



JUSTICE DEPARTMENT

Rules to prohibit ethnicity in criminal investigations

By **DAVE BOYER**

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Federal law enforcement agents will be prohibited from considering a suspect's nationality or ethnicity in criminal investigations when the Justice Department announces updates to its anti-discrimination guidelines.

The pending move raises concerns about tying investigators' hands, particularly in terrorism cases.

The rules are expected to be released around the anniversary of the death of George Floyd on May 25. A draft of the guidelines, viewed by The Washington

'Unbiased' identification worries federal law enforcers

Times, shows that the administration would add nationality as a "protected characteristic" that investigators cannot consider while conducting most investigations.

The Justice Department would bar law enforcement agents, including the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security, from considering the race and ethnicity of suspects. Homeland Security is responsible for border security.

The guidelines were last updated in 2014. President Biden issued an executive

order last year directing the department to update the rules. Nationality was not a "protected characteristic" in the 2014 guidelines.

The proposed guidance "reaffirms the federal government's deep commitment to ensuring that law enforcement and national and homeland security agencies conduct their activities in an unbiased manner," according to the draft.

"Biased practices are ineffective," the document states.

The pending guidance would expand

restrictions against using protected characteristics in law enforcement to identify a suspect, the documents state.

Officers would be barred from considering "actual or perceived race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, sex characteristics, disability status, or gender identity," it said.

A person familiar with the internal discussions, who asked for anonymity because of concerns of retaliation, said the proposed guidance is a woke policy

that would compromise federal agents' intelligence-gathering capabilities, especially in counterterrorism work.

"The new version is a clear sign of their politicization of federal agencies," the source said of the administration.

"This so-called 'anti-discrimination' guidance would significantly impact how law enforcement and intelligence work. It means that the FBI can no longer consider where the suspects/targets come from while conducting investigations."

The Justice Department did not respond to a request for comment.

» see **JUSTICE** | A4

FOREIGN POLICY

Biden move disappoints key Pacific allies again

Debt crisis shows U.S. dysfunction

By **GUY TAYLOR**

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

President Biden's decision to shorten his upcoming Asia trip and skip a meeting of leaders of the strategic U.S.-India-Japan-Australia "Quad" group to deal with the national debt crisis marks a blow to the ongoing U.S. campaign to show itself as a reliable partner for countering China's increasingly aggressive rise in the region and on the world stage.

The change in plans also risks tarnishing U.S. influence in the Pacific, analysts say, and it fuels perceptions that Washington is too gripped by dysfunction and partisan bickering at home to lead the Quad. The alignment of powerful democracies began more than a decade ago but gained momentum under President Trump as a counter to China's rising influence.

The cancellation proved a blow to U.S. soft power as well. Papua New Guinea declared a national holiday to mark Mr. Biden's expected three-hour stop in the country early next week in what would have been the first visit by a sitting U.S. president to any Pacific island nation.

Mr. Biden planned to attend a much-anticipated summit with his Japanese, Indian and Australian counterparts in Sydney after the summit this weekend in Japan of the more broadly focused Group of Seven leading industrial nations. His decision on Tuesday to truncate the trip and stop only in Japan led Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese to call off the Sydney summit entirely.

Mr. Albanese rejected the idea of holding the summit in Sydney without Mr. Biden. He said the Quad leaders

» see **PACIFIC** | A9

► Biden heads to summit in Asia distracted by debt crisis in U.S. **A8**

ECONOMY

READING THE ROOM



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTOGRAPHS

CONTROVERSY ON DISPLAY: Public and school libraries have restricted some books to young readers, but they have digital versions available. Some conservative parent groups are calling for the closure or defunding of what they call "woke" libraries.

Libraries turn the page on services in era of budget cuts, changing needs

By **SEAN SALAI**

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

U.S. libraries, beset by book controversies, shrinking budgets, an influx of homeless and the ongoing loss of their readers to the internet, are struggling to adjust to a post-pandemic reset that has many communities looking at cutbacks and closings.

The University of California, Berkeley, plans to shutter three libraries, including the public school's 80,000-volume anthropology collection, to save \$5 million in an overhaul of the library system. The anthropology collection is one of only three at American research universities. The other two are at Harvard University and the University of Pennsylvania.

Administrators intend to shrink the

number of UC Berkeley libraries from 23 to 10 hub libraries and seven satellites with fewer services, shorter hours and no on-site librarian in some cases.

"The Library of the Future," a 2022 report from the Chronicle of Higher Education, said college librarians hoping to tempt students out of their dorm rooms and back to underused libraries are rapidly replacing empty periodical rooms and untouched book collections with open "maker spaces," computer laboratories and technology rooms wired for individual and group study.

That reflects the reality that e-books

» see **LIBRARY** | A7

► Florida school district sued over ban of LGBTQ-themed books. **A6**

PUBLIC HEALTH

Wuhan lab cut off from U.S. animal research aid

NIH also deletes Russia from list

By **STEPHEN DINAN**

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The National Institutes of Health has quietly erased the Wuhan Institute of Virology — the facility at the center of speculation about the origin of COVID-19 — from its list of labs that can conduct animal testing with U.S. money.

Wuhan was on the list as of late April but has since disappeared. NIH has also erased all Russian laboratories from the list, meaning no taxpayer money from U.S. public health service agencies can be used for animal testing in that country.

In deleting the Wuhan Institute, NIH was striking back against the lab that some U.S. agencies have concluded spawned the COVID-19 pandemic, which upended the global economy and killed millions of people.

"China's state-run Wuhan Institute of Virology, which was known to be unsafe, should never have received U.S. support for its dangerous experiments on bat coronaviruses," said Sen. Joni Ernst, Iowa Republican.

She said she was "cautiously optimistic" about the delisting but disturbed that Wuhan got taxpayer money in the first place.

"What other batty studies are we paying for that are flying under the radar? I soon plan to introduce legislation requiring every penny sent to an institution in China or any other adversarial country be publicly disclosed," she said.

Justin Goodman, senior vice president for advocacy at the White Coat Waste Project, which pushed to expose the U.S. money that funded Wuhan, called the delisting "a decisive victory

» see **WUHAN** | A4

► Rubio report offers evidence COVID-19 originated at lab. **A3**

CONGRESS

Energy deal enters talks for critical raise of debt limit

By **SUSAN FERRECHIO, RAMSEY TOUCHBERRY AND HARRIS ALIC**

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

House and Senate negotiators working to secure a deal to raise the nation's borrowing limit are weighing a plan that could eventually give the federal government expanded authority to greenlight an extended phalanx of interstate transmission lines for wind, solar and hydropower.

