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A Biden campaign quip, with a Boston twist

President attributes his ‘almighty’ quote to iconic mayor White, among other sources

By Jim Puzzanghera
GLOBE STAFF

WASHINGTON — The TV camera crews had departed Boston City Hall after a news briefing on May 21, 1979, when Mayor Kevin H. White surprised a clutch of lingering reporters and his own aides with an announcement that wasn’t expected for weeks: He was running for reelection that fall.

His impromptu statement didn’t last long and wasn’t captured on audio or video. But a bit of it still echoes in American politics and voters could hear it often this year.

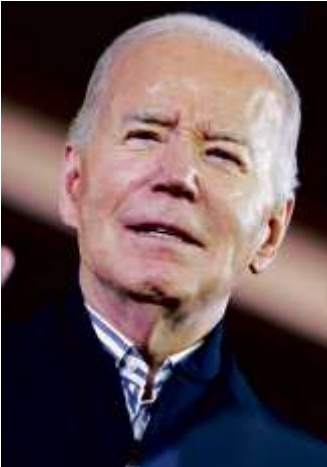
“Don’t compare me to the almighty,” White said in launching his bid for a fourth mayoral term. “Compare me to the alternative.”

President Biden adopted the saying

years ago and sometimes attributed it to the late White, a fellow Irish-Catholic politician whom he admired, while other times he cites his father, or no one at all. Ascertaining its true source is complicated, but determining its meaning is not. It neatly defines Biden’s political persona — at once religious, pragmatic, self-effacing, and pugnacious — and succinctly frames his challenge in overcoming low approval ratings to win a second term in a likely rematch against Donald Trump.

“It is actually the antithesis of the Trumpian statement, ‘I alone can fix it,’” said former Biden speechwriter Jeff Nussbaum. “Trump says, ‘I alone can fix it,’ and doesn’t. Joe Biden says, ‘Don’t compare me to the almighty’ and comes pretty damn close to getting everything done

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DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF/1979

‘Don’t compare me to the almighty. Compare me to the alternative.’

SAYING OF BOTH PRESIDENT BIDEN AND FORMER MAYOR KEVIN WHITE

Israel set to withdraw some forces from Gaza

Officials say they intend to continue battles until Hamas is destroyed

By Aaron Boxerman, Isabel Kershner, and Eric Schmitt
NEW YORK TIMES

JERUSALEM — The Israeli military said Monday it would begin withdrawing several thousand troops from the Gaza Strip at least temporarily, in what was the most significant publicly announced reduction since the war with Hamas began.

The military cited a growing toll on the Israeli economy after nearly three months of wartime mobilization with little end in sight to the fighting. Israel had been considering scaling back its operations, and the United States has been prodding it to do so more quickly as the death toll and privation in Gaza rose.

More than 20,000 people have been killed in Gaza since the beginning of the war, most of them civilians, according to local health authorities, primarily in Israeli bombings. With aid delivery restricted and aid workers unable to move safely within the territory, half of Gaza’s roughly 2.2 million people are at risk of starvation, according to the United Nations.

Historic court ruling

Israel’s Supreme Court halted a law limiting its powers, a momentous step in the political crisis over Benjamin Netanyahu’s plan to overhaul the judiciary. **A4.**

MIDEAST, Page A4

At Starbucks, fight for union can be a grind

High turnover and tactics by company often frustrate long-term bids to organize

By Diti Kohli
GLOBE STAFF

Three months ago, baristas at a Starbucks in Beverly narrowly voted to unionize, hoping for better wages, working conditions, and benefits.

Now only four of the 14 employees who cast votes in that election remain at the cafe, said barista Rob Stevens — a high turnover rate that threatens the union’s momentum as Starbucks pushes back. Many baristas left, after what Stevens said were petty retaliations by managers, such as ding-ing them over dress clothes prohibitions or scheduling them for either too few or too many hours. (Starbucks denies those allegations.)

He intends to hang on, but it’s getting lonely. “I’ll be a thorn in their side until I die,” he said. “But I’m just scared that it’ll be left to me.”

