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**Body**

Schumer's rebuke of Netanyahu shows the long, fragile line the US and allies walk on interference

WASHINGTON — Republicans and Israeli officials were quick to express outrage after Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer sharply criticized Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's handling of the war in Gaza and called for Israel to hold new elections. They accused the Democratic leader of breaking the unwritten rule against interfering in a close ally’s electoral ***politics***.

Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell reacted to Schumer by saying it was “hypocritical for Americans who hyperventilate about interference in our own democracy to call for the removal of a democratically elected leader.”

House Speaker Mike Johnson said Schumer's call for new elections was “inappropriate.” Even Benny Gantz, a political rival of Netanyahu and member of Israel's war cabinet, said Schumer's remarks were “counterproductive.”

Schumer's stinging rebuke of Netanyahu — the senator said the Israeli leader had “lost his way” and was an obstacle to peace — was certainly provocative but it was hardly norm-breaking. U.S. leaders, as well as American allies, are more frequently butting into electoral ***politics*** beyond the water’s edge.

Look no further than the close and historically complicated relationship that American presidents and congressional leaders have negotiated with Israel leaders over the last 75 years.

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Russians cast ballots in an election preordained to extend President Vladimir Putin's rule

Voters across Russia cast ballots Saturday on the second day of an election set to formalize six more years of power for President Vladimir Putin, who faces no serious challengers after crushing political dissent over his nearly quarter-century of rule.

The election comes against the backdrop of a ruthless crackdown that has stifled independent media and prominent rights groups. Putin’s fiercest foe, Alexei Navalny, died in an Arctic prison in February, and other critics are either in jail or in exile.

The 71-year-old Putin faces three token rivals from Kremlin-friendly parties who have refrained from any criticism of him or his full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Putin has cast his war in Ukraine, now in its third year, as an existential battle against the U.S. and other Western powers bent on destroying Russia.

Officials said voting was proceeding in an orderly fashion. But despite tight controls, at least a half-dozen cases of vandalism at polling stations were reported Friday and Saturday, including a firebombing and several people pouring green liquid into ballot boxes. The latter was an apparent homage to Navalny, who in 2017 was attacked by an assailant who splashed green disinfectant in his face.

A 50-year-old university professor was arrested Saturday after she unsuccessfully tried to throw green liquid into a ballot box in the Urals city of Ekaterinburg. She was imprisoned for 15 days for “petty hooliganism”, but could face further charges, according to local news outlet Ura.ru. A pensioner in the Altai region in southern Siberia was also detained after attempting to damage ballots, Russia’s state news agency Tass reported.

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Man suspected of killing 3 people in Philadelphia area arrested in New Jersey, police say

TRENTON, N.J. (AP) — A man suspected of killing three people in their Philadelphia-area homes Saturday was later arrested in New Jersey's capital city following a major police response and hourslong standoff, authorities said.

Steve Wilson, police director for the city of Trenton, said the man was found near a house were he was believed to have barricaded himself and was taken into custody. He apparently escaped the perimeter around the home before it was set up, according to Wilson.

Wilson added that he did not believe the suspect was armed at the time. No one else was injured.

The suspect was identified earlier as 26-year-old Andre Gordon Jr. Authorities said they believe he killed his stepmother, his teenage sister and the mother of his children in shootings that stretched into two homes in eastern Pennsylvania’s Falls Township in the morning, Bucks County District Attorney Jennifer Schorn said.

Officials said they couldn't yet speak to a motive for the attacks. While Gordon had had some minor brushes with the law, they were “nothing that would indicate that anything like this would happen,” Falls Township Police Chief Nelson Whitney said at a news conference.

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State Medicaid offices target dead people’s homes to recoup their health care costs

WASHINGTON (AP) — As Salvatore LoGrande fought cancer and all the pain that came with it, his daughters promised to keep him in the white, pitched roof house he worked so hard to buy all those decades ago.

So, Sandy LoGrande thought it was a mistake when, a year after her father’s death, Massachusetts billed her $177,000 for her father’s Medicaid expenses and threatened to sue for his home if she didn’t pay up quickly.

“The home was everything," to her father said LoGrande, 57.

But the bill and accompanying threat weren't a mistake.

Rather, it was part of a routine process the federal government requires of every state: to recover money from the assets of dead people who, in their final years, relied on Medicaid, the taxpayer-funded health insurance for the poorest Americans.

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Cease-fire talks with Israel and Hamas are expected to resume on Sunday in Qatar

CAIRO (AP) — Stalled talks aimed at securing a cease-fire in the Israel-Hamas war are expected to resume in earnest in Qatar as soon as Sunday, according to Egyptian officials.

The talks would mark the first time both Israeli officials and Hamas leaders join the indirect negotiations since the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. International mediators had hoped to secure a six-week truce before Ramadan started earlier this week, but Hamas refused any deal that wouldn’t lead to a permanent cease-fire in Gaza, a demand Israel rejected.

But both sides have made moves in recent days aimed at getting the talks, which never fully broke off, back on track.

Hamas gave mediators a new proposal for a three-stage plan that would end the fighting, according to two Egyptian officials, one who is involved in the talks and a second who was briefed on them. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to reveal the contents of the sensitive discussions.

