

‘Leadership was absent’ in Uvalde response, DOJ says in unsparing report

Police inaction had deadly consequences during school massacre

BY ARELIS R. HERNÁNDEZ, DEVLIN BARRETT AND MARK BERMAN

UVALDE, TEX. — The nation’s top law enforcement official on Thursday punctuated a scathing report on police failures during the 2022 massacre at Robb Elementary School by declaring that “lives would have been saved” if officers had responded quickly.

Families of the victims bowed their heads and passed around a tissue box as Attorney General Merrick Garland told them that law enforcement’s lengthy delay in confronting the gunman also impacted the medical response to the mass killing.

“The report concludes that had law enforcement agencies followed generally accepted practice

es in an active shooter situation and gone right after the shooter to stop him, lives would have been saved and people would have survived,” Garland said.

The Justice Department’s report is a damning 575-page catalogue of confusion and lack of courage, as well as their deadly consequences. The 18-year-old gunman killed 19 students and two teachers before officers eventually shot him. Many of the grim, maddening details of the faulty response were already known, but the federal report is the fullest, most detailed account of one of the worst school shootings in the nation’s history.

The report is highly critical of local police commanders but also criticizes state law enforcement, saying its officers added to the disorganization and confusion that contributed to delays and indecision after the shooter burst into the school.

“Leadership in law enforcement was absent,” the report says.

Key findings: “Cascading failures” by law enforcement revealed. **A10**

Judge orders hearing on claims of DA misconduct

Willis appears forced to respond to accusations roiling Ga. election case

BY AMY GARDNER AND HOLLY BAILEY

A state judge overseeing the election interference case against former president Donald Trump in Georgia has scheduled a hearing for Feb. 15 to hear evidence regarding accusations that Fulton County District Attorney Fani T. Willis (D) and her lead prosecutor engaged in an improper relationship and mishandled public money.

Fulton County Superior Court Judge Scott McAfee also wrote in his order that Willis must re-

spond to the accusations in writing by Feb. 2. Willis has declined to directly address the explosive accusations that first came to light last week in a filing from one of Trump’s co-defendants, former campaign aide Mike Roman. The filing did not include evidence to substantiate the claims.

McAfee’s order, which was obtained and first reported by The Washington Post, could force Willis to address the allegations in televised court proceedings, a development that could at least be embarrassing for the district attorney and at worst derail the investigation completely. The district attorney separately signaled Thursday that she plans to fight the efforts to disqualify her from the case, filing a motion to block a subpoena that could force

SEE WILLIS ON A2

Gaza fight rages despite pressure



PHOTOS BY LOAY AYYOUB FOR THE WASHINGTON POST



TOP: An injured Palestinian child sits on the rubble of a building after an Israeli strike in Rafah, in southern Gaza. **ABOVE:** Gazans inspect the rubble of several buildings in the city on the Egyptian border. Fighting Thursday was especially fierce in central Gaza, as it also flared in the north. Witnesses reported shelling and gunfire in several parts of Gaza City and surrounding communities.

Answer to Iran: Pakistan launches strikes as Mideast tensions appear to move east. **A14**

HOSTAGE FAMILIES DOUBT TACTICS

Medicines in deal appear to enter enclave

BY STEVE HENDRIX, HAZEM BALOUSHA AND MIRIAM BERGER IN JERUSALEM

Israel pounded southern Gaza on Thursday, including one attack in Rafah near the Egyptian border that killed at least 16 people, according to reports. The major southern city of Khan Younis saw some of Gaza’s heaviest fighting in weeks, with at least 40 Hamas fighters killed, according to Israel.

The fierce fighting, especially in central Gaza, suggested that Israeli forces are not yet fully scaling back their assault despite U.S. pressure over heavy civilian casualties and increasing doubts among families of hostages held by Hamas and its allies. In one sign of hope in the conflict, medicine destined for the hostages appears to have crossed into Gaza, though it is not clear whether it has reached its intended recipients yet.

The Israel Defense Forces said its troops, backed by tanks and aircraft, attacked several Hamas weapons caches and bases around Khan Younis. The IDF withdrew from the vicinity of al-Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis on Wednesday, after several days of heavy fighting that destroyed residential buildings and a cemetery and caused thousands of refugees to flee, according to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of

SEE GAZA ON A14

Stopgap bill delays threat of shutdown until March

BY JACOB BOGAGE AND MARIANNA SOTOMAYOR

Congress on Thursday passed legislation to keep the federal government open into March, approving the third stopgap spending bill in four months as lawmakers struggle to agree on long-term government funding plans.

