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Joint Chiefs Chairman Mark Milley: North Korea 'real danger' to U.S. homeland

By Thomas Maresca UPI

Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, told a congressional hearing that North Korea poses a direct threat to the United States with its long-range missiles and other weapons programs.

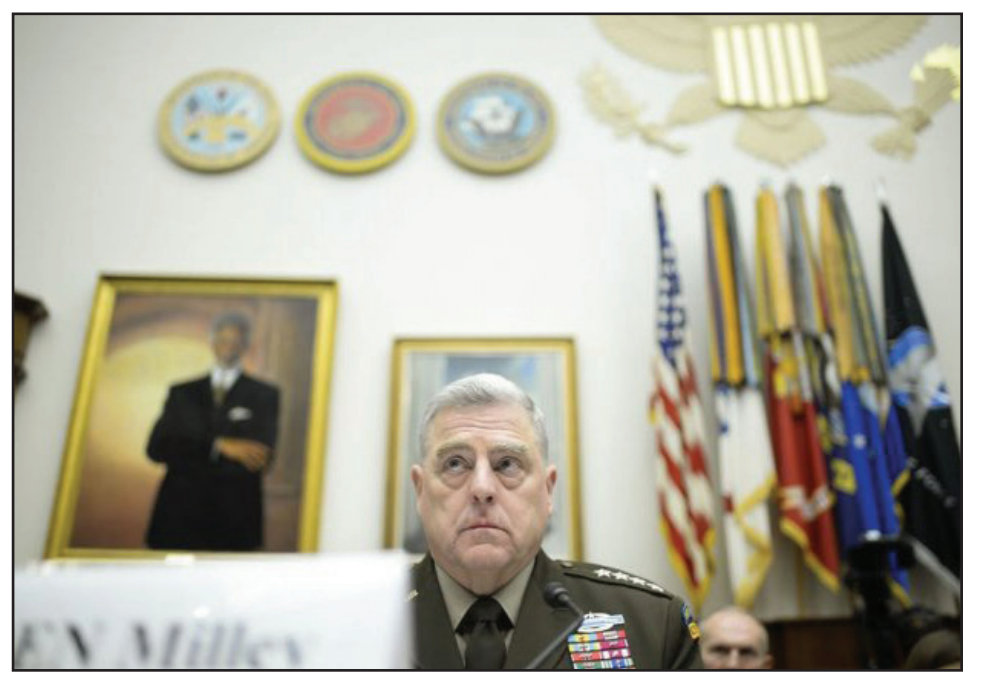
Milley made the remarks on Tuesday at a hearing of the House armed services committee, just days after Pyongyang said it tested its long-range Hwasong-17.

“The DPRK continues to enhance its ballistic missile capability and possesses the technical capacity to present a real danger to the U.S. homeland as well as our allies and partners across the Indo-Pacific,” Milley said.

The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea is the official name of North Korea. “[North Korean leaders] show no signs of relenting in their myopic focus on military capability at the expense of their citizens and peace of the Korean Peninsula as well as the entire region.”

North Korea has conducted a flurry of weapons tests since the start of the year, culminating in the March 24 firing of an inter-continental ballistic missile, which marked the first time Pyongyang had conducted a full ICBM launch since

See **KOREA**, page 4



Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley told lawmakers at a budget hearing Tuesday that North Korea presented a threat to the U.S. homeland with its ballistic missile capability. Photo by Bonnie Cash/UPI

Democrats, Republicans spar over gasoline price spike during House hearing

By Daniel Uriah & Clyde Hughes UPI

Democrats and Republicans squared off during a House committee hearing with some of the leading figures in the petroleum industry Wednesday, taking familiar sides during testimony that highlights the struggle to bring down high gasoline prices.

Democrats hammered oil executives over dividends to shareholders, stock buybacks and CEO pay while gas prices have hovered at record highs. Republicans defended the oil industry, charging it has been President Joe Biden’s rush to green energy that has cut the legs from under the industry and currently prevents them from producing more oil and lowering prices.

See **GAS**, page 4

Oklahoma House approves bill banning abortion

By Danielle Haynes UPI

The Oklahoma House of Representatives on Tuesday passed a near-total ban on abortions Tuesday, sending the legislation to Gov. Kevin Stitt’s desk for a signature.

The chamber voted 70-14 in favor of the bill, with 16 members not voting, Tulsa World reported. One Republican, Rep. Carol Bush of Tulsa, voted against the measure.

The legislation passed the Oklahoma Senate last year.

Stitt has signaled his willingness to sign the legislation into law, The Washington Post reported.

One of the most restrictive bills in the country, it would make all abortions illegal other than those to save the life of the woman. Those convicted of illegally performing an abortion face up to 10 years in prison and a \$100,000 fine.

If signed into law, the abortion ban would go into effect in August when the Oklahoma

See **ABORTION**, page 2



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OPINION

Biden's Nine-Word Gaffe May Cause Countless Tragedies

Revolutionary changes in transportation could slow global warming if done right

By Alan Jenn
University of California Davis

Around the world, revolutionary changes are under way in transportation. More electric vehicles are on the road, people are taking advantage of sharing mobility services such as Uber and Lyft, and the rise in telework during the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted the way people think about commuting.

Transportation is a growing source of the global greenhouse gas emissions that are driving climate change, accounting for 23% of energy-related carbon dioxide emissions worldwide in 2019 and 29% of all greenhouse gas emissions in the United States.

The systemic changes under way in the transportation sector could begin lowering that emissions footprint. But will they reduce emissions enough?

In a new report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released Monday, scientists from around the world examined the latest research on efforts to mitigate climate change. The report concludes that falling costs for renewable energy and for electric vehicle batteries, in addition to policy changes, have slowed the growth of climate change in the past decade, but that deep, immediate cuts are necessary to stop emissions growth entirely and keep global warming in check.

The transportation chapter, which I contributed to, homed in on transportation transformations -- some just starting and others expanding -- that in the most aggressive scenarios could reduce global greenhouse gas emissions from transportation by 80% to 90% of current levels by 2050. That sort of drastic reduction would require a major, rapid rethinking of how people get around globally.

Future of EVs

All-electric vehicles have grown dramatically since the Tesla Roadster and Nissan Leaf arrived on the market a little over a decade ago, following the popularity of hybrids.

In 2021 alone, the sales of electric passenger vehicles, including plug-in hybrids, doubled worldwide to 6.6 million, about 9% of all car sales that year.

Strong regulatory policies have encouraged the production of electric vehicles, including California's Zero Emission Vehicle regulation, which requires automakers to produce a certain number of zero-emission vehicles based on their total vehicles sold in California; the European Union's CO2 emissions standards for new vehicles; and China's New Energy Vehicle policy, all of which have helped push EV adoption to where we are today.

Beyond passenger vehicles, many micro-mobility options -- such as autorickshaws, scooters and bikes -- as well as buses, have been electrified. As the cost of lithium-ion batteries decreases, these transportation options will become increasingly affordable and further boost sales of battery-powered vehicles that traditionally have run on fossil fuels.

