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Today, sunny, not as warm, lower humidity, high 82. **Tonight**, clear skies, cooler, low 66. **Tomorrow**, plenty of sunshine, humidity remains low, high 84. Weather map is on Page 19.

\$6.00

In the past five years, at least 33 instructors have been charged with misconduct with students, a Times investigation found.

# 'I Felt Trapped': Sexual Abuse in J.R.O.T.C.

### Retired Military Officers Repeatedly Prey on Their Teenage Students

This article is by Mike Baker, Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs and Ilana Marcus.

PICAYUNE, Miss. — With the rifle skills she honed in the Mississippi backwoods, Victoria Bauer had a path to escape the trap of drugs and dead-end jobs she saw most everywhere around her. Her future was in the Marines, she decided, and she had an idea about how to get there.

Across the way from her freshman algebra class, Ms. Bauer approached Steve Hardin, the retired Navy intelligence officer who guided the high school's Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps, a leadership program sponsored by the U.S. military at high schools across the country. He welcomed her into the fold, she said, and seemed interested in how her family, which traced roots back to the Four Winds Cherokee of Louisiana, had been displaced by Hurricane Katrina.

Soon, her 45-year-old J.R.O.T.C. instructor was messaging her on Snapchat late into the night, telling her that it would "drive the guys crazy" if she wore a "small bikini" during the trip to their next out-ofstate shooting competition. Then one night in 2015 as he drove her home from rifle

practice, she told investigators, Mr. Hardin pushed his hand into her pants and penetrated her with his fingers — the start of what she said was months of sexual assaults. Ms. Bauer, who was 15 at the time, feared that resisting him would jeopardize her shot at advancement through the J.R.O.T.C. ranks or a military career.

"I gave all the body-language signals that I didn't want it," Ms. Bauer said in an interview. "I didn't feel like I had a choice." For more than a century, the J.R.O.T.C. program has sought to instill U.S. military values in American teenagers, with classes Continued on Page 16

### Sri Lanka Said To Oust Leader In Mass Revolt

### By SKANDHA GUNASEKARA

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka — With his home overrun by protesters, his powerful family on the run and the nation he once controlled in revolt against him, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa of Sri Lanka agreed to resign on Saturday, according to the country's top law-

Mr. Rajapaksa's apparent decision to step down was the culmination of months of public pressure and protest. Thousands of people on Saturday braved police curfew, fuel shortage and a shutdown of public trains to descend on the capital, Colombo, to register their fury over the government's inability to address a crippling economic crisis.

Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena, the speaker of Parliament and an ally of the president, said Mr. Rajapaksa agreed he would resign on July 13 "to ensure a peaceful transition of power" after the country's top political leaders urged him on Saturday to step down. There was no direct confirmation about the potential resignation from Mr. Rajapaksa, who is in hiding and who has defied pre-

vious calls to leave office. Sri Lanka has run out of foreignexchange reserves for imports of essential items like fuel and medicine, and the United Nations has Continued on Page 5



### A City of Joy and Grief

In Lviv, Ukraine, babies are born just steps away from where fallen soldiers are laid to rest. Page 8.

## A New Hampshire Town's Lesson in Democracy

### By DAN BARRY

CROYDON, N.H. - The tiny New Hampshire town of Croydon fits the New England of the imagination, with its cozy general store, one-room schoolhouse and local museum open by appointment. The only thing missing is supposed to be missing: a stoplight.

But it's not just the Rockwellian setting that makes this community of 800 seem quintessentially

American. People here have just who is pursuing a new career as a experienced a fractious come-to-Jefferson moment that has left many with a renewed appreciation for something they had taken for granted: democracy.

"Showing up. That's the big lesson," said Chris Prost, 37, a Croydon resident who runs a small brewery from a barn at the back of his house. "And not just showing up, but also knowing what's going

Hope Damon, 65, a dietitian

result of her town's recent crisis, agreed. What happened here, she said, "could happen most any-

To understand what happened — and is happening — in Croydon, you should remember the New Hampshire motto: "Live Free or Die." This is, after all, the only state that does not require adults to wear seatbelts.

