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AMMAR AWAD/REUTERS

Mourners on Sunday surrounded the coffins of children killed in a rocket strike from Lebanon a day earlier in Majdal Shams in the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights.

Rail Mogul Cloaked in Mystery Spends Millions to Back Trump

By ALEXANDRA BERZON and MIKE McINTIRE

Timothy Mellon, a wealthy banking heir and railroad magnate, has reached the stratosphere of American political influence as the top supporter of Donald J. Trump, doling out millions to try to elect the former president and his allies.

But to his neighbors in a Rhode Island beachfront enclave, he is better known as the prime suspect in the Narragansett Runestone Affair.

A hulking boulder once positioned just offshore in Narragansett Bay, the runestone bears inscriptions that some believe

were left by Viking explorers. It was the stuff of local lore and attracted visitors at low tide — to the consternation of Mr. Mellon, the pedigreed businessman whose home looked out on the rock.

And then one day it was gone.

A criminal investigation yielded a witness who had heard sounds of heavy machinery at night. Mr. Mellon refused to talk and hired a former state attorney general as his lawyer. Nearly a year later, the matter was resolved quietly: Mr. Mellon agreed to return the stone, and prosecutors agreed not to bring charges.

The episode was a rare glimpse into the private life and the public dealings of Mr. Mellon, 81, a reclusive heir and railroad magnate who has recently turned himself into a political force. He has surprised even political insiders with the size of his contributions this year, throwing \$75 million behind Mr. Trump’s attempt to return to the White House and an additional \$25 million toward Robert F. Kennedy Jr.’s independent presidential run, making him both candidates’ single largest benefactor.

All told, he has given \$227 million in contributions to federal



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Timothy Mellon is a reclusive heir to a banking fortune.

Past Comments Fluster Vance As Democrats Go on Offense

By JONATHAN WEISMAN and SHANE GOLDMACHER

The choice of Senator JD Vance as former President Donald J. Trump’s running mate reflected the confidence of a campaign so sure of victory in November that it could look beyond a second Trump term to the legacy of his movement.

But in less than two weeks, Mr. Vance has found himself on the defensive, and his struggles have dented the sense of invulnerability that only a week ago seemed to be the overriding image of the Trump campaign.

A stream of years-old quotes, videos and audio comments unearthed by Democrats and the news media in recent days has threatened to undermine the Trump campaign’s outreach to women, voters of color and the very blue-collar voters Mr. Vance,

a first-term Ohio senator, was supposed to reach.

His past comments deriding “childless cat ladies,” supporting a “federal response” to stop abortion in Democratic states and promoting a higher tax burden for childless Americans have yielded a chorus of criticism from Democrats. Mr. Vance’s fresh efforts to explain them have provided Democrats more material; the Harris campaign promoted one short clip in which he clarified on his comments on childless cat ladies, saying that he was sarcastic — “I’ve got nothing against cats,” he said.

And his first handful of appearances on the stump have drawn unflattering attention. During an appearance in his hometown, Middletown, Ohio, he tried to ex-

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A Pool of Contenders in Fellow Attorneys General

By KATIE GLUECK

When President Biden introduced Kamala Harris as his running mate four years ago, he shared their origin story: He had first learned of her through his son Beau, who served with her as a state attorney general.

“I know how much Beau respected Kamala and her work,” Mr. Biden said of his son, who died in 2015 and was Delaware’s attorney general when Ms. Harris held the same job in California. “That mattered a lot to me, to be honest with you, as I made this decision.”

Now it is Vice President Harris who is deciding on a running mate. And as she leans into her

Possible Running Mates Could Bring Balance to Harris Ticket

law enforcement background, with Democrats framing the race against former President Donald J. Trump as a choice between a prosecutor and a felon, the path to the Democratic ticket may again run through a class of ambitious former attorneys general who came up alongside her.

Of the five or six vice-presidential options currently seen as the most serious contenders, two of

them — Governors Roy Cooper of North Carolina and Andy Beshear of Kentucky — directly overlapped with Ms. Harris as attorneys general. Now-Gov. Josh Shapiro of Pennsylvania came into the job as she was leaving her post, and as Mr. Trump entered the White House.

Interviews with more than a dozen people who worked with Ms. Harris and those men at the time offer a window into her relationships with these possible running mates, and a snapshot of what each might bring — a steady, seasoned hand; political potency in an essential battleground state; or proven appeal in conservative

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IVOR PRICKETT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

As Hunger Looms, Sudan Blocks Aid
The country is on the edge of one of the world’s worst famines in decades, experts said. Page A6.