The first stage would be a six-week cease-fire that would see the release of 35 hostages — women, those who are ill and older people — held by militants in Gaza in exchange for 350 Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

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The Hur interview transcript offers a window into the life of 'frustrated architect' Joe Biden

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden was returning from church a week ago when he stepped out of his armored SUV onto the driveway of his Wilmington, Delaware, home on an important mission: He wanted to inspect the landscaping.

The sprawling home on a manmade pond, three miles or five kilometers from downtown, has a special place — some might call it an obsession — in his heart.

When he met special prosecutor Robert Hur to talk about the sensitive documents he’d improperly kept after his vice presidency, Biden offered a confession. Three times over the five hours, Biden told Hur he is a “frustrated architect.”

He allowed that his wife, Jill, once offered to send him to architecture school if he’d only stop running for the Senate. It was not to be. But he still seems to have architectural design in his blood. And he's mused privately about redesigning elements of the home after his presidency.

The house is central in the controversy over Biden's handling of classified documents. FBI agents and the president's lawyers identified at least 28 items there that contained classified information or markings from his time as vice president. Hur this past week defended his assessment that there was not sufficient evidence to charge Biden with willfully retaining the classified information.

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After the pandemic, young Chinese again want to study abroad, just not so much in the US

WASHINGTON (AP) — In the Chinese city of Shanghai, two young women seeking an education abroad have both decided against going to the United States, a destination of choice for decades that may be losing its shine.

For Helen Dong, a 22-year-old senior studying advertising, it was the cost. “It doesn’t work for me when you have to spend 2 million (yuan) ($278,000) but find no job upon returning,” she said. Dong is headed to Hong Kong this fall instead.

Costs were not a concern for Yvonne Wong, 24, now studying comparative literature and cultures in a master’s program at the University of Bristol in Britain. For her, the issue was safety.

“Families in Shanghai usually don’t want to send their daughters to a place where guns are not banned — that was the primary reason,” Wong said. “Between the U.S. and the U.K., the U.K. is safer, and that’s the biggest consideration for my parents.”

With an interest in studying abroad rebounding after the pandemic, there are signs that the decades-long run that has sent an estimated 3 million Chinese students to the U.S., including many of the country’s brightest, could be trending down, as geopolitical shifts redefine U.S.-China relations.

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A new kind of hospital is coming to rural America. To qualify, facilities must close their beds

As rural hospitals continue to struggle financially, a new type of hospital is slowly taking root, especially in the Southeast.

Rural emergency hospitals receive more than $3 million in federal funding a year and higher Medicare reimbursements in exchange for closing all inpatient beds and providing 24/7 emergency care. While that makes it easier for a hospital to keep its doors open, experts say it doesn’t solve all of the challenges facing rural health care.

People might have to travel further for treatments for illnesses that require inpatient stays, like pneumonia or COVID-19. In some of the communities where hospitals have converted to the new designation, residents are confused about what kind of care they can receive. Plus, rural hospitals are hesitant to make the switch, because there’s no margin of error.

“It’s ironic” that the facilities that might need the most help can’t afford to take the risk, said Carrie Cochran-McClain, chief policy officer at the National Rural Health Association. She pointed to having to give up certain services and benefits, such as a federal discount program for prescription drugs.

The government, which classifies hospitals by type, rolled out the rural emergency option in January 2023. Only 19 hospitals across the U.S. received rural emergency hospital status last year, according to the University of North Carolina’s Sheps Center for Health Services Research.

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A warming island's mice are breeding out of control and eating seabirds. An extermination is planned

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) — Mice accidentally introduced to a remote island near Antarctica 200 years ago are breeding out of control because of climate change, and they are eating seabirds and causing major harm in a special nature reserve with “unique biodiversity.”

Now conservationists are planning a mass extermination using helicopters and hundreds of tons of rodent poison, which needs to be dropped over every part of Marion Island's 115 square miles (297 square kilometers) to ensure success.

If even one pregnant mouse survives, their prolific breeding ability means it may have all been for nothing.

The Mouse-Free Marion project — pest control on a grand scale — is seen as critical for the ecology of the uninhabited South African territory and the wider Southern Ocean. It would be the largest eradication of its kind if it succeeds.

The island is home to globally significant populations of nearly 30 bird species and a rare undisturbed habitat for wandering albatrosses — with their 10-foot wingspan — and many others.

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With green and glee, major US parades mark St. Patrick's Day — a little early

NEW YORK (AP) — People across the United States celebrated Irish heritage at several major St. Patrick's Day parades Saturday, marking the holiday a day early at events that included a big anniversary in Savannah, Georgia, and honored a pioneering female business leader as grand marshal in New York.

The holiday commemorates Ireland's patron saint and was popularized largely by Irish Catholic immigrants. While St. Patrick's Day falls on March 17, some parades were moved up from Sunday, a day of worship for the Christian faithful.

Manhattan's St. Patrick's Day Parade, which dates to 1762 — 14 years before the U.S. Declaration of Independence — is one of the world’s largest Irish heritage festivities.

Megan Stransky of Houston and two relatives planned a Broadway weekend to coincide with the parade, seeing it as a prime opportunity to remember their family's Irish roots and the traditions that helped shape their upbringing.

The event didn't disappoint.

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