You also should know that New Continued on Page 13

**NEWS ANALYSIS** 

## Ukraine War Now a Battle Of Endurance

Global Fatigue Testing Commitments of West

#### By PETER BAKER and DAVID E. SANGER

WASHINGTON — Another day, another weapons shipment: On Friday, the Pentagon announced a new transfer of precision-guided shells and multiple rocket launchers to Ukraine, the latest armaments heading east. But will there come a day when that system begins to slow?

More than four months after Russia invaded Ukraine, a war that was expected to be a Russian blitzkrieg only to turn into a debacle for Moscow has now evolved into a battle of inches with no end in sight, a geopolitical stamina contest in which President Vladimir V. Putin is gambling that he can outlast a fickle, impatient West.

President Biden has vowed to stand with Ukraine for "as long as it takes," but neither he nor anyone else can say how long that will be or how much more the United States and its allies can do over that distance, short of direct military intervention. At some point, officials acknowledge, U.S. and European stocks of weapons will run low; while the United States has authorized \$54 billion in military and other assistance, no one expects another \$54 billion check when that runs out.

So Mr. Biden and his team are searching for a long-term strategy at a time when the White House sees the dangers of escalation increasing, the prospect for a negotiated settlement still far-off and public weariness beginning to set in at home and abroad.

"I worry about the fatigue factor of the public in a wide range of countries because of the economic costs and because there are other pressing concerns," said Senator Chris Coons, Democrat of Delaware and a close ally of Mr. Biden's who attended the NATO summit meeting in Madrid last month.

"I think we need to be deter-Continued on Page 10

## FEARING OIL JOLT, U.S. PITCHES PLAN ON GLOBAL PRICES

### **UNTESTED IDEA PUSHED**

### Effort to Keep Russian Crude Flowing While **Punishing Putin**

#### By JIM TANKERSLEY

WASHINGTON - Relief at the gas pump coupled with this past week's news that businesses continue to hire at a blistering clip have tempered many economists' fears that America is heading into

a downturn. But while President Biden's top aides are celebrating those economic developments, they are also worried the economy could be in for another serious shock later this year, one that could send the country into a debilitating re-

White House officials fear a new round of European penalties aimed at curbing the flow of Russian oil by year-end could send energy prices soaring anew, slamming already beleaguered consumers and plunging the United States and other economies into a severe contraction. That chain of events could exacerbate what is already a severe food crisis plaguing countries across the world.

To prevent that outcome, U.S. officials have latched on to a never-before-tried plan aimed at depressing global oil prices - one that would complement European sanctions and allow critical flows of Russian crude onto global markets to continue but at a steeply discounted price.

Europe, which continues to guzzle more than two million barrels of Russian oil each day, is set to enact a ban on those imports at the end of the year, along with other steps meant to complicate Russia's efforts to export fuel globally. While Mr. Biden pushed Europe to cut off Russian oil as punishment for its invasion of Ukraine, some forecasters, along with top economic aides to the president, now fear that such policies could result in huge quantities of Russian oil which accounts for just under a tenth of the world's supply - sud-

Continued on Page 9

## Biden, at 79, Shows Signs of Age And Aides Fret About His Image

### By PETER BAKER

WASHINGTON — When President Biden leaves Tuesday night for a four-day swing through the Middle East, he will presumably be more rested than he would have been had he followed the original plan.

The trip was initially tacked onto another journey last month to Europe, which would have made for an arduous 10-day overseas trek until it became clear to Mr. Biden's team that such extended travel might be unnecessarily taxing for a 79-year-old president, or "crazy," as one official put it.

Aides also cited political and diplomatic reasons to reorganize the extra stops as a separate trip weeks later. But the reality is that managing the schedule of the oldest president in American history presents distinct challenges. And as Mr. Biden insists he plans to run for a second term, his age has increasingly become an uncomfortable issue for him, his team and his party.

