

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 1 of 83

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- This week on GDILIVE.COM](#)
- [3- Groton Garden Club](#)
- [4- Haakon County Fatal Crash](#)
- [5- Beadle County Fatal Crash](#)
- [6- Adam Sandler Day!!](#)
- [6- GHS 50th Class Reunion](#)
- [7- GHS/Avantara-Groton Royalty](#)
- [8- Today's Information for VB Match](#)
- [9- SD SearchLight: Trial for abortion ballot measure in limbo as court staff 'not aware' of planned start date](#)
- [10- SD SearchLight: 'Exceptional' law enforcement student denied police certification for past convictions](#)
- [13- SD SearchLight: Q&A: Meet South Dakota's first state public defender](#)
- [15- SD SearchLight: Government shutdown deadline nearing as U.S. House stumbles on stopgap spending bill](#)
- [17- SD SearchLight: Police academy adding extra ethics session due to heightened publicity, officer interest](#)
- [19- Weather Pages](#)
- [23- Daily Devotional](#)
- [24- Subscription Form](#)
- [25- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [26- Upcoming Groton Events](#)
- [27- News from the Associated Press](#)

## Thursday, Sept. 19

School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.  
School Lunch: Lasagna bake, garlic toast.  
Senior Menu: Lasagna bake, tossed salad with dressing, melon, cookie, garlic bread.  
Boys Golf at Hankinson, N.D., 10 a.m.  
Cross Country at Lee Park, Aberdeen, 4 p.m.  
JH Football at Britton-Hecla, 4:30 p.m.  
Volleyball hosts Clark/Willow Lake: 7th/C at 5 p.m., 8th/JV at 6 p.m., varsity to follow

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



## Friday, Sept. 20

School Breakfast: Egg wraps.  
School Lunch: Hot dogs, chips.  
Senior Menu: Chicken pasta salad, peas and carrots, grape juice, cake with strawberries, dinner roll.  
Homecoming Parade  
Boys Soccer hosts Custer, 4 p.m.  
Football hosts Deuel, 7 p.m.

## Saturday, Sept. 21

Volleyball at Hamlin Tournament, 9 a.m.  
JH FB Jamboree at Webster, 10 a.m.  
Boys Soccer hosts Hot Springs, 11 a.m.  
Common Cents Community Thrift Store open, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., 209 N Main  
3rd/4th and 5th/6th Football hosts Jamboree

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 2 of 83



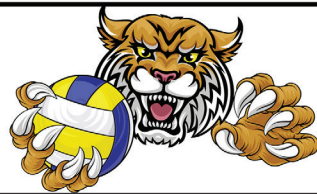
## GDILIVE.COM

10th Anniversary of GDILIVE.COM!



**Monday, Sept. 16**  
**Coronation, 7:30 p.m.**

**Tuesday, Sept. 17**  
**Soccer in Groton vs. Dakota Valley**  
**Girls at 4 p.m., Boys at 5:30 p.m.**



**Thursday, Sept. 19**  
**Volleyball**  
**hosts Clark/Willow Lake**  
**Varsity at 7:15 p.m.**

**Friday, Sept. 20**



**Homecoming**  
**Parade**  
**1 p.m.**



**Boys Soccer**  
**hosts Custer,**  
**4 p.m.**



**Football hosts**  
**Deuel,**  
**7 p.m.**

**Saturday, Sept. 21**  
**Volleyball at**  
**Hamlin Tournament**



**\$5 ticket or GDI Subscription required to watch the events.**

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 3 of 83



The members of the Groton Garden Club decorated the downtown light poles this past week. Pictured in front, left to right, are Dhera Hoffman, Pat Larson, Linda Gengerke and Deb McKiver; in back, left to right, are Linda Anderson, Lonnie Hoffman, Becky Aldrich, Eunice McColister, Karen Babcock, Denise Sombke and Ardella Theunissen. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

## Haakon County Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle fatal crash

Where: SD Highway 34, mile marker 128, 34 miles northwest of Philip, SD

When: 12:46 a.m., Wednesday, September 18, 2024

Vehicle 1: 2001 Freightliner TR

Driver 1: 59-year-old male, serious, non-life-threatening injuries

Seatbelt Use: No

Passenger 1: 51-year-old male, no injuries

Seatbelt Use: No

Vehicle 2: 1996 Freightliner TR

Driver 2: 25-year-old male, fatal injuries

Seatbelt Use: Yes

Haakon County, S.D.- A Florida man died early this morning when his semi collided with another semi in a two-vehicle crash 34 miles northwest of Philip, SD.

The names of the persons involved have not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 2001 Freightliner was parked in the lane of travel with its emergency flasher on near mile marker 128 on SD Highway 34 in Haakon County, SD. The driver of a 1996 Freightliner, heading the same direction, struck the back of the parked semi.

The driver of the 2001 Freightliner was moving about the cab during the collision and suffered serious, non-life-threatening injuries. A passenger was outside of the vehicle at the time and uninjured. The driver of the 1996 Freightliner sustained fatal injuries.

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

## Beadle County Fatal Crash

CORRECTION: The 2023 International struck the flagger, not the Dodge as previously reported. The revised details are below.

What: Two vehicle and pedestrian fatal crash

Where: US Highway 14, mile marker 319, two miles east of Wessington, SD

When: 12:55 p.m., Tuesday, September 17, 2024

Vehicle 1: 2023 International MV607

Driver 1: 47-year-old male, minor injuries

Seatbelt Use: Under investigation

Vehicle 2: 2022 Dodge Ram

Driver 2: 27-year-old male, minor injuries

Seatbelt Use: Under investigation

Pedestrian/Construction Flagger: 44-year-old female, fatal injuries

Beadle County, S.D.- A construction zone worker died Tuesday from injuries sustained in a two-vehicle crash two miles east of Wessington, SD.

The names of the persons involved have not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 2022 Dodge Ram was traveling westbound on US Highway 14 near mile marker 319 and entered a construction zone. A construction worker 'Flagger' was on on-scene directing westbound traffic to slow down and stop. The driver of the Dodge had stopped as directed. As the driver of a 2023 International MV607 traveling the same direction approached, he collided with the Dodge, and then struck the Flagger.

The Flagger suffered fatal injuries. The two drivers sustained minor injuries and were transported to a nearby hospital.

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

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

# Groton Daily Independent


Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 6 of 83



## Adam Sandler Day!!

So many different Adam Sanders came to school Wednesday and they were all awesome! Here's the winners.

In back, left to right, are Dacey Kampa (7), Abby Fjeldheim (8), Tevan Hanson (8), T.C. Schuster (9), McKenna Tietz (10), Chesney Weber (9) and Jackson Hopfinger (10); in front, left to right, are Tori Schuster (6), Rowan Patterson (7), Landon Thorton (6), Knox Mulder (6), Ivan Schwan (6), Raelee Lily (11), Cambria Bonn (11) and Rebecca Poor (12); not pictured is Faith Traphagen (12). (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



### CLASS REUNION

## GHS 50th Class Reunion

The GHS Class of 1974 will be celebrating 50 years on Friday, September 20, 2024 at the Groton Legion. The evening is open to anyone who would like to come and visit members of the class.

# Groton Area GT TIGERS

## GDILIVE.COM

10th Anniversary of GDILIVE.COM!



Thursday, Sept. 19  
Volleyball  
hosts Clark/Willow Lake JV at 6 p.m.  
Sponsored by Adam and Nicole Wright  
Varsity to follow

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 7 of 83



## GHS/Avantara-Groton Royalty

Congrats to this year's GHS Royalty and the entire 2024 Court! Mayor Scott Hanlon had a nice visit with King Jaeger Kampa and Queen Gretchen Dinger on Wednesday morning.

Pictured are Groton Mayor Scott Hanlon, GHS Royalty Kampa and Dinger; and Avantara Royalty- King Elroy "Sarge" Likness and Queen Beverly McGannon.

Mayor wishes everyone a safe and fun Homecoming week! (Courtesy Photo)

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 8 of 83



## GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT 06-6

### MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL

P.O. Box 410  
502 North 2<sup>nd</sup> Street  
Groton, SD 57445  
Fax: (605) 397-8453

### ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

P.O. Box 410  
810 North 1<sup>st</sup> Street  
Groton, SD 57445  
Fax: (605) 397-2344

#### Groton Area School Board

Grant Rix, President  
Nick Strom, VP  
Debra Gengerke  
Martin Weismantel  
Tigh Fliehs  
Travis Harder  
Dr. Heather Lerseth-Fliehs,  
DVM

#### Superintendent

Joseph J. Schwan  
(605) 397-2351 ext. 1003  
Joe.Schwan@k12.sd.us

#### High School Principal

Shelby Edwards  
(605) 397-8381 ext. 1004  
Shelby.Edwards@k12.sd.us

#### Elementary Principal

Brett Schwan  
(605) 397-2317  
Brett.Schwan@k12.sd.us

#### Business Manager

Becky Hubsch  
(605) 397-2351 ext. 1008  
Becky.Hubsch@k12.sd.us

#### Athletic Director

Alexa Schuring  
(605) 397-8381 ext. 1068  
Alexa.Schuring@k12.sd.us

#### Opportunity Coordinator

Jodi Schwan  
(605) 397-8381 ext. 1015  
Jodi.Schwan@k12.sd.us

#### K-12 School Counselor

Emily Neely  
(605) 397-2317  
Emily.VanGerpen@k12.sd.us

#### Technology Coordinator

Aaron Helvig  
(605) 397-8381 ext. 1025  
Aaron.Helvig@k12.sd.us

### High School Girls Volleyball Game

Clark/Willow Lake @ Groton Area  
Thursday, September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024

#### Game Times/Locations:

Main Court in Arena	Main Court in Old Gym
- 5:00PM → C	- 5:00PM → 7 <sup>th</sup> Grade
- 6:00PM → JV	- 6:00PM → 8 <sup>th</sup> Grade
- 7:15PM → Varsity	

Groton Area Homecoming Court will be announced prior to introductions/lineups.  
The National Anthem will be first, with Varsity Introductions/Lineups to follow.

LOCKER ROOM: Clark/Willow Lake will use the two locker rooms down the JH hallway (two doors on the left).

ATHLETIC TRAINER: There will be an athletic trainer on site. AED is located near the ticket booth.

ADMISSION & SPECTATORS: Adults: \$5.00 Students: \$4.00.

CONCESSIONS: Will be available

JV/Varsity Refs: Eric Donat and Scott Deutsch

JV/Varsity Line Judges: Kristi Zoellner and Melanie Johnson

C Refs: Melanie Johnson

C Line Judges: HS VB Players

JH Scoreboard/Refs/Line Judges: HS VB Players

Announcer: Mike Imrie

Scoreboard: Kristen Dolan

Official Book: Lynette Grieve

Libero Tracker: Becky Erickson

National Anthem: HS Pep Band, under the direction of Desiree Yeigh

#### Team Benches –

Groton: South Bench

Clark/Willow Lake: North Bench

Livestream: GDlive.com or NFHS (must pay to watch)

Thank you,  
Alexa Schuring, Athletic Director





## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Trial for abortion ballot measure in limbo as court staff 'not aware' of planned start date

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR AND SETH TUPPER - SEPTEMBER 18, 2024 4:18 PM

The trial date for a lawsuit against South Dakota's abortion-rights ballot measure was not added to a court calendar, despite a signed order from a judge saying the trial would begin next week.

That leaves the date of the trial in limbo even as early and absentee voting will begin Friday.

Judge John Pekas signed a scheduling order on Aug. 9 saying the trial would take place during the week of Sept. 23 in Sioux Falls.

This week, Pekas emailed the parties in the case and said, without further explanation, "this matter must be scheduled through court administration" and "my schedule is filling up quickly."

Minnehaha County Deputy Court Clerk Bryce Kummer was among the email recipients. He replied by asking how much time is needed for the trial and said if the parties could give him an idea, he could offer the next available options on the judge's calendar.

Jim Leach, the lawyer for the abortion-rights side, responded with confusion, saying it was his understanding the trial would start Monday, Sept. 23. "Am I mistaken?" he wrote.

Kummer replied that he was "not aware of any trial being scheduled in this case."

The lawyer for the anti-abortion side, Sara Frankenstein, filed a formal objection to moving the trial date. She also requested that if the trial date is moved, it should be scheduled in time to conclude before Election Day on Nov. 5.

Leslee Unruh is co-chair of the Life Defense Fund, which filed the lawsuit. She had no further information from the court as of Wednesday afternoon.

"We expected the trial to be held next week in accordance with the court's scheduling order," Unruh said in a statement. "We are waiting for further direction on how the court will proceed with our trial in recent light of the court's scheduling conflicts."

The lawsuit centers around allegations from the Life Defense Fund that petition circulators violated laws while gathering signatures to put the abortion-rights measure on the ballot. Life Defense Fund hopes to invalidate the measure, even though it's too late to remove it from ballots.

The petition circulators worked for a group called Dakotans for Health, led by Rick Weiland.

"We are now just waiting to see what the court does next," Weiland said.

Current state law bans abortions except when necessary to "preserve the life of the pregnant female."



**The Minnehaha County Courthouse in Sioux Falls, pictured on Nov. 1, 2022.** (John Hult/South Dakota Searchlight)

The ballot measure, Amendment G, would prohibit regulation of abortion during the first trimester. In the second trimester, regulations would be allowed if they are reasonably related to the pregnant woman's physical health. During the third trimester, abortion could be regulated or prohibited, except when necessary to preserve the life or health of the woman, as determined by her physician's medical judgment.

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

*Seth is editor-in-chief of South Dakota Searchlight. He was previously a supervising senior producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and a newspaper journalist in Rapid City and Mitchell.*

## 'Exceptional' law enforcement student denied police certification for past convictions

**Police commission also bars Mobridge officer for sexual harassment of trainee**

**BY: JOHN HULT - SEPTEMBER 18, 2024 3:04 PM**

A Colorado native and former teenage runaway with a criminal history who moved to South Dakota with her children and became a top student in a law enforcement program won't be allowed to become a police officer in the state.

The state Law Enforcement Officers Standards and Training Commission voted unanimously on Wednesday to deny certification for Samantha Hamm.

Commissioners commended her story of self-improvement after a troubled young adulthood and encouraged her to look for work in the criminal justice system, but said the details of a 2020 marijuana arrest were too concerning to certify her.

Hamm's case was one of two contested hearings that took place Wednesday at the George S. Mickelson Criminal Justice Center in Pierre. The second involved former Mobridge Police Officer Nick Bratland, a training officer who was fired this year for sending dozens of sexually explicit messages to a female trainee over Instagram.

Bratland told commissioners he'd struggled with sleep and post-traumatic stress from a 2006 explosion in Afghanistan during his military service that left him scarred, and that he doesn't remember much of his conduct as a result. But he also said there was no excuse for his behavior and did not deny the allegations.

The commission voted to revoke Bratland's certification.

### **Officer candidate says she was forced to be a prostitute**

Hamm was convicted of prostitution in 2010 after an arrest in Aurora, Colorado. It came after an undercover sting operation during which local officers responded to a Craigslist ad and set up a meeting with her in a hotel room.

During the contested hearing on her certification in Pierre, Hamm told commissioners she'd run away from home at 13, and again at 16, "trying to find anyone that loved me," and fell in with the people who



(Getty Images)

prostituted her.

Hamm said she was "forced to be a prostitute," and that she was beaten and not allowed to leave.

"It started slow, with these people taking me into their home, feeding me, promises of a good life, nice cars, money, and then it slowly progressed into prostitution," Hamm said.

Her arrest was a blessing, she said, because it made her a liability and allowed her to get away.

"It opened my eyes to a lot of things," she said.

She said at the time, when she was 18, she was unaware that her driver's license had been suspended, which was another of what law enforcement commission staff referred to as "a litany of criminal offenses."

Hamm apologized for not disclosing the suspension.

## **Marijuana arrest scrutinized**

In 2020, Hamm was arrested for felony marijuana possession in South Dakota after a traffic stop by a state trooper. The trooper found the remains of a marijuana joint in a baggie with marijuana, as well as eight separate 1-ounce baggies of marijuana, a pistol and hundreds of dollars in cash, according to Hank Prim, law enforcement training director for South Dakota.

Hamm later pleaded guilty to felony marijuana possession and received a suspended imposition of sentence. Such a sentence clears a charge from a person's record after a period of good behavior. Hamm's public-facing criminal record is now clear, but police have access to information on charges scrubbed from public searches.

Hamm told commissioners that she'd grown up around marijuana in Colorado, which became one of the first two states in the nation to legalize recreational cannabis in 2012. The other state was Washington.

When asked about the individual baggies, she said they'd come from different dispensaries. She was also asked about the amount, questioning how long it would take her to smoke that much marijuana.

"I smoked quite a bit," Hamm said. "I would think three or four times a day."

As with the prostitution arrest, Hamm described the situation as a wake-up call. She'd long hoped to become a police officer, but said it wasn't until her arrest that she realized that it was illegal to have a handgun with that much marijuana in South Dakota.

At that point, she said, she decided to stop smoking weed altogether, in hopes of working in criminal justice and being a role model to her two children.

Were she given the chance to be an officer, she said, her personal experience would help her connect with others in need and build bridges between law enforcement and people living the kind of life she once led.

Holding back tears, she described her desire to be an officer, and said "I am determined to demonstrate that I am capable of doing so with the highest level of professionalism, compassion and integrity."

"I want to be a part of the solution, building trust between law enforcement and the community. I want to use my story as a way to connect with the community and show them that change is possible."

## **Commission: Marijuana situation 'a lot to digest'**

The head of Lake Area Technical College's law enforcement program, former Watertown Police Officer Chad Stahl, said he first met Hamm as a student, and that he didn't become aware of the extent of her criminal history until well into her time at the school.

Even after that, Stahl said, he sees her as a strong candidate. She was "an exceptional student," he said, especially considering that she'd started the program as a single mother in her 30s.

"There was no cause to believe that she would not be an exceptional officer," Stahl said.

Brent Kempema, the lawyer heading up the hearing on the commission side, didn't say much in his closing arguments, saying that the evidence "speaks for itself."

"I'll let the commission make the decision as to the veracity of whether or not 8 ounces of marijuana possession is personal use," Kempema said. "That's obviously a large amount."

After going into a closed executive session to deliberate, Commissioner Steve Allender, the former mayor and former police chief of Rapid City, moved to deny certification for Hamm.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 12 of 83

He cited concerns about the amount of marijuana in the 2020 arrest as a prime reason.

The commission has forgiven marijuana use by some officers in the past, but Allender said the 2020 situation was too serious to brush off.

"That simply does not work for us in terms of a standard," he said. "There's a lot to be said in terms of the proximity in time, the amount, the cash and the gun. There's a lot to digest there, and so today, 2024, this doesn't seem to pass muster."

But Allender also told Hamm that she ought to pursue a career in criminal justice. He said her personal story can serve her in any other role she'd choose in the profession.

"I don't think any of us think your degree in law enforcement was wasted," he said. "Your personal change is not unnoticed. Your desire to be better for your children and your community is admirable. In fact, if more people felt that way, we'd have better communities."

## **Mobridge training officer loses certification**

Bratland's hearing came about two hours after the vote on Hamm's situation. The former Mobridge officer had been a trainer for the department, a position he described during his hearing as both mentor and supervisor. He trained three officers in total while serving in that role, he said, and sent the harassing messages to the third. She was the only female among his trainees.

Bratland said he only remembered sending one of the sexually explicit messages to her, but admitted at the start of the hearing that he'd sent them over Instagram. He also admitted to sending a message to the harassed officer's boss claiming she'd been "making up" stories about him.

Through multiple rounds of questioning, Bratland said he only remembered sending one message.

"If I quick-count here, there were more than 20 of a sexual nature," Allender said. "Were all these sent while on duty?"

At one point after his behavior was reported, Bratland told a supervisor that he'd meant to send "the" message to male colleagues and had accidentally sent it to the female officer.

Despite his explanation of sleep deprivation, he told commissioners he knows his conduct was wrong, and that he expected to be punished for it.

"I have no excuse. I messed up, that's why I'm here," Bratland said.

At one point, Commissioner and Division of Criminal Investigation Director Dan Satterlee asked Bratland if he'd forgotten anything else during the time he was missing so much sleep, such as traffic stops or interviews.

Bratland said he doesn't have lapsed memories.

"During your duties, the only part you don't remember is this part?" Satterlee said.

The commission voted to revoke his certification after around half an hour in executive session. The commission's next meeting will take place in Sioux Falls on Oct. 30.

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

## Q&A: Meet South Dakota's first state public defender Christopher Miles will lead team of attorneys in criminal appeals from indigent defendants

BY: JOHN HULT - SEPTEMBER 18, 2024 10:06 AM

A deputy public defender from Sioux Falls will head up the recently created state Office of Indigent Legal Services, according to an announcement Wednesday from the Unified Judicial System.

Christopher Miles, 35, will leave the Minnehaha County Public Defender's Office to lead a team of four lawyers, a paralegal and a legal secretary. The office in Sioux Falls will primarily be tasked with representing those who cannot afford an attorney in their appeals to the South Dakota Supreme Court, but will also serve as a data hub for public defense and work on ways to improve its delivery across the state.

Lawmakers signed off on the new office this year, as well as on the creation of a Commission on Indigent Legal Services, at the urging of state Supreme Court Chief Justice Steven Jensen. The office was the number one recommendation of a study group that spent 2023 looking into issues with the state's approach to indigent defense.

Most states already have a state-level public defender's office, but South Dakota did not.

That's been a burden for the counties that pick up the tab for public defense, especially in recent years. There are only three fully staffed county public defender offices in the state, and most counties contract with private attorneys. Those roles are often difficult to fill in rural areas, as most lawyers live in larger cities including Sioux Falls, Rapid City or Pierre.

"The Commission was fortunate to have exceptional candidates for the chief defender position. We are excited about Chris Miles being the first chief defender," said Commission on Indigent Legal Services Chair Neil Fulton, who is dean of the University of South Dakota Knudson School of Law.

Miles recently answered questions from South Dakota Searchlight. This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Tell us about your background.

I grew up in Brookings and graduated from Brookings High School. After that, I actually went on to play baseball at Fort Scott Community College in Kansas, but ended up making my way back home and graduated from South Dakota State University.

I did end up going to law school in St Paul, to William Mitchell College of Law.

When did you join the Minnehaha County Public Defender's Office, how long have you been there, and what was it that drew you to the work?

I started doing public defense work with Minnehaha County Public Defender's Office all the way back in November of 2015.

You know, I feel like just the sense of fairness was always something that was kind of a fundamental



**An equal justice statue stands outside the doors of the Minnehaha County Courthouse in Sioux Falls.** (Makenzie Huber/

South Dakota Searchlight)

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 14 of 83

principle for me. I think with public defense work specifically, it was a way for me to apply myself in the court system, really, with that fairness principle leading the way.

The work is definitely challenging, but it's also very rewarding. Another aspect of why I've been able to stay so long is that for a lot of my time there, I've been doing appellate work. I enjoy appellate work quite a bit. I haven't really had a desire to leave because that work has been so fulfilling.

When you say appellate work, can you explain what you're talking about?

I've been doing direct appeals to the South Dakota Supreme Court. So primarily what I've been doing is a lot of reading transcripts, researching legal issues, and then submitting briefs to the South Dakota Supreme Court for individuals that have been convicted and then are seeking review from a higher court.

I'm spending my time seeing if there's any supporting case law to advance the argument that (the defendant would) like to make, and then ultimately decide whether or not there's merit to the appeal and whether or not it's worth pursuing.

I'm kind of guiding them through that difficult process.

Why were you drawn to this statewide position? What is it you feel South Dakota needs from an office like this?

The office, at least initially, will be handling direct appeals. As I said, the majority of my time at the public defender's office was spent on appeals, so I feel like I'd have a pretty good handle on it.

I think this office will benefit more people than just the individuals we plan on serving. Across the state, in particular rural areas, there's just limited access to quality representation for people that have been accused of crimes. So that's certainly one aspect that we hope to overcome.

And then at a more macro level, the county-based system is putting a lot of strain on the counties financially, the costs are rising. Not only rising, they're also unpredictable. So on a year-to-year basis, it's hard for the counties to really budget. The goal is to implement a better system, where we can deliver the public defense services to those who need it, and to also reduce the financial burden on the counties.

What kinds of appeals are we talking about?

We would be handling criminal appeals, and we would also be handling any direct appeal to the South Dakota Supreme Court, which could also include individuals who are appealing decisions in an abuse and neglect proceeding, like a termination of parental rights, individuals who are seeking an appeal of petition for writ of habeas corpus (prisoners disputing the legality of their incarceration), and then potentially some juvenile cases on direct appeal.

What are a few common misconceptions about indigent defense, in South Dakota or otherwise?

One is that taxpayer dollars spent on public defense don't contribute to public safety. An adequately trained and funded law enforcement agency and an adequately trained public defense system are both necessary and important functions for government.

Maybe, for example, an individual that is convicted of a crime didn't actually commit that crime. Well, when we have a well-trained and equipped public defense system, that is less likely to happen. But it also reduces the chances that someone who actually did commit the crime is free. And furthermore, when we as public defense attorneys are testing law enforcement in the courts, we really improve law enforcement, as well.

And then on just a purely economic level, when we have effective public defense attorneys that are doing good work at the trial level, that reduces the amount of resources that end up getting spent maybe litigating the integrity of a conviction on the back end.

Are you coming in with a set of goals? What do you expect will be your guiding principles as you build this office from the ground up? What will success look like to you five years from now?

One of the overarching goals is to just continue to collect data from across the state, using that data to then improve the ways and the mechanisms and the means by which we really deliver public defense services. Our focus will be to streamline the processes so we can ensure that caseloads across the state are within the standards we adopt.

In five years, it would be great if we had branch offices across the state, streamlined processes, and potentially even, here with the statewide office, attorneys that are equipped to handle high-level felony cases at the trial court level.

Anything else you want the people of South Dakota to know as you step into this role?

With building the office up from nothing, so from the ground up, we'll definitely have some hurdles and some growing pains along the way. The change that we see will be incremental, but we're very excited for the office to come to fruition. We'll certainly appreciate the patience as we move forward.

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

## Government shutdown deadline nearing as U.S. House stumbles on stopgap spending bill

**South Dakota's Dusty Johnson votes yes on failed continuing resolution**

**BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - SEPTEMBER 18, 2024 6:25 PM**

WASHINGTON — Congress has 12 days left to approve a short-term government funding bill before the shutdown deadline, though leaders in the Republican House and Democratic Senate haven't felt the need to start negotiations just yet.

House GOP leaders, instead, attempted to pass a six-month continuing resolution Wednesday that carried with it a bill requiring proof of citizenship to register to vote, but were unsuccessful.

The 202-220 vote in the House included a yes vote from South Dakota Republican Dusty Johnson, with two members voting present and 14 Republicans in opposition. It came shortly after Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump called on lawmakers to force a government shutdown as leverage to enact the voter ID law.

"If Republicans don't get the SAVE Act, and every ounce of it, they should not agree to a Continuing Resolution in any way, shape, or form," Trump wrote on social media, doubling down on a shutdown statement he made last week.

The unsuccessful House vote could provide space for Speaker Mike Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, to negotiate with the Senate.

But, with just one week left in the session before Congress departs for a six-week election break, there's



**House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-Louisiana, walks back to his office following a vote in the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 11, 2024, in Washington, D.C.** (Anna Rose Layden/

Getty Images)

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 16 of 83

not much time for leaders to find consensus, draft a bill, hold votes in both chambers and secure President Joe Biden's signature.

