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BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

WAR IN UKRAINE

Kyiv lowers age of draft

Long-delayed move to boost ranks risks political backlash

By Andrew E. Kramer
The New York Times

KYIV, Ukraine — President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine has signed into law three measures aimed at replenishing the ranks of his country's exhausted and battered army, including the politically poisonous step of lowering the age when men become eligible for mobilization, and eliminating some medical exemptions.

Parliament passed the legislation lowering the draft eligibility age to 25, from 27, last May, but Zelenskyy had delayed signing it in hopes that it would not be needed. He relented Tuesday and signed the measure, along with laws eliminating a category of medical exemption known as "partially eligible" and creating an electronic database of men in Ukraine, starting at age 17, to crack down on draft dodgers.

"It is a very unpopular decision, and that is why Zelenskyy held it without signing," said Volodymyr Arie, a lawmaker in parliament who is in the opposition European Solidarity party. "Now he has no choice."

Russia's forces have been on the offensive along the front line, and Ukrainian generals

Turn to Draft, Page 2



Pedestrians cross LaSalle Street in front of the Chicago Board of Trade building Tuesday in the Loop. EILEEN T. MESLAR/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Some big views to fill

Johnson greenlights four 'LaSalle Reimagined' sites to build residences in empty office spaces

By A.D. Quig
Chicago Tribune

Mayor Brandon Johnson will move ahead with predecessor Lori Lightfoot's program to fix up four aging Loop buildings, offering \$151.2 million in public money to help convert them into residences as the city seeks a way to repurpose empty downtown offices.

Together, the projects would cost roughly \$520 million and create 1,000 more living units. Of those, 319 would be rented at affordable rates, if they are approved by various city panels.

Two of the development teams are also in the process of seeking federal loans. If approved, the four projects could break ground as soon as early next year and open

by 2027. They would include a mix of studio, one- and two-bedroom units and would chip away at the estimated 5 million square feet of vacant space and dearth of affordable housing downtown. Just 32 units in the loop are currently affordable.

With the exception of one new project, Johnson's announcement Wednesday was nearly identical to the ones unveiled by Lightfoot's administration in the spring, although somewhat pared down. The announcement, however, did

provide assurances to anxious developers and downtown aldermen that city assistance will likely come through.

The proposals must still be reviewed by the city's Community Development Commission, Landmarks Commission and the City Council.

Johnson also used his Wednesday rollout at 208 S. LaSalle St. to preview other upcoming development-friendly initiatives,

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"These four buildings are sure to become our poster children, if you will, for the Loop's rebirth as a mixed-use neighborhood and we are thrilled with each team." — Planning Commissioner Ciere Boatright



Ericka Matos, right, and attorney Tamara Holder at a news conference in Chicago on Wednesday. STACEY WESCOTT/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Attorneys ask AG's office to criminally investigate OB-GYN, health systems

By Emily Hoerner
and Lisa Schencker
Chicago Tribune

Attorneys representing former patients of OB-GYN Fabio Ortega are calling on the Illinois attorney general and the office of outgoing Cook County State's Attorney Kim Foxx to criminally investigate the troubled doctor and the health systems where he worked.

The request came the same day that one of the women who is suing Ortega and Swedish Covenant Health spoke publicly for the first time, saying she wants justice for herself and others who

allege Ortega harmed them.

"I'm not afraid of him," Ericka Matos said of Ortega, at a news conference Wednesday. "I'm not crying anymore like I used to. I'm strong right now. I want justice for me and for the rest of the ladies."

Cook County prosecutors charged Ortega with criminal sexual assault of two patients in 2018 and 2019. The former gynecologist pleaded guilty to charges of aggravated criminal sexual abuse of both patients in October 2021, and a judge sentenced him to three years in the Illinois

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'We are the caretakers of the Earth'

Muslim women push for a 'green' Ramadan

By Adriana Pérez
Chicago Tribune

On a recent Sunday evening, a group of Muslim women huddled around a hot beverage dispenser. They watched as one woman mixed cardamom tea, anise seed, cinnamon, ginger and different kinds of milk.

It would be easier to offer hot water and tea bags, Sam Bawamia said as she stirred the warm beverage. But she had recently read that tea bags contain countless microplastic particles and, horrified, had decided to prepare the drink from scratch.

"We have to go green. You have to tell people — no plastics! Look at all these plastic bottles," she said as she pointed to some shelves in the back of the kitchen stocked with single-use water bottles. "You have to say: 'No, no, no.'"



Sam Bawamia, right, and Mona Mahmoud make tea for attendees of an interfaith iftar at the Muslim Education Center in Morton Grove on March 17. TROY STOLT/FOR THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

The Muslim Community Center where Bawamia champions green initiatives has mosques in Chicago and Morton Grove, two of many across the world that face an environmental challenge particular to the month of Ramadan. Providing a meal and water to hundreds of people who haven't had anything to eat or drink all day requires straightforward, replicable solutions — usually in the shape of disposable plastic plates, utensils and cups — and can often result in food waste.

"In our faith, in the Islamic faith, we are taught that we are the caretakers of the Earth," Bawamia said, taking the podium for a short speech before sundown. "We humans use its resources, but we must maintain a balance. In the Quran ... it says that (there's) a delicate balance with which this world was set in motion. But our job is to correct our overuse of resources and address the injustices and effects of selfish change

Turn to Ramadan, Page 5

Swim the Chicago River?

It's been more than a century since swimmers braved the Chicago River, but a local group hopes to change the public's perception of the waterway with an open-water swim set for the fall. **Page 2**

WBEZ announces layoffs

WBEZ announced a number of layoffs Wednesday for various departments, along with the impending closure of the company's Vocolo radio broadcast following years of lagging listenership. **Business**

