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10/2/23 Monday

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Newsom Appoints Ex-Harris Adviser, Emily's List Chief to Feinstein's Senate Seat

California Governor Gavin Newsom has appointed Laphonza Butler, a powerful Democratic Party political activist, to fill the vacant US Senate seat left by US Sen. Dianne Feinsten when she died last week.

"Laphonza has spent her entire career fighting for women and girls and has been a fierce advocate for working people," Newsom said.

"From her time as President of EMILY's List to leading the state's largest labor union, she has always stood up for what is right and has led with her heart and her values," the governor added. "I have no doubt she will carry the baton left by Senator Feinstein, continue to break glass ceilings, and fight for all Californians in Washington."

Emily's List is a powerful Democrat-aligned political action committee (PAC) that supports the election campaigns of Democratic women in races across the US, in particular those who place abortion at the center of their campaigns. Butler has led the PAC since 2021.

Butler previously served as a senior adviser to Kamala Harris' 2020 US presidential campaign. Harris dropped out of the race early-on and was later tapped by Joe Biden to be his vice-presidential running mate on what became a winning ticket.

Before that, Butler was a regent of the University of California system and spent many years as an organizer for the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), becoming President of SEIU Local 2015, which represents 325,000 nursing home and home-care workers. She and her wife live in Maryland, but reportedly own a home in California as well, according to US media reports.

In choosing Butler, Newsom spurned the recommendations of several leading Democrats, including Congressional Black Caucus Chair Steven Horsford, and Washington Rep. Pramila Jayapal, both of whom publicly urged Newsom to pick Rep. Barbara Lee, who represents California's 12th District in the US House of Representatives.

Butler's appointment will last until the November 2024 elections, when voters will decide who will fill the seat. It's unclear what Butler's plans are in that area, but several powerful California Democrats from the US House of Representatives have declared their intent to win the party's nomination for the race, including Reps. Lee, Katie Porter, and Adam Schiff.

Feinstein died on Friday at the age of 90, the oldest and longest-serving member of the US Senate. Her death came after a prolonged and increasingly public degeneration of her health that included her handing over control of her estate; however, she refused to yield her office despite the pleadings of both fellow Democrats and her constituents.

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New 5G Satellite Appears ‘Unacceptably Bright’ in Night Sky, Astronomers Grumble

There are nearly 8,700 artificial satellites in Earth orbit, the vast majority of which have been launched in the last few years, including 5,000 Starlink internet satellites launched by SpaceX. By 2030, scientists expect there to be 100,000 satellites in orbit, dramatically altering Earthlings’ view of the night sky.

A recently-launched communications satellite has become one of the brightest objects in the night sky for an Earth observer, which astronomers say emphasizes the need for better regulation of orbital platforms. However, it’s just one of a whole new planned constellation of satellites - a situation astronomers say is “unacceptable.”

In September 2022, AST SpaceMobile launched the BlueWalker 3 satellite, a prototype for what the Texas-based firm hopes will be a new constellation of 5G internet satellites.

The satellite orbits at an altitude of between 316 miles and 327 miles (508 and 527 kilometers, respectively), which is higher than the International Space Station, as well as some other micro-satellite constellations that have attracted the ire of astronomers and stargazers alike. But BlueWalker 3’s problem isn’t its altitude, it’s the size and design of the spacecraft that’s causing the trouble.

That giant aperture, called a phased-array antenna, is 689 square feet (64 square meters) wide, or about 26.3 feet (8 meters) long on each side. The panels are reflective, turning the satellite into a giant mirror bouncing sunlight down toward Earth.

According to media reports, it’s the largest commercial antenna system ever deployed in low-Earth orbit.

A group of irate astronomers have published a paper documenting the effect the satellite has on Earth, which was published on Monday in Nature.

"Optical observations confirm that BW3 increases in brightness when BW3 is at a higher elevation above the horizon, and indicate that the range between the observer and BW3 is a primary contributor to the apparent/observed magnitude," they wrote. "The apparent brightness of BW3 also shows correlation with solar phase angle and appears brighter at high phase angles."

“The peak brightness of the satellite reached an apparent magnitude of 0.4,” the scientists noted. “This made the new satellite one of the brightest objects in the night sky.”

In other words, the satellite appears brighter than the planet Saturn in the night sky, brighter even than Polaris, the North Star. By comparison, the current International Astronomical Union recommendation is for space objects not to be brighter than magnitude 7, which is close to the dimmest objects the human eye can detect unaided.

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Photos: JWST Spots Dozens of Rogue Jupiter-Sized Planets in Orion Nebula Close-Up

A stunning new discovery has been made using the James Webb Space Telescope (JSWT), the most powerful telescope ever built by humans. The orbital observatory has spotted dozens of planets roaming freely in the Orion nebula, unconnected to any star.

Using the JWST, the scientists say they have found at least 40 pairs of Jupiter-sized objects freely floating about the Orion nebula, an area rich in new star formation about 1,350 light-years from Earth, so named because it sits within the constellation Orion in Earth's night sky.

Some of the objects are floating by themselves, others seem to be orbiting each other - but not a star. Bereft of a better explanation, the scientists have dubbed them Jupiter Mass Binary Objects, or "JuMBOs," and say they might be a completely new category of interstellar object.

According to reports, they explored the idea that the JuMBOs might be brown dwarfs or "hot Jupiters," as they are sometimes called, which are a type of failed star that is larger than Jupiter but not large enough to begin fusing hydrogen into helium - the explosive reaction that makes stars shine so brightly. Brown dwarfs can get very hot and glow a dull brown color due to lesser kinds of fusion, such as deuterium. But the objects observed by the JWST are too cool and too small to be brown dwarfs, with some even being smaller than Jupiter.

Mark McCaughrean, a senior science adviser for the ESA who led the study, told British media they think the planets might have been ejected from the star systems in which they formed, rather than having formed alone.

"Gas physics suggests you shouldn't be able to make objects with the mass of Jupiter on their own, and we know single planets can get kicked out from star systems," McCaughrean said. "But how do you kick out pairs of these things together? Right now, we don't have an answer. It's one for the theoreticians."

Or to put it another way ESA scientist Samuel Pearson said simply that the objects they've found "shouldn't exist," whether they formed independently or were ejected from star systems. Especially puzzling is why so many have paired together after being supposedly ejected.

"It's like kicking a cup of tea across a room and having all the tea land in the teacup," Pearson quipped. "And then doing that 42 times."

"There's something wrong with either our understanding of planet formation, star formation - or both," he added.

Their work has been published privately online and submitted to the journal Astronomy and Astrophysics, but has not yet been peer reviewed or accepted for publication.The ESA has also published the entire imageof the Orion nebula for the public to marvel at or scrutinize to their heart's content.

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Scientists Claim 'Conclusive, Unambiguous' Proof of Gulf Stream Weakening

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A group of oceanographers tracking one of the world's most powerful and important ocean currents have arrived at a startling conclusion: that current, which helps to keep Europe temperate in spite of its northerly latitudes, is weakening.

Lisa Beal of the University of Miami's Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science and Christopher G. Piecuch from the Physical Oceanography Department at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in Massachusetts, described their conclusion in an article that was recently published in Geophysical Research Letters, a peer-reviewed journal by the American Geophysical Union.

"We conclude with a high degree of confidence that Gulf Stream transport has indeed slowed by about 4% in the past 40 years, the first conclusive, unambiguous observational evidence that this ocean current has undergone significant change in the recent past," they wrote.

The powerful current flows from the Gulf of Mexico through the Straits of Florida, up the eastern coast of North America and across the Atlantic Ocean to the British Isles, carrying heat to the northerly latitudes that helps to keep a temperate climate in Canada's maritimes and in Western Europe, despite their northerly latitudes, which in other parts of the planet can have subarctic temperatures.

The study was based on data collected by undersea cables, satellite altimetry, and in situ observations, which were fed into a Bayesian model, which uses probability to represent uncertainty. The researchers noted that omitting any one of the data sets failed to change the final conclusion, further strengthening their analysis.

"When you are making your case, you need more than one witness, and you ideally want a collection of independent witnesses whose statements - when taken together - paint a consistent and coherent story," Piecuch said.

A weakening of global climate-influencing currents like the Gulf Stream has long been predicted as a possible outcome of a changing global climate. However, the scientists are careful to note their study does not attempt to explain the reasons behind the change, only to accurately document it is happening.

"While we can definitively say this weakening is happening, we are unable to say to what extent it is related to climate change or whether it is a natural variation," Piecuch said. "We can see similar weakening indicated in climate models, but for this paper we were not able to put together the observational evidence that would really allow us to pinpoint the cause of the observed decline."

"The Gulf Stream is a vital artery of the ocean's circulation, and so the ramifications of its weakening are global," Beal noted. "I think there is potential for this technique to extract other climate change signals from among the scattered observations we have in the ocean."