Johnson, asked repeatedly by reporters Wednesday about the possibility of a shutdown, didn't entirely rule out a funding lapse beginning on Oct. 1.

"We'll see what happens with the bill," Johnson said before the vote. "We're on the field in the middle of the game, the quarterback is calling the play, we're going to run the play."

## Blaming the Senate

Johnson criticized the Senate for not being further along in the annual appropriations process, seeking to place the blame for a stopgap spending bill and a possible shutdown on that chamber.

The Senate Appropriations Committee approved 11 full-year government funding bills with broadly bipartisan votes this summer, but experienced challenges with the Homeland Security funding measure.

The House Appropriations Committee approved all dozen of its bills along party-line votes and was able to move five of those across the floor with GOP support, but not broad backing from Democrats.

House and Senate leaders haven't allowed the two chambers to begin conferencing the bills that have either passed out of committee or off the floor, despite that being a regular occurrence in past years.

It's highly unlikely leaders will bring any more of the full-year spending bills to the floor this fall, making the election results the biggest piece of the puzzle that will change between now and the end of the calendar year.

## McConnell: Shutdown would be 'politically, beyond stupid'

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., has repeatedly called on his colleagues to avoid a shutdown, though he hasn't jumped in to negotiate a stopgap bill and doesn't seem inclined to do so.

"I think we first have to wait and see what the House sends us," McConnell said during a Tuesday press conference. "My only observation about this whole discussion is the one thing you cannot have is a government shutdown. It would be, politically, beyond stupid for us to do that right before the election because, certainly, we'd get the blame."

McConnell then referenced the saying that there's no "education in the second kick of a mule" and noted funding the government for a few more months will "ultimately end up being a discussion between" Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and Johnson.

"I'm for whatever avoids a government shutdown," McConnell added.

## Election year drama

Leaning on a stopgap spending bill has been a regular part of Congress' annual appropriations process for nearly three decades. During that time, lawmakers have consistently failed to approve all the full-year government funding bills before the Oct. 1 deadline.

The September struggle to approve a continuing resolution, which is intended to give lawmakers a bit more time to reach bicameral agreement on the full-year spending bills, has become increasingly dramatic with election-year politics ratcheting up the posturing this year.

In divided government, any legislation to fund the government must be bipartisan, or it all but guarantees a shutdown.

The House's failed six-month continuing resolution also wasn't supported by most Senate Republicans.

GOP senators argued it was too lengthy and could have hindered that chamber's ability to confirm the next president's Cabinet during the first few months of 2025.

Senate Republicans and defense hawks in the House also said that leaving the Department of Defense on autopilot for half of the next fiscal year was an abdication of Congress' responsibility and a threat to national security.



## December end date eyed

The final stopgap spending bill that Congress approves in the days ahead will likely last through Dec. 20, the final day this year that Congress is scheduled to be in session. It is also unlikely to include the voter registration ID component.

That final, bipartisan continuing resolution could also include a plus-up in spending for the Secret Service or a provision that allows the agency to spend its stopgap allocation at a faster rate to bolster Trump's security following two apparent assassination attempts.

Florida Republican Rep. Mario Díaz-Balart, chairman of the State-Foreign Operations spending panel, said Wednesday that if he was a betting man, he'd expect Congress to pass a stopgap spending bill through mid-December.

"The first thing is, we can't have a shutdown," Díaz-Balart said. "I think most people here understand that that would be catastrophic, particularly when half the world is in flames."

During a government shutdown, some federal workers continue reporting to the office without pay while the rest are furloughed until Congress approves a new funding bill. All federal employees impacted by a shutdown receive back pay.

A shutdown this October would affect all the departments and agencies funded within the annual process, including the departments of Agriculture, Defense, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security and State.

Idaho Republican Rep. Mike Simpson, chairman of the Interior-Environment appropriations subcommittee, said he was sure there would be no shutdown but didn't detail how exactly Congress would broker a bipartisan agreement in the days ahead.

"I don't think anybody wants to shut the government down," Simpson said. "That's not a viable option."

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

## Police academy adding extra ethics session due to heightened publicity, officer interest

BY: JOHN HULT - SEPTEMBER 18, 2024 12:03 PM



**An officer recruit fires a pistol during firearms training at the George S. Mickelson Law Enforcement Center in Pierre on July 8, 2024.**

(John Hult/South Dakota Searchlight)

Officers in South Dakota's Basic Law Enforcement Certification course will have an extra lesson on ethics and the role of the state's police commission, starting with the current cohort.

Hank Prim, director of law enforcement training for the state Division of Criminal Investigation, told the South Dakota Law Enforcement Officers Standards and Training Commission about the change at the start of the group's Wednesday meeting in Pierre.

The new four and a half hour ethics session, Prim told the commission, will "talk a little bit about the conditions that are important to you, the things that you all look for, and the expectations you have with new officers as they go out in the field."

"I think especially with the publicity of the commission's work over the last couple years, there's a new emphasis and interest by the officers in the basic class to understand what the commission does," Prim said.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 18 of 83**

The commission's activities have received more media coverage recently. South Dakota Searchlight regularly covers the meetings, as does Bob Mercer of the KELO Capital News Bureau. Austin Goss of The Dakota Scout has also written about contested case hearings.

The commission reviews training program changes, applications for renewed certification for officers who step away from the profession for a while, approves grant requests for training by local departments, works with technical colleges on their criminal justice programs, and reviews complaints of misconduct against officers.

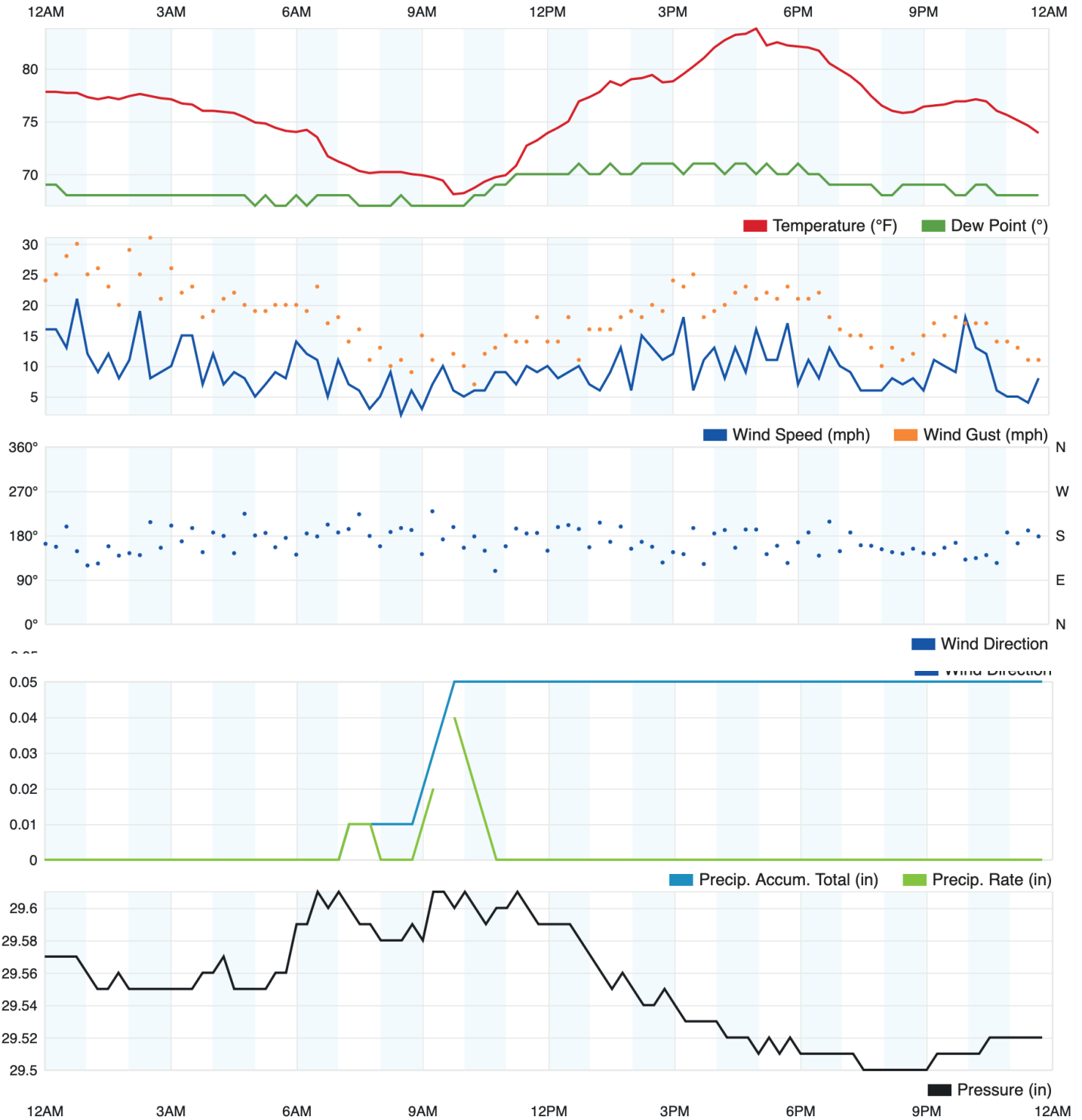
Many complaints are resolved informally, with officers voluntarily ceding their certification or the commission imposing remedial training and reprimands for poor performance. The commission also acts as a jury of sorts in contested hearings, when officers accused of misbehavior defend themselves in proceedings similar to those in a courtroom.

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

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 19 of 83

## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



# Broton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 20 of 83

Today



High: 77 °F

Sunny and Breezy

Tonight



Low: 50 °F

Mostly Clear

Friday



High: 80 °F

Sunny

Friday Night



Low: 55 °F

Mostly Clear

Saturday



High: 69 °F

Slight Chance Showers



## Through The Weekend

September 19, 2024  
3:37 AM

Mostly Dry With Temperatures Closer to Average

Thursday



Highs: 75-80°F

Friday



Highs: 81-90°F  
Lows: 50-55°F

Saturday



Highs: 66-74°F  
Lows: 50-58°F

Sunday



Highs: 64-67°F  
Lows: 40-48°F

Monday



Highs: 68-72°F  
Lows: 41-45°F

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

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Through the next several days, the forecast includes closer to normal temperatures and mainly dry condition. The best chance for moisture (10-30%) is associated with a cold front early Saturday and will be limited to far eastern SD/western MN

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 21 of 83

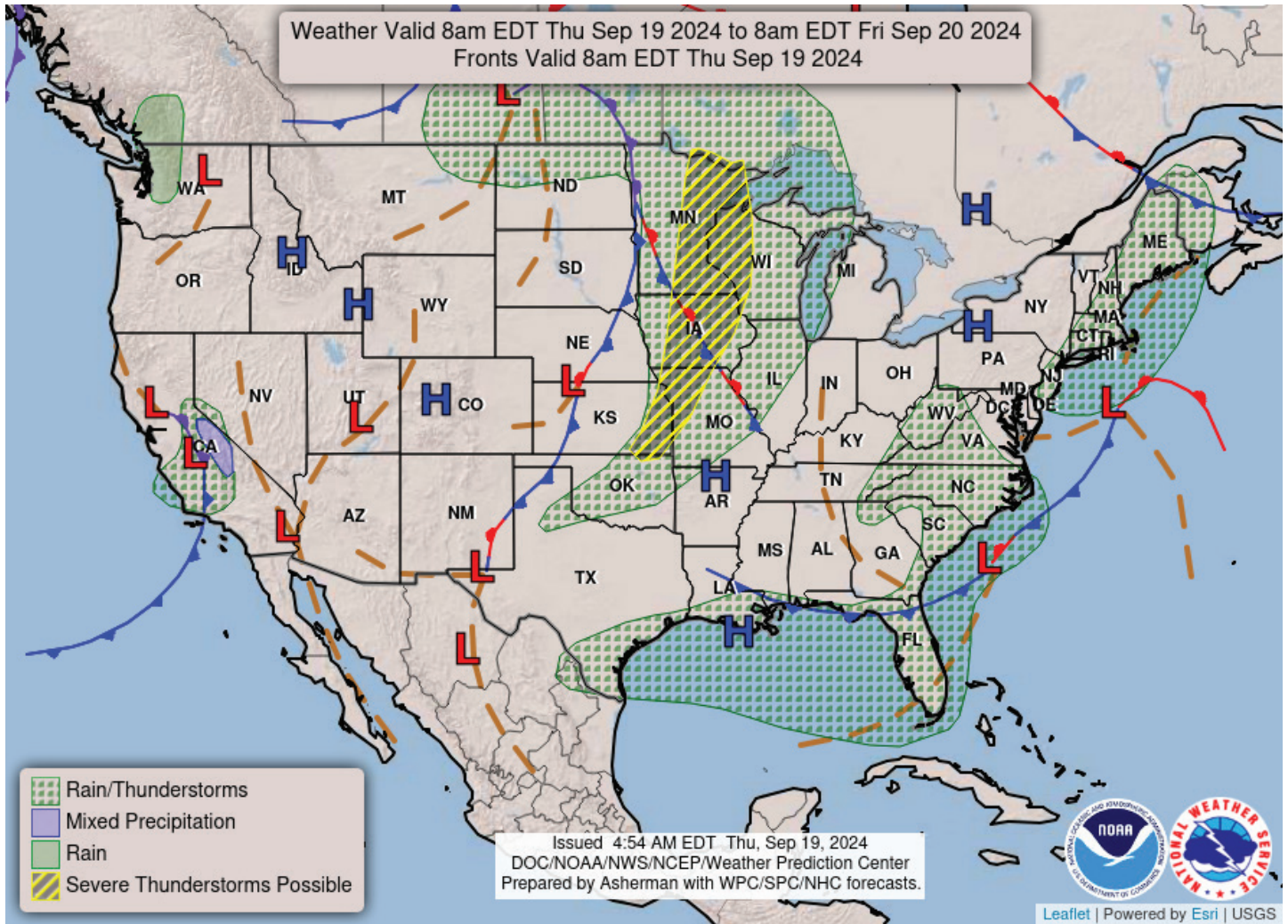
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 84 °F at 5:01 PM**  
**Low Temp: 68 °F at 9:46 AM**  
**Wind: 31 mph at 2:31 AM**  
**Precip: : 0.05**

Day length: 13 hours, 21 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 101 in 1895  
Record Low: 26 in 1938  
Average High: 74  
Average Low: 46  
Average Precip in Sept.: 1.26  
Precip to date in Sept.: 0.24  
Average Precip to date: 17.60  
Precip Year to Date: 19.66  
Sunset Tonight: 7:36:30 pm  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:16:30 am



# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 22 of 83

## Today in Weather History

September 19, 1991: Record to near record cold hit central and northeast South Dakota on this day. Temperatures fell into the 20s during the morning bringing a hard freeze to much of the area. Pierre and Mobridge had record lows of 24 degrees while Timber Lake set a record low of 21 degrees. Near record lows of 28 degrees and 22 degrees occurred at Aberdeen and Kennebec, respectively.

1947: A hurricane made landfall near the Chandeleur Islands, LA on this day. Wind gusts of 112 mph and a central pressure of 967 mb were measured at Moisant International Airport. A storm surge of 9.8 feet reached Shell Beach, Lake Borgne. Moisant Airport field was flooded by two ft. of water while Jefferson Parish was flooded to depths of 3.28 ft. New Orleans suffered \$100 million in damages. Total loss of life was 51 people. As a result of this storm, hurricane protection levees were built along the south shore of Lake Pontchartrain to protect Orleans and Jefferson Parishes from future storm surges.

1967 - Hurricane Beulah deluged Brownsville, TX, with 12.19 inches of rain in 24 hours, to establish a record for that location. Hurricane Beulah made landfall on the 20th near the mouth of the Rio Grande River, where a wind gust to 135 mph was reported by a ship in the port. (19th-20th) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Cool autumn-like weather invaded the Central Rockies. Temperatures dipped into the 30s and 40s, with readings in the teens and 20s reported in the higher elevations. Gunnison CO was the cold spot in the nation with a morning low of 15 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms developing along a fast moving cold front produced severe weather in Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana and Michigan. Eight tornadoes were reported, including five in Indiana. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 74 mph at Wabash IND. Winds associated with the cold front itself gusted to 69 mph at Kenosha WI. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Showers and thunderstorms produced heavy rain in the Middle and Northern Atlantic Coast Region. Cape Hatteras NC was deluged with nearly 3.50 inches of rain in three hours. Syracuse NY reported 1.77 inches of rain, a record for the date, and Chatham NJ reported an all-time record of 3.45 inches in one day. Hurricane Hugo headed for the Bahamas, and Tropical Storm Iris, following close on its heels, strengthened to near hurricane force. (The National Weather Summary)



## DO YOU CARE?

An elderly lady asked a young child, "How do you do, my dear?"

"Fine, thank you," came the reply.

There was a pause, and finally the lady asked, "Why don't you ask me how I am doing?"

After thinking for a moment, the child replied, "You know, I really don't care how you are doing!"

Demonstrating care for others is an important responsibility of the Christian. In fact, the first century Christians were recognized by the saying, "My, how they love one another!" Sadly, that is not true today. Some churches are more like a wrestling match than a worship center.

In His wisdom, God has connected all of us together, believers and nonbelievers. No one is self-sufficient or able to act independently of others and never require help from anyone. We must never think that we are ever excused from the responsibility of giving help to those in need. It's God's way, especially for Christians, to show His love to those who are unsaved.

We read in God's Word that "we will reap whatever we sow." As someone once said, "You can't plant corn and expect to get a crop of watermelons." Although we may not want to believe it, we will only get what we have planted. We see this truth in the laws of nature and find evidence of it in the laws of God as well. Everything we do has predictable results. If we sow comfort, we can be assured of receiving care. Christians must always live God's love.

Prayer: Help us, Father, to be alert to the needs of others and sow Your love and grace. May we share the gifts You give us with others, and bless them in Your Name, for Your sake. Amen.

Scripture For Today: Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. Galatians 6:1-10

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

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 24 of 83

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# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 25 of 83



## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

09.17.24

14 31 48 57 64 9

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$47,000,000**

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 26  
DRAW: Mins 24 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

09.18.24

7 17 29 42 45 5

All Star Bonus: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$9,310,000**

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 41  
DRAW: Mins 23 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

09.18.24

10 13 28 43 47 9

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT 16 Hrs 56 Mins  
DRAW: 24 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

09.18.24

3 15 23 25 29

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$35,000**

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 56  
DRAW: Mins 24 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

09.18.24

16 23 50 53 66 14

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 25  
DRAW: Mins 23 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

09.18.24

1 11 22 47 68 7

Power Play: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$195,000,000**

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 25  
DRAW: Mins 24 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 26 of 83

## 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
- Cancelled:** 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
- 07/09/2025 Legion Auxiliary Salad Luncheon
- 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

### **The Thai zoo home to baby hippo and internet sensation Moo Deng is patenting the pygmy**

By JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI Associated Press

CHONBURI, Thailand (AP) — Only a month after Thailand's adorable baby hippo Moo Deng was unveiled on Facebook, her fame became unstoppable both domestically and internationally.

Zookeeper Atthapon Nundee has been posting cute moments of the animals in his care for about five years. He never imagined Khao Kheow Open Zoo's newborn pygmy hippo would become an internet megastar within weeks.

Cars started lining up outside the zoo well before it opened Thursday. Visitors traveled from near and far for a chance to see the pudgy, expressive 2-month-old in person at the zoo about 100 kilometers (60 miles) southeast of Bangkok. The pit where Moo Deng lives with her mom, Jona, was packed almost immediately, with people cooing and cheering every time the pink-cheeked baby animal made skittish movements.

"It was beyond expectation," Atthapon told The Associated Press. "I wanted people to know her. I wanted a lot of people to visit her, or watch her online, or leave fun comments. I never would've thought (of this)."

Moo Deng, which literally means "bouncy pork" in Thai, is a type of meatball. The name was chosen by fans via a poll on social media, and it matches her other siblings: Moo Toon (stewed pork) and Moo Waan (sweet pork). There is also a common hippo at the zoo named Kha Moo (stewed pork leg).

"She's such a little lump. I want to ball her up and swallow her whole!" said Moo Deng fan Areeya Sripanya while visiting the zoo Thursday.

Already, Moo Deng has been made into memes. Artists are drawing cartoons based on her. Social media platform X even featured her in its official account's post.

With all that fame, zoo director Narongwit Chodchoi said they have begun patenting and trademarking "Moo Deng the hippo" to prevent the animal from being commercialized by anyone else. "After we do this, we will have more income to support activities that will make the animals' lives better," he said.

"The benefits we get will return to the zoo to improve the life of all animals here."

The zoo sits on 800 hectares (almost 2,000 acres) of land and is home to more than 2,000 animals. It runs breeder programs for many endangered species like Moo Deng's. The pygmy hippopotamus that's native to West Africa is threatened by poaching and loss of habitat. There are only 2,000-3,000 of them left in the wild.

To help fund the initiative, the zoo is making Moo Deng shirts and pants that will be ready for sale at the end of the month, with more merchandise to come.

Narongwit believes a factor of Moo Deng's fame is her name, which compliments her energetic and chaotic personality captured in Atthapon's creative captions and video clips.

Appropriately, Moo Deng likes to "deng," or bounce, and Atthapon got a lot of cute and funny moments or her giddy bouncing on social media. Even when she's not bouncing, the hippo is endlessly cute — squirming as Atthapon tries to wash her, biting him while he was trying to play with her, calmly closing her eyes as he rubs her pinkish cheeks or her chubby belly.

Atthapon, who has worked at the zoo for eight years taking care of hippos, sloths, capybaras and binturongs, said baby hippos are usually more playful and energetic, and they become calmer as they get older.

The zoo saw a spike in visitors since Moo Deng's fame — so much that the zoo now has to limit public access to the baby's enclosure to 5-minute windows throughout the day during weekends.

Narongwit said the zoo has been receiving over 4,000 visitors during a weekday, up from around just 800 people, and more than 10,000 during a weekend, up from around 3,000 people.

But the fame has also brought some hostile visitors to Moo Deng, who only wakes up ready to play about two hours a day. Some videos showed visitors splashing water or throwing things at the sleeping Moo Deng to try to wake her up. The hippo pit now has a warning sign against throwing things at Moo

Deng — posted prominently at the front in Thai, English and Chinese.

Narongwit said the zoo would take action under the animal protection law if people mistreat the animal. But clips emerged of people treating Moo Deng poorly, and the backlash was fierce. The zoo director said that since then, they haven't seen anyone doing it again.

For fans who can't make the journey or are discouraged after seeing the crowds for Moo Deng, the Khao Kheow Open Zoo set up cameras and plan to start a 24-hour live feed of the baby hippo in the coming week.

## Lebanon is rocked again by exploding devices as Israel declares a new phase of war

By BASSEM MROUE, JOHNSON LAI, and JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Walkie-talkies exploded in Beirut and other parts of Lebanon on Wednesday in a second wave of attacks targeting devices a day after pagers used by Hezbollah blew up, state media and officials for the militant group said. At least 20 people were killed and more than 450 wounded in the second wave, the Health Ministry said.

The attacks — which were widely believed to be carried out by Israel targeting Hezbollah but have also killed civilians — have hiked fears that the two sides' simmering conflict could escalate into all-out war.

Speaking to Israeli troops on Wednesday, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said, "We are at the start of a new phase in the war — it requires courage, determination and perseverance." He made no mention of the exploding devices but praised the work of Israel's army and security agencies, saying "the results are very impressive."

In Wednesday's attacks, several blasts were heard at a funeral in Beirut for three Hezbollah members and a child killed by exploding pagers the day before, according to Associated Press journalists at the scene. An AP photographer in the southern coastal city of Sidon saw a car and a mobile phone shop damaged after devices exploded inside of them. The state news agency reported home solar energy system blowing up in several locations, but experts cast doubt on whether those incidents were connected, saying they may have been coincidental accidents.

The new blasts hit a country still roiling with confusion and anger after Tuesday's pager bombings, which killed at least 12 people, including two children, and wounded some 2,800 others.

The second wave also deepens concern over the potentially indiscriminate casualties caused in the attacks, in which hundreds of blasts went off wherever the holder of the pager happened to be — in homes, cars, at grocery stores and in cafes, often with family or bystanders nearby.

While the pagers were used by Hezbollah members, there was no guarantee who was holding the device at the time it was detonated. Also, many of the casualties were not Hezbollah fighters, but members of the group's extensive civilian operations mainly serving Lebanon's Shiite community.

At least two health workers were among those killed Tuesday. Doctors, nurses, paramedics, charity workers, teachers and office administrators work for Hezbollah-linked organizations, and an unknown number had pagers.

Mary Ellen O'Connell, a professor of law and international peace studies at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana, said booby-traps are banned under international law. "Weaponizing an object used by civilians is strictly prohibited," she said.

The U.N. human rights chief, Volker Türk, called for an independent investigation into the mass explosions, saying, "The fear and terror unleashed is profound."

The U.N. Security Council scheduled an emergency meeting on the explosions in Lebanon on Friday afternoon at the request of Algeria, the Arab representative on the powerful 15-member body.

Iran-backed Hezbollah — Lebanon's strongest armed force — has exchanged fire with Israel's military almost daily since Oct. 8, the day after a deadly Hamas-led assault in southern Israel triggered the war in Gaza. Since then, hundreds have been killed in strikes in Lebanon and dozens in Israel, while tens of thousands on each side of the border have been displaced. Hezbollah said its strikes are in support of its

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 29 of 83

ally, Hamas.

Hezbollah announced three strikes on parts of northern Israel Wednesday, at least one of which took place after the latest round of explosions in Lebanon.

Israeli leaders have issued a series of warnings in recent weeks that they might increase operations against Hezbollah in Lebanon, saying they must stop the exchange of fire to allow people to return to homes near the border. Israel began moving more troops to its border with Lebanon on Wednesday as a precautionary measure, according to an official with knowledge of the movements who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

In his comments, Gallant said that after months of fighting Hamas in Gaza, "the center of gravity is shifting to the north by diverting resources and forces."

As Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu huddled with top security officials at Israeli military headquarters in Tel Aviv, the country's army chief, Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi, said plans have been drawn up for additional action against Hezbollah. Israeli media say the government has not yet decided whether to launch a major offensive in Lebanon.

Hezbollah's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, is expected to deliver a major speech on Thursday.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the U.S. is still assessing how the attacks in Lebanon could affect efforts to negotiate a cease-fire in the Israel-Hamas war.

The pager bombings appeared to be a complex operation months in the making, with many experts believing Israel infiltrated the supply chain and rigged hundreds of pagers with explosives before they were imported to Lebanon. But little evidence has emerged so far.

Gold Apollo, a Taiwanese firm, said it authorized a Hungary-based company, BAC Consulting KFT, to use its name on devices delivered to Hezbollah. But a Hungarian government spokesman said Wednesday the pagers delivered to Hezbollah were never in Hungary and that BAC Consultants merely acted as an intermediary.

Hungarian national security services were cooperating with international partners, the Hungarian spokesman, Zoltán Kovács, posted Wednesday on X.

Wednesday's new bombings came as Lebanese were mourning the dead from the day before.

Two explosions went off at the edges of the funeral of two fighters, a young boy and a paramedic in southern Beirut. As ambulances screeched to the scene, the ceremony continued, with a senior Hezbollah official, Hashem Safieddine, telling mourners that Israel's "aggression will face its special punishment."

Israeli drones buzzed overhead – as they do often over Beirut and many parts of Lebanon – as thousands of mourners marched in a procession with the four coffins to a cemetery.

