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Democracy Dies in Darkness

THURSDAY, JANUARY 11, 2024 • \$3

ELECTION 2024

Christie ends his long-shot campaign

GOP's anti-Trump wing hopes his departure will buoy Haley's chances

BY DYLAN WELLS,
MAEVE RESTON
AND AZI PAYBARAH

Former New Jersey governor Chris Christie on Wednesday announced that he would suspend his long-shot bid for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, clearing a wider lane in New Hampshire for former U.N. ambassador Nikki Haley as calls to exit the race and consolidate support behind an anti-Trump alternative grew stronger.

Launching his presidential campaign in June, Christie positioned himself as the only candidate directly making the argument that former president Donald Trump is unfit for office. But in recent weeks, Christie had faced increasing pressure among Republicans and donors who do not support Trump to drop out, including New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu, who endorsed Haley. Sununu, a longtime friend of Christie's, told reporters in Rye, N.H., last week that Christie had a chance to "be the hero" and swing the state in Haley's favor.

His departure from the Republican field adds new fluidity to a contest long dominated by Trump that has featured little drama or change. It brings anti-Trump forces closer to the prospect of consolidating support against him, but with little assurance that will be enough to stop him with the first nominating contests set to begin this month.

"I've always said that there came a point in time in this race where I couldn't see a path to accomplishing that goal that I would get out," Christie said

SEE CHRISTIE ON A4



WOJCIECH GRZEDZINSKI FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

She just turned 16. The war in Ukraine wrecked her city — and her childhood.

BY LIZZIE JOHNSON AND KAMILA HRABCHUK
IN IZYUM, UKRAINE

Kate Kobets passes through a World War II memorial on one of her walks in war-ravaged Izyum. Walking helps her recall what her life was, and escape what it has become.

Newly 16, she likes to walk alone, hands shoved in pockets, music loud in her ears, for mile after mile.

If Kate Kobets walks far enough, she can escape into her own world. It is a place where her childhood hasn't been destroyed — her home loud with war, her soldier stepfather locked away as a Russian prisoner of war, she and her mom confined to a bomb shelter for much of the year after she turned 14.

She is part of a generation of Ukrainian teenagers living through a conflict entering its third year with no end in sight. Raised during a pandemic — then through gunfire and bloodshed — Kate, like many of her peers, is unsure what it means for her future. She knows she is luckier than some of her friends — who have lost their homes or even their lives. Still, it is difficult to make sense of it all.

Kate feels frozen, she said in interviews during three days of visits to her home, her life suspended when Russia invaded her country in February 2022, then overtook her city a month later — a brutal occupation that lasted half a year. Kate's mom didn't want to split their family up. By the time they decided to evacuate, it was too late.

Kate was there as 80 percent of Izyum was razed, as more than 1,000 of her neighbors were killed. She was there when the city — an important transportation hub in eastern Ukraine with a pre-invasion population of about 45,000 — was liberated in September 2022.

SEE TEEN ON A10

River push: Ukrainian marines tell of high risk, little gain. A9

GOP rhetoric fills Iowa's immigrants with dread

Ahead of caucuses, Trump's 'poisoning the blood' comments and candidates' ads stoke fear



KATHRYN GAMBLE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Norah Innis at Celebrity International Store, her grocery in Des Moines. The native of Liberia has been trying to focus on her business rather than politics. "It's too stressful," she said.

Final debate: Haley, DeSantis trade harsh attacks battling for second place as Trump skips again. A8

A turbulent 2024: Read the answers to eight questions about the opening of this pivotal election year. A7

BY DANIELLE PAQUETTE
AND SARRINA RODRIGUEZ
IN DES MOINES

The grocery store had been her American Dream, but now Norah Innis wondered if she'd be better off bolting the doors and moving back to Liberia.

Sales were down. Rent was harder to pay. And campaign ads dominating Iowa's screens and airwaves ahead of the first Republican showdown of 2024 seemed to paint immigrants like her as the enemy.

She worried the rhetoric could fuel violence.

"It scares me," said Innis, 60, tying plastic bags of peanuts in her shop catering to West African transplants, Celebrity International Store. "It scares me a lot."

As the race for the White House officially kicks off and GOP contenders jostle for votes before next week's Iowa caucuses, people who've settled here from all over the world say the intensifying spotlight on border security and caustic language lobbed by Republican candidates has filled them with dread.

The fire hose of campaign

SEE IOWA ON A6

Ecuador in 'state of war' a day after gang bedlam

President's historic order targets 22 criminal bands as violence grips nation

BY ARTURO TORRES,
LIZZIE JOHNSON
AND SAMANTHA SCHMIDT

QUITO, ECUADOR — This country was once a relatively peaceful haven in South America, wedged between neighbors often racked by armed conflict and guerrilla violence.

On Wednesday, Ecuador's president, Daniel Noboa, declared that his nation was entering a new era: "We are in a state of war."

A day earlier, the 36-year-old president had taken an extraordinary measure never before used in Ecuador and rarely seen in Latin America, formally announcing a state of internal armed conflict and giving the military sweeping powers to combat 22 criminal gangs he defined as "terrorists."

Noboa issued the executive order in response to a series of apparently coordinated attacks that swept across Ecuador on Tuesday, terrorizing citizens and paralyzing cities. A group of armed men took over a TV station during a

live broadcast, holding its staff hostage at gunpoint. More than 30 car explosions took place across the country, riots broke out in several prisons, and at least seven police officers were kidnapped. In Guayaquil, Ecuador's largest city and the epicenter of the violence, four people were killed by armed men who shot them indiscriminately while they were walking in the streets, according to the city's police chief. Dozens of prison guards continue to be held hostage in four prisons across the country.

The attacks followed the prison escape of the country's most notorious gang leader, José Adolfo "Fito" Macías Villamar, who had received leaked information that the government was planning to transfer top gang leaders to maximum-security prison wards, Noboa said. Government officials have suggested this move may have prompted the attacks.

The government is now in a battle against criminal organizations with more than 20,000 members, Noboa said — groups that have now become "military targets."

Tuesday's chaos — and Noboa's stunning declaration of armed conflict — marks a turning point in an escalating security crisis

SEE ECUADOR ON A11

IN THE NEWS

Flooded homes Thousands of U.S. properties have been repeatedly damaged as climate change outpaces efforts to mitigate risk. A18

Unfit for trial A Wisconsin judge ended the effort to try former D.C. archbishop Theodore McCarrick on criminal sex assault charges, deeming him incompetent. B1

THE NATION Two House panels voted to urge that Hunter Biden be held in contempt, capping a day of insults and tempers. A2
The White House is deciding whether to ban menthol cigarettes. A4

THE WORLD DNA has helped scientists shed light on the prevalence of multiple sclerosis in Europe. A11
The militant group al-Shabab seized a U.N. helicopter crew that landed in Somalia. A11

THE ECONOMY A former accountant is dispensing tax advice to an unusual clientele: fellow sex workers. A13
The UAW announced progress toward unionization of an Alabama Mercedes plant, a milestone in its push to corral auto factories in the South. A14

THE REGION History and policy were in the mix as the Virginia and Maryland legislatures were gavelled into session. B1
Record rainfall, downed trees, high winds and school closures resulted from the storm that soaked the D.C. region Tuesday. B1

SPORTS Nick Saban, who won 297 games and seven national titles (including six at Alabama, which he made into a modern-day dynasty), is retiring. D1

LOCAL LIVING If a tidier home is on your docket in 2024, check out our list of eight ways to do it.

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Year 147, No. 53727

