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9/23/22 Friday

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McCarthy Lays Out GOP's 'Commitment to America' Platform Six Weeks Before Midterm Election
By - Fantine Gardinier

With a little over a month to go before the 2022 midterm elections, House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) has laid out four main talking points he hopes will guide the Republican Party to victory in November.

The agenda, called the Republican “Commitment to America,” is summarized in four points so broadly worded that their meaning is almost indiscernible: “an economy that's strong,” “a nation that's safe,” “a future that's built on freedom,” and “a government that's accountable,” according to McCarthy’s website.

The name is modeled on Newt Gingrich’s successful “Contract With America,” with which the GOP attained an astounding victory in the 1994 midterm elections, winning majorities in both houses. It, too, was introduced just six weeks before the election, and focused on broad conservative talking points such as reducing the size of the government, cutting taxes, and addressing what they described as out-of-control crime in US cities - much like McCarthy’s program.

"We want an economy that is strong. That means you can fill up your tank. You can buy the groceries. You have enough money left over to go to Disneyland and save for a future - that the paychecks grow, they no longer shrink," McCarthy told the crowd at a party event in Monongahela, Pennsylvania, on Thursday, where the GOP program was unveiled.

"We have a plan for a nation that's safe. That means your community will be protected, your law enforcement will be respected. Your criminals will be prosecuted. We believe in a future that's built on freedom - that your children come first."

Kellyanne Conway, a one-time adviser to former US President Donald Trump, told the crowd that it was important to focus on the economy instead of other issues Democrats are likely to use to attack the GOP, such as abortion, climate change, and the January 6 insurrection, according to Politico.

After the event, Gingrich described McCarthy’s program as “more sophisticated” than his own, the outlet also noted.

The races for control over the House and Senate are tight: the most recent polls released last weekend show the two parties neck-and-neck. At present, the Democrats have a slim majority in the House and are evenly split with the Republicans in the Senate, but command a de facto majority thanks to Vice President Kamala Harris’ ability to cast a tie-breaking vote. However, it’s common for the president’s party to lose in the midterm elections following his own election victory.

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If the GOP does retake the House, as Politico's projections suggest is likely, then McCarthy would be elevated to Speaker, taking Rep. Nancy Pelosi's (D-CA) job.
After McCarthy seemingly fumbled and tweeted a link to the program website prior to the event, Pelosi's press crew went on the attack, labeling it an "Extreme MAGA Agenda," invoking Trump's political slogan of "Make America Great Again." The Democrats have labored to convince Americans that Trump's politics, which included a militant rejection of the 2020 election results, are no longer on the GOP fringe, but have become integrated into the party.
The success of Trump-backed candidates in GOP primary races across the country seems to give credence to that claim, even if McCarthy and his Senate counterpart, Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY), are both quick to draw Trump's ire.
Trump has yet to comment on McCarthy's program. However, McConnell, who gave Sen. Rick Scott (R-FL) the cold shoulder after he unilaterally dropped a "Rescue America" agenda in March that became a lightning rod for withering liberal criticism, decided to endorse McCarthy's program, saying it would "bring the people's priorities back into the people's House."

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GOP Congressman Matt Gaetz Likely to Dodge Charges in Sex-Trafficking Probe
By - Fantine Gardinier
All materials
The US Department of Justice (DOJ) is less likely to charge Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-FL) after prosecutors recommended against doing so, the Washington Post reported on Friday, citing "people familiar with the matter."
According to the report, prosecutors are concerned about the credibility of the two central witnesses. One is an ex-girlfriend of Gaetz's, and the other is Joel Greenberg, a former Seminole County tax collector and a personal friend of Gaetz's. Accordingly, they have recommended against pressing charges they're afraid won't stick.
Gaetz is accused of engaging in a sexual relationship with a 17-year-old girl, including paying for her to travel with him. Of the two witnesses, Gaetz's ex-girlfriend could only corroborate that the girl had traveled with him after she turned 18, and Greenberg, although he previously pleaded guilty to sex-trafficking charges, has also pleaded guilty to falsely accusing an election rival of having a relationship with a minor, tarnishing his claims that Gaetz has done so.
The DOJ has made no official comment on the matter of the prosecutors' recommendations. However, it is rare for their counsel to go unheeded.
The encounters reportedly took place in 2019 and 2020, and the DOJ's probe began before then-US President Donald Trump left office. Gaetz has denied the accusations and claimed they are an attempt to extort him for money.
However, the case gets weirder. Stephen Alford, a Florida business executive, has separately pleaded guilty to trying to extort Gaetz's father, a former Florida state lawmaker, for $25 million with promises he could get Gaetz a presidential pardon from Trump. Alford later claimed the offer was a lie, but was given 5 years in prison for wire fraud.

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Last week, the Washington Post also reported that Gaetz had also separately reached out to Mark Meadows while he was Trump's chief of staff in an attempt to secure a pardon for himself. The allegation is based on comments by Johnny McEntee, Trump's director of the White House Presidential Personnel Office.
Gaetz is a strong supporter of Trump's and has promoted the former president's claims that the November 2020 election was marred by fraud by Democrats. Last month, Trump endorsed the Florida congressman's re-election bid.

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Blinken Tells Wang at UN That Maintaining Peace Across Taiwan Strait 'Absolutely, Vitally Important'
By - Fantine Gardinier

Amid the United Nations General Assembly meeting in New York this week, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his counterpart, Chinese Foreign Minister and State Councilor Wang Yi, met to discuss the tense situation surrounding Taiwan over the last two months.
According to a Friday readout by the US State Department, Blinken and Wang "discussed the need to maintain open lines of communication and responsibly manage the US-PRC [People's Republic of China] relationship, especially during times of tension."
"For our part, the Secretary made crystal clear, that in accordance with our long-standing one-China policy, which again has not changed, the maintenance of peace and stability across the Strait is absolutely, vitally important," a senior US official told reporters following the meeting.
Tensions surrounding Taiwan have been building for years, ever since 2017, when Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen came to power and then-US President Donald Trump rushed to support her pro-independence agenda. There has been a sharp increase in weapons sales to Taiwan, as well as US rhetoric about alleged Chinese "aggression" and the need to defend Taiwanese "democracy" against Chinese "authoritarianism."
However, they reached an acme last month when US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) traveled to Taiwan to meet with Tsai and other Taiwanese leaders and to denounce China. The third-most powerful US politician, no one of Pelosi's stature has visited the island since 1997.
China has long warned the US about encouraging "separatist" forces on Taiwan, which Beijing regards as a Chinese province in rebellion and says is destined to reunite with the mainland.
Following Pelosi's visit, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) launched unprecedented drills in the areas surrounding Taiwan as a demonstration that it could blockade Taiwan if it so wished. However, the warning has not abated US behavior.
A day before his meeting with Blinken, Wang said at a New York event hosted by the Asia Society that Taiwan was the issue with the most potential to destroy US-China relations.
"Should it be mishandled, it is most likely to devastate our bilateral ties," he said. "Just as the US will not allow Hawaii to be stripped away, China has the right to uphold the unification of the country,"

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"If the US handles Sino-US relations along a zero-sum game mentality and continues to use 'political correctness' to mislead its China policy, it will not only fail to solve its own problems, but will also bring Sino-US relations to conflict and confrontation," Wang explained.
"The US has been making endless provocations on China's core interests and development rights, but at the same time it is calling for stabilizing relations and avoiding confrontation. This is contradictory in logic and reality."
The US established relations with China in 1979, switching its recognition of the legitimate Chinese government over to Beijing from the republican rump state on Taiwan, which is the last vestige of the government overthrown 30 years earlier by communist forces. Washington ended its formal relations with Taipei and acknowledged Beijing's One-China Policy, but has maintained informal relations with Taiwan nonetheless.
Although it is no longer obliged to militarily defend Taiwan, the US has made a point of not explicitly saying whether it would or would not defend the island from Chinese attack. Despite this, US President Joe Biden has repeatedly statedthat he was required to defend Taiwan, requiring his staff to contradict their boss.
"I think we can all be pretty certain at this point that it was not a gaffe - four times in a row … [means] what's happening is there are people in the administration who think that by demonstrating a greater willingness to defend Taiwan, that'll help reestablish deterrence," Oriana Skylar Mastro, center fellow at Stanford University's Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, told Politico on Monday.

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Elijah McClain's Autopsy Amended to Say Cause of Death Was Police-Administered Ketamine Overdose
By - Fantine Gardinier

Elijah McClain, a 23-year-old Black man, died in August 2019 following a police stop. Accused by police of being uncontrollable, McClain was given a ketamine shot against his will, which stopped his heart. He died in the hospital after being declared brain dead.
The Adams County Coroner's Office in Colorado on Friday released an amended version of McClain's autopsy report, based on new information provided to the office.
The report now lists the cause of death as "complications of ketamine administration following forcible restraint" - it previously described McClain's death as "undetermined."
In an amended opinion at the end of the new version of the report, coroner Stephen Cina said the original decision had been "based on information available at the time."
"Since then, this office has received additional material for review, including extensive body camera footage, witness statements, and additional records," he adds. "It is worth noting that these materials had been requested prior to release of the initial autopsy report, but the material was either not provided to us or not provided to us in their entirety. Having insufficient information as of November 7, 2019, was one of the reasons the cause and manner of death in

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this case were deemed undetermined. Additional material of relevance has also been generated through the grand jury investigation."

He then describes how McClain had a high blood ketamine level and that the newly viewed footage showed he was "extremely sedated within minutes," including evidence that respiratory arrest was "imminent."

"Simply put, this dosage of ketamine was too much for this individual and it resulted in an overdose, even though his blood ketamine level was consistent with a 'therapeutic' blood concentration," Cina wrote. "I believe that Mr. McClain would most likely be alive but for the administration of ketamine."

