



Thousands told to flee as California wildfire spreads



JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY IMAGES

Fire retardant is released over Oroville, Calif., about 70 miles north of Sacramento, to counter the Thompson Fire, which by noon Wednesday had reached over 3,500 acres and was zero percent contained. Evacuation orders were in effect for 28,000 people in surrounding Butte County, where temperatures have been topping 100. **Story, A9**

ELECTION 2024

Pressure builds on Biden to prove his fitness

‘DEAFENING SILENCE’ AS PARTY SQUIRMS

President tells his staffers he’s staying ‘to the end’

BY MICHAEL SCHERER, TYLER PAGER AND MATT VISER

President Biden and his senior team said they accepted Wednesday the grim ultimatum they have been hearing from almost all quarters of the Democratic Party this week: quickly demonstrate his fitness for office or face a significant effort to force him to step aside.

Growing concern from Capitol Hill, top donors and senior party strategists, including some of his own advisers, prompted Biden to start reaching out to allies in recent days to admit that he is in a tough moment and that he has to prove to voters he is up for the job, according to two people familiar with the conversations.

His critics have been shaken by his relative inaction over the pre-

vious six days to directly address the panic ignited by his halting debate performance. Starting Tuesday afternoon, he started calling top congressional leaders, scheduled a sit-down interview with ABC News and announced weekend campaign travel plans that will be closely scrutinized.

Even a spotless performance over the coming week may not save him if significant cracks appear in public and internal polling, said senior Democratic strategists, who, like many for this story, spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe private conversations.

Biden, 81, has appeared in public four times since a rally Friday in North Carolina — for remarks on a

SEE BIDEN ON A5

War chest: Biden camp raked in \$264 million in second quarter. **A4**

Democrats rallying around Harris as potential nominee

BY CLEVE R. WOOTSON JR., LEIGH ANN CALDWELL AND NICOLE MARKUS

As President Biden continues to face questions about whether he should end his bid to seek a second term, there are growing signs that many in the Democratic Party are willing to accept the notion of Vice President Harris at the top of their presidential ticket, a potentially significant shift.

House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-N.Y.) is signaling to members that Harris would be the best option to lead the ticket if Biden chooses to step aside, said two people familiar with this thinking who spoke on the condition of anonymity to

detail private conversations.

Rep. James E. Clyburn (S.C.), a high-ranking member of the House and a longtime Biden friend, has publicly said he would support Harris if Biden steps aside, adding that his fellow Democrats “should do everything to bolster her, whether she’s in second place or at the top of the ticket.”

Tim Ryan, a former Ohio congressman and presidential candidate, said in an op-ed that while he loves Biden, Harris should be the Democratic nominee for president after Biden stumbled in a high-profile debate performance last week. Some other possible contenders — including Michigan Gov.

SEE HARRIS ON A4

For Israeli hostage’s mother, patience is long gone

BY SHIRA RUBIN

TEL AVIV — When Einav Zangauker’s son was dragged into Gaza on Oct. 7, she trusted that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would do everything possible to bring him home.

For two months, she barely ventured outside, refusing to meet with public figures, paralyzed by the fear that voicing her anguish could endanger her son’s release.

“I thought, Netanyahu is ‘Mr. Security,’ he’s delivered Israel through many wars,” she recalled. “I thought, I believe in him and I need to give him a chance.”

Her patience has long since run out. After months of failed



HEIDI LEVINE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Einav Zangauker, center, the mother of Israeli hostage Matan Zangauker, takes part in a protest in Tel Aviv in April.

diplomacy aimed at freeing the more than 100 captives still held by Hamas — “dozens” are still alive, Israeli officials say, though no one knows exactly how many — Zangauker has been at the forefront of swelling anti-government protests, uniting disillusioned hostage families and their supporters. They believe Netanyahu is torpedoing a deal to return their loved ones and end the war in Gaza — and must be driven from power.

The movement plans to ramp up its “disruption” efforts in the coming weeks, hoping to topple the government before the Israeli parliament ends its summer session July 28. It is just one in a series of crises converging on

SEE ISRAEL ON A11

Blame flies over abrupt end to \$6.6B Medicare deal

BY DAN DIAMOND

On the surface, 1-800-MEDICARE is a government success story: a free, popular service helping tens of millions of older Americans understand their health insurance and options for care. The call line boasts a 95 percent satisfaction rate, according to federal officials.