Arrival of F-16s May Not Solve Ukraine’s Challenges in the Skies

By MARC SANTORA and ERIC SCHMITT

MYRHOROD, Ukraine — The surveillance drone appeared high above the Ukrainian air base without warning in early July. Minutes after it relayed targeting data back to a Russian base, a barrage of ballistic missiles struck the airfield, Ukrainian officials said, recounting the episode.

“That first hit was so powerful

that even our windows were trembling,” said Valeria Minenko, 21, who lives near the air base in Myrhorod, central Ukraine, one of many targeted in relentless attacks by Russia in recent months.

“Now they’re hitting the air base with the rockets all the time,” Ms. Minenko said.

Russia has been saturating the skies over Ukraine with surveillance drones, exploiting gaps in air-defense systems, to launch in-

Russian Bombardment Thwarts Western Aid

creasingly sophisticated attacks on Ukrainian positions. Its dominance in the air along parts of the front has allowed it to bombard Ukrainian positions with hundreds of powerful guided bombs every day, helping its ground

THE WEATHER
Today, cloudy, spotty showers, high 82. Tonight, partly cloudy, humid, a thunderstorm, low 73. Tomorrow, some sun, humid, a thunderstorm, high 84. Weather map is on Page B8.

DIPLOMATS RACE TO REDUCE RISK OF A WIDER WAR

ROCKET FROM LEBANON

Israel Blames Hezbollah and Retaliates for at Least 12 Deaths

This article is by Patrick Kingsley, Euan Ward and Isabel Kershner.

JERUSALEM — Western diplomats were scrambling on Sunday to prevent a surge of fighting along the Israel-Lebanon border, officials said, after a rocket from Lebanon on Saturday killed at least 12 children and teenagers in an Israeli-controlled town. The rocket prompted Israel to retaliate early Sunday with strikes across Lebanon.

The initial Israeli response appeared to stop short of a major escalation, but there were still fears that the fallout from the rocket launch would lead to all-out war. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel, facing domestic pressure to mount a fiercer response, met with senior ministers and security officials on Sunday to discuss further steps, after flying back early from a trip to the United States.

Israel blamed Hezbollah, an Iranian-backed Lebanese group that has been attacking Israel in solidarity with Hamas, for the deadly rocket attack on Saturday on the Druse Arab town of Majdal Shams. Hezbollah has denied it was responsible.

Adrienne Watson, a spokeswoman for the National Security Council, said in a statement that Hezbollah had organized the attack. “It was their rocket, and launched from an area they control,” the statement said.

U.S. diplomats were in continuous contact with the Israeli and Lebanese governments on Sunday to contain the hostilities, Ms. Watson’s statement said. The U.S. had asked Lebanon’s government to relay a message to Hezbollah to show restraint in the face of a further Israeli response, according to Lebanon’s foreign minister, Abdallah Bou Habib.

“We are trying to restrain Hezbollah now from retaliating to whatever the Israelis do next,” Mr. Bou Habib said in a call with The New York Times. It was not immediately possible to confirm that with U.S. officials.

French officials also passed messages back and forth between Israel and Hezbollah, according to a Western official who requested anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue. France still has some influence in Lebanon owing to its former status as a French protectorate after World War I.

The backchannel diplomacy came amid threats from both Israel and Iran. The Iranian Foreign Ministry warned Israel of “unforeseen consequences” of any Israeli escalation, while Israel’s education minister, Yoav Kisch, called for a strong response “even if it means entering into an all-out war.”

The Israeli military said its overnight strikes had chiefly targeted places in Lebanon that it had often hit in the past, mostly

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Resistance to Newsom’s Order
Los Angeles is fighting the California governor’s declaration urging cities to clear homeless camps. PAGE A10

Diagnosing Alzheimer’s
A blood test accurately found the disease 90 percent of the time, according to a study. PAGE A15

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The partial lifting of a communications blackout is providing a picture of the young victims of a brutal crackdown on protesters. PAGE A4

Bolstering U.S.-Japan Alliance
The two governments announced steps to strengthen their military ties, a response to aggression by China. PAGE A9

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A Novelist of Passions
The works of Edna O’Brien often explored the lives of willful women who loved flawed men. She was 93.



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In a new album, the Swedish-born singer Molly Nilsson looks at the threat of a modern-day McCarthyism. PAGE C1

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CJ 4DPlex and other companies have turned splashing and shaking moviegoers into a lucrative art. PAGE C1

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Participation in the labor force has surged among women in their prime working years. But the heavy burden of child care costs might be hampering progress, some economists say. PAGE B1

Online Revival on the Left
After sluggish years under President Biden, liberal social media creators are seeing their messages resonate as Vice President Kamala Harris campaigns for the White House. PAGE B1

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Farah Stockman PAGE A16



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Biles Back at Full Force
Three years after pulling out of the Tokyo Olympics with a mental block, the U.S. gymnast powered through a calf injury in Paris. PAGE D1



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