



KENNY HOLSTON/THE NEW YORK TIMES
President Biden honored three Army reservists killed in the Middle East as their bodies arrived at Dover Air Force Base. Page A14.

Labor Market
Starts the Year
With Big Gains

By LYDIA DePILLIS

The United States produced an unexpectedly sizable batch of jobs last month, a boon for American workers that shows the labor market retains remarkable strength after three years of expansion.

Employers added 353,000 jobs in January on a seasonally adjusted basis, the Labor Department reported on Friday, and the unemployment rate remained at 3.7 percent.

The report also put an even shinier gloss on job growth for 2023, including revisions that added more than 100,000 to the figure previously tallied for December. All told, employers added 3.1 million jobs last year, more than the 2.7 million initially reported.

After the loss of 14 percent of the nation's jobs early in the Covid-19 pandemic, the labor market's endurance despite aggressive interest rate increases has caught economists off guard.

"I think everyone is surprised at the strength," said Sara Rutledge, an independent economics consultant. "It's almost like a 'pinch me' scenario."

Ms. Rutledge helped tabulate the National Association for Business Economics' latest member survey, which found rising optimism that the country would avoid a recession — matching a turnaround in measures of consumer sentiment as inflation has eased.

January's crop of added jobs, nearly twice what forecasters had expected, mirrors the similarly surprising strength in gross domestic product measurements for the fourth quarter of 2023. It is

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Head Down, Phone Up and Feet Swiftly Moving

By ANNIE KARNI

WASHINGTON — It was his first day back in Washington after a long winter break, and Speaker Mike Johnson was under pressure to pass a short-term funding bill to avoid a government shutdown within days.

With hard-right Republicans in full revolt over the plan, everyone in the Capitol was eager to know what the inexperienced leader would do next, and whether it might lead to his ouster.

After spending less than six minutes answering questions at a news conference, Mr. Johnson shut down reporters' shouted questions with a silent cue, like a cab light switched off, signaling he was no longer available: He held his phone to his ear and speed-walked out of sight.

It is a ploy that Mr. Johnson has used frequently to dodge questions since the fall when he won the position of speaker, and with it the tricky job of governing with a deeply divided and shrinking Republican majority in the House.

Before he was elected in October, Mr. Johnson, a Louisiana Republican in his fourth term, routinely stopped for hallway interviews. They are a staple of a lawmaker's life on Capitol Hill, where credentialed reporters roam freely in all but a few secure spaces, buttonholing members of Congress wherever they can find them. Mr. Johnson would often stop and talk in the marble corridors surrounding the House floor, submitting to impromptu and sometimes lengthy question-and-answer sessions with reporters before and after votes.

But since winning the gavel, Mr. Johnson has taken to avoiding that ritual, employing one of the most common tactics in a member of Congress's playbook to do so: talking, or pretending to talk, on the phone. These days, as he strides through the Capitol

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ANNA ROSE LAYDEN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES
Speaker Mike Johnson with his phone to his ear as he moved through the Capitol on Wednesday.

U.S. STRIKES BACK
AT IRANIAN FORCES
IN SYRIA AND IRAQ

Retaliation for Killing of 3 Americans, in
Escalation Biden Tried to Avoid

This article is by Helene Cooper, Eric Schmitt and Julian E. Barnes.

WASHINGTON — The United States on Friday carried out a series of military strikes against Iranian forces and the militias they support in seven sites in Syria and Iraq, marking a sharp escalation of the war in the Middle East that the Biden administration has for four months sought to avoid.

The airstrikes, targeting command and control operations, intelligence centers, weapons facilities and bunkers used by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Quds Force and affiliated militia groups, made good on President Biden's promise to respond to a drone attack in Jordan on Sunday that killed three American soldiers and injured at least 40 more service members.

The military action also sought to send a message to Iran and the militias it backs that continued attacks on U.S. troops in the region and commercial ships in the Red Sea would draw a response.

The strikes hit more than 85 targets at different locations using more than 125 precision-guided munitions, according to a statement by U.S. Central Command.

"This past Sunday, three American soldiers were killed in Jordan by a drone launched by militant groups backed by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps," President Biden said in a statement. "Our response began today."

Mr. Biden approved the strikes earlier in the week. He even telegraphed that they were coming when he told reporters on Tuesday that he had made a decision on the response to the drone attack on a remote outpost in Jordan. Middle East analysts said that many Revolutionary Guards trainers, fearful that they could be hit, returned to Iran this week while militia leaders are in hiding.

But U.S. officials made it clear that Friday night's attacks were to be followed by more over the next days, weeks and perhaps even months. Two American officials said the United States on Friday also conducted cyberoperations against Iranian targets but declined to provide details.

The American response, Mr. Biden said in his statement Friday, "will continue at times and places of our choosing."