He added that a "carotid control hold" had been applied to McClain by police, but that he could not determine whether it contributed to McClain's death. However, he noted that McClain was "likely under physiological and emotional stress," which can result in "several metabolic abnormalities," of which it is not possible to determine their relation to his death.

In sum, Cina said that McClain died due to "ketamine toxicity," which is "usually classified as an accident."

Aurora Police stopped McClain on the night of August 24, 2019, following a 9-1-1 call about a "sketchy" person in the neighborhood. McClain, who was walking from a convenience store, was wearing a ski mask for warmth due to a blood circulation disorder and had headphones on, dancing to the music on his walk. When police approached him, he didn't immediately respond because he didn't hear them, and officers treated this suspiciously. Later, a struggle with police ensued, and they restrained him and ordered medics to give him a ketamine shot to calm him down. It was later determined they had both considerably exaggerated his hostility and his size, leading to medics giving him a larger dose of ketamine than was appropriate.

On the way to the hospital, McClain suffered cardiac arrest and died three days later.

An Aurora Police Department investigation afterward exonerated the three responding officers - Nathan Woodyard, Jason Rosenblatt and Randy Roedema - of any criminal wrongdoing, and a subsequent review of their actions in February 2020 found their application of force consistent with police training. However, an independent investigation commissioned by the Aurora City Council eviscerated the officers' actions, finding that "Aurora police and paramedics made substantial errors at nearly every stage of their interaction with Elijah McClain and the detectives tasked with investigating the incident that led to the 23-year-old's death stretched the truth to exonerate the officers involved."

The three officers, plus two medics, fire department paramedic Jeremy Cooper and fire Lt. Peter Cichuniec, were later charged with a total of 32 counts, including manslaughter and criminally negligent homicide, just over two years after McClain's death.

McClain's death became a major focal point for the 2020 nationwide Black Lives Matter protests that followed the murder of George Floyd, and thousands of protesters demanded that officers be held responsible for McClain's death as well. Protesters who led a series of militant marches, including a protest outside an area police station, were later violently arrested and charged with a slew of crimes, including attempted kidnapping and attempting to influence a public official. Judges threw out the charges after a nationwide campaign was mounted to exonerate the demonstrators.

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Fiona Hits Canada's Atlantic Coast, State of Emergency Declared in Newfoundland Town

Yesterday

By - Mary Manley

Hurricane Fiona is ripping through the Atlantic coast and is the first hurricane of the Atlantic Basin season. It first smacked into Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic earlier this week, killing at least five people and leaving more than a million others without power or running water. The post-tropical cyclone is now striking parts of Canada.

Hurricane Fiona has been downgraded to a post-tropical cyclone, but still carries the wind speed of a Category One hurricane. Fiona slammed into the Gulf of St. Lawrence at around 2 p.m. on Saturday before it carried over to eastern Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador. Coastal homes, cars, and other structures in Newfoundland and Labrador collapsed after being swallowed up by the cyclone's waves.

The town of Channel-Port aux Basques was forced to declare a state of emergency after Hurricane Fiona touched down on the province of Newfoundland. Multiple homes were destroyed and drifted out to sea during the storm. Waves between 36 ft to 49 ft in height and winds between 62 mph and 87 mph were recorded at 8:47 a.m. on Saturday by Environment Canada.

Brian Button, the mayor of Channel-Port aux Basques, declared a state of emergency for his town on Facebook*.

"We're in the process here of calling a state of emergency, our town is in all intents and purposes we are already in a state of emergency here, it's just going to formalities now. So anybody that's being told to leave their homes you need to leave, there's no 'ifs', 'ands', or 'buts', you need to leave. We have our crews out and we'll soon won't be able to have our crews out in some areas, it's just becoming unsafe for our crews," said Button, adding that the Lions Club and the Salvation Army were available to shelter those in need of it.

Power lines were also downed in Channel-Port aux Basques, some with live wires. Button added in his Facebook post that locals should stay in shelter because of the strong weather and the debris, including uprooted trees and poles with live wires, would be dangerous to come into contact with. Cape Breton also declared a state of emergency and ordered people to shelter in place.

The Royal Canadian Mountain Police (RCMP) also received a report of a woman who was washed into the ocean off the coast of Port aux Basques after her home collapsed. Thankfully, she was rescued and taken to a nearby hospital for medical care. She is reported to be in good condition, but one other person remains missing.

Hurricane Fiona ravaged Nova Scotia with heavy rains and winds blowing at over 85 mph on Friday, leaving 70% of the province as well as Prince Edward Island without power. Caribou, Maine also reported wind speeds of 52 mph according to the town's U.S. National Weather Service office.

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Several buildings in the coastal Newfoundland community of Burnt Islands were ripped apart by Fiona's winds.
At least 348,204 customers in Nova Scotia, 84,701 customers in Prince Edward Island, 42,268 customers in New Brunswick, 14,209 in Ontario, and 8,906 customers in Newfoundland and Labrador reported power outages at around 4:50 p.m. according to PowerOutage.com.

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Michigan Man Pleads Guilty to Murdering and Eating Man Named Kevin Bacon
By - Mary Manley

On Thursday, Mark Latunski, 53, admitted to stabbing and eating part of a man he met on a dating app three years ago in December of 2019. The 25-year-old, named Kevin Bacon, was first reported missing by his family on Christmas Day of 2019 after he failed to show up to breakfast.
Latunski now faces life in prison after he pleaded guilty to open murder and mutilation of a man who was his Grindr date—a dating app for the gay, bi, trans, and queer communities, according to their website.
Police spoke to Bacon's roommate when his family reported him missing. This led them to Latunski's home.
Bacon, 25, a hairstylist and psychology major according to his father, met Latunski on Grindr before unsuspectingly arriving at the 53-year-old's home on West Tyrrell Road in Bennington Township. Police found Bacon's body on December 28, 2019, hanging from his ankles.
Latunski had reportedly stabbed Bacon, cut his throat and eaten parts of him. Police report that the Michigan man cut off the University of Michigan-Flint student's testicles and ate them after he was murdered. Authorities believe Bacon was killed sometime on the evening of December 24, or early December 25.
"We have discussed this matter and consistently he's been very clear, more than once, multiple times, on his choice and on his reasoning," said Mary Chartier, Latunski's attorney, in court on Thursday.
Bacon's father, Karl Bacon, says their family has not been able to celebrate a Christmas day since the murder of their son three years ago.
"I'm just glad we're seeing the end of it," Bacon said, adding that he is relieved that he and his family won't have to sit through a trial. "Maybe it'll close this chapter in our lives. I don't know yet, we're still trying to figure that out."
Latunski will remain at the Center for Forensic Psychiatry in Saline until his next court appearance which is scheduled for October 18. The trial will determine if Latunski's crimes are first-degree murder, second-degree murder, or manslaughter.

Latunski's attorneys had hoped to use an insanity defense for their client, which would have meant Latunski would have been in a state of mind in which he did not know what he was doing. Latunski chose to plead guilty, going against the advice of his attorneys.

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If Latunski had approved of an insanity defense then he would have to go to a forensics center for a minimum of 60 days for evaluation. When asked why he did not want his mental diagnoses discussed in court, Latunski said it was “not relevant.”
“It’s what I wanted. I wanted him to serve life,” said the victim's father. “I’m still trying to figure things out. It’s been long and hard.”
Police also spoke to two other men who were also Grindr dates of Latunski and reportedly fled his home in fall of 2019, including a 28-year-old from Lansing and a middle-aged man from New York.

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California Becomes Fifth State to Legalize Human Composting
By - Mary Manley

California will join a list of other states that are approving greener ways to bury themselves and their loved ones including Washington, Colorado, Vermont, and Oregon which have also legalized composting human remains.
Earlier this week California Governor Gavin Newsom (D) signed a bill into law that will allow Californians to compost themselves and their loved ones as a greener alternative to traditional burials. Washington was the first state to legalize the process in 2019, after which Oregon and Colorado also legalized the process in 2021.
Vermont also legalized composting of their dead in early 2022, and New York too legalized the practice, though New York Governor Kathy Hochul (D) has yet to sign the bill.
More than half (almost 58%) of Americans who must bury their dead choose to cremate them, and that process takes up to three hours to burn a single corpse, and releases almost 600 pounds of carbon dioxide. Estimates guess that about 360,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide are emitted into the atmosphere every year in the United States due to cremations.
The latest United Nations report shows no signs of change when it comes to the ongoing climate crisis, so the turn to “greener” burials is most likely a welcome turn for environmentalists.
“In 1960, only about 3% of people in America were being cremated, so the impact to the environment was negligible,” said Dr. David Sloane, a history and urban planning professor at the University of Southern California. “But if you have 60 to 70% of Americans choosing cremation, that’s millions of people to think about — and once you add up the numbers globally, you don’t just get a couple of million but many tens of millions, and then the concern becomes more real.”
Assembly Bill 351, which was drafted by California Assembly Member Cristina Garcia was signed by Newsom on Sunday. Officials in California will have five years to come up with guidelines and regulations for natural organic reduction (composting) of their dead.
“With climate change and sea-level rise as very real threats to our environment, this is an alternative method of final disposition that won’t contribute emissions into our atmosphere,” Garcia said in a statement.

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The process of composting a body involves placing them in an 8ft-long steel box and covering them in biodegradable materials such as wood chips, alfalfa and straw which will break down the body and turn it into soil after about 30 to 60 days. That soil can then be returned to the relatives of the deceased.
Composting can cost anywhere from $5,000 to $7,000, but a casket burial in California costs about $7,000, and a cremation can cost $6,000.