"We will not despair and we will not surrender. We will continue as long as blood circulates in our veins," said one woman, who identified herself as Um Hussein, as she stood outside the cemetery with her four children.

In the village of Nabi Sheet in the Bekaa Valley, dozens gathered to mourn 9-year-old Fatima Abdul-lah, another victim of the pagers. Her mother, wearing black and donning a yellow Hezbollah scarf, wept alongside other women and children as they gathered around the little girl's coffin before her burial.

## Is Israel preparing for a war with Hezbollah?

By JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — With Israel's defense minister announcing a "new phase" of the war and an apparent Israeli attack setting off explosions in electronic devices in Lebanon, the specter of all-out combat between Israel and Hezbollah seems closer than ever before.

Hopes for a diplomatic solution to the conflict appear to be fading quickly as Israel signals a desire to change the status quo in the country's north, where it has exchanged cross-border fire with Hezbollah since the Lebanese militant group began attacking on Oct. 8, a day after the war's opening salvo by Hamas.

In recent days, Israel has moved a powerful fighting force up to the northern border, officials have escalated their rhetoric, and the country's security Cabinet has designated the return of tens of thousands

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 30 of 83

of displaced residents to their homes in northern Israel an official war goal.

Here's a look at how Israel is preparing for a war with Lebanon:

Troops drawn from Gaza to the northern border

While the daily fighting between Israel and Hezbollah has escalated on several occasions, the bitter enemies have been careful to avoid an all-out war.

That appears to be changing — especially after pagers, walkie-talkies, solar equipment and other devices exploded in Lebanon on Tuesday and Wednesday, killing at least 20 and wounding thousands in a sophisticated attack Hezbollah blamed on Israel.

"You don't do something like that, hit thousands of people, and think war is not coming," said retired Israeli Brig. Gen. Amir Avivi, who leads Israel Defense and Security Forum, a group of hawkish former military commanders. "Why didn't we do it for 11 months? Because we were not willing to go to war yet. What's happening now? Israel is ready for war."

As fighting in Gaza has slowed, Israel has fortified forces along the border with Lebanon, including the arrival this week of a powerful army division that took part in some of the heaviest fighting in Gaza.

The 98th Division is believed to include thousands of troops, including paratrooper infantry units and artillery and elite commando forces specially trained for operations behind enemy lines. Their deployment was confirmed by an official with knowledge of the matter who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss troop movements.

The division played a key role in Gaza, spearheading the army's operations in the southern city of Khan Younis, a Hamas stronghold. The offensive inflicted heavy losses on Hamas fighters and tunnels, but also wreaked massive damage, sent thousands of Palestinians fleeing and resulted in scores of civilian deaths. Israel says Hamas endangers civilians by hiding in residential areas.

The military also said it staged a series of drills this week along the border.

"The mission is clear," said Maj. Gen. Ori Gordin, who heads Israel's Northern Command. "We are determined to change the security reality as soon as possible."

A 'new phase' of war

The military movements have been accompanied by heightened rhetoric from Israel's leaders, who say their patience is running thin.

Defense Minister Yoav Gallant on Wednesday night declared the start of a "new phase" of the war as Israel turns its focus toward Hezbollah. "The center of gravity is shifting to the north by diverting resources and forces," he said.

He spoke a day after Israel's Cabinet made the return of displaced residents to their homes in northern Israel a formal goal of the war. The move was largely symbolic — Israeli leaders have long pledged to bring those residents home. But elevating the significance of the aim signaled a tougher stance.

After meeting Wednesday with top security officials, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared: "We will return the residents of the north securely to their homes."

Netanyahu delivered a similarly tough message with a top U.S. envoy sent to the region this week to soothe tensions.

An official with knowledge of the encounter told The Associated Press that the envoy, Amos Hochstein, told Netanyahu that intensifying the conflict with Hezbollah would not help return evacuated Israelis back home.

Netanyahu, according to a statement from his office, told Hochstein that residents cannot return without "a fundamental change in the security situation in the north." The statement said that while Netanyahu "appreciates and respects" U.S. support, Israel will "do what is necessary to safeguard its security."

Is war inevitable?

Israeli media reported Wednesday that the government has not yet decided whether to launch a major offensive in Lebanon.

Much, it seems, will depend on Hezbollah's response. The group's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, is expected to deliver a major speech on Thursday.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 31 of 83

But public sentiment in Israel seems to be supportive of tougher action against Hezbollah.

A poll in late August by the Israeli Democracy Institute, a Jerusalem think tank, found that 67% of Jewish respondents thought Israel should intensify its response to Hezbollah. That includes 46% of Jewish respondents who believed Israel should launch a deep offensive striking Lebanese infrastructure, and 21% who seek an intensified response that avoids striking Hezbollah infrastructure.

"There's a lot of pressure from the society to go to war and win," said Avivi, the retired general. "Unless Hezbollah tomorrow morning says, 'OK, we got the message. We're pulling out of south Lebanon,' war is imminent."

Such a war would almost certainly prove devastating to both sides.

Already, more than 500 people have been killed in Lebanon by Israeli strikes since Oct. 8, most of them fighters with Hezbollah and other armed groups but also more than 100 civilians. In northern Israel, at least 23 soldiers and 26 civilians have been killed by strikes from Lebanon.

Israel inflicted heavy damage on Lebanon during a monthlong war against Hezbollah in 2006 that ended in a stalemate. Israeli leaders have threatened even tougher action this time around, vowing to repeat the scenes of destruction from Gaza in Lebanon.

But Hezbollah also has built up its capabilities since 2006. Hezbollah has an estimated 150,000 rockets and missiles, some believed to have guidance systems that could threaten sensitive targets in Israel. It has also developed an increasingly sophisticated fleet of drones.

Capable of striking all parts of Israel, Hezbollah could bring life in Israel to a standstill and send hundreds of thousands of Israelis fleeing.

## Why is Congo struggling to contain mpox?

By RUTH ALONGA, CHINEDU ASADU and GERALD IMRAY Associated Press

KAVUMU, Congo (AP) — Health authorities have struggled to contain outbreaks of mpox in Congo, a huge central African country where a myriad of existing problems makes stemming the spread particularly hard.

Last month, the World Health Organization declared the outbreaks in Congo and about a dozen other African countries a global health emergency. And in Congo, scientists have identified a new strain of mpox that may spread more easily. It has reached areas where conflict and the displacement of a large number of people have already put health services under pressure.

Overall, Congo has more than 21,000 of the 25,093 confirmed and suspected mpox cases in Africa this year, according to WHO's most recent count.

Has Congo seen cases of mpox before?

Yes, Congo is one of the African countries where mpox has been endemic for decades.

Mpox, once known as monkeypox, comes from the same family of viruses as smallpox but causes milder symptoms such as fever. People with more serious cases can develop skin lesions. More than 720 people in Africa have died in the latest outbreaks, mostly in Congo.

Mpox is a zoonotic disease, meaning it can spread to humans from infected animals. In the global mpox outbreak of 2022, the virus spread between people primarily through sex and close physical contact.

What changed in Congo?

In September 2023, mpox spread to Congo's eastern province of South Kivu; it had previously been seen in the center and far west. Scientists then identified a new form of mpox in South Kivu that may be more infectious.

The WHO said that from the outbreak in South Kivu, the virus spread among people elsewhere in the country, arriving in neighboring province North Kivu. Those two provinces — some 2,000 kilometers (1,240 miles) from the capital, Kinshasa — face escalating violence, a humanitarian crisis and other issues.

What are the problems in eastern Congo?

More than 120 armed groups have been fighting each other and the Congolese army for years in the eastern part of the country over the control of minerals. That has forced millions of people fleeing violence into refugee camps or nearby towns.

That means mpox is hitting already-stretched health facilities. Dr. Musole Mulambamunva Robert, medical director of the Kavumu hospital in eastern Congo, said it is “truly a challenge” — sometimes treating as many as four times the facility’s capacity for patients.

With more than 6 million displaced people in the east, authorities and aid agencies were already struggling to provide food and healthcare, while fighting other diseases such as cholera. Many people have no access to soap, clean water or other basics.

Some eastern Congo communities are out of reach of health clinics — roads are unreliable, and hourslong risky boat trips are sometimes the only means of transport, said Mercy Muthee Lake of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent.

People can be more susceptible to severe mpox cases because of malnutrition and undiagnosed HIV, she said.

She also said health workers in eastern Congo have requested more mpox training as medications to treat fever and ease pain run out.

Health authorities “are up against it because it’s such a complex area,” said Chris Beyrer, of Duke University’s Global Health Institute.

What about vaccines?

Africa has no capacity to produce mpox vaccines. Around 250,000 doses have arrived in Congo from the European Union and the United States, and more are expected. Congolese authorities say they need around 3 million vaccines. It will likely be weeks before any vaccines reach people in eastern Congo.

For now, the vaccine is approved only for adults. There’s limited evidence of how it works in children.

Vaccines are desperately needed, but they’re just “an additional tool,” said Emmanuel Lampaert, the Congo representative for Doctors Without Borders. The key, Lampaert said, is still identifying cases, isolating patients, and executing grassroots health and education campaigns.

Local conditions make that trying — Lampaert noted it’s almost impossible to isolate cases among poor, displaced people.

“Families with six to eight children are living in a hut, which is maybe the space of the bed we are sleeping in,” he said. “So, this is the reality.”

Why are critics blasting the mpox response?

Unlike the millions of dollars that poured into Congo for Ebola and COVID aid, the response to mpox has been sluggish, many critics say.

Health experts say the sharp contrast is due to a lack of both funds and international interest.

“Ebola is the most dangerous virus in the world, and COVID wiped out the world economy,” said professor Ali Bulabula, who works on infectious diseases in the medical department at Congo’s University of Kindu. “While mpox is a public health emergency of international concern, there is a lack of in-depth research and interest in the virus, as it’s still seen as a tropical disease, localized to Africa with no major impact on Western economies.”

## Rampant adoption fraud separated generations of South Korean children from their families, AP finds

By KIM TONG-HYUNG and CLAIRE GALOFARO Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — As the plane descended into Seoul, Robert Calabretta swaddled himself in a blanket, his knees tucked into his chest like a baby in the womb. A single tear ran down his cheek.

The 34-year-old felt like a newborn — he was about to meet his parents for the first time since he was 3 days old.

Most of his life, he thought they’d abandoned him for adoption to the United States. When he finally found them, he learned the truth: The origin story on his adoption paperwork was a lie. Instead, he said, his parents were told in 1986 that their infant was very sick and they thought he had died.

“I am so sorry,” his birth father had written when they found each other, his words interrupted by fits of weeping. “I miss you. How did you endure this cruel world?”



# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 33 of 83

Calabretta is among a growing and vocal community of victims of an adoption system they accuse of searching out children for would-be parents, rather than finding parents for vulnerable children — sometimes with devastating consequences only surfacing today.

South Korea's government, Western countries and adoption agencies worked in tandem to supply some 200,000 Korean children to parents overseas, despite years of evidence they were being procured through questionable or downright unscrupulous means, an investigation led by The Associated Press found. Those children grew up and searched for their roots — and some realized they are not who they were told.

Their stories have sparked a reckoning that is rocking the international adoption industry, which was built in South Korea and spread around the world. European countries have launched investigations and halted international adoption. The South Korean government has accepted a fact-finding commission under pressure from adoptees, and hundreds have submitted their cases for review.

The AP investigation, done in collaboration with Frontline (PBS), was based on interviews with more than 80 adoptees in the U.S., Australia and six European countries, along with parents, agency employees, humanitarian workers and government officials. It also drew on more than 100 information requests and thousands of pages of documents — including many never publicly seen before and some the AP got declassified — from courts, archives, government files and adoption papers.

In dozens of cases AP examined with Frontline, it found: Children were kidnapped off the streets and sent abroad. Parents claim they were told their newborns were dead or too sick to survive, only to have them shipped away. Documents were fabricated to give children identities that belonged to somebody else, leading adoptees to anguished reunions with supposed parents — to later discover they were not related at all.

The agencies and governments each played a part in keeping the baby pipeline pumping. Adoption agencies created a competitive market for children and paid hospitals to supply them, documents show. The South Korean government not only knew of fraudulent practices but designed laws to speed up the exportation of children it deemed undesirable. Western governments turned a blind eye, sometimes even pressuring South Korea for children, while promoting the narrative that they were saving orphans with no other options.

Calabretta doesn't believe he was saved; he believes he was stolen. And many in his network of adult adoptees believe they were, too.

Advocates say the vast majority of adoptions are honest and end well. But it is impossible to know how many adoptions are fraudulent because unreliable documents prevent adoptees from finding their birth families and learning the truth. Government data obtained by AP shows less than a fifth of 15,000 adoptees like Calabretta, who have asked South Korea for help with family searches since 2012, have managed to reunite with relatives.

In 2019, a Korean government agency told Calabretta they had found his father. He pictured himself as a rock on a beach, with two waves crashing over it. The first was joy — he had been loved. The other was fury that something profound had been taken from him.

"You're constantly in flux between two worlds," he said, "the one you could have and should have been in, and the one where you are."

"A baby factory"

Adoptions from South Korea peaked in the 1980s, fueled by the government, just as Calabretta's parents arrived at the hospital with a blanket in which to carry their firstborn son home.

The adoption industry had grown out of the wreckage of the Korean War in the 1950s, when Americans took in the unwanted biracial children born of Korean women and Western soldiers. As it clawed its way out of post-war poverty, South Korea continued to rely on private adoption agencies as its social safety net, bringing millions of dollars into the economy and saving even more by never building its own child welfare program.

Meanwhile, in the West, the number of adoptable babies plummeted because of access to birth control and abortion. The desires of two cultures collided: couples in wealthy nations desperately wanted babies,

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 34 of 83

and South Korea desperately wanted to rid itself of mouths to feed.

As the supply of biracial babies dwindled, South Korea turned to those it saw as unwelcome citizens: fully-Korean children of poor families and unwed mothers.

Korean officials fit their laws to match American ones to make children adoptable for what some deride as "baby diplomacy" to satisfy Western demand. The government endorsed "proxy adoptions," for families to adopt children quickly without ever visiting Korea, meeting them by the planeloads at American airports.

In an internal memo from 1966 obtained by AP, International Social Service, a Geneva-based organization, wrote that it suspected the Korean government assessed agencies not by child welfare standards, but by the money they brought in.

"There is quite a bit of rivalry and competition among the different agencies, and it is not beyond agencies to bribe or pressure mothers for the release of these children, and not beyond agencies to try to compete with each other for the same child," officials noted in the document, now at the agency's archives at the University of Minnesota Libraries.

In 1976, Patricia Nye, east Asia director for ISS, concluded in a memo that the South Korean government was "entirely irresponsible." What was happening, she wrote, was "close to being scandalous, the mass exportation of children, Korea has been called a baby factory."

Nye, who has died, said publicly on a BBC program called "A Traffic in Babies," that Korean adoptions had "gone out of control."

"We are not talking about little pets or pieces of wood," Nye said into the camera. "It's almost like a trade in children ... Asian children flowing from Asia to Europe and North America."

The Korean government tried to downplay the concerns. Documents reveal an official insisted the show — which described the country's adoption program as "baby wholesaling" — actually depicted it as "organized and well-managed."

In December 1976, the government facilitated a new law that widened the legal definition of adoptable children, removed judicial oversight and granted vast powers to the heads of private agencies.

The government empowered four agencies to handle most adoptions: Holt Children's Services, which had pioneered sending Korean children to the U.S., and three others, Eastern Social Welfare Society, Korea Welfare Services and Korea Social Service. A 1983 Health Ministry audit cited all four agencies and accused Holt of providing larger-than-allowed payments to impoverished birth mothers. The ministry's response was to issue a "warning."

Records show that officials were aware of a laundry list of dubious practices in the industry: lost children were documented as abandoned; the origins of alleged orphans weren't verified; some were "disguised" by agencies as being born from unwed mothers to make them adoptable, according to Health Ministry records seen by AP. In the early 1980s, the government itself likened the agencies' child-hunting practices to "trafficking." At a meeting in 1982, documents show, the ministry admitted to child "intake" problems and cautioned agencies to improve their practices to avoid the appearance of "trafficking, profiteering." Yet the government still called for "as many adoptions as possible."

Calabretta was taken from the Red Cross Hospital in Daegu in 1986. His father, Lee Sung-soo, said an administrator told him his son had serious lung and heart problems. The family didn't have a lot of money. The only option, the administrator said, was a high-risk and very expensive surgery that could leave the baby dead or severely disabled.

She advised Lee to relinquish his son to Holt, which would pay for the surgery and find a home for a disabled child if he survived.

Lee said he signed the paper, believing it was the only way to save his son, and wept. The AP could not verify Lee's account — the hospital closed and its records were destroyed. Information obtained through a records request show that 470 children born in that hospital were adopted during the 80s and 90s.

"It felt like the sky was falling," Lee said. "I felt like my heart was being ripped apart."

By then, agencies were procuring most of their children directly from hospitals and maternity homes, which often received illegal payments for babies, records show. Though the stated intention of adoption was to spare children from orphanages, they gathered more than 4,600 children from hospitals in 1988,

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 35 of 83

60% of their supply.

"In paying rewards for childbirth delivery costs to hospitals, maternity homes, local administrative offices and others when acquiring children for adoption," the Health Ministry wrote in 1988, "the social welfare institutions (agencies) have lost their morality and have descended to become trafficking institutions."

A government audit the following year shows that Holt made nearly 100 illegal payments to hospitals during six months in 1988, worth about \$16,000 now. Eastern Social Welfare Society gave even more, now worth about \$64,000, to hospitals over that period.

The South Korean government declined to answer questions about its responsibility for the past, saying it will let the fact-finding commission finish its work. In a statement, the Health Ministry acknowledged that skyrocketing adoptions in the 1970s-80s were possibly driven by an intent to reduce welfare spending to balance cuts in foreign aid.

Lee Moo-ja, a retired local official in Boryeong city, recalled a sense of helplessness during the 1980s. Abandoned children were supposed to be reported to city officials, who would assign them to an orphanage, she said. But instead, agencies were directly scooping them up, and the pleading letters she sent to hospitals went nowhere.

The national government wasn't interested in enforcement, she said, leaving local officials like her powerless to stop it.

Calabretta's parents felt powerless too; they got onto an elevator with other couples holding their newborn children. All they had was the empty blanket.

"Is this really all for children?"

With the government on their side, agencies raced against time for children.

Employees were told to process them as quickly as they could, said two former adoption workers who spoke anonymously because Korean law forbids them from publicizing confidential information.

"All I heard was work faster, faster," said one, employed at an agency from 1979 to 1984. "Do it faster and faster."

Even now, the woman clenches her hands and clutches a pillow as she said she convinced herself they were saving orphans. She couldn't help but quietly wonder: "Is this really all for children?"

Agencies had intake workers scour every region of the country for children, she said. They invested "zero effort" in confirming a child was truly orphaned.

She questioned whether dubious practices were baked into the system, from beginning to end. A colleague once brought in a girl allegedly abandoned in Daegu, about 145 miles away from Seoul. She refused to process the girl for adoption because she thought it was too soon to conclude she was abandoned. Not long after, the Daegu worker sent the same girl again, with the same photo — but a new name and background story that claimed she'd been abandoned earlier.

The former worker said she never learned whether the girl was adopted.

Some lost children ended up overseas.

Laurie Bender was approached by a strange woman while playing in the front yard in South Korea in 1975. She remembers the woman saying that Bender's family didn't want her anymore because her mother had another baby. She went with the woman, and felt so sad she thought she might die.

Bender says she was 4, but Korea calculates birthdays differently and her records say she was 6.

Every day, her mother, Han Tae-soon, went to police stations, government offices, adoption agencies. Every night, she slept with a picture of her missing daughter.

That picture was displayed everywhere — in subway stations, on lamp posts, on bags of snacks that advertised missing children, the Korean version of American milk cartons. But Bender was on the other side of the globe — sent by Holt to an American family who believed she was an orphan.

The U.S. took in the highest number of orphans by far, and to be eligible for a visa, they had to have lost one or both parents to death, disappearance or abandonment. The agencies seized on the word abandonment, applying it to most of the children they acquired.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 36 of 83

Records from 1980 to 1987 show that more than 90% of the Korean children sent to the West almost certainly had known relatives, said Philsik Shin, a scholar at Korea's Anyang University. The number of children sent for adoption was often more than 10 times higher than the police count for abandoned children, he found — close to 9,000 in 1985.

Listing children as abandoned made adoptions easier because agencies didn't have to verify child origins or obtain parental relinquishment. It was "almost customary" to document children as abandoned, said Helen Noh, who matched hundreds of children with U.S. parents at Holt Children's Services from 1981 to 1982.

Now a scholar at Seoul's Soongsil University, Noh said Holt workers understood the agency was charging adopters about \$3,000 per child.

"My salary was 240,000 won, which is like less than \$200 a month," Noh said. "If you send one child ... that amount could pay at least one worker for the whole year."

Documents obtained by AP show that agencies were likely charging even more, around \$4,000 to \$6,000. But they pocketed some of that money through improper means, such as charging for travel expenses for adoption workers but arranging for commercial passengers to carry babies instead.

Workers tried to meet specific requests from adoptive families. Some asked for siblings, Noh said, so she and her colleagues would compete over the small number of twins in their networks.

Another former worker, employed at two agencies from the 1970s to early 1990s, said anybody facing challenges in raising their children would be strongly encouraged to give them away.

"Many of the children we gathered would have stayed with their biological parents with a little help," the former worker said. "But what we heard (from management) was always the same — if we don't take that child, another adoption agency will."

Private counseling records in a 1988 Holt document obtained by AP show that some parents who relinquished their children soon pleaded for them back. The agency's workers told them that their children would thrive under good Western parents and may return home someday rich or "with Ph.Ds."

In one case, a mother returned and asked to see her son. The boy was still in Seoul, but a Holt worker told the mother he'd been flown to the U.S.

"After being told the lie," the worker wrote, "the birth mother began to regain her peace of mind as expected."

Susan Soonkeum Cox, who long worked for Holt International, the Oregon-based U.S. arm of the Holt adoption network, denied widespread problems. She said the goal was always to find good homes for children who would have otherwise grown up in orphanages.

"Has there been some activity that shouldn't have happened? Probably. We're human and everybody is different. There's good social workers, there's bad social workers, there's good employees, bad employees," she said. "But...the accusation of systemic, deliberate wrongdoing, that I reject."

The Seoul-based Holt Children's Services, which split from the American agency in the 1970s, and the three other Korean agencies declined to comment on specific cases.

Holt Korea has in recent years denied accusations of wrongdoing and attributed adoptee complaints to misunderstandings and Korea's social welfare issues. Kim Jin Sook, president of Eastern, has said the agency carried out government policies to find homes for "discarded children."

But some other agencies on the ground started closing their programs because of ethical concerns.

In the 1970s, Francis Carlin ran South Korea's Catholic Relief Services, which facilitated about 30 adoptions a month, compared to hundreds by the larger agencies. The demand from the West was intense, and there weren't enough legitimate orphans to feed it, he said, leading to "a lot of the compromises, a lot of the hanky panky."

The larger agencies toured orphanages, grabbing up healthy babies and leaving older and disabled children, he said.

"These, I would call them brokers, were going out and trying to get more and more children," Carlin said when reached by AP. "They would put the legitimate parent on a guilt trip and say, what are you doing? You can't afford to take care of this child.... Why don't you just step back and let them have a better life? You're so selfish."

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 37 of 83

One Korean social worker expressed disgust in words so crushing they stuck with Carlin all these years: "It's sickening, just sickening."

Catholic Relief Services ceased its adoption program in 1974. Carlin remembers standing up at a meeting of humanitarian organizations: "We are beginning to slide into the abyss," he said.

Four decades later, Laurie Bender took a DNA test because her own daughter was curious about their heritage. In 2019, she got a call: "Your mother has been looking for you."

Bender dropped the phone.

"It's like a hole in your heart has been healed, you finally feel like a complete person," Bender said. "It's like you've been living a fake life and everything you know is not true."

Bender and her daughter flew to South Korea just weeks later. Her mother, Han Tae-soon, wore her best outfit and lipstick for the first time in a long time. She recognized her daughter immediately in the airport and ran to her, screaming, moaning, running her fingers through her hair.

Han, who is in her 70s, has notebooks feverishly annotated with English translations, written during countless hours trying to learn her daughter's language. Amid the photos of her children on her living room wall is a black-and-white one of Bender as a little girl, stuck in time.

Han plans to sue the South Korean government and Holt for robbing them of ever having a real relationship.

"I feel like I am dying. I really am dying," she said. "There's so little time for me."

She jabbed her finger at paperwork that sent her daughter away.

"Isn't this a government seal?" she demanded. "Why did you make this up and sell away other people's children?"

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This story is part of an ongoing investigation led by The Associated Press in collaboration with FRONTLINE (PBS). The investigation includes an interactive and the upcoming documentary South Korea's Adoption Reckoning, premiering Sept. 20 on PBS & online.

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## Switched identities

This system turned children into people with no history, no parents, no ties.

Many adoptees will never know the basic facts of their lives — their birthdays, their birth parents, if they were wanted or truly abandoned — because their documents are false.

Robyn Joy Park, adopted to the United States, cherished her documents so much that she tattooed her adoption number — 82C-1320 — on her back. It was her only tether to her motherland.

Those documents said she was a girl named Park Joo Young, born in Busan in August 1982, and her unmarried mother couldn't afford to keep her. In 2007, Park traveled to Korea to meet the woman that her adoption agency, Eastern, listed as her mother.

Their bond deepened slowly over years. They visited relatives, held hands, shared hotel rooms — the mother spoonfed her rice. The woman's son changed his name to Park Joon Young, to share the "Young" syllable in line with Korean naming traditions for siblings.

Five years passed. Park asked the woman to take a DNA test in the hope of finding her father.

They were not related. She was not Park Joo Young — she was another, unknown, girl.

"I really was so hurt and stunned and devastated and incredibly angry," Park said. "I could only imagine what it was like for her."

She lost touch with the woman, although she remains in contact with the man she considered her brother. Her agency offered her nothing but an apology, and declined to comment when reached by AP.

Her story is not uncommon. When children processed for adoption died, became too sick to travel or were found by their biological families, agencies often replaced them with other children instead of redoing the process from scratch, according to former adoption workers. At a meeting with an adoptee in 2021 where AP was present, a longtime worker said Western partner agencies were willing to take "any child of the same sex and similar age, because it would take too much time to start over again."

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 38 of 83

The AP has spoken to 10 others who found that their identity was switched with someone else.

One of them, Mia Sang Jørnø, raised in Denmark, developed a close relationship with the family of the man listed as her father by her agency, Korea Social Service. She attended his funeral in 2000, even joining relatives as they received guests through the traditional three-day mourning procession.

He had given her the name of her mother, and she worked up the courage to contact her. They took a DNA test.

They weren't related.

The agency told her that her paperwork was mistaken, and she wasn't even the girl named on her documents, Park Sang Ok. She was Kim Eun-hye. She had mourned a father who wasn't hers.

"I always have this kind of restlessness, she said, "of just not knowing that part of me, my identity."

KSS did not respond to questions. In letters seen by AP and Frontline, the agency has admitted to adoptees that the stories on their paperwork were invented to get the adoptions through.

"I would like to apologize for the wrong information in your adoption paper," a KSS worker wrote to a Danish adoptee in 2016. "It was made up just for adoption procedure." The worker could not be reached by AP.

