediting” the Russian military and sentenced to 2 ½ years in prison in February.

The 70-year-old co-chair for the Nobel Peace Prize-winning human rights group Memorial was charged over an article he wrote denouncing Russia’s war in Ukraine.

In 1995, when Chechen rebels in the city of Budyonnovsk took thousands of people hostage in a hospital, Orlov was among the human rights activists who offered themselves as hostages in exchange for the release of civilians.

Orlov was convicted and sentenced to a fine of 150,000 rubles (about \$1,500 at the time) in October 2023, significantly less than the lengthy prison terms some other Russians have received for criticizing the war. Underscoring Putin’s low tolerance of criticism of the invasion of Ukraine, the prosecution appealed the fine and sought harsher punishment.

In a statement, Memorial called Orlov’s sentence “an attempt to drown out the voice of the human rights movement in Russia and any criticism of the state.”

ALEXEI GORINOV, SERVING 7 YEARS

Alexei Gorinov, a member of a Moscow municipal council, was the first person to be sentenced to prison under the law penalizing the spread of “false information” about the Russian military after the invasion of Ukraine.

He was arrested in April 2022 after criticizing the war at a municipal council meeting. A YouTube video showed him voicing skepticism about holding a planned children’s art competition in his constituency while “everyday children are dying” in Ukraine. He was sentenced to seven years in prison.

The long sentence for a low-profile activist shocked many. In written comments to AP from behind bars in March 2023, Gorinov, 62, said “authorities needed an example they could showcase to others (of) an ordinary person, rather than a public figure.”

Gorinov has a chronic respiratory condition and had part of a lung removed before he was imprisoned. His health deteriorated during six weeks in solitary confinement in a penal colony in the Vladimir region east of Moscow. He is still recovering.

Portugal is electing a new parliament and government. Here’s what to know about the major issues

By BARRY HATTON Associated Press

LISBON, Portugal (AP) — Portugal is holding an early general election on Sunday when 10.8 million registered voters will elect 230 lawmakers to the National Assembly, the country’s parliament. The lawmakers will then choose a new government.

Two moderate parties that have alternated in power for decades — the center-left Socialist Party and the center-right Social Democratic Party — are once again expected to capture most votes.

But a radical right populist party is feeding off disenchantment with the mainstream parties and could help propel Europe’s tilt to the political right.

These are the issues that have been at the heart of the campaign:

CORRUPTION SCANDALS

The election is taking place because a Socialist government collapsed in November during a corruption investigation. The scandal included a police search of Prime Minister Antonio Costa’s official residence and the arrest of his chief of staff. Costa has not been accused of any crime.

Also in recent weeks, a Lisbon court decided that a former Socialist prime minister in power 2005-2011 should stand trial for allegedly pocketing some 34 million euros (\$36.7 million) during his time in office.

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

A recent 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 5-year-old radical right populist party called Chega, or “Enough,” has made the fight against corruption

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 30 of 70

one of its political banners and could profit from the scandals.

A HOUSING CRISIS

House prices in Portugal jumped by around 80% and rents rose by some 30% between 2010 and the second quarter of last year, European Union statistics show. Those increases were way above wage rises.

Much of the price growth came in recent years, largely fueled by the influx of foreign investors and tourists seeking short-term rentals. The shift has been felt keenly in big cities such as the capital, Lisbon, where many locals have been priced out of the housing market.

The problem was made more acute by last year's surge in mortgage rates and inflation.

LOW PAY

The Portuguese have long been among Western Europe's lowest earners. That rankles, and the latest street protests over pay have come from police officers.

Last year, the average monthly wage before tax was around 1,500 euros (\$1,630) — barely enough to rent a one-bedroom flat in Lisbon.

The minimum wage, earned by more than 800,000 people, is 820 euros (\$893) a month. That's 676 euros (\$736) in take-home pay. Close to 3 million Portuguese workers earn less than 1,000 euros (\$1,090) a month.

Weak economic growth and productivity have kept a lid on incomes. In the first 22 years of this century, average annual GDP per capita growth was around 1%. The economy feels stuck in a low gear.

Portugal's GDP per capita has been lower than 80% of the EU average since 2011, and before that it never surpassed 83%.

THE LEADING CANDIDATES

Socialist leader Pedro Nuno Santos 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 an unresolved dispute over the site of a new Lisbon airport.

He comes from a family in northern Portugal with successful business interests. When much younger, he once drove a Porsche but says he "didn't feel comfortable" owning the car so he sold it.

Luis Montenegro, the 51-year-old Social Democratic Party leader, is a lawyer who served as a lawmaker for 16 years after first entering Parliament at the age of 29.

He heads the Democratic Alliance, a grouping of mostly small right-of-center parties formed for the election. He has never been part of the Portuguese government.

Police investigated claims in 2017 that Montenegro received trips to soccer games paid for by a media company, but later dropped the case.

Chega leader Andre Ventura, 41, appears to have no chance of becoming prime minister but he may end up playing a key role after the election if his party's support jumps.

Ventura has had a colorful career. He has gone from being a practicing lawyer and university professor specializing in tax law to a boisterous TV soccer pundit, an author of low-brow books and a bombastic orator on the campaign trail.

Italy's migrant detention centers in spotlight after death of Guinean and calls to close them down

By PAOLO SANTALUCIA Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pressure is building on authorities in Italy to close a notorious Rome migrant detention center where a 19-year-old Guinean allegedly hanged himself last month. Visiting opposition senators have decried "undignified" conditions for people ordered to leave Italy but awaiting repatriation.

Italy's 10 migrant repatriation centers have long been criticized by human rights groups. They describe them as black holes of human rights violations where undocumented migrants are essentially detained for months without charges in conditions worse than prisons.

The centers are supposed to be temporary holding facilities for migrants whose asylum bids failed, or foreigners who have been ordered expelled for criminal or other reasons while the paperwork is completed

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 31 of 70

to send them home.

But because of bureaucratic delays and a lack of repatriation agreements with countries of origin, only around half of the detainees are actually sent back and the centers end up acting as de facto prisons but without a prison's rehabilitation, educational or proper medical facilities, rights groups say.

The right-wing government of Premier Giorgia Meloni has defended the use of the centers and even called to expand them as a necessary component of a broader strategy to manage Italy's migration flows. Her government has extended the amount of time migrants can be held to 18 months as part of a deterrent strategy to persuade would-be refugees and their traffickers to stay home.

The Radicali Roma, an association affiliated with the Italian Radical Party, started an online petition Friday calling on center-left Mayor Roberto Gualtieri to close Rome's repatriation center in Ponte Galeria, citing repeated episodes of violence, suicide and protests by desperate detainees.

Last month, the body of Ousmane Sylla was found in the center after he apparently hung himself. He had been ordered expelled from the country, but Italy has no repatriation agreement with his native Guinea. After his body was discovered, detainees set mattresses on fire and threw objects at law enforcement personnel, resulting in 14 arrests. The center has a maximum capacity of 125 people.

In recent days, another six migrants attempted to kill themselves at the same facility, said Marco Stufano, the head of the office of Rome's prefect. One remained hospitalized, two were returned to the center and three were transferred to other facilities because their conditions were deemed "incompatible" with detention at Ponte Galeria, he said.

Last month, Rome's city assembly called on Gualtieri to open "urgent" negotiations with government authorities to close the Ponte Galeria, given the "serious violations of human rights suffered by people detained there."

Even Italy's national guarantor for the rights of prisoners, Mauro Palma, weighed in after visiting the center in December. In letters to Rome's prefect and police chief, Palma decried the lack of monitoring at the center, saying any facility that deprives people of their freedom must have a functioning system of registering critical events and medical interventions for violence that results in injury, riots and attempted escapes to ensure the basic rights of detainees are being respected.

This week, three opposition senators visited the center and emerged stunned by what they saw.

"This place is worse than a penitentiary," said Sen. Ivan Scalfarotto, of the Italy Alive party. "The rooms where they live are absolutely unwatchable, toilets are below any human standard. Inside this place people do nothing all day, there is no labor, training, no education, something that is normally provided in all our penitentiaries. People are kept here without any hope."

Sen. Walter Verini, with the opposition Democratic Party, said while criticism of the centers had been continuous for years, the government's new provisions allowing for detention of up to 18 months required immediate action.

"We have to fight because this is something unworthy of a civilized and democratic country," he said.

Interior Minister Matteo Piatedosi has described the expansion of the network of repatriation centers as a "fundamental" element in the government's overall migration strategy, and said the difficult conditions found in them are the result of riots and vandalism by the detainees.

At a recent press briefing, he said 50% of the detainees are repatriated, that there had been an increase of 20%-30% in repatriations so far this year compared to the previous year, and that he expected the numbers to grow.

But the actual number of repatriations is among the lowest in Europe, with an average of 3,000 people sent back every year out of more than 150,000 arrivals in 2023 and more than 105,000 in 2022.

"There is no prospective to deny any human rights, but in these centers are people who – after a long process of checks of irregularity in their residency permits -- present conditions of danger that are confirmed by judicial authorities," he said.

Kenyan activists are on a mission to end gender-based violence as attacks on women surge

By TOM ODULA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Njeri Migwi's phone buzzes incessantly. Phone calls and messages keep coming in from women seeking help to escape life-threatening situations. A mother and her remaining child are looking for a place to stay after her partner allegedly raped and killed her two other children, including a 6-month old.

Moments later, someone calls looking to help a woman who has been nearly beaten to death.

"Sometimes I feel like I am the government, because I'm doing the work that they should be doing," says Migwi, 43, the co-founder of a community-based organization called Usikimye, which means "Don't be silent" in Swahili. The organization helps women escape violent relationships, puts them up in safe houses and counsels them on how to rebuild their lives.

Migwi is on the front lines of a war against a silent epidemic of gender-based violence in Kenya, where almost 60 women have been killed since the beginning of the year, according to the government.

She says her work supporting and protecting survivors of gender-based violence feels like a drop in the ocean compared to the floodgate of victims seeking help daily. Only in January of this year, Migwi says, 32 women were victims of femicide, defined by the United Nations as "the intentional killing with a gender-related motivation."

"What would the government do if 32 women were killed by a disease in a month? It would declare it a national disaster," Migwi said.

Kenya's Demographic and Health Survey of 2023 found that more than 11 million women — or 20% of the population — have experienced physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner during their lives, with 2.8 million of those women having experienced this type of violence in the last 12 months.

Odipo Dev, a Kenyan research firm, says at least 500 women in Kenya were killed because of their gender from January 2016 to December 2023.

Migwi, a survivor of domestic violence herself, says she co-founded Usikimye in 2019 to rescue and assist Kenyan women who are silent victims of gender-based violence and who feel helpless and trapped in violent relationships.

She says that nothing would have prepared her then for the avalanche of cases of violence against women she deals with on a daily basis, particularly in the low-income area where she set up the organization's offices.

Soon after setting up shop in Soweto, one of the most violent neighborhoods in Kenya's capital, Nairobi, Migwi realized that many cases of violence against women go unreported to the police. She also found that the majority of the perpetrators are never held to account, and this emboldens them to commit worse atrocities against their victims, ultimately leading to death.

Kenya made headlines in recent months after the Jan. 3 killing of Wahu Starlet, a 26-year-old sister and daughter of evangelical preachers, who was stabbed by a man alleged to belong to a criminal ring and whose members extort and rape women they target through dating sites.

The suspect, John Matara, was arrested after he checked himself into a hospital with stab wounds from the confrontation with Starlet. He has been charged with rape and murder. After his identity was revealed, seven women came forward alleging he had tortured and extorted them.

The killing of Starlet, along with those of more than 31 women in January, led thousands of Kenyans to take to the streets in the country's largest protest ever against sexual and gender-based violence.

"None of the men who killed these women are in prison ... Most of them are walking among us," Migwi says.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when reported gender-based violence cases in Kenya shot up by 300%, the government reactivated special desks at police stations with officers especially trained to help fast track investigations cases of into gender-based violence to give survivors justice and deter perpetrators.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 33 of 70

But rights activists in Kenya, many of whom spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals, say those desks are no longer functional and that some of the officers in charge were frustrated over poor pay, taking out their frustrations on the survivors themselves.

Activists also point at the pervasive bribe-taking culture among members of the Kenyan police, and cases in which police officers have asked victims of gender-based violence to pay a bribe for action to be taken against the perpetrators.

Kenya police did not respond to a written request for comment about these allegations.

Migwi says she sometimes feels she's losing her mind by her inability to help all of the victims. But she draws inspiration from seeing some of the women she has helped reclaim their voice, start a new life and find their independence.

She recalls a meeting at a Rotary Club last week, where she was invited to give a keynote address, and met Sheila Shiyonga, a woman her organization helped rescue in 2021 from female genital mutilation her husband and his parents were forcing her to undergo.

"I thank God for Njeri, she rescued me and took me to her safe house where I stayed with my two kids for six months. She ensured my kids went to school ... and she helped me get a job," said Shiyonga, who now works as a supervisor at a branch of one of Kenya's leading supermarket chains.

It is the success stories like that of Shiyonga's that give Migwi and other rights activists in Kenya the motivation to continue to fight.

"In helping others I heal myself — and I find my voice," Migwi said.

The US is springing forward to daylight saving. For Navajo and Hopi tribes, it's a time of confusion

By TERRY TANG Associated Press

TUBA CITY, Ariz. (AP) — Melissa Blackhair is not eager to spring forward Sunday.

"I'm dreading it. I just don't want to see how much we have to adjust," Blackhair said while sitting in her home office in Tuba City on the Navajo Nation, the only area in Arizona that follows daylight saving time. With her husband working during the week in Phoenix, their clocks will vary.

"Everything in our house is set to daylight saving time. It just kind of is an inconvenience because I am having to remember which car is on daylight and which is on standard time," she said. "My husband will not change our time in our apartment (in Phoenix)."

Those who live on the Arizona portion of the Navajo Nation — the largest Native American reservation in the U.S. — endure mind-bending calculations every March through November.

The Navajo Nation, which also stretches into Utah and New Mexico, will reset clocks for one hour later despite being situated between two territories that remain on standard time: the rest of Arizona and the neighboring Hopi reservation.

It's made for an especially unique situation with the Hopi reservation, which is landlocked within the Navajo Nation and goes by standard time year-round. A stretch of U.S. 160 in Tuba City is the de facto border between the two reservations and two time zones.

Reva Hoover, longtime manager of the Bashas' supermarket along U.S. 160 on the Navajo side, says Sunday will inevitably be chaotic. Despite posting reminders in the locker room, employees who live on both reservations likely will arrive late.

Tourists might not be aware. Guests staying at the Moenkopi Legacy Inn & Suites on the Hopi side across the street who come into the grocery store at what they think is 8:30 p.m. would have only 30 minutes to shop before it closes, Hoover said.

"In reality, it probably would be a lot easier for everybody if we all stayed on the same time. But I take it as being unique," Hoover said. "Where else can you say that? 'Oh they're on a different time across the street.'"

Deannethea Long, the hotel's general manager, agrees it makes for an interesting talking point with guests. The hotel, which is on standard time, does little things like have one wall clock per time zone in

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 34 of 70

the lobby.

"We have in-room notices to know when stores close, understanding your time zones. We explain it at the front desk, too. It can get very confusing," Long said.

Kimberly Humetewa lives on the Hopi side in Moenkopi, but her children attend school and other events on the Navajo side. The time change is hard on them, she said. They have to get up earlier, and she has to stop and calculate the time for almost everything.

Most of the essentials — the post office, the grocery store, Tuba City's only hospital — are on the other side of the highway, where everything will be on daylight saving time.

"Since everything's on this side, everybody changes the time unlike us on the Hopi reservation," Humetewa said. "It's a little tough but sometimes we just manage to deal with it."

The time change permeates Blackhair's work and home life. The graphic artist often advises clients to specify on announcements or invitations which time zone the event is recognizing. She also has to make sure she's not late for medical appointments in Flagstaff, Arizona, which isn't on either tribe's reservation.

One time, she miscalculated when to leave for her son's football game on the Hopi reservation and arrived when it was over. Her mother-in-law's home is a half-mile but one time zone away. So, for the months that Blackhair is on daylight saving, her family doesn't visit her long on school nights.

"Once we start looking at people's clocks, we just kind of think 'OK, it's 7 o'clock but it's really 8 o'clock at our house in the evening,'" Blackhair said, adding that the family doesn't go onto the Hopi side on school nights during daylight saving.

The time warp also has fed into lingering feelings of anti-socialness from when Navajo and Hopi shut down during the coronavirus pandemic. If an organizer of an event doesn't make clear in what time zone it's happening, Blackhair would rather not go.

