

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 1 of 85

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- Water Restrictions in Effect](#)
- [2- Special Needs Family Fun Night](#)
- [2- Doggie Day](#)
- [3- GDI Fitness New Program ad](#)
- [4- Sunday Extras](#)
- [22- Gov. Noem's Weekly Column](#)
- [23- Sen. Thune's Weekly Column](#)
- [24- Rep. Johnson's Weekly Column](#)
- [25- Rev. Snyder's Column](#)
- [27- EarthTalk - Playback](#)
- [28- SD SearchLight: South Dakota father is leading effort to restore abortion rights in the state](#)
- [31- Weather Pages](#)
- [36- Daily Devotional](#)
- [37- Subscription Form](#)
- [38- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [39- Upcoming Groton Events](#)
- [40- News from the Associated Press](#)

Bee Kind Bee Loving
Bee Thoughtful Bee Grateful
Bee Giving Bee A Blessing



“Kindness begins with
the understanding that
we all struggle.”

Sunday, July 28

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship 9 a.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's, 9 a.m.;
and at Zion, 11 a.m.
United Methodist: Worship: Conde at 8:30 a.m.;
Groton at 10:30 a.m.; Coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS
Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45
a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.
First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.;
Worship, 11 a.m.
Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship,
10:30 a.m.
State Teener Tournament at Garretson

Monday, July 29

Senior Menu: Baked fish, oven roasted potatoes
pea-cheese salad, fruit, whole wheat bread.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.
Pantry Open, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Groton Community
Center

Tuesday, July 30

Senior Menu: Tater tot hot dish, carrots, peaches,
whole wheat bread.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.
Common Cents Community Thrift Store open, 3
p.m. to 6 p.m.
Pantry Open, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m., Groton Community
Center

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

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 2 of 85

Water Restrictions Now In Effect



Water restrictions have been put in place for the City of Groton. Odd number houses may water on odd number days between 6 p.m. and 11 a.m. Even number houses may water on even number days between 6 p.m. and 11 a.m.

Absolutely no watering from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Thank you for your cooperation!

Special Needs Family Fun Night

4 AUGUST | **4PM-5:30PM**
Groton Swimming Pool.

For all children and adults with special needs, with their families and/or caregivers.

Sensory friendly time.
No radio or water features.

No Charge
Concessions Available

8TH ANNUAL DOGGIE DAY!



Sunday, September 8th 4-6pm
Groton Swimming Pool \$5/dog
Dogs must be accompanied by an adult.

Brand New Program at

15 N Main St. - Ste. 101
Downtown Groton

Call/Text Paul: 605-397-7460
Call/Text Tina: 605-397-7285



\$20 Monthly Membership

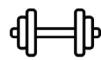
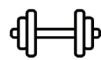
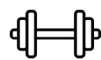
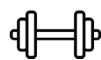
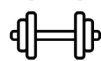
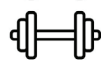
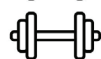
- ☞ for people 60 years of age and older
- ☞ for those who need equipment for physical therapy!



Downtown
Groton

24/7 access to the facility ~ Cancel any time

**Staying fit and practicing healthy nutrition
can be linked to benefits, such as:**

-  Reduced levels of stress and anxiety
-  Improved cognitive function
-  Increased energy levels and productivity
-  Controlled blood pressure
-  Better blood flow circulation
-  Strengthened bones and muscles
-  Reduced risk of heart disease and other illnesses

Call/Text Paul at 605-397-7460

Call/Text Tina at 605-397-7285

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 4 of 85

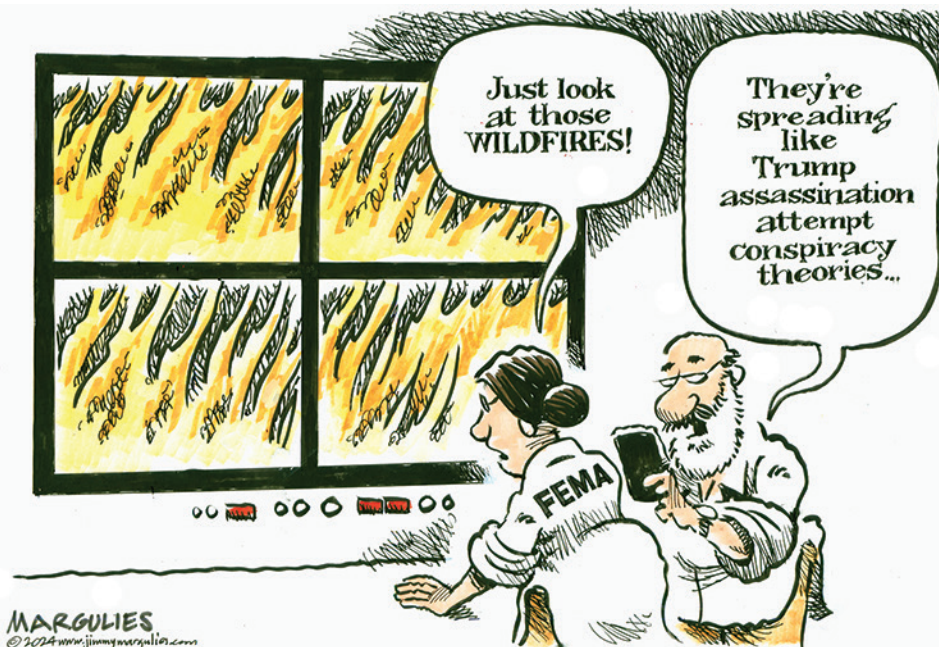


THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE

*Let us acknowledge the Lord;
let us press on to acknowledge him.
As surely as the sun rises,
he will appear;
he will come to us like the winter rains,
like the spring rains that water the earth.*

HOSEA 6:3

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BIBLE

TRIVIA

by Wilson Casey

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

2. What did the Lord cast down among the Israelites who complained about their wilderness misfortunes?

Fire, Hail, Stones, Winds

3. From Genesis 33, where did Jacob build a house and make booths for his cattle? *Beersheba, Succoth, Jerusalem, Kidron*

4. On the seventh day of the creation week, what did God do? *Created man, Divided the oceans, Named the animals, Rested*

5. On which Mount did Moses receive the Ten Commandments? *Sinai, Zion, Carmel, Pisgah*

6. Whose two sons were Hophni and Phinehas? *Ichabod, Eli, Jehoiada, Mattan*

ANSWERS: 1) New, 2) Fire, 3) Succoth, 4) Rested, 5) Sinai, 6) Eli

Sharpen your understanding of scripture with Wilson's Casey's latest book, "Test Your Bible Knowledge," available in bookstores and online.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 6 of 85

I WAS A BOY WHEN I SAW MY FATHER -- VULTUS, KING OF THE HAWKMEN -- GIVE UP SKY CITY TO MING THE MERCILESS.



FLASH GORDON

BUT I WASN'T LOOKING AT MY FATHER--



--I WAS LOOKING AT MING.

EYES BLAZING, DRINKING IN OUR SHAME AND FEAR.

HOW I WANTED THOSE EYES.



FLASH SCALES THE ARMORY, FREEING HIS SNOWSTEEL SWORD AND SHIELD, AS WELL AS THE ARMOR WE ONCE MADE HIM!



THEY AIM TO ESCAPE, SEE-- FLASH, DALE, ZARKOV AND THE DRAGONMAN BOK!



BUT I AM VULTAN, AND I BROUGHT THEM TO SKY CITY FOR A REASON!

FLASH KNOWS I CAN'T LET THEM LEAVE WITHOUT A FIGHT.



AND WHAT A FIGHT!

POLITICS IS AN UGLY BUSINESS--



--BUT COMBAT!?

COMBAT IS CLEAN.



SUDDENLY, SKY CITY SHAKES!

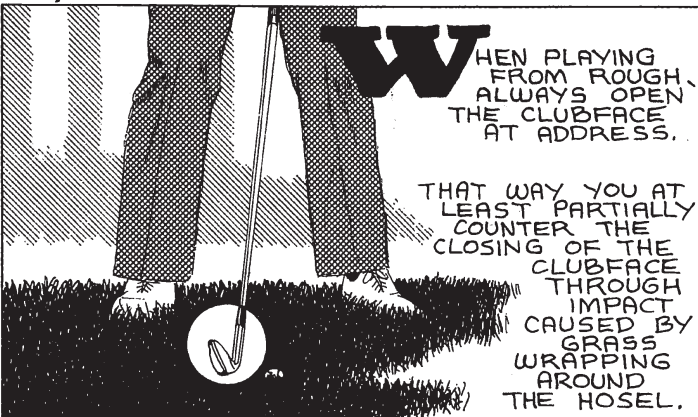
THIS SHOULD NOT BE.

WE'RE BEING ATTACKED!



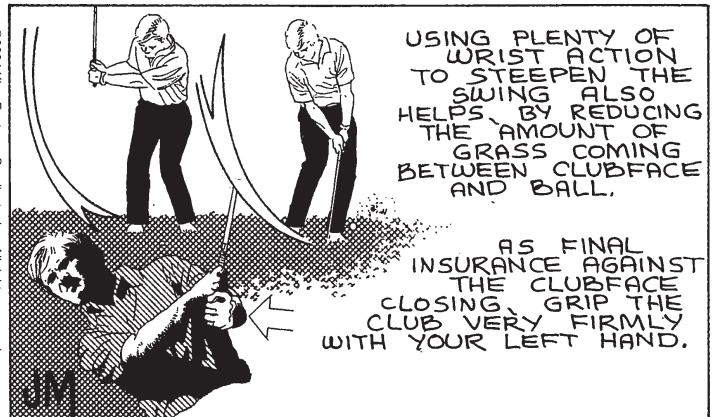
NEXT: WHERE THE AIR RUNS THIN

Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS



WHEN PLAYING FROM ROUGH, ALWAYS OPEN THE CLUBFACE AT ADDRESS.

THAT WAY YOU AT LEAST PARTIALLY COUNTER THE CLOSING OF THE CLUBFACE THROUGH IMPACT CAUSED BY GRASS WRAPPING AROUND THE HOSEL.



USING PLENTY OF WRIST ACTION TO STEEPEN THE SWING ALSO HELPS BY REDUCING THE AMOUNT OF GRASS COMING BETWEEN CLUBFACE AND BALL.

AS FINAL INSURANCE AGAINST THE CLUBFACE CLOSING, GRIP THE CLUB VERY FIRMLY WITH YOUR LEFT HAND.

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High Creatinine and GFR Levels Signify Severe Kidney Damage

DEAR DR. ROACH: Last summer, a city policeman came to my door. My doctor had been unable to contact me with the results of a recent blood test and called the police. The policeman handed me a card with the results written on it. My creatinine level was 4.1, and my glomerular filtration rate (GFR) was 14. He said the numbers indicated that my kidneys were failing and that I should go to the emergency room immediately. Except for swelling in one ankle, I had no symptoms.

During a day and a half in the hospital, I lost 14 pounds of fluid after the insertion of a catheter. Within two weeks, my creatinine level was measured at 2.1. After a few months of wearing the catheter, my prostate was

"trimmed back" (my words, not the doctor's) using a procedure called a "TURP." I am back to normal.

What is a TURP, and how routine is it? Are there any long-term negative effects? How close did I come to kidney failure? -- T.J.R.

ANSWER: Your problem was obstruction of urine flow due to an enlarged prostate. The urethra (the tube that carries urine out of the body) goes right through the middle of the prostate, and an enlarged prostate can block flow partially or completely. This is a very common problem. Sometimes the urine flow stops entirely, but this doesn't have to happen in order for kidney damage to occur. It's the increased pressure in the bladder that causes damage.

Creatinine is an end product of protein metabolism, and since it is removed by the kidney, it's a good indicator of kidney function. The higher the creatinine level, the worse the kidney function. The creatinine level (along with age and sex) are used to estimate the GFR, a direct statement of a person's kidney function.

A (stable) GFR of less than 15 is considered stage 5 kidney failure, which usually means that dialysis will be necessary to preserve life. Note that creatinine itself isn't the problem; it's a marker for the fact that the kidney can't remove all the other waste products, which will then build up and make a person very ill.

When a person with urinary obstruction develops a creatinine level over 6, it's likely that they will have permanent kidney damage, but I have seen people with higher levels recover and some with lower levels experience permanent kidney function loss. My guess is that you were only a few days away from having permanent damage.

A trans-urethral resection of the prostate (TURP) is a traditional treatment for an enlarged prostate. Although newer treatments are often used in situations where there is plenty of time to spare, a TURP is a routine treatment for the type of obstruction you had. There are possible long-term side effects from a TURP, such as erectile dysfunction, but those are usually noticed immediately after surgery and often get better over time.

Finally, a plea: Make sure that your doctor has your up-to-date contact information, including your emergency contacts. We physicians are very grateful to have the police available for emergencies, but would rather not have to use them. I try to remind my resident physicians to be sure that we have a working contact number any time we order a test, but it's best if both the patient and physician have it on their lists. Even routine tests can occasionally come back with critical results.

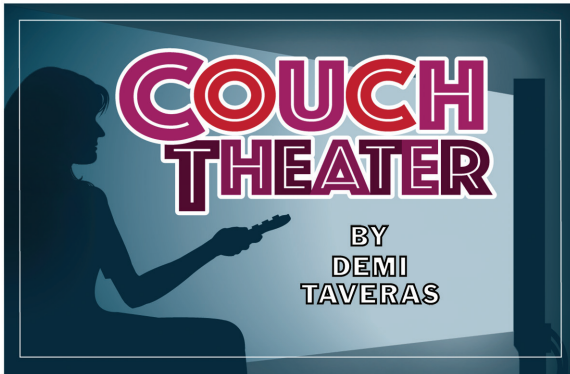
Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email questions to ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu.

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Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 8 of 85



Cole Sprouse, left, and Kathryn Newton star in "Lisa Frankenstein." Courtesy of MovieStillsDB

"Dirty Pop: The Boy Band Scam" (TV-MA) -- This docuseries out now takes a deep dive into the life and career of talent manager Lou Pearlman, who launched legendary boy bands like the Backstreet Boys and NYSNC. Although he had an exceptional eye for spotting talented musicians,

Pearlman was a bit of a scammer. Having run one of the longest-running Ponzi schemes in United States history, he created a ton of enemies and left his company with more than \$300 million in debt. Not only did his scamming tarnish his legacy as a music mogul, Pearlman was also accused of sexual harassment by Rich Cronin, the former lead singer of LFO, and many others; however, nothing has ever come out of those claims. (Netflix)

"Lisa Frankenstein" (PG-13) -- Starring Kathryn Newton ("Big Little Lies") and Cole Sprouse ("Riverdale"), this comedy-horror film puts a fun, campy spin on the Frankenstein trope. Taking place in 1989, Newton plays Lisa Swallows, a misunderstood teenage goth girl. After fumbling with her crush and barely escaping the clutches of her grimy lab partner, Lisa mourns her bad luck by visiting the grave of a young pianist who died in 1837. Little does she know that casually doting on a handsome man's burial site could bring him back to life! Now a full-fledged zombie, the pianist, known hereafter as The Creature, breaks into Lisa's home and forms an oddly delightful bond with her. But can a human girl really get her happily ever after with a zombie? Premieres July 30. (Amazon Prime Video)

"Love Island USA, Season 6" (TV-MA) -- With summer comes a new season of "Love Island," whether you're in the United States, the United Kingdom, or even France or Australia! But for those of us from the Western Hemisphere, we usually like to dial in on the USA Islanders, and it's an interesting bunch this time around! In true "Love Island" fashion, a few Islanders from the past were brought back into the villa, such as Robert Rausch who was on the previous season, but new additions include "The Traitors UK" season 1 winner Aaron Even, and Kordell Beckham -- the younger brother of NFL wide receiver Odell Beckham Jr. The real difference you'll notice this year is new host Ariana Madix, of "Vanderpump Rules" fame. All 32 episodes are out now, and they're full of out-of-pocket moments. So, grab a bevvy and get to watching! (Peacock)

"Sunny" (TV-MA) -- Rashida Jones ("Parks and Recreation") leads this black-comedy series that takes place in Japan. She portrays an American woman named Suzie, whose husband and son suddenly disappear in a plane crash. Shortly following their disappearance, Suzie is gifted with a cute domestic robot named Sunny that was supposedly a creation of her husband. Confused, since she thought he worked in refrigerators, Suzie feels pushed to investigate further into the robotics company that her husband worked for, but the path it leads her down is filled with mystery, violence and secrets. Four episodes are out now, with the remaining six releasing every Wednesday. (Apple TV+)

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 9 of 85



1. Who was the first to release "Talk to Me, Talk to Me"?
2. Who released "Love Is Strange"?
3. Name the first song released by the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band.
4. Which group wrote and released "Behind Blue Eyes"?
5. Name the song that contains this lyric: "You're asking me will my love grow, I don't know, I don't know, You stick around, now it may show, I don't know, I don't know."

Answers

1. Little Willie John, in 1958. The most popular version, however, was released by Sunny & the Sunglows, later named Sunny & the Sunliners, in 1963. The song was written by

group member Joe Seneca.

2. Mickey and Sylvia, in 1957. The song was covered by several others and ended up being used in the "Dirty Dancing" soundtrack in 1987.

3. "Buy for Me the Rain," in 1967. Their big hit was in 1970, "Mr. Bojangles," followed by "An American Dream" in 1979.

4. The Who, in 1971. It was penned by band member Peter Townshend.

5. "Something," by the Beatles, in 1969. The song was released on their "Abbey Road" album. Very quickly the song was certified gold and within 10 years over 150 other artists had covered the song.

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GRIN and BEAR IT ^{Wagner}



"If I had known he had opinions of his own, I never would have married him!"

Just Like Cats & Dogs

by Dave T. Phipps



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HOCUS-FOCUS

BY
HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



Differences: 1. Hand is moved. 2. Ear is larger. 3. Man is thinner. 4. Awning is different. 5. Tree is moved. 6. Cap is larger.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 11 of 85



* Clean baby food jars can be filled with small snacks like Cheerios and doled out in the car during longer trips. They hold just enough for a quick snack.

* "If you pull all the way into your garage, tack some carpet scraps to the wall that you pull in toward. It will protect the wall's paint, and it will protect your car's bumper if you accidentally rub the wall." -- U.F. in North Carolina

* For dance recitals, make sure to get a recording of the music to be used. You also can videotape the practice performance and have the student watch it, pointing out the great parts and the parts that need work. -- via email

* Stop runs in hose or tights by painting the bottom of the run with clear nail polish. Let dry and repeat. Do this while

wearing them, and gently unstick from the skin. It works better when they are stretched as they will be worn, and you don't risk attaching it to the other side of the tights.

* "I somehow lost one of a pair of socks that had gripper dots on the bottoms of the feet, so they would be nonslip. I gave the odd sock to my mom, and she uses it as a jar or bottle opener. The gripper dots help her get a hold of the lid to unscrew it." -- R.J. in Ohio

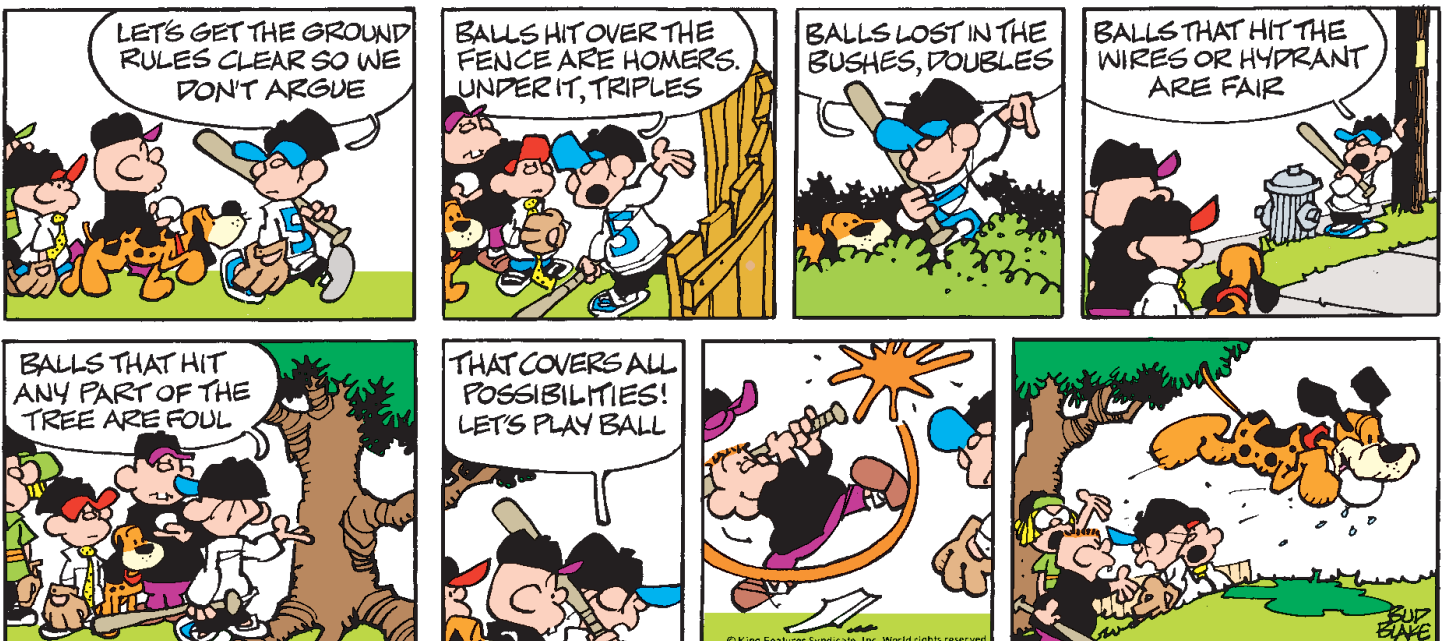
* To freshen a lunchbox, dampen a paper towel with plain vinegar and stick it inside the lunchbox. Leave overnight.

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

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TIGER

by BUD BLAKE



Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 12 of 85

King Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Swear
- 5 Understood
- 8 Six-pack units
- 12 Slightly
- 13 French assent
- 14 October birthstone
- 15 Sultry Horne
- 16 Annoying
- 18 Michelangelo works
- 20 Pumped (up)
- 21 Medit. nation
- 22 " — Blue?"
- 23 Cook in the oven
- 26 Sun spot
- 30 Take courses?
- 31 Pie — mode
- 32 Felon's flight
- 33 Fake ally
- 36 Cavorts
- 38 Mel of baseball
- 39 UFO crew
- 40 Top floor
- 43 Cargo
- 47 First-termers
- 49 Contrite one
- 50 Staffer
- 51 Brit. record label
- 52 Actress Fisher
- 53 Colonial flag maker
- 54 "Norma —"

1	2	3	4		5	6	7		8	9	10	11
12					13				14			
15					16			17				
18				19				20				
			21				22					
23	24	25				26				27	28	29
30					31				32			
33			34	35				36	37			
			38				39					
40	41	42				43				44	45	46
47					48				49			
50					51				52			
53					54				55			

- 55 Harbor arrival
- 17 Docile
- 35 Engrave
- 19 Chicago winter hrs.
- 36 GPS suggestion
- 22 Altar in the sky
- 37 Egyptian deity
- 23 Ump
- 39 Golfer Els
- 24 Rowing need
- 40 Miles away
- 25 Packed away
- 41 Half a sextet
- 26 Aviate
- 42 Turner and Danson
- 27 Carrier to Amsterdam
- 43 Disaster aid org.
- 28 Napkin's place
- 44 Get overemotional
- 29 Ambulance initials
- 45 Prefix with pad or port
- 30 Handle
- 31 Invoice fig.
- 46 Snare
- 32 Santa's ride
- 34 Loud sounds
- 48 Mal de —

DOWN

- 1 Baby elephant
- 2 Cab alternative
- 3 Trig function
- 4 Equilibrium
- 5 Really dig
- 6 Belonging to us
- 7 Dead heat
- 8 Universal
- 9 Per person
- 10 Handle
- 11 Santa's ride

— King Crossword —

Answers

Solution time: 23 mins.

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

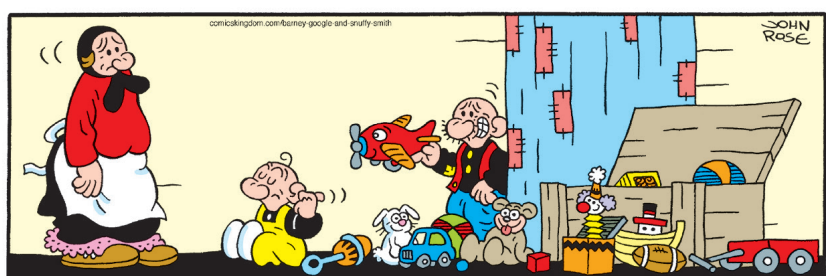
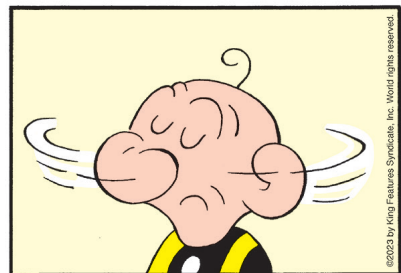
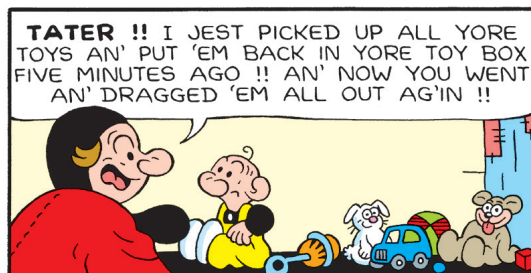
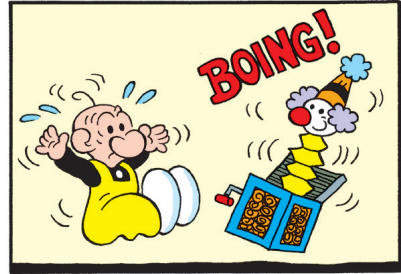
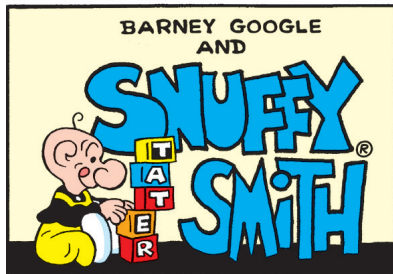
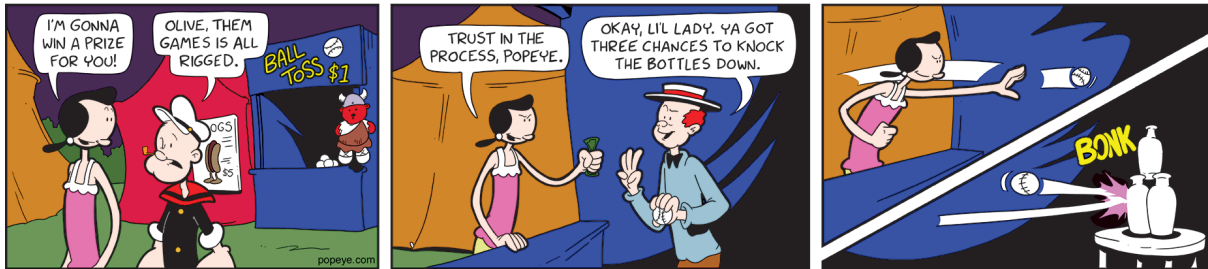
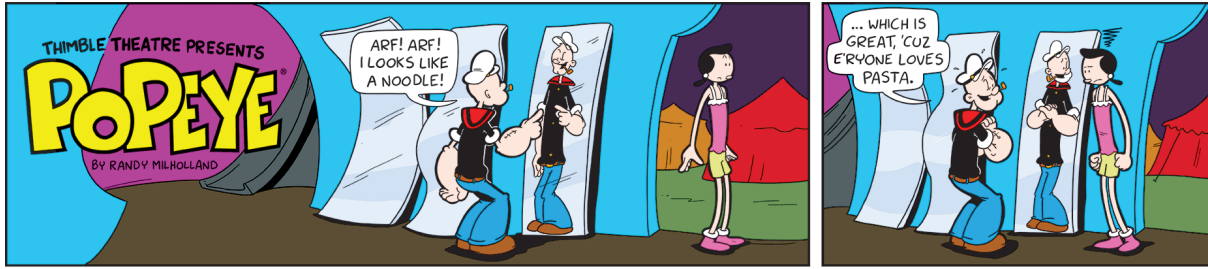
Out on a Limb

by Gary Kopervas



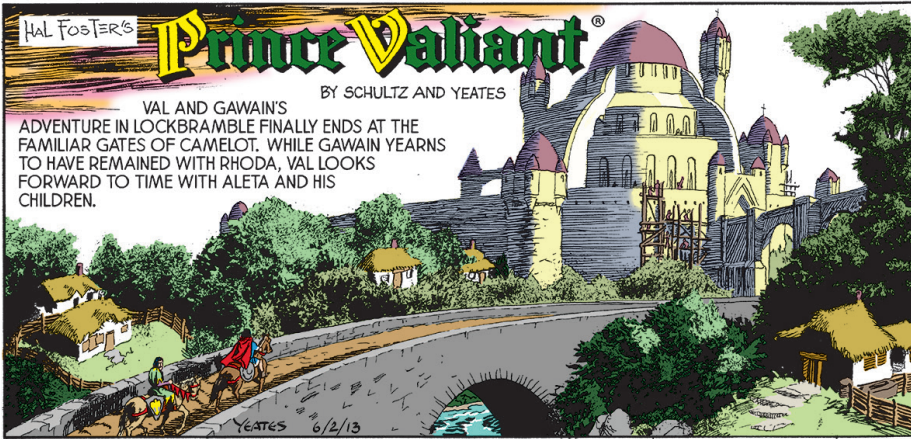
Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 14 of 85

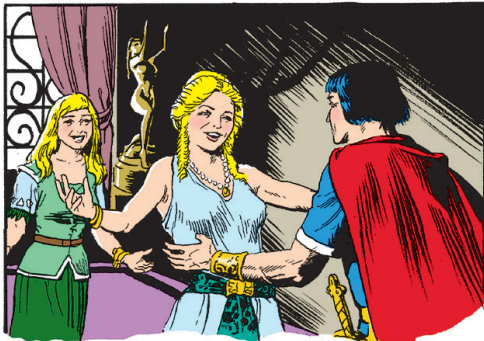


Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 15 of 85

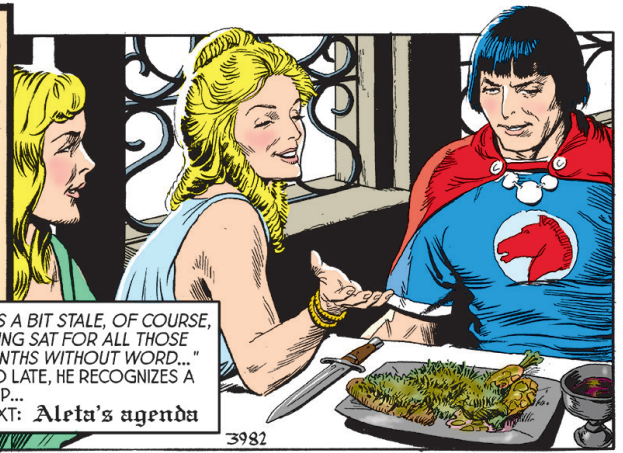
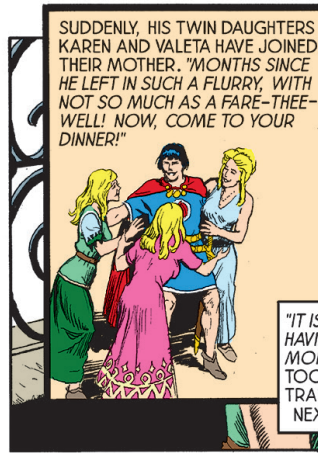


BUT FIRST A REPORT MUST BE MADE TO THE REGENT ARN. VAL AND GAWAIN FUDGE THE DETAILS A BIT, TO PROTECT LOCKBRAMBLE'S SOCIAL EXPERIMENT. AND THEY SIMPLY ALLOW THAT GRUNYARD IS HAPPILY ENGAGED WITH HIS PEOPLE AGAIN.