The bill extends deadlines to March 1 and March 8. Money for roughly 20 percent of the government — including the Transportation Department, some veterans’ assistance, and food and drug safety programs — had been set to expire just after midnight early Saturday. The remainder — which funds the Defense and State departments, among other critical functions — would have expired Feb. 2 without the new extension.

The Senate passed the legislation, 77-18, Thursday afternoon. The House followed suit, 314-108, SEE SHUTDOWN ON A6

@PKCapitol: McConnell pushes for deal on Ukraine and the border. **A6**

Fast-food giants overwork teens, driving child labor crisis

Thousands have been illegally scheduled during post-pandemic shortages, Post analysis finds



JOHN TULLY FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Tyler Karpinsky began working for the McDonald’s in Rutland, Vt., at 15, often being scheduled for shifts that went into the evening and subsequently affected his schooling.

BY LAUREN KAORI GURLEY AND EMMANUEL MARTINEZ

The fast-food industry is fueling a surge in child labor violations across the United States, especially at companies with franchised locations such as McDonald’s, Sonic and Chick-fil-A, according to a Washington Post analysis of federal data.

Since the widespread labor shortages of the pandemic, fast-food companies have illegally scheduled thousands of teenagers to work late and long hours and to operate dangerous kitchen equipment, The Post found. In some cases, companies have hired children 13 or younger — violating 1930s-era laws designed to protect their safety and educational opportunities. Federal law prohibits 14- and 15-year-olds from working past 7 p.m. and more than three hours on school nights.

Overall, child labor violations have more than tripled in the past 10 years, with violations in food service increasing almost sixfold, according to The Post’s analysis of U.S. Labor Department data. In the first nine months of 2023, agency officials found more than 4,700 teenagers under 18 working

SEE CHILD LABOR ON A8

ELECTION 2024

DeSantis faces a bleak path as he pivots to S.C.

BY HANNAH KNOWLES

Ron DeSantis is turning his sights to South Carolina, moving much of his presidential campaign staff there and assuring allies that he plans to stay in the Republican race for that late February contest after effectively surrendering in New Hampshire.

But the Florida governor’s path to the GOP nomination is bleaker than ever, with Donald Trump cracking 50 percent of the vote in Iowa this week and former South Carolina governor Nikki Haley running ahead of DeSantis in her home state.

In New Hampshire, which votes next on Tuesday, DeSantis has become an afterthought, tumbling into the single digits in public polls and expected to finish a distant third. Many Republicans have questioned the

SEE DESANTIS ON A5

Haley sparks debate: Whether the U.S. is or was a racist country. **A4**

IN THE NEWS

‘Keeping people safe’ A trans woman created a group for LGBTQ gun owners to gather and learn how to arm themselves properly. **A7**

Metro audit Workers in charge of safety systems that keep trains apart are not following critical procedures, a report by the agency’s independent regulator found. **B1**

THE NATION Public school attendance averaged 90 percent last fall, which experts say is too low. **A2** Nearly 50,000 veterans received free suicide prevention care last year from a VA program. **A3**

THE WORLD Under a bill to deport asylum seekers, Britain would evade norms it helped create. **A11** The breaking of an 1850 promise to Indigenous peoples could cost Canada a lot. **A12**

THE ECONOMY Emails and notifications can pile up on your computer or cellphone. We tell you how you can cut those backlogs down to size. **A15** Global leaders at the World Economic Forum expressed concerns over the perils of artificial intelligence. **A15**

THE REGION A “gang” of White officers created a hostile work environment for officers of color at a Maryland prison, a new lawsuit alleges. **B1** With more children on both sides of shootings, D.C. youths create artwork to process the rise in gun violence. **B1**

STYLE The end of an era for Pitchfork is a dagger to the heart of music journalism, Post critic Chris Richards writes. **C1** WEEKEND New Year’s resolutions are notoriously hard to keep, but making the process a little more fun can help.

BUSINESS NEWS.....A15 COMICS.....C5 OPINION PAGES.....A17 OBITUARIES.....B4 TELEVISION.....C4 WORLD NEWS.....A11

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