An important aspect to remember about electrifying the transportation system is that its ability to cut greenhouse gas emissions ultimately depends on how clean the electricity grid is. China, for example, is aiming for 20% of its vehicles to be electric by 2025, but its electric grid is still heavily reliant on coal.

With the global trends toward more renewable generation, these vehicles will be connected with fewer carbon emissions over time. There are also many developing and potentially promising co-benefits of electromobility when coupled with the power system. The batteries within electric vehicles have the potential to act as storage devices for the grid, which can assist in stabilizing the intermittency of renewable resources in the power sector, among many other benefits.

This week's events, particularly those in Brussels and Poland, have left little reason for optimism. There is not a single leader in the world today whose staff is stepping out at the United Nations, in Washington or on the ground in Brussels to correct, walk back or clarify what their country's elected leader truly meant to say. It is unseemly, and it is unprecedented. President Joe Biden made remarks so inflammatory that many believe it could spark further fighting and death in the Ukraine-Russia conflict.

Self-described "gaffe machine" Biden supposedly "ad-libbed" in his speech for regime change in nuclear-armed Russia: "For God's sake, this man cannot remain in power." Secretary of State Antony Blinken, a long-serving Biden aide, swiftly muddled the matter by asserting that the president did not mean what he said.

Was this merely a genuine blunder, or was it a calculated escalation by the same neoconservatives who campaigned for a series of disastrous government overthrows throughout the Obama administration?

It seems to be that Americans, in general -- but particularly those in Washington -- are deafeningly silent over Biden's blunder, something that is far more terrifying than the apparent absence of the president and vice president from the world's

most powerful nation at the moment. I anticipate hearing a seething address from Russian President Vladimir Putin this week regarding Biden's statement. Putin's public statement, which will most likely be linked to some type of action on the battlefield, will almost certainly be far more meaningful and effective than the drivel from his trip to Brussels. After all, the leader of a war-torn nation was seemingly threatened by the leader of the most powerful nation in the world. If Putin is ready to take Russia down with him, then I would expect no less from him than unambiguous action on the battlefield.

In addition, Biden has declared war on "oligarchs." But is it as simple as that? Virtually all of President Volodymyr Zelensky's Ukraine is presently controlled by six Ukrainian oligarchs who came to power after the 1991 Ukrainian Independence Referendum. These six oligarchs control everything from banking to agriculture to energy. On top of this, there are also the revelations of the Pandora Papers, which show that Zelensky himself possesses a series of offshore companies (hastily transferred

after disclosure to wife and friends) whose purposes seem to be a mystery at this point.

These issues are just a few of the many that are occurring at the moment that are a cause for concern: Taiwan's maritime routes and islands are being investigated by China. A new ballistic missile has been launched by North Korea. And individual military units, as well as the logistics infrastructure that comes with them, are being redirected to Ukraine or repositioned within Russia. The two takeaways that posed the greatest threat were Biden's remark to the 82nd Airborne Division -- "when you get to Ukraine" -- and his unambiguous call for a regime change in Russia. Even though Biden is a scattered old man, anyone who has witnessed a parent or elder relative suffer from dementia or Alzheimer's disease understands that in the early stages of these conditions, people rarely say things that are utterly out of character. Instead, they inadvertently and out of focus repeat what they have heard. Biden didn't make these two "missteps" in the spur of the moment, rather he repeated topics that he had witnessed in a prior discussion; regime change and force deployments are undoubtedly on the table, and Biden reiterated what he has heard for weeks.

The United States cannot continue to drift in this direction. Iran is expected to respond this week, and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action negotiations have already been placed on hold. It is extremely likely that they will not agree to a nuclear deal since they see no reason or benefit to doing so. Increased sales to Russia and China, as well as illegal sales through Iraq, are allowing Iran to avoid sanctions. Iran can blend in its crude oil and export it through Iraq with, likely, a million barrels per day. At approximately \$100 per barrel, there is no need to do anything but cash in right now.

The West is headed toward a likely severe food shortage later this summer. The poorest nations would be the first to suffer from the shortage. Few people realize how much grain and other commodities originate from Ukraine; the invasion has caused the planting season to be disrupted. At the moment, the majority of central Ukraine resembles Kansas; it is flat, with cultivated fields stretching as far as the eye can see. Those farms will be dirt in summer, and once the topsoil has dried out from the winter, it will blow away. Crops are required to avoid erosion in these lush farming regions.

It's going to be a long and arduous road to November.

U.S.' existential battle is with internal political parties, not autocracies abroad

By Harlan Ullman,
Arnaud de Borchgrave
UPI

President Joe Biden has monopolized the international megaphone to rally the "world" and the "free world" in an existential struggle against autocracy, as well as to punish Russian President Vladimir Putin's reprehensible, unprovoked attack on Ukraine. But is the "world" fully united on anything or unified around any single issue?

Similarly, what constitutes the "free world?" Or is this an anachronism reflecting an earlier, idealistic perception of a world that largely existed only in Washington minds? And is the fight against autocracy the correct one?

On March 2, the United Nations General Assembly voted to condemn Putin's invasion of Ukraine. The "world" was not unanimous: 141 voted to condemn; 35 abstained; five opposed; and 12 did not vote. The abstentions, including China and India, amounted for about half the global population. And the "world" is even more divided on Russian sanctions.

Brazil, Israel, Mexico and the United Arab Emirates, among others, oppose sanctions. Brazil is unsurprising. Israel has an unholy alliance with Russia so that it is free to strike Hezbollah forces in Syria. Yet, one needs to be careful in relying on the

world to act or using it for consensus.

"Free world" has been used almost promiscuously since World War II. It became universal during the Cold War against monolithic communism. But "free world" did not apply to recruiting America's allies.

States opposing the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the People's Republic of China became honorary members of the Free World club. In NATO, that Portugal and, for a time, Greece were ruled by an autocrat or junta, was not disqualifying: ditto for Hungary and Turkey today. In the Vietnam War, the South was also an adopted member of the "free world," along with South Korean and Filipino allies. And in the 1991 and 2003 Iraq wars, despite the size of the coalitions that were arrayed against Saddam Hussein, neither consisted of only "free world" states.

About the existential battle today, as Biden puts it, between democracy and autocracy, what is different from World War II and the Cold War? Autocracy means rule by one. While Joseph Stalin and Mao Zedong fit that category, successive Soviet regimes were collective leaderships and did not. And Mao's dominance was bypassed for a time.

Russia under Putin and China under Xi Jinping seem to be autocracies. But, and this is critical, the flaws and weaknesses in Russian and Chinese polit-

ical systems have been discounted or ignored. While the failings of democracy are real, their cause is the inability of many governments to provide credible governance and not of democracy. As the credibility of democratic governments to govern declined, possibly in some cases precipitously, the viability of democracy has been wrongly brought into greater question.