"Ever since the pandemic, we've kind of stuck to ourselves," Blackhair said. "It's a lot easier to just stay home."

Arizona lawmakers passed legislation in 1968 cementing standard time after the federal government attempted to make daylight saving time the norm nationwide. Arizona tried daylight saving the previous year. Residents living in sweltering summer heat complained about having to wait through an extra hour of sunlight. Arizona and Hawaii do not change clocks.

In contrast, the Navajo Tribal Council — now the Navajo Nation Council — issued a resolution in March of that year proclaiming the reservation would follow the U.S. government's lead. The original resolution notes this would avoid confusion even in areas in other states. Also, another hour of daylight during summer "will be of great benefit to the Navajo people."

Adding another layer to the alternating time zones is a pocket in the southern end of the Hopi reservation that is Navajo Nation. Traveling more than 160 miles (258 kilometers) from northern Arizona through Tuba City, and back-and-forth from Hopi to Navajo, residents and tourists could cross time zones several times.

The configuration of the reservations is due, in part, to what was a decadeslong land dispute between the tribes. At one point, the federal government imposed a construction ban lasting 50 years on land both tribes had claimed as their own.

The proximity of Navajo and Hopi makes it hard for the two tribes to avoid association. Still, there is a constant feeling of David and Goliath between them. While Navajo is the largest Native American reservation in the U.S. — bigger than 10 U.S. states — Hopi is small with villages that are the oldest, continually inhabited among all 574 federally recognized tribes.

Like grocery stores, one tribe can offer basic utilities to members of the other.

Hopi Telecommunications has 1,200 internet and phone customers, including 200 to 300 Navajos. It can be frustrating for Navajo customers on daylight saving to wait longer to report an outage because the provider isn't open yet, said Carroll Onsaie, president and general manager.

For the next several months, business meetings always come down to "Hopi time" or "Navajo time." But he is taking it in stride.

"An hour difference is not too much of an inconvenience," Onsaie said.

He has Hopi friends, however who work on the Navajo Nation and aren't too keen on the situation. For part of the year, it's almost like they are being forced to practice daylight saving time anyway.

Residents like Blackhair would support the Navajo Nation doing away with daylight saving time. She says she heard rumblings about that possibility a few years ago and was disappointed nothing materialized.

"We really don't feel like it accomplishes anything having to move forward an hour," Blackhair said. "It's like moving from landline phone lines to mobile cellular phones. That advancement had to happen. We're living in an age now moving from daylight saving time just has to happen."

Female representation remains low in US statehouses, particularly Democrats in the South

By LEAH WILLINGHAM and KIMBERLEE KRUESI Associated Press

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) — Democrat Kayla Young and Republican Patricia Rucker frequently clash on abortion rights and just about everything else in West Virginia's Legislature, but they agree on one thing: Too few of their colleagues are women, and it's hurting the state.

"There are exceptions to every single rule, but I think in general, men do kind of see this as their field," said Rucker, part of the GOP's Senate supermajority that passed one of the nation's strictest abortion bans while Young — the lone Democratic woman elected to the House — opposed it.

Nearly 130 years since the first three women were elected to state legislative offices in the U.S., women remain massively underrepresented in state legislatures.

In 10 states, women make up less than 25% of their state legislatures, according to Rutgers' Center for American Women in Politics. West Virginia is at the very bottom of that list, having just 16 women in its 134-member Legislature, or just under 12%. That's compared with Nevada, where women occupy just over 60% of state legislative seats. Similar low numbers can be found in the nearby southern states of Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee and Louisiana.

"It's absolutely wild to know that more than 50 percent of the population of West Virginia are women, and sometimes I'm the only woman that's on a committee, period," said Young, currently the only woman on the House Artificial Intelligence Committee and was one of just two on the House Judiciary Committee when it greenlighted the state's near total abortion ban.

The numbers of women filling legislative seats across the U.S. have remained low despite women registering and voting at higher rates than men in every presidential election since 1980 — and across virtually every demographic, including race, education level and socioeconomic status.

For the last three decades, voters have demonstrated a willingness to cast ballots for women. But they didn't have the opportunity to do so because women weren't running, said Jennifer Lawless, chair of the politics department at the University of Virginia.

"The gender gap in political ambition is just as large now as it was then," said Lawless, adding that women are much less likely to get recruited to run for office or think they're qualified to run in what they perceive as a hostile political environment.

And those running in southern, conservative states — still mostly Democratic women, data show — aren't winning as those states continue to overwhelmingly elect Republicans.

In 2022, 39 women ran as their party's nominee for state legislative seats in West Virginia, and 26 were Democrats. Only two of the Democratic candidates won, compared to 11 out of 13 of the Republicans.

Debbie Walsh, director of Rutgers' Center for American Women in Politics, said there's more money, infrastructure and support for recruiting and running Democratic female candidates. The Republican Party often shies away from talking about what is labeled or dismissed as "identity politics," she said.

"It's a belief in a kind of meritocracy and, 'the best candidate will rise. And if it's a woman, great.' They don't say, 'We don't want women, but if it's a man, that's fine, too,'" she said. "There's no sort of value in and of itself seen in the diversity."

Larissa Martinez, founder and president of Women's Public Leadership Network, one of only a few right-leaning U.S. organizations solely supporting female candidates, said identity politics within the GOP is a

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 36 of 70

big hurdle to her work. Part of her organization's slogan is, "we are pro-women without being anti-man."

In 2020, small-town public school teacher Amy Grady pulled off a huge political upset when she defeated then-Senate President Mitch Carmichael in West Virginia's Republican primary, following back-to-back years of strikes in which school employees packed into the state Capitol.

Carmichael took in more than \$127,000 in contributions compared to Grady's self-funded war chest of just over \$2,000. Still, Grady won by fewer than 1,000 votes.

"It's just you're told constantly, "You can't, you can't, you can't do it,"" said Grady, who has now risen through the ranks to become chair of the Senate Education Committee. "And it's just like, why give it a shot?"

Tennessee state Sen. Charlane Oliver says she didn't have many resources when she first raised her hand to run for political office. She had to rely on grassroots activism and organizing to win her 2022 election.

Yet securing the seat was just part of the battle. Oliver, a 41-year-old Black Democratic woman, is frequently tasked with providing the only outside perspective inside for the Republican supermajority Legislature.

"They don't have any incentive to listen to me, but I view my seat as disruption and give you a perspective that you may not have heard before," she said.

Many male-dominant statehouses have enacted strict abortion bans in GOP-controlled states since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in 2022. For many female lawmakers, this trend has meant sharing deeply personal stories surrounding abortion and childbirth.

In South Carolina, the abortion debate resulted in an unlikely coalition of women banding together to filibuster a near-total abortion ban. The five female senators — three Republicans, two Democrats and one independent — quickly became known as the "sister senators" as they took turns describing pregnancy complications, the dangers surrounding limited access to contraceptives and the reproductive system.

Their actions were met with praise from national leaders, but at home, the consequences have been swift. The Republican women received censures and promises of primary challenges in this year's elections.

Women also have championed gun policy, education, health care, and housing proposals.

Recently, some states have allowed candidates to make childcare an allowable expense for campaign finance purposes. Young was the sponsor of her state's law — one of her priorities her first session in the Capitol in the minority party.

During Young's first term in office, she relied on a family member who would care for her two young children while he was at the state Capitol. But she was left without a solution last year when that caregiver passed away unexpectedly days before the session. Her husband, who works in television production, had to stay home and didn't work for two months, meaning the family lost out on his income.

Young's bill won the vote of Rucker, the first Hispanic woman elected to the West Virginia Senate. She too has had to juggle the challenges of being a working mom. She left her job as a teacher to homeschool her five children, and the family relied on her husband's salary as a pediatric nurse to make ends meet.

"I ran for office because I feel like having that voice is actually really important — someone who lives paycheck to paycheck," said Rucker, a first-generation U.S. citizen who made the difficult decision to pull her kids. "I'm not here because of a title, I'm not here because of a position, I'm here to do my job, and I want to do the best I can."

UN chief: Legal equality for women could take 300 years as backlash rises against women's rights

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Legal equality for women could take centuries as the fight for gender equality is becoming an uphill struggle against widespread discrimination and gross human rights abuses, the United Nations chief said on International Women's Day.

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told a packed U.N. commemoration Friday that "a global backlash

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 37 of 70

against women's rights is threatening, and in some cases reversing, progress in developing and developed countries alike."

The most egregious example is in Afghanistan, he said, where the ruling Taliban have barred girls from education beyond sixth grade, from employment outside the home, and from most public spaces, including parks and hair salons.

At the current rate of change, legal equality for women could take 300 years to achieve and so could ending child marriage, he said.

Guterres pointed to "a persistent epidemic of gender-based violence," a gender pay gap of at least 20%, and the underrepresentation of women in politics. He cited September's annual gathering of world leaders at the U.N. General Assembly, where just 12% of the speakers were women.

"And the global crises we face are hitting women and girls hardest — from poverty and hunger to climate disasters, war and terror," the secretary-general said.

In the past year, Guterres said, there have been testimonies of rape and trafficking in Sudan, and in Gaza women and children account for a majority of the more than 30,000 Palestinians reported killed in the Israeli-Hamas conflict, according to the Gaza Ministry of Health.

He cited a report Monday by the U.N. envoy focusing on sexual violence in conflict that concluded there are "reasonable grounds" to believe Hamas committed rape, "sexualized torture" and other cruel and inhumane treatment of women during its surprise attack in southern Israel on Oct. 7. He also pointed to reports of sexual violence against Palestinians detained by Israel.

International Women's Day grew out of labor movements in North America and across Europe at the turn of the 20th century and was officially recognized by the United Nations in 1977. This year's theme is investing in women and girls to accelerate progress toward equality.

Roza Otunbayeva, the head of the U.N. political mission in Afghanistan, told the Security Council on Wednesday that what is happening in that country "is precisely the opposite" of investing in women and girls.

There is "a deliberate disinvestment that is both harsh and unsustainable," she said, saying the Taliban's crackdown on women and girls has caused "immense harm to mental and physical health, and livelihoods."

Recent detentions of women and girls for alleged violations of the Islamic dress code "were a further violation of human rights, and carry enormous stigma for women and girls," she said. It has had "a chilling effect among the wider female population, many of whom are now afraid to move in public," she said.

Otunbayeva again called on the Taliban to reverse the restrictions, warning that the longer they remain, "the more damage will be done."

Sima Bahous, the head of UN Women, the agency promoting gender equality and women's rights, told the commemoration that International Women's Day "sees a world hobbled by confrontation, fragmentation, fear and most of all inequality."

"Poverty has a female face," she said. "One in every 10 women in the world lives in extreme poverty."

Men not only dominate the halls of power but they "own \$105 trillion more wealth than women," she said.

Bahous said well-resourced and powerful opponents of gender equality are pushing back against progress. The opposition is being fueled by anti-gender movements, foes of democracy, restricted civic space and "a breakdown of trust between people and state, and regressive policies and legislation," she said.

"We all feel this pushback acutely," Bahous said. "Our values and principles have never been as challenged as they are today."

Guterres urged nations to prioritize equality for women and girls. He announced that the U.N. is launching a "Gender Equality Acceleration Plan" to support governments in designing and implementing policies and spending that respond to the needs of women and girls.

Bahous drew strong applause when she called for a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza, which Guterres has long sought as well.

She also urged funding for women and girls, stressing that when this happens economies grow, governments thrive and peace is achieved sooner.

"But in spite of these clear facts, we continue to stubbornly invest in weapons more than we invest in women and girls," Bahous said.

How the US military is scrambling to build a floating dock for urgently needed aid to Gaza

By LOLITA C. BALDOR and TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Even before President Joe Biden announced in his State of the Union address the plans for providing aid to Gaza by sea, the Army's 7th Transportation Brigade and other units were scrambling to pull equipment together.

They received their orders before the speech: Build a floating dock off the Gaza coast to provide food and other desperately needed assistance to residents of Gaza. The aid is needed because Israel has sharply restricted land routes into Gaza, slowing the flow of aid to a trickle.

It's a complex operation, involving as many as 1,000 U.S. troops, and it won't happen overnight. Air Force Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder, the Pentagon press secretary, told reporters it will take weeks for this to come together. Some officials say it will take about two months. And beyond the logistical challenges, the operation will depend on Israel's cooperation, which isn't assured.

A look at what's known about the operation.

WHY BUILD A FLOATING PIER?

In the five months since Hamas militants attacked Israel on Oct. 7, killing about 1,200 people and taking 250 others hostage, Israel's military has battered the territory, killing more than 30,000 Palestinians, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. The result of the Israel-Hamas war is a devastating humanitarian catastrophe.

The U.N. says virtually all of Gaza's 2.3 million people are struggling to find food, and more than a half-million currently face starvation. Many people have been reduced to eating animal fodder to survive.

Getting in food, medical supplies and other aid has been difficult, if not impossible at times, due to the ongoing hostilities and struggles to coordinate with the Israeli military, which has blocked routes and slowed deliveries due to inspections.

Trucks carrying humanitarian aid have to drive from the Rafah crossing with Egypt or the Kerem Shalom crossing with Israel, both on the southern edge of Gaza, through the conflict zone to reach the largely cut-off areas in the north.

It's been frustrating for the Biden administration as its efforts to step up aid to Gaza have been impeded by the obstacles posed by Israel, its close ally.

Last week, the U.S. began airdrops of aid for Gaza. But that can provide only a limited amount of aid and may not reach those who need it.

In his address Thursday, Biden directed the military to construct a temporary pier on Gaza's coast "that can receive large ships carrying food, water, medicine and temporary shelters."

Biden said the pier will "enable a massive increase in the amount of humanitarian assistance getting into Gaza every day."

ASSEMBLED LIKE LEGOS

According to defense officials, the 7th Transportation Brigade based at Joint Base Langley-Eustis in Virginia is already starting to pull together what's called the Joint Logistics Over The Shore (JLOTS) equipment and watercraft.

It's like a huge LEGO system — an array of 40-foot-long (12-meter-long) pieces of steel that can be locked together to form a pier and causeway. The causeway would be up to 1,800 feet (nearly 550 meters) long and two lanes wide.

And in the coming days, U.S. troops will begin loading the equipment onto a large Military Sealift Command vessel. The equipment will include the steel pieces and smaller tug vessels that can help move things into place.

That loading isn't likely to start until sometime next week, and once done the ship will set off across the

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 39 of 70

Atlantic Ocean with members of the 7th Transportation Brigade aboard. A number of other military units from the U.S. and abroad will also be participating in the mission.

Ryder said the troops will build an offshore pier where large ships can offload food and supplies. Then smaller military vessels will transport that aid from the floating pier to the temporary causeway that will be driven into the ground at the shoreline.

Biden said Thursday that there will be no U.S. forces on the ground in Gaza for the mission, which will likely involve other allies, contractors and aid agencies.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

A key question will be what Israel is prepared to do to support the aid delivery effort.

The U.S. airdrops have been an unusual workaround by the Biden administration, which for months has appealed to Israel to increase the delivery of aid to Gaza and provide access and protection for trucks carrying the goods.

According to Biden, the Israeli government will maintain security at the pier and protect it from any attacks by Hamas. And there may also be a need for crowd control, in case residents try to storm the pier to get the desperately needed food.

While officials said they don't likely need security on the sea route to Israel there will be a requirement for allies and private ships to deliver the aid along the maritime corridor.

It is also unclear who will be unloading the aid at the dock and moving it to shore.

WHAT ARE OTHER NATIONS AID GROUPS DOING?

Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides offered the use of his country's port in Larnaca months ago for a possible sea route for aid deliveries to Gaza, a 230-mile (370-kilometer) journey. Cyprus invited authorities from Israel, the U.S. and other European countries to join Cypriot agents in vetting all shipments so nothing could be used by Hamas against Israel. The offer received strong interest from the Americans, Europeans and others, and extended planning followed.

The European Commission said Friday that a ship bearing humanitarian aid was preparing to leave Cyprus and head for Gaza.

The vessel belonging to Spain's Open Arms aid group will make a pilot voyage to test the maritime corridor in the coming days. The ship has been waiting at Larnaca for permission to deliver food aid from World Central Kitchen, a U.S. charity founded by celebrity chef José Andrés.

The UAE ambassador to the U.S., Yousef Al Otaiba, told the AP the exact timing of the pilot shipment by sea depended on conditions, but said Sunday looked favorable. The UAE funded the operation and worked directly with the Israelis in getting the shipment ready without issues, he said.

World Central Kitchen prepared the boat in Cyprus with 200 tons of rice, flour and proteins that will soon be ready to leave for Gaza, and an additional 500 tons of aid is in Cyprus and ready to follow, spokeswoman Chloe Mata Crane said in a statement.