Just a year and a half into his



President Biden insists that he plans to run for a second term.

first term, Mr. Biden is already more than a year older than Ronald Reagan was at the end of two terms. If he mounts another campaign in 2024, Mr. Biden would be asking the country to elect a leader who would be 86 at the end of his tenure, testing the outer boundaries of age and the presidency. Polls show many Americans consider Mr. Biden too old, and some Democratic strategists do not think he should run again.

Continued on Page 14

**SPORTS 24-27** 

### An Upset at Wimbledon

Elena Rybakina, the 23rd-ranked player, rebounded from a first-set loss to defeat second-ranked Ons Jabeur for the singles title. On Tennis.

#### SUNDAY STYLES One Nation, on Meds

The pandemic's full toll on mental health is still unclear, but data shows a jump in the use of prescription drugs for conditions like depression.

**METROPOLITAN** 

### Two Friends and a Secret Past

Tin Chin and Mo Lin were inseparable at the homeless shelter. But one of the men wasn't who he seemed to be, and it changed his best friend's life.

**OBITUARIES 21-23** 

### A 'Sopranos' Mobster

Tony Sirico, a familiar face in Woody Allen movies, became widely known for his portrayal of Paulie Walnuts on the hit HBO series. He was 79.

SUNDAY REVIEW

Frank Bruni

PAGE 9





#### From Page 1

Hampshire's individual-rights vibe, along with its small population (1.38 million) and large legislature (400 representatives and 24 senators), has drawn libertarians like colonists to a tea party.

This includes the Free State Project, a movement that for years has promoted a mass migration of "liberty activists" to the state so as to seed a kind of limited-government Shangri-La. The group espouses "radical personal responsibility," "constitutional federalism" and "peaceful resistance to shine the light on the force that is the state," its website says.

Croydon, incorporated in 1763, is among the New Hampshire towns with a free-state vein running through its granite hills. This was hinted at in 2020, when Ian Underwood, a town selectman aligned with the Free State, proposed eliminating the police department as a way to fire its sole employee, the longtime and somewhat controversial chief.

The three-member select board adopted the approach and instructed the chief to return his badge and gear. He promptly handed over his uniform, which he happened to be wearing, and then, in hat, boots and underwear, walked out into a February snowstorm. His wife collected him down past the general store.

Croydon life continued, with yard sales at the museum, Halloween celebrations at the fire station and generally low turnouts at the annual town meetings — a directdemocracy tradition common in New England, when residents gather to approve, deny or amend proposed municipal budgets.

On a snowy Saturday this past March, the 2022 meeting began in the two-century-old town hall, where the walls are adorned with an 1876 American flag made by the "women of Croydon" and instructions to reset the furnace to 53 degrees before leaving.

Residents approved the town budget in the morning. Then they turned in the afternoon to the proposed \$1.7 million school budget, which covers the colonial-era schoolhouse (kindergarten to fourth grade) and the cost of sending older students to nearby schools of their choice, public or

This is when Mr. Underwood, 60, stood up and threw a sucker punch to the body politic.

Calling the proposed budget a "ransom," he moved to cut it by more than half — to \$800,000. He argued that taxes for education had climbed while student achievement had not, and that based in part on the much lower tuition for some local private schools, about \$10,000 for each of the town's 80 or so students was sufficient — though well short of, say, the nearly \$18,000 that public schools in nearby Newport charged for pupils from Croydon.

In pamphlets he brought to the meeting, Mr. Underwood asserted that sports, music instruction and other typical school activities were not necessary to participate intelligently in a free government, and that using taxes to pay for them "crosses the boundary between public benefit and private charity?

The pamphlet did not note that its author was a 1979 graduate of the public high school in Chesterton, Ind., where he starred on the tennis team, ran track, played intramural sports and joined extracurricular activities in math, creative writing, radio and student government. Also: National Honor Society member, National Merit finalist and valedictorian.

One person not completely gobsmacked by Mr. Underwood's proposal was the school board chairwoman: his wife, Jody Underwood. The Underwoods, who do not have children, moved to Croydon from Pennsylvania in 2007 in part to join the Free State mission: they are now considered a Free State power couple.