"The United States does not seek conflict in the Middle East or anywhere else in the world," he said. "But let all those who might seek to do us harm know this: If

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THE SATURDAY PROFILE
In India, a Fight
For the Dignity
Of Clean Work

By SUHASINI RAJ

NEW DELHI — When he came to fully realize exactly what his parents and older brother did for a living, and what it likely meant for his own future, Bezwada Wilson says he was so angry he contemplated suicide.

His family members, and his broader community, were manual scavengers, tasked with cleaning by hand human excrement from dry latrines at a government-run gold mine in southern India.

While his parents had tried hard to hide from their youngest child the nature of their work as long as they could — telling Mr. Bezwada they were sweepers — as a student Mr. Bezwada knew his classmates viewed him with cruel condescension. He just didn't know the reason.

"In my growing up years, I was made to feel different from the rest in school. I was not allowed to laugh at jokes, and caste slurs were thrown at me," Mr. Bezwada said in an interview on a recent evening in Delhi. "All I wanted to know then was, why was my community different and how could I make them equal to the others?"

By the time he was 18 or so, the young man knew what his community did to put food on the table but his knowledge was still only theoretical. He wanted to experience the work for himself.

So he urged some manual scavengers to take him on the job. He watched them reach way down into a pit to scrape dried human waste from toilet floors, piling it into iron buckets and then transferring it into a trolley to be dumped on the mining

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Demolitions in Gaza
Israeli ground forces have carried out more than two dozen detonations that have leveled homes, schools and mosques. Pages A6-7.



KENNY HOLSTON/THE NEW YORK TIMES
The Trump prosecutors Fani T. Willis and Nathan J. Wade.

Willis Admits
To Relationship
With Colleague

By RICHARD FAUSSET and DANNY HAKIM

ATLANTA — Fani T. Willis, the district attorney prosecuting the Georgia election interference case against former President Donald J. Trump, acknowledged on Friday a "personal relationship" with a prosecutor she hired to manage the case but argued that it was not a reason to disqualify her or her office from it.

The admission came almost a month after allegations of an "improper, clandestine personal relationship" between the two surfaced in a motion from one of Mr. Trump's co-defendants. The motion seeks to disqualify both prosecutors and Ms. Willis's entire office from handling the case — an effort that, if successful, would likely sow chaos for an unprecedented racketeering prosecution of a former president.

"While the allegations raised in the various motions are salacious and garnered the media attention they were designed to obtain, none provide this Court with any basis upon which to order the relief they seek," Ms. Willis's filing said, adding that her relationship

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Fringe Climate Proposal, a Giant Space Parasol, Gains Interest

By CARA BUCKLEY

It's come to this. With Earth at its hottest point in recorded history, and humans doing far from enough to stop its overheating, a small but growing number of astronomers and physicists are proposing a potential fix that could have leaped from the pages of science fiction: the equivalent of a giant beach umbrella, floating in outer space.

The idea is to create a huge sunshade and send it to a far away point between the Earth and the sun to block a small but crucial amount of solar radiation, enough to counter global warming. Scientists have calculated that if just shy of 2 percent of the sun's radiation is blocked, that would be enough to cool the planet by 1.5 degrees Celsius, or 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit, and keep Earth within manageable climate boundaries.

The idea has been at the outer fringes of conversations about climate solutions for years. But as the climate crisis worsens, interest in sun shields has been gaining momentum, with more researchers offering up variations. There's even a foundation dedicated to promoting solar shields.

A recent study led by the University of Utah explored scattering

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Team of Scientists Says
Prototype Is Possible

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NATIONAL A12-19
Police Robot Is Retired
The N.Y.P.D.'s Knightscope K5 debuted amid fanfare, but ended its brief tour in a vacant storefront, all alone. PAGE A17

A Reprieve on Race
The Supreme Court, for now, upheld the use of race-based admissions by the U.S. Military Academy. PAGE A18

INTERNATIONAL A4-11
Elections in El Salvador
President Nayib Bukele and his party are likely to win resoundingly on Sunday. His running mate says they are "replacing" democracy. PAGE A4

China and the U.S. Talk
Meetings have resumed on restricting the flow of fentanyl. But Iran and North Korea may be sticking points. PAGE A10

SPORTS B7-10
A Changed Pebble Beach
The AT&T pro-am minimized amateur involvement, and 48 of the top 50 PGA Tour players showed up. PAGE B8



ARTS C1-6
It's 50 Degrees. Bye, Ice Shanty.
An annual art event opened to crowds on a frozen lake in Minneapolis. Then March-like temperatures set in. PAGE C1

For André 3000, No Words
The onetime Outkast rapper brought his improvised solo album of experimental music to the stage. PAGE C1

BUSINESS B1-6
A Film Festival 'Fairy Tale'
Sean Wang, a first-time director, received an audience award at Sundance for his coming-of-age film, "Didi." He also got the ultimate prize: a distribution deal. PAGE B1

Biden Goes After Grocers
The president has begun to accuse chains of overcharging shoppers, as food costs remain a burden for consumers while inflation in general has moderated. PAGE B1

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Jessica Bennett PAGE A20