The Biden-Trump rematch comes into view with dueling visits to Georgia

By BILL BARROW and JEFF AMY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — The 2024 presidential election campaign will pick up Saturday where the 2020 contest left off. Or, more precisely, in a place where it never actually ended.

Georgia was so close four years ago that Republican Donald Trump finds himself indicted here for his push to "find 11,780 votes" and overturn Democrat Joe Biden's victory. Now, fresh off their Super Tuesday domination to set up a near-certain rematch, the two rivals will hold dueling events in a state that both parties see as pivotal to winning in November.

"Elections are hard. We're a true battleground state now," said U.S. Rep. Nikema Williams, an Atlanta Democrat who doubles as state party chairwoman.

Once a Republican stronghold, Georgia is now so competitive that neither party can agree on how to describe today's divide. A "52-48 state," said Republican Gov. Brian Kemp, whose party controls state government. "We're not blue, we're not red," Williams countered, but "periwinkle," a claim she supports with Biden's 2020 win and the two Democratic senators, Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff, Georgia sent

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 40 of 70

to Washington.

There is agreement, at least, that Biden and Trump each have a path to victory — and plenty of obstacles along the way.

“Biden’s numbers are in the tank for a lot of good reasons, and we can certainly talk about that. And so, it makes it where Trump absolutely can win the race,” Kemp said at a recent forum sponsored by Punch-bowl News. “I also think he could lose the race. I think it’s going to be a lot tougher than people realize.”

A perilous balance for both parties

Biden’s margin was about a quarter of a percentage point in 2020. Warnock won his 2022 Senate runoff by 3 points. Kemp was elected in 2018 by 1.5 percentage points but expanded his 2022 reelection margin to 7.5 points, a blowout in a battleground state.

In each of those elections, Democrats held wide advantages in the core of metro Atlanta, where Biden will be Saturday. They also performed well in Columbus and Savannah and a handful of rural, majority-Black counties. But Republicans dominated in other rural areas, small towns and the smallest cities — like Rome, where the former president will appear Saturday in the congressional district represented by arch-conservative firebrand Marjorie Taylor Greene.

The fast-growing, diversifying suburbs and exurbs of metro Atlanta, meanwhile, offer the most opportunity for swings, especially from GOP-leaning moderates disenchanted with Trump.

“This will be won or lost on the margins,” said Eric Tanenblatt, an Atlanta lawyer and longtime Republican fundraising bundler who backed Nikki Haley’s GOP bid against Trump.

Democrats have a head start in building their campaign organization and promise sustained, direct outreach to millions of Georgians — different from the pandemic-limited 2020 campaign and more like Warnock’s reelection bid.

“When you’re talking about slim margins like the one in 2020, organizing has got to be at the heart of the campaign strategy,” said Jonae Wartel, Biden’s state director and a veteran of Warnock’s operation.

Biden’s visit Saturday follows first lady Jill Biden campaigning in the state, and Vice President Kamala Harris has visited Georgia many times since she and Biden were inaugurated.

Still, Biden could see a slip in any part of his coalition for any number of reasons: inflation, the Israel-Hamas war, worries over a spike in migrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border and broad concerns about whether he’s up to the job at 81 years old.

Local issues

There are local matters to boot: Biden cannot afford to lose younger metro-Atlanta voters energized by their opposition to a police training facility being built in Atlanta and backed by the city’s Democratic leadership. And Republicans are intensifying their immigration attacks by highlighting the case of a Venezuelan migrant who entered the U.S. illegally and is accused of killing of a Georgia college student, Laken Riley, last month.

Williams countered that Biden has a positive record to sell. She pointed to an infrastructure package that cleared Congress with bipartisan support and a strong overall economy with low unemployment, rising wages and stabilizing inflation. The economy is strong enough, she noted, to give Georgia an ample surplus that the Republican Kemp brags about.

“We have work to do we have work to do between now and November to remind people what has happened,” Williams said.

Trump’s biggest challenge may be corraling centrist white voters who defected from the GOP in some recent elections. Democrats are eager to remind those voters, especially women, of Trump’s role in the Supreme Court decision to end a national right to abortion — a ruling with salience in Georgia because of a state ban on abortions at six weeks of gestation, before many women know they are pregnant.

The former president’s pending racketeering trial in Fulton County will keep the spotlight on Biden’s argument that his predecessor is a threat to American democracy. And Trump’s rift with traditional Republicans, including Haley backers, remains on full display.

“Far be it from me to tell the former president what to do, but I think he would want someone like Nikki

to be part of his team — and she could bring other people,” said Tanenblatt, the Haley bundler.

Tanenblatt said he sees “no evidence” that Trump or his advisers are engaged in conventional party unity efforts, like what Biden managed with Bernie Sanders and his progressive backers in 2020.

“Marjorie Taylor Greene, one of the former president’s major supporters, is out there before Nikki got out saying she should switch parties,” Tanenblatt said. “That’s not the kind of rhetoric you should be spewing.”

No endorsement from GOP governor

Kemp, once a target of Trump’s ire because he certified Biden’s slate of 2020 electors, is among the prominent Republicans nationally who have yet to endorse Trump. The governor pledges to support the GOP ticket and echoes Trump’s attacks on Biden, on immigration particularly. But it remains a question what part Kemp will play in the fall. When Trump loyalists took over the state GOP after 2020, Kemp simply built his own political organization. It is expected mostly to target competitive state legislative seats ahead of November.

Georgia Republican Chairman Josh McKoon downplayed any talk of splintering, noting the left has a plethora of campaign and nonprofit organizations contacting voters. “Gov. Kemp is a great governor, and his work will benefit Republicans up and down the ticket,” McKoon said.

Lt. Gov. Burt Jones, the highest-ranking Georgia Republican who openly backs Trump, said the GOP’s overall message is the most important variable. “This ‘24 election cycle is going to be about kitchen table issues,” Jones said, predicting that will win back enough usual Republicans who in 2020 were “voting on emotion of a personality.”

Trump himself also insists he can attract more Black and Latino voters, mainly men. Wartel promised an aggressive response with “an all of the above” approach. She promised more visits not only from Harris and the Bidens, but “a lot of local champions” vouching for them.

Some activists demonstrate why that becomes another tightrope.

Harris came last fall to Atlanta’s Morehouse College, a historically Black campus, during the peak of public debate over a planned law enforcement training facility that opponents deride as “Cop City.” The development, supported by Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens, has drawn protests, with some violent clashes, and Dickens has opposed a referendum on the project’s future.

When Dickens stepped to the Morehouse stage to introduce Harris, he was drowned out with jeers from students from multiple campuses.

Hillary Holley, who runs the Care in Action group that organizes domestic workers in Georgia, said it reflected frustration over “anti-democratic tactics” that can, in turn, affect Biden.

Dickens, Holley said, “is not a surrogate that Biden and Harris need to be around.”

Congress passes first package of spending bills just hours before shutdown deadline for key agencies

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate on Friday approved a \$460 billion package of spending bills in time to meet a midnight deadline for avoiding a shutdown of many key federal agencies, a vote that gets lawmakers about halfway home in wrapping up their appropriations work for the 2024 budget year.

The measure contains six annual spending bills and has already passed the House. It now goes to President Joe Biden to be signed into law. The White House said he would do so Saturday, and “agencies will not shut down and may continue their normal operations.”

Meanwhile, lawmakers are negotiating a second package of six bills, including defense, in an effort to have all federal agencies fully funded by a March 22 deadline.

“To folks who worry that divided government means nothing ever gets done, this bipartisan package says otherwise,” said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y.

He said the bill’s passage would allow for the hiring of more air traffic controllers and rail safety inspectors, give federal firefighters a raise and boost support for homeless veterans, among other things.

The Senate passed the bill by a vote of 75-22. The chamber labored to get to a final vote just hours

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 42 of 70

before the midnight deadline for the first set of appropriations bills. Lawmakers sought votes on several amendments and wanted to have their say on the bill and other priorities during debate on the floor. It was unclear midday if senators would be able to avert a short shutdown, though eventual passage was never really in doubt.

"I would urge my colleagues to stop playing with fire here," said Sen. Susan Collins, the top-ranking Republican member of the Senate Appropriations Committee. "It would be irresponsible for us not to clear these bills and do the fundamental job that we have of funding government. What is more important?"

The votes this week come more than five months into the current fiscal year after congressional leaders relied on a series of stopgap bills to keep federal agencies funded for a few more weeks or months at a time while they struggled to reach agreement on full-year spending.

In the end, total discretionary spending set by Congress is expected to come in at about \$1.66 trillion for the full budget year ending Sept. 30.

Republicans were able to keep non-defense spending relatively flat compared to the previous year. Supporters say that's progress in an era when annual federal deficits exceeding \$1 trillion have become the norm. But many Republican lawmakers were seeking much steeper cuts and more policy victories.

The House Freedom Caucus, which contains dozens of the GOP's most conservative members, urged Republicans to vote against the first spending package and the second one still being negotiated.

Democrats staved off most of the policy riders that Republicans sought to include in the package. For example, they beat back an effort to block new rules that expand access to the abortion pill mifepristone. They were also able to fully fund a nutrition program for low-income women, infants and children, providing about \$7 billion for what is known as the WIC program. That's a \$1 billion increase from the previous year.

Republicans were able to achieve some policy wins, however. One provision, for example, will prevent the sale of oil in the Strategic Petroleum Reserve to China. Another policy mandate prohibits the Justice Department from investigating parents who exercise free speech at local school board meetings.

Another provision strengthens gun rights for certain veterans, though opponents of the move said it could make it easier for those with very serious mental health conditions like dementia to obtain a firearm.

"This isn't the package I would have written on my own," said Sen. Patty Murray, the Democratic chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee. "But I am proud that we have protected absolutely vital funding that the American people rely on in their daily lives."

Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., said one problem he sees with the bill is that there was too much compromise, and that led to too much spending.

"A lot of people don't understand this. They think there is no cooperation in Washington and the opposite is true. There is compromise every day on every spending bill," Paul said.

"It's compromise between big-government Democrats and big-government Republicans," he added.

Still, with a divided Congress and a Democratic-led White House, any bill that doesn't have buy-in from members of both political parties stands no chance of passage.

The bill also includes more than 6,600 projects requested by individual lawmakers with a price tag of about \$12.7 billion. The projects attracted criticism from some Republican members, though members from both parties broadly participated in requesting them on behalf of their states and congressional districts. Paul called the spending "sort of the grease that eases in billions and trillions of other dollars, because you get people to buy into the total package by giving them a little bit of pork for their town, a little bit of pork for their donors."

But an effort by Sen. Rick Scott, R-Fla, to strip out the projects mustered only 32 votes with 64 against. Murray said Scott's effort would overrule "all the hard work, all the input we asked everyone to provide us about projects that would help their constituents."

Even though lawmakers find themselves passing spending bills five months into the fiscal year, Republicans are framing the process as improved nonetheless because they broke the cycle of passing all the spending bills in one massive package that lawmakers have little time to study before being asked to vote on it or risk a government shutdown. Still, others said that breaking up funding into two chunks of legislation war hardly a breakthrough.

The first package now making its way to Biden's desk covers the departments of Justice, Veterans Affairs, Agriculture, Interior and Transportation, among others.

Program that allows 30,000 migrants from 4 countries into the US each month upheld by judge

By JUAN A. LOZANO Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — The Biden administration can keep operating a program that allows a limited number of migrants from four countries to enter the U.S. on humanitarian grounds after a federal judge on Friday dismissed a challenge from Republican-led states.

U.S. District Judge Drew B. Tipton said Texas and 20 other states had not shown they had suffered financial harm because of the humanitarian parole program that allows up to 30,000 asylum-seekers into the U.S. each month from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela combined. That was something the states needed to prove to have legal standing to bring the lawsuit.

"In reaching this conclusion, the Court does not address the lawfulness of the Program," Tipton wrote.

Eliminating the program would undercut a broader policy that seeks to encourage migrants to use the Biden administration's preferred pathways into the U.S. or face stiff consequences.

The states, led by Texas, had argued the program is forcing them to spend millions on health care, education, and public safety for the migrants. An attorney working with the Texas attorney general's office in the legal challenge said that the program "created a shadow immigration system."

Advocates for the federal government countered that migrants admitted through the policy helped with a U.S. farm labor shortage.

The White House welcomed the ruling.

"The district court's decision is based on the success of this program, which has expanded lawful pathways for nationals from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela who have a sponsor in this country and pass our rigorous vetting process, while dramatically decreasing the number of nationals from those countries crossing our Southwest Border," White House spokesperson Angelo Fernández Hernández said.

The Texas Attorney General's Office did not immediately reply to messages seeking comment. An appeal by Texas and the other states seemed likely.

Since the program was launched in fall 2022, more than 357,000 people from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela have been granted parole and allowed to enter the country through January. Haitians have been far been the biggest group to use the program with 138,000 people from that country arriving, followed by 86,000 Venezuelans, 74,000 Cubans and 58,000 Nicaraguans.

Migrants must apply online, arrive at an airport and have a financial sponsor in the U.S. If approved, they can stay for two years and get a work permit.

President Joe Biden has made unprecedented use of parole authority, which has been in effect since 1952 and allows presidents to let people in for "urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit."

Esther Sung, an attorney for Justice Action Center, which represented seven people who were sponsoring migrants as part of the program, said she was looking forward to calling her clients to let them know of the court's decision.

"It's a popular program. People want to welcome other people to this country," she said.

Valerie Laveus, one of the seven represented by Justice Action Center, sponsored her brother and nephew and they arrived in Florida from conflict-plagued Haiti last August. They are flourishing in their new lives, she said, and her nephew has a newfound normalcy and is able to do things like play basketball outdoors without having to worry about safety. Her brother is working in construction.

Laveua said she is grateful for the legal outcome and people entering the country through the program are contributing to society.

"I am ecstatic, not just for my family but for all the other families who are still waiting," she said.

During an August trial in Victoria, Texas, Tipton declined to issue any temporary order that would halt the

parole program nationwide. Tipton is an appointee of former President Donald Trump who ruled against the Biden administration in 2022 on an order that determined who to prioritize for deportation.

Some states said the initiative has benefited them. One Nicaraguan migrant admitted into the country through the process filled a position at a farm in Washington state that was struggling to find workers.

Tipton questioned how Texas could be claiming financial losses if data showed that the parole program actually reduced the number of migrants coming into the U.S.

"The Court has before it a case in which Plaintiffs claim that they have been injured by a program that has actually lowered their out-of-pocket costs," Tipton said in Friday's ruling.

When the policy took effect, the Biden administration had been preparing to end a pandemic-era policy at the border known as Title 42 that barred migrants from seeking asylum at ports of entry and immediately expelled many who entered illegally.

Proponents of the policy also faced scrutiny from Tipton, who questioned whether living in poverty was enough for migrants to qualify. Elissa Fudim, a lawyer with the U.S. Department of Justice, responded: "I think probably not."

Federal government attorneys and immigrant rights groups said that in many cases, Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans are also fleeing oppressive regimes, escalating violence and worsening political conditions that have endangered their lives.

The lawsuit did not challenge the use of humanitarian parole for tens of thousands of Ukrainians who came after Russia's invasion. It is among several legal challenges the Biden administration has faced over its immigration policies.

The program's supporters said each case is individually reviewed and some people who had made it to the final approval step after arriving in the U.S. have been rejected, though they did not provide the number of rejections that have occurred.

Friday's decision "is a clear win and affirmation of humanitarian immigration parole being an indispensable, necessary and model program of the type of smart solutions we should be focusing on to relieve pressure on the border and modernize our failed immigration system," said Todd Schulte, president of immigration advocacy organization FWD.us.

Foreigners trapped in violence-torn Haiti wait desperately for a way out

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — Dozens of foreigners, including many from the United States and Canada, are stranded in Haiti, desperately trying to leave the violence-torn country where anti-government gangs are battling police and have already shut down both of the country's international airports.

They were in Haiti for reasons ranging from adoptions to missionary and humanitarian work. Now, they are locked down in hotels and homes, unable to leave by air, sea or land as Haiti remains paralyzed by the mayhem and the gangs' demands that Prime Minister Ariel Henry resign.

"We are seriously trapped," said Richard Phillips, a 65-year-old from the Canadian capital, Ottawa, who has traveled to Haiti more than three dozen times to work on projects for the United Nations, USAID and now, a Haitian nonprofit called Papyrus.

After arriving in Haiti in late February, Phillips flew to the southern coastal city of Les Cayes to teach farmers and others how to operate and repair tractors, cultivators, planters and other machinery in an area known for its corn, rice, peas and beans.