In 2022, the agency emailed another adoptee that their "real background is different" than listed, apologizing that the discrepancy might "confuse" them.

Neither Park nor Jørnø ever found their real parents. They both think often of the girls whose identities they were given, and wonder: What happened to her?

"We were supposed to be a happy family"

The Korean government cracked down on the adoption industry when the 1988 Olympics brought attention to the baby trade as a national shame.

The Health Ministry instructed agencies to "improve" their practices and stop "touring" hospitals and orphanages to gather children, according to a document obtained by AP. They were told they could be punished if they continued to "competitively engage in unlawful practices."

Adoptions plummeted, from around 8,000 a year in the mid-1980s to around 2,000 a year in the 1990s. But tens of thousands of children were already overseas, including Calabretta.

Hospital officials told Calabretta's mother to assume he had died. She went to a temple three times to offer a Buddhist ceremony to bless the soul of the dead.

The documents that went with him to the U.S. in 1986 described him as a "normal healthy baby, adoptable," born to an unwed mother, and made no mention of a surgery.

Calabretta returned to South Korea in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. His father, Lee Sung-soo, could not wait out the two-week quarantine and showed up outside the apartment the next day.

Calabretta threw open the window. "Dad!" he shouted.

"My son!" Lee shouted back.

"We were supposed to be a happy family, not separated. He was my precious firstborn son," Lee said. "For over 30 years, he lived in a foreign land against his will. That makes my heart break."

Calabretta visits South Korea often, and they talk on the phone every few days. He has the same odd divot in his ear as his mother, the same laugh as his father, the same taste in shoes and jackets and music, the same allergies.

All those years, Calabretta's mother kept the blanket she'd carried empty out of the hospital, a symbol of the absence where her son should be.

He asked her to rename him, to reclaim him, as her son and a son of Korea. In Korea, there is a sentiment that something isn't truly yours until you name it, and once you do, you must take care of it.

So he prefers his new name now: Hanil Lee.

## A gold mining town in Congo has become an mpox hot spot as a new strain spreads

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

KAMITUGA, Congo (AP) — Slumped on the ground over a mound of dirt, Divine Wisoba pulled weeds from her daughter's grave. The 1-month-old died from mpox in eastern Congo in August, but Wisoba, 21, was too traumatized to attend the funeral.

In her first visit to the cemetery, she wept into her shirt for the child she lost and worried about the rest of her family. "When she was born, it was as if God had answered our prayers — we wanted a girl," Wisoba said of little Maombi Katengey. "But our biggest joy was transformed into devastation."

Her daughter is one of more than 6,000 people officials suspect have contracted the disease in South Kivu province, the epicenter of the world's latest mpox outbreak, in what the World Health Organization has labeled a global health emergency. A new strain of the virus is spreading, largely through skin-to-skin contact, including but not limited to sex. A lack of funds, vaccines and information is making it difficult to stem the spread, according to alarmed disease experts.

Mpox — which causes mostly mild symptoms like fever and body aches, but can trigger serious cases with prominent blisters on the face, hands, chest and genitals — had been spreading mostly undetected for years in Africa, until a 2022 outbreak reached more than 70 countries. Globally, gay and bisexual men made up the vast majority of cases in that outbreak. But officials note mpox has long disproportionately affected children in Africa, and they say cases are now rising sharply among kids, pregnant women and other vulnerable groups, with many types of close contact responsible for the spread.

Health officials have zeroed in on Kamituga, a remote yet bustling gold mining town of some 300,000 people that attracts miners, sex workers and traders who are constantly on the move. Cases from other parts of eastern Congo can be traced back here, officials say, with the first originating in the nightclub scene.

Since this outbreak began, one year ago, nearly 1,000 people in Kamituga have been infected. Eight have died, half of them children.

### Challenges on the ground

Last month, the World Health Organization said mpox outbreaks might be stopped in the next six months, with governments' leadership and cooperation.

But in Kamituga, people say they face a starkly different reality.

There's a daily average of five new cases at the general hospital, which is regularly near capacity. Overall in South Kivu, weekly new suspected cases have skyrocketed from about 12 in January to 600 in August, according to province health officials.

Even that's likely an underestimate, they say, because of a lack of access to rural areas, the inability of many residents to seek care, and Kamituga's transient nature.

Locals say they simply don't have enough information about mpox.

Before her daughter got sick, Wisoba said, she was infected herself but didn't know it.

Painful lesions emerged around her genitals, making walking difficult. She thought she had a common sexually transmitted infection and sought medicine at a pharmacy. Days later, she went to the hospital with her newborn and was diagnosed with mpox. She recovered, but her daughter developed lesions on her foot.

Nearly a week later, Maombi died at the same hospital that treated her mother.

Wisoba said she didn't know about mpox until she got it. She wants the government to invest more in teaching people protective measures.

Local officials can't reach areas more than a few miles outside Kamituga to track suspected cases or inform residents. They broadcast radio messages but say that doesn't reach far enough.

Kasindi Mwenyelwata goes door to door describing how to detect mpox — looking for fevers, aches or lesions. But the 42-year-old community leader said a lack of money means he doesn't have the right materials, such as posters showing images of patients, which he finds more powerful than words.

ALIMA, one of the few aid groups working on mpox in Kamituga, lacks funds to set up programs or

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 40 of 83

clinics that would reach some 150,000 people, with its budget set to run out at year's end, according to program coordinator Dr. Dally Muamba.

If support keeps waning and mpox spreads, he said, "there will be an impact on the economy, people will stop coming to the area as the epidemic takes its toll. ... And as the disease grows, will resources follow?"

The vaccine vacuum

Health experts agree: What's needed most are vaccines — even if they go only to adults, under emergency approval in Congo.

None has arrived in Kamituga, though it's a priority city in South Kivu, officials said. It's unclear when or how they will. The main road into town is unpaved — barely passable by car during the ongoing rainy season.

Once they make it here, it's unclear whether supply will meet demand for those who are at greatest risk and first in line: health staff, sex workers, miners and motorcycle taxi drivers.

Congo's government has budgeted more than \$190 million for its initial mpox response, which includes the purchase of 3 million vaccine doses, according to a draft national mpox plan, widely circulating among health experts and aid groups this month and seen by The Associated Press. But so far, just 250,000 doses have arrived in Congo and the government's given only \$10 million, according to the finance ministry.

Most people with mild cases recover in less than two weeks. But lesions can get infected, and children or immunocompromised people are more prone to severe cases.

Doctors can ensure lesions are clean and give pain medication or antibiotics for secondary infections such as sepsis.

But those who recover can get the virus again.

A new variant, a lack of understanding

Experts say a lack of resources and knowledge about the new strain makes it difficult to advise people on protecting themselves. An internal report circulated among aid groups and agencies and seen by AP labeled confidence in the available information about mpox in eastern Congo and neighboring countries low.

While the variant is known to be more easily transmissible through sex, it's unclear how long the virus remains in the system. Doctors tell recovered patients to abstain from sex for three months, but acknowledge the number's largely arbitrary.

"Studies haven't clarified if you're still contagious or not ... if you can or can't have sex with your wife," said Dr. Steven Bilembo, of Kamituga's general hospital.

Doctors say they're seeing cases they simply don't understand, such as pregnant women losing babies. Of 32 pregnant women infected since January, nearly half lost the baby through miscarriage or stillbirth, hospital statistics show.

Alice Neema was among them. From the hospital's isolation ward, she told AP she'd noticed lesions around her genitals and a fever — but didn't have enough money to travel the 30 miles (50 kilometers) on motorbike for help in time. She miscarried after her diagnosis.

As information trickles in, locals say fear spreads alongside the new strain.

Diego Nyago said he'd brought his 2-year-old son, Emile, to the hospital for circumcision when he developed a fever and lesions.

It was mpox — and today, Nyago is grateful he was already at the hospital.

"I didn't believe that children could catch this disease," he said as doctors gently poured water over the boy to bring his temperature down. "Some children die quickly, because their families aren't informed.

"Those who die are the ones who stay at home."



## **A news site that covers Haitian-Americans is facing harassment over its post-debate coverage of Ohio**

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Journalists at a news site that covers the Haitian community in the United States say they've been harassed and intimidated with racist messages for covering a fake story about immigrants eating the pets of people in an Ohio town.

One editor at the Haitian Times, a 25-year-old online publication, was "swatted" this week with police turning up at her home to investigate a false report of a gruesome crime. The news site canceled a community forum it had planned for Springfield, Ohio and has shut down public comments on its stories about the issue because of threats and vile posts.

The Times, which had the Committee to Protect Journalists conduct safety training for its journalists in Haiti, has now asked for advice on how to protect staff in the United States, said Garry Pierre-Pierre, founder and publisher.

"We've never faced anything like this," Pierre-Pierre said Wednesday.

The site says it isn't backing down

The Times has debunked and aggressively covered the aftermath of the story about immigrants supposedly eating the dogs and cats of other Springfield residents, as it was spread by Ohio Sen. JD Vance, Donald Trump's Republican running mate in the presidential election, and Trump himself in his debate with Democrat Kamala Harris.

Despite receiving hundreds of these messages, the site isn't backing down, said Pierre-Pierre, a former reporter at The New York Times who echoed a mission statement from his old employer in making that promise.

"We do not want to hibernate," he said. "We're taking the precautions that are necessary. But our first duty is to tell the truth without fear or favor, and we have no fear."

Pierre-Pierre, who emigrated to the United States in 1975, started the Haitian Times to cover issues involving first- and second-generation Haitians in the United States, along with reporting on what is happening in their ancestral home. It started as a print publication that went online only in 2012 and now averages 10,000 to 15,000 visitors a day, although its readership has expanded in recent weeks.

Macollvie Neel, the New York-based special projects editor, was the staff member who had police officers show up at her doorstep on Monday.

It was triggered when a Haitian advocacy group received an email about a crime at Neel's address. They, in turn, notified police who showed up to investigate. Not only did the instigators know where Neel lived, they covered their tracks by funneling the report through another organization, she said.

Neel said she had a premonition something like this might happen, based on hateful messages she received. But it's still intimidating, made more so because the police who responded were not aware of the concept of doxxing, or tracing people online for the purpose of harassment. She said police searched her home and left.

She was always aware that journalism, by its nature, can make people unhappy with you. This takes the threat to an entirely new level. Racist hate groups who are ready to seize on any issue are sophisticated and well-funded, she said.

"This is a new form of domestic terrorism," she said, "and we have to treat it as such."

They're receiving some backup

Katherine Jacobsen, the Committee to Protect Journalists' U.S., Canada and Caribbean program coordinator, said it's a particularly acute case of journalists being harassed in retaliation for their coverage of a story. "It's outrageous," she said. "We should not be having this conversation. Yet we are."

Even before Springfield received national attention in recent weeks, the Haitian Times had been covering the influx of immigrants to the Midwest in search of jobs and a lower cost of living, Pierre-Pierre said. A story currently on its site about Springfield details how the furor "reflects America's age-old battle with newcomers it desperately needs to survive."

Another article on the site talks about the NAACP, Haitian-American groups and other activists from across the country coming to the aid of Springfield residents caught in the middle of the story.

Similarly, the Times has heard from several other journalists — including from Pierre-Pierre's old employer — who have offered support. "I'm deeply touched," he said.

## **At least 15 dead since July and thousands of hectares scorched as wildfires sweep Peru**

LIMA, Peru (AP) — Wildfires in Peru have left at least 15 dead since July and more than 3,000 hectares (7,400 acres) of cultivated land and natural areas scorched, authorities said Monday.

Prime Minister Gustavo Adrianzén told reporters that the fires were started by human activity and that 22 of the 24 regions that make up the country have active outbreaks. He added that clouds, smoke and winds were hampering the operations of the aircraft available to fight the fires.

A Civil Defense report seen by The Associated Press indicates that since July at least 15 people have died and another 98 have been injured due to the fires. Of the fatalities, 10 died in the last two weeks and more than 1,800 people have been affected. The livestock sector was reported to have lost 334 animals.

Peru's National Forest and Wildlife Service, SERFOR, indicated that the effects of climate change intensify the conditions that facilitate the spread of fire.

"Extremely strong winds and prolonged droughts dry out vegetation, turning it into highly flammable fuel," said Romina Liza, a specialist in monitoring and management of forest fires at SERFOR. "This allows the fires to spread rapidly."

Some of the most complicated fires are in the Amazon region, which borders Ecuador, the head of civil defense, Juan Urcarigui, told a local television station.

## **Adoption fraud separated generations of South Korean children from their families, AP finds**

By KIM TONG-HYUNG and CLAIRE GALOFARO Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's government, Western countries and adoption agencies worked in tandem to supply some 200,000 Korean children to parents overseas, despite years of evidence they were being procured through questionable or downright unscrupulous means, an investigation led by The Associated Press has found.

Those children grew up and searched for their roots — and some realized they are not who they were told. Their stories have sparked a reckoning that is rocking the international adoption industry.

The investigation, in collaboration with Frontline (PBS), was based on interviews with more than 80 adoptees in the U.S., Australia and six European countries, along with parents, agency employees, humanitarian workers and government officials. It also drew on more than 100 information requests and thousands of pages of documents — including many never publicly seen before and some the AP got declassified.

In dozens of cases AP examined, it found: Children were kidnapped off the streets. Parents claim they were told their newborns were dead or very sick, only to have them shipped away. Documents were fabricated, leading adoptees to anguished later reunions with supposed parents — only to discover they were not related at all.

Government officials declined to answer questions about its past, saying it will let a fact-finding commission finish its work. But in a written statement, the Health Ministry acknowledged that skyrocketing adoptions in the 1970s-80s were possibly driven by an intent to reduce welfare spending.

The adoption agencies declined to comment on specific cases, but have long defended their practices as a way to search for foreign families for vulnerable children.

Here are further findings:

Desperate to reduce spending, South Korea targeted its weakest citizens

Korea's adoption program grew out of the wreckage of the 1950-53 Korean War, when Americans took

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 43 of 83

in the unwanted biracial children of Korean women and Western soldiers. It expanded to include the children of unwed mothers and poor families. Korea relied on private adoption agencies as its social safety net, bringing millions of dollars into the economy.

Korean officials fit their laws to match American ones to make children adoptable in the West, where access to birth control and abortion had caused the domestic supply of adoptable babies to plummet. The government endorsed "proxy adoptions" for families to adopt children quickly without ever visiting Korea. Korea also rewrote its laws to remove minimal safeguards or judicial oversight.

Concerns were raised early. In a 1966 internal memo obtained by AP, International Social Service, a Geneva-based organization, wrote that it suspected the Korean government assessed agencies not by child welfare standards, but by the money they brought in. Korean officials were aware that lost children were documented as abandoned; the origins of alleged orphans weren't verified; and some were "disguised" by agencies as being born from unwed mothers to make them adoptable, according to records seen by AP. In the early 1980s, the government itself likened the agencies' child-hunting practices to "trafficking."

Workers warned that adoption agencies were aggressively hunting for children

Former adoption workers told AP that agencies paid to have every corner of the country scoured for children. One worker, employed at an agency from 1979 to 1984, said the agencies had no process to verify the backgrounds of children and invested "zero effort" in confirming the child was orphaned.

Private counseling records in a 1988 document prepared by the country's largest adoption agency, Holt Children's Services, show that some parents who relinquished their children soon pleaded for them back, with no success. The document, obtained by AP, describes how agency's workers told parents that their children would thrive in good Western families and may return home someday rich or "with Ph.Ds."

Humanitarian workers openly worried about what they were seeing. Francis Carlin, who then ran Korea's Catholic Relief Services, said there weren't enough legitimate orphans to feed Western demand, which led to "a lot of the compromises, a lot of the hanky panky" involving larger agencies.

"These, I would call them brokers, were going out and trying to get more and more children," Carlin said. "They would put the legitimate parent on a guilt trip and say, what are you doing? You can't afford to take care of this child.... You're so selfish."

Children were stolen from parents, bought from hospitals and falsely described as abandoned

By the 1980s, agencies were procuring most of their children directly from hospitals and maternity homes, which often received illegal payments for babies, according to records seen by AP. Though the stated intention of adoption was to spare children from orphanages, they gathered more than 4,600 children from hospitals in 1988, 60% of their supply.

A government audit in 1989 shows that Holt Children's Services, the biggest agency, made nearly 100 illegal payments to hospitals during six months in 1988, worth about \$16,000 now. Eastern Social Welfare Society gave even more, worth about \$65,340, to hospitals over that period.

Despite the agencies' common practice of labeling children as "abandoned," records from 1980 to 1987 show that more than 90% of the Korean children sent to the West almost certainly had known relatives, said Philsik Shin, a scholar at Korea's Anyang University. It was "almost customary" to document children as abandoned, said Helen Noh, who matched hundreds of children with U.S. parents at Holt from 1981 to 1982.

As complaints mount, South Korea is under pressure

Robyn Joy Park, who was adopted by parents in Minnesota in 1982, traveled to South Korea in 2007 to meet a woman her agency, Eastern, said was her biological mother. She developed a deep bond with the woman over several years, but was devastated after a DNA test in 2012 showed they weren't related.

The AP spoke to 10 others who found their identity was switched with someone else. When children processed for adoption died, became too sick to travel or were found by their biological families, agencies often replaced them with other children, according to former adoption workers. At a meeting with an adoptee in 2021 where AP was present, a longtime worker said Western partner agencies were willing to take "any child of the same sex and similar age, because it would take too much time to start over again."

Park is among more than 360 adoptees who have asked South Korea's Truth and Reconciliation Commission to investigate the circumstances surrounding their adoptions.

Nobody knows how many Korean adoptions were questionable or even fraudulent, in part because of the privacy and sensitivities involved along with the vagueness and unreliability of the documents. Advocates say many adoptions have happy endings.

## **Inside the Brooklyn federal jail where Sean 'Diddy' Combs is locked up: violence, squalor and death**

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — As they unsuccessfully fought to keep Sean "Diddy" Combs out of jail after his sex trafficking arrest, the music mogul's lawyers highlighted a litany of horrors at the Brooklyn federal lockup where he was headed: horrific conditions, rampant violence and multiple deaths.

Combs, 54, was sent to the Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn on Tuesday — a place that's been described as "hell on earth" and an "ongoing tragedy" — after pleading not guilty in a case that accuses him of physically and sexually abusing women for more than a decade.

The facility, the only federal jail in New York City, has been plagued by problems since it opened in the 1990s. In recent years, its conditions have been so stark that some judges have refused to send people there. It has also been home to a number of high-profile inmates, including R. Kelly, Ghislaine Maxwell and cryptocurrency fraudster Sam Bankman-Fried.

In a statement, the federal Bureau of Prisons said: "We also take seriously addressing the staffing and other challenges at MDC Brooklyn." An agency team is working to fix problems, including by adding permanent correctional and medical staff, remedying more than 700 backlogged maintenance requests and answering judges' concerns.

A judge on Wednesday denied a request by Combs' lawyers to let him await trial under house arrest at his \$48 million mansion on an island in Miami Beach, Florida.

Here are some important things to know about the jail:

What is the Metropolitan Detention Center?

The Bureau of Prisons opened the facility, known as MDC Brooklyn, as a jail in the early 1990s.

It's used mainly for post-arrest detention for people awaiting trial in federal courts in Manhattan or Brooklyn. Other inmates are there to serve short sentences following convictions.

The facility, in an industrial area on the Brooklyn waterfront, has about 1,200 detainees, down from more than 1,600 in January. It has outdoor recreation facilities, a medical unit with examination rooms and a dental suite. It has a separate wing for educational programs and the jail's library.

The Bureau of Prisons closed its crumbling Metropolitan Correctional Center in Manhattan in 2021, leaving MDC Brooklyn as its only facility in the nation's largest city.

What are some problems with MDC Brooklyn?

Detainees have long complained about rampant violence, dreadful conditions, severe staffing shortages and the widespread smuggling of drugs and other contraband, some of it facilitated by employees. At the same time, they say they've been subject to frequent lockdowns and have been barred from leaving their cells for visits, calls, showers or exercise.

In June, Uriel Whyte, 37, was stabbed to death at the jail. A month later, Edwin Cordero, 36, died after he was hurt in a brawl. At least four people detained at the jail have died by suicide in the last three years.

Cordero's lawyer, Andrew Dalack, told The New York Times his client was just the victim of "an overcrowded, understaffed and neglected federal jail that is hell on earth."

At least six MDC Brooklyn staff members have been charged with crimes in the last five years. Some were accused of accepting bribes or providing contraband such as drugs, cigarettes, and cellphones, according to an Associated Press analysis of agency-related arrests.

MDC Brooklyn has also come under fire for its response to debilitating infrastructure breakdowns and the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, a week-long power failure sparked unrest among shivering inmates and

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 45 of 83

drew concerns from federal watchdogs. In March 2020, the jail had the first federal inmate to test positive for COVID-19.

As of last November, according to court filings, MDC Brooklyn was operating at about 55% of full staffing, which was taxing to employees and added to its security woes.

What is being done about these problems?

Judges and advocates have taken notice, excoriating the Bureau of Prisons for “dangerous, barbaric conditions” and pressing the agency to make improvements. Some judges have moved away from sending defendants to MDC Brooklyn or have given reduced sentences because of the conditions there.

In January, U.S. District Judge Furman took the rare step of allowing Gustavo Chavez, 70, to remain free on bail after his conviction for drug crimes rather than locking him up at the Brooklyn jail to await sentencing.

“Prosecutors no longer even put up a fight, let alone dispute that the state of affairs is unacceptable,” Furman wrote.

In August, U.S. District Judge Gary Brown said he would vacate a 75-year-old defendant’s nine-month sentence for tax fraud and place him on home confinement if the Bureau of Prisons sent him to MDC Brooklyn.

In response, the Bureau of Prisons said it had “temporarily paused” sending any defendants convicted of crimes to the jail to serve their sentences. In a statement Tuesday, the agency said 43 people were currently serving sentences in a minimum-security unit at the jail.

What other notable people have been detained at MDC Brooklyn?

Combs is just the latest celebrity inmate to be locked up at MDC Brooklyn, joining a list that includes Maxwell, Kelly, Bankman-Fried and the rapper Fetty Wap.

Other high-profile detainees have included Pharma Bro Martin Shkreli, NXIVM sex cult founder Keith Raniere, former Mexican government official Genaro Garcia Luna and ex-Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez Alvarado.

What happened to New York City’s other federal jail?

The Metropolitan Correctional Center in Manhattan closed in 2021 after a slew of problems that came to light after Jeffrey Epstein’s suicide there two years earlier.

The jail — next to the courthouse where Combs was arraigned — was plagued by lax security, severe staffing shortages and squalid, unsafe conditions including falling concrete, freezing temperatures and busted cells.

People detained at the facility were relocated to MDC Brooklyn or a medium-security prison in Otisville, New York.

What have Combs’ lawyers and prosecutors said?

Combs’ lawyers argued in paperwork seeking his release that the Metropolitan Detention Center is not fit for pretrial detention. They cited recent detainee deaths, and the concerns shared by judges that the jail is no place for anyone to be held.

Asked about keeping a high-profile inmate like Combs locked up, particularly in light of Epstein’s 2019 death, Manhattan-based U.S. Attorney Damian Williams said: “We are concerned with anyone’s safety whenever they are detained prior to trial.”

“I do not draw any sort of connection between Jeffrey Epstein’s suicide and what may or may not happen to any other defendant while they are detained pretrial,” he added.

Combs’ lawyer, Marc Agnifilo, said Wednesday that the rapper is being held in MDC Brooklyn’s special housing unit, which offers an extra layer of security but can make trial preparation more onerous. He asked that Combs be moved to a New Jersey jail, but a judge said it’s up to the Bureau of Prisons to decide.

Is it just MDC Brooklyn, or do all federal prisons have issues?

An ongoing Associated Press investigation has uncovered deep, previously unreported flaws within the Bureau of Prisons, an agency with more than 30,000 employees, 158,000 inmates, 122 facilities and an annual budget of about \$8 billion.

AP reporting has revealed dozens of escapes, chronic violence, deaths and severe staffing shortages

that have hampered responses to emergencies, including inmate assaults and suicides.

In April, the Bureau of Prisons said it was closing its women's prison in Dublin, California, known as the "rape club," giving up on attempts to reform the facility after an AP investigation exposed staff-on-inmate sexual abuse.

In July, President Joe Biden signed a law strengthening oversight of the Bureau of Prisons after the AP's reporting shined a spotlight on the agency's many flaws. \_\_\_\_

## Threats and assassination attempts come with the office Donald Trump once held and is seeking again

By GARY FIELDS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former President Donald Trump, following an apparent assassination attempt on him on Sunday, claimed that overheated rhetoric from Democrats was responsible for him being under threat.

It turns out, records show, that threats come with the office that he once held and is trying to win again, and occur far more frequently than is widely known.

An examination of Syracuse University's Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, known as TRAC, shows that since 1986 when Ronald Reagan was in the White House, the federal government has prosecuted 1,444 cases of threats against presidents or others in line of presidential succession.

The highest number of prosecutions in a single year came in 1987 during the Reagan years when there were 73. TRAC data shows there were 72 cases brought in 2002 during the George W. Bush administration. The Bush administration also had the highest number of cases over its eight-year span with 383, a time of heightened tension during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Prosecutors brought 343 cases when Bill Clinton was president and 213 during former President Barack Obama's two terms. There were 68 cases brought in Trump's first term. Reagan had 200 in the last three years of his presidency and 213 cases were brought during George H.W. Bush's one term.

The number of convictions was highest in the George W. Bush and Clinton years.

TRAC is a widely used database research tool established in the 1980s by the Newhouse School and the Martin J. Whitman School of Management and created with government data obtained through federal open records laws and court litigation.

Trump falls into numerous categories as a former president and presidential candidate. There are statutes pertaining to threats or attacks on both.

So far, Ryan Wesley Routh, 58, has been charged with possessing a firearm despite a prior felony conviction and possessing a firearm with an obliterated serial number. Additional charges are possible.

Authorities were continuing to examine Routh's potential motive and movements in the days and weeks leading up to Sunday, when a Secret Service agent assigned to Trump's security detail spotted a firearm poking out of shrubbery on the West Palm Beach golf course where Trump was playing. The agent fired, and Routh escaped into a sport utility vehicle, leaving behind a digital camera, a backpack, a loaded SKS-style rifle with a scope and a plastic bag containing food.

The attempt on Trump is unique because he is a former president seeking to regain the office who has now faced two attempts. But he is not the only former president who survived an assassination attempt trying to retake the office. Teddy Roosevelt was running as a former president in 1912 when he was shot in the chest while campaigning in Milwaukee.

"This is not unprecedented. People tend to forget how violence has been around the United States for a long time," said David Head, a historian at the University of Central Florida in Orlando.

There have been a number of notable instances that are not included in the TRAC data. Reagan was severely wounded in 1982 and then-President Gerald Ford had two attempts on his life in a 17-day period in 1975. George W. Bush was in Tbilisi, Georgia with Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili in 2005 when someone rolled a hand grenade into the room that did not explode.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 47 of 83

Clinton was in the White House on Oct. 29, 1994, when Francisco Martin Duran, then 26, opened fire outside and fired about 20 rounds at the building. No one was injured but Duran was convicted of attempting to assassinate the president and sentenced to 40 years. According to the Bureau of Prisons website, he is in a federal prison in Virginia and is not eligible for release until 2029.

Earlier this year, a New Hampshire man charged with threatening Republican candidates was found dead while a jury deliberated his case.

