

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 1 of 60

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [3- Weekly Vikings Roundup](#)
- [4- PrairieDoc: "True Self-Care"](#)
- [5- Welcome Home!](#)
- [6- Names Released in Yankton County Fatal Crash](#)
- [7- School Board Agenda](#)
- [7- Farm Credit Services Ad](#)
- [8- Brown County Commission Agenda](#)
- [9- County Zoning Commission Agendas](#)
- [11- DEXtravaganza to Feature Country Music Superstar Thomas Rhett](#)
- [12- EarthTalk - Turkeys](#)
- [13- Weather Pages](#)
- [17- Daily Devotional](#)
- [18- Subscription Form](#)
- [19- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [20- News from the Associated Press](#)

## Monday, March 18

School Breakfast: Pancake on stick.  
School Lunch: Chicken patty, baked beans.  
Pantry Open 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.  
Senior Citizens Meet at the Groton Community Center, 1 p.m.  
Senior Menu: Cranberry meatballs, mashed potatoes, mixed vegetables, fruit, whole wheat bread.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Christian Literature Circle, 7:30 p.m.

## Tuesday, March 19

School Breakfast: Scones.  
School Lunch: Meatballs, roasted potatoes.  
Indoor track meet at Northern State University  
Thrift Store open 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.  
Food Pantry open 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.  
City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.  
Senior Menu: Baked fish, au gratin potatoes, 3 bean salad, tropical fruit, whole wheat bread.  
St. John's Lutheran: Quilting, 9 a.m.  
Special School Board Meeting in Bristol, 7 p.m.  
United Methodist: Spring Tea luncheon, 10:30 a.m.

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

“

*Yes to everything scary. Yes to everything that takes me out of my comfort zone. Yes to everything that feels like it might be crazy.*

-Shonda Rhimes



## Wednesday, March 20

School Breakfast: Cereal.  
School Lunch: Pizza crunchers, green beans.  
Senior Menu: Breaded pork cutlets, creamy noodles, broccoli/cauliflower blend, frosted brownie, fruit, whole wheat bread.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Luther League, 5:30 p.m.; Soup Supper, 6 p.m. (Luther League host); Lenten worship, 7 p.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.; Lent Service, 7 p.m.  
United Methodist: Communion coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Confirmation, 6 p.m.; Lent Bible Study, 7 p.m.; Groton Ad Council, 7 p.m.  
Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm

## Thursday, March 21

School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.  
School Lunch: Chicken strips, fries.  
Senior Menu: Ranch chicken breast, long grain wild rice, vegetable capri blend, acini depepi fruit salad, whole wheat bread.

**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

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 2 of 60

# 1440

In partnership with **smartasset**<sup>™</sup>

Mike Lynch, founder of software company Autonomy, is headed to court today in what US prosecutors have called the "largest fraud in the history" of Silicon Valley.

The 68-team field for the 2024 men's college basketball tournament was revealed yesterday, with the defending champion University of Connecticut (31-3) taking the top overall seed. The Huskies were joined by the other three No. 1 seeds in Houston (30-4), Purdue (29-4), and North Carolina (27-7).

Southern Iceland was hit with its fourth volcanic eruption in the past three months over the weekend, prompting the evacuation of thousands from a nearby town and tourist attraction. As of this writing, no deaths have been confirmed; however, one local worker remains unaccounted for after falling into a fissure opened by the seismic activity.

## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Usher wins entertainer of the year, "The Color Purple" wins best film at 55th NAACP Image Awards; see full list of awardees.

David Seidler, Oscar-winning screenwriter known for "The King's Speech," dies at 86. Byron Janis, American classical pianist known for cultural diplomacy performances in the Soviet Union and Cuba, dies at 95.

National Women's Soccer League season kicks off; see full team-by-team preview. Chicago Bears trade QB Justin Fields to Pittsburgh Steelers; Bears widely expected to take a QB with top pick in April's draft.

## Science & Technology

Engineers develop AI-assisted wearable electronic patch allowing patients who lack the use of vocal cords to communicate verbally. Robotics startup Figure debuts humanoid robot powered by ChatGPT.

US Defense Department contracts with Elon Musk-owned SpaceX to develop global spy satellite network, according to reports; \$1.8B deal with the company's Starshield program was inked in 2021.

Scientists discover new way the Ebola virus replicates inside the body; discovery may lead to new preventive treatments for the deadly disease.

## Business & Markets

Markets close lower Friday (Dow -0.5%, S&P 500 -0.7%, Nasdaq -1.0%), with S&P 500 notching second straight week of losses ahead of Wednesday's Federal Reserve policy statement.

US trade regulators launch probe into social news aggregator Reddit over deals it struck with AI companies to license user data to train AI models. News comes ahead of platform's initial public offering, with the company's valuation estimated near \$6B; see previous write-up.

Grant Thornton to sell majority stake in US arm to private equity firm Mountain Capital; company is the seventh-largest American accounting firm.

## Politics & World Affairs

Early results show Russian President Vladimir Putin wins reelection with over 85% of the vote for fifth presidential term; thousands appeared to heed late opposition leader Alexei Navalny's call to protest.

Supreme Court today will review whether federal officials violated the law by urging social media to remove COVID-19 and election-related posts deemed false or misleading.

South Sudan shuts down all schools in anticipation of a two-week heat wave. North Korea fires ballistic missile into the sea of Japan as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken visits South Korea following days of joint military exercises.

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 3 of 60

## Weekly Vikings Roundup

By Jordan Wright

NFL free agency kicked off last week, and the Minnesota Vikings were involved in plenty of headlines around the league. From some big-name players leaving the team, to high-priced free agents joining, here is everything you might have missed...

The biggest storyline entering free agency was the status of quarterback Kirk Cousins. The Vikings' front office publicly spoke about wanting Kirk back, while also pointing out that they wouldn't exceed a certain price point. Enter the Atlanta Falcons. Much like the Vikings in 2018, many in Atlanta felt the team was only a quarterback away from truly competing. So, as the Vikings did six years ago, the Falcons offered a massive contract to Cousins (four years, \$180M). The contract on the table was much higher than what the Vikings were offering, in both salary and years, so Kirk is officially moving to Georgia while the land of 10,000 lakes is once again trying to figure out what to do at the game's most important position.

To fill that void, the Vikings made two moves this past week that give us a good idea of what they intend. The first move was bringing in Sam Darnold with a one-year, \$10M deal. Darnold was taken third overall in the 2018 NFL draft by the New York Jets. After three unproductive seasons in NY, Darnold was shipped off to the Carolina Panthers. Two seasons later, Carolina decided to draft Darnold's replacement, and Sam spent this past season as a backup in San Francisco. Now, Darnold gets one final shot to show the world that he is a capable starter in the NFL.

The second move the Vikings made was making a trade with Houston to acquire their first-round pick this year. By making the trade now, the Vikings currently have two first-round picks in the upcoming draft, and theoretically have the ammunition needed to move up and get a rookie quarterback. To get one of the A-tier signal callers, the Vikings will likely need to move into the top three, and I expect if that's the plan we'll see a corresponding trade happen sooner rather than later.

Aside from quarterback, the Vikings also needed to address their pass rush. With their top three outside linebackers hitting free agency (Danielle Hunter, D.J. Wonnum, and Marcus Davenport), the Vikings elected to spend big money on the position. The first move was to sign Jonathan Greenard (pronounced Gruh-NARD) to a four-year, \$76M contract. Greenard spent the first four seasons of his career in Houston and now becomes the main pass rusher for Minnesota (ironically enough, the Houston Texans filled Greenard's position by signing Danielle Hunter).

To further bolster the outside linebacker position, the Vikings also signed Andrew Van Ginkel from Miami (two-year, \$20M). Van Ginkel was a third-round pick in 2019 when Vikings' defensive coordinator Brian Flores was the Dolphin's head coach.

At inside linebacker, the Vikings replaced the aging and departing Jordan Hicks with Blake Cashman, a former University of Minnesota standout. Cashman will pair with last year's undrafted rookie Ivan Pace Jr, providing the Vikings with a ton of speed and athleticism at the inside linebacker spot.

The biggest remaining area of need on the Vikings' defense is along the defensive line. While the team did re-sign Jonathan Bullard and brought in Jerry Tillery through free agency, neither player has shown they are capable starters thus far into their respective careers. With the available number of free-agent defensive linemen dwindling, I expect the Vikings to spend a high(ish) draft pick at the position.

On the offensive side of the ball, aside from quarterback, the biggest addition was adding running back Aaron Jones. Jones, a superstar for the division rival Packers for many years, was cut by the team after they added Josh Jacobs in free agency. Less than 24 hours later, Jones had signed with the Vikings, following in the footsteps of many great players who eschewed the ugly green and yellow and upgraded to the purple and gold.

Three other players the Vikings brought in through free agency are offensive guard/center Dan Feeny, wide receiver Trent Sherfield, and kicker John Parker Romo. Feeny projects to be the primary backup interior offensive lineman, while Sherfield's biggest strength is on special teams.

In addition to adding outside help, the Vikings also re-signed some of their own pending free agents, including tight ends Johnny Mundt and Nick Muse, offensive linemen Blake Brandel and David Quessenberry, receiver Brandon Powell, and safety Theo Jackson.

## "True Self-Care"

During our most recent family movie night, we watched one of my favorites: Encanto. At one point in the movie, a character who has been gifted supernatural strength confesses that she fears she will crumble under the weight of all that is expected from her. Although she accomplishes amazing things, it never feels like enough. She never feels like she, herself, is enough.

Popular culture suggests she should prioritize "self-care," which is usually represented by manicures or massages and long soaks in the tub, or perhaps half an hour of meditation or spin class.

Now, to be clear, I'm a big fan of massages and getting my nails done, and I spend a lot of my professional time nagging people about exercise, as my patients can certainly attest. But I'd suggest this perspective on self-care is at best incomplete. Protecting your mental well-being goes well beyond little escapes, and even beyond tending to your physical health.

The specifics of true self-care are unique to each individual, because each individual is unique, in their needs, their desires, and their circumstances. You simply can't meditate quality daycare into existence, or a nasty coworker into a team player, or a loved one into sobriety.

Self-care, meaningful self-care, means being able to recognize that you are human, and you have limits and that it's not just ok, it's critical, to acknowledge and respect those limits. The demands vying for your time and energy are endless. Those resources, however, are not. True self-care means standing up for your right to be the one who decides how you will allocate them.

This means setting boundaries, and that's an incredibly difficult thing to do. With those limits will naturally come guilt, because you simply can't do everything for everyone, or even all the things you yourself want to do. No one else can decide where your lines are, and no one else will hold those lines on your behalf.

In order to hold those boundaries, you must be kind to yourself. Most of us have a perpetual self-commentary of criticism that tells us we could do better, we should do better, we aren't enough. Honest self-reflection is important, but why does that so often mean a laser focus on where we fell short, without recognizing how far we came? We internalize the message that if we can't keep up with demands that escalate until we crack, the fault is ours. It's not. To draw these boundaries, and make that self-compassion meaningful, we each must clarify our own values.

Spending our limited energy in ways that conflict with the ideas we hold most dear is the antithesis of self-care. We need a clear idea of what those values are to hold that line. Massages and meal delivery services can be great tools, but the real key to protecting your mental well-being is a lot harder to define and a lot harder to do.

Debra Johnson, M.D. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices family medicine in Brookings, South Dakota. Follow The Prairie Doc® at [www.prairiedoc.org](http://www.prairiedoc.org) and on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show providing health information based on science, built on trust for 22 Seasons, on SDPB and streaming live on Facebook most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.



Debra Johnston, MD

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 5 of 60



## Welcome Home!

The Groton Area boys basketball team, cheerleaders and parents/fans were welcomed home with a caravan. After the caravan, a program was held in the Arena.



## Names Released in Yankton County Fatal Crash

What: Motorcycle vs. Truck fatal crash

Where: 301st Street and 446th Avenue, 4 miles north and 3 miles west of Volin, SD

When: 5 p.m., Tuesday, March 12, 2024

Driver 1: Gordon Jay Sorensen, 65-year-old male from Irene, SD, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 2006 Harley Davidson

Helmet Use: No

Driver 2: Donald Ernest Robinson, 54-year-old male from Yankton, SD, no injuries

Vehicle 2: 2001 Septic Tanker Truck

Seatbelt Use: Yes

Yankton County, S.D.- A motorcyclist suffered fatal injuries Tuesday in a two-vehicle crash near Volin, SD.

Preliminary crash information indicates Gordon J. Sorensen, the 65-year-old male driver of a 2006 Harley Davidson motorcycle was traveling east on 301st Street near 446th Avenue behind a semi tractor/trailer. A septic tanker truck, driven by Donald E. Robinson, was traveling the same direction and was in front of the semi. The septic tanker truck slowed down to turn north into a field. Sorensen attempted to pass the semi and struck the side of the septic tanker truck as it was turning into the field. Sorensen was thrown from his motorcycle and died at the scene as a result of his injuries. He was not wearing a helmet.

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

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

## GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT #06-6

Special School Board Meeting

March 19, 2024 – 6:00 PM

Bristol Community Center (86 S Main Street, Bristol, SD)

### AGENDA:

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

### POTENTIAL CONFLICTS DISCLOSURE PURSUANT SDCL 23-3

### OLD/CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. Open Forum for Public Participation...in accordance with Board Policy & Guidelines.
2. Public Discussion Regarding District Opt-Out Proposal.

### ADJOURN

PROUD TO SUPPORT  
**NATIONAL  
AG DAY**

**MARCH 19 / #AGDAY24**



**Farm Credit  
Services  
of America**

**605.225.1030**

4835 Sixth Avenue SE  
Aberdeen, SD 57401

**Agriculture Works Here. > FCSAmerica.com**

# Broton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 8 of 60

BROWN COUNTY  
BROWN COUNTY COMMISSION AGENDA  
REGULAR MEETING TUESDAY

March 19, 2024 8:45 A.M.

COMMISSIONER'S CHAMBERS, COURTHOUSE ANNEX - 25 MARKET STREET, ABERDEEN SD

1. Call To Order - Pledge of Allegiance
2. Approval of Agenda
3. Opportunity of Public Comment
4. Discuss Burn Ban
5. Discuss Community Health Contract for 2024
6. Brown County Fair Sanitation & Cleaning Service Proposals
7. Consent Calendar
  - a. Approval of General Meeting Minutes of March 12, 2024
  - b. Claims
  - c. HR Report
  - d. Travel Requests
  - e. Claim Assignments
  - f. Fair Contract with Hub City Radio for Advertising
  - g. Approval of SD DOT Pavement Marking Contract and Authorize Chairman to sign
  - h. Lease
  - i. SPURS Lottery Permit – Date Change
  - j. Approve updated Dive Team List
8. Other Business
9. Executive Session (if requested per SDCL 1-25-2)
10. Adjourn

Brown County Commission Meeting

**Please join my meeting from your computer, tablet, or smartphone.**

<https://meet.goto.com/BrCoCommission>

**You can also dial in using your phone.** United States: [+1 \(872\) 240-3311](tel:+18722403311)

**Access Code:** 601-168-909 #

Get the app now and be ready when your first meeting starts: <https://meet.goto.com/install>

Public comment provides an opportunity for the public to address the county commission but may not exceed 3 minutes.

Public comment will be limited to 10 minutes (or at the discretion of the board).

Public comment will be accepted virtually when the virtual attendance option is available.

**Official Recordings of Commission Meetings along with the Minutes can be found at**

<https://www.brown.sd.us/node/454>

---

**11:00 A.M. – Department Head Meeting**



# AGENDA

## BROWN COUNTY PLANNING/ZONING COMMISSION REGULAR SCHEDULED MEETINGS

TUESDAY, MARCH 19, 2024 – 7:00 PM  
BROWN COUNTY COURTHOUSE ANNEX in the BASEMENT  
(STAIRWAY AND ELEVATOR ACCESS TO BASEMENT)

- I. **Call to Order:** for Brown County Planning/Zoning Commission
- II. **Roll Call:** David North - Vice Chair, Dale Kurth, Patrick Keatts, James Meyers, Carrie Weisenburger, County Commissioner Mike Gage, and Stan Beckler-Chairman.
- III. **Approval of March 19, 2024, Agenda:** Motion: 1<sup>st</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ 2<sup>nd</sup> \_\_\_\_\_
- IV. **Approval of February 20, 2024, Minutes:** Motion: 1<sup>st</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ 2<sup>nd</sup> \_\_\_\_\_

## ZONING BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT

- V. **Old Business:**
  1. **Sign-up sheet:** On the table by the door entrance, and you can clearly mark YES or NO if you want to speak to the Board on any Agenda Item.
  2. **Permits:** Anyone that has submitted a Variance Petition (VP) or a Conditional Use Petition (CUP) to the Zoning Board of Adjustment (BOA) is still required to get their required PERMITS from the Zoning Office before starting their project if their Petition gets approved. Penalties may be assessed per Ordinance when starting projects without proper permits in place.
- VI. **New Business:** *Brown County Planning/Zoning Commission as Zoning Board of Adjustment (BOA).*
  1. **Conditional Use Petition (CUP)** in a Highway Commercial District (HC) described as Lot 1B, "Gossman First Addition" in the S1/2 of Section 15-T123N-R63W of the 5<sup>th</sup> P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (5759 E Hwy 12, Bath Twp.)
  2. **Conditional Use Petition (CUP)** in a Mini-Agriculture District (M-AG) described as Lot 1, "J & G Barringer First Subdivision" & Lot 1-2 in the NE1/4 of Section 15-T123N-R64W of the 5<sup>th</sup> P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (2035 & 2305 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue NW, Aberdeen Twp.)
- VII. **Other Business:**

*Completed as Zoning Board of Adjustment (BOA) & going to Planning Commission*

# AGENDA

## BROWN COUNTY PLANNING/ZONING COMMISSION REGULAR SCHEDULED MEETINGS

TUESDAY, MARCH 19, 2024 – 7:00 PM  
BROWN COUNTY COURTHOUSE ANNEX in the BASEMENT  
(STAIRWAY AND ELEVATOR ACCESS TO BASEMENT)

### PLANNING COMMISSION

- I. **Old Business:**
- II. **New Business:** *Brown County Planning/Zoning Commission as Planning Commission.*
  10. **Rezone Petition** for a property described as “T. Zeck Outlot A” in the SW1/4 of Section 25-T123N-R62W of the 5<sup>th</sup> P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (13451 400<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Henry Twp.) to be rezoned from Agriculture Preservation District (AG-P) to Mini-Agriculture District (M-AG) for 15.44 ± acres.
  11. **Preliminary & Final Plat** for conveyance purposes on a property described as “Droog’s Second Subdivision” in the S1/2 of Section 22-T123N-R64W of the 5<sup>th</sup> P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (1401 385<sup>th</sup> Avenue South, Aberdeen Twp.)
  12. **Preliminary & Final Plat** for conveyance purposes on a property described as “Munger-Mackner Addition” in the N1/2 of Section 9-T121N-R64W of the 5<sup>th</sup> P.M., Brown County, South Dakota (38465 & 38477 143<sup>rd</sup> Street, Warner Twp.)
- III. **Other Business:** Executive Session if requested.
- IV. **Motion to Adjourn:** 1<sup>st</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ 2<sup>nd</sup> \_\_\_\_\_

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 11 of 60

## DEXtravaganza to Feature Country Music Superstar Thomas Rhett

HURON, S.D. –The South Dakota State Fair and the South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources (DANR) are thrilled to welcome country music superstar Thomas Rhett to the DEX for the DEXtravaganza 'Grand Opening' Concert on June 13, 2024.

Tickets go on-sale to the public on Friday, March 22 at 10:00 am CDT and will be available at SDStateFair.com.

Ten years after signing his record deal with Big Machine Label Group's The Valory Music Co., arena-packing superstar Thomas Rhett has 21 No. One singles, 15 BILLION streams and the longest current active streak of consecutive No. One's in the format (Mediabase/Country Aircheck Chart). His most recent sixth studio album, WHERE WE STARTED "practically demands an open field, tens-of-thousands-strong throng of fans in front of it" (Esquire). Declared "a prince in the genre" (USA Today), he has been honored with eight ACM Awards including Entertainer of the Year, two CMA Awards, five GRAMMY® Awards nominations, plus trophies from the CMT Music Awards, Billboard Awards and iHeartRadio Awards, in addition to being recognized with five CMA Triple Play awards for penning three No. One songs within a 12-month period. The hitmaker has also launched a tequila brand, Dos Primos, now offering Blanco, Reposado, and Añejo variants. For more information, visit [www.ThomasRhett.com](http://www.ThomasRhett.com).

"When the Open Class Beef barn burned down in October 2020, our motto became, 'out of adversity, comes opportunity', and that opportunity, along with a lot of hard work, has helped us discover the DEX," said DANR Secretary Hunter Roberts. "To be here today, announcing superstar Thomas Rhett as our DEXtravaganza headliner is truly amazing. I am so proud of what we have accomplished, and I can't wait to celebrate with everyone who helped bring this vision to life!"

