



Partly sunny 92/77 • Tomorrow: T-storms 82/74 B6

Democracy Dies in Darkness

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CAROLYN VAN HOUTEN/THE WASHINGTON POST

Beset by Taliban, finding hope online

Three years into Taliban rule, Afghan women and girls are finding ways online to take back some of what was taken from them in 2021.

Banned from secondary and higher education, they attend online classes, learn foreign languages with the help of AI chatbots and e-books, and trade cryptocurrencies in the hope of becoming financially independent. They have tried to make up for the closing of movie theaters, the shuttering of gyms for women and the banning of music by turning to YouTube's copious offerings of comedy shows, fitness classes and mu-

With their options severely limited under Islamist rule, many Afghan women and girls have turned to the internet for a slice of freedom

BY RICK NOACK IN KABUL

Women celebrate a birthday at a restaurant in Kabul on May 16. Since the Taliban takeover in 2021, Afghan women and girls have faced curbs on their education, work and social life.

sic videos.

But more than a dozen women and girls interviewed in Kabul said they worry that these havens might be short-lived. Many say they have to hide their Instagram and Facebook profiles from their families or that they self-censor their posts for fear of being discovered by the Taliban government.

Some spend so much time online that their friends worry about addiction. Others face torturously slow internet speeds, or — in rural areas — cannot get online at all.

"The internet is our last hope," said SEE AFGHANISTAN ON A13

ELECTION 2024

Top Democrats say Biden must show he can win

UNIONS AND CAMPAIGN STAFF HAVE DOUBTS

President sees first defection among party's senators

BY TYLER PAGER, MICHAEL SCHERER AND DAN BALZ

Democratic leaders called on President Biden and his campaign Wednesday to provide convincing evidence of a viable path to victory amid a steady tide of bad battleground state polling and growing concerns that he cannot defeat former president Donald Trump in November.

The calls came as top union leaders expressed grave concerns about his candidacy, more members of Congress and other Democrats called on him to step aside, and even members of Biden's senior campaign staff began to exchange doubt about his prospects.

In a closed-door meeting Wednesday, some of the country's union leaders — many of whom are strident backers of Biden — said Americans' doubts about Biden's ability to do the job were damaging his candidacy and re-

peatedly asked Biden campaign officials for their plan to defeat Trump, according to two people familiar with their comments, who like others for this story spoke on the condition of anonymity to share private comments. Two of the most outspoken leaders were Sara Nelson, the president of the Association of Flight Attendants, and Shawn Fain, the president of the United Auto Workers, two of Biden's biggest labor allies.

In a statement later Wednesday, AFL-CIO leadership "unanimously voted to reaffirm its commitment" to Biden, saying, "No president has been more invested

SEE BIDEN ON A9

Harris hails Biden: Vice president rallies AKA sorority sisters. **A7**

Looming deadlines: State ballots add to urgency for Democrats. **A8**

Hollywood: George Clooney calls for president to step aside. **C1**

Pelosi subtly opens door in calls for replacement

Former speaker may be the only one who can sway Biden, aides say

BY LEIGH ANN CALDWELL, MARIANNA SOTOMAYOR, JACQUELINE ALEMANY AND PAUL KANE

Former House speaker Nancy Pelosi delivered a very early wake-up call to Washington on Wednesday when she deftly sidestepped a straightforward question during a morning television interview: Should President Biden run for reelection?

In a 10-minute TV appearance on "Morning Joe" at 7:40 a.m., Pelosi — who has a decades-long relationship with the president

and still commands the deep respect of her colleagues — left her mark on the biggest political crisis facing the Democratic Party in years.

"It's up to the president to decide if he is going to run. We're all encouraging him to make that decision, because time is running short," the California Democrat said. "He is beloved, he is respected, and people want him to make that decision."