Once his work was done, Phillips flew to the capital, Port-au-Prince, only to find that his flight had been canceled. He stayed at a nearby hotel, but the gunfire was relentless, so moved on to a safer area.

"We are actually quite concerned about where this is going," he told The Associated Press by phone. "If the police force collapses, there's going to be anarchy in the streets, and we might be here a month or more."

Scores of people have been killed in the gang attacks that began Feb. 29, and more than 15,000 people

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 45 of 70

have been left homeless by the violence.

Earlier this week, Haiti's government extended a state of emergency and nightly curfew to try and quell the violence, but the attacks continue.

Gangs have burned police stations, released more than 4,000 inmates from Haiti's two biggest prisons and attacked Port-au-Prince's main airport, which remains closed. As a result, the prime minister has been unable to return home after a trip to Kenya to push for the U.N.-backed deployment of a police force from the East African country.

Phillips said he has exhausted all options to leave Haiti by air, noting that a helicopter operator couldn't get insured for such a flight and a private plane pilot said that approach would be too risky. As for trying to trek to the neighboring Dominican Republic: "It's possible we could walk miles and miles to get to a border, but I'm sure that's dangerous as well."

Despite being stuck, Phillips said he remains calm.

"I've been shot at many times in Haiti and have bullet holes in my truck," he said. "Personally, I'm kind of used to it. But I'm sure other people, it's quite traumatic for them."

Yvonne Trimble, who has lived in Haiti for more than 40 years, is among the U.S. expats who can't leave. She and her husband are in the northern coastal city of Cap-Haitien, waiting for a private evacuation flight for missionaries that had already been canceled once.

"We're completely locked down," she said by phone. "This is the worst I've seen it. It's total anarchy."

Trimble noted how a mob surrounded the airport in Cap-Haitien recently and began throwing rocks and bottles following a rumor that the prime minister was going to land.

She and her husband are scheduled to fly out next week courtesy of Florida-based Missionary Flights International.

The company's vice president of administration, Roger Sands, said Missionary Flights International has received up to 40 calls from people hoping to leave or remain on standby.

"We're getting phone calls constantly," he said. "The big concern is that every time people see an airplane, they think the prime minister is coming back to the country, and there's a large segment of the society that doesn't want that to happen. So we don't want to be the first ones in."

It's not clear when Haiti's two international airports will reopen.

"This is difficult for us," Sands said. "We hate seeing our planes on the ground when there's need."

A missionary couple who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of their safety said they have been living in Haiti for several years but won't leave because they're in the middle of adopting a 6-year-old boy.

"There is no choice to be made. We're here as family," the woman said.

Meanwhile, her husband was supposed to fly to the U.S. last week for medical care since he has Type 1 diabetes and has developed a neuropathy that causes severe pain in his legs and back, and muscle-wasting in his legs, making it difficult to move.

For now, the four appointments he made are on hold.

"It's a little frustrating," he said.

Also unable to leave are Matt Prichard, a 35-year-old from Lebanon, Ohio, and his family. Prichard, COO of a missionary, has two children — an infant and toddler — with his Haitian wife, as well as an 18-year-old son.

The rest of his family hasn't been able to get documents to enter the U.S. yet, so they will all stay in southern Haiti for now.

"We unfortunately seem to be stuck," he said.

Prichard noted that his son is stressed out by the situation, telling him he should leave because 'this isn't a good place for you. Just get out of here.'

But Prichard said, "As a father, you can't leave your kids or your family."

He said the local grocery store has nearly run out of basic goods and gas has been hard to find.

"The expat community here is really our solace," he said. "It's that connection, those relationships, that really are getting us through."

Peru arrests an Iranian man accused of planning an attack on an Israeli citizen

LIMA, Peru (AP) — Police in Peru announced the arrest Friday of an Iranian citizen who was purportedly a member of Iran's Quds Force and allegedly planned to kill an Israeli citizen in the South American country. Gen. Óscar Arriola, Peru's police chief, said in a press conference that Majid Azizi, 56, was arrested Thursday in Lima, along with two Peruvian citizens.

Arriola said authorities thwarted the attack against the Israeli. He did not identify the intended target for security reasons. Police are still looking for a third Peruvian they think was in charge of the plot to kill the Israeli man, he said.

Arriola said Azizi entered Lima on March 3, and they were alerted about him by foreign intelligence offices. The Associated Press couldn't independently confirm whether Azizi is a member of the Quds Force. Iranian authorities did not comment, and Iranian state media did not acknowledge the arrest early Saturday. Iran has run intelligence operations in South America in the past, particularly through the expeditionary Quds, or Jerusalem, Force of its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard.

Iran maintains close ties to Venezuela. The Quds Force was linked to an impounded Boeing 747 in Argentina and later seized by the United States. And most notoriously, Argentina believes Iran was behind the 1994 bombing of a Jewish center that killed 85 people.

This is the first time Peruvian authorities have announced the arrest of an alleged member of that group. Arriola said Azizi was captured after withdrawing money from an ATM and, along with the two Peruvians arrested, will remain in prison for an initial 15 days under terrorism charges.

The general said the man intended to return to Iran the same day he was captured. Azizi is married to a Peruvian woman, he added.

OpenAI has 'full confidence' in CEO Sam Altman after investigation, reinstates him to board

By MATT O'BRIEN and HALELUYA HADERO AP Business Writers

OpenAI is reinstating CEO Sam Altman to its board of directors and said it has "full confidence" in his leadership after the conclusion of an outside investigation into the company's turmoil.

The ChatGPT maker tapped the law firm WilmerHale to look into what led the company to abruptly fire Altman in November, only to rehire him days later. After months of investigation, it found that Altman's ouster was a "consequence of a breakdown in the relationship and loss of trust" between him and the prior board, OpenAI said in a summary of the findings Friday. It did not release the full report.

OpenAI also announced it has added three women to its board of directors: Dr. Sue Desmond-Hellman, a former CEO of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; Nicole Seligman, a former Sony general counsel; and Instacart CEO Fidji Simo.

The actions are a way for the San Francisco-based artificial intelligence company to show investors and customers that it is trying to move past the internal conflicts that nearly destroyed it last year and made global headlines.

"I'm pleased this whole thing is over," Altman told reporters Friday, adding that he's been disheartened to see "people with an agenda" leaking information to try to harm the company or its mission and "pit us against each other." At the same time, he said he's learned from the experience and apologized for a dispute with a former board member he could have handled "with more grace and care."

In a parting shot, two board members who voted to fire Altman before getting pushed out themselves wished the new board well but said accountability is paramount when building technology "as potentially world-changing" as what OpenAI is pursuing.

"We hope the new board does its job in governing OpenAI and holding it accountable to the mission," said a joint statement from ex-board members Helen Toner and Tasha McCauley. "As we told the investigators, deception, manipulation, and resistance to thorough oversight should be unacceptable."

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 47 of 70

For more than three months, OpenAI said little about what led its then-board of directors to fire Altman on Nov. 17. An announcement that day said Altman was “not consistently candid in his communications” in a way that hindered the board’s ability to exercise its responsibilities. He also was kicked off the board, along with its chairman, Greg Brockman, who responded by quitting his job as the company’s president.

Much of OpenAI’s conflicts have been rooted in its unusual governance structure. Founded as a nonprofit with a mission to safely build futuristic AI that helps humanity, it is now a fast-growing big business still controlled by a nonprofit board bound to its original mission.

The investigation found the prior board acted within its discretion. But it also determined that Altman’s “conduct did not mandate removal,” OpenAI said. It said both Altman and Brockman remained the right leaders for the company.

“The review concluded there was a significant breakdown in trust between the prior board, and Sam and Greg,” Bret Taylor, the board’s chair, told reporters Friday. “And similarly concluded that the board acted in good faith, that the board believed at the time that its actions would mitigate some of the challenges that it perceived and didn’t anticipate some of the instability.”

The dangers posed by increasingly powerful AI systems have long been a subject of debate among OpenAI’s founders and leaders. But citing the law firm’s findings, Taylor said Altman’s firing “did not arise out of concerns regarding product safety or security.”

Nor was it about OpenAI’s finances or any statements made to investors, customers or business partners, Taylor said.

Days after his surprise ouster, Altman and his supporters — with backing from most of OpenAI’s workforce and close business partner Microsoft — helped orchestrate a comeback that brought Altman and Brockman back to their executive roles and forced out board members Toner, a Georgetown University researcher; McCauley, a scientist at the RAND Corporation; and another co-founder, Ilya Sutskever. Sutskever kept his job as chief scientist and publicly expressed regret for his role in ousting Altman.

“I think Ilya loves OpenAI,” Altman said Friday, saying he hopes they will keep working together but declining to answer a question about Sutskever’s current position at the company.

Altman and Brockman did not regain their board seats when they rejoined the company in November. But an “initial” new board of three men was formed, led by Taylor, a former Salesforce and Facebook executive who also chaired Twitter’s board before Elon Musk took over the platform. The others are former U.S. Treasury Secretary Larry Summers and Quora CEO Adam D’Angelo, the only member of the previous board to stay on.

(Both Quora and Taylor’s new startup, Sierra, operate their own AI chatbots that rely in part on OpenAI technology.)

After it retained the law firm in December, OpenAI said WilmerHale conducted dozens of interviews with the company’s prior board, current executives, advisers and other witnesses. The company also said the law firm reviewed thousands of documents and other corporate actions. WilmerHale didn’t immediately respond to a request for comment Friday.

The board said it will also be making “improvements” to the company’s governance structure. It said it will adopt new corporate governance guidelines, strengthen the company’s policies around conflicts of interest, create a whistleblower hotline that will allow employees and contractors to submit anonymous reports and establish additional board committees.

The company still has other troubles to contend with, including a lawsuit filed by Musk, who helped bankroll the early years of OpenAI and was a co-chair of its board after its 2015 founding. Musk alleges that the company is betraying its founding mission in pursuit of profits.

Legal experts have expressed doubt about whether Musk’s arguments, centered around an alleged breach of contract, will hold up in court.

But it has already forced open the company’s internal conflicts about its unusual governance structure, how “open” it should be about its research and how to pursue what’s known as artificial general intelligence, or AI systems that can perform just as well as — or even better than — humans in a wide variety of tasks.

Taylor said Friday that OpenAI's "mission-driven nonprofit" structure won't be changing as it continues to pursue its vision for artificial general intelligence that benefits "all of humanity."

"Our duties are to the mission, first and foremost, but the company — this amazing company that we're in right now — was created to serve that mission," Taylor said.

A ship with Gaza aid is preparing to inaugurate a sea route from Cyprus to the war-ravaged strip

By MENELAOS HADJICOSTIS Associated Press

LARNACA, Cyprus (AP) — A ship bearing humanitarian aid was making preparations to leave Cyprus and head for Gaza, the European Commission president said Friday as international donors launched a sea corridor to supply the besieged territory that is facing widespread hunger after five months of war.

The opening of the corridor, along with the recent inauguration of airdrops of aid, showed increasing frustration with the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and a new international willingness to work around Israeli restrictions.

The vessel belonging to Spain's Open Arms aid group will make a pilot voyage to test the corridor in the coming days, Ursula von der Leyen told reporters in Cyprus, where she's inspecting preparations for it. The ship has been waiting at Cyprus's port of Larnaca for permission to deliver food aid from World Central Kitchen, a U.S. charity founded by celebrity chef José Andrés.

Israel said Friday it welcomed the maritime corridor, but cautioned it would also need security checks.

"The Cypriot initiative will allow the increase of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, after a security check according to Israeli standards," Lior Haiat, spokesperson for Israel's foreign ministry, said on X, formerly Twitter.

The European Union, together with the United States, the United Arab Emirates and other involved countries were launching the sea route in response to the "humanitarian catastrophe" unfolding in Gaza, Von der Leyen said at a news conference with Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides.

"The humanitarian situation in Gaza is dire, with innocent Palestinian families and children desperate for basic needs," she said.

Open Arms founder Oscar Camps told The Associated Press the ship is scheduled to depart Saturday and would take two to three days to arrive at an undisclosed location where the group World Central Kitchen is constructing a pier to receive it. The group has 60 food kitchens throughout Gaza to distribute aid, he said.

The ship will pull a barge loaded with 200 tons of rice and flour close to the Gaza shore, he said. Pontoon boats will then be used for the complicated final leg to tow the barge up to the pier.

Camps said his group has been planning the delivery for two months, long before the EU Commission chief declared the launch of the safe corridor. He said he's not as concerned about the security of the ship as "about the security and lives of the people who are in Gaza."

"I don't know if nations plan to do something bigger, but we are doing everything we can" with the group's 3 million euros budget from private donations, Camps said.

In Brussels, commission spokesman Balazs Ujvari said the Open Arms ship's direct route to Gaza raises a number of "logistical problems" which are still being worked out. He said United Nations agencies and the Red Cross will also play a role.

Efforts to set up a sea route for aid deliveries come amid mounting alarm over the spread of hunger among Gaza's 2.3 million people. Hunger is most acute in northern Gaza, which has been isolated by Israeli forces for months and suffered long cutoffs of food supply deliveries.

On Thursday, President Joe Biden announced a plan to build a temporary pier in Gaza to help deliver aid, underscoring how the U.S. has to go around Israel, its main Mideast ally and the top recipient of U.S. military aid, to deliver aid to Gaza, including through airdrops that started last week. Israel accuses Hamas of commandeering some aid deliveries.

Aid officials have said that deliveries by sea and by air are far more costly and inefficient than sending trucks by land in getting the massive amounts of aid needed to people.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 49 of 70

Five people in Gaza were killed and several others were injured when airdrops malfunctioned Friday and hit people and landed on homes, Palestinian officials said.

After months of warnings over the risk of famine in Gaza under Israel's bombardment, offensives and siege, hospital doctors have reported 20 malnutrition-related deaths at two northern Gaza hospitals.

While reiterating his support for Israel, Biden used his State of the Union speech to reiterate demands that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu allow in more aid to Gaza.

"To the leadership of Israel, I say this: Humanitarian assistance cannot be a secondary consideration or a bargaining chip," Biden declared before Congress. He also repeated calls for Israel to do more to protect civilians in the fighting, and to work toward Palestinian statehood as the only long-term solution to Israeli-Palestinian violence.

United States officials said it will likely be weeks before the Gaza pier is operational.

Aid groups have said their efforts to deliver desperately needed supplies to Gaza have been hampered because of the difficulty of coordinating with the Israeli military, the ongoing hostilities and the breakdown of public order. It is even more difficult to get aid to the isolated north.

Sigrid Kaag, the U.N. senior humanitarian and reconstruction coordinator for Gaza, told reporters late Thursday that air and sea deliveries cannot make up for a shortage of supply routes on land.

Von der Leyen said the EU would continue exploring different ways of getting aid to Gaza. She said the bloc would consider "all other options, including airdrops, if our humanitarian partners on the ground consider this effective."

Meanwhile, efforts to reach a cease-fire before Ramadan appeared stalled. Hamas said Thursday that its delegation had left Cairo, where talks were being held, until next week.

International mediators had hoped to alleviate some of the immediate crisis with a six-week cease-fire, which would have seen Hamas release some of the Israeli hostages it is holding, Israel release some Palestinian prisoners and aid groups be given access to get a major influx of assistance into Gaza.

Palestinian militants are believed to be holding around 100 hostages and the remains of 30 others captured during Hamas' Oct. 7 attack, in which militants killed about 1,200 people in Israel and took some 250 hostages. Several dozen hostages were freed in a weeklong November truce, and about 30 are believed to be dead.

Gaza's Health Ministry says at least 30,878 Palestinians have been killed. It does not differentiate between civilians and combatants in its tallies but says women and children make up two-thirds of those killed. The ministry, which is part of the Hamas-run government, maintains detailed records and its casualty figures from previous wars have largely matched those of the U.N. and independent experts.

Egyptian officials said Hamas has agreed to the main terms of such an agreement as a first stage but wants commitments that it will lead to an eventual more permanent cease-fire, while Israel wants to confine the negotiations to the more limited agreement.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the negotiations with media. Both officials said mediators are still pressing the two parties to soften their positions.

The NYPD is using social media to target critics. That brings its own set of worries

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The first "NYPD: Most Wanted" video was meant to be intimidating.

Over a pounding soundtrack, the montage cuts among stock images and body-camera footage of actual police raids. A fake gun discharges. Real officers break down a door, barking orders at a man asleep on a couch.

As a key turns in a jail cell lock, a New York City police deputy appears on screen to announce the arrest of a teenage suspect — not the person seen in the video moments earlier — in a shooting on a Bronx subway platform.