Artist Fanclub pre-sale will be on sale March 20 at 10 am CDT until March 21 at 10 pm CDT. Venue pre-sale will go on sale on March 21 from 10 am to 10 pm CDT. Tickets to the public will go on sale on Friday, March 22 at 10 am CDT.

Gates will open at 6 pm on June 13 with the show starting at 8 pm. Attendees can expect a festival-style atmosphere, complete with on-site camping facilities for an additional nightly fee, a variety of food vendors, and a post-concert after-party.

The DEX is the new multipurpose facility replacing the Open Class Beef Complex destroyed by fire in 2020. The

The DEXtravaganza concert, along with the success of recent events like the PRCA rodeo, showcase the versatility of the DEX and its impact not only on the South Dakota State Fair and the Huron community, but the entire state.

## EARTHTALK ™

Dear EarthTalk: What's causing the decline in U.S. wild turkey populations? – John Groveton, Alexandria, VA

Americans have always loved wild turkeys, perhaps too much. By 1900, we had nearly driven this close relative to the chicken to extinction as a result of unregulated hunting and habitat destruction. But thanks to conservation and re-location efforts, these big birds started making a comeback in the 1940s. Over the next several decades, thanks to a series of reforms and demographic changes, wild turkey numbers grew and the species hit its population peak in 2004 with as many as seven million of them across the U.S. All this made wild turkeys one of the biggest success stories in the history of American wildlife?

But will it last? Since that population peak, wild turkey numbers have fallen, declining some 15 percent between 2004-2014 and another 3 percent between 2014-2019. Biologists are struggling to determine why. Much of this decline has been in the South and the Midwest. Scientists have been investigating habitat loss, hunting, disease and climate change, as all possible causes of this population downturn.

One of the potential reasons causes for the decline is the rise in turkey-eating predators. Hawks, bobcats, coyotes and raccoons are among wild turkeys' natural predators. Hawks and owls are protected species and have had significant rebounds since the federal government banned the use of the pesticide DDT. This protection has allowed populations of birds of prey to grow, but they are also key predators of turkeys. This increase in predators could be one of the sources of the turkey decline.

Turkeys have very specific requirements when it comes to their environment, so habitat loss could be another factor of their decline. Turkeys need areas of low, thick vegetation for nesting and raising chicks, and areas with mature trees to provide nuts to eat in the fall. As more natural areas are destroyed, turkeys may be having a harder time finding swatches of land that meets all of their needs.

Climate change is likely another factor. Turkeys may be experiencing a failure to respond to the environmental shifts of climate change. A study published in the journal *Climate Change Ecology* found that turkeys don't shift nesting times much as temperatures and precipitation change. This has can cause newly hatched turkeys to miss out on plant cover and edible bugs if the spring bloom starts earlier. In turn, this could affect the likelihood that turkey chicks survive into adulthood. We already know that rising temperatures affect over 100 bird species in the Americas; they might be harming turkeys too.

There is more research needed to find a definitive answer to the decline in turkey populations. It is most likely that the answer is the combination of a number of problems. As scientists look for solutions, many states have started to scale back on turkey hunting seasons in hopes of bringing population numbers up again.



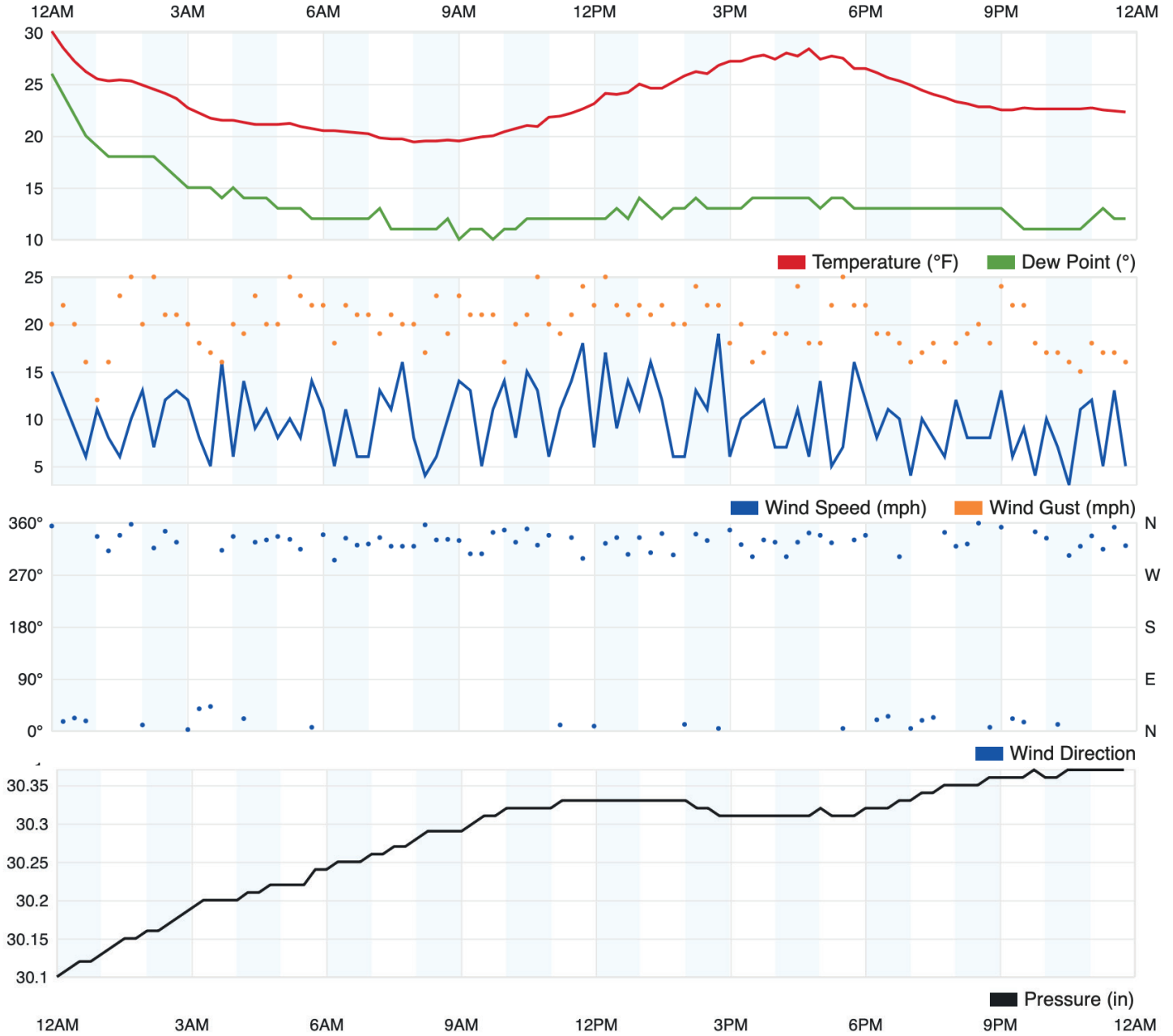
**Wild turkey population numbers are declining across the U.S. in recent years and researchers haven't figured out how to turn the tide.** Credit:

Pexels.com.

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 13 of 60

## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 14 of 60

Today



Scattered  
Flurries and  
Breezy

High: 32 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: 13 °F

Monday



Sunny then  
Mostly Sunny  
and Breezy

High: 49 °F

Monday  
Night



Mostly Clear  
and Breezy  
then Partly  
Cloudy

Low: 31 °F

Tuesday



Mostly Sunny

High: 53 °F



## Fire Safety

March 18, 2024  
4:30 AM

### Things to Avoid...

- Tossing Cigarette Butts
- Outdoor Burning
- Campfires & Grilling
- Off-Road Travel
- Use of Machinery
- Welding



Raging wildfire. Photo: SciJinks, NOAA



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

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

With increasing temperatures and wind on Monday come the threat for high to very high fire danger across central and northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota. Following these tips will lower the chances of fires igniting and spreading. Please avoid tossing cigarette butts on the ground, don't burn outdoors or make campfires or do any grilling. It's also best to avoid off road travel in vehicles. Also, avoid using machinery over dry ground and vegetation and curtail the use of welding equipment in the outdoors.

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 15 of 60

## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 30 °F at 12:00 AM

Low Temp: 19 °F at 7:56 AM

Wind: 25 mph at 1:42 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 12 hours, 08 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 85 in 2012

Record Low: -15 in 1923

Average High: 43

Average Low: 21

Average Precip in March.: 0.46

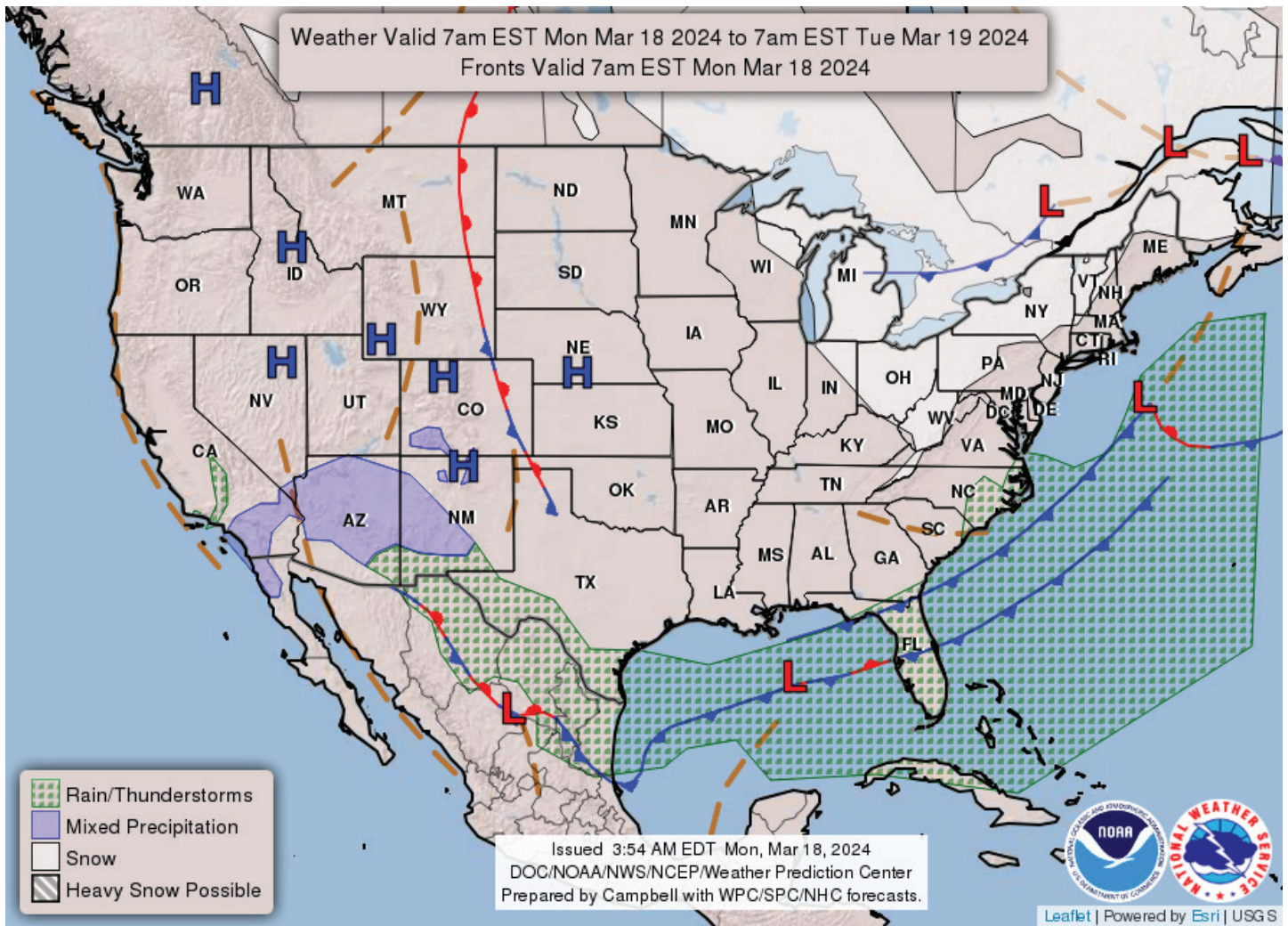
Precip to date in March: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 1.63

Precip Year to Date: 0.07

Sunset Tonight: 7:44:19 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:34:12 am



# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 16 of 60

## Today in Weather History

March 18, 1982: Northern Lawrence and Southwest Butte Counties experienced strong winds during the afternoon of March 18, 1982. Winds gusting to 70mph in Spearfish and Belle Fourche areas overturned a trailer house near Belle Fourche. No injuries were reported.

March 18, 2013: An area of low pressure moving across the region brought widespread accumulating snowfall along with powerful northwest winds to northeast South Dakota. Snowfall amounts from 1 to 4 inches along with sustained winds of 25 to 35 mph with gusts up to near 60 mph caused widespread blizzard conditions. Travel was disrupted or halted. Some businesses and schools were also closed. Some snowfall amounts included; 1 inch at Sisseton; 2 inches south of Bristol and at Bowdle; 3 inches near Big Stone City; and 4 inches at Summit. The highest wind gust was 58 mph at Aberdeen and near Summit. The snowfall began between 5 and 7 pm on the 17th and ended between 5 and 9 pm on the 18th.

March 18, 2014: A low-pressure surface area moving off to the east brought some heavy snow into far eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota. A narrow band of heavy snow set up across this area bringing from 6 to 11 inches of snow.

1925: The great "Tri-State Tornado" occurred, the deadliest tornado in U.S. history. The storm claimed 695 lives (including 234 at Murphysboro, IL, and 148 at West Frankfort, IL), and caused seventeen million dollars property damage. It cut a swath of destruction 219 miles long and as much as a mile wide from east-central Missouri to southern Indiana between 1 PM and 4 PM. The tornado leveled a school in West Frankfort, Illinois, and picked up sixteen students setting them down unharmed 150 yards away. Seven other tornadoes claimed an additional 97 lives that day.

1952: 151.73 inches of rain fell at Cilaos, La Reunion Island in the Indian Ocean over five days (13th-18th) to set the world rainfall record. This record was broken on February 24th-28th, 2007, when Commerce La Reunion Island picked up 196.06 inches.

1971 - High winds accompanied a low pressure system from the Rocky Mountains to the Great Lakes. Winds gusted to 100 mph at Hastings NE, and reached 115 mph at Hays KS. High winds caused two million dollars damage in Kansas. Fire burned 50,000 forest acres in eastern Oklahoma. (17th-19th) (The Weather Channel)

1990: An intense hailstorm struck the Sydney region in Australia, producing strong winds and torrential rains in a swath from Camden to Narrabeen, causing extensive damage. Hailstones were measured up to 3 inches in diameter. The total insured cost was estimated at \$319 million, the third-largest loss event in Australian insurance history.

1987 - A storm in the central U.S. produced up to 10 inches of snow in western Nebraska, and up to six inches of rain in eastern sections of the state. The heavy rains pushed the Elkhorn River out of its banks, submerging the streets of Inman under three feet of water. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Light rain and snow prevailed east of the Mississippi River. Fair weather prevailed west of the Mississippi. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - A storm in the western U.S. produced heavy rain in California, with heavy snow in the Sierra Nevada Range. Venado CA was drenched with 5.40 inches of rain in 24 hours. A dozen cities in the eastern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date, including Baltimore MD with a reading of 82 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Heavy rain caused extensive flooding of rivers and streams in Georgia, with total damage running well into the millions. Flooding also claimed six lives. Nearly seven inches of rain caused 2.5 million dollars damage around Columbus, and up to nine inches of rain was reported over the northern Kinchafoonee Basin in Georgia. (Storm Data)



# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 17 of 60

Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### THE LAST MILE

Eric Severide was a news journalist who achieved much recognition and fame. In fact, he was considered to be an "elite correspondent."

When he graduated from high school, a local newspaper sponsored him and a classmate, Walter Port, to travel by canoe from Minneapolis to York Factory - a journey of 2250 miles. When they came to the last leg of their journey, they were overwhelmed with what they faced - 450 miles through the rugged wilderness.

As they faced what seemed to them to be overwhelming odds, an old fur trader recognized their doubt. So, he offered a few words of simple advice: "Just think of the last mile."

Great advice for them. Great advice for Christians.

We do not know what the journey before us may be. As we face today or tomorrow or next week, we do not know what lies before us. Sometimes we look back and recall unpleasant memories that have left us scared and scarred, perhaps fearful and frightened. So, we doubt.

But, we are here today, and have the final, reassuring promise of Jesus to hold on to for the rest of our lives: "Be sure of this, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

When we place our trust in the Lord, we have a Guide who has never forgotten His promises and a Guard who has never abandoned one of His children.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for Your guarantee that You are and always will be with us no matter what. May we trust You always, knowing that Your grace is sufficient. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Matthew 28:20



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

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 18 of 60

## 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](mailto:paperpaul@grotonsd.net)

## Groton Daily Independent

[www.397news.com](http://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](https://paypal.me/paperpaul)



# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 19 of 60



## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.15.24

13 25 50 51 66 6

MegaPlier: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$875,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 14 Mins 54 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.16.24

11 30 43 47 51 4

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$2,250,000**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 29 Mins 54 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.17.24

1 15 20 43 44 4

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 44 Mins 54 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.16.24

2 15 17 21 24

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$24,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 44 Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.16.24

9 11 13 29 69 12

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 13 Mins 54 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.16.24

12 23 44 57 61 5

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$645,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 13 Mins 54 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

## News from the Associated Press

### **Putin gets 5th term in election that was never in doubt, after harshest crackdown since Soviet era**

By EMMA BURROWS, DASHA LITVINOVA and JIM HEINTZ Associated Press

Election commission results on Monday showed that President Vladimir Putin has secured a fifth term with an overwhelming number of votes, in an election that held little suspense after the harshest crackdown on the opposition and free speech since Soviet times.

After facing only token challengers and harshly suppressing opposition voices, Putin was set to extend his nearly quarter-century rule for six more years. Even with little margin for protest, Russians crowded outside polling stations at noon on Sunday, the last day of the election, apparently heeding an opposition call to express their displeasure with the president.

Putin has led Russia as president or prime minister since December 1999, a tenure marked by international military aggression and an increasing intolerance for dissent.

Early Monday, Putin hailed overwhelming preliminary results as an indication of “trust” and “hope” in him — while critics saw them as another reflection of the preordained nature of the election.

“Of course, we have lots of tasks ahead. But I want to make it clear for everyone: When we were consolidated, no one has ever managed to frighten us, to suppress our will and our self-conscience. They failed in the past and they will fail in the future,” Putin said at a meeting with his campaign staff after polls closed.

Any public criticism of Putin or his war in Ukraine has been stifled. Independent media have been crippled. His fiercest political foe, Alexei Navalny, died in an Arctic prison last month, and other critics are either in jail or in exile.

Beyond the fact that voters had virtually no choice, independent monitoring of the election was extremely limited.

Russia’s Central Election Commission said Monday that with nearly 100% of all precincts counted, Putin got 87.29% of the vote. Central Election Commission chief Ella Pamfilova said that nearly 76 million voters cast their ballots for Putin, his highest vote tally ever.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and the presidents of Bolivia, Cuba, Honduras, Nicaragua and Venezuela quickly congratulated Putin on his victory, as did the leaders of ex-Soviet nations Belarus, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Meanwhile, the West dismissed the vote as a sham.

British Foreign Secretary David Cameron wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter: “This is not what free and fair elections look like.”

In the tightly controlled environment, Navalny’s associates urged those unhappy with Putin or the war to go to the polls at noon on Sunday — and lines outside a number of polling stations both inside Russia and at its embassies around the world appeared to swell at that time.

Among those heeding call was Yulia Navalnaya, Navalny’s widow, who spent more than five hours in the line at the Russian Embassy in Berlin. She told reporters that she wrote her late husband’s name on her ballot.

Asked whether she had a message for Putin, Navalnaya replied: “Please stop asking for messages from me or from somebody for Mr. Putin. There could be no negotiations and nothing with Mr. Putin, because he’s a killer, he’s a gangster.”

But Putin brushed off the effectiveness of the apparent protest.

“There were calls to come vote at noon. And this was supposed to be a manifestation of opposition. Well, if there were calls to come vote, then ... I praise this,” he said at a news conference after polls closed.

Putin referenced Navalny by name for the first time ever at the news conference, declaring that he was ready to release him in a swap for unidentified inmates in Western custody just days before the opposition leader’s death.

He rejected Western criticism of the vote and tried to turn the tables at the West, charging that the four

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 21 of 60

criminal cases against Republican candidate Donald Trump were a use of the judiciary for political aims and describing denigrating democracy in the U.S. as a "catastrophe." "The whole world is laughing at it," he said.

Some Russians waiting to vote in Moscow and St. Petersburg told The Associated Press that they were taking part in the protest, but it wasn't possible to confirm whether all of those in line were doing so.

A voter in Moscow, who identified himself only as Vadim, said he hoped for change, but added that "unfortunately, it's unlikely." Like others, he didn't give his full name because of security concerns.

