

National Edition
Upper Midwest: Sunshine after morning heavy rain. High in upper 70s to middle 80s. Clear tonight. Lows in 50s to 60s. Sunny tomorrow. Weather map appears on Page A15.

E.U. Confident It Can Escape Energy Crisis

Steps Appear to Blunt Putin's Gas Power

This article is by Melissa Eddy, Erin Solomon and Anton Troianovski. BERLIN — Not long after Russian forces invaded Ukraine, another mobilization began. European energy ministers and diplomats started jetting across the world and making energy deals — racing to prepare for a rough winter should Russia choose to cut off its cheap gas in retaliation for Western sanctions.

Since then, President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia has fiddled with the gas tap to Europe repeatedly. Through Gazprom, the Kremlin-controlled gas monopoly, Russia has vastly reduced supplies or suspended them for days at a time — until last week, when it announced that it would indefinitely halt flows through the Nord Stream 1 pipeline that supplies Germany, and through it, much of Europe.

Yet when the blow finally came, it proved more ridicule than outrage among European leaders, who say that by now they would expect nothing less from Mr. Putin and that they have accepted that the era of cheap Russian gas is over, unimaginable as that might have seemed just months ago.

In some corners, even as Europe's leaders scramble to blunt the blow from lower gas supplies and higher prices, there is a growing sense that perhaps Russia's weaponizing of gas exports is a strategy of diminishing returns — and that Mr. Putin may have overplayed his hand.



A German fuel site near Poland where Russian gas was halted.

It would have been surprising the other way around. Robert Habeck, Germany's economy minister, said this week of Russia's announcement that Nord Stream 1 would remain shut. "The only thing from Russia that is reliable is the lies."

Even the markets seemed to take the latest disruption in stride. After rising 5 percent on the heels of Gregoire's announcement, prices are now lower than they were at the start of last week.

That does not mean that European nations are not feeling the pain, or have skirted the risk that the energy crunch could sow social unrest, fracturing their unity against the Kremlin this winter. But a lot of the damage has already been done, with gas prices several times above anything that

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Brooklyn D.A. Seeks to Toss Tainted Convictions

By REBECCA DAVIS O'BRIEN and TROY CLARKE. Brooklyn prosecutors are seeking to throw out 37 criminal convictions — mostly low-level drug and traffic offenses, dating to 1999 — that relied on the work of former New York Police Department officers who were later convicted of crimes related to their work.

Misconduct by Officers Cited in 378 Cases

The move is part of an expansive effort by prosecutors across the city to review cases, even decades old, that involved convicted police officers. It reflects a

G.O.P. Field With Little Interest in Compromise

By JONATHAN WEISMAN

Josh Brecheen, an ardent Republican who is virtually assured of victory in November to represent an overwhelmingly red House seat in eastern Oklahoma, has a message that is geared as much toward G.O.P. leaders in Washington as it is toward his party's voters: He's not going to the Capitol to make friends.

"Whenever is elected to this seat will be grounded for conformity into moderate positions and debt spending by the Republican establishment," he proclaims on his campaign website. "Only a rare few won't be at the buffet of compromise."

Mr. Brecheen assures voters he won't be tempted.

As the general election season begins in earnest, the House Republican conference appears destined for a more conservative, fractious future no matter which party wins a majority, thanks to the candidates chosen by voters in the most solidly G.O.P. districts.

Numerous Republican congressmen in battleground districts have taken fringe positions or espoused conspiracy theories. Democrats

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But the judge's blast, far-reaching defense of Mr. Trump's rights as a former president poses a dilemma for Attorney General Merrick B. Garland and his top officials, who want the ruling but controlled the public narrative surrounding the inquiry.

The case presents the department with several tough calls, requiring a careful balance between the desires to speedily resolve the investigation and to limit an expansion of executive power espoused by Mr. Trump's team.

"It is a very hard series of decisions," said Mary McCormack, who held several top positions at the Justice Department from 2014 to 2017 in the Obama administration.

Department officials are expected to oppose the judge's call for the arbor, known as a special master, by a midnight deadline on

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A Presidential Tradition Resumes

The official portraits of the Obamas were unveiled at the White House on Wednesday. Page A17.

FOR VOTER FRAUD, A FEW GO TO JAIL, AS OTHERS DON'T

UNEQUAL PUNISHMENTS

People Who Didn't Mean to Break the Law Are Often Ensnares

By MICHAEL WINES

After 15 years of scrapes with the police, the last thing that 33-year-old Terris L. Conroy needed was another run-in with the law. He got one anyway two years ago, after election officials held a presentation on voting rights for inmates of the county jail in Gainesville, Fla.

Apparently satisfied that he could vote, Mr. Conroy registered after the session, and cast a ballot in 2020. In May, he was arrested for breaking a state law banning voting by people serving felony sentences — and he was sentenced to almost another full year in jail.

This show-no-mercy approach to voter fraud is what got Dan DeStasio, a Republican, has encouraged this year during his reelection campaign. "That was against the law," he said last month about charges against 29 other felons who voted in Florida, "and they're going to pay a price for it."

But many of those cases seem already to be falling apart, because, like Mr. Conroy, the former felons did not intend to vote illegally. And the more typical kind of voter-fraud case in Florida has long exacted punishment at a steep discount.

Last winter, four residents of the Republican-leaning village community The Villages were indicted on charges for voting twice in Florida, and again in other states where they had also lived.

Despite being charged with third-degree felonies, the same as Mr. Conroy, two of the Villages residents pleaded guilty to the crime by taking a 24-hour civic class. Others are pending for the other two.