Because the Gulf Stream channels heat away from the tropics and toward colder parts of the world, it is an important mechanism for balancing global temperatures. A weaker Gulf Stream can mean hotter tropics and a colder Europe.

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The latest trial against the former US president came underway after a New York state judge found the one-time commander-in-chief liable for committing fraud byway of inflating his business portfolio. The presiding judge, Judge Arthur Engoron, earlier remarked that the defendant was working in an "fantasy world, not the real world."

Monday marked the official 'day one' of courtroom proceedings in the civil fraud trial in which former US President Donald Trump and company are alleged to have engaged in nefarious business practices that centered around the misevaluation of various real estate properties.

The trial was brought by New York Attorney General Letitia James, who has told reporters that she remains confident that "justice will prevail" in the matter. The official is seeking at least $250 million in fines and a permanent ban against Trump and his sons, Donald Jr. and Eric, from conducting any business in the state.

So, what were some key takeaways from the day's events?

Trump Account Posts While Ex-Prez Inside Court

In the lead-up to Donald Trump's civil lawsuit trial in New York, the former president repeatedly called the case, along with the multitude of other cases against him, a politically-motivated witch-hunt.

That Trump continued to make that assertion and attack Attorney General Letitia James when arriving at the courthouse, during recess and after the day's events surprised no one; however, what raised some eyebrows was Trump's Truth Social account posting while the former president was in the courthouse.

The posts did not come before opening statements - no one is accusing Trump of posting during the trial - but his account did post several videos of James talking about suing Trump while he was sitting inside the Manhattan courtroom.

The Trump defense team had tried to argue that James' suit was politically motivated by pointing to comments she made during her campaign about going after Trump. Judge Arthur Engoron and an appellate court ruled against the argument and Engoron reminded Trump's defense team of that when they attempted to bring it up during opening arguments.

"Ms. James' motivations are no longer at issue in this case, are they?" he asked.

Barring Trump From NY Business Deals

New York is where Trump first entered the public view. Now, decades later, the state attorney general's office is looking to bar the former commander-in-chief from ever being able to carry out business in the Empire State.

Kevin Wallace, of the AG's office, argued Trump's alleged fraudulent financial statements resulted in banks taking on a hidden risk "to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars."

"Year after year, loan after loan, the defendants misrepresented Mr. Trump's net worth to maintain those favorable interest rates," Wallace told the judge.

The attorney general's office alleges Trump inflated the value of properties he owned by the billions between 2011 and 2021 in order to secure favorable loans and insurance arrangements, with some property values reportedly being inflated by over $2 billion.

Some of those properties include Trump Park Avenue and the famed Mar-a-Lago Florida resort, which was raided by multiple FBI agents looking to retrieve troves of classified documents that were being stored on the grounds.

Trump Lawyers Argue Real Estate 'Highly Speculative'

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Trump defense attorney Chris Kise countered in his opening arguments by saying that Trump made his billions by utilizing his real estate knowledge - not by engaging in fraudulent business practices.

“President Trump has made billions of dollars building one of the most successful real estate empires in the world,” Kise said. “He has made a fortune literally about being right about real estate.”

Kise also pointed out that while the leading German Deutsche Bank valued Trump’s net worth at $2 billion less than he did, they still underwrote a loan for him. That is evidence, Kise argued, that real estate valuations can vary greatly.

The lawyer went on to remark that when is comes down to business in the Big Apple, "this is what happens every day in this city."

In order to ground the argument, reports have indicated that the Trump camp is seeking to call in witnesses from Deutsche Bank.

Trump Properties the ‘Mona Lisa’ of Real Estate

Another Trump defense attorney, Alina Habba, argued that Engoron’s valuations of Trump properties were wildly inaccurate, comparing the estates to the Mona Lisa, which is commonly said to be the most valuable painting in the world.

"[The Trump National Doral Miami hotel] would sell for at least a billion dollars. Mar-a-Lago at least a billion,” Habba said. “The value is what someone is willing to pay. The Trump properties are Mona Lisa properties."

“That is not fraud, that is real estate," she added.

The judge ruled that Mar-a-Lago was worth $18 million in a ruling last week.

Habba and Engoron went on to spare over the issue, with the judge arguing that the financial statements were meant to show what their value was, not what they could theoretically be sold for. “These statements of financial condition were current, current market value. The point is what were they worth then.”

First Witness Takes Stand

Donald Bender, a former accountant and tax consultant for Trump was called as the first witness in the case, and was promptly moved to be disqualified by the Trump team although Engoron ruled against them.

Bender testified he largely relied on financial information provided by the Trump organization, while also noting that when he noticed mistakes he would point them out to the Trump organization.

In fact, in one incident Bender recalled that he pointed out a discrepancy involving the penthouse of Trump’s daughter Ivanka Trump. Bender said he corrected the number at least twice.

The discrepancies with the penthouse were mentioned in documents in the case.

“Ms. Trump’s rental agreement for Penthouse A in Trump Park Avenue included an option to purchase the unit for $8,500,000. But in the 2011 and 2012 Statements of Financial Condition, this unit was valued at $20,820,000—approximately two and a half times as much as the option price, with no disclosure of the existence of the option,” the lawsuit stated.

Bender is expected to continue his testimony on Tuesday.

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Outside of Partisans, Few Americans Want to Vote for Biden or Trump - Poll

Both candidates face significant legal issues: US President Joe Biden is facing a House impeachment inquiry while his son faces gun and possible tax charges. Meanwhile, former President Donald Trump is facing dozens of federal and state indictments in multiple legal venues.

A Monmouth University poll released on Monday shows that outside of members of their party, few US registered voters are happy about the prospect of voting for either US President Joe Biden or former US President Donald Trump for the 20204 election.

While the poll shows voters are not happy with either choice, Biden performed significantly worse than his likely Republican opponent in most of the survey's questions.

Only 37% of voters say they are either “very” or “somewhat” enthusiastic about Trump becoming the Republican nominee for president, and an even lower percentage, 32%, say the same about Biden.

The only group of voters that Trump and Biden performed well in were those inside their respective parties, though Trump outperformed Biden there as well. Some 78% of Republicans said they were enthusiastic about Trump, with 47% saying they were “very enthusiastic.” Another 68% of Democrats said they were enthusiastic about Biden but less than a third (29%) of Democrats described themselves as “very enthusiastic” about the prospect of a Biden nomination.

Independents are particularly turned off by both likely candidates from the two major parties. Only 32% of Independents say they will “definitely” or “probably” vote for Biden. Trump performed slightly better, with 43% saying the same about him.

The findings left roughly 25% of Independent voters saying they will “definitely not” or “probably not” vote for either candidate.

Combined with the 14% of Democrats who say the same about Biden and the 12% of Republicans who say that about Trump, a total of roughly 51% of registered voters are considering either voting for the party’s other candidate, not voting at all, or planning to vote for a third-party candidate.

There has not been a significant third-party candidate since Ross Perot in 1992, when the outsider businessman briefly led in the polls and ended with 18.91% of the popular vote.

Another concerning response in the poll for the Biden administration seems to be a lack of support from what would traditionally be his base. More than half of the respondents who said they identify as liberal (regardless of party affiliation) are either “not at all enthusiastic” or “not too enthusiastic” about a Biden nomination. By contrast, only 38% of voters who identified as conservative felt the same about Trump.

The poll also reflected previous polling about the two candidates’ ages. About 48% of voters in the questionnaire said they feel Trump is too old to serve another presidential term, while 80% said the same about Biden.

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The commander-in-chief is currently 80 years old while Trump is 77. While three years does not seem like a big gap between the two, other factors may be in play, including a series of high-profile gaffes by Biden, including multiple incidents where he seemed to shake hands with thin air.

The one silver lining in the poll for the Biden administration is that voters do not yet see the impeachment inquiry against him as something worth being impeached over. Only 34% of voters say Biden's actions are worthy of impeachment, with an additional 16% saying he "may have violated [his] oath" but not in a way that warrants impeachment.

By contrast, 46% of voters say Trump committed a crime in his response to the 2020 election and another 29% say he did something wrong but not criminal.

Meanwhile, only 27% of voters say the legal troubles of first son Hunter Biden will make them less likely to support Biden in the election.

Biden was also viewed slightly less unfavorably than Trump, with 45% of respondents saying they have a "very unfavorable" view of him, compared to 50% of voters who said that about Trump.

The survey was conducted between September 19 and 24 among a total of 737 registered US voters.

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Florida's Gaetz Files Motion to Remove McCarthy From House Speakership

The journey to becoming the US House speaker was riddled with setbacks and repeatedly saw then-contender Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) offer a trove of concessions to hardline Republicans. The 15th final vote that gave McCarthy the win in January came down 216 for the California lawmaker and 212 for Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries.

US Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-FL) officially filed a motion late Monday to call for the removal of House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, a move likely to put the lower congressional chamber into chaos just days after a government shutdown was averted.

Gaetz has been threatening McCarthy with a "vote to vacate" his position since the deal to avert the government shutdown was made. Gaetz has accused MacCarthy of making a "secret side deal on Ukraine" with Democrats. Gaetz and dozens of other House Republicans have stated their opposition to further funding of Kiev by Washington and aid to Ukraine was ultimately cut from the stop-gap funding bill.

"I rise to give notice of my intent to raise a question of the privileges of the house," Gaetz said on the House floor while filing the motion. "[It is] resolved that the Office of Speaker of the House of Representatives is hereby declared to be vacant."

After filing the motion, Gaetz told reporters that he had enough Republican votes to oust McCarthy, unless he gets help from Democrats.

"I have enough Republicans where at this point next week one of two things will happen: Kevin McCarthy won't be the Speaker of the House or he'll be the Speaker of the House working at the

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pleasure of the Democrats," The firebrand representative said. "I'm at peace with either result because the American people deserve to know who governs them."

The House will have two days to consider the measure, though it could be taken up earlier. A simple majority will be needed to oust McCarthy.

Republicans have a slim nine-seat majority in the House. Typically, when House speakers are appointed, the minority party votes in unison against the nomination. If that holds for votes to vacate, Gaetz would only need a handful of Republicans to join him in removing McCarthy.

However, this is largely uncharted waters. There has only been one vote to vacate the speakership in 1910. In more recent times, former Speaker John A. Boehner was threatened with the prospect but it was never voted on and Boehner resigned soon after.

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) has already come out against Democrats coming to the aid of McCarthy, saying in an interview on US television on Sunday that her party doesn't "give up votes for free" and that she would "absolutely" vote to remove McCarthy.

Other Democrats may consider voting to keep McCarthy however, especially since he reached across the aisle to pass the spending bill. However, his move to open a formal impeachment inquiry against US President Joe Biden has also angered Democrats, making any potential vote difficult to predict.

Even if they decide against voting to keep McCarthy, Democrats could skip the vote or vote "present" which would lower the total number needed for a majority and make it easier for Republicans still loyal to McCarthy to defeat the measure without official support from the Democrats.

Gaetz told reporters that in the event a vote for a new speaker is held, he would vote for Rep. Steve Scalise (R-LA), among other candidates. Scalise is the number two Republican in the House and his name was floated as a potential alternative when McCarthy struggled to secure the speakership at the start of the year.

In fact, McCarthy only managed to secure the speakership after making various concessions and only after a 15th ballot was held in January 2023, a fact that Gaetz used to hint he isn't done with his attacks on McCarthy, even if this motion fails.

“It took Speaker McCarthy 15 votes to become the speaker,” Gaetz said. "Until I get to 14 or 15, I don’t think I’m being any more dilatory."

In order the secure the nomination and appease 20 Republican hardliners, McCarthy agreed to a series of procedural reforms, including that any lawmaker can call for a vote to vacate the position.

McCarthy remained defiant in a post on X (formerly Twitter) apparently responding to the motion.

McCarthy previously dared Gaetz and the other Republicans who oppose his speakership to try and remove him.

"If someone wants to remove because I want to be the adult in the room, go ahead and try," he told reporters on Saturday morning ahead of the late Saturday vote to pass the spending bill.

To avoid the vote entirely, McCarthy could hold a vote to table the resolution, which could then refer the motion to a committee favorable to him or kill it outright.

Gaetz told reporters he hopes "that someone emerges out of this historic process who has greater vision and greater clarity and greater trust and confidence and more integrity," than McCarthy for the speaker position.

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Watchdog: Biden's Remarks on Diplomatic Efforts in Afghanistan Harmed 2021 US Evacuation

US President Joe Biden remarked on July 8, 2021, that he intended to “maintain" the American "diplomatic presence in Afghanistan.” By August 31 of that year, operations in Afghanistan officially ended and the US withdrawal from the country, such as it was, was completed.
Statements from US President Joe Biden regarding the administration's intentions to maintain a diplomatic presence in Afghanistan not only backfired but proved to harm the evacuation efforts of staffers stationed at the US Embassy in Kabul, new findings by the Office of the Inspector General (OIG).
The report details how the embassy staffers spent significant resources preparing for the administration’s stated goals in the country. In fact, the stated position of the Biden White House was one of several issues with the withdrawal, the government watchdog revealed.
Because of the Biden administration’s assertion that the diplomatic mission in Afghanistan would continue even after US troops withdrew from the country, embassy staff spent “considerable efforts” planning projects increasing the defensive capabilities of the embassy, developing supply lines and creating other support platforms.
While embassy employees who would perform their tasks remotely were removed from Afghanistan as early as April, some staffers returned to the embassy, ultimately increasing the total number of employees who needed to be evacuated.
The plan to keep operating as normal also led to other staffing issues as embassy officials rotated out normally. This resulted in the senior regional security officer and two deputies being replaced in August with staff that had just arrived earlier that month or in July, despite a rapidly deteriorating security situation.
The consular chief and attending staff, responsible for issuing passports, visas and other documents to citizens and Afghan nationals, also left the country in early August and were replaced with newly arrived staff.
At least one embassy employee told inspectors that staff were reprimanded by the US ambassador for raising concerns about the security situation in the country. The report also notes the embassy feared overt evacuation orders would undermine support for the Afghan government and panic the Afghan population. When the order finally came, some staff reported hearing about it for the first time over the building’s loudspeaker.
Another issue contributing to the chaotic nature of the withdrawal was an incomplete list of US nationals in the country and a lack of guidance on which Afghans qualified for evacuation and no procedures were provided for evacuating locally employed staff.
In an attempt to rectify that situation, the department - at that point limited to Kabul’s airport, sent an email including “passes” and other documents to Afghan nationals eligible for evacuation; however, those emails were forwarded to “many other email addresses” by the Afghans, resulting in many more showing up to the airport than would have otherwise.

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While not directly related to the chaotic nature of the withdrawal, the report also notes it was unable to verify the number of individuals evacuated from Afghanistan. Although it's noted that Secretary of State Antony Blinken claimed “approximately 124,000 individuals, including 6,000 US citizens” were evacuated, the department failed to provide any supporting documents despite the OIG making “multiple requests.”

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McCarthy Says if 5 Republicans Join Democrats in Voting Against Him Then He is Out

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) – US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy said on Tuesday that should five Republican lawmakers join Democrats in voting against him, he will be out of the Speaker chair.

On Monday, Congressman Matt Gaetz filed a motion to remove McCarthy from the position of House speaker.

"If five Republicans vote with Democrats, then I’m out," McCarthy told reporters.

However, McCarthy added that he remains confident he will not be voted out.

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Hunter Biden Pleads Not Guilty to 3 Felony Firearms Charges in US Court - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - Hunter Biden pleaded not guilty to three felony firearms charges during an arraignment hearing at a federal courthouse in Delaware, NBC News reported on Tuesday.

“Mr. Biden pleads not guilty,” defense attorney Abbe Lowell reportedly said.

Prosecutors allege that Biden lied about his illegal drug use when purchasing a handgun in 2018.

Biden pleaded not guilty to charges including false statement in purchase of a firearm, false statement to a Federal Firearms Licensed seller and possession of a firearm by an unlawful drug user, the report said. Biden faces up to 25 years in prison if convicted on the charges.

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Canada Doesn't Want to Escalate Situation With India- Trudeau

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - Ottawa is not seeking to further escalate its ties with India, and will continue to engage constructively with New Delhi, Canadian Prime Minister Justin

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Trudeau said on Tuesday.

"We are not looking to escalate as I've said, we're going to be doing the work that matters in continuing to have constructive relations with India through this extremely difficult time," Trudeau said. "We are going to continue to engage responsibly and constructively with the Government of India."

India has demanded that Canada repatriate roughly 40 diplomats from the country by October 10, following Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's remark that New Delhi may have been linked to the murder of a Sikh independence activist in Canada, Financial Times reported Monday, citing people familiar with the demand.

One of the sources told the media that Canada had 62 diplomats in India, adding that New Delhi had told Ottawa to reduce the number by 41 people. Another source said that New Delhi had threatened to revoke the diplomatic immunity of Canadian diplomats who remained after that date, the report said.

India has reportedly said it wanted "parity" in the number and grade of diplomats posted in each nation.

Trudeau said in September that Canada was examining "credible allegations" potentially linking Indian officials to the June 18 killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar by two masked gunmen in Surrey, British Columbia. The prominent separatist leader campaigned for the creation of an independent Sikh state in India called Khalistan.

Following the incident, Canada expelled a high-ranking Indian diplomat allegedly linked with Indian foreign intelligence.