Republicans leading the talks have offered Democrats a commitment to work

Negotiating table gets more crowded

on a transmission line proposal as part of an energy side deal in negotiations to raise the \$31.4 trillion federal borrowing limit to meet a June 1 deadline.

The Republican proposal gives preference to fossil fuels and immediately streamlines the permitting process to speed up energy projects — mostly involving oil and gas — under the National Environmental Policy Act. It also pledges that Congress, at some point,

will work on a measure to accelerate the construction of interstate transmission lines critical to wind, solar and hydroelectric power.

Democrats downplayed the deal because it postpones the renewable energy component and makes no guarantees that the transmission line proposal will be implemented or even get a vote in Congress.

"That is hard no," said Sen. Brian

Schatz, Hawaii Democrat. "No transmission, no deal. We're not doing the 'gladly pay you tomorrow for a hamburger today.'"

Republicans, eager to speed up oil and gas production permits, say they will keep trying to shoehorn a bipartisan energy proposal into the must-pass debt limit legislation.

"Permitting reform is on the table," Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, West Virginia Republican, told The Washington Times.

» see **DEBT** | A4



ASSOCIATED PRESS

CONFIDENT: House Speaker Kevin McCarthy says Republican unity on cutting spending while raising the debt limit will force Democratic concessions.

POLITICS

Federal judge rebukes Homeland Security for migrant release. A5

NATION

Grand jury indicts man in stabbing deaths of four Idaho students. A6

WORLD

Russian bombers flying near Alaska deemed nonthreatening. A8

REGION

Abortion outlawed in N.C. after 12 weeks with veto override. A10

VOLUME 41, NUMBER 104



American Scene

TECHNOLOGY

Artificial intelligence presents political peril with threat to mislead voters

By DAVID KLEPPER AND ALI SWENSON

Computer engineers and tech-inclined political scientists have warned for years that cheap, powerful artificial intelligence tools would soon allow anyone to create fake images, video and audio that was realistic enough to fool voters and perhaps sway an election.

The synthetic images that emerged were often crude, unconvincing and costly to produce, especially when other kinds of misinformation were so inexpensive and easy to spread on social media. The threat posed by AI and so-called deepfakes always seemed a year or two away.

No more. Sophisticated generative AI tools can now create cloned

human voices and hyperrealistic images, videos and audio in seconds, at minimal cost. When strapped to powerful social media algorithms, this fake and digitally created content can spread far and fast and target highly specific audiences, potentially taking campaign dirty tricks to a new low.

The implications for the 2024 campaigns and elections are as large as they are troubling: Generative AI cannot only rapidly produce targeted campaign emails, texts or videos, it also could be used to mislead voters, impersonate candidates and undermine elections on a scale and at a speed not yet seen.

"We're not prepared for this," warned A.J. Nash, vice president of intelligence at the cybersecurity firm ZeroFox. "To me, the



Generative artificial intelligence can produce targeted campaign emails, texts or videos to mislead voters and undermine elections.

going to have a major impact." AI experts can quickly rattle off a number of alarming scenarios in which generative AI is used to create synthetic media for the purposes of confusing voters, slandering a candidate or even inciting violence.

Here are a few: Automated robocall messages, in a candidate's voice, instructing voters to cast ballots on the wrong date; audio recordings of a candidate supposedly confessing to a crime or expressing racist views; video footage showing someone giving a speech or interview they never gave. Fake images designed to look like local news reports, falsely claiming a candidate dropped out of the race.

"What if Elon Musk personally calls you and tells you to vote for a certain candidate?" said

Oren Etzioni, the founding CEO of the Allen Institute for AI, who stepped down last year to start the nonprofit AI2. "A lot of people would listen. But it's not him."

Former President Donald Trump, who is running in 2024, has shared AI-generated content with his followers on social media. A manipulated video of CNN host Anderson Cooper that Mr. Trump shared on his Truth Social platform on Friday, which distorted Mr. Cooper's reaction to the CNN town hall this past week with Mr. Trump, was created using an AI voice-cloning tool.

A campaign ad released last month by the Republican National Committee offers another glimpse of this digitally manipulated future. The online ad, which came after President Biden announced his reelection campaign,

and starts with a slightly warped image of Mr. Biden and the text "What if the weakest president we've ever had was reelected?"

A series of AI-generated images follows: Taiwan under attack, boarded up storefronts in the United States as the economy crumbles, soldiers and armored military vehicles patrolling local streets as tattooed criminals and waves of immigrants create panic.

The RNC acknowledged its use of AI, but others, including nefarious political campaigns and foreign adversaries, will not, said Petko Stoyanov, global chief technology officer at Forcepoint, a cybersecurity company based in Austin, Texas. Mr. Stoyanov predicted that groups looking to meddle with U.S. democracy will employ AI and synthetic media as a way to erode trust.

BRIEFLY THE NATION

Harry's mother, Princess Diana, died in a car crash in 1997 while being pursued by paparazzi in Paris. — Associated Press

Prosecutors urged Judge Vernon S. Broderick to impose a sentence of eight consecutive life sentences and an additional 260 years in prison. — Associated Press

Republicans have a supermajority in both chambers and easily approved the bills for Mr. DeSantis' signature. — Associated Press

It also prompted Honolulu's water utility to shut down nearby wells that provided about 20% of the city's water supply. After the spill, the state of Hawaii ordered the military to drain and close the tanks. — Associated Press

improving access to health care. — Associated Press

NEW YORK Prince Harry, Meghan in car chase with paparazzi

NEW YORK | Prince Harry and his wife, Meghan, were involved in a car chase while being followed by photographers following a charity event in New York, the couple's office said Wednesday.

The pair, together with Meghan's mother, were followed for more than two hours by a half-dozen vehicles with blacked out windows.

Their office said the chase "resulted in multiple near collisions involving other drivers on the road, pedestrians and two NYPD officers." It called the incident "near catastrophic."

NEW YORK U.S. seeks life sentences for NYC bike path killer

NEW YORK | Relatives of eight people killed in a Halloween terror attack on a New York City bike path as well as those who were injured spoke through tears Wednesday at sentencing hearing for an Islamic extremist who prosecutors say deserves multiple life sentences.

Sayfullo Saipov's sentencing in Manhattan federal court comes after a jury in March rejected the death penalty for the Uzbekistan citizen and onetime New Jersey resident, leaving him with a mandatory life sentence.

