

U.S. NEWS



FAA's Acting Chief To Depart

BY ANDREW TANGEL
AND ALISON SIDER

The Federal Aviation Administration faces a potential leadership vacuum as its acting chief has decided to leave the U.S. air-safety regulator.

Billy Nolen announced his departure plans Friday in a letter to agency employees. He plans to leave the agency sometime this summer, according to his letter.

A pilot and former airline executive who has served as acting administrator of the agency for about a year, Mr. Nolen has taken himself out of consideration by the White House to fill the job permanently, people familiar with the matter said.

Federal officials haven't disclosed who will take over as acting administrator in the interim until a permanent leader is confirmed by the U.S. Senate. Under federal law, Mr. Nolen can serve as acting administrator for several more months, people familiar with the matter said. He was named the agency's safety chief in January 2022.

"Now it is time for a new captain to guide the FAA," Mr. Nolen wrote, adding he had told Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg and notified the White House of his plans to depart "as a new nominee is named this summer." Mr. Nolen said in the letter that he wanted to focus on his family.

Mr. Buttigieg said that Mr.

Federal officials haven't disclosed who will take on the role in the interim.

Nolen had helped the FAA keep safety at the forefront during a complex period. "Billy is a tremendous leader, a true expert, and a dedicated public servant," Mr. Buttigieg said.

The Biden administration's pick to lead the FAA on a permanent basis, Denver airport chief Phil Washington, withdrew earlier this year after his nomination ran into trouble in the U.S. Senate.

Mr. Nolen's planned departure comes as the agency faces challenges including a spate of near-collisions at U.S. airports and failing technology that earlier this year ground U.S. air traffic to a halt.

The agency is revamping how its safety regulators approve new airplane designs in the wake of two deadly Boeing 737 MAX crashes in 2018 and 2019.

FROM LEFT: SHAWN THEW/EPA/SHUTTERSTOCK; EVERETT COLLECTION/REUTERS

Ron DeSantis, left, now trails Donald Trump by 13 points in a survey of GOP voters about a potential head-to-head matchup for the 2024 Republican nomination.

Trump Tops DeSantis in Poll of GOP

BY ALEX LEARY

Donald Trump has gained command of the GOP presidential-nomination race over Ron DeSantis, a new Wall Street Journal poll finds, with the former president building support across most parts of the primary electorate as the Florida governor has struggled on the national stage.

Mr. DeSantis's 14-point advantage in December has fallen to a 13-point deficit, and he now trails Mr. Trump 51% to 38% among likely Republican primary voters in a hypothetical head-to-head matchup.

The GOP candidate field is still developing, and the first primary balloting is more than eight months away. But as of now, Mr. Trump also trounces all competitors in a test of a fuller, potential field of 12 Republicans, winning 48% support to 24% for Mr. DeSantis.

Nikki Haley, the former South Carolina governor, draws 5% support, and South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott draws 3% in the survey, which included 600 likely GOP primary voters. All other candidates had 2% support or less.

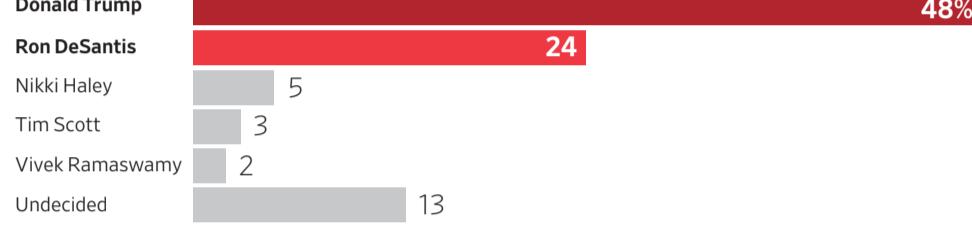
Mr. DeSantis's strength in the Journal's December poll came on the heels of his 19-point re-election victory in Florida. The governor, who has been slow to engage with Mr. Trump for fear of alienating his supporters, has since hit a rough patch as he approaches a formal entrance in the race.