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Edinburgh Resident Reveals How She Reached 102 Years of Age
By - Mary Manley

A care home resident in Edinburgh, Scotland, reached the age of 102 years of age this weekend. Lena 'Alice' Lamont, who lives at Murrayside, revealed how she far surpassed the average age of most Scotts.
Lamont, who is a resident of the care home Murrayside, turned 102 years old on Friday. She revealed the secret to her long life, saying a good glass of wine, lots of laughter, and sharing compassion with those around one's self is the secret to a long and happy life.
The Edinburgh centenarian celebrated her 102 years with chocolate cake and a singer who serenaded her with songs of her choice. Lamont is a life-long resident of Edinburgh and says she is an admirer of the city's scenery and historic architecture.
"We could certainly learn a lot from Alice's secrets to a long life! It was wonderful to discuss these and hear her life stories when marking such a momentous birthday," said Suzanne Welsh, the home manager at Murrayside.
"Alice is a much-loved resident at the home, she's always looking out for others and making everyone laugh. We were honored to raise a glass to her incredible life so far and we are so proud to have her as part of our Murrayside family," added Welsh.
Centenarians are those who live past the age of 100 years old, and in 2021 more than half a million people around the world were 100-years-old or older. About 97,000 centenarians lived in the United States last year, and Japan had about 79,000 people who were 100 years or older in 2021, with 0.06% of their population being made up of centenarians.
The oldest person who ever lived was a French woman named Jeanne Calment who died at the age of 122 years old. Calment, born 14 years before the Eiffel Tower was built, died in 1997.
The French had their own theories about Calment's secrets for longevity, including eating more than two pounds of chocolate a week, treating her skin with olive oil, and riding a bicycle until the age of 100, and only quitting smoking five years before her death.
But Jean-Marie Robine, who wrote a book on Calment, says she thinks the secret to long life lies elsewhere.
"I think she was someone who, constitutionally and biologically speaking, was immune to stress," said Robine, the year Calment died. "She once said, 'If you can't do anything about it, don't worry about it.'"

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There are several factors which may contribute to long life, including good genes. Dr. Angel Iscovich, a former emergency medicine physician, wrote that routine, even unhealthy ones such as daily consumption of sugary drinks or fatty foods, can help a person to live longer. It's the routine, says Iscovich, more than the habit that helps centenarians live for so long.

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Poll: Voters Virtually Split on Midterm Elections
By - Ian DeMartino

Midterm elections are typically difficult for the party that controls the White House. However, a few recent legislative wins and the Supreme Court's decision to overturn Roe v Wade have buoyed Democrat's hopes in November.

Likely voters are split on how they plan to fill out their ballots this November. According to a Washington Post-ABC Poll released Sunday, which asked who respondents would vote for if November's midterm elections were held today, 46% said they would vote for a Democrat while 47% said they would support a Republican candidate. The poll did not ask about specific candidates, instead generically asking what party they plan to vote for.

The 1% difference is well within the poll's 3.5% margin of error. One percent of respondents said they would vote for someone else, while 2%said they would not vote at all. Four percent of voters were undecided.

The same poll in April had similar results, with the same number picking Democrats while 45% said they would vote for the Republican candidate. That was also within the poll's margin of error.

Meanwhile, Biden's poll numbers do not seem to be improving, after other polls showed the President rebounding somewhat after a tough spring and early summer for the President.

Only 39% of likely voters said they approve of Biden's overall job performance and only 36% approved of his handling of the economy. A Gallup poll from August had seen Biden's approval rating rise to 44%from a low of 38%, but that was not reflected in this Washington Post-ABC poll.

Democrats will be hoping this poll is an anomaly and not the start of a trend.

However, the Democratic party seems more popular than the President. Voters were evenly split on which party they trust to tackle the nation's issues at 42% each.

One interesting result in the poll is how many voters think this midterm election is more important than previous midterm elections. Sixty-six percent said that it was, the same percentage of respondents who said the 2018 midterms were more important than previous midterm elections.

On specific issues, Democrats did better on abortion (52% to 32%), education and schools (47% to 41%), and climate change (54% to 31%). Republicans performed better on crime (52% - 36%), inflation (54% to 35%) and the economy (52% - 38%). Immigration was virtually tied, with Democrats receiving 44% and Republicans getting 43%.

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The economy was chosen most often as the most important issue for voters, with education and schools ranking second, and inflation ranking third.

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Rihanna Will Headline Super Bowl LVII Halftime Show
By - Ian DeMartino

The Super Bowl halftime show, along with the game, will take place on February 12, 2023, at the State Farm Stadium in Glendale Arizona.
Rihanna will headline the Super Bowl Halftime show. She announced the news by posting a photo of her tattooed arm holding an NFL football on her Instagram. The post was shared by her music label Roc Nation and she also posted it on her Twitter, which was retweeted by the NFL. Rihanna's post was her first social media activity since giving birth to her first child in May.
Taylor Swift was rumored to be the headliner at the show and according to TMZ, was offered the spot, but Swift refused until she finishes re-recording her first six albums. The rights to those albums were purchased by a group that included record executive Scooter Braun. Super Bowl halftime performers predictably receive a sales boost after performing and it stands to reason Swift wants that boost to go towards songs she owns the rights to, not the Braun group.
According to the NFL, 208 million people tuned into the game last year, with 120 million watching the halftime show.
The decision to perform at the halftime show is a departure for Rihanna who was offered the spot at the 2019 Super Bowl but turned it down to support Colin Kaepernick, the former San Francisco 49er Quarterback who many believe was blackballed from the league because he kneeled during the national anthem to protest police brutality.
"I couldn't dare do that," Rihanna told Vogue in 2019. "For what? Who gains from that? Not my people. I just couldn't be a sellout. I couldn't be an enabler. There's things within that organization that I do not agree with at all, and I was not about to go and be of service to them in any way."
Kaepernick remains without a job in the NFL but did get a tryout during the offseason.
Last year's Super Bowl halftime show was headlined by Dr. Dre, Eminem, Kendrick Lamar, Mary J. Blige, and Snoop Dogg. It also included a surprise appearance by 50 Cent.
Rihanna, 34, released her last album "Anti" in 2016. According to Chart Masters, as of June 2021, Rihanna's eight studio albums have sold 33.5 million copies and she has 14 #1 singles in the US, the second most for a woman of all time, trailing only Mariah Carey.

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Police Cuff Woman in Back of Patrol Car, Minutes Before it is Struck by a Train
By - Ian DeMartino

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Authorities in Colorado have released an edited eight-minute video showing police leave a suspect in the back of a patrol cruiser as it is struck by an oncoming train. In 2021, 26% of the 893 railroad-related deaths occurred at rail crossings.

The video was released on Friday by the Platteville and Fort Lupton police departments. It shows one police officer arriving on the scene where another officer had pulled over Yareni Rios-Gonzalez, 20. At that time the patrol vehicle was already parked directly on the train tracks, a few yards behind Rios-Gonzalez's vehicle. The rail crossing signs are visible.

After making her exit her vehicle, police handcuff Rios-Gonzalez and place her in the back of the police vehicle. They then start searching the car when the train's horn can be heard in the background. It takes at least 15 seconds after the first horn can be heard for the officer to realize a train is oncoming. One officer can be heard yelling "move your car" before another says "stay back."

The freight train then barrels into the car, with Rios-Gonzalez still inside. It appears that the cops may have forgotten that Rios-Gonzalez was in the vehicle, initially telling radio dispatchers "a patrol car has been hit by a train," before adding "Get us medical, emergent. The suspect was in the vehicle that was hit by the train."

According to Rios-Gonzalez's lawyer, Paul Wilkinson, she suffered a broken arm that needed surgery, nine broken ribs, a fractured sternum, a back injury, and a head injury. She remains hospitalized but is expected to survive.

While Rios-Gonzalez was unconscious when she reached the hospital, Wilkinson says that she remembers the crash.

"She saw it coming and could hear the horn," Wilkinson said. "She was trying to get the police officers' attention, screaming at them. She tried unlocking the door. She had her hands behind her back and was frantically trying to unlock the door."

He added that the officers are to blame for her injuries. "You just never park on a train track. You have to park somewhere else."

The police released the video to the Denver Post, which obtained it through an open records request.

Police were responding to a report of a road rage incident involving a gun when they stopped Rios-Gonzalez. Before and after the crash, police can be seen searching her vehicle where they found a gun holster, but it is unclear if a gun was recovered. Rios-Gonzalez has not been charged with a crime. A Union Pacific spokesperson told the Denver Post that the train's crew was not injured in the crash.

According to the Denver Post, one police officer has been placed on paid administrative leave after the incident. The Platteville police chief, Carl Dwyer, declined to reveal any of the officers' names or answer other questions involving the crash.

The Fort Lupton police are continuing the investigation of the alleged road rage incident, while the Colorado state patrol is examining the crash, and the Colorado Bureau of Investigations is looking into the injuries Rios-Gonzalez sustained while in police custody.

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Liz Cheney Says She Is Willing To Campaign For Democrats
By - Ian DeMartino

Representative Liz Cheney has been a rare vocal Republican critic of former President Donald Trump. She recently lost a primary challenge from a Trump-endorsed candidate and will be out of Congress in January.

Liz Cheney, a Republican Representative from Wyoming, said on Saturday that she is willing to campaign for Democrats to stop election deniers like Arizona GOP gubernatorial candidate Kari Lake.

Cheney was speaking at the Texas Tribune Festival in Austin, where she said, “partisanship has to have a limit.” She also mentioned Virginia governor Glenn Youngkin, who has said he is planning to campaign for Lake.

"He’s demonstrated that he’s somebody who has not bought into the toxin of Donald Trump — but he campaigned recently for Kari Lake, who’s an election denier, who is dangerous,” Cheney said. “That’s the kind of thing we cannot see in our party. We cannot see an accommodation like that, and I think it’s very important that we be clear about that.”

When asked if she would consider campaigning for Lake’s Democratic opponent, Katie Hobbs, Cheney said that she would. “I am going to do everything I can to make sure that Kari Lake is not elected.”

Cheney, who has been a consistent critic of former President Donald Trump for his actions after the 2020 election, has been hinting at a possible presidential run in 2024. If she does decide to run, she will face an uphill battle; only 4% of Republicans indicated they will vote for her over Trump.