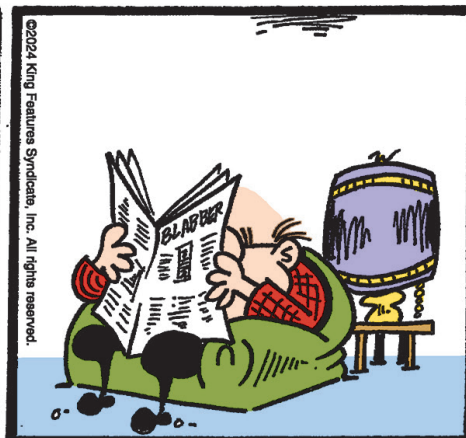
THEN, ON TO THE DOMESTIC REWARDS OF HIS LOVING WIFE AND FAMILY! ALETA GREET'S VAL ENTHUSIASTICALLY: "IT HAS BEEN MONTHS— YES, MONTHS— SINCE LAST I GAZED UPON MY DEAR HUSBAND'S VISAGE!"

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The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



SENIOR NEWS LINE

by Matilda Charles

Why seniors need to adopt a pet

Animal shelters across the country are loaded with adoptable animals, with more coming in all the time. How did this happen?

When the pandemic started and people were locked at home, many decided the time was perfect to adopt a pet. But now that offices have reopened and the kids are back in school, those pets have, in too many cases, become a chore no one has time for anymore. Thousands of pets have ended up in the shelters, not through any fault of their own. And they need loving homes.

That's where we come in.

We seniors spend more hours at home, for the most part, and we have the time to take care of one (or more) of those little creatures. We have so much to give them, and they deserve it.

But it's not a one-way street. Having a pet to care for has big benefits for us as well, both physical and psychological.

Research shows that we're happier in general when we have a pet and we hold off cognitive decline, because these little furry guys keep us thinking, remembering, sticking to a routine and planning for their care.

When we have a pet, we reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, blood pressure goes down, and we get exercise if walking a dog (and meet up with other dog owners along the way). Cholesterol levels go down and so does our stress. And we have the satisfaction of taking care of another living creature who rewards us with love.

If you live in a place where it's impossible to have a pet, you can still get the benefits of being around animals. Walk the dogs at the shelter and play with the cats several days a week to distract them from the noisy chaos of that environment. Your efforts will be very much appreciated.

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Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 17 of 85

1. What college basketball team has former NBA stars Kurt Rambis and Steve Nash among its alumni?

2. Herb Carneal was a radio play-by-play broadcaster for what Major League Baseball team from 1962-2006?

3. Jack Nicklaus has three wins at The Open Championship (1966, 1970 and 1978), and he has the most second-place finishes at the tournament with how many?

4. Randy Cunneynworth was interim head coach of what NHL team in 2011-12?

5. Bo Nix, 2024 first-round NFL Draft pick for the Denver Broncos, holds the NCAA record for games started by a college quarterback with how many?

6. The Kyalami Grand Prix Circuit, the site of 20 FIA Formula 1 World Championship races from 1967-93, is located in what country?

7. Sasha DiGiulian is a three-time U.S. national champion and 2011 world champion competing in what sport?



by Ryan A. Berenz

Answers

1. The Santa Clara University Broncos.

2. The Minnesota Twins.

3. Seven from 1964-79.

4. The Montreal Canadiens.

5. 61.

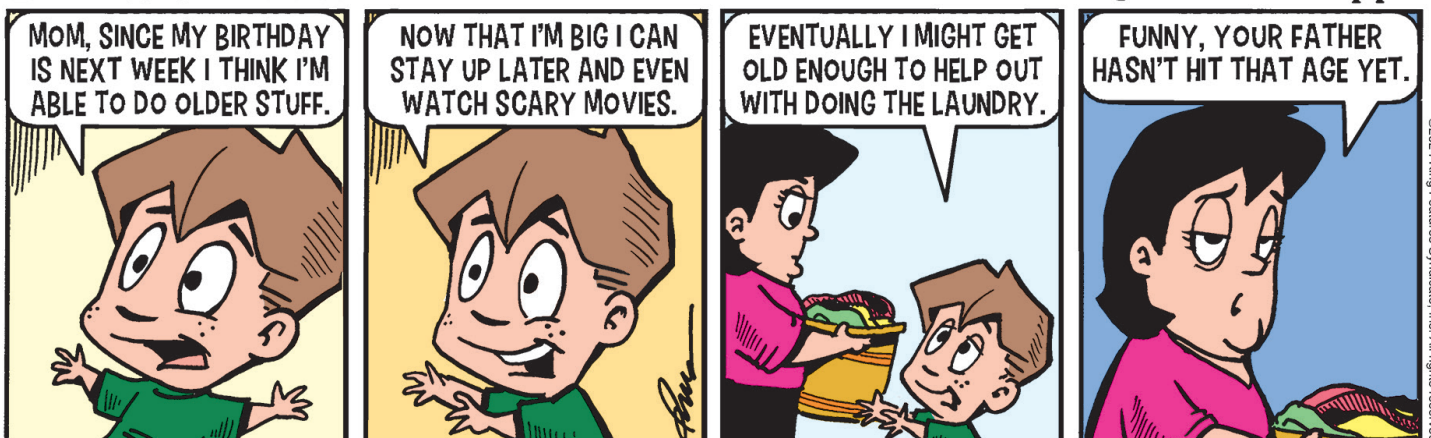
6. South Africa.

7. Sport climbing.

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Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps





Flying with a pet: Preparation is key

DEAR PAW'S CORNER: My family is taking a vacation to Orlando in three months, and we want to take our Bichon Frise, "Arabelle," with us. She is a small-medium size dog. Can we take her aboard the plane as an emotional support animal, or do we have to pay? -- Carol in Minneapolis

DEAR CAROLE: You'll have to pay for Arabelle to accompany you on the aircraft, and I recommend you book as soon as possible. Airlines offer limited space for small and medium size pets to ride in the passenger cabin with you.

Since a 2020 ruling by the Department of Transportation, only trained dogs that perform specific tasks to aid

a person with a disability can be classified as service dogs. Most airlines no longer allow emotional support animals, as they are not considered service animals.

Here are some important tips for traveling by air with your pet:

- Book as early as possible to reserve a space for your pet to travel in the cabin.
- Expect to pay between \$100 and \$200 for pet accommodation on your flight.
- Your pet must be well-behaved and responsive to your commands; cabin crew can ask you to deplane if your pet does not behave.
- Smaller pets should be kept in a carrier. They should be able to stand, turn around and lie down inside the carrier.
- Visit the veterinarian for a pre-travel checkup, and make sure your pet is up to date with all vaccinations, especially rabies. Airlines won't allow unvaccinated pets to fly.
- Exercise and feed your pet before leaving for the airport.
- Arrive early. Running late can stress you and your pet.

Get more tips at the AARP's website: <https://tinyurl.com/3ex23uw9>

Have you flown with a pet? How did it go? Tell me about it at ask@pawscorner.com.

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Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 19 of 85

Strange BUT TRUE

* In some Inuit (Eskimo) languages, a noun can have over 1,000 forms.

* Oxford University once had rules forbidding students from bringing bows and arrows to class.

* King Mithridates VI of Pontus took small doses of poison throughout his life to develop a resistance in case an attempt was made to kill him. He built up such a strong immunity that when he attempted suicide to escape capture by the Romans, the poison had no effect and he had to order a

slave to dispatch him with a sword.

* Isaac Asimov's first bestseller was his 262nd published book.

* The record for spinning a basketball on a toothbrush is 1 minute and 8.15 seconds. (No, we never thought of spinning a basketball on a toothbrush, either.)

* Velociraptor noises in the film "Jurassic Park" were made by mating tortoises.

* In 1984, a Chihuahua named Percy was seemingly killed by a car while accompanying his owner, Christine, on a visit to her parents. Christine's father buried the dog in his garden, but a terrier named Mick, who belonged to her parents, dug up the grave, dragged Percy to the house, and licked him until a faint heartbeat could be detected. While Percy recovered, it's worth noting that the two dogs had always hated each other, and continued to do so after Percy's rescue!

* Historically, on Father's Day, more collect calls were made than on any other day of the year.

* China has more people who have learned English than the United States.

* In ancient Egypt, slaves were murdered to accompany their deceased owners to the afterlife.

Thought for the Day: "I remind myself every morning: Nothing I say this day will teach me anything. So if I'm going to learn, I must do it by listening." -- Larry King

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The Garden Bug



For your **Tuscan**-style breads, use rosemary, basil, thyme or oregano; these pair well with garlic and parmesan. The "herbs de **Provence**" blend includes thyme, oregano, summer savory, and rosemary, which grow abundantly in the hillsides and fields of Provence in southern France. Herbs used in **Greek** cuisine include oregano, thyme, sage, parsley, dill, mint, spearmint and fennel. - Brenda Weaver

Grow herbs for baking



Sources:
davesgarden.com, marthastewart.com, athensfoodonfoot.com



by Freddy Groves

It's not double dipping!

Veterans who took the separation check that was offered when they left the service cannot legally get disability payments now -- until that separation money is paid back.

Think about that a minute.

The military wants to wind down and asks a veteran to go ahead and retire early, maybe years before the veteran planned to do so. But, yeah, the check is offered and accepted.

Time goes by and life happens and disability payments are needed. Or maybe the veteran is eligible due to the PACT Act covering exposure to toxins ... except there's a law saying a veteran can't get both the separation money and disability payments. That separation money has to be paid back, and the Department of Veterans Affairs starts taking it out of any disability payments it does make. And what of the veterans who did receive disability over the years because, oops, the VA made a mistake and now it wants all that money back?

In some cases, the amount taken monthly is the total income a veteran has. Some have applied for hardship and been denied. Some will be paying back that separation money for years and years.

The RAND Corporation did a study about how many veterans are caught in this situation. On average, per that study, veterans are having to pay back between \$20,000 and more than \$50,000.

It's not only those who left the service and were given separation pay. Other types of benefits include disability severance pay, non-disability severance pay, readjustment pay, special separation benefit and others.

And what does a veteran do when suddenly the monthly income drops to zero?

The VA wants to consider these two types of payments -- disability benefits and separation pay -- double dipping if a veteran gets both. It's not. And if the government is going to offer thousands of dollars to coax a veteran to leave the service, they need to make it absolutely clear that disability payments won't be allowed if needed down the road.

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Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 21 of 85

Wishing Well®

7	8	2	4	6	8	3	4	3	2	3	7	8
S	A	A	U	Y	T	D	N	E	N	V	T	T
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E	U	E	S	O	A	A	U	O	B	T	I	I
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7	2	5	6	8	7	2	8	6	8	2	8	8
S	A	E	E	I	S	W	L	L	I	N	T	Y

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

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- TELEVISION: What was Sponge-Bob SquarePants' original name when the story was pitched?
- MOVIES: Which famous horror film was set at Crystal Lake, New Jersey?
- LANGUAGE: In Great Britain, what are stabilisers?
- MUSIC: Which band had a hit with the 1961 "The Lion Sleeps Tonight"?
- GEOGRAPHY: How many U.S. states have a border with Mexico?
- MATH: How many sides does a hectogon have?
- INVENTIONS: In what year were flat-screen TVs first sold?
- FOOD & DRINK: What kind of cheese is used in a caprese salad?
- U.S. STATES: Which state's nickname is "The Land of Enchantment"?
- ANIMAL KINGDOM: What kind of dog is Scooby-Doo in the animated cartoons?

Answers

- SpongeBoy.
- "Friday the 13th."
- Training wheels.
- The Tokens.
- Four: California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas.
- 100.
- 1997.
- Fresh mozzarella.
- New Mexico.
- A Great Dane.

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South Dakota Governor

Kristi Noem



South Dakota: *Under God, the People Rule*

The Ringing Bell of Liberty

When anti-American criminals tear down our statues, deface our monuments, or burn our flag, we must hold them to account for their vile actions. This past week, anti-American criminals defaced the Washington D.C. replica of the Liberty Bell in the name of violence and hatred, writing " Hamas is coming " and other far more vulgar statements.

In 1776, when our Founding Fathers first declared independence from Great Britain, a bell in the tower of what would later be called Independence Hall rang out to summon the citizens of Philadelphia to gather. They would hear for the very first time the Declaration of Independence read aloud in public.

Colonel John Nixon, who was in command of the Philadelphia city guard, read aloud those immortal words, "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

Inspired by those words, Americans fought and died to defend them and to make them true here at home. In the decades and centuries since, many nations around the world have been similarly inspired, taking to heart that simple yet revolutionary claim "that all men are created equal."

The bell that rung that day became a symbol of the liberty that the Declaration of Independence proclaimed: the Liberty Bell. Inscribed on the bell is the beautiful phrase, "Proclaim Liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof."

In Washington D.C., the center of the federal government that the Declaration proclaims was instituted "to secure these rights," a replica of the Liberty Bell was installed so that the leaders of our nation would never forget the purpose for which they hold elected office.

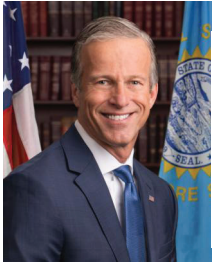
11 years after the Liberty Bell rang out to herald the reading of the Declaration of Independence, it rang again for another solemn occasion: the signing of the United States Constitution. Although it wasn't in the original text, that Constitution established the First Amendment, which provided for "the right of the people peaceably to assemble." It created no right to violently protest, deface public property, or espouse violence and genocide against an entire people.

Symbols have meaning, not merely because they exist, but because of what they symbolize. Statues honoring our leaders matter, not because they were better than anyone else, but because of the importance of their actions and what they symbolize.

The Liberty Bell symbolizes perhaps the two most important political documents ever written. In fact, the only document that I hold in higher regard is the Bible itself. In so defacing it, these criminals rejected the foundational truths that those documents proclaim. They defaced not just a bell, but the core principles that make the United States of America more than just a shape on a map – the principles that make us the greatest nation the world has ever known.

The American colonists were fighting for their right to exist as a free and independent nation. Today, the Israeli people are similarly fighting for their right to exist. And these pro-Hamas, anti-American criminals want them wiped off the face of the earth.

South Dakota will not stand for it. We will continue to speak out against hate. We will continue to proclaim the blessings of America. And we will forever celebrate "that all men are created equal" – and protect it with everything that we have.



JOHN THUNE
U.S. SENATOR FOR SOUTH DAKOTA

A Dangerous World Calls for a Strong America

I often say, "If we don't get national security right, the rest is just conversation." In just the last year, we've seen our ally Israel come under attack from terrorists, and our own military has been attacked by Iran-backed militias 170 times, all while Russia and China continue their campaigns of aggression and strengthen their alliance with one another. Times like these underscore the need for American strength.

The reality is that we are not as prepared as we should be to address these threats. The weakness that the Biden-Harris administration has shown on the world stage has emboldened our adversaries. At the same time, our military readiness is not where it needs to be to deter aggression. We have service branches that are below their recruitment targets. We have planes that can't fly and ships that can't sail because of deferred maintenance. And we have shortages of munitions and weapons.

Last month, my colleagues on the Senate Armed Services Committee put forward a National Defense Authorization Act for next year that takes steps to address the challenges we're facing. It fully funds deterrence initiatives and strengthens partnerships to counter Russia and China. It makes critical efforts to modernize military technologies and strategies that will define tomorrow's conflicts. And it authorizes the purchase of new combat vessels, vehicles, and aircraft to upgrade our aging fleets.

I'm particularly proud to report that this bill includes full funding for the next steps of the B-21 mission, including necessary support facilities. The Air Force calls this new plane the future backbone of its bomber force, and I am incredibly proud that its first mission will be hosted at South Dakota's own Ellsworth Air Force Base. One of my top priorities is making sure that Ellsworth has everything it needs for this critical advancement in our nation's defense.

The annual defense bill is one of the most important pieces of legislation we consider each year. I believe there should be a sense of urgency about getting it to the floor. My colleague Sen. Roger Wicker (R-Miss.) recently released a blueprint for making a generational investment in our military. He noted that our defense budget as a share of our economy has fallen to near record lows, and he proposes a defense buildup similar to President Reagan's initiative in the 1980s.

We have no time to waste to build up our military, and the first step is getting this year's defense bill passed in a timely manner. History has shown that weakness invites aggression. The strength of our military is the surest way we have of securing peace, and it must be a priority.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 24 of 85



Delivering Wins for Indian Country

BIG News

The public safety crisis on Indian reservations is serious. Tribal law enforcement agencies are faced with a lack of resources and officers, contributing to long response times and insufficient safety. I've requested additional funding for tribal law enforcement, field hearings in Indian country, and introduced legislation to ease the burden on tribal law enforcement.

This week, the House passed the appropriations bill for the Department of Interior which oversees tribal safety programs within the Bureau of Indian Affairs. I fought hard to get an increase in funding, and this package included the following:

\$2.81 billion for the Bureau of Indian Affairs – a 14.5% increase from the FY24 enacted level – which includes:

\$746 million for Public Safety and Justice programs – a 34% increase from the FY24 enacted level.

\$414 million for Criminal Investigations and Police Service – a 51% increase from the FY24 enacted level.

\$55 million for Tribal Courts – an 18% increase from the FY24 enacted level.

Fiscal responsibility is important, so I'm glad these funding increases are done without raising the cost of the bill. We made significant cuts elsewhere to provide resources for essential safety programs. This is a huge win for Indian country.

BIG Idea

In South Dakota, the average life expectancy is 78 years old. But, for Native American enrolled members on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, it's 58 years. That's a remarkable 20-year gap. One of the reasons for that is the poor quality of health care in Indian country. The federal government has trust and treaty obligations to address this, but the quality of care is second class. The Indian Health Service (IHS) faces a lack of oversight, questionable financial integrity, staffing needs, and employee shortcomings.

I introduced the Restoring Accountability in the IHS Act to improve the delivery of care for Native Americans relying on IHS by promoting the recruitment and retention of staff, best practices on information-sharing, cultural awareness, and accountability.

This week, I testified in the House Natural Resources Committee on my bill to improve service for Indian country.

BIG Update

The assassination attempt on President Trump is a very serious act that should not be overlooked. Congress is working to get to the bottom of this. The House held committee hearings this week to get answers about what happened at the rally in Pennsylvania. The hearings resulted in Kimberly Cheatle stepping down from her position as Director of the Secret Service, after members on both sides of the aisle called for her resignation.

I voted to establish a special task force to investigate and identify ways to strengthen security measures. The bipartisan task force passed the House unanimously – all members agree that we can't let this major security failure ever happen again.



Dr. James L. Snyder Ministries

PO Box 831313 - Ocala, FL 34483

1-352-216-3025

Who Is Shadowing Me

I've been bouncing back after a health hiatus and thought I was doing well. I still have some coughs and sneezes, but they are slowly diminishing. It's good to get back on schedule again.

The other day, I had to get some gas for my vehicle. It's been a long time since I put gas in that vehicle, and it was about time to get filled up. When I got to the gas station, I didn't know if I needed to go to the bank and get a loan for my gas. Prices are ridiculous. When I first got my license, gas was \$0.29 a gallon.

When I left that morning, I noticed a shadow on my left side as I was driving. I looked to the left, and saw nothing. I was sure there was something there because of the shadow.

Throughout the day, there was a scary shadow on my left side that I couldn't identify.

I didn't know if somebody was following me and if they were, why?

Of course, thinking the way I do, it could be an angel following me to make sure I got back home safe.

When I got home, I told The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage that I believed an angel was shadowing me to make sure I didn't get hurt.

She just looked at me, laughed and said, "What angel would waste his time with you?"

Without thinking, I responded, "Well, you did."

She looked at me with one of "those stares" and I realized I had said that phrase out loud. That's my problem. I cannot keep such phrases in my head.

Throughout the rest of the day, I had this shadow to the left of me. No matter where I went, there was this shadow. I could never make it out, I could never see it, and I didn't know what it was.

After a while, something like this can work on your nerves. I don't know what's wrong. Maybe I'm losing it.

Throughout the day, I went about very carefully, not knowing who was shadowing me. I got very frustrated with this, not realizing what in the world was going on.

The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage suggested that maybe it was old age catching up with me. Then, she laughed as she walked away.

I had a lot of places to go and was quite frustrated with this thing shadowing me.

Then, the Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage asked if I could go to Publix and pick up some groceries she needed for the day. Of course, I agreed and got ready to go.

Shadowing me as I walked to my vehicle was this "thing" that had been shadowing me all day. I was trying to think of how to eliminate this nonsense.

Maybe, just maybe, if I sneaked over to Publix and got an Apple Fritter, I would be able to solve this problem I was having. At least it's an excuse to get an Apple Fritter.

I got my Apple Fritter and sat on a bench outside to eat it. That lousy shadow was with me while I was eating. I was very cautious because I did not want that shadow to get a bite of my Apple Fritter. That would have spelled tragedy in the worst sense of the word.

As I took the last bite of the Apple Fritter, I turned to my left to find that person shadowing me, and there was nobody there. I was getting frustrated. Something had to be done.

On my way home, that shadow was still on my left side. I don't know how that shadow could be there and not be seen. Something's going on.

I had one final stop before I went home. I was going to get a haircut because it was that time of the month.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 26 of 85

I went in and was seated. My barber got everything ready and then looked at me and said, "How did you get that little bit of peanut butter on your glasses?"

What? I removed my glasses, and sure enough, there was a little peanut butter spot on my left lens. I was a little excited because I had found my shadower.

He laughed, and I joined in the laughter, but underneath, I was as frustrated as I've ever been. All day long, this little bit of peanut butter had been shadowing me, and I had not noticed it until now.

When I got home, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage greeted me and asked me a simple question. "Have you been shadowed this afternoon?"

I had to tell her, so I revealed that I had a little speck of peanut butter on my left lens.

She laughed and said, "I saw that this morning and wondered how soon it would be for you to realize what it really was."

While I was pondering my blunder for the day and shadows, I was reminded of a verse in the Bible. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (Psalm 91:1).

To be associated with this shadow is the most important thing in the world. To know that I'm under the care of God gives me the courage to walk in faith. If I am under that shadow I am where God wants me to be and where God can use me for His purpose.

EARTHTALK ™

Dear EarthTalk: Is it ethical for birders to use “playback” to see birds? -- P.L., via email

Birders and wildlife photographers can become frustrated or overzealous when searching for elusive species. Tempted to get that perfect avian silhouette in the binocular or camera lens, they turn to a concept that has been made possible with the widespread use of portable technology: playback, the playing of a recording of a bird’s call to attract the bird whose song they play (given that the bird is within earshot).

The ethical debate surrounding playback has arisen due to the sheer number of people who now have the ability to play these bird songs from their phones. Whether a serious birder, photographer, researcher or casual hiker, the sounds are much more frequent now versus the days when some were able to imitate bird calls themselves. Research suggests playback can be disruptive and even detrimental to some species.

Many smaller bird species are prey of larger bird species. When someone plays the call of a predatory bird, it can make smaller birds panic. This fearful state causes them to limit normal eating, foraging and breeding. Playback can also cause prey birds to neglect their nests, sometimes entirely abandoning them. This is especially deleterious to at-risk and endangered species struggling to maintain a foothold.

“Before we had devices, good guides were experts at imitating bird calls. I don’t think there was a particular harm in that because they were not doing it repeatedly or in a way that disturbed the birds,” reports naturalist Stephen Alter on Mongabay-India, a conservation platform. “Now you can download any bird call, attach it to an amplifier and start using it in the wild and the poor birds get very confused.

These disturbances also impact scientific research and can be an obstacle to investigation. Scientists use playback in order to band birds or retrieve geolocators to study their movements. “Certain species will hear so much playback, they won’t respond well when researchers attempt to capture them,” says Jennifer Tyrell, a Master Bird Bander with Audubon South Carolina. According to Audubon, playing recordings of birds is illegal in national parks and national wildlife refuges in the U.S. Otherwise in the U.S. and globally rules vary greatly.

If you’re a birder or wildlife photographer, follow guidelines in park and nature preserves, and check with the offices if you’re unsure if playback is allowed. Even if it is permitted, consider the negative impacts it can have. Use playback indoors to learn bird sounds before heading into the field. This way, you will know which avian species you are hearing and observing without disruption. Educate your fellow birders and photographers on the drawbacks of using bird recordings in the wilderness, and lead by example.



Staffers from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission’s Fish and Wildlife Research Institute use playback devices that broadcast Florida scrub-jay territorial calls in the Ocala National Forest during an annual Jay Watch survey.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

South Dakota father is leading effort to restore abortion rights in the state

BY: ELISHA BROWN - JULY 27, 2024 6:00 AM

Unlike other abortion-rights initiatives across the country, major reproductive rights groups haven't backed the effort to restore access in South Dakota.

But that hasn't stopped Dakotans for Health — a ballot question committee behind a measure that is set to appear on the November ballot — from galvanizing voters in the state, where abortion is banned unless the mother's life is at risk. South Dakota enacted a trigger law, first passed by lawmakers in 2005, after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade two years ago.