This week, a series of U.S. House members from Florida rebuffed him by endorsing Mr. Trump, and he recently drew GOP criticism for comments describing the war in Ukraine as a territorial dispute.

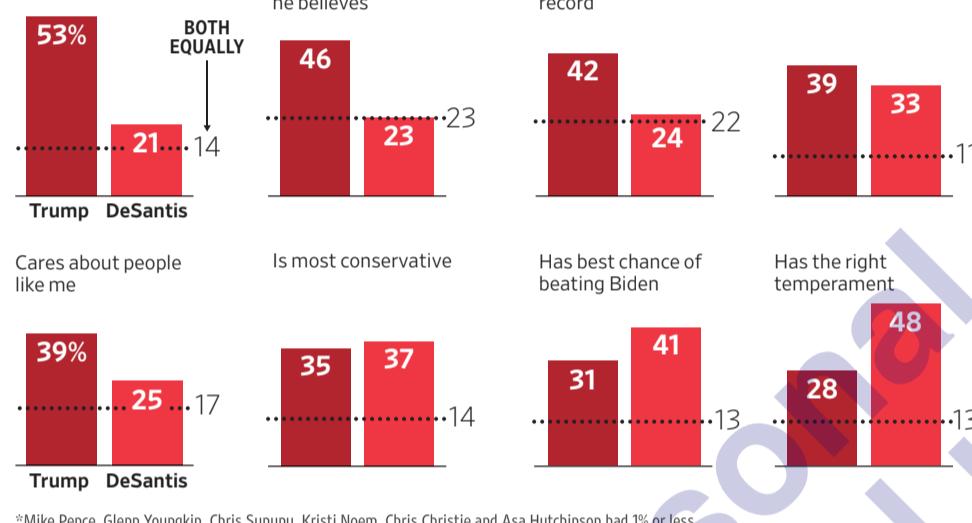
At the same time, Mr. Trump has stepped up campaign activity—and attacks on his rival—since the Journal's December poll, and he has enjoyed GOP solidarity in the face of criminal charges filed against him in New York.

The new Journal poll finds

If the Republican presidential primary or caucus were held today, for whom would you vote?



Share of GOP primary voters who say each trait better describes Trump or DeSantis



*Mike Pence, Glenn Youngkin, Chris Sununu, Kristi Noem, Chris Christie and Asa Hutchinson had 1% or less.
Source: Wall Street Journal poll of 600 likely Republican primary voters, conducted April 11-17; margin of error +/- 4 pct. pts.

Mr. DeSantis losing ground to Mr. Trump among voters who call themselves "very conservative"—a group that makes up about half of the GOP primary electorate. Mr. DeSantis has also ceded substantial support to the former president among women and voters with four-year college degrees.

Molly Murphy, a Democratic pollster who helped conduct the survey with Democrat John Anzalone and Republican Tony Fabrizio, said that Mr. Trump showed durability with his dominating leads both against Mr. DeSantis and in the multicandidate field.

"If you are with Trump, you are with him," said Ms. Murphy, whose firm has worked for President Biden. "You can throw 10 other candidates in the field; you can take all of the candidates out."

Still, the poll finds a number of advantages for Mr. DeSantis. He carries a more positive image than Mr. Trump, with 84% viewing him favorably, versus 78% who say so of Mr. Trump. Some 41% of GOP primary voters say Mr. DeSantis would have the better chance of beating Mr. Biden, while 31% say Mr. Trump would be stronger.

Among the 1,500 registered voters in the survey, Mr. DeSantis leads Mr. Biden 48% to 45% in a hypothetical contest, while Mr. Trump lags behind the Democratic president by 3 points. Both leads are within the poll's margin of error of plus or minus 2.5 percentage points for the full sample of voters. Mr. Biden in 2020 de-

feated Mr. Trump by 4.5 percentage points.

The poll also shows potential general-election vulnerabilities for Mr. DeSantis as he seeks to rack up conservative policy victories during the Florida legislative session.

A six-week abortion ban, which he signed into law last week, is overwhelmingly popular with Republicans but opposed by 53% of voters overall, including 64% of white suburban women, a coveted swing group. By 2 to 1, voters oppose allowing people to carry a concealed handgun without a permit, another measure Mr. DeSantis signed into law.

Mr. Biden, who is expected to announce his re-election bid as soon as next week, shows weaknesses as well. His job

approval rating remains underwater, with 42% of voters approving of his performance in office and 56% disapproving. Yet, Mr. Biden draws more support than his 42% job approval rating in test matches against both Messrs. Trump and DeSantis. One reason is that voters who only "somewhat disapprove" of Mr. Biden's job performance, rather than strongly disapprove, say they would pick him over both potential GOP nominees.

And Mr. Fabrizio, who works for a pro-Trump super PAC, said that Mr. Biden tops Mr. Trump by 54% to 15% among voters who disapprove of how both men have handled the office of the presidency.

Mr. Trump has focused his attacks in recent weeks on Mr. DeSantis's support while a member of Congress for budget resolutions calling for changes to Social Security and Medicare. The Journal poll found that Republican primary voters by an 18-point margin want Social Security and Medicare to be preserved in their current form, rather than subject to changes that could entail benefit cuts intended to extend the solvency of the programs. Voters who back Mr. DeSantis favor a candidate who will push for changes.

Mr. DeSantis has waded heavily into fights over gender, race and climate. This week he renewed a battle with Walt Disney Co., which opposed legislation signed by Mr. DeSantis that bars teaching about sexual orientation or gender identity in early elementary-school grades. On Wednesday, the DeSantis administration expanded that restriction through 12th grade.

The Journal poll of 1,500 registered voters, with a margin of error of plus or minus 2.5 percentage points for the full sample, was conducted April 11-17 by Impact Research and Fabrizio, Lee & Associates. The margin of error was plus or minus 4 percentage points among a sample of 600 likely Republican primary voters.

Location: Rice Village
Mural by: Michael C. Rodriguez
Featuring: Arushi Garg
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WORLD NEWS

Hack Fails To Halt Planes In Europe

By BOJAN PANCEVSKI AND BENJAMIN KATZ

A cyberattack blamed on pro-Russia hackers continued to disrupt operations at Europe's top air-traffic agency, but officials said some systems had stabilized and air-traffic safety remained unaffected.

The limited operational damage of the hack has highlighted the relative robustness of the continent's air-traffic system. Built-in redundancies and backup systems designed decades ago, and not reliant on the internet, can protect it from the sort of technical hiccups that have become part of everyday life, such as internet and communication apps outages, hacks and cyberattacks.

This week's attack also has helped underscore the sometimes-limited impact of such cyber offensives. That has especially been the case for the increasingly frequent, yet not overly sophisticated, cyberattacks blamed on, or claimed by, Russia supporters amid Moscow's war in Ukraine.

Eurocontrol, the agency that coordinates commercial traffic between national air-traffic control entities, has suffered through days of technology disruption. Some smaller airlines were forced to use older technology, including a telefax-era backup system, to manage flight schedules. But officials said flight operations weren't disrupted, and the safety of European commercial airspace was never threatened.

It couldn't be determined whether the hackers were seeking to directly disrupt European flight traffic, which might have required a more dedicated assault on the targeted systems.

The Wall Street Journal first reported Thursday that the agency was under attack from what it said were pro-Russian hackers.

Global Stakes in Sudan War Are High

By GABRIELE STEINHAUSER AND NICHOLAS BARIYO

The fate of some of Africa's most important strategic resources is hanging in the balance as Sudan's top two generals vie for supremacy, from the waters of the Nile and access to crucial shipping lanes to some of the continent's largest gold mines.

These riches have long caught the eye of outside powers, including Russia, Egypt and the petrostates of the Gulf. Now, some are trying to influence the outcome of the conflict, by offering military support to the rival factions, moves that could drag out a lethal confrontation between Sudan's military and a state-sponsored militia in which hundreds of people have been killed.

Thousands have been wounded and many more have either fled or remain trapped in their homes amid airstrikes and street-level exchanges of gun and artillery fire.

Russian paramilitary group Wagner has offered heavy weapons to the Rapid Support Forces, the militia run by Lt. Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, The Wall Street Journal has reported. A person close to the general said he has declined the offer for now.

Gen. Dagalo's rival, Lt. Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the commander of Sudan's military and the country's de facto head of state, meanwhile, has received support from neighboring Egypt, the Journal has also reported.

Experts and Western officials worry the warring generals' geopolitical entanglements could plunge the country—which is larger than France, Germany, Spain and Italy combined—deeper into a messy conflict and further destabilize a strategic but fragile region.

"Sudan really sits at the intersection of the Arab and the African worlds," said Giorgio Cafiero, chief executive of Gulf State Analytics, a Washington-based risk-consulting firm. "If



Sudan's Army chief Lt. Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, center, and paramilitary commander Lt. Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, second from left, attended the signing of an initial deal in December to end a crisis caused by last year's military coup in Khartoum.

a country can obtain a lot of clout in Sudan, this offers many opportunities for local supply chains, trade routes and networking links to other African countries."

For Sudan's more than 45 million people, the conflict exacerbates a devastating humanitarian and economic crisis that, even before the fighting started, had one in three Sudanese suffering hunger. The promise of a more peaceful future that came with the fall of dictator Omar al-Bashir in 2019 is in tatters.

But for the two generals' external allies, their battle for political and military dominance could decide what happens to billions of dollars in investments, and their ability to project power across the region.

Egypt has a more immediate interest than most in how the drama unfolds.

Sudan's northern neighbor wants Khartoum's help to oppose a massive dam and reservoir farther south on the Nile by Ethiopia. Cairo fears the project

could choke off the freshwater for millions of Egyptians and cripple its agriculture.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi has thrown his weight behind Gen. Burhan, who, like the Egyptian leader, seized power through a coup. He has sent jet fighters and pilots to support Sudan's air force,

'If a country can obtain a lot of clout in Sudan, this offers many opportunities.'

bolstering Gen. Burhan's control over the country's skies.

In addition to Wagner's offer of weapons Gen. Dagalo has received at least one shipment of ammunition from a Libyan militia leader backed by Russia and the United Arab Emirates, the Journal has reported.

There were no indications that Moscow or the U.A.E. had

a hand in ordering the reinforcements sent by Khalifa Haftar, the commander of a faction that controls eastern Libya.

The U.A.E., like Saudi Arabia, has spent billions of dollars buying farmlands irrigated by Sudan's section of the Nile to secure food for its own desert-dwelling population. It hired the RSF to fight in Yemen, supplying the militia with extra resources to take on Gen. Burhan and the military.

In December, a U.A.E.-based consortium signed a \$6 billion deal to build a new port facility on Sudan's Red Sea coast.

Sudan's ports are the only point of export for about

135,000 barrels of oil a day produced inside the country

and neighboring South Sudan.

They are also the main gateway for goods to and from landlocked, mineral-rich Central African nations such as Chad and the Central African Republic.

For the U.S., the bigger concern is Russia's potential impact

on the conflict and Moscow's ability to use Sudan to exert power in the region and help fund its campaign in Ukraine.

Gen. Dagalo has close ties with Russia, and the Kremlin is awaiting final signoff from Sudan's leadership on a 25-year lease for a naval base in Port Sudan, about 1,000 miles north of the biggest U.S. military base in Africa. The Russian base would give Moscow's warships access to the Suez Canal and the Indian Ocean.

U.S. military officials believe Russia sees the base as a way to facilitate the extraction of gold, rare-earth minerals and other resources from Sudan and Central Africa.

In response to questions from the Journal, Yevgeny Prigozhin, a key ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin and the owner of Wagner, said the paramilitary group "is in no way involved in the Sudanese conflict."

An adviser to Gen. Dagalo said the general denies working with Wagner.

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