

VOA NEWS

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This is VOA News. I'm Alexis Strobe.

President Joe Biden is pushing back against calls to drop his reelection bid after last week's disastrous debate. AP Washington correspondent Sagar Meghani reports.

"... can't say it was my best performance."

But the president says he will not let 90 minutes wipe out three and a half years of work.

"They're trying to push me out of the race."

"No."

"Let me say this as clearly as I can: I'm staying in the race"

The president was in battleground Wisconsin, part of a campaign blitz to show he's up to the job as questions about his fitness for another term loom.

He was minutes away from sitting for a network TV interview.

"We're expecting millions of Americans are gonna watch."

The White House and spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre raised the stakes as more Democrats called for the president to end his bid. Many are split over whether he should stay or go.

Sagar Meghani, Washington.

New Prime Minister Keir Starmer says the country has voted for the return of politics to public service in his first speech as prime minister. AP correspondent Nayun Kim reports.

In his first speech as PM, Starmer vows to lead a government of service, marking the beginning of a new Britain.

"Politics can be a force for good. We will show that we've changed the Labour Party to return into service, and that is how we will govern. Country first, party second."

Starmer won citizens of all political colors to join his project of change with stability.

"I invite you all to join this government of service in the mission of national renewal."

Outgoing leader Rishi Sunak earlier offered his resignation to the king after his party's crushing defeat.

Nayun Kim, London.

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Prominent Hong Kong activist Joshua Wong should be considered an active participant in a landmark [sub...] subversion case involving 47 democrats, his lawyer said on Friday, but urged a court to hand him a lighter sentence for entering his plea early. Ryan Chang from Reuters reports.

The 27-year-old was one of dozens of activists arrested in 2021 for joining an unofficial primary election to choose candidates for the city's legislature. Of these, 47 were charged with conspiracy to commit subversion under a national security law imposed by Beijing.

Wang's lawyer, Marco Li, told the court while his client should be considered an "active participant" in the conspiracy, he was not involved in organizing or assisting in the primary election. And in view of Wong's early plea of guilty, Li urged a reduction of a third of his sentence. That could range from three to 10 years for active participants in the conspiracy, but life in jail for those deemed principal offenders.

Lee added that Wong hopes to reform himself and part with his past history.

Ryan Chang from Reuters.

Hamas says amendments it proposed to the most recent U.S. plan for a cease-fire in Gaza "have been met with a positive response by the mediators." However, "the official Israeli position has not yet become clear" and no date for negotiations has been set, according to Hamas spokesperson Jihad Taha on Friday.

Cease-fire talks between Israel and Hamas appear to be reviving after having stalled for weeks as U.S., Qatari and Egyptian mediators try to overcome differences that have repeatedly thwarted a deal.

Late Friday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said he was sending negotiators to Qatar next week, but, quote, "There are still gaps between the parties."

Donald Trump denies knowing about Project 2025, his ally's weeping plans to transform the U.S. government. AP Correspondent Ed Donahue reports.

Heritage Foundation President Kevin Roberts said on a podcast Republicans are in the process of taking this country back, adding "We are in the process of the second American Revolution, which will remain bloodless if the left allows it to be."

On his social media site, Trump said he knows nothing about Project 2025 and has no idea who is behind it. Trump also said he disagrees with some of the things they're saying, calling them "absolutely ridiculous and abysmal."

The 922-page plan outlines a dramatic expansion of presidential power and a plan to fire as many as 50,000 government workers and replace them with Trump loyalists.

Ed Donahue, Washington.

NATO leaders plan to pledge to keep pouring arms and ammunition into Ukraine at current levels for at least another year. U.S. President Joe Biden and his counterparts will make the pledge at a summit in Washington next week.

NATO was desperate to do more for Ukraine, but is struggling to find new ways. The leaders are to announce that NATO will soon manage equipment deliveries, too. But two red lines remain: no NATO membership until the war is over and no NATO boots on the ground in Ukraine.

I'm Alexis Strobe.