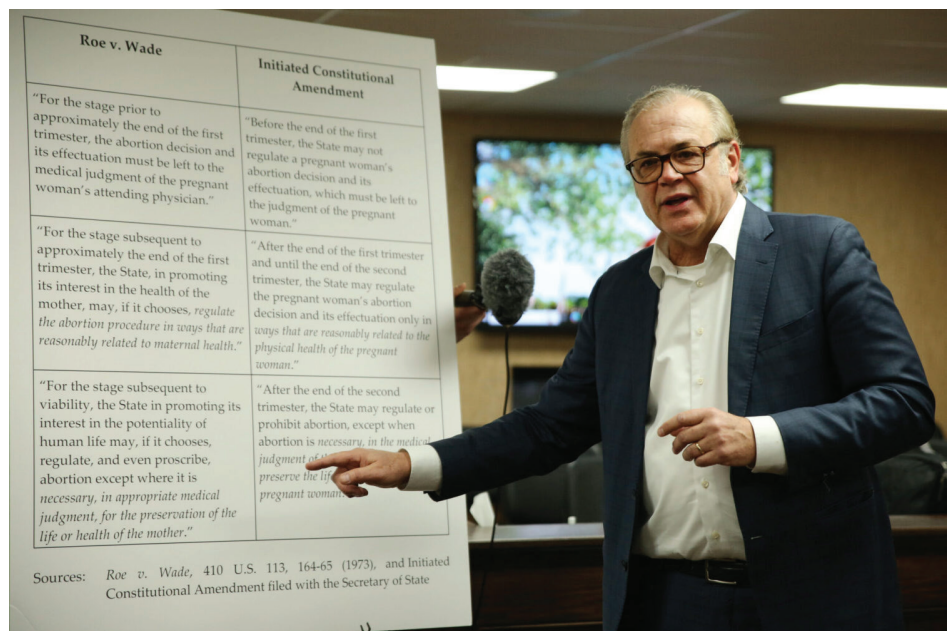
The ballot question asks voters to ban legislators from regulating abortion until the end of the first trimester, allow regulations during the second trimester "in ways that are reasonably related to the physical health of the pregnant woman" and let the state prohibit abortion in the third trimester unless the procedure is necessary to save the life or health of a pregnant patient.

Despite the lack of support from major organizations, the group submitted more than 55,000 petition-signatures to election officials in May, South Dakota Searchlight reported. About 46,000 of those signatures were from registered voters, even though the group only needed roughly 35,000 valid signatures to make the ballot.

Anti-abortion groups have mobilized against the measure. Republican Rep. Jon Hansen introduced a bill this year allowing voters to withdraw their signatures from petitions. GOP Gov. Kristi Noem signed the measure into law in March, along with approving legislation that directed health officials to create a video explaining the state's abortion ban.

Hansen is also co-chair of the Life Defense Fund, a group that Republican Secretary of State Monae Johnson called "scammers" and accused its members of "impersonating" her staff during calls that encouraged voters to remove their signatures from the petition, Searchlight reported. (Johnson asked the attorney general to investigate the calls, but he said no laws were broken and the anti-abortion group identified themselves as volunteers.)

With a few months left until Election Day, Dakotans for Health is focused on encouraging people to



Dakotans for Health Executive Director Rick Weiland speaks to the press Feb. 7, 2024, at the Capitol in Pierre about an initiated constitutional amendment to enshrine abortion rights in the state constitution. (Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 29 of 85

vote "yes" for Amendment G. Last month, it launched the Freedom Amendment Coalition led by former Democratic state lawmaker Nancy Turbak Berry. Republicans and doctors have announced their support to restore abortion access in South Dakota, too.

States Newsroom spoke to Dakotans for Health leader Rick Weiland, a Sioux Falls resident who unsuccessfully ran for Congress three times as a Democrat, about the grassroots campaign.

The following interview has been edited and condensed.

States Newsroom: The casual reader may be surprised to find out that you, a 65-year-old father of five, have spearheaded a campaign to restore abortion rights in South Dakota. So why did you decide to organize the ballot measure?

Rick Weiland: I have two daughters who are of child-bearing years. I have a granddaughter who's 11, and I think about the poor kid that was raped in Ohio and had to go to Indiana to get an abortion, and I have a zillion nieces. Abortion rights are human rights in so many ways. When you look at the fact that women had these rights for 50 years and, with the change in the makeup of the court, they were eviscerated, and now we're living in the most restrictive state in the country.

We have, with the trigger law, an exception for the life of the mother, right? But we still don't know what that would constitute. Even after Dobbs and the trigger law kicking in, we couldn't get anything through the legislature — because of the Right to Life lobby — to give doctors some peace of mind that they could help their patients. Finally, the legislature, which by the way is made up of 94 Republicans and 11 Democrats, allocated \$100,000 to the state Department of Health to work with the governor and the attorney general to develop some kind of video that will instruct doctors on what they can and can't do. Doctors are still operating under a pretty risky situation, and you hear a lot of stories about women having to travel out of state for help. It's just a mess out here and for me, it checked a lot of boxes, in terms of us getting involved.

SN: If approved, the ballot measure would allow abortion with no restrictions from the state legislature up to the end of the first trimester. But then in the second trimester, it lets lawmakers enact restrictions reasonably related to the physical health of the pregnant mother, and in the third trimester, abortion is banned except to save the life and health of the mother. Why did the committee choose that language instead of using the fetal viability language?

RW: Because Roe was a recognizable 50-year precedent, and we're living in South Dakota. When you break it down, the only push back I'd have on that second trimester, as you described it, is that they can't restrict, they can regulate, but they can't prohibit an abortion in the second trimester. We're talking about abortion that takes place in a hospital or a licensed medical facility by a licensed medical professional — those are the kinds of regulations that would be allowable, like they were under Roe. Essentially 99% of all abortions in this country occur in the first two trimesters. Right now we have 0% accessibility. We're covering 99%, and then you get into the third trimester, which is pretty typical in most states. It's the life or health of the mother.

SN: Back in December, the regional Planned Parenthood and state American Civil Liberties Union opposed the scope of the measure. Those are organizations with big money who have backed a lot of the successful initiatives in Michigan and Ohio. Have they come around after seeing the success of the initiative so far?

RW: Not yet. We are sincerely hoping that they will. I reached out very early in our process of trying to convene groups of stakeholders. And at the time, I think it was too early for them. We know, having done these initiatives, that we need to get started early out here, because we rely pretty heavily on the grassroots. That can be a mixed bag. Sometimes volunteers don't want to circulate in sub-zero weather. We have tough winters out here, and we knew we needed every day possible, every day available to be able to gather signatures — especially for a constitutional amendment. But we reached out to Planned Parenthood and to the ACLU at the time. To be honest with you, I don't think that they were particularly interested in South Dakota in a ballot measure approach. I think they were looking at other bigger states. We've extended olive branch after olive branch to these groups hoping that they'll get engaged at some point.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 30 of 85

I know there are people on the left that would like to go a lot further. Think about what happened after that trigger law went into effect. It just seems to make a lot of sense and to be able to say, hey, all we're doing is restoring the rights that women had for 50 years. Read the language of Roe [side-by-side] with our ballot measure. The language is pretty much exact. If these national groups want to do something after we're successful and expand it, have at it. But we're concentrating on something that we think makes a lot of sense.

SN: South Dakota GOP Rep. Jon Hansen sponsored legislation that allows citizens to withdraw petition signatures. The governor signed that into law in March, and Hansen is also the co-chair of the Life Defense Fund, which is opposing the abortion-rights ballot measure. How is Dakotans for Health preparing for any future attacks against the campaign as we near the election?

RW: We just intercept it. They were apparently representing themselves as members of the secretary of state's office. But a number of people complained about it and that's why [Secretary of State] Monae Johnson requested [Attorney General Marty] Jackley investigate.

I have described their efforts as desperate. They were harassing us the whole time we were circulating. They would send protesters out to harass our circulators and to harass or intimidate voters that wanted to sign the petition. It has been an interesting journey. Ultimately, our mantra has been 'let the voters decide.' We've been qualified. We're going to be on the ballot. We're prepared for a lawsuit.

SN: In May, you submitted some 55,000 signatures — that's way over the 35,000 needed from registered voters to qualify. What memorable interactions have you had with South Dakotans in support of this? What has the response been from South Dakotans on the ground?

RW: We've got a number of people from the medical community that are doctors who are just really troubled by the situation today. There's a woman that's running for Congress out here who came to one of our events last year. She wasn't a candidate then, and I've known her for quite some time, but her daughter was miscarrying, went to one of the hospitals and was told to go home. Then her husband finds her passed out in the bathroom bleeding and had to call the ambulance to get her in. Of course then her life was on the line and they took care of the situation, but that's not right.

We're calling our effort a freedom amendment. Women who are raped don't have the freedom they once had to make a decision. A victim of incest who becomes pregnant lost that ability, and women with dangerous problematic pregnancies have lost their freedom. We have a governor who likes to tell you to come to South Dakota: Live, work and play. It's a free state. Well, it ain't free if you're a female.

SN: Nancy Turbak Berry, a former state Democratic lawmaker and an abortion-rights advocate, will lead the Freedom Amendment Coalition to support the measure in the next phase. Was it a strategic choice to add a woman leader to the effort? Will you still be involved?

RW: Oh, yeah, I'll be intimately involved. We spent so much time this last year and a half focusing on getting signatures. We look at this as the next step of the campaign which is expanding beyond volunteers. The grassroots to building a nonpartisan, bipartisan coalition. We'll be announcing Republicans for the Freedom Amendment, Libertarians for the Freedom Amendment, Independents for the Freedom Amendment.

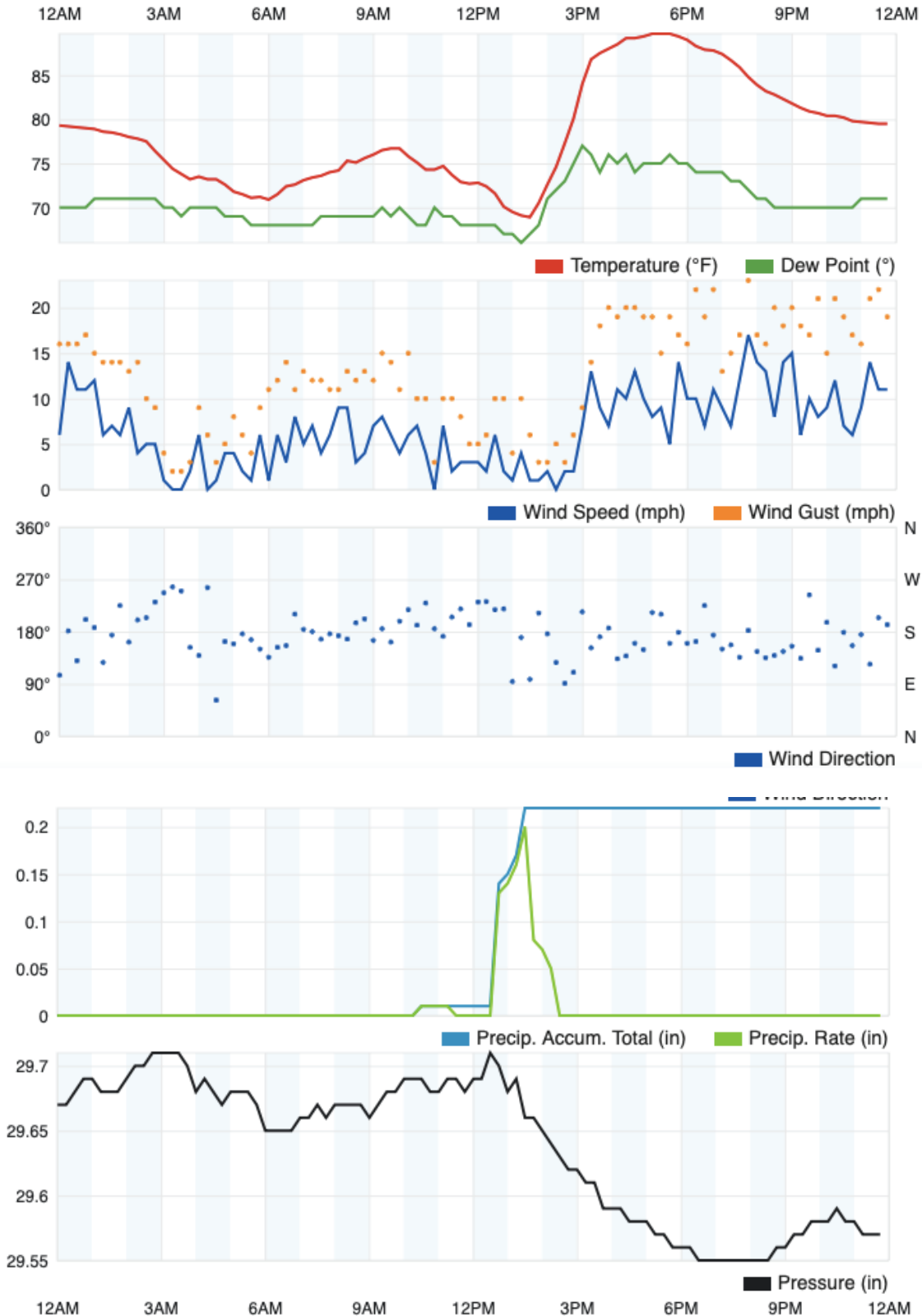
Nancy is very articulate. I've known her for years. She's been practicing attorney in Watertown, born and raised up there. I love her story. She was educated in an 11-room schoolhouse but ends up going to Harvard and does her undergrad and then bolts to university to get her law degree, came back, ran for the legislature later and served two terms in the [state] Senate. She's going to bring a lot to the campaign.

Elisha Brown is the Reproductive Rights Today newsletter author at States Newsroom. She is based in Durham, North Carolina, where she previously worked as a reporter covering reproductive rights, policy, and inequality for Facing South. Her work has appeared in The New York Times, The Daily Beast, The Atlantic, and Vox. She attended American University in Washington, D.C. and was raised in South Carolina.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 31 of 85

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Broton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 32 of 85

Sunday

Sunday Night

Monday

Monday Night

Tuesday



High: 85 °F

Low: 65 °F

High: 90 °F

Low: 66 °F

High: 91 °F

Slight Chance
T-storms then
Chance
T-storms

Chance
T-storms and
Patchy Fog

Patchy Fog
then Sunny

Mostly Clear

Hot



Severe Weather Threat Overview

July 28, 2024
3:41 AM

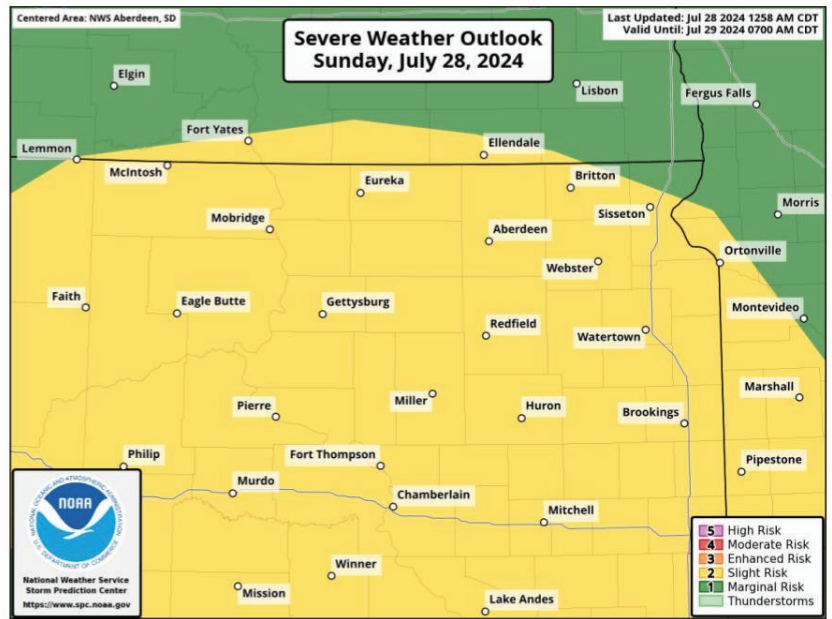
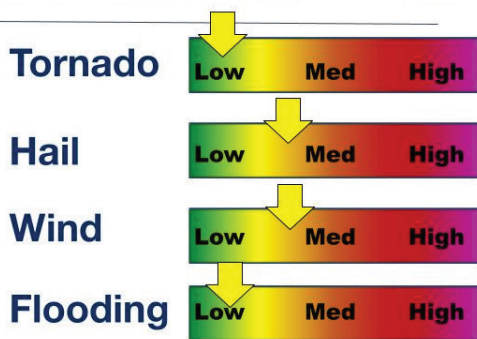
Sunday Afternoon and Evening

Hazards

Storms that develop on Sunday afternoon and evening have the potential to produce hail larger than 1" in diameter and winds exceeding 60 mph.

Timing/Location

There is a 20-30% chance of storms in the morning, but storms will increase in intensity and area through the afternoon and into the evening (40-60%). There is low confidence in the location(s) of storm development.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Storms will be possible this morning (20 to 30%), but will increase in intensity and area through the afternoon and into the evening (40 to 60%). Exact locations to be affected are uncertain. Any storms that develop have the potential to produce hail larger than an inch in diameter and winds exceeding 60 mph.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 33 of 85



Start of Week Forecast

Today



Highs: 84-94°F

Lows: 62-67°F

Chance of PM storms

Monday



Highs: 86-92°F

Lows: 63-97°F

Highs will be above average in the mid 80s to mid 90s both today and Monday. Some storms are possible today across the area and Monday in north central SD.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 34 of 85

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 90 °F at 4:56 PM

Low Temp: 69 °F at 1:20 PM

Wind: 22 mph at 5:07 PM

Precip: : 0.22

Day length: 14 hours, 55 minutes (lost 15 minutes since last Sunday)

Today's Info

Record High: 109 in 1975

Record Low: 40 in 2013

Average High: 85

Average Low: 60

Average Precip in July.: 2.84

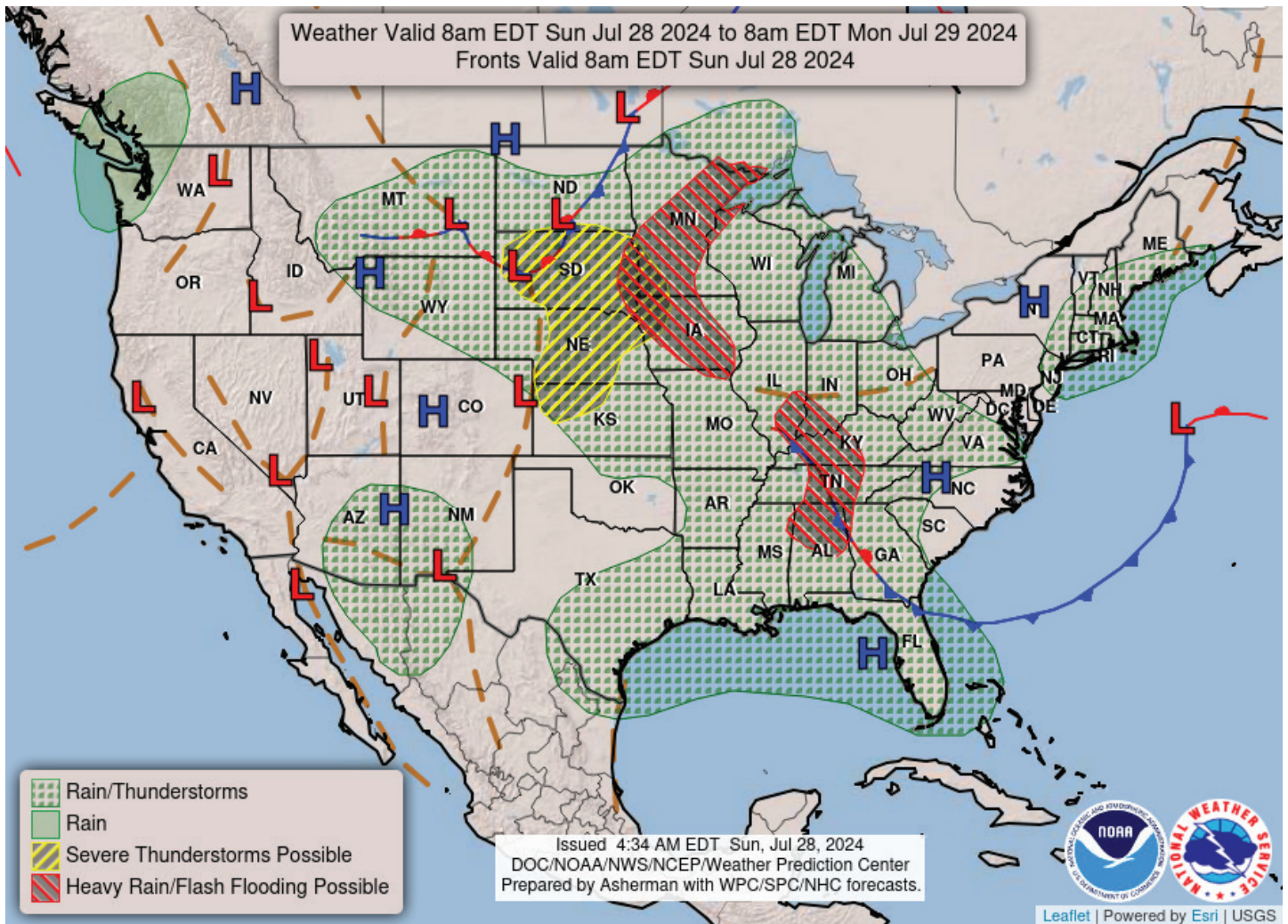
Precip to date in July: 3.78

Average Precip to date: 13.85

Precip Year to Date: 14.73

Sunset Tonight: 9:06:32 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:12:24 am



Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 35 of 85

Today in Weather History

July 28, 1986: Very intense thunderstorms developed in South Dakota and Nebraska and moved into Iowa. The first of these storms produced a tornado that crossed into Iowa south of Sioux City and slammed into a coal-burning power plant. This storm caused between 25 and 50 million dollars damage to the plant. The tornado continued across farmland, then damaged a store and flattened a motel in Sloan before lifting up.

1819 - A small but intense hurricane passed over Bay Saint Louis, MS. The hurricane was considered the worst in fifty years. Few houses were left standing either at Bay Saint Louis or at Pass Christian, and much of the Mississippi coast was desolate following the storm. A U.S. cutter was lost along with its thirty-nine crew members. The storm struck the same area that was hit 150 years later by Hurricane Camille. (David Ludlum)

1898: A severe thunderstorm produced considerable hail (some stones to 11 ounces) in Chicago, Illinois business district. Some people were hurt, not by hail, but by several hundred runaway horses spooked by the hailstones.

1930 - The temperature at Greensburg, KY, soared to 114 degrees to set a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1934 - The temperature at Grofino, ID, climbed to 118 degrees to establish a record for Idaho. (The Weather Channel)

1952 - A severe storm with hail up to an inch and a half in diameter broke windows, ruined roofs, and stripped trees of leaves near Benson, AZ. The temperature dropped to 37 degrees, as hail was three to four inches deep, with drifts 46 inches high. (The Weather Channel)

1976: At 3:42 AM, an earthquake measuring between 7.8 and 8.2 magnitudes on the Richter scale flattens Tangshan, a Chinese industrial city with a population of about one million people. An estimated 242,000 people in Tangshan and surrounding areas were killed, making the earthquake one of the deadliest in recorded history, surpassed only by the 300,000 who died in the Calcutta earthquake in 1737, and the 830,000 thought to have perished in China's Shaanxi province in 1556.

1986 - Severe thunderstorms moving out of South Dakota across Iowa produce high winds which derailed eighteen piggyback trailer cars of a westbound freight train near Boone, IA. Sixteen of the cars fell 187 feet into the Des Moines River. The thunderstorms also spawned a number of tornadoes, including one which caused twenty-five to fifty million dollars damage at Sloan, near Sioux City, IA. (Storm Data)

1987 - Thunderstorms in Nevada produced wind gusts to 70 mph at Searchlight, reducing visibilities to near zero in blowing dust and sand. Thunderstorms in Montana drenched Lonesome Lake with 3.78 inches of rain. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms drenched Wilmington, NC, with 3.33 inches of rain, bringing their monthly total 14.46 inches. Seven cities in Michigan and Minnesota reported record high temperatures for the date. Marquette, MI, hit 99 degrees, and the record high of 94 degrees at Flint MI was their tenth of the month. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Afternoon thunderstorms produced large hail and damaging winds in Massachusetts. Early evening thunderstorms over Florida produced wind gusts to 68 mph at Fort Myers, and evening thunderstorms in South Dakota produced nearly two inches of rain in twenty minutes at Pierpoint. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



WHOSE SIDE ARE YOU ON?

During one of the civil wars in Italy a regimental leader was having a difficult time recruiting soldiers to fight. To solve his problem, he was going from city to city looking for people to join him. Many joined him bringing with them their swords and guns.

One old lady was so moved as she saw the response that she wanted to join in the battle. So, she grabbed her broom, put it over her shoulder and began to march with the men.

Many laughed at her, and one person jeered from the crowd, "What are you doing old lady? What good are you?"

"Not much," came the answer, "but at least everyone will know whose side I'm on."

Every day we are confronted with choices that reflect our allegiances to Christ. Often they are subtle and do not require much effort and get little attention from others. Sometimes the call to obedience may result in revolutionary changes and completely upset lifelong plans and dreams. Surely there have been times when all He asked was to "be still and know that I am God."

The call varies but our response to be faithful to Him is always optional. We either turn toward Him and do as he asks us to do or turn away from Him and follow our selfish ambitions. To choose is not optional.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we are always available when You call us to serve You. We pray, however, that when You call we will respond in faithful service. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Yes, ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it! "If you love me, obey my commandments. John 14:14-15

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

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 37 of 85

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Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 38 of 85



WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.26.24

2 14 33 58 65 3

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$331,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.27.24

9 15 17 42 45 2

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$6,010,000

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.27.24

9 32 37 40 43 15

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 44 Mins
40 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.27.24

3 5 8 11 26

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$51,000

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.27.24

19 45 57 64 69 7

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.27.24

3 31 37 40 64 17

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$144,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 39 of 85

Upcoming Groton Events

- 07/04/2024 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 07/09/2024 FREE SNAP Application Assistance 1-6pm at the Community Center
- 07/14/2024 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm
- 07/17/2024 Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar at the Groton Legion 11am-1pm
- 07/17/2024 Pro Am Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 07/25/2024 Dairy Queen Miracle Treat Day
- 07/25/2024 Summer Downtown Sip & Shop 5-8pm
- 07/25/2024 Treasures Amidst The Trials 6pm at Emmanuel Lutheran Church
- 07/26/2024 Ferney Open Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Start
- 07/27/2024 1st Annual Celebration in the Park 1-9:30pm
- 08/05/2024 School Supply Drive 4-7pm at the Community Center
- 08/02/2024 Wine on 9 at Olive Grove Golf Course 6pm
- 08/08/2024 Family Fun Fest 5:30-7:30pm
- 08/9-11/2024 Jr. Legion State Baseball Tournament
- 08/12/2024 Vitalant Blood Drive at the Community Center 1:15-7pm
- 09/07/2024 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 09/07-08/2024 Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport
- 09/08/2024 Sunflower Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 10am
- 10/05/2024 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
- 10/11/2024 Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am
- 10/31/2024 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
- 10/31/2024 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
- 11/16/2024 Groton American Legion "Turkey Raffle" 6:30-11:30pm
- 11/28/2024 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm
- 12/01/2024 Groton Snow Queen Contest, 4:30 p.m.
- 12/07/2024 Olive Grove 8th Annual Holiday Party & Tour of Homes with Live & Silent Auctions 6pm-close
- 04/12/2025 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt at the City Park 10am Sharp
- 05/03/2025 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 05/26/2025 Memorial Day Services Groton Union Cemetery with lunch at Legion Post #39, 12pm
- 07/04/2025 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 07/13/2025 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm
- 09/06/2025 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 10/31/2025 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
- 11/27/2025 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm

News from the **AP** Associated Press

US beach stars Kloth, Nuss didn't need the Golden State. They're going for gold at Olympics anyway

By JIMMY GOLEN AP Sports Writer

PARIS (AP) — A South Dakota native, Taryn Kloth had never even played beach volleyball until after she graduated from Creighton as a star in the indoor version of the sport. In pursuit of a business degree, she landed at LSU without any beach skills at all.

"I actually got dismantled. I was horrible. I couldn't even talk and walk in the sand at the same time," she said. "I just remember going home and calling my parents and I'm like: 'Oh, my gosh. They should probably kick me off the team.'"

Unlike the generations of Californians who grew up playing volleyball on the local beaches as kids, Kloth and teammate Kristen Nuss came to the sandy side of the sport late. After teaming up at LSU, they stayed in Louisiana, training in Nuss' hometown of New Orleans.

And when the world's second-ranked team made its debut with a 21-17, 21-14 victory over Canada at Eiffel Tower Stadium in Paris on Saturday night, it was the first American beach volleyball pair ever to go for Olympic gold without any connection to the Golden State.

"We kind of said we wanted to rewrite the script, and kind of change that," Nuss said in a recent phone interview before the pair departed for Paris. "You had to move out to California. You had to live in California to make it into something in this sport. And I feel like we really done a good job of kind of changing that."