FLORIDA DeSantis signs bills targeting drag shows

TALLAHASSEE | Gov. Ron DeSantis signed bills Wednesday that ban gender-transition care for minors, target drag shows, restrict discussion of "preferred pronouns" in schools and require people to use certain bathrooms.

Mr. DeSantis has made anti-LGBTQ legislation a large part of his agenda as he prepares to seek the GOP presidential nomination.

Democrats opposed the bills, and LGBTQ rallies were held at the Capitol during the session that ended two weeks ago, but

HAWAII Navy eyes October for draining fuel tanks

HONOLULU | The U.S. military on Tuesday proposed an October start date for a plan to drain a World War II-era fuel tank facility that poisoned 6,000 people when it leaked jet fuel into Pearl Harbor's drinking water 18 months ago.

Fuel from the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility leaked into a Navy drinking water well supplying water to 93,000 people in 2021.

The episode poisoned about 6,000 people — mostly military personnel and their families — on and around the Hawaii naval base.

FLORIDA Voters elect city's first female mayor

JACKSONVILLE | Voters in Jacksonville have elected the city's first female mayor.

Democrat Donna Deegan earned 52% of the vote in Tuesday's election, beating Republican Daniel Davis, according to unofficial results. About 217,000 people voted in the race, for a turnout of 33%.

Ms. Deegan said she plans to focus on upgrading infrastructure, building an economy that works for everyone and

NEW MEXICO Student killed three in 'random' shooting

FARMINGTON | The gunman who killed three people and wounded six others as he fired randomly while roaming his northwestern New Mexico neighborhood was a local high school student and his victims include a 97-year-old woman and her daughter, police said Tuesday.

Investigators were still trying to determine a motive for the attack by Beau Wilson, 18, in the Farmington neighborhood where he lived.

They say he opened fire Monday, killing Gwendolyn Schofield; her 73-year-old daughter, Melody Ivie; and 79-year-old Shirley Voita.

— Associated Press

LIBRARY

From page A1

and online journals now dominate most student research outside of the humanities, said Jeremy Ott, UC-Berkeley's classics and Germanic studies librarian.

"Academic libraries are alive, but in many cases imperiled, as they continue to provide vital scholarly resources and services despite the impact of declining budgets that is particularly felt at public institutions with diminished levels of state support," Mr. Ott told The Washington Times. "Beyond funding, the continuing effects of the internet revolution and the 'distanced' aspects of the coronavirus pandemic have fundamentally altered the relationship between libraries and the students and faculty who use them."

College libraries aren't the only ones facing existential crises.

In Wisconsin, the Waterford Public Library said it would close on Saturdays and reduce weekly hours of operation from 58 to 44.

The Fairfax County Public Library in suburban Washington, citing ongoing staffing issues, cut back hours in August.

In cash-strapped New York, Mayor Eric Adams has proposed cutting \$13 million this fiscal year from the city's \$400 million library budget and another \$20 million or more next year.

Institutions in flux

Budget cuts hit public libraries and school libraries during the pandemic, but the number of K-12 school libraries and librarians has been declining for decades.

From the 1999-2000 to the 2015-2016 academic years, the latest figures available, the number of school librarians dropped 19% from 53,659 to 43,367, according to a School Library Journal analysis of National Center for Education Statistics data.

Patrons of many public libraries who turned to remote or virtual services when COVID-19 hit didn't return as the pandemic receded.

Instead, libraries across the country are increasingly dealing with the needs — and problems — that come with trying to serve throngs of homeless men and women, many of them addicts, who turn to libraries as a respite from the street.

A statement on the American Library Association website says public libraries have a civic duty to care for poor and homeless patrons.

"People experiencing poverty or homelessness constitute a significant portion of users in many libraries today



Underused libraries are taking printed books off shelves and replacing them with computer labs. At busier libraries, patrons can borrow gardening tools and cooking utensils.

and this population provides libraries with an important opportunity to change lives," the ALA statement reads. "As the number of poor children, adults, and families in America rise, so does the urgent need for libraries to effectively respond to their needs."

Some libraries have embraced controversies such as drag queen story hours and other unconventional in-person events in the scramble to recapture attention and crowds to help justify costs to skeptical public officials. Others have focused on unique, hands-on activities, such as the rooftop beehives that produce honey at two Philadelphia Free Library branches.

"Libraries are now 'learning centers' as fewer and fewer people read books printed on paper," said Robert Weissberg, a former University of Illinois professor, but he wonders whether something valuable has been lost in the move away from books and printed material.

Patrons at the busiest libraries can now borrow gardening tools and cooking utensils as easily as they can check out books, according to the American Library Association.

"As the needs of the community change, so do the services and resources available through our libraries," ALA

President Lessa Kanani'opua Pelayo-Lozada told The Times.

Librarians nationwide are weighing priorities as they respond to these trends.

Last month, industry researcher Ithaka S+R asked library directors where they would cut funds if a 10% budget reduction became necessary at their schools or institutions. More than half (54%) of the 612 librarians who responded said they would cut their budgets for printed books, and 45% said they would end print journal subscriptions.

In the event of a 10% budget increase, 56% said they would direct extra funds to new or redefined positions, and 41% said they would use it to raise staff salaries.

Card-carrying woke

While many communities have embraced the idea of libraries and librarians stepping up as service providers for the destitute, others wonder whether turning libraries into de facto shelters will hasten a decline into irrelevancy for patrons worried about safety.

In the District of Columbia, police reported in March that a knife fight broke out between two homeless men at the Petworth Neighborhood Library. One man killed the other, age 45, in what the

Metropolitan Police Department called a "targeted attack."

Four Colorado public libraries closed temporarily this winter to remove unsafe levels of methamphetamine from the air. The meth had entered the buildings' air ducts from restrooms frequented by homeless drug addicts.

Meanwhile, some right-leaning parental rights groups have called for closing or defunding "woke" libraries.

The ALA reported last month that parents challenged books in school libraries and classrooms in record numbers for the second straight year in 2022. One contentious work on LGBTQ identity bore the brunt of conservatives' wrath.

The library group found in an annual report that the number of reported challenges to books nearly doubled from a record 729 in 2021 to 1,269 last year. The number of challenges to unique titles rose 38%, from 1,858 to 2,571, during the same period.

Of the 1,269 challenges reported last year, 51% were for books taught in schools or found in school libraries, according to the ALA. Forty-eight percent were for public libraries and 1% for college and university libraries.