But autocracies have profound contradictions and inherent problems that limit their reach and scope with possibly existential consequences. In autocracies, one-man rule leads to elemental questions of succession and control. No one leader is always infallible and correct. Mistakes and errors will lead to dissent no matter how latent. A long rule deprives others from leadership. And who replaces the leader?

Russia has a few but only a few advantages. It is a nuclear and energy superpower. It has a highly technically educated cadre. And it has a rich history and culture. However, Russia lacks a diverse economy that will only deteriorate as sanctions bite. And it is still politically corrupt and brittle. Both imploded the Soviet Union.

China faces huge challenges, as well: a huge debt; a shadow banking system that exacerbates debt; a real estate bubble on which its economy depends; and massive corruption. The aging population created

a demographic crisis with fewer younger Chinese to fill working force numbers. And unless China's economy grows at a rapid pace above inflation, the needs of the enormous underclass of 400 million-500 million will not be met.

What to do? Simple: Relocate the terms "world" and "free world" to emeritus status and take more seriously the possible fatal flaws and limitations of China, Russia and other autocracies such as North Korea. Iran is different. No one, not even the grand ayatollah, is entirely in charge as are Xi, Putin and Kim Jong Un.

America is NOT in an existential battle with autocracy. America is in an existential battle with two political parties that seem equally incapable of fulfilling the preamble of the Constitution "to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare and secure the blessing of liberty to ourselves and our posterity." This is the greater danger confronting democracy, not a few autocracies.

Harlan Ullman is senior adviser at Washington's Atlantic Council, the prime author of "shock and awe" and author of "The Fifth Horseman and the New MAD: How Massive Attacks of Disruption Became the Looming Existential Danger to a Divided Nation and the World at Large." Follow him @harlankullman.



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Abortion

continued from page 1

Legislature adjourns. The Post reported Oklahoma law's future will likely depend on the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling on Mississippi's 15-week abortion ban.

The Oklahoma House's

vote coincided with a planned abortion rights protest on the Oklahoma State Capitol steps.

Tamya Cox-Touré, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Oklahoma, said the state is "facing an abortion access crisis," with seven anti-abortion bills currently under con-

sideration in the Legislature.

"These harmful bills are an alarming reminder that the days of access to safe and legal abortion may be numbered, and we must continue to fight to guarantee all people have access to the essential health care they need, including abortion," she said.



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Gas

continued from page 1

“As oil prices rise and Americans are hurting, the six oil companies testifying today made more than \$75 billion in profits between them last year,” said House Energy and Commerce Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr., D-N.J., in his opening statement.

“In fact, on Monday Exxon announced that its first quarter profits may be more than \$9 billion. That’s higher than last year’s first quarter profits of \$8.8 billion. All these profits while Americans are getting taken for a ride at the gas pump.”

Republican ranking member Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., shot back calling the surging gasoline prices “President Biden’s price hike.”

“Today is purely political,” Rodgers said in her opening statement. “President Biden needs cover for his war on American energy that has caused gas prices to skyrocket. First, the administration tried blaming Putin. They called it the ‘Putin Price Hike.’

“But anyone who has been filling up their tank since last January knows this is not true. The average gas price when President Biden took office was \$2.38 and it climbed over a dollar a gallon more well before the invasion.”

Executives from some of the world’s largest oil companies were called to the hearing before the House energy and commerce committee titled, “Gouged at the Gas Station: Big Oil and America’s Pain at the Pump.”

Speakers included BP America President David Lawler, Chevron CEO Michael Wirth, Devon Energy Corp. CEO Richard Muncrief, Exxon Mobil CEO Darren Woods, Pioneer Natural Resources CEO Scott Sheffield and Shell USA President Gretchen Watkins.

Lawler said BP was already moving swiftly to low carbon energy investment, saying it will soon put up to \$6 billion into clean energy sources, representing about one-third of its total investments.

Wirth said Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is an added challenge to the oil industry already strained by the coronavirus pandemic. He added that Chevron does not control the market prices for



The rise in gas prices has corresponded with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, which prompted a surge in crude oil prices President Joe Biden has also banned imports of Russian-made oil to tighten the screws economically against Moscow for its bloody campaign.

File Photo by Terry Schmitt/UPI

petroleum or national gas. “We have no tolerance for price gouging,” Wirth said. “We are pursuing the responsible development of oil and gas while investing to advance a lower carbon future.”

The rhetoric over a lower carbon future did not sit well with Democrats who claimed the industries were not moving to those futures fast enough. Republicans, on the other hand, said actions of Democrats and Biden have made the United States much more dependent on foreign oil, including from Russia.

U.S. gas prices have been on the rise over the past several weeks, with the national average reaching a record high of \$4.32 per gallon on March 8, according to AAA. Prices are highest in California, at an average of \$5.82 per gallon, and are above \$5 in two other states -- Hawaii (\$5.23) and Nevada (\$5.16).

A fueling station in Furnace Creek, Calif., posted what are believed to be the highest prices anywhere in the nation -- around \$9 per gallon.

There are a number of factors that go into what determines the final cost of gasoline -- state taxes, proximity to refineries, national and global market fluctuations and supply and production conditions.

The rise in prices also has corresponded with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, which prompted a surge in crude oil prices, with West Texas Intermediate -- the U.S. benchmark -- reaching as high as \$123.70. President Joe Biden has also banned imports of Russian-made oil to tighten the screws economically against

Moscow for its bloody campaign.

Nonetheless, there are concerns among lawmakers and consumers about possible gas price gouging -- a situation in which gas companies or station owners exploit a particular situation to hike prices at the pump beyond what the market says they should be. These concerns have been amplified by reports of record or near-record profits from the oil companies.

The executives largely agreed that increasing the oil supply represents an effective means to quell the rising gasoline costs, which Biden has tried to do by tapping into the U.S. strategic reserve. The president announced last week that he’s ordered an extra 1 million barrels per day from the reserve for the next six months -- a move that amounts to the release of 180 million barrels.

AAA said Biden’s move has had an impact on gas prices.

“[The release] helped send the global oil price tumbling to near \$100 [per barrel],” it wrote Tuesday. “The national average for a gallon of gas has fallen to \$4.18.”

“The upward push on oil prices caused by Russia’s war in Ukraine is meeting stronger downward pressure from the planned [reserve] oil release and increased COVID fears in China,” added AAA spokesman Andrew Gross. “And lower global oil prices are reflected in falling pump prices for consumers in the U.S.”

According to AAA on Wednesday, the national average fell further to \$4.16 per gallon.

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Korea

continued from page 1

2017.

Analysts believe that North Korea’s long-range missiles have the range to reach the entire continental United States with a nuclear warhead.

Officials have also detected heightened activity at North Korea’s Punggye-ri nuclear test site in recent months, suggesting a forth-

coming detonation.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said at the hearing on Tuesday that the United States must “remain vigilant” to the danger from North Korea.