The West Coast has the sunshine

Beach volleyball was made for — and made in — California, with its miles of sandy shoreline and weather that allows athletes to play year-round.

The two-person game was invented there, and it has thrived on beaches where volleyball nets welcome professionals and recreational players alike. The Volleyball Walk of Fame on the Manhattan Beach Pier commemorates the winners of the annual tournament there — one of the sport's most prestigious.

And since the NCAA first sanctioned beach volleyball in 2016, California schools — UCLA and Southern California, to be precise — have won every national championship.

"When people say California is the hotbed of the sport, it really is," Nuss said. "People grow up going to the beach, playing the sport. People love it there.

"Louisiana was definitely not the hotbed of beach volleyball when I was growing up," said Nuss, who started playing beach volleyball as a sophomore in high school. "We would almost have to beg other junior teams to play in tournaments, so we could just have a juniors tournament."

They knock me out when I'm down there

Kloth played indoor volleyball at Creighton in Omaha, Nebraska — another distinctively nonbeach town — and arrived at LSU ready to, and needing to, learn. Her only experience with the beach game was hitting the ball around with friends at a lake back in South Dakota.

"I wouldn't even call it a beach. I would call it dirt," she said. "It was like concrete with a little bit of dust on the top of it, and we would just play indoor volleyball outside."

(Beach volleyball is a totally different sport than the indoor game, with two players on a team instead of six. But the biggest change is going from the hardwood to the flexible surface, which makes running and jumping — any sudden movement, really — a new challenge.)

"When I came on my visit, I didn't even know where LSU was. I thought it was in New Orleans. I show up in January and what happens a month later? Mardi Gras," Kloth said. "Yeah, I was already thrown into, like, the most Louisiana time ever."

Kloth managed to master the beach game quickly enough so that by her first full season at LSU, 2020, she went 27-0 with two different partners. In her second year, she and Nuss teamed up to go 36-0 — including a pair of doubleheader victories over UCLA and top-ranked USC.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 41 of 85

And by the time she had her degree, Kloth also had acquired enough of a support system to want to stay. "I was just thrown into this very different culture," she said. "And they were just very gracious in welcoming me and knowing that I did not have a family here like everybody else probably did."

By a palm tree in the sand

So when the time came to move out to California — like every other would-be beach volleyball Olympian the United States has ever produced — they didn't.

Training in New Orleans meant they wouldn't be surrounded by the best competition and all of the resources that California could offer. But Kloth didn't need her MBA to know that it would also be cheaper — an important factor for two people starting out in a sport that can be a tough living.

In Louisiana, though, they had a place to stay and a gym; their coach was local, too.

"For us, our coach was here. We had a place to stay. We had our gym. And I think, for sure, the cost of living was definitely something that steered us away," Nuss said. "Because it was like: 'Why? Why would we go pay a large sum of money when we can just stay here?'"

I've been all around this great big world

The Americans have dominated Olympic beach volleyball — especially on the women's side, with Misty May-Treanor and Kerri Walsh Jennings winning three straight gold medals from 2004-12 and April Ross and Alix Klineman winning it all in Tokyo three years ago.

Their resumes read like a California atlas: Long Beach, USC, Stanford.

In fact, all 32 pairs the U.S. previously sent to the Summer Games has had some connection to the Golden State.

Nuss and Kloth are hoping to start a new trend.

"They obviously have a great support system where they're at. And they felt like there's no need to come to California," Walsh Jennings, who is in Paris as an analyst, said Friday. "They knew what they wanted and they just went with it.

"When you're working to become the best in the world, to do it your way, and to do it in a way that is going to serve you and your team best, sometimes people question your judgment. But ultimately it's your call," the five-time Olympian said. "And they made the adult and awesome call for themselves."

Simone Biles is on the Olympic gymnastics competition floor in front of a star-studded crowd

By WILL GRAVES AP National Writer

PARIS (AP) — Simone Biles' quest for a return to the top of the Olympic podium is officially underway.

The 27-year-old American and the five-woman U.S. gymnastics team took the floor at a packed, star-studded Bercy Arena during the second qualifying subdivision for the Paris Games on Sunday. The Americans are heavily favored to win the team gold after finishing runner-up to Russia three years ago in Tokyo.

Biles, with the crowd roaring at every turn and a remix of the pop song "Lose Control" by Teddy Swims playing in the background, dazzled during her opening beam routine, an event where she is a two-time Olympic bronze medalist. She drilled a difficult acrobatic series, her score of 14.733 easily the best among the four Americans.

The stands were buzzing and filled with celebrities. Tom Cruise posed for selfies while waiting for Biles to emerge. Snoop Dogg had front-row seats, and Ariana Grande, Jessica Chastain, John Legend and Anna Wintour were also on hand.

Biles arrived in Paris as the face of the U.S. Olympic movement and maybe the Olympics themselves. The buzz around her return to the Games has been palpable, with NBC leaning heavily into her star power by splashing Biles' face on countless promotions in the lead-up to Paris.

Her gravitational pull is real. Athletes across the Olympic spectrum have said they want to make it a point to catch the most decorated gymnast of all time in what could be the final competition of her unparalleled career. Among them: LeBron James and the U.S. men's basketball team, which was busy Sunday with Olympic qualifying.

Biles and teammates, starting on balance beam, wore blue-gray uniforms with nearly 3,000 sequins sewn into the top. Jordan Chiles went first, giving an emphatic fist bump after nailing the dismount to end her routine.

Venezuelan election could lead to seismic shift in politics or give President Maduro six more years

By REGINA GARCIA CANO Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Polls have opened in Venezuela, where people are voting Sunday in a presidential election whose outcome will either lead to a seismic shift in politics or extend by six more years the policies that caused the world's worst peacetime economic collapse.

Whether it is President Nicolás Maduro who is chosen, or his main opponent, retired diplomat Edmundo González, the election will have ripple effects throughout the Americas. Government opponents and supporters alike have signaled their interest in joining the exodus of 7.7 million Venezuelans who have already left their homes for opportunities abroad should Maduro win another term.

Polls open at 6 a.m. local time. The number of eligible voters is estimated to be around 17 million.

Authorities set Sunday's election to coincide with what would have been the 70th birthday of former President Hugo Chávez, the revered leftist firebrand who died of cancer in 2013, leaving his Bolivarian revolution in the hands of Maduro. But Maduro and his United Socialist Party of Venezuela are more unpopular than ever among many voters who blame his policies for crushing wages, spurring hunger, crippling the oil industry and separating families due to migration.

Maduro, 61, is facing off against an opposition that has managed to line up behind a single candidate after years of intraparty divisions and election boycotts that torpedoed their ambitions to topple the ruling party.

González is representing a coalition of opposition parties after being selected in April as a last-minute stand-in for opposition powerhouse Maria Corina Machado, who was blocked by the Maduro-controlled Supreme Tribunal of Justice from running for any office for 15 years.

Machado, a former lawmaker, swept the opposition's October primary with over 90% of the vote. After she was blocked from joining the presidential race, she chose a college professor as her substitute on the ballot, but the National Electoral Council also barred her from registering. That's when González, a political newcomer, was chosen.

Sunday's ballot also features eight other candidates challenging Maduro, but only González threatens Maduro's rule.

Venezuela sits atop the world's largest proven oil reserves, and once boasted Latin America's most advanced economy. But it entered into a free fall after Maduro took the helm. Plummeting oil prices, widespread shortages and hyperinflation that soared past 130,000% led first to social unrest and then mass emigration.

Sanctions from U.S. President Donald Trump's administration seeking to force Maduro from power after his 2018 reelection — which the U.S. and dozens of other countries condemned as illegitimate — only deepened the crisis.

In recent days, Maduro has crisscrossed Venezuela, inaugurating hospital wards and highways and visiting rural areas where he had not set foot in years. His pitch to voters is one of economic security, which he underscores with stories of entrepreneurship and references to a stable currency exchange and lower inflation rates.

The capital, Caracas, saw an increase in commercial activity after the pandemic, bolstering an economy the International Monetary Fund forecasts will grow 4% this year — one of the fastest in Latin America — after having shrunk 71% from 2012 to 2020.

"They tried to subjugate our people," Maduro said of the United States during his closing rally Thursday in Caracas, "but today we are standing tall and ready for victory on the 28th of July."

But most Venezuelans have not seen any improvement in their quality of life. Many earn under \$200 a month, which means families struggle to afford essential items. Some work second and third jobs. A basket

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 43 of 85

of basic staples — sufficient to feed of family of four for a month — costs an estimated \$385.

The opposition has tried to seize on the huge inequities arising from the crisis, during which Venezuelans abandoned their country's currency, the bolivar, for the U.S. dollar.

González and Machado focused much of their campaigning on Venezuela's vast hinterland, where the economic activity seen in Caracas in recent years didn't materialize. They promised a government that would create sufficient jobs to attract Venezuelans living abroad to return home and reunite with their families.

An April poll by Caracas-based Delphos said about a quarter of Venezuelans were thinking about emigrating if Maduro wins Sunday. The poll had a margin of error of plus or minus 2 percentage points.

Most Venezuelans who migrated over the past 11 years settled in Latin America and the Caribbean. In recent years, many began setting their sights on the U.S.

Both campaigns have distinguished themselves not only for the political movements they represent but also on how they have addressed voters' hopes and fears.

Maduro's campaign rallies featured lively electronic merengue dancing as well as speeches attacking his opponents. But after he caught heat from leftist allies such as Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva for a comment about a "bloodbath" should he lose, Maduro recoiled. His son told the Spanish newspaper El País that the ruling party would peacefully hand over the presidency if it loses — a rare admission of vulnerability out of step with Maduro campaign's triumphalist tone.

In contrast, the rallies of González and Machado prompted people to cry and chant "Freedom! Freedom!" as the duo passed by. People handed the devout Catholics rosaries, walked along highways and went through military checkpoints to reach their events. Others video-called their relatives who have migrated to let them catch a glimpse of the candidates.

During a rally in mid-May, González, 74, asked supporters to imagine "a country in which our airports and borders would be filled with our children returning home."

A strike from Lebanon killed 12 youths. Could that spark war between Israel and Hezbollah?

By MELANIE LIDMAN and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — The Middle East was bracing for a potential flare-up in violence on Sunday after Israeli authorities said a rocket from Lebanon struck a soccer field in the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights killing, 12 children and teens in what the military said was the deadliest attack on civilians since Oct. 7. The strike raised fears of a broader regional war between Israel and Hezbollah, which denied a role in the attack.

Overnight, the Israeli military said it struck a number of targets inside Lebanon, though the intensity of the strikes was similar to months of cross-border fighting between Israel and Hezbollah.

Saturday's attack comes at a sensitive time, as Israel and Hamas are negotiating a cease-fire proposal to end the nearly 10-month war in Gaza and free the roughly 110 hostages who remain captive there.

Here is a look at the broader repercussions of Saturday's attack:

What happened?

On Saturday just before sunset, a rocket slammed into a soccer pitch where dozens of children and teens were playing in the Druze town of Majdal Shams, which is located about 12 kilometers (7 miles) south of Lebanon and next to the Syrian border. Twelve young people between the ages of 10 and 20 were killed, and 20 were wounded, according to the Israeli military.

"I feel darkness inside and out. Nothing like this happened here," Anan Abu Saleh, a Majdal Shams resident, said from the soccer field on Saturday night. "There's no way to explain this. I saw children, I don't want to say what I saw, but its horrible, really horrible. We need more security."

Shrapnel and spatters of blood pockmarked the field as emergency workers collected burned backpacks and bicycles. Overnight, residents began setting up hundreds of chairs on the field where the attack took place to hold a mass memorial. Residents told Israeli media it was the only place in the town that would be able to hold the tens of thousands of people expected to gather.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 44 of 85

On Sunday morning, many of the bodies were brought to a community center in Majdal Shams, where family members wailed over the coffins. At midday, the coffins, draped in white cloth and bearing photos of the victims, were brought to the cemetery, passed through a crowd of thousands and lined up for burial. One 11-year-old child is still missing, residents told Israeli media.

Who are the Druze?

The Druze are a religious sect that began as an offshoot of Shiite Islam. There are Druze communities in Israel, Syria, and Lebanon. There are about 140,000 Druze in Israel, 25,000 of whom live in four towns in the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights, according to Yusri Hazran of the Hebrew University, who is Druze and researches minorities in the Middle East.

The Druze community is considered among Israel's most loyal citizens. Many Druze serve in the Israeli military, although those living in the Golan Heights have a more fraught relationship with the authorities.

Israel captured and annexed the Golan, a strategic plateau overlooking northern Israel, from Syria in the 1967 Mideast war. Much of the international community considers the area to be occupied territory.

While Druze leaders in the Golan still profess allegiance to Syria, relations with Israel are normally good. The Druze towns in the Golan are a popular vacation destination for Israelis and are filled with hotels and restaurants, and most Druze residents speak Hebrew fluently.

What could this mean for Lebanon and for a wider war?

The attacks on the Israel-Lebanon border have simmered just below the threshold of an all-out war since the start of the conflict in October. But the deadly toll of the attack, and the young age of the victims, could push Israel to respond more severely.

The Iranian-backed Hezbollah began firing rockets at Israel the day after Hamas' attack on Oct. 7, and Israel has responded by targeting what it says is Hezbollah military infrastructure with airstrikes and drones. Most of the attacks have been confined to the area on either side of the border, though Israel has also assassinated Hezbollah and Hamas leadership farther north in Lebanon. Tens of thousands of people on both sides of the border have evacuated the area.

Since early October, Israeli airstrikes in Lebanon have killed more than 500 people, mostly Hezbollah members, but also around 90 civilians. On the Israeli side, 22 soldiers and 24 civilians have been killed.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who was in America at the time of the strike, warned that Hezbollah "will pay a heavy price for this attack, one that it has not paid so far."

The Israeli military's Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Herzl Halevi met with leaders of Majdal Shams on Saturday night, and said Israel was preparing for "the next stage of fighting" in the north. "We know how to strike even very far from the state of Israel," he said.

In a rare move, Hezbollah denied it was responsible for the attack, but Halevi said the rocket was a Falaq rocket with a 53-kilogram warhead that belonged to the Hezbollah.

U.S. intelligence officials have no doubts that Hezbollah carried out the attack on the Golan Heights, but it was not clear if the militant group intended the target or misfired, according to a person familiar with the matter who was not authorized to comment publicly.

Lebanon's government, in a statement that didn't mention Majdal Shams, urged an "immediate cessation of hostilities on all fronts" and condemned all attacks on civilians.

Iran on Sunday warned Israel that a strong reaction to the Golan Heights strike will lead to "unprecedented consequences."

"Any unwise action by the Zionist regime is a ground-paving for expansion of instability, insecurity and war in the region," said Nasser Kanaani, the spokesman for the Iranian foreign ministry. Iran and Israel's yearslong shadow war burst into the open in April, when Iran launched 300 missiles and drones at Israel, most of which were intercepted, in response to the killing of an Iranian general.

How could this impact the war in Gaza?

An Egyptian official said the attack in the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights could give urgency to the negotiations to reach a cease-fire deal in Gaza, which would be reflected on the Israeli-Hezbollah front.

He said mediators will use such an attack to press for a cease-fire in Gaza to avoid an all-out war in the

region.

"Both fronts are connected," he said. "A cease-fire in Gaza will lead to a cease-fire with Hezbollah."

The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to discuss the sensitive talks with the media.

Officials from the United States, Egypt and Qatar are meeting Sunday with Israeli officials in Rome in the latest push for a cease-fire deal in Gaza.

Lawmakers from 6 countries say Beijing is pressuring them not to attend summit in Taiwan.

By DAKE KANG Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Lawmakers from at least six countries say Chinese diplomats are pressuring them not to attend an annual China-focused summit in Taiwan.

Politicians in Bolivia, Colombia, Slovakia, North Macedonia, Bosnia and one other Asian country that declined to be named, told The Associated Press they are getting texts, calls and urgent requests for meetings that would conflict with their plans to attend the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance conference, in what they describe as efforts to isolate the self-governed island.

China vehemently defends its claim to Taiwan and views it as its own territory to be annexed by force if necessary.

The IPAC, a group of hundreds of lawmakers from 35 countries concerned about how democracies approach Beijing, is set to start the summit on Monday. It has long faced pressure from the Chinese government and Beijing has even sanctioned some of its members. In 2021, the group was targeted by Chinese state-sponsored hackers, according to a U.S. indictment unsealed earlier this year.

However, Luke de Pulford, the alliance's director, says the pressure from Chinese officials the past few days has been unprecedented. Previously, Chinese diplomats approached lawmakers only after the meetings concluded but this year, there appears to be a coordinated attempt to stop participants from attending.

The AP also spoke to three lawmakers and reviewed texts and emails sent by Chinese diplomats asking whether they were planning to participate in the summit.

"I'm Wu, from Chinese Embassy," read a message sent to Antonio Miloshoski, a member of parliament in North Macedonia. "We heard that you got an invitation from IPAC, will you attend the Conference which will be held next week in Taiwan?"

In some cases, lawmakers described vague inquiries about their plans to travel to Taiwan. In other cases, the contact was more menacing: One lawmaker told the AP that Chinese diplomats messaged the head of her party with a demand to stop her from going.

"They contacted president of my political party, they ask him to stop me to travel to Taiwan," said Sanela Klarić, a member of parliament in Bosnia. "He showed me the message from them. He said, 'I will advise you not to go, but I cannot stop you, it's something you have to make a decision.'"

China routinely threatens retaliation against politicians and countries that show support for Taiwan, which has only informal relations with most countries due to Chinese diplomatic pressure. Klarić said the pressure was unpleasant but only steeled her determination to go on the trip.

"I really am fighting against countries or societies where the tool to manipulate and control peoples is fear," said Klarić, adding that it reminded her of threats and intimidation she faced while suffering through wars in Bosnia in the 1990s. "I really hate the feeling when somebody is frightening you."

The Chinese Foreign Ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

"This is gross foreign interference. This is not normal diplomacy," de Pulford said. "How would PRC officials would feel if we tried to tell them about their travel plans, where they could and could not go? It's absolutely outrageous that they think that they can interfere in the travel plans of foreign legislators," he added, using the acronym for China's official name, the People's Republic of China.

Lawmakers from 25 countries are expected to attend this year's summit and will feature high-level meetings with Taiwanese officials, according to a press release. The Taiwanese Foreign Ministry did not

immediately respond to a request for comment.

Last week, Beijing criticized Taiwan for its annual Han Kuang military drills, saying that Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party was "carrying out provocations to seek independence."

"Any attempt to whip up tensions and use force to seek independence or reject reunification is doomed to failure," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told reporters.

China has been peeling off the island's diplomatic allies, often with promises of development aid, in a long-running competition between the two that has swung in Beijing's favor in recent years. The Pacific Island nation of Nauru switched recognition to Beijing earlier this year, a move that reduced Taiwan's dwindling number of diplomatic allies to 12.

But China's at-times heavy-handed approach has also triggered backlash.

In 2021, Beijing downgraded relations and blocked imports from Lithuania, a member of both the EU and NATO, after the Baltic nation broke with diplomatic custom by agreeing that a Taiwanese representative office in its capital of Vilnius would bear the name Taiwan instead of Chinese Taipei, which other countries use to avoid offending Beijing. The following year, the EU adopted a resolution criticizing Beijing's behavior toward Taiwan and took action against China at the World Trade Organization over the import restrictions.

This year, Bolivian Senator Centa Rek said that she submitted a letter of protest after a Chinese diplomat called her and told not to go to Taiwan, saying the island was run by an "imposter president" and that the summit was hosted by an organization "not accepted within the terms of the policy of mainland China." When Rek refused, the diplomat said he would report her decision to his embassy, which Rek interpreted as a "veiled threat".

"I told him that it was an unacceptable intrusion, that I would not accept an order or intrusion from any government," Rek said. "These were personal decisions and that it seemed to me that he had gone beyond all international political norms."

Most of the lawmakers targeted appear to be from smaller countries, which de Pulford, the alliance's director, said was likely because Beijing "feels that they can get away with it." But he added that the coercive tactics have only made participants more determined to take part in the summit.

Miriam Lexmann, a Slovakian member of the European Parliament whose party head was approached by Chinese diplomats, said the pressure underscored her reason for coming to Taiwan.

We want to "exchange information, ways how to deal with those challenges and threats which China represents to the democratic part of the world, and of course, to support Taiwan," she said.

Harris raised \$200M in first week of White House campaign and signed up 170,000 volunteers

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris' campaign has raised \$200 million since she emerged as the likely Democratic presidential nominee last week, an eye-popping haul in her race against the Republican nominee, former President Donald Trump.

The campaign, which announced its latest fundraising total on Sunday, said the bulk of the donations — 66% — comes from first-time contributors in the 2024 election cycle and were made after President Joe Biden announced his exit from the race and endorsed Harris.

Over 170,000 volunteers have also signed up to help the Harris campaign with phone banking, canvassing and other get-out-the-vote efforts. Election Day is 100 days away.

"The momentum and energy for Vice President Harris is real — and so are the fundamentals of this race: this election will be very close and decided by a small number of voters in just a few states," Michael Tyler, the campaign's communications director, wrote in a memo.

Harris campaigned in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, on Saturday, drawing hundreds to a fundraiser that had been organized when Biden was still at the top of the Democratic ticket. The fundraiser had originally been expected to raise \$400,000 but ended bringing in about \$1.4 million, according to the campaign.

Harris quickly coalesced Democratic support after Biden, whose candidacy fizzled following his disastrous

June 27 debate performance against Trump, exited the race. Former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries, former House Minority Whip Jim Clyburn, former President Bill Clinton and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton were quick to announce their support.

Prodigious Democratic fundraisers former President Barack Obama and his wife Michelle Obama announced their endorsement on Friday.

Harris at her Saturday fundraiser said she remained the “underdog” in the race but that her campaign was picking up steam.

Future Forward, the largest super PAC in Democratic politics, announced last week it had secured \$150 million in commitments over the first 24 hours from donors after Biden bowed out and endorsed Harris.

Democratic House and Senate candidates say they also have seen a surge in support since Harris emerged as the party’s likely nominee.

At least 12 killed by mudslide in China as heavy rains from tropical storm Gaemi drench region

By KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — At least 12 people were killed after a mudslide hit a homestay house in a tourist area in southeastern China on Sunday as heavy rains from what remained of a tropical storm drenched the region, state media said.

Elsewhere in China, a delivery person on a scooter was killed Saturday after being hit by a falling tree in Shanghai, apparently because of storm-related winds, according to The Paper, a digital news outlet.

The deaths were the first in China that appear linked to Typhoon Gaemi, which weakened to a tropical storm after making landfall on Thursday. Before reaching China, the typhoon intensified monsoon rains in the Philippines, leaving at least 34 dead, and swept across the island of Taiwan, where the death toll has risen to 10, authorities said late Saturday.

The mudslide struck the homestay house about 8 a.m. and trapped 21 people in Yuelin village, which falls under the jurisdiction of Hengyang city in Hunan province, state broadcaster CCTV said in a series of online reports. About 30 centimeters (12 inches) of rain was recorded in the area over a 24-hour period.

Six injured people were rescued. The reports didn’t say whether the injuries were serious. The owner of the house initially reported that 18 people were trapped, but a search and rescue team later determined that three more people were unaccounted for, CCTV said.

The one-story house offered food and accommodation near Hengshan, a mountain in a scenic area where tourists come on weekends to escape the summer heat, a report by The Paper said. The scenic areas had been closed starting Sunday because of the rains until further notice, even before the mudslide.

The CCTV reports said the mudslide was triggered by water rushing down the mountains from the rains. They didn’t mention Gaemi but the China Meteorological Administration said that heavy rain tied to the tropical storm hit southeastern parts of Hunan province on Saturday.

In Shanghai, a photo posted by The Paper showed a delivery scooter on its side mostly covered by leafy branches near the still-standing barren trunk of a tree. It said that winds from the storm were the suspected cause, and that the investigation was continuing.

The wide arc of the tropical storm also was bringing heavy rain about 2,000 kilometers (1,200 miles) away to China’s northeast.

The Linjiang city government in Jilin province posted a notice on social media asking residents living below the third floor to move to higher places on Sunday as the Yalu River, which forms the border with North Korea, rose above the warning level.

In neighboring Liaoning province, hundreds of chemical and mining companies suspended operations from Saturday as a precautionary measure and more than 30,000 people had been evacuated, the official Xinhua News Agency said. Nearly 40 trains were suspended through Thursday for safety reasons after steady rain in recent days created hazards and damaged tracks.

Two more people were reported dead in Taiwan, raising the death toll to 10, the island's Central News Agency said, quoting the emergency operation center. Two others were missing, and 895 people were injured.

The latest victims were a man found in a drainage ditch and another man who died in a car accident.

More than 800 people remained in shelters in Taiwan as of Saturday night, and more than 5,000 households remained without power.

The typhoon caused nearly 1.7 billion New Taiwan dollars (\$51.8 million) in damage to crops including bananas, guavas and pears; chicken and other livestock farming and oyster and other fisheries, the Central News Agency said, citing figures from the Ministry of Agriculture.

A cargo ship sunk off Taiwan's shore during the typhoon, killing the captain, while eight other ships ran aground.

Strike in Israeli-controlled Golan Heights kills at least 12 and threatens to spark a wider war

By TIA GOLDENBERG and BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — A rocket strike Saturday at a soccer field killed at least 12 children and teens, Israeli authorities said, in the deadliest strike on an Israeli target along the country's northern border since the fighting between Israel and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah began. It raised fears of a broader regional war.

Israel blamed Hezbollah for the strike in the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights, but Hezbollah rushed to deny any role. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned that Hezbollah "will pay a heavy price for this attack, one that it has not paid so far."

The Israeli military's chief spokesman, Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, called it the deadliest attack on Israeli civilians since the Hamas attack on Oct. 7 that sparked the war in Gaza. He said 20 others were wounded.

"There is no doubt that Hezbollah has crossed all the red lines here, and the response will reflect that," Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz told Israeli Channel 12. "We are nearing the moment in which we face an all-out war."

Hezbollah chief spokesman Mohammed Afif told The Associated Press that the group "categorically denies carrying out an attack" on the town of Majdal Shams. "It is unusual for Hezbollah to deny an attack.

The office of Netanyahu, who was on a visit to the United States, said he would cut short his trip by several hours, without specifying when he would return. It said he will convene the security Cabinet after arriving.

Far-right members of Netanyahu's government called for a harsh response against Hezbollah. But an all-out war with a militant group with far superior firepower to Hamas would be trying for Israel's military after nearly 10 months of fighting in Gaza.

Footage aired on Israeli Channel 12 showed a large blast in one of the valleys in the Druze town of Majdal Shams, in the Golan Heights, which Israel captured from Syria in the 1967 Mideast war and annexed in 1981. Some Druze have Israeli citizenship. Many still have sympathies for Syria and rejected Israeli annexation, but their ties with Israeli society have grown over the years.

Video showed paramedics rushing stretchers off the soccer field toward waiting ambulances.

Ha'il Mahmoud, a resident, told Channel 12 that children were playing soccer when the rocket hit the field. He said a siren was heard seconds before the rocket hit, but there was no time to take shelter.

Jihan Sfadi, the principal of an elementary school, told Channel 12 that five students were among the dead: "The situation here is very difficult. Parents are crying, people are screaming outside. No one can digest what has happened."

Israel's military said its analysis showed that the rocket was launched from an area north of the village of Chebaa in southern Lebanon.

The Israeli military said early Sunday that it struck targets deep inside Lebanon as well as in southern

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 49 of 85

Lebanon. There were no reports of casualties and the strikes were no more intense than what has become routine over the past 10 months.

The strike at the soccer field, just before sunset, followed earlier cross-border violence on Saturday, when Hezbollah said three of its fighters were killed, without specifying where. Israel's military said its air force targeted a Hezbollah arms depot in the border village of Kfar Kila, adding that militants were inside at the time.

Hezbollah said its fighters carried out 10 different attacks using rockets and explosive drones against Israeli military posts, the last of which targeted the army command of the Haramoun Brigade in Maaleh Golani with Katyusha rockets. In a separate statement, Hezbollah said it hit the same army post with a short-range Falaq rocket. It said the attacks were in response to Israeli airstrikes on villages in southern Lebanon.

U.S. intelligence officials have no doubts that Hezbollah carried out the attack on the Golan Heights, but it was not clear if the militant group intended the target or misfired, according to a person familiar with the matter who was not authorized to comment publicly.

The White House National Security Council in a statement said the U.S. "will continue to support efforts to end these terrible attacks along the Blue Line, which must be a top priority. Our support for Israel's security is iron-clad and unwavering against all Iranian-backed terrorist groups, including Lebanese Hezbollah."

Lebanon's government, in a statement that didn't mention Majdal Shams, urged an "immediate cessation of hostilities on all fronts" and condemned all attacks on civilians.

