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Democracy Dies in Darkness

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ELECTION 2024

# Reality of Trump's query is complex

He implied the U.S. was better off four years ago. In many ways, it wasn't.

BY ASHLEY PARKER AND HANNAH KNOWLES

Donald Trump posed an all-but-shouted query on his social media platform last week, echoing a talking point that has recently become popular in Republican circles: "ARE YOU BETTER OFF THAN YOU WERE FOUR YEARS AGO?"

The clear implication from Trump and his allies is that the country was thriving in 2020 when he was president in a way that it is not now under President Biden. But the reality is far more complicated.

Four years ago last week, the stock market was collapsing — hitting its worst week since the Great Recession of 2008 — as the country spiraled into a years-long pandemic that claimed more than 1 million American lives, cratered the economy, upended daily life and, arguably, helped cost Trump a second term in the White House.

The third week of March 2020 — four years before Trump sent his query — reveals a nation that was on the precipice of crisis, and a leader exhibiting the full panoply of characteristics that his

SEE TRUMP ON A4

# Boeing, air travel now the butt of the joke

Despite a string of recent incidents, experts stress that flying remains safe

BY IAN DUNCAN AND TAYLOR LORENZ

The nation's top aviation safety officials sought to reassure travelers last week that flying in the United States remains incredibly safe, despite a series of high-profile mishaps and an ongoing probe at Boeing that have spooked the public and turned airlines into fodder for late-night comedians and social media meme pages.

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg stressed at a conference hosted by news site Axios that flying was the safest way to travel. Michael Whitaker, the head of the Federal Aviation Administration, repeated that message on NBC's "Nightly News." And in a post on X, Jennifer Homendy, the chair of the National Transportation Safety Board, compared the airlines' safety record against the 118 people who die on average each day in car crashes.

But their voices have to compete with the likes of comedian Jimmy Fallon, who targeted Boeing in a limerick on his show this month: "Spring break the students were going — excited, they all were a-glowin'. Then they let out a squeal, lost the door and

SEE AVIATION ON A13



KATHRYN GAMBLE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

# Gaza dissenter plans second act

GRINNELL, IOWA — The peace talks underway in Josh Paul's classroom were doomed.

Israel was unyielding. Hamas and the Palestinian Authority traded accusations. Nobody paid attention to civic groups or tribal leaders. After two rounds of debate, the college students role-playing as negotiators were stuck with bleak prospects for the Gaza Strip.

The sole compromise was a watered-down rejection of "violence" that didn't name perpetrators or victims.

"You're the one group that got to some sort of agreement — by being so general that it was almost meaningless," Paul said, to laughter from the students. "Congratulations, that's how diplomacy works."

That lesson in the frustration of Middle East policymaking came from bitter experience. Paul, 45, is a veteran civil servant who for more than a decade helped send weapons to foreign nations, including to Israel for the war it launched after Hamas killed 1,200 people and took 253 hostage during an Oct. 7 attack.

But on Oct. 18, when the death toll

Working to change how Americans think about the Middle East

BY HANNAH ALLAM

Josh Paul, a State Department career officer who resigned in protest over U.S. support for Israel's operation in Gaza, teaching a policymaking class at Grinnell College in Iowa in February.

in Gaza had climbed past 2,000, Paul hit his breaking point. He announced his resignation from the State Department in a public LinkedIn post outlining concerns about U.S. weapons being used against Palestinian civilians. He described "rushing more arms to one side of the conflict" and other policies as unjust and "contradictory to the very values that we publicly espouse."

With those words, Paul had broken the ultimate taboo for a government official: publicly criticizing Israel, the top U.S. ally in the Middle East.

Four months later, he was on the wind-whipped plains of Iowa, leading a classroom simulation of the war that had cost him his State Department career.

Paul spent February teaching at Grinnell College, a tiny liberal arts school in the heart of Trump country, as his old life imploded and another took shape around his new identities as "dissident" and "whistleblower." The brief exile gave him space to reflect on a question he's wrestled with since his resignation: What, if any, was the impact?

SEE GAZA ON A6



SARAH STIER/GETTY IMAGES

## Bounced in Brooklyn

Terrence Edwards Jr. leaves the court after 12th-seeded James Madison's 93-55 loss to Duke in the second round of the NCAA men's basketball tournament on Sunday. **Story, D1**

# Teens accuse polo icon of sexual harassment

John Gobin allegedly used cash, threats, power to prey on them

BY JUSTIN JOUVENAL

The teenage polo player was excited when John Gobin, a champion in the sport, approached her one night at a 2021 polo event in Virginia. Gobin had reached the pinnacle of U.S. polo in the 1990s and 2000s, captaining national teams and winning international cups.

He took part in exclusive matches even by the rarefied standards of the "sport of kings," riding with a scion of the Ferragamo fashion house and playing before Prince Charles. After stepping back from major competition, he started a polo school in Virginia's horse country that is one of the largest in the nation.

"Your body looks really good," the then 16-year-old recalled Gobin, a married man in his 50s, telling her, before offering her a job on the Middleburg farm where he has run the Twilight Polo Club school for 15 years and has had dozens of young employees.

She said she initially brushed off the comment. The chance to work with someone of Gobin's stature seemed like a great opportunity for an up-and-coming player.

Instead, the woman, now 19, alleges in a lawsuit filed in Virginia state court last week that Gobin pressured her and another underage girl into sex before trying to silence them. She is among half a dozen women who described to The Washington Post a pattern of sexual harassment and misconduct by Gobin over five years, alleging he demeaned teens and young women, inappropriately touched them, or offered them cash for sex.

SEE POLO ON A16

## IN THE NEWS

**House GOP** Less than six months after a revolt against Kevin McCarthy, Republicans are questioning his successor's leadership. **A5**

**The royal family** A second cancer diagnosis raises questions about a British institution under strain, with fewer figures available to make public appearances. **A13**

**THE NATION** **The Supreme Court** will hear arguments Tuesday about limits on abortion pill access. **A2** **It's a busy day** in Donald Trump's cases, with a hearing and a deadline to come up with cash. **A2**

**THE WORLD** **On the island** of Borneo, a renaissance of the traditional food culture is underway. **A8** **Israel's** defense minister headed to Washington at a time of increasingly strained relations. **A9**

**THE ECONOMY** **A look at your** iPhone's restrictions shows why the federal government is suing Apple, Shira Ovide writes. **A12**

**THE REGION** **Crime has become** the top concern for voters in the District's closest Maryland suburbs, a poll found. **B1**

**Virginia Gov.** Glenn Youngkin and Monumental owner Ted Leonsis rejected a proposal to pair an arena with a casino in the Tysons area. **B1** **An undercover** operation in Maryland helped lead to the arrest of a suspect in a lucrative scam involving gold bars, authorities said. **B1**

**STYLE** **Regina King**, who took a hiatus from Hollywood after a personal tragedy, is back with "Shirley" — and she's just getting restarted. **C1** **Ronna McDaniel** faced brutal criticism during her first NBC appearance since the network hired her as an analyst. **C1**

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