“We face persistent threats from North Korea, with its nuclear arsenal and developing missile capability,” Austin said.

President Joe Biden is seeking a \$773 billion defense budget for 2023, which would be an increase

of 4%.

The budget is necessary to focus on the “pacing challenge of China,” Austin said in an earlier statement.

“It preserves our readiness and deterrent posture against the threats we face today: the acute threat of an aggressive Russia and the constantly emerging threats posed by North Korea, Iran, and violent extremist organizations.”

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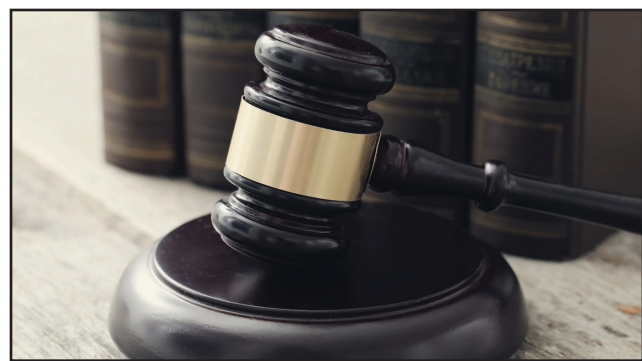
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UAE sentences woman to death for possession of 500 grams of cocaine

By Daniel Uria
UPI

A court in the United Arab Emirates sentenced an Israeli woman who was convicted of cocaine possession to death Tuesday.

The woman, identified as 43-year-old photography studio owner Fidaa Kiwan, was arrested a week after arriving in Dubai for work about a year ago after police found 500 grams of cocaine in the apartment in which she was staying.

She has denied that the drugs were hers, and her lawyer is expected to appeal the court's decision.

"The case is known and we are handling it through the consular service and our representatives in the Emirates," the Israeli Foreign Ministry said.

Officials with knowledge of the case told the Times of Israel they expect the sentence to be reduced to a long prison term following the appeal.

The United Arab Emirates is known for strict anti-drug laws but its death sentences are not often enforced and are instead often converted to lengthy prison sentences.

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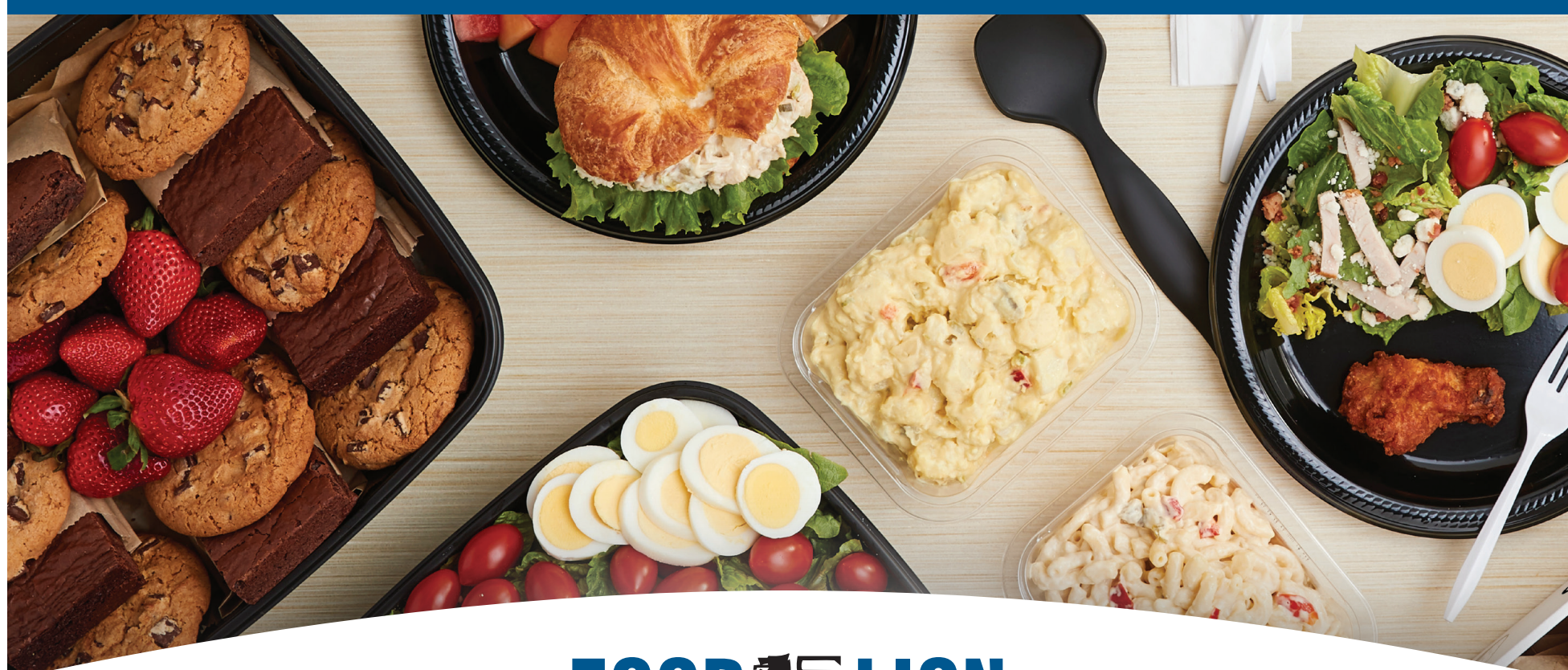
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German, U.S. authorities seize world's largest darknet marketplace

By Darryl Coote
UPI

Authorities in Germany and the United States have seized and shuttered Hydra Market, the world's largest and longest-running darknet marketplace, on accusations it functioned as a criminal trading platform for narcotics, money laundering and other nefarious goods and services.

In conjunction with the move, the U.S. Treasury unveiled sanctions against the marketplace and a cryptocurrency exchange while the Justice Department indicted Hydra's hosting provider.

The Russian-language Hydra Market, located in

Germany, ran on the darknet, a network only accessible via specialized software and tools, allowing vendors to surreptitiously create accounts to advertise their illegal products that ranged from drugs to false identification documents, such as U.S. passports and driver's licenses.

Some vendors also sold hacking tools and services where buyers could choose their targets for cyberattacks while others sold stolen financial information.

German officials said the market consisted of more than 19,000 vendors and about 17 million registered buyers who traded exclusively on the platform in cryptocurrencies.

The market has been accessible via the darknet since 2015, with its revenue growing from 10 million the following year to \$1.3 billion in 2020, according to U.S. officials.

In total, the market has received \$5.2 billion, and represented about 80% of all cryptocurrency transactions on darknet markets last year, they added.

Authorities seized the market Tuesday morning following an investigation launched in August of last year by Germany's Criminal Police Office and its Central Office for Combating Cybercrime along with U.S. law enforcement.

