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Democracy Dies in Darkness

THURSDAY, JANUARY 25, 2024 • \$3

ACA plans once again see record enrollment

Third straight milestone comes as Trump vows to repeal health-care law

BY DAN DIAMOND

More than 21 million people have signed up for health plans through the Affordable Care Act's health insurance marketplaces, the Biden administration announced Wednesday. The record level of enrollment comes as former president Donald Trump, seeking the GOP nomination, is again vowing to repeal the program if elected.

Sign-ups in the health insurance marketplaces — a jump of 5 million since last year and the third straight year of record enrollment — were partly driven by states “unwinding” pandemic-era protections in Medicaid, with millions of people culled from the safety net health program, said Biden officials and outside researchers. The enrollment figures reflect a roughly 80 percent surge in sign-ups for the ACA since President Biden took office in 2021 and expanded the subsidies available to consumers.

“The American people have made it clear: they don't want the Affordable Care Act weakened and repealed — they want it strengthened and protected,” Biden said in a statement.

The sweeping health program — which includes marketplaces for consumers to shop for health coverage, federal incentives for states to expand Medicaid and protections for people with pre-existing health conditions — was viewed as President Barack Obama's signature domestic

SEE ACA ON A14

Accused principal in Md. has lost his job

After harassment claims, departure adds turmoil in Montgomery schools

BY NICOLE ASBURY

A former Montgomery County principal accused of sexual harassment and bullying is “no longer an employee” of the school system, a schools spokesman said Wednesday. A new report documents that the school system was warned of problems in its unit that investigates employee misconduct beginning in 2019 but took little corrective action.

The former principal, Joel Beidleman, had been on administrative leave since August when The Washington Post reported that the school system received at least 18 complaints alleging misconduct by him dating back to 2016. He has denied many of the allegations.

Montgomery schools spokesman Chris Cram declined to say Wednesday whether Beidleman was dismissed, saying it's a personnel matter. He referred further questions to the former principal, who did not immediately respond to a request for comment

SEE BEIDLEMAN ON A12



HEIDI LEVINE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Increasingly desperate Israeli hostage families boost pressure

BY STEVE HENDRIX AND HEIDI LEVINE

JERUSALEM — Frustration is turning to fury for Israel's hostage families. After three agonizing months of waiting for their children, parents and spouses to be freed, the hyper-organized community is growing more desperate, and more militant.

On Monday, a group of hostage advocates stormed two committee meetings of the Knesset, Israel's parliament, refusing to budge as they yelled at lawmakers, “You will not sit here while they die there.”

Over the weekend, a hunger striker joined a protest encampment in front of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's private home in the coastal city of Caesarea. Another round-the-clock vigil — dubbed the “Time Has Run Out” encampment — occupies an intersec-

Campaign seeks to push government to reach new deal for captives' release

tion near his official residence in Jerusalem. Protesters poured a red liquid, symbolizing blood, onto the busy street Monday night.

“My fingers are blue, but it's colder in those tunnels,” said Efrat Machikawa, blowing on her hands in the drizzly winter chill at the site Tuesday. In front of a half-dozen tents, others stood holding posters of those still held by Hamas, including Machikawa's 79-year-old uncle, Gadi Moses.

“There must be a deal now,” she said of the captives marking time in the darkness beneath Gaza. “They are dying.”

At the start of their ordeal, many of the families felt torn between fear for their kidnapped relatives and support for Israel's battle against Hamas. But they say something shifted last week when the country marked 100 days of war with no new momentum toward freeing their loved ones.

Some 132 hostages remain in captivity, although the Israeli prime minister's office says 28 are believed to have died — either of their injuries or at the hands of Hamas. In December, three hostages were mistakenly killed by Israeli troops in Gaza as they tried to escape while waving white flags and shouting in Hebrew. Hamas has claimed, without evidence, that dozens of hostages have been killed in Israeli strikes.

In the early days of the war, “We couldn't attack the government because the government was responsible for

SEE HOSTAGES ON A10

Relatives of hostages and other Israelis gather near the home of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem during a protest Monday. Families of the hostages taken by Hamas have put pressure on the government for months.

