



Clockwise from top: Migrants bathing in a river in Panama after crossing the perilous Darién Gap; Laura Loomer, a right-wing activist, interviewing Ayub Ibrahim, 20, of Somalia, at a migrant camp in Panama; and migrants at a store at a Panama reception center.

Hungary’s Treetop Walkway Omitted One Thing

By ANDREW HIGGINS

NYIRMARTONFALVA, Hungary — Eager to get a small piece of the billions of euros provided to his country by the European Union, a mayor in eastern Hungary applied for money to build a “treetop canopy walkway” that would provide panoramic views of the forest outside his village.

Hungarian officials responsible for distributing European money liked the idea and in 2021 approved a grant worth about \$175,000. The elevated walkway, in the village of Nyirmartonfalva, near the border with Romania, now stretches for nearly 100 yards, next to a wooden observation tower.

There’s just one problem: The mayor, a supporter of Hungary’s governing Fidesz party who owns the land where the treetop walk-

Patronage Politics on Display After Mayor Sells the Trees

way was built last year, cut down all the trees before construction started. So the walkway looks out on flat, barren land.

The project is one of tens of thousands undertaken in Hungary under programs funded by the European Union to help narrow the economic gap between the bloc’s richer, original members in the west and newer entrants, particularly those in the east.

But even as he has railed against Brussels over what he sees as its meddling in Hungary’s internal affairs, Prime Minister

Viktor Orban has made lavish use of such E.U. funds to direct cash and other benefits to his political allies.

Tipped off by a hiker who last year stumbled on the looming wooden structure marooned on a patch of empty land, Akos Hadhazy, an opposition legislator, aided by news outlets critical of the government, has turned the walkway into a cause célèbre.

“The whole system here is built on Fidesz giving financial favors to its supporters,” Mr. Hadhazy said in Budapest, citing the Nyirmartonfalva walkway as a prime example.

Alerted by the ruckus, the European Union’s executive arm asked for an explanation from the Hungarian government. In response, Zsolt Papp, an official responsible for disbursing European money



“We call it our Bridge of Sighs,” said a resident near the walkway, in Nyirmartonfalva, Hungary.

Democrats Try To Derail Bids By 3rd Parties

By REBECCA DAVIS O’BRIEN

The Democratic Party, increasingly alarmed by the potential for third-party candidates to swing the election to former President Donald J. Trump, has put together a new team of lawyers aimed at tracking the threat, especially in key battleground states.

The effort comes as challengers — including the independent candidates Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Cornel West plus groups like No Labels as well as the Green Party — have ramped up their push to qualify for states’ ballots ahead of critical deadlines in the spring and summer.

The legal offensive, led by Dana Remus, who until 2022 served as President Biden’s White House counsel, and Robert Lenhard, an outside lawyer for the party, will be aided by a communications team dedicated to countering candidates who Democrats fear could play spoiler to Mr. Biden. It amounts to a kind of legal Whac-a-Mole, a state-by-state counter-insurgency plan ahead of an election that could hinge on just a few thousand votes in swing states.

Breaking Down Why Our Bodies Break Down

By DANA G. SMITH

According to some estimates, consumers spend \$62 billion a year on “anti-aging” treatments. But while creams, hair dyes and Botox can give the impression of youth, none of them can roll back the hands of time.

Scientists are working to understand the biological causes of ag-

Seeking Clicks, And Influence, In Jungle Pass

Right-Wing Backdrop for Migrant Debate

By KEN BENSINGER

METETI, Panama — Ayub Ibrahim had just walked out of the jungle. His feet still ached. A month earlier, he had left his home in Somalia, fleeing a civil war, he said, traveling first to Turkey, then Brazil and finally crossing on foot through a 66-mile expanse of wilderness known as the Darién Gap.

Resting in the sweltering San Vicente migrant camp in Panama with hundreds of other recent arrivals, he suddenly found himself surrounded by a half-dozen Americans with video cameras.

“Do you guys like Ilhan Omar?” one person asked. “What do you think about Joe Biden?”

Mr. Ibrahim, 20, answered the questions. He said he liked and admired Ms. Omar, the first Somali American to serve in Congress. He doesn’t follow American politics, he added, but thinks Mr. Biden is a good president. When asked if Mr. Biden or former President Donald J. Trump would be better for immigrants, he chose Mr. Biden.

Later, Mr. Ibrahim would say he had felt ambushed and confused by the questions. He hadn’t intended to make a political statement.

But by then, it was too late.

One of his questioners, Laura Loomer, a right-wing activist and former Republican candidate for Congress, had already posted an edited video of the conversation online. It had rocketed around the internet, amassing nearly two million views on X.

The caption read: “Somali illegal aliens proclaim support for Ilhan Omar and Joe Biden inside Panama migrant camp!”

As immigration becomes a dominant issue in the 2024 presidential race, right-wing media has been awash in gritty and often deceptive videos of migrants emerging from the Darién Gap, a roadless stretch of Panamanian jungle that has become a bottleneck for thousands of people on their way to the United States.

The clips are presented as proof of what Republicans often de-

NAIL-BITING WAIT AS TEXAS STATUTE IS RECONSIDERED

BEFORE APPEALS PANEL

U.S. Is Furiously Trying to Block the State’s New Migrant Law

By J. DAVID GOODMAN

EAGLE PASS, Texas — A panel of three federal appeals court judges heard arguments on Wednesday in a bitter legal fight between Gov. Greg Abbott and the Biden administration over Texas’ new migrant arrest law, punctuating a dizzying series of legal developments over the previous 24 hours that left migrants and many law enforcement officials in Texas confused and uncertain.

The session had been hastily convened the day before by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, leaving lawyers scrambling to prepare for a hearing that could determine whether one of the nation’s most aggressive state efforts to enforce security on the U.S.-Mexico border should be allowed to become law.

Two judges spoke frequently during the hearing, and their comments suggested a split on the panel.

The chief judge of the court, Priscilla Richman, appeared skeptical of the Texas law, particularly its provision allowing state courts to order migrants back to Mexico. As she questioned Aaron Nielson, the Texas solicitor general, she read from a 2012 Supreme Court case out of Arizona that upheld the supremacy of the federal government in immigration matters.

“It seems to me that this statute washes that away,” Judge Richman said of the Texas law.

The other judge who spoke, Andrew S. Oldham, a former general counsel to Mr. Abbott, peppered the U.S. Justice Department’s lawyer with questions and appeared likely to side with Texas. Mr. Oldham had dissented in a Fifth Circuit ruling on Tuesday night that effectively put the law back on hold, hours after the U.S. Supreme Court had allowed it to

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Leo Varadkar said he would resign as leader of the country and of his struggling Fine Gael party. PAGE A10

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Superbly preserved remains of a settlement offer a glimpse of domesticity circa 850 B.C. PAGE A4



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If Arizona’s Supreme Court rules in favor of a near total ban dating to 1864 instead of a 15-week limit, Democrats could receive a lift. PAGE A19

Concerns About Measles Grow

Cases this year have already topped the total in 2023 and are surging in pockets of the U.S. Unvaccinated travelers account for most infections. PAGE A21

The Burden of the Children

Alicia Menendez is on MSNBC. Her brother, Rob, is a member of Congress. The bribery scandal surrounding their father has cast a long shadow. PAGE A14

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