In response to Ottawa's actions, Indian authorities announced their decision to expel a senior Canadian diplomat and asked him to leave the country within five days. The Indian Foreign Ministry later urged its citizens planning to visit or currently in Canada to exercise extra caution in view of "growing anti-India activities."

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Hunter Biden Arrives at US Courthouse in Delaware for Arraignment on Gun Charges - Footage

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - Hunter Biden, son of US President Joe Biden, arrived at a federal courthouse in the state of Delaware on Tuesday for an arraignment hearing on felony firearms charges.

Biden arrived at the J. Caleb Boggs Federal Building in Wilmington for the in-person arraignment, per video footage from the scene. The court denied Biden’s request to appear virtually.

Biden faces criminal charges for allegedly lying about his illegal drug use when purchasing a handgun, for which he faces up to 25 years in prison if convicted. Biden is expected to plead not guilty to the charges against him.

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US Major Political Parties About Equally Disliked, But GOP More Trusted on Issues - Poll

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) – The two major political parties in the United States are both viewed unfavorably by a majority of Americans, but the Republicans have more trust on the issues of security and prosperity, according to a Gallup poll published on Tuesday.

A total of 56% of Americans view the Republican Party unfavorably and 58% say the same of the Democratic Party, according to the survey.

The Republicans, however, have a clear edge over their opponents on a number issues. Fifty-three percent of Americans believe they will do a better job of keeping the country prosperous over the next few years, whereas only 39% prefer the Democrats.

"A slightly larger majority, 57%, have greater faith in the Republican Party to protect the country from international terrorism and military threats, while 35% favor the Democrats," the poll said.

The poll, which took place amid efforts to a avoid a government shutdown, also revealed that over 80% disapprove of the job of Congress, and about 60% disapprove of US President Joe Biden's job performance.

The poll was conducted from September 1-23 among 1,016 adults in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia.

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IMF Warns Commodity Markets Fragmentation May Lead to Price Instability

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - Fragmentation of international commodity markets may lead to significant price changes and additional volatility, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said in its new World Economic Outlook (WEO).

"Further fragmentation of commodity markets - which had been on the rise even before the war in Ukraine - could cause large price changes and more price volatility," the report said.

Trade disruptions due to the fragmentation could result in substantial economic impacts in commodity-dependent economies, it added.

The IMF warned that low-income countries that are highly dependent on agricultural imports would be affected "disproportionally." Such a situation would raise further food security concerns, the report noted.

"The fragmentation of mineral markets could also make the clean energy transition more costly and lead to lower-than-needed investment in renewable energy and electric vehicles," it added.

The IMF found out that commodities are vulnerable in the event of fragmentation. The fund also mentioned rising fragmentation in commodity markets.

"Measures restricting commodity trade surged in 2022, much more than those restricting trade in other goods. For selected commodities, price differentials across geographic markets have widened. And commodity sector foreign direct investment (FDI) and cross-border mergers and acquisitions were on the decline even prior to the war in Ukraine," it said.

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The report called Russia's military operation in Ukraine a major reason of the restrictions for commodities, noting their sixfold increase compared to the period between 2016 and 2019. In contrast, trade-restricting measures on overall trade increased 3.5 times, it added.

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US Issues Formal Diplomatic Note to Pressure Kiev to Do More on Corruption - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) – The Biden administration issued a formal diplomatic note in late summer to exert pressure on Ukraine to fight corruption more aggressively, CNN reported on Tuesday, citing multiple US officials.

The United States has increased efforts to urge Ukraine to do more on governmental corruption, the report said. In recent weeks, Washington sent several notices to Kiev, making it clear that some kinds of economic support would depend on the progress in reforms, it added.

Officials reaffirmed ironclad US commitment to supporting Ukraine militarily but pointed out that some other forms of aid could face potential danger if Kiev does not take steps to tackle corruption, the report said.

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McCarthy Says 'Bring it On' to Gaetz Motion to Oust Him From House Speaker Post

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - House Speaker Kevin McCarthy in response to a motion, submitted by a fellow Republican, to oust him from power said "bring it on."

Earlier on Monday, Congressman Matt Gaetz filed a motion to remove McCarthy from his position as House speaker.

"Bring it on," McCarthy said in a post on X (formerly Twitter) after Gaetz introduced the motion.

Gaetz, after he filed his motion, told reporters it's now up to House Democrats if they want to save McCarthy.

Earlier in the day, Gaetz in an X post suggested that McCarthy struck a "secret side deal" with President Joe Biden on Ukraine.

During remarks on the House floor last month, Gaetz said the House Speaker was "out of compliance" with the agreement struck with a Republican faction that allowed McCarthy to win the gavel. Gaetz also warned that he would move to vacate the chair if McCarthy failed to take steps to comply with the deal.

A simple majority of votes are needed in the Republican-majority House to remove the speaker.

On Sunday, McCarthy said he believes he will survive Gaetz's attempt to remove him.

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US Congressman Gaetz Files Motion to Oust House Speaker McCarthy

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Matt Gaetz filed a motion to oust House Speaker Kevin McCarthy.

"I rise to give notice of my intent to raise a question of the privileges of the house... declaring the office of Speaker of the House of Representatives to be vacant, resolved that the Office of Speaker of the House of Representatives is hereby declared to be vacant," Gaetz said during remarks on the House floor Monday evening.

On Sunday, McCarthy said he believes he will survive Gaetz's attempt to oust him from his position as speaker of the House.

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GM Indefinitely Lays Off 160 Workers Amidst UAW Strikes - Spokesperson

(Updates attribution in headline, lede, adds details in paras 2,4 and 6)

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - General Motors (GM) had to layoff more than160 employees at plants in Indiana and Ohio due to the ongoing United Auto Workers (UAW) strike, GM spokesperson Kevin Kelly told Sputnik.

"The UAW leadership's decision to call a strike at GM Wentzville Assembly, and now GM Lansing Delta Township Assembly, continues to have negative ripple effects. Beginning Monday, October 2nd, a portion of GM's Parma Metal Center [130 employees] and Marion Metal Center [34 employees] represented workforce will have no work available," Kelly said on Monday.

According to reports, GM's Fairfax, Kansas plant saw 2,000 indefinite layoffs due to a strike-induced parts shortage, causing the UAW to escalate strikes at the Lansing Delta Township assembly plant producing the Buick Enclave and Chevrolet Traverse SUVs.

Kelly said the affected team members are not expected to return until the strike has been resolved.

"Since we are working under an expired labor agreement, there are no provisions for company-provided SUB-pay in this circumstance," Kelly said.

GM, he added, has repeatedly said nobody wins in a strike, and this is yet another demonstration of that fact.

"We will continue to bargain in good faith with the union to reach an agreement as quickly as possible," Kelly said.

Almost 19,000 US auto workers at various Ford, General Motors, and Stellantis facilities are striking due to unsuccessful wage negotiation attempts, with the UAW seeking a 46% pay raise and a 32-hour work week, among other terms.

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with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

DISH to pay $150,000 Fine for Satellite Deorbiting Breach - FCC

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) announced that DISH Network has settled the charges of mismanaging the deorbiting of its EchoStar-7 satellite and will pay a fine in the amount of $150,000.

"The FCC's Enforcement Bureau today announced a settlement of its investigation into DISH for failure to properly deorbit its EchoStar-7 satellite," the FCC said in a statement on Monday. "The settlement includes an admission of liability from the company and an agreement to adhere to a compliance plan and pay a penalty of $150,000."

Launched in 2002, DISH's EchoStar-7 was set to deorbit 300 km above its geostationary arc by 2022. However, due to propellant shortages, it retired only 122km above, violating its approved debris mitigation plan, the statement said.

The FCC determined that DISH breached multiple regulations, including the Communications Act and its license conditions, by moving the EchoStar-7 satellite to an altitude lower than stipulated, potentially exacerbating space debris issues, the statement said.

The FCC mandates that devices transmitting energy or signals in space adhere to specific authorizations to ensure non-interference and proper satellite management, ultimately focusing on reducing space debris and proper satellite disposal at mission's end, the statement said.

"As satellite operations become more prevalent and the space economy accelerates, we must be certain that operators comply with their commitments. This is a breakthrough settlement, making very clear the FCC has strong enforcement authority and capability to enforce its vitally important space debris rules," the statement added.

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Chinese Embassy Says Beijing Welcomes US Senators Scheduled to Visit China Next Week

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - Beijing welcomes the group of US senators scheduled to visit China next week and hopes their stay will help improve bilateral relations, Chinese Embassy in Washington spokesperson Liu Pengyu told Sputnik.

"China welcomes people from all walks of life in the United States, including members of the Congress, to visit China so as to have a better understanding of China, promote exchanges between the two countries, and inject more positive energy into the China-US relationship," Liu said in a statement on Monday.