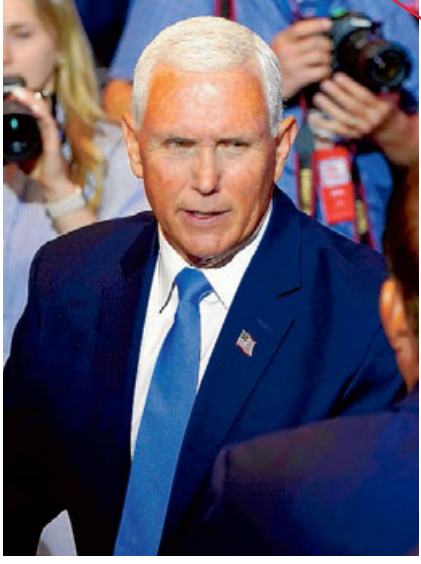
Maia Kobabe's comic-book-style

memoir "Gender Queer," an account of the author's coming out as nonbinary and queer, led the ALA's list of most-challenged books for the second year in a row in 2022. Parental rights groups last year made 151 efforts to remove the graphic novel, which includes brightly colored illustrations of minors engaging in homosexual activity, from library shelves.

In Texas, some parents pushed Llano County commissioners during a contentious April 13 special meeting to close the rural area's three public libraries after a federal judge ruled that they could not legally remove titles such as "Gender Queer" from shelves. A county judge said the libraries would remain open despite the pushback.

Libraries have no right to remain open when they become community centers for porn and drag, said Sheri Few, founder and president of United States Parents Involved in Education.

"To Kill a Mockingbird" should be available, but porn like "Gender Queer" should not be in public libraries," Ms. Few said in an email. "Libraries now host 'Drag Queen Story Hour' and focus on social workers and social justice. What on earth happened to good books?"



ASSOCIATED PRESS

'NEVER' Former Vice President Mike Pence said he ensured that the Constitution prevailed over a wayward president who lost the 2020 election.

CAMPAIGN 2024

Pence turns on Trump, announces official bid

Says former boss unfit as president

By **SETH McLAUGHLIN**
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

ANKENY, IOWA | Former Vice President Mike Pence formally launched his 2024 bid for the Republican presidential nomination on Wednesday, clearly stating that the party and the nation should "never" allow his onetime boss, former President Donald Trump, back into the White House.

Mr. Pence said Mr. Trump scored conservative wins as president but started to lose his way as he pressured his vice president to overstep his constitutional authority and refuse to certify President-elect Joseph R. Biden's 2020 victory.

"The American people must know that we will keep our oath to support and defend the Constitution even when it is not in our political interests," Mr. Pence said at his campaign launch at the Des Moines Area Community College.

"Anyone who puts themselves over the Constitution should never be president of the United States, and anyone who asks someone else to put them over the Constitution should never be president of the United States again," he said.

Mr. Pence's plunge brings a Robin versus Batman storyline to a race that will test whether voters have an appetite for Mr. Pence's push for more civility in politics and for the Republican Party to return to classical conservatism. Mr. Pence's campaign focuses on building a strong national defense, promoting freedom around the globe, cutting spending

» see **PENCE** | **A6**

► North Dakota governor joins Republican presidential fray. **A6**

ENERGY

Hasty rollouts lead to rolling blackouts

Hot, dark summer on horizon if renewable energy fails

By **SUSAN FERRECHIO**
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Motionless windmills, solar plant glitches, shuttered coal plants and low water levels create a recipe for widespread power outages this summer, the country's leading watchdog on power grid reliability warns.

An assessment from the North American Electric Reliability Corp. found that electrical grids powering two-thirds of the U.S. are "at risk of energy shortfalls" during summer heat waves.

NERC officials warned Congress that

the threat likely will worsen unless the U.S. "recalibrates" its effort to transform the nation's power grid to renewable energy by focusing on reliability.

"Our assessments demonstrate that the electric grid is operating ever closer to the edge, where more frequent and more serious disruptions are increasingly likely," James B. Robb, NERC's president and chief executive officer, told the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee on June 1.

The risk of summer outages is high in the West, where intermittent solar and wind power have been increasingly

incorporated into the energy grid.

The renewable power scheme is forcing California and other states to rely on energy transfers from other regions, which might not be available, to meet demand during periods of high use.

President Biden's environmental rules also increase the threat of power outages, NERC reports.

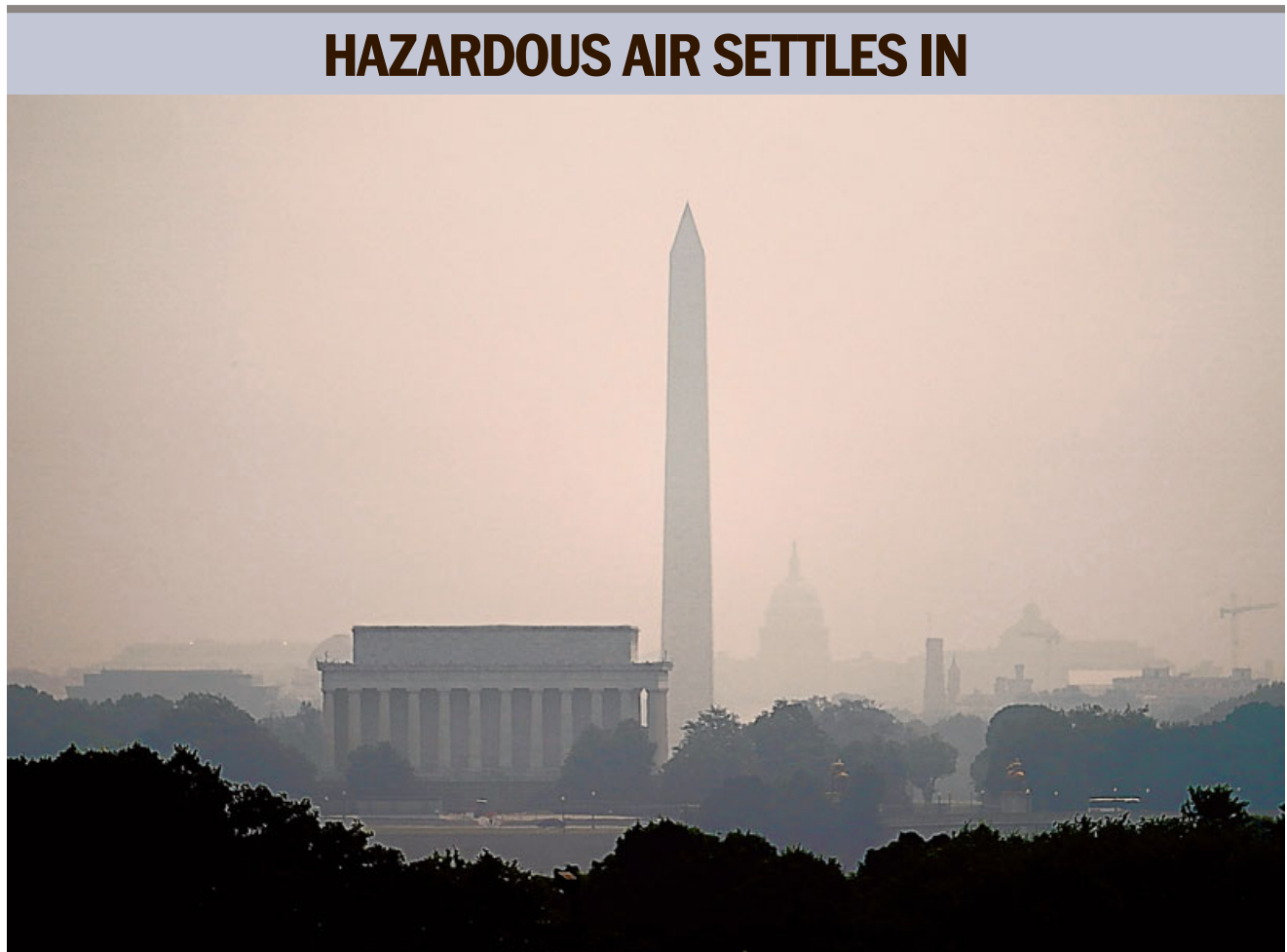
New pollution caps from the Environmental Protection Agency require coal- and gas-fired power plants to reduce greenhouse gas emissions affecting states