His is a fairly common sentiment among veteran baristas at newly unionized Starbucks locations across the region, as the fight to organize the Seattle coffee giant enters its third year.

Starbucks remains one of the biggest-name bat-

STARBUCKS, Page A10



JOHN TLUMACKI/GLOBE STAFF

Tyler Bourne (in wheelchair) was assisted by Jade Silva at a Christmas-themed event at Community Connections in Mashpee.

CARE CENTERS STILL RUN SHORT OF HELPING HANDS

Gaps in staffing narrow, but many with disabilities face long wait for programs

By Jason Laughlin
GLOBE STAFF

MASHPEE — Hundreds of people with developmental disabilities have finally returned to critically important day programs thanks to new investment from MassHealth. But many more remained on waiting lists last fall, exiled from programs they’re entitled to attend.

Programs still don’t have the staff to serve everyone eligible, providers reported. State-wide, 20 percent of jobs at day habilitation programs were unfilled as of October, according to a survey of members conducted by the

Association of Developmental Disabilities Providers and shared with the Globe.

The day programs offer skilled nursing, physical therapy, speech therapy, group outings, and opportunities to socialize for people with developmental disabilities.

“Day hab is very hard work,” said Jean Yang, chief executive of Vinfen, a Cambridge-based nonprofit running six day-hab programs in the state. “We have a long way to go to get to a workforce willing to come in and also stay.”

People with the most complex medical and behavioral needs require one-on-one

care, so staff shortages affect them directly. Shortages grew to acute levels during the pandemic, and roughly 2,000 Massachusetts residents were shut out of them.

Day hab programs are not alone in their struggle to find and retain workers. Understaffing is endemic statewide at programs that provide services for people with developmental and intellectual disabilities, the Association of Developmental Disabilities Providers survey found. Nursing and direct-care jobs are particularly hard to fill.

New financial supports for day hab pro-

DAY HAB, Page A7


Off on bright foot
Tuesday: Brilliant sunshine.
High 38-43, low 29-34.
Wednesday: Sun and clouds.
High 41-46, low 29-34.
Sunrise: 7:13. Sunset: 4:23.
Weather and comics, **D4-5.**
Obituaries, **C9.**

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Parts of Japan reeled from a powerful earthquake, with officials warning of aftershocks and a potential tsunami. **A3.**

The MBTA has reduced slow zones on the subway to below 20 percent of the tracks for the first time nine months. **B1.**

Developers are pushing plans to transform more than 100,000 square feet of office space into 170 apartments in Boston, propelled by potential tax breaks. **D1.**

A flip of the calendar and the thrill of the chill. Adventurers young and old took the New Year’s Day plunge into the waters of South Boston. **B1.**

The Michigan Wolverines topped Alabama to advance to the NCAA national football championship. **C1.**

Common ground for communities, inmates

Douglass Project brings leaders, prisoners together to ease return to freedom

By Ivy Scott
GLOBE STAFF

NORTH BILLERICA — Chris hadn’t always been much of a talker, particularly around people he didn’t know, and especially in jail.

But sitting opposite a local police chief and a former town manager in the gym of the Middlesex County Jail, he decided to take the risk of opening up, and watched their faces fix on his, smiling and without judgment.

“I’ve always been an introverted person, but I talked and listened to a town manager and a police officer for 35 minutes and nobody was better than anybody,” he said. “They ain’t



JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF

Louis L. Reed (left) and Sheriff Peter Koutoujian spoke to participants at Middlesex House of Correction and Jail.

better than I am, I ain’t better than they are, we’re all the same.”

This fall, Chris was one of 23 people to participate in the Massachusetts launch of the Frederick Douglass Project for Justice, an initiative to destigmatize incarceration already active in seven other states around the country. The project, founded by Georgetown law professor Marc Howard in 2019, brings business, political, and religious leaders together with roughly a dozen inmates for weeks of candid conversation, focused not on criminal justice reform or public policy, but just about life.

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