Cryptocurrency wallets containing about \$25 mil-



Since Hydra was seized Tuesday, visitors to the site have been greeted by a banner informing them of the joint action between the U.S. and German authorities to take down the illicit marketplace. **Photo courtesy of Bundeskriminalamt**

lion in bitcoin were also grabbed in the joint operation, authorities said.

Visitors to the market since the seizure have been greeted by a banner informing them in English, German and Russian of the law enforcement operation.

"This coordinated action sends a clear message to anyone attempting to operate or support an online criminal enterprise under the cover of the darkweb," U.S. Attorney Stephanie Hinds for the Northern District of California said in a statement. "The darkweb is not a place criminals can operate with impunity or hide from U.S. law enforcement, and we will continue to use our sophisticated tools and expertise to dismantle and disable darknet markets."

U.S. federal prosecutors in conjunction with the seizure also announced charges against Dmitry Olegovich Pavlov, a 30-year-old Russian resident, for operating Promservice, the company that administered Hydra's servers.

The indictment states that starting in 2013 Pavlov managed domain servers for two Russian online drug forums that merged to create Hydra in 2015 in order to compete against a now-shuttered Russian darknet market. Prosecutors accuse Pavlov of administering Hydra's leased servers from at least November 2015, allowing it to function as an illicit marketplace and in return received cryptocurrency payments.

"He conspired with the other operators of Hydra to further the sites success by providing the critical infrastructure that allowed Hydra to operate and thrive in a competitive darknet market environment," the indictment states, adding that he allowed it to reap commissions worth millions of dollars from illicit sales.

Pavlov has been charged with one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering and one count of conspiracy to distribute narcotics.

The charges follow undercover law enforcement agents buying some 5 grams of methamphetamine and having it sent to a San Francisco post office box. The package originated in Ukraine and its contents were confirmed via laboratory analysts.

The undercover agents then used Hydra's Bitcoin money laundering service to launder .015 Bitcoins, which Hydra remitted to a wallet of the agents' choosing after taking its commission.

Proof of Pavlov's involvement with hosting the marketplace consists of invoices prosecutors said he received from a commercial data center.

"The Justice Department will be relentless in our efforts to hold accountable those who violate our laws -- no matter where they are located or how they try to hide their crimes," Attorney General Merrick Garland said.

Hydra was also sanctioned Tuesday by the U.S. Treasury in a coordinated effort with German partners to disrupt cybercrime.

An Office of Foreign Assets Control investigation has identified some \$8 million in ransomware proceeds that have transited through the markets virtual accounts including from Sodinokibi, also known as REvil, the Russia gang accused of netting some \$11 million from major meat producer JBS after forcing its plants to shutter last spring.

The office in sanctioning Hydra also identified more than 100 virtual currency addresses associated with its operations that have been used for illicit transactions.



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U.S. announces additional \$100M in military aid to Ukraine

By Darryl Coote
UPI

The Biden administration announced late Tuesday a drawdown of \$100 million in security assistance for Ukraine.

President Joe Biden approved the drawdown of anti-armor systems valued at up to \$100 million from Defense Department stockpiles, bringing the total value of arms, equipment and supplies given to the

besieged Eastern European nation to more than \$2.4 billion since the beginning of the administration and \$1.7 billion since the invasion began.

"The world has been shocked and appalled by the atrocities committed by Russia's forces in Bucha and across Ukraine," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement. "Ukraine's forces bravely continue to defend their country and their freedom,

and the United States, along with our allies and partners, stand steadfast in support of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

The announcement comes on the heels of Biden and his national security advisor, Jake Sullivan, separately telling reporters Monday that the United States will continue to arm Ukraine after the revelation over the weekend that hundreds of civilians in the Kyiv region, including the

city of Bucha, were brutally executed by retreating Russian forces.

Ukrainian officials have said 410 charred bodies were found in cities and suburbs surrounding the capital, posting graphic images and video of dead and bloodied Ukrainians with hands tied behind their backs and littered upon roads.

The Biden administration is working "around the clock" to fulfill Ukraine's

main security assistance requests, Sullivan said Monday with Blinken stating in his Tuesday statement that they will supply Ukraine's "urgent need for additional anti-armor systems" without specifying the weapons.

To date, the United States has conducted six drawdowns for Ukraine since August of last year.

The Defense Department on Friday also announced a \$300 million security assistance package that included laser-guided rocket systems, switchblade tactical unmanned aerial systems and others under the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, which differs from a presidential drawdown from Pentagon reserves as it procures the items from companies.

On March 16, Biden announced an additional \$800 million drawdown package of 800 stinger anti-aircraft systems, 2,000 javelin missiles, 20

million rounds of small arms ammunition and the like.

More than 30 countries have provided similar assistance to Ukraine since Russia invaded the country early Feb. 24.

The announcement also was made amid a growing push from democratic nations following the week-end revelations of atrocities committed in the Kyiv region to impose further sanctions against Russia and to hold its leadership, including President Vladimir Putin, to account for war crimes.

"As we strengthen Ukraine's position on the battlefield and at the negotiating table, we will also work with our allies and partners to gather information to document reported abuses and make it available to the appropriate bodies to hold those responsible to account," Blinken said.



The Biden administration announced Monday that it is supplying Ukraine with up to \$100 million in military assistance from U.S. defense inventories.
File Photo by Sgt. Michelle Reif/U.S. Marine Corps



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Barbara Gaskins Relaunches Congressional Campaign in New NC-03

Washington, NC- Today, Barbara Gaskins re-launched her campaign for Congress in the newly formed 3rd Congressional District. Currently held by Greg Murphy, the new NC-03 was formed after a contentious redistricting process that faced multiple court challenges.

On the topic of her re-launch, Ms. Gaskins released the following statement:

"I'm running to amplify our voice, solve our

problems, and fight for our future - together. Our community needs a leader who will fight to protect our democratic process, not discard it. Unlike our current representative, I will not be your typical politician. Instead of making empty promises, I will actually get to work solving our community's problems once elected. I know firsthand what needs to be addressed, because my roots in East North Carolina run deep and my community

work shows my dedication to improve my community. My family has lived here since the 1700's and has built a legacy of hard-work, perseverance, and community service. I'm humbled and honored to carry that legacy with me to Congress to be the voice of change for the people of ENC."

Ms. Gaskins is running on a community focused platform that prioritizes fair redistricting reform, rebuilding Eastern North

Carolina's middle class, investing in infrastructure revitalization, expanding broadband, improving healthcare, improving our children's education, and creating a fair criminal justice and policing system. When elected, Ms. Gaskins will be the first black woman to represent NC-03.



Photo by Kevin Lowery

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Biden nominates Linda Fagan to command Coast Guard

By Rich Klein
UPI

President Joe Biden has nominated Admiral Linda L. Fagan to lead the U.S. Coast Guard as its next commandant, which would make her the first woman to lead any branch of the U.S. military services.

Fagan, the first woman in American military service to achieve four stars, currently serves as second in command behind Admiral Karl Schultz, who is scheduled to retire in May.

