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Democracy Dies in Darkness

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 10, 2024 • \$3

## Blinken's trip reveals divisions over Gaza

Enclave's governance, residents' return to north put U.S., Israel at odds

BY STEVE HENDRIX AND JOHN HUDSON

TEL AVIV — Disagreements between the United States and Israel over the Jewish state's treatment of Palestinians emerged during Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit to Israel on Tuesday as leaders aired opposing views over when Palestinians can return to northern Gaza and receive tax revenue collected by Israel.

"These are their revenues," Blinken told reporters here. "They should have them." Israel's far-right finance minister, Bezalel Smotrich, has vowed not to transfer any tax money to Gaza as long as he remains in that job.

Blinken traveled to Israel on Monday to present a plan for Gaza's future based on his discussions with Arab and Turkish leaders during a tour of the region. But he received little public response from Israeli officials.

In meetings Tuesday with Israel's president, prime minister, defense minister and emergency war cabinet, Blinken pressed Israel to reduce civilian casualties in its war on Hamas, already one of the century's most destructive conflicts. About 23,000 people have been killed in Gaza over the past three months, health officials there say.

But the gaps between Israeli and Arab leaders remain wide. Far-right members of the Israeli government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu are calling for the mass removal of civilians from Gaza. Israeli officials have dismissed U.S. calls for a "revamped and revitalized" Palestinian Authority to play a role in a

SEE BLINKEN ON A10



EVELYN HOCKSTEIN/REUTERS

**Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, left, and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Tel Aviv on Tuesday. Blinken traveled to Israel on Monday to present a plan for Gaza's future based on his discussions with Arab and Turkish leaders during a tour of the Middle East.**

**Weapons sales:** Democrats say Biden must notify Congress about transfers of arms to Israel. A10

## As longevity declines, U.S. short on answers

Its causes varied, a life expectancy slide alarms health experts but elicits scant political action

BY DAN DIAMOND

The commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration had an urgent message last winter for his colleagues, brandishing data that life expectancy in the United States had fallen again — the biggest two-year decline in a century.

Robert Califf's warning, summarized by three people with knowledge of the conversations, boiled down to this:

*Americans' life expectancy is going the wrong way. We're the*

*top health officials in the country. If we don't fix this, who will?*

A year after Califf's dire warnings, Americans' life expectancy decline remains a pressing public health problem — but not a political priority.

President Biden has not mentioned it in his remarks, according to a review of public statements; his Republican challengers have scarcely invoked it, either. In a survey of all 100 sitting senators, fewer than half acknowledged it was a public health problem. While recent federal data suggests

that life expectancy ticked up in 2022, a partial rebound from the ravages of the coronavirus pandemic, no national strategy exists to reverse a years-long slide that has left the United States trailing peers, such as Canada and Germany, and rivals, such as China.

"I wish that life expectancy or health span were a fundamental political issue in the 2024 presidential campaign," said Dave A. Chokshi, a physician and public health professor who formerly served as health commissioner of New York. "We're not living the

healthiest lives that we possibly could."

The Washington Post spoke with more than 100 public health experts, lawmakers and senior health officials, including 29 across the past three presidential administrations, who described the challenges of attempting to turn around the nation's declining life expectancy. Those challenges include siloed operations that make it hard for public- and private-sector officials to coordinate their efforts, a health-care

SEE LONGEVITY ON A18

## Austin had surgery to treat cancer, doctors say

BY DAN LAMOTHE, MATT VISER, FENIT NIRAPPIL AND MISSY RYAN

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin had surgery last month after a prostate cancer diagnosis, officials disclosed Tuesday, detailing for the first time what condition led to serious medical complications and a lengthy hospitalization that he kept secret for days from the White House, Congress and the American public.

Austin's condition was announced by the Pentagon in a statement attributed to John Maddox and Gregory Chesnut, doctors at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Maryland. They said the retired Army general, 70, was diagnosed with cancer in December after routine screening and underwent a "minimally invasive surgical procedure" known as a prostatectomy, in which all or part of the organ is removed, while under general anesthesia. He was admitted Jan. 1 after developing complications from the surgery and remains a patient there.

