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Democracy Dies in Darkness

SUNDAY, JANUARY 8, 2023 • \$5

Biden bows to difficult realities on immigration

BY MARIA SACCHETTI AND NICK MIROFF

President Biden's Irish ancestors escaped the Famine on coffin ships. Vice President Harris's parents were scholars from India and Jamaica. And Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas came to the United States as a baby when his family fled Cuba.

All three leaders stood before television cameras in Washington last week to announce that some migrants would get new opportunities to pursue similar dreams in the United States and that others would face swift removal to border cities in Mexico.

It was a deflating and lonely moment for a president who had promised to leave President Donald Trump's harsh immigration policies in the dustbin of history. Instead