Meanwhile, supporters of Navalny streamed to his grave in Moscow, some bringing ballots with his name written on them.

Meduza, Russia's biggest independent news outlet, published photos of ballots it received from their readers, with "killer" inscribed on one and "The Hague awaits you" on another. The latter refers to an arrest warrant for Putin on war crimes charges from the International Criminal Court.

Some people told the AP that they were happy to vote for Putin — unsurprising in a country where state TV airs a drumbeat of praise for the Russian leader and voicing any other opinion is risky.

Dmitry Sergienko, who cast his ballot in Moscow, said, "I am happy with everything and want everything to continue as it is now."

Voting took place over three days at polling stations across the vast country, in illegally annexed regions of Ukraine and online.

Several people were arrested, including in Moscow and St. Petersburg, after they tried to start fires or set off explosives at polling stations while others were detained for throwing green antiseptic or ink into ballot boxes.

Stanislav Andreychuk, co-chair of the Golos independent election watchdog, said Russians were searched when entering polling stations, there were attempts to check filled-out ballots before they were cast, and one report said police demanded a ballot box be opened to remove a ballot.

That left little room for people to express themselves. Still, huge lines formed around noon outside diplomatic missions in London, Berlin, Paris and other cities with large Russian communities, many of whom left home after Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

"If we have some option to protest I think it's important to utilize any opportunity," said 23-year-old Tatiana, who was voting in the Estonian capital of Tallinn and said she came to take part in the protest.

## Israel launches another raid on Gaza's main hospital, charging that Hamas has regrouped there

By WAFAA SHURAF, SAMY MAGDY and TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli forces launched another raid on the Gaza Strip's largest hospital early Monday, saying Hamas militants had regrouped there and had fired on them from inside the compound, where Palestinian officials say tens of thousands of people have been sheltering.

In a separate development, the European Union's top diplomat, Josep Borrell, accused Israel of continuing to hinder efforts to deliver aid to Gaza, saying the territory faces an "entirely man-made" famine as "starvation is used as a weapon of war."

The army last raided Shifa Hospital in November after claiming that Hamas maintained an elaborate command center within and beneath the facility. The military revealed a tunnel leading to a bunker, as well as weapons it said were found inside the hospital, but the evidence fell short of the earlier claims and critics accused the army of recklessly endangering the lives of civilians.

People sheltering in the hospital said Israeli forces backed by tanks and artillery had surrounded the medical complex early Monday and that snipers were shooting at people inside. They said the army raided a number of buildings and detained dozens of people.

"We're trapped inside," said Abdel-Hady Sayed, who has been sheltering in the medical facility for over three months. "They fire at anything moving. ... Doctors and ambulances can't move."

Gaza's Health Ministry said the Israeli army was directing gun and missile fire at a building used for

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 22 of 60

specialized surgeries. It said a fire broke out at the hospital's gate.

The ministry said around 30,000 people are sheltering at the hospital, including patients, medical staff and people who have fled their homes seeking safety.

Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, the chief Israeli military spokesperson, said the army launched a "high-precision operation" in parts of the medical complex. He said senior Hamas militants had regrouped there and were directing attacks from the compound.

The army released a grainy aerial video of what it said were militants firing on its forces from inside the hospital, as well as video of a rocket-propelled grenade striking an armored vehicle. It said its forces had detained around 80 people in the raid.

Hagari said the patients and medical staff could remain in the medical complex and that a safe passage was available for civilians who wanted to leave.

## HOSPITALS OUT OF SERVICE AS TOLL MOUNTS

Israel accuses Hamas of using hospitals and other civilian facilities to shield its fighters, and the Israeli military has raided several hospitals since the start of the war, which was triggered by Hamas' Oct. 7 attack into southern Israel.

Most of Gaza's medical facilities have been forced to shut down for lack of fuel and medical supplies, even as scores of people are killed and wounded each day in Israeli strikes.

The Gaza Health Ministry said Monday that at least 31,726 Palestinians have been killed in the war, including 81 in the past 24 hours. The ministry doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count, but says women and children make up two-thirds of the dead.

Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people in the surprise attack out of Gaza that triggered the war, and took another 250 people hostage. Hamas is still believed to be holding about 100 captives, as well as the remains of 30 others, after most of the rest were freed during a cease-fire last year in exchange for the release of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

The United States, Qatar and Egypt have spent weeks trying to broker another cease-fire and hostage release, but the gulf between the two sides remains wide, with Hamas demanding guarantees for an end to the war and Israel vowing to continue the offensive until it destroys the militant group.

Israel's offensive has driven most of Gaza's 2.3 million people from their homes and the U.N. says a quarter of the population is starving.

## HARSH CONDEMNATION FROM EU DIPLOMAT

Northern Gaza, including Gaza City, was the first target of the invasion and suffered widespread destruction. The military said late last year that it had dismantled most of Hamas' military infrastructure in the north and withdrew thousands of forces, but sporadic fighting has continued.

The north is the epicenter of Gaza's humanitarian catastrophe, with many residents reduced to eating animal feed and searching for food in demolished buildings because of ongoing hostilities and Israeli restrictions. At least 20 people, mostly children, have died from malnutrition and dehydration in the north, the Health Ministry said earlier this month.

Airdrops by the U.S. and other nations continue, while deliveries on a new sea route have begun, but aid groups say it's essential that Israel open up more ground routes and ease restrictions to meet the mounting humanitarian needs.

"We are in a state of famine, affecting thousands of people," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said at an international aid conference in Brussels. "Starvation is used as a weapon of war."

He went on to call for greater efficiency at the two functioning border crossings and for Israel to open additional ones.

"Israel has to do it. It is not a question of logistics. It is not because the United Nations has not provided enough support," he said. The support is there, waiting. Trucks are stopped. People are dying, while the land crossings are artificially closed."

Israeli authorities say they place no limits on the entry of aid and accuse U.N. bodies of failing to distribute it in a timely manner, saying aid piles up on the Gaza side of the crossings.

Aid groups say shipments are held up by a burdensome inspection process, and that distribution in much of Gaza is nearly impossible because of ongoing fighting, difficulties in coordinating shipments with the military and the breakdown of law and order.

## The Latest | Israeli military raids Gaza's main hospital, claiming Hamas is using it as a base

By The Associated Press undefined

Israeli forces have launched another raid on the Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, accusing Hamas militants of using it as a base.

Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, the chief military spokesman, said the army had launched a "high-precision operation" in parts of the medical complex. He said senior Hamas militants had regrouped there and were directing attacks from the compound, without providing evidence. The military said militants had opened fire from within the hospital.

Gaza's Health Ministry said the army attacked the hospital early Monday, directing gun and missile fire at a building used for specialized surgeries. It says a fire broke out at the hospital's gate.

Israel raided the medical center in November after claiming that Hamas was concealing a major command and control center within and beneath the compound. It revealed a tunnel running to an underground bunker beneath the hospital, and some weapons discovered inside, but not the elaborate facilities it had described before the raid.

The Gaza Health Ministry said at least 31,645 Palestinians have been killed in the war. The ministry doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count, but says women and children make up two-thirds of the dead.

Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people in the surprise Oct. 7 attack out of Gaza that triggered the war, and they took another 250 people hostage. Hamas is still believed to be holding some 100 captives, as well as the remains of 30 others.

Currently:

- Netanyahu snaps back against growing US criticism after being accused of losing his way on Gaza
- Israel strikes several sites in Syria, wounding a soldier, Syrian military says
- The European Union announces an \$8 billion aid package for Egypt as concerns mount over migration
- How should Israel bring to justice the perpetrators behind the worst attack in its history?
- AP reporters aboard a US military plane watch small batches of aid airdropped on a destroyed Gaza
- Find more of AP's coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>

Here's the latest:

**EU'S TOP DIPLOMAT ACCUSES ISRAEL OF USING STARVATION AS A WEAPON OF WAR**

**BRUSSELS** — The European Union's top diplomat on Monday accused Israel of using starvation as a weapon of war by preventing humanitarian aid from reaching Gaza.

"We are in a state of famine, effecting thousands of people," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said at an international aid conference in Brussels. He said that this famine "is entirely man-made."

"This is unacceptable. Starvation is used as a weapon of war. Yes, starvation is used as a weapon of war," Borrell said.

He said that Israel is preventing hundreds of aid trucks from entering Gaza, and he urged the Israeli authorities to stop hindering the aid effort.

"It's absolutely imperative to make crossing points work effectively, and open additional crossing points," Borrell said. "It's just a matter of political will. Israel has to do it. It is not a question of logistics. It is not because the United Nations has not provided enough support. The support is there, waiting. Trucks are stopped. People are dying, while the land crossings are artificially closed."

"We cannot stand by and watch Palestinians starve," he said.

**ISRAELI MILITARY RAIDS SHIFA HOSPITAL IN GAZA**

**RAFAH, Gaza Strip** — Israeli forces have launched another raid on the Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, ac-

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 24 of 60

cusing Hamas militants of using it as a base.

Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, the chief military spokesman, said the army had launched a "high-precision operation" in parts of the medical complex. He said senior Hamas militants had regrouped there and were directing attacks from the compound, without providing evidence. The military said militants had opened fire from within the hospital.

Gaza's Health Ministry says the army attacked the hospital early Monday, directing gun and missile fire at a building used for specialized surgeries. It says a fire broke out at the hospital's gate.

The ministry says around 30,000 people are sheltering at the hospital, including patients, medical staff and people who have fled their homes seeking safety.

Hagari said the patients and medical staff could remain in the compound and that a safe passage was available for civilians to leave.

Israel raided the medical center in November after claiming that Hamas was concealing a major command and control center within and beneath the compound. It revealed a tunnel running to an underground bunker beneath the hospital, and some weapons discovered inside, but not the elaborate facilities it had described before the raid.

Israel accuses Hamas of using hospitals and other civilian facilities to shield its fighters.

The army has raided other hospitals across the territory. Most of Gaza's medical facilities have been forced to shut down for lack of fuel and medical supplies, even as scores of people are killed and wounded each day in Israeli strikes.

## NETANYAHU PUSHES BACK AGAINST GROWING US CRITICISM

TEL AVIV, Israel — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu railed Sunday against growing criticism from top ally the United States against his leadership amid the devastating war with Hamas, describing calls for a new election as "wholly inappropriate."

In recent days, U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, the highest-ranking Jewish official in the country and a strong Israel supporter, called on Israel to hold a new election, saying Netanyahu had "lost his way." President Joe Biden expressed support for Schumer's "good speech," and earlier accused Netanyahu of hurting Israel because of the huge civilian death toll in Gaza.

Netanyahu told Fox News that Israel never would have called for a new U.S. election after the Sept. 11 attacks in 2001, and denounced Schumer's comments as inappropriate.

"We're not a banana republic," he said. "The people of Israel will choose when they will have elections, and who they'll elect, and it's not something that will be foisted on us."

When asked by CNN whether he would commit to a new election after the war ends, Netanyahu said: "I think that's something for the Israeli public to decide."

## ISRAEL HITS SEVERAL SITES IN SYRIA, SYRIAN MILITARY SAYS

BEIRUT — Israeli airstrikes hit several sites in southern Syria early Sunday wounding a soldier, Syrian state media reported.

State news agency SANA, citing an unnamed military official, said air defenses shot down some of the missiles, which came from the direction of the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights at around 12:42 a.m. local time. The strikes led to "material losses" and the wounding of a soldier, the statement said.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, said Israeli strikes also hit two military sites in the Qalamoun mountains northeast of Damascus, an area where the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah has operations. One of the targets was a weapons shipment, the observatory said.

The observatory said the strikes represented the 24th time Israel has struck inside Syria since the beginning of 2024. They have killed 43 fighters with various groups — including Hezbollah and Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard — and nine civilians.



## **Biden to sign executive order aimed at advancing study of women's health**

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is expected to sign an executive order Monday aimed at advancing the study of women's health in part by strengthening data collection and providing easier and better funding opportunities for biomedical research.

Women make up half the population, but their health is underfunded and understudied. It wasn't until the 1990s that the federal government mandated women be included in federally funded medical research; for most of medical history, though, scientific study was based almost entirely on men.

Today, research often fails to properly track differences between women and men, and does not represent women equally particularly for illnesses more common to them. Biden's executive order is aiming to change that, aides said.

"We still know too little about how to effectively prevent, diagnose and treat a wide array of health conditions in women," said Dr. Carolyn Mazure, the head of the White House initiative on women's health.

Biden said he's long been a believer in the "power of research" to help save lives and get high-quality health care to the people who need it. But the executive order also checks off a political box, too, during an election year when women will be crucial to his reelection efforts. First lady Jill Biden is leading both the effort to organize and mobilize female voters and the White House Initiative on Women's Health Research.

And the announcement comes as the ripple effects spread from the Supreme Court's decision that overturned federal abortion rights, touching on medical issues for women who never intended to end their pregnancies. In Alabama, for example, the future of IVF was thrown into question statewide after a judge's ruling.

Women were a critical part of the coalition that elected Biden in 2020, giving him 55% of their vote, according to AP VoteCast. Black women and suburban women were pillars of Biden's coalition while Trump had a modest advantage among white women and a much wider share of white women without college degrees, according to the AP survey of more than 110,000 voters in that year's election.

The National Institutes of Health is also launching a new effort around menopause and the treatment of menopausal symptoms that will identify research gaps and work to close them, said White House adviser Jennifer Klein.

Biden and Jill Biden, the first lady, were expected to announce the measures at a Women's History Month reception on Monday at the White House.

NIH funds a huge amount of biomedical research, imperative for the understanding of how medications affect the human body and for deciding eventually how to dose medicine.

Some conditions have different symptoms for women and men, such as heart disease. Others are more common in women, like Alzheimer's disease, and some are unique to women — such as endometriosis, uterine cancers and fibroids found in the uterus. It's all ripe for study, Mazure said.

And uneven research can have profound effects; a 2020 study by researchers at the University of Chicago and University of California, Berkeley found that women were being overmedicated and suffering side effects from common medications, because most of the dosage trials were done only on men.

The first lady announced \$100 million in funding last month for women's health.

## **North Korea resumes missile tests, raising tensions with its rivals after their military drills' end**

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea fired multiple short-range ballistic missiles toward its eastern waters Monday morning, its neighbors said, days after the end of the South Korean-U.S. military drills that the North views as an invasion rehearsal.

The launches — North Korea's first known missile testing activities in about a month — came as U.S.

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 26 of 60

Secretary of State Antony Blinken was in Seoul for a democracy summit. Outside experts earlier predicted North Korea would extend its run of missile tests and intensify its warlike rhetoric ahead of the U.S. presidential election in November to boost its leverage in future diplomacy.

Japan's Defense Ministry said North Korea fired three missiles, two together at 7:44 a.m. and the other about 37 minutes later. Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told a parliamentary session that the North Korean missiles landed in the waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan, all outside of Japan's exclusive economic zone, and that no damage or injuries have been reported.

Kishida denounced North Korea's repeated ballistic missile tests as acts "that threaten the peace and safety of Japan, the region and the international society." He said Japan strongly protested against North Korea over its testing activities, saying they violated U.N. Security Council resolutions that ban the North from engaging in any ballistic activities.

South Korea's military said it also detected "several" suspected short-range ballistic launches by North Korea on Monday morning. The Joint Chiefs of Staff called the launches "clear provocation" that threaten peace on the Korean Peninsula. It said South Korea will maintain readiness to repel any provocation by North Korea, based on its solid military alliance with the United States.

According to Japanese and South Korean assessments, the North Korean missiles fired from its capital region traveled a distance of 300-350 kilometers (about 185-220 miles) and reached a maximum altitude of 50 kilometers (about 30 miles). Observers say the missiles' flight distances indicate they are weapons targeting major facilities in South Korea, such as its military headquarters in the central region.

The U.S. State Department condemned the launches, saying they pose a threat to the North's neighbors and undermine regional security. A State Department statement said the U.S. commitment to the defense of South Korea and Japan remain "ironclad."

The U.S. stations a total of 80,000 troops in South Korea and Japan, the backbone of its military presence in the Asia-Pacific region.

During the South Korea-U.S. military drills that ended Thursday, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un guided a series of military training exercises involving tanks, artillery guns and paratroopers and called for greater war fighting capabilities. The 11-day South Korean-U.S. drills involved a computer-simulated command post training and 48 kinds of field exercises, twice the number conducted last year.

The North didn't perform any missile tests during its rivals' training, however. Its missile tests are considered much bigger provocations as North Korea has been pushing hard to mount nuclear warheads on its missiles targeting the U.S. mainland and its allies. Many experts say North Korea already has nuclear-armed missiles capable of reaching all of South Korea and Japan, but it has yet to have functioning long-range missiles that can strike the U.S. mainland.

Before Monday's launches, North Korea last carried out missile tests in mid-February by firing cruise missiles into the sea.

Animosities on the Korean Peninsula remain high in the wake of North Korea's barrage of missile tests since 2022. Many of the tests involved nuclear-capable missiles designed to attack South Korea and the mainland U.S. The U.S. and South Korean forces have responded by expanding their training exercises and trilateral drills involving Japan.

Experts say North Korea likely believes a bigger weapons arsenal would increase its leverage in future diplomacy with the United States. They say North Korea would want to win extensive sanctions relief while maintaining its nuclear weapons.

Worries about North Korean military moves have deepened since Kim vowed in a speech in January to rewrite the constitution to eliminate the country's long-standing goal of seeking peaceful unification of the Korean Peninsula and to cement South Korea as its "invariable principal enemy." He said the new charter must specify North Korea would annex and subjugate the South if another war broke out.

Observers say North Korea may launch limited provocations along its tense border with South Korea. But they say the prospects for a full-scale attack by North Korea are dim as it would know its military is outmatched by the U.S. and South Korean forces.

## Germans thought they were immune to nationalism after confronting their Nazi past. They were wrong

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — When Sabine Thonke joined a recent demonstration in Berlin against Germany's far-right party, it was the first time in years she felt hopeful that the growing power of the extremists in her country could be stopped.

Thonke, 59, had been following the rise of the Alternative for Germany, or AfD, with unease. But when she heard about a plan to deport millions of people, she felt called to action.

"I never thought such inhuman ideas would be gaining popularity in Germany again. I thought we had learned the lessons from our past," Thonke said.

Many Germans believed their country had developed an immunity to nationalism and assertions of racial superiority after confronting the horrors of its Nazi past through education and laws to outlaw persecution. They were wrong.

If an election were held today, the AfD would be the second largest party, according to polls.

But national polls camouflage an important division: the AfD has disproportionate support in the formerly communist and less prosperous eastern states of Germany.

After the fall of communism in 1989 and the unification of East and West Germany a year later, many people in the five eastern states lost not only their jobs but their collective past, leaving them disoriented and helpless in the capitalist system.

The AfD's rise has been propelled by anger over inflation and, above all, rising immigration. The EU received 1.1 million asylum requests in 2023, the highest number since 2015. Germany got by far the largest number of claims — more than 300,000 — mostly from Syria, Afghanistan and Turkey. The country has also taken in more than a million Ukrainian refugees displaced by Russia's invasion.

Voters in Germany and across Europe are increasingly empowering far-right nationalist parties who promise to restrict immigration and, in some cases, constrain democratic freedoms of religion, of expression, of the right to protest. These forces have bubbled up in France, Italy, the Netherlands and Austria.

---

This story, supported by the Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting, is part of an ongoing Associated Press series covering threats to democracy in Europe.

---

### THE LESSONS OF WORLD WAR II

After 1945, West Germans grew up with the guiding principle that there should "never again" be a dictatorship on German soil. West German leaders made visits to Israel and apologized to the countries occupied by the Nazis, while schoolchildren were taken to see concentration camps or Holocaust memorials.

But in the East, a self-declared anti-fascist society, young people were taught that they were only the descendants of the Nazis' victims.

Thonke, who works at Berlin's water utility, grew up in Bavaria, which was part of West Germany before reunification in 1990. She said she did not speak much with her grandparents — the Nazi generation — about what happened during the Third Reich, but learned about Adolf Hitler's rise to power and the Holocaust in school.

Today's far right is using similar tactics, she said, exploiting people's fears to win their trust and their votes.

"I understand that many people are worn out from all these crises — the coronavirus pandemic, the war in Ukraine, the many migrants, inflation — and that they are afraid that things are going to get worse," Thonke said. "But the solutions the AfD offers won't solve any of these problems."

Polls show the AfD as the top party in the eastern states of Saxony and Thuringia, with roughly 35% support in each. Both states have elections this fall, along with the eastern state of Brandenburg, where the AfD is also expected to make strong gains.

The AfD's appeal is particularly strong among men — about two-thirds of its voters are male — and, increasingly, younger voters. In the last state elections in Hesse and Bavaria in October, AfD made signifi-

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 28 of 60

cant gains among voters 24 and younger.

The party is far more internet-savvy than its rivals, making use of social media to get its message out to young people. At the same time, AfD officials often avoid talking to mainstream media reporters and sometimes don't accredit journalists they perceive as too critical to their party conventions.

The party has benefited from voters' deep frustration with Chancellor Olaf Scholz. His government came to power over two years ago with a progressive, modernizing agenda, but now is viewed by many as dysfunctional and incapable.