It is worth considering if a Cheney endorsement would be valuable for Hobbs. She is exceedingly unpopular with most voters other than Democrats, who are already likely to vote for Hobbs.

According to a Morning Consult poll, taken shortly after Cheney’s primary loss to Harriet Hageman in August, only 14% of Republicans view Cheney favorably, compared to 66% who view her unfavorably.

Independents are not much better. Forty-two percent hold an unfavorable view of her, compared to 27% who have a favorable view of the soon-to-be former Representative.

Only Democrats seem to like the daughter of former Vice President Dick Cheney, with 48% holding a favorable view, compared to 23% who hold an unfavorable view.

If the hope is to peel off some Republican voters from Lake or convince Independents who are on the fence, putting Hobbs on stage next to Cheney may not be the most effective path to that goal.

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Canada to Drop COVID-19 Entry Requirements on October 1 – Health Minister

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WASHINGTON, September 26 (Sputnik) – Canada will remove all COVID-19-related border requirements for all travelers entering the country beginning on October 1, Minister of Health Jean-Yves Duclos said on Monday.

"We are announcing that the government of Canada will not renew the order-in-council that expires on September 30 and will therefore remove all COVID-19 border requirements for all travelers entering Canada," Duclos said at a press conference. "This includes the removal of all federal testing, quarantine, and isolation requirements, as well as the mandatory submission of health information in ArriveCan."

Transport Minister Omar Alghabra also announced that air and rail travelers will no longer be required to undergo health check or wear masks on planes and trains. Cruises will also no longer have to review the vaccination status of crew and passengers.

Duclos said that Canada was in "a much better position than we were in 2020," largely due to vaccinations and observance of other public health measures. He added that more than 85% of Canadians had received at least two doses of COVID-19 vaccines and Moderna's new bivalent vaccine specifically targeting the Omicron variant was now available to all adults.

Duclos said fall booster campaigns were already in progress, citing 40% of Canadians saying they wanted to receive a booster this fall and another 40% saying they were considering it.

The health minister called on Canadians to get a booster if it had been six months since their last dose, comparing the practice to charging a phone battery. He conceded that the government expected an increase in cases of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses during the fall with activities moving indoors, but believed it could be managed with vaccinations and protocols like masks and handwashing.

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US Vice President Discusses Taiwan, North Korea With Japanese Prime Minister

WASHINGTON, September 26 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Kamala Harris discussed with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida recent missile launches by North Korea and tensions over Taiwan, the White House said on Monday.

Harris is currently in Japan to attend former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's state funeral.

"They discussed the People's Republic of China's recent aggressive and irresponsible provocations in the Taiwan Strait, and reaffirmed the importance of preserving peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait. The leaders condemned recent ballistic missile launch by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and pledged to work together to address the threats posed by DPRK's nuclear and ballistic weapons program," the statement said.

They also discussed the importance of resolving the issue of Japanese citizens allegedly abducted by North Korea.

Harris conveyed condolences over the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe while also discussing his legacy.

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Abe was killed by a gunman in July while delivering a campaign speech in the Japanese city of Nara. The state funeral will be the second held by Japan for a former prime minister since World War II. Over 6,000 Japanese and foreign officials are expected to attend the event.
While in Japan, Harris will also meet with the prime ministers of Australia and South Korea to discuss Indo-Pacific developments, including work by the "Quad" alliance and climate change.

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US Announces $457.5Mln in New Civilian Security Assistance for Ukraine – Blinken
(Adds details in paras 3-5)
WASHINGTON, September 26 (Sputnik) - The United States is announcing $457.5 million in new civilian security assistance for Ukraine, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday.
"The United States today committed an additional $457.5 million in civilian security assistance to enhance the efforts of Ukrainian law enforcement and criminal justice agencies to improve their operational capacity and save lives as they continue to help defend the Ukrainian people, their freedom, and their democracy from the Kremlin's brutal war of aggression," Blinken said in a statement.
Since mid-December 2021, the US has committed over $645 million in assistance to Ukrainian law enforcement and criminal justice partners, including the National Police of Ukraine and State Border Guard Service, Blinken recalled.
He expressed confidence that the provision of personal protective equipment, medical supplies, and armored vehicles has significantly reduced casualties for Ukrainians.
The United States remains committed to supporting a democratic, independent, and sovereign Ukraine, he added.

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PREVIEW - Harris to Visit Japan, S. Korea for Abe State Funeral, Talks With World Leaders

WASHINGTON, September 26 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Kamala Harris will travel to Japan and South Korea next week to attend the state funeral for former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and engage with world leaders on matters of regional and global significance including tensions in the Taiwan Strait.

Abe was killed by a gunman in July while delivering a campaign speech in the Japanese city of Nara. The state funeral will be the second held by Japan for a former prime minister since World War II. Over 6,000 Japanese and foreign officials are expected to attend the event.

"The purpose of this trip is threefold: first, obviously, to honor the legacy of Prime Minster Abe and support the Japanese people as they mourn the tragedy of his assassination. Second, to reaffirm the United States' commitment to our allies in an increasingly complex security environment. And third, to deepen our overall engagements in the Indo-Pacific region," a senior US administration official told reporters last week

On Monday, Harris will arrive in Tokyo and meet with current Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, the senior official said. The leaders are expected to discuss the US-Japan alliance, space cooperation and regional issues such as tensions in the Taiwan Strait, according to the official.

On Tuesday, Harris will attend Abe's state funeral and meet with Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, with whom she will discuss Indo-Pacific developments, including work by the "Quad" alliance and climate change, the official said.

Harris will also meet with South Korean Prime Minister Han Duck-soo while he is in Tokyo for the state funeral, during which time she will discuss the US-South Korea security alliance, the official added.

On Wednesday, Harris will convene a group of Japanese business executives in the semiconductor industry to discuss investment in manufacturing, supply chain resilience and research and development, according to the official.

Later on Wednesday, Harris will go to a US naval base in Japan to receive a briefing and tour of a destroyer ship, as well as meet with soldiers and deliver remarks on enduring US commitments to the Indo-Pacific region, the official also said.

On Thursday, Harris will travel to South Korea for a bilateral meeting with President Yoon Suk-yeol, the official said. Harris will discuss the strength of the US-South Korea alliance, threats posed by North Korea, stability across the Taiwan Strait and technology partnership, according to the official.

Harris will also hold a roundtable discussion with "groundbreaking Korean women" to discuss gender issues in South Korea and around the world, the official added.

While there are no deliverables expected to be announced by the United States during the trip, engagement can be a deliverable onto itself, the official said.

The trip will occur amid the possibility of further North Korean nuclear or missile tests, as well as increased tensions between Washington and Beijing over Taiwan relations.

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Ukraine Conflict Will Not Be Resolved Without Russia-US Talks - Hungarian Foreign Minister

UNITED NATIONS, September 24 (Sputnik) - The conflict in Ukraine cannot be resolved without negotiations between Russia and the United States, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto told Sputnik on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly.
"I do believe that without an American-Russian agreement, without a Russian-American discussion this situation will not be resolved, whether we like it or not," Szijjarto said. "I see that in order to close this crazy situation as soon as possible, American-Russian discussions are needed."

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Hungary's Top Diplomat Says Hoped UNGA Would Help Resolve Ukraine Crisis, Situation Worse

UNITED NATIONS, September 24 (Sputnik) - Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto told Sputnik he hoped the high-level United Nations General Assembly debate would help resolve the crisis in Ukraine but the situation became worse than it was a week ago.
"I regret it's Friday already because when I came on Monday I had a hope that the General Assembly would bring some good news because I still believe that there is no more appropriate place to discuss issues of peace than in UN, but now it's Friday and the situation is worse than it was on Monday," Szijjarto said.
However, Szijjarto mentioned that NATO member states have excluded the idea of deploying troops to Ukraine amid Russia's special military operation, and he hopes this decision remains in place.

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NATO-Russia Risk of Escalation to Remain as Long as Ukraine Crisis Continues - Hungary FM
UNITED NATIONS, September 24 (Sputnik) - The risks of escalation between the NATO military alliance and Russia will remain for as long as the crisis in Ukraine continues, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto told Sputnik on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly.
"You asked me whether the danger of escalation is there. Of course. I mean as long as there is war, the danger of escalation is there," Szijjarto said.

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RPT - Turkey's Lack of Commitment Only Obstacle to Syria Peace Process - Syrian Foreign Minister

UNITED NATIONS, September 24 (Sputnik) - The lack of commitment on the side of Turkey is the only obstacle stalling the Syria peace process under the Astana framework, Syrian Foreign Affairs Minister Faisal Mekdad told Sputnik.
"We ask the Turkish side to be more serious to implement their commitments as being agreed upon by the Astana process. This is the only problem we are facing, but we believe the efforts of our friends, both the Russians and the Iranians, are going in the correct direction," Mekdad said on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly on Friday.
Mekdad added that the Astana process has so far been "the only viable component that has succeeded on the ground," and resulted in "many successes." The Syrian minister noted that there have been no contacts or meetings with the Turkish side during the United Nations General Assembly High-Level Week.
"There are no negotiations, there are no contacts, there is nothing at least on the level of foreign ministers," Mekdad said.

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Hungary Sees Preventing NATO-Russian Conflict as Top Priority - Foreign Minister

UNITED NATIONS, September 24 (Sputnik) - Hungary views preventing a direct conflict between NATO and Russia as a topmost priority, Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto told Sputnik on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly.
"Well, when you ask me what's the most important duty now, exactly this: To avoid any kind of direct conflict between NATO and Russia because this would lead to somewhere neither of us wanna go," Szijjarto said. "Whenever we are sitting together with NATO colleagues this is always our number one issue - to avoid a conflict between NATO and Russia."