» see **POWER** | **A4**



ASSOCIATED PRESS

VULNERABLE: California relies on renewable sources for half of its energy grid but is the nation's largest importer of electricity — if other states can spare it.



ASSOCIATED PRESS

An unhealthy haze of smoke from Canadian wildfires is blanketing monuments on the National Mall, delaying flights and postponing Major League Baseball games. Canadian officials are projecting the nation's worst wildfire season ever. Story, A7.

HAZARDOUS AIR SETTLES IN

DISTRICT

Homicide threshold earliest in 20 years as D.C. police try to highlight successes

By **MATT DELANEY**
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The District has recorded 100 homicides at its earliest date in two decades, police data shows, as the mayor searches for the next police chief and congressional Republicans hound the city over its inability to tamp down the violence.

Crime data from the Metropolitan Police Department shows that the city recorded 102 homicides through Tuesday — a 19% increase from the 86 slayings in the District through the same period last year.

The D.C. Police Union said the city

had not reached the 100-homicide threshold this quickly since 2003, which ended with 248 killings.

"It is indeed a grim milestone," D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser, a Democrat, said at a press conference Wednesday. "Any day it would be grim to talk about 100 people, in a city our size, being lost to gun violence or some other type of violence in our neighborhood."

She said the city is working to close gaps in the law and has programs and services in place to engage young offenders, and "the system of consequences is also working."

Interim Police Chief Ashan Benedict

said during the press conference that the department is using hot spot policing to get a grip on crime. He said foot patrols are interacting with the public in four or five locations within each of the city's seven police districts.

Chief Benedict lamented that the District's homicide numbers are overshadowing positive developments in crime reduction.

He said no violent crimes were reported from late afternoon to late evening Tuesday in the District except for a deadly shooting at a Shell gas station on

» see **HOMICIDE** | **A10**

CONGRESS

Hard-liners force freeze on House floor action

Upset McCarthy won Democrats

By **HARIS ALIC**
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The conservative House Freedom Caucus paralyzed the House again on Wednesday and forced Speaker Kevin McCarthy to cancel votes for the rest of the week.

For the second consecutive day, hard-line conservative holdouts blocked Mr. McCarthy from bringing a slew of Republican initiatives to the House floor. Members of the Freedom Caucus say the delay is warranted because of Mr. McCarthy's deal last week to suspend the debt limit until after the 2024 presidential election.

"These continued sellouts breach the agreement we made in January for a unified, functioning Congress," said Rep. Lauren Boebert, Colorado Republican. "I've had enough of the games."

The rebels demanded that Mr. McCarthy stop using Democratic votes to pass legislation, as he did with the debt limit deal because the same faction of Freedom Caucus members refused to back it.

Mr. McCarthy downplayed the significance of the continued stalling of floor action after 11 archconservatives derailed votes Tuesday on a series of Republican bills.

"We've been through this before; we're [a] small majority," said Mr. McCarthy, California Republican. "You work through this, and you're going to be stronger."

On the losing end of the conservative blockade are bills prohibiting the Biden administration from banning gas stoves and requiring Congress to approve any

» see **HOUSE** | **A6**



ASSOCIATED PRESS

PUSHING BACK: South Africans living in Hammanskraal, an area experiencing the worst of the cholera outbreak, are losing faith in the African National Congress despite the government's promises of improved drinking water and electricity supplies.

SOUTH AFRICA

Cholera threatens party of Mandela

Electricity crisis causes shortage of clean drinking water

By **GEOFF HILL**
SPECIAL TO THE WASHINGTON TIMES

JOHANNESBURG | The death toll from a cholera outbreak in South Africa has climbed to 26 in recent days, with dozens more hospitalized while frustration mounts over the government's response to the disease, which is common in several areas of Africa but rarely spreads in this country.

Cases have been reported in five of South Africa's nine provinces in recent

days, but the rising death toll has been in a predominantly Black area north of the capital, Pretoria.

The government, ruled by the African National Congress, says it is trying to discover the source of the outbreak. Protests have erupted in some areas, and opposition groups say government malfeasance has contributed to the spread of the disease.

Analysts point to chronic power outages that have left economically impoverished areas of South Africa without

electricity for up to 12 hours a day as winter takes hold in the Southern Hemisphere.

Cholera is a waterborne disease. Although rainfall in the region has filled dams, specialists say South Africa lacks the electricity to pump water to reservoirs before it can be filtered and piped into homes.