Earlier in the day, US Senator Mike Crapo's spokesperson confirmed to Sputnik that a bipartisan group of senators will travel to China next week, however, a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping has not been confirmed yet.

According to media reports, the senators want to raise with Xi the problems US microchip company Micron Technology faces operating in China.

In May, China's Cyberspace Administration announced that Micron Technology would be

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banned from selling to critical infrastructure operators after it was found to pose a national security risk. China's Cybersecurity Administration is currently conducting an investigation into the US semiconductor company, according to media reports.

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US House Rules Panel Chair Says 'Crucial' to Pass Spending Bills by January to Avoid Cuts

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - Passing the appropriations bills to fund the federal government before the end of the year is "crucial" to avoiding automatic spending cuts and other budgetary measures, US House Rules Committee Chairman Tom Cole said in a statement.

"It is crucial that we complete the appropriations process before January 1, 2024. At that point, if all 12 bills have still failed to be enacted, a new law will automatically enact a continuing resolution to fund the government until the end of the next fiscal year, September 30, 2024, with a one percent across-the-board cut to all programs and agencies," the statement said on Monday.

An across-the-board cut would lock in "unfavorable" funding levels and policies from a Democratic majority, the statement said.

US House Republicans can spend taxpayer dollars more wisely through full-year appropriations measures, the statement said.

Congress passed a short-term government funding measure over the weekend to avoid a shutdown and give lawmakers more time to pass appropriations bills. House Republicans have already passed four bills that would fund approximately 70% of the government, the statement added.

Members of the House of Representatives will remain in Washington for the rest of the month to complete the funding bills and begin work with the Senate on a final agreement, according to the statement.

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Russia Trusts Task Force Deployment in Haiti Will Decrease Flow of Weapons - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, October 3 (Sputnik) - Russia trusts that the UN Security Council-approved deployment of a task force to Haiti will help decrease the flow of illicit weapons into the country, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said.

"In particular, we trust that this measure will help to significantly decrease the illegal flow of weapons to the island and shed light on smuggling sources and routes," Nebenzia said following the vote of the UN Security Council on deploying the task force to Haiti.

The ambassador also said that Russia hopes the task force will help to stabilize the situation in Haiti.

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Earlier on Monday, the UN Security Council approved a resolution aimed at deploying a task force to Haiti in cooperation with the Haitian government. The measure was approved with 13 votes in favor and two abstentions.

The task force is supposed to cooperate and closely coordinate activities with the Haitian government as well as provide support to the Haitian National Police during security-related operations and in the protection of infrastructure.

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US Senator's Office Confirms Lawmakers Will Travel to China, Xi Meeting Not Confirmed Yet

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - US Senator Mike Crapo's spokesperson confirmed to Sputnik that a bipartisan group of senators will travel to China next week, but a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping has not been confirmed yet.

"I can confirm Crapo is attending a [Majority Leader Chuck] Schumer CODEL to China, Japan and South Korea," the spokesperson said on Monday.

The spokesperson also said Crapo told Bloomberg they hope to meet with Xi, but that it has not been confirmed.

Media reported earlier in the day that the senators want to raise issues with Xi related to problems US microchip company Micron Technology faces operating in China.

In May, China's Cyberspace Administration announced that Micron Technology would be banned from selling to critical infrastructure operators after it was found to pose a national security risk. China's Cybersecurity Administration is currently conducting an investigation into the US semiconductor company, according to media reports.

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State Dept. Says Issued Record 24Mln Passports Since Oct 2022, Reduced Processing Times

WASHINGTON, October 2 (Sputnik) – The US State Department said on Monday that it has issued more than 24 million passport books and cards between October 2022 and September 2023, and will reduce passport processing times by two weeks.

“Between October 2022 and September 2023 (the federal fiscal year), the State Department issued more than 24 million passport books and cards, the most ever in our nation’s history,” the State Department said in a press release. “Beginning October 2, 2023, passport processing times will be 8-11 weeks for routine service and 5-7 weeks for expedited service.”

In 2020-2022, it was taking up to 13 weeks to process one application to issue a new passport book.

The fee for a routine service to get a new passport book is $130. If someone wants to get a passport two weeks earlier, they will have to pay an additional $60 dollars.

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PREVIEW - Hunter Biden to Appear in US Court for Firearms Charges

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - Hunter Biden is set to appear in federal court in the US state of Delaware on Tuesday for a hearing on felony firearms charges brought against him.

Biden was indicted last month for allegedly lying about his illegal drug use when buying a pistol in 2018. US law prohibits illegal drug users from purchasing firearms and requires that buyers attest to their lack of drug use.

Biden intends to plead not guilty to the charges against him, his defense attorneys have said.

The case marks the first prosecution of the child of a sitting US president. District Judge Maryellen Noreika rejected a request by Biden to appear for the hearing via video conference, but moved the hearing date from September 26 to October 3.

The charges come following the collapse of a plea deal between Biden and prosecutors, under the terms of which he would have pleaded guilty to misdemeanor tax charges and entered a pre-trial diversion agreement on the firearm charges.

The case also comes alongside other investigations into alleged criminal activity involving Hunter Biden and his father, President Joe Biden.

House lawmakers are probing allegations of bribery and influence peddling by the Biden family, conducted through Hunter Biden's business activities. Joe Biden has denied ever discussing business affairs with his son.

Biden faces charges including making a false statement in the purchase of a firearm and possession of a firearm by a person who is an unlawful user of a controlled substance, for which he could face up to 25 years in prison if convicted, according to the US Justice Department.

In July, the White House said that Biden would not pardon his son if he were convicted.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) -

WESTERN SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE

* The United States has suspended the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative and the Foreign Military Financing contracting programs for Ukraine, US State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.

* The US Congress must take action to fund security assistance efforts for Ukraine due to the United States having exhausted much of its existing funding, Miller said.

* The United States is going to announce another aid package for Ukraine as part of a larger

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effort to signal its continued support, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said.
* EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said he had proposed a new bilateral multi-annual envelope worth up to 5 billion euros ($5.25 billion) for military support of Ukraine in 2024 and expressed hope that the bloc would be able to agree on the aid package before the end of 2023.
* The United States' refusal to provide financial aid to Ukraine is a temporary phenomenon and Washington will continue to be directly involved in the conflict, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

NAGORNO-KARABAKH
* Russian peacekeepers have noted a ceasefire violation in Nagorno-Karabakh after an unknown person opened fire at a joint Russian-Azerbaijani patrol, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Monday.
* Russia is working with Azerbaijan on the stabilization of situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.
* Baku said that it will guarantee the right of residents of Nagorno-Karabakh to preserve the Armenian culture as part of the plan for the region's reintegration into Azerbaijan's society.

RUSSIA-SLOVAKIA DISPUTE
* The Slovak Foreign Ministry on Monday summoned a representative of the Russian diplomatic mission over statements about influencing the Saturday parliamentary elections in the country.
* The Russian embassy in Bratislava said that it firmly rejects allegations of interference in the Slovak election process.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE
* Ukraine has lost up to 180 soldiers in the Donetsk direction over the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Monday.
* Poland has repaired the first set of Leopard tanks for Ukraine, the Polska Grupa Zbrojeniowa defense holding said.
* UK Secretary of State for Defense Grant Shapps walked back reports that the UK navy might be deployed to provide protection to Ukrainian ships transporting grain in the Black Sea.

RUSSIAN ENERGY
* The average price of the Russian oil brand Urals amounted to $83.08 per barrel in September, while the Brent benchmark was trading at $93.98 per barrel, bringing the Russian oil's discount to $10.9 per barrel, the Russian Finance Ministry said on Monday.
* Contacts between Moldova and the Russian energy giant Gazprom continue given that Chisinau has debts that need to be settled, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.
* Gazprom said it was receiving daily requests for gas supply from Moldovan national gas company Moldovagaz and is fulfilling them.

RUSSIA'S REACTION TO EU BAN ON CAR ENTRY
* It is not necessary to introduce mirror measures in response to the ban of EU countries on the

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entry of Russian personal vehicles, however, such decisions have a negative impact on relations with EU countries, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Monday.
* Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov called the recent decision by some EU states to ban entry of cars with Russian plates into their territories "a manifestation of Nazism."