Dr. Underwood, 61, a learning scientist with a doctorate in education, said that she had known of her husband's budget-cut proposal beforehand, but hadn't felt obliged to give the community a heads-up. "Do Ian and I talk about things? Yes," she said. "Is that shocking?"

Even so, she said, "I didn't think it was going to pass.'

In fact, Mr. Underwood's motion was seconded, sparking a contentious debate that included his wife reading a statement in support of the budget cut — in effect arguing against the \$1.7 million budget that she and the rest of the school board had previously recommended. (Dr. Underwood later explained that her husband's assertions — including that education spending had gone up 30 percent in recent years - had persuaded her.)

Amanda Leslie, 42, a resident who teaches in another district, became so alarmed that she texted her husband to get to town hall right away: "The Free Staters are trying to cut the budget more

than in half." His vote wouldn't have mat-The budget-slashing

amendment passed, 20 to 14. The school clerk, Angi Beaulieu, was so dismayed by what she had

Kirsten Noyes contributed research.

# In New Hampshire Town, A Lesson in Democracy



Chris Prost, who runs a small brewery in his barn, said the big lesson of the budget battle was "showing up."



Amanda Leslie, a resident and a teacher, was outraged by the March vote on the school budget.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN TULLY FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Croydon, N.H. (population: 800), has a one-room schoolhouse dating to colonial times.



A PROPOSED BUDGET CUT

Left, Ian Underwood questioning the school board during a town meeting in 2017. Right, Jody Underwood, the

also have obligations. And when we

don't fulfill our obligations, we often end

up with results we don't like.'

WAYNE LESPERANCE, a political-science professor

at New England College in Henniker, N.H.

school board chairwoman, last week. She described the latest budget vote as a victory for "mob rule." 'As citizens we have many rights, but we

just witnessed that instead of signing her account of the minutes with the standard "respectfully submitted," she wrote, "Regretfully submitted."

The shocking budget cut meant that the school board suddenly had to craft a new financial plan, while many parents suddenly had to come up with thousands of dollars to keep their children in public schools.

"I would have to put in an extra thousand hours of work a year," said Ed Spiker, 38, a painting contractor whose two sons attend Newport public schools.

Mr. Underwood did not respond to requests for comment. But in the weeks after the meeting, he and his wife made separate appearances on an online Free State program to discuss what Free Staters were claiming as a victory for their cause.

Mr. Underwood asked what for him appears to be a fundamental question — "Why is that guy paying for that guy's kids to be educated?" - and denied that he and

his wife were "in cahoots." "It's a lot of stress on her at home," said Mr. Underwood, who has described himself as a former planetary scientist and artificialintelligence researcher. "Less

stress on me. I just threw the

wrench into the machinery, and now, you know, the school board has to clean it up." Dr. Underwood, meanwhile,

smiled as she recalled the amendment's passage. She also noted that "people were pissed."

For students taking debate, as Mr. Underwood did in high school, this is an example of understatement. Many Croydon residents were livid.

But they were also chastened. They hadn't attended the town meeting. They hadn't fulfilled their democratic obligation. They hadn't kept informed about the Free State movement. To some observers, they had gotten what they deserved.

"I was practically kicking myself in the ass for not being there," Mr. Spiker said. "I guess I assumed our town would take care

The moment revealed a democracy mired in indifference. Turnout at town meetings has been low for years. The town's websites are barely rudimentary, with school board minutes posted online sporadically. The select board's minutes are found at the town hall open three afternoons a week or the general store, beside chocolate bars being sold to benefit the local humane society.

From this muddle of anger, confusion and regret, though, a movement was born. It came to be known as We Stand Up for Crovdon Students.

Conservatives, liberals and those who shun labels - "an entirely nonpartisan group," said Ms. Damon, one of the members - began meeting online and in living rooms to undo what they considered a devastating mistake. They researched right-to-know

laws, sought advice from nonprofits and contacted the state attorney general's office to see whether they had any legal options.

They did: Under New Hampshire law, citizens could petition for a special meeting where the budget cut could be overturned if at least half the town's voters were present and cast ballots.