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Hungary Will Never Agree to Sanction Russia's Rosatom, Gazprom - Foreign Minister

UNITED NATIONS, September 24 (Sputnik) - Hungary will never agree to add Russian energy firms Rosatom and Gazprom to the EU sanctions list, Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto told Sputnik on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly.

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"We will never agree with Rosatom or Gazprom being put on a sanction list, and we would never agree any entity to be put on a sanction list which is important for us from the perspective of the supply of energy," Szijjarto said.
European Union officials have said they will soon roll out a new package of sanctions against Russia.

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Hungary Does Not Expect EU to Lift Anti-Russia Sanctions Anytime Soon - Foreign Minister

UNITED NATIONS, September 24 (Sputnik) - Hungary does not expect the European Union to lift sanctions against Russia soon, Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto told Sputnik on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly.
"No, no, it's the other way around," Szijjarto said when asked if the European Union has discussed the lifting of sanctions against Russia.

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US Republican Party Unveils Campaign Video With Footage From Russia, Ukraine

WASHINGTON, September 24 (Sputnik) - The US Republican party has published a campaign video - “The Preamble to the Commitment to America” - that contains footage of Russia and Ukraine.
The video is made of a series of fragments designed to inform about the history, achievements and pressing problems of the United States ahead of the November midterms elections and is accompanied by an off-screen voice narration.
Some of the footage on the video was not filmed in the United States, but in Russia, Ukraine and Slovakia.
Two video snippets, one presenting oil pumps and a boy running across a field with an airplane in his hands, were actually filmed in the Volgograd region by Russian filmmaker Serg Grbanoff. The filmmaker informed the HuffPost about the fact that he took the video.
Similarly, the Trump Make America Great Again Committee released in 2020 a digital advertisement as part of the then-President Donald Trump’s campaign that called upon people to support US troops and used a stock photo of Russian-made fighter jets and Russian models in military uniforms.

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Biden Formally Terminates Designation of Afghanistan as Major Non-NATO Ally - Memo

WASHINGTON, September 24 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden in a determination to the State Department formally terminated Afghanistan's designation as a major non-NATO ally.
"By the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America...I hereby terminate the designation of Afghanistan as a Major Non-NATO Ally of the United States," Biden said in a memorandum on Friday.
The United States designated Afghanistan as a major non-NATO ally in July 2012, but the situation on the ground changed last August when the US-backed government in Kabul fell to the Taliban (under UN sanctions for terrorism).

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US in Talks to Expedite Construction of Australia's First Nuclear Submarines - Reports
(Updates with more details, background in paras 5-7)
WASHINGTON, September 24 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is in the middle of discussions to expedite the construction of Australia's first nuclear-powered submarines as guaranteed in the AUKUS defense pact, the Wall Street Journal reported.
The report said on Friday, citing Western officials, that the United States wants to build the first several nuclear-powered submarines for Australia and provide it with a submarine fleet by the mid-2030s in response to China's growing military power.
The United States' recommendation has not yet been formally approved, but a final decision on this matter is expected in March, the report said.
The report also highlighted the challenges the United States would face to complete the task, including the need to secure billions of dollars to expand its submarine-production capacity and a contribution from Australia to back the effort.
The White House said in a press release on Friday that Australia, United Kingdom and the United States - the countries that comprise the AUKUS security pact - have made significant progress toward ensuring that Australia would acquire conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines. The AUKUS allies will provide the submarines at the earliest possible date, the release said.
In September, the three allies announced the new trilateral security partnership, forcing Australia to abandon its $66 billion contract with France to receive 12 state-of-the-art conventionally-powered attack submarines from the United States.
In May, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said the AUKUS security pact is provoking an arms race in the South Pacific without any consultation with island countries of the region.

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Syria Supports Grain Deal, Blames West for Problems in Poor Countries - Foreign Minister

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UNITED NATIONS, September 24 (Sputnik) - Syria fully supports the grain deal between Russia and Ukraine and considers Western countries responsible for the problems developing countries are currently facing, Foreign Affairs Minister Faisal Mekdad told Sputnik.
"We support fully this [grain deal]. Western countries are responsible for the problems being faced by developing countries. They are not accepting to give any facilitation for Russian goods to go into the international markets while they want the Ukrainian side to do everything. I think this is absolutely unfair," Mekdad said on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly on Friday.
Mekdad called the alleged Western plans to let Ukraine play the same role as Russia has played, including its support for the development of countries around the world, "absolutely illogical."

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Turkey's Lack of Commitment Only Obstacle to Syria Peace Process - Syrian Foreign Minister

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Mekdad added that the Astana process has so far been "the only viable component that has succeeded on the ground," and resulted in "many successes." The Syrian minister noted that there have been no contacts or meetings with the Turkish side during the United Nations General Assembly High-Level Week.
"There are no negotiations, there are no contacts, there is nothing at least on the level of foreign ministers," Mekdad said.

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US, Allies Say Concerned Over Alleged Russian Threats to Nuclear Security in Ukraine

WASHINGTON, September 24 (Sputnik) - The United States and a number of its allies and partners, including the United Kingdom, Germany and France, issued a joint statement on Friday expressing a "grave concern" over alleged Russian threats to the security of nuclear facilities in Ukraine.
"We, the ministers of Foreign Affairs of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, Ukraine, and the United States of America, and senior officials from the Republic of

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Korea and Switzerland, as well as the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, wish to express our grave concern regarding the threats posed to the safety and security of nuclear facilities devoted to peaceful purposes in Ukraine and their personnel, significantly raising the risk of a nuclear accident," the joint statement said on Friday.
The allies pledge to continue supporting the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) action in helping facilitate the implementation of seven principles outlined in the statement of IAEA Director General's statement made on March 2-3, the statement said.
Among the seven principles are ensuring the physical integrity of all nuclear facilities, the functionality of all safety and security systems and equipment as well as effective on-site radiation monitoring systems, the statement said.
The ministers of the signatory countries also welcome the IAEA mission to the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant (ZNPP) and stand ready to support its nuclear safety, security and safeguards objectives, the statement added.
On Wednesday, IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi said that the agency along with representatives of Russia, Ukraine and other partners is already working on the very specific aspects that would be required to establish a demilitarized zone around the ZNPP. Grossi also said that IAEA will enlarge the size of its mission at the ZNPP in the next several days.
Located on the left bank of the Dnieper River, the ZNPP is the largest nuclear power plant in Europe in terms of the number of units and output. During the special military operation in Ukraine launched by Russia on February 24, the nuclear plant and surrounding area fell under the control of the Russian forces. The ZNPP has recently been targeted by multiple shelling, raising international concerns over a possible nuclear accident. Russia and Ukraine blame each other for the shelling.

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Syrian Foreign Minister Tells Sputnik Ukraine Conflict Not in Interest of Ukrainian People
UNITED NATIONS, September 24 (Sputnik) - The conflict in Ukraine is absolutely not in the interest of the Ukrainian people and the negotiating table is the place where all the issues must be resolved, Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs Faisal Mekdad told Sputnik.
"I think this war is absolutely not in the interest of the Ukrainian people, and the negotiating table is the place to solve all these problems," Mekdad said on Friday.
The Syrian Foreign Minister also noted that the crisis in Ukraine has affected the entire world.
"I put the entire responsibility on the Ukrainian side, on the Western side. The support given by the United States and Western countries to Ukraine is counterproductive," Mekdad said.
The Syrian Foreign Minister also said that it seems to him the United States and its allies want to "fight until the last Ukrainian."

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US to Work With Allies to Impose More Costs on Russia Over Referenda in Ukraine - Biden

WASHINGTON, September 24 (Sputnik) - The United States will work with its partners to impose additional economic costs on Russia in response to the expected accession of four regions to Russia during popular referenda, US President Joe Biden said.
"The United States will never recognize Ukrainian territory as anything other than part of Ukraine," Biden said in a statement on Friday. "We will work with our allies and partners to impose additional swift and severe economic costs on Russia. The United States stands with our partners around the world - and with every nation that respects the core tenets of the UN charter - in rejecting whatever fabricated outcomes Russia will announce."
The Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics as well as the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions are holding referenda on whether to join Russia. The areas have been largely secured by Russian forces during Moscow's special military operation in response to requests for help from the regions due to mistreatment by the Kiev regime.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY
WASHINGTON, September 24 (Sputnik) -

UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS
* No threats from the EU or other Western countries will change Russia's determination to achieve all the goals and objectives of its special military operation, the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement on Friday.
* The United States is not capable of negotiating and pushing Kiev to move hostilities to Russian territory while using nuclear blackmail, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said.

GLOBAL ECONOMY
* US stocks were headed on Friday for their worst weekly loss since June as global equity markets sank under the weight of recession fears after central banks from the Federal Reserve to the Bank of England raised interest rates sharply this week in a desperate bid to fight inflation.
* The British pound fell more than 2% against the dollar on Friday evening, and went below $1.1 for the first time since March 1985.

PARTIAL MOBILIZATION IN RUSSIA
* Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov dismissed reports of alleged draft of more than 300,000 people as part of the partial mobilization.
* The statement of EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell about partial mobilization in Russia and referenda in the liberated territories is riddled with a "confrontational mood," devoid of objectivity and out of touch with reality, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

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US-RUSSIA RELATIONS

* Russian ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said on Friday that he wants to believe Russia and the US are yet not on the verge of a nuclear conflict despite all the difficulties in the relations.
* Russia will show the latest intercontinental ballistic missile Sarmat to a US inspection team before February 2024, according to the terms of reference published on the public procurement portal.
* Demonstrations of weapons under the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) are currently suspended, Roscosmos ordered the demonstration of the Sarmat rocket to the US inspection as part of the fulfillment of its obligations, in case the demonstrations are resumed, the state corporation told reporters.
* The United States and its allies are prepared to impose new sanctions on Russia if it moves forward with the "annexation" of Russian-controlled territory in Ukraine after referendums, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said.