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Antisemitism 'Well-Grounded' in US, Complicated Problem Has No Easy Answer - Veteran

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - Antisemitism has strong roots in the United States and Canada and represents a serious problem with no easy answers, US World War II veteran Frank Cohn told Sputnik.
"Of course, anti-Semitism is well grounded in the American scene and always has been, Cohn said.
He emphasized that the horrors of the Holocaust during World War II forced anti-Semites to keep silent for many years after Hitler's defeat in 1945. However, now, as the years came, the Holocaust denial arose for the new generations, who have not enough knowledge about what has happened.
Cohn, a German-born Jew who fled the country in 1938 amid anti-Jewish violence, emphasized that Antisemitism gained a lot of support, which is a big problem now. He said anti-Semites "are not all the same," in some cases education might be used to counter the development.
"There is the possibility of learning and education, which may help give them a better insight. They can be salvaged. Others may be defensive, they claim that they are not anti-Semites but are against Israel," he said.
The veteran also warned about the danger of the start of "another Holocaust." He expressed confidence that those supporting anti-Semitic groups can be found among Democratic leftists and Republican rightists in the US.
"What can be done with them? Initially - nothing. Speech is cheap. But as soon as anyone of these starts to use physical force, the prosecution must seek the steepest permitted penalties," he said.
However, Cohn warned that these efforts will take a long time, and American society may face many problems before seeing daylight.

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Invitation of Ukrainian Nazi to Canadian Parliament Is 'Diplomatic Mess' - US Veteran

WASHINGTON, October 3 (Sputnik) - Celebrating Ukrainian Nazi Yaroslav Hunka at the Canadian Parliament represents a diplomatic mess for the county's government and for Ukraine, US World War II veteran Frank Cohn told Sputnik.

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"The invitation of the 98-year-old Ukrainian Nazi to the Canadian Parliament was certainly a diplomatic mess and probably meant to be such by the speaker who must have wanted to embarrass [Canadian Prime Minister Justin] Trudeau," Kohn said.

On September 22, Hunka, a former volunteer with the 14th Waffen SS Grenadier Division, a Nazi military unit declared a criminal organization during the Nuremberg trials in 1946, was invited to the Canadian parliament by Speaker Anthony Rota to attend Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's address and lauded as a "hero" who fought against the Russians in World War II. Rota resigned over the backlash that followed the exposure of Hunka's role in the notorious SS.

Cohn, who was born in a Jewish family in Germany in 1923 and escaped the Hitler regime 15 years later, expressed confidence that this situation was an "intentional stab at Ukraine." He also pointed out that it supported Russia's position about a "Nazi-oriented government" in Kiev.

The US veteran questioned if the Canadian parliamentarians, who met Hunka with ovations, were aware of his background or just invited him as a regular individual with Ukrainian heritage.

"If they knew the truth, Trudeau is in real trouble and there were certainly anti-Semitic vibes," he said.

The honoring of a Nazi veteran prompted outcries from Russia and Poland, with senior officials suggesting Hunka should be extradited to face justice in a court of law. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov insisted that Hunka's crimes had no statute of limitations.

The Israeli Anti-Fascist Movement urged the Canadian authorities to disclose information about Nazi criminals who took refuge in the country after World War II and bring to justice those of them who are still alive.

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Bipartisan Group of US Senators Trying to Set Up Meeting With Xi For China Visit Next Week

WASHINGTON, October 2 (Sputnik) - A bipartisan group of US senators is trying to schedule a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping during their visit to China next week, Bloomberg News reported on Monday, citing Senator Mike Crapo.

The report said the lawmakers want to raise issues with Xi related to problems US microchip company Micron Technology faces operating in China, but a meeting has yet to confirmed.

China's Cybersecurity Administration is currently conducting an investigation into the US semiconductor company, the report said.

The senators are also scheduled to meet with members of the US business community in Shanghai to discuss concerns about the investment climate for US companies operating in China, the report said.

The offices of Senator Chuck Schumer and Crapo did not immediately respond to request for comment on this matter nor did the Chinese Embassy in Washington immediately respond to Sputnik's request for comment.

In May, China's Cyberspace Administration announced that Micron Technology would be banned from selling to critical infrastructure operators after it was found to pose a national

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security risk.

The Financial Times reported in April that the United States asked South Korea to limit semiconductor exports to China after it launched a security probe into Micron. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning called the review a "normal regulatory measure" and criticized the US for breaking trade rules.

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UNSC Approves Security Task Force to be Deployed in Haiti - Correspondent

UNITED NATIONS, October 2 (Sputnik) - The United Nations Security Council members on Monday approve approved a resolution aimed at deploying a task force to Haiti in cooperation with the Haitian government.

The resolution "authorizes Member States that have notified the Secretary General of their participation to form and deploy a Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission with a lead country, in close cooperation and coordination with the Government of Haiti, for an initial period of twelve months following the adoption of this resolution, to be reviewed nine months after the adoption of this resolution," according to the text.

The council approved the measure with 13 countries voting in favor and two abstentions.

The special support will be directed towards "providing operational support to the Haitian National Police, including building its capacity through the planning and conduct of joint security support operations, as it works to counter gangs and improve security conditions in Haiti, characterized by kidnappings, sexual and gender-based violence, trafficking in persons…"

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Syria's Embassy in Saudi Arabia in Process to Reopen - Vice Foreign Minister

UNITED NATIONS, October 2 (Sputnik) - Syria's embassy in Saudi Arabia is in the process to reopen after a decades-long hiatus in relations between the two countries, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Bassam Sabbagh told Sputnik.

"Our diplomatic mission is in process to start working," Sabbagh said.

In May, Syria and Saudi Arabia agreed to restore diplomatic relations. It came on the heels of Syria's reinstatement in the Arab League.

The Al-Watan newspaper reported over the weekend that consul Ihsan Raman has arrived at the Syrian embassy in Riyadh.

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Oil Down 2% as Q4 Starts With New Concerns Over Inflation, Global Economy

NEW YORK CITY, October 2 (Sputnik) - Crude prices fell 2% on Monday as global markets began trading for the fourth quarter amid renewed concerns about inflation and a worldwide slowdown.

"The damage that can be done to the economy by high oil prices is very real and it's completely delusional to think this is acceptable for the bulk of the world which does not produce oil but instead consumes it," John Kilduff, partner at New York energy hedge fund Again Capital, said in a text shared with Sputnik.

Both New York-traded West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude and London's Brent oil fell about 2% each, extending losses from Friday. The two crude benchmarks had risen nearly 30% in the third quarter, threatening a new round of chaos to economies in non-oil producing countries.

WTI for delivery in November settled at $88.82 — below the key $90 per barrel mark — after sliding $1.97, or 2.2%, on the day. The US crude benchmark hit a session trough of $88.47, its lowest since September 21.

Brent for the most-active December contract settled at $90.71, down $1.49 cents or 1.6%. The global crude benchmark plunged to $90.36 earlier.

While September manufacturing data, via the Purchasing Managers Index, improved in both the United States and Europe, economists saw that as more of a work-off on inventories of raw materials in hold. The concern is how the global economy would fare for the rest of 2023 if energy prices continue rising without control, adding an onerous burden to overheads.

The dollar's surge to a new 10-month high added to the weight of commodities denominated in the US currency. The dollar shot up as a number of policy-makers at the Federal Reserve hinted on Monday at another rate hike in either November or December to keep inflation under control and nearer to the central bank's 2% per annum target from a current 3.7%.

On the brighter side of oil, OPEC+, the 23-nation alliance of oil producers, is to meet on Wednesday. The proponents of higher crude prices are counting on OPEC+ — which groups the 13-member Saudi-led Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries with 10 independent oil producers steered by Russia — to reignite the upward momentum held by the market over the past four months.

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US Needs More Rate Hikes, Policy-Makers Say Ahead of Fed's November Meeting

WASHINGTON, October 2 (Sputnik) - The United States will likely need higher interest rates to keep inflation under control and nearer to the central bank's target of 2% per annum, policymakers at the Federal Reserve said Tuesday ahead of a decision on rates by the central bank next month.

"It will likely be appropriate to raise rates further and hold them at a restrictive level for some

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time," Fed Governor Michelle Bowman said in remarks prepared for delivery at a banking conference. "Inflation remains too high."

US headline inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index, or CPI, hit 40-year highs of more than 9% in June 2022 before falling to as low as 3.0% by June this year. Since then, it has been on the rise, rising to 3.7% in August, as high global oil prices bumped up fuel costs at home.

The Fed left rates unchanged when it last met on September 20, after adding a quarter point in July. It has hiked rates 11 times since March 2022, adding 5.25 percentage points to a prior base that peaked at just 0.25%.

While the central bank paused on an increase last month, it maintained projections that a quarter point increase was possible at either one of its remaining two meetings for this year, scheduled in November and December.

A near 30% jump in oil prices during the third quarter has bumped up concerns that the US economy might face severe headwinds again just as gross domestic product appeared to have stabilized at over 2% for 2023.

Bowman said she expects "progress to be slow on inflation given the current level of monetary policy restraint" - a reference to the 11 rate hikes the central bank has already instituted in less than two years.

"There is a risk that high energy prices could reverse some of the recent progress on lowering inflation," she added.

Michael Barr, the Fed's vice chair for supervision, concurred with Bowman that the central bank will likely "need to keep rates up for some time".

But Barr also said higher-for-longer did not mean higher-forever.