Produced in-house by the New York Police Department and promoted across its official social media

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 50 of 70

channels, the dramatic two-minute clip reflects a concerted effort by the nation's largest police force to engage the public and influence policy through a more aggressive online presence.

The strategic shift has brought criticism from former NYPD officials and civil liberties groups who say police leaders shouldn't use public resources to advance their own policy agenda or attack other civil servants. But the NYPD hasn't backed down.

"We want to go on social media and push back on the misinformation that's out there," Tarik Sheppard, the NYPD's top spokesperson, said in an interview. "Because if we don't, it could cause damage to the reputation of our cops and the work that we're doing."

In recent months, the department has added production-savvy staff to its communications arm, with plans to release a long-form documentary series later this year.

At the same time, it has encouraged police chiefs to be more vocal on social media, giving them the green light to go after judges and prosecutors seen as too lenient on crime and to criticize public policies that police oppose.

In a post shared on X last week, Chief of Patrol John Chell lashed out at a state judge by name, saying she had released a man he deemed a "predator" who had been accused of stealing a cellphone and carrying drugs.

The message was later found to have misidentified both the judge and prosecutor involved, though not before it generated dozens of hateful comments, some of them featuring the judge's photograph.

"It's a naked form of intimidation against the judiciary, which is dangerous and scary," said Steven Zeidman, director of the criminal defense clinic at the City University of New York School of Law. "Their job is to investigate crimes, not to act as a mouthpiece to spew hate and fearmonger."

Chell later issued an apology for the error, though it remains published on the department's official Instagram and X accounts. NYPD officials said they would continue to hold judges "accountable."

The NYPD has long used social media to solicit tips on crimes and to share news of arrests and emergencies. But close observers of the department see an escalation in both content and rhetoric under New York City Mayor Eric Adams, a former police captain.

In recent weeks, official NYPD accounts have gone after journalists by name, threatened to "flood" the jails with disruptive protesters, and highlighted instances of low-level transit crime — a push that coincided with a decision by Gov. Kathy Hochul to send hundreds of National Guard members to the subway system.

One video from last month featured Adams rallying officers before an early-morning raid on a public housing building. Three men are hauled away in handcuffs, described by Kaz Daughtry, the deputy commissioner of operations, as "migrants preying on vulnerable New Yorkers."

Zachary Tumin, a former NYPD official who oversaw the rollout of social media accounts to precinct commanders and chiefs beginning in 2015, said police officials were initially instructed to maintain a positive tone.

"The basic guidelines were: Don't attack, don't personalize and don't name," Tumin said. "Picking fights on social media with members of the public ... was something we wanted to stay away from."

It's not uncommon for law enforcement officials to use social media to assail judges and specific policies, such as changes to bail laws. Elected sheriffs from Arizona to Florida have increasingly embraced social media as a tool to push their own narratives.

An analysis by the Brennan Center for Justice, a think tank at the New York University School of Law, found that very few departments maintain public-facing guidance spelling out how police are making use of the platforms.

The section of the NYPD's administrative guide dealing with department social media accounts is not available online. Under the patrol guide, uniformed police — a group including chiefs — are prohibited from publicly expressing opinions about "any public policy matter or legislation pending before any government body."

In January, several chiefs shared a video opposing a City Council bill that would require officers to record additional data about their interactions with the public. The three-minute clip, described as a "simulation,"

showed a frantic mother asking police to help locate her missing child. It claimed the law would require officers to record the race and gender of each witness they asked for help — a characterization the council disputed.

Another set of posts shared by top police leaders going after a freelance journalist for allegedly spreading “false narratives” about the treatment of pro-Palestinian protesters were later deleted without explanation.

A spokesperson for the NYPD declined to answer questions about why the posts were deleted. They also didn’t respond to inquiries about the amount of money spent on the department’s social media budget, including the added video production staff.

The NYPD’s new social strategy will soon extend beyond written posts and short video clips, moving into what Sheppard described as “long-form YouTube.”

In the coming months, he said, the department will resume production of a short-lived series, “True Blue: NYPD’s Finest,” that premiered last year without much attention.

The previous two episodes of the series relied heavily on body-worn camera footage of dramatic pursuits narrated by police officials, resembling a municipally crafted version of the long-running TV series “Cops.”

Michael Hallett, a professor of criminology at the University of North Florida who studied the effects of “Cops,” said he viewed the NYPD’s forays into social media as a natural response to a digital media ecosystem that rewards speed and sensationalism.

The proliferation of body-camera footage and, increasingly, drones, have made it easy for police to create their own reality series, free of delays imposed by the TV gear and network schedules, he said.

“They now have a proactive and sophisticated messaging system that is designed and intended to deliver messages on behalf of the police agenda,” Hallett added. “In the negotiation for control of the message, that gives them the upper hand.”

Biden in a hot mic moment shows his growing frustration with Netanyahu over Gaza humanitarian crisis

By AAMER MADHANI and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden’s growing frustration with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu continues to mount, with the Democrat captured on a hot mic saying that he and the Israeli leader will need to have a “come to Jesus meeting.”

The comments by Biden came as he spoke with Sen. Michael Bennet, D-Colo., on the floor of the House chamber following Thursday night’s State of the Union address.

In the exchange, Bennet congratulates Biden on his speech and urges the president to keep pressing Netanyahu on growing humanitarian concerns in Gaza. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg were also part of the brief conversation.

Biden then responds using Netanyahu’s nickname, saying, “I told him, Bibi, and don’t repeat this, but you and I are going to have a ‘come to Jesus’ meeting.”

An aide to the president standing nearby then speaks quietly into the president’s ear, appearing to alert Biden that microphones remained on as he worked the room.

“I’m on a hot mic here,” Biden says after being alerted. “Good. That’s good.”

The president on Friday acknowledged the comments, lightheartedly poking at reporters that they were “eavesdropping” on his conversation. Asked if he thought Netanyahu should be doing more to alleviate the humanitarian suffering, Biden responded, “Yes, he does.”

A widening humanitarian crisis across Gaza and tight Israeli control of aid trucks have left virtually the entire population desperately short of food, according to the United Nations. Officials have been warning for months that Israel’s siege and offensive were pushing the Palestinian territory into famine.

Biden has become increasingly public about his frustration with the Netanyahu government’s unwillingness to open more land crossings for critically needed aid to make its way into Gaza.

In his address on Thursday, he called on the Israelis to do more to alleviate the suffering even as they try to eliminate Hamas.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 52 of 70

"To Israel, I say this humanitarian assistance cannot be a secondary consideration or a bargaining chip," Biden said.

The president announced in his speech Thursday that the U.S. military would help establish a temporary pier aimed at boosting the amount of aid getting into the territory. Last week, the U.S. military began air dropping aid into Gaza.

Biden said the temporary pier, "will enable a massive increase in humanitarian assistance getting into Gaza."

Later on Friday, Biden at a campaign stop in suburban Philadelphia told reporters that the prospects of forging an extended cease-fire agreement between Israel and Hamas before the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan is "looking tough." Ramadan is expected to begin on Sunday.

Biden also said that he was worried about violence spreading to east Jerusalem. Clashes have erupted during Ramadan in recent years between Palestinians and Israeli security forces around Jerusalem's Old City, home to major religious sites sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims and the emotional epicenter of the Middle East conflict.

Biden says he'll sign proposed legislation to ban TikTok if Congress passes it

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Friday endorsed legislation that could lead to the popular video-sharing app TikTok being banned in the United States, a move that comes amid growing concern in Washington about keeping Americans' data out of China's hands.

The legislation that passed through the U.S. House Energy and Commerce Committee unanimously on Thursday calls on China's ByteDance to divest its ownership of TikTok — or effectively face a U.S. ban. Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson also supports the bill and has indicated it would soon come up for a full vote in the House.

"If they pass it, I'll sign it," Biden said when asked by reporters about the legislation.

The White House had provided technical support in the drafting of the bill, though White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said earlier this week the TikTok legislation "still needs some work" to get to a place where Biden would endorse it.

Former President Donald Trump, the likely Republican nominee, came out in a Truth Social post on Thursday saying he opposed a ban because it would help rival social media platform Facebook. Trump's opposition to the legislation comes after he issued — and then rescinded — an executive action late in his presidency intended to ban TikTok and another popular app, WeChat.

Trump's pushback puts him on the opposite side of the debate of powerful Republicans, including Johnson and Republican House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, who has called the legislation a "critical national security bill."

Both the FBI and the Federal Communications Commission have warned that TikTok owner ByteDance could share user data — such as browsing history, location and biometric identifiers — with China's authoritarian government. TikTok said it has never done that and wouldn't do so if asked. The U.S. government also hasn't provided evidence of that happening.

In a separate move, Biden recently signed an executive order allowing the Department of Justice and other federal agencies to take steps to prevent the large-scale transfer of Americans' personal data to what the White House calls "countries of concern," including China, Russia, North Korea, Iran, Cuba and Venezuela.

Biden, in 2022, banned the use of TikTok by the federal government's nearly 4 million employees on devices owned by its agencies, with limited exceptions for law enforcement, national security and security research purposes.

While his administration has raised national security concerns about TikTok, Biden's reelection campaign last month joined the platform.

If enacted, the bill would effectively ban TikTok and other ByteDance apps from being available in Apple

or Google app stores or on web hosting services in the U.S.

The bill takes a two-pronged approach. First, it requires ByteDance Ltd., which is based in Beijing, to divest TikTok and other applications it controls within 180 days of enactment of the bill or those applications will be prohibited in the United States. Second, it creates a narrow process to let the executive branch prohibit access to an app owned by a foreign adversary if it poses a threat to national security.

The company also has promised to wall off U.S. user data from its parent company through a separate entity run independently from ByteDance and monitored by outside observers.

A poll published last month by The Associated Press and NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found Americans are deeply divided on the issue of banning the app. Thirty-one percent of U.S. adults said they would favor a nationwide ban on TikTok use, while 35% said they would oppose that type of action. An additional 31% of adults said they neither favor nor oppose a ban on the social media platform,

The AP-NORC poll shows TikTok users — about 170 million in the U.S., most of whom skew younger — are less likely to be worried about the app sharing American users' data, reflecting a previously felt generational divide. About a quarter of daily users say they are "extremely or very concerned" about the idea of the Chinese government obtaining the personal information of users, compared to about half of U.S. adults overall.

Former president of Honduras convicted in US of aiding drug traffickers

By LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Former Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez was convicted Friday in New York of charges that he conspired with drug traffickers and used his military and national police force to enable tons of cocaine to make it unhindered into the United States.

The jury returned its verdict at a federal court after a two-week trial, which has been closely followed in his home country. Hernandez was convicted of conspiring to import cocaine into the U.S. and two weapons counts. The charges carry a mandatory minimum of 40 years in prison and a potential maximum of life. Sentencing was set for June 26.

Hernandez, 55, who served two terms as the leader of the Central American nation of roughly 10 million people, patted a defense attorney, Renato Stabile, on the back as they stood along with everyone else in the courtroom while the jurors filed out after the reading of the verdict.

When the news reached nearly 100 opponents of Hernandez on the street outside the courthouse, they applauded and began jumping into the air to celebrate the outcome.

The scene in the courtroom was subdued and Hernandez seemed relaxed as the verdict on three counts was announced by the jury foreperson. At times, Hernandez had his hands folded before him or one leg crossed over the other as each juror was asked to affirm the verdict. They all did.

In remarks to the jury before they left the courtroom, Judge P. Kevin Castel praised jurors for reaching a unanimous verdict, which was necessary for a conviction.

"We live in a country where 12 people can't agree on a pizza topping," the judge told them, saying his message would have been the same regardless of their verdict. "That's why I'm in awe of you."

Defense attorney Sabrina Shroff said Hernandez will appeal the conviction.

In a release, U.S. Attorney Damian Williams said he hopes the conviction "sends a message to all corrupt politicians who would consider a similar path: choose differently."

He added that Hernandez "had every opportunity to be a force for good in his native Honduras. Instead, he chose to abuse his office and country for his own personal gain and partnered with some of the largest and most violent drug trafficking organizations in the world to transport tons of cocaine to the United States."

Hernandez was arrested at his home in Tegucigalpa, the Honduran capital, three months after leaving office in 2022 and was extradited to the U.S. in April of that year.

U.S. prosecutors accused Hernandez of working with drug traffickers as long ago as 2004, saying he took millions of dollars in bribes as he rose from rural congressman to president of the National Congress

and then to the country's highest office.

Hernandez acknowledged in trial testimony that drug money was paid to virtually all political parties in Honduras, but he denied accepting bribes himself.

He noted that he had visited the White House and met U.S. presidents as he cast himself as a champion in the war on drugs who worked with the U.S. to curb the flow of drugs to the U.S.

In one instance, he said, he was warned by the FBI that a drug cartel wanted to assassinate him.

He said his accusers fabricated their claims about him in bids for leniency for their crimes.

"They all have motivation to lie, and they are professional liars," Hernandez said.

But the prosecution mocked Hernandez for seemingly claiming to be the only honest politician in Honduras.

During closing arguments Wednesday, Assistant U.S. Attorney Jacob Gutwillig told the jury that a corrupt Hernandez "paved a cocaine superhighway to the United States."

Stabile said his client "has been wrongfully charged" as he urged an acquittal.

Trial witnesses included traffickers who admitted responsibility for dozens of murders and said Hernandez was an enthusiastic protector of some of the world's most powerful cocaine dealers, including notorious Mexican drug lord Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, who is serving a life prison term in the U.S.

Hernandez, wearing a suit throughout the trial, was mostly dispassionate as he testified through an interpreter, repeatedly saying "no sir" as he was asked if he ever paid bribes or promised to protect traffickers from extradition to the U.S.

His brother, Juan Antonio "Tony" Hernandez, a former Honduran congressman, was sentenced to life in 2021 in Manhattan federal court for his own conviction on drug charges.

Turkey's Erdogan offers to host a peace summit with Russia during a visit from Ukraine's Zelenskyy

By AYSE WIETING and SUZAN FRASER Associated Press

ISTANBUL (AP) — Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, whose NATO-member country has sought to balance its close relations with both Ukraine and Russia, offered during a visit Friday from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to host a peace summit between the two countries.

Erdogan, who has repeatedly discussed brokering a peace deal, said at a news conference in Istanbul following his meeting with Zelenskyy that he hoped Russia would be on board with Turkey's offer.

"Since the beginning, we have contributed as much as we could toward ending the war through negotiations," Erdogan said. "We are also ready to host a peace summit in which Russia will also be included."

Ukraine remains firm on not engaging directly with Russia on peace talks, and Zelenskyy has said multiple times the initiative in peace negotiations must belong to the country which has been invaded.

Zelenskyy said any peace negotiations must align with a 10-point plan he has previously suggested, which includes food security, restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity, the withdrawal of Russian troops, release of all prisoners, a tribunal for those responsible for the aggression, and security guarantees for Ukraine.

"Any proposals for settling this war must start with the formula proposed by the state defending its land and its people," he said. "We want a fair peace."

The Ukrainian leader expressed hope that at the inaugural peace summit expected to be held this year in Switzerland, the possibility of reopening all Ukrainian ports, not only in Odesa but also in Mykolaiv in southern Ukraine, will be considered.

Zelenskyy, who visited shipyards where corvettes for the Ukrainian navy are being built, said on X that agreements were reached on joint defense projects with the Turkish government and corporations. He said on Telegram that they also agreed to simplify trade and remove barriers to business.

Erdogan said the two discussed stability in the Black Sea shipping corridor and he reiterated Turkey's support for Ukraine's "territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence."

The visit comes as Zelenskyy and other officials continue to press other nations for more munitions and weaponry to halt the advance of Russian troops trying to make deeper gains into the Ukraine-held western part of the Donetsk region and also penetrating into the Kharkiv region north of it in the third year of war.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 55 of 70

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said in Vilnius, Lithuania, where he was attending a meeting of the foreign ministers of France, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, that “drop by drop” aid to Ukraine no longer works.

“If things continue as they currently happen, it’s not going to end well for all of us,” Kuleba said. “What is required is an unrestricted and timely supply of all types of weapons and ammunition to ensure that Ukraine beats Russia and the war in Europe does not spill over.”

An envoy from China, which has frustrated Ukraine and its Western allies by boosting trade with Russia and portraying the conflict and its causes largely from Moscow’s point of view, was in Kyiv on Thursday during a European visit for talks on settling what it calls the Ukraine crisis. Li Hui, the special representative for Eurasian affairs, met with officials from Russia, the EU, Switzerland and Poland before his stop in Ukraine and was scheduled to go on to Germany and France.