REFERENDUMS IN DONBASS

* Russian President Vladimir Putin and the parliament will act promptly and sign all necessary documents if people in Donbas, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions vote to join Russia at the ongoing referendums, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.
* The Russian constitution will be valid in Donbas, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions if they join the federation following referenda, Peskov said when asked about possible Ukrainian attacks on these territories.
* Switzerland has condemned the decision to hold referenda on joining Russia in Donbas republics and summoned the Russian ambassador in Bern over this situation, the Swiss government said.

MIR PAYMENT SYSTEM IN TURKEY

* Turkey is looking for alternatives to Russian payment system Mir and considering all available options, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Friday.
* The accusations against Turkey over work of the Mir payment system in the country are unfounded, Ankara is looking for alternative ways to resolve the issue, Turkish presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said.

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Canada, South Korea Launching High-Level Economic Security Dialogue - Statement

TORONTO, September 23 (Sputnik) - Canada and South Korea are launching a high-level economic security dialogue in an attempt to address areas such as critical mineral supply chains and clean energy development, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol said on Friday.

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"Today, we agreed to work towards launching a high-level dialogue on economic security involving the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Industry," Trudeau and Yoon said in a joint statement.

Canada and South Korea will bolster cooperation and coordination on supply chain resilience, including critical mineral and battery supply chains, the statement said.

The two officials also agreed to strengthen the bilateral Joint Committee on Science, Technology and Innovation, the statement added.

Canada and South Korea will announce in the coming months an agreement to build value chains in their countries that enable clean energy transition and energy security, according to the statement.

Yoon's visit to Canada for talks with Trudeau was his first bilateral trip since assuming office in March. The two officials also discussed Indo-Pacific regional strategy amid increasing tensions across the Taiwan strait.

"We have spoken at great length today about the fact that both of us are developing renewed Indo-Pacific strategies and we've committed to continuing to work together closely," Trudeau said during a joint press conference with Yoon. "China is certainly a real challenging actor in the region."

China must be worked with on areas of mutual interest such as climate change but challenged on areas such as respect for the so-called "rules-based international order" promoted by Canada, the United States and other aligned states, Trudeau said.

Trudeau also highlighted and praised the historical and cultural ties between Canada and South Korea, and praised the notable Korean community in Canada.

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Mississippi Man Charged With Federal Hate Crime for Burning Cross - US Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) - A 23-year-old Mississippi resident has been charged with a hate crime and arson for burning a cross in an attempt to threaten a Black family in Gulfport, the US Justice Department said on Friday.

"Axel C. Cox, 23, has been charged with hate crime and arson violations for burning a cross in his front yard to threaten, interfere with and intimidate a Black family in Gulfport, Mississippi," the Justice Department said in a press relese. "Cox is charged with one count of criminal interference with the right to fair housing and one count of using fire to commit a federal felony."

On December 3, 2020, Cox threatened, intimidated and interfered with a Black family's enjoyment of their housing rights by burning a cross in his front yard and threatened and uttered racially derogatory comments at his Black neighbors, the release said.

If convicted, Cox faces up to ten years in prison for interfering with the family's housing rights and another ten years for using fire to commit a federal felony. the release added.

Cox could also be fined as much as $250,000 for each charge, according to the release.

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US in Talks to Expedite Construction of Australia's First Nuclear Submarines - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is in the middle of discussions to expedite the construction of Australia's first nuclear-powered submarines as guaranteed in the AUKUS defense pact, the Wall Street Journal reported on Friday.
The report said, citing Western officials, that the United States wants to build the first several nuclear-powered submarines for Australia and provide it a fleet by the mid-2030s in response to China's growing military power,
The United States' recommendation has not yet been formally approved, but a final decision on this matter is expected in March, the report said.
The report also highlights the challenges the United States would face to complete the task, including the need to secure billions of dollars to expand its submarine-production capacity and to secure a contribution from Australia to back the effort.

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Lightning, Potential Hurricane Could Again Delay Artemis 1 Launch on Tuesday - NASA

WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) - Artemis 1 mission engineers were confident their unmanned first test launch of a giant rocket to orbit the Moon will go ahead on September 27 as scheduled speaking at a news conference on Friday, but they also cautioned that Tropical Depression Nine now approaching Florida could once again delay the launch.
"We are tracking no technical constraints," to delay the launch on Tuesday, September 27, NASA Exploration Ground Systems Program Deputy Manager Jeremy Parsons told reporters. However, he continued, "Our biggest concern is weather ... There is a 15% chance of lightning within 5 nautical miles."
In addition, Tropical Depression Nine, which is gathering strength in the Atlantic Ocean and moving toward the coast of Florida, has introduced an element of uncertainty into launch calculations, NASA officials acknowledged. They said they would decide on Saturday whether or not to delay the launch because of the worsening weather conditions.
"We're just taking it a step at a time," NASA's deputy associate administrator for exploration systems told the news conference."
Tropical Depression Nine formed in the Caribbean Sea on Friday and it could hit the Florida coast as a Category 3 hurricane. The National Hurricane Center on Friday morning announced the depression was still 515 miles east-southeast of Jamaica and was moving in a west-northwest direction at 15 miles per hour.

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Two Men Plead Guilty to Stealing $30Mln in Foreign Exchange Scheme - US Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) - Two men who concocted a foreign exchange trading ruse that netted them $30 million pleaded guilty for their involvement in the plan, the US Justice Department said on Friday.

"Patrick Gallagher, 44, of Middleborough, Massachusetts, and Michael Dion, 49, of Orlando, Florida, devised a scheme in which they would solicit victims to invest in their foreign exchange company, Global Forex Management, by promising them large returns based on previous trading results that they had fabricated," the Justice Department said in a press release.

Gallagher and Dion told the victims that their funds would be traded using an online trading platform provided by a co-conspirator's company, IB Capital, but were working with other co-conspirators in the Netherlands to steal the victim investors' money, the release said.

In May 2012, Gallagher and Dion executed their plan by purposely creating massive trading losses for the investors and stole $30 million from their victims, the release also said.

The two then directed the stolen money through a number of shell companies they had set up overseas, the release added.

Both men pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit securities fraud, and each face a maximum of five years in prison, according to the release.

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Oil Tumbles on Recession Fears, US Crude Below $80 After Almost 8% Drop on Week

(Adds details, comments and context in paras 4-12)

NEW YORK, September 23 (Sputnik) - Oil prices tumbled on Friday as recession fears gripped global markets, with investors sending US crude below the key $80 per barrel mark after a near 8% loss on the week.

West Texas Intermediate crude, the benchmark for US oil, settled down Friday's trade at $78.74 per barrel, down $4.75, or 5.7%, on the day.

For the week, the so-called WTI crude was down 7.5% amid risk-aversion across markets after central banks from the Federal Reserve to the Bank of England raised interest rates sharply this week in a desperate bid to fight inflation.

"WTI is inching closer to the 100-Week SMA of $77.50 with today's low of $78.14," Sunil Kumar Dixit, chief technical strategist at SKCharting.com, said, referring to US crude's Simple Moving Average. "Some additional drop beyond the support is not ruled out."

Brent, the London-traded global benchmark for oil, settled at $86.15, down $4.31, or 4.8% on the day, after an intraday drop to $85.51.

For the week, Brent was down 5.7% for its biggest weekly decline since the end of August.

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"Central banks now appear to accept that a recession is the price to pay for getting a grip on inflation, which could weigh on demand next year," Craig Erlam, analyst at online trading platform OANDA, said.
This is despite the market remaining tight on supply and producer group OPEC+ appearing willing to cut output further, even without delivering on export quotas it has set for itself.
"What's more, a nuclear deal between the US and Iran looks no closer, and Russia's mobilization [to support its military operation in Ukraine] could pose a risk to supply," Erlam said, adding that considering all these, "very little is probably priced in at this point" into oil risks.
The European Union ratcheted up, on Thursday, its plans to put a cap on the price of Russian oil — a measure aimed at weakening Moscow's ability to fund its military campaign in Ukraine.
Nigeria's Oil Minister Timipre Marlin Sylva, speaking on behalf of producer alliance OPEC+, meanwhile, threatened a cut in global crude output if prices continued to fall.
Neither announcement made much of an impact on the market.

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UN Concerned by Reports of Victims at Protests in Iran - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, September 23 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is concerned about reports of victims during protests in Iran sparked by the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in the custody of the country's morality police, spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Friday.
"Looking at what's going on today, we're, obviously, concerned about the reports of peaceful protests being met by excessive use of force, leading to dozens of deaths and injuries. We call on security forces to refrain from using unnecessary and disproportionate force and appeal to all to exercise restraint to avoid further escalation," Dujarric told journalists.
On September 13, Amini was detained by Iran's morality police in Tehran for wearing an "improper" hijab, an offense punishable by prison. The woman was sent to a detention center for an explanatory conversation. According to Iranian authorities, she had a heart attack there, after which she was immediately taken to a nearby hospital. On September 16, the young woman died.
Her death sparked protests, with some suggesting that law enforcement officers hit Amini in the head. Iranian women started publishing videos on social media that show them cutting their hair and burning hijabs, which they are obligated to wear.
Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi expressed condolences to Amini's family and ordered a special investigation into her death. Examination of the woman's body revealed no signs of violence, Iranian lawmaker Mohammad Saleh said.
The protests have still continued across the country. So far, 26 demonstrators and policemen have been killed in violent clashes during the rallies, according to Iranian state-run media.

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US Takes Alleged Russian Nuclear Threats 'Very Seriously' – White House

WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) - The United States takes the alleged Russian nuclear threats very seriously but does not see any reason to adjust its nuclear posture at this time, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said on Friday.
"We obviously take these [Russian nuclear] threats very seriously, but we have not seen any reason to adjust our own nuclear posture at this time," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing.