"In my view, the most important question at this point is not whether an additional rate increase is needed this year or not, but rather how long we will need to hold rates at a sufficiently restrictive level to achieve our goals," Barr said in comments prepared for delivery to the Forecasters Club of New York. "I expect it will take some time."

Fed Chairman Jerome Powell, meanwhile, told another event that the US economy was "still working through the impact of the pandemic," and needs more time to stabilize.

A decade before the outbreak of the COVID-19 in March 2020, the United States had one of the lowest inflation rates in the world, with annual price growth ranging from 1% to 2%. That changed with the pandemic as trillions of dollars of federal relief spending was directed at the economy, with ultra-loose money supply adding to the fire of inflation.

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Trial in Corruption Case Against US Sen. Menendez Set for May 6, 2024 - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 2 (Sputnik) - The trial for a criminal corruption case involving US Sen. Robert Menendez will begin on May 6, 2024, Bloomberg reported on Monday.

The court held a status conference in Menendez's case and set a trial date of May 6, 2024, the report said.

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Last month, prosecutors announced bribery and fraud charges against Menendez for allegedly attempting to exchange his influence as a lawmaker for material gain. Menendez allegedly received bribes including cash, gold bars and a luxury vehicle.

Menendez has pleaded not guilty to the charges against him and was released on bail. Menendez stepped down as chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee but has not resigned from his seat in Congress.

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Russia Bids to Rejoin UN Human Rights Council for 2024-2026 After Suspension

UNITED NATIONS, October 2 (Sputnik) - Russia will bid to rejoin the UN Human Rights Council for 2024-2026 after having been suspended from it in a US-led campaign in connection with the Ukraine conflict, according to the country's position paper.

"Despite unprecedented pressure, including on the human rights track, the Russian Federation decided to present its candidature to return to the Council for the term 2024-2026 at the elections to be held on 10 October 2023 during the 78-th session of the UN General Assembly," the position paper said.

If elected, Russia will resist the "increasing trend" of turning the Human Rights Council into an instrument that serves political interests of one group of countries, according to the paper.

Russia will also promote the principles of cooperation and constructive and mutually respectful dialogue in order to find adequate solutions for human rights issues, it added.

Russia was elected to the UN Human Rights Council in 2020. In April 2022, its membership was suspended by the UN General Assembly in a 93-24 vote, with 58 countries abstaining.

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US Opposes Iran's Efforts to 'Militarize Antarctica' - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 2 (Sputnik) - The United States opposes efforts by Iran to conduct military activities in Antarctica, US State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.

"Antarctica should remain a sanctuary for peaceful exploration and scientific research… we unequivocally oppose any efforts to militarize Antarctica," Miller said during a press briefing.

Last week, Iranian Navy Commander Rear Adm. Shahram Irani said Tehran plans to engage in military and scientific endeavors in Antarctica.

Irani also said Tehran intends to construct a permanent station in Antarctica to conduct the planned efforts.

Miller emphasized that the United States remains committed to the Antarctic Treaty of 1959, which prohibits the establishment of military bases in Antarctica.

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However, Miller acknowledged that Iran is not a party to the treaty.

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State Dept. Says Does Not Expect Putin to Attend APEC, Honors Host Obligations

WASHINGTON, October 2 (Sputnik) - US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday he would be "highly surprised" if Russian President Vladimir Putin wanted to show up at the APEC summit in San Francisco,

"I don't have anything I think I want to say about invitations," Miller said during a press briefing. "We've said we recognize our obligations as the host of the APEC but we are going to honor our sanctions rules and regulations in making invitations ... I would be highly surprised if Vladimir Putin, who has been at times reluctant to leave its own borders recently for the fear of arrest for the war crimes he has committed... I'd be highly surprised if he wanted to show up at the meeting in San Francisco."

When further asked whether the US will invite Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Miller reiterated that he does not have anything specific about invitations.

The United States has informed Russia that it is not going to invite a number of leaders, including President Putin, to the APEC summit in San Francisco scheduled for November 11-17, APEC Senior Official Marat Berdyev told Sputnik last week.

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US State Dept. Says Iran 'Long Way Off' From Even Considering Reentering Nuclear Agreement

WASHINGTON, October 2 (Sputnik) - Iran is a "long way off" from even considering returning to the nuclear agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.

"I think we are a long way off from Iran even considering reentering the JCPOA," Miller said during a press briefing.

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Brazil Looks For Negotiations on Ukraine, Did Not Put Meeting Into UNSC

UNITED NATIONS, October 2 (Sputnik) - Brazil would like to see negotiation process on Ukraine but the Brazilian Mission to the United Nations did not include the meeting on the topic in the official program of work for October, the country's Ambassador to UN Sergio Franca

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Danese said on Monday.

"What we are looking forward to is that at some point the negotiating process will be opened and peace will be given a chance. As regards meetings on Ukraine -we didn't put it ourselves directly into the program." Danese told journalists during a press briefing on the UN Security Council agenda.

If there is a request, Danese aedded, Brazil will be open to scheduling it.

Brazil assumed the role of the UN Security Council president for October, following the presidency of Albania during September.

In September, Russia expressed its dissatisfaction with Albania who had included an official meeting on the situation in Ukraine in its program of work at the beginning of the month.

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White House Says Republicans Should' Figure Out' Potential Motion to Vacate House Speaker

WASHINGTON, October 2 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives potential motion to vacate US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy is a matter for congressional Republicans to address, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said on Monday.

"The motion to vacate has nothing to do with us. That is something for House Republicans to figure out," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing.

US Congressman Matt Gaetz announced last week his intention to initiate a motion to vacate McCarthy from the speakership position because he gave in to Democrats' demands and collaborated with them to pass a funding measure and prevent a government shutdown for 45 days.

However, Gaetz said earlier on Monday that he did not move forward with the effort to oust McCarthy, saying he is still expects answers from the speaker and may proceed depending on the response.

The motion to vacate allows any member of the House of Representatives to propose the unseating of the speaker if his conduct is deemed "privileged." Since Republicans hold a slim majority in the lower chamber of Congress, McCarthy risks his position if he loses more than four party votes.

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US Official Confirms $5.4Bln Remains in Ukraine Aid After Congress Fails to Provide More

WASHINGTON, October 2 (Sputnik) - A US official confirmed to Sputnik on Monday that $5.4 billion remains in available funding for Ukraine amid Russia's special military operation.

The $5.4 billion available allows the United States to send weapons and equipment from its own stockpiles to Ukraine under the presidential drawdown authority.

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Moreover, according to the US official, only $1.6 billion remains in funding from the $25.9 billion approved by Congress to replenish US military stocks depleted by Ukraine security assistance packages.

The US official said there are too many variables to speculate how long the remaining Ukraine funds will last.

Media reported earlier, citing Pentagon officials, that the remaining funding for Ukraine should last about six months.

On Saturday, Congress passed a short-term spending bill that did not include additional assistance for Ukraine. However, the shot-term spending bill gives lawmakers until November 17 to consider full-term spending legislation for next year, including more funding for Ukraine.

President Joe Biden recently asked Congress to approve some $24 billion in additional aid for Ukraine in his $40 billion supplemental request.

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US State Department Says Suspended Long-Term Contracting for Ukraine

WASHINGTON, October 2 (Sputnik) - The United States has suspended Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI) and Foreign Military Financing (FMF) contracting programs for Ukraine, US State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.

"While we have some remaining drawdown authority that we can draw on to continue to provide security assistance to Ukraine in the short-term... USAI funding has been suspended, FMF funding has been suspended," Miller said during a press briefing. "Those are the contracting programs that allow us to contract for Ukraine in the long-term."

The State Department calls on Congress to replenish both short-term and long-term security assistance funding for Ukraine, Miller said.

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More Than 75,000 Kaiser Union Workers to Start US Health Strike - Statement

WASHINGTON, October 2 (Sputnik) - More than 75,000 workers at health care provider Kaiser Permanente are set to strike on Wednesday, the Coalition of Kaiser Permanente Unions announced in a statement.

The workers' contract with Kaiser Permanente expired on Saturday amid the as of yet unsuccessful negotiations regarding staffing levels and an increase in wages and benefits.

"There have been good discussions with Kaiser [Permanente] on a number of issues and while there is no concrete agreement, we can see a path to resolution on raising shift differentials, a fair remote work agreement and investments in training for both current employees to promote to harder to fill jobs and community members to become the healthcare workforce needed for

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the future," the statement said.

The coalition said Kaiser Permanente committed unfair labor practices and noted that it had alerted the health care provider's leadership about the plan for the workers to strike from October 4 to October 7, the statement said.

The strike will target hundreds of Kaiser Permanente facilities in the US states of California, Colorado, Oregon, Washington, Virginia and the District of Columbia, the statement said.

Kaiser Permanente is the largest health care provider in the United States, serving nearly 13 million patients and operating 39 hospitals and some 600 medical offices across eight states and the District of Columbia.