## Residents of Springfield, Ohio, hunker down and pray for a political firestorm to blow over

By JULIE CARR SMYTH Associated Press

SPRINGFIELD, Ohio (AP) — In the quiet corners of Springfield, Ohio — out of sight of the drumbeat of politicians and journalists, troopers and newly installed security cameras — the people who live here are taking a breath, praying and attempting to carry on.

Between the morning bomb sweeps of Springfield's schools and the near daily afternoon media briefings, a hush comes over the city of 58,000 that residents say is uncanny, haunting even. It's fear. It's confusion — dismay at being transformed overnight into a target for the nation's vitriol.

Pastor Andy Mobley, who runs the Family Needs Inc. food pantry on the city's south side, said people are hunkered down out of the public eye. He said they're hoping the attention sparked by former President Donald Trump spreading unsubstantiated rumors about the city's legal Haitian immigrants eating house pets during last week's presidential debate will blow over.

Trump and his vice presidential running mate, Ohio's junior Sen. JD Vance, have used the cat-eating rumors to draw attention to the city's 15,000 Haitian immigrants, whose arrival to fill manufacturing, distribution and warehouse jobs has put a severe strain on local resources.

Since the Republican candidates' initial comments, more than two dozen bomb threats — mostly from foreign actors seeking to sow discord — have prompted the state to send in additional state troopers and install surveillance cameras around the city in order to reopen schools and government buildings.

"We've got good people here. Republican, Democrat. They're good people," Mobley said Tuesday, as the pantry tended to a steady stream of clients seeking clothing and food.

Resident Josh Valle said the situation is unsettling.

"We definitely need answers," said the 35-year-old tool and die repairman, who has lived in Springfield for decades. "It's affecting my kids and my community and my neighbors. With the bomb threats and the influx, it's something new every day. And this used to be a really chill town, you know, it used to be just a small town Ohio."

The area around Springfield City Hall, where Valle spoke, sat largely silent Tuesday afternoon, until a news conference with state and local officials prompted a brief swarm of activity. Local families are avoiding schools in the wake of earlier bomb threats, even though dozens of troopers have fanned out across the Springfield City School District to stand guard. Some 200 of 500 students were absent Tuesday from a single elementary school, officials said.

Still, there are signs of hope.

"Home Sweet Springfield" tea towels adorn the window of Champion City Guide & Supply on a downtown block that bustles with activity over the lunch hour. One line of mugs and clothing items reads: "Speak a Good Word for Springfield — or say nothing."

Across town, a small group of kids whose parents kept them home on Tuesday horsed around together at a makeshift lemonade stand they set up to make a few bucks. They delighted in the revving motor of a passing muscle car and, when sales were slow, swigged back the merchandise.

David Graham, who visits communities in crisis as The Praying Cowboy, positioned himself in Springfield this week to show support. "Agenda: Pray, worship, witness, smile, honor, esteem," he wrote in a Facebook post from the city, accompanied by his hands holding an open Bible with a newly installed surveillance platform in the background. He added lines with black electrical tape to a small heart placard he posted

nearby, to represent Springfield hearts being broken.

He wasn't the only one trying to help. A bipartisan group of area mayors met with Springfield Mayor Rob Rue on Monday to figure out how they can help — including with resources to address the traffic, health care, social services and housing needs prompted by the increase in the Haitian population and their language barrier.

Andrew Ginther, the Democratic mayor of Ohio's capital, Columbus, and president of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, said in a statement: "Mayors across America will continue to stand by Springfield and all cities working to responsibly address an increased number of migrants, which we can do without losing sight of our shared humanity."

Years ago, Family Needs Inc. was designated one of President George H.W. Bush's "thousand points of light," honoring its dedication to volunteerism. The organization has helped Haitians arriving in Springfield for years now, Mobley said — providing them translation services and co-signing their rental agreements.

He recalled working with Haitian immigrants as far back as 2016, the year Trump took office — though census figures show the population remained at only about 400 until a few years ago.

"In 2016, we started signing contracts. Through the pandemic, we were doing things for the Haitian community," he said. "Has that all been forgotten? They have been here, and we've been dealing with this, and we've been asking for help through two different administrations. And no administration has helped us, until now this thing has become public."

As she walked downtown, one resident who declined to give her name said she's not letting the situation get her down.

"It's childish. It's stupid. It took one stupid person to get on a debate and ruin the reputation of a community. I think you know exactly who I'm talking about," she said.

"He should never have said that. There's no truth to those allegations whatsoever. I was born and raised in this town, I'm staying here, and I have no problem with nobody."

## Refugees in New Hampshire turn to farming for an income and a taste of home

By NICK PERRY and CHARLES KRUPA Associated Press

DUNBARTON, N.H. (AP) — It's harvest time in central New Hampshire, and one farm there appears to have been transplanted from a distant continent.

Farmers balance large crates laden with vegetables on their heads while chatting in Somali and other languages. As the sun burns away the early morning mist, the farmers pick American staples like corn and tomatoes as well as crops they grew up with, like okra and sorrel. Many of the women wear vibrant orange, red and blue fabrics.

Most workers at this Dunbarton farm are refugees who have escaped harrowing wars and persecution. They come from the African nations of Burundi, Rwanda, Somalia and Congo, and they now run their own small businesses, selling their crops to local markets as well as to friends and connections in their ethnic communities. Farming provides them with both an income and a taste of home.

"I like it in the USA. I have my own job," says Somali refugee and farmer Khadija Aliow as she hams it up by sashaying past a reporter, using one hand to steady the crate of crops on her head and the other to give a thumbs-up. "Happy. I'm so happy."

The farm is owned by a New Hampshire-based nonprofit, the Organization for Refugee and Immigrant Success, which lets the farmers use plots of land and provides them with training and support. The organization runs similar farms in Concord and the nearby town of Boscawen.

In all, 36 people from five African countries, including South Sudan, and the Asian nation of Nepal work on the farms. Many were farmers in their home countries before coming to the U.S. or had previous experience with agriculture, said Tom McGee, a program director with the nonprofit.

"These are farmers who are basically independent business owners, who are working in partnership with our organization to be able to bring this produce to life in this country," he said. "And to have another



# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 49 of 83

sense of purpose, and a way that they can bring themselves into the community, and belong. And really participate in the American dream."

The nonprofit runs a food market in Manchester, where people can buy fresh produce or sign up to have boxes delivered. McGee said there are a few other programs with similar aims scattered throughout the U.S. but that the model remains relatively rare. He said his organization relies on state and federal funding, as well as private donations.

Farmer Sylvain Bukasa said he escaped in 2000 from the decades-long conflict in Congo that has resulted in millions of deaths. He spent six years with his wife and son in a refugee camp in Tanzania before being accepted into the U.S. in 2006.

"I was worried for my safety," he said. "I decided to just go somewhere where it's a little bit safer."

Bukasa said he has worked hard since arriving in the U.S. and relishes his new life. But at first he missed the foods he grew up with. He could only find them in specialized markets, where they tended to be expensive and of poor quality.

"Back home we ate more vegetables and less meat," he said. "When we came here it's more chicken, more pizza, things like that. They taste good, but it's not good for you."

Bukasa started growing crops on the farm in 2011. The initial plan on the Dunbarton farm was to allow migrants like him to grow traditional crops for themselves and their families. But demand grew, particularly during the pandemic, prompting the farm's evolution into a commercial operation.

For a few of the farmers, the harvest provides their primary income. For most, like Bukasa, it's a side gig. He works fulltime as a service agent for a rental car company and travels whenever he can to tend his plot of just over an acre (0.4 hectares). The biggest challenges are making sure his crops are adequately watered and stopping the weeds from taking over, he said.

Mondays are harvest days, and on a recent Monday, Bukasa listed the crops he was picking: tomatoes, summer squash, zucchini, kale, corn, okra, and the leaves from pumpkins and sorrel — which he and the other migrants call sour-sour because of its taste.

He said there's a surprisingly large Congolese community throughout New England, and they appreciate what he grows.

"It's a hard job, but hard work is good work," Bukasa said. "It's fun and it helps people. I like when I satisfy people with the food that they eat."

His dream is to one day buy his own farm with a couple of acres of land, so he can walk out his front door to tend to his crops rather than driving 20 minutes like he does now. A more immediate challenge, he said, is to work on the marketing side of his business.

He's got to the point where he now grows more food than he's able to sell, and he hates seeing any of it go to waste. One idea is to buy a van, so he can deliver more produce himself.

"You see the competition in there," he says with a grin, motioning toward the tent where other refugee farmers wash and pack their crops. "See how many farmers are trying to sell their produce."

## Voters view Harris more favorably as she settles into role atop Democratic ticket: AP-NORC poll

By LINLEY SANDERS and JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Until recently, Lillian Dunsmuir of Bullhead City, Arizona, "didn't really think about" Kamala Harris and had no opinion of the vice president. But now she likes what she's seeing.

"She's funny. I think she's very smart. She can speak well," said Dunsmuir, a 58-year-old real estate agent. "I would feel safe with her because I think she can handle herself with foreign leaders. I like her because she's for pro-choice, and so am I."

Voters view Harris slightly more favorably than they did in July, just after President Joe Biden dropped out of the race, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. The Democratic presidential nominee is now seen more positively than negatively. Former President Donald Trump's favorability ratings remained steady, although the poll was conducted prior to the apparent

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 50 of 83

assassination attempt of the Republican nominee on his golf course in Florida on Sunday.

According to the survey, about half of voters have a somewhat or very positive view of Harris, and 44% have a somewhat or very negative view. That's a small shift since late July, just after Biden dropped out of the race, when views of Harris were slightly more unfavorable than favorable. Six in 10 voters, meanwhile, have a somewhat or very unfavorable view of Trump, while about 4 in 10 have a somewhat or very favorable view of him.

Changes in views of national figures like Biden, Trump or Harris have been rare over the past few years. Trump's favorability rating didn't budge over the course of the summer, despite a felony conviction, a close call with a would-be assassin in Pennsylvania, and a new opponent in the presidential contest.

But Trump has prevailed in the past with similarly low favorability ratings. He won the 2016 election despite being broadly unpopular, and came close to winning in 2020 under similar conditions.

The survey also found that relatively small shares of voters — around one-third — say the phrase "would change the country for the better" describes Trump or Harris extremely or very well, suggesting that voters retain some gloom about their options in the race.

"Everyone talks about how polarized we are. I don't see the election solving that," said Sean Luebbbers, a 55-year-old high school history teacher in Upland, California, who supports Harris. "I don't see Harris solving that. I think a lot of the damage has already been done, so I'm not hopeful that the election will solve that. Right now, you might call it triage. We can't make things worse."

Still, there are other signs in the poll that Harris' introduction to the country is continuing to go well. Voters are more likely to say that Harris would make a good president and that the Republican former president would not make a good president. About half of voters say that Harris would make a good president, while 36% of voters say that about Trump. And voters think Harris has a better chance of winning the election in November, though a substantial share say the candidates are equally likely to win or don't have an opinion.

In another potentially promising finding for Harris, independent voters view her a little more favorably compared to Trump, although a sizable share of independents view both candidates negatively. Among independents, 3 in 10 say they don't know enough to say whether Harris would make a good president, while 1 in 10 say that about Trump, suggesting the vice president has more room to gain ground than her rival on that measure.

Opinions about Trump on a variety of attributes are generally more formed than opinions about Harris. About 6 in 10 voters say the phrase "will say anything to win the election" describes Trump "extremely" or "very" well. About 4 in 10 voters say that phrase describes Harris at least very well.

Voters are more likely to say "would change the country for the better" describes Harris extremely or very well. They're also more likely to see Harris over Trump as someone who would fight for people like them.

Despite attempts by Trump to cast Harris as a weak alternative, voters are similarly likely to think that Trump and Harris are tough enough to be president.

"I think that was his biggest problem — he was a strong leader and they didn't like it," Pat Brumfield, a 71-year-old retired administrator from Glenwood, West Virginia, said of Trump. That strength, she said, could benefit the country now.

"I think that we need it," said Brumfield, who described herself as a lifelong Democrat, but said she's become disillusioned with the party and won't vote for Harris. "After almost four years of Biden barely getting around, I think it's put a black eye on the whole nation."

On both sides of the political aisle, Republican and Democratic voters have stronger feelings about their opponent than their own party's candidate. For example, Democratic voters were more likely to say that Trump would not change the country for the better or fight for people like them than they were to say Harris would do these things.

Republicans are a little more divided on Trump than Democrats are on Harris on some attributes. About one-third of Republican voters say "will say anything to win the election" describes Trump very or extremely well, while only 15% of Democratic voters say that about Harris.

Democratic voters, meanwhile, now have stronger positive feelings about Harris than Republican voters do about Trump. About 9 in 10 Democratic voters have a somewhat or very favorable view of their nominee, while about 8 in 10 Republican voters say the same about Trump.

"I think she really understands, and I think her understanding of how expensive child care is, how impossible it is for first-time homebuyers to buy anything," said Chanda Harcourt, a 54-year-old writer in Albuquerque, New Mexico, who supports Harris. "She really has a grip on it."

## **Colombia suspends peace talks with ELN rebel group after a deadly attack on the military**

BOGOTA, Colombia (AP) — Colombia on Wednesday suspended peace talks with the National Liberation Army, or ELN, after blaming the rebel group for an attack that killed two soldiers and injured more than 20.

"Today the dialogue process is suspended," said the government's peace delegation in a statement. "Its viability is severely damaged, and its continuity can only be recovered with an unequivocal manifestation of the ELN's will for peace."

This is the deepest crisis of the peace negotiations with the ELN since November 2022 and after President Gustavo Petro took power as the first leftist president launching talks with that and other armed groups under a policy known as total peace.

The National Liberation Army, or ELN, ended a cease-fire with the Colombian government in August, but was still involved in peace talks aimed at ending more than five decades of conflict.

The army said Tuesday that the group fired homemade rockets from a cargo truck that had been parked near a base in Puerto Jordan, a small town in Arauca province.

The rebel group has not claimed responsibility for the attack.

The ELN was founded in the 1960s by union leaders and university students inspired by the Cuban Revolution. The group has an estimated 6,000 fighters in Colombia and Venezuela and finances itself through drug trafficking and illegal gold mines.

Recently the ELN has been spreading into rural areas abandoned by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, the large rebel group that made a peace deal with Colombia's government in 2016.

The attack on Tuesday left two soldiers killed and 26 wounded, according to the latest report from Defense Minister Iván Velásquez.

Most of the wounded were airlifted to a military hospital in Bogotá, Colombia's capital, where Petro visited them on Wednesday. According to the hospital's medical report, 13 remain hospitalized in "stable condition," most with soft tissue injuries, while five are in the intensive care unit.

Authorities announced on Wednesday a reward of up to \$23,700 for information leading to the capture of those responsible for the attack. They also confirmed a reward of up to \$948,000 for the main leaders of the ELN.

Petro compared the attack in Arauca to another carried out by the ELN in 2019 against a police school in Bogotá that killed 22 people and dozens injured. That assault led also to the suspension of the peace talks of the rebel group with the government of Iván Duque, president from 2018 to 2022.

## **Search for suspect in Kentucky highway shooting ends with discovery of body believed to be his**

By BRUCE SCHREINER Associated Press

FRANKFORT, Ky. (AP) — A body found in rural southeastern Kentucky is believed to be the man suspected of shooting and wounding five people on an interstate highway, authorities said Wednesday night. The search ended with two private sleuths joining in the dramatic discovery.

Kentucky State Police Commissioner Phillip Burnett Jr. said the body located earlier in the day was believed to be Joseph Couch, of Woodbine. Authorities hoped the discovery signaled the conclusion of an intense, nearly two-week search that had area residents on edge.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 52 of 83

"People have been in fear," Laurel County Sheriff John Root said. "That's not the normal here in Laurel County. So now that this has been discovered, I hope that our county can get back to what's normal."

A dozen vehicles were hit and five people wounded in the Sept. 7 shooting on Interstate 75 near London, a city of about 8,000 people roughly 75 miles (120 kilometers) south of Lexington.

Burnett said Wednesday night that accessories found with the body led authorities to conclude it was Couch. He had no details on the cause of death, saying that would be determined in an autopsy, but he said a weapon was found at the site. He didn't know how long the body had been there.

"We are very confident this brings the closure to the search for Joseph Couch," Burnett said.

Root said the discovery of the body wasn't the outcome authorities wanted.

"I don't think nobody on this stage wished that we would have found him in the condition that we found," Root said at a news conference in London. "I'd rather he'd been alive and he could have paid for what he's done."

The body was found following an exhaustive search of the rugged and hilly terrain in the area where the attack happened. Teams combed 28,000 acres (11,331 hectares) in the search.

But it is a private couple who will reap a \$25,000 reward for their part in the discovery.

YouTube streamers Fred and Sheila McCoy from Kentucky said they searched the area for about six days and were looking for signs of vultures in the air. Fred McCoy said he saw some near the I-75 exit Wednesday, and they followed the rough terrain down a valley. They then picked up on a bad smell.

"Hey guys, you won't believe it, we found him, oh my goodness gracious," Sheila McCoy said while filming the search. "Now this little area (London) can rest."

State police troopers had searched the area all day and also noticed vultures hovering above and then detected a strong odor, Burnett said Wednesday night. While moving through the woods to locate the odor, the troopers heard voices, identified themselves and asked the others to do so, he said.

It turned out to be the McCoy's, who told the troopers they also were searching for Couch.

"Almost immediately after that interaction between troopers and the McCoy's, the troopers and the McCoy's stumbled upon an unidentified body," Burnett said.

The highway shootings led some schools to shut down and shift to virtual learning for several days as authorities warned residents to be extra vigilant. Schools reopened Tuesday with bolstered police security in the county where the shooting happened.

Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear called the shootings an "act of violence and evil."

Authorities said the shooter fired 20 to 30 rounds, creating a chaotic scene. The five victims survived, but some suffered serious injuries.

After sending the text message vowing to "kill a lot of people" to a woman before the attack, Couch sent another saying, "I'll kill myself afterwards," investigators said in an affidavit. The document did not describe the relationship between Couch and the woman. However, the two have a child together but were never married, according to an attorney who handled the custody arrangement for their son, born in 2016.

Early in the search, authorities found Couch's abandoned vehicle near the crime scene and a semi-automatic weapon that investigators believe was used in the shooting. An Army-style duffel bag that was found had "Couch" handwritten in marker, and a phone believed to be Couch's was found without a battery.

Authorities said he purchased the AR-15 weapon and about 1,000 rounds of ammunition at a London gun store hours before the shooting.

Couch had a military background in the Army Reserve. The U.S. Army said he served from 2013 to 2019 as a combat engineer. He was a private when he left and had no deployments.

The search focused on a densely wooded area about 8 miles (13 kilometers) north of London that a state police official described as "walking in a jungle." Aided by helicopters and drones, search teams on the ground contended with cliffs, sinkholes, caves, waterways and thick brush.

When the ground search was suspended at night, specially trained officers were deployed in strategic locations to prevent the gunman from slipping out of the area. On Tuesday, authorities said they were pulling searchers from the woods to bolster patrols in nearby communities in hopes of calming fears among residents.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 53 of 83

As the mystery of Couch's whereabouts appeared to be solved Wednesday, the sheriff urged prayers for the shooting victims and for the suspect's family, who he said have cooperated with authorities. "The family cannot be blamed for the misfortune that this guy's caused," Root said.

## Venezuela's opposition ex-candidate says he was forced to sign letter that effectively admits defeat

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Venezuela's former opposition candidate, Edmundo González, on Wednesday said he was coerced into signing a letter effectively recognizing his defeat in July's presidential election, which electoral authorities claim was won by President Nicolás Maduro.

The revelation of the letter is the latest strain to the country's political crisis, which was exacerbated by the disputed election results and González's recent departure for exile in Spain. González and the Unitary Platform coalition he represented on July 28 claim they defeated Maduro by a wide margin.

The document states it was meant to be confidential, but Jorge Rodríguez, head of the National Assembly and Maduro's chief negotiator, presented it during a nationally televised press conference hours after a local news outlet published parts of it. The letter shows González as the sender and is addressed to Rodríguez, who signed it as recipient.

Rodríguez told reporters González signed the letter of his own volition. González, however, in a video posted on social media said he signed it under duress.

"They showed up with a document that I would have to sign to allow my departure from the country," González said. "In other words, either I signed or I would face consequences. There were very tense hours of coercion, blackmail and pressure."

Rodríguez, questioned about González video message, threatened to reveal audio of his conversations with González if he did not take back his assertions.

Venezuela's National Electoral Council, which is stacked with Maduro loyalists, declared Maduro the election winner hours after polls closed. Unlike previous presidential elections, electoral authorities did not provide detailed vote counts.

But the opposition coalition collected tally sheets from 80% of the nation's electronic voting machines and posted them online. González and opposition leader Maria Corina Machado said the voting records showed the former diplomat won the election with twice as many votes as Maduro.

González then became the subject of an arrest warrant over an investigation into the publishing of the tally sheets.

Global condemnation over the lack of transparency prompted Maduro to ask Venezuela's Supreme Tribunal of Justice, whose members are aligned with the ruling party, to audit the results. The high court reaffirmed his victory.

González, Machado, other opposition leaders and foreign governments questioned the audit's results. However, in the letter made public Wednesday, González admitted that while he does not agree with the tribunal's ruling, "I abide by it because it is a resolution of the highest court of the Republic."

In contrast, in his video message, he called himself the "elected president of millions and millions of Venezuelans" and promised to "fulfill" their mandate.

Venezuela's next presidential term begins Jan. 10 and lasts six years.

## Harris hits Trump's promise of mass deportations as Trump rallies on Long Island

By MEG KINNARD, AAMER MADHANI and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris on Wednesday criticized Republican Donald Trump's promise to deport millions of people who are in the United States illegally, questioning whether he would rely on massive raids and detention camps to carry it out.

Harris, the Democratic presidential nominee, told the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute's annual

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 54 of 83

leadership conference that the nation can find both a pathway to citizenship for those who want to come and at the same time secure the border.

"We can do both, and we must do both," she said.

Trump, for his part, leaned heavily on his alarmist message on immigration as he held a rally in Uniondale on New York's Long Island, focusing the bulk of his remarks on the subject.

"We're just destroying the fabric of life in our country. And we're not going to take it any longer. And you got to get rid of these people. Give me a shot," Trump said.

Both candidates took a break Wednesday from campaigning in the toss-up states that will likely decide the Nov. 5 election. The former president drew a large, roaring crowd, giving him a chance to show deep support even in a blue state.

He ripped into Democratic leadership in New York City and state, blaming them for homeless people living in what he called "horrible, disgusting, dangerous, filthy encampments," and even the conditions on the New York City subway, which he called "squalid and unsafe" and promised to renovate.

"What the hell do you have to lose?" he said in asking for their votes.

Before heading out to the suburbs, Trump stopped at a Bitcoin cafe in New York City. Trump has recently embraced cryptocurrency and on Monday night helped launch his family's new cryptocurrency venture.

Harris harked back to the Trump administration's immigration policies as she bid for Hispanic support.

"While we fight to move our nation forward to a brighter future, Donald Trump and his extremist allies will keep trying to pull us backward," Harris said. "We all remember what they did to tear families apart, and now they have pledged to carry out the largest deportation, a mass deportation, in American history."

"Imagine what that would look like and what that would be? How's that going to happen? Massive raids? Massive detention camps? What are they talking about?" she said.

Trump has promised to carry out "the largest deportation operation in the history of our country" if he's elected in November. He has offered no details on how such an operation would work.

Trump has focused on immigration as a top campaign issue and made it a key focus of his remarks Wednesday.

"Look at what's happening," he told his crowd in New York. "Businesses that are fleeing, money draining out of your state and hundreds of thousands of illegal migrants sucking your public resources dry."

Trump said he plans in the next two weeks to visit Springfield, Ohio, which has been the center of false accusations from the former president and his running mate JD Vance that members of the city's Haitian community are abducting and eating cats and dogs. Trump also said he plans to visit Aurora, Colorado, where he says a Venezuelan street gang with a small presence in the city has taken over a rundown apartment complex. Aurora police say that's not the case.

He has an advantage over Harris in opinion polling on whom voters trust to better handle the issue.

Meanwhile, the Teamsters labor union declined to endorse either Harris or Trump, saying neither had sufficient support from its 1.3 million members.

Harris had met Monday with a panel of Teamsters, having long courted organized labor and made support for the middle class her central policy goal. Trump met earlier in the year with a panel of Teamsters, and its president, Sean O'Brien, spoke at his invitation at the Republican National Convention.

Trump's rally Wednesday night was in Uniondale, an area that could be key to Republicans maintaining control of the House. His party is trying to protect 18 Republicans in Democratic-heavy congressional districts that Joe Biden carried in 2020, particularly in coastal New York and California, and going on offense to challenge Democrats elsewhere.

Long Island in particular features one of the most closely watched races, between first-term Republican Rep. Anthony D'Esposito and Democrat Laura Gillen. D'Esposito is a former New York Police detective who won in 2022 in a district that Biden won by about 15 percentage points in 2020.

Trump posted Tuesday on his Truth Social platform that the GOP has "a real chance of winning" New York "for the first time in many decades." In that same post, Trump also pledged that he would "get SALT back," suggesting he would eliminate a cap on state and local tax deductions that were part of tax cut legislation he signed into law in 2017.

The so-called SALT cap has led to bigger tax bills for many residents of New York, New Jersey, California and other high-cost, high-tax states, and is an important campaign issue in those states, particularly among those New York Republicans serving in districts Biden won.

Harris' speech to the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute marked the second day in a row that she has tended to constituencies considered key to the Democratic Party.

On Tuesday, she sat for an interview in Philadelphia with members of the National Association of Black Journalists. She decried Trump's rhetoric and said voters should make sure he "can't have that microphone again." She has trips planned later in the week to Michigan, Georgia and Wisconsin.

Trump is attempting to return to his campaign cadence after Sunday's apparent assassination attempt as he golfed in Florida. On Tuesday, he traveled to Flint, Michigan, and has not appeared to alter plans for upcoming trips to the nation's capital and North Carolina later in the week.

His running mate, Ohio Sen. JD Vance, held an event in Raleigh, North Carolina, on Wednesday.

## Iranian hackers tried but failed to interest Biden's campaign in stolen Trump info, FBI says

By ERIC TUCKER and DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Iranian hackers sought to interest President Joe Biden's campaign in information stolen from rival Donald Trump's campaign, sending unsolicited emails to people associated with the then-Democratic candidate in an effort to interfere in the 2024 election, the FBI and other federal agencies said Wednesday.

There's no indication that any of the recipients responded, officials said, and several media organizations who have said they also were approached with stolen material did not publish it. Kamala Harris' presidential campaign called the emails from Iran "unwelcome and unacceptable malicious activity" that were received by only a few people who regarded them as spam or phishing attempts.

The emails were received before the hack of the Trump campaign was publicly acknowledged, and there's no evidence the recipients of the emails knew their origin.

The announcement is the latest U.S. government effort to call out what officials say is Iran's brazen, on-going work to interfere in the election, including a hack-and-leak campaign that the FBI and other federal agencies linked last month to Tehran.

U.S. officials in recent months have used criminal charges, sanctions and public advisories to detail actions taken by foreign adversaries to influence the election, including an indictment targeting a covert Russian effort to spread pro-Russia content to U.S. audiences.

It's a stark turnabout from the government's response in 2016, when Obama administration officials were criticized for not being forthcoming about the Russian interference they were seeing on Trump's behalf as he ran against Democrat Hillary Clinton.

