

All the News
That's Fit to Print

The New York Times

THE WEATHER

Today, mainly cloudy with showers and thunderstorms, high 87. Tonight, thunderstorms early, low 64. Tomorrow, breezy and less humid, high 80. Weather map is on Page 20.

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Prices in Canada may be higher

\$6.00

Biden's Debate Breeds Doubts In Donor Class

Contributors Weighing How to Respond

This article is by Theodore Schleifer, Kenneth P. Vogel and Shane Goldmacher.

WASHINGTON — The Democratic Party's perennially nervous donor class descended into deep unease on Friday, as some of the wealthiest people in America commiserated over President Biden's weak debate performance and puzzled over what, if anything, they could do to change the course of the race.

There were discussions with political advisers about arcane rules under which Mr. Biden might be removed from the ticket against his will and replaced at or before the Democratic National Convention, according to a person familiar with the effort.

In Silicon Valley, a group of megadonors, including Ron Conway and Laurene Powell Jobs, were calling, texting and emailing one another about a situation they described as a possible catastrophe. The donors wondered about whom in the Biden fold they could contact to reach Jill Biden, the first lady, who in turn could persuade her husband not to run, according to a person familiar with the conversations.

A Silicon Valley donor who had planned to host an intimate fundraiser featuring Mr. Biden this summer decided not to go through with the gathering because of the debate, according to a person told directly by the prospective host. Another major California donor left a debate watch party early and emailed a friend with the subject line: "Utter disaster," according to a copy of the email.

In group chats and hushed discussions, some wealthy Democrats floated interventions, others hoped Mr. Biden would have an epiphany and decide to exit on his own, and still more strategized about steering dollars to down-ballot candidates. The most optimistic donors wanted to wait for polling to see the scope of the fallout.

The crisis in the donor class — outlined in interviews with almost two dozen donors and fund-raisers, many of whom insisted on anonymity to discuss their private conversations — could not come Continued on Page 19



DANIEL BEREHULAK/THE NEW YORK TIMES

More Mayhem in Trenches
Ukrainians building a trench in the country's east. Attacking Russians are now using motorcycles to speed across open fields. Page 8.

Navy SEALs Lost to Suicide Share a Pattern of Brain Damage

By DAVE PHILIPPS

David Metcalf's last act in life was an attempt to send a message — that years as a Navy SEAL had left his brain so damaged that he could barely recognize himself.

He died by suicide in his garage in North Carolina in 2019, after nearly 20 years in the Navy. But just before he died, he arranged a stack of books about brain injury by his side, and taped a note to the door that read, in part, "Gaps in memory, failing recognition, mood swings, headaches, impulsiveness, fatigue, anxiety, and paranoia were not who I was, but have become who I am. Each is worsening."

Then he shot himself in the heart, preserving his brain to be analyzed by a state-of-the-art Defense Department laboratory in Maryland.

The lab found an unusual pat-

Lab Found Blast-Wave Injuries, but Data Stayed Hidden

tern of damage seen only in people exposed repeatedly to blast waves.

The vast majority of blast exposure for Navy SEALs comes from firing their own weapons, not from enemy action. The damage pattern suggested that years of training intended to make SEALs exceptional was leaving some barely able to function.

But the message Lieutenant Metcalf sent never got through to the Navy. No one at the lab told the SEAL leadership what the analysis had found, and the leadership never asked.

It was not the first time, or the last. At least a dozen Navy SEALs

have died by suicide in the last 10 years, either while in the military or shortly after leaving. A grassroots effort by grieving families delivered eight of their brains to the lab, an investigation by The New York Times has found. And after careful analysis, researchers discovered blast damage in every single one.

It is a stunning pattern with important implications for how SEALs train and fight. But privacy guidelines at the lab and poor communication in the military bureaucracy kept the test results hidden. Five years after Lieutenant Metcalf's death, Navy leaders still did not know.

Until The Times told the Navy of the lab's findings about the SEALs who died by suicide, the Navy had not been informed, the service confirmed in a statement.

A Navy officer close to the SEAL leadership expressed audi- Continued on Page 14



METCALF FAMILY PHOTO

Lt. David Metcalf, a high achiever in the SEALs, became moody, confused, paranoid and plagued by headaches.

Snap Election, A Spike in Bets And an Inquiry

By RORY SMITH

LEEDS, England — Rishi Sunak's gamble was a considerable one. Five weeks ago, the British prime minister bet the house on his belief that a summer election might offer his Conservative Party a better chance of holding onto power than waiting until the fall.

Calling a snap election served as Mr. Sunak's last roll of the dice. But it has since emerged that in the days before he stood forlornly in the pouring rain on May 22 and told the country he was going to the polls, a number of colleagues and underlings were placing bets of the more literal kind.

Reviewing data from the week before Mr. Sunak's announcement, bookmakers noticed a spike in bets being placed on the election date. The amounts being staked were small — totaling just Continued on Page 5



JARED WICKERHAM FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



CAROLINE GUTMAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The Science of Pets

Once largely ignored by scholarly researchers, the ways in which our animal companions (such as Tiki, left, and Everett, right) change our lives have now become a hot topic. Special Section.

A Nepali's Harrowing Escape From the Russian Army's Snare

By BHADRA SHARMA and JEFFREY GETTLEMAN

KATHMANDU, Nepal — He didn't have any documents. Or money. Or even a phone.

He was wrapped in bandages and 2,500 miles from his village in the Himalayas.

But as he lay in a Russian military hospital, wounded in battle and surrounded by people speaking an alien language, Krishna Bahadur Shahi, an out-of-work engineer from Nepal who had committed the mistake of joining Moscow's army, made a vow.

Somehow, he told himself, I'm getting home.

"I had to get out," he said in a recent interview. "I was even thinking of killing myself. I knew if I didn't leave that hospital, they would send me back to the front and if they did that, well, there would be no possibility of returning alive."

Mr. Shahi had become ensnared in the shadowy, predatory under-

world of human traffickers from Nepal who supply foreign fighters to the Russian army for its war in Ukraine. The Nepali government has been trying to shut down this pipeline. But the Russian military continues to rely on it, boosting combat power with impoverished young foreigners even though many, like Mr. Shahi, said they didn't know they would be going into battle.

More and more are trying to get out. Mr. Shahi actually tried to escape twice. The first time he was rattled out by his own smugglers.

Mr. Shahi is a thoughtful, talkative, fit 24-year-old civil engineer from a village in the Dailekh area of western Nepal. A university graduate, he faced grim job prospects after finishing a short-term contract building water tanks last year. Nepal is one of the poorest countries in Asia, and his parents, who are millet farmers, Continued on Page 9

INTERNATIONAL 4-11

Iran Presidency Goes to Runoff

A reformist and a hard-line conservative will face off this week after candidates showed notable candor about the country's mounting problems. PAGE 10

SUNDAY BUSINESS

Effort to Slow Biological Clocks

Fertility clinics are experiencing a surge in egg freezing by younger women, coinciding with a rise in corporate benefit packages that cover it. PAGE 8

OBITUARIES 23-25

Baseball Hall of Famer

Orlando Cepeda, known as the Baby Bull, played 17 seasons in the major leagues. A drug arrest marred his reputation. He was 86. PAGE 24

ARTS & LEISURE

A Life of Magical Thinking

Richard Hatch gave up physics to be a magician, and a one-man historical preservation society dedicated to a writer killed in the Holocaust. PAGE 11

SUNDAY OPINION

Bliss Broyard

PAGE 6



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