Israel and Hezbollah have been trading fire since Oct. 8, a day after Hamas militants stormed into southern Israel. In recent weeks, the exchange of fire along the Lebanon-Israel border has intensified, with Israeli airstrikes and rocket and drone attacks by Hezbollah striking deeper and farther away from the border.

Majdal Shams had not been among border communities ordered to evacuate as tensions rose, Israel's military said, without saying why. The town doesn't sit directly on the border with Lebanon.

Officials from countries including the United States and France have visited Lebanon to try to ease the tensions but failed to make progress. Hezbollah has refused to cease firing as long as Israel's offensive in Gaza continues. Israel and Hezbollah fought an inconclusive war in 2006.

Saturday's violence comes as Israel and Hamas are weighing a cease-fire proposal that would wind down the nearly 10-month war in Gaza and free the roughly 110 hostages who remain captive there. Hamas' attack on Oct. 7 killed some 1,200 people and took 250 others hostage. Israel's offensive has killed more than 39,000 people, according to local health authorities.

Since early October, Israeli airstrikes in Lebanon have killed more than 450 people, mostly Hezbollah members, but also around 90 civilians and non-combatants. On the Israeli side, 45 have been killed, at least 21 of them soldiers.

US-Japan security talks focus on bolstering military cooperation amid rising China threat

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japanese and U.S. defense chiefs and top diplomats held talks in Tokyo on Sunday on further bolstering their military cooperation, including by upgrading the command and control of U.S. forces and strengthening American-licensed missile production in Japan, amid a rising threat from China.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin joined their Japanese counterparts, Yoko Kamikawa and Minoru Kihara, at the Japan-U.S. Security Consultative Committee, known as "2+2" security talks, to reaffirm their alliance following President Joe Biden's withdrawal from the November presidential race.

"We are at a turning point in history as the rules-based, free and open international order is shaken to the core," Kamikawa said. "Now is a critical phase when our decision today determines our future."

Austin, in his opening remarks, said China is "engaging in coercive behavior, trying to change the status quo in the East and South China Seas, around Taiwan and throughout the region," adding that North Ko-

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 50 of 85

rea's nuclear program and its deepening cooperation with Russia "threaten regional and global security."

Austin said the ministers planned to discuss "historic efforts to modernize" U.S. and Japanese command and control structures, including for U.S. forces in Japan.

That would involve upgrading the U.S. command and control system alongside Japan's ongoing efforts to have a unified command in March.

"It will be one of the most significant developments in the history of our alliance," Austin said.

Japan is home to more than 50,000 U.S. troops, but a commander for the U.S. Forces Japan headquartered in Yokota in the western suburbs of Tokyo, tasked with managing their bases, has no commanding authority. Instead that comes from the Indo-Pacific Command in Hawaii. The plan to upgrade USFJ's command and control capability is designed to help smooth joint exercises and operations, officials say.

The ministers were to also discuss enhancing coordination in intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance and cybersecurity, areas where Japan needs further improvement to help jointly tackle future threats.

For the first time, the ministers will hold separate talks to reaffirm the U.S. commitment to "extended deterrence," which includes atomic weapons — a shift from Japan's earlier reluctance to openly discuss the sensitive issue in the world's only country to have suffered nuclear attacks — amid growing nuclear threats from Russia and China.

Japan has been accelerating its military buildup and has increased joint operations with the U.S., as well as with South Korea, while trying to strengthen its largely domestic defense industry.

Japan has significantly eased its arms export restrictions and in December accommodated a U.S. request for shipment of surface-to-air PAC-3 missile interceptors produced in Japan under an American license to replenish U.S. inventories, which have decreased due to its support for Ukraine.

The ministers were expected to discuss increased Japanese production of PAC-3 interceptors for export to the United States, as well as co-production of Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missiles.

Japan and the U.S. have been accelerating arms industry cooperation following an April agreement between Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Biden. The two sides have set up working groups for missile co-production and for the maintenance and repair of U.S. Navy ships and Air Force aircraft in the region.

While Japan's role is largely designed to help U.S. weapons supply and keep its deterrence credible in the Indo-Pacific amid continuing conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine, Japanese officials say it will help strengthen the Japanese defense industry.

Ahead of the 2+2 talks, Kihara met with Austin and South Korean Defense Minister Shin Won-sik for their first trilateral defense talks hosted by Tokyo and signed a memorandum based on their June agreement in Singapore that institutionalizes their regular high-level talks, joint exercises and other exchanges.

Defense officials said the memorandum serves as the basis for future defense cooperation among the three countries despite possible changes in leadership, while showcasing their unity.

"The signing of this memorandum makes our trilateral cooperation unwavering even under changing global environments," Kihara told reporters.

Kihara also met Shin, who is the first South Korean defense chief to visit Japan in 15 years, and they agreed to take steps to deepen their bilateral defense ties.

Olympics pre-race triathlon event in Seine River canceled over water quality concerns

PARIS (AP) — Concerns over the water quality of Paris' Seine River have continued into the 2024 Olympics, with a pre-race triathlon event there canceled Sunday.

Organizers said they nixed the swimming leg of the triathlon familiarization scheduled for Sunday morning after a meeting about water quality among authorities tasked with carrying out water quality tests. That included representatives of World Triathlon, as well as city and regional authorities.

Swimming in the Seine has been banned for over a century in big part due to poor water quality. Or-

ganizers have invested \$1.5 billion to prepare the Seine for these Games, and the government has said the river would be clean enough to hold events, including the swimming portion of the triathlon and the marathon swimming event.

Daily water quality tests in early June indicated unsafe levels of E. coli bacteria, followed by recent improvements. Parisian Mayor Anne Hidalgo took a famous dip in the river less than two weeks before Olympic events were set to start, fulfilling a promise to show that the long-polluted waterway was clean enough to host swimming competitions.

Heavy rain during the opening ceremony revived concerns over whether the long-polluted waterway will be clean enough to host swimming competitions, since water quality is deeply linked with the weather in the French capital.

Since 2015, organizers have invested heavily to prepare the Seine for the Olympics and to ensure Parisians have a cleaner river after the Games. The plan included constructing a giant underground water storage basin in central Paris, renovating sewer infrastructure and upgrading wastewater treatment plants.

Triathletes have expressed hope that the waters would be clean enough for them to swim in.

"Hopefully we get to swim, bike and run because I don't swim this much to just run and bike," Spanish triathlete Alberto Gonzalez said.

Firefighters helped by cooler weather battle blaze that has scorched area larger than Los Angeles

By NIC COURY, EUGENE GARCIA and OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ Associated Press

FOREST RANCH, Calif. (AP) — Thousands of firefighters battling a wildfire in Northern California received some help from the weather hours after it exploded in size, scorching an area greater than the size of Los Angeles. The blaze was one of several tearing through the western United States and Canada, fueled by wind and heat.

Cooler temperatures and an increase in humidity could help slow the Park Fire, the largest this year in California. Its intensity and dramatic spread led fire officials to make unwelcome comparisons to the monstrous Camp Fire, which burned out of control in nearby Paradise in 2018, killing 85 people and torching 11,000 homes.

Paradise again was near the danger zone on Saturday. The entire town was under an evacuation warning, one of several communities in Butte County. Evacuation orders were also issued in Plumas, Tehama and Shasta counties. An evacuation warning calls for people to prepare to leave and await instructions, while an evacuation order means to leave immediately.

Temperatures are expected to be cooler than average through the middle of next week, but "that doesn't mean that fires that are existing will go away," said Marc Chenard, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service Weather Prediction Center in College Park, Maryland.

As of Saturday night, the Park Fire had scorched 547 square miles (1,416 square kilometers) and destroyed 134 structures since igniting Wednesday, when authorities said a man pushed a burning car into a gully in Chico and then fled. It was 10% contained and moving to the north and east near Chico.

The fire is larger than the city of Los Angeles, which covers about 469 square miles (1,214 square kilometers), and now ranks seventh on the list of the state's top 10 largest wildfires by acreage, Cal Fire said in a social media post.

Nearly 2,500 firefighters were battling the blaze, aided by 16 helicopters and numerous air tankers.

Jeremy Pierce, a Cal Fire operations section chief, said firefighters were taking advantage of the cooler weather while it lasts: "We're having great success today."

Susan Singleton and her husband packed their SUV with clothes, some food and their seven dogs and rushed to evacuate their home this week in Cohasset, a town of about 400 northeast of Chico. They have since learned that their house burned down.

"Everything else we had burned up, but getting them out, getting us out, was my priority," Singleton said Saturday, standing outside her SUV as her dogs rested. They have all been sleeping in the car outside a

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 52 of 85

Red Cross shelter at a church that does not allow animals, and Singleton, 59, said the next thing is to find a place for her pets to stretch out.

"We've got to have a place to land and stop doing this, because this is what's stressing me out," she said.

Overall more than 110 active fires covering 2,800 square miles (7,250 square kilometers) were burning in the U.S. as of Friday, according to the National Interagency Fire Center.

In Southern California, a blaze in the Sequoia National Forest swept through the community of Havilah after burning more than 48 square miles (124 square kilometers) in less than three days. The town of 250 people had been under an evacuation order.

Crews were also making progress on a complex of fires in the Plumas National Forest near the California-Nevada line, Forest Service spokesperson Adrienne Freeman said. Traffic was backed up for miles near the border along the main highway linking Los Angeles and Las Vegas.

The most damage so far has been to the Canadian Rockies' Jasper National Park, where 25,000 people were forced to flee and the park's namesake, a World Heritage site, was devastated, with 358 of the town's 1,113 structures destroyed.

Late Friday in eastern Washington, crews stopped the progress of a fire near Tyler that destroyed three homes and five outbuildings, the Washington Department of Natural Resources said.

Two fires in eastern Oregon, the Durkee and Cow Valley blazes, burned about 660 square miles (1,709 square kilometers).

And in Idaho, homes, outbuildings and a commercial building were among structures lost in several communities including Juliaetta, which was evacuated Thursday. The grouping of blazes referred to as the Gwen Fire was estimated at 41 square miles (106 square kilometers) in size with no containment.

How photographer Frank Stewart captured the culture of jazz, church and Black life in the US

By RANDALL CHASE Associated Press

CHADDS FORD, Pa. (AP) — At first glance, it looks like an aerial photo of a cemetery destroyed by war, with charred coffins ripped from broken concrete vaults and arched marble tombstones flattened by a bomb blast.

Then, the viewer begin to discern details: the coffins and vaults are actually parts of a keyboard. Instead of names and dates, the apparent tombstones are inscribed with words like "vibrato" and "third harmonic."

"It looks like a graveyard," photographer Frank Stewart said.

Stewart's ghostly photograph of a New Orleans church organ ravaged by the floodwaters of Hurricane Katrina is part of a career retrospective of his decades documenting Black life in America and exploring African and Caribbean cultures.

"Frank Stewart's Nexus: An American Photographer's Journey, 1960s to the Present," is on display at the Brandywine Museum of Art through Sept. 22. Brandywine is the fourth and final stop for the exhibition, which was organized by The Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C., and the Telfair Museums in Savannah, Georgia.

"I wanted to talk about the Black church and what influence they had on the culture," Stewart said of his post-Katrina work in New Orleans. "This organ, the music and everything corresponds. It all comes together. I just wanted to show the devastation of churches and the music and the culture."

Music is elemental to Stewart's practice. He was the long-time photographer for the Savannah Music Festival, and for 30 years he was the senior staff photographer for Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, which paired him with artistic director and Grammy-winning musician Wynton Marsalis.

"He's like my brother," said Stewart, whose exhibition includes "Stomping the Blues," a 1997 photograph of Marsalis leading his orchestra off the stage during a world tour of his Pulitzer Prize-winning jazz oratorio "Blood on the Fields."

Stewart, who was born in Nashville, Tennessee, and grew up in Memphis, Tennessee, and Chicago, has

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 53 of 85

his own ties to jazz and blues. His stepfather, Phineas Newborn Jr., was a pianist who worked with the likes of musicians Lionel Hampton, Charles Mingus and B.B. King.

Describing himself as a child of the "apartheid South," Stewart has drawn inspiration from photographers such as Ernest Cole and Roy DeCarava, who was among Stewart's instructors at New York's Cooper Union, where Stewart received a bachelor of fine arts degree. DeCarava's photographs of 1950s Harlem led to a collaboration with Langston Hughes on the 1955 book, "The Sweet Flypaper of Life."

Cole, a South African photographer, achieved acclaim in 1967 with "House of Bondage," the first book to inspire Stewart. It chronicled apartheid using photographs he smuggled out of the country. Cole was never able to replicate his early success and fell on hard times before dying at age 49 in New York City. A documentary about him, "Ernest Cole: Lost and Found," premiered at this year's Cannes Film Festival.

"He came to New York and he was homeless in New York, so I would see him on the street and we would talk," said Stewart, who is quick to draw a distinction between his work and Cole's.

"I consider myself an artist more than a documentarian," explained Stewart, who attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago before enrolling at Cooper Union and was a longtime friend and collaborator of artist Romare Bearden.

That's not to say Stewart doesn't have journalistic instincts in his blood. He recounts a work history that includes the Chicago Defender, the largest Black-owned daily in the country at the time, and stringing for Ebony, Essence and Black Enterprise magazines. He looks back less fondly on a short stint of large-format work photographing fine art for brochures and catalogs, an undertaking he described as "tedious."

Through it all though, Stewart has maintained an artistic approach to his work, looking to combine pattern, color, tone and space in a visually appealing manner while not leaving the viewer searching for the message.

"It has to still be 'X marks the spot,'" he explained. "It still has to be photographic. It can't be just abstract."

Or maybe it can. How else to explain the color and texture seen in "Blue Car, Havana" from 2002?

"It's all about abstract painting," Stewart said in wall text accompanying the photo.

The retrospective shines a light on how Stewart's work has evolved over time, from early black-and-white photographs to his more recent prints, which feature more color.

"It's two different languages," he said. "English would be the black and white. French would be the color."

"I worked in color the whole time, I just didn't have the money to print them," he added.

While photography can inform people about the world around them, Stewart has noted there is a gulf between the real world and a photograph.

"Reality is a fact, and a photograph is another fact," he explained. "The map is not the territory. It's just a map of the territory."

Barcelona wants to get rid of short-term rental units. Will other tourist destinations do the same?

By JOSEPH WILSON Associated Press

BARCELONA, Spain (AP) — Imagine planning a vacation and not being able to check Airbnb or another online booking site for an apartment in which to spend a few days walking, shopping and eating among the locals. Would a hotel do?

That's the future confronting visitors to central Barcelona in four years. To safeguard and expand the housing supply for full-time residents, local authorities want to rid the Spanish city known for its architecture, beaches and Catalan culture of the 10,000 apartments licensed as short-term rentals.

Barcelona City Hall announced last month that it would not renew any tourist apartment licenses after they expire in 2028. Deputy Mayor Laia Bonet said the city wants tourism, which accounts for 15% of the local economy, but must help residents cope with skyrocketing rents and real estate prices.

"Our housing emergency obligates us, forces us, to change the way we do things and to put the priority on housing above our policies for accommodating tourists," Bonet told The Associated Press.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 54 of 85

Property owners plan to fight the decision, arguing that eliminating short-term rentals would threaten their livelihoods and leave the city without enough temporary lodging: Some 2.5 million tourists stayed in an apartment last year, according to the Association of Tourist Apartments of Barcelona, also known as Apartur.

Residents of the city, which has a population of about 1.6 million, have campaigned against "overtourism" for several years, but the anti-tourism sentiment has grown more heated: During a protest in Barcelona's Las Ramblas district this month, some participants shouted "Go home!" and squirted water pistols at people seated at outdoor tables.

Residential real estate prices in Barcelona have increased by an average of 38% over the past decade, a period in which the average rent soared by 68%, according to the municipal government. Like in other popular urban areas, many young people who grew up there struggle to afford a place of their own. Authorities say a lack of supply is partly to blame.

A global dilemma

Other cities around the world also are struggling to reconcile the housing needs of year-round residents, the rights of landlords and the allure of the economic benefits that being a top tourist destination can bring.

Measures to limit the free-for-all of investors converting apartments into holiday rentals have included partial bans, caps on the number of days units can be let out and registration requirements for frequent hosts.

New York cracked down on short-term apartment rentals in September with rules requiring owners to remain in their residence when they host overnight visitors and capping the number of guests at two. Maui's mayor said last month that he wants to end condo rentals to tourists to help deal with a housing shortage made worse by last year's devastating fire on the Hawaiian island.

In Italy, a 2022 amendment to national legislation allowed the lagoon city of Venice to limit short-term rentals, but the city administration has not acted on it.

Before moving to eradicate tourist apartments altogether, Barcelona officials tried more limited approaches. Its previous mayor, a former housing activist, made several moves to regulate the market, including a ban on the rental of individual rooms in apartments for stays under 31 days in 2020. The city also has moved aggressively to get unlicensed tourist apartments removed from online platforms.

"We have accumulated lots of know-how in Barcelona that we are ready to share with other cities that want to have this debate," Bonet said.

What's at stake for owners

The decision in Barcelona was made possible after the government of Catalonia, the northeast region of which Barcelona is the capital, passed a law year year stating that current licenses for tourist apartments would expire by 2028 in areas determined to have shortages of affordable housing.

Local governments that want to renew the licenses must demonstrate that doing so is compatible with locals being able to find affordable housing. Barcelona City Hall said it wasn't.

Spain's conservative opposition party is challenging the regional law in the country's Constitutional Court, alleging that the law infringes on property rights and economic liberty. Apartur, which represents 400 owners of short-term rental units in Barcelona, argues the industry has become a scapegoat in a city that has not granted any new tourist apartment licenses since 2014.

Bonaventura Durall runs a company that owns and rents out 52 apartments near Barcelona's beachfront. Forty of the apartments are located in a building that his business and others built in 2010 to tap into the growing short-term rental industry. He says the municipal government's plan to phase out vacation rentals is unfair and puts his business and its 16 employees at risk.

"There is an investment behind this that has created jobs and tax revenues and a way of life, which will now have its wings clipped," Durall said. "This is like you go to a bar and take away its liquor license or you take away a taxi driver's permit to drive a taxi."

Critics also say the move amounts to Barcelona exercising eminent domain and will inevitably create a black market of unregulated vacation rentals. Bonet, the deputy mayor, denies that City Hall is expropriating anyone's property.

"We are not saying that these apartments will disappear and therefore the owners of these apartments can't generate revenue from them," Bonet said. "They will have the same assets, but they will have to put them to the use they were originally built for, which is to house families."

The limits of the sharing economy

Ignasi Martí, director of the Observatory for Dignified Housing at Spain's Esade business and law school, said that in addition to likely facing legal hurdles, the initiative would at most only dent rental costs.

Most studies indicate that Barcelona needs about 60,000 new housing units to meet current demand, he said.

But Martí thinks that removing tourists from residential buildings could improve the daily lives of people who call the city home.

"Take the case of a mother who needs to leave her child with a neighbor. If she lives in a building with tourist apartments, she knows that she can't count on them," he said. "Tourist apartments undoubtedly have repercussions in the possibility of creating ties, solidarity or making friends, beyond the issue of noise and people coming and going at any hour."

Esther Roset, a 68-year-old retired bank worker, thinks so, too. She has spent years complaining about the tourist apartment above her home. Some guests have done things like vomit off the balcony, brought in prostitutes and opened a fire extinguisher in the stairwell.

Apartur argues that such behavior is rare, in part because of Barcelona's strict regulations.

Roset has other tourist-related pet peeves, such as the expensive food joints catering to foreigners that have swept away the traditional bars where she could get a simple sandwich. She pointed to three nearby restaurants that specialize in brunch. Roset, like most Spaniards, doesn't do brunch.

"I shouldn't have to leave. This is my apartment. If the tourists who came behaved, OK, but one out of every 10 doesn't," she said. "At the end, I will have to follow the advice of a lawyer and hang a sheet from my balcony with the message 'Tourist go home.'"

Trump and Vance team up to campaign in Minnesota, a state that hasn't backed the GOP in 52 years

By MICHELLE L. PRICE and ALI SWENSON Associated Press

ST. CLOUD, Minn. (AP) — As the presidential campaign enters a critical final 100 day stretch, Republican nominee Donald Trump and his running mate, JD Vance, rallied supporters on Saturday in a state that hasn't backed a GOP candidate for the White House since 1972.

The rally in St. Cloud, Minnesota, was designed as a sign of the campaign's bullishness about its prospects across the Midwest, particularly when President Joe Biden was showing signs of weakness ahead of his decision to exit the campaign. Trump, who won Michigan and Wisconsin in 2016 only to lose them four years later, has increasingly focused on Minnesota as a state where he'd like to put Democrats on defense.

The rally is something of a gamble, potentially forcing the likely Democratic nominee, Vice President Kamala Harris, and Democrats to devote resources in a state they would likely otherwise ignore. But it could also be a risk for Trump if he spends time in places that might prove to be a reach with Harris leading the ticket when he could otherwise focus on maintaining his support in more traditional battlegrounds.

Trump spoke for more than an hour and a half to cheering crowds holding signs supporting police and calling for the deportation of migrants in the country illegally. He continued a pattern of escalating attacks against Harris on immigration and crime.

He called her a "crazy liberal" and accused her of wanting to "defund the police," while he said by contrast, he wants to "overfund the police."

"She has no clue, she's evil," Trump said, suggesting Harris had failed at her tasks related to the border as vice president. "Kamala Harris' deadly destruction of America's borders is completely and totally disqualifying for her to be president."

Trump called out Harris for a 2020 post she made after the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis at the hands of police. The post had encouraged people to help protesters by donating to the Minnesota

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 56 of 85

Freedom Fund, which had been working on reforming the bail system and posted criminal bail for people as part of a campaign to address inequities in the system.

Though Harris did not contribute to the fund herself, her tweet was among those from celebrities and high-profile people that helped donations flow into the cash-strapped nonprofit, helping it quickly raise \$34 million. In the immediate aftermath of the protests and unrest, the group actually spent little bailing out protesters.

Ammar Moussa, a spokesperson for the Harris campaign, called Trump's attack line "a desperate lie from a desperate campaign" that can't change the fact that its candidate has been convicted of multiple felonies.

Trump also knocked Harris as an "absolute radical" on abortion, seemingly sensing an opening to attack her on the issue after she has become the Biden administration's most vocal proponent of abortion rights. He wrongly suggested Harris wants abortion "right up until birth and after birth." Infanticide is criminalized in every state, and no state has passed a law that allows killing a baby after birth.

Yet the former president also recycled much of his past material targeting Biden, showing how his campaign has sought to keep Biden's pitfalls fresh in voters' minds even after the president has ended his candidacy and endorsed Harris.

Trump's remarks followed a spirited speech from Vance, in which he leaned heavily into issues that animate the GOP base, particularly security at the U.S.-Mexico border and crime. He also took a broadside against the news media, arguing that journalists were comparing the first Black woman and person of south Asian descent to lead a major party ticket to Martin Luther King, Jr.

In May, Trump headlined a GOP fundraiser in St. Paul, where he boasted he could win the state and made explicit appeals to the iron-mining range in northeast Minnesota, where he hopes a heavy population of blue-collar and union workers will shift to Republicans after years of being solidly Democratic.

Appealing to that population has also helped Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz land on the list of about a dozen Democrats who are being vetted to potentially be Harris' running mate.

Walz posted on the social platform X on Friday poking fun at Trump's visit to his state.

"Donald Trump is coming back to the State of Hockey tomorrow for the hat trick," Walz wrote. "He lost Minnesota in '16, '20, and he'll lose it again in '24."

Saturday's rally took place at the Herb Brooks National Hockey Center, a 5,159-seat hockey arena. After surviving the July 13 assassination attempt on him at an outdoor rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, Trump has only had events at indoor venues. But he said in a post on his social media network Saturday that he will schedule outdoor stops and the "SECRET SERVICE HAS AGREED TO SUBSTANTIALLY STEP UP THEIR OPERATION."

Secret Service officials would not say whether the agency had agreed to expand operations at Trump's campaign events or had any concerns about him potentially resuming outdoor gatherings. "Ensuring the safety and security of our protectees is our highest priority," Secret Service spokesman Anthony Guglielmi said in a statement Saturday. "In the interest of maintaining operational integrity, we are not able to comment on specifics of our protective means or methods."

Earlier Saturday, Trump spoke at a bitcoin conference in Nashville, Tennessee, laying out a plan to embrace cryptocurrency if elected and promising to make the U.S. the "crypto capital of the planet" and a "bitcoin superpower."

Trump didn't always support cryptocurrency but has changed his attitude toward the digital tokens in recent years and in May, his campaign started accepting donations in cryptocurrency.

Also Saturday, Harris ramped up her campaign for president with her first fundraiser since becoming the Democrats' likely White House nominee.

The event in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, on Saturday was expected to raise more than \$1.4 million, her campaign announced, from an audience of hundreds at the Colonial Theatre. That would be \$1 million-plus more than the original goal set for the event before Biden dropped out of the race.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 57 of 85

Even on quiet summer weekends, huge news stories spread to millions more swiftly than ever before

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

James Peeler's phone blew up with messages as he drove home from church in Texas. Reading a book on her couch in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Wendy Schweiger spied something on Facebook. After finishing a late-night swim in the Baltic Sea off Finland, Matti Niiranen clicked on a CNN livestream.

Each learned that President Joe Biden had abandoned his re-election bid minutes after he dropped a statement online without warning on a summer Sunday.

Eight days after the assassination attempt on former President Donald Trump, it marked the second straight July weekend that a seismic American story broke at a time most people weren't paying attention to the news. Biden's announcement was a startling example of how fast and how far word spreads in today's always-connected world.

"It seemed like a third of the nation knew it instantly," said longtime news executive Bill Wheatley, "and they told another third."

News travels fast, as they say

Wheatley, now retired and summering in Maine, had sat down to check his email and absent-mindedly refreshed the CNN.com home site on his computer. If he didn't learn the news that way, text messages from friends would have alerted him soon after.

At 1:46 p.m. Eastern Time, the moment Biden posted his announcement on X, an estimated 215,000 people happened to be logged on to one of 124 major U.S. news websites. Fifteen minutes later, those sites had 893,000 readers, according to Chartbeat.

On apnews.com, 3,580 people entered the site during the 1:46 p.m. minute. Nearly an hour later, at 2:43 p.m., The Associated Press' online news destination site hit the afternoon's peak of 18,936 new visitors. CNN.com and its news app saw its usage quintuple within 20 minutes of the news breaking, the network said.

Television networks broke into regular programming for the story between 1:50 and 2:04 p.m. During the relatively quiet quarter-hour before 2 p.m., a total of 2.69 million people were watching either CNN, Fox News Channel or MSNBC, the Nielsen company said. The audience on those three networks swelled to 6.84 million between 2 and 4 p.m. Eastern. Add ABC and CBS, which also had special coverage in those hours, and there were at least 9.27 million following the story on television.

How did everybody get there so quickly? As Wheatley suggested, word of mouth played a big role. To his credit, Peeler said he didn't open his text messages until stopping his car.

Many people also have alerts set up on their phone.

"Our phones are constantly chirping at us and we have them with us all the time," said Brian Ott, a media and communications professor at Missouri State University and author of "The Twitter Presidency: Donald J. Trump and the Politics of White Rage."

Ott and his wife were traveling in Belgrade, Serbia, and, with the time difference, had gone to bed on Sunday night before Biden made his announcement. Ott found out the next morning when he checked news sites online and told his wife when she woke up.

"Oh, I already know," she responded. She had logged on to X when she got up to use the bathroom in the middle of the night.

Since then, as he has moved on to Italy, visiting Rome and Florence, Ott said everyone he's run into who hears he speaks English has wanted to talk to him about Biden.

"My sense is that the compulsion is the same for everyone," he said. "In our digital world, information is capital, and everyone wants to demonstrate their capital."

Finding out in various ways

At his summer house in Pyharanta, Finland, Niiranen has taken a keen interest in U.S. politics, which the semiretired writer said dates to his time as an exchange student in Michigan. He had gone for a swim after 10 p.m. on Sunday, since daylight lingers longer there.

Niiranen had read speculation that Biden might drop out, so when he sat down on his deck after getting

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 58 of 85

out of the water, he checked the CNN stream and found that was the case.

"Interesting election you have there!" he said. "I'll be watching it."

Visiting family in Canaan, New Hampshire, Tracy Jasnowski was having a mostly unplugged week because of spotty internet service. Once a day, adults and children alike retreated with their devices to a spot on the lawn where the service is more consistent. That's when she found out.

"Honestly, I thought I might vomit," she said. "I was shocked. I was cast adrift. I had no idea that would happen."

Even if she hadn't learned it then, Jasnowski said she quickly got text messages from friends. And when her father woke up from his nap, he turned on Fox News.

A generation or two earlier, people would have to be watching TV or listening to the radio to hear a special report about momentous news, said Wheatley, a former executive at NBC News. Then people would spread it by telling friends or family. Now with social media, text alerts and websites available at a click, news moves "much, much faster."