Along with the shortage of clean drinking water in some areas, overnight

» see **CHOLERA** | **A10**

POLITICS

U.S., international antitrust enforcers to review golf merger. A3

NATION

Protestant churches rely on armed members to provide security. A7

WORLD

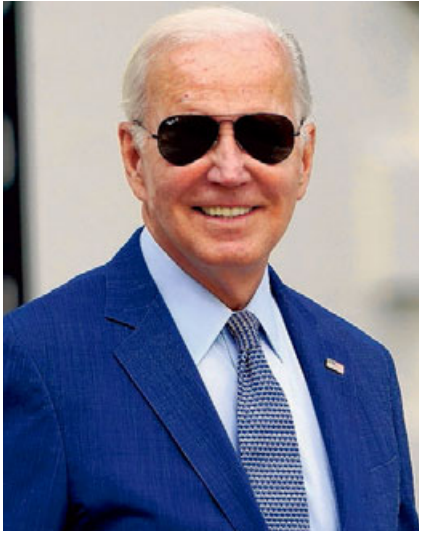
Drinking water rushed to areas flooded by collapsed dam. A9

REGION

Virginia regulators OK Youngkin plan to leave carbon program. A12

VOLUME 41, NUMBER 119





ASSOCIATED PRESS

THE 'BRAND' President Biden stopped denying knowledge about his son's business deals after a 2015 photo and other evidence suggested otherwise.

WHITE HOUSE

Message shifts as denials grow doubtful

By **SUSAN FERRECHIO**
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

President Biden's repeated denials that he participated in his son's foreign business transactions or ever spoke with his son about them have shifted after an accumulation of evidence from bank records and eyewitness testimony in recent weeks shows he likely played a pivotal role in securing the lucrative deals.

Mr. Biden remained silent Friday when reporters shouted questions at him about a Justice Department special counsel investigation of his son Hunter Biden related to tax evasion, financial schemes and suspicions of acting as an

Biden now insists he 'never talked business' with son's foreign cohorts

unregistered lobbyist for foreign entities.

The president has long denied involvement in his son's business deals, but a House investigation has compiled evidence that Mr. Biden helped his family pocket millions of dollars by serving as the influential "brand" and briefly joining phone calls and business meetings.

Questions about Mr. Biden's candor were raised again last week with the surfacing of a 2015 photo showing then-Vice President Biden aboard Air Force

Two en route to Ukraine talking with adviser Amos Hochstein. According to congressional investigators, Mr. Hochstein repeatedly warned about a conflict of interest from Hunter Biden's job on the board of Ukrainian energy firm Burisma that paid \$1 million a year.

Hunter Biden and his associates also sought help from Mr. Hochstein on behalf of Burisma on a Ukrainian gas tax initiative, but it's unclear whether the adviser provided any assistance.

Republicans called the Air Force Two photo "damning." They said it was further evidence that Mr. Biden was well aware of his son's business deals and spoke about them.

The photo was taken on the way to Kyiv, where Mr. Biden met with President Petro Poroshenko and demanded that he fire Prosecutor General Viktor Shokin, who had been investigating Burisma.

At an event Tuesday in Arizona, Mr. Biden did not deny knowing about his son's business deals but said, "I never talked business with anybody."

» see **BIDEN** | A5

CAMPAIGN 2024

Trump crashes DeSantis' party on fairgrounds

Two Republican front-runners vie for the attention of Iowa voters

By **SETH McLAUGHLIN**
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

DES MOINES, IOWA | Ron DeSantis was the top political draw at the Iowa State Fair, but only for a few hours.

Mobbed by reporters, cameras and voters, the Florida governor and 2024 Republican presidential contender traversed the sprawling fairgrounds with one of his daughters atop his shoulders and his wife at his side. He stopped for photographs and small talk before engaging in a political right of passage in Iowa: flipping pork chops.

The moment was fleeting thanks to the arrival of former President Donald Trump, the clear front-runner in the race for the Republican presidential nomination.

Always the showman, Mr. Trump made his entrance with his airplane buzzing low above the fairgrounds as Mr. DeSantis worked the grill alongside Gov. Kim Reynolds and Sen. Joni Ernst. The site of Trump Force One triggered shrieks of delight and oohs and aahs. Many in the crowd sported Trump gear.

Mr. Trump breezed into the fairgrounds with a Secret Service escort and an entourage of elected leaders from Mr. DeSantis' home state, including Republican Reps. Matt Gaetz and Byron Donalds.

The crowd watched Mr. Trump's every action and cheered him on when he hoisted a pork chop on a stick like a trophy.

"It's a beautiful day in Iowa," Mr. Trump told reporters. "There's a record crowd. They've never had anything even close."

The Iowa State Fair on Saturday was the backdrop to a clash of the titans in the 2024 Republican presidential race. It also served as a reminder that Mr. Trump, one of the most famous people on the planet, plays by his own rules.

Mr. Trump was the sole Republican

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ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTOGRAPHS

CROWD FAVORITE: Former President Donald Trump captivated supporters at the Iowa State Fair on Saturday from the moment Trump Force One buzzed overhead to his hoisting of a pork chop. He passed up the opportunity for a chat with Gov. Kim Reynolds.



OVERSHADOWED: Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis was the top political draw at the fair until Mr. Trump arrived with a reminder that he plays by his own rules.

'Fair-Side Chat' gives lesser-known candidates a turn in the spotlight

By **SETH McLAUGHLIN**
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

DES MOINES, IOWA | North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum made the rounds at the iconic Iowa State Fair to tout his small-town roots and promise a "180-degree" turn from President Biden's policies, which he says hurt Americans of every political stripe.

Mr. Burgum was among the lesser-known Republican presidential contenders who made their way to the fair to introduce themselves to voters and try to steal a bit of the spotlight from former President Donald Trump, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and other high-profile contenders.

Mr. Burgum, a billionaire who grew up in a small North Dakota town and



Burgum

made his fortune by investing in the technology industry, said the first thing he would do as president is take a more pro-America stance on energy.

"The Biden administration, I say their energy policy was designed by China because if you want to go all-electric vehicles, it is basically a war on liquid fuels," Mr. Burgum said during a "Fair-Side Chat" with Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds. "It is a war on liquid fuels. It is a war on America."

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JUSTICE DEPARTMENT

Weiss' new job seen as 'cover-up' for Bidens

Special counsel botched plea deal

By **RAMSEY TOUCHBERY AND JEFF MORDOCK**
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The appointment of a special counsel may appear to put a bull's-eye on Hunter Biden and threaten to make the family's foreign business deals a lasting issue for the president's reelection campaign.

Yet some Republicans fear that a special counsel investigation is a device to whitewash President Biden's purported involvement in pay-to-play schemes.

They point out that Attorney General Merrick Garland appointed as special counsel the prosecutor responsible for Hunter Biden's botched sweetheart plea deal on tax and gun crimes.