The AfD's Thuringia branch is particularly radical and was put under official surveillance by the domestic intelligence service four years ago as a "proven right-wing extremist" group.

AfD's Thuringia leader, Bjoern Hoecke, has at various times espoused revisionist views of Germany's Nazi past. In 2018, he called the Holocaust memorial in Berlin a "monument of shame" and called for Germany to make a "180-degree turn" in the way it remembers its past.

"The AfD is a nationalist party, and nationalists want to be proud of their history, and anyone who wants to be very proud of German history must of course minimize, play down, or even deny the shame of the Nazi crimes in order to be able to tell the story of national greatness," said Jens-Christian Wagner, a historian and the head of the Buchenwald Memorial, a former concentration camp in Thuringia, where the Nazis killed more than 56,000 people.

Attacks on the former concentration camp have stepped up massively in recent months: Wagner says this is because of the "revisionist, antisemitic and racist slogans" promoted by the AfD.

## A WAKE-UP CALL

Since January, a wave of protests against the far right has swept across Germany, triggered by a report that right-wing extremists met to discuss the deportation of millions of immigrants, including some with German citizenship.

AfD members were present at the meeting, along with Martin Sellner, a persuasive young Austrian with neo-Nazi links and convictions for violent extremism.

The meeting, in November, bore an eerie resemblance to the Wannsee Conference, when the Nazis agreed to the so-called "final solution" — the systematic round-ups that led to the murder of 6 million Jews.

Just like in the winter of 1942, when senior Nazi officials met covertly in a villa by a lake outside Berlin, the recent meeting also took place in secrecy at a villa not far from the German capital.

AfD party leaders have sought to distance themselves from the meeting, saying the party had no organizational or financial links to the event, that it wasn't responsible for what was discussed there and members who attended did so in a purely personal capacity.

AfD chief whip in parliament, Bernd Baumann, complained that his party faces a "devious campaign by politicians and journalists from the ruined left-green class."

"Little private debating clubs are being blown up into secret meetings that are a danger to the public," he said.

Still, week after week, millions of Germans have turned out to protest, attending events with slogans such as "Never Again is Now," "Against Hate" and "Defend Democracy."

Demonstrations in cities such as Berlin, Munich, Hamburg or Duesseldorf, have drawn hundreds of thousands of participants at a time — so many that authorities have had to end some marches early due to safety concerns with overcrowded streets.

People also turned out for protests in smaller towns and even held weekly vigils in their neighborhoods to express their frustration with growing support for far-right populism at the ballot box.

More than 2.4 million people have so far joined the anti-AfD protests which began in mid-January, according to the German interior ministry. The organizers of the demonstrations estimate more than 3.6 million people have participated.

Among them was Thonke, who went to two pro-democracy rallies in Berlin, relieved that the country was, as she put it, "waking up."

"I no longer have this feeling of powerlessness that I had during the last years while watching the rise

and success of the AfD," she said, adding that the government must do more.

"The government needs to find solutions for the migration crisis, otherwise the AfD will continue to exploit this topic for their own purposes and become even more powerful," she said.

Earlier waves of protests against the anti-Islam and anti-immigration movement PEGIDA eventually ran out of steam, although they weren't as large as the anti-AfD movement that is building.

Still, the AfD is riding high. In December, it marked another milestone, when for the first time its candidate won a mayoral election in a midsized town: Pirna, in Saxony.

Now the party is setting its sights on elections for the European Parliament in June. If Thonke and her fellow protesters want to push back the far right, they will have to persuade their compatriots not just to protest, but to turn out in large numbers at the ballot box.

## How Russia's grab of Crimea 10 years ago led to war with Ukraine and rising tensions with the West

By The Associated Press undefined

A decade ago, President Vladimir Putin seized Crimea from Ukraine, a bold land grab that set the stage for Russia to invade its neighbor in 2022.

The quick and bloodless seizure of the diamond-shaped peninsula, home to Russia's Black Sea fleet and a popular vacation site, touched off a wave of patriotism and sent Putin's popularity soaring. "Crimea is ours!" became a popular slogan in Russia.

Now that Putin has been anointed to another six-year term as president, he is determined to extend his gains in Ukraine amid Russia's battlefield successes and waning Western support for Kyiv.

Putin has been vague about his goals in Ukraine as the fighting grinds into a third year at the expense of many lives on both sides, but some of his top lieutenants still talk of capturing Kyiv and cutting Ukraine's access to the Black Sea.

The largest conflict in Europe since World War II has sent tensions between Moscow and the West soaring to levels rarely seen during even the chilliest moments of the Cold War.

When he seized Crimea in 2014, Putin said he persuaded Western leaders to back down by reminding them of Moscow's nuclear capabilities. It's a warning he has issued often, notably after the start of his full-scale invasion; in last month's state-of-the-nation address, when he declared the West risks nuclear war if it deepens its involvement in Ukraine; and again on Wednesday, when he said he would use that arsenal if Russia's sovereignty is threatened.

Analyst Tatiana Stanovaya says Putin feels more confident than ever amid "the Kremlin's growing faith in Russia's military advantage in the war with Ukraine and a sense of the weakness and fragmentation of the West."

The senior fellow at Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center noted that Putin's speech last month "created an extremely chilling impression of an unraveling spiral of escalation."

The 71-year-old Kremlin leader has cast the war in Ukraine as a life-or-death battle against the West, with Moscow ready to protect its gains at any cost. His obsession with Ukraine was clear in an interview with U.S. conservative commentator Tucker Carlson, with Putin delivering a long lecture that sought to prove his claim that the bulk of its territory historically belonged to Russia.

He made that argument 10 years ago when he said Moscow needed to protect Russian speakers in Crimea and reclaim its territory.

When Ukraine's Kremlin-friendly president was ousted in 2014 by mass protests that Moscow called a U.S.-instigated coup, Putin responded by sending troops to overrun Crimea and calling a plebiscite on joining Russia, which the West dismissed as illegal.

Russia then annexed Crimea on March 18, 2014, although the move was only recognized internationally by countries such as North Korea and Sudan.

Weeks later, Moscow-backed separatists launched an uprising in eastern Ukraine, battling Kyiv's forces. The Kremlin denied supporting the rebellion with troops and weapons despite abundant evidence to the

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 30 of 60

contrary, including a Dutch court's finding that a Russia-supplied air defense system downed a Malaysia Airlines passenger jet over eastern Ukraine in July 2014, killing all 298 people aboard.

Russian hard-liners later criticized Putin for failing to capture all of Ukraine that year, arguing it was easily possible at a time when the government in Kyiv was in disarray and its military in shambles.

Putin instead backed the separatists and opted for a peace deal for eastern Ukraine that he hoped would allow Moscow to establish control over its neighbor. The 2015 Minsk agreement brokered by France and Germany, following painful defeats suffered by Ukrainian forces, obliged Kyiv to offer the separatist regions broad autonomy, including permission to form their own police force.

Had it been fully implemented, the agreement would have allowed Moscow to use the separatist areas to dictate Kyiv's policies and prevent it from ever joining NATO. Many Ukrainians saw the deal as a betrayal of its national interests.

Russia viewed the election of political novice Volodymyr Zelenskyy as president in 2019 as a chance to revive the anemic Minsk deal. But Zelenskyy stood his ground, leaving the agreement stalled and Putin increasingly exasperated.

When Putin announced his "special military operation" in Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022, he hoped the country would fall as quickly and easily as Crimea. But the attempt to capture Kyiv collapsed amid stiff Ukrainian resistance, forcing Russian troops to withdraw from the outskirts of the capital.

More defeats followed in fall 2022, when Russian troops retreated from large parts of eastern and southern Ukraine under a swift counteroffensive by Kyiv.

Fortunes changed last year when another Ukrainian counteroffensive failed to cut Russia's land corridor to Crimea. Kyiv's forces suffered heavy casualties when they made botched attempts to break through multilayered Russian defenses.

As Western support for Ukraine dwindled amid political infighting in the U.S. and Kyiv ran short of weapons and ammunition, Russian troops have intensified pressure along the over 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line, relying on hundreds of thousands of volunteer soldiers and the newly supplied weapons that replaced early losses.

After capturing the key eastern stronghold of Avdiivka last month, Russia has pushed deeper into the Donetsk region as Zelenskyy pleads with the West for more weapons.

Testifying before the U.S. Senate last week, CIA Director William Burns emphasized the urgency of U.S. military aid, saying: "It's our assessment that with supplemental assistance, Ukraine can hold its own on the front lines through 2024 and into early 2025."

Without it, he said, "Ukraine is likely to lose ground — and probably significant ground — in 2024," adding, "you're going to see more Avdiivkas."

The dithering Western support has put Ukraine in an increasingly precarious position, analysts say.

"Russia is gaining momentum in its assault on Ukraine amid stalled Western aid, making the coming months critical to the direction of conflict," said Ben Barry, a senior fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, in an analysis. "In a worst-case scenario, parts of Kyiv's front line could be at risk of collapse."

Putin demurred when asked how deep into Ukraine he would like to forge, but he repeatedly stated that the line of contact should be pushed long enough to protect Russian territory from long-range weapons in Ukraine's arsenal. Some members of his entourage are less reticent, laying out plans for new land grabs.

Dmitry Medvedev, deputy head of Russia's Security Council who has sought to curry Putin's favor with regular hawkish statements, mentioned Kyiv and the Black Sea port of Odesa.

"Ukraine is Russia," he bluntly declared recently, ruling out any talks with Zelenskyy's government and suggesting a "peace formula" that would see Kyiv's surrender and Moscow's annexation of the entire country.

Russian defense analysts are divided over Moscow's ability to pursue such ambitious goals.

Sergei Poletaev, a Moscow-based military expert, said the Russian army has opted for a strategy of draining Ukraine resources with attacks along the front line in the hope of achieving a point when Kyiv's defenses would collapse.

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 31 of 60

"What matters is the damage inflicted to the enemy, making the enemy weaken faster," he said. Others say Russia's attacks seeking to exhaust Ukraine's military are costly for Moscow, too. Russian and Ukrainian forces are locked in a stalemate that gives Moscow little chance of a breakthrough, said Ruslan Pukhov, head of the Center for the Analysis of Strategies and Technologies think tank. "The Ukrainian defense is quite strong, and it doesn't allow Russian troops to achieve anything more substantial than tactical gains," he said. Such a positional war of attrition "could be waged for years," Pukhov added, with both parties waiting for the other to "face internal changes resulting in a policy shift."

## The spring equinox is here. What does that mean?

By The Associated Press undefined

Spring is almost here — officially, at least.

The vernal equinox arrives on Tuesday, marking the start of the spring season for the Northern Hemisphere.

But what does that actually mean? Here's what to know about how we split up the year using the Earth's orbit.

What is the equinox?

As the Earth travels around the sun, it does so at an angle.

For most of the year, the Earth's axis is tilted either toward or away from the sun. That means the sun's warmth and light fall unequally on the northern and southern halves of the planet.

During the equinox, the Earth's axis and its orbit line up so that both hemispheres get an equal amount of sunlight.

The word equinox comes from two Latin words meaning equal and night. That's because on the equinox, day and night last almost the same amount of time — though one may get a few extra minutes, depending on where you are on the planet.

The Northern Hemisphere's spring — or vernal — equinox can land between March 19 and 21, depending on the year. Its fall — or autumnal — equinox can land between Sept. 21 and 24.

What is the solstice?

The solstices mark the times during the year when the Earth is at its most extreme tilt toward or away from the sun. This means the hemispheres are getting very different amounts of sunlight — and days and nights are at their most unequal.

During the Northern Hemisphere's summer solstice, the upper half of the earth is tilted in toward the sun, creating the longest day and shortest night of the year. This solstice falls between June 20 and 22.

Meanwhile, at the winter solstice, the Northern Hemisphere is leaning away from the sun — leading to the shortest day and longest night of the year. The winter solstice falls between December 20 and 23.

What's the difference between meteorological and astronomical seasons?

These are just two different ways to carve up the year.

Meteorological seasons are defined by the weather. They break down the year into three-month seasons based on annual temperature cycles. By that calendar, spring starts on March 1, summer on June 1, fall on Sept. 1 and winter on Dec. 1.

Astronomical seasons depend on how the Earth moves around the sun.

Equinoxes mark the start of spring and autumn. Solstices kick off summer and winter.

## Who is Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and why is he running for president?

By JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

The lack of excitement many Americans feel about a presidential rematch has heightened interest in alternatives to the major-party candidates, none more so than Robert F. Kennedy Jr., whose famous name has helped him build buzz for his independent bid.

Kennedy is a huge longshot to win Electoral College votes, much less the presidency. But his campaign

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 32 of 60

events have drawn large crowds of supporters and people interested in his message. He plans to announce his vice presidential nominee later this month in Oakland, California, and is stoking expectations that he might pick New York Jets quarterback Aaron Rodgers or former Minnesota Gov. Jesse Ventura.

Here is a look at his campaign and what he's stood for:

Who is RFK Jr?

Kennedy, 70, is a member of perhaps the nation's most famous political dynasty. His uncle was President John F. Kennedy. His father served as attorney general and a U.S. senator before seeking the Democratic nomination for president. Both were assassinated.

RFK Jr. built a reputation of his own as an activist, author and lawyer who fought for environmental causes such as clean water.

More recently, his activism has veered into conspiracies and contradicted scientific consensus, most infamously on vaccines. Some members of his family have publicly criticized his views.

Kennedy founded Waterkeeper Alliance, which works to secure clean water, and Children's Health Defense, an anti-vaccine group that saw its reach grow rapidly during the pandemic.

Children's Health Defense has a lawsuit pending against a number of news organizations, among them The Associated Press, accusing them of violating antitrust laws by taking action to identify misinformation, including about COVID-19 and COVID-19 vaccines. Kennedy took leave from the group when he announced his run for president but is listed as one of its attorneys in the lawsuit.

He's married to actress Cheryl Hines.

What does Kennedy's campaign look like?

Kennedy's need to collect thousands of signatures to get on the ballot has taken him to places that rarely see presidential candidates, including Hawaii, Wyoming and West Virginia.

At events in Phoenix and Las Vegas, hundreds of supporters queued up outside hours before he was scheduled to arrive. He attracts a legion of fans, many of whom have listened extensively to Kennedy's interviews on podcasts or YouTube videos.

In Nevada, massive graphics and photos were projected on three walls as upbeat music played. Drinks and merchandise were for sale.

Kennedy speaks in a quiet, strained voice, sometimes haltingly, the result of a neurological condition called spasmodic dysphonia.

What does he talk about?

Kennedy frames himself as a truth teller with a track record of fighting for the middle class against powerful interests. He points to lawsuits he's won against corporate behemoths such as Monsanto and DuPont.

"I can fix this country," he said in Las Vegas in February. "All these agencies that intimidate normal politicians, I've sued every one of them. ... When you sue these agencies, you get a Ph.D. in corporate capture and how to unravel it." Corporate capture refers to private interests using their influence to control government decision-making, as when they help draft legislation.

Kennedy has been critical of U.S. support for Ukraine and supportive of Israel's war against Hamas. He wants to reduce military and health care spending because of the impact on budget deficits, and combat rising housing costs so young people can afford to buy homes.

Kennedy has found a loyal following among people distrustful of institutions and those who believe the government has been captured by corporations, especially pharmaceutical companies.

He hasn't shied away from his controversial views on health care and vaccines. He wants to dismantle the public health bureaucracy, saying he'd immediately tell the National Institutes of Health to refocus research away from infectious diseases and vaccines and toward chronic diseases.

Kennedy insists he is not anti-vaccine and claims he has never told the public to avoid vaccination. But he has repeatedly made his opposition to vaccines clear. He said on a podcast "there's no vaccine that is safe and effective" and has urged people to resist CDC guidelines on when kids should get vaccinated.

While there are rare instances when people have severe reactions to vaccines, the billions of doses administered globally provide real-world evidence that they are safe. The World Health Organization says



# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 33 of 60

vaccines prevent as many as 5 million deaths each year.

Can he win?

The United States has a long history of rejecting independent or third-party presidential candidates. In fact, the last president to win without a party's backing was George Washington, and he did it before there were political parties.

The last third-party candidate to make it to the White House was Abraham Lincoln with the newly formed Republican Party.

The last third-party candidate to pull more than single digits in the popular vote was Ross Perot, a businessman who won 19% in 1992 and 8% in 1996. But he won zero electoral votes.

And while the independent share of the electorate is growing, it is still dwarfed by voters who consistently support Republican or Democratic candidates, even if they identify as independent.

In other words, the odds are long.

Kennedy's case for optimism hinges on his relatively strong showing in a few national polls. Polls during the 2016 presidential campaign regularly put libertarian Gary Johnson's support in the high single or low double digits, but he ultimately received only about 3% of the vote nationwide.

Horse-race polls are also notoriously unreliable this far out from an election, and many Americans don't know who Kennedy is. A February AP-NORC poll found, for instance, that 29% of Americans don't know enough about Kennedy to have a view about him.

Some of the people who say they'd support him may also be reacting to his famous last name rather than his actual pitch as a candidate. A CNN/SSRS poll conducted last spring found that 20% of people who said they would consider supporting Kennedy for the Democratic nomination — for which he was running at the time — said that their support was related to his last name and Kennedy family connections. Only 12% said it was because of support for his views and policies.

But for any of that to matter, he has to get on the ballot.

How does he get on the ballot?

Forget getting elected; merely running for president is an arduous process, especially for candidates like Kennedy who don't belong to a party.

Every state has different rules, requiring an army of lawyers to make sure everything is done right. Most states require thousands of signatures.

A pro-Kennedy super PAC is helping pay for Kennedy's ballot access work in several states. His allies have created a political party to ease the process in some states by getting recognized as a party and making Kennedy its nominee.

He has been approved for the ballot in Utah. His campaign and super PAC say he's collected enough signatures to qualify in several other states, including the battlegrounds of Arizona, Georgia and Nevada, though election officials in those states have not yet affirmed his candidacy.

Kennedy has also said he's talked with officials from the Libertarian Party, though it's not clear what a tie-up between the two might look like.

Who is working for him?

Kennedy is looking to his family and his allies in the anti-vaccine world to staff his campaign, building a leadership team that is light on experience working in politics.

His campaign manager is Amaryllis Fox Kennedy, his daughter-in-law who served as a CIA officer and has not worked in politics before.

His communications director, Del Bigtree, is founder of the Informed Consent Action Network, an anti-vaccine group. He also produced "Vaxxed," an anti-vaccine film that promoted the discredited idea that the vaccines cause autism.

Press secretary Stefanie Spear was an editor for the Children's Health Defense news website. Charles Eisenstein, a New Age author, is an adviser.

Kennedy also has staff and volunteers spread throughout states and focused on gathering signatures to get him on the ballot.

## In Vermont, 'Town Meeting' is democracy embodied. What can the rest of the country learn from it?

By NICK PERRY and LISA RATHKE Associated Press

ELMORE, Vt. (AP) — Julie wants more donations to the food pantry. Kipp is busy knitting a sweater. Shorty is ready to ask: Why is so much being spent on a truck? The coffee, fresh-baked bread and donuts have been laid out. Eighty-seven voters have squeezed into the Elmore Town Hall.

Town Meeting is about to begin. Moderator Jon Gailmor stands up.

"Good morning, everyone, and welcome to democracy," he says. "This is the real thing, and we should all be proud that we're doing this."

Across the United States, people are disgusted with politics. Many feel powerless and alienated from their representatives at every level — and especially from those in Washington. The tone long ago became nasty, and many feel forced to pick a side and view those on the other side as adversaries.

But in pockets of New England, democracy is done a bit differently. People can still participate directly and in person. One day each year, townsfolk gather to hash out local issues. They talk, listen, debate, vote. And in places like Elmore, once it's all over, they sit down together for a potluck lunch.

Town Meeting is a tradition that, in Vermont, dates back more than 250 years, to before the founding of the republic. But it is under threat. Many people feel they no longer have the time or ability to attend such meetings. Last year, residents of neighboring Morristown voted to switch to a secret ballot system, ending their town meeting tradition.

Not so in Elmore, population 886. Its residents are used to holding tight to traditions. They've fought to keep open their post office, their store and their school, the last one-room schoolhouse in the state. Last fall, Elmore residents voted 2-1 in favor of keeping their town meetings.

Elmore calls itself the beauty spot of Vermont. The town borders a lake, which in early March is dotted with people ice fishing. Beyond, a mountain rises. At night, steam floats up from sugarhouses, where maple sap is being boiled down into syrup.

The heartbeat of the town is the store. "I've always said it's a live, living, breathing creature. I don't own it; she owns me," says Kathy Miller, 63, a longtime former owner who still helps out at the store. People would come in not only to buy milk and pick up the mail, Miller recalls, but to use the fax machine, find a plumber or just to swap gossip.

After joining the state grocers' association in the 1980s, Miller testified before Congress about the impact of credit card fees. Back then, she believed that little people could have a voice in national politics. But these days, she says, Washington has gotten away from the basics. Too big, she says. Too messed up. Tilted off its axis.