"The next logical question," he said, "is how accurate is it?"

Get it first, but first get it right

It's a mantra drummed into young journalists: Get the news fast but, more importantly, get it right. A mistake on a major, breaking story can derail a career. This month's big stories illustrated the pressure that comes with the need for speed.

Almost immediately after Biden's announcement, it became a major part of the story journalists were filing that he hadn't endorsed his vice president, Kamala Harris, to succeed him. He did within a half hour, but that's an eternity for those who want to raise questions or float conspiracy theories.

Similarly, video of the Trump rally where shots were fired appeared instantly on television screens. But most initial news reports were extremely cautious, sticking to what was known: Trump was hurried off the stage by Secret Service agents. Blood was visible. There was a noise that sounded like gunshots.

That, in turn, led some to criticize journalists for being too wary, too reluctant to call it an assassination attempt. Yet not all facts are quickly known; nearly two weeks later, at a congressional hearing, FBI Director Christopher Wray said it still wasn't fully clear whether Trump had been hit by a bullet or shrapnel. The next day, the FBI announced it had concluded it was a bullet.

In other words, it's common that there's more to a story than meets the eye, and the frenzy of initial breaking news requires strong adherence to the facts available at the moment, no matter what becomes clear later.

When Peeler arrived at his destination in Texas last week and checked on what his friends had texted him about Biden, he called up the websites of local TV network affiliates. In Pennsylvania, Schweiger turned immediately to the AP and The New York Times online.

Both were grateful they had someplace they considered reliable to learn the facts.

"I operate under the assumption that news is 24 hours, and that you always have people that can be pressed into service for anything at any time," Schweiger said.

Can tech help solve the Los Angeles homeless crisis? Finding shelter may someday be a click away

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD and JANIE HAR Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Billions of dollars have been spent on efforts to get homeless people off the streets in California, but outdated computer systems with error-filled data are all too often unable to provide even basic information like where a shelter bed is open on any given night, inefficiencies that can lead to dire consequences.

The problem is especially acute in Los Angeles, where more than 45,000 people — many suffering from serious mental illness, substance addictions or both — live in litter-strewn encampments that have spread into virtually every neighborhood, and where rows of rusting RVs line entire blocks.

Even in the state that is home to Silicon Valley, technology has not kept up with the long-running crisis.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 59 of 85

In an age when anyone can book a hotel room or rent a car with a few strokes on a mobile phone, no system exists that provides a comprehensive listing of available shelter beds in Los Angeles County, home to more than 1 in 5 unhoused people in the U.S.

Mark Goldin, chief technology officer for Better Angels United, a nonprofit group, described L.A.'s technology as "systems that don't talk to one another, lack of accurate data, nobody on the same page about what's real and isn't real."

The systems can't answer "exactly how many people are out there at any given time. Where are they?" he said.

The ramifications for people living on the streets could mean whether someone sleeps another night outside or not, a distinction that can be life-threatening.

"They are not getting the services to the people at the time that those people either need the service, or are mentally ready to accept the services," said Adam Miller, a tech entrepreneur and CEO of Better Angels.

The problems were evident at a filthy encampment in the city's Silver Lake neighborhood, where Sara Reyes, executive director of SELAH Neighborhood Homeless Coalition, led volunteers distributing water, socks and food to homeless people, including one who appeared unconscious.

She gave out postcards with the address of a nearby church where the coalition provides hot food and services. A small dog bolted out of a tent, frantically barking, while a disheveled man wearing a jacket on a blistering hot day shuffled by a stained mattress.

At the end of the visit Reyes began typing notes into her mobile phone, which would later be retyped into a coalition spreadsheet and eventually copied again into a federal database.

"Anytime you move it from one medium to another, you can have data loss. We know we are not always getting the full picture," Reyes said. The "victims are the people the system is supposed to serve."

The technology has sputtered while the homeless population has soared. Some ask how can you combat a problem without reliable data to know what the scope is? An annual tally of homeless people in the city recently found a slight decline in the population, but some experts question the accuracy of the data, and tents and encampments can be seen just about everywhere.

Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass has pinpointed shortcomings with technology as among the obstacles she faces in homelessness programs and has described the city's efforts to slow the crisis as "building the plane while flying it."

She said earlier this year that three to five homeless people die every day on the streets of L.A.

On Thursday, Gov. Gavin Newsom ordered state agencies to start removing homeless encampments on state land in his boldest action yet following a Supreme Court ruling allowing cities to enforce bans on sleeping outside in public spaces.

There is currently no uniform practice for caseworkers to collect and enter information into databases on the homeless people they interview, including notes taken on paper. The result: Information can be lost or recorded incorrectly, and it becomes quickly outdated with the lag time between interviews and when it's entered into a database.

The main federal data system, known as the Homeless Management Information System, or HMIS, was designed as a desktop application, making it difficult to operate on a mobile phone.

"One of the reasons the data is so bad is because what the case managers do by necessity is they take notes, either on their phones or on scrap pieces of paper or they just try to remember it, and they don't typically input it until they get back to their desk" hours, days, a week or even longer afterward, Miller said.

Every organization that coordinates services for homeless people uses an HMIS program to comply with data collection and reporting standards mandated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. But the systems are not all compatible.

Sam Matonik, associate director of data at L.A.-based People Assisting the Homeless, a major service provider, said his organization is among those that must reenter data because Los Angeles County uses a proprietary data system that does not talk to the HMIS system.

"Once you're manually double-entering things, it opens the door for all sorts of errors," Matonik said.

"Small numerical errors are the difference between somebody having shelter and not."

Bevin Kuhn, acting deputy chief of analytics for the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, the agency that coordinates homeless housing and services in Los Angeles County, said work is underway to create a database of 23,000 beds by the end of the year as part of technology upgrades.

For case managers, "just seeing ... the general bed availability is challenging," Kuhn said.

Among other changes is a reboot of the HMIS system to make it more compatible with mobile apps and developing a way to measure if timely data is being entered by case workers, Kuhn said.

It's not uncommon for a field worker to encounter a homeless person in crisis who needs immediate attention, which can create delays in collecting data. Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority aims for data to be entered in the system within 72 hours, but that benchmark is not always met.

In hopes of filling the void, Better Angels assembled a team experienced in building large-scale software applications. They are constructing a mobile-friendly prototype for outreach workers — to be donated to participating groups in Los Angeles County — that will be followed by systems for shelter operators and a comprehensive shelter bed database.

Since homeless people are transient and difficult to locate for follow-up services, one feature would create a map of places where an individual had been encountered, allowing case managers to narrow the search.

Services are often available, but the problem is linking them with a homeless person in real time. So, a data profile would show services the individual received in the past, medical issues and make it easy to contact health workers, if needed.

As a secondary benefit — if enough agencies and providers agree to participate — the software could produce analytical information and data visualizations, spotlighting where homeless people are moving around the county, or concentrations of where homeless people have gathered.

One key goal for the prototypes: ease of use even for workers with scant digital literacy. Information entered into the app would be immediately unloaded to the database, eliminating the need for redundant reentries while keeping information up to date.

Time is often critical. Once a shelter bed is located, there is a 48-hour window for the spot to be claimed, which Reyes says happens only about half the time. The technology is so inadequate, the coalition sometimes doesn't learn a spot is open until it has expired.

She has been impressed with the speed of the Better Angels app, which is in testing, and believes it would cut down on the number of people who miss the housing window, as well as create more reliability for people trying to obtain services.

"I'm hoping Better Angels helps us put the human back into this whole situation," Reyes said.

Firefighters helped by cooler weather battle blaze that has scorched area size of Los Angeles

By NIC COURY and OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ Associated Press

FOREST RANCH, Calif. (AP) — Thousands of firefighters battling a wildfire in Northern California received some help from the weather Saturday hours after it exploded in size, scorching an area greater than the size of Los Angeles. The blaze was one of several tearing through the western United States and Canada, fueled by wind and heat.

Cooler temperatures and an increase in humidity could help slow the Park Fire, the largest this year in California. Its intensity and dramatic spread led fire officials to make unwelcome comparisons to the monstrous Camp Fire, which burned out of control in nearby Paradise in 2018, killing 85 people and torching 11,000 homes.

Paradise again was near the danger zone. The entire town was under an evacuation warning, one of several communities in Butte County. Evacuation orders were also issued in Plumas, Tehama and Shasta counties. An evacuation warning calls for people to prepare to evacuate and await instructions, while an evacuation order means to leave immediately.

Temperatures are expected to be cooler than average through the middle of next week, but "that doesn't

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 61 of 85

mean that fires that are existing will go away," said Marc Chenard, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service Weather Prediction Center in College Park, Maryland.

The Park Fire has scorched 547 square miles (1,416 square kilometers) as of Saturday and destroyed 134 structures since igniting Wednesday when authorities said a man pushed a burning car into a gully in Chico and then fled. It was 10% contained and moving to the north and east of Chico.

Ronnie Dean Stout, 42, was arrested Thursday at his home in Chico and was being held without bail pending a Monday arraignment, officials said. There was no reply to an email to the district attorney asking whether he had legal representation or someone who could comment on his behalf.

Billy See, an incident commander with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, or Cal Fire, said at a briefing that the blaze had been advancing 8 square miles (21 square kilometers) per hour since its inception. But there was cautious optimism as weather conditions slowed it in some areas, and firefighters were able to plan and deploy additional personnel. Nearly 2,500 firefighters were battling the blaze, aided by 16 helicopters and numerous air tankers.

Jeremy Pierce, a Cal Fire operations section chief, said firefighters were taking advantage of the cooler weather: "We're having great success today. Our crews are strong and going out there and getting this while the weather is in our favor."

President Joe Biden was briefed on the Park Fire and directed his team to do everything possible to support suppression efforts, according to the White House.

In Southern California, a blaze in the Sequoia National Forest swept through the community of Havilah after burning more than 48 square miles (124 square kilometers) in less than three days. The town of 250 people had been under an evacuation order.

Benjamin Cossel, a fire information officer with the U.S. Forest Service, said firefighters and the sheriff's office planned to go through the area to assess the damage and try to determine if any lives were lost.

"It's still pretty hot in that area," Cossel said.

Overall, more than 110 active fires covering 2,800 square miles (7,250 square kilometers) were burning in the U.S. as of Friday, according to the National Interagency Fire Center. Some were caused by the weather, with climate change increasing the frequency of lightning strikes as the region endures record heat and bone-dry conditions.

Susan Singleton and her husband packed their SUV with clothes, some food and their seven dogs and rushed to evacuate their home Wednesday in Cohasset, a town of about 400 northeast of Chico. She said they have since learned that their house burned down.

"Everything else we had burned up but getting them out, getting us out, was my priority," Singleton said Saturday, standing outside her SUV where her dogs were resting. The couple and their pets have been sleeping in their car outside the Red Cross shelter at the Neighborhood Church of Chico, which does not allow pets inside.

Singleton, 59, said her priority was finding a place for her pets to stretch out.

"We've got to have a place to land and stop doing this because this is what's stressing me out," she said pointing to her little dogs inside small carriers.

Elsewhere, crews were making progress on another complex of fires in the Plumas National Forest near the California-Nevada line, Forest Service spokesperson Adrienne Freeman said. Traffic was backed up for miles near the border along the main highway linking Los Angeles and Las Vegas, as crews continued to battle a fire that started Friday when a truck crashed.

The most damage so far has been to the Canadian Rockies' Jasper National Park, where 25,000 people were forced to flee and the park's namesake, a World Heritage site, was devastated, with 358 of the town's 1,113 structures destroyed. Authorities said cool and wet weather was helping, however.

In eastern Washington late Friday, crews stopped the progress of a fire near Tyler that destroyed three homes and five outbuildings, the Washington Department of Natural Resources said Saturday. The South Columbia Basin fire burned timber and grasses, and crews continued work on containment lines along the perimeter.

Two fires in eastern Oregon, the Durkee and Cow Valley blazes, burned about 660 square miles (1,709 square kilometers). Gov. Tina Kotek expressed condolences Friday to the family of a pilot of a single-engine air tanker that went down in forested terrain while fighting a separate fire near the town of Seneca and the Malheur National Forest.

In Idaho, homes, outbuildings and a commercial building were among structures lost in several communities including Juliaetta, which was evacuated Thursday. Officials said Saturday that they were continuing to assess the damage from a grouping of blazes referred to as the Gwen fire, which was estimated at 41 square miles (106 square kilometers) in size with no containment.

Surf's up! Paris Olympics surfing competition commences in Tahiti, with wave rides and wipe outs

By VICTORIA MILKO Associated Press

TEAHUPO'O, Tahiti (AP) — Surfers rode through and wiped out on barrel-shaped waves in their quest for gold during the first day of the Paris Olympics surfing competition in Tahiti on Saturday, with some of the biggest names in the sport side-by-side on their boards in the ocean.

"This morning, I woke up with butterflies in my stomach of excitement and also a little bit nervous," said French Polynesian surfer Vahine Fierro. "But once I touched the water, I felt really comfortable."

Despite no competitors facing elimination in the first round, surfers gave their all during the 30-minute heats, providing a tantalizing preview of what could be in store in the competition in days to come.

Wave sets were sparse during the early part of the men's round in the morning, making some competitors feel there was a tough, slow start.

"As a competitor you feel like there's not enough space for three people in the water," said Kanoa Igarashi from Japan, who won the men's silver medal at the Tokyo Olympics, but placed last in his heat on Saturday. "There's just not enough waves going around for everybody."

But the swell picked up closer to the afternoon for the men's heats and throughout the women's, leading to more regular waves.

"I think the swells have been building a little bit — I feel like we've seen some bigger sets. Throughout the day it should just keep getting better," said Caroline Marks, from the United States, after she placed first in her heat. "That's just mother nature and how it works."

Many surfers said they viewed the first round as an opportunity to review their performance and prepare for the next rounds, when surfers start being eliminated from the competition.

"I'll probably go back and settle down, watch the footage and analyze my heat a bit more," said Billy Stairmand from New Zealand, who placed last in his heat, after he came ashore. "I'll reset and go in again tomorrow."

Others said they plan to take a more laid-back approach to the rest of the competition.

"All the hard work is done already. So, it's just like, relax, have fun, replenish, feel good," said Griffin Colapinto from the United States, who placed first in his heat.

Near the wave, jet skis and boats carried surfing officials, safety patrol staff and media for a closer look as competitors rode waves.

In the minutes before the start of their heat, surfers were ferried on a jet ski to a competitor's boat, where they put on a red, blue or green jersey to help judges and viewers better identify them while competing. Some surfers donned helmets to protect themselves from potential injuries from wiping out on the shallow, jagged coral near the wave.

Judges announced ride scores and updates from the newly constructed viewing tower, which previously garnered criticism from environmental groups and was downsized from original blueprints by organizers in an effort to address concerns.

Each round is made up of heats, with surfers looking to lock in their two highest-scoring waves. Each run can score up to 10 points for a possible 20-point heat total. A panel of judges scores each wave ride based on factors including degree of difficulty, maneuvers, speed and flow.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 63 of 85

The Paris Olympic surfing competition features six rounds: Rounds one through three, followed by the quarterfinals, semifinals and finals.

Saturday's first round consisted of eight heats of three surfers each. The winner of each heat advanced directly to round three, while the other two surfers will go to round two. In round two, there will be eight heats of two surfers, with the winner advancing to round three and the loser getting eliminated.

Starting with round three the competition functions as a single-elimination, head-to-head bracket. Each heat will feature two surfers, with the winner advancing to the next round and the loser getting eliminated. The losers of the two semifinal heats will compete in the bronze-medal match.

From the men's round one competition, Colapinto and John John Florence from the U.S., Joao Chianca and Gabriel Medina from Brazil, Ethan Ewing from Australia, Joan Duru from France, Alonso Correa from Peru and Reo Inaba from Japan will advance directly to round three.

For the women's: Caroline Marks, Carissa Moore and Caitlin Simmers from the U.S., Fierro from France, Tyler Wright from Australia, Brisa Hennessy from Costa Rica, Luana Silva from Brazil and Nadia Erostarbe from Spain will advance directly to round three.

The next competition day will be determined after officials assess wave conditions in the early morning.

Technology's grip on modern life is pushing us down a dimly lit path of digital land mines

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — "Move fast and break things," a high-tech mantra popularized 20 years ago by Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, was supposed to be a rallying cry for game-changing innovation. It now seems more like an elegy for a society perched on a digital foundation too fragile to withstand a defective software program that was supposed to help protect computers — not crash them.

The worldwide technology meltdown caused by a flawed update installed earlier this month on computers running on Microsoft's dominant Windows software by cybersecurity specialist CrowdStrike was so serious that some affected businesses such as Delta Air Lines were still recovering from it days later.

It's a tell-tale moment — one that illustrates the digital pitfalls looming in a culture that takes the magic of technology for granted until it implodes into a horror show that exposes our ignorance and vulnerability.

"We are utterly dependent on systems that we don't even know exist until they break," said Paul Saffo, a Silicon Valley forecaster and historian. "We have become a little bit like Blanche DuBois in that scene from 'A Streetcar Named Desire,' where she says, 'I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.'"

'Gum and shoelaces' and the perils of a connected world

The dependence — and extreme vulnerability — starts with the interconnections that bind our computers, phones and other devices. That usually makes life easier and more convenient, but it also means outages can have more far-reaching ripple effects, whether they are caused by a mistake like the one made by CrowdStrike or through the malicious intent of a hacker.

"It might be time to look at how the internet works and then question why the internet works this way. Because there is a lot of gum and shoelaces holding things together," said Gregory Falco, an assistant professor of engineering at Cornell University.

The risks are being amplified by the tightening control of a corporate coterie popularly known as "Big Tech": Microsoft, whose software runs most of the world's computers; Apple and Google, whose software powers virtually all of the world's smartphones; Amazon, which oversees data centers responsible for keeping websites running (another key service provided by Microsoft and Google, too, in addition to its e-commerce bazaar); and Meta Platforms, the social networking hub that owns Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp.

It's a highly concentrated empire with a few corridors open to a network of smaller companies such as CrowdStrike — a company with \$3 billion in annual revenue, a fraction of the nearly \$250 billion in annual sales that Microsoft reels in. All of the key players still tend to put a higher priority on the pursuit of profit than a commitment to quality, said Isak Nti Asar, co-director of the cybersecurity and global policy

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 64 of 85

program at Indiana University.

"We have built a cult of innovation, a system that says, 'Get technology into people's hands as quick as possible and then fix it when you find out you have a problem,'" Nti Asar said. "We should be moving slower and demanding better technology instead of giving ourselves up to these feudal lords."

How on Earth did we get here?

But is Big Tech to blame for that situation? Or is it 21st-century society that obliviously allowed us to get to this point — consumers eagerly buying their next shiny devices while gleefully posting pictures online, and the seemingly overmatched lawmakers elected to impose safeguards?

"Everybody wants to point the blame somewhere else," Saffo said, "but I would say you better start looking in the mirror."

If our digital evolution seems to be headed in the wrong direction, should we change course? Or is that even possible at a juncture where some credit card companies charge their customers a fee if they prefer to have their monthly billing systems delivered to them through a U.S. Postal Service that has become known as "snail mail" because it moves so slowly?

Remaining stuck in a different era worked out well for Southwest Airlines during the CrowdStrike snafu because its system is still running on Windows software from the 1990s. It's such antiquated technology that Southwest doesn't rely on CrowdStrike for security. That sword has another, less appealing edge, though: Behaving like a Luddite hobbled Southwest during the 2022 holiday travel season when thousands of its flights were canceled because its technology was unable to properly adjust crew schedules.

But it's becoming increasingly untenable to toggle back to the analog and early digital era of 30 or 40 years ago when more tasks were done manually and more records were handled on pen and paper. If anything, technology appears destined to become even more pervasive now that artificial intelligence seems poised to automate more tasks, including potentially writing the code for software updates that will be checked by a computer — that will be overseen by another computer to make sure it's not malfunctioning.

That doesn't mean individual households still can't revert to some of their old tricks as a backup for when technology falters, said Matt Mittelsteadt, research fellow for Mercatus Center, a research institution at George Mason University. "There is this creeping realization that some of the things we once mocked, like putting a password on a Post-It note, isn't necessarily the worst idea."

At this juncture, experts believe both the government and the private sector need to devote more time mapping out the digital ecosystem to get a better understanding of the weaknesses in the system. Otherwise, society as a whole may find itself wandering through a field of digital land mines — while blindfolded. Says Mittelsteadt: "We have no intelligence about the environment we are operating in now other than that there is this mass of ticking time bombs out there."

Australian women off to a dominant start in their Olympic swimming rivalry with the US

By STEPHEN WADE AP Sports Writer

NANTERRE, France (AP) — The Australian women are about the surest thing in swimming, and they showed it Saturday on the first night at the Paris Olympic pool.

They picked up two gold medals, led by Ariarne Titmus in the 400-meter freestyle and another by the quartet in the 4x100 freestyle relay, their fourth straight Olympic victory in that event.

Mollie O'Callaghan, Shayna Jack, Emma McKeon and Meg Harris set an Olympic record with a time of 3 minutes, 28.92 seconds.

"I think as the years go on, the standards just get higher and higher," McKeon said. "I mean, you look at the history in this event for Australia and everyone wants to be a part of that and everyone works really hard to be a part of that and the standards just the bar keeps raising. I think that's probably what brings the strength to this team."

The victory was especially sweet for the 30-year-old McKeon, swimming in her final Olympics. She won seven medals three years ago in Tokyo, including four gold. It also raised her gold-medal tally to six start-

ing with the 2016 Rio Olympics.

The Aussie women's showdown with the United States will be a story on all nine days at the pool, and they have gained an early edge over their No. 1 rivals.

"For me it's definitely about getting up there and doing my country proud," Jack said. "It's a really special moment to stand on the podium with the other three girls."

The U.S. claimed gold in the final event of first night at the pool, winning the men's 4x100 freestyle relay with Caeleb Dressel on the anchor leg. The Australians settled for silver.

Katie Ledecky gave the Americans a bronze in the 400 free — her 10th Olympic medal, including six gold — and the U.S. women took silver in the 4x100 free relay in 3:30.20 with Kate Douglass, Gretchen Walsh, Torri Huske and Simone Manuel.

China finished third.

When it comes to the 4x100 free relay, the Aussie women are used to gold.

Especially McKeon, who has 12 medals in her career.

"I think I was 17 when I missed London (for the 2012 Olympics), you couldn't have told me that I'm gonna go on to do this," McKeon said. "It's just that persisting and, you have ups and you have downs and you just keep going along and you keep ticking the boxes and doing everything that you can."

Harris holds her first fundraiser as the likely Democratic nominee as donors open their wallets

By ZEKE MILLER AP White House Correspondent

PITTSFIELD, Mass. (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris used her first fundraiser since becoming the Democrats' likely White House nominee to excoriate the Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump as determined to roll back Americans' freedoms.

Harris traveled to Pittsfield, Massachusetts, on Saturday where she was expected to raise more than \$1.4 million, her campaign announced, from an audience of hundreds at the Colonial Theatre. That would be \$1 million-plus more than the original goal set for the event before President Joe Biden dropped out of the race.

She told an excited group of supporters that she entered the race as an "underdog," while expressing confidence that her surging campaign could defeat Trump.

"I will fight to move our nation forward," Harris said. "Donald Trump intends to take our country backwards."

Harris also poked at Trump, and his running mate Sen. JD Vance, for lobbing peculiar attacks at her and other Democrats. The vice president appeared to be alluding to a 2021 interview with Vance in which he slammed some prominent Democrats without biological children, including Harris, as "childless cat ladies" with "no direct stake" in America.

"You may have noticed Donald Trump has been resorting to some wild lies about my record and some of what he and his running mate are saying, it is just plain weird," Harris said. "I mean that's the box you put that in, right?"

Harris' branding the Republican ticket as "weird" appears to be part of a concerted effort by her campaign to spotlight some of Trump and Vance's rhetoric as questionable. Earlier this week, the Harris campaign on the social media site X called Vance "weird and creepy" for some of his stances on women's reproductive rights. Trump, meanwhile, has raised the fictional serial killer Hannibal Lecter from the film "Silence of the Lambs" in stump speeches.

"These guys are just weird," Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, a Democrat who is on Harris' shortlist for vice president, said in an MSNBC interview earlier this week. "They're running for He-man women-haters club or something."

Supporters for the fundraiser included musician James Taylor and many of the state's Democratic heavyweights, including Sens. Elizabeth Warren and Ed Markey, former Gov. Deval Patrick and Rep. Richie Neal.

Harris took in more than \$100 million in donations in the first 48 hours after Biden quit the race, a presi-

dential record, and aides said she has continued to raise money at a steady clip.

"This is a people-powered campaign," Harris said. "And we have momentum."

Harris, a former prosecutor in her home state of California, also derided Trump for his legal troubles. She noted his recent conviction on 34 counts of falsifying business records in New York, a jury finding the former president of being liable for sexual abusing advice columnist E. Jean Carroll in 1996, and a \$25 million settlement paid to attendees of the now-defunct real estate seminar called Trump University.

"I've been dealing with people like him my entire career," Harris said. She added, "So in this campaign, and I say in all seriousness, I will proudly put my record against his any day."

Harris began her remarks with praise for Biden, who opted to end his reelection bid and endorse Harris last weekend after his campaign fell into a tailspin following his disastrous June 27 debate performance against Trump.

She called Biden's legacy of accomplishment over the past three and a half years "unmatched in modern history."

Trump denigrated Harris as a "radical left lunatic" who wants to defund the police during a keynote address at a bitcoin conference in Nashville on Saturday.

He said she was worse than Biden but was probably his second preference for a candidate to run against after Biden.

Trump told the crowd of bitcoin supporters that he would embrace the cryptocurrency more than the Biden-Harris administration has and vowed to "replace the Biden-Harris economic stagnation" with an economic boom.

The vice president told supporters at her Massachusetts fundraiser that her economic agenda would sharply contrast with Trump's, who she claimed is squarely focused on lowering tax rates for wealthy Americans and improving the bottom lines of corporations.

"Building up the middle class will be the defining goal of my presidency," Harris said. She added, "Let us make no mistake, this campaign is not just about us versus Donald Trump. Our campaign has always been about two very different visions for our nation."

Separately, the vice president's office announced Harris would travel on Tuesday to Atlanta for a campaign event, and will head Thursday to Houston to attend a memorial service for Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, 74, a longtime Democratic House member who died on July 20.

Jackson Lee, who had pancreatic cancer, helped lead federal efforts to protect women from domestic violence and recognize Juneteenth as a national holiday.

Drag queens shine at Olympics opening, but 'Last Supper' tableau draws criticism

By THOMAS ADAMSON Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — In an unprecedented display of inclusivity, drag queens took center stage at the Paris Olympics opening ceremony, showcasing the vibrant and influential role of the French LGBTQ+ community — while also attracting criticism over a tableau reminiscent of "The Last Supper."

Held along the Seine River, the spectacular four-hour event featured global stars such as Celine Dion and Lady Gaga, both considered queer icons. The ceremony blended historic and modern French culture with a touch of kitsch, culminating in a flotilla of barges carrying thousands of Olympians.

Nicky Doll, known for competing on the 12th season of "RuPaul's Drag Race" and hosting "Drag Race France," participated in a high-octane fashion runway segment along with "Drag Race France" Season 1 winner Paloma, Season 3's Piche, and Giselle Palmer. Initially, they stood alongside the runway, gazing fiercely at the strutting models. Later, they joined in, showcasing their own style.

Le Filip, the recent winner of "Drag Race France," expressed their positive "surprise" and "pride" at the ceremony's scale and representation.

"I thought it would be a five-minute drag event with queer representation. I was amazed. It started with Lady Gaga, then we had drag queens, a huge rave, and a fire in the sky," they said. "It felt like a crowning

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 67 of 85

all over again. I am proud to see my friends and queer people on the world stage.”

Among their bold performances was a scene that seemed to evoke Leonardo da Vinci’s “The Last Supper,” featuring the drag queens and other performers in a configuration reminiscent of Jesus Christ and his apostles. This segment drew significant attention — and mixed reactions.

“The (French) government knows what it’s doing. They want to show themselves in the best way possible. They showed no restraints in expression,” Le Filip told The Associated Press.

On the other hand, prominent far-right politician Marion Maréchal denounced the performance on social media.

“To all the Christians of the world who are watching the Paris 2024 ceremony and felt insulted by this drag queen parody of the Last Supper, know that it is not France that is speaking but a left-wing minority ready for any provocation,” she posted on the social platform X, a sentiment that was echoed by religious conservatives internationally.

“... because decapitating Habsburgs and ridiculing central Christian events are really the FIRST two things that spring to mind when you think of #OlympicGames,” Eduard Habsburg, Hungary’s ambassador to the Vatican, posted on X, also referencing a scene depicting the beheading of Marie Antoinette.