Ms. Beaulieu, 44, a project manager for a kitchen and bath store, helped to gather enough signatures for the necessary petition. Once a date in May was set for the special meeting, she and other volunteers spread the word, knocking on doors, conducting phone banks and planting lawn

Meanwhile, the three-member school board developed a plan to fit within its shrunken budget. It would mean that more than half the jobs in the town's tiny school system would be either lost or outsourced.

For the lower grades, a private contractor would provide in-person learning at the schoolhouse that included a certified teacher overseeing three so-called guides, who needn't be certified. For the higher grades, \$9,000 allocated for each student would cover the cost of nearby private schools or an in-person online option — "in a

church, or town hall, or some rented space," Dr. Underwood said — but only about half the tuition for public schools.

Democracy is a scrum, especially in a town of 800. There were awkward encounters at the Shaw's supermarket in Newport, cross-accusations of bullying and misinformation, sharp words exchanged on Facebook and at town meetings. Some neighbors stopped taking long walks togeth-

There also developed a heightened awareness — and, for some, a heightened distrust — of the Free State movement.

Aaron McKeon, 39, a school board member whose children were already being taught at home, said that the We Stand Up supporters "didn't waste any time starting a Free State witch hunt." In fact, he said, they inaccurately described him as a Free Stater because his positions sometimes aligned with those of the Underwoods - though he believed that Mr. Underwood's sudden and divisive motion to cut the budget was not the best approach.

"I agree with some of the things they try to do," Mr. McKeon said of Free Staters. "But that doesn't make me one of them."

"I don't believe it for a second," said Ms. Leslie, the teacher.

The crisis in Croydon generated a curious democratic dynamic. Since the law required that at least half the town's electorate participate in the special meeting's vote for it to be binding, those trying to overturn the Underwood budget encouraged people to attend, while those hoping to retain it encouraged people to do just the opposite and stay home.

On the chilly Saturday morning of May 7, Croydon residents filed into a spacious building at the local YMCA camp for their special meeting. The We Stand Up contingent needed at least 283 voters.

The turnout: 379. The vote in favor of overturning

the Underwood budget: 377. The vote against: 2. The We Stand Up crowd

CANADA 50 MILES MAINE VERMONT Portland

THE NEW YORK TIMES **INCORPORATED IN 1763** New Hampshire has a

libertarian streak.

cheered and hugged, leaving Mr. Underwood to vent online with posts titled "Your House Is My A.T.M." and "Possibly Dumbest Thing I've Heard Someone Say, Ever," and Dr. Underwood to frame the moment as both an impressive voter turnout and a vic-

tory for "mob rule." "It felt to me like a bunch of woke people came to Croydon," she said.

Croydon's experience resonated well beyond its borders, receiving substantial regional news coverage. It became a cautionary tale for these times — or, perhaps, a reflection of them.

"As citizens we have many rights, but we also have obligations," said Wayne Lesperance, a political-science professor at New England College, in Henniker, N.H. "And when we don't fulfill our obligations, we often end up with results we don't like."

It seems that many in Croydon have come to feel that obligation.

Ms. Damon, the dietitian, is planning to retire and has begun campaigning for a seat in the state legislature. "I hope enough of us can get together and find a middle ground," she said.

Ms. Beaulieu, the school clerk and former school board member, is breaking a private vow and plans to run again for a school board seat. "I thought, 'I don't have the time," she said. "Then I thought, 'Yes, you do.'"

Ms. Leslie, the teacher, is working on the political campaigns of her We Stand Up colleagues. She said she is fueled by a desire to oust from public office anyone associated with the Free State movement.

Mr. Spiker, the painting contractor, spent a few hundred dollars on a camera and a microphone. Now he records and posts the school board and select board meetings

And the group originally known as We Stand Up for Croydon Students is now called We Stand Up for Croydon. Its members met in a living room a couple of weeks ago to discuss future plans, including how to confront that central threat

to democracy, complacency. "Outsiders think they know what happened," said Mr. Prost, the brewer. "Town rallies to restore the budget! Democracy lives! But most people here know that's not the whole story. It's just