In this case, the hackers sent emails in late June and early July to people who were associated with Biden's campaign before he dropped out. The emails "contained an excerpt taken from stolen, non-public material from former President Trump's campaign as text in the emails," according to a statement released by the FBI, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency.

The agencies have said the Trump campaign hack and an attempted breach of the Biden-Harris campaign are part of an effort to undermine voters' faith in the election and to stoke discord.

The FBI informed Trump aides within the last 48 hours that information hacked by Iran had been sent to the Biden campaign, according to a senior campaign official granted anonymity to speak because of the sensitive nature of the investigation.

The Trump campaign disclosed on Aug. 10 that it had been hacked and said Iranian actors had stolen and distributed sensitive internal documents. At least three news outlets — Politico, The New York Times and The Washington Post — were leaked confidential material from inside the Trump campaign. So far, each has refused to reveal any details about what it received.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 56 of 83

Politico reported that it began receiving emails on July 22 from an anonymous account. The source — an AOL email account identified only as “Robert” — passed along what appeared to be a research dossier that the campaign had apparently done on the Republican vice presidential nominee, Ohio Sen. JD Vance. The document was dated Feb. 23, almost five months before Trump selected Vance as his running mate.

In a statement, Harris campaign spokesperson Morgan Finkelstein said the campaign has cooperated with law enforcement since learning that people associated with Biden’s team were among the recipients of the emails.

“We’re not aware of any material being sent directly to the campaign; a few individuals were targeted on their personal emails with what looked like a spam or phishing attempt,” Finkelstein said. “We condemn in the strongest terms any effort by foreign actors to interfere in U.S. elections including this unwelcome and unacceptable malicious activity.

Trump campaign national press secretary Karoline Leavitt called the effort to dangle stolen information to the Biden campaign “further proof the Iranians are actively interfering in the election” to help Harris.

Intelligence officials have said Iran opposes Trump’s reelection, seeing him as more likely to increase tension between Washington and Tehran. Trump’s administration ended a nuclear deal with Iran, reimposed sanctions and ordered the killing of Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani, an act that prompted Iran’s leaders to vow revenge.

Iran’s intrusion on the Trump campaign was cited as just one of the cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns identified by tech companies and national security officials at a hearing Wednesday of the Senate Intelligence Committee. Executives from Meta, Google and Microsoft briefed lawmakers on their plans for safeguarding the election, and the attacks they’d seen so far.

“The most perilous time I think will come 48 hours before the election,” Microsoft President Brad Smith told lawmakers during the hearing, which focused on American tech companies’ efforts to safeguard the election from foreign disinformation and cyberattacks.

## **Days after posting mugshot of a boy accused of school threat, sheriff puts video of 2 teens online**

By KATE PAYNE Associated Press/Report for America

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Around the country, communities are being battered by a wave of school shooting threats, sparking emergency notifications, urgent group chats and heightened fears among parents that their child’s school could be the next Parkland or Sandy Hook or Uvalde — or any other town hit by mass shootings.

On Florida’s Atlantic coast, Sheriff Mike Chitwood of Volusia County said he got some of these same notifications after he walked his grandchildren to school this week.

“It just stuck with me because my cell phone was going off telling me about the other threats. Thinking to myself, how many parents in this country have done just what I just did,” Chitwood said, “and they never, ever, ever get to hold their loved one again.”

Fed up with school shooting threats in his community, Chitwood pledged to publicly identify students accused of making such threats.

On Monday, he posted the name and mugshot of an 11-year-old boy arrested for allegedly threatening to carry out a shooting at a middle school in his county. The decision swiftly drew praise and criticism amid the ongoing national debate over what it would take to stem the gun violence plaguing the nation. On Wednesday evening he released another video online showing two more young people, identified as 16- and 17-year-olds, in handcuffs and being led to jail over what he called another school threat.

The initial video posted by Chitwood online showed what an arrest report described as “various airsoft style rifles and pistols, magazines, fake ammunition ... and several knives and swords” that investigators say the 11-year-old boy gathered. The footage later cuts to an officer leading the handcuffed boy from a squad car before he’s locked into an empty cell. The boy’s face is frequently visible in the video, which already has gained hundreds of thousands of social media views.



# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 57 of 83

Then on Wednesday, Chitwood was at it again, posting a message online: "Two more students are in custody following a school shooting threat" and adding of the teens, "We will introduce you to these two in the very near future."

Hours later the sheriff posted a Facebook video showing two teens being led in handcuffs from a law enforcement van into separate empty cells. He is heard saying in the post: "Go talk to the families who have lost a loved one in a school shooting. These little knuckleheads think it's funny? Go talk to those parents and see how funny this is."

The AP generally does not identify anyone under 18 accused of a crime or transmit images that would reveal their identity.

Chitwood this week told The Associated Press he doesn't know if publicly shaming accused juveniles will be effective. But he had to act to get through to students and their parents.

Since the school year started a few weeks ago in Volusia County, Chitwood said, his office has reported more than 280 school threats compared to 352 in all of last year.

"Something has to be done," Chitwood said. "Where are the parents?"

Under Florida law, juvenile court records are generally confidential and exempt from public release — unless the child is charged with a felony, as in this case.

Chitwood has a reputation of being a tough-talking figure and maintains he is within his rights to identify such young people.

"I'm not worried about the 2% that might get handcuffed that somebody might get offended about," Chitwood said. "I'm worried about the other 98% that are trying to go to school and live their normal lives not in fear to get an education."

Daniel Mears, a criminology professor at Florida State University who researches school shootings, said the sheriff's actions are contrary to the spirit of the juvenile justice system.

"Juvenile records were supposed to be confidential for a reason. The idea was that kids would have a second shot in life," Mears said.

Still, Mears said there have long been exceptions for particularly heinous crimes, noting school threats are treated differently.

"School shootings are just really unbelievably scary and concerning to people," he said.

Among those applauding the sheriff's actions is Max Schachter, whose son Alex was murdered along with 16 others in a 2018 mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

"We had a culture of complacency that led to the Parkland school shooting. And we can't be complacent anymore," Schachter told AP. "We should be holding the individuals that perpetrate these threats and become mass shooters to the highest extent of the law. And ultimately we should be holding their parents responsible."

Chitwood has said he's investigating whether parents of kids who make threats can be held financially or criminally liable.

The first parents convicted in a U.S. mass school shooting — Jennifer and James Crumbley — were sentenced in April to at least 10 years in prison as a Michigan judge lamented missed opportunities that could have prevented their teenage son Ethan from possessing a gun and killing four students in 2021. The parents were convicted of involuntary manslaughter earlier in the year.

In Winder, Georgia, prosecutors have filed charges against the father of a 14-year-old boy accused of killing two students and two teachers in a recent high school shooting.

Keri Rodrigues, president of the education advocacy group National Parents Union, said what's needed is gun control — and sufficient psychological support for children in crisis. Surveys show American youth are in the throes of an unprecedented mental health crisis.

"I think parents across the country are struggling with what to do with kids," Rodrigues said. "It's so difficult because we don't have enough social workers. We don't have enough school psychiatrists."

Kathleen Miksits is the mother of two middle schoolers in Volusia County. She believes students and parents need to understand the toll these threats take on their community. Miksits kept her kids home one day this week after students at their school was targeted by a threat.

Still, she struggles with the thought that this 11-year-old boy may never live this down. "Kids say things that they don't mean. Or they don't understand what they're saying," she said. "But on the other hand, this is an extremely serious matter and we keep having kids die."

## Federal Reserve signals end to inflation fight with a sizable half-point rate cut

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Federal Reserve on Wednesday cut its benchmark interest rate by an unusually large half-point, a dramatic shift after more than two years of high rates that helped tame inflation but also made borrowing painfully expensive for American consumers.

The rate cut, the Fed's first in more than four years, reflects its new focus on bolstering the job market, which has shown clear signs of slowing. Coming just weeks before the presidential election, the Fed's move also has the potential to scramble the economic landscape just as Americans prepare to vote.

The central bank's action lowered its key rate to roughly 4.8%, down from a two-decade high of 5.3%, where it had stood for 14 months as it struggled to curb the worst inflation streak in four decades. Inflation has tumbled from a peak of 9.1% in mid-2022 to a three-year low of 2.5% in August, not far above the Fed's 2% target.

The Fed's policymakers also signaled that they expect to cut their key rate by an additional half-point in their final two meetings this year, in November and December. And they envision four more rate cuts in 2025 and two in 2026.

In a statement and in a news conference with Chair Jerome Powell, the Fed came closer than it has before to declaring victory over inflation.

"We know it is time to recalibrate our (interest rate) policy to something that's more appropriate given the progress on inflation," Powell said. "We're not saying, 'mission accomplished' ... but I have to say, though, we're encouraged by the progress that we have made."

"The U.S. economy is in a good place," he added, "and our decision today is designed to keep it there."

Though the central bank now believes inflation is largely defeated, many Americans remain upset with still-high prices for groceries, gas, rent and other necessities. Former President Donald Trump blames the Biden-Harris administration for sparking an inflationary surge. Vice President Kamala Harris, in turn, has charged that Trump's promise to slap tariffs on all imports would raise prices for consumers even further.

Rate cuts by the Fed should, over time, lead to lower borrowing costs for mortgages, auto loans and credit cards, boosting Americans' finances and supporting more spending and growth. Homeowners will be able to refinance mortgages at lower rates, saving on monthly payments, and even shift credit card debt to lower-cost personal loans or home equity lines. Businesses may also borrow and invest more. Average mortgage rates have already dropped to an 18-month low of 6.2%, according to Freddie Mac, spurring a jump in demand for refinancings.

"It's a step in the right direction," Laura Rosner-Warburton, senior economist of MacroPolicy Perspectives, said of Wednesday's Fed move.

The additional rate cuts it indicated it will make, she said, will "prevent risks from building and the unemployment rate from rising. They are trying to keep the economy in good shape."

In an updated set of projections, the policymakers collectively envision a faster drop in inflation than they did three months ago but also higher unemployment. They foresee their preferred inflation gauge falling to 2.3% by year's end, from its current 2.5%, and to 2.1% by the end of 2025. And they now expect the unemployment rate to rise further this year, to 4.4%, from 4.2% now, and to remain there by the end of 2025. That's above their previous forecasts of 4% for the end of this year and 4.2% for 2025.

Powell was pressed at his news conference about whether the Fed's decision to cut its key rate by an unusually large half-point is an acknowledgement that it waited too long to begin reducing borrowing rates.

"We don't think we're behind," he replied. "We think this is timely. But I think you can take this as a sign

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 59 of 83

of our commitment not to get behind. We're not seeing rising (unemployment) claims, not seeing rising layoffs, not hearing from companies that that's something that's going to happen."

He added: "There is thinking that the time to support the labor market is when it's strong and not when you begin to see the layoffs. We don't think we need to see further loosening in labor market conditions to get inflation down to 2%."

The Fed's next policy meeting is Nov. 6-7 — immediately after the presidential election. By cutting rates this week, soon before the election, the Fed is risking attacks from Trump, who has argued that lowering rates now amounts to political interference. Yet Politico has reported that even some key Senate Republicans who were interviewed expressed support for a Fed rate cut this week.

Powell pushed back against any suggestion that the Fed shouldn't cut rates so close to an election.

"We're not serving any politician, any political figure, any cause, any issue," he said. "It's just maximum employment and price stability on behalf of all Americans. And that's how the other central banks are set up, too. It's a good institutional arrangement, which has been good for the public, and I hope and strongly believe that it will continue."

Powell's characterization of the economy as fundamentally healthy, with inflation under control and employment stable but likely to benefit from rate cuts was an unspoken rebuttal to Trump's warnings that an economic disaster is near.

The Fed's move Wednesday reverses the inflation-fighting effort it engineered by raising its key rate 11 times in 2022 and 2023. Wage growth has since slowed, removing a potential source of inflationary pressure. And oil and gas prices are falling, a sign that inflation should continue to cool in the months ahead. Consumers are also pushing back against high prices, forcing such companies as Target and McDonald's to dangle deals and discounts.

The Fed's decision drew the first dissent from a member of its governing board since 2005. Michelle Bowman, a board member who has expressed concern in the past that inflation had not been fully defeated, said she would have preferred a quarter-point rate cut.

But the Fed's policymakers as a whole appear to recognize that after years of strong job growth, employers have slowed hiring, and the unemployment rate has risen nearly a full percentage point from its half-century low in April 2023 to a still-low 4.2%. Once unemployment rises that much, it tends to keep climbing.

At the same time, the officials and many economists have noted that the rise in unemployment this time largely reflects an influx of people seeking jobs — notably new immigrants and recent college graduates — rather than layoffs.

The Fed's attention now is "preserving the health of the labor market and preventing unnecessary damage to the economy from a pretty restrictive (interest rate) stance," said Rubeela Farooqi, chief U.S. economist at High Frequency Economics.

## **Veteran CIA officer who drugged and sexually assaulted dozens of women gets 30 years in prison**

By JIM MUSTIAN and JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A longtime CIA officer who drugged, photographed and sexually assaulted more than two dozen women in postings around the world was sentenced to 30 years in federal prison Wednesday after an emotional hearing in which victims described being deceived by a man who appeared kind, educated and part of an agency "that is supposed to protect the world from evil."

Brian Jeffrey Raymond, with a graying beard and orange prison jumpsuit, sat dejectedly as he heard his punishment for one of the most egregious misconduct cases in the CIA's history. It was chronicled in his own library of more than 500 images that showed him in some cases straddling and groping his nude, unconscious victims.

"It's safe to say he's a sexual predator," U.S. Senior Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly said in imposing the full

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 60 of 83

sentence prosecutors had requested. "You are going to have a period of time to think about this."

Prosecutors say the 48-year-old Raymond's assaults date to 2006 and tracked his career in Mexico, Peru and other countries, all following a similar pattern:

He would lure women he met on Tinder and other dating apps to his government-leased apartment and drug them while serving wine and snacks. Once they were unconscious, he spent hours posing their naked bodies before photographing and assaulting them. He opened their eyelids at times and stuck his fingers in their mouths.

One by one, about a dozen of Raymond's victims who were identified only by numbers in court recounted how the longtime spy upended their lives. Some said they only learned what happened after the FBI showed them the photos of being assaulted while unconscious.

"My body looks like a corpse on his bed," one victim said of the photos. "Now I have these nightmares of seeing myself dead."

One described suffering a nervous breakdown. Another spoke of a recurring trance that caused her to run red lights while driving. Many told how their confidence and trust in others had been shattered forever.

"I hope he is haunted by the consequences of his actions for the rest of his life," said one of the women, who like others stared Raymond down as they walked away from the podium.

Reading from a statement, Raymond told the judge that he has spent countless hours contemplating his "downward spiral."

"It betrayed everything I stand for and I know no apology will ever be enough," he said. "There are no words to describe how sorry I am. That's not who I am and yet it's who I became."

Raymond's sentencing comes amid a reckoning on sexual misconduct at the CIA. The Associated Press reported last week that another veteran CIA officer faces state charges in Virginia for allegedly reaching up a co-worker's skirt and forcibly kissing her during a drunken party in the office.

Still another former CIA employee — an officer trainee — is scheduled to face a jury trial next month on charges he assaulted a woman with a scarf in a stairwell at the agency's Langley, Virginia, headquarters. That case emboldened some two dozen women to come forward to authorities and Congress with accounts of their own of sexual assaults, unwanted touching and what they contend are the CIA's efforts to silence them.

And yet the full extent of sexual misconduct at the CIA remains a classified secret in the name of national security, including a recent 648-page internal watchdog report that found systemic shortcomings in the agency's handling of such complaints.

"The classified nature of the activities allowed the agency to hide a lot of things," said Liza Mundy, author of "Sisterhood: The Secret History of Women at the CIA." The male-dominated agency, she said, has long been a refuge for egregious sexual misconduct. "For decades, men at the top had free rein."

CIA has publicly condemned Raymond's crimes and implemented sweeping reforms intended to keep women safe, streamline claims and more quickly discipline offenders.

"There is absolutely no excuse for Mr. Raymond's reprehensible, appalling behavior," the agency said Wednesday. "As this case shows, we are committed to engaging with law enforcement."

But a veil of secrecy still surrounds the Raymond case nearly four years after his arrest. Even after Raymond pleaded guilty late last year, prosecutors have tiptoed around the exact nature of his work and declined to disclose a complete list of the countries where he assaulted women.

Still, they offered an unbridled account of Raymond's conduct, describing him as a "serial offender" whose assaults increased over time and become "almost frenetic" during his final CIA posting in Mexico City, where he was discovered in 2020 after a naked woman screamed for help from his apartment balcony.

U.S. officials scoured Raymond's electronic devices and began identifying the victims he had listed by name and physical characteristics, all of whom described experiencing some form of memory loss during their time with him.

One victim said Raymond seemed like a "perfect gentleman" when they met in Mexico in 2020, recalling only that they kissed. Unbeknownst to the woman, after she blacked out, he took 35 videos and close-up photos of her breasts and genitals.

"The defendant's manipulation often resulted in women blaming themselves for losing consciousness, feeling ashamed, and apologizing to the defendant," prosecutors wrote in a court filing. "He was more than willing to gaslight the women, often suggesting that the women drank too much and that, despite their instincts to the contrary, nothing had happened."

Raymond, a San Diego native and former White House intern who is fluent in Spanish and Mandarin, ultimately pleaded guilty to four of 25 federal counts including sexual abuse, coercion and transportation of obscene material. As part of his sentence, the judge ordered him to pay \$10,000 to each of his 28 victims.

Raymond's attorneys had sought leniency, contending his "quasi-military" work at the CIA in the years following 9/11 became a breeding ground for the emotional callousness and "objectification of other people" that enabled his years of preying upon women.

"While he was working tirelessly at his government job, he ignored his own need for help, and over time he began to isolate himself, detach himself from human feelings and become emotionally numb," defense attorney Howard Katsoff wrote in a court filing.

"He was an invaluable government worker, but it took its toll on him and sent him down a dark path."

## UN chief urges divided nations to approve blueprint to address global challenges from climate to AI

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The United Nations chief urged the world's divided nations on Wednesday to compromise and approve a blueprint to address global challenges from conflicts and climate change to artificial intelligence and reforming the U.N. and global financial institutions.

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told reporters that discussions on the "Pact of the Future" are in their final stretch and failure to reach the required consensus among all 193 U.N. member nations "would be tragic."

A year ago, Guterres sounded an alarm about the survival of humanity and the planet and summoned world leaders to a Summit of the Future at their global gathering this year to unite and take action to reform the U.N. and other institutions established after World War II and address new global threats. It is taking place Sunday and Monday, just before Tuesday's start of the annual high-level meeting at the U.N. General Assembly.

Negotiations on the 30-page pact, now in its fourth revision, have been taking place for months, and in recent interviews and at Wednesday's press conference the secretary-general has faced questions about its lack of vision, and what is different from U.N. documents adopted in recent years that haven't been implemented.

"It's very simple," the U.N. chief replied.

All the previous "extraordinary, important declarations" were about what is needed to meet the challenges of the 21st century, he said. The Summit of the Future is about implementing those challenges, which requires reform of global institutions established after World War II including the United Nations.

Guterres stressed that in every area — from climate to AI — "there is a serious problem of governance," and that's what the Summit of the Future is about.

The draft Pact of the Future says world leaders are gathering "at a time of profound global transformation," and it warns of "rising catastrophic and existential risks" that could tip people everywhere "into a future of persistent crisis and breakdown."

But the draft says leaders are coming to the U.N. "to protect the needs and interests of present and future generations through actions in the Pact for the Future."

It includes 51 actions on issues including eradicating poverty, combating climate change, achieving gender equality, promoting peace and protecting civilians, and reinvigorating the multilateral system to "seize the opportunities of today and tomorrow."

Guterres pointed to "potential breakthroughs" in the pact including "the strongest language on Security

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 62 of 83

Council reform in a generation," and the most concrete steps to enlarging the powerful 15-member body since 1963.

He also cited the first measures to govern new technologies including Artificial Intelligence, a "major advance" in reforming international financial institutions, and a commitment to multiply resources for developing countries to meet U.N. development goals by 2030.

Urging member states to get the Pact of the Future "over the finish line," Guterres said, "We can't create a future fit for our grandchildren with systems built for our grandparents."

U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield told reporters Tuesday that a priority for the Biden administration at this year's Summit of the Future is "to create a more inclusive and effective international system."

She said the Group of 77 which now represents 134 developing countries at the U.N., the 27-member European Union and the United States all agreed to the fourth revision of the Pact of the Future.

But the U.S. ambassador said Russia objected to about 15 different issues, Saudi Arabia had problems with the climate language, and other countries objected to the language on reforming the international financial institutions including the World Bank and International Monetary Fund..

"I do think the Summit of the Future will make a difference," Thomas-Greenfield said. "There are still some major differences. ... But I am still hopeful that we will get there."

## Sean 'Diddy' Combs will stay in jail after bail is denied for a second time

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, LARRY NEUMEISTER and ANDREW DALTON Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Sean "Diddy" Combs is staying locked up after a judge Wednesday rejected the hip-hop mogul's proposal that he await his sex trafficking trial in the luxury of his Florida mansion instead of a grim Brooklyn federal jail.

U.S. District Judge Andrew L. Carter ruled that Combs' plan — which included a \$50 million bail offer, GPS monitoring and strict limitations on visitors — was "insufficient" to ensure the safety of the community and the integrity of his case.

Carter, agreeing with prosecutors who fought to keep Combs in jail, found that "no condition or set of conditions" governing his release could guard against the risk of him threatening or harming witnesses — a central charge in his case.

Combs' lawyers were making their second attempt in as many days to spring him from the Metropolitan Detention Center, where he has been held since pleading not guilty Tuesday to charges he physically and sexually abused women for years.

Combs has been in federal custody since his arrest Monday night at a Manhattan hotel. A federal magistrate on Tuesday rejected Combs' initial bail request. On Wednesday, he and his lawyers struck out with Carter, the judge who will preside over his trial.

Defense lawyer Marc Agnifilo says he will now ask the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals to overturn Carter's ruling and release Combs. In the meantime, he wants Combs moved from the Brooklyn lockup, which has been plagued by rampant violence and horrific conditions, to a jail in New Jersey. Carter said decisions on placement are entirely up to the federal Bureau of Prisons.

"I'm not going to let him sit in that jail a day longer than he has to," Agnifilo said to reporters outside the courtroom.

Combs looked at family members and tapped his heart several times as Wednesday's hearing began, then sat stoically as he listened to arguments. Afterward, as federal agents led him away, his relatives somberly embraced and exchanged hand slaps.

Combs, 54, is accused in an indictment of using his "power and prestige" to induce female victims and male sex workers into drugged-up, elaborately produced sexual performances dubbed "Freak Offs" that Combs arranged, participated in and often recorded on video. The events would sometimes last days and Combs and victims would often receive IV fluids to recover, the indictment said.

The indictment alleges Combs coerced and abused women for years, with the help of a network of as-

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 63 of 83

sociates and employees, while using blackmail and violent acts including kidnapping, arson and physical beatings to keep victims from speaking out.

Arguing to keep Combs in jail, prosecutor Emily Johnson told Carter that the once-celebrated rapper has a long history of intimidating both accusers and witnesses to his alleged abuse. She cited text messages from women who said Combs forced them into "Freak Offs" and then threatened to leak videos of them engaging in sex acts.

Johnson said Combs' defense team was "minimizing and horrifically understating" Combs' propensity for violence, taking issue with his lawyer's portrayal of a 2016 assault at a Los Angeles hotel as a lovers' quarrel. Security video of the event, which only came to light in May, showed Combs hitting and kicking his then-girlfriend, the R&B singer Cassie, in a hotel hallway.

"What's love got to do with that?" an incredulous Carter asked.

Johnson also seized on a text message from a woman who said Combs dragged her down a hallway by her hair. According to Johnson, the woman told the rapper: "I'm not a rag doll, I'm someone's child."

"There is a longstanding pattern of abuse here," Johnson said.

Combs' Florida house is on Star Island, a man-made dollop of land in Biscayne Bay near Miami Beach, reachable only by a causeway or boat. It is among the most expensive places to live in the United States. Combs' request echoed that of a long line of wealthy defendants who have offered to post multimillion-dollar bails in exchange for home detention in luxurious surroundings.

If he had been granted bail, Combs would have been confined to his home, with visits restricted to family, property caretakers and friends who are not considered co-conspirators, his lawyers said. After prosecutors said they served a search warrant Tuesday on Combs' private security chief, his lawyers offered to hire a new firm to monitor him and ensure he abided by the proposed agreement.

Carter was unmoved, questioning the plan as an "allegedly fool-proof system."

Many allegations in Combs' indictment parallel accusations in a November lawsuit filed by Cassie, whose legal name is Casandra Ventura. Combs settled the suit the next day, but its allegations have followed him since.

The AP does not typically name people who say they have been sexually abused unless they come forward publicly, as Ventura did.

Without naming Ventura but clearly referring to her, Agnifilo argued that the entire criminal case is an outgrowth of one long-term, troubled-but-consensual relationship that faltered amid infidelity. The "Freak Offs," he contended, were an expansion of that relationship, and not coercive.

"The sex and the violence were totally separate and motivated by totally different things," Agnifilo said, contending that Combs and Cassie brought sex workers into their relationship because "that was the way these two adults chose to be intimate."

Prosecutors portrayed the scope as larger. They said they had interviewed more than 50 victims and witnesses.

Like many aging hip-hop figures, Bad Boy Records founder Combs had established a gentler public image. The father of seven was a respected businessman whose annual Hamptons "White Party" was once a must-have invitation for the jet-setting elite.

But prosecutors said he facilitated his crimes using the same companies, people and methods that vaulted him to power. They said they would prove the charges with financial and travel records, electronic communications and videos of the "Freak Offs."

In March, authorities raided Combs' Los Angeles and Florida homes, seizing drugs, videos and more than 1,000 bottles of baby oil and lubricant, prosecutors said. They said agents also seized guns and ammunition, including three AR-15s with defaced serial numbers.

A conviction on every charge would require a mandatory 15 years in prison with the possibility of a life sentence.

## 'Hidden Figures' of the space race receive Congress' highest honor at medal ceremony

By ADITHI RAMAKRISHNAN AP Science Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The hidden figures of the space race were recognized with Congress' highest honor at a medal ceremony on Wednesday.

The Congressional Gold Medal was presented to the families of Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, Mary Jackson and Christine Darden at the U.S. Capitol. Darden watched the ceremony from her Connecticut home.

A medal was also given to all the women who worked as mathematicians, engineers and "human computers" in the U.S. space program from the 1930s to 1970s.

"By honoring them, we honor the very best of our country's spirit," said author Margot Lee Shetterly, whose book "Hidden Figures" was adapted into a film in 2016.

The National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics – a precursor to NASA – hired hundreds of women to crunch numbers for space missions. The Black women hired worked in a segregated unit of female mathematicians at what is now NASA's Langley Research Center in Virginia.

Johnson's hand-written calculations helped John Glenn become the first American to orbit the Earth in 1962. She was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2015 – the nation's highest civilian honor.

Vaughan rose to become NASA's first Black supervisor and Jackson was NASA's first Black female engineer. Darden is best known for her sonic boom research.

## Lawyers question whether a drugged French woman was truly unconscious during alleged rapes

By DIANE JEANTET and MARINE LESPRIT Associated Press

AVIGNON, France (AP) — Lawyers for some of the men accused of raping an unconscious French woman who had been drugged by her husband questioned her Wednesday about her habits, personal life and sex life, and even questioned whether she was truly unconscious during the encounters.

