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Democracy Dies in Darkness

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Tesla claim of drivers' liability is challenged

Crash-related suits say Autopilot creates a false sense of complacency

BY TRISHA THADANI

SAN FRANCISCO — As CEO Elon Musk stakes the future of Tesla on autonomous driving, lawyers from California to Florida are picking apart the company's most common driver assistance technology in painstaking detail, arguing that Autopilot is not safe for widespread use by the public.

At least eight lawsuits headed to trial in the coming year — including two that haven't been previously reported — involve fatal or otherwise serious crashes that occurred while the driver was allegedly relying on Autopilot. The complaints argue that Tesla exaggerated the capabilities of the feature, which controls steering, speed and other actions typically left to the driver. As a result, the lawsuits claim, the company created a false sense of complacency that led the drivers to tragedy.

Evidence emerging in the cases — including dash-cam video obtained by The Washington Post — offers sometimes-shocking details: In Phoenix, a woman allegedly relying on Autopilot plows into a disabled car and is then struck and killed by another vehicle after exiting her Tesla. In Tennessee, an intoxicated man

SEE TESLA ON A2

Anti-trans ire targets Planet Fitness

The inclusive gym brand has become a battlefield over LGBTQ+ rights

BY TAYLOR LORENZ
AND GUS GARCIA-ROBERTS

John Hart-Battles, a 17-year-old high school junior in Oklahoma, joined Planet Fitness last June to keep in shape as a member of his school's color guard team. As a young gay man, he liked Planet Fitness's focus on inclusivity, an approach that turned it into one of the leading fitness brands in the United States. He started going twice a week.

But for the past few weeks, he, like many LGBTQ+ Planet Fitness patrons and staffers, has stayed away, as at least 54 bomb threats have been made to Planet Fitness locations across the country, many of which led to evacuations. "It's one of my worst fears, to be hate crimed, specifically in a locker room," said Hart-Battles, who called the attacks on Planet Fitness "very unsettling."

Local police and the FBI say they have yet to determine who is behind the threats, which in some instances have forced the evacuation, police say, not just of Planet

SEE PLANET FITNESS ON A9



SARAH RICE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

A mayor in the eye of Gaza storm

Abdullah Hammoud had been outspoken about Israel's assault in Gaza and President Biden's unconditional support of Israel for nearly four months, but he had not attracted much attention outside his native Dearborn. That all changed in late January, when he made a decision that would catapult him from little-known mayor to national figure.

Biden's campaign manager, Julie Chavez Rodriguez, was coming to town, a fellow Arab American official told Hammoud. How would the Dearborn mayor feel about meeting with her?

Something didn't sit right with Hammoud. Israel's military campaign in Gaza had killed more than 25,000 Palestinians. Hammoud had heard from residents of this majority Arab American city who had lost 20, 40, even 80, relatives. The war was spreading to southern

In Michigan, navigating residents' rage over war and Democrats' fears of Trump

BY YASMEEN ABUTALEB
IN DEARBORN, MICH.

Lebanon and Yemen, where many of Dearborn's residents had ancestral roots. This was the first outreach he had received from anyone in the Biden camp and it was not a White House official with the ability to influence policy, but someone whose sole job was getting the president reelected.

Hammoud, a Democratic mayor of a city of just over 100,000 residents, made a decision that sent an unmistakable message: He turned down the meeting.

"That was a concept people couldn't understand: 'Why would you do that?'" Hammoud said in a recent interview while driving around Dearborn. "Immediately when I got the invitation, I felt like it was a disingenuous engagement. It was an engagement only for the worry of what's going to happen in the upcoming election, and not for the worry of what's actually

SEE HAMMOUD ON A16

Dearborn Mayor Abdullah Hammoud at his office in Michigan last month. Hammoud, who is an Arab American, is playing a key role in mediating between the anger of Arab Americans and Muslims in Michigan and President Biden's White House.



BRYAN TERRY/OKLAHOMAN/USA TODAY NETWORK

'You just can't believe the destruction'

A man looks at the wreckage of a building damaged by tornadoes that tore through Sulphur, Okla., on Saturday. An unusually severe outbreak of storms has hit several states, including Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska and Iowa. **Story, A8**

For Jewish students, pinballing off emotions

Protests against Israel's war effort in Gaza produce intense feelings

BY LAURA MECKLER
AND MICHELLE BOORSTEIN

The protests outside her window at Columbia University were loud, and Dahlia Soussan lay awake all night, tossing in her dorm room bed, a little bit scared.

As a Jewish student, some of the chants felt threatening, like she was being targeted because she supports the existence of the state of Israel. But the next day, when more than 100 protesters were arrested, that was upsetting, too. She did not want students taken to jail or suspended from college. She, too, wants the bombing in Gaza to stop.

"Every value that I hold in my heart is in tension with another principle I hold deeply right now," said Soussan, a junior at Barnard College, which is affiliated with

Columbia.

In the days that followed, her anger and sadness would grow. So would her frustration, as she saw friends unwilling to take a stand against what she saw as antisemitism on campus. When she went home to Toronto for the Jewish holiday of Passover, part of her did not want to come back to New York. But she did.

"I can't walk away from something that's hard," she said.

For Jewish college students, this is a moment of intense and sometimes conflicting emotions as many college campuses erupt in loud protests against Israel's conduct in the war and, in some cases, its existence — all while the deadly war in Gaza presses on and Israeli hostages remain in captivity.

It adds up to profound questions over what it means to be a young Jew in America in 2024. For some, the overriding feeling is one of fear and pain. Others

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Policing protests: A new set of challenges for law enforcement. **A5**

IN THE NEWS

World Central Kitchen The organization announced it would resume aid operations in Gaza on Monday, weeks after an Israeli airstrike killed seven of its workers. **A7**

Hostage deal negotiations Secretary of State Antony Blinken will travel to Saudi Arabia this week to meet with regional partners. **A12**

THE NATION
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Images of a hurt wolf, muzzled in a bar, led to an uproar over Wyoming's hunting laws. **A10**

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A worker shortage may make it difficult for Olympics organizers to find 22,000 private security agents. **A11**

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A Virginia woman is locked in a legal battle with her ex-husband over whether she can use two frozen embryos they froze during a cycle of in vitro fertilization. **B1**
Housing advocates want a permanent cap on rent increases in Prince George's, where homelessness is rising. **B1**

STYLE
How three up-and-coming D.C. players navigated White House correspondents' dinner weekend. **C1**
In Express, young women found assurance that they were in it together, even if they were still figuring it out, Monica Hesse writes. **C1**

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