Shortly after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Turkey hosted a meeting between the Russian and Ukrainian foreign ministers as well as unsuccessful talks between negotiators from the two countries aimed at ending the hostilities.

Later in 2022, Turkey, along with the United Nations, also brokered a deal between Russia and Ukraine that allowed the shipment of millions of tons of Ukrainian grain through the Black Sea. Russia, however, pulled out of the deal last year, citing obstacles to its export of food and fertilizers.

During Li’s visit to Kyiv, Ukrainian officials described the horrors of the war.

“It is very important that you hear firsthand about the situation on the front line, what is happening and where we are,” Andriy Yermak, the head of the presidential office, said, according to a Ukrainian statement.

It wasn’t clear how Li reacted to the presentation. China released a terse statement Friday saying only that Li arrived in Kyiv by train at noon, held candid and friendly talks, and departed by train the same evening.

The war has created a sharp division between China and the West. The Chinese government avoids using the words “war” or “invasion” to describe Russia’s attack and cites NATO expansion as a root cause of the conflict.

The Ukraine statement said the two sides discussed the possibility of China’s assistance in prisoner exchanges, the return of Ukrainian children in Russia and the return of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, which Russia took control of during fighting in 2022.

Ukraine Energy Minister Herman Halushchenko on Friday urged Russia to immediately comply with an International Atomic Energy Agency resolution calling for the complete withdrawal its troops from the Zaporizhzhia plant and return of the station to Ukrainian control.

“Every day that Russians stay at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant increases the number of the existing problems and increases the threat of a nuclear incident,” Halushchenko said on national television.

In other developments:

— Zelenskyy signed an order Thursday allowing the first demobilization of soldiers who were conscripted into the army before Russia’s full-scale invasion. The order takes effect in April or May.

The soldiers, who had been required to continue their service after martial law was declared, can return home and remain in the army reserves, according to the order. It was not known how many troops are eligible because that information is classified.

— Indian authorities said Friday that they are in talks with Russia about returning Indian citizens duped into working for the Russian army, a day after a federal investigation agency said it broke up a human trafficking network that lured people to Russia under the pretext of giving them jobs.

How do animals react during a total solar eclipse? Scientists plan to find out in April

By CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — When a total solar eclipse transforms day into night, will tortoises start acting romantic? Will giraffes gallop? Will apes sing odd notes?

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 56 of 70

Researchers will be standing by to observe how animals' routines at the Fort Worth Zoo in Texas are disrupted when skies dim on April 8. They previously detected other strange animal behaviors in 2017 at a South Carolina zoo that was in the path of total darkness.

"To our astonishment, most of the animals did surprising things," said Adam Hartstone-Rose, a North Carolina State University researcher who led the observations published in the journal *Animals*.

While there are many individual sightings of critters behaving bizarrely during historic eclipses, only in recent years have scientists started to rigorously study the altered behaviors of wild, domestic and zoo animals.

Seven years ago, Galapagos tortoises at the Riverbanks Zoo in Columbia, South Carolina, "that generally do absolutely nothing all day ... during the peak of the eclipse, they all started breeding," said Hartstone-Rose. The cause of the behavior is still unclear.

A mated pair of Siamangs, gibbons that usually call to each other in the morning, sang unusual tunes during the afternoon eclipse. A few male giraffes began to gallop in "apparent anxiety." The flamingos huddled around their juveniles.

Researchers say that many animals display behaviors connected with an early dusk.

In April, Hartstone-Rose's team plans to study similar species in Texas to see if the behaviors they witnessed before in South Carolina point to larger patterns.

Several other zoos along the path are also inviting visitors to help track animals, including zoos in Little Rock, Arkansas; Toledo, Ohio; and Indianapolis.

This year's full solar eclipse in North America crisscrosses a different route than in 2017 and occurs in a different season, giving researchers and citizen scientists opportunities to observe new habits.

"It's really high stakes. We have a really short period to observe them and we can't repeat the experiment," said Jennifer Tsuruda, a University of Tennessee entomologist who observed honeybee colonies during the 2017 eclipse.

The honeybees that Tsuruda studied decreased foraging during the eclipse, as they usually would at night, except for those from the hungriest hives.

"During a solar eclipse, there's a conflict between their internal rhythms and external environment," said University of Alberta's Olav Rueppell, adding that bees rely on polarized light from the sun to navigate.

Nate Bickford, an animal researcher at Oregon Institute of Technology, said that "solar eclipses actually mimic short, fast-moving storms," when skies darken and many animals take shelter.

After the 2017 eclipse, he analyzed data from tracking devices previously placed on wild species to study habitat use. Flying bald eagles change the speed and direction they're moving during an eclipse, he said. So do feral horses, "probably taking cover, responding to the possibility of a storm out on the open plains."

The last full U.S. solar eclipse to span coast to coast happened in late summer, in August. The upcoming eclipse in April gives researchers an opportunity to ask new questions including about potential impacts on spring migration.

Most songbird species migrate at night. "When there are night-like conditions during the eclipse, will birds think it's time to migrate and take flight?" said Andrew Farnsworth of Cornell University.

His team plans to test this by analyzing weather radar data – which also detects the presence of flying birds, bats and insects – to see if more birds take wing during the eclipse.

As for indoor pets, they may react as much to what their owners are doing – whether they're excited or nonchalant about the eclipse – as to any changes in the sky, said University of Arkansas animal researcher Raffaella Lesch.

"Dogs and cats pay a lot of attention to us, in addition to their internal clocks," she said.

Much of America asks: Where did winter go? Spring starts early as US winter was warmest on record

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Across much of America and especially in the normally chilly north, the country went through the winter months without, well, winter.

In parka strongholds Burlington, Vermont, and Portland, Maine, the thermometer never plunged below zero. The state of Minnesota called the last three months "the lost winter," warmer than its infamous "year without a winter" in 1877-1878. Michigan, where mosquitos were biting in February, offered disaster loans to businesses hit by a lack of snow. The Great Lakes set records for low winter ice, with Erie and Ontario "essentially ice-free."

For a wide swath of the country from Colorado to New Jersey, and Texas to the Carolinas, spring leaves are arriving three to four weeks earlier than the 1991-2020 average, according to the National Phenology Network, which tracks the timing of plants, insects and other natural signs of the seasons.

"Long-term warming combined with El Nino conspired to make winter not show up in the U.S. this year," said Yale Climate Connections meteorologist Jeff Masters, who co-founded the private firm Weather Underground. Masters said he was bitten by a mosquito in Michigan this year, which he called crazy.

On Friday, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration confirmed that the winter of 2023-2024 was the warmest in nearly 130 years of record-keeping for the United States. The Lower 48 states averaged 37.6 degrees (3.1 degrees Celsius), which is 5.4 degrees (3 degrees Celsius) above average.

This is just the latest in a drumbeat of broken temperature records, national and global, that scientists say is mostly from human-caused climate change from the burning of coal, oil and gas.

And it was the warmest U.S. winter by a wide margin. The past three months were 0.82 degrees (0.46 degrees Celsius) warmer than the previous record set eight years ago, which "is a pretty good leap above the previous record," said Karin Gleason, chief of monitoring at NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information.

Last month was only the third-warmest February on record. But Iowa blew past its warmest February by 2 degrees, while parts of Minnesota were 20 degrees warmer than average for all of February, Gleason said.

On Feb. 11, Great Lakes ice cover hit a February record low of 2.7%.

A strong ridge of high pressure kept the eastern United States warm and dry, while California kept getting hit with atmospheric rivers, she said.

The European climate agency Copernicus earlier this week said it was the warmest winter globally, mostly due to climate change with an added boost from a natural El Nino, which alters weather worldwide and provides extra heat.

In the past 45 years, winter has warmed faster in the United States than it has worldwide, with the Lower 48 states' winters now averaging 2.2 degrees (1.2 degree Celsius) warmer than in 1980, according to an analysis of NOAA data by The Associated Press.

That's probably because land warms faster than ocean with much of the United States as land and most of the globe as ocean, Gleason said.

While it is still getting warmer in the United States, since 2000 the rate of extra warming has slowed a bit, NOAA data shows. Winter weather expert Judah Cohen of Atmospheric Environmental Research, a commercial firm outside Boston, blames Arctic Amplification, which is how climate change has made the Arctic warm three to four times more than the rest of the globe and seems to shift weather patterns further south.

As the Arctic warms faster, the jet stream — which moves weather systems across the Earth — wobbles and weakens. That means the cold air trapped at the top of the planet, called the polar vortex, escapes its normal confines and drifts elsewhere, bringing short plunges of frigid air that temporarily counteracts the overall warming trend in places, Cohen said.

That happened briefly in January when winter "just made a cameo appearance in the Lower 48," Cohen said. But most of the time this year, when the polar vortex went wandering it hit Europe or Asia with bursts

of icy air, not the United States, so there wasn't an offsetting effect on winter American temperatures, he said.

Boston never even got a sniff of single digit temperatures this year, with a winter low of 14 degrees, a record for lack of deep cold.

And snow? Forget about it, at least in the east and north.

In Fort Kent, in far northern Maine, lack of snow canceled an annual dog sled race. The town had had 46.8 inches (119 cm) of snow this year as of last week, a bit more than half as much as usual, the National Weather Service said.

Snow cover in the United States in February was the second lowest on record and third lowest in December, with only January above normal, according to the Rutgers Snow Lab.

There's consequences to warm winters, said Theresa Crimmins, director of the National Phenology Network.

"Warm winters can also lead to earlier, longer, and more abundant pest seasons, because populations weren't knocked back by cold," Crimmins said in an email. "As well, the allergy season can be worse — starting earlier, lasting longer, and resulting in more pollen in the air."

Because it's warmer, trees and flowers may bloom early. Washington's cherry blossoms are predicted to peak about two weeks earlier than they did in 2013. Early blossoming can screw up intricate timing with pollinators and birds.

"Many of the birds that migrate south for the winter use day length as a cue to come north in the spring," Crimmins said. "In years like this one, where plant and insect activity is cued to start much earlier than usual, the birds can miss out on peak food availability by arriving too late."

But there is some good news for California with atmospheric rivers and snowstorms likely to rebuild snowpacks and fill in reservoirs that had been dangerously low until a couple years ago, Gleason said.

Winter weather expert Cohen, who is based outside of Boston, joked that the U.S. no longer has four seasons: "We have two seasons. We have summer and we have November."

Behind-the-scenes of AP photographer's experience covering violence against women in Haiti

By ARIANA CUBILLOS Associated Press

Ariana Cubillos is an Associated Press photojournalist based in Caracas, Venezuela. She was based in Haiti from 2004 to 2009, and also covered the country's 2010 earthquake and its descent into gang violence.

In June 2023, I was zipping through the bustling streets of Haiti's capital Port-au-Prince on the back of a motorcycle. After covering the Caribbean nation for years, I was in search of stories that could highlight the human impact of Haiti's deepening gang violence crisis.

I stumbled upon the courtyard of a small house where a group of women and their children were clustered. The place was a kind of shelter for the families who were protecting each other as a group after being forced to flee their homes. The owner of the house let them stay there so they wouldn't have to sleep on the street with their children.

When I began to hear their stories, most had been sexually assaulted, others had gunshot wounds or signs of physical abuse. Some had witnessed the execution of their husbands.

That day is one of the best examples I have in my career where I felt that being a woman opened a door for me to tell these vulnerable stories and build a connection with these women that allowed me to capture the very intimate consequences of Haiti's crisis. The empathy, the natural connection with them that I felt, I think, was reflected in my images.

They gave me their names, they told me their stories, they showed me documents certifying the sexual abuse.

Between clicks of my camera, I felt the satisfaction of being able to document something I felt was

important mixed with a great helplessness — especially as a woman — watching violence against women be such a recurrent theme.

That day, I photographed Januelle Datka, with her baby, Princess, and her 15-year-old daughter Titti. Datka and Titti told me how they'd both been raped by gang members and had become pregnant. Together, they were forced through abuse to become mother, daughter, sister and grandmother all at the same time. The sadness of their tragedy hung in their eyes, a reminder of the reality so many Haitian women now face.

As we spent time together, they spoke about their tragedy, their pain, the injustice of what had happened to them without filters, as if they hadn't had the opportunity to fully process what had happened to them because they had been running in survival mode. I felt that day the openness women so often have with each other in vulnerable moments like this.

Biden calls out 'shrinkflation' as part of a broader strategy to reframe how voters view the economy

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is going all-in on calling out "shrinkflation."

The term applies to a seemingly covert way for companies to raise prices by ever so slightly reducing the size of their products. There's suddenly fewer pretzels in the bag, less toothpaste in the tube and shorter candy bars.

"It's called shrinkflation," Biden said in his State of the Union speech on Thursday night. "You get charged the same amount and you got about, I don't know, 10% fewer Snickers in it."

The president's focus on shrinkflation is part of a broader strategy to reframe how voters think about the economy before the November election. Biden is trying to deflect criticism about high prices and instead pin the blame on big business.

He also is attempting to show everyday people that he's fighting for them as he struggles to convince the public that the economy has strengthened under his leadership.

He talked about the shrinkflation issue in a video released on Super Bowl Sunday and highlighted a social media post by the "Sesame Street" character Cookie Monster that complained about smaller cookies.

The country's low 3.7% unemployment rate and record 16 million applications to start new businesses have largely been overlooked by voters, who are dwelling on higher grocery and housing prices after inflation struck a four-decade high in June 2022 at 9.1%. Even as inflation has drifted down to 3.1% annually, shoppers are still worried about paying a premium at supermarkets.

"Joe Biden recognizes that high grocery prices are an 'Achilles Heel' politically," said Ryan Bourne, an economist at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank. "When consumers are going into the grocery store, they remember that they're paying more than they did in 2019."

But Bourne cautioned that, in the alternative, companies might have simply raised their list prices without shrinkflation, possibly upsetting consumers more and hurting the president's approval on the issue. Just 34% of U.S. adults say they agree with how Biden has handled the economy, according to polling by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

"A number of companies did that because they thought that their customers would prefer it to paying higher headline prices," Bourne said. "So I think the president should be very careful what he wishes for when he says he thinks shrinkflation is unfair."

Sen. Katie Britt, R-Alabama, delivered the GOP response to the State of the Union and put the blame for inflation solely on Biden.

"His reckless spending dug our economy into a hole and sent the cost-of-living through the roof — the worst inflation in 40 years," Britt said.

Republicans have claimed that prices jumped because of Biden's \$1.9 trillion pandemic relief package, even though the price increases were also global in nature. That's a sign that broken supply chains and higher energy and food prices after Russia's invasion of Ukraine played a role.

In a report published Wednesday, the liberal economic advocacy group Groundwork Collaborative dug

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 60 of 70

into the inflation numbers published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and documented the evidence of shrinkflation, finding it played a meaningful but modest role in higher prices since 2019.

More than 7% of the increase in coffee prices came from reduced packaging. About 10% of the higher prices for snacks and household paper products came from shrinkflation. And for a president who loves ice cream, about 7% of the inflation for that product came from shrinkflation.

Companies might have been masking the higher prices from customers, but they were straightforward with investors on earnings calls, the report said. Some companies such as General Mills have also portrayed the reduced package sizes as a way to manage their own costs and address the challenge of climate change.

The snack company Utz shaved its potato chip bags by half an ounce to 9 ounces, the report said. It trimmed two ounces worth of pretzels out of its pretzel jars, with the CEO heralding to stock analysts its ability to manage what the industry calls "price pack architecture." PepsiCo reduced the size of its Frito Scoops bags, Gatorade bottles and Doritos bags.

"Why we're seeing it now is because shrinkflation is late-stage 'greedflation' — when you've gone as far as you can go in increasing prices and consumers can't take another increase," said Lindsay Owens, executive director of the Groundwork Collaborative. "It's much more deceptive than a list price hike."

Sen. Bob Casey, D-Pennsylvania, has introduced a bill that would ban shrinkflation by ordering the Federal Trade Commission to treat it as an unfair or deceptive practice, enabling the government to pursue civil penalties in court against companies that do so.

Biden gave the measure a full endorsement in his speech.

"Pass Bobby Casey's bill and stop this," he said.

Another burst of hiring shows off the resilience of the US job market

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — America's employers delivered another healthy month of hiring in February, adding a surprising 275,000 jobs and again showcasing the U.S. economy's resilience in the face of high interest rates.

Last month's job growth marked an increase from a revised gain of 229,000 jobs in January. At the same time, the unemployment rate ticked up two-tenths of a point in February to 3.9%. Though that was the highest rate in two years, it is still low by historic standards. And it marked the 25th straight month in which joblessness has remained below 4% — the longest such streak since the 1960s.

