



Partly sunny 87/68 • Tomorrow: T-storm 78/70 B6

Democracy Dies in Darkness

TUESDAY, JUNE 4, 2024 • \$3

Russian cash sways far right in Europe

Kremlin-backed outlet funneled thousands to politicians, officials say

BY CATHERINE BELTON AND SOUAD MEKHENNET

PRAGUE — When an associate of one of Russian President Vladimir Putin's closest allies launched a pro-Kremlin media outlet here in May 2023, Czech counterintelligence officers began keeping careful watch.

For nearly a year, European intelligence officials said, the Czech authorities secretly recorded hours of meetings between several far-right politicians from across Europe and the associate, Artem Marchevsky, who was running the propaganda website, Voice of Europe, including at its offices on a quiet side street in the center of Prague. E.U. and Czech authorities, which have shut down the site, have labeled Voice of Europe a Russian propaganda operation.

The Czech probe rapidly expanded into Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland and France, European security and intelligence officials said, as investigators concluded that Voice of Europe represented far more than its official veneer as a pro-Russian website interviewing favored European politicians about ending aid to Ukraine.

The organization was being used to funnel hundreds of thousands of euros — up to 1 million a month — to dozens of far-right

SEE RUSSIA ON A14

Interference: Report says Russia is trying to disrupt Olympics. **A14**

Religious schools get billions in public cash

State rules on vouchers expand taxpayer funds for private tuition use

BY LAURA MECKLER AND MICHELLE BOORSTEIN

Billions in taxpayer dollars are being used to pay tuition at religious schools throughout the country, as state voucher programs expand dramatically and the line separating public education and religion fades.

School vouchers can be used at almost any private school, but the vast majority of the money is being directed to religious schools, according to a Washington Post examination of the nation's largest voucher programs.

Vouchers, government money that covers education costs for families outside the public schools, vary by state but offer up to \$16,000 per student per year, and in many cases fully cover the cost of tuition at private schools. In some schools, a large share of the student body is benefiting from a voucher, meaning a significant portion of the school's funding is coming directly from the government.

In just five states with expansive programs, more than 700,000

SEE SCHOOLS ON A6



CARL DE SOUZA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Claudia Sheinbaum, protégée of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, celebrates her successful bid Sunday to succeed him. Their Morena party also appeared close to assembling two-thirds majorities in Congress. Likely next on the party's agenda: the judiciary.

For Mexican democracy, 'warning signs'

BY MARY BETH SHERIDAN

MEXICO CITY — Claudia Sheinbaum's resounding victory in Mexico's presidential election has injected fresh energy into a leftist movement that has rapidly reshaped the United States' most populous neighbor and is poised to assume far-reaching control over government.

It took Mexico decades of painstaking effort to transition from a one-party state to a 21st-century democracy. Now, some warn, it's at risk of returning to the authoritarian system of the 20th century, under a different name.

"There are many warning signs on the horizon that should worry those concerned about the future of democracy in Mexico," said political scientist Denise Dresser, a prominent critic of the ruling Morena party.

Morena, founded by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, emerged from Sunday's election the undisputed heavyweight of Mexican politics. It secured the presidency for six more years and appeared close to

Vote's concentration of power in López Obrador's leftist movement raises specter of a return to one-party rule

assembling two-thirds majorities in Congress, which could allow it to change the constitution.

With such clout, it could now take control of the third branch of government, the judiciary — a prospect that alarms some democracy activists. López Obrador has proposed modifying the constitution to change how judges are named.

What sets Morena apart is that it sees itself as more than a political party. It's proclaimed the "Fourth Transformation" of Mexico, a campaign to break the grip of a corrupt political class linked to economic and media leaders. López Obrador, or AMLO, has maintained high ratings with expansive welfare

programs and the kind of bash-the-elites rhetoric that's fueled the popularity of Donald Trump.

Opposition parties say López Obrador has interpreted his mandate as a license to centralize power and weaken any institutions — the courts, the federal election board, the media — that stand in his way. They fear that Sheinbaum, his protégée, will do the same.

Morena supporters counter that a strong, centralized government can avoid the gridlock that has kept Mexico from solving some of its most intractable problems, such as the spectacular growth of organized-crime groups. Yet even some of those supporters concede that Morena, which also controls two-thirds of the nation's governorships, could be tempted to run roughshod over opponents.

"The big question," political scientist Carlos Pérez Ricart said, "is how do you ensure

SEE MEXICO ON A13

Female president: With official push for parity, Mexico paved way for a woman to lead. **A12**

Biden faces son's trial as president and patriarch

Opening pushes a new high-profile legal case into heart of campaign

BY TOLUSE OLORUNNIPA

As jury selection launched Monday for *United States v. Robert Hunter Biden*, it marked another novel moment in a period that has seen no shortage of them: the first time the child of a president faces a felony trial.