Thomas Jolly, the artistic director of the opening ceremony, afterward drew attention away from “The Last Supper” references, saying that hadn’t been his intention.

Le Filip responded to the criticism of the scene with a touch of humor and sorrow.

“It feels like the words of somebody who didn’t get on the guest list. We could all be laughing together. It’s sad to me, honestly,” they said.

Inter-LGBT President James Leperlier was more circumspect, arguing that France still has significant strides to make in inclusivity.

“We know in the LGBTQ community in France we are far from what the ceremony showed. There’s much progress to do in society regarding transgender people. It’s terrible that to legally change their identity they are forced to be on trial,” Leperlier said.

He also highlighted the disparity in acceptance, saying that the community is not visible in other official ceremonies and “has difficulty being heard.”

“If you saw the opening ceremony last night you’d think it was like that normally, but it’s not. France tried to show what it should be and not what it is,” he said.

The opening ceremony came as drag and the voguing nightclub scene in France has experienced a revival. The cabaret club Madame Arthur, founded in 1946 in the ashes of World War II, is one of the world’s oldest continually running LGBTQ+ theaters. It opened as Europe was only just beginning to understand the extent of the widespread murder of members of the queer community in WWII and is currently experiencing a massive renaissance.

Drag is not just a pastime; for many minority French communities who feel alienated over tensions arising from divisive politics and scars from the anti-gay marriage protests a decade ago, it’s a statement of defiance. Many gay Black and Arab youths — especially those from Paris’ less affluent and religiously conservative suburbs — and others who feel a sense of disconnect with French society find voguing and drag events safe places where their identities can be expressed without fear of reprisal.

Despite the backlash, Le Filip believes the opening ceremony will ultimately transcend controversy.

“The message of the show is freedom, and it’s a good postcard for France,” they concluded.

Fires in the West are becoming ever bigger, consuming. Why and what can be done?

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

Decades of snuffing out fires at the first sign of smoke combined with climate change have laid the groundwork for a massive wildfire in northern California and scores of smaller ones across the western U.S. and Canada, experts say.

These fires are moving faster and are harder to fight than those in the past. The only way to stop fu-

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 68 of 85

ture wildfires from becoming so ferocious is to use smaller controlled fires, as indigenous people did for centuries, experts say. But they acknowledge that change won't be easy.

Here are some things to know about the latest fires and why they are so savage:

Blazes scorch hundreds of square miles

The Park Fire, the largest blaze so far this year in California, stood at 544 square miles (1,409 square kilometers) as of Saturday. It ignited Wednesday when authorities said a man pushed a burning car into a gully in Chico and then calmly blended in with others fleeing the scene.

Its intensity and dramatic spread led fire officials to make unwelcome comparisons to the monstrous Camp Fire that fire burned out of control in nearby Paradise in 2018, killing 85 people and torching 11,000 homes.

Communities elsewhere in the U.S. West and Canada also were under siege Saturday from fast-moving flames. More than 110 active fires covering 2,800 square miles (7,250 square kilometers) were burning in the U.S. on Friday, according to the National Interagency Fire Center.

Fires are becoming bigger and more threatening

"Amped up" is how Jennifer Marlon, a research scientist at Yale's School of the Environment, described the recent fires.

Marlon said there aren't necessarily more wildfires now, but they are larger and more severe because of the warming atmosphere. "The big message is that seeing extreme wildfires is just part of a series of unnatural disasters that we are going to continue seeing because of climate change," she said.

Ten of California's 20 largest fires occurred in the last five years, said Benjamin Hatchett, a fire meteorologist with the Cooperative Institute for Research in the Atmosphere with Colorado State University, in Fort Collins.

And he noted that the Park Fire was in eighth place as of Saturday morning, even as it continued to spread. He blamed climate change for creating more variability in weather conditions.

"We have a lot of very, very wet years and very, very dry years," Hatchett said. "And so we get a lot of this variability that helps to accumulate and then dry out fuels."

Such is the case this year in California, where record-setting temperatures dried up the plant growth that sprung up during recent wetter-than-average years, Hatchett said.

"So now we really have a really good setup for having these widespread large wildfires," Hatchett said. "And we're starting to push the limits of firefighting resource availability."

These fires don't even give firefighters a chance to rest at night, said Daniel Swain, a climate scientist with the University of California, Los Angeles and the National Center for Atmospheric Research.

"They're burning with extreme intensity straight through the overnight and just continuing on into the next day," he said. "We're also seeing fires burning over a longer fire season than we used to."

Forests may have trouble recovering

The fires that are burning today are sometimes so severe and hot that they transform forests into a different type of ecosystem, Swain said.

"The forest is not coming back in the same in the same way as it was in a lot of regions," Swain said.

Part of the issue is that climate change means that there are hotter conditions as plant life returns. In some cases, trees are replaced with invasive grasses that are themselves flammable.

"So the climate change has altered the context in which these fires are occurring," he said. "And that's affecting not only the intensity and the severity of the fires themselves, which it clearly is at this point, but it's also affecting the ability of ecosystems to recover afterwards."

Snuffing out fires in the past created problems now

In parts of the country, like the Midwest, farmers use fire to control trees, woody shrubs and invasive species. But not so in the western U.S., where fires have been extinguished in their infancy for decades.

"The problem now is we've allowed so much fuel to build up in some of these places that the fires burn very hot and intense. And that tends to do more damage than what nature typically will do with a fire," said Tim Brown, a research professor at the Desert Research Institute and director of the Western Regional

Climate Center in Reno, Nevada.

Fires were once commonplace in the West because of lightning strikes and indigenous burning, Hatchett said. The practice stopped during colonial settlement, but it now needs to return, Hatchett said.

"That's the only way we're really going to get out of this, is to really accept and embrace the use of fire on our terms," Hatchett said. "Otherwise we're going to get fire on the fire's terms, which is like what we're seeing right now."

Doing so isn't easy because there are no longer big-open landscapes where millions of acres can burn unchecked, Swain acknowledged.

"And that's sort of the conundrum: This is something we need to be doing more of. But the practical reality of doing so is not at all simple," Swain said.

But he said there is no option to address the wildfire risk that doesn't involve fire.

"We're going to see more and more fire on the ground," he said. "The question is whether we want to see it in the form of more manageable, primarily beneficial prescribed burns, or in these primarily harmful, huge, intense conflagrations that we're increasingly seeing."

Mets ace Kodai Senga expected to miss rest of regular season with calf strain

By MIKE FITZPATRICK AP Sports Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Kodai Senga's season is over almost as soon as it started.

The New York Mets pitcher is expected to miss the remainder of the regular season after straining his left calf Friday night in the sixth inning of his 2024 debut against Atlanta. The team's projected No. 1 starter this year, Senga had been sidelined by a shoulder injury since early in spring training.

Senga hurt his lower leg when he bolted away from the mound to make way for teammate Pete Alonso to catch a popup. Mets manager Carlos Mendoza said Saturday an MRI showed a "high-grade strain."

"I think it's fair to say that he's pretty much done for the regular season," Mendoza said.

"It's hard to put a timetable here, especially when we're talking about a calf. Those are tricky," he added. "We could be looking at eight, 10 weeks before he's a big league pitcher — you know, 85 pitches. But yeah, it's hard to predict."

It's devastating news for Senga and the streaking Mets, who began the day holding the top National League wild card even after waiting almost four months for Senga to pitch.

Mendoza did not rule out a return for Senga this year if the Mets make the playoffs.

"It's a huge blow. But at the same time like you say, we got to this point without him," Mendoza said. "It sucks for him, for all of us. The way I see it is, we've been through a lot, and if we get to see him pitch again this year that means we're in a good spot. So, hopefully that's the case."

Senga was sharp in his first outing, striking out nine in 5 1/3 innings of two-run ball to earn the win in an 8-4 victory over the Braves. The 31-year-old right-hander allowed just two hits and retired his final 10 batters.

"Yeah, it's hard for him. We're feeling it for him because he's been through a lot the whole year. He goes out there and has a game like that, and then for him to go down that way sucks. But you've just got to keep going. No one's going to feel sorry for us," Mendoza said.

After getting hurt in spring training, Senga began a rehabilitation assignment on July 3 and went 0-0 with a 4.15 ERA in four minor league starts, three for Triple-A Syracuse and one for Class A Brooklyn.

Senga was 12-7 with a 2.98 ERA in 29 starts last season, his first in the majors after leaving Japan and signing a \$75 million, five-year contract with the Mets. He was runner-up for NL Rookie of the Year and finished seventh in Cy Young Award voting.

"We hurt for him. Obviously, he's put a lot of hard work in to get back to this point," Mets outfielder Brandon Nimmo said following a 4-0 loss to Atlanta. "He's a true ace when he's healthy and he's out there. ... It's really hard to replace aces like that."

New York placed Senga on the 15-day injured list and recalled right-hander Tylor Megill from Syracuse.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 70 of 85

Megill had already been slated to start Saturday against Atlanta as the replacement for rookie Christian Scott, who went on the injured list earlier in the week with a sprained ulnar collateral ligament in his right elbow.

Scott won't throw for two weeks, but the Mets hope he'll be able to return this year.

With the arrival of Senga, the club had been planning to shift to a six-man rotation because he's accustomed to pitching on at least five days' rest. But now, after his injury, the Mets will stick with a five-man rotation going forward, Mendoza said, and Megill will get another opportunity to hold down a starting spot.

New York president of baseball operations David Stearns has acquired veteran relievers Phil Maton and Ryne Stanek this month to boost a struggling and injury-depleted bullpen, but the Mets could now be in the market for a starter as well before Tuesday's trade deadline.

"We still feel good with our options. Guys will step up," Mendoza said. "We've got five legit starters here that, they put us in this position where we're in right now – and Megill's been a big part of that. He's getting an opportunity now, people are going to get opportunities, and we also like what we have down in Triple-A. So guys will step up, guys will get opportunities, and we'll be fine."

In another move, the Mets optioned right-hander Eric Orze to Triple-A to make room in the bullpen for Stanek, who was obtained from the Seattle Mariners in a trade Friday evening.

In a show of growing ties, Russian warships make a new visit to Cuban waters

HAVANA (AP) — Three Russian warships arrived in Cuban waters on Saturday, Moscow's second such maritime voyage in as many months in a reflection of deepening ties between Russia and Cuba.

The naval group, consisting of a training ship, patrol frigate and refueling tanker, are expected to remain docked in Cuba's port of Havana until July 30. The arrival of the vessels comes mere weeks after another squadron of Russian warships, including a powerful nuclear-powered submarine, visited Havana as part of planned military exercises last month.

American officials closely tracked the mid-June military exercises, saying that the four-vessel group posed no real threat. At the time, experts described the warships' Caribbean tour as a symbolic show of strength in response to continued U.S. and Western support for Ukraine.

Cuban defense officials announced the latest port call earlier this week, calling the arrival of the Russian warships a "historical practice" and show of "friendship and collaboration." But neither government elaborated on the purpose of this latest deployment.

Cuba greeted the Baltic fleet on Saturday with a booming cannon salute. The docking of the flotilla has sparked a flurry of excitement among the general public, with Cubans strolling the port avenue to get a better glimpse of the warships Saturday and authorities saying interested visitors would be admitted on board the Russian training ship, called Smolny, on Sunday and Monday.

"It's a friendly thing. A bond between Russia and the Cubans," said 29-year-old onlooker Maydelis Perez, pointing the hulking warships out to her three children. "I'm taking a family outing."

Russia is a longtime ally of Venezuela and Cuba, and its warships and aircraft have periodically made forays into the Caribbean and docked in Havana. Though Cuba is not a key player in Russian foreign policy, experts say that Russia sees Cuba — with its port less than 100 miles (160 km) from Florida — as strategically important given its continued clout among developing nations.

Cuba and Russia — Cold War allies now both under severe U.S. sanctions — have strengthened their political and economic ties in recent years, particularly as Moscow aims to boost diplomatic support for its war in Ukraine and Havana seeks whatever economic assistance it can get.

Cuba has consistently abstained on U.N. resolutions on the invasion of Ukraine and avoided criticism of Moscow's war. Russia has sold significant volumes of oil to Cuba, which has struggled with regular power outages under Washington's economic embargo.

'Gen Z feels the Kamalove': Youth-led progressive groups hope Harris will energize young voters

By CHRISTINE FERNANDO Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — "Brats for Harris." "We need a Kamalanomenon." "Gen Z feels the Kamalove."

In the days since President Joe Biden exited the presidential race and endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris, Gen Z voters jumped to social media to share coconut tree and "brat summer" memes — reflecting a stark shift in tone for a generation that's voiced feeling left behind by the Democratic Party.

Youth-led progressive organizations have warned for months that Biden had a problem with young voters, pleading with the president to work more closely with them to refocus on the issues most important to younger generations or risk losing their votes. With Biden out of the race, many of these young leaders are now hoping Harris can overcome his faltering support among Gen Z and harness a new explosion of energy among young voters.

Since last Sunday, statements have poured out from youth-led organizations across the country, including in Arizona, Wisconsin, Michigan, California, Minnesota, North Carolina and Pennsylvania, as leaders thanked Biden for stepping aside and celebrated the opportunity to organize around a new candidate. On Friday, a coalition of 17 youth-led groups endorsed Harris.

"This changes everything," said Zo Tobi, director of communication for the Movement Voter Project, a national progressive funding group focusing on youth-led organizations, when he heard the news that Biden was dropping out of the race and endorsing Harris. "The world as it is suddenly shifted into the world as it could be."

As the campaign enters a new phase, both Harris and her Republican rival, Donald Trump, are delivering messages aimed at younger voters who could prove decisive in some of the most hotly contested states.

Harris recorded a brief video message shown Saturday at a conference of Gen Z activists and elected officials in Atlanta.

"We know young voters will be key, and we know your vote cannot be taken for granted," Harris told the gathering, highlighting her support for gun safety, abortion rights, LGBTQ rights and action to combat climate change.

Eve Levenson, the national youth engagement director for Harris' campaign, attended the conference in Atlanta, and she praised young voters across the country for their response to the vice president's elevation to likely nominee.

"As amazing as it is to see the tremendous youth enthusiasm online, what has been even more incredible is how that online energy has already translated into a tangible desire to take action and get involved with our campaign," she said, citing new voter registrations, small donations from young voters and student requests to help start campus-based campaign organizations.

Trump, in his own address Friday in Florida to a conference on faith hosted by Turning Point USA, derided Harris as an "incompetent" and a "far left" vice president. He vowed to champion religious Americans' causes in a second White House term.

"With your vote, I will defend religious liberty in all of its forms," Trump told the conservative group that focuses on high school, college and university campuses. "I will protect Christians in our schools and our military and our government and our workplaces and our hospitals, in our public square and I will also protect other religions."

John Della Volpe, director of polling at the Harvard Kennedy School Institute of Politics, who has worked with Biden, said the "white-hot energy" among young people is something he hasn't seen since former President Barack Obama's campaign. While there's little reliable polling so far, he described the dynamic as "a combination of the hopefulness we saw with Obama and the urgency and fight we saw after the Parkland shooting."

In many ways, it was the first time many young people felt heard and felt like their actions could have an impact on politics, he and several young leaders said.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 72 of 85

"It's reset this election in profound ways," he said. "People, especially young people, for so long, for so many important reasons have been despondent about politics, despondent about the direction of the country. It's weighed on them. And then they wake up the next morning, and it seems like everything's changed."

About 6 in 10 adults under 30 voted for Biden in 2020, according to AP VoteCast, but his ratings with the group have dipped substantially since then, with only about a quarter of the group saying they had a favorable opinion of him in the most recent AP-NORC poll, conducted before Biden withdrew from the race.

That poll, along with polls from The New York Times/Siena and from CNN that were conducted after Biden dropped out, suggest that Harris starts off with somewhat better favorable ratings than Biden among young adults.

Sunjay Muralitharan, vice president of College Democrats of America, said it felt like a weight was lifted off his chest when Harris entered the race.

Despite monthly coalition calls between youth-led groups and the Biden campaign, Muralitharan spent months worrying about how Biden would fare among young voters as he watched young people leave organizations such as the College Democrats and Young Democrats to join more leftist groups.

College Democrats issued statements and social media posts encouraging the party to prioritize young people and to change course on the war in Gaza and have "worked tirelessly to get College Dems programming" at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago later this summer. But they received limited outreach in return, Muralitharan said.

A Harris campaign represents an opportunity to move in a new direction, he said. The vice president has shown her vocal support for issues important to young voters such as climate change and reproductive rights, Muralitharan said, adding that she may also be able to change course and distance herself from Biden's approach to the war in Gaza.

"The perpetual roadblock we've run into is that Biden is the lesser of two evils and his impact on the crisis in Gaza," he said. "For months, we've been given this broken script that's made it difficult for us to organize young voters. But that changes now."

Santiago Mayer, executive director of the Gen Z voter engagement organization Voters of Tomorrow, said the Biden campaign "created an entirely new framework for operating with youth organizations" that can now be transitioned into supporting Harris' campaign.

"Gen Z loves VP Harris, and VP Harris loves Gen Z," he said. "So we're ready to get to work for her."

Canada tops Giannis and Greece on Day 1. Wemby and France also win, as do Germany and Australia

By KYLE HIGHTOWER AP Sports Writer

VILLENEUVE-D'ASCQ, France (AP) — Canada was tested, then held on to get its first Olympic win in 24 years.

RJ Barrett scored 23 points, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander added 21 and Canada survived a big effort from Giannis Antetokounmpo to beat Greece 86-79 in the Paris Olympics opener for both teams in Group A play on Saturday night.

Antetokounmpo led all scorers with 34 points for Greece. Dillon Brooks scored 14 for Canada.

Even though Antetokounmpo had the big night, Barrett lauded the waves of defenders Canada threw his way.

"That's why you have the word 'team,'" Barrett said. "It's not one guy. It's all of us, all together. Everybody has their part to do. Playing Giannis is not an easy task."

Canada led by as many as 16 and never trailed, though Greece made matters very interesting in the final moments. Vasilis Toilopoulos scored with 1:15 remaining to get Greece within four and a Canada turnover on the next possession led to a dunk by Antetokounmpo to cut the lead to 80-78.

But Gilgeous-Alexander got a high-arching shot over Antetokounmpo's outstretched arm to kiss off the

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 73 of 85

glass for a score with 42.8 seconds left, restoring the four-point edge, and Canada would escape.

"They're a really good team so that's going to happen," Gilgeous-Alexander said. "They're not going to quit, obviously. So we expected that. We expected we'd make our run and they'd have a little more juice and make their run. For us it was just about weathering the storms, and kind of sticking to our game plan throughout the runs. Basketball is a game of ups and downs. We just try to weather the other teams' better than they weather yours."

There were 52 fouls called in the game resulting in 64 free throws — 32 for each team.

It was Canada's first Olympic men's basketball win since 2000 at Sydney. The Canadians hadn't made an Olympic tournament since — but earned this spot after a run to the bronze medal at the World Cup last summer in the Philippines.

France 78, Brazil 66

Victor Wembanyama had 19 points, nine rebounds, four steals and three blocks to help France overcome an early deficit and get past Brazil in Group B.

"We're all here for a purpose," Wembanyama said.

France coach Vincent Collet acknowledged he noticed Wembanyama consumed by something he'd never seen on the young phenom this week: anxiety.

"I think for the first time in his career he was a little bit stressed this week," Collet said. "I tried to help him. He's so mature that day-by-day he got better. ... People who know basketball understand he's only 20 years (old). People, they like sports but they do not know basketball, they think Victor is always Michael Jordan."

Almost, though?

"He's not far, but he still needs some time," Collet said with a smile.

Nicolas Batum added 19 points for France, which was showered with chants of "Les Bleus!" France next plays Japan, which lost Saturday to Germany, on Tuesday. Brazil has Germany next.

Leo Meindl and Cristiano Felicio led Brazil with 14 points apiece.

Australia 92, Spain 80

Jock Landale had 20 points and nine rebounds and Australia opened Group A play with a win.

Patty Mills scored 19 points and Josh Giddey added 17 to lift Australia, which is tied with Canada atop Group A. Australia faces Canada on Tuesday, while Spain will face Greece in a game that will be big for both teams in terms of making the knockout stage.

"They made two heavy runs at us and then took the lead. I thought we were fearless and were courageous, and I thought we had great guard play," Australia coach Brian Goorjian said. "Just a good contribution from everybody."

Santi Aldama scored 27 points for Spain and Sergio Llull added 17 points.

With 2:13 remaining in the period, Spain's Usman Garuba set a hard screen on Australia's Josh Green, sending him stumbling backward. Green took exception and got in Garuba's face. Garuba slapped Green's hand away and Will Magnay stepped in to defend his teammate, prompting Garuba to shove him.

Referees reviewed the incident and assessed double unsportsmanlike fouls on Garuba and Magnay. Two more incidents also resulted in brief game stoppages.

Germany 97, Japan 77

Franz Wagner had 22 points and six rebounds, and Germany pulled away from Japan in the second half to secure a Group B win.

Daniel Theis added 18 points and seven rebounds. Moritz Wagner scored 15 for the defending World Cup champions, who never trailed and face Brazil on Tuesday. Japan takes on Olympics host France that same day.

"We kind of got a target on our back after last year's success," Theis said. "Everybody wants to beat the world champion."

Rui Hachimura finished with 20 points for Japan, which has only 13 wins in its seven Olympic appearances.

"We know we're organized, so we have to get together," Hachimura said. "We've got to know what we're doing."

Dennis Schroder had 13 points and 12 assists for Germany, which entered the Olympics ranked third in FIBA's world rankings behind the U.S. and Spain.

An Israeli airstrike hits a school sheltering people in Gaza, killing at least 30 including children

By WAFAA SHURAFI and SAM METZ Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli airstrikes hit a school used by displaced Palestinians in central Gaza on Saturday, killing at least 30 people including several children, as the country's negotiators prepared to meet international mediators about a proposed cease-fire.

Seven children and seven women were among the dead taken from the girls' school in Deir al-Balah to Al Aqsa Hospital. Israel's military said it targeted a Hamas command center used to direct attacks against Israeli troops and store "large quantities of weapons." Hamas called the military's claim false.

Civil defense workers in Gaza said thousands had been sheltering in the school, which also contained a medical site. Associated Press journalists saw a dead toddler in an ambulance and bodies covered with blankets. Shattered walls gaped and classrooms were in ruins. People searched the rubble strewn with pillows and other signs of habitation.

Gaza's Health Ministry said at least 12 people were killed in other strikes on Saturday.

Officials from the U.S., Egypt, Qatar and Israel are scheduled to meet in Italy on Sunday to discuss cease-fire negotiations. CIA Director Bill Burns is expected to meet with Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed Bin Abdul Rahman al-Thani, Mossad director David Barnea and Egyptian spy chief Abbas Kamel, according to officials from the U.S. and Egypt who spoke on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to discuss the plans.

U.S. officials on Friday said Israel and Hamas agree on the basic framework of the three-phase deal. But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in his speech to the U.S. Congress vowed to press ahead with the war until "total victory."

After the Israeli strike on the school, Nabil Abu Rudeineh, spokesperson for Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, said Netanyahu's reception from supporters in the U.S. constituted a "green light" to continue Israel's offensive.

A deadly new exchange of fire between Israel's military and Hezbollah militants in Lebanon renewed concerns about the war in Gaza inspiring a wider regional conflict.

New evacuation order for part of humanitarian zone

Israel's military on Saturday ordered a new evacuation of part of a designated humanitarian zone in Gaza ahead of a planned strike on Khan Younis in the south. The order was in response to rocket fire that Israel said came from the area.

The military said it planned an operation against Hamas militants, including in parts of Muwasi, the crowded tent camp in a zone where Israel has told thousands of Palestinians to seek refuge. It's the second evacuation order issued in a week.

The 60-square-kilometer (roughly 20-square-mile) zone is blanketed with tent camps that lack sanitation and medical facilities and have limited access to aid. Israel expanded the zone in May to take in people fleeing the southernmost city of Rafah, where more than half of Gaza's population at the time had crowded.

"This is my ninth or eighth displacement," said Mohammad Jaber, who was originally displaced from Rafah. "Every time they tell us to go to an area, and it is unsafe. This time, we do not know where to go." He wiped the sweat from his face as children piled neat bundles of belongings on the sand, ready for transport by vehicle or donkey cart.

Gaza Health Ministry officials said the evacuation orders had forced at least three health centers to stop providing care.

Israel estimates that about 1.8 million Palestinians shelter in the zone. In November, the military said the area could still be struck and that it was "not a safe zone, but it is a safer place than any other" in Gaza.

The U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees, known as UNRWA, said it was difficult to know how many people would be affected by the latest order. "These are forced displacement orders," said Juliette Touma, the agency's director of communications, adding that Palestinians have "very little time to move."

Farther north, Palestinians mourned seven people killed by Israeli airstrikes overnight on Zawaida in central Gaza. Parents and their two children and a mother and her two children were wrapped in white burial shrouds as friends and neighbors wept. Al Aqsa Hospital confirmed the count and AP journalists saw the bodies.

Two deaths in the West Bank

In the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian Health Ministry said a 17-year-old and 24-year-old were killed and 22 other people wounded after an Israeli drone strike in Balata camp in Nablus.

The Israeli military said an aircraft attacked from the air as part of its activity in Nablus. It said "terrorists" had fired at a military position and a soldier was lightly wounded.

The war in Gaza has killed more than 39,200 Palestinians, according to the Health Ministry, which doesn't distinguish between combatants and civilians in its count. The U.N. estimated in February that some 17,000 children in the territory are now unaccompanied, and the number is likely to have grown since.

The war began with an assault by Hamas militants on southern Israel on Oct. 7 that killed 1,200 people, most of them civilians, and took about 250 hostages. About 115 are still in Gaza, about a third of them believed to be dead, according to Israeli authorities.

On Saturday night, Israelis again held an anti-government demonstration in Tel Aviv demanding a cease-fire deal and the return of remaining hostages. "There's a deal on the table and we need to make it happen, and we need to make it happen now," said one protester, Tamir Guytsabary.

US women's basketball focused on own Olympic gold, not program's incredible legacy

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

PARIS (AP) — The friendly warmup games are over. Now the U.S. women's basketball team has to deal with the pressure of history.

Led by two-time WNBA MVPs A'ja Wilson and Breanna Stewart, the U.S. starts its quest at the Paris Games for an unprecedented eighth straight gold medal on a 55-game Olympic winning streak for a program that hasn't lost since 1992 in Barcelona.

There also is 42-year old Diana Taurasi, who will be going for a sixth gold medal. She isn't focused on the big picture of what the U.S. has accomplished over the last three decades in the Olympics; her eyes are fixed solely on getting another gold in Paris.

"It doesn't matter what the history is, it doesn't affect this team or this Olympics," she said. "We find a way to find our own identity as a team on and off the court. Those last eight don't promise you anything going forward. That's the mindset we've always taken."

The team is trying to break a tie with the U.S. men's basketball team for the most consecutive gold medals. The men won seven straight from 1936-68.

The women open play against Japan on Monday. The two teams met in the gold-medal game in Tokyo three years ago and the U.S. came away with a 90-75 victory. The U.S. also has Olympic newcomer Germany and Belgium in its group.

"There's so many good teams and everyone's level has raised in the last two or three Olympics," Taurasi said. "You see the investment in women's sports and it pays off on the court. So that's promising to see."

The Americans won by an average of 16 points at the Tokyo Games. That was their smallest margin of victory since the gold-medal streak started at the 1996 Atlanta Games.

They have had little practice time since the team was put together in June. They had three days in Phoenix during WNBA All-Star weekend before heading to London for an exhibition game against Germany on Tuesday. They got to France on Thursday after a train ride from England.

The Americans weren't sure of their exact travel plans going to and from the preliminary games in Lille

after three major high-speed train lines were disrupted by acts of sabotage on Friday.

"We're not sure if we'll train or bus," Taurasi said. "We have confidence in our security team; we'll get there."

They will have had only about 14 hours of practice together before their opening game against a Japan team that has been preparing for a year.

"We make the most of the time we have and just try to get better every day," said Wilson, who is on her second Olympic team.

The advantage the U.S. has is its incredible depth. The team has been able to wear down opponents and has reserves that would be starting for every other country in the Olympics.

"We know we have an advantage because of our depth, so when we're on the court we're looking for the best shot and we can just bring in fresh players all the time," Stewart said.

Coach Cheryl Reeve called the Americans' depth their top strength, followed closely by their sheer size. That allows her not to overwork players during games while also being creative.

"Look what's coming off our bench," Reeve said. "I think that's been real valuable. I've seen that. I was in London for the 2012 Olympics and just watching the way they used their second team. Felt it again in 2016, and so, yeah, I mean we would be a fool not to utilize our depth."

Apache Christ icon controversy sparks debate over Indigenous Catholic faith practices

By DEEPA BHARATH Associated Press

MESCALERO, New Mexico (AP) — Anne Marie Brillante never imagined she would have to choose between being Apache and being Catholic.