Gisèle Pelicot's testimony came a day after her ex-husband, Dominique Pelicot, told the court that for nearly 10 years, he drugged her and invited dozens of men to rape her as she lay defenseless. She fiercely rejected any suggestion that she was anything but an unwitting victim.

"Since I've arrived in this courtroom, I've felt humiliated. I am treated like an alcoholic, an accomplice. ... I have heard it all," she said at the start of the day's proceedings, breaking at times with the remarkable calm and stoicism she has shown throughout the often harrowing trial that has gripped France.

Gisèle Pelicot, who was married to her husband for 50 years and shares three children with him, has become a hero to many rape victims and a symbol of the fight against sexual violence in France for waiving her anonymity in the case, letting the trial be public and appearing openly in front of the media.

Her ex-husband and the 50 other men on trial, who range in age from 26 to 74, face up to 20 years in prison if convicted.

Many of the defendants deny having raped Gisèle Pelicot. Some claim they were tricked by Dominique Pelicot, others say they believed she was consenting, and others argue that her husband's consent was sufficient.

Gisèle Pelicot and her lawyers say the preponderance of evidence -- thousands of videos and photos shot by her ex-husband of men having sex with her while she appeared to be unconscious -- should be enough to prove she was a victim and was entirely unaware of what Dominique Pelicot was subjecting her to from at least 2011 until 2020.

But on Wednesday, defense lawyers focused their questions on the notion of consent and whether she was aware of what was happening at any point during some of the 90 sexual encounters that prosecutors believe were rapes.

"Don't you have tendencies that you are not comfortable with?" one lawyer asked Gisèle Pelicot.



# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 65 of 83

"I'm not even going to answer this question, which I find insulting," she responded, her voice breaking. "I understand why victims of rape don't press charges. We really spill everything out into the open to humiliate the victim."

Another lawyer asked whether she was indeed unconscious during one of the encounters captured on video.

"I didn't give my consent to Mr. Pelicot or these men behind me for one second," she said, referring to her ex-husband's co-defendants. "In the state I was in, I could not respond to anybody. I was in a state of coma — the videos will attest to it."

The line of questioning upset her. "Since when can a man decide for his wife?" she said, stressing that only one of her ex-husband's 50 co-defendants had refused his invitation to rape her. That man met Dominique Pelicot online and invited him to rape his own wife, who was also drugged, authorities contend.

"What are these men? Are they degenerates?" she said angrily. "They have committed rapes. That's all I have to say."

Another questioned the time and date stamps on the videos, and whether she thought the sexual acts lasted as long as the stamps suggested. "Rape is not a question of time," she said.

"To talk of minutes, seconds. ... It does not matter how long they spent. It's so degrading, humiliating what I am hearing in this room," she said.

At one point, Dominique Pelicot, who already said during the trial that all of the accusations against him are true, came out in support of his ex-wife, saying, "Stop suspecting her all the time ... I did many things without her knowing."

On Tuesday, he testified that all of his co-defendants knew exactly what they were doing when he had them over, saying, "They knew everything. They can't say otherwise."

## Teamsters union declines to endorse Trump or Harris for president

By JOSH BOAK and TOM KRISHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The International Brotherhood of Teamsters declined Wednesday to endorse Kamala Harris or Donald Trump for president, saying neither candidate had sufficient support from the 1.3 million-member union.

"Unfortunately, neither major candidate was able to make serious commitments to our union to ensure the interests of working people are always put before Big Business," Teamsters President Sean M. O'Brien said in a statement. "We sought commitments from both Trump and Harris not to interfere in critical union campaigns or core Teamsters industries — and to honor our members' right to strike — but were unable to secure those pledges."

The Teamsters' rebuff reflected a labor union torn over issues of political identity and policy, one that mirrors a broader national divide. Vice President Harris has unmistakably backed organized labor, while former President Trump has appealed to many white blue-collar workers even as he has openly scorned unions at times. By not endorsing anyone, the Teamsters are essentially ceding some influence in November's election as both candidates claimed to have support from its members.

Harris campaign spokesperson Lauren Hitt noted in an emailed statement that more than three dozen retired Teamsters spoke last month in Chicago at the Democratic National Convention, having endorsed Harris. Their pensions were saved through the 2021 passage of the Butch Lewis Act that President Joe Biden and Harris championed.

"While Donald Trump says striking workers should be fired, Vice President Harris has literally walked the picket line and stood strong with organized labor for her entire career," Hitt said. "The Vice President's strong union record is why Teamsters locals across the country have already endorsed her — alongside the overwhelming majority of organized labor."

The Teamsters said Wednesday that internal polling of members showed Trump with an advantage over Harris, a fact that the Republican's campaign immediately seized upon by sending out an email that said the "rank-and-file of the Teamsters Union supports Donald Trump for President."

Trump called the Teamsters' decision not to endorse "a great honor."

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 66 of 83

"It's a great honor," he said. "They're not going to endorse the Democrats. That's a big thing."

Harris met Monday with a panel of Teamsters, having long courted organized labor and made support for the middle class her central policy goal. Trump also met with a panel of Teamsters in January and even invited O'Brien to speak at the Republican National Convention, where the union leader railed against corporate greed.

In an interview Wednesday on Fox News, O'Brien said lack of an endorsement tells candidates that they have to back the Teamsters in the future. "This should be an eye opener for 2028," he said. "If people want the support of the most powerful union in North America, whether you're a Democrat or Republican, start doing some things to support our members," he said.

The Teamsters' choice to not endorse came just weeks ahead of the Nov. 5 election, far later than endorsements by other large unions such as the AFL-CIO, the American Federation of Teachers and the United Auto Workers that have chosen to devote resources to getting out the vote for Harris.

With O'Brien facing a backlash from some Teamsters' members after speaking at the Republican National Convention, it's no surprise that the union decided not to make an endorsement, said Art Wheaton, director of labor studies at Cornell University.

Trump's praise of Tesla CEO Elon Musk for firing workers who supposedly went on strike really made a Trump endorsement very unlikely, Wheaton said. "The members were not in total agreement," he said.

Marick Masters, a business professor emeritus at Wayne State University in Detroit who follows labor issues, said the Teamsters lack of an endorsement suggests a realignment within the union's membership.

For many workers, issues such as gun control, abortion and border security override Trump's expressions of hostility to unions, Masters said.

The Teamsters detailed their objections to the candidates in a statement, starting with their objection to a contract implemented by Congress in 2022 on members working in the railroad sector.

The union wanted both candidates to commit to not deploying the Railway Labor Act to resolve contract disputes and avoid a shutdown of national infrastructure, but Harris and Trump both wanted to keep that option open even though the Teamsters said it would reduce its bargaining power.

Harris has pledged to sign the PRO Act, which would strengthen union protections and is something the Teamsters support. Trump, in his roundtable with the Teamsters, did not promise to veto a proposal to make it harder nationwide to unionize.

Other unions have shown trepidation about endorsing either presidential candidate. The United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers of America on Friday ultimately endorsed Harris with a caveat that "the manner in which party leaders engineered Biden's replacement at the top of the ticket with Vice President Kamala Harris was thoroughly undemocratic," union leadership said in a statement.

But the Teamsters lack of endorsement also suggests an indifference to the Biden-Harris administration, which signed into law a measure that saved the pensions of millions of union retirees, including many in the Teamsters.

As part of its 2021 pandemic aid, the administration included the Butch Lewis Act to save the underfunded pensions of more than 1 million union workers and retirees' underfunded pensions. The act was named after a retired Ohio trucker and Teamsters union leader who spent the last years of his life fighting to prevent massive cuts to the Teamsters' Central States Pension Fund.

## Haiti creates a provisional electoral council to prepare for the first elections since 2016

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — Haiti's government on Wednesday created a provisional electoral council long sought by the international community to prepare the troubled Caribbean country for its first general elections since 2016.

Smith Augustin, a member of the country's transitional presidential council, confirmed to The Associated Press that the electoral council was created, albeit with only seven of what by law is supposed to be a

nine-member panel. He said the two other members would likely be announced in upcoming days.

The electoral council, which represents groups including farmers, journalists, human rights activists and the Vodou community, is tasked with organizing the elections and helping create the legal framework to hold them.

Haiti has not had a president since July 2021, and it last held elections in 2016.

The previous electoral council had been dissolved in September 2021 by former Prime Minister Ariel Henry, who accused it of being "partisan." His move delayed elections planned for November 2021 and prompted critics to accuse Henry of holding on to power, accusations he rejected.

Henry was himself a transitional leader. He was sworn in as prime minister roughly two weeks after former President Jovenel Moïse was assassinated at his private home in July 2021. Henry repeatedly pledged to hold elections but blamed worsening gang violence for his failure to do so.

Earlier this year, gangs that control 80% of the capital of Port-au-Prince launched coordinated attacks on critical government infrastructure, a move that eventually led to Henry's resignation.

A transitional presidential council was then created and tasked with holding presidential elections by February 2026.

The assassination of Moïse had left a major political vacuum.

In addition, the terms of 10 remaining senators expired in January 2023, stripping Haiti of its last democratically elected institution. The country had failed to hold legislative elections since October 2019, with Moïse ruling by decree before he was killed.

The newly formed provisional electoral council faces numerous obstacles, including persistent gang violence blamed for the killing of more than 3,200 people from January to May.

To help quell gang violence, nearly 400 Kenyan police arrived in Haiti earlier this year as part of a U.N.-backed mission that also expects to see the pledged deployment of soldiers and police from the Bahamas, Chad, Benin and Bangladesh.

Turf wars among gangs have left more than half a million people homeless in recent years, with thousands of Haitians forced to flee their homes, abandoning essential documents including ID's needed to vote.

Government officials have been visiting makeshift shelters to provide new IDs, but many Haitians remain without one.

"How are people going to vote?" said Daniel Janvier, 40, who now lives at a shelter after gangs raided his home and forced him to leave everything behind. "Most of the people that I know in this area don't have an ID."

Janvier, who is unemployed after losing his job at a factory making pants, said he had his doubts that the government would actually organize elections.

"I think all of this is a joke," he said. "Thousands and thousands of people are spread out. They won't know where to go and vote if they manage to have elections."

## Ship owner cut corners on repairs before deadly Baltimore bridge collapse, US says in \$100M lawsuit

By LEA SKENE and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — The owner and manager of the cargo ship that caused the deadly Baltimore bridge collapse recklessly cut corners and ignored known electrical problems on the vessel, the Justice Department alleged Wednesday in a lawsuit seeking to recover more than \$100 million that the government spent to clear the underwater debris and reopen the city's port.

The lawsuit filed in Maryland provides the most detailed account yet of the cascading series of failures on the Dali that left its pilots and crew helpless in the face of looming disaster.

The Justice Department alleges that mechanical and electrical systems on the massive ship had been "jury-rigged" and improperly maintained, culminating in a power outage moments before it crashed into a support column on the Francis Scott Key Bridge in March. Six construction workers were killed when the bridge toppled into the water.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 68 of 83

"This tragedy was entirely avoidable," if not for the companies' decision to place an "ill-prepared crew on an abjectly unseaworthy vessel," says the lawsuit against Dali owner Grace Ocean Private Ltd. and manager Synergy Marine Group, both of Singapore.

"They did so to reap the benefit of conducting business in American ports. Yet they cut corners in ways that risked lives and infrastructure," the complaint says.

Darrell Wilson, a Grace Ocean spokesperson, said the owner and manager had no comment on the merits of the claim but "look forward to our day in court to set the record straight."

Justice Department officials refused to answer questions Wednesday about whether a criminal investigation into the collapse remains ongoing. FBI agents boarded the vessel in April.

The ship was leaving Baltimore for Sri Lanka when its steering failed because of the power loss. Six men on a road crew, who were filling potholes during an overnight shift, fell to their deaths. The collapse snarled commercial shipping traffic through the Port of Baltimore for months before the channel was fully opened in June.

The companies filed a court petition days after the collapse seeking to limit their legal liability in what could become the most expensive marine casualty case in history. Justice Department officials said there is no legal support for that bid to limit liability and pledged to vigorously contest it.

"With this civil claim, the Justice Department is working to ensure that the costs of clearing the channel and reopening the Port of Baltimore are borne by the companies that caused the crash, not by the American taxpayer," Attorney General Merrick Garland said in a statement.

The case comes a day after the victims' families declared their intent to file a claim seeking to hold the ship's owner and manager liable for the disaster.

Brawner Builders, which employed the victims, filed its own claim for damages Wednesday, saying the company had lost "six beloved employees" as well as the construction equipment and vehicles they were using.

Documents released last week by the National Transportation Safety Board showed investigators discovered a loose cable on the Dali that, when disconnected, triggered an electrical blackout similar to what happened as it approached the bridge on March 26.

But the Dali had already experienced power issues earlier. Its first blackout occurred while still docked in Baltimore after a crew member mistakenly closed an exhaust damper during maintenance, causing one of the diesel engines to stall, according to safety investigators. Crew members then switched from one transformer and breaker system — which had been in use for several months — to a second that was active upon its departure. That second system is where investigators found the loose cable.

The Justice Department complaint points to "excessive vibrations" on the ship that attorneys called a "well-known cause of transformer and electrical failure." Instead of dealing with the source of the excessive vibrations, crew members "jury-rigged" the ship, the complaint alleges.

The complaint notes cracked equipment in the engine room and pieces of cargo shaken loose. Inspectors also found loose nuts and bolts and broken electrical cable ties, the Justice Department says. The ship's electrical equipment was in such bad condition that an independent agency stopped further electrical testing because of safety concerns, according to the lawsuit.

"In sum, this accident happened because of the careless and grossly negligent decisions made by Grace Ocean and Synergy, who recklessly chose to send an unseaworthy vessel to navigate a critical waterway and ignored the risks," said Acting Deputy Assistant Attorney General Chetan A. Patil.

When the active transformer and breaker system failed as the ship approached the bridge, power should have automatically transferred to the ship's other system, the lawsuit says, "but this automation, a safety feature tailor made for the occasion at hand, had been recklessly disabled." Instead, the ship's engineers had to manually restore power, which took a full minute, the complaint says.

If the transformers had been in automatic mode rather than manual, the ship "would not have lost power and steering for any meaningful period of time, and the devastating tragedy that ensued would not have occurred," the lawsuit says.

Power was momentarily restored by the engineers, but it again switched off because of a separate problem

with the ship's fuel pumps, which resulted from a cost-cutting measure, the Justice Department alleges. The anchor couldn't be immediately deployed and the bow thruster was unavailable in the critical moments when the ship's pilots were desperately trying to avoid disaster, according to the complaint.

## The Federal Reserve is finally lowering rates. Here's what consumers should know

By CORA LEWIS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The Federal Reserve has cut its benchmark interest rate from its 23-year high, with consequences for debt, savings, auto loans, mortgages and other forms of borrowing by consumers and businesses.

On Wednesday, the Fed announced that it reduced its key rate by an unusually large half-percentage point, to between 4.75 and 5 percent, the first rate cut in more than four years.

The central bank is acting because, after imposing 11 rate hikes dating back to March 2022, it feels confident that inflation is finally mild enough that it can begin to ease the cost of borrowing. At the same time, the Fed has grown more concerned about the health of the job market. Lower rates would help support the pace of hiring and keep unemployment down.

"Recent indicators suggest that economic activity has continued to expand at a solid pace," the Fed said in a statement. "Job gains have slowed, and the unemployment rate has moved up but remains low. Inflation has made further progress."

More Fed rate cuts are expected in the coming months, with the steepness of the reductions dependent on the direction of inflation and job growth.

"We know that it is time to recalibrate our (interest rate) policy to something that's more appropriate given the progress on inflation," Fed Chair Jerome Powell said at a news conference. "The labor market is actually in solid condition and our intention with our policy move today is to keep it there."

"We don't think we're behind — we think this is timely," he added. "But I think you can take this as a sign of our commitment not to get behind."

What do the Fed's rate cuts mean for savers?

Although taking action now to try to capitalize on lower rates, like shifting money out of a certificate of deposit or refinancing a mortgage, "might be warranted for some, you shouldn't feel obligated to completely change up your financial strategy just because rates move lower," said Jacob Channel, a senior economist at LendingTree.

"Act cautiously and responsibly," Channel said, "and don't make any rash decisions based on a single Fed meeting or economic report."

Eventually, yields for savers will decline as the Fed lowers its benchmark rate.

"As attractive as yields on savings instruments have recently been, it's wise not to hold too much in cash because these are short-term instruments and their yields are ephemeral," said Christine Benz, director of personal finance at Morningstar. "The really great yields that we've had recently may go lower."

If you don't have a need for cash right away, you can continue to lock in what are "still pretty decent yields on offer," she said. In that case, "longer-term certificates of deposit might make sense."

"Lower interest rates make it harder to maximize savings and preserve the capital built while interest rates have been higher," said Matt Brannon, a personal finance expert at MarketWatch guides. "An easy short-term move to protect your savings is to shift your funds into a high-yield savings account, which offers higher interest rates than traditional savings accounts... These types of savings accounts will still help you to preserve capital due to comparatively higher interest rates."

How will the rate cuts affect credit card debt and other borrowing?

"While lower rates are certainly a good thing for those struggling with debt, the truth is that this one rate cut isn't really going to make much of a difference for most people," said Matt Schulz, a credit analyst at LendingTree.

That said, the Fed's declining benchmark rate will eventually mean better rates for borrowers, many of

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 70 of 83

whom are facing some of the highest credit card interest rates in decades. The average interest rate is 23.18% for new offers and 21.51% for existing accounts, according to WalletHub's August Credit Card Landscape Report.

Still, "the best thing people can do to lower interest rates is to take matters into their own hands," Schulz said. "Consolidating your debts with a 0% balance transfer credit card or a low-interest personal loan can have a far bigger impact on your debt load than most anything the Fed will do."

How about mortgages?

The Fed's benchmark rate doesn't directly set or correspond to mortgage rates. But it does have a major indirect influence, and the two "tend to move in the same direction," said LendingTree's Channel.

To wit, mortgage rates have already declined ahead of the Fed's predicted cut.

"It goes to show that even when the Fed isn't doing anything and just holding steady, mortgage rates can still move," he said.

Channel said that the majority of Americans have mortgages at 5%, so rates may have to fall further than their current average of 6.46% before many people consider refinancing.

And car loans?

"With auto loans, it's good news that rates will be falling, but it doesn't change the basic blocking and tackling of things, which is that it's still really important to shop around and not just accept the rate that a car dealer would offer you at the dealership," said Greg McBride, an analyst at Bankrate. "It's also really important to save what you can and be able to try to put as much down on that vehicle as you can."

McBride predicts that the rate cuts and the avoidance of a recession will lead to lower auto loan rates, at least for borrowers with strong credit profiles. For those with lower credit profiles, double digit rates will likely persist for the remainder of the year.

Robert Frick, corporate economist for Navy Federal Credit Union, said that while he thinks a rate cut will work its way into auto loans, it probably won't happen immediately and people with higher credit scores will likely benefit first.

Loans for new vehicles right now are averaging 7.1%, with used vehicle loans at a much higher 11.3%, according to Edmunds.com.

Those rates, coupled with still-high prices, have sent many possible buyers to the sidelines waiting for rates to drop. Partly as a result, U.S. new vehicle sales rose only a sluggish 2.4% through June.

High prices and rates have also led to more delinquent payments and defaults on auto loans, especially among people with lower credit scores. As a result, Frick said, many lenders will probably try to keep rates high to cover potential losses.

"Rates will be coming down, but we shouldn't expect them to come down quickly overall," he said.

Frick suggests waiting for additional Fed rate cuts to come through if possible, especially if you're buying a used vehicle.

Jeff Schuster, vice president of automotive research for Global Data, said he doubts that modest rate cuts by the Fed will be enough to draw many buyers off the sidelines, unless automakers offer their own low-interest loans and other discounts.

"I think it's going to take a couple more cuts before we get any substantial relief for those consumers," he said.

What's going on with inflation and the job market?

Consumer prices rose 2.5% in August from a year earlier, down from 2.9% in July — the fifth straight annual drop and the smallest since February 2021.

Hiring picked up a bit in August, and the unemployment rate dipped for the first time since March. Employers added 142,000 jobs, up from 89,000 in July. The unemployment rate declined to 4.2% from 4.3%, which had been the highest level in nearly three years.

Those signs indicate that the job market, though cooling, remains sturdy.

The rate at which the Fed continues to cut rates after September will depend in part on what happens next with inflation and the job market, in the coming weeks and months.

## A Hungarian company is linked to the pagers that exploded in Lebanon and Syria

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) — In a duplex in a quiet neighborhood of the Hungarian capital is the headquarters of a company that is linked to the manufacture of the pagers that exploded in Lebanon and Syria as part of an apparent Israeli operation against the Hezbollah militant group.

BAC Consulting shares the ground floor of the modest building in Budapest with other enterprises. On Wednesday morning, Associated Press journalists saw the names of multiple companies, including BAC, posted on pieces of printer paper and taped in a window.

In a corporate registry, the company listed 118 official functions, including sugar and oil production, retail jewelry sales and natural gas extraction.

BAC reportedly supplied the thousands of devices that killed at least 12 people, including two children, and wounded about 2,800 on Tuesday in a coordinated attack that Hezbollah and the Lebanese government blamed on Israel.

More attacks were reported Wednesday, when walkie-talkies and solar equipment exploded in multiple parts of Lebanon. The second wave of attacks killed at least 14 people and wounded more than 450, the Health Ministry said.

The Taiwanese company whose brand appears on the pagers, Gold Apollo, said Wednesday that it had authorized the use of its name on the devices.

BAC was authorized "to use our brand trademark for product sales in designated regions, but the design and manufacturing of the products are solely the responsibility of BAC," Gold Apollo said in a statement.

A Hungarian government spokesman said the pagers were never in Hungary and that BAC Consultants merely acted as an intermediary.

"Authorities have confirmed that the company in question is a trading intermediary, with no manufacturing or operational site in Hungary. It has one manager registered at its declared address, and the referenced devices have never been in Hungary," Zoltán Kovács posted Wednesday on X. He did not say where the pagers were manufactured.

Hungarian national security services were cooperating with international partners, and the matter posed no national security risk to Hungary, he added.

BAC Consulting, which was registered as a limited liability company in May 2022, brought in \$725,000 in revenue in 2022 and \$593,000 in 2023, according to the company registry.

Its CEO is Cristiana Bársony-Arcidiacono, who describes herself on LinkedIn as a strategic adviser and business developer with a doctorate.

BAC could be an acronym, in the Eastern name order that is used in Hungary, for Bársony-Arcidiacono Cristiana.

The AP attempted to reach Bársony-Arcidiacono by email and social media sites but received no response. It was not clear what connection, if any, she or BAC had to the attack.

She describes herself as a physicist and a consultant for projects to solve environmental and political issues. She co-authored a paper in 2022 for a UNESCO conference on underground water management.

Among other positions, Bársony-Arcidiacono's LinkedIn page said she serves on the board of directors of the Earth Child Institute, a sustainability group. But the group does not list Bársony-Arcidiacono among its board members on its website.

She also writes that she is a strategic adviser for major international organizations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency and the CARE humanitarian agency, as well as for venture capital firms.

The IAEA confirmed that a person by Bársony-Arcidiacono's name was an intern with the agency for nine months in 2008 and 2009. The other relationships could not be immediately confirmed.

In an article featuring her on an online expert site, Bársony-Arcidiacono said: "A good understanding of local issues and a network of collaborators in various areas are important to succeed."

The BAC Consulting website, which became unavailable Wednesday, describes the company's fields of

expertise as "environment, development and international affairs."

Phone calls to the number listed for BAC went unanswered. A woman who emerged Wednesday from the Budapest building housing the company's headquarters said the location is used as a service that provides addresses to companies. She would not give her name.

Social media accounts indicate Bársony-Arcidiacono studied at the London School of Economics and Political Science and the School of Oriental and African Studies. She has also posted published scientific papers on water ionization, climate change and other topics in the natural sciences.

An Instagram account features many of her "photos and sketches from around the world." "Sicily, Budapest, Paris, Africa, etc.," it reads.

## US wants more clarity from Ukraine on possible use of long-range weapons

By LOLITA C. BALDOR and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration still is not convinced that it should give Ukraine the authority to launch long-range missiles deeper into Russia, and U.S. officials say they are seeking more detailed information about how Kyiv would use the weapons and how they fit into the broader strategy for the war.

U.S. officials said they have asked Ukraine to spell out more clearly its combat objectives, as President Joe Biden prepares to meet with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy next week.

Administration officials are concerned that loosening restrictions on the use of the weapons would have limited impact and come with great risk. Russian President Vladimir Putin last week warned that Russia would be "at war" with the United States and its NATO allies if they allow Ukraine to use the long-range weapons.

U.S. defense officials have repeatedly argued that the long-range missiles are limited in number and that Ukraine already is using its own long-range drones to hit targets farther into Russia. That capability was evidenced by a Ukrainian drone strike overnight that hit a large military depot, causing a huge blaze, in a town 500 kilometers (300 miles) from the border.

Ukrainian leaders, however, say they need permission to strike weapons depots, airfields and military bases far from the border to motivate Russia to seek peace. The U.S. allows Ukraine to use American-provided weapons in more limited, cross-border strikes to counter attacks by Russian forces.

The U.S. is coming under mounting pressure from NATO allies who believe Ukraine should be the one to decide how and where it uses the weapons and how it fights its own war. A senior U.S. official said the subject came up during meetings of NATO defense chiefs in Europe over the weekend — attended by Gen. CQ Brown, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff — and that most advocated in favor of the change.

The U.S. officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

Ukraine is pressing to use U.S.-supplied Army Tactical Missile Systems, or ATACMS, and British-supplied Storm Shadow missiles to hit deeper into Russia. Biden discussed the issue during a meeting last week with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer.

U.S. officials familiar with discussions said they believed Starmer was seeking Biden's approval to allow Ukraine to use the Storm Shadow missiles for expanded strikes in Russia. Biden's approval may be needed because Storm Shadow components are made in the U.S. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to share the status of private conversations.

Starmer said talks would continue when global leaders convene for the U.N. General Assembly gathering next week. Biden's meeting with Zelenskyy is expected to happen late next week after the U.S. president returns from the U.N.

A senior U.S. official said the U.S. wants to help Ukraine shape its combat objectives for the war and the use of long-range weapons.

On Saturday, the head of NATO's military committee said Ukraine has the solid legal and military right



to strike deep inside Russia to gain combat advantage. Speaking in Prague at the close of the meeting of the alliance's military chiefs, Adm. Rob Bauer of the Netherlands said, "Every nation that is attacked has the right to defend itself. And that right doesn't stop at the border of your own nation."

Lt. Gen. Karel Řehka, chief of the General Staff of the Czech Armed Forces, made it clear his nation places no such weapons restrictions on Kyiv.

"We believe that the Ukrainians should decide themselves how to use it," Řehka said.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, however, has consistently pushed back on the idea that long-range strikes would be a game-changer.

"I don't believe one capability is going to be decisive, and I stand by that comment," Austin said, noting that Ukraine has other means to strike long-range targets.

## **Blinken says surprise escalations threaten to derail talks for a cease-fire in Gaza**

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken expressed frustration Wednesday at surprise escalations that threaten to derail efforts to broker a cease-fire deal in Gaza, noting that the United States is assessing a deadly attack that caused pagers used by Hezbollah to explode in Lebanon.

Blinken spoke to reporters in Cairo, where he traveled for talks on the cease-fire negotiations and U.S.-Egyptian relations. While Israel has not publicly spoken on responsibility in the pager attack, a U.S. official has said Israel briefed the United States after the explosions.

