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Democracy Dies in Darkness

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## ELECTION 2024

# Obama asks Biden to bolster campaign

Former president says Democrat's team needs stronger decision-makers

BY TYLER PAGER

Former president Barack Obama has raised questions about the structure of President Biden's reelection campaign, discussing the matter directly with Biden and telling the president's aides and allies the campaign needs to be empowered to make decisions without clearing them with the White House, according to three people familiar with the conversations.

Obama grew "animated" in discussing the 2024 election and former president Donald Trump's potential return to power, one of the people said, and has suggested to Biden's advisers that the campaign needs more top-level decision-makers at its headquarters in Wilmington, Del. — or it must empower the people already in place. Obama has not recommended specific individuals, but he has mentioned David Plouffe, who managed Obama's 2008 race, as the type of senior strategist needed at the Biden campaign.

Obama's conversation with Biden on the subject took place during a private lunch at the White House in recent months, one of the people said, a meeting that has not been previously reported. Biden, who has long used Obama as a sounding board, invited his former boss to lunch, and the two discussed a range of topics including the 2024 election.

During the lunch, Obama noted the success of his reelection campaign structure in 2012, when some of his top presidential aides, including David Axelrod and Jim Messina, left the White House to

SEE OBAMA ON A10

Forty-two former inmates describe horrific conditions and frequent torture



ARLETTE BASHIZI FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

# In Eritrea, risking death to escape prison

BY KATHARINE HOURELD IN NAIROBI

The tiny African nation of Eritrea is a sliver of fear wedged between Ethiopia and the Red Sea, a land that has known only a single strongman leader and the shadow of repression since independence three decades ago. Nothing exemplifies the reach and cruelty of the state today as much as its prison system.

Eritrea is riddled with an appalling variety of prisons: Underground cells of crumbling concrete, and sweltering jails fashioned from converted metal cargo containers. Cages crammed with hundreds of men who must sleep on their sides like sardines, as their cellmates wearily stand to make room, and shallow holes scraped from the earth with log and dirt ceilings so low that inmates cannot stand up.

Giorgio, a former Eritrean prisoner who was arrested in Ethiopia and taken back to Eritrea, says he was held there in two different underground prisons.

The conditions, former prisoners recounted, are often so ghastly and the prison terms so open-ended that desperate inmates frequently attempt to escape, but those who try are often gunned down.

Unlike in many other authoritarian countries, where people can frequently avoid prison by keeping their heads down and steering clear of politics, most Eritreans face the inevitability of detention if they refuse mandatory national service that can stretch for decades, mostly in a military infamous for leaving conscripts impoverished and brutalized.

Prison time is so ubiquitous that one former detainee, Mulue Zerezi, who was held for five years without ever learning the

SEE PRISONS ON A16

# FAA grounds some Boeing planes after midair crisis

This article is by Ian Duncan, Justine McDaniel, Lori Aratani, Adela Suliman, Andrew Jeong and Dan Rosenzweig-Ziff

The Federal Aviation Administration ordered the grounding of 171 Boeing airplanes for inspection on Saturday, after part of a jet's wall blew out in midair on a flight Friday and caused a dramatic emergency landing.

All Boeing 737-9 Max planes with the same part — a mid-cabin door plug, or an exit that's paneled off rather than used as a door — operating in the United States must be inspected, the FAA ordered.

Alaska and United airlines, which use the jets, had begun inspections, the carriers said. The incident caused dozens of flight cancellations Saturday, with the checks expected to continue into next week.

On the Friday Alaska Airlines flight, a door plug blew out partway down the plane, leaving a gaping hole beside a row of seats, according to the FAA, experts and images captured by passengers. Some onboard described pieces of debris flying around and flight air rushing in as the pilots made an emergency landing.

SEE PLANE ON A18



KATIE FALKENBERG/KLAMATH RIVER RENEWAL CORP.

California's Copco 2 is one of several Klamath River dams that helped electrify the West. Its razing, above, began in June, with three more of the river's dams set to meet that fate this year.

# A river's dams signaled American might. Their undoing aspires to a restoration.

BY REIS THEBAULT, ALICE LI AND MELINA MARA

It was a small moment, with little fanfare, in one of the most remote patches of northern California. Just the rattle of three Caterpillar excavators gnawing through concrete signaled the beginning

of the largest dam removal project in the history of the country, and perhaps the world.

There was no ribbon cutting or ceremonial dynamite detonation. But the demolition on that June day arrived only after decades of argument and activism.

The Klamath River dams,

built between the early 1900s and 1960s, fundamentally reshaped one of the West's most important watersheds. They electrified this hard-to-reach part of the country for the first time, powering the nation's vision of a Manifest Destiny.

The hydropower dams, which altogether stand at 411

SEE DAMS ON A8

# A mothballed Va. plant leaves a region hanging

A government-funded factory to make material for gloves sits unfinished

BY LAURA VOZZELLA

WYTHE COUNTY, VA. — The federal government spent \$123 million during the coronavirus pandemic to build a massive chemical plant here in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, a project meant to help ensure that supply-chain disruptions would never again leave the nation short of medical gloves.

In late spring, construction wrapped up on the plant, the only one in the country capable of producing the synthetic rubber needed to make disposable nitrile gloves.

By fall, the factory was mothballed.

"Just wasted money," Blue Star NBR chief executive Scott Maier said last month, surveying hundreds of motors removed from the plant's reactors in November and stashed in a humidity-controlled storage shed, where they will stay unless and until production gets underway. "This was all built, ready to go. And because we didn't start, now we have to take it all apart. ... We just want to finish what we started."



ALLISON LEE ISLEY FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Scott Maier, chief executive of Blue Star NBR, which built a now-idled factory to help make rubber medical gloves.

Washington initially planned to build two factories with Blue Star, one to make the rubber and another to turn the material into medical gloves, which were in dangerously short supply in the early days of the pandemic. But by the time the rubber plant was erected, the worst of the pandemic and glove shortages had passed. Now, federal officials say, Blue Star's contract is complete even though it still needs \$60 million to hook up the rubber factory to utilities and \$170 million to build an adjacent glove factory. The company will have to

SEE FACTORY ON A14

## METRO

A year after a boy shot his teacher, witnesses tell of efforts to save her life.

## BOOK WORLD

"Equality: The History of an Elusive Idea" looks at nonlinear progress.



## BUSINESS

Ten online influencers break down how much money they really earn.

## TRAVEL

The 52 definitive rules of flying, from airport arrival to landing.



## ARTS & STYLE

Redford and Newman were on equal footing in "The Sting" — a rarity.

## SPORTS

As season finale arrives, Commanders are still seeking home-field edge.

\$494

SUNDAY COUPON INSERTS

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