Miller describes herself as a Republican who hasn't drunk the Kool-Aid. But at Town Meeting, she says, political differences don't mean a thing.

"There's no animosity," she says. "People can talk about things. You shake hands with your neighbor when you leave."

At Town Meeting, she's successful in pushing for an increase to the town's library funding from \$1,000 per year to \$3,000.

Gailmor, 75, is a singer-songwriter who describes himself as an independent voter. He first moved to Elmore in 1980 and says he found the town meeting tradition nothing short of miraculous. It wasn't some politician spouting off but real people taking part. He was so inspired that he even wrote a song about it.

"Greet the old town folks, hear the gossip and the jokes, dip a donut in a good strong cup of Joe," Gailmor sings. "Find your favorite chair, plant your buttocks there — we're getting down to business, don't you know."

At town meetings, people sometimes go beyond voting on local issues and decide to take a stand on national issues of the day. At home, Gailmor holds a photograph of his late wife, Cathy Murphy, when she was speaking out against nuclear weapons at an Elmore Town Meeting in the 1980s.

This year, Elmore decides to take a stance on another broader issue by adopting a declaration of inclusion.

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 35 of 60

It states the town will welcome all people regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity.

Frank Bryan, a retired University of Vermont professor who wrote a book about town meetings, coined the term "forced civility" to describe the way people dealing with disagreements in person are compelled to recognize each other's common humanity in a way that larger-scale political interactions do not allow.

But just having voters show up for hours on a weekday morning is challenging. Morristown is one of many Vermont towns to end the tradition of town meetings. Richard Watts, the director of the Center for Research on Vermont at UVM, says people in larger towns tend to feel less sense of connection.

There's a key downside when a town moves to secret ballot, also known as an Australian ballot because states there were the first to adopt such a system in the mid-19th century: It's usually a straight up-or-down vote. That means people can't make tweaks or debate issues. And for some, the open, collegial debate is the genius of the entire system.

Elmore's Town Meeting has been going for nearly four hours. What has unfolded represents a cross-section of democracy, of people choosing for themselves how to live and work and govern.

An impassioned speech by Julie Bomengen secures an extra \$500 for the Lamoille Community Food Share, raising Elmore's annual contribution to \$750.

Several people have been criticizing the town's spending habits. Others argue that replacing equipment like the road maintenance truck will only end up costing more if the can is kicked down the road. "We have just spent two-and-a-half million on this new garage, and then we go out and put \$300,000 into a new truck. I think that's a little overkill," Shorty Towne tells the crowd.

After exhaustive discussions, Elmore's annual town budget of \$1.1 million is passed in a voice vote. There is no dissent.

Gailmor commends townsfolk for holding a lively and well-attended meeting. Kipp Bovey, who has been active in the meeting, has made good progress on knitting her sweater. Towne has had his say about the truck. Democracy has unfolded on a small canvas. And the much-discussed American political polarization? It's nowhere in sight.

It's time to adjourn.

"Lunch is cold," Gailmor says. "But it will be in the church."

## Idaho considers a ban on using public funds or facilities for gender-affirming care

By REBECCA BOONE Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Idaho lawmakers are expected to vote this week on a bill that would ban the use of any public funds for gender-affirming care, including for state employees using work health insurance and for adults covered by Medicaid.

The legislation already passed the House and only needs to clear the majority Republican Senate before it is sent to Gov. Brad Little's desk, where it would likely be signed into law. The Republican governor has said repeatedly he does not believe public funds should be used for gender-affirming care.

If the legislation is enacted, Idaho would become at least the 10th state to ban Medicaid funding for gender-affirming care for people of all ages, according to the advocacy and information organization Movement Advancement Project. The laws are part of an ongoing national battle over the rights of LGBTQ+ Americans.

Opponents to the Idaho bill say it almost certainly will lead to a lawsuit in federal court. The state has already been sued multiple times over attempts to deny gender-affirming care to transgender residents and so far has not had much success defending the lawsuits.

In one case, the state was ordered to provide a transgender inmate with gender-transition surgery, and the inmate was later awarded roughly \$2.5 million in legal fees.

Last year a federal judge barred Idaho from enforcing its newly enacted ban on gender-affirming medical care for minors until a lawsuit brought by transgender youth and their families is resolved. A different federal judge denied the state's motion to dismiss a separate lawsuit filed by adults in 2022 who said

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 36 of 60

Medicaid officials wrongly denied coverage for their medically necessary gender-affirming treatment.

"This bill violates the 14th Amendment equal protections clause" and the federal Medicaid Act, Boise attorney Howard Belodoff told lawmakers during a hearing on Thursday.

Belodoff represents the transgender adults who sued the state over what they said were discriminatory Medicaid policies excluding coverage for genital reconstruction surgery.

"You cannot distinguish between providing care on the basis of diagnosis, type of illness or condition," Belodoff said. "That's exactly what this bill does: it violates the Medicaid Act."

One of the bill's sponsors, Republican Rep. Bruce Skaug, said those lawsuits prompted creation of the bill.

"This is a taxpayer protection bill in my view," Skaug said, suggesting that without it the state could end up paying millions for gender-affirming care. Roughly 70% of Idaho's Medicaid program is federally funded.

Some who testified against the bill suggested it could have a far larger reach than intended by eliminating gender-affirming care for even privately insured residents living in rural areas with only state-funded medical centers.

Isaac Craghtten, an Idaho Department of Correction employee, noted that many correctional employees work 12- to 16-hour shifts, which can require taking some prescribed medications like hormone therapy while on the job.

But the legislation bars the use of any state property, facility or building for providing surgical operations or medical interventions, which could mean employees would be subject to criminal penalties for taking their own legally prescribed medication while in a break room, Craghtten said.

The punishment for violating the law would include fines ranging from \$300 to \$10,000 and imprisonment between one and 14 years.

At least 23 states including Idaho have passed laws banning gender-affirming care for minors. Some states also have considered policies that experts say would make it more difficult for transgender adults to receive care, such as eliminating telehealth options or requiring repeated psychological examinations for continued gender-affirming treatment.

Major medical groups, including the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics, oppose gender-affirming care bans and have endorsed such care, saying it is safe when administered properly.

While courts have blocked the enforcement of gender-affirming care bans for minors in Idaho, Montana and Arkansas, they have allowed enforcement in Alabama and Georgia.

## Supreme Court weighs how far federal officials can go to combat controversial posts on hot topics

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a busy term that could set standards for free speech in the digital age, the Supreme Court is taking up a dispute Monday between Republican-led states and the Biden administration over how far the federal government can go to combat controversial social media posts on topics like COVID-19 and election security.

The justices are hearing arguments in a lawsuit filed by Louisiana, Missouri and other parties accusing administration officials of leaning on the social media platforms to unconstitutionally squelch conservative points of view. Lower courts have sided with the states, but the Supreme Court blocked those rulings while it considers the issue.

The high court is in the midst of a term heavy with social media issues. On Friday, the court laid out standards for when public officials can block their social media followers. Less than a month ago, the court heard arguments over Republican-passed laws in Florida and Texas that prohibit large social media companies from taking down posts because of the views they express.

The cases over state laws and the one being argued Monday are variations on the same theme, complaints that the platforms are censoring conservative viewpoints.

The states argue that White House communications staffers, the surgeon general, the FBI and the U.S.

cybersecurity agency are among those who coerced changes in online content on Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) and other media platforms.

"It's a very, very threatening thing when the federal government uses the power and authority of the government to block people from exercising their freedom of speech," Louisiana Attorney General Liz Murrill said in a video her office posted online.

The administration responds that none of the actions the states complain about come close to problematic coercion. The states "still have not identified any instance in which any government official sought to coerce a platform's editorial decisions with a threat of adverse government action," wrote Solicitor General Elizabeth Prelogar, the administration's top Supreme Court lawyer. Prelogar wrote that states also can't "point to any evidence that the government ever imposed any sanction when the platforms declined to moderate content the government had flagged — as routinely occurred."

The companies themselves are not involved in the case.

Free speech advocates say the court should use the case to draw an appropriate line between the government's acceptable use of the bully pulpit and coercive threats to free speech.

"The government has no authority to threaten platforms into censoring protected speech, but it must have the ability to participate in public discourse so that it can effectively govern and inform the public of its views," Alex Abdo, litigation director of the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University, said in a statement.

A panel of three judges on the New Orleans-based 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals had ruled earlier that the administration had probably brought unconstitutional pressure on the media platforms. The appellate panel said officials cannot attempt to "coerce or significantly encourage" changes in online content. The panel had previously narrowed a more sweeping order from a federal judge, who wanted to include even more government officials and prohibit mere encouragement of content changes.

A divided Supreme Court put the 5th circuit ruling on hold in October, when it agreed to take up the case.

Justices Samuel Alito, Neil Gorsuch and Clarence Thomas would have rejected the emergency appeal from the Biden administration.

Alito wrote in dissent in October: "At this time in the history of our country, what the Court has done, I fear, will be seen by some as giving the Government a green light to use heavy-handed tactics to skew the presentation of views on the medium that increasingly dominates the dissemination of news. That is most unfortunate."

A decision in *Murthy v. Missouri*, 23-411, is expected by early summer.

## **Netanyahu snaps back against growing US criticism after being accused of losing his way on Gaza**

By TIA GOLDENBERG and RAVI NESSMAN Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu railed Sunday against growing criticism from top ally the United States against his leadership amid the devastating war with Hamas, describing calls for a new election as "wholly inappropriate."

In recent days, U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, the highest-ranking Jewish official in the country and a strong Israel supporter, called on Israel to hold a new election, saying Netanyahu had "lost his way." President Joe Biden expressed support for Schumer's "good speech," and earlier accused Netanyahu of hurting Israel because of the huge civilian death toll in Gaza.

Netanyahu told Fox News that Israel never would have called for a new U.S. election after the Sept. 11 attacks in 2001, and denounced Schumer's comments as inappropriate.

"We're not a banana republic," he said. "The people of Israel will choose when they will have elections, and who they'll elect, and it's not something that will be foisted on us."

When asked by CNN whether he would commit to a new election after the war ends, Netanyahu said: "I think that's something for the Israeli public to decide."

The U.S., which has provided key military and diplomatic support to Israel, also has expressed concerns

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 38 of 60

about a planned Israeli assault on the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where about 1.4 million displaced Palestinians are sheltering. The spokesman for the National Security Council, John Kirby, told Fox the U.S. still hasn't seen an Israeli plan for Rafah.

The U.S. supports a new round of talks aimed at securing a cease-fire in exchange for the return of Israeli hostages taken in Hamas' Oct. 7 attack.

The Israeli delegation to those talks was expected to leave for Qatar after Sunday evening meetings of the Security Cabinet and War Cabinet, which will give directions for negotiations.

Despite the talks, Netanyahu made it clear he would not back down from the fighting that has killed more than 31,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza health officials. More than five months have passed since Hamas attacked southern Israel, killed 1,200 people and took another 250 hostage.

Earlier Sunday, Netanyahu said calls for an election now — which polls show he would lose badly — would force Israel to stop fighting and paralyze the country for six months.

Netanyahu also reiterated his determination to attack Hamas in Rafah and said that his government approved military plans for such an operation.

"We will operate in Rafah. This will take several weeks, and it will happen," he said. The operation is supposed to include the evacuation of hundreds of thousands of civilians, but it is not clear how Israel will do that.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi reiterated his warning that an Israeli ground offensive in Rafah would have "grave repercussions on the whole region." Egypt says pushing Palestinians into the Sinai Peninsula would jeopardize its peace treaty with Israel, a cornerstone of regional stability.

"We are also very concerned about the risks a full-scale offensive in Rafah would have on the vulnerable civilian population. This needs to be avoided at all costs," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said after meeting with el-Sissi.

And German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, after meeting with Netanyahu on Sunday, warned that "the more desperate the situation of people in Gaza becomes, the more this begs the question: No matter how important the goal, can it justify such terribly high costs, or are there other ways to achieve your goal?"

Germany is one of Israel's closest allies in Europe and, given memories of the Holocaust, often treads carefully when criticizing Israel.

Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar, in Washington for St. Patrick's Day, said during a White House reception that the Irish people were "deeply troubled" by what's unfolding in Gaza. He said there was much to learn from Ireland's peace process and the critical U.S. involvement in it.

Varadkar said he's often asked why the Irish are so empathetic to the Palestinians.

"We see our history in their eyes. A story of displacement, dispossession, and national identity questioned and denied forced emigration, discrimination and now hunger," he said.

Alon Pinkas, a former Israeli consul-general in New York and an outspoken critic of Netanyahu, said that the prime minister's comments fit with his efforts to find someone else to blame if Israel doesn't achieve its goal of destroying Hamas.

"He's looking on purpose for a conflict with the U.S. so that he can blame Biden," Pinkas said.

Both sides have something to gain politically from the dispute. The Biden administration is under increasing pressure from progressive Democrats and some Arab-American supporters to restrain Israel's war against Hamas. Netanyahu, meanwhile, wants to show his nationalist base that he can withstand global pressure, even from Israel's closest ally.

But pressure also comes from home, with thousands protesting again in Tel Aviv on Saturday night against Netanyahu's government and calling for a new election and a deal for the release of hostages. Large parts of the Israeli public want a deal, fearing that hostages are held in poor conditions and time is running out to bring them home alive.

Israel's offensive has driven most of Gaza's 2.3 million people from their homes. A quarter of Gaza's population is starving, according to the U.N.

Airdrops by the U.S. and other nations continue, while deliveries on a new sea route have begun, but aid groups say more ground routes and fewer Israeli restrictions on them are needed to meet humanitarian

needs in any significant way.

"Of course we should be bringing humanitarian aid by road. Of course by now we should be having at least two, three other entry points into Gaza," chef José Andrés with World Central Kitchen, which organized the tons of food delivered by sea, told NBC.

The Gaza Health Ministry said at least 31,645 Palestinians have been killed in the war. The ministry doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count, but says women and children make up two-thirds of the dead.

Israel says Hamas is responsible for civilian deaths because it operates in dense residential areas.

The Health Ministry on Sunday said that the bodies of 92 people killed in Israel's bombardment had been brought to hospitals in Gaza in the past 24 hours. Hospitals also received 130 wounded, it said.

At least 11 people from the Thabet family, including five children and one woman, were killed in an airstrike in Deir al-Balah city in central Gaza, according to the Palestinian Red Crescent Society and an Associated Press journalist. The body of an infant lay among the dead.

## **Putin basks in electoral victory that was never in doubt even as Russians quietly protest**

By EMMA BURROWS, DASHA LITVINOVA and JIM HEINTZ Associated Press

Russian President Vladimir Putin basked in a victory early Monday that was never in doubt, as partial election results showed him easily securing a fifth term after facing only token challengers and harshly suppressing opposition voices.

With little margin for protest, Russians crowded outside polling stations at noon Sunday, on the last day of the election, apparently heeding an opposition call to express their displeasure with Putin. Still, the impending landslide underlined that Russian leader would accept nothing less than full control of the country's political system as he extends his nearly quarter-century rule for six more years.

Putin hailed the early results as an indication of "trust" and "hope" in him — while critics saw them as another reflection of the preordained nature of the election.

"Of course, we have lots of tasks ahead. But I want to make it clear for everyone: When we were consolidated, no one has ever managed to frighten us, to suppress our will and our self-conscience. They failed in the past and they will fail in the future," Putin said at a meeting with volunteers after polls closed.

British Foreign Secretary David Cameron wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter: "The polls have closed in Russia, following the illegal holding of elections on Ukrainian territory, a lack of choice for voters and no independent OSCE monitoring. This is not what free and fair elections look like."

Any public criticism of Putin or his war in Ukraine has been stifled. Independent media have been crippled. His fiercest political foe, Alexei Navalny, died in an Arctic prison last month, and other critics are either in jail or in exile.

Beyond the fact that voters had virtually no choice, independent monitoring of the election was extremely limited. According to Russia's Central Election Commission, Putin had some 87% of the vote with about 90% of precincts counted.

In that tightly controlled environment, Navalny's associates urged those unhappy with Putin or the war in Ukraine to go to the polls at noon on Sunday — and lines outside a number of polling stations both inside Russia and at its embassies around the world appeared to swell at that time.

Among those heeding call was Yulia Navalnaya, Navalny's widow, who joined a long line in Berlin as some in the crowd applauded and chanted her name.

She spent more than five hours in the line and told reporters after casting her vote that she wrote her late husband's name on the ballot.

Asked whether she had a message for Putin, Navalnaya replied: "Please stop asking for messages from me or from somebody for Mr. Putin. There could be no negotiations and nothing with Mr. Putin, because he's a killer, he's a gangster."

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 40 of 60

But Putin brushed off the effectiveness of the apparent protest.

"There were calls to come vote at noon. And this was supposed to be a manifestation of opposition. Well, if there were calls to come vote, then ... I praise this," he said at a news conference after polls closed.

Unusually, Putin referenced Navalny by name for the first time in years at the news conference. And he said he was informed of an idea to release the opposition leader from prison, days before his death. Putin said that he agreed to the idea, on condition that Navalny didn't return to Russia.

Some Russians waiting to vote in Moscow and St. Petersburg told The Associated Press that they were taking part in the protest, but it wasn't possible to confirm whether all of those in line were doing so.

One woman in Moscow, who said her name was Yulia, told the AP that she was voting for the first time.

"Even if my vote doesn't change anything, my conscience will be clear ... for the future that I want to see for our country," she said. Like others, she didn't give her full name because of security concerns.

Another Moscow voter, who also identified himself only by his first name, Vadim, said he hoped for change, but added that "unfortunately, it's unlikely."

Meanwhile, supporters of Navalny streamed to his grave in Moscow, some bringing ballots with his name written on them.

Meduza, Russia's biggest independent news outlet, published photos of ballots it received from their readers, with "killer" inscribed on one, "thief" on another and "The Hague awaits you" on yet another. The last refers to an arrest warrant for Putin from the International Criminal Court that accuses him of personal responsibility for abductions of children from Ukraine.

Some people told the AP that they were happy to vote for Putin — unsurprising in a country where independent media have been hobbled, state TV airs a drumbeat of praise for the Russian leader and voicing any other opinion is risky.

Dmitry Sergienko, who cast his ballot in Moscow, said, "I am happy with everything and want everything to continue as it is now."

Voting took place over three days at polling stations across the vast country, in illegally annexed regions of Ukraine and online. As people voted Sunday, Russian authorities said Ukraine launched a massive new wave of attacks on Russia, killing two people — underscoring the challenges facing the Kremlin.

Despite tight controls, several dozen cases of vandalism at polling stations were reported across the voting period.

Several people were arrested, including in Moscow and St. Petersburg, after they tried to start fires or set off explosives at polling stations while others were detained for throwing green antiseptic or ink into ballot boxes.

Stanislav Andreychuk, co-chair of the Golos independent election watchdog, said that pressure on voters from law enforcement had reached unprecedented levels.

Russians, he said in a social media post, were searched when entering polling stations, there were attempts to check filled-out ballots before they were cast, and one report said police demanded a ballot box be opened to remove a ballot.

"It's the first time in my life that I've seen such absurdities," Andreychuk wrote on the messaging app Telegram, adding that he started monitoring elections in Russia 20 years ago.

The OVD-Info group that monitors political arrests said that 80 people were arrested in 20 cities across Russia on Sunday.

That left little room for people to express their displeasure, but Ivan Zhdanov, the head of Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation, said that the opposition's call to protest had been successful.

Beyond Russia, huge lines also formed around noon outside diplomatic missions in London, Berlin, Paris, Milan, Belgrade and other cities with large Russian communities, many of whom left home after Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

Protesters in Berlin displayed a figure of Putin bathing in a bath of blood with the Ukrainian flag on the side, alongside shredded ballots in ballot boxes.

Russian state television and officials said the lines abroad showed strong turnout.



In Tallinn, where hundreds stood in a line snaking around the Estonian capital's cobbled streets leading to the Russian Embassy, 23-year-old Tatiana said she came to take part in the protest.

"If we have some option to protest I think it's important to utilize any opportunity," she said, only giving her first name.

Boris Nadezhdin, a liberal politician who tried to join the race on an anti-war platform but was barred from running by election officials, voiced hope that many Russians cast their ballots against Putin.

"I believe that the Russian people today have a chance to show their real attitude to what is happening by voting not for Putin, but for some other candidates or in some other way, which is exactly what I did," he said after voting in Dolgoprudny, a town just outside Moscow.

## Usher, Fantasia Barrino, 'Color Purple' honored at 55th NAACP Image Awards

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Usher was named entertainer of the year at the 55th annual NAACP Awards on Saturday night, which highlighted works by entertainers and writers of color.

After Usher accepted his award at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles, the superstar R&B singer spoke about being thankful about the journey of his successful career that has lasted three decades.

He reeled off several of his recent big moments including his sold-out residency in Las Vegas, getting married, releasing his ninth studio album "Coming Home" and his Super Bowl halftime performance, which became the most-watched in the game's history.

Usher beat out Colman Domingo, Fantasia Barrino, Halle Bailey and Keke Palmer.

"I don't know how many people do that much stuff in one setting," said the multi-Grammy winner, who was presented the award by Oprah Winfrey. After being surprised by Winfrey's presence, he thanked those who have supported him throughout the years.

"This is for you, you, my number ones," the singer said as the audience repeated his words back to him. The final words of his speech were recited lyrics from his popular song "Superstar" from his 2024 album "Confessions," which has sold more than 10 million units in the U.S.

Earlier in the ceremony, Usher was honored with the President's Award for the singer's public service achievements through his New Look Foundation. He thanked the strong women in his life, including his mother and wife Jenn Goicoechea, whom he married after his Super Bowl halftime performance last month.

"The say behind or beside or with every strong man is a stronger woman," he said.

Queen Latifah hosted the awards ceremony aired live on BET.

"The Color Purple" was awarded best motion picture. The musical film featured star-studded cast including Barrino, Taraji P. Henson, Domingo, H.E.R., Danielle Brooks, Corey Hawkins and Bailey.

Barrino, who starred as Celie in the film, won for best actress in a motion picture.

"I didn't prepare a speech, because I didn't think I was going to win," the singer-actor said. "I was afraid to play Celie, but I'm glad I did. Because I kept saying 'If I don't win an award, the awards that I will win will come from the people who watched 'Color Purple' and the women who will relate to her and feel like Oscars when they walk out.'"

New Edition was inducted into the NAACP Image Awards Hall of Fame. The induction is bestowed on individuals who are viewed as pioneers in their respective fields and whose influence shaped their profession.

"We stand here in brotherhood," said Michael Bivins while his group members behind him. The Grammy-nominated group includes Bobby Brown, Johnny Gill, Ralph Tresvant, Ronnie DeVoe and Ricky Bell.

"You've seen our story. You know what we've been through," said Bivins, who spoke about the group overcoming conflict and tension in their earlier years to now holding a residency in Las Vegas.

"But we call each other every day," he continued. "We text each other every day. We check on our families. You watched us grow up. We're still growing."

Damson Idris won best actor in a drama television series for his role in "Snowfall." Henson and Domingo took home best supporting roles in "The Color Purple." Domingo also won best actor in a motion picture for his role in "Rustin."

## **Colombia suspends ceasefire with faction of ex-FARC rebels following attack on Indigenous community**

BOGOTA, Colombia (AP) — Colombian President Gustavo Petro on Sunday suspended a ceasefire with one of a handful of armed groups with which he hoped to negotiate peace accords, saying its fighters violated the truce by attacking an Indigenous community.

The government said that starting Wednesday it would resume military operations against Estado Mayor Central, a group of fighters who broke away from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia when it signed a peace pact in 2016.

Indigenous leaders in the war-torn western region of Cauca said an attack by the dissident group Saturday wounded at least three people and a young student was taken away by force.

In a post on the X platform, Petro said group was “violating the ceasefire agreement,” adding that he believed it used peace negotiations as a cover to “strengthen itself militarily.”

The suspension of the ceasefire was a political blow to Petro, a former rebel who became Colombia’s first leftist leader promising to consolidate “total peace” in a country long ravaged by armed conflict.

He has sought to rewire the way the country grapples with its decades of conflict, by addressing the poverty that underlies the unrest while simultaneously negotiating peace with armed groups to minimize bloodshed. Yet conflict continues to rage in many rural swaths of the South American nation.

With implementation of the FARC accord’s provisions lagging, a growing number of former rebels have rearmed against the government, joining a toxic slate of drug gangs and guerrilla groups to war for power.

A report by a United Nations agency warned Friday that more than 8 million people in Colombia need humanitarian help, mainly because of the expansion of the country’s armed conflict.

## **Commenting on Navalny’s death for first time, Putin says he supported prisoner swap for his foe**

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

Russian President Vladimir Putin said early Monday that he supported an idea to release opposition leader Alexei Navalny in a prisoner exchange just days before the man who was his biggest foe died.

In his first comments to address Navalny’s death, Putin said of the dissident’s demise: “It happens. There is nothing you can do about it. It’s life.”

The remarks were unusual in that he repeatedly referenced Navalny by his name for the first time in years — and that they came at a late-night news conference as results poured in from a presidential election that is certain to extend his rule.

Early returns showed him leading with over 87% of the votes in a race with no competition, after years of ruthlessly suppressing the opposition and crippling independent media.

Navalny’s allies last month also said that talks with Russian and Western officials about a prisoner swap involving Navalny were underway. The politician’s longtime associate Maria Pevchikh said the talks were in their final stages just days before the Kremlin critic’s sudden and unexplained death in an Arctic penal colony.

She accused Putin of “getting rid of” Navalny in order not to exchange him, but offered no evidence to back her claims, and they could not be independently confirmed.

Putin said Monday, also without offering any evidence, that several days before Navalny’s death, “certain colleagues, not from the (presidential) administration” told him about “an idea to exchange Navalny for certain people held in penitentiary facilities in western countries.” He said he supported the idea.

“Believe it or not, but the person talking to me didn’t even finish their sentence when I said: ‘I agree,’” Putin said in response to a question from a journalist about Navalny’s death. He added that his one condition was that Navalny wouldn’t return to Russia.

“But unfortunately, whatever happened, happened,” Putin said.

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 43 of 60

Navalny, 47, Russia's best-known opposition politician, died last month while serving a 19-year sentence on extremism charges that he rejected as politically motivated. His allies, family members and Western officials blamed the death on the Kremlin, accusations it has rejected.

The politician's associates said officials listed "natural causes" on paperwork Navalny's mother was shown when she was trying to retrieve his body.

Navalny had been jailed since January 2021, when he returned to Moscow of his own accord after recuperating in Germany from nerve agent poisoning he blamed on the Kremlin. He was immediately arrested. The Kremlin has vehemently denied it was behind the poisoning.

Pevchikh claimed that there was a plan to swap Navalny and two U.S. citizens held in Russia for Vadim Krasikov. He was serving a life sentence in Germany for the 2019 killing in Berlin of Zelimkhan "Tornike" Khangoshvili, a 40-year-old Georgian citizen of Chechen descent. German judges said Krasikov acted on the orders of Russian authorities.

She didn't identify the U.S. citizens that were supposedly part of the deal. There are several in custody in Russia, including Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich, arrested on espionage charges, and Paul Whelan, a corporate security executive from Michigan, convicted of espionage and serving a long prison sentence. They and the U.S. government dispute the charges against them.

German officials have refused to comment when asked if there had been any effort by Russia to swap Krasikov.

Putin had earlier said that the Kremlin was open to negotiations on Gershkovich. He pointed to a man imprisoned in a "U.S.-allied country" for "liquidating a bandit" who had allegedly killed Russian soldiers during separatist fighting in Chechnya. Putin didn't mention names but appeared to refer to Krasikov.

## South Carolina, Iowa, USC and Texas are the top seeds in the women's NCAA Tournament

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

Dawn Staley and South Carolina could see some familiar faces on their path to trying to finish off an undefeated season.

The Gamecocks, who are the No. 1 overall seed in the women's NCAA Tournament, are looking to become the 10th women's basketball team to go unbeaten for an entire season.

They had a chance last season before falling just short against Caitlin Clark and Iowa in the Final Four. The Hawkeyes received the other No. 1 seed in the Albany Regional. The two teams wouldn't potentially face off until the national championship game this time. Iowa is a one-seed for the first time since 1992.

USC and star freshman JuJu Watkins earned the Trojans' first No. 1 seed since 1986 as the top choice in a Portland Regional. Texas earned the fourth No. 1 seed, its first since 2004, and will play Drexel in the other Portland Regional opener. There was debate whether Texas or Stanford would get the fourth No. 1 seed.

"To say we talked about it more than once was an understatement," said NCAA selection committee Chair Lisa Peterson. "What it came down to was Texas had to play three tournament teams to get to the (Big 12) championship."

South Carolina coach Dawn Staley's squad has been challenged a few times this year, including needing a buzzer-beating 3-pointer from Kamilla Cardoso to win the semifinals of the SEC Tournament over Tennessee, but has always pulled through. The Gamecocks, who are a No. 1 seed for the fourth consecutive year, will play the winner of Sacred Heart and Presbyterian in the first round of the tournament.

"I always feel good to be the No. 1 overall seed and to be undefeated," Staley said. "I'm excited because we get a chance to know what our path is to win the national championship and, all great teams, a lot of familiar faces that are in our region. But we have to take it one game at a time and that's what we'll do on Friday."

Cardoso will miss the opening game after getting ejected for fighting in the SEC title game. The Gamecocks would have her back for a potential second-round matchup against either North Carolina or Michigan

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 44 of 60

State. South Carolina beat the Tar Heels earlier in the season.

"Fortunately for us, it's someone we played without for four games this season," Staley said. "We know we're a better basketball team when Kamilla Cardoso is in the lineup."

Joining the Gamecocks in the Albany Region are No. 2 seed Notre Dame, third-seeded Oregon State and fourth-seeded Indiana. South Carolina opened up its season against the Irish, routing them in Paris.

Clark, who became the NCAA's all-time leading scorer this year, is trying to win her first title. The Hawkeyes open up against the winner of Holy Cross and UT Martin. Joining the Hawkeyes in their region are No. 2 UCLA, defending champion and third-seeded LSU and fourth-seeded Kansas State. The Tigers beat the Hawkeyes for the national championship last year.

The other top teams in USC's bracket are Ohio State, UConn and Virginia Tech. The Huskies were the last team to go undefeated in a season, running through the 2015-16 season.

Texas could have to contend with No. 2 Stanford, No. 3 North Carolina State and fourth-seeded Gonzaga.

The NCAA changed its format last season and is having two regional sites for the Sweet 16 and Elite Eight rounds. Albany, New York, hosts one and Portland, Oregon, the other. Once again the top four teams in each region will host the opening two rounds.

The tournament begins Wednesday with two First Four games. The full madness starts with 16 games Friday and 16 more the next day. The Final Four will be played in Cleveland this year for the first time since 2007. The national semifinals are on April 5, with the championship game two days later.

Tennessee continued its streak of appearing in all 42 NCAA Tournaments. On the other end, Presbyterian, California Baptist, Columbia and Texas A&M-Corpus Christi are all making their first appearance.

The Lions were one of the last four teams in the field. Just outside the field of 68 were Penn State, Washington State, Miami and Villanova.

"There were seven or eight schools we talked about," Peterson said of the final few spots. "That conversation lasted over two days."

The Atlantic Coast Conference and Southeastern Conference both have eight teams in the field. The Big Ten, Pac-12 and Big 12 each have seven. The Big East has three teams. The West Coast Conference and Ivy League each have two. It's the second time that the Ivy League has gotten an at-large bid.

## First charter flight with US citizens fleeing Haiti lands in Miami

MIAMI (AP) — A charter flight carrying dozens of U.S. citizens fleeing spiraling gang violence in Haiti landed Sunday in Miami, U.S. State Department officials said.

More than 30 U.S. citizens were on the government-chartered flight, officials said in a statement. It arrived in the Miami International Airport after the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince earlier this month urged U.S. citizens to leave "as soon as possible" as chaos grips Haiti.

Passenger Avlot Qessa, who lives in Boston, traveled from the center of the country to board the charter flight after going to Haiti last month for what was supposed to be a weeklong trip to visit his mother.

"It's just terrible ... The suffering, you can only imagine," Qessa told the Miami Herald of the nearby Caribbean nation. "Haiti is my homeland and it's very stressful to see the homeland going through this act of violence, destruction ... and they are our neighbors."

Haiti's main airport in Port-au-Prince remains closed following gang attacks that have raged through Haiti in recent weeks, pushing many people to the brink of famine. Government and aid agencies this weekend reported looting of aid supplies as the situation worsened.

The State Department announced Saturday that it would offer limited charter flights for American citizens from the less chaotic northern city of Cap-Haïtien.

Officials said they could not provide ground transportation to Cap-Haïtien and that U.S. citizens should consider the charter flights "only if you think you can reach Cap-Haïtien airport safely."

"We encourage U.S. citizens still in Haiti who seek to depart to contact the Department of State using the crisis intake form on our website if they have not already done so," the agency said.

People taking the U.S. government-coordinated flights must sign a promissory bill agreeing to reimburse

the government.

Another passenger on Sunday's flight, Marie Lucie St. Fleur, 69, of West Palm Beach, said she feels most at home in Haiti and it pains her to see what her homeland is enduring.

"I don't feel well at all. I would like to live in my country and I can't," she said while sitting in a wheelchair.

The State Department said government officials in Miami were helping the newly arrived evacuees to determine their next steps.

The U.S. military last week flew in additional forces to bolster security at the U.S. Embassy, which is in a neighborhood largely controlled by gangs.

## **The European Union announces an \$8 billion aid package for Egypt as concerns mount over migration**

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — The European Union on Sunday announced a 7.4 billion-euro (\$8 billion) aid package for cash-strapped Egypt as concerns mount that economic pressure and conflicts in neighboring countries could drive more migrants to European shores.

The deal, which drew criticism from rights groups over Egypt's human rights record, was signed Sunday afternoon in Cairo by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. The ceremony was attended by leaders of Belgium, Italy, Austria, Cyprus and Greece.

"Your visit today represented a very important milestone in the relations between Egypt and the European Union," el-Sissi told visiting European leaders. He said the deal has achieved a "paradigm shift in our partnership."

The aid package includes both grants and loans over the next three years for the Arab world's most populous country, according to the EU's mission in Cairo. Most of the funds — 5 billion euros (\$5.4 billion)— are macro-financial assistance, according to a document from the EU mission in Egypt.

The mission said the two sides have promoted their cooperation to the level of a "strategic and comprehensive partnership," paving the way for expanding Egypt-EU cooperation in various economic and noneconomic areas.

"The European Union recognizes Egypt as a reliable partner and its unique and vital geostrategic role as a pillar of security, moderation and peace in the Mediterranean, Near East and African region," a joint statement said after the summit.

Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, whose country played a major role in achieving the deal, lauded it as "historic."

"This initiative shows our willingness to strengthen and encourage a new structural method of cooperation between the two sides of the Mediterranean," she told the Egyptian-EU summit in Cairo.

The deal, known as the Joint Declaration, aims among other things to promote "democracy, fundamental freedoms, human rights, and gender equality," according to the European Commission. Both sides will also deepen their cooperation to address challenges related to migration and terrorism.

The EU will provide assistance to Egypt's government to fortify its borders, especially with Libya, a major transit point for migrants fleeing poverty and conflicts in Africa and the Middle East. The 27-nation bloc will also support the government in hosting Sudanese who have fled nearly a year of fighting between rival generals in their country. Egypt received more than 460,000 Sudanese since April last year.

The deal comes amid growing concerns that Israel's looming ground offensive on Gaza's southernmost town of Rafah could force hundreds of thousands of people to break into Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. The Israel-Hamas war, now in its sixth month, has pushed more than 1 million people to Rafah.

Egypt says there are 9 million migrants in the country, including about 480,000 who are registered refugees and asylum-seekers with the U.N. refugee agency. Many of those migrants have established their own businesses, while others work in the huge informal economy as street vendors and house cleaners.

For decades, Egypt has been a refuge for migrants from sub-Saharan Africa trying to escape war or poverty. Egypt is a destination and a haven for some, because it's the closest and easiest country for them

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 46 of 60

to reach. For others, it's a point of transit before attempting the dangerous Mediterranean Sea crossing to Europe.

While the Egyptian coast has not been a major launching pad for human traffickers sending overcrowded boats across the Mediterranean to Europe, Egypt faces migratory pressures from the region, with the added looming threat that the Israel-Hamas war could spill across its borders.

The deal would inject much-needed funds into the Egyptian economy, which has been hit hard by years of government austerity, the coronavirus pandemic, the fallout from Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and most recently, the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza.

Egypt reached a deal with the International Monetary Fund earlier this month to increase a bailout loan to \$8 billion, up from \$3 billion, after marathon negotiations. The deal with the IMF was combined with economic reforms that included the flotation of the Egyptian pound and a sharp raising of the main interest rate.

The EU deal follows the template of those recently signed with Tunisia and Mauritania that pledged funds in return for fortifying their borders. Both Tunisia and Mauritania are key points of departure for migrants crossing the Mediterranean and a stretch of the Atlantic to Italy and Spain, respectively, and they too were criticized for alleged abuses against migrants.

The package drew criticism from international rights groups over Egypt's human rights record. Amnesty International urged European leaders not to be complicit with human rights violations taking place in Egypt.

"EU leaders must ensure that the Egyptian authorities adopt clear benchmarks for human rights," said Eve Geddie, Amnesty International's head of the European institutions office. Geddie pointed to Egypt's restrictions on media and freedom of expression and a crackdown on civil society.

Questioned about the morality of such deals earlier this week in Brussels, European Commission spokesperson Eric Mamer acknowledged there were issues in all these countries, but defended the partnerships nonetheless.

"Yes, we know the criticism related to human rights in those countries and it is obvious that this is an issue," he told reporters.

"Does that mean we should break off all relations? Would that lead to an improvement in the situation? Or should we try to find a way to work with those countries to improve the situation on the ground both for local populations and for migrants coming to those countries?" he said.

## March Madness is here. UConn, Purdue, Houston and North Carolina get top seeding in NCAA Tournament

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

Even before the brackets came out Sunday, March Madness was a muddled mess.

About the closest thing to a sure thing: UConn.

The defending champion Huskies earned the top seed in the NCAA Tournament, joined by Houston, Purdue and North Carolina as No. 1 seeds in a bracket that started going haywire even before the pairings were announced Sunday evening.

Of those top teams, only UConn heads into the tournament coming off a win. The others lost in their conference tournaments, yet those were hardly the only surprises over the final weekend of hoops before the sport's main event hits center stage.

Unexpected titles placed teams like Oregon, North Carolina State and even Duquesne, none of whom were projected to make the tournament, into the field of 68 via the automatic bid that goes to conference champions. The teams they beat gobbled up a handful of the 34 at-large bids, thus shrinking the number of spots available to teams on the so-called bubble.

"It was one of the most difficult that I've been involved in," Charles McClelland, the chairman of the selection committee, said of the process that had everyone up until 2:30 a.m. the night before. "And I talked to some of the staff that's been in that room for the last 20 years, and they said this is probably the most difficult selection process that they've been a part of."

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 47 of 60

It showed in a bracket that had its share of head-scratchers:

— Two of the last four teams in — Boise State and Colorado State — weren't even considered on the bubble by most bracketologists.

"A little surprised to be honest," Boise State coach Leon Rice said of his team's No. 10 seed.

— Some of the teams left out — St. John's and Oklahoma — were thought to be safely in as late as Saturday. St. John's decided not to even play in the NIT.

"How is St. John's so far off the cutline?" said UConn coach Dan Hurley, who was surprised only three Big East teams made it.

— Florida Atlantic and Texas A&M were considered bubble teams but ended up with 8 and 9 seeds, respectively.

All of this could be fodder for the growing conversation about expanding the bracket to 76, maybe 80 teams. Under that scenario, bubble teams like Pittsburgh, Seton Hall and even Indiana State would almost certainly be in.

The tournament starts Tuesday with two First Four games, including a matchup between Virginia and Colorado State. The 32 first-round games take place Thursday and Friday. The Final Four is set for April 6-8 in Glendale, Arizona.

UConn the favorite

UConn, which opens Friday against Stetson, is the favorite according to FanDuel Sportsbook and is trying to become the first repeat champion since Florida in 2006-07. The Huskies (31-3) are on a seven-game win streak and are tied with James Madison for most wins in the nation.

For all its excellence this season, UConn ended up in an East region with two of last year's Final Four teams (San Diego State and Florida Atlantic) along with Iowa State, which is coming off a 69-41 win over Houston and was thought, for a minute, to be top-seed material.

"If we're able to get to our identity ... and then we play harder than you, we keep ourselves from being vulnerable that way," Hurley said.

Conference bragging rights

Both the SEC and Big 12 placed eight teams in the field, while the Big Ten and Mountain West each had six.

Speaking of pride: Michigan State extended its nation-leading streak to 26 straight years in the tournament. The ninth-seeded Spartans will play Mississippi State on Thursday, the same day No. 5 seed Gonzaga plays No. 12 McNeese. In February, the Zags were considered a bubble team, but a stretch of nine wins in 10 games changed that, and coach Mark Few's team made the field for the 25th consecutive year.

Injury worries

Injury-riddled Kansas comes in as a 4 seed, set to play Samford, after two of its best players, Hunter Dickinson and Kevin McCullar Jr., sat out the Jayhawks' 20-point loss in their Big 12 Tournament opener.

Florida is a 7 seed, and will play the winner of the Boise State-Colorado play-in game, but the Gators suffered a big blow when big man Micah Handlogten broke his leg early in the SEC title game.

Small fry

The Ivy League is sending Yale, a 13 seed that needed a furious late comeback and a buzzer-beating basket against Brown to win the title and set up a game Friday against No. 4 Auburn. And Saint Peter's back in the tournament, two years after making an unlikely run to the Elite Eight as a No. 15. This year, the Peacocks are 15 seeds again, opening against Tennessee in the Midwest.

