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Democracy Dies in Darkness

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2024 • \$3

RFK Jr. tapped to take helm at HHS

Vaccine skeptic could soon oversee an agency tasked for vaccine safety

BY DAN DIAMOND, LAUREN WEBER, JOSH DAWSEY AND LENA H. SUN

President-elect Donald Trump on Thursday selected Robert F. Kennedy Jr., a longtime vaccine skeptic, to lead the Department of Health and Human Services, the sprawling agency responsible for administering millions of Americans' health insurance, approving drugs and medical supplies, regulating food, and responding to infectious-disease outbreaks.

Kennedy, who in August suspended his own bid for president in hopes of winning a spot in a Trump administration, has pledged to make fighting chronic disease his signature cause.

"The Safety and Health of all Americans is the most important role of any Administration, and HHS will play a big role in helping ensure that everybody will be protected from harmful chemicals, pollutants, pesticides, pharmaceutical products, and food additives that have contributed to the overwhelming Health Crisis in this Country," Trump wrote in a post on the social

Kennedy's quest: He wants to overhaul nation's food policy. A4

Pentagon pick: Hegseth has decried drive for troop diversity. A9



Sen. John Cornyn (R-Texas) said he would like to have access to the House Ethics Committee's findings on Matt Gaetz.

AG selection puts new focus on sexual allegations

BY MICHAEL KRANISH, PERRY STEIN AND ANN E. MARIMOW

Matt Gaetz's selection as attorney general has reopened a central question that has been probed by the Justice Department he now hopes to lead, and by the Congress from which he just resigned: Did he engage in sexual misconduct with a 17-year-old girl and violate sex-trafficking laws?

After the Justice Department dropped its investigation into those explosive allegations in 2023, the House Ethics Committee

House Ethics Committee pressed to release report on claims by 17-year-old

tee restarted its probe into Gaetz, and it was slated to release its report Friday. Gaetz's resignation from the House on Wednesday means the committee no longer has jurisdiction over him, but the panel is under increasing pressure to release its findings — including from an attorney representing the woman who has been

at the center of the claims.

The woman has never been publicly identified, but her lawyer, John Clune, said in a post on X that Gaetz's selection "is a perverse development in a truly dark series of events. We would support the House Ethics Committee immediately releasing their report. She was a high school student and there were witnesses." Clune did not respond to a request for comment.

Gaetz said in a statement forwarded by the Trump transition team that "these allegations are invented" and that "this false smear following a three-year

criminal investigation should be viewed with great skepticism."

As Republicans in Congress and career officials in the Justice Department alike grapple with Gaetz's stunning ascension to potentially become America's top law enforcement official, the sordid details of the allegations he faced — and the lingering questions about why the Justice Department did not end up filing charges — have unexpectedly taken center stage in President-elect Donald Trump's lightning speed rollout of Cabinet officials.

The possibility that Gaetz

Gaetz faces a 'steep' climb

SKEPTICISM WITHIN HIS OWN PARTY

Possible standoff with Trump over Justice pick

BY LIZ GOODWIN, LEIGH ANN CALDWELL AND MARIANNE LEVINE

Republican senators signaled Thursday that they plan to closely scrutinize allegations of wrongdoing dogging former congressman Matt Gaetz, President-elect Donald Trump's pick to lead the Justice Department, setting up a potential showdown between Trump and the GOP-controlled Senate.

Gaetz resigned Wednesday, effectively ending a House Ethics Committee investigation into allegations that he might have engaged in sexual misconduct and illegal drug use and accepted improper gifts. But several Republican senators said they want access to the investigation, as well as any information the FBI would uncover in a background check as part of the confirmation process.

Some Republican senators have discussed their concerns about Gaetz with Trump's team since his surprise selection, according to two people familiar with the outreach who spoke on

Make America Florida: Trump taps Sunshine State politicians. A4

Trump speaks: At gala, he heaps praise on his Cabinet-in-waiting. A9

At the center of political power sits Mar-a-Lago

Long-shot job seekers and serious contenders converge at Trump's club

BY SARAH BLASKEY, SAMUEL OAKFORD AND JOSH DAWSEY

Since President-elect Donald Trump's historic victory last week, Melissa Rein-Lively has spent as much time as possible at his club, Mar-a-Lago, "wheeling and dealing like nobody's business," she told The Washington Post.

The 39-year-old publicist first gained notoriety during the pandemic when she live-streamed herself at a Target in Scottsdale, Arizona, yelling expletives as she destroyed a display of masks intended to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

Now, Rein-Lively says she wants to be press secretary for the second Trump administration. And, she said, she believes Mar-a-Lago is her golden ticket to Washington.