In those few sentences on a program Biden is known to watch, Pelosi didn't directly call for Biden to step aside. But she did significantly reframe a delicate but urgent conversation taking place among Capitol Hill lawmakers, Democratic donors, party strategists and voters after Biden's faltering debate performance two weeks ago raised

SEE PELOSI ON A9

Mission of NATO's leaders: 'Trump-proofing' it

BY MICHAEL BIRNBAUM, EMILY RAUHALA, MISSY RYAN AND JOHN HUDSON

Former president Donald Trump doesn't have a seat at the table as NATO leaders gather this week in Washington, but he might as well, as officials strategize about how to adapt the alliance for the possibility that its most senior leader may soon again be

Policy makers aim to lock in support for Ukraine and the alliance itself

a skeptic.

Alliance policy makers have moved control of major elements of military aid to Ukraine away from U.S. command to the NATO

umbrella. They appointed a new NATO secretary general who has a reputation as being especially agile with Trump's unpredictable impulses toward the alliance. They are signing decade-long defense pledges with Ukraine to try to buffer military aid to Kyiv from the ups and downs of politics. And they are pushing up their defense spending, Trump's single biggest anger point when it comes to NATO.

The gathered leaders on Wednesday agreed that they will support Ukraine "on its irreversible path to full Euro-Atlantic integration, including NATO membership" — wording that was subject to intense negotiation in recent weeks, with President Biden initially opposed to using the

SEE NATO ON A10

Tony P: D.C.-based influencer is face of summit's welcome video. **B1**

'They want to kick us out of our party'

Two GOP women lobbied for Texas Republicans to move on from abortion. Then came the backlash.

BY CAROLINE KITCHENER

Gilda Bayegan did not have the time or the patience to choose her words carefully. She felt the party of Lincoln was in peril — and she had to speak her mind.

"Every time we talk about abortion, we are putting gas in the tank of the Democrats. That's their one winning issue," the 70-year-old state delegate told her fellow Texas Republicans at the party's convention in late May, a gathering of 10,000 delegates from across the state. Her party had already made abortion illegal, she said, and now some were seeking to go even further.

"What are we going to do," she said from the podium, " ... stone women next?"

As she spoke, Bayegan stood not far from her sisters-in-arms, a small group of mostly retired Houston-area women who attended the meeting in suffragist-style sashes and foam Lady Liberty crowns. Drawing inspiration

SEE ABORTION ON A4



DANIELLE VILLASANA FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Gilda Bayegan, left, and Michelle Bouchard head to a meeting in Houston on June 19. The state delegates want the GOP to deprioritize abortion, which they see as a "winning issue" for Democrats.

IN THE NEWS

Deadly heat wave Dozens have died in the past week, with the toll expected to rise, as cities across the nation bake under record-breaking temperatures. **A20**

Tree limb kills woman The victim was struck by branches that fell from a swamp white oak at a park in Southeast Washington. **B1**

THE NATION

The NASA astronauts who flew in the Starliner craft are confident it will get them home. **A2**
Many colleges are applying the Supreme Court ruling on admissions to financial aid. **A3**

THE WORLD

Hezbollah is readying its sophisticated weapons arsenal in case of a war with Israel. **A11**
Officials say Russia has been recruiting sympathizers online for sabotage in Europe. **A12**

THE ECONOMY

Younger women are breaking down their paychecks on TikTok as part of a push for pay transparency. **A15**
British Prime Minister Keir Starmer's government hopes a playbook modeled on "Bidenomics" will invigorate a lagging economy. **A20**

THE REGION

Authorities confirmed that seven people have died as a result of the extreme heat in the Washington area. **B1**
Urban planners are circulating conceptual designs that would connect the Kennedy Center to the National Mall via rolling parkland. **B1**

SPORTS

Gregg Berhalter is out as coach of the U.S. men's national soccer team after its early exit from Copa América. **D1**

LOCAL LIVING

New appliances have fancy features and are more efficient than older models — but they also have shorter life spans.

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