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FOR THESE N.H. VOTERS, A VARIETY OF PATHS FROM ‘UNDECIDED’



ACROSS THE BOARD, I THINK [POLITICIANS] ARE ALL LIARS. I DON'T KNOW OF REALLY ANY OTHER OCCUPATION OTHER THAN USED CAR SALESMEN WHERE YOU'D QUESTION WHETHER OR NOT THEY'RE TELLING THE TRUTH.'

-JEFF CONNOR
Age: 50
Hometown: Henniker
Occupation: Trucking
Candidates under consideration: "Wide open" (but not Donald Trump)



'[THE REPUBLICAN PARTY] WAS STRONG ON NATIONAL DEFENSE, LOW TAXES, GROW THE ECONOMY FROM THE BOTTOM UP... I JUST IDENTIFY AS, 'WELL, I'M A REAGAN REPUBLICAN.' I'M NOT A 2023 REPUBLICAN BECAUSE IT JUST WENT TOO FAR RIGHT.'

-PAMELA COFFEY
Age: 70
Hometown: Peterborough
Occupation: Retired
Candidates under consideration: Chris Christie and Nikki Haley



'I FEEL LIKE IF [DONALD TRUMP] GETS TO THE GENERAL, THERE'S A CONCERN THAT HIS LEGAL BAGGAGE, AS FABRICATED AS IT MAY BE, MIGHT SCARE OFF INDEPENDENT VOTERS. AND IF WE LOSE THE INDEPENDENTS, WE LOSE THE ELECTION.'

-JAMES THIBAUT
Age: 18
Hometown: Franklin
Occupation: High school senior
Candidates under consideration: Ron DeSantis and Vivek Ramaswamy

PHOTOS BY CHERYL SENTER FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE; JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF (RIGHT)

A search for direction and light in the looming shadow of Trump

By Emma Platoff
GLOBE STAFF

They've been called the presidential wine tasters of America.

When it comes to presidential primaries, New Hampshire voters get to go first. This year, that means an out-sized role in deciding whether Donald Trump will be the next Republican nominee, or whether his bid for a second term will end before it really begins.

For months, pundits have talked

about the Republican nomination as if Trump has it sewn up. But in New Hampshire, underdogs have a history of beating the odds, and GOP voters' support for Trump hovers at less than 50 percent, leaving a narrow chance that voters could pick someone else.

Polls and dozens of interviews show that voters who back Trump are for the most part certain of their choice. Those who love him, love him — criminal indictments, fraud trials, and promises to govern as a dictator, at least on day one,

be damned.

Meanwhile, those still deciding tend to say that this year, they'd like someone new, regardless of whether they've supported Trump in the past. And even for never-Trumpers, the front-runner dominates their decision-making process. Their votes are as strategic as they are personal — more important than a candidate's tax policy is whether she or he has any real chance of ousting the front-runner.

NEW HAMPSHIRE, Page A9

On gun laws, GOP candidates stick to their opposition

By Jess Bidgood
GLOBE STAFF

WASHINGTON — Hours after the Thursday school shooting in Perry, Iowa, left a sixth-grader dead, former governor Nikki Haley of South Carolina and Governor Ron DeSantis of Florida took the stage at back-to-back CNN town halls and said that mass shootings had shaped their own governorships.

"When I became governor, it was on the heels of the worst school shooting that we had in the history of the state," DeSantis said, referring to the 2018 shooting in Parkland, which

killed 14 students and three members of the staff.

Haley spoke of a 2016 elementary school shooting in Townville, S.C., that left one 6-year-old dead. "I was at the hospital with his parents the night he was shot," Haley said. "The gravity of what that was is something I will never forget."

Then they each summarily dismissed the need for any new gun restrictions, calling instead for mental health interventions and more school security.

"We could go and take away a certain kind of gun today,"

GUNS, Page A9

Congress strikes deal on funding

Unclear whether it can be passed before shutdown

By Carl Hulse
NEW YORK TIMES

WASHINGTON — Senate and House leaders announced Sunday they had struck an overarching agreement on 2024 government funding, but it was not clear whether they would be able to cement the deal and pass it into law in time to avert a partial government shutdown in less than two weeks.

After weeks of negotiations and on the eve of Congress returning from its holiday break, top Senate and House members said they had agreed to set the total amount of spending at nearly \$1.66 trillion, bringing funding in line with the deal struck last year between President Biden and then-Speaker Kevin McCarthy that met with vehement conservative opposition.

The agreement includes an increase in Pentagon spending to \$886.3 billion and holds nondefense funding essentially flat at \$772.7 billion, including \$69 billion of added money agreed to through a handshake deal between McCarthy and the White House. That additional spending is offset by speeding up \$10 billion in cuts to IRS enforcement and clawing back \$6 billion in unspent COVID dollars and other emergency funds. Officials said the agreement did not include an additional

CONGRESS, Page A8

JOE O'DONNELL 1944-2024

His dedication created futures for thousands of ailing kids

Entrepreneur led fight against cystic fibrosis

By Bryan Marquard
GLOBE STAFF

In his decades as one of Boston's most successful and influential entrepreneurs, Joe O'Donnell kept as low a profile as possible for someone who came close at different points to buying the local football and baseball teams.

"As a kid, I was taught not to shine a spotlight on yourself, and I always thought people who did that were kind of jerks," he told the Globe in 2001, when he was trying to purchase the Red Sox. "And even today, I still think that's true."

Instead, he worked endless hours beyond the glare of headlines, never more so than while raising money for cystic fibrosis research. Little could be done in 1974 when his son, Joey, was born with the genetic disorder and died 12 years later. Leaving no potential donor's hand unshaken, Mr.

O'DONNELL, Page A7

Belichick made history. Will he now be history?

DAN SHAUGHNESSY

FOXBOROUGH — It's always about history with Bill Belichick.

He's famously chasing the late Don Shula (347 wins) to become the winningest coach in NFL history (Belichick has 333). He donated his collection of football history books to the US Naval Academy in 2006. When it came time to tell his secrets to an author, Belichick favored the late David Halberstam, one of the great American history writers of the last two centuries.

Quite possibly, Belichick is now history in New England.

Sunday in a freezing, January snow squall, Belichick coached his 429th and possibly final game with the Patriots, a 17-3 loss to the hated Jets in a largely empty Gillette Stadium.

Belichick reportedly has one year left on

SHAUGHNESSY, Page C5



MATTHEW J. LEE/GLOBE STAFF

Bill Belichick watched Sunday as the Patriots lost to the New York Jets at snowy Gillette Stadium in what could be his final game as Pats coach.



Balm after the storm

Monday: Sunny, breezy.
High 34-39, low 22-27.
Tuesday: Strong wind, late rain.
High 38-43, low 32-37.
Sunrise: 7:13. Sunset: 4:28.
Weather and comics, **D4-5**.
Obituaries, **C12**.

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Governor Maura Healey plans to announce \$375 million in spending cuts, including slashing 50 percent from an array of local earmarks and hundreds of millions from other programs, lawmakers say. **B1**

The Israeli military said it will be shifting its focus in the Gaza Strip from the north to the south. **A6**.

This season's first nor'easter proved to be a very different storm, depending on where you call home. **B1**.

Biotech executives see reasons to believe in a turnaround in their industry, which has struggled in recent years. **D1**.

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