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Democracy Dies in Darkness

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2023 • \$3

# 12 states could see abortion on ballot

Measures are being put forward to codify right or ban in constitutions

BY AMY B WANG AND LEIGH ANN CALDWELL

Voters in a dozen states in 2024 could decide the fate of abortion rights with constitutional amendments on the ballot in a pivotal election year — including in several battlegrounds that will be key to deciding the presidential race and which party controls Congress.

Abortion rights advocates chose the path of constitutional amendments because if passed, they would supersede any law enacted by state legislatures. Those advocates have reason to be hopeful: Since the Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* in June 2022, every ballot measure that has sought to preserve or expand abortion access has been successful, while those that have sought to restrict abortion access have failed — even in states that skew conservative.

Weeks after the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision, voters in deep-red Kansas defeated a ballot measure that would have removed abortion protections from the state's constitution. Last November, voters in Michigan, California and Vermont approved ballot initiatives that enshrined the right to abortion in state constitutions, while voters in Kentucky and Montana defeated antiabortion

SEE ABORTION ON A6

# Venezuela extradites fugitive in U.S. scandal

Prisoner swap includes figure in worst bribery case in Pentagon history

BY SAMANTHA SCHMIDT, ANA VANESSA HERRERO AND CRAIG WHITLOCK

Leonard Glenn Francis, the fugitive defense contractor who admitted to a \$35 million bribery scheme in the largest corruption scandal in U.S. military history, has been arrested and returned by Venezuela to the United States as part of a major prisoner swap between the estranged countries, President Biden said Wednesday.

Venezuela is also releasing 10 Americans detained by the government of Nicolás Maduro, Biden said.

Biden, in exchange, has agreed to grant clemency to Alex Saab, a close Maduro ally who was awaiting trial in Miami on federal money-laundering charges, senior administration officials said. The businessman, whom federal prosecutors consider a corrupt enabler of Venezuela's authoritarian socialist government, is accused of siphoning off hundreds of millions of dollars in state contracts.

Saab, 51, was arrested last year

SEE VENEZUELA ON A11



JOHN MOORE/GETTY IMAGES

# A historic surge of migrants, and few solutions in sight

BY NICK MIROFF IN LUKEVILLE, ARIZ.

Smugglers have sawed through the U.S. border wall here so many times lately that parts of the barrier look like something out of a sculpture garden or a Mad Max movie. Scraps of metal have been welded to the bars at odd angles by repair crews trying to hold the structure together. Along one badly disfigured segment spanning about 100 feet of the border, the wall has been cut 41 times.

The broader U.S. immigration system is in similar tattered shape after decades of congressional inaction and recurring migration spikes — including record numbers of illegal crossings this month. U.S. Customs and Border Protection is surpassing 10,000 encounters with migrants along the southern border per day, an influx likely to exacerbate strains on New York, Chicago and other cities already swamped by newcomers seeking shelter, food and assistance.

The latest surge is happening as negotiations in Washington to tighten U.S. enforcement

SEE MIGRANTS ON A8



ERIC THAYER FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

TOP: A Texas National Guard soldier in Eagle Pass, Tex., counts people who had crossed the U.S.-Mexico border Wednesday. ABOVE: Families walk along the border near Lukeville, Ariz., last week after crossing into the United States. The fencing in the area has been repeatedly cut, repaired and cut again.

# Young Ukrainians seized by Russia tell their stories

BY SIOBHÁN O'GRADY AND ANASTACIA GALOUCHKA IN KYIV

The Russian missing-child poster went up in Crimea soon after Rostyslav Lavrov escaped last month.

"HELP FIND," it read. "17 years old, born 2006. ... Height 160 cm, thin build, dark hair, blue eyes."

"Anyone who knows anything about the whereabouts of the teenager is asked to report this."

The attached photo — which Lavrov said was taken several months ago when Russian authorities holding him against his will tried to issue him a Russian ID card — showed the Ukrainian teen sullen in a white shirt and tie.

He is one of three Ukrainian teenagers who fled Russia or Russian-occupied Crimea this summer and shared their experiences with The Washington Post in lengthy interviews in Kyiv and Kherson. They each described systematic efforts by Russian officials to keep them in Russian-controlled territory.