Although the special counsel has the authority to investigate the Biden family's lucrative foreign business deals and bring more charges against the first son or others, Republican lawmakers fear that giving that power to David Weiss, U.S. attorney for the District of Delaware, is all for show.

"This appointment is camouflage, and it's a cover-up. I think it's disgraceful," Sen. Ted Cruz, Texas Republican, said on Fox News' "Sunday Morning Futures."

Mr. Cruz said Mr. Weiss "was either an active participant in covering this criminality and protecting Joe Biden and engaging in obstruction of justice ... or he was so weak that he couldn't stop the partisans at main Justice from turning it in a political effort."

Others said Mr. Weiss would draw out the investigations past the statute of limitations on potential charges.

Sen. Marsha Blackburn, Tennessee Republican, called Mr. Weiss a "collaborator."

"The American people can see through this. They know what is going on," she said on "Sunday Morning Futures." "Merrick Garland — he owes the

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IRS

'Dead' in name only, taxpayers get buried in red tape for federal checks

By **STEPHEN DINAN**
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The IRS has taken plenty of flak for sending stimulus checks to dead people, but a new inspector general's audit says the agency also has the reverse problem: It refused to send checks to some living people, claiming they were dead.

The problem arose after the onset of the pandemic. Taxpayers trying to get their checks were told their accounts were locked because the IRS thought

they were dead.

Tens of thousands of accounts were deadlocked, the inspector general said, meaning the taxpayers didn't receive their stimulus checks and were blocked from filing tax returns or collecting refunds.

To be removed from the dead list, the taxpayers had to wade through red tape with the IRS or Social Security Administration.

"Although the deceased account lock is designed to prevent the filing of

fraudulent tax returns, when there is an error, the unintended consequence is that legitimate taxpayers cannot file a tax return and receive a refund," the inspector general said. "These errors increase taxpayers' burden to get the matter resolved as well as the IRS' workload due to the receipt of additional telephone calls or correspondence from taxpayers."

The IRS said it took steps to solve the problem. One was an annual review of data that the Social Security Administration sends to the IRS to match death

dates with files.

The inspector general originally flagged 77,868 accounts showing signs of being erroneously dead-locked as of Jan. 1, 2022. The IRS rechecked and concluded that 20,222 of them had to be unlocked.

When the inspector general updated its numbers for 2022, it flagged 14,193 more accounts that may have been erroneously locked between Jan. 2 and Oct. 29 of that year.

The IRS was still reviewing those

accounts, the inspector general said.

Accounts can be locked because of the Social Security Administration's master death list or because of an error at the IRS, the audit said.

Daniel C. Cohen, a lawyer at Consumer Attorneys, wrote about the issue in May, saying it "happens more often than you might think."

He said the problem could be as simple as a misplaced digit in a communication

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BIDEN

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Mr. Biden was responding to a reporter's question about testimony from his son's former business associate Devon Archer.

Archer recently told House investigators that Mr. Biden, as vice president, phoned into about 20 of Hunter Biden's business meetings and dined twice with their business associates.

Mr. Biden's response marked a shift from his professed ignorance about his son's lucrative deals, including his board seat on Burisma, which paid Hunter Biden a total of more than \$3 million.

Asked in a 2019 Axios interview what job Hunter Biden was performing for Burisma to earn the hefty paycheck, Mr. Biden said, "I don't know what he was doing. I knew he was on the board, but that was it."

Archer, who is facing a prison term on an unrelated securities fraud conviction, testified that Burisma owner Mykola Zlochevsky and another top Burisma executive, Vadym Pozharskyi, arranged a phone call, through Hunter, with Vice President Biden in December 2015. The Burisma executives wanted to talk with him about a state corruption probe of their company that was hindering efforts to break into U.S. energy markets.

Mr. Pozharskyi also dined with Mr. Biden at a Georgetown restaurant in April 2015, Archer revealed to House investigators.

Archer said the dinner conversation did not include any business talk. Democrats have downplayed Archer's testimony and said Hunter Biden was merely selling "the illusion" that his powerful father would help Burisma executives and other business associates.

Earlier this summer, two IRS



Questions about candor were following President Biden last week after he arrived at Grand Canyon National Park to designate a national monument. A reporter asked the president about testimony from his son's former business associate Devon Archer.

whistleblowers told Congress that they found evidence of more direct involvement from Mr. Biden.

In their investigation into Hunter Biden over unpaid taxes, IRS investigators uncovered WhatsApp messages in which Hunter Biden threatened a Chinese business associate to make good on a payment.

"I am sitting here with my father and we would like to understand why the commitment made has not been fulfilled," Hunter Biden messaged to Henry Zhao on June 30, 2017. "Tell the director that I would like to resolve this now before it gets out of hand, and now means tonight."

"And, Z, if I get a call or text from

anyone involved in this other than you, Zhang, or the chairman, I will make certain that between the man sitting next to me and every person he knows and my ability to forever hold a grudge that you will regret not following my direction. I am sitting here waiting for the call with my father."

After the revelations, the White

House changed its message.

Press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre pivoted away from claiming that the president was ignorant of his son's business deals. "The answer remains the same. The president was never in business with his son," she told reporters.

Mr. Biden started denying knowledge about his son's business deals in 2019 when he ran for president.

"First of all, I have never discussed with my son or my brother or anyone else anything having to do with their business, period," Mr. Biden said at a campaign event in Spartanburg, South Carolina, in August 2019.

He told reporters that during his time as vice president, "There wasn't any hint of scandal at all when we were there." He pledged "an absolute wall" between the White House and his family's business deals.

"That's why I never talked with my son or my brother or anyone else, even distant family, about their business interests. Period," Mr. Biden said.

Archer disputed Mr. Biden's claim this month in an online interview with Tucker Carlson. He called the denials "categorically false" and said Mr. Biden "was aware of Hunter's business [and] met with Hunter's business partners."

House Republican leaders recently wrote to White House Counsel Stuart Delery to ask whether Mr. Biden was tapped into his son's business deals. The letter points to the shifting statements from the president and his press team that seem to offer wiggle room to accommodate the bank records and witness testimony that could tie the president to his son's business deals.

"The American people must have confidence that the President of the United States is not compromised by foreign interests," lawmakers wrote.

The White House has not responded.

IRS

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between a credit reporting agency and the Social Security Administration. The consequences aren't so simple.

"Being listed as 'deceased' by the IRS is a massive inconvenience," he wrote.

Dealing with dead people has been a standing problem for the government.

