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Democracy Dies in Darkness

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## Arena plan is cut from Va. state budget

Gov. Youngkin collides with lawmakers over luring Wizards, Capitals

BY GREGORY S. SCHNEIDER AND LAURA VOZZELLA

RICHMOND — Leading Virginia lawmakers have stripped plans for a new Wizards and Capitals arena from the state budget that the General Assembly is expected to approve on Saturday, blocking Gov. Glenn Youngkin's best shot at bringing the teams to Alexandria and dealing a severe blow to a deal the governor has touted as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Calling the move a "colossal mistake," Youngkin (R) told reporters Thursday that one senator — Sen. L. Louise Lucas (D-Portsmouth), though he did not name her — was acting as "a single roadblock. ... It just befuddles me that we're not talking today about how to deliver it."

Lucas, who stood on the portico of the Capitol looking down on Youngkin's news conference, said afterward that he was correct in his assessment. "I am a roadblock, yes," Lucas said, adding that she does not believe the proposed arena and its \$1.5 billion in public debt are a good deal for taxpayers. Asked if she would be open to a better arena deal, she said, "A better deal would be if they paid for it themselves," referring to the teams' owner, Ted Leonsis. Lucas used her position as chairwoman

SEE ARENA ON A18

## Decaying offices, AI's future test federal lab

At cash-strapped agency, some workers navigate black mold, flaky internet

BY CAT ZAKRZEWSKI

At the National Institute of Standards and Technology — the government lab overseeing the most anticipated technology on the planet — black mold has forced some workers out of their offices. Researchers sleep in their labs to protect their work during frequent blackouts. Some employees have to carry hard drives to other buildings; flaky internet won't allow for the sending of large files.

And a leaky roof forces others to break out plastic sheeting.

"If we knew rain was coming, we'd tarp up the microscope," said James Fekete, who served as chief of NIST's applied chemicals and materials division until 2018. "It leaked enough that we were prepared."

NIST is at the heart of President Biden's ambitious plans to oversee a new generation of artificial intelligence models; through an executive order, the agency is tasked with developing tests for security flaws and other harms. But budget constraints have left the 123-year-old lab with a skeleton staff on key tech teams and most facilities on its main Gaithersburg, Md., and Boulder, Colo., campuses below acceptable building standards.

SEE NIST ON A14

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**Singer-songwriter** Mary Timony and rock band Sleater-Kinney bring their respective tours to the District next week.

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### STATE OF THE UNION

# A fervent Biden takes on Trump, GOP



MATT MCCLAIN/THE WASHINGTON POST

President Biden, flanked by Vice President Harris and House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.), delivers his State of the Union address Thursday night. The president never mentioned Donald Trump by name, referring to him throughout as "my predecessor."

## President confronts age concerns in feisty speech

BY MATT VISER

President Biden often has a ready rejoinder for anyone who expresses concerns about his age: "Watch me."

As he arrived at the rostrum at the front of the U.S. House chamber on Thursday night, he had more Americans watching him than in some time. And in an election year where a chief concern among voters is whether the 81-year-old president is fit enough for another four years, the State of the Union address took on outsized importance as a way for him to

While stumbling at times, he casts his long experience as an asset

confront the topic.

"I know I may not look like it, but I've been around awhile," he said toward the end of his remarks. "When you get to my age certain things become clearer than ever."

He cast the fact that he entered office as one of the youngest senators in American history and now is the oldest president in Ameri-

can history as an asset. He argued both implicitly and explicitly that his age brings wisdom rather than worry.

"My lifetime has taught me to embrace freedom and democracy. A future based on core values that have defined America: honesty, decency, dignity, equality," he said, adding a moment later: "Now other people my age see it differently: The American story of resentment, revenge and retribution. That's not me."

As he emerged from the White House and walked to his armored limousine, he quickened his gait

and jabbed his fists enthusiastically. As he entered the House chamber, he took several minutes — much longer than usual — and shook hands with members, telling one to give him a phone number. He paused for selfies. He greeted Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.), who was wearing a red "Make America Great Again" hat.

He was feisty at times — chiding Republicans for touting infrastructure projects that came to their districts despite their votes against the legislation that

SEE BIDEN ON A6

## U.S. to build temporary port to get aid into Gaza

'Emergency mission' won't require American troops on the ground in Strip, administration says



LOAY AYYOUB FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

In Rafah, in southern Gaza, families and others bury Palestinians killed in strikes and gunfire, after the bodies were released by Israel. The announcement of the U.S. port plan comes as hopes fade that a cease-fire deal will be reached before Ramadan, the Muslim holy month that begins next week.

**Ramadan nears:** What to know about Islam's holiest month, and its prospects for a cease-fire. A10

BY KAREN DEYOUNG AND SARAH DADOUCH

Amid dimming hopes that an Israel-Hamas cease-fire and hostage-release deal will be reached before the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, President Biden has ordered the U.S. military to construct a temporary port and pier on Gaza's Mediterranean coast to open a new route for providing humanitarian aid.

Administration officials described what they called an "emergency mission," announced Thursday night in Biden's State of the Union speech, that is part of the president's directive to "flood the zone" with desperately needed assistance arriving by air, land and sea.

The port plan follows last week's initiation of U.S. military airdrops of aid into Gaza, the third of which took place Thursday. The new maritime facility will allow "hundreds" of truckloads of assistance to be delivered daily to Gaza, said one of three senior administration officials who briefed reporters on the plan on the condition of anonymity under

SEE GAZA ON A10

## Navy demoted former White House doctor after inquiry

BY DAN DIAMOND AND ALEX HORTON

Ronny Jackson, the former White House physician turned GOP congressman, regularly touts his military bona fides.

"As a retired U.S. Navy Rear Admiral with nearly three decades of military service I understand the commitment and sacrifices made by servicemen and servicewomen to serve our country," the two-term representative from Texas says on his congressional website in a message posted on a page listing his work on veterans issues.

But Jackson is no longer a retired admiral. The Navy demoted him in July 2022 following a damaging Pentagon inspector general's report that substantiated allegations about his inappropriate behavior as a White House physician, a previously unreported decision confirmed by a current defense official and a former U.S. official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive personnel move.

Jackson is now a retired Navy

SEE JACKSON ON A4