Should Tennessee advance, coach Rick Barnes could face his old school, No. 7 Texas, which opens against the Virginia-Colorado State winner.

Meanwhile, Duquesne, the surprise winner of the Atlantic-10, is back in the tournament for the first time since 1977. A game against No. 6 BYU awaits.

Job security

Back in 1999, head coach Dan Monson and assistant Mark Few led Gonzaga on a surprise run all the way to the Elite Eight. Monson now coaches Long Beach State and, just last week, was relieved of his duties pending the end of the season. Funny enough, Monson's team went on a run and won the Big West to

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 48 of 60

get a ticket to the tournament. The 15th-seeded Beach open Thursday against No. 2 Arizona.

"As Mark Few said in a text, why don't we have a run in the first year and one in the last," Monson said after his job-extending win.

## Cockney Rebel singer Steve Harley, who had a hit with 'Make Me Smile,' dies at 73

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Steve Harley, a British musician whose glam-rock band Cockney Rebel had an enduring hit with the song "Make Me Smile (Come Up and See Me)," has died. He was 73.

Harley's family said Sunday that he had "passed away peacefully at home, with his family by his side." Harley said late last year he was being treated for "a nasty cancer."

Born in London in 1951, Harley spent almost four years of his childhood hospitalized after contracting polio, periods during which he began reading and writing poetry. He worked as a trainee accountant and as journalist on local newspapers, and began his performing career at London folk clubs.

He formed Cockney Rebel, which released a debut album, "The Human Menagerie," in 1973 before foundering over creative differences. With a new lineup and rebranded as Steve Harley and Cockney Rebel, the band released the 1975 album "The Best Years of Our Lives," which contained Harley's biggest hit.

With its barbed lyrics — aimed at Harley's former bandmates — and infectiously catchy chorus, the Alan Parsons-produced "Make Me Smile" topped the U.K. singles chart. It went on to be covered scores of times and was used on countless soundtracks, including in the 1997 film "The Full Monty" and in ads for Carlsberg beer, department store Marks and Spencer and Viagra.

Harley also sang the title song of Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical "The Phantom of the Opera" alongside Sarah Brightman when it was released as a single in 1986. He was originally cast in the title role for the stage musical, but was replaced by Michael Crawford.

Ultravox frontman Midge Ure, who produced Harley's 1982 track "I Can't Even Touch You," called him a "true 'working musician.'"

"He toured until he could tour no more, playing his songs for fans old and new," Ure wrote on social media. "My thoughts go out to Dorothy and his family at this very sad time. Our songs live on longer than we ever can."

Harley is survived by his wife Dorothy, children Kerr and Greta and four grandchildren. The family said in a statement that they knew he would be "desperately missed by people all over the world."

## State Medicaid offices target dead people's homes to recoup their health care costs

By AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As Salvatore LoGrande fought cancer and all the pain that came with it, his daughters promised to keep him in the white, pitched roof house he worked so hard to buy all those decades ago.

So, Sandy LoGrande thought it was a mistake when, a year after her father's death, Massachusetts billed her \$177,000 for her father's Medicaid expenses and threatened to sue for his home if she didn't pay up quickly.

"The home was everything," to her father said LoGrande, 57.

But the bill and accompanying threat weren't a mistake.

Rather, it was part of a routine process the federal government requires of every state: to recover money from the assets of dead people who, in their final years, relied on Medicaid, the taxpayer-funded health insurance for the poorest Americans.

A person's home is typically exempt from qualifying for Medicaid. But it is subject to the estate recovery process for those who were over 55 and used Medicaid to pay for long-term care such as nursing home stays or in-home health care.



# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 49 of 60

This month, a Democratic lawmaker proposed scuttling the “cruel” program altogether. Critics argue the program collects too little — roughly 1% — of the more than \$150 billion Medicaid spends yearly on long-term care. They also say many states fail to warn people who sign up for Medicaid that big bills and claims to their property might await their families once they die.

LoGrande says that’s how she ended up in a two-year legal battle with Massachusetts after her father died. Several years before he died in 2016, she had turned to a local nonprofit for advice on caring for her elderly father. The group suggested she sign him up for Medicaid. She even remembers asking about the house, but was assured the state would only seek the house if it sent her father to a nursing home.

“He never would have signed on with anything that would put his home in jeopardy,” she said.

For years, her father got an annual renewal notice from the state’s Medicaid office. She says it wasn’t until after his death, when the state’s demand for \$177,000 arrived, that she saw the first bill for his care, which included a brief stint in the hospital for pain from cancer, medications and hospice.

“That’s what ripped my guts out,” LoGrande said. “It was dishonest.”

The state settled with the LoGrandes in 2019 and released its claim on the house.

State policies around this recovery process vary widely, according to a 2021 report from the Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission, which makes policy recommendations to Congress.

Some states will put a lien — a legal right — on a home while others don’t. Meanwhile, some Medicaid offices try to recoup all medical costs from patients, like doctor visits or prescriptions, while others just pursue the costs for long-term care. Alaska and Arizona pursued just dozens of properties in recent years while other states go after thousands of homes, totaling hundreds of millions of dollars.

New York and Ohio topped the country for such collections, recovering more than \$100 million combined in a single year, a Dayton Daily News investigation found.

An investigation into the Kansas program, released Tuesday by the Health and Human Services inspector general, found that program was cost effective — yielding \$37 million while only spending \$5 million to recover the money. But the state didn’t always collect the money from estates that were eligible.

Last month, a foundation for one of the industry’s biggest health insurance giants called on Massachusetts to overhaul its process, which includes collecting reimbursement for most Medicaid costs, beyond the federal government’s minimum requirement to recover long-term care expenses. The Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation of Massachusetts recommended the state Legislature pass a law that would prohibit those additional collections.

Estate recovery “has the potential to perpetuate wealth disparities and intergenerational poverty,” said Katherine Howitt, a Medicaid policy director with the foundation.

In Tennessee, which recovered more than \$38.2 million from more than 8,100 estates last year, Imani Mfalme found herself in a similar predicament after her mother’s death in 2021.

As her mother’s early-onset Alzheimer’s worsened, Mfalme continued to care for her. But in 2015, when Mfalme was diagnosed with breast cancer and needed a double mastectomy, she started looking at other options. She hosted a meeting in her mother’s home with the local Medicaid office. The representative told her to drain her mother’s bank accounts — money Mfalme poured into assisted living facility payments for her mom — so her mother would qualify for the program.

She recalls being somewhat offended during the meeting after the representative asked her three times: “This is your mother’s home?” The representative, Mfalme said, made no mention that she could be forced to sell the house to settle her mother’s bill with Medicaid once she died.

Now, Tennessee’s Medicaid office says she owes \$225,000 and the state is seeking a court order that would require Mfalme to sell the house to pay up.

Mfalme, now 42, said she wants to pay what she can, but the house is a particular pain point. Her mother, a Black woman, purchased her dream home in Knoxville after she won a landmark discrimination lawsuit against her former employer, Boeing, for paying her less than her male coworkers.

“She fought hard for equal pay and equal rights. Just to see that ripped away just because she was sick and I was sick, it’s just absolutely devastating,” Mfalme said of her mother.

TennCare, Tennessee’s Medicaid office, said in an email to The Associated Press that it would not com-

ment on specific cases.

The Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission's report recommended that Congress reverse the 1993 law that required states to recover money from estates, instead making it optional.

Earlier this month, Democratic Rep. Jan Schakowsky of Illinois reintroduced legislation that would end the federal government's mandate. Schakowsky believes the rule is a losing proposition for families, who give up their homes, and taxpayers, who don't see big returns from the recovery efforts.

"It is one of the most cruel, ineffective programs that we see," Schakowsky told the AP. "This is a program that doesn't work for anybody."

In a gridlocked Congress, where some Republicans are clamoring to trim Medicaid entitlements, the bill is unlikely to garner the bipartisan support needed to become law.

There's at least one person who acknowledges the rule isn't working: the man who engineered it.

Many people don't know about the decades-old mandate, which was intended to encourage people to save for long-term care — or risk losing the equity from their home, explained Stephen Moses, who now works for the conservative Paragon Health Institute.

"The plan here was to ensure that people who need long-term care can get it but that you plan ahead to be able to pay privately so you don't end up on the public health care program," Moses said.

## US military operations across the Sahel are at risk after Niger ends cooperation

By JESSICA DONATI and SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

DAKAR, Senegal (AP) — The United States scrambled on Sunday to assess the future of its counterterrorism operations in the Sahel after Niger's junta said it was ending its yearslong military cooperation with Washington following a visit by top U.S. officials.

The U.S. military has hundreds of troops stationed at a major airbase in northern Niger that deploys flights over the vast Sahel region — south of the Sahara Desert — where jihadi groups linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group operate.

Top U.S. envoy Molly Phee returned to the capital, Niamey, this week to meet with senior government officials, accompanied by Marine Gen. Michael Langley, head of the U.S. military's African Command. She had previously visited in December, while acting Deputy Secretary of State Victoria Nuland traveled to the country in August.

The State Department said Sunday in a post on X, formerly Twitter, that talks were frank and that it was in touch with the junta. It wasn't clear whether the U.S. has any leeway left to negotiate a deal to stay in the country.

Niger had been seen as one of the last nations in the restive region that Western nations could partner with to beat back growing jihadi insurgencies. The U.S. and France had more than 2,500 military personnel in the region until recently, and together with other European countries had invested hundreds of millions of dollars in military assistance and training.

But that changed in July when mutinous soldiers ousted the country's democratically elected president and months later asked French forces to leave.

The U.S. military still had some 650 personnel working in Niger in December, according to a White House report to Congress. The Niger base is used for both manned and unmanned surveillance operations. In the Sahel the U.S. also supports ground troops, including accompanying them on missions. However, such accompanied missions have been scaled back since U.S. troops were killed in a joint operation in Niger in 2017.

It's unclear what prompted the junta's decision to suspend military ties. On Saturday, the junta's spokesperson, Col. Maj. Amadou Abdramane, said U.S. flights over Niger's territory in recent weeks were illegal. Meanwhile, Insa Garba Saidou, a local activist who assists Niger's military rulers with their communications, criticized U.S. efforts to force the junta to pick between strategic partners.

"The American bases and civilian personnel cannot stay on Nigerien soil any longer," he told The As-

sociated Press.

After her trip in December, Phee, the top U.S. envoy, told reporters she had "good discussions" with junta leaders and called on them to set a timeline for elections in return for restoring military and aid ties. But she also said the U.S. had warned Niamey against forging closer ties with Russia.

Neighboring Mali and Burkina Faso, which have experienced two coups each since 2020, have turned to Moscow for security support. After the coup in Niger, the military also turned to the Russian mercenary group Wagner for help.

Cameron Hudson, who served with the Central Intelligence Agency and State Department in Africa, said the incident shows the diminution of U.S. leverage in the region and that Niger was angered by Washington's attempt to pressure the junta to steer clear of Russia. "This is ironic since one mantra of the Biden Administration has been that Africans are free to choose their partners," he said.

The U.S. delegation visit coincided with the start of Ramadan, a month of dawn-to-dusk fasting and intense prayer for Muslims. Niger's junta leader, Gen. Abdourahmane Tchiani, refused to meet them. A U.S. press conference at the embassy in Niger was canceled.

The junta spokesperson, speaking on state television, said junta leaders met the U.S. delegation only out of courtesy and described their tone as condescending.

Aneliese Bernard, a former U.S. State Department official who specialized in African affairs and director of Strategic Stabilization Advisors, a risk advisory group, said the recent visit had failed and the U.S. needs to take a critical look at how it's doing diplomacy not just in Niger but in the whole region.

"What's going on in Niger and the Sahel cannot be looked at continuously in a vacuum as we always do," she said. "The United States government tends to operate with blinders on. We can't deny that our deteriorating relationships in other parts of the world: the Gulf, Israel and others, all have an influential impact on our bilateral relations in countries in West Africa."

## 'There's no agenda here': A look at the judge who is overseeing Trump's hush money trial

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Judge Juan M. Merchan looked across his high-ceilinged courtroom, facing the defendant in a complicated case.

Not the one everyone knows about.

Yes, Merchan could become the first judge ever to oversee a former U.S. president's criminal trial: Donald Trump's hush money case. But on a recent morning, the judge was attending to much less conspicuous cases in Manhattan's once-weekly Mental Health Court, where selected mentally ill offenders agree to closely monitored treatment in hopes of getting charges dismissed and their lives on track.

As Merchan talked with defendants about their progress, stumbles, jobs, families and even workouts, it was a far cry from the upcoming trial in which Trump will be at the defense table, but the judge also will be in a hot seat.

The ex-president and presumptive Republican nominee has called Merchan a "Trump-hating" judge, and defense lawyers unsuccessfully asked him to exit the case. Merchan received dozens of death threats after Trump slammed him on social media last year.

Ten days before jury selection was to start, Merchan on Friday postponed the trial until at least mid-April because of a last-minute evidence dump. He scheduled a March 25 hearing on next steps.

Merchan wouldn't talk about the case last week, but allowed that getting ready for the historic trial is "intense."

He is striving "to make sure that I've done everything I could to be prepared and to make sure that we dispense justice," he said in an interview, emphasizing his confidence in court staffers.

"There's no agenda here," he said. "We want to follow the law. We want justice to be done."

"That's all we want," he said.

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 52 of 60

## THE PATH TO TRUMP'S CASE

Born in Colombia, Merchan emigrated as a 6-year-old and grew up in New York. He worked his way through college, graduated from Hofstra University's law school, and was a state lawyer and Manhattan prosecutor before being appointed a family court judge in 2006. Three years later, he was assigned to a felony trial court, which New York calls a state Supreme Court.

Now 61, he has presided over cases alleging murder, rape and many other crimes: a multimillion-dollar investment fraud, a clubland stabbing, stolen laptops, harassment.

He oversaw trials of three men who parachuted off the rebuilt World Trade Center's tallest skyscraper and of at least one defendant in a sprawling Social Security disability fraud case against police officers, firefighters and others accused of faking psychological problems to get benefits.

Merchan is still dealing with the aftermath of the 2012 case of Anna Gristina, the "soccer mom madam" whose alleged exploits spurred a 2021 Lifetime movie. She now wants to rescind her guilty plea and is suing the judge to try to get some case transcripts unsealed. Lawyers for Merchan have said the sealing was justified.

The spotlight on Merchan grew white-hot in the last three years as he took on cases involving Trump's company, its former longtime finance chief Allen Weisselberg and, eventually, Trump himself.

Trump has pleaded not guilty to doctoring business records to veil a 2016 effort to squelch claims of extramarital affairs, which he denies. Prosecutors say he was trying to protect his first campaign; he has said he is fighting a "fake case" brought to impede his current run.

Trump wasn't charged in the tax fraud case against his company, the Trump Organization. A jury voted to convict. Merchan imposed a \$1.6 million fine, the legal maximum. The company denied wrongdoing and is appealing.

If some might see Merchan's familiarity with the Trump Organization case as preparation for the hush money trial, the ex-president and his lawyers see a problem.

They have asserted Merchan has "preconceived bias" against Trump, saying the judge strong-armed Weisselberg behind the scenes into taking a plea deal, agreeing to testify in the tax fraud case and serve a five-month jail sentence.

Merchan and prosecutors have disputed the claims. The judge wrote that defense lawyers drew "misleading" conclusions from an "inaccurate" portrayal of his involvement in Weisselberg's plea negotiations.

Trump's lawyers also have pointed out that Merchan's daughter is a political consultant whose firm has worked for Democrats and the judge donated \$35 in 2020 to Democratic causes, including \$15 to now-President Joe Biden. A state court ethics panel opined that Merchan could continue on the case. The judge has vouched he can be fair and impartial.

Trump has a history of assailing judges in cases involving his business or administration. He tangled with jurists in person during his recent civil trials over New York state's claims of business fraud and writer E. Jean Carroll's sexual assault and defamation allegations. Trump denied all the accusations.

Federal Judge Lewis A. Kaplan presided with stern authority over two jury trials on Carroll's claims. In the non-jury business fraud trial, state Judge Arthur Engoron at times gave latitude, such as letting lawyers revisit issues he had decided, but at other points pounded his desk in frustration.

Merchan has conducted the criminal court dates so far with a mannerly but firm formality. When one of Trump's lawyers complained last month that the trial would burden the candidate as he campaigned, Merchan responded: "That's not a legal argument. Anything else?"

Roger Stavis, a lawyer who testified before Merchan during a jury trial years ago, recalls the judge as self-confident but "not overbearing."

"He's in command of his courtroom," Stavis said. "He won't be baited, and he won't be pushed around."

As for Merchan himself, he says that in his courtroom, "everybody gets treated respectfully, professionally."

## 'A DIFFERENT LENS'

During long trials, Manhattan judges often reserve a day each week for other cases. Merchan is keeping Wednesdays for mental health court, which he has overseen since its 2011 start, and a similar veterans'

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 53 of 60

docket he took on in 2019.

The mental health court currently handles nearly 70 cases while budgeted for 50 a year, coordinator Amber Petitt-Cifarelli said. About 100 participants successfully finished between 2014 and 2021, while 190 were accepted, according to a report from Manhattan prosecutors.

"We help a lot of people, but it's hard work. ... You get really invested in people's lives," Merchan said, adding that it lets him "see people through a different lens" than he did when presiding only over criminal cases.

Last week, Merchan offered encouragement to a newcomer who teared up while describing how mental illness ended his full-scholarship college studies. He urged one assault defendant not to lose patience with residential treatment rules and congratulated another on passing her real estate class final. He handed progress certificates to some, including a residential treatment patient approved for an apartment.

It wasn't all good news. Merchan issued a warrant for someone who didn't return to a residential program after a medical visit. A robbery defendant apologized for having smoked K2, his first misstep in a year of court-supervised treatment.

When Merchan asked what happened, the man said he had been depressed because his mom and siblings were far away, but he later talked with his counselor about handling such feelings.

"So we're not going to harp on that situation that happened. Because you've earned good faith," Merchan decided, noting the man's honesty. He remains on course for a progress certificate if he avoids further slips.

Another man was making headway toward quitting marijuana, avoiding old hangouts and getting a library card to make reading a new pastime.

"You've got this one issue, and you're working through it," Merchan told him. "I'm very proud of you."

## **Biden campaign has amassed \$155M in cash on hand for 2024 campaign and raised \$53M last month**

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden's campaign has amassed \$155 million in cash on hand for the 2024 election, far exceeding the in-hand total for his Republican opponent, Donald Trump.

The president raised \$53 million alone last month, which was the strongest grassroots fundraising month since the campaign launched, according to campaign officials. Among those efforts was a contest for supporters to attend a fundraiser on March 28 in New York with Biden, Barack Obama and Bill Clinton that raised \$4 million last month.

"The enthusiasm we're picking up as we go around the country is real," Biden said in a radio interview with WNOV 860 in Wisconsin last week. "We've raised a whole lot of money. We have 1.5 million donors, including 500,000 are brand new, they're small donors; 97% of the donations under \$200."

Both Biden and Trump clinched their party nominations last week, setting up a 2024 rematch.

Trump's February figures have not been released. By the end of January, his two major committees had just \$36.6 million in cash on hand, and those committees collectively spent more than they took in that month. A major driver of those costs was millions of dollars in legal fees from Trump's myriad court cases. The figures are only a partial snapshot of the Trump operation's finances because other branches won't have to disclose their numbers until April.

Biden's cash on hand total is the highest amassed by any Democratic candidate in history during this point in the campaign, the campaign said. Emails to Biden supporters that focused on concerns over Trump helped drive up support last month.

"While Joe Biden and Democrats continue to put up historic grassroots fundraising numbers, Donald Trump and the RNC are in financial disarray," said Jaime Harrison, leader of the Democratic National Committee. "Our grassroots supporters know that the stakes of this year could not be higher, and they're chipping in like our democracy is on the line — because it is."

## Wales' first Black leader is a testament to Britain's political diversity, but racism persists

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Vaughan Gething's election as the next leader of Wales marks a milestone: For the first time, none of the U.K.'s four main governments is led by a white man.

It's a striking moment in a country still grappling with racism and the legacy of empire.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has Indian heritage and is Britain's first Hindu leader. Scottish First Minister Humza Yousaf — who, like Gething, heads a semi-autonomous government -- comes from a Pakistani Muslim family. Northern Ireland's regional administration is jointly led by two women, Michelle O'Neill and Emma Little-Pengelly.

Gething, son of a Welsh father and a Zambian mother, said his election on Saturday as the first Black leader of the governing Welsh Labour Party marked a moment when "we turn the page in the book of our nation's history, a history that we write together."

### DIVERSITY AT THE TOP

There's no denying British politics has changed, and quickly.

Before 2002, the country had never had a non-white Cabinet minister. Sunak likes to point out that his Cabinet is one of the most diverse in British history. It includes Home Secretary James Cleverly and Trade Secretary Kemi Badenoch, who are Black, and Energy Secretary Claire Coutinho, whose parents immigrated from India.