One year ago, when Fagan was nominated as Vice Admiral, Schultz described Fagan as “an outstanding leader with 36 years of Coast Guard operations, pol-

icy-making, joint service, and interagency experience.”

On Tuesday, he confirmed her nomination on Twitter.

“Admiral Fagan is an exceptional senior Coast Guard officer and nominee, possessing the keen intellect, the depth of operational experience, and the well-honed leadership and managerial acumen to serve with distinction as our Service’s 27th Commandant,” Schultz said.

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said Tuesday in a statement that Fagan is “a tremendous leader, trailblazer, and respected public servant who will lead the Coast Guard across its critical missions with honor. Over Adm. Fagan’s 36

years in the Coast Guard, she has served on seven continents, was previously commander of the Coast Guard Pacific Area, and is the officer with the longest service record in the marine safety field.”

She holds a bachelor’s degree in Marine Science from the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, a master’s in Marine Affairs from the University of Washington, and a master’s in National Resource Strategy from the Industrial College of the Armed Forces.

Schultz also confirmed on Twitter that Fagan has selected and Biden has nominated Vice Admiral Steve Poulin to become vice commandant of the Coast Guard.



Admiral Linda L. Fagan was nominated by President Joe Biden to lead the U.S. Coast Guard, which would make her the first woman to lead any branch of the American military services. Photo courtesy of Coast Guard

Hong Kong arrests 6 on sedition charges for creating a ‘nuisance’ in court

By Thomas Maresca
UPI

Hong Kong police arrested six people Wednesday on charges of violating a colonial-era sedition law by allegedly causing a “nuisance” at court hearings in December and January.

The police did not release the names of the individuals, only identifying them as four men and two women with ages ranging from 32 to 67.

“The arrested persons are suspected of having purposely caused nuisance during their attendance for hearing in different courts,” the Hong Kong Police Force said in a statement.

The six are being detained for further investigation, the police said. A conviction carries a prison sentence of two years.

Local media reported that the arrested included Leo Tang, former vice-chairman of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions, and Siew Yun-long, a citizen journalist.

The trade union group



Hong Kong police arrested six people on charges of sedition, which carries a sentence of two years, over allegedly creating a “nuisance” during court hearings. File Photo by Miguel Candela/EPA-EFE

had operated in Hong Kong for more than three decades and played a central role in the pro-democracy movement that swept through the semi-autonomous city in 2019.

However, it disbanded in September under pressure from a sweeping national security law imposed by Beijing that has been used to target activists, opposition politicians, independent media and civil society organizations.

Beijing bypassed the Hong Kong legislature to enact the law in July 2020,

claiming it was necessary to restore order to a city that had been roiled by protests.

The arrests Wednesday were carried out under an older law against sedition that has been on the books since Hong Kong was a British colony and until recently had not been used for decades.

Authorities have started leveling sedition charges with increasing frequency over the past several months, however, with targets ranging from journalists at pro-democracy media outlets to pop singer

Tommy Yuen, who posted comments on social media criticizing the government’s handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A total of 183 people have been arrested for alleged national security crimes, including sedition, since July 2020, according to data collected by the Center on U.S.-China Relations at the Asia Society.

“The vast majority of arrests targeted activities that would be considered peaceful and constitutionally-protected exercise of basic political and civil rights in other jurisdictions,” the Center wrote on its ChinaFile site. “In fact, such activities would have been protected in Hong Kong itself prior to the [national security law’s] enactment in July 2020.”

In 2020, the United States sanctioned eleven officials for “undermining Hong Kong’s autonomy and restricting the freedom of expression or assembly of the citizens” in response to the security law.

Former Virginia police officer faces trial for Jan. 6 riots

By Daniel Uria
UPI

Lawyers for a former Virginia police officer facing felony charges for participating in the Jan. 6, 2021, riots said he only entered the Capitol Building that day to retrieve his friend.

Thomas Robertson has pleaded not guilty to five felony charges and a misdemeanor, including attempting to obstruct Congress from certifying the results of the 2020 presidential election, interfering with police during a civil disorder and obstruction of justice for his actions during the riots.

Prosecutors said Robertson used a long wooden pole in clashes with police at the Capitol and later entered the building, then boasted about his actions on social media.

“There was chaos, broken glass everywhere and alarms blaring,” Assistant U.S. Attorney Elizabeth Aloï told the court. “He took a victory lap.”

Aloï added that Robertson “had been clear in his calls for violence,” referencing messages and social media posts he sent ahead of the riots and saying he brought a large wooden stick and three gas masks along for the trip to Washington, D.C.

“I’ve spent most of my adult life fighting a counter insurgency. I’m about to become part of one, and a very effective one,” a Facebook post by Robertson read.

Defense Attorney Camille Wagner said Robertson, whom she referred to as T.J., never attempted to interfere with police or the election count and that he only entered the build-

ing to help his friend and fellow former officer, Jacob Fracker, who has pleaded guilty to the charges against him and will testify against Robinson.

“You’re not going to see T.J. engaging in any violence. You’re not going to see T.J. damaging any property,” said Wagner.

She said Robertson, a combat veteran, was injured by gunfire in an ambush in Afghanistan in 2011, leaving him with a limp. The injury is why he brought the wooden pole, which she described as a “walking stick,” to the Capitol.

“It is used because of the serious injuries that he suffered while in Afghanistan,” Wagner said.

She added that he never held it out and that it became stuck in an officer’s gun belt at one point due to the pushing in the crowd.

“Let’s just say things were very chaotic,” Wagner said. “There is a wild crowd behind him that is pushing and pushing and pushing.”

Wagner also sought to downplay Robertson’s comments on social media.

“Social media is not reality. You can be or say anything you want on social media,” she said. “Hey, anything for the ‘gram or Facebook. It’s not reality.”

She seemed to suggest that Robertson will testify in his own defense, saying “T.J. is going to admit to you his wrongs.”

Fracker’s testimony is expected to counter the defense’s claims as he has agreed to testify that Robertson brought gas masks and other tactical gear and used the wooden stick in clashes with police.

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Tampa Bay Buccaneers' Bruce Arians steps down as head coach

By Connor Grott
UPI

Bruce Arians has stepped down as head coach of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers after three seasons, it was announced Wednesday.

Arians told ESPN, NBC Sports and the Los Angeles Times that he is shifting into a front-office role within the Buccaneers organization. Arians' new role as a "senior football consultant" will begin with Tampa Bay's 2022 draft prep.

The Buccaneers later confirmed Arians' decision and named current defensive coordinator Todd Bowles as the team's next head coach.