Yet despite sharply lower inflation, a healthy job market and a record-high stock market, many Americans say they are unhappy with the state of the economy — a sentiment that is sure to weigh on President Joe Biden's bid for re-election. Many voters blame Biden for the surge in consumer prices that began in 2021. Though inflationary pressures have significantly eased, average prices remain about 17% above where they stood three years ago.

Friday's report gave the inflation fighters at the Federal Reserve some encouraging news: Average hourly wages rose just 0.1% from January, the smallest monthly gain in more than two years, and 4.3% from a year earlier, less than expected. Average pay growth has been exceeding inflation for more than year, but when it rises too fast it can feed inflation.

The latest figures reflected the job market's sustained ability to withstand the 11 rate hikes the Fed imposed in its drive against inflation, which made borrowing much costlier for households and businesses. Employers have continued to hire briskly to meet steady demand from consumers across the economy.

The February figures will likely make Fed officials more comfortable about cutting rates sometime in the coming months. With December and January job gains revised sharply down, wage growth easing and the unemployment rate up, the Fed's policymakers aren't likely to worry about an overheating economy. Most economists and Wall Street traders expect the first rate cut to come in June. The Fed stopped raising rates in July and has signaled that it envisions three rate cuts this year.

The unemployment rate rose last month in part because more people began looking for a job and didn't immediately find one. The Fed could be reassured by the influx of job seekers, which typically makes it easier for businesses to fill jobs without having to significantly raise pay.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 61 of 70

Gus Faucher, chief economist at PNC Financial Services, said he was impressed by the breadth of hiring last month: Among industries, health care companies added 67,000 jobs, government at all levels 52,000, restaurants and bars 42,000, construction companies 23,000 and retailers 19,000.

When the Fed began aggressively raising rates in March 2022 to fight the worst bout of inflation in four decades, a painful recession was widely predicted, with waves of layoffs and high unemployment. The Fed boosted its benchmark rate to the highest level in more than two decades.

Inflation has eased, more or less steadily, in response: Consumer prices in January were up just 3.1% from a year earlier — way down from a year-over-year peak of 9.1% in 2022 and edging closer to the Fed's 2% target. Unemployment is still low. And no recession is in sight.

The combination of easing inflation and sturdy hiring is raising hopes that the Fed can achieve a so-called "soft landing" by taming inflation without causing a recession — a scenario consistent with Friday's numbers.

Faucher said he expects average monthly job growth to decelerate to around 150,000 and for the unemployment rate to rise to slightly above 4% by year's end. A cooling labor market, he suggested, will allow the Fed to start cutting rates this spring.

Even though the Labor Department's revisions shaved 167,000 jobs from its previous estimate of December and January hiring, acting Labor Secretary Julie Su noted Friday that even counting those downward revisions, job growth has averaged an impressive 265,000 over the past three months.

In the meantime, many employers are still contending with labor shortages. Among them is Nicola Davies, who owns the small Tranquil Home cleaning company in San Diego and is struggling to find reliable help. Six months ago, Davies resorted to offering bonuses to employees who basically do the minimum: Show up on time and don't provoke complaints from customers.

"That's how horrible the climate is," she said.

If she has to raise wages again, she said, she might have to increase the rates she charges her cleaning customers.

At a job fair this week in Allentown, Pennsylvania, Katie Sanders, a human resources specialist, said she was seeking some machinists — "a dying breed," she said — to work at Lehigh Heavy Forge, which occupies part of a former Bethlehem Steel plant and forges steel pieces for the Navy and private industries.

Sanders said it was difficult to find workers with the experience to replace those who are retiring.

"But all it takes is one," she said, hopefully.

Hana Haseman, the human resources manager for Active Learning Centers, a chain of childcare facilities in the Allentown region, needs to fill about 10 full-time openings. The company increased wages a few years ago to as high as \$20 an hour. But Haseman said raising pay is only part of the challenge.

"We have to do things internally to invest in our staff members and make them feel appreciated and let them know the work they're doing is meaningful," she said. "With Burger King or a warehouse or wherever paying very highly, and with the cost of our program for students and parents, being competitive is difficult."

The tight job market means more workers have managed to find jobs that they like and that are well-suited to their skills. Some economists say that trend, along with business investment in automation, is helping fuel a surge in productivity that allows companies to raise pay and reap bigger profits without necessarily raising prices.

Consider Elizabeth Toenyas, who medically retired as an Army captain in 2022 after undergoing hip and shoulder surgeries and receiving a diagnosis of PTSD. A former public affairs officer, Toenyas, 29, began seeking a job in public relations or a related field.

"It was a great time to be looking for jobs," she said. "The culture of employers had begun shifting" as younger workers who replaced retiring baby boomers demanded more flexible working conditions, including the option to work from home.

Toenyas landed a job she loves as an editorial strategist with the staffing firm Aquent. She works from home with her service dog.

The comfortable setting makes her more productive, she said, as do artificial intelligence tools that help her write faster.

"Sometimes I can pound out a six-page blog on AI and get it done in one or two hours," she said, thereby freeing up time to take a walk.

It's not just Israeli bombs that have killed children in Gaza. Now some are dying of hunger too

By MOHAMED JAHJOUH, JACK JEFFERY and LEE KEATH Associated Press
RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — It's not just Israeli bombs that have killed children in war-ravaged Gaza — now some are dying of hunger.

Officials have been warning for months that Israel's siege and offensive were pushing the Palestinian territory into famine.

Hunger is most acute in northern Gaza, which has been isolated by Israeli forces and has suffered long cutoffs of food supplies. At least 20 people have died from malnutrition and dehydration at the north's Kamal Adwan and Shifa hospitals, according to the Health Ministry. Most of the dead are children — including ones as old as 15 — as well as a 72-year-old man.

Particularly vulnerable children are also beginning to succumb in the south, where access to aid is more regular.

At the Emirati Hospital in Rafah, 16 premature babies have died of malnutrition-related causes over the past five weeks, one of the senior doctors told The Associated Press.

"The child deaths we feared are here," Adele Khodr, UNICEF's Middle East chief, said in a statement earlier this week.

Israel's bombardment and ground assaults have already wreaked a high toll among children, who along with women make up nearly three-quarters of the more than 30,800 Palestinians killed, according to the Gaza Health Ministry.

Malnutrition is generally slow to bring death, striking children and the elderly first. Other factors can play a role. Underfed mothers have difficulty breastfeeding children. Diarrheal diseases, rampant in Gaza due to lack of clean water and sanitation, leave many unable to retain any of the calories they ingest, said Anuradha Narayan, a UNICEF child nutrition expert. Malnutrition weakens immune systems, sometimes leading to death from other diseases.

Israel largely shut off entry of food, water, medicine and other supplies after launching its assault on Gaza following Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel, in which militants killed some 1,200 people and took around 250 hostage. It has allowed only a trickle of aid trucks through two crossings in the south.

Israel has blamed the burgeoning hunger in Gaza on U.N. agencies, saying they fail to distribute supplies piling up at Gaza crossings. UNRWA, the largest U.N. agency in Gaza, says Israel restricts some goods and imposes cumbersome inspections that slow entry.

Also, distribution within Gaza has been crippled, U.N. officials say convoys are regularly turned back by Israeli forces, the military often refuses safe passage amid fighting, and aid is snatched off trucks by hungry Palestinians on route to drop-off points.

With alarm growing, Israel bent to U.S. and international pressure, saying this week it will open crossings for aid directly into northern Gaza and allow sea shipments.

DESPERATION IN THE NORTH

Conditions in the north, largely under Israeli control for months, have become desperate. Entire districts of Gaza City and surrounding areas have been reduced to rubble by Israeli forces. Still, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians remain.

Meat, milk, vegetables and fruit are nearly impossible to find, according to several residents who spoke to the AP. The few items in shops are random and sold at hugely inflated prices — mainly nuts, snacks and spices. People have taken barrels of chocolate from bakeries and are selling tiny smears of it.

Most people eat a weed that crops up in empty lots, known as "khubaiza." Fatima Shaheen, a 70-year-old who lives with her two sons and their children in northern Gaza, said boiled khubaiza is her main meal, and her family has also ground up food meant for rabbits to use as flour.

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 63 of 70

"We are dying for a piece of bread," Shaheen said.

Qamar Ahmed said his 18-month-old daughter, Mira, eats mostly boiled weeds. "There is no food that suits her age," said Ahmed, a researcher with Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor and an economic journalist. His 70-year-old father gives his own food to Ahmed's young son, Oleyan. "We try to make him eat and he refuses," Ahmed said of his father.

Mahmoud Shalaby, who lives in the Jabaliya refugee camp, said he saw a man in the market give a bag of potato chips to his two sons and tell them to make it last for breakfast and lunch. "Everyone know I has lost weight," said Shalaby, the senior program manager for the aid group Medical Aid for Palestinians in northern Gaza.

Dr. Husam Abu Safiya, the acting head of Kamal Adwan Hospital, told the AP his staff currently treats 300 to 400 children a day, and that 75% of them are suffering from malnutrition.

Recent airdrops of aid by the U.S. and other countries provide far lower amounts of aid than truck deliveries, which have become rare and sometimes dangerous. UNRWA says Israeli authorities haven't allowed it to deliver supplies to the north since Jan. 23. The World Food Organization, which had paused deliveries because of safety concerns, said the military forced its first convoy to the north in two weeks to turn back Tuesday.

When the Israeli military organized a food delivery to Gaza City last week, troops guarding the convoy opened fire — on a perceived threat, the military says — as thousands of hungry Palestinians mobbed the trucks. Some 120 people were killed in the shooting, as well as by being trampled in the chaos.

WORSENING SOUTH

Yazan al-Kafarna, 10, died Monday after almost a week of unsuccessful treatment in Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah. Photos of the boy showed him extremely emaciated, with twig-like limbs and deep-sunk eyes in a face shriveled to his skull.

Al-Kafarna was born with cerebral palsy, a neurological condition that affects motor skills and can make swallowing and eating difficult. His parents said they struggled to find food he could eat, including soft fruits and eggs, since fleeing their home in the north.

He died due to extreme muscle wastage caused primarily by lack of food, according to Dr. Jabr al-Shair, head of the children's emergency department at Abu Youssef Najjar Hospital.

On a recent day, around 80 malnourished children crowded the hospital's wards. Aya al-Fayoume, a 19-year-old mother displaced to Rafah, had brought her 3-month-old daughter, Nisreen, who has lost vast amounts of weight over the winter months, sick with persistent diarrhea and vomiting. On her diet of mainly canned goods, al-Fayoume said she doesn't produce enough breast milk for Nisreen.

"Everything I need is expensive or unavailable," she said.

Fresh food supplies in Rafah have dwindled, while its population has swelled to more than 1 million with displaced residents. The main thing available are canned goods, often found in aid packages.

At Emirati Hospital, Dr. Ahmed al-Shair, deputy head of the nursery unit, said the recent deaths of premature babies was rooted in malnutrition among mothers. Malnourishment and extreme stress are both factors causing premature, underweight births, and doctors say anecdotally cases have risen during the war, though the U.N. does not have statistics.

Al-Shair said premature babies are treated for several days to improve their weight. But then they are released home, which is often a tent with not enough heat, with mothers too malnourished to breastfeed and milk difficult to obtain. Parents sometimes give newborns plain water instead, which is often unclean, causing diarrhea.

Within days, the babies "are brought back to us in a terrible state. Some were brought already dead," al-Shair said. He said 14 babies at the hospital died in February and two more so far in March.

Currently, the hospital's wards have 44 babies under 10 days old with weights as low as 2 kilograms (4 pounds), some on life support. Every incubator has at least three premature babies in it, raising the risk of infection. Al-Shair said he fears some will meet the same fate when returned home.

"We treat them now but God knows what the future will be," he said.

Kirk Cousins, Chris Jones, Saquon Barkley are among the star players set to test NFL free agency

By ROB MAADDI AP Pro Football Writer

Kirk Cousins will be a free agent for the first time since the Vikings gave him the first fully-guaranteed quarterback deal in the NFL. Baker Mayfield is expected to stay put in Tampa Bay. Russell Wilson has to make another move. Joe Flacco could find a new home, too.

The quarterback carousel will start spinning when the NFL's free agency period opens Monday with the legal tampering period. Players can't officially sign new deals until the opening of the league's new year on Wednesday.

While the quarterbacks get much of the attention, many of the best players available play other positions.

All-Pro defensive tackle Chris Jones heads a list that includes fellow defensive tackle Christian Wilkins, edge rushers Danielle Hunter, Chase Young and Jonathan Greenard, safeties Justin Simmons and Xavier McKinney, cornerbacks Xavien Howard and Tre'Davious White, linebackers Patrick Queen and Lavonte David, and many others.

There's also plenty of talented guys on the offensive side, including running backs Saquon Barkley, Derrick Henry, Josh Jacobs and D'Andre Swift, offensive tackles Tyron Smith, Jonah Williams and Trent Brown, wide receivers Calvin Ridley, Marquise Brown and Odell Beckham Jr., and more.

Eight players received the non-exclusive franchise tag, including wide receivers Tee Higgins and Michael Pittman, edge rusher Josh Allen and All-Pro safety Antoine Winfield. They can still test the open market, but teams would have to give up a pair of first-round picks to sign them.

Jones will have an opportunity to cash in after helping Kansas City win its third Super Bowl in five years. The Chiefs tagged cornerback L'Jarius Sneed instead of placing it on Jones for the second straight season.

Jones' price tag will likely exceed the \$95 million, three-year deal eight-time All-Pro DT Aaron Donald got from the Los Angeles Rams in 2022.

The Chiefs already made it clear re-signing Jones is a top priority. They can get Sneed back for at least one year for the \$19.8 million tag, give him a long-term deal or trade him.

Half of the NFL's teams have more than \$30 million available in salary cap, making it a player-friendly market to a certain degree.

There's much interest in how the running backs will fare.

Barkley, Jacobs and Tony Pollard received franchise tags last season but no team wanted to commit \$11.9 million to its running back. Austin Ekeler rounds out the top six.

The Giants seem ready to move on from Barkley, who should get interest from plenty of teams, including a pair of New York's NFC East rivals. The Eagles will be looking for a running back at the right price, of course, if they don't retain Swift, who is coming off his first 1,000-yard season. Barkley would be an upgrade for the Cowboys over Pollard.

Henry is 30 but he ran for 1,167 yards and scored 12 touchdowns in 2023 and has had five 1,000-yard seasons in the last six years. He'd be a better fit for a Super Bowl contender than Tennessee.

NFL teams have undervalued the running back position to the point where they have the lowest franchise tag number among the skill players. Wide receivers are now nearly \$10 million higher at \$21.8 million.

"I think that, at the end of the day, talented players end up getting paid," Eagles general manager Howie Roseman said. "So, I think everyone will kind of have value on players just like any other position. Obviously, those guys handle the ball a lot, and they're important players."

Nobody gets paid quite like the quarterbacks, whose franchise tag is \$38.3 million.

Cousins, a four-time Pro Bowl pick, is coming off a torn an Achilles tendon that ended his season in October.

Minnesota wants him back and he prefers to stay there but there's a possibility another QB-needy team like Atlanta steals him away.

Mayfield revived his career with the Buccaneers, had his best all-around season and led the team to the second round of the playoffs. Now, he's set to cash in. Tampa Bay already re-signed wide receiver Mike Evans and tagged Winfield. They plan to keep Mayfield, who loves playing in the city.

"Well, it didn't take long for me to realize just what a great dude he was and what a great teammate he was," Buccaneers GM Jason Licht said of Mayfield. "As the season went on more and more, how important it was for him to set an example of what we're trying to be as a team, and that's a tough team, that endures adversity, but also a physical tone setter out on the field. Typically, it's not a good recipe to have your quarterback trying to run over linebackers and be the tone setter, but he's willing to do whatever it takes to win. So, it's a selfless nature of his."

Wilson already was informed the Broncos will release him after two seasons in Denver. The Falcons, Steelers and Raiders are his most likely landing spots. If the Vikings lose Cousins, they'd have to consider Wilson. The Patriots could view him as a stopgap if they don't take a QB with the No. 3 overall pick in the draft or prefer to let a rookie QB start the season on the sideline.

Justin Fields is another big-name quarterback expected to switch teams, though Chicago will have to trade him. The Bears have the No. 1 pick and it would be a shocker if they don't take Caleb Williams.

More quality players could become available over the weekend as teams continue to manage their salary caps.

The frenzy begins Monday. Just one month after the Chiefs beat the 49ers in the Super Bowl, the NFL is set to dominate the headlines again.

Maine mass shooter had a brain injury. Experts say that doesn't explain his violence.

