

Portrayal of Biden’s memory stuns aides

Special counsel’s conclusions at odds with attorneys’ recollections

BY MATT VISER

President Biden had just spoken with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu the morning of Oct. 8, agonizing over how to rescue hostages taken by Hamas in its bloody attack the previous day, pledging American assistance, and weighing a volatile situation that threatened to spiral out of control in the Middle East.

Shortly after they hung up, the president’s personal attorney, Bob Bauer, and White House counsel Ed Siskel arrived at the White House. The group walked down one flight of stairs to the Map Room, where Biden was to be interviewed by special counsel Robert K. Hur, who for nine months had been investigating Biden’s handling of classified documents.

Those five hours and 10 minutes of interviews, unfolding over two days, would turn out to be momentous. But at the time, few foresaw how they would blow up four months later — not because of their content, but because Hur would repeatedly deride Biden’s memory during their time together. In a long-awaited report issued this week, Hur declined to prosecute Biden over his handling of classified documents but cast doubt on his memory, threatening to upend Biden’s pursuit of reelection by dwelling on perhaps his biggest political liability.

Hur’s description of Biden’s demeanor as that of a “well-meaning, elderly man with a poor memory” would infuriate Biden’s aides, who saw it as sharply at odds with what occurred as the president sat

SEE BIDEN ON A6

The Fact Checker: What the Hur report says on “willful retention.” **A4**

Hur report’s critique seen as affront to DOJ norms

BY PERRY STEIN

The conclusion laid out in special counsel Robert K. Hur’s final report was straightforward: Joe Biden mishandled classified materials, though there was not enough proof that he intended to break the law to meet the Justice Department’s high prosecution threshold.

But the 345-page report also contained explosive information about President Biden’s allegedly faulty memory, overshadowing the issue of how he stored sensitive government materials after his vice presidency ended.

Hur portrayed the president as an elderly man who shared sensitive information with his ghostwriter and struggled to remember key details in his life — unleashing calls from Republicans that Biden is unfit to serve, and a furious backlash from Democrats who said assessments of the president’s memory were inappropriate.

The appointment of a special counsel is intended to make high-profile, sensitive investigations as independent and apolitical as possible. But current and former Justice Department officials said the increasing reliance on special

SEE COUNSEL ON A5



PHOTOS BY BONNIE JO MOUNT/THE WASHINGTON POST

A radical plan to save a rural oasis

As suburbia expands, a bid to protect Loudoun County’s gravel roads is dividing residents

BY JUSTIN JOUVENAL,
BONNIE JO MOUNT
AND JAYNE ORENSTEIN

Allen Cochran shouts “Here we go!” and the sheep skitter from a weathered gray barn, bounding into golden afternoon light on a mile-long journey to pasture. Their beating hoofs sound like a sudden downpour on the centuries-old gravel road.

The tableau feels ripped from rural Ireland or even another century, but it is playing out not too far from a Chipotle. This is western Loudoun County, Va., where the superheated suburban development of the D.C. area runs headlong into a picturesque rural enclave that’s been defined by farms and horses for 300 years.

It has become the latest focus of an unlikely movement to preserve a slice of landscape often thought of as waiting its turn for improvement: unpaved roads.

While hamlets in Upstate New York and elsewhere have taken steps to protect unpaved roads, an ambitious and unorthodox plan being pushed in

SEE LOUDOUN ON A12



TOP: A driver waits as Allen Cochran and his border collies herd sheep, which includes travel on paved and gravel roads, in Hamilton, Va. **ABOVE:** Cyclists travel on one of Loudoun County’s gravel roads. Some say putting the roads on the National Register of Historic Places will ensure that their charm survives suburban onslaught.

Liberal billionaire now a leader in anti-DEI crusade

BY ELIZABETH DWOSKIN

Three years ago, Vivek Ramaswamy called up hedge fund manager Bill Ackman with an idea: an “anti-woke” asset management firm that would combat social justice and climate initiatives spreading through the business world.