"Right now, it's showtime," Rein-Lively said. At Trump's club in Palm Beach, Florida, she was able to promote herself "at the absolute highest level, in an orbit that is essentially impenetrable by everyone else in America," she said.

While Rein-Lively has man-

aged to snap a few pictures with Trump insiders at Mar-a-Lago, there is no sign that she is in the running for any position in the incoming administration. She told The Post on Tuesday that Trump transition co-chair Howard Lutnick had called to offer her the press secretary job. She declined to provide any evidence of such a call, and Lutnick denied her claim, saying, "Under no circumstances do I call anyone, ever."

But the emphasis Rein-Lively put on being seen with the GOP in-crowd at Mar-a-Lago is a sign of the venue's resurgence as an unorthodox center of political power: a lavish seaside social club from which a White House transition is being run, where hundreds of members and their guests rub shoulders with Trump's inner circle and perhaps even with the former and future president himself.

The club has become increasingly central to Trump's political and personal life since his first election in 2016, when he conducted the transition largely from his office in Trump Tower in Manhattan and his golf club in Bedminster, New Jersey. That time around, in an effort that seemed engineered for public consumption, many candidates for Trump's first Cabinet either passed a phalanx of reporters camped in the Trump Tower lobby or posed with the president-

SEE MAR-A-LAGO ON A6



ILLUSTRATION BY BRIAN HUBLE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

A money trail leads to a Va. mansion

Cash stolen from Nigeria was spent on U.S. real estate, authorities allege

BY STEVE THOMPSON

The \$2.8 million mansion, tucked at the end of a private drive, boasts a climate-controlled wine cellar, sauna and four fireplaces — features not uncommon to this wealthy part of the Washington suburbs.

But the man who bought the place a couple of years ago did not stick around to enjoy them, neighbors said. He introduced

himself, then disappeared, leaving some wondering what was happening behind his nine-foot-tall carved-wood front doors.

The mansions in leafy McLean, Virginia, like mansions everywhere, tend to hold interesting characters with money. Here along a quiet street in a neighborhood called The Ridings, there's a noted plastic surgeon, a high-powered corporate lawyer and the CEO of a defense

consulting firm, among others, property records show.

But court filings in Nigeria, as well as those from an insurance claim surrounding a jewelry theft from another mansion near Beverly Hills, California, suggest the owner of the McLean residence has a different type of story.

The way Nigerian authorities tell it, their country's former

SEE MANSION ON A10

Trump to Senate on nominees: Step aside

Recess appointment push would test GOP-led chamber's autonomy

BY COLBY ITKOWITZ

As Donald Trump moves to fill his administration with polarizing figures like former Florida congressman Matt Gaetz and onetime presidential rival Robert F. Kennedy Jr., he may need Congress to heed his demand to allow him to bypass the traditional confirmation process and appoint his picks without Senate approval.

The president-elect has insisted that rather than put his nominees through an extended public vetting process, the GOP-led Senate should take extended breaks that would allow him to make recess appointments.

Experts in American democracy say Trump's call is the first major post-election test for Republicans in Congress of whether they will stand up for traditional checks and balances or bend to Trump's desire not to have his choices questioned. The Constitution dictates that while the

SEE TRUMP ON A7

IN THE NEWS

Biden in Latin America He will attend his last two global summits, as foreign leaders fear his vow that "America is back" is at risk. A20

Virginia Senate Six Democrats and six Republicans seeking to succeed Suhas Subramanyam will vie for nominations Saturday in firehouse primaries. B1

THE NATION Despite a slight uptick, trust in science hasn't fully recovered from the covid pandemic. A2
Polls for this year's election again underestimated support for Donald Trump. A8

THE WORLD Russia appears to be on the offensive in southeastern Ukraine amid talk of negotiations. A12
China opened a huge port in Peru to extend its reach — and clout — in Latin America. A14

THE ECONOMY Donald Trump is expected to expand efforts to hobble China's technological development, former officials said. A15
Teeing up a clash, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau has taken steps to place Google under formal federal supervision. A16

THE REGION A bagel shop and deli in Georgetown won a zoning fight with neighbors who said diners created a nuisance. B1
Mel Franklin, a former Prince George's Council member, was ordered to serve a year in jail for stealing money from his own campaign fund. B1

STYLE Alex Jones has lost his far-right Infowars to satire site the Onion, whose CEO called the sale "cosmic justice." C1
WEEKEND Are you not entertained? "Gladiator II" and 18 more films everyone will be talking about this holiday season.

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