By HOLLY RAMER and MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Brain injury experts are cautioning against drawing conclusions from newly released and limited information about evidence of a brain injury in an Army reservist who killed 18 people last year in Maine's deadliest mass shooting.

Boston University researchers who analyzed a sample of Robert Card's brain tissue said Wednesday they found evidence of traumatic brain injury. The analysis, requested by the Maine medical examiner, found degeneration in the nerve fibers allowing communication between different areas of the brain, inflammation and small blood vessel injury, according to Dr. Ann McKee of the university's Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE) Center.

Card had been an instructor at an Army hand grenade training range, where it is believed he was exposed to repeated low-level blasts. It is unknown if that caused Card's brain injury and what role the injury may have played in his declining mental health before he opened fire at a bowling alley and bar in Lewiston on Oct. 25.

McKee made no connection between the injury and Card's violent actions.

"While I cannot say with certainty that these pathological findings underlie Mr. Card's behavioral changes in the last 10 months of life, based on our previous work, brain injury likely played a role in his symptoms," McKee said in a statement released by the Card family.

Dr. Alexandra Filippakis, a neurologist who has treated members of the military and others for traumatic brain injuries, said Thursday she would not conclude brain injury played a role in Card's behavior based on McKee's description of her findings.

"TBI is a very broad diagnosis, and it looks different in different people. Not everybody has the same symptoms. Not everybody has the same severity of symptoms," Filippakis said. "There's no way that you could, with certainty, link that to a particular action."

Filippakis, who works at Wentworth-Douglass Hospital in Dover, New Hampshire, said the connectivity damage McKee described is common and can have many causes, including aging, high blood pressure and smoking.

"That could mean so many different things," she said. "You certainly can't draw any conclusions from that piece of information."

But James Stone, a University of Virginia radiologist who has studied repeated low-level blast exposure in the military, said changes to Card's brain "seemed pretty profound."

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 66 of 70

Such injuries can affect impulse control and emotional regulation, he said, and though he doesn't know if those parts of Card's brain were affected, "it's certainly hard to imagine that the level of brain changes that we're seeing in some way did not contribute to his behavior."

Chris Dulla, a professor and interim chair of neuroscience at Tufts School of Medicine, said he was surprised that researchers found no evidence of chronic traumatic encephalopathy, which has plagued many professional football players.

"It doesn't seem to be as cut and dry," he said. "What that speaks to is how varied traumatic brain injuries are, and how difficult they can be to diagnose, even in the postmortem brain sample, when you can study every detail."

The findings highlight the connection between brain injuries and underlying psychological conditions, Dulla said.

"If you're already struggling with some kind of psychiatric condition or at risk for some kind of psychiatric problem, brain injuries might be something that can kind of push you over the edge and have that change really come front and center when it might have been sort of a minor underlying thing before," he said.

Experts say traumatic brain injury can lead to headaches, mood changes, memory loss and sleep issues. Stone said his research has shown repeated exposure to even low-level blasts can result in changes to the brain. The Department of Defense has been "very engaged" in studying the issue, Stone said, and a panel on which he serves is expected to release new guidelines in May for both the U.S. military and NATO allies.

"They've been very proactive about this," he said.

An Army spokesperson on Thursday called the lab findings regarding Card "concerning" and said they "underscore the Army's need to do all it can to protect Soldiers against blast-induced injury."

In addition to updating the guidance on risk mitigation, the Army plans to launch a public safety campaign and will begin requiring documentation of training environments and tracking of exposed personnel.

Sean Hodgson, Card's close friend and a fellow reservist, said Thursday that safety was a top priority at their training range and the blast exercises were well controlled.

"You feel it through you, but it's mild," he said.

"In my opinion it's one of the safest ranges to be on," Hodgson said. "I never heard him complain about the blasts."

Six weeks before the shooting, Hodgson texted an Army supervisor about his growing concerns about Card, saying, "I believe he's going to snap and do a mass shooting."

That Sept. 15 message came months after relatives warned police that Card had grown paranoid and said they were concerned about his access to guns.

Card was hospitalized in a psychiatric unit for two weeks in July after shoving a fellow reservist and locking himself in a motel room. In August, the Army barred him from handling weapons while on duty and declared him nondeployable.

In their first public comments since the shooting, Card's family members apologized Wednesday for the attack, saying they are heartbroken for the victims, survivors and their loved ones.

"We are hurting for you and with you, and it is hard to put into words how badly we wish we could undo what happened," they said in a statement. "While we cannot go back, we are releasing the findings of Robert's brain study with the goal of supporting ongoing efforts to learn from this tragedy to ensure it never happens again."

UN rights office says Israeli settlements in Palestinian areas amount to a 'war crime'

GENEVA (AP) — The U.N. human rights office says in a report published Friday that the establishment and expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and east Jerusalem amount to a war crime.

The report covers the one-year period from Nov. 1, 2022, to Oct. 31, 2023, when it says roughly 24,300 housing units in existing settlements in the West Bank were "advanced" — the highest number in a year since monitoring began in 2017. It deplored an increase in the building of new settlement homes in recent

months.

"The West Bank is already in crisis. Yet, settler violence and settlement-related violations have reached shocking new levels, and risk eliminating any practical possibility of establishing a viable Palestinian state," U.N. human rights chief Volker Türk said. He presented the report to the Human Rights Council on Friday.

Reports this week that Israel plans to build nearly 3,500 settler homes in three areas "fly in the face of international law," he said.

Türk said the creation and expansion of settlements amount to the transfer by Israel of its own population into territories that it occupies, "which amounts to a war crime under international law," his office said in a statement.

Israel's diplomatic mission in Geneva, which regularly accuses Türk's office of overlooking violence by Palestinian extremists against Israelis, said the report "totally ignored" what it said was the deaths of 36 Israelis and injuries of nearly 300 others in attacks due to "Palestinian terrorism" last year.

Much of the international community considers the settlements to be illegal under international law.

Expanded settlement activity and an upsurge in violence in the West Bank in recent months have been largely overshadowed by bloodshed and displacement of Palestinians in Gaza, where Israeli forces have led a blistering military campaign against the militant group Hamas following its deadly Oct. 7 attacks in Israel.

From 'The Bodyguard' to 'Barbie': Is the movie soundtrack back and bigger than ever?

By MARIA SHERMAN and GARY GERARD HAMILTON Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Throughout the billion-dollar "Barbie" film, an instrumental version of Billie Eilish's hit "What Was I Made For" weaves in and out, soundtracking the famous doll's existential crisis. In the final scene — no spoilers! — Eilish's crackling, saccharine falsetto is finally heard atop the familiar piano. Cue the waterworks.

It is one of many standout musical moments in a movie stacked with them: from Dua Lipa's disco-pop "Dance the Night," with lyrics that perfectly sync up to Margot Robbie's bespoke choreography, to a reimagination of the 1997 Europop hit "Barbie Girl," courtesy Nicki Minaj and Ice Spice.

The music of "Barbie" has become its own blockbuster, selling 126,000 copies in its first week and debuting at No. 2 on the Billboard Hot 200 albums chart.

"Barbie" music has also earned three Grammy Awards, one Golden Globe and two Academy Award nominations in the original song category — more than any other film.

It is hard to pinpoint how long it has been since a soundtrack has dominated conversation the way "Barbie" has, particularly at the Oscars — Lady Gaga's "A Star is Born" performance comes to mind, with the success of "Shallow." Then there's "La La Land," and "Dreamgirls," which received three of the five original song nominations in 2007. But overwhelmingly, there has been a drought in zeitgeist-defining film soundtracks.

So, is "Barbie" an exception? Or are soundtracks back?

SOUNDTRACK FORMULAS

Each decade has produced iconic soundtracks. The all-time best-seller is still 1992's "The Bodyguard" powered by Whitney Houston and her iconic "I Will Always Love You," with 45 million copies sold.

And there are many ways soundtracks are created. Often, studios will license recognizable, pre-existing music — likely "the safer play," as Gary Trust, Billboard's chart director says — because two-thirds of all music streams are older music.

In the current era, most "successful" soundtracks opt for that — like "Guardians of the Galaxy" and its 2014 "Awesome Mix Vol. 1" soundtrack, which hit No. 1 on the Billboard 200 with songs from the Jackson 5, David Bowie and Marvin Gaye. Musicals have also done well, like "La La Land," and Disney hits like "Moana," and "Frozen" — although the genre typically doesn't crossover to pop radio airplay. (Exception: "Encanto" and its megahit "We Don't Talk About Bruno.")

Another option is to use original material, like in "Barbie" — what Trust views as a throwback to movies

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 68 of 70

like "Dirty Dancing," released during a time when a single soundtrack could produce multiple radio hits from various artists. In "Barbie's" case, that's Lipa, Eilish, Minaj and Ice Spice.

Spring Aspers, president of Sony Pictures Music Group, says a successful soundtrack is one that works with the film's narrative to become a critical part of its story.

"It's not just finding who's the most popular but finding incredibly talented artists that know how to create something that really does an extension of the storytelling," she said.

When it works, you get songs that permeate pop culture with real staying power linked to the film: like Seal's "Kiss from a Rose" from "Batman Forever," or Celine Dion's "My Heart Will Go On" from "Titanic."

"They just become these forever songs.... It's like a great band who has chemistry: the right song, the right visual, the right scene, it just becomes something so much bigger than itself," explained Aspers. "I know that that's because of the brilliance of the song and the movie. It's the two of them together."

SOUNDTRACKS: A CAREER BOOST

The right soundtrack sync has the power to break an artist, like in the case of Post Malone's "Sunflower" with Swae Lee on the "Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse" soundtrack — the first ever double-diamond single — overseen by Aspers.

Soundtracks can also introduce new audiences to an artist. Take Sophie Ellis-Bextor's 2001 indie dance hit "Murder on the Dancefloor"; recently, the song went viral because of its use in a very memorable (and very nude) final scene in the divisive film "Saltburn."

In January, "Murder" broke the Billboard Hot 100 — a career first for Ellis-Bextor — 23 years after the song's release. By the end of that month, on TikTok alone, the track has been featured in more than 550,000 videos and the #MurderOnTheDancefloor hashtag has nearly 170 million views. In February, the viral song brought her U.S. television debut on "The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon."

"Lucky me!" she told The Associated Press. "What a cool thing to be a part of." She theorizes that her song has connected with a new audience (and a nostalgic one who heard it the first time around) because of its relationship to the film. It is the last song in "Saltburn," it arrives in a pivotal scene, it's played loud in the mix and the entire song is heard — not just a snippet, which is most common.

In her view, "Murder on the Dancefloor" became one of those significant movie moments — think Elton John's "Tiny Dancer" in "Almost Famous" — because the right placement "unlocks the next level of emotion in the film," she says.

DOES A SUCCESSFUL SOUNDTRACK MAKE FOR A SUCCESSFUL FILM?

There's a synergy across fans of both film and music. According to Luminate's 2023 end-of-year report, U.S. movie theatergoers are 70% more likely to have attended a live concert in the last six-months than those who don't go to movie theaters.

What's more, the industry data and analytics company found that 42% of female Gen Z consumers are more likely to discover new music through film soundtracks, which is 20% more than the general public — and could likely speak partially to the success of a film like "Barbie."

"The film is not a musical, but it was always going to have music at the heart of it," says Mark Ronson, the executive producer of the "Barbie" soundtrack.

Kevin Weaver, president of Atlantic Records West Coast, which released "Barbie The Album," says it was always the label's ambition for the soundtrack to stand on its own outside of the film but also work symbiotically — a reflection of how movies and their musical companions can work together.

"We tried to come with the highest caliber of music and artists," Weaver says. "And when we do (soundtrack) albums, we really try to do them in a way where they are a body of work, and where you can live with that as a body of work."

For artists like Ellis-Bextor, it underscores a connection between the two. "Music is a really useful tool. Nothing can set the tone for a scene like music can," she says of the relationship.

"Music will lead you by the hand to what it is hoping you feel. That's music's sole intention. So, a soundtrack is like an extra character... And with a soundtrack, you get a shared, emotional, visual memory."

Ronson agrees. "When you walk out of a movie on such a high that you want to relive it and you're like,

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 69 of 70

'What can I do?' and you go and get the soundtrack," he says. "I used to do that: I'd walk out of the movie theater to the mega store on the corner and buy it. So, I think that really helps when a movie gives you that feeling."

Today in History: March 9 The Notorious B.I.G. is shot and killed at 24

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, March 9, the 69th day of 2024. There are 297 days left in the year.

Today's highlight in history:

On March 9, 1997, rapper The Notorious B.I.G. (Christopher Wallace) was killed in a still-unsolved drive-by shooting in Los Angeles at age 24.

On this date:

In 1796, the future emperor of the French, Napoleon Bonaparte, married Josephine de Beauharnais (boh-ahr-NAY'). (The couple later divorced.)

In 1841, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *United States v. The Amistad*, ruled 7-1 in favor of a group of illegally enslaved Africans who were captured off the U.S. coast after seizing control of a Spanish schooner, *La Amistad*; the justices ruled that the Africans should be set free.

In 1862, during the Civil War, the ironclads *USS Monitor* and *CSS Virginia* (formerly *USS Merrimac*) clashed for five hours to a draw at Hampton Roads, Virginia.

In 1916, more than 400 Mexican raiders led by Pancho Villa (VEE'-uh) attacked Columbus, New Mexico, killing 18 Americans. During the First World War, Germany declared war on Portugal.

In 1933, Congress, called into special session by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, began its "hundred days" of enacting New Deal legislation.

In 1945, during World War II, U.S. B-29 bombers began launching incendiary bomb attacks against Tokyo, resulting in an estimated 100,000 deaths.

In 1964, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *New York Times Co. v. Sullivan*, raised the standard for public officials to prove they'd been libeled in their official capacity by news organizations.

In 1976, a cable car in the Italian ski resort of Cavalese fell some 700 feet to the ground when a supporting line snapped, killing 43 people.

In 1987, Chrysler Corp. announced it had agreed to buy the financially ailing American Motors Corp.

In 1989, the Senate rejected President George H.W. Bush's nomination of John Tower to be defense secretary by a vote of 53-47. (The next day, Bush tapped Wyoming Rep. Dick Cheney, who went on to win unanimous Senate approval.)

In 2000, John McCain suspended his presidential campaign, conceding the Republican nomination to George W. Bush. Bill Bradley ended his presidential bid, conceding the Democratic nomination to Vice President Al Gore.

In 2020, global stock markets and oil prices plunged, reflecting mounting alarm over the impact of the coronavirus. An alarmingly sharp slide at the opening bell on Wall Street triggered the first automatic halt in trading in more than two decades; the Dow industrials finished nearly 8% lower.

In 2018, Martin Shkreli, the former pharmaceutical CEO who'd been vilified for jacking up the price of a lifesaving drug, was sentenced in New York to seven years in prison for securities fraud.

In 2021, Buckingham Palace said allegations of racism made earlier in the week by Prince Harry and Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex, were "concerning" and would be addressed privately by the royal family.

In 2022, a Russian airstrike devastated a maternity hospital in the besieged Ukrainian port city of Mariupol and wounded at least 17 people.

Today's birthdays: Actor Joyce Van Patten is 90. Actor Trish Van Devere is 83. Singer-musician John Cale (The Velvet Underground) is 82. Singer Mark Lindsay (Paul Revere and the Raiders) is 82. Former ABC

Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, March 09, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 257 ~ 70 of 70

anchorman Charles Gibson is 81. Rock musician Robin Trower is 79. Singer Jeffrey Osborne is 76. Country musician Jimmie Fadden (The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band) is 76. Actor Jaime Lyn Bauer is 75. Magazine editor Michael Kinsley is 73. TV newscaster Faith Daniels is 67. Actor Linda Fiorentino is 66. Actor Tom Amandes is 65. Actor-director Lonny Price is 65. Country musician Rusty Hendrix (Confederate Railroad) is 64. Actor Juliette Binoche is 60. Rock musician Robert Sledge (Ben Folds Five) is 56. Rock musician Shannon Leto (30 Seconds to Mars) is 54. Rapper C-Murder (AKA C-Miller) is 53. Actor Emmanuel Lewis is 53. Actor Jean Louisa Kelly is 52. Actor Kerr Smith is 52. Actor Oscar Isaac is 45. Comedian Jordan Klepper (TV: "The Daily Show") is 45. Rapper Chingy is 44. Actor Matthew Gray Gubler is 44. Rock musician Chad Gilbert (New Found Glory) is 43. NHL defenseman Brent Burns is 39. Actor Brittany Snow is 38. Rapper Bow Wow is 37. Rapper YG is 34. Actor Cierra Ramirez is 29. U.S. Olympic gold-medal-winning gymnast Sunisa Lee is 21.