



What to know about USA's second male cross-country skiing medalist

SPORTS, 1B

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A 2023 study found that 75% of college students feel free to report their professors if they say something objectionable. Self-identified liberal students were more likely than conservative students to report their professors to the administration. GETTY IMAGES

Student informants spur academic freedom debate

Classroom speech, rights of educators and pupils under scrutiny

Austin Sarat
Amherst College
THE CONVERSATION

Texas A&M University told philosophy professor Martin Peterson in early January that he could not teach some of Greek philosopher Plato's writings that touch on "race and gender ideology."

The university's local chapter of the American Association of University Professors, an organization of professors and academics in the United States, quickly denounced this requirement.

Peterson, in response to his university's direction, replaced the Plato read-

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ings with material on free speech and academic freedom.

Silencing a professor from teaching a certain subject fits within what experts have long recognized as encroaching on academic freedom.

In another high-profile incident at Texas A&M in September, a student filmed an exchange with an English literature professor, Melissa McCoul, who was talking about gender identity.

The student said that McCoul was violating President Donald Trump's January 2025 executive order that recognized "women are biologically female, and men are biologically male." As a result, the student told her professor, as seen in her video, "I've already been in touch with the president of A&M, and I have a meeting with him in person to show all of my documentation tomorrow." Her video went viral.

This represents a growing threat to academic freedom: Students who act as informants and police their classes and professors for signs of political incorrectness.

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Interim mayor wants to keep serving

Megan Stewart
Burlington Free Press
USA TODAY NETWORK

Interim Winooski Mayor Thomas Renner is running unopposed for the remaining year of his predecessor's two-year term.

Renner, who previously served as deputy mayor, assumed the interim role Sept. 15 following former Mayor Kristine Lott's resignation after nearly seven years on the job. Lott, the city's first woman mayor, attributed her departure to expecting her first child and transitioning careers.

Renner told the Free Press that he wants to see through the plans that Lott, he and the other Winooski City Council members had set into motion. Some of those plans include creating more affordable housing, finishing the major roadwork on Main Street, improving "economic vitality" and preparing businesses and residents for the Burlington-Winooski bridge construction project, which begins next year.

Renner said he had received immense support from constituents to continue serving as mayor and that he would have had to run for re-election to the council anyway on Town Meeting Day.

Renner said his proudest accomplishment as mayor has been finishing the budget for next fiscal year. When he started five months ago, Renner and the council had to almost immediately begin the budget process, he said.

"It's a lot to jump into," Renner said. "Normally the mayor would have many, many months to prep before budgeting started."

It was a difficult time for councilors, but ultimately, he said, "I'm proud of what we're putting forward for voters."

Town Meeting Day takes place March 3.

Renner was first elected to the Winooski City Council in 2021. His council peers selected him as deputy mayor in 2023.

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St. Michael's College to expand financial aid with \$1M gift

Beth McDermott
AI-assisted reporter
Burlington Free Press
USA TODAY NETWORK

St. Michael's College has received a \$1 million gift to launch a new scholarship initiative aimed at making tuition more affordable for students and their families, according to a community announcement from the school.

The donation will support the college's expanded financial aid efforts, which were recently introduced to increase access and affordability, the college says.

St. Michael's President Richard Plumb is appreciative of the support at a time when students and families are feeling the pressure of rising educational costs.

"This extraordinary act of generosity reflects the deep commitment of our community to ensuring that a St. Michael's education remains within reach," he said. "At a time when families face increasing financial pressures, this gift empowers us to expand opportunity, strengthen our mission and continue providing an exceptional, values-driven education to students who will go on to make meaningful

contributions to the world."

The gift has already inspired additional support, with another \$3 million in donations coming from former and current trustees, alumni and friends of the college, according to the announcement.

"This is in addition to our general St. Michael's Fund annual appeal, which has been increasing over the last two years and also helps reduce the cost of tuition," said Ellen Kane, vice president for advancement and communications.

The college recently introduced several financial aid initiatives to expand

access, including free tuition for Vermont households earning under \$100,000, a tuition match with the University of Vermont for households earning more than \$100,000, a new out-of-state flagship tuition rate and a new commuter tuition option for local students.

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