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US Exhausted Much Ukraine Funding, Congress Must Take Action - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, October 2 (Sputnik) - The US Congress must take action to fund security assistance efforts for Ukraine due to the United States having exhausted much of its existing funding, US State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.

“While we have the ability to continue to support Ukraine’s ability to defend itself in the immediate term, we have already exhausted much of the existing security assistance funding. It is imperative that Congress take action,” Miller said during a press briefing.

The State Department calls on Congress to fully fund both Ukraine’s short-term and long-term security needs, Miller added.

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White House Confident Bipartisan Support for Ukraine Will Continue in Congress

WASHINGTON, October 2 (Sputnik) - White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Monday that she is confident bipartisan support for Ukraine will continue in Congress.

"There's bipartisan support, we've heard that from Republicans and Democrats, and we appreciate the bipartisan support that we have seen for Ukraine and we we are confident that we're going to continue to see that," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing.

Jean-Pierre further said Russian President Vladimir Putin is wrong if he thinks he can outlast the United States' commitment to Ukraine, adding that the Biden administration will soon announce another package of aid for Ukraine.

The United States, according to reports, has some $5.4 billion remains to provide Ukraine weapons from its own stockpiles and $1.6 billion in funding remains from the $25.9 billion approved by Congress to replenish US military stocks that have been going to Ukraine.

US lawmakers left out additional funding for Ukraine from the House version of the short-term spending bill passed on Saturday by both chambers in Congress. The Senate wanted to provide

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$6 billion to Ukraine in its version of the short-term spending legislation.

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US to Announce Another Ukraine Aid Package Soon to Signal Continued Support - White House

WASHINGTON, October 2 (Sputnik) - The United States is going to announce another aid package for Ukraine as part of a larger effort to signal its continued support, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Monday.

"And so we will have another package of aid for Ukraine soon to signal our continued support for the brave people of Ukraine," Jean-Pierre said during a press conference.

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Gaetz Urges McCarthy to Reveal 'Secret Ukraine Side Deal' Ahead of Move to Oust Speaker

WASHINGTON, October 2 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Matt Gaetz said on Monday that House Speaker Kevin McCarthy ought to reveal details of a secret deal with President Joe Biden on assistance for Ukraine, ahead of a motion to remove him as head of the lower chamber of Congress.

"Mr. Speaker, just tell us: what was in the secret Ukraine side deal? What commitments were made to President Biden to continue the spending of President Biden in exchange for doing things for President Biden? It is becoming increasingly clear who the Speaker of the House already works for, and it's not the Republican conference," Gaetz said during remarks on the House floor.

Gaetz said he intends to file a motion to unseat McCarthy this week, after the speaker led the passage of a short-term government funding deal on the eve of a shutdown. Gaetz opposed the legislation, instead proposing that Congress pass single-subject appropriations bills.

Gaetz alleges that McCarthy made a secret deal with Biden to bring Ukraine aid legislation to the House floor as part of negotiations on the short-term funding measure. Other members of Republican leadership were not aware of the deal, Gaetz said.

Ukraine has lost the support of the "majority of the majority" in the House of Representatives, Gaetz said. McCarthy cannot team with Democrats to overrule the will of the majority party per the so-called Hastert Rule, Gaetz said.

The House could hold votes later on Monday or later this week that "could be implicated" by McCarthy's response to Gaetz's question, the lawmaker said, in reference to his motion to vacate the speakership.

Some House Republicans are also preparing an effort to expel Gaetz from Congress, pending an ethics probe into the lawmaker, US media reported earlier this week. US Congresswoman

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Marjorie Taylor Greene has opposed both the motion to vacate McCarthy's speakership and the effort to expel Gaetz, arguing that the in-fighting only hurts the party's work in Congress.

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General Motors Lays Off 160 Workers Amid United Auto Workers Union Strike - Reports

WASHINGTON, October 2 (Sputnik) - General Motors has announced it will lay off of 160 employees at plants in the US states of Indiana and Ohio due to ongoing disruptions from the United Auto Workers (UAW) union strike, Reuters reported on Monday.

Some 19,000 US auto workers at various Ford, General Motors and Stellantis facilities are striking due to unsuccessful negotiations with the UAW. The union is seeking a 46% pay raise and a 32-hour work week for the autoworkers, among other terms.

The General Motors plant in Fairfax, Kansas, saw earlier this month 2,000 indefinite layoffs due to a strike-induced parts shortage, the report said.

The UAW then escalated its strike at the Lansing Delta Township assembly plant, where the Buick Enclave and the Chevrolet Traverse are finalized, the report also said.

Financial institutions like JPMorgan have projected that the strike has resulted in a loss of $191 million for General Motors and $145 million for Ford, the report added.

However, most hope for a forthcoming agreement as both parties appear close to settling, according to the report.

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US Supreme Court Declines to Hear Case to Ban Trump From Running for President - Filing

WASHINGTON, October 2 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court announced on Monday that it will not hear the case to ban former President Donald Trump from running for the presidency in 2024 over his alleged role in the January 6 Capitol riot.

An order list published on Monday said that the US highest court declined the petition for a writ of certiorari in a case brought by John Anthony Castro earlier this year.

The denial came without any comments or recorded vote, according to the document.

John Castro, 39, is a Republican politician and a primary candidate in the 2024 presidential election, though he could not meet minimal poll requirements to take part in any of the two GOP debates to date.

Castro's case against Trump is based on Section 3 of the 14th Amendment to the US Constitution which says that no person shall become a US president if he has engaged in a rebellion or insurrection against the Constitution. At the same time, neither the constitution nor the amendment provisions clarify how the ban should be implemented in practice.

Trump is currently facing two federal indictments, including an alleged mishandling of classified

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documents at his house in Florida and an alleged attempt to overturn the outcome of the 2020 presidential election. He also faces charges in the state of Georgia related to election meddling.

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US Congresswoman Greene Says Opposes Efforts to Remove McCarthy as Speaker, Expel Gaetz

WASHINGTON, October 2 (Sputnik) - US Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene said on Monday that she opposes an effort to vacate Kevin McCarthy as Speaker of the House, as well as an effort to expel Congressman Matt Gaetz.

"Now my friend Matt Gaetz says he is going to make a motion to vacate our Speaker Kevin McCarthy. And I saw in the news that other Republicans are now talking about expelling Matt Gaetz," Greene said in a statement via social media platform X. "All of this now has the House of Representatives on the verge of chaos and will only leave our majority weakened and dangerously fractured."

On Sunday, Gaetz said he plans on filing a motion to vacate McCarthy, after the speaker led the passage of a short-term government funding bill ahead of a potential shutdown. Gaetz instead proposed passing a series of single-subject spending bills.

House Republicans are planning on filing a motion to expel Gaetz if an Ethics Committee probe into the lawmaker finds evidence of wrongdoing, US media reported on Sunday.

Removing McCarthy as speaker will not change the "systemic failure" that creates the need for short-term government funding measures, Greene said. Congress' calendar is designed to produce annual failure by setting the end of the fiscal year at September 30 but sending lawmakers home for much of August and September, Greene said.

Moreover, an effort to expel Gaetz will "not be tolerated" by Republicans across the United States, Greene said.

Greene urged fellow House Republicans to stop engaging in "absurd drama" and begin focusing on ending the cycle of systemic funding failure. Democrats will seize the opportunity to receive favors in exchange for votes on the efforts, Greene said.

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Trump Says New York Civil Fraud Trial Part of US Government 'Election Interference' Effort

WASHINGTON, October 2 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump said on Monday that the civil fraud charges brought against him in the state of New York are part of a coordinated effort by government officials to interfere in his 2024 re-election bid.

"The crime is against me, because we have a corrupt District Attorney, a corrupt Attorney General, and it all comes down from the DOJ [Department of Justice], they're totally

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coordinated," Trump said during remarks outside the courtroom. "This has to do with election interference, it's plain and simple."

Trump appeared at a courthouse in New York for the first day of the civil trial against him. New York Attorney General Letitia James accuses Trump of committing fraud by inflating asset values. The trial will be overseen by New York Judge Arthur Engoron, whom Trump also criticized.

Last week, Engoron issued a partial summary judgment in the case, finding Trump and other co-defendants liable for fraud.

Trump said prosecutors could have brought this case years ago, but they waited until he was in the middle of his 2024 re-election campaign. The New York case and other federal indictments are all coordinated by the corrupt Justice Department, Trump added.

Trump holds the support of 54.8% of Republican Party primary voters, despite not having attended the first two debates with the other contenders for the party's presidential nomination, according to FiveThirtyEight primary poll averages published on Sunday. Trump is trailed by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis at 14.1% support, entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy at 7.1% and former US Ambassador the UN Nikki Haley at 6.9%.

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