But behind the scenes, the multibillion-dollar job of running the Medicare call line and similar services for the Affordable Care Act — one of the richest service contracts offered by the federal government — has sparked a bitter battle between a powerful labor union, a prominent federal contractor and politicians who are now accusing the White House of delivering an election-year favor for its union allies.

The fight centers on the Biden administration’s decision in September 2022 to award a \$6.6 billion contract to Maximus, a McLean, Va., company that helps

SEE MEDICARE ON A7

Teachers race to solve the math problem facing schools

Pandemic relief funds are running low, and students are still behind after losing ground

BY LAUREN LUMPKIN

Black marker in hand, Nick Baar returned to the whiteboard. The newly minted math tutor wrote an equation for the eighth-graders in front of him: 25×199 .

The rules were simple: No calculators or pencils allowed. Baar wanted to see if his students at Perry Street Preparatory, a charter school in Northeast Washington, could solve the problem in their heads. They had breezed through an earlier problem — 25×200 — but now appeared stumped. The group sat in silence.

One boy spoke up. He knew that $25 \times 200 = 5,000$, so he guessed that 25×199 could equal 4,999. Baar paused before breaking the equation down into smaller chunks, offering a reminder that multiplication is just adding the same number over and over again. The group slowly caught on to the pattern until they produced the right answer: 4,975.

“I know that they can do it,” he said after the session. “It’s a lot of giving them encouragement.”

At Perry Street Prep, each of its

SEE MATH ON A8



JAHU CHIKWENDU/THE WASHINGTON POST

Nave’ Marshall, third from left, is among a group of students eager to answer a question during a third-grade math class at Friendship Public Charter School’s Blow Pierce campus in D.C. in November.

Trump wants to face Biden, but team eyes new scenario

BY ISAAC ARNSDORF, JOSH DAWSEY AND MARIANNE LEVINE

Donald Trump and his campaign hope President Biden stays in the race, according to four people familiar with private discussions, believing they can beat him even with Trump’s felony conviction and other charges. But they are also ramping up attacks on Vice President Harris.

Publicly, Trump and his allies have dismissed suggestions that Biden could withdraw from the race, insisting that it is too late for Democrats to change course. Privately, they have started preparing for different possibilities, and feel it could be harder to beat another Democrat who is not Biden or Harris.

“I’m going to show up and I’m going to campaign whether it’s him or somebody else,” Trump said in an interview Monday with Richmond radio host John Reid, referencing polls showing

SEE TRUMP ON A6

IN THE NEWS

U.S. climate response Supreme Court rulings, particularly two last week, added obstacles to the government’s ability to regulate pollution and greenhouse gases. **A9**

Hurricane Beryl Still at Category 4 intensity, the storm was menacing Jamaica as hard-hit islands assessed the damage in its wake. **A12**

THE NATION
Two Union soldiers executed after an 1862 hijacking were awarded the Medal of Honor. **A3**
Sen. Bob Menendez (D-N.J.) called on family members to testify at his corruption trial. **A6**

THE WORLD
In Britain, 14 years of Tory rule brought chaos and torpor. Today, the people vote. **A10**
Jewish voters who split with Britain’s Labour Party over antisemitism are returning. **A12**

THE ECONOMY
General Motors will pay a penalty of about \$146 million over excess emissions from nearly 6 million vehicles. **A13**
The Federal Trade Commission voted to block mattress maker Tempur Sealy’s purchase of the Mattress Firm retail chain. **A14**

THE REGION
Virginia’s House and Senate struck a deal to repeal new limits on a college tuition program for military families. **B1**
Maryland’s Board of Public Works approved a \$50 million contract to clear debris from the Francis Scott Key Bridge’s collapse. **B1**

STYLE
Skydance Media agreed to a deal to gain control of the firm that owns CBS, MTV and Paramount Plus. **C1**
LOCAL LIVING
Going plastic-free is nearly impossible, but more people are trying to see how close they can get to that goal.

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