The United States, Egypt and other international partners are working for an agreement between Israel and Hamas to halt nearly a year of war in Gaza and release hostages held by the militant group. The U.S. says such a deal is the best chance at tamping down wider regional tensions, with Israeli leaders threatening to step up military action against Iranian-backed Hezbollah militants in Lebanon and the pager attack risking further escalation.

"Time and again" when the U.S. and other mediators believe they are making progress on a cease-fire deal in Gaza, "we've seen an event that ... threatens to slow it, stop it, derail it," Blinken said in response to a question about the previous day's explosions in Lebanon.

Personal pagers used by Hezbollah in Lebanon exploded nearly simultaneously Tuesday, killing at least 12 people, including two children.

Blinken reiterated that the U.S. was still gathering information on the circumstances of the pager attack and declined to make more specific comments.

In other unexpected events that have put a cease-fire deal at risk, Blinken spoke of the discovery this month of the bodies of six hostages who Israel said had been recently killed by Hamas. They were among those still held in Gaza following Hamas' Oct. 7 attacks in Israel that launched the war.

When news came of their deaths, negotiators had been making progress on the timing and other details of a swap that would have freed hostages in exchange for the release of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli detention, America's top diplomat said.

Blinken, who had meetings with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi and Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty, said the most dire need in the troubled cease-fire negotiations was for both sides to show they actually wanted a deal.

"The most important thing in this moment is to see a demonstration of political will," Blinken said.

He headed to his 10th trip to the Middle East since the war in Gaza began without the optimistic projections that the Biden administration has previously conveyed of a breakthrough in the negotiations. The U.S., Egypt and other allies say a deal is essential to quelling escalated attacks by Iranian-backed groups in Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq and Syria.

Israeli leaders warned this week of a possible military offensive in Lebanon to stop what have become daily exchanges of rockets and missiles between Hezbollah and Israel across the southern Lebanese border.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 74 of 83

Abdelatty, the Egyptian foreign minister, said Wednesday the region was on the brink of wider war and spoke critically of Tuesday's targeted explosions in Lebanon.

"Any escalation, including what happened yesterday, certainly hinders reaching a cease-fire deal and the release of hostages and detainees," he said. "Certainly what happened doesn't only hinder the current talks, but also risks getting into a full-scale war."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been accused of slow-rolling the talks for a cease-fire in Gaza because a deal could mean the collapse of his hardline coalition government, with some members opposed to any deal with the Palestinians.

## Derek Carr and the Saints buck the NFL trend of early season offensive struggles

By JOSH DUBOW AP Pro Football Writer

Inside the Numbers dives into NFL statistics, streaks and trends each week. For more Inside the Numbers, head here.

The worst start to a season for passing offenses in years hasn't hit the New Orleans Saints.

While quarterbacks and offenses around the league have struggled to get going, Derek Carr and the Saints are clicking with an early efficiency that might not ever have been reached before in the NFL.

The Saints followed a 47-point outburst in the season opener against the Carolina Panthers by beating the Dallas Cowboys 44-19 on Sunday, becoming the fifth team to score at least 44 points in each of the first two games of a season.

New Orleans was the last team to do it in 2009 on the way to the franchise's only Super Bowl title, with the other three instances coming before the 1970 NFL-AFL merger. The Raiders did it in 1968, Detroit in 1962 and the Rock Island Independents in 1920 in the inaugural season in what is now known as the NFL.

The Saints, under new coordinator Klint Kubiak, scored on their first 15 drives of the season with Carr at quarterback, scoring on all nine drives in the opener before Carr was replaced by Jake Haener and then getting TDs on the first six possessions against the Cowboys before an interception ended that run.

Sportradar has tracked player participation since 2006 and no quarterback in that span had led 15 straight scoring drives at any point of a season. The longest streaks before Carr's for the Saints, excluding drives that ended with kneel downs at the end of a half or game, were a 13-drive streak for Drew Brees and the Saints in 2018 and streaks of 12 for Baltimore's Lamar Jackson in 2019 and New England's Tom Brady in 2007.

Carr and the Saints are the exception, with the 128 offensive touchdowns down 54 from the first two weeks in 2020 and tied for the second fewest in the last 18 seasons. The 193.6 net yards passing per game are the fewest through two weeks since 1996 (188.3).

While Carr has thrown for only 443 yards in the first two weeks thanks to blowouts that led to a heavy dose of runs, only five QBs have hit the 300-yard mark for the fewest 300-yard passing games in the first two weeks since 1996, when there were only three.

The situation isn't nearly so rosy for another NFC South team, with 2023 No. 1 overall draft pick Bryce Young having only 245 yards passing in two games combined, leading to his benching just two games into his second season.

Young was the 27th quarterback taken first overall in the common draft era and the first of those to lose his starting job in his second season for non-injury reasons.

Young's production has been anemic, with his career passer rating (70.9), touchdown passes (11) and yards per attempt (5.4) trailing the numbers through 18 starts of 2007 No. 1 overall pick JaMarcus Russell, who is the epitome of a top-pick QB bust.

Young's 2-16 record is the third worst of any quarterback who has made at least 15 starts, and he went four straight starts dating to last season with no TD passes and fewer than 165 yards passing in each

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 75 of 83

game. Only four other QBs had done that since 2000, with at least 12 attempts in each game.

While Young has struggled in Year 2, the rookie QBs haven't fared much better, with Caleb Williams, Jayden Daniels and Bo Nix combining for a 64.2 passer rating and no TD passes on 196 attempts.

That's the most attempts for rookie quarterbacks in the first two weeks without a TD since the merger, topping the 70 from 1970 when Terry Bradshaw was the top rookie.

Tough Tomlin

The Pittsburgh Steelers have more wins than touchdowns this season in what can best be described as Mike Tomlin football.

After winning the opener against Atlanta on six field goals by Chris Boswell, Pittsburgh got into the end zone once on Sunday in a 13-6 win over Denver.

The Steelers are just the third team since at least 1960 to win the first two games of a season while scoring only one TD combined in those games. Detroit did it in 2000 and Buffalo in 1988.

The wins the first two weeks improved Tomlin's record as a coach to 42-40-1 (.512) when his team scores one offensive touchdown or fewer in a game. The rest of the NFL has a .227 winning percentage in that situation since Tomlin was hired in 2007, with no other coach with at least 10 tries having a winning record.

How'd that happen?

The New York Giants scored three touchdowns on Sunday against Washington, allowed none and somehow came out on the losing end of a 21-18 score.

How rare is that?

Extremely, it turns out.

The last time a team scored at least three touchdowns, gave up none and lost a game came on Nov. 5, 1989. On that day, Minnesota got seven field goals from Rich Karlis in regulation and beat the Rams 23-21 in overtime when the Vikings blocked a punt for a game-ending safety.

In all, there have been 1,235 times since 2000 that a team scored three more TDs than the opponent. The Giants are just the second of those teams to lose, with the other coming Oct. 21, 2007, when Houston fell 38-36 to Tennessee. The Titans got a record eight field goals from Rob Bironas and two TDs that day, while the Texans scored five touchdowns.

Nearly as unlikely was the comeback for Atlanta against Philadelphia on Monday night. The Falcons had a 0.7% chance of winning when they trailed 18-15 with 1:56 remaining and the Eagles had a first down at the Atlanta 17, according to the NFL's Next Gen Stat model.

But two runs followed by the Falcons' final two timeouts and then a dropped pass by Saquon Barkley on third down gave Atlanta a chance. Philadelphia opted to kick a field goal on fourth-and-3 to go up six, setting the stage for Kirk Cousins to drive for the winning TD and the seventh-most improbable win as far back as NGS data goes to 2016.

800 club

The Green Bay Packers became the first team in NFL history to win 800 regular-season games when they topped the Indianapolis Colts 16-10 on Sunday.

The Bears franchise, which began as the Decatur Staleys in 1920, had been the winningest team in NFL history at the end of the league's first 102 seasons before being passed by Green Bay in 2022.

Chicago is second with 794 wins. The only other team with at least 700 wins is the New York Giants with 721.

The Packers also have the most titles with 13, including three won in 1929-31 before the start of the playoffs.

## Scientists detect longest pair of jets streaming from a supermassive black hole

By ADITHI RAMAKRISHNAN AP Science Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Scientists have discovered the longest pair of jets streaming from a black hole in a distant galaxy.

The jets shooting hot plasma are the largest ever spotted – about as long as 140 Milky Way galaxies lined up end-to-end.

“This one has managed to reach a size that’s so big,” said Eileen Meyer, who studies black holes at University of Maryland, Baltimore County and who was not involved in the study.

The discovery, made using images from a European radio telescope, was reported Wednesday in the journal *Nature*.

Black holes eat most space debris that falls their way. Sometimes, heated-up plasma makes a narrow escape by spewing out in thin, high-energy jets.

The jets can break apart soon after their creation, jostled by space turbulence or starved in the absence of new matter. But jets from supermassive black holes can become supersized.

The latest combined jets from a faraway supermassive black hole are around 23 million light-years long. That’s about 7 million light-years longer than the previous recordholder. A light-year is 5.8 trillion miles.

Study co-author Martijn Oei said researchers weren’t expecting to find long black hole jets so early in the universe’s history. The jets date back to when the universe was less than half its current age.

Studying the jets could reveal whether they had an influence on how the early universe came to be, said Oei with the California Institute of Technology.

## Lessons from Red Sea and Ukraine’s Black Sea fight help prep Navy for possible conflict with China

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Navy is taking lessons from its combat in the Red Sea over the past year and what Ukraine has done to hold off the Russians in the Black Sea to help U.S. military leaders prepare the service for a potential future conflict with China.

From drones and unmanned surface vessels to the more advanced operation of ship-board guns, the Navy is expanding its combat skills and broadening training. It is also working to overcome recruiting struggles so it can have the sailors it needs to fight the next war.

Adm. Lisa Franchetti, chief of naval operations, is laying out a series of goals, including several that will be highly challenging to meet, in a new navigation plan she described in an interview with *The Associated Press*. The objective is to be ready to face what the Pentagon calls its key national security challenge — China.

“I’m very focused on 2027. It’s the year that that President Xi (Jinping) told his forces to be ready to invade Taiwan,” Franchetti said. “We need to be more ready.”

The new plan, set to be released Wednesday, includes what she considers seven priority goals, ranging from removing delays in ship depot maintenance to improving Navy infrastructure, recruiting and the use of drones and autonomous systems.

One significant challenge is to have 80% of the force be ready enough at any given time to deploy for combat if needed — something she acknowledged is a “stretch goal.” The key, she said, is to get to a level of combat readiness where “if the nation calls us, we can push the ‘go’ button and we can surge our forces to be able to meet the call.”

The announcement of the goals comes as U.S. leaders are treading a fine line, pledging a commitment to the defense of Taiwan while also working to keep communication open with Beijing to deter greater conflict.

Taiwan, a self-governing island democracy that split from communist China in 1949, has rejected Beijing’s

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 77 of 83

demands that it accept unification. China says it will do so by force if necessary. The United States is obligated under domestic law to help defend Taiwan and give it weapons and technology to deter invasion.

An important element in any Asia-Pacific conflict will be the need to control the seas. Franchetti said the U.S. can learn from how the Ukrainians have used drones, airstrikes and long-range unmanned vessels to limit Russian ship activity in the western Black Sea and keep access open to critical ports.

"If you look at the Ukrainian success in really keeping the Russian Black Sea fleet pushed all the way over into the east, that's all about sea denial and that's very important," Franchetti said. She added that Ukraine has been innovating on the battlefield by using existing systems, such as drones, in different ways.

The Navy's monthslong battle with the Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen has provided other lessons.

"I think probably no one is learning more than the Navy, because really, this is the first time we've been in a weapons engagement zone for this sustained period," she said.

She said sailors are watching their attacks and analyzing the data as ships respond.

Earlier this year, the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower aircraft carrier was stationed in the Red Sea to respond to help Israel and to defend commercial and military ships from Houthi attacks. The carrier returned home after an eight-month-plus deployment that the Navy said was the most intense running sea battle since World War II.

F/A-18 fighter jets routinely launched off the carrier's deck to take out Houthi weapons, and Navy destroyers persistently fired rounds of missiles and used on-board guns to shoot down incoming strikes and drones.

On board the USS Mason destroyer, which was stationed with the Eisenhower, Franchetti in August met and promoted one of the destroyer's fire control sailors who worked on its large, fully automatic artillery gun. Unlike missiles, many of the drones launched by the Houthis were more complicated and challenging to target and shoot down, and he was able to adjust the gun to better defeat them.

"He could see how it was performing against the Houthi threat," Franchetti said, "and he came up with a different way to use the gun to make it more effective in these engagements."

She did not identify the sailor and declined to provide details on the exact changes he recommended. But it resulted in new formal military tactics and procedures that were distributed to all other ships.

Another key effort will be to improve Navy development of unmanned and autonomous systems and weapons and integrate them into training and combat. As the military brings on new technologies, including unmanned surface vessels, the Navy needs to ensure it has trained sailors who can use and repair them.

The new navigation plan notes that the Navy is now working on concepts and requirements for larger robotic systems and the artificial intelligence applications they could use to understand and control the battlespace.

Navy leaders also understand the financial restraints they will likely face from Congress — limits that rivals such as China do not have. China outpaces the U.S. in the number of ships and is expected to do so into the future.

Navy officials said that while they would like a bigger naval force, they need to offset that by working more effectively with the Army, Air Force, Space Force and Marines, which is something the U.S. has historically done very well.

A challenge will be eliminating the maintenance overruns that often prevent ships from being able to deploy on time. Getting ships in and out of depots on time, Franchetti said, is critical to having a combat-ready Navy.

"These are the things that we know that we need to be able to do to have the force that's going to be more ready every single day," she said.

## **An ancient African tree is providing a new 'superfood' but local harvesters are barely surviving**

By FARAI MUTSAKA Associated Press

Since childhood, Loveness Bhitoni has collected fruit from the gigantic baobab trees surrounding her homestead in Zimbabwe to add variety to the family's staple corn and millet diet. The 50-year-old Bhitoni never saw them as a source of cash, until now.

Climate change-induced droughts have decimated her crops. Meanwhile, the world has a growing appetite for the fruit of the drought-resistant baobab as a natural health food.

Bhitoni wakes before dawn to go foraging for baobab fruit, sometimes walking barefoot though hot, thorny landscapes with the risk of wildlife attacks. She gathers sacks of the hard-shelled fruit from the ancient trees and sells them on to industrial food processors or individual buyers from the city.

The baobab trade, which took root in her area in 2018, would previously supplement things like children's school fees and clothing for locals of the small town of Kotwa in northeastern Zimbabwe. Now, it's a matter of survival following the latest devastating drought in southern Africa, worsened by the El Niño weather phenomenon.

"We are only able to buy corn and salt," Bhitoni said after a long day's harvest. "Cooking oil is a luxury because the money is simply not enough. Sometimes I spend a month without buying a bar of soap. I can't even talk of school fees or children's clothes."

The global market for baobab products has spiked, turning rural African areas with an abundance of the trees into source markets. The trees, known for surviving even under severe conditions like drought or fire, need more than 20 years to start producing fruit and aren't cultivated but foraged.

Tens of thousands of rural people like Bhitoni have emerged to feed the need. The African Baobab Alliance, with members across the continent's baobab producing countries, projects that more than 1 million rural African women could reap economic benefits from the fruit, which remains fresh for long periods because of its thick shell.

The alliance's members train locals on food safety. They also encourage people to collect the fruit, which can grow to 8 inches (20 centimeters) wide and 21 inches (53 centimeters) long, from the ground rather than the hazardous work of climbing the enormous, thick-trunked trees. Many, especially men, still do, however.

Native to the African continent, the baobab is known as the "tree of life" for its resilience and is found from South Africa to Kenya to Sudan and Senegal. Zimbabwe has about 5 million of the trees, according to Zimtrade, a government export agency.

But the baobab's health benefits long went unnoticed elsewhere.

Gus Le Breton, a pioneer of the industry, remembers the early days.

"Baobab did not develop into a globally traded and known superfood by accident," said Le Breton, recalling years of regulatory, safety and toxicology testing to convince authorities in the European Union and United States to approve it.

"It was ridiculous because the baobab fruit has been consumed in Africa safely for thousands and thousands of years," said Le Breton, an ethnobotanist specializing in African plants used for food and medicine.

Studies have shown that the baobab fruit has several health benefits as an antioxidant, and a source of vitamin C and essential minerals such as zinc, potassium and magnesium.

The U.S. legalized the import of baobab powder as a food and beverage ingredient in 2009, a year after the EU. But getting foreign taste buds to accept the sharp, tart-like taste took repeated trips to Western and Asian countries.

"No one had ever heard of it, they didn't know how to pronounce its name. It took us a long time," Le Breton said. The tree is pronounced BAY-uh-bab.

Together with China, the U.S. and Europe now account for baobab powder's biggest markets. The Dutch government's Center for the Promotion of Imports says the global market could reach \$10 billion by 2027. Le Breton says his association projects a 200% growth in global demand between 2025 and 2030, and is

also looking at increasing consumption among Africa's increasingly health-conscious urbanites.

Companies such as Coca-Cola and Pepsi have opened product lines promoting baobab ingredients. In Europe, the powder is hyped by some as having "real star qualities" and is used to flavor beverages, cereals, yogurt, snack bars and other items.

A packet of a kilogram (2.2 pound) of baobab powder sells for around 27 euros (about \$30) in Germany. In the United Kingdom, a 100-milliliter (3.38-ounce) bottle of baobab beauty oil can fetch 25 pounds (about \$33).

The growing industry is on display at a processing plant in Zimbabwe, where baobab pulp is bagged separately from the seeds. Each bag has a tag tracing it to the harvester who sold it. Outside the factory, the hard shells are turned into biochar, an ash given to farmers for free to make organic compost.

Harvesters like Bhitoni say they can only dream of affording the commercial products the fruit becomes. She earns 17 cents for every kilogram of the fruit and she can spend up to eight hours a day walking through the sunbaked savanna. She has exhausted the trees nearby.

"The fruit is in demand, but the trees did not produce much this year, so sometimes I return without filling up a single sack," Bhitoni said. "I need five sacks to get enough money to buy a 10-kilogram (22-pound) packet of cornmeal."

Some individual buyers who feed a growing market for the powder in Zimbabwe's urban areas prey on residents' drought-induced hunger, offering cornmeal in exchange for seven 20-liter (around 4-gallon) buckets of cracked fruit, she said.

"People have no choice because they have nothing," said Kingstone Shero, the local councilor. "The buyers are imposing prices on us and we don't have the capacity to resist because of hunger."

Le Breton sees better prices ahead as the market expands.

"I think that the market has grown significantly, (but) I don't think it has grown exponentially. It's been fairly steady growth," he said. "I believe at some point that it will increase in value as well. And at that point, then I think that the harvesters will really start to be earning some serious income from the harvesting and sale of this really truly remarkable fruit."

Zimtrade, the government export agency, has lamented the low prices paid to baobab pickers and says it's looking at partnering with rural women to set up processing plants.

The difficult situation is likely to continue due to a lack of negotiating power by fruit pickers, some of them children, said Prosper Chitambara, a development economist based in Zimbabwe's capital, Harare.

On a recent day, Bhitoni walked from one baobab tree to the next. She carefully examined each fruit before leaving the smaller ones for wild animals such as baboons and elephants to eat — an age-old tradition.

"It is tough work, but the buyers don't even understand this when we ask them to increase prices," she said.

## What will become of Sean 'Diddy' Combs' musical legacy? Experts weigh in following his indictment

By MARIA SHERMAN AP Music Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Sean "Diddy" Combs is widely recognized as one of the most influential figures in hip-hop, but his indictment Tuesday on sex trafficking and racketeering charges further clouds his legacy. For some, it may change their relationship to his music.

The indictment, detailing allegations dating back to 2008, accuses him of abusing, threatening and coercing women for years "to fulfill his sexual desires, protect his reputation, and conceal his conduct."

Some experts believe the severity of the crimes may tarnish his career moving forward.

"The chance to just be looked at strictly in musical terms, and that being the defining part of his legacy, is pretty much gone," says Peter A. Berry, a music journalist with work in XXL and Complex.

"I'm not sure you can play 'Mo Money, Mo Problems' at the barbeque now," he says. "You can't look at Diddy's music in a vacuum the same way you did before."

"He's gone from this aspirational, go-getting music industry legend to essentially, arguably, the Bill Cosby

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 80 of 83

of hip-hop.”

Berry views Combs indictment as “a continuation of a reckoning for the rap world,” which includes sexual misconduct allegations leveled at Russell Simmons by multiple women, as well as R&B-singer R Kelly who is serving a 30-year prison sentence for using his fame to sexually abuse young fans, including some who were just children, in a systematic scheme that went on for decades.

Sowmya Krishnamurthy, music journalist and author of “Fashion Killa: How Hip-Hop Revolutionized High Fashion,” sees it differently.

“It’s always a question of — are fans going to separate the person from the art? Are you able to differentiate the good musical contribution somebody has made, the artists they’ve introduced us to, the hit songs they’ve given us, the soundtrack to our lives versus what’s going on in their personal life, the legal issues that they’re facing?” she asks.

“When it comes to Puff, very similar to a lot of incredibly talented, successful but problematic men, I do think many fans will be able to differentiate the two.”

She says you can still expect to hear Diddy’s music out in the world — the records he made, produced, released and beyond — but the effects will be felt elsewhere.

“We’re not going to see his music synced in TV shows and films. You’re not going to see his music being synced, for example, in commercials,” she says.

As for streaming platforms: “As long as people keep streaming records, watching music videos and supporting it behind the scenes, I think a lot of companies have no problem quietly profiting,” she adds.

Combs is one of the best-known music executives, producers and performers across hip-hop, having won three Grammys and worked with artists such as Notorious B.I.G., Mary J. Blige, Usher, Lil Kim, Faith Evans and 112. He founded Bad Boy Records in 1993, the influential fashion line Sean John, a vodka brand and the Revolt TV network. He sold off his stake in the latter company in June of this year.

In the ‘00s, he was a producer on MTV’s reality television series “Making the Band,” and “Making His Band,” launching the careers of artists like the girl group Danity Kane while embodying a kind of temperamental, “grandiose television personality,” A.D. Carson, associate professor of hip-hop at University of Virginia points out.

“Does MTV stop running those shows if they’re running in syndication?” he asks. “No company that’s making money off of something that they produce is going to willingly give up that money.

“I don’t think anybody who’s still committed to listening to Diddy’s music in 2024 is going to be convinced by this indictment to stop listening to it in the same way that somebody who is, you know, listening to R. Kelly in 2024,” he adds.

Diddy hasn’t consistently released new solo music the last two decades. Carson theorizes that might make it easier for others to stop playing his records. “The easiest place to boycott is a place that you were never going to patronize anyway.”

It has been 17 years since Combs had a top 10 hit — 2007’s “Last Night” featuring Keisha Cole hit No. 10 on the Billboard Hot 100. Still, his career and cultural contributions continue to be celebrated. In 2022, Combs received the Lifetime Achievement Award at the BET Awards. Last year, he performed at the MTV VMAs and released his fifth studio album, “The Love Album: Off the Grid,” his first new album since 2006 chart-topping “Press Play.”

“The Love Album” was nominated for best progressive R&B album at the Grammy Awards. Combs did not attend.

“This time last year, Diddy was being handed a key to the city,” Berry points out. “Now he’s being indicted.”

The lawsuits Combs faces began in November 2023, when singer Cassie Ventura sued him for alleging years of sexual abuse including rape. (New York State’s Adult Survivors Act, enacted in 2022, allows victims to file beyond certain statute of limitations.)

In June, video that appeared to show Combs attacking Cassie in a Los Angeles hotel hallway in 2016 surfaced, resulting in public outcry. Howard University cut ties with Combs, rescinding an honorary degree that was awarded to him and disbanding a scholarship program in his name as a result. Combs returned his key to New York City after a request from Mayor Eric Adams in response to the video. And in December, Billboard reported that a forthcoming Hulu reality show following Combs and his family was no longer in



# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 81 of 83

production.

So, what does that say of his career?

"I do think that certain accolades, you know, industry awards, I could see them being rescinded," says Krishnamurthy. "But who knows what the future holds. And I do think as time goes on, sometimes the effect is that people do look at the past with rose-colored glasses or it becomes easier to remove ourselves from the negativity and focus on the music and the good times."

"I think Diddy is basically canceled," says Berry. "I don't see him making a comeback."

"His music is too great to ignore," he adds. "A good amount of people will still play it. But they're going to get a side-eye."

"My hope is that folks don't use Diddy example to scapegoat hip-hop, because this isn't a problem that's unique to hip hop," says Carson.

Additionally, he says "we focus a lot of attention on the legacy on the people who did the harm. The more responsible thing to ask is: What do reparations look like for the people who were harmed?"

## Today in History: September 19 State funeral of Queen Elizabeth II

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, Sept. 19, the 263rd day of 2024. There are 103 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Sept. 19, 2022, Great Britain and the world said a final goodbye to Queen Elizabeth II at a state funeral that drew presidents and kings, princes and prime ministers — and crowds who thronged the streets of London.

Also on this date:

In 1796, President George Washington's farewell address was published. In it, America's first chief executive advised, "Observe good faith and justice toward all nations. Cultivate peace and harmony with all."

In 1881, the 20th president of the United States, James A. Garfield, died 2 1/2 months after being shot by Charles Guiteau; he was succeeded by Vice President Chester A. Arthur.

In 1955, President Juan Peron of Argentina was ousted after a revolt by the army and navy.

In 1957, the United States conducted its first contained underground nuclear test, code-named "Rainier," in the Nevada desert.

In 1985, the Mexico City area was struck by a devastating earthquake that killed at least 9,500 people.

In 1988, Olympic diver Greg Louganis suffered a concussion after striking his head on the diving board during the preliminary round of the 3-meter springboard diving competition at the Seoul Summer Games; Louganis would recover from the injury and win a gold medal in the event the following day.

In 1995, The New York Times and The Washington Post published the manifesto of Unabomber Ted Kaczynski (kah-ZIHN'-skee), which proved instrumental in identifying and capturing him.

In 2004, Hu Jintao (hoo jin-tow) became the undisputed leader of China with the departure of former President Jiang Zemin (jahng zuh-MEEN') from his top military post.

In 2008, struggling to stave off financial catastrophe, the Bush administration laid out a radical bailout plan calling for a takeover of a half-trillion dollars or more in worthless mortgages and other bad debt held by tottering institutions. Relieved investors sent stocks soaring on Wall Street and around the globe.

In 2011, Mariano Rivera of the New York Yankees recorded his 602nd save, making him baseball's all-time leader in the category.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Rosemary Harris is 97. Singer-songwriter Paul Williams is 84. Singer Bill Medley (The Righteous Brothers) is 84. Singer Sylvia Tyson (Ian and Sylvia) is 84. R&B singer Freda Payne is 82. Actor Jeremy Irons is 76. Model-actor Twiggy Lawson is 75. TV personality Joan Lunden is 74. Musician-producer Nile Rodgers is 72. Rock singer Lita Ford is 66. Musician Jarvis Cocker (Pulp) is 62. Country singer Trisha Yearwood is 60. Sen. Tim Scott, R-S.C., is 59. News anchor Soledad O'Brien is 58. Actor Sanaa Lathan (suh-NAH' LAY'-thun) is 53. "Tonight Show" host Jimmy Fallon is 50. Actor Columbus Short is 42.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 82 of 83

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 086 ~ 83 of 83