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Terry Silveira of Clinton and Emily Mortada of Shrewsbury say that they have been scammed by a Worcester used-car dealer. PHOTOS BY ALLAN JUNG/TELEGRAM & GAZETTE

ANALYSIS

States vie to kick off voting in Democratic primaries

Francesca Chambers
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – Democrats are facing a familiar dilemma as they brace for a bruising 2028 presidential primary:

Which states' voters should have the first say in picking the party's nominee?

New Hampshire has history and tradition on its side. It has held the first-in-the-nation primary for more than a century, immediately after Iowa's caucuses.

But neither state is as racially, politically or geographically diverse as Democrats want for the contests at the top of their primary calendar. And they don't necessarily help the party win the swing states that determine the outcome of the general election.

Delaware says it has more to offer. But some of the Democrats tasked with making the decision worry that the state is too closely associated with former President Joe Biden. His late decision to quit the race and anoint former Vice President Kamala Harris as his successor two years ago remains a sore subject within the Democratic Party after her loss to President Donald Trump.

Deciding which states get to hold their nominating contests first, and in what order, during what's known as the early window – the primaries taking place before Super Tuesday – is one of the trickiest decisions facing national Democrats this year. The choice could have far-reaching consequences for a political party wrestling with its identity and looking to recapture the White House.

Members of the rulemaking panel say they hope to make a decision by August so they can vote on the slate at the next Democratic National Committee meeting. In 2022, they squabbled about the order until after the midterms.

Then, Biden ultimately dictated the voting order to members – ousting Iowa, downgrading New Hampshire, promoting Nevada and adding Michigan and Georgia to the first batch. He chose South Carolina to lead off.

Now, the Southern state that gave Biden his first primary victory in 2020 is on the chopping block as Democrats look for a do-over.

"When you don't have the White House, it's a different decision-making process," said Leah Daughtry, a member of Democrats' rulemaking panel and the chair of its 2008 and 2016 conventions.

The contest in the South

At least one state from the South will be in the group that votes first. But South Carolina faces an uphill climb to retain the top spot, and risks being tossed altogether.

The state is diverse: Nearly 28% of its residents are Black, 8% are Hispanic and 2% are Asian. But it hasn't sent a

See PRIMARIES, Page 7A

Worcester buyers say dealer stuck them with 'lemon' used cars

Rachel Gow
Worcester Telegram & Gazette
USA TODAY NETWORK

Terry Silveira, 61, has been buying used vehicles since she was in her 20s.

So, when her 2013 Nissan Altima topped 220,000 miles in June 2025, she didn't think twice about purchasing a used Buick Encore from a Worcester car dealer recommended by a local mechanic.

Almost a year later, Silveira says the decision has turned her life into a "nightmare."

The car she bought immediately broke down, plunging the single mother into thousands of dollars of debt to fix it and touching off a contentious month-long battle in small claims court to recoup the losses. Silveira has yet to get back all of the money the dealer, Dheyaa Almuntafik, has been ordered to pay, despite multiple court rulings in her favor.

It was during the process that Silveira learned that Almuntafik, who also goes by Kian Haider, had a history. Operating out of different locations, under an alias and with an ever-evolving business name, the dealership allegedly sold cars with severe defects to six other people, all with stories eerily similar to Silveira's, according to court documents and victim accounts.

The owner stood by his business practices in an exchange with the Telegram & Gazette.

The group said they are speaking out to save future buyers from a similar fate.

"This has caused me more pain that I could ever explain to you," said Silveira, who depleted her savings and took an advance from her employer to buy the car, in an interview with the T&G. "Of



The check-engine light is on in Emily Mortada's Ford.

course I want my money back, but this is more than that. I am just so scared he will do it again."

Two names, one dealer

The story begins at 610 Lincoln St. in Worcester at a dealership called SGS Auto Sales, owned by a man who introduced himself to customers as Kian.

There are two business certificates for SGS Auto Sales. One, with the name Dheyaa Almuntafik, was discontinued by the applicant on Dec. 8, at which point a new one was issued under the name Kian Haider. Court records indicate they are the same person. There are also filings against Almuntafik for his dealings at a "DH Auto."

Silveira of Clinton and the other buyers the T&G spoke with for this story

said their interactions with "Kian" were largely unceremonious, if anything a bit rushed.

In November, Emily Mortada, 24, of Shrewsbury said she test-drove a blue 2018 Ford Escape, negotiating the price down from \$7,000 to \$5,000 before signing the title, in an interaction that lasted only an hour.

Michael Jaramillo-Massa, a 20-year-old Worcester Polytechnic Institute student, said the 2007 Toyota Camry he bought at SGS Auto Sales in July "looked great."

Both Mortada and Jaramillo-Massa brought mechanics with them to the dealership who didn't detect any significant defects with the vehicles, they said.

See CARS, Page 5A

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