Testimony of three teenagers who got away could be used against Putin in a court of law



ALICE MARTINS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Rostyslav Lavrov, 17, was taken from his home village in Ukraine's Kherson region to Russian-held Crimea. He fled and is now in Kyiv.

New source for missiles: To aid Ukraine, the U.S. looks to Japan. A13

Ukraine says there are thousands of Ukrainian children like Lavrov who have been forced to move to Russia or Russian-occupied territory, including Crimea, since Russia's February 2022 invasion. What makes Lavrov exceptional is that he got out, carrying with him memories of his experience that could one day be used in court to prove Russia committed war crimes by relocating children.

On March 17, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Russian President Vladimir Putin and his commissioner for children's rights, Maria Lvova-Belova, which accused them of war crimes for unlawfully deporting and transferring Ukrainian children. Lvova-Belova herself adopted a Ukrainian teen from the occupied city of Mariupol. The Kremlin has denounced the warrants and said they have no legal validity in Russia.

Some of the Ukrainian children in Russia are too young to know their own names or citizenship. Others may be too scared to

SEE CHILDREN ON A12

# Justices pivotal to 2024 election

MULTIPLE CASES INVOLVE HIGH COURT

Trump's eligibility for office, immunity at stake

BY ROBERT BARNES AND PERRY STEIN

The Supreme Court will be pressed to answer multiple questions crucial to next year's presidential election, thrust into a pivotal role not seen since its 2000 decision that sealed the victory for President George W. Bush.

*Bush v. Gore* split the nation and left lasting scars. However, the legal battles being waged in courtrooms across the nation involving former president Donald Trump and his bid to regain the presidency are more numerous, more complicated and could prove even more divisive in a polarized nation.

Some of the cases raise issues never squarely addressed by the Supreme Court, and seem to be quandaries that can be settled only by the nine justices.

They include Tuesday's ruling by the Colorado Supreme Court that Trump's name cannot appear on the primary-election ballot in that state because he engaged in insurrection on Jan. 6, 2021, and Trump's claim that he is protected by presidential immunity from being prosecuted for trying to block Joe Biden's 2020 election victory.

SEE TRUMP ON A4

# GOP fraud units fail to find a vast voter plot

Only 47 convictions in six states, targeting mostly Democrats, minorities

BY JUSTIN JOUVENAL

As Donald Trump falsely claimed the 2020 presidential election was stolen from him, Republicans in some states launched special units to prosecute voter fraud as part of a high-profile and controversial push to stamp out cheating some claimed was rampant.

But the election integrity units established or expanded in six states after Trump's loss obtained only 47 convictions during a period in which tens of millions of votes were cast, and the units overwhelmingly targeted minorities and Democrats for prosecution, according to a first-of-its-kind analysis by The Washington Post of nearly every prosecution.

The analysis found that 76 percent of defendants whose race or ethnicity could be identified were Black or Hispanic, while White people constituted 24 percent of those prosecuted by the units.

Registered Democrats made up 58 percent of those charged whose party could be identified, while registered Republicans

SEE INTEGRITY ON A2

## IN THE NEWS

**Statue removed** With legal hurdles cleared, workers took down the Confederate Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery. B1

**Homecoming in Israel** Families returned to the destroyed Kibbutz Beeri, calling attention to the plight of the more than 100 hostages who remain held in Gaza. A14

**THE NATION** A watchdog found that Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg followed rules on jet use. A5  
**The Supreme Court** said it will review the EPA's power to reduce downwind pollution. A5

**THE WORLD** The French city of Nice has become a laboratory for using AI-powered surveillance. A10  
**In Europe**, migration debates have pushed politics to the right amid hardened attitudes. A16

**THE ECONOMY** The Federal Trade Commission proposed expanding protections for children's data and limiting what information can be collected. A17  
**An Apple Watch ban** is looming, and not even the company knows when it will be able to sell the devices again. A17

**THE REGION** Gov. Glenn Youngkin (R) of Virginia presented his proposed budget, which would lower income taxes but raise sales tax rates. B1  
**D.C. Council** member Vincent C. Gray (D-Ward 7) won't seek reelection in 2024, citing his declining health. B1

**STYLE** Just Sam went from subway singing to winning "American Idol" in 2020. This year, it was back to busking. C1

**LOCAL LIVING** As she signs off, The Post's On Parenting editor shares five truths she has learned about raising children.

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