Sunak told last year's Conservative Party conference that he is "proud to be the first British Asian prime minister," but "even prouder that it's just not a big deal."

The government's diversity reflects years of work by the center-right party to shake its "pale, male and stale" image and encourage people of color to run for Parliament.

Sunder Katwala, who heads equality think-tank British Future, wrote in The Guardian that "ethnic diversity right at the top has become the 'new normal.'"

But critics say an increase in diversity in high office hasn't been accompanied by government policies to reduce wider social inequalities.

Some also accuse Sunak's administration of deliberately politicizing race as a wedge issue during an election year in which the Conservatives trail far behind Labour in opinion polls.

They point to politicians like former Home Secretary Suella Braverman, who claims multiculturalism has failed and says Britain faces an "invasion" of asylum-seekers. Braverman, whose Indian parents moved to Britain from Kenya and Mauritius, was fired by Sunak in November but remains a powerful and ambitious Conservative lawmaker.

"Some of our most divisive politicians are people like Suella Braverman," former government adviser Samuel Kasumu told the BBC on Sunday.

"It is not the color of your skin that matters when it comes to tackling racism, discrimination and bringing communities -- it has to be the content of your character and your willingness to lead. And that is not happening now."

### CONSERVATIVE RACISM CLAIMS

Claims of racism within the Conservative Party have made headlines in recent weeks.

Last month, Sunak suspended a senior Conservative lawmaker for saying London's Muslim mayor is controlled by Islamists. Lee Anderson, who has since defected to the right-wing party Reform U.K., said Islamists had "got control" of Mayor Sadiq Khan, who had "given our capital city away to his mates."

Sunak said the comments "weren't acceptable," though he denied they showed the Conservatives have an Islamophobia problem.

Sunak also has denounced comments by a party donor about a Black female politician. Software entrepreneur Frank Hester, who has given the Conservatives at least 10 million pounds (\$12.8 million) in the past year, said Labour lawmaker Diane Abbott made him "want to hate all Black women" and that she "should be shot."

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 55 of 60

Sunak called the comments racist, but has ignored calls to return Hester's money.

Sayeeda Warsi, a former chairwoman of the Conservative Party, said she felt there was more overt racism now than in 2010, when she was the only person of color in the then-Prime Minister David Cameron's Cabinet.

Warsi told Times Radio that while she had celebrated Sunak's appointment as prime minister, "I think, tragically, his tenure will be remembered as him presiding over a terribly racist period within the party."

Opponents also accuse the Conservatives of deliberately raising tensions over pro-Palestinian protests that have drawn hundreds of thousands of demonstrators since the Israel-Hamas war began in October.

Sunak claimed last month there has been "a shocking increase in extremist disruption and criminality." In response, his government has drawn up a new definition of extremism. Critics say it could disproportionately target Muslims and limit free speech.

## A CONTESTED HISTORY

Britain's diversity, and its divisions, are rooted in the country's imperial past. About 18% of the population is non-white, and many people have roots in countries the British Empire once ruled, including India, Pakistan and Caribbean nations such as Jamaica.

How to remember and reconcile with that legacy is a hotly contested issue. It erupted into headlines in 2020, when Black Lives Matter protesters toppled a statue of 17th-century slave trader Edward Colston in the city of Bristol.

Since then, several major institutions have begun to address their ties to slavery. The Church of England aims to raise 1 billion pounds (\$1.27 billion) to address its historic complicity in the trans-Atlantic slave trade by investing in disadvantaged Black communities.

Not everyone thinks that is the right approach. Sunak opposes removing contentious statues, and has said that "trying to unpick our history is not the right way forward."

Black academic Tony Sewell, who produced a contentious 2021 report on racism in the U.K., said church leaders were "using the race element as a mechanism to solve their own uncertainty in the world."

Sewell led the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, set up by then-Prime Minister Boris Johnson after the 2020 protests. It concluded that there is racism in Britain, but it's not a systematically racist country that is "deliberately rigged" against non-white people.

Critics said the report downplayed racism, noting that Black and other ethnic-minority Britons still have more poverty and worse health than their white compatriots, a gap bleakly exposed by higher death rates in the COVID-19 pandemic.

But Sewell told the Times of London that race is no longer the defining factor in whether people succeed or fail in Britain.

"Class, geography, family structure, how you speak, is more defining here," he said.

## Trump ramps up dark rhetoric in Ohio stump speech for Senate candidate Bernie Moreno

By MEG KINNARD and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

VANDALIA, Ohio (AP) — Former President Donald Trump claimed that he — not President Joe Biden — will protect Social Security and warned of a "bloodbath" if he loses in November as he campaigned for Senate candidate Bernie Moreno in Ohio.

Trump, speaking on a wind-whipped airfield outside of Dayton Saturday, praised his chosen candidate in the race as an "America first champion" and "political outsider who has spent his entire life building up Ohio communities."

"He's going to be a warrior in Washington," Trump said, days after securing enough delegates to clinch the 2024 Republican nomination.

Moreno faces Secretary of State Frank LaRose and state Sen. Matt Dolan in Tuesday's GOP primary. LaRose and Moreno have aligned themselves with the pro-Trump faction of the party, while Dolan is backed by more establishment Republicans, including Gov. Mike DeWine and former Sen. Rob Portman.

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 56 of 60

Saturday's rally was hosted by Buckeye Values PAC, a group backing Moreno's candidacy. But Trump used the stage to deliver a profanity-filled version of his usual rally speech that again painted an apocalyptic picture of the country if Biden wins a second term.

"If I don't get elected, it's going to be a bloodbath for the whole — that's going to be the least of it. It's going to be a bloodbath for the country," he warned, while talking about the impact of offshoring on the country's auto industry and his plans to increase tariffs on foreign-made cars.

Biden campaign spokesperson James Singer accused Trump of doubling "down on his threats of political violence."

"He wants another January 6, but the American people are going to give him another electoral defeat this November because they continue to reject his extremism, his affection for violence, and his thirst for revenge," Singer charged in a statement.

Trump campaign spokesman Steven Cheung said that Trump had clearly been talking about the impact of a second Biden term on the auto industry and broader economy.

"Crooked Joe Biden and his campaign are engaging in deceptively, out-of-context editing," he said.

Trump repeatedly noted his difficulty reading from his teleprompters, which could be seen visibly whipping in 35-mile-per-hour wind gusts.

A one-time Trump critic, Moreno, a wealthy Cleveland businessman, supported Marco Rubio for president in the 2016 Republican primary, and once tweeted that listening to Trump was "like watching a car accident that makes you sick, but you can stop looking." In 2021, NBC News reported on an email exchange around the time of Trump's first presidential run in which Moreno referred to Trump as a "lunatic" and a "maniac."

On Saturday, however, Moreno praised Trump as a "great American" and railed against those in his party who have been critical of the former president, who this week became his party's presumptive nominee for a third straight election.

"I am so sick and tired of Republicans that say, 'I support President Trump's policies but I don't like the man,'" he said as he joined Trump on stage.

Trump also dismissed recent allegations against Moreno, comparing them to attacks he has faced through the years, including his criminal indictments. Trump has been charged in four separate cases that span his handling of classified documents to his efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 election.

"He's getting some very tough Democrat fake treatment right now," Trump said. "And we're not going to stand for it because I know this man. We all know this man. He's a hero, he's a winner. And we're not going to let these people — these people are sick."

The Associated Press reported on Thursday that in 2008, someone with access to Moreno's work email account created a profile on an adult website seeking "Men for 1-on-1 sex." The AP could not definitively confirm that it was created by Moreno himself. Moreno's lawyer said a former intern created the account and provided a statement from the intern, Dan Ricci, who said he created the account as "part of a juvenile prank."

Questions about the profile have circulated in GOP circles for the past month, sparking frustration among senior Republican operatives about Moreno's potential vulnerability in a general election, according to seven people who are directly familiar with conversations about how to address the matter. They requested anonymity to avoid running afoul of Trump and his allies.

Trump, in his remarks, also accused Biden of posing a threat to Social Security as he continued trying to clean up comments from an interview earlier this week in which he appeared to voice openness to cuts.

"You will not be able to have Social Security with this guy in office because he's destroying the economics of our country. And that includes Medicare, by the way, and American seniors are going to be in big trouble," he warned, even though Biden has pledged to protect and strengthen Social Security as it faces a projected budget shortfall.

"I made a promise that I will always keep Social Security, Medicare. We always will keep it. We never will cut it," he said.

In a Monday interview with CNBC, Trump had answered a question about Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid by saying that, "there is a lot you can do in terms of entitlements, in terms of cutting and in terms



# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 57 of 60

of also the theft and the bad management of entitlements, tremendous bad management of entitlements. There's tremendous amounts of things and numbers of things you can do."

Trump also continued to criticize Biden over his handling of the border as he cast migrants as less than human. "In some cases, they're not people, in my opinion," he said. Trump laced into Dolan, calling him a "weak RINO" — a Republican in name only — and accused him of "trying to become the next Mitt Romney." He also criticized the Dolan family, which owns Cleveland's baseball team, for changing its name from the Cleveland Indians to the Cleveland Guardians.

Trump was joined at the rally by Ohio Sen. JD Vance and South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, who have both stumped with Moreno and are considered potential vice-presidential candidates.

Trump's decision to back Moreno marked a major blow to LaRose, who had taken a number of steps to win his favor. Just days after entering the Senate race, LaRose endorsed Trump for president — reversing an earlier stance that the state's elections chief should remain politically neutral. The next month, he fired a long-time trusted aide after old tweets surfaced in which the staffer criticized Trump.

The winner of Tuesday's primary will face third-term Sen. Sherrod Brown, viewed as among the nation's most vulnerable Democrats, in November.

Brown, first elected in 2006 and uncontested in his primary this year, has managed to hold onto his seat even as the state has shifted to the right. In his most recent reelection in 2018, he defeated then-Rep. Jim Renacci by almost 7 percentage points. Two years later, Ohio voted for then-President Trump by 8 points.

## **Shooting in Washington leaves 2 dead, 5 injured. Police are looking for a single gunman**

WASHINGTON (AP) — Two people have been killed and five others injured in a shooting in the nation's capital early Sunday.

Police were looking for a single gunman after the seven people were shot around 3 a.m. in the Shaw neighborhood of Washington. The five people who were injured were all taken to local hospitals, said Jeffrey Carroll, the executive assistant chief of the Metropolitan Police Department. All of the victims are adults, he said.

Police did not immediately provide details of the circumstances surrounding the shooting or the conditions of those injured.

The District of Columbia is struggling with a sharp increase in violent crime, which went up 39% in 2023. The increase was largely fueled by a 35% rise in homicides and growth in carjackings, which nearly doubled. Police Chief Pamela Smith has pushed lawmakers to pass legislation that would strengthen penalties for gun offenses in the nation's capital.

## **Ohio primary will set up a fall election that could flip partisan control of the state supreme court**

By JULIE CARR SMYTH and CHRISTINE FERNANDO Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — It's been nearly four decades since liberal-leaning justices held a majority on Ohio's supreme court.

Democrats hope this is the year that changes, in a campaign that will begin to take shape with Tuesday's primary. They'll be choosing a candidate to compete for an open seat on a court that will be at the center of fights over redistricting, public education, health care, environmental issues and criminal justice.

But it's abortion that Democrats hope will be a game-changer in a state that has swung from centrist to reliably Republican over the past decade. The Ohio Supreme Court is expected to shape how a voter-approved constitutional amendment that enshrined reproductive rights in the state constitution will be implemented.

"I don't think it's an overstatement to say reproductive freedom and abortion access is at stake in this state supreme court race," said Kellie Copeland, executive director of Pro-Choice Ohio.

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 58 of 60

It will be a consequential year for state supreme court seats around the country, with 80 of them on the ballot in 33 states. Ohio is among only a few states where it's possible for voters to flip partisan control of their supreme court, and already activists and the major parties are bracing for an intense and expensive campaign.

Democrats will be defending two seats on the Ohio court this year, while a third is open. Only the open seat, where two Democrats are campaigning for the right to face a Republican judge in November, has a competitive primary.

They would have to win all three races in the fall to flip the court's 4-3 majority. That's a tall task in a state where Republicans hold every statewide office, supermajorities in the Legislature and twice voted convincingly for Donald Trump for president.

But Ohio Democrats see a possible path to cracking the Republican Party's longstanding lock on all three branches of state government. In November, the amendment enshrining an individual's right to make reproductive health-care decisions — including on abortion, miscarriage care, contraception and IVF — won with 57% support.

"Voters may not realize that even if they pass this amendment for abortion rights, these fights over existing abortion laws are all still ongoing in the court system, and the Ohio Supreme Court holds power in interpreting the amendment how they see fit," said Jessie Hill, a law professor at Case Western Reserve University School of Law in Cleveland who consulted for advocates of the amendment, known as Issue 1. "That is a huge amount of power."

Aaron Baer, president of the Center for Christian Virtue in Ohio, said the partisan makeup of the court will largely determine how the amendment gets implemented.

"We just passed an amendment that says we're not going to be able to have abortion restrictions prior to viability," said Baer, who served on the board for Protect Women Ohio, the Issue 1 opposition campaign. "But are you going to see judges take this amendment and try to jam a California agenda onto Ohioans?"

State supreme court races across the country have become increasingly costly in recent years. During a Wisconsin Supreme Court race last year, spending topped \$42 million, nearly triple the previous record for any state supreme court contest. A Democratic-backed Milwaukee judge won that race, giving liberals control of the court with the fate of the state's abortion ban on the line.

Former Ohio Democratic Party Chair David Pepper said the party's success in Wisconsin is bolstering its hopes in court races across the nation — particularly in Ohio, where party control is in play.

"I used to have to beg people nationally to understand why these supreme court races mattered," he said. "After Wisconsin, these are no longer some hidden, low-interest campaigns."

He said the races began to gain greater attention after the 2022 U.S. Supreme Court decision that ended the constitutional right to abortion, turning the issue back to the states.

In Michigan, where Democrats hold a 4-3 court majority, one Democrat and one Republican incumbent are up for election this year, though without party labels. The minimum wage and clean energy goals are among the central issues there.

In Ohio, Republicans have controlled a majority on the state Supreme Court since 1986. The court has served as final arbiter on disputed laws passed by GOP supermajorities in the Legislature and signed by Republican governors, as well as on decisions of the Republican-controlled redistricting commission.

The commission's votes led to a protracted legal dispute in which the court repeatedly declared its maps unconstitutionally gerrymandered. After that fight, a bipartisan coalition is gathering signatures for a constitutional amendment in November that would remove politicians from Ohio's map-making process. Their campaign could elevate redistricting as another major issue in the supreme court contests this fall.

The one contested primary in Tuesday's election features two Democrats, 8th District Court of Appeals Judge Lisa Forbes and Judge Terri Jamison, a 10th District Court of Appeals judge who ran and lost two years ago. The winner will face Republican Dan Hawkins, a judge on the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas, for the one open seat.

During a recent candidate forum, both Democrats hinted at how important it could be to have a Democratic majority on the court to interpret laws coming from a legislature that is gerrymandered to give

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 59 of 60

Republicans a supermajority.

Forbes, who has been endorsed by the state Democratic Party, said she was motivated to run to assure the court serves as an effective firewall.

"One of the things that I am concerned about is, you hear legislators talking openly about trying to avoid implementing, or working around, enacted laws — the constitutional amendment that the citizens of Ohio overwhelmingly enacted — and that gives me concern for our democracy," she said. "When people speak, it is the legislators' job to do their will."

During the same event, Jamison said Ohio's judiciary is an independent branch of government that should never defer to the Legislature.

"We have no secondary position to them," she said.

Forbes, Jamison and Hawkins are seeking the seat currently held by Republican Justice Joseph Deters, after Deters chose instead to challenge Democratic Justice Melody Stewart for her seat this fall. The decision allows Deters to seek a spot on the court that runs until 2030, four years longer than his current term.

In the third contest, incumbent Justice Michael Donnelly, a Democrat, will face a challenge from Republican Megan Shanahan, a Hamilton County Common Pleas Court judge, in November.

Deters' move could increase Democrats' vulnerability and even allow Republicans to gain more seats on the high court than they already have. The former state treasurer and county prosecutor shares Stewart's incumbency advantage but stands to benefit from Ohio's conservative political leanings: Republicans represent roughly 54% of the electorate compared with Democrats' 46%.

Party affiliation matters now in Ohio's court races, thanks to a 2021 Republican-backed law that requires judicial candidates to run with party labels.

Ryan Stubenrauch, a Republican consultant to Shanahan's campaign, said Ohio's conservative-leaning politics will make it difficult for Democrats to win any court race that includes party labels. He also said abortion appears to have already faded as a top campaign issue.

"It would be the hope and prayer of Democrats to turn the supreme court race and every other race in Ohio into an abortion-centered race," he said. "To me, that seems extremely unlikely to work because voters feel like abortion was addressed with Issue 1 and enough time will have passed that the concern will have been forgotten."

## Today in History: March 18

### FDR signs executive order on internment of Japanese-Americans

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, March 18, the 78th day of 2024. There are 288 days left in the year.

Today's highlight in history:

On March 18, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed an executive order authorizing the War Relocation Authority, which was put in charge of interning Japanese-Americans, with Milton S. Eisenhower (the younger brother of Dwight D. Eisenhower) as its director.

On this date:

In 1766, Britain repealed the Stamp Act of 1765.

In 1922, Mohandas K. Gandhi was sentenced in India to six years' imprisonment for civil disobedience. (He was released after serving two years.)

In 1925, the Tri-State Tornado struck southeastern Missouri, southern Illinois and southwestern Indiana, resulting in some 700 deaths.

In 1937, in America's worst school disaster, nearly 300 people, most of them children, were killed in a natural gas explosion at the New London Consolidated School in Rusk County, Texas.

In 1940, Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini met at the Brenner Pass, where the Italian dictator agreed to join Germany's war against France and Britain.

In 1963, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Gideon v. Wainwright*, ruled unanimously that state courts were

# Groton Daily Independent

Monday, March 18, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 266 ~ 60 of 60

required to provide legal counsel to criminal defendants who could not afford to hire an attorney on their own.

In 1965, the first spacewalk took place as Soviet cosmonaut Alexei Leonov went outside his Voskhod 2 capsule, secured by a tether.

In 1974, most of the Arab oil-producing nations ended their 5-month-old embargo against the United States that had been sparked by American support for Israel in the Yom Kippur War.

In 2002, Brittanie Cecil died two days short of her 14th birthday after being hit in the head by a puck at a game between the host Columbus Blue Jackets and Calgary Flames; it was apparently the first such fan fatality in NHL history.

In 2016, police in Brussels captured Europe's most wanted fugitive, Salah Abdeslam, who was the prime suspect in the deadly 2015 Paris attacks.

In 2017, Chuck Berry, rock 'n' roll's founding guitar hero and storyteller behind such classics as "Johnny B. Goode," "Sweet Little Sixteen" and "Roll Over Beethoven," died at age 90.

In 2018, a self-driving Uber SUV struck and killed a pedestrian in suburban Phoenix in the first death involving a fully autonomous test vehicle; Uber suspended its autonomous vehicle testing program in Arizona, California, Pittsburgh and Toronto after the crash.

In 2020, the U.S. and Canada agreed to temporarily close their shared border to nonessential travel in the early days of the coronavirus pandemic.

In 2022, Vladimir Putin appeared at a huge flag-waving rally at a Moscow stadium and lavished praise on his troops fighting in Ukraine, three weeks into the invasion that led to heavier-than-expected Russian losses on the battlefield and increasingly authoritarian rule.

Today's Birthdays: Composer John Kander is 97. Actor Brad Dourif is 74. Jazz musician Bill Frisell is 73. Alt-country musician Karen Grotberg (The Jayhawks) is 65. Movie writer-director Luc Besson is 65. Actor Geoffrey Owens is 63. Actor Thomas Ian Griffith is 62. Singer-songwriter James McMurtry is 62. TV personality Mike Rowe is 62. Singer-actor Vanessa L. Williams is 61. Olympic gold medal speedskater Bonnie Blair is 60. Actor David Cubitt is 59. Rock musician Jerry Cantrell (Alice in Chains) is 58. Rock singer-musician Miki Berenyi is 57. Actor Michael Bergin is 55. Rapper-actor-talk show host Queen Latifah is 54. Former White House Chief of Staff Reince Priebus is 52. Actor-comedian Dane Cook is 52. Country singer Philip Sweet (Little Big Town) is 50. Rock musician Stuart Zender is 50. Singers Evan and Jaron Lowenstein are 50. Actor-singer-dancer Sutton Foster is 49. Rock singer Adam Levine (Maroon 5) is 45. Rock musician Daren Taylor (Airborne Toxic Event) is 44. Olympic gold medal figure skater Alexei Yagudin is 44. Actor Adam Pally is 42. Actor Cornelius Smith Jr. is 42. Actor Duane Henry (TV: "NCIS") is 39. Actor Lily Collins is 35. Actor-dancer Julia Goldani Telles is 29. Actor Ciara Bravo is 27. Actor Blake Garrett Rosenthal is 20.