"When Bruce arrived in Tampa Bay three years ago, he spoke about establishing a winning culture and adding another Super



Tampa Bay Buccaneers head coach Bruce Arians (R), shown Sept. 26, 2021, coached the franchise to a Super Bowl championship less than 14 months ago. **File Photo by Jon SooHoo/UPI**

Bowl championship for our community," Bucs owner Joel Glazer said in a statement. "He delivered on both of those promises, and

our family is deeply appreciative for all that he has accomplished during his time as our head coach. "As impressive as his coach-

ing accomplishments have been, his legacy will live on through the doors of opportunity that he has opened for minority coaches and women in football. We support Bruce's decision to transition from the sidelines and look forward to continuing to lean on his vast football knowledge and experience well into the future.

"On behalf of all Buccaneers fans, I would like to thank Bruce for all that he has done for this franchise and our community."

Arians explained the reasoning behind his decision in a phone interview with NBC Sports and the L.A. Times.

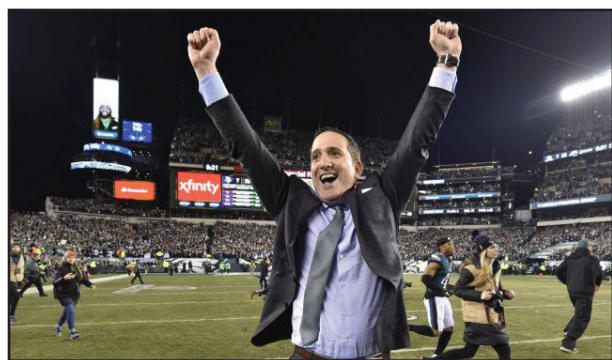
"Succession has always been huge for me," Arians told the outlets. "With the organization in probably the best shape it's been in its history, with Tom Brady com-

ing back ... I'd rather see Todd in position to be successful and not have to take some [crappy] job.

"I'm probably retiring next year anyway in February. So, I control the narrative right now. I don't control it next February because [if] Brady gets hurt, we go 10-7, and it's an open interview for the job. I got 31 [coaches and their] families that depend on me. My wife is big on not letting all those families down."

Arians took over as the Buccaneers' coach in January 2019 after a brief one-year retirement. Before his short hiatus, he served as the Arizona Cardinals' head coach from 2013-17.

In three seasons at the helm, Arians led the Buccaneers to a 31-18 regular-season record and a victory in Super Bowl LV.



Saints acquire second 2022 first-round pick in trade with Eagles

By Alex Butler
UPI

The New Orleans Saints acquired an additional second-round pick in the 2022 NFL Draft through a trade with the Philadelphia Eagles, the teams announced.

The Eagles and Saints completed the swap Monday. The Saints will send the Eagles the No. 18 overall pick, in addition to third- and seventh-round picks in 2022, a 2023 first-round pick and a 2024 second-round pick.

The Eagles will send the Saints the No. 16 and No. 19 overall picks and a sixth-round pick in 2022.

For clarity, the Saints now own two total first-round selections in the draft. The Eagles went from three first-round picks in 2022 to two selections, as a result of the swap.

The Jacksonville Jaguars own the No. 1 overall pick in the draft. The Detroit Lions, Houston Texans, New York Jets, New York Giants, Carolina Panthers, Giants, Atlanta Falcons, Seattle Seahawks and Jets follow in the Top 10. The Washington Commanders, Minnesota Vikings, Houston Texans, Baltimore Ravens, Eagles, Saints, Los Angeles Chargers, Eagles, Saints and Pittsburgh Steelers own pick Nos. 11 through 20.

The New England Patriots, Green Bay Packers, Arizona Cardinals, Dallas Cowboys, Buffalo Bills, Tennessee Titans, Tampa Bay Buccaneers and Packers own pick Nos. 21 through 28. The Kansas City Chiefs own pick Nos. 29 and 30, followed by the Cincinnati Bengals and Lions.

The 2022 NFL Draft will be April 28 through 30 in Las Vegas. Edge rushers Aidan Hutchinson, Travon Walker and Kayvon Thibodeaux, cornerback Sauce Gardner, offensive tackles Ickey Ekwonu, Evan Neal and Charles Cross, safety Kyle Hamilton and wide receiver Garrett Wilson are among the top prospects.

Six attorneys general warn NFL over workplace harassment claims

By Simon Druker
UPI

Attorneys general from six U.S. states said Tuesday, they will investigate the National Football League over concerns about workplace harassment, particularly against women and minorities.

Offices from Massachusetts, New York, Illinois, Washington, Oregon and Minnesota sent a letter to NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell, outlining their concerns over anti-discrimination laws that protect workers and saying they will use "the full weight of our authority" if the league doesn't address the issues.

"We all watched in horror in 2014 when the video of Ray Rice striking, knocking out, and spitting on his fiancé was made public. In the aftermath, you promised to take gender violence seriously and improve the institutional culture for women at the N.F.L.," the letter reads.

"These recent allegations suggest that you have not."

Specifically, the six are referring to allegations made by several former



Rep. Rashida Tlaib, D-Mich., said Tuesday that passing Build Back Better and ending the filibuster could advance a progressive agenda in a response to the State of the Union address. **File Photo by Sarah Silbiger/UPI**

league employees.

"We write to express our grave concerns about the recent allegations in the New York Times by over thirty former employees of the National Football League, who described a workplace culture that is overtly hostile to women," the letter states.

It refers to several examples, including female employees being forced to watch the video of Rice attacking his fiancé.

"Anti-discrimination

laws in many states, including New York, prohibit employers from subjecting domestic violence victims, as well as women and people of color, to a hostile work environment," it states.

Women have also described unwanted touching from male supervisors, parties where prostitutes were hired, being passed over for promotions based on their gender, and being pushed out for complaining about discrimination.

"All of this is entirely unacceptable and potentially unlawful. The N.F.L. must do better -- pink jerseys are not a replacement for equal treatment and full inclusion of women in the workplace. Our offices will use the full weight of our authority to investigate and prosecute allegations of harassment, discrimination, or retaliation by employers throughout our states, including at the National Football League," the letter reads.

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SpaceX completes static fire test ahead of first private astronaut mission to ISS

By Amy Thompson
UPI

SpaceX on Wednesday completed a static fire test ahead of its launch of the first-ever private mission to the International Space Station, Axiom-1.

The mission, dubbed Axiom-1, will see a crew of four citizens strap into a Crew Dragon capsule and blast off on a 10-day flight where they will conduct a number of research investigation onboard the orbital outpost. The launch, scheduled for Friday at 11:17 a.m. EDT, will see a two-stage Falcon 9 rocket will blast off from Pad 39A here at NASA's Kennedy Space Center. Less than 24-hours later, at 6:45 a.m. EDT, the capsule will dock itself to the space station.

Weather officials at Cape Canaveral Space Force Station currently predict there's an 80% chance of favorable weather for launch on Friday, but teams continue to monitor the weather all along the launch corridor.



The Axiom-1 crew practices launch day procedures ahead of a planned Friday morning launch. Photo by Axiom Space/Twitter

A cold front is expected to move in overnight, bringing with it potential for upper level winds and iffy weather along the rocket's trajectory. SpaceX said teams will ensure the booster can make a safe landing, and that the crew is able to abort safely if an anomaly pops up during flight.