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White House Says Does Not Seek Conflict With Russia, Attentive to Managing Escalation

WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) – The United States does not seek conflict with Russia and is attentive to managing escalation amid the Ukraine crisis, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said on Friday.
"We do not seek conflict with Russia. Of course, we are attentive to managing escalation in this conflict as always, as we have been for the past six months or more of this war, and throughout this year," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing.

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White House on If Biden Has Confidence in Malpass: We Disagree With His Remarks on Climate

WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration does not agree with comments from World Bank President David Malpass with regard to climate change, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Friday.
At a climate event hosted by the New York Times earlier in the week, Malpass was asked whether he believes that the "manmade burning of fossil fuels is rapidly and dangerously warming the planet." The World Bank chief said: "I don't even know. I'm not a scientist." The comment triggered backlash and media reports that the Biden administration considers ousting him over his "weak" stance on climate change.
Earlier on Friday, Malpass said that he is not a climate denier.
"We disagree with the comments of the [World Bank] President," Jean-Pierre said when asked if the White House has lost confidence in Malpass.

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US Ready to Impose Sanctions on Russia If Moves Forward With 'Annexation' - White House

WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) - The United States and its allies are prepared to impose new sanctions on Russia if it moves forward with the "annexation" of Russian-controlled territory in Ukraine after referendums, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Friday.
The breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk (DPR and LPR) as well as the Russian-controlled regions of Zaporizhzhia and Kherson hold referendums on accession to Russia from September 23-27.
"We are prepared to impose additional swift and severe economic costs on Russia, along with our allies and partners, in response to these actions, if they move forward with annexation," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing, adding that the United States will continue to provide Ukraine with security assistance.

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Guterres Condemns Recent Attack in Front of Mosque in Kabul - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, September 23 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemns the attack which took place on Friday in front of Wazir Akbar Khan mosque in Kabul, spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said at a briefing.
"The Secretary-General condemns today's attack in front of Wazir Akbar Khan mosque in Kabul following Friday's prayers. The Secretary-General conveys his condolences to the families of the victims and wishes a swift recovery to those injured," he said.
At least seven people were killed and over 40 injured after a car bomb went off as worshipers were leaving the mosque, a Taliban official said. Children are among the victims.
So far, no group has claimed responsibility for the attack.

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Oil Tumbles on Recession Fears, US Crude Below $80 After Almost 8% Drop on Week

NEW YORK, September 23 (Sputnik) - Oil prices tumbled on Friday as recession fears gripped global markets, with investors sending US crude below the key $80 per barrel mark after a near 8% loss on the week.
West Texas Intermediate crude, the benchmark for US oil, settled down Friday’s trade at $78.74 per barrel, down $4.75, or 5.7%, on the day. For the week, the so-called WTI crude was down 7.5% amid risk-aversion across markets after central banks from the Federal Reserve to the Bank of England raised interest rates sharply this week in a desperate bid to fight inflation.

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Elon Musk Says Activating Starlink in Iran - Statement

WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) - SpaceX founder Elon Musk said on Friday that he is activating Starlink, a satellite internet constellation operated by his company, in Iran.
"Activating Starlink," Musk said via Twitter in response to the US sanctions waiver to provide Iranians with greater internet access.
Earlier in the day, the Treasury Department issued a license that expands the provision of internet services to Iran in an effort to support the "free flow of information" amid mass protests in the country.

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US Stocks Head for Worst Week Since June on Recession Fears

NEW YORK, September 23 (Sputnik) - US stocks were headed on Friday for their worst weekly loss since June as global equity markets sank under the weight of recession fears after central banks from the Federal Reserve to the Bank of England raised interest rates sharply this week in a desperate bid to fight inflation.
With 90 minutes to Friday's close, the Dow Jones Industrial Average, which comprises stocks of 30 large US corporations, was down 4.5% on the week. The S&P 500 Index, which represents the top 500 US stocks, showed a weekly loss of 5.2%. The Nasdaq Composite Index, which comprises marquee names in technology such as Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google, posted a weekly decline of 5.8%.

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Blinken, China's Wang Discuss Need to Responsibly Manage Relations - US State Dept.
(Updates with details in paras 4, 5)
NEW YORK, September 23 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi discussed in a bilateral meeting on the margins of the UN General Assembly the need to maintain open lines of communication and responsibly manage relations amid tensions between the two countries, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Friday.
"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken met today with PRC [People's Republic of China] State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the margins of the 77th UN General Assembly in

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New York City," Price said in a press release. "The Secretary discussed the need to maintain open lines of communication and responsibly manage the US-PRC relationship, especially during times of tension."
Blinken emphasized during the meeting that the United States is committed to maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, consistent with the One China policy, Price said.
The two officials also discussed the crisis in Ukraine and Blinken reiterated the United States' condemnation of Russia's special military operation and raised the issue of implications for China should it provide support to Moscow.
Aside from Taiwan and Ukraine, Blinken also said the United States remains open to cooperating with China where they may have common interests.

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Biden Says Not All Republicans 'MAGA' Variety, But Group Runs Party

WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) - Not every member of the Republican Party in the United States is a so-called "MAGA Republican" but those who control the whole party are, President Joe Biden said on Friday.
"MAGA" refers to the 2016 Donald Trump campaign slogan "Make America Great Again," which Biden uses to identify purportedly radical elements of the party. Biden in remarks earlier this month said the faction represents an "extremism" that threatens US democracy.
"The path offered by Democrats is contrasted with the one offered by the MAGA Republicans, and by the way, not all Republicans are MAGA Republicans, so I want to make that clear," Biden said during remarks to the Democratic National Committee. "The MAGA Republicans control the Republican party right now, and that's self-evident."
After Biden's comments earlier this month, House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy said the president vilified tens of millions of US citizens who supported Trump and the Republican Party.

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Biden Says Would Veto Nationwide Abortion Ban if Republicans Win US Congress in Midterms

WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden on Friday affirmed he would veto a nationwide ban on abortion should Republicans gain control of Congress in the upcoming midterms and pass such legislation.
"If Republicans win control of the Congress, abortion will be banned. By the way, it'll be initially banned, but if they win Congress, I will veto it," Biden said during remarks to the Democratic National Committee.

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Republican state legislatures and federal lawmakers have pushed legislation to restrict or ban abortions following a Supreme Court decision earlier this year returning the right to regulate abortions to the states.
Biden and many of the his Democratic colleagues have criticized the Supreme Court's decision and vowed to implement federal protections for abortion.

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Blinken, China's Wang Discuss Need to Responsibly Manage Relations - State Dept.

NEW YORK, September 23 (Sputnik) - US Secretary Antony Blinken and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi discussed in a bilateral meeting on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly the need to maintain open lines of communication and responsibly manage relations amid tensions between the two countries, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Friday.
"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken met today with PRC [People's Republic of China] State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the margins of the 77th UN General Assembly in New York City," Price said in a press release. "The Secretary discussed the need to maintain open lines of communication and responsibly manage the US-PRC relationship, especially during times of tension."
Blinken emphasized that the United States is committed to maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, consistent with the One China policy, Price said.

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UPDATE - US Expands License for Internet Services in Iran - Deputy Treasury Secretary
(Updates with additional details, background in paras 5-7, 10, 11)
WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) - The US Treasury Department has issued a license that expands the provision of internet services to Iran amid a government crackdown on internet access during mass protests, US Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo said on Friday.
"As courageous Iranians take to the streets to protest the death of Mahsa Amini, the United States is redoubling its support for the free flow of information to the Iranian people," Adeyemo said in a press release. "Today, Treasury is announcing the expansion of Iran General License D-2, which will expand the range of internet services available to Iranians. With these changes, we are helping the Iranian people be better equipped to counter the government's efforts to surveil and censor them."
The Iranian government has cut off internet access for most of its citizens amid a violent crackdown on protests following the death of 22-year-old Amini while she was in the custody of the country's Morality Police.

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The expanded license authorizes technology companies to offer Iranians more secure, external internet service options, the release said.
A senior Treasury Department official said during a press briefing on Friday that the idea behind the issuance of a new license was to update and expand the list of authorized communication tools to match modern time technologies that were not covered by the general license D-1.
The official explained that some services and hardware are not covered by the new general license, meaning that interested companies will have to apply for specific licenses as in the case with Elon Musk's Starlink satellite services.
"Our understanding of Starlink is that what they provide would be a commercial grade and it would be hardware that's not covered in the general license [D-2]. So that would be something that they would need to write into Treasury for," the Treasury Department official said.
The release said that the license extends authorized categories of software and services to include social media platforms, collaboration platforms, video conferencing, and most importantly cloud-based services in support of such services.
The license also covers tools that incorporate communication functions and are often included with authorized items or services; for example, online maps, e-gaming, e-learning platforms, automated translation, web maps, and user authentication services, the release added.
The Treasury Department clarified that general license D-2 does not authorize the importation into the United States of Iranian-origin software or the dealing in such software, including the hosting of Iranian-origin software on a mobile application store.
On Monday, SpaceX founder Elon Musk said he will seek an exemption from US sanctions on Iran in order to allow his company to provide internet service to people in the country.

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Harris to Meet With Japanese, S. Korean Leaders During Abe State Funeral - Senior Official

WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Kamala Harris will meet with the prime ministers of Japan and South Korea during her visit to Japan to attend former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's state funeral, a senior Biden administration official said on Friday.
"On Monday, the Vice President will arrive in Tokyo. She will have that evening a bilateral meeting with Prime Minister [Fumio] Kishida," the senior official said. "The Vice President Will also meet with Prime Minister Han [Duck-soo] of the Republic of Korea, who will be in Tokyo for the funeral."
Harris is expected to discuss tensions between Washington and Beijing over the issue of Taiwan during the bilateral meetings, the senior official also said, adding that there is "a lot at stake" for Japan and South Korea with respect to relations in the Indo-Pacific region.

