



GAS TAX BREAK?

AMID A TENUOUS CEASEFIRE WITH IRAN, PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP SAID HE SUPPORTS A SUSPENSION OF THE FEDERAL GAS TAX, BUT CONGRESS WOULD HAVE TO APPROVE. **C2**

SUPERIOR COURT

Judge refuses to toss charges in deaths of Gaudreau brothers



Sean Higgins, right, appears in Salem County Superior Court on Monday. Higgins is accused of driving while intoxicated when he fatally struck NHL player Johnny Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew Gaudreau, in 2024. *Joe Warner, for NJ.com*

The defense argued prosecutors misled the grand jury over blood alcohol evidence after hockey star and his brother were killed.

Matt Gray *NJ.com*

A judge has denied a bid to dismiss charges against the driver accused of killing hockey star Johnny Gaudreau and his brother in a 2024 crash.

Attorneys for Sean M. Higgins argued that prosecutors misled a grand jury by claiming their client was legally intoxicated when he struck NHL player Johnny Gaudreau, 31, and Matthew R. Gaudreau, 29, as the pair bicycled along a rural road in Salem County.

Gaudreau, a star on the Columbus Blue Jackets, and his brother died at the scene.

Prosecutors said Higgins' blood alcohol concentration measured 0.087% after the crash. That was above the legal limit of 0.08%.

However, a defense expert's review determined his blood alcohol concentration was 0.075%. The expert said the test was done on Higgins' blood serum, instead of his whole blood sample, skewing the original results.

Prosecutors stood behind their claim that Higgins was drunk, arguing the defense's challenge was based on a single expert's opinion.

Prosecutors argued the grand jury was given an accurate account of how the blood



Columbus Blue Jackets star Johnny Gaudreau and his brother were killed in a 2024 crash as they cycled in Salem County. *Matt Slocum, Associated Press*

evidence was gathered.

"There was no half truth. There was no misleading or misdirection on part of the state in presenting this case to the grand jury," Assistant Prosecutor Michael Mestern said. "The indictment was thorough. It presented all the evidence clearly."

After hearing arguments on Monday, Superior Court Judge Michael Silvanio concluded that there was no basis to dismiss the charges against Higgins.

The Gaudreau family was in the courtroom as the two sides made their arguments and the judge made his ruling.

The prosecution argued during the hearing that it has multiple ways of proving Higgins was reckless and showed an "extreme indifference to human life" on the night of the crash.

Higgins was arrested after failing a field sobriety test. He also admitted to drinking several beers before the crash and while driving that day, according to police.

On the night of the crash, New Jersey State Police troopers took him to a hospital to draw a blood sample.

A nurse used a State Police blood draw kit to collect two vials of blood. After sealing the second vial, the nurse told a trooper the seal on one vial may be defective, police said.

The trooper retrieved another kit, and the nurse drew two more vials.

The first kit was not used, but the second was tested at a State Police lab to produce the 0.087% reading, according to the defense.

The sample had clotted by the time analysts tested it at a State Police lab, Mestern said during arguments Monday afternoon.

The sample that was tested was serum, the prosecutor said. Blood serum is the clear, yellowish liquid that remains after blood clots.

Defense attorneys questioned if the blood had clotted in both of the tubes given to the lab. They also questioned which of the tubes was tested.

"Because if there's two tubes that are clotted, there's a serious issue then with the transportation or the storage of this blood for it to get to that point," defense attorney Richard Klineburger III said Monday.

Mestern said he did not know offhand if both were clotted, but said he would provide that information to the defense before the next hearing.

SEE SUPERIOR COURT, A2

STATEHOUSE

N.J. acts to protect access to abortion and transgender healthcare

Under bill, the state would consider it unlawful to interfere with people seeking or providing those services.

Susan K. Livio *NJ.com*

With more than half of all states banning or severely limiting transgender health care and abortion access under President Trump, New Jersey lawmakers took the first step Monday to protect the rights of people seeking and providing these medical services.

For the first time, the state would consider it a criminal act to interfere with people seeking or providing reproductive or gender-affirming health services, through the bill the Senate Health, Human Services and Senior Citizens Committee approved Monday by a 5-2 vote. This would affect protesters blocking access to clinics and video-recording patients and providers within 100 feet of the facility and other intimidation tactics, according to the bill, S2260.

The bill also would impose civil penalties on people and entities that hinder rights to reproductive and transgender health services. Health insurers, for instance, would be prohibited from denying or limiting coverage of medical services involving abortion and gender transition and identity, according to the bill. Medical providers who treat patients traveling from outside New Jersey would be protected from facing criminal or civil penalties in other states.

Senate Majority Leader Teresa Ruiz, D-Essex, one of the bill's prime sponsors, said resident's healthcare choices need special protection in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court overturning Roe v. Wade four years ago and President Trump's executive orders punishing providers of transgender care for youth.

"I never imagined that in 2026 ... you would need to pass a law to protect a doctor for being arrested for doing their job. I never thought we would need to **SEE STATEHOUSE, A3**

SPORTS

Giants vs. Cowboys

John Harbaugh's debut as the Giants' head coach will be against Dallas on Sept. 13 at MetLife Stadium. **F1**

LIFE

Cannes Film Festival

This week, the eyes of the movie world will be on the Cannes Film Festival. Here are the key films making their debut. **I1**

PINE BARRENS

Scientist discovers a new plant found only in Jersey

Gavin Schweiger *NJ.com*

It's about 2 feet tall, has a lot of cousins and you can only find it — you guessed it — in New Jersey.

A Temple University scientist just proved the unique plant is its own distinct species — and one that exists nowhere else in the world outside of the state's Pine Barrens. There are a few thousand new plant species discovered around the globe every year. But new ones here, that don't exist outside our borders? That's a lot less common.

"This one is not only rare for us, it's rare for the world," Russell Juelg, the land steward

for the NJ Conservation Foundation, said of the discovery. Most rare plants in the Pine Barrens can be found elsewhere too, he said.

But not *Triantha x novacaesariensis*. Sasha Eisenman, the horticulture professor who discovered the plant and named it "novacaesariensis" — a Latinization of New Jersey — spent about a decade researching it before he could definitively say it was a distinct species.

It grows to around 25 inches tall and has small, white flowers.

Scientists long thought that the species was either its southern cousin, *Triantha*

racemosa, or a hybrid of it and its northern cousin, *Triantha glutinosa*.

Eisenman found that *T. novacaesariensis* could have been a hybrid thousands of years ago, since it bears traits from both related species. After the plant became isolated, it evolved independently into a distinct species.

"The pollen from any of those northern or southern species have no way of traveling hundreds of miles, and there's no way for any interbreeding to occur," Eisenman said. "This species has really developed on its own for a long time."

SEE PINE BARRENS, A2



Triantha novacaesariensis, a newly named plant. *Courtesy of Chris Hoess*