To ensure the rocket was ready

to fly, SpaceX on Wednesday briefly fired up the Falcon 9's first stage engines while holding the rocket in place.

This type of test allows engineers to review data collected from the vehicle's various systems, with the rocket company confirming it is ready to launch.

Earlier that morning, the Axiom-1 crew of Michael López-

Alegría, a retired NASA astronaut; Larry Connor, a real estate and technology entrepreneur; Mark Pathy, a Canadian businessman; and Eytan Stibbe, an Israeli entrepreneur and former fighter jet pilot, ran through day of launch procedures.

Called a dry dress, the crew practiced the steps they would complete on launch day, including suiting up and strapping into the rocket.

Up next for the Axiom mission will be a launch readiness review on Thursday. This will be the determining factor for whether the mission gets the final green light to proceed with launch day activities.

The mission has faced myriad delays, including a several-day wait for NASA to carry out prelaunch testing on its next mega moon rocket, the Space Launch System, which sits on an adjacent launch pad.

That test ran into several anomalies, resulting in the teams pausing the testing long enough for Axiom-1 to get off the ground.

That's mainly because Axiom-1 is a 10-day mission that will fly to the ISS.

The space station has a variety of docking ports that are meant to support different types of vehicles.

SpaceX's Crew Dragon spacecraft happens to be fully autonomous, able to park itself at one of two specialized docking ports designed to fit this specific spacecraft. Currently, the other empty space is occupied by the current crew residing on the ISS.

Axiom-1 needs to complete its mission before NASA's next crew of astronauts -- NASA astronauts Jessica Watkins, Bob Hines and Kjell Lindgren, along with Italian astronaut Samatha Cristoforetti -- can launch on their own six-month mission.

Dubbed Crew-4, the mission is currently scheduled to launch no earlier than April 20. NASA is hoping to get the Crew-4 astronauts on station and acquainted with their surrounding before sending the Crew-3 astronauts home at the end of April.

Wildfire danger to accompany record-challenging heat in California

By Alyssa Smithmyer
UPI

A wave of warmth is set to build over the western United States from Wednesday to Saturday, putting multiple records at risk of being broken and increasing the fire threat as temperatures climb well above average.

"An unusually strong ridge of high pressure for early spring will be strengthening off the West Coast," AccuWeather Senior Meteorologist Heather Zehr said.

Forecasters say that while this area of high pressure will continue to strengthen and shift inland Wednesday, the strong offshore winds will provide a rush of unseasonably warm and dry air.

By Wednesday, temperatures in portions of Southern California and southwest Arizona are forecast to surge upwards of 90 degrees Fahrenheit, including heavily populated regions west of the San Gabriel, San Bernardino and San Jacinto Mountains. Downtown Los Angeles is expected to climb past 90 F for the first time since Nov. 13, 2021.

"Temperatures across California will jump about 10 degrees from Tuesday into Wednesday however, they will peak on Thursday and Friday at around 20 degrees above average," noted Zehr.

Multiple locations spanning from the Sacramento Valley to San Diego will soar high enough to threaten daytime high records on Thursday and Friday.

"Heat will certainly be building as we move into late week," stated AccuWeather Meteorologist Andrew Kienzle.

Taking a closer look at Southern California, the heat is expected to peak from Thursday to Friday across the Los Angeles Basin, when daytime highs can reach values into the upper 90s F. Desert regions in Southern California will likely experience the highest temperatures from Friday to Saturday. Some locations, such as Palm Springs, California, stand a chance of breaking the 100-degree mark on both days.

Downtown Los Angeles is forecast to reach a high of

94 F on Friday, challenging the daily record for April 8 of 92 F set back in 1989. Farther south, San Diego is forecast to get up to 87 F on Friday, which would tie the previous daily record set in 2014.

Forecasters say that AccuWeather RealFeel® Temperatures will range from 95 to 105 degrees F across much of Southern California during the peak daytime heating hours Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Heat advisories have been issued across portions of Ventura County, the Santa Clarita Valley and San Fernando Valley for 11 a.m. PDT Wednesday through 6 p.m. PDT Friday ahead of the building heat.

In order to avoid heat-related illnesses, residents are encouraged to drink plenty of water, find an air-conditioned environment and avoid strenuous activity when temperatures are at their peak in the middle of the day.

Heat advisories (orange shaded counties) were issued by the National Weather Service (NWS) from 11 a.m. PDT Wednesday, April 6,

through 6 p.m. PDT Friday, April 8.

A clear sky and dry weather will accompany the warm conditions through Thursday before clouds start to spread over the Southwest ahead of this weekend. The Southwest has remained largely rain-free for the last week, with the last observed rainfall in the Los Angeles Basin occurring on March 29.

This is good news for baseball fans anxiously awaiting the first home games of the new season, which include the San Diego Padres hosting the Arizona Diamondbacks Thursday evening and the Oakland Athletics hosting the Philadelphia Phillies Friday afternoon.

According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, widespread regions of California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona and New Mexico are currently experiencing moderate drought levels. Portions of Central and Northern California, southern Nevada, western Utah, and central New Mexico are facing extreme drought levels.

William C. Shiver Write up 2022

William C. Shiver is an everyday man working for every day people. He is a native of Pitt County and has lived in the city of Greenville for over 20 years. He grew up in the Hillsdale community, close to the Pitt/Greenville Airport. He attended Sally Branch Elementary School (now Belvoir Elementary), Belvoir High School and was in the first graduating class at North Pitt High

School in Bethel, N.C. Shiver received his Bachelor of Science in Health and Physical Education with a minor in Business from Elizabeth City State University where he also excelled in basketball.

William Shiver is a public servant and family man who is married to his lovely wife Gale of 27 years. He and Gale are the founders and owners of Sure Foundation Behavioral Health Services, LLC. They offer an array of counseling services to the community. Over the last 24 months Shiver organized volunteers for Community Impact and collaborated with other community services, organizing over 30 COVID-19 testing sites, delivering over 1,000 food boxes and COVID-19 assistance checks to over 300 individuals and families affected by COVID-19.

In 2009, they launched the Kings Table TV Broadcast Ministry, teaching and sharing the Word of God on the local public access channel to date. Shiver is the author of "Day of Christ Return: The Alpha & Omega" and served as Senior Pastor of Shield of Faith Outreach Ministry for more than 16 years here in West Greenville preaching and teaching the Word of God. Through his outreach, Shiver helped many people as they faced some of life's most difficult challenges. Pastor Shiver also served as the administrator for the Shield of Faith Fellowship of churches in California assisting pastors of more than 500 churches on the behalf of the organizations Bishop.

William Shiver has always been known as a fierce advocate for positive change in the community including establishing Community Impact Organization in 1989, a non-profit that developed the first of its kind all day out of school suspension program in the nation, and a community substance abuse prevention program in his earlier years.

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