As with his hospitalization, Austin withheld the existence of his cancer diagnosis from President Biden and other key administration officials, the White House

SEE AUSTIN ON A2



ALEX WROBLEWSKI FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

### Snow hits Great Plains as severe weather sweeps U.S.

Heavy precipitation blanketed Des Moines, above, as part of a sprawl of foul conditions that spawned deadly tornadoes and blizzards, downed power lines and caused flooding. **Story, A3**

## 2023 is declared the hottest year on record

BY SCOTT DANCE, SARAH KAPLAN AND VERONICA PENNEY

The year 2023 was the hottest in recorded human history, Europe's top climate agency announced Tuesday, with blistering surface temperatures and torrid ocean conditions pushing the planet dangerously close to a

long-feared warming threshold. According to new data from the Copernicus Climate Change Service, Earth's average temperature last year was 1.48 degrees Celsius (2.66 degrees Fahrenheit) hotter than the preindustrial average, before humans began to warm the planet through the burning of fossil fuel and other polluting activities. Last year shattered the

global temperature record by almost two-tenths of a degree — the largest jump scientists have ever observed.

This year is predicted to be even hotter. By the end of January or February, the agency warned, the planet's 12-month average temperature is likely to exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees

SEE HEAT ON A9

ELECTION 2024

## Surging political threats menace U.S. democracy

Swatting, bomb scares, other violent tactics soar ahead of first balloting

BY SARAH ELLISON, YVONNE WINGETT SANCHEZ AND PATRICK MARLEY

Rusty Bowers, a former speaker of the Arizona House of Representatives who played a pivotal role in resisting efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election, drove into his neighborhood east of Phoenix the day after Christmas to a spine-chilling scene.

His home, nestled off a dirt road in an unincorporated slice of the desert, was surrounded by sheriff's deputies. An unknown caller had reported that there was a pipe bomb inside and that a woman had been murdered.

After searching the house and questioning Bowers's wife and grandson, according to Bowers and authorities, sheriff's deputies determined that neither claim was true.

The incident of swatting, a prank call to emergency services designed to draw a law enforcement response, wasn't just a terrifying moment for Bowers and his family. It was one of

many violent threats and acts of intimidation that have defined the lives of various government officials since the 2020 election. And now they are casting a shadow over the 2024 campaign as Americans prepare to vote in a primary season that kicks off this month.

Those on the receiving end span the range of America's democratic system, including members of Congress, state officials, local leaders and judges. While some are prominent, others have relatively low-profile roles. The intensity has accelerated in recent weeks.

Bomb threats last week caused evacuations at state capitol buildings across the country. Federal authorities arrested and charged a man with threatening to kill a congressman and his children, while other members of Congress dealt with swatting incidents. The Maine secretary of state and the Colorado Supreme Court, both of which recently deemed Donald Trump ineligible to run for the presidency because he engaged in an insurrection, received a surge of threats after being castigated by Trump in speeches and social media posts.

Police responded to an alleged swatting attempt Sunday night at the home of Tanya S. Chutkan, the federal judge overseeing

SEE DEMOCRACY ON A6

## IN THE NEWS

**737 Max 9 grounding** Boeing's CEO promised "complete transparency," saying the company will acknowledge its "mistake." A12

**'We need accountability'** Maryland Gov. Wes Moore (D) announced proposals to address crime in the state, including a gun violence prevention center. B1

**THE NATION** Congress may need to pass a short-term funding bill to avoid a partial shutdown. A3  
**The defense** for the NRA denied corruption allegations at a trial in New York. A6

**THE WORLD** Gabriel Attal, 34, became France's youngest and first openly gay prime minister. A8  
**A man** with U.S. citizenship was detained last week on drug charges in Russia. A9

**THE ECONOMY** A European Union study warns the bloc may need to target high-tech investments to guard against a potential U.S. decline and the rise of China or Russia. A11  
**Millions of gig** workers could qualify as employees under a new Labor Department rule. A14

**THE REGION** The first Black chief of police in Bowie was sworn in, making him the force's third leader since its founding. B1  
**DNA evidence** suggests that a man who died in 2017 was responsible for three unsolved murders in Hampton Roads in the 1980s, police said. B1

**STYLE** The racket sport padel is gaining in popularity in affluent circles, and its advocates hope to spark interest among average Joes. C1

**FOOD** Five tips for cutting back on your salt intake without sacrificing flavor. E1

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The Washington Post  
Year 147, No. 53726