Coming just four days after jurors in New York convicted former president Donald Trump for falsifying records to hide a hush money payment, Hunter Biden's trial for allegedly lying on a gun-purchase form further entrenches the courtroom as a central player in an unorthodox and chaotic presidential election.

President Biden has lost two other children, and the legal ordeal facing his surviving son will be an emotional experience as well, longtime associates say, testing his ability to maintain a professional and political distance.

Facing a situation unlike any president before him, Biden — who at 81 is the patriarch of a large and growing family — will have to navigate the trial as



KEVIN LAMARQUE/REUTERS

Hunter Biden arrives at federal court Monday with his wife, Melissa Cohen Biden, in Wilmington, Del. He is charged with lying on an official form when he bought a gun in 2018.

president, candidate and father.

The cases against Trump and Hunter Biden are markedly different, not least because one defendant is seeking the presidency and the other is a private citizen. But both could affect the 2024

election as Republicans seek to tie Biden to his son's legal troubles, and the president's handling of them will be scrutinized closely by voters considering his performance as president and as patriarch.

"We live in a time when Americans largely consider the courtroom to be politics by other

SEE BIDEN ON A4

Jury selection: First day of trial highlights U.S. drug epidemic. **A4**

Biden to set cap limiting asylum

ACCESS TIED TO ILLEGAL CROSSINGS

System shuts down if threshold is exceeded

BY NICK MIROFF AND TOLUSE OLORUNNIPA

President Biden plans to issue an order Tuesday that would shut off access to the U.S. asylum system when illegal border crossings exceed a daily threshold, according to four administration officials and people with knowledge of the plans.

Migrants would be returned to their home countries or Mexico and be ineligible for asylum consideration once the limit is surpassed, according to the officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the pending White House order.

The administration has been considering the move since the failure of bipartisan border legislation this year that would have enacted a similar trigger to shut off asylum access at times when U.S. authorities become overwhelmed. People with knowledge of the plans said they expected the cap to be set at a daily average of 2,500 illegal crossings. Standard asylum processing would resume when the number drops below 1,500 crossings, an official said.

Illegal crossings along the U.S.-Mexico border have averaged more than 3,500 in recent weeks, according to the latest government

SEE BORDER ON A7

Billionaire to pay D.C. \$40M in settlement

Lawsuit accused Bitcoin investor of dodging his income taxes for years

BY MICHAEL LARIS

Billionaire bitcoin investor Michael Saylor and the software company he founded have agreed to pay \$40 million to settle a lawsuit by D.C.'s attorney general alleging he defrauded the city of millions in taxes by falsely claiming he lived in Virginia or Florida, according to a copy of the agreement.

Attorney General Brian L. Schwab (D) said the resolution marked the largest income tax recovery in city history and should serve as a message for District residents trying to dodge tax bills by pretending to live elsewhere.

"No one in the District of Columbia, no matter how wealthy or powerful they may be, is above the law," Schwab said in a statement.

Under the agreement, Saylor and MicroStrategy, the business software firm he founded in 1989, deny they violated District law and admitted no wrongdoing.

In a statement Monday, Saylor

SEE SETTLEMENT ON A20

IN THE NEWS

'Simply preposterous' Anthony S. Fauci, a former health adviser to Donald Trump and President Biden, dismissed allegations at a House hearing that he led a covid coverup. **A5**
Schools' budget crunch Rising costs, strained tax revenue and the expiration of pandemic aid are affecting districts in the D.C. region. **B1**

THE NATION
"Appeal to Heaven" flags have been appropriated in recent years by extremist groups. **A3**
At the bribery trial of Sen. Bob Menendez, his wife's texts and voice mails figure heavily. **A8**

THE WORLD
Ukrainian commanders said many of their new troops arrive without basic training. **A10**
Benjamin Netanyahu and Hamas both said a cease-fire agreement has not been reached. **A11**

THE ECONOMY
President Biden's science adviser is overseeing a harder line in the country's approach to technology policy toward China. **A15**
Congress is weighing delaying action on the farm bill over disputes about SNAP benefits and climate policy. **A16**

THE REGION
D.C. voters are set to select Democratic nominees in a hard-fought Ward 7 council race and other contests. **B1**
Noncitizen residents of D.C., newly eligible to vote in the city's local races, shared what the right to cast a ballot means for them. **B1**

STYLE
New editor Matt Murray met with Washington Post staffers as Publisher William Lewis fielded questions about newsroom reshuffling. **C1**
HEALTH & SCIENCE
Along-term study of dolphins sheds light on the marine mammals' complex society. **E1**

BUSINESS NEWS.....A15
COMICS.....C6
OBITUARIES.....B4
OPINION PAGES.....A17
TELEVISION.....C3
WORLD NEWS.....A10

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