To her, and many others in the Mescalero Apache tribe in New Mexico who are members of St. Joseph Apache Mission, their Indigenous culture had always been intertwined with faith. Both are sacred.

"Hearing we had to choose, that was a shock," said a tearful Brillante, a member of the mission's parish council.

The focus of this tense, unresolved episode is the 8-foot Apache Christ painting. For this close-knit community, it is a revered icon created by Franciscan friar Robert Lentz in 1989. It depicts Christ as a Mescalero medicine man, and has hung behind the church's altar for 35 years under a crucifix as a reminder of the holy union of their culture and faith.

On June 26, the church's then-priest, Peter Chudy Sixtus Simeon-Aguinam, removed the icon and a smaller painting depicting a sacred Indigenous dancer. Also taken were ceramic chalices and baskets given by the Pueblo community for use during the Eucharist.

Brillante said the priest took them away while the region was reeling from wildfires that claimed two lives and burned more than 1,000 homes.

The Diocese of Las Cruces, which oversees the mission, did not respond to several emails, phone calls and an in-person visit by The Associated Press.

Parishioners, shocked to see the blank wall behind the altar when they arrived for Catechism class, initially believed the art objects had been stolen. But Brillante was informed by a diocesan official that the icon's removal occurred under the authority of Bishop Peter Baldacchino and in the presence of a diocesan risk manager.

The diocese has returned the icons and other objects after the community's outrage was covered by various media outlets, and the bishop replaced Simeon-Aguinam with another priest. But Brillante and others say it's insufficient to heal the spiritual abuse they have endured.

Brillante said their former priest opened old wounds with his recent actions, suggesting he sought to cleanse them of their "pagan" ways, and it has derailed the reconciliation process initiated by Pope Francis in 2022. That year, Francis gave a historic apology for the Catholic Church's role in Indigenous residential schools, forcing Native people to assimilate into Christian society, destroying their cultures and separating families.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 77 of 85

A spokesperson for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops declined comment on the Mescalero case. But last month, the conference overwhelmingly approved a pastoral framework for Indigenous ministry, which pointed to a “false choice” many Indigenous Catholics are faced with — to be Indigenous or Catholic: “We assure you, as the Catholic bishops of the United States, that you do not have to be one or the other. You are both.”

Several of the mission’s former priests understood this, but Brillante believes Simeon-Aguinam’s recent demand to make that “false choice” violated the bishops’ new guidelines.

Larry Gosselin, a Franciscan who served St. Joseph from 1984 to 1996 and again from 2001 to 2003, said he sought the approval of 15 Mescalero leaders before Lentz began the painting that took three months to complete.

“He poured all of himself into that painting,” said Gosselin, explaining that Lentz sprinkled gold dust on himself and skipped showering, using his body oils to adhere the gold to the canvas. Then he gave the painting to the humble church.

Albert Braun, the priest who helped construct the church building in the 1920s, respected Mescalero Apache traditions in his ministry and was so beloved that he is buried inside the church, near the altar.

Church elders Glenda and Larry Brusuelas said to right this wrong and to repair this damage, the bishop must issue a public apology.

“You don’t call or send a letter,” Larry Brusuelas said. “You face the people you have offended and offer some guarantee that this is not going to happen again. That’s the Apache way.”

While Bishop Baldacchino held a two-hour meeting with the parish council in Mescalero after the items were returned, Brillante said he seemed more concerned about the icon being “hastily” reinstalled rather than acknowledging the harm or offering an apology.

Still, some are hopeful. Parish council member Pamela Cordova, said she views the bishop appointing a new priest who was more familiar with the Apache community as a positive step.

“We need to give the bishop a chance to prove himself and let us know he is sincere and wants to make things right,” she said.

The concept of “inculturation,” the notion of people expressing their faith through their culture, has been encouraged by the Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s, said Chris Vecsey, professor of religion and Native American studies at Colgate University in Hamilton, New York.

“It’s rather shocking to see a priest who has been assigned a parish with Native people acting in such a disrespectful way in 2024,” he said. “But it does reflect a long history of concern that blending these symbols might weaken, threaten or pollute the purity of the faith.”

Deacon Steven Morello, the Archdiocese of Detroit’s missionary to the American Indians, said the goal of the U.S. bishops’ new framework is to correct the ills of the past. He said Indigenous spirituality and Catholic faith have much in common, such as the burning of sage in Native American ceremonies and incense in a Catholic church.

“Both are meant to cleanse the heart and mind of all distractions,” he said. “The smoke goes up to God.”

Morello said Pope Francis’ encyclical on caring for the Earth and the environment titled “Laudato Si” addresses the sacredness of all creation — a core principle Indigenous people have lived by for millennia.

“There is no conflict, only commonality, between Indigenous and Catholic spirituality,” he said.

There are over 340 Native American parishes in the United States and many use Indigenous symbols and sacred objects in church. In every corner of the Mescalero church, Apache motifs seamlessly blend in with Catholic imagery.

The Apache Christ painting hangs as the focal point of the century-old Romanesque church whose rock walls soar as high as 90 feet. Artwork of teepees adorns the lectern. A mural at the altar shows the Last Supper with Christ and his apostles depicted as Apache men. Tall crowns worn by mountain dancers known as “gahe” in Apache, hang over small paintings showing Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection.

For parishioner Sarah Kazhe, the Apache Christ painting conveys how Jesus appears to the people of Mescalero.

“Jesus meets you where you are and he appears to us in a way we understand,” she said. “Living my

Apache way of life is no different than attending church. ... The mindless, thoughtless act of removing a sacred icon sent a message that we didn't matter."

Parishioners believe the Creator in Apache lore is the same as their Christian God. On a recent Saturday night, community members gathered to bless two girls who had come of age. Kazhe and Donalyn Torres, one of the church elders who authorized Lentz to paint the Apache Christ, sat in lawn chairs with more than 100 others, watching crown dancers bring blessings on them.

Under a half-moon, the men wore body paint and tall crowns, dancing to drumbeats and song around a large fire. The women, including the two girls donning buckskin and jewelry, formed the outer circle, moving their feet in a quick, shuffling motion.

In the morning, many from the group attended Mass at their church, the Apache Christ restored to its place of honor.

The painting shows Christ as a Mescalero holy man, standing on the sacred Sierra Blanca, greeting the sun. A sun symbol is painted on his left palm; he holds a deer hoof rattle in his right hand. The inscription at the bottom is Apache for "giver of life," one of their names for the Creator. Greek letters in the upper corners are abbreviations for "Jesus Christ."

Gosselin, the mission's former priest, said he was struck by the level of detail Lentz captured in that painting, particularly the eyes — which focus on a distance just as Apache people would when talking about spirituality. He believes the painting was "divinely inspired" because the people who received it feel a holy connection.

"This has resonated in the spirit and their hearts," he said. "Now, 35 years later, the Apache people are fighting for it."

Harris freshens up her message on the economy as Trump and Republicans go after her on inflation

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — All of a sudden it's Kamala Harris' economy — a major opportunity as well as a possible risk for the likely Democratic presidential nominee.

Shortly after President Joe Biden left the race a week ago, Harris began to craft her own narrative around the economy by putting an emphasis on ending child poverty, promoting labor unions, reducing the costs of health and child care and protecting "dignity" in retirement.

Not once in speeches in Wisconsin, Indiana or Texas did she mention the word "inflation" — the overwhelming economic challenge that has dogged Biden's administration and forced him in remarks to consistently acknowledge voters' pain as they cope with higher grocery, gasoline, housing and auto expenses.

Harris is putting a bigger priority on what she says could be ahead.

"In our vision of the future, we see a place where every person has the opportunity not just to get by but to get ahead — a future where no child has to grow up in poverty, where every senior can retire with dignity and where every worker has the freedom to join a union," Harris told the American Federation of Teachers on Thursday.

But Republicans have moved quickly to try to blame Harris for the inflation that until recently they pinned on Biden. They are emphasizing the cumulative impact of high prices under the Democratic administration.

Labor Department data show that consumer prices are up 19.2% since Biden took office, while average hourly earnings have risen 16.9%.

GOP leaders are openly saying Harris contributed to the inflation without specifying how she managed to do so other than by being vice president.

"Vice President Harris owns this administration's record," said Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky. "Her fingerprints are all over the past four years of failure."

Past and current officials who worked with Harris said in interviews that there is an expectation that criticism on inflation will not stick to her because for many voters she represents a fresh voice after nearly eight years with either Republican Donald Trump or Biden in the Oval Office.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 79 of 85

Now it's time for Harris to spell out her own policy positions on economic matters.

Some of those officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly discuss political matters, said Harris is likely to stay in line with Biden's 2025 budget proposal and its plan to increase the corporate tax rate to 28% from the 21% set by Trump's 2017 tax overhaul.

Her emergence as the Democratic nominee has overlapped with positive economic news.

The Commerce Department said Thursday that the economy grew at an annual pace of 2.8% in the second quarter. On Friday, it reported that the personal consumption expenditures measure of inflation eased to an annual 2.5%, with financial markets now expecting a Federal Reserve interest rate cut in September.

Those who have known Harris for years said her work as a prosecutor in California caused a sense of fairness to be at the core of her economic policy ideas.

"She's a capitalist at heart — she wants businesses to do well," said Yasmin Nelson, a former senior adviser to Harris. "But she recognizes that the scales have been tipped toward them during the Trump administration. In her view, she wants to even the playing field."

Trump and his running mate, Sen. JD Vance, R-Ohio, are focused on portraying Harris as more liberal than Biden, suggesting that the former California senator would further restrict the use of fossil fuels in favor of solar, wind and other renewable energy sources.

Trump, at a rally in North Carolina on Wednesday, called Harris "the most incompetent and far left vice president in American history."

Vance went after her policies in a Friday interview on Megyn Kelly's SiriusXM program.

"We cannot let people who are going to destroy the American manufacturing and energy economy take over the reins of power," Vance said. "It's going to be a lot worse when you get somebody who's even more liberal than Biden in there."

The Trump campaign has quickly revived Harris' statements from her short-lived run for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination. She said on CNN at the time that she favored banning plastic straws, offshore oil drilling and the use of fracking for oil and natural gas, a controversial stance in the swing state of Pennsylvania.

Republican lawmakers also say that Harris would raise taxes, which is only what Biden's 2025 budget plan would do for wealthier households and corporations.

The Harris campaign said that she does not support a fracking ban. During the 2020 vice presidential debate, she stressed multiple times that Biden would not end fracking.

The Energy Information Administration shows that both natural gas and oil production have increased to record levels during Biden's presidency after a pandemic driven dip. But the Biden administration's policies are more restrictive than what the GOP wants.

The bigger risk for Harris might be how the persistence of inflation shapes voters' views of the economy. Many economic models used by financial firms to analyze the election are based on the incumbent's party, not the candidate herself in this case.

The consultancy Oxford Economics said in an analysis Monday that the odds favored Trump. The forecast is based on models that use economic data. It does not necessarily account for social issues such as abortion and gun control that Democrats say will help them in the election.

The analysis stressed there is a high degree of uncertainty and noted that a lot could happen in the months ahead, though it is fairly straightforward in concluding that inflation is still a drag for the vice president.

"I doubt that Harris will significantly change how swing voters think of the economy," said Bernard Yaros, an economist at Oxford Economics. "She still carries that same baggage of presiding over the high inflation of 2021 and 2022. Like Biden, her approval took a hit during that inflation surge."

Justice Department says TikTok collected US user views on issues like abortion and gun control

By HALELUYA HADERO and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a fresh broadside against one of the world's most popular technology companies, the Justice Department is accusing TikTok of harnessing the capability to gather bulk information on users based on views on divisive social issues like gun control, abortion and religion.

Government lawyers wrote in documents filed late Friday to the federal appeals court in Washington that TikTok and its Beijing-based parent company ByteDance used an internal web-suite system called Lark to enable TikTok employees to speak directly with ByteDance engineers in China.

TikTok employees used Lark to send sensitive data about U.S. users, information that has wound up being stored on Chinese servers and accessible to ByteDance employees in China, federal officials said.

One of Lark's internal search tools, the filing states, permits ByteDance and TikTok employees in the U.S. and China to gather information on users' content or expressions, including views on sensitive topics, such as abortion or religion. Last year, the Wall Street Journal reported TikTok had tracked users who watched LGBTQ content through a dashboard the company said it had since deleted.

The new court documents represent the government's first major defense in a consequential legal battle over the future of the popular social media platform, which is used by more than 170 million Americans. Under a law signed by President Joe Biden in April, the company could face a ban in a few months if it doesn't break ties with ByteDance.

The measure was passed with bipartisan support after lawmakers and administration officials expressed concerns that Chinese authorities could force ByteDance to hand over U.S. user data or sway public opinion towards Beijing's interests by manipulating the algorithm that populates users' feeds.

"Intelligence reporting further demonstrates that ByteDance and TikTok Global have taken action in response to (Chinese government) demands to censor content outside of China," Casey Blackburn, a senior U.S. intelligence official, wrote in a filing that supported the government's arguments.

The Justice Department warned, in stark terms, of the potential for what it called "covert content manipulation" by the Chinese government, saying the algorithm could be designed to shape content that users receive.

"By directing ByteDance or TikTok to covertly manipulate that algorithm, China could for example further its existing malign influence operations and amplify its efforts to undermine trust in our democracy and exacerbate social divisions," the brief states.

The concern, the Justice Department said, is more than theoretical, alleging that TikTok and ByteDance employees are known to engage in a practice called "heating" in which certain videos are promoted in order to receive a certain number of views. While this capability enables TikTok to curate popular content and disseminate it more widely, U.S. officials posit it can also be used for nefarious purposes.

Federal officials are asking the court to allow a classified version of the legal brief, which would not be accessible to the two companies.

Nothing in the redacted brief "changes the fact that the Constitution is on our side," TikTok spokesperson Alex Haurek said in a statement.

"The TikTok ban would silence 170 million Americans' voices, violating the 1st Amendment," Haurek said. "As we've said before, the government has never put forth proof of its claims, including when Congress passed this unconstitutional law. Today, once again, the government is taking this unprecedented step while hiding behind secret information. We remain confident we will prevail in court."

In the redacted version of the court documents, the Justice Department said another tool triggered the suppression of content based on the use of certain words. Certain policies of the tool applied to ByteDance users in China, where the company operates a similar app called Douyin that follows Beijing's strict censorship rules.

But Justice Department officials said other policies may have been applied to TikTok users outside of China. TikTok was investigating the existence of these policies and whether they had ever been used in the U.S. in, or around, 2022, officials said.

The government points to the Lark data transfers to explain why federal officials do not believe that Project Texas, TikTok's \$1.5 billion mitigation plan to store U.S. user data on servers owned and maintained by the tech giant Oracle, is sufficient to guard against national security concerns.

In its legal challenge against the law, TikTok has heavily leaned on arguments that the potential ban violates the First Amendment because it bars the app from continued speech unless it attracts a new owner through a complex divestment process. It has also argued divestment would change the speech on the platform because it would create a version of TikTok lacking the algorithm that has driven its success.

In its response, the Justice Department argued TikTok has not raised any valid free speech claims, saying the law addresses national security concerns without targeting protected speech, and argues that China and ByteDance, as foreign entities, aren't shielded by the First Amendment.

TikTok has also argued the U.S. law discriminates on viewpoints, citing statements from some lawmakers critical of what they viewed as an anti-Israel tilt on the platform during the war in Gaza.

Justice Department officials disputes that argument, saying the law at issue reflects their ongoing concern that China could weaponize technology against U.S. national security, a fear they say is made worse by demands that companies under Beijing's control turn over sensitive data to the government. They say TikTok, under its current operating structure, is required to be responsive to those demands.

Oral arguments in the case is scheduled for September.

Southeast Asia top diplomats condemn Myanmar violence, urge peaceful means to settle sea disputes

By JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI Associated Press

VIENTIANE, Laos (AP) — Southeast Asian top diplomats on Saturday condemned violence in Myanmar's ongoing civil war and urged for "practical" means to defuse rising tensions in the South China Sea during the last of the three-day regional talks with allies including the U.S., Russia and China.

Foreign Minister Saleumxay Kommasith of Laos, which currently chairs the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), hailed dialogue partners for "frank, candid and constructive exchanges" on key issues revolving around regional security.

The weekend talks in the Laotian capital were dominated by the increasingly violent and destabilizing civil war in ASEAN-member Myanmar as well as maritime disputes of some of the bloc members with China, which have led to direct confrontations that many worry could lead to broader conflict.

In a joint statement issued at the end of the talks, the bloc said there's an urgent need to address the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar, and called for "all relevant parties in Myanmar to ensure the safe and transparent delivery of humanitarian assistance, to the people in Myanmar without discrimination."

"We strongly condemned the continued acts of violence against civilians and public facilities and called for immediate cessation, and urged all parties involved to take concrete action to immediately halt indiscriminate violence," it said.

The army in Myanmar ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021 and suppressed widespread nonviolent protests that sought a return to democratic rule, leading to increasing violence and a humanitarian crisis.

Thailand, which shares long borders with Myanmar, said it was given ASEAN backing to play a wider role there, including in providing humanitarian assistance in which it's already heavily involved. It also said more peace talks have been proposed to include additional stakeholders, especially Myanmar's neighbors Thailand, China and India.

More than 5,400 people have been killed in the fighting in Myanmar and the military government has arrested more than 27,000 since the coup, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners. There are now more than 3 million displaced people in the country, with the numbers growing daily as fighting intensifies between the military and Myanmar's multiple ethnic militias as well as the so-called people's defense forces of military opponents.

ASEAN has been pushing a "five-point consensus" for peace, but the military leadership in Myanmar has

so far ignored the plan, raising questions about the bloc's efficiency and credibility. The peace plan calls for the immediate cessation of violence in Myanmar, a dialogue among all concerned parties, mediation by an ASEAN special envoy, provision of humanitarian aid through ASEAN channels, and a visit to Myanmar by the special envoy to meet all concerned parties.

The meetings also served to highlight rivalries in the region as the U.S. and China look to expand their influence there. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken met his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in Vientiane on Saturday after Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov held direct talks with Wang on Thursday. Washington's two biggest rivals, Moscow and Beijing, which have grown closer over the past two years, prompting deep concerns about their combined global influence.

Regarding tensions in the South China Sea, ASEAN said it maintains its position on the freedom of navigation over the sea and urged a full implementation of a South China Sea code of conduct, which the bloc has been working on with China for some time.

ASEAN members Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei all have conflicts with China over its claim of sovereignty over virtually all of the South China Sea, one of the world's most crucial waterways for shipping. Indonesia has also expressed concern about what it sees as Beijing's encroachment on its exclusive economic zone.

ASEAN foreign ministers also welcomed "practical measures that could reduce tensions and the risk of accidents, misunderstandings, and miscalculation," in an apparent reference to a rare deal between the Philippines and China that aims to end their confrontations, establish a mutually acceptable arrangement for the disputed area without conceding each other's territorial claims.

Prior to the deal, tensions between the Philippines and China escalated for months, with China's coast guard and other forces using powerful water cannons and dangerous blocking maneuvers to prevent food and other supplies from reaching Filipino navy personnel.

On Saturday, the Philippines said it was able to make a supply trip to the disputed area without having to confront Beijing's forces, the first such trip since the deal was reached a week ago. Blinken applauded it as a success in his opening remarks at the meeting with ASEAN foreign ministers, while calling China's past actions against the Philippines — a U.S. treaty partner — "escalatory and unlawful."

The United States and its allies have regularly conducted military exercises and patrols in the area to assert their "free and open Indo-Pacific" policy — including the right to navigate in international waters — which has drawn criticism from China.

Wang said in his meeting with Philippines Secretary of Foreign Affairs Enrique Manalo on Friday that the deployment of a U.S. intermediate-range missile system in the Philippines would create regional tension and trigger an arms race, according to a statement from the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

Simone Biles is leading the charge of older gymnasts at the Olympics who are redefining their sport

By WILL GRAVES AP National Writer

It still happens to Simone Biles. Even now, after two Olympics, six world championships, and a decade-plus in the spotlight.

The most decorated gymnast of all time and the face of the U.S. Olympic movement will be chatting with someone when her age comes up.

"They're like 'Oh my god, you're so cute, you're a kid'" Biles told The Associated Press with a somewhat exasperated laugh. "Like I want to say 'I'm grown. I'm an adult now. I'm 27 years old.'"

Yet the perception of Biles as a pony-tailed prodigy persists even as the demographics at the top of her sport shift.

Maybe it's because all but one of the last 13 Olympic champions have been teenagers, including Biles when she triumphed in Rio de Janeiro eight years ago and U.S. teammate and good friend Sunisa Lee, who was 18 when she edged Brazilian star Rebeca Andrade in a taut final in Tokyo in 2021.

They're both back on what they've labeled a "redemption tour." When Biles and Lee step onto the floor

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 83 of 85

at Bercy Arena on Sunday for Olympic qualifying, they'll be joined by 2020 Olympic floor champion Jade Carey (24) and 2020 Olympic silver medalist Jordan Chiles (23) along with newcomer Hezly Rivera, at 16 by far the youngest member of the oldest team the Americans have ever sent to the Games.

Gone are the days when six-time Olympic medalist Aly Raisman was dubbed the team grandma in 2016 at all of 22, a moniker Biles jokingly admitted she now needs to apologize for using.

"Like I'm ancient now," Biles said. "Forget grandma, we're past that."

A rapid evolution

Improved training, the easing of rules around name, image and likeness rights for college athletes, and the power of social media are allowing the top Americans to extend their careers.

Carey, Lee and Chiles have spent a significant portion of their time since Tokyo competing at the NCAA level, once thought of strictly as a way for former Olympians to gently ease into retirement.

Not so much anymore. Relaxed NIL rules meant Chiles, Lee and Carey could cash in on their Tokyo success without sacrificing their college eligibility. The frequency of NCAA meets and the emphasis on execution over difficulty let Chiles refine more basic skills while also getting invaluable competition experience without burning out.

"Like, now you can do college and you can go back to elite and go back and forth," she said. "I think that is something that's cool, and all because you can rest your body in a way."

A new paradigm

Perhaps the biggest reason may be more fundamental and perhaps more impactful and lasting.

The climate and the culture around elite gymnastics are evolving. So are the power dynamics as the sport becomes more athlete-centric, moving away from a paradigm of authoritarian coach and talented-but-dutiful prodigy that defined success at the highest level for so long.

"People have stopped telling them that they can't do it," said Aimee Boorman, who coached Biles earlier in her career and is the co-founder of GIGA, a professional women's gymnastics league that will launch in 2025. "They've stopped telling them they're washed up at 17 or 18. ... The stigma of 'little girls in pretty boxes' is not a thing anymore."

Biles has been asked repeatedly since she returned to the sport last summer why she's doing this far closer to her 30th birthday than her 20th. She keeps coming back to some version of the same answer: "Because I can."

"Nobody is forcing me to do it," Biles said after U.S. Olympic trials. "I wake up every day and choose to grind in the gym and come out here and perform for myself."

It's the way that she grinds, however, that has changed. She uses her time more efficiently at the gym, partly out of choice to help a body that's been at this for 20 years and partly because her crowded personal schedule demands it.

A worldwide trend

The reality is what Biles and company are doing in the U.S. has been increasingly commonplace internationally.

While Oksana Chusovitina remains an outlier — the 49-year-old Uzbek will miss her first Olympics since the 1988 Games but is still pointing toward 2028 in Los Angeles — there are plenty of women in their 20s and 30s who will try to join the Americans on the medal stand.

Andrade is 25 and the biggest threat to Biles' claiming the all-around title. Sanne Wevers of the Netherlands turns 33 in September but remains one of the finest balance beam workers in the world. Ellie Black of Canada will be 29 in September. Paris marks her fourth Olympics, but in some ways she comes as good as ever.

Perhaps happier than ever too, a not unimportant part of the equation.

Black spends less time practicing on a given actual apparatus and more time focusing on "strength conditioning," something she wouldn't mind seeing adopted by younger athletes.

"I think it's just finding that balance, making sure that we're strong," Black said. "We're not overtraining. We're not doing an insane amount of reps. We're also not spending our whole complete lives in the gym."

The other side

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 84 of 85

Laurent Landi, who has coached Biles alongside his wife Cecile since late 2017, believes there is another element at play too as gymnasts wrangle with how to best prepare for competition.

There was a sense in the U.S. in the wake of the Larry Nassar sexual abuse scandal that the training pendulum swung from too strict to too loose. Biles told the AP in 2021 that it felt like "a horse out of the barn: you can't get it back in."

While Biles' stance has softened of late, describing it more as a generational difference and that there is no one right way to succeed, Landi thinks one of the reasons the U.S. team is so veteran-heavy is because the next wave isn't ready or willing to push themselves to the top. Though he allows the concern is American-specific.

"This is why you see the older generation, they are hanging in," he said. "They realize that, 'Oh yeah, if you want to (excel) you should do 'This, this, this.'"

"Is it going to be hard? Yes. Is it going to be hell? Yes," he continued. "But you need to stick to it to (get) to a stage where, 'OK, I can do it.'" And those kids don't even know anymore how to really push themselves to that limit."

Landi stressed that no athlete wants to reach the point where it needs to get hard before it starts to get easy but believes "that's part of sports, that's part of life, too."

How long can they go?

The end will come soon enough for Biles and everyone else. She's keeping quiet for now on whether Paris will be her final competition. While the pull to dive fully into her next chapter with her husband Chicago Bears safety Jonathan Owens is real, she's also aware that once the ride is over, there is no hopping back on.

It can be a difficult path to navigate, one Elisabeth Seitz is pondering as she spends her fourth trip to the Olympics as a TV commentator after narrowly missing making the five-woman German team.

Like Biles, Seitz is hit with questions back home that run along the lines of, as she put it, "you're still a gymnast, get a real job."

The thing is, the 30-year-old Seitz believes she's in the best shape of her life after recovering from a torn Achilles tendon last fall. Her experience helped her recover from an injury in eight months. She knows what she can do, and what she can't do.

Why would she want to walk away from something that still has a powerful hold on her before she wants to? Before she has to?

In that way, she sounds just like Biles and the rest of her peers helping redefine who can — and who can't — do this for a living.

"I just love gymnastics," she said. "I just love the sport. That's why I'm still doing it."

Today in History: July 28

US Army airplane crashes into Empire State Building

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Sunday, July 28, the 210th day of 2024. There are 156 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On July 28, 1945, A U.S. Army B-25 bomber crashed into the 79th floor of New York's Empire State Building, the world's tallest structure at the time, killing 14 people.

Also on this date:

In 1794, Maximilien Robespierre and Louis Antoine de Saint-Just were executed by guillotine during the French Revolution.

In 1914, World War I began as Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia.

In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson announced he was increasing the number of American troops in South Vietnam from 75,000 to 125,000.

In 1976, an earthquake devastated northern China, killing at least 242,000 people, according to an of-

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, July 28, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 034 ~ 85 of 85

ficial estimate.

In 1984, the Los Angeles Summer Olympics opened; 14 Eastern Bloc countries, led by the Soviet Union, boycotted the Games.

In 1995, a jury in Union, South Carolina, rejected the death penalty for Susan Smith, sentencing her to life in prison for drowning her two young sons (Smith will be eligible for parole in November 2024).

In 1996, 8,000 year-old human skeletal remains (later referred to as Kennewick Man) were discovered in a bank of the Columbia River in Kennewick, Washington.

In 2004, the Irish Republican Army formally announced an end to their armed campaign against British rule in Northern Ireland.

In 2015, it was announced that Jonathan Pollard, the former U.S. Naval intelligence analyst who had spent nearly three decades in prison for spying for Israel, had been granted parole.

In 2018, Pope Francis accepted the resignation of U.S. Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, the emeritus archbishop of Washington, D.C., following allegations of sexual abuse, including one involving an 11-year-old boy.

In 2019, a gunman opened fire at a popular garlic festival in Gilroy, California, killing three people, including a six-year-old boy and a 13-year-old girl, and wounding 17 others before taking his own life.

Today's Birthdays: Music conductor Riccardo Muti is 83. Former Senator and NBA Hall of Famer Bill Bradley is 81. "Garfield" creator Jim Davis is 79. TV producer Dick Ebersol is 77. Actor Sally Struthers is 77. Architect Santiago Calatrava is 73. CBS TV journalist Scott Pelley is 67. Actor Lori Loughlin is 60. Jazz musician-producer Delfeayo Marsalis is 59. UFC president Dana White is 55. Actor Elizabeth Berkley is 52. Basketball Hall of Famer Manu Ginobili is 47. Actor John David Washington is 40. Actor Dustin Milligan is 39. Rapper Soulja Boy is 34. England soccer star Harry Kane is 31. Pop/rock singer Cher Lloyd is 31. Golfer Nelly Korda is 26.