Florida is an exaggerated version of America as a whole. A review by The New York Times of some 400 voting-fraud charges filed nationwide since 2017 underscores what critics of fraud crackdowns have long said: Actual prosecutions are blue-moon events, and other charged people who didn't realize they were breaking the law.

Punishment can be wildly inconsistent. Most violations draw wrist-slaps, while a few high-profile prosecutions produce draconian sentences. Penalties often fall heaviest on those least able to mount a defense. Those who are poor and who are men tend to be sent to jail than comfortable retirees facing similar charges.

The high-tech political-ethic behind fraud prosecutions drowns out how infrequent — and inconsistent — the actual prosecutions are, said Richard L.

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'Zero Covid' Pursuit Backs China Into a Corner

Xi's Unwavering Policy Has Hurt Economy

that grows more anomalous by the day as the rest of the world learns to live with the coronavirus. But even as the costs of Chi-

Key county in Ga. still seeks chief of elections

Strife tied to 2020 vote and ongoing harassment make job a tough hire

By MATTHEW BROWN

ATLANTA — It is in many ways an ideal job for a public servant with a passion for democracy — the chance to facilitate voting in Georgia's most populous county, the electoral center of one of the most important political battlegrounds in the nation.

Yet for 10 months, local leaders have been unable to hire a permanent director to run the Department of Registration and Elections in Fulton County, home to Atlanta.

The previous director resigned in November and left the position in April, after pressure from local lawmakers and the turmoil of the 2020 election, when county staff endured death threats, baseless conspiracy theories, high-stakes audits and harassment from former president Donald Trump and his allies.

Now, with Georgia in another highly charged campaign season and poised to play a pivotal role in the next presidential election, many here think the toxic swirl of state politics, national scrutiny, ongoing harassment and long-standing logistical issues has turned off potentially strong candidates and cast a shadow over the office itself.

The staff has worked through the uncertainty under an interim director, but the county has been slow to implement changes mandated by a sweeping new election law; update its voting equipment; make plans with key contractors; and recruit new polling sites and workers for the midterm

SEE GEORGIA ON A4

D.C. officer's recorded chats raise extremism 'red flags'

Anti-racism activist posed as Patriot Front aide to out sympathizers

By PETER HERMANN

On one end of the phone was a D.C. police lieutenant in charge of the intelligence unit. On the other, a man who called himself "Mason," purporting to be a top adviser to the white-nationalist group Patriot Front, and its leader, Thomas Rousseau.

The veteran police supervisor, Shane Lamond, wanted to know when the group planned a return visit to the District, so police could prepare and allow demonstrators to safely protest "without being attacked or harassed," he told the man on the other end of the line.

Mason pressed for intelligence on plots targeting his purported group. And he was interested in learning of police officers "sympa-

For one day, the Obamas turn back the White House clock



Barack and Michelle Obama unveil their official portraits in the East Room of the White House on Wednesday in a ceremony that felt like a grand reunion for the dozens of former staffers who joined the presidential couple. Their moment was delayed for years because President Donald Trump refused to host the tradition. Stories, A5 and C1

Awash in scrutiny, teachers losing public's trust

By HANNAH NATANSON

Americans are losing faith in their schoolteachers. Falling poll numbers tied to pandemic, political criticism, parent activism

The lingering aftershocks of the pandemic have all sapped public confidence in the teaching profession. In January, a Gallup poll found

that Americans' belief in grade-school teachers' honesty had dropped to an all-time low, with 64 percent of adults reporting they believe those instructors are truthful and have ethical standards, down from a high of 75 percent in 2020, during the tensest days of the pandemic.

In January, a Gallup poll found that just 26 percent of Americans have "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in public schools — the second-lowest this figure has been since Gallup began asking this question in 1973. Both polls found divisions along party lines, with Republicans more likely than Democrats to distrust teachers and schools. Seventy-three percent of Democrats and Democratic-leaning individuals gave high honesty and ethics ratings to grade-school teachers, but 64 percent of Republicans

Buses of migrants make D.C. an 'unofficial border town'

Republican governors are making a political statement; those seeking a better life see hope



Alexandra Pizzo, center, and husband David Hernandez at the D.C. hotel room they share with their 11-year-old son and 4-year-old daughter. The family fled Venezuela, eventually reaching Texas. SEE MIGRANTS ON A10

California heat wave tests goals on climate

RESIDENTS FORCED TO CUT ENERGY USE

Power grid in transition carries risk of blackouts

By EVAN HALPER and ERICA WEAVER

California's risk of widespread blackouts this week is forcing millions of residents to keep the grid afloat by jacking up thermostats and shutting off appliances, but they are not the only ones feeling the heat. The lawmakers and regulators behind the state's emphatic embrace of green energy are feeling it, too.

Even before this week's historic September heat wave, the state's wobbly grid, with a history of disrupting political careers, had become a fresh target for critics of California's climate-forward energy policies. The same state that is rushing to rid its roads of gas-powered vehicles was pleading with electric car drivers this week not to recharge during peak hours.

Meanwhile, aging natural-gas-fired generators that California wants to eradicate are being leaned on heavily to keep the lights on. And the state is scrambling to postpone the closure of a nuclear plant that officials earlier said would be made obsolete by sun and wind power.

California is redoubting its commitment — arguing that the culprit of its energy woes is not the aggressive pace of its transition but the climate-change that transition is designed to confront. "We understand we cannot see CALIFORNIA AS A16 Drought's heat: Yields of tomatoes, corn and more have shrunk. A16 SEE TEACHERS ON A3