Though the billionaire power broker had made a career forcing management changes in businesses including Wendy’s and JCPenney, Ackman seemed an unlikely backer for his tennis buddy’s project. A longtime Democratic donor, Ackman had helped propel the career of Sen. Cory Booker (D-N.J.), and his philanthropic efforts included paying for thousands of undocumented immigrants to attend college. Moreover, Ackman had praised the movement Ramaswamy opposed — known as environmental, social and corporate governance, or ESG — endorsing ESG practices in his 2021 shareholder letter.

But the tumultuous years of the pandemic had shifted the Wall Street billionaire’s worldview. Like others in his uber-wealthy circles, Ackman had come to believe that well-meaning ESG efforts had curdled into something pernicious, stifling debate, destroying careers and undermining the meritocratic values that made the

Bill Ackman used Wall Street tactics to oust Harvard’s first Black president



TORI FERENC FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

“What I want is fairness,” said billionaire hedge fund manager Bill Ackman.

free-market system “the most powerful potential force for good in addressing society’s long-term problems,” as he once put it.

Ackman invested \$2.5 million in Ramaswamy’s Strive Asset Management — an early flash point in his personal transformation. By last month, when the hedge fund manager led a successful campaign to oust Harvard University’s first Black president, he had fully emerged as one of the most powerful — and unexpected — adversaries of a diversity movement that has swept society since the 2020 murder of George Floyd, a Black man, at the hands of a White police officer.

In hours of interviews with The Washington Post, Ackman, who is Jewish, argued that campus responses to the Oct. 7 attack had been lackluster compared with the solidarity shown post-George Floyd. To Ackman, the contrast exposed the hypocrisy of the movement for “diversity, equity and inclusion,” or DEI — which includes race-based hiring goals and diversity trainings he called “unhealthy” and the “root cause of anti-semitism.”

SEE ACKMAN ON A10

NFL: DEI’s “Rooney Rule” under a legal microscope, on and off field. **Business**

Security high for Trump’s D.C. trial

FENCING WILL BE SIMILAR TO JAN. 6

Aim is for buffer between courthouse and public

BY SPENCER S. HSU,
RACHEL WEINER
AND PETER HERMANN

U.S. officials are debating how thick of a security blanket they will wrap around the federal courthouse in downtown Washington for former president Donald Trump’s trial — a practical and symbolic measure of the case’s importance that must balance safety with the ongoing functions of a city and a public courthouse, according to people familiar with discussions.

Proposed changes for the criminal trial of a former American president include ringing all or part of the E. Barrett Prettyman federal courthouse with metal fencing, closing or controlling sidewalk access for several blocks, and temporarily closing neighboring streets in the heart of the city, two of the people said. The goal is to create an additional security buffer between the proceedings inside and the public outside, said the people, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss pending security plans.

The barriers will pose a visual reminder of the police barricades erected before the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol and its grounds, which sit 300 yards from the courthouse across an open expanse of the National Mall. The preparations come amid rising threats to public officials, including judges and prosecutors in Trump’s cases, and the

SEE JAN. 6 ON A20

ELECTION 2024

Voting offices, fearing worst, go on offense to avert chaos

BY YVONNE WINGETT
SANCHEZ

PHOENIX — In training poll workers for this year’s presidential election, Arizona Secretary of State Adrian Fontes is preparing them for a series of worst-case scenarios, including combat.

His office is coordinating active-shooter drills for election workers and has sent kits to county election offices that include tourniquets to stem bleeding, devices to barricade doors and hammers to break glass windows.

Fontes, a Democrat and Marine Corps veteran, doesn’t think he is overreacting.

“We recognize the real and present danger that’s presented by the conspiracy theories and the lies,” Fontes said. “An ounce of prevention is really all we can afford right now, and so that’s what we’re going to do.”

Around the nation, those who run voting operations — more than a dozen of whom were interviewed by The Washington Post — say they are preparing for the types of disruptions that historically had been more asso-

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METRO
Inside the arrests of two suspects in the shooting death of a 2-year-old.

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TRAVEL
The Bushman Café is a haven for culture and chocolate in West Africa.

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The Washington Post / Year 147, No. 53758

