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Steward is not alone in courting disaster

Hospitals statewide face nurse shortages, backed-up ERs, health care executives say

By Jon Chesto
GLOBE STAFF

Steward Health Care's Massachusetts hospitals are on the brink of financial disaster. But in many important ways, Steward's troubles are just a symptom of a larger crisis engulfing the entire industry.

While Steward's for-profit ownership structure put its hospitals at a

disadvantage, many health care executives say the state's entire network of hospitals is approaching a capacity shortage not seen since the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Industry leaders are calling for urgent action from the Healey administration and the Legislature to help stem the crisis. Even just sim-

plifying the state regulatory bureaucracy and approvals for bringing uninsured patients into the MassHealth system would help, executives say.

Hospital officials emphasize that money alone won't solve the problems, though they have long pushed for better reimbursements from the state's MassHealth system to cover those who don't have private insurance.

"I don't think you can point to the state nor the feds and say, 'Here's

the recipe for them to save us,'" said Michael Lauf, chief executive of Cape Cod Healthcare. "This system hasn't been created overnight, nor will we get out of this acute stage overnight."

Emergency rooms are regularly backed up around the state, with many so-called "boarders" waiting on cots for rooms to open up. A big reason is on the other end: When hospitals want to discharge a patient, they often can't do so right

HOSPITALS, Page A7

Gov. Healey to seek pardons in pot cases

Tens of thousands could see marijuana possession convictions forgiven

By Matt Stout
GLOBE STAFF

Governor Maura Healey will announce plans this week to seek pardons for those convicted of simple marijuana possession in Massachusetts, four people familiar with her plans told the Globe, in a sweeping move that could see tens of thousands of people statewide forgiven for past crimes.

It wasn't clear Monday how Healey would structure the pardon recommendation, or exactly how many people could be eligible. But two of those briefed on her plans told the Globe that she would seek blanket forgiveness of simple marijuana possession charges dating back years in Massachusetts, where voters in 2016 legalized marijuana.

The announcement, scheduled for Wednesday morning at the State House, appears to follow through on one of the Democrat's campaign promises. It would continue her muscular and early use of the office's clemency power, which she has embraced more forcefully than many of her predecessors.

"It's supposed to be a blanket pardon," said state Senator Adam Gomez, a Springfield Democrat who was briefed on the basic details of the governor's plans and invited to Wednesday's news conference. Gomez is also the Senate chair of the Legislature's committee on cannabis policy, and

MARIJUANA, Page A10

"The fund should be flush, the fines should be applied, traffickers should be in jail, and survivors should have access to resources."

STATE SENATOR MARK C. MONTIGNY



SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF

At Safe Exit Initiative, a Worcester organization that helps women who seek to leave the sex trade, co-chief executive Audra Doody checked in with a participant.

AID FOR TRAFFICKING VICTIMS FALLS SHORT

Decade-old fund struggles to collect fines from pimps and sex buyers

By Sean Cotter
GLOBE STAFF

The idea was to turn the cycle of exploitation on its head: Take money from fines against pimps, human traffickers, and people buying sex, and use it to help sex workers seeking to leave the industry.

But more than a decade after the Victims of Human Trafficking Trust Fund was created, it has been hampered by limited funding, including no new money at all over the past four years. The fund, a mechanism that advocates and lawmakers once cheered as a way of ensuring support for victims of an exploitive underground industry, has been stymied, experts say, by the realities of prosecuting sex

\$66,890.89
is the current balance of the fund, according to the Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance, which has administered it since it was started in 2012.

The only time the victim assistance office distributed money was a round of grants in fiscal year 2021, when it allocated just over **\$113,000**

crimes. Though Massachusetts law includes options for fines or forfeitures as punishment for crimes such as paying for sex and human trafficking, the cases often fall apart because they rely on difficult victim testimony, or they result in prison time rather than fines.

"This fund should be helping people get back on their feet," said state Senator Mark C. Montigny, a New Bedford Democrat who authored the 2011 bill that created the trust fund. "The fund should be flush, the fines should be applied, traffickers should be in jail, and survivors should have access to resources."

The fund currently has a balance of

TRAFFICKING, Page A7

Biden aims to ease hurt feelings in N.H.

After shunning primary, he returns for 1st time in 2 years in campaign blitz

By Jim Puzzanghera
GLOBE STAFF

MANCHESTER, N.H. — The setting for President Biden was straight out of the New Hampshire primary season: a small campaign office sandwiched between the Heng Won Chinese restaurant and the Individual Fitness personal training studio in a two-story strip shopping center.

► **Biden's budget accents divide with GOP, A2.**

But the primary was seven weeks ago and Biden was a no-show. He skipped the contest after state officials ignored his push for South Carolina to hold the first-in-the nation primary and went ahead with theirs first anyway. Biden won handily in a write-in effort launched on his behalf because he opted not to even put his name on the ballot.

That drama behind him, Biden returned to the state for the first time in two years on Monday, hoping to smooth over any hard feelings. After all, he can't afford to lose New Hampshire's four elec-

BIDEN, Page A6



Just mild about it

Tuesday: Sunny and breezy.
High 53-58, low 35-40.
Wednesday: Partly sunny.
High 47-52, low 39-44.
Sunrise: 7:01. Sunset: 6:48.
Obituaries, **C9.**
Comics and Weather, **D5-6.**

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A fugitive wanted in the shooting deaths of a mother and her 11-year-old daughter in Worcester has been arrested in California, according to Worcester police. **B1.**

The 20-year-old woman who died while skiing on Mount Washington was an athletic, determined person with a 'heart of gold,' those closest to her say. **B1.**

An ability to code has long been seen as the key to a lucrative career. But many software engineering jobs could be in jeopardy due to advances in artificial intelligence, computer science experts say. **D1.**

The New England Patriots are welcoming back quarterback Jacoby Brissett and have signed running back Antonio Gibson in early free agent moves. **C1.**

A cure to what ails you? 44-degree water!

Dipping into the cold plunge tub has great benefits, or so the 'shaman' said

By Beth Teitell
GLOBE STAFF

In retrospect, I shouldn't have listened to the free-lance "shaman." But when you're standing soaking wet, in the middle of Boston, in February — and good god, you're wearing a bathing suit — you want someone who knows what they're talking about, even if they don't.

But let me back up. Perhaps you're familiar with the mania for cold plunges? I wasn't, and must confess that this trend, like so many, rose without my awareness, until suddenly a cedar tub of 44-degree water came for me.

Like others who have succumbed to wellness baloney, I'd come to believe that thrusting myself into an ice bath would solve my problems.

What were my problems, anyway? Who cares! I just hoped they were water-soluble.

Besides, who am I to question? Cold plunges date to

PLUNGE, Page A5



SHARON CHEN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE