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Washington Insider

ABOUT US

Transatlantic Today delighted to present the Washington Insider Magazine, a product that we present to our readers in Washington DC and beyond. Our magazine publishes unique and independent coverage on transatlantic relations with a Washington perspective. Transatlantic Today covers policymaking, politics and business related to the transatlantic relationship.

Our magazine strives to be become a key news analysis source for news on politics and policymakers in the US with particular focus on DC. Our coverage is designed with nonpartisan journalism and real-time tools create, inform and engage a those seeking timely and concise news.

We believe in providing our audience with indepen-

dent journalism throughout expert writers, analysts and journalists. Our culture is distinguished by unwavering grit, honesty, and a focus on innovation.

Our work is designed by relentless grit, integrity and a prioritization of urgent and newsworthy topics.

In both of our website and and this magazine we cover topics about Diplomacy, Security, Defence, Counter Terrorism, foreign policy and international affairs. Indeed our reporting, OPeds, interviews with various stakeholders provide unique insights and analysis as well as the tools to arm you with the intel you need to make informed decisions.

Here I wish to commend.

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Israelis Kill Four Palestinian Civilians in West Bank: Health Ministry Reports

BY ADRIANA MONTES

The Palestinian Ministry of Health reported on Monday that four Palestinian civilians were killed and over 65 injured in the occupied West Bank since Friday. The fatalities and injuries were attributed to gunfire from Israeli forces and settlers, highlighting a worsening cycle of violence in the region.

According to the ministry, the recent incidents add to a grim toll of at least 464 Palestinians killed and over 4,800 wounded in the West Bank since October 7. The majority of injuries in the latest period were caused by live ammunition, raising concerns about the excessive use of force.

Escalating Violence in the West Bank

The occupied West Bank has witnessed a sharp



increase in confrontations in recent months. Clashes between Israeli settlers, military personnel, and Palestinians have surged, with civilian casualties mounting. Humanitarian organizations have called for restraint to prevent further escalation.

The Health Ministry's statement on Telegram emphasized the need for international

intervention, noting the toll on civilians and the growing humanitarian crisis in the region.

As tensions persist, global calls for de-escalation and accountability continue to grow, urging all parties to prioritize the protection of civilians and adherence to international law.

Iran-Israel Clash: Analyzing the Near-War Crisis

By Jan Frazier

A dramatic escalation in tensions unfolded as Iran launched over 300 drones and missiles at Israel, marking the first direct attack between the two adversaries. The assault, described as the largest of its

kind, narrowly avoided triggering a devastating regional conflict.

Israel's air defense systems intercepted the majority of the missiles, preventing civilian

casualties. However, military experts highlighted how close the situation came to catastrophe.

"One GPS failure could have resulted in a significant urban impact,"

noted a senior Western security official.

A Coordinated Defense

The attack prompted an international response, with the U.S. mobilizing support from Gulf nations, including Jordan and Saudi Arabia. The allied effort successfully bolstered Israel's defenses, with Jordan reportedly intercepting Iranian drones and providing airspace access to Israeli warplanes.

"This was an extraordinary display of military cooperation,"

said a Western source, citing the combined efforts of U.S., British, French, Jordanian, and Saudi forces.

Strategic Implications

While some analysts lauded the operation as a triumph of intelligence and defense coordination, others expressed concern about the long-term implications.

"This could embolden both sides to consider direct strikes as an option,"



warned Emile Hokayem of the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

Critics also questioned Israel's reliance on allied support and the sustainability of its air defense stockpiles in prolonged conflicts.

A temporary deterrence?

Though both sides signaled restraint following the attacks, experts debated whether this incident established mutual deterrence or merely set a dangerous precedent.

"Iran's attack demonstrated its willingness to escalate,"

wrote Afshon Ostovar from the Foreign Policy Research Institute. Meanwhile, Israel's measured retaliation underscored its ability to target Iranian assets without broadening the conflict.

The Bigger Picture

Despite the immediate de-escalation, the situation remains precarious. Analysts fear future miscalculations could spark wider conflict in a region already fraught with instability.

Israel-Iran Covert Strike: Rising Tensions Amid Strategic Deterrence

By Eric Gahagan

The fraught rivalry between Israel and Iran has taken another perilous turn. On Friday, reports of an Israeli covert operation in Iran's Isfahan and Tabriz provinces surfaced, though Israel has not officially claimed

responsibility. The operation appears to have targeted critical facilities associated with Iran's military and nuclear infrastructure.

Conflicting Reactions **Accounts** **and**

American officials attribute the strike to missiles, while Iran asserts small drones caused minimal damage. Quadcopters, Israel's signature in covert missions, were reportedly deployed against sites vital to

Iran's defense, including the Natanz nuclear facility and drone manufacturing hubs.

Iranian leaders have publicly downplayed the incident, with Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian calling the impact negligible. However, the calculated timing before the Jewish Passover—underscores the urgency of Israel's warning.



A Decades-Old Rivalry Intensifies

This latest strike marks another chapter in an ongoing shadow war. Israel's move, analysts suggest, aims to deter Iran's expanding influence and retaliatory capabilities, including its missile and drone stockpiles used in attacks on Israel.

For Iran, these strikes challenge its self-proclaimed "strategic deterrence," a doctrine bolstered by its

alliances with proxies across the region, collectively known as the "Axis of Resistance."

Regional Implications

While both sides avoid full-scale escalation, the region remains tense. Israel's response to mounting attacks emphasizes intelligence precision and operational reach, while Iran's

narrative seeks to project resilience and strength.

As the Gaza conflict rages and ceasefire talks stall, the broader Middle East faces increasing instability. The latest developments highlight the fragile balance, where even minor provocations risk triggering widespread conflict.

Middle East on the Brink: UN Chief Warns Against Escalation

By Irene Taschek

UN Secretary-General António Guterres has warned of catastrophic consequences if tensions in the Middle East continue to escalate, emphasizing the urgent need for restraint and diplomacy.

"One miscalculation, one miscommunication, one mistake could lead to a full-scale regional conflict that would

devastate all involved and the wider world," he cautioned, urging all parties to avoid further escalation.

Call to End Gaza Hostilities

Mr. Guterres underscored the importance of halting violence in Gaza as a crucial step toward de-escalation across the region. He reiterated

his demand for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and the release of all hostages held in the enclave.

"Ending hostilities in Gaza would significantly reduce tensions and open the door to diplomacy,"

he stated.

challenges. This week, the World Food Program delivered over 370 metric tons of wheat flour into Gaza. However, U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres criticized Israel's limited progress in facilitating aid.

Despite aid efforts, Gaza faces potential famine. U.N. officials stress the need for safe conditions for humanitarian workers and civilians to access essential resources.

Security Council Blocks
Palestinian Statehood
Recognition

Tensions extended to the diplomatic front as the U.S. vetoed a U.N. resolution supporting Palestinian statehood. U.K. and Switzerland abstained, while 12 members voted in favor. U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield reiterated that the resolution was inconsistent with achieving a two-state solution.



Conflict Casualties Mount

The Hamas-run Gaza Health Ministry reports 34,000 Palestinian fatalities since the conflict began, two-thirds of whom are women and children. Israel launched its offensive after an October 7 Hamas attack killed 1,200 Israelis and resulted in hostage-taking. While over 100 hostages were released during a temporary ceasefire, Israel reports that 130 remain captive, with one-quarter presumed dead.

Qatar Reevaluates Mediation Role

Qatar's Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani announced a reassessment of Qatar's mediator role, citing perceived abuses of its efforts. Qatar, Egypt, and the U.S. have been central to negotiations aimed at halting the fighting and facilitating prisoner exchanges.

EU States Back Cyprus on Syria Reclassification Amid Migration Focus

By Christina Levandowski

Around ten EU member states align with Cyprus in advocating for the reclassification of certain Syrian regions from unsafe to safe, according to sources cited by the Cyprus News Agency. This initiative, driven by Cyprus, aims to pressure the European Commission, with Nicosia hosting a pivotal conference

from May 15-18.

The move follows President Nikos Christodoulides' declaration that Cyprus will no longer process asylum applications from Syrians and seeks to strengthen Lebanon's capacity to manage regional migration. The reclassification effort is supported by the Czech

Republic, proposing a joint mission to Syria to identify safe zones.

Efforts to address migration include campaigns in sub-Saharan Africa, streamlined asylum processing, and strengthened controls at Turkish airports. In January, departures (1,200) outpaced

Condemnation of Violence

The Secretary-General strongly condemned the October 7 attacks by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups, calling them a violation of humanity and international law. He also criticized the recent attacks on Iranian and Israeli targets, highlighting the cyclical nature of retaliation.



Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza

Seven months of military operations in Gaza have left the region in what Mr. Guterres called a “humanitarian hellscape.” Over 13,800 children are among the tens of thousands killed, while two million Palestinians face famine.

Although some aid, such as food parcels and wheat flour from the World Food Programme (WFP), has entered Gaza,

logistical challenges and restrictions have severely limited its impact.

Urgent Humanitarian Action is needed.

To avert famine and preventable deaths, Mr. Guterres called for a “quantum leap” in humanitarian aid and demanded that Israel facilitate operations.

“Delivering aid at scale requires functional communication between humanitarians and military leaders,”

With the region on edge, the Secretary-General urged the global community to prioritize diplomacy, restraint, and humanitarian assistance to avert further devastation.

Israel Intensifies Strikes in Gaza and Lebanon Amid Rising Regional Tensions

By Randy Whitehead

Israel’s military reported widespread airstrikes in Gaza on Thursday, targeting Hamas fighters and infrastructure. Simultaneously, aerial strikes in southern Lebanon killed two Hezbollah militants, heightening fears of regional escalation in the Israel-Hamas war.

The strikes in Lebanon followed Hezbollah attacks that injured 14 Israeli soldiers on

Wednesday. In response, Israel launched retaliatory measures near Kfar Kila, according to Agence France-Presse, with Hezbollah confirming two fatalities.

U.S.-Israel Discussions on Rafah

Amid the military operations, U.S. and Israeli officials discussed strategies concerning Rafah, a southern Gaza city. The White House

emphasized shared goals to defeat Hamas while urging caution in planned operations. Israeli representatives acknowledged U.S. concerns and agreed to consider them, according to a White House statement.

Humanitarian Crisis Worsens in Gaza

The United Nations reports growing humanitarian

arrivals (737) for the first time, marking a shift in migration dynamics.

With approximately 30,000 Syrian refugees in Cyprus receiving supplementary protection, the government continues to manage arrivals effectively, balancing humanitarian principles with practical migration policies.



EU Leaders Nominate von der Leyen for Second Term, Kallas for Foreign Policy Chief

BY JAN FRAZIER



The European Parliament has passed a groundbreaking overhaul of the EU's migration and asylum policies, marking a significant step in managing the ongoing migration challenges across the bloc.

The migration pact, nearly a decade in the making, secured approval despite opposition from far-right and far-left parties. It outlines measures for member states to share

responsibility for asylum seekers, including mandatory financial contributions for countries opting out of accepting migrants.

Parliament President Roberta Metsola declared the move "history made," while German Chancellor Olaf Scholz called it an "indispensable step" for the EU. The reforms aim to strengthen external border

protections, ensure aid for vulnerable groups, and introduce faster returns for those ineligible to stay.

However, not all reactions were celebratory. Protests erupted during the parliamentary session, with demonstrators shouting, "This pact kills," and human rights organizations criticizing the pact for undermining the right to seek asylum. Amnesty International warned of increased risks of human rights violations under the new framework.

The pact must now be endorsed by all 27 EU member states, with a vote expected by late April 2024. While hailed as a milestone by some, the pact faces continued scrutiny from rights groups and opposition within the bloc.

EU Adopts Robust Laws to Combat Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing

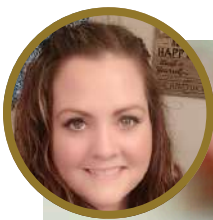
By Mandilee Hecht

The European Parliament has adopted a comprehensive package of laws aimed at fortifying the EU's arsenal against money laundering and terrorist financing. These measures promise greater

transparency, stricter oversight, and enhanced enforcement mechanisms across the bloc.

Transparency and Access to Beneficial Ownership Data

The new laws mandate national registries to grant unfiltered, direct, and free access to beneficial ownership data. Stakeholders such as journalists, civil society organizations, and supervisory



bodies can access not only current records but also archived data dating back at least five years.

Empowered Financial Intelligence Units (FIUs)

FIUs across the EU gain expanded powers to analyze, detect, and halt suspicious. They can now suspend transactions suspected of links to illicit activities, bolstering

Enhanced Due Diligence

Stricter due diligence measures require banks, crypto asset managers, and real estate agents to verify customer identities and report any suspicious activities. From 2029, high-value transactions involving professional football clubs will also fall under this scrutiny, targeting sponsors, advertisers, and player transfers.

Limits on Cash Payments and Vigilance for the Ultra-Rich

Key provisions include an EU-wide cash payment limit of €10,000, barring private, non-professional exchanges. Ultra-rich individuals with net assets exceeding €50 million (excluding primary residences) will face heightened oversight to prevent financial abuse and sanctions circumvention.

Introducing AMLA: A Central EU Watchdog

A new Authority for Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AMLA) will be established in Frankfurt. AMLA will directly supervise high-risk financial entities, mediate between national regulators, and ensure consistent enforcement of sanctions.

EU Approves Ambitious Packaging Regulation to Cut Waste and Promote Sustainability

By Liam Flynn

The European Parliament has adopted a groundbreaking regulation to tackle packaging waste, harmonize internal market rules, and promote a circular economy. The regulation was approved with 476 votes in favor, 129 against, and 24 abstentions, signaling a strong commitment to sustainability across the EU.

The new rules introduce ambitious packaging reduction

targets, requiring EU countries to cut packaging waste by five percent by 2030, ten percent by 2035, and fifteen percent by 2040. A maximum empty space ratio of 50 percent is mandated for grouped, transport, and e-commerce packaging to reduce unnecessary materials. Manufacturers and importers must ensure packaging weight and volume are minimized.

Starting January 1, 2030,

certain single-use plastic packaging types will be banned. These include packaging for unprocessed fresh fruits and vegetables, food and beverages consumed in cafés and restaurants, individual portion containers for condiments and sauces, miniature toiletries in accommodations, and lightweight plastic carrier bags.

The regulation also bans harmful “forever chemicals,” or

per- and polyfluorinated alkyl substances (PFAS), in food-contact packaging above specific thresholds to prevent adverse health effects.

To encourage reuse, targets have been set for 2030, covering alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverage packaging, transport packaging, and grouped packaging. Final distributors of beverages and take-away food must offer consumers the option to bring their own containers and ensure that at least ten percent of their products are available in reusable formats by 2030.

Recyclability is a cornerstone of the regulation, requiring all packaging to meet strict criteria. Measures include minimum recycled content for plastic packaging and defined recycling targets by weight for all packaging materials. By 2029, 90 percent of single-use plastic and metal beverage containers up to three liters must be collected separately through systems like deposit-return programs.



Rapporteur Frédérique Ries described the regulation as a major step forward, stating that for the first time, the EU has set material-neutral reduction targets for packaging. She highlighted the ban on forever chemicals in food packaging as a significant victory for consumer health and innovation in sustainable practices.

The regulation now moves to the EU Council for formal approval.

In 2021, packaging waste in the EU reached 84 million tonnes, up from 66 million tonnes in 2009. Without intervention, this figure is expected to rise to 209 kilograms per person by 2030. This legislation reflects EU citizens' demands for a circular economy, reduced waste, and the phasing out of non-sustainable packaging as expressed in the Conference on the Future of Europe.

EU Marks 20 Years Since Historic 2004 Enlargement in Strasbourg Ceremony

By Eric Gahagan

The European Parliament celebrated the 20th anniversary of the EU's 2004 enlargement in a formal sitting attended by key figures, including European Parliament President Roberta Metsola, European Commission

President Ursula von der Leyen, former EP President Pat Cox, and former Commission President Romano Prodi.

This milestone marked the accession of ten countries to the EU, uniting millions under

the shared vision of unity and diversity.

In her address, President Metsola reflected on two decades of transformation, emphasizing:

“Europe is about embracing differences while ensuring equality of opportunity. Membership has strengthened economies, upheld citizens’ rights, and enriched our shared identity.”

The event featured past leaders such as Günter Verheugen, former Commissioner for Enlargement, alongside representatives from the nations that joined in 2004. Notable attendees included Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, former Latvian President, and Leszek Miller, former Polish Prime Minister.

A symbolic moment unfolded as young representatives born around May 1, 2004, engaged with these leaders, embodying the next generation of Europe.



The ceremony concluded with a stirring performance of Beethoven’s Ode to Joy by the

Voix de Stras’ choir, reaffirming the EU’s enduring commitment to unity in diversity.

UK-Rwanda Asylum Partnership Faces Human Rights Concerns Ahead of Flights

By Christina Levandowsk

Two years ago, the UK launched the Migration and Economic Development Partnership (MEDP), now known as the UK-Rwanda Asylum Partnership, which aimed to send asylum seekers to Rwanda before their claims were heard. Under this arrangement, Rwanda’s national asylum system would then assess their need for international protection.

However, in November 2023, the UK Supreme Court

ruled that the policy was unlawful, citing safety concerns in Rwanda. In response, the UK and Rwanda introduced a new bill declaring Rwanda a safe country for asylum seekers, with additional safeguards.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak is pushing to pass the bill, with the first flight of asylum seekers set to depart within 10 to 12 weeks, according to international reports.

Despite this, UN Special

Rapporteurs have raised significant human rights concerns. They warn that transferring asylum seekers to Rwanda or any other country could expose airlines and aviation authorities to the risk of refoulement—forcing refugees to return to places where they may face persecution or torture. This would violate international human rights laws, including the prohibition against torture or inhuman treatment.



The UN experts stress that even if the UK-Rwanda agreement is

finalized, airlines that facilitate removals to Rwanda could be

complicit in violating human rights and court orders. The UN has urged the UK Government, as well as aviation regulators, to uphold their responsibilities under international law and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

The UN Human Rights Council appoints Special Rapporteurs to independently monitor and report on global human rights issues, serving in a personal capacity without government affiliation or compensation.

Palestinian Lawyers Work to Prosecute Israel for Genocide Amid Gaza Crisis

By Randy Whitehead

Piles of court documents, in both English and Arabic, filled the desk and floor of Triestino Mariniello's home office in Messina, Italy, this past March. Mariniello, a criminal prosecutor for the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR), along with a team of lawyers from Gaza, has spent months working on a case to prosecute Israel for genocide.

Despite being far from the war zone, the team, led by PCHR director Raji Sourani, sought solace in Messina to continue their legal battle. "We wanted to detach ourselves from the constant horrors," Mariniello told Al Jazeera, referring to the challenges of working amidst the ongoing conflict. The team, which includes international law professor Chantal Meloni, has

focused on gathering evidence to bring their case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

Sourani, who narrowly survived an Israeli airstrike in Gaza, joined Mariniello in Sicily after fleeing Gaza with his family. He considers this collaboration more than just a professional effort—it's a deep personal commitment to Gaza's victims. "We've been documenting the horrors Gazan families have gone through for years," Mariniello said, emphasizing the importance of humanizing victims who have been stripped of their dignity.

The legal team represents the families of countless victims of Israeli attacks in Gaza, including the late PCHR lawyer

Nour Naser Abu al-Nour and 26-year-old Dana Yaghi, both of whom were killed in February 2024. These tragedies underscore the urgency of their work, especially as the team has documented systemic aggression dating back to the 2014 blockade.

While they previously submitted documentation to the International Criminal Court in 2021, progress has been slow. In light of the lack of resolution, the team has shifted its focus to the ICJ, which recently warned of the possibility of genocide in Gaza. Mariniello explained how Israel's actions, including targeting hospitals and blocking humanitarian aid, fit this definition.

Sourani, reflecting on the

experience of working in Messina, expressed hope that the international community would take stronger action. “Watching the Etna volcano reminded me of my people. Like a volcano, we will never calm down until we achieve justice,” he said.

The team’s efforts have not gone unnoticed. In a public lecture in Messina, Mariniello emphasized the vital role of ordinary citizens in supporting the legal cause, highlighting how public pressure helped end apartheid in South Africa. “Without public support, a legal case cannot change history,” he stated.



With the case now headed to The Hague, the team hopes their relentless documentation of Israel’s actions will ultimately lead to justice for Gaza’s victims.

Clashes Erupt at UCLA and Across U.S. Campuses Amid Protests Over Israel-Gaza Conflict

BY JAN FRAZIER



Pro-Palestinian and pro-Israel demonstrators clashed at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) as protests over the Israel-Gaza conflict intensified across U.S. campuses. Tensions at these rallies have led to hundreds of arrests nationwide, with no sign of slowing over the past weekend.

At UCLA, “physical altercations broke out” after a barrier dividing the two sides was breached, according to a university official. This follows a growing presence of pro-Palestinian activists on campus, joined by pro-Israel counter-demonstrators organized by the Israeli American Council (IAC). The IAC expressed “profound concern” over reported antisemitic incidents on other campuses, including Columbia

University in New York.

The White House has urged that all demonstrations remain peaceful, with National Security Council spokesman John Kirby underscoring the government’s support for peaceful protests while condemning antisemitic actions and hate speech. Many pro-Palestinian activists have distanced themselves from antisemitic incidents, attributing some actions to external agitators.

A group of 21 Democratic members of Congress has called on Columbia University to dismantle what they describe as an “unauthorized and impermissible encampment” of anti-Israel activists. Columbia University President Dr. Minouche Shafik stated that the

school is considering alternative solutions to resolve the crisis after recent talks with protest organizers failed.

Reports indicate that some individuals involved in UCLA clashes may not be affiliated with the university, as campus police intervened to separate groups trading punches on Sunday.

The conflict’s escalation follows the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel and Israel’s subsequent strikes on Gaza, with universities and law enforcement reportedly struggling to maintain order amid protests. Over 100 demonstrators at Columbia were detained during a police operation to clear an encampment, fueling further protests. Arrests have now occurred at multiple campuses nationwide, with some demonstrators pitching tents on university grounds.

The protests have expanded to Canada, where a pro-Palestinian camp has been set up at McGill University in Montreal. Activists in both countries are demanding a ceasefire and that universities cut financial ties with companies doing business in or with Israel,

accusing them of complicity in the Gaza conflict.

Alleged antisemitic incidents have prompted concerns for Jewish students' safety, with reports of chants supporting Hamas and perceived threats. Northeastern

University in Boston reported "virulent antisemitic slurs" at a recent protest, blaming outside organizers.

Additional recent developments include the arrest of Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein

at Washington University, the establishment of a new encampment at Yale University following a police intervention, a request from California State Polytechnic University, Humboldt, for students to move to online classes, and more than a dozen arrests at the University

Biden Signs Law to Ban TikTok if Not Sold Within a Year, Raising Tech Tensions with China

By Jan Frazier

President Biden has signed a new law that could ban the Chinese-owned app TikTok in the U.S. unless its parent company, ByteDance, sells it within a year. The measure, seen as a major step in the ongoing U.S.-China tech rivalry, does not impose an immediate shutdown but has sparked legal challenges likely to delay any direct impact for months.



The law was discreetly added to a broader bill providing foreign aid to Israel, Ukraine, and Taiwan. It mandates ByteDance to divest its stake in TikTok within 12 months, or face the app's removal from app stores and U.S. web-hosting services.

The Federal Trade Commission's Lina Khan, among others, has expressed support for new regulations to address foreign ownership in tech. Since ByteDance's acquisition of the app in 2017, U.S. officials have scrutinized TikTok, citing security concerns over its ties to China, where national security

laws could compel ByteDance to share data with the government. Despite these concerns, TikTok has amassed around 170 million users in the U.S., including many young people who use it for news and entertainment.

Sen. Maria Cantwell emphasized on the Senate floor that the legislation aims to protect Americans from potential surveillance or influence from foreign adversaries, not to punish any single company.

Following Biden's signing,

TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew assured users that the company would fight back, claiming the law threatens free expression and that TikTok's case aligns with constitutional rights. Civil liberties advocates have voiced similar concerns, with critics like Kate Ruane from the Center for Democracy & Technology arguing that Congress should focus on broad privacy protections rather than targeting a single platform.

Selling TikTok may prove challenging, as ByteDance's algorithm—essential to the app's popularity—is subject to

China's export controls. Officials in Beijing have resisted forced sales of tech assets, particularly algorithms that power content recommendations.

The law's rapid passage surprised many within TikTok, especially after an earlier legislative effort requiring divestment stalled. This new law

allows ByteDance nine months to arrange a sale, with the possibility of a three-month extension if a deal is close.

Critics, including Sen. Edward Markey, have questioned the TikTok ban, noting that many U.S.-based tech companies similarly handle vast amounts of personal data and affect young

users' mental health. He has called for comprehensive data privacy legislation to address concerns across the entire tech industry, rather than focusing solely on TikTok.

While TikTok's fate remains uncertain, activists and lawmakers continue to debate the balance

Record Surge in Indian Migrants at U.S.-Canada Border Amid Limited Legal Pathways

By Eric Gahagan

The United States is witnessing a significant increase in undocumented migrants from India, with a growing number bypassing the U.S.-Mexico border and entering through Canada. In fiscal year 2023, nearly 97,000 Indian migrants were encountered nationwide, including more than 30,000 at the northern border, per Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) data. This influx is straining border security in northern U.S. states and unsettling local communities.

Experts attribute this surge partly to perceptions of lenient U.S. asylum policies and the Biden administration's approach to immigration. Many migrants, influenced by the upcoming U.S. presidential election, are seeking asylum before any potential policy shifts.

The Indian migrant population, the third-largest group of undocumented

migrants in the U.S., has risen sharply over recent years. According to a Pew Research Center report, there were about 725,000 undocumented Indians in 2021. Most migrants are not the highly educated professionals often associated with Indian immigration but are individuals seeking economic opportunities unavailable in India.

Unlike traditional economic migrants from poorer backgrounds, many Indian migrants are relatively affluent. Originating mainly from the prosperous states of Punjab and Gujarat, they fund their journeys by selling property or taking high-interest loans to afford the \$50,000 required for the "donkey route," a treacherous, multi-country path often facilitated by human trafficking networks.

Canada's relatively accessible student visa system has made it an appealing

stepping stone. The country's visa policies, particularly its openness to international students, have encouraged many Indians to first establish themselves in Canada before moving to the U.S. Seeking better economic prospects, many migrants use the Canada-U.S. border as a safer, quicker alternative to the U.S.-Mexico route.

Canada's immigration agency has affirmed its commitment to screening visa applicants while maintaining people-to-people connections. Meanwhile, the Canadian government is grappling with the implications of its visa policies, which have indirectly facilitated U.S. border crossings.

The presence of established Indian-American communities, particularly in the Chicago area, is another draw. A recently uncovered smuggling network showed that many Gujarati migrants entering the

U.S. from Canada were directly connected to Gujarati American-owned businesses.

The journey across the Canada-U.S. border, however, can be perilous. In 2022, a family of four from India froze to death just yards from the border in Manitoba, and in 2023, the bodies of eight migrants, including four Indians, were recovered from the St. Lawrence River.

Canadian immigration lawyer Maureen Silcoff highlighted the severe risks migrants face, pointing out that these journeys are often driven by desperation rather than mere ambition. "People don't simply leave their homes and communities for adventure; they seek relief from hardship and, at times, escape from human rights abuses," she said.



As the U.S. and Canadian authorities work to address this trend, both countries are confronted with complex

questions about migration, safety, and the economic forces shaping cross-border movements.

Biden Administration Moves to Reclassify Cannabis, Aiming to Ease Federal Restrictions

By Eric Gahagan

The Biden administration is set to take a historic step toward loosening federal cannabis restrictions, with plans to reclassify marijuana from a Schedule I to a Schedule III drug under the Controlled Substances Act. This change, anticipated to be confirmed by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), would mark the first shift in federal cannabis policy in over 50 years, allowing the drug to be acknowledged for its medical

potential.

Rescheduling cannabis as a Schedule III substance, alongside drugs like codeine and steroids, would reduce barriers to medical research and open doors for pharmaceutical companies to participate in the cannabis market in states where it's legal. For the \$34 billion cannabis industry, this reclassification could also ease financial pressures, lifting tax restrictions that prevent

cannabis companies from claiming standard business deductions under IRS code Section 280E. In addition, this move may help undercut black-market sales, especially in states where legalization has been undercut by the black market.

However, the rescheduling process will take time. The proposal will be subject to a 60-day public comment period and a potential administrative review before any final rule is

implemented. Congress could also challenge the rule through the Congressional Review Act, although this is unlikely given the Democratic Senate majority.

Cannabis reform has gained bipartisan support, with around 6 in 10 Americans favoring legalization for both medical and recreational use. Many lawmakers are pushing for further cannabis reform legislation, such as the SAFER Banking Act, which would allow cannabis businesses access to traditional financial services, and the HOPE Act, which would support expunging records for minor cannabis-related offenses.

Despite support, the potential reclassification has raised concerns. Some experts, including Kevin Sabet of Smart Approaches to Marijuana, argue that relaxing cannabis restrictions could lead to higher youth exposure and potential health risks due to high-potency products. Research suggests a link between potent cannabis and mental health disorders, particularly in young men.



Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer praised the Biden administration's efforts, calling the reclassification "long overdue." He remains committed to passing the SAFER Banking Act and pushing for the full removal of cannabis from the Controlled Substances Act. Meanwhile, lawmakers are cautious, recalling unintended consequences from the legalization of hemp in 2018, which led to the unregulated sale of synthetic cannabinoids, like Delta-8, often without proper oversight.

Senator Cory Booker also supported the reclassification but emphasized the need for comprehensive reform, stating that cannabis-related criminal records continue to burden thousands of Americans. He urged Congress to follow the example of states that have legalized cannabis, aiming to create a clear federal framework that balances legal cannabis sales with safety and economic justice for communities impacted by the "War on Drugs."

U.S. Police Departments Report Increase in New Hires and Lower Resignation Rates After Years of Decline

By Christina Levandowski

For the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 death of George Floyd, police departments across the United States are seeing growth

in their ranks. A recent survey by the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) shows that more officers were hired in 2023 than in any of the previous

four years, while resignations and retirements have declined.

Floyd's death led to nationwide protests, intensifying scrutiny of law

enforcement practices and sparking a wave of resignations and retirements. To meet staffing needs, some departments had to reassign officers from quality-of-life issues to respond to increased crime rates. However, PERF's survey now suggests the trend is reversing, with departments slowly rebuilding their forces. Chuck Wexler, PERF's executive director, noted this as a turning point for American policing, although he emphasized the profession "isn't out of the woods yet."



PERF's survey results show that large departments still lag behind their 2020 staffing levels by over 5%, while smaller departments, especially those with fewer than 50 officers, continue to face higher resignation rates. Small departments have struggled to retain officers as larger departments offer incentives like signing bonuses and higher pay—benefits smaller agencies cannot always afford. At least a dozen small departments have even disbanded, forcing their municipalities to depend on state or county law enforcement.

To attract more applicants, many departments have eased hiring standards, including adjusting policies on tattoos and past financial issues, although Wexler cautions against lowering training standards. Some experts, such as Maria Haberfeld of John Jay College, worry that efforts to bolster numbers may overlook qualities essential for effective policing, such as emotional intelligence and maturity.

Overall, the survey noted a 20% drop in resignations from 2022 to 2023, though retirements varied by department size. Wexler

attributed some of this improvement to a shift in public officials' attitudes, who have moved away from discussions of defunding to recognizing the need for well-supported law enforcement. He believes this change reflects a broader "sea change among political leaders" as they address public safety needs and work to retain their police workforces.

Debate Over Fluoridated Drinking Water Gains Momentum Across U.S. Communities

By Christina Levandowski

Across the United States, more communities are reconsidering fluoridation of drinking water—a practice established in the 1950s to

combat tooth decay. While some, like Regina Barrett of Monroe, North Carolina, are concerned about the mineral's effects, others emphasize

fluoride's long-standing public health benefits. Union County, for instance, recently voted to remove fluoride from its water, reflecting a growing movement

for personal choice over community-wide measures.

Fluoride has been celebrated for reducing cavities, but opponents question its safety, arguing that products like toothpaste make water fluoridation unnecessary. Research underscores fluoride's preventive benefits, but fluoride critics, including the Fluoride Action Network, contend it poses risks such as thyroid issues and bone conditions. This opposition has led to significant community actions—since 2010, over 240 towns worldwide have ceased fluoridation.

The debate has reached the federal level, where an ongoing case may compel the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to set regulations on fluoride in water. If successful, the case could reshape policies across the country.



However, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) maintains that the low fluoride levels in water are safe and that combining topical and systemic fluoride use provides the best protection against tooth decay. Studies show increased dental issues where fluoride was removed, such as in Juneau, Alaska. Public health officials worry about the impact on low-income families, for

whom water fluoridation might be their primary dental health safeguard.

The debate highlights the divide between proponents who see fluoridation as essential for public health and those, like Barrett, who view it as unnecessary. With local governments making these decisions, the fluoride debate represents a new frontier in public health autonomy.

Philippines Strengthens Defense Ties with US and Japan Amid Rising Tensions in South China Sea

BY JOHN RUEHL



Following a trilateral summit with US President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida at the White House on April 12, the Philippines is preparing for an extensive joint military exercise with the US and Japan from April 22 to May 10. This training, known as Balikatan, marks the 39th annual event between the US and Philippines, aimed at enhancing military coordination and readiness between the allies.

More than 16,000 personnel from the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the US military will participate this year. Additionally, troops from the Australian Defence Force and, for the first time, the French Navy will join. Fourteen other nations, including India, Canada,

and the UK, will participate as international observers. According to an official statement from the US Embassy in the Philippines, Balikatan supports the US-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty by strengthening the defense partnership.

Following the summit, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) welcomed the creation of a trilateral maritime dialogue between the Philippines, Japan, and the US, which aims to enhance maritime coordination in the region. This move has been viewed as a strategic step toward bolstering the Philippines' position in the South China Sea, where tensions with China continue to rise. The PCG stated that the new trilateral maritime exercise

will improve interoperability and cooperation among the three nations.

In a related development, the Philippines and Japan are finalizing a reciprocal access agreement to facilitate easier movement of military forces between the two nations for joint exercises. The US and the Philippines already have a similar arrangement known as the Visiting Forces Agreement, which allows for the rotation of American forces in the Philippines.

Philippine Shift Toward US and Japan for Defense Cooperation

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s decision to deepen military ties with the US and Japan has been widely commended by defense analysts. This shift represents a departure from the pro-China stance of former President Rodrigo Duterte, under whose administration the Philippines attempted to forge closer economic ties with Beijing. Analysts like Derek Grossman from Rand Corporation see the trilateral summit as a strategic move to counter China's expansive claims in the South China Sea, though it does carry risks. Yusuke Takagi, an

associate professor at Japan's National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies, said the growing presence of Chinese

Under Duterte's administration, Manila's closer relations with China brought minimal benefits. China's Belt and Road Initiative did not result in significant infrastructure projects for the Philippines. This has prompted Marcos to explore multilateral partnerships that could also enhance the Philippines' maritime security capabilities.

Chinese Reaction and Public Opinion in the Philippines

Following the trilateral summit, the joint statement from the US, Japan, and the Philippines expressed serious concerns over China's "dangerous and aggressive behavior" in the South China Sea, specifically targeting

Beijing's actions that challenge Philippine sovereignty. In response, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning criticized any efforts to heighten tensions in the region, stating that such actions undermine the strategic security and interests of other nations.

Anti-China sentiment has grown in the Philippines, with many Filipinos concerned about China's aggressive maritime expansion. CEO of Amador Research Services in the Philippines, sees the trilateral summit as a significant diplomatic achievement but stresses the need to manage relations with China carefully.

Analysts like Tokyo University's Wataru Kusaka believe that while Marcos aims to reinforce ties with the US and Japan, he is

cautious not to overly antagonize China, which remains a vital neighbor due to its geographic and economic proximity. Kusaka noted that the Philippines must carefully navigate its relationship with both China and the US, and Japan, emphasizing that the US and Japan should avoid pressuring Manila into taking sides.

In strengthening defense partnerships with the US and Japan, the Philippines seeks to secure its interests in the South China Sea while retaining diplomatic space to negotiate and ease tensions with China. The outcome of this balanced approach will be pivotal in shaping the country's regional strategy going forward.

US Considers Sanctions Against Israel's Netzah Yehuda Battalion Over Human Rights Violations

By Mirza

The Netzah Yehuda battalion is a special unit within the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) created in 1999 to integrate ultra-Orthodox Jewish soldiers into the military. The unit accommodates the religious needs of these soldiers by allowing them to maintain their religious practices, such as limiting exposure to female soldiers and allowing time for prayers and religious studies.

The unit has been implicated in several controversial incidents, particularly involving violence against Palestinians. The most notable case that has garnered international attention is the death of Palestinian-American Omar Assad in 2022. Assad, aged 78, died after being detained, blindfolded, handcuffed, and abandoned in near-freezing conditions by

members of the battalion. An autopsy indicated that the cause of death was a stress-induced heart attack. This led the US State Department to demand a criminal investigation, and the case is one of the reasons behind the consideration of sanctions against the unit by the Biden administration.

The possible sanctions are related to violations of human rights, as the Leahy Laws prevent US military assistance to foreign security forces or units involved in gross human rights violations. Secretary of State Antony Blinken indicated that an announcement regarding these sanctions could be made soon.



US GPS Jamming Technique May Have Impacted India's Military Operations in the Past

By Eric Gahagan

A technique reportedly used by Israel to counter Iran's missile attacks may have a historical parallel in India's past military operations. In a move designed to disrupt Iran's missile targeting systems ahead of its first-ever direct attack on Israel, Israeli intelligence is said to have jammed GPS signals, confusing Tehran's missile navigation teams. This technique, which degrades or jams GPS navigation, has been used to reduce the accuracy of enemy missiles and drones, which often rely on GPS for guidance.

The strategy mirrors an incident during the 1999 Kargil War, where India sought GPS data to navigate operations in the conflict with Pakistan. However, the US denied this request, reportedly hindering India's military effectiveness by using selective availability technology to degrade GPS

signals. This action, as per reports, had a significant impact on Indian military operations. The US Department of Defense had used selective availability to ensure that military GPS accuracy was restricted to its own forces, leaving adversaries, like India, with less precise data.

The Kargil incident led to India developing its own independent satellite navigation system, NavIC (Navigation with Indian Constellation), created by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). This system provides accurate and secure navigation services for strategic and civilian uses within India and surrounding regions.

In Israel's case, ahead of the Iranian attack, GPS signals were reportedly scrambled, with Israeli residents experiencing location errors, such as being shown in Cairo or Beirut. The result was intended to throw off

Iran's missile guidance systems. While the majority of the over 300 Iranian projectiles were intercepted by Israel's air defense and allied forces, only a few reached Israeli territory, causing no casualties.

Iran's missiles and drones, equipped with Russia's GLONASS system as a GPS alternative, were still partially neutralized. However, GLONASS is less accurate than GPS, illustrating the challenges adversaries face when their navigation systems are disrupted.



Iran's Direct Missile and Drone Attack on Israel Sparks Joint Defensive Efforts

By Conor La Rouché

On April 14, Israel faced an unprecedented attack from Iran, which launched around 300 drones and missiles targeting Israeli territory. This marked Iran's first direct assault on Israel, with projectiles intercepted by Israel's defense systems and international allies, including the United States, United Kingdom.

The coordinated defense response saw US forces intercept over 100 Iranian aerial threats, with Jordanian and UK forces also downing projectiles. The Iran-Israel conflict escalated after Iran's retaliation for an alleged Israeli strike in Syria, which reportedly killed high-ranking members of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).



In addition to its own air defenses, Israel relied on the Arrow Defense System, a key component in protecting its airspace, especially over Jerusalem. The US is reported to have provided early intelligence on the attack through space-based infrared systems, enhancing the IDF's readiness.

US President Joe Biden condemned the attack, affirming US support for Israel. This escalation underscores the region's volatility, with fears that ongoing hostilities could spiral into a larger conflict across West Asia.

Taiwan Detects Increased Chinese Military Activity Amid Growing Tensions

By Jan Frazier

Between April 21 and April 22, Taiwan's Ministry of National Defence reported detecting 10 Chinese military aircraft and six naval vessels near its territory, with eight aircraft crossing the Taiwan Strait median line, a sensitive boundary between Taiwan and China. In response, Taiwan deployed aircraft, naval ships, and air defense missile systems to monitor the People's Liberation Army (PLA) activity.

tactics around Taiwan since September 2020, increasing its military presence without direct confrontation. Gray zone tactics involve operations that avoid large-scale force but achieve strategic goals, adding pressure without provoking open conflict. Taiwan has tracked Chinese military aircraft 203 times and naval vessels 131 times this month alone, reflecting this sustained pressure.

Taiwan-held Kinmen Island, where China has frequently crossed into waters Taiwan claims. Although Beijing doesn't recognize Taiwan's claims, the Mainland Affairs Council argues that China's recent incursions violate a previously unspoken adherence to these boundaries, disrupting the status quo.

China has escalated "gray zone" Tensions also simmer over



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Following the July coup that ousted Niger's elected President Mohamed Bazoum, the nation has steadily pivoted from Western alliances to a partnership with Russia. This move aligns Niger with other military-led Sahel nations like Mali and Burkina Faso, which

also shifted alliances after recent coups. The three nations have formed a joint force to tackle escalating violence and the humanitarian crisis in the region, where over three million people remain displaced.

Russia's growing influence in Africa, promoted as support

without colonial ties, presents a significant shift in the region's strategic alignment. Niger's strengthened ties with Russia come amid U.S. restrictions on its 1,000 troops in Niger following the coup, which halted cooperative military operations on the ground.



Speaker Mike Johnson Faces Growing GOP Division Over Foreign Aid Package

BY KATHY MALOUF

House Speaker Mike Johnson is grappling with intense pressure from within his own Republican Party as he navigates the contentious issue of providing aid to U.S. allies, including Israel, Ukraine, and Taiwan. After months of uncertainty, Johnson has proposed separate votes on four key bills, each addressing different aspects of national security aid. The strategy is designed to allow varying coalitions to form for each vote, with Israel aid likely to pass with strong Republican support, while Ukraine aid could gain traction with Democrats and moderate Republicans.

However, Johnson's leadership is increasingly under threat. Rep. Thomas Massie, a vocal critic of Ukraine aid, announced that he would co-sponsor a motion to remove Johnson as Speaker, claiming that Johnson's support for foreign aid could cost him the



backing of his conservative base. Massie and others argue that Johnson's record on spending and national security compromises risks further alienating the GOP's far-right faction, which is crucial to maintaining his narrow majority.

Johnson's position is precarious, with just a one-vote majority after this Friday's

deadline. While some centrist Democrats have expressed willingness to step in and support Johnson in such an event, Republican critics argue that such a move would further isolate him from his party. Johnson remains resolute, insisting he is focused on fulfilling his duties despite the challenges ahead.

Prosecution Begins Case Against Trump, Alleges Hush Money Cover-Up in 2016 Election

By Randy Whitehead

New York prosecutors opened their case against Donald Trump, accusing him of orchestrating a

"criminal conspiracy" to sway the 2016 election by covering up hush money payments to

silence damaging stories. Manhattan DA's office, led by Matthew Colangelo, claimed

Trump “lied in his business records” to hide the alleged scheme involving his then-lawyer Michael Cohen and tabloid publisher David Pecker, who reportedly helped suppress negative stories.

Prosecutors introduced the notorious “Access Hollywood” tape to demonstrate the atmosphere of concern in Trump’s camp during the 2016 campaign. Colangelo argued that the tape prompted further efforts to contain the Stormy Daniels affair story, leading to hush money payments managed by Cohen. David Pecker testified, describing a practice of “checkbook journalism,” wherein payments were made to suppress damaging stories. According to Pecker, Trump personally thanked him post-election for his support as the campaign’s “eyes and ears.”



In response, Trump’s attorney, Todd Blanche, countered by portraying Cohen as a disgruntled former employee and questioning the validity of evidence, much of which he argued was outdated. Blanche argued that attempts to influence elections through

nondisclosure agreements are legal and claimed Daniels had “extorted” Trump. With a full jury panel now seated, Judge Juan Merchan underscored that the burden remains on the prosecution to prove their case beyond a reasonable doubt.

Lawmakers Sound Alarm on Deepfake Threats to 2024 Election Integrity

By Henry Nicholas

In a recent Senate Judiciary subcommittee hearing, Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) warned of a “deluge of deception” poised to distort the 2024 election through AI-generated deepfakes. These manipulated images, voices, and videos pose a unique threat to democracy, he cautioned, capable of covertly undermining elections on a scale far beyond past attempts.

Blumenthal highlighted how AI-fueled misinformation,

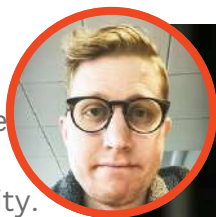
like a robocall using a fake President Biden voice urging voters to skip a primary, has already surfaced. This incident represents the first known deepfake voter suppression attempt, according to The Associated Press.

To address this bipartisan threat, a coalition of Senators — including Amy Klobuchar, Chris Coons, Josh Hawley, and Susan Collins — introduced the Protect Elections from Deceptive AI Act in September. This bill would

ban deceptive AI in political ads and empower candidates to seek legal action against malicious deepfake content. However, as Hawley noted, swift legislative action is crucial to prevent an “electoral disaster.”

In a broader context, deepfakes have emerged as tools to spread disinformation, often exacerbated by the decline in local journalism, which reduces fact-checking resources. Blumenthal and other experts, like Zohaib

Ahmed of Resemble AI, proposed measures including a public database and digital watermarking to verify content authenticity.



Despite efforts, the World Economic Forum reports a staggering 900% increase in deepfake content from 2019 to 2020. As Klobuchar stressed, decisive action cannot wait.



Maryland Governor Wes Moore Urges Federal Action to Rebuild Baltimore's Collapsed Key Bridge

By Randy Whitehead

Maryland Gov. Wes Moore (D) launched a lobbying campaign on Capitol Hill to push for federal support in rebuilding Baltimore's collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge, which continues to disrupt the Port of Baltimore's main shipping channel. With over 12,000 tons of steel and concrete debris blocking this vital economic route, Moore emphasized the national importance of the reconstruction effort.

In a statement, Moore expressed his commitment to persuading Congress, noting, "I want them to understand why rebuilding this bridge is a patriotic responsibility." Accompanied by Maryland's congressional delegation, including Rep. Andy Harris, the state's only Republican in Congress, Moore underscored

the bipartisan need to secure federal funding.

Challenges persist, particularly from conservative lawmakers, who seek funding cuts and policy conditions for aid. Despite the obstacles, Harris joined Moore and other Maryland representatives in emphasizing unity: "Tragedy knows no partisanship," he said, as he backed the rebuilding push.

The reconstruction cost is expected to exceed \$1 billion, though exact estimates remain undefined. The federal government has already provided \$60 million in emergency aid and repurposed an \$8 million grant for economic recovery. A recent bridge collapse, caused by a massive container ship, has left six workers dead or missing.

Maryland officials prioritized the recovery of these workers' bodies, with assistance from federal agencies like the Army Corps of Engineers and the Coast Guard. To date, three of the workers' bodies have been recovered from the Patapsco River.

In response to the disaster, federal agencies are working to open a "limited access" shipping channel by month's end, accommodating around 80% of the Port of Baltimore's cargo traffic. Pilots specially trained for this route will begin operating later this week, according to Lt. Gen. Scott A. Spellmon of the Army Corps.

At a closed-door meeting organized by Sen. Ben Cardin (D-Md.), Moore and other

Maryland leaders, along with federal officials, discussed future legislative measures to fund the reconstruction. Cardin pledged to introduce a bill covering full replacement costs and highlighted plans to pursue liability payments from parties responsible for the collapse. Ongoing investigations by the National Transportation Safety Board seek to determine fault, with ship owners currently denying responsibility.

On Tuesday, Moore also enacted a state law to increase weekly unemployment benefits for affected workers, exempting these payments from state taxes for two years. Local businesses and sports teams, including the Baltimore Orioles and Ravens, have contributed millions to support families of the deceased workers and those impacted economically. Rep. David Trone (D), running for Senate in 2024, called for ongoing financial support, stressing the inadequacy of current unemployment benefits.



The Biden administration, represented by Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, expressed a commitment to taxpayer reimbursement for bridge reconstruction but emphasized that this should not delay necessary aid. Although

some Republican senators voiced concerns about spending oversight, they acknowledged the urgency of reopening the port's shipping channel, viewing it as a nationwide economic priority.

U.S. Political Fundraising: GOP Leadership Transitions and Campaign Strategies Revealed in New Filings

By Jan Frazier

As House Speaker Kevin McCarthy was ousted last fall, Republican operatives worried that his successor, Mike Johnson, would struggle to match his fundraising capabilities. Recent federal filings confirm these concerns.

Earlier this month, Johnson announced raising \$20 million in the first quarter of 2024. These funds will support his campaign, fellow Republican colleagues, and party committees. However, this falls short of McCarthy's previous fundraising

benchmarks: in the first quarter of 2022, McCarthy raised \$31.5 million for Republicans, followed by \$35 million in the same period in 2023.

Further highlighting the fundraising gap, filings from

both leaders' joint fundraising committees, submitted Monday to the Federal Election Commission, show a marked difference. In the first quarter of last year, McCarthy's committee, Protect The House 2024, brought in \$28 million. In comparison, Johnson's committee, Grow the Majority, raised \$9 million between January and March this year.

McCarthy, who spent years building donor relationships and supporting allies, had a well-established fundraising network. Johnson, in contrast, assumed the role just six months ago, facing the challenges of developing a fundraising base during an election year. Still, his current fundraising figures add pressure to his position as he continues to face potential ouster threats from some members of his caucus.

Reflecting on his fundraising, Johnson stated, "In less than six months as Speaker, we have hit the ground running to ensure House Republicans have the resources necessary to win in battlegrounds across America – and we cannot slow down now. While families suffer under increasing inflation, rising crime, and open borders, we will stay focused on our goal to grow the majority in November and deliver solutions for our nation."

Despite resigning from Congress in December, McCarthy retains \$6.3 million in

his campaign account, which he can use to support other campaign efforts. In the first quarter, he contributed \$4,000 to Vince Fong, a California assemblyman running to succeed him, and to Louisiana Rep. Garret Graves, a McCarthy ally. McCarthy also transferred \$200,000 to a pro-Fong super PAC and donated \$2,000 to a challenger of Virginia Rep. Bob Good, a Freedom Caucus member who voted for McCarthy's ouster.

Meanwhile, McCarthy's campaign committee refunded approximately \$2.8 million in contributions last quarter and terminated his leadership PAC in February, indicating that he is winding down his political activities.

In the Senate, recent FEC records highlight strategic moves by GOP leaders John Thune of South Dakota and John Cornyn of Texas, who are positioning themselves to potentially succeed Mitch McConnell as Senate GOP leader in November.

Cornyn, a former chair of the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC), allocated \$1.2 million to the NRSC and \$1.3 million to Senate candidates and incumbents through his joint fundraising account. Thune's PAC, Heartland Values, directed \$120,000 to a GOP Senate fundraising committee and sent \$1.2 million to the NRSC via his j

oint fundraising operation.

Monday's filings also covered major Senate-aligned super PACs. The Democratic Senate Majority PAC raised \$39.3 million, surpassing its GOP counterpart, Senate Leadership Fund, which raised \$26.8 million. The Democratic PAC closed April with \$92.4 million in cash, compared to the GOP's \$59.5 million. Both super PACs are set to play pivotal roles this fall, with Senate Majority PAC planning \$239 million in key races and the Senate Leadership Fund reserving \$130 million.

FEC filings also shed light on intraparty divides. Maine Sen. Susan Collins's PAC donated \$15,000 to Republican Rep. John Curtis's campaign to replace retiring Sen. Mitt Romney in Utah. Other Utah candidates include former House Speaker Brad Wilson and attorney Brent Hatch, son of late Sen. Orrin Hatch.

California Rep. John Duarte's PAC contributed \$2,000 to a primary challenger of Rep. Nancy Mace, one of the Republicans who voted to remove McCarthy.

As members work to shape elections, FEC reports reveal financial maneuvers by those preparing to leave office. Arizona Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, who announced she won't seek reelection, ended April with \$10.1 million. Since March 5, she

has spent \$180,000 on expenses such as security, travel, and payroll.



Retiring Sen. Joe Manchin's PAC donated \$5,000 to Wheeling Mayor Glenn Elliott, a candidate for Manchin's West Virginia seat. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer recently encouraged Manchin to seek reelection as an independent, though Manchin ruled out a third-party presidential run.

Meanwhile, indicted Sen. Bob Menendez of New Jersey, who has not pursued reelection as a Democrat but left open the option of an independent run, raised only \$1,200 in the first quarter, while spending nearly \$600,000, including \$550,000 for legal fees related to his bribery case.



Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont has yet to confirm if he'll seek a fourth term. His first-quarter filings indicate potential preparations, with \$1.1 million raised and \$9.8 million cash on hand as of April.

Conservative Support Grows for Revised FISA Bill Ahead of Crucial Vote

By Jan Frazier

Conservative holdouts appear to be warming to a revised version of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) reauthorization, which could bring the bill to a vote in the House on Friday. The key change—a two-year reauthorization instead of the original five-year term—gives former President Donald Trump a chance to overhaul the law if he wins the presidency in 2024. Florida Rep. Matt Gaetz framed the revision as a significant victory for Trump, who would have the opportunity to address

what he sees as a system that wronged him during his presidency.

The House Rules Committee voted 8-4 Thursday to advance the modified FISA bill, with hardline Republicans expressing satisfaction with the changes. The new version is seen as more palatable to GOP members, particularly after concessions were made to appease their concerns. Gaetz also noted that next week, Republicans will hold a separate vote on data privacy legislation,

which hardliners see as another win.

Speaker Mike Johnson is working to secure votes by providing members with classified briefings, hoping to convince them of the bill's importance for national security. Johnson is also in communication with Trump, who had previously called for the repeal of FISA but is now reportedly more open to the two-year sunset provision.

Despite these concessions, some members remain undecided, with Rep. Cory Mills of Florida signaling he is closer to supporting the bill but still awaiting further assurances. As negotiations continue, Republicans are optimistic about passing the reauthorization, which is crucial to their legislative agenda amid a slim majority.





Washington Insider

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