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US Supreme Court Rules Alabama Can Execute Man With Non-Preferred Method - Filing

WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court in a 5-4 decision ruled that Alabama may execute a death-row inmate using lethal objection despite his requests to be executed through suffocation due to a fear of needles, the high court said in an order filed Thursday.

Alabama permits death-row inmates to choose execution by nitrogen hypoxia – a rule introduced in 2018 because of challenges in obtaining the drugs needed for lethal injections.

Alan Miller, who was convicted of killing three men in 1999, claims to have filed an application requesting the method that was lost by government staff.

A federal court halted Miller's execution, which was initially set for Thursday, due to the state's inability to perform the execution by means of nitrogen hypoxia. The judge found that it was likely Miller filed the application but that prison officials misplaced it.

However, the Supreme Court overturned the court's ruling on Thursday despite being upheld by a different appellate court earlier in the day.

"The application to vacate injunction presented to Justice Thomas and by him referred to the Court is granted. The September 19, 2022 order of the United States District Court for the Middle District of Alabama is vacated," the order said.

Justices Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan, Amy Coney Barrett and Ketanji Brown Jackson dissented from the court's majority decision.

Eight executions are currently scheduled in the US before the end of 2022, including four in the state of Oklahoma, three in Texas, and one in Missouri, according to the Death Penalty Information Center (DPIC). DPIC currently lists Miller's execution as "failed" after Alabama was not able to execute him via lethal injection Thursday night.

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Harris to Head US Delegation to Japan for Abe State Funeral on September 27 - White House

WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Kamala Harris will head the US delegation to Japan for the state funeral of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on September 27, the White House said on Friday.

"President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. today announced the designation of a Presidential Delegation to attend the State Funeral of former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo of Japan on September 27, 2022, in Tokyo, Japan. The Honorable Kamala Harris, Vice President of the United States of America, will lead the delegation," the White House said in a statement.

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US Announces $327Mln in Additional Humanitarian Aid for Afghans - Blinken

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WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) - The United States pledges to commit $327 million in additional humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Friday.
"The United States is providing nearly $327 in additional humanitarian assistance to help the people of Afghanistan," Blinken said.

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European Council President Says 'No One Threatened, Attacked, Invaded Russia'

UNITED NATIONS, September 23 (Sputnik) - Russia has not been threatened, attacked or invaded by anyone and no one in Europe sought a conflict with that country, European Council President Charles Michel said on Friday.
"No one threatened, attacked and invaded Russia and absolutely no one in Europe wanted a conflict with Russia," Michel said.
The European Council President also said that Russia's statement that it was threatened was false.
On Wednesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on partial mobilization amid the special military operation in Ukraine. Putin accused the United States and its allies of nuclear blackmail and said if the territorial integrity of Russia is threatened, it will certainly use all the means at its disposal to protect itself. Putin also voiced support for the referenda in the breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk as well as in the Russian-controlled Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions to join Russia.

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US Expands License for Internet Services in Iran - Deputy Treasury Secretary
(Updates with more details in paras 3-6)
WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) - The US Treasury Department has issued a license that expands the provision of internet services to Iran during a government crackdown on internet access amid mass protests, US Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo said on Friday.
"As courageous Iranians take to the streets to protest the death of Mahsa Amini, the United States is redoubling its support for the free flow of information to the Iranian people," Adeyemo said in a press release. "Today, Treasury is announcing the expansion of Iran General License D-2, which will expand the range of internet services available to Iranians. With these changes, we are helping the Iranian people be better equipped to counter the government's efforts to surveil and censor them."

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The Iranian government has cut off internet access for most of its citizens amid a violent crackdown on protests following the death of 22-year-old Amini while she was in custody of the country's Morality Police.
The expanded license authorizes technology companies to offer Iranians more secure, external internet service options, such as Elon Musk's Starlink satellite service, the release said.
The license extends authorized categories of software and services to include social media platforms, collaboration platforms, video conferencing and cloud-based services in support of such services, the release added.
The license also covers tools that incorporate communication functions and are often included with authorized items or services; for example, online maps, e-gaming, e-learning platforms, automated translation, web maps and user authentication services, according to the release.

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CORRECTION - US Army Awards $20.6Mln Contract for 'Switchblade' Drones as Supplies to Ukraine Surge
(Corrects to remove para 2)
WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) - The US Army awarded defense manufacturer AeroVironment a $20.6 million contract to procure Switchblade 300 loitering munition drones, one of the two variants of Switchblade UAVs being supplied to Ukraine, the company said in a statement.
The United States awarded a $20,602,464 fixed-price contract award to AeroVironment to procure Switchblade 300 systems – unmanned aerial drones that loiter in the skies before performing a "kamikaze" style attack on designated targets, the statement said on Thursday.
The drones are scheduled to be delivered by July 2023, the statement added.
"Deployed by the US Army for more than a decade, Switchblade 300 remains a critical force protection and soldier lethality solution for our customers, including Ukraine," AeroVironment Vice President Brett Hush said in the statement.
Switchblade 300 models are a lightweight variant of the Switchblade system, hundreds of which have been sent by the US to Ukraine since the beginning of Russia's special military operation.
Switchblade 300s can be carried in a backpack and rapidly deployed, allowing strike capabilities up to 10 kilometers (six miles) from their launch location, according to the statement.
The Biden administration has authorized nearly $16 billion in security funding for Ukraine since taking office, including sending drones, armored vehicles, artillery and other weapons for use against Russian forces.

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Guterres Calls for Undertaking Reform of 'Morally Bankrupt' Global Financial System

UNITED NATIONS, September 23 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Friday that the global financial system, which he characterized as being "morally bankrupt," should be reformed.

"We need to reform a morally bankrupt global financial system," Guterres said at the opening ceremony of the annual meeting of foreign ministers of the Group of 77 countries and China.

Guterres noted that the financial system was created by rich countries to benefit them and it perpetuates poverty and inequalities.

The UN Secretary-General said there is a need to balance the scales between developed and developing countries and create a new global financial system that will benefits all.

"This must include lending criteria that go beyond Gross Domestic Product and provide a true view of the vulnerabilities faced by developing countries," he said.

The Group of 77 was created at the United Nations in 1964 as a coalition of 77 non-aligned states. The group currently comprises of 134 developing countries that promote their collective economic interests.

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Malpass Says He Is Not Climate Denier After Reports That Biden Admin Mulls Ousting Him

WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) – President of the World Bank Group David Malpass said on Friday he is not a climate denier, following reports that the Biden administration considers ousting him over his "weak" stance on climate change.

"When asked 'are you a climate denier?' I should have said 'no.' I didn't even really go in that direction. Because it's no one said that other than Al Gore and it was pretty much off-topic," Malpass said during a virtual conversation organized by Politico. "You know, I was at a seminar on Tuesday, where we were supposed to be talking about impact, and I really wasn't prepared and didn't do my best job in answering that charge."

On Tuesday, Al Gore, vice president under the Clinton administration, called on President Joe Biden to remove Malpass from office, calling him a "climate denier."

On Friday, Axios reported that the Biden administration is weighing ousting Malpass.

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US Considers Ousting World Bank President Malpass – Reports

WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is weighing the possibility of removing World Bank President David Malpass from office in connection with what it believes is his "weak" stance on climate, Axios reported on Friday, citing sources familiar with the matter.

The White House is reportedly concerned by his failure to answer this week when asked if climate change was caused by humans.

Those pushing for Malpass' ouster still acknowledge that it is a very difficult process, which will take significant time, and they are not sure how and if the US can start it, according to the report.

Traditionally, the World Bank is headed by US citizens, but the US administration has no control over this institution. Like his predecessors, Malpass, who took office in 2019 under Trump, was approved by the bank's board of executive directors. His 5-year term expires in 2024.

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US Treasury Expands License for Internet Services in Iran – Treasury

WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) – The US Treasury issued a license on Friday expanding the provision of internet services to Iran during a government crackdown on internet access amid mass protests.

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"As courageous Iranians take to the streets to protest the death of Mahsa Amini, the United States is redoubling its support for the free flow of information to the Iranian people," Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Wally Adeyemo said in the release. "Today, Treasury is announcing the expansion of Iran General License D-2, which will expand the range of internet services available to Iranians. With these changes, we are helping the Iranian people be better equipped to counter the government's efforts to surveil and censor them."

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Canada Appoints Jennifer May as Ambassador to China

WASHINGTON, September 23 (Sputnik) – Canada has appointed Jennifer May as its ambassador to China, the prime minister's office said on Friday.
"As Ambassador to China, Ms. May will lead Canada's important work in standing up for democratic values, human rights, and the rule of law," the press release stated.
May's experience in Canada's public service has spanned over 30 years across three continents. She was most recently appointed as Canada's ambassador to Brazil in 2019 and has served in Canadian diplomatic missions in Europe, Latin America, and Asia, including in Beijing. She joined the Department of External Affairs in 1990.
May will work to advance Canadian priorities in the Canada-China relationship, the release added, including supporting the long-standing people-to-people, economic, and business ties between the two countries. More than 1.8 million Canadians are of Chinese origin, Chinese languages are the most spoken languages in Canada after English and French, and immigrants born in China are one of Canada's largest immigrant groups.

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Top Saudi Diplomat Hopeful Progress on JCPOA Still Possible, But No Positive Signs Now

UNITED NATIONS, September 23 (Sputnik) - Saudi Arabia believes there is still hope for progress in talks on the Iran nuclear program, but sees no positive signs at the moment, Minister of Foreign Affairs Adel bin Ahmed Al-Jubeir said on Friday.
"We are hopeful that there is still potential for progress on the negotiations, but unfortunately the signs as of now are not positive. We are encouraging all parties to be serious about these negotiations and find a way to resolve the issues while ensuring that the minimum necessary safeguards of non-proliferation are met," Al-Jubeir told journalists on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly.
There have been no meetings with Iran, he added.

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