Top U.S. envoy visits region: He's pushing for a breakthrough on a hostage deal but has little progress to report. A9

Like her abortion pleas, her complaint was rejected

Government tells Oklahoma woman that hospital did nothing wrong when it denied her emergency care

BY CAROLINE KITCHENER AND DAN DIAMOND

Jaci Statton sat in her car last winter, shocked that doctors at an Oklahoma hospital had instructed her to wait in the parking lot until she became sick enough to qualify for an abortion under the state's near-total ban. Physicians agreed that the 25-year-old had a potentially life-threatening pregnancy complication; they just didn't believe they could legally treat her.

The case attracted national media attention, with some abortion rights advocates saying the hospital had violated a federal law requiring health-care providers to treat patients in emergency situations — a measure the Biden administration has repeatedly argued requires abortions to be performed in some cases involving life-threatening pregnancies, even in states with strict bans.

But when Statton later filed a complaint with the Biden administration about how her case was

SEE ABORTION ON A2



DOUG HOKE/OKLAHOMAN

Jaci Statton was bleeding and severely nauseated when she arrived at an Oklahoma hospital with a potentially life-threatening pregnancy complication. She was told she didn't qualify for an abortion.

IN THE NEWS

Saving Mom, twice A daughter was a match for a liver transplant. A year later, her mother needed help again. B1

Jon Stewart returns Starting Feb. 12, the longtime former host of “The Daily Show” will be back at the desk on Monday nights for the duration of the 2024 election cycle. C1

THE NATION
Five more elite colleges settled a class-action suit alleging price-fixing in financial aid. A3
The Supreme Court declined to halt an execution by nitrogen gas in Alabama. A3

THE WORLD
A surrogacy success has raised hopes for saving the endangered northern white rhino. A8
Moscow accused Kyiv of shooting down a military jet carrying Ukrainian POWs, killing 74. A10

THE ECONOMY
A growing number of apps are helping automate pro-Israel activism online, raising questions for tech platforms. A13
Reversing course, the Education Department will fix an error in the income guidelines for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. A14

THE REGION
A man suffering a mental health crisis and wielding “a metal object” was fatally shot by a D.C. officer, the city's police chief said. B1
A Chicago police officer was given 90 days of home detention for entering the U.S. Capitol during the Jan. 6 riot. B1

STYLE
Sen. Bob Menendez (D-N.J.) is confident as he faces two challenges this year: a reelection bid and a bribery trial. C1

LOCAL LIVING
Many starter homes are becoming forever homes, thanks to the tight real estate market and higher interest rates.

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ELECTION 2024

A 2020 do-over looking likelier

BIDEN-TRUMP RERUN DREADED BY VOTERS

Both sides are eager to pivot to general election

BY MICHAEL SCHERER AND TOLUSE OLORUNNIPA

The presidential campaign matchup most Americans oppose is becoming a reality.

Republican National Committee Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel dropped her pledge of neutrality after Tuesday's New Hampshire primary to call for her party to “unite around our eventual nominee, which is going to be Donald Trump.”

Republican fundraisers have been racing to line up major donors to back former president Trump in a spring advertising offensive against President Biden, and the Republican National Committee is putting finishing touches on a joint fundraising agreement that will allow its nominee to tap wealthy donors for checks larger than \$800,000.

Biden, for his part, has announced that two of his top White House aides will move to his campaign operation, a sudden shift that his staffers attribute the accelerating pace of the GOP nomination process. Biden's advisers have also sharpened their attacks on Trump, accusing him of running a campaign of “revenge and

SEE REMATCH ON A5

Key endorsement: United Auto Workers gets behind Biden. A14

Trump buzz saw fells Haley in primary

BY MAEVE RESTON AND ASHLEY PARKER

NASHUA, N.H. — Donald Trump and his team had a singular mission as the Republican primary shifted to New Hampshire: Destroy Nikki Haley.

Behind closed doors, Trump's team had long viewed Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis as the bigger threat because of his vast war chest and his ideological alignment with the base. They quietly agreed to allow Haley to surge, viewing her as a useful foil as they finished off DeSantis in Iowa.

But now it was time to train Trump's full arsenal of attacks on the woman who had previously served as his U.N. ambassador and would prove the last Republican standing between him and his party's nomination.

During a Saturday rally in downtown Manchester, Trump used a giant projector screen behind him to display sign after sign attacking Haley as his crowd roared its booing disapproval at the mere mention of her name. In what senior Trump adviser Chris LaCivita described as a “pincer” movement, Trump bombarded Haley from both ideological sides

SEE NEW HAMPSHIRE ON A6

Eyes on S.C.: Haley faces a high hurdle even in her home state. A4