Early in the pandemic, the IRS paid \$1.4 billion in stimulus checks to dead people. The agency said it didn't think it was allowed to withhold the payments

under congressional rules.

That was a question of how to read the law.

A more persistent problem is tallying who is alive and who is dead and how that information is shared.

The Social Security Administration maintains the Death Master File, known as the DMF among government agencies. The file is based on alerts from family members, funeral homes, banks, the U.S. Postal Service and other agencies.

Social Security will share the data in its files with other federal and state agencies that pay benefits.

Errors can happen on both sides of the ledger.

When a death isn't reported, benefits can be paid improperly. In one case, the nephew of a woman who died in 1971 was still collecting her checks nearly 50 years later. The government also sent a pandemic stimulus check in 2020.

Then there are cases where a death is recorded but the person is still alive.

Sometimes a wrong report is sent in. Other times, the agency gets an accurate report but matches it to the wrong person in the system. Sometimes a data-entry

error marks someone as dead.

As of January, the IRS had deadlocked 52.5 million accounts over the agency's history.

If someone tries to file a tax return for a locked account, the IRS issues a notice alerting the taxpayer to the attempt and suggesting avenues to challenge the lock.

The inspector general looked at 9,646 notices issued as of the start of last year and found that more than 70% of the time, the accounts shouldn't have been locked.

Although Social Security's DMF was usually at fault, investigators uncovered

some accounts that the IRS locked even though the Social Security data didn't flag them as deceased.

The inspector general said the IRS should make clear on the notice that taxpayers can contact the IRS directly for help clearing a lock rather than directing them to Social Security.

In an official response to the audit, the IRS agreed to update its employee guidance. The agency rejected the suggestion of updating the notice, saying taxpayers "should not hesitate" to contact the IRS if they haven't been able to resolve the issue.

COUNSEL

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American people better than to do something like this."

Hunter Biden also is a central figure in congressional investigations of Mr. Biden's involvement in his family's shady foreign deals and alleged influence peddling and bribery. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, California Republican, is considering an impeachment inquiry to investigate the president's culpability in deals that netted millions of dollars for Hunter Biden, the president's brother James Biden and several other members of the Biden clan.

Mr. Garland tapped Mr. Weiss for the job just weeks after Hunter Biden's plea deal crumbled in the courtroom. The agreement would have spared the president's son felony charges and jail time for failing to pay taxes and lying on a federal background check form to buy a gun.

The attorney general said he elevated Mr. Weiss because "extraordinary circumstances relating to this matter" warranted special counsel powers. Mr. Weiss has been overseeing an investigation of Hunter Biden since 2018.

The plea deal also would have shielded Hunter Biden from further prosecution. Under questioning by the judge, prosecutors disclosed that Hunter Biden could face additional criminal charges, including violations of the Foreign Agents Registration Act, or FARA, which requires lobbyists for foreign governments to register with the Justice Department.

Hunter Biden might have run afoul of FARA by dealing with foreign entities to lobby his father, a U.S. policymaker.

The judge asked Mr. Weiss' prosecutors and Hunter Biden's attorneys to resolve the plea deal dispute and get back to her.

In a court filing Friday, just moments before Mr. Garland's announcement, prosecutors said the plea negotiations were at a stalemate and they expected the case to go to trial. They also asked that the case be tried in California because it was the most appropriate venue.

Former President Donald Trump, the leading candidate for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, said through a spokesman that the request for a California trial raised questions about the newly minted special counsel's independence.

Mr. Weiss is trying to move the case "to a more Democrat-friendly venue," said the spokesperson, adding that an independent investigation will quickly conclude that Mr. Biden and his son "should face the required consequences."

Mr. Weiss is slated to testify before the House Judiciary Committee in the coming weeks about the now-scuttled plea deal.

Abbe Lowell, an attorney for Hunter Biden, blamed the special counsel investigation on conservative media's promotion of "false allegations" of corruption.

He said prosecutors already had an opportunity to investigate the president's son for FARA violations.

"After five years and what we know happened in the grand jury, of course, that had to be part of what the prosecutor has already looked at, as well as every other false allegation made by the right-wing media and others, whether it's corruption or FARA or money laundering," Mr. Lowell said Sunday on CBS's "Face the Nation." "That was part of what this prosecutor's office had to have been looking over for five years."

Calls for a special counsel to investigate Hunter Biden intensified after two IRS investigators accused the Biden administration of trying to interfere with the probe.

In congressional testimony, the two agents said Mr. Weiss had recommended felony tax charges against Hunter Biden, even though his deal required him to plead guilty to only two misdemeanors.

A felony tax charge likely would have resulted in prison time. Mr. Weiss' office offered Hunter Biden a sentence of probation in exchange for the guilty pleas on misdemeanor charges.

One of those agents, Joseph Ziegler, wrote an op-ed in The Wall Street Journal last month urging Mr. Garland to appoint a special counsel because what he

witnessed in the investigation was "outside the norm."

Yet Mr. Weiss repeatedly assured lawmakers that there was no interference in the Hunter Biden investigation. In a June letter to the House Judiciary Committee, Mr. Weiss said he was "granted ultimate authority over the matter."

Mr. Trump nominated Mr. Weiss as U.S. attorney in 2017. The Republican-controlled Senate confirmed him in 2018.

The Justice Department order appointing Mr. Weiss as special counsel authorizes him to "conduct the ongoing investigation ... as well as any matters that arose from that investigation or may rise."

As special counsel, Mr. Weiss will have the authority to bring criminal charges in any jurisdiction, not just Delaware. He does not have that power as a U.S. attorney. Mr. Weiss will also have greater autonomy to make decisions.

He must publicly report his finding when the investigation is complete. Other recent special counsels, including Robert Mueller and John Durham, have written lengthy reports detailing their conclusions.

"Mr. Weiss has the authority he needs to conduct a thorough investigation and continue to take steps he deems appropriate independently, based only on the facts and the law," Mr. Garland said.

Mr. Weiss is the third special counsel Mr. Garland has appointed since he took charge of the Justice Department in 2021.

In November, Mr. Garland named Jack Smith to serve as special counsel to look into Mr. Trump's handling of classified government documents and his efforts to reverse the results of the 2020 election. Mr. Smith has filed criminal charges stemming from both investigations.

In January, Mr. Garland named Robert Hur as special counsel to investigate classified documents found in President Biden's office and residence dating to his time in the Senate and vice presidency.

In an appearance Sunday on ABC's "This Week," Rep. Jamie Raskin, Maryland Democrat, accused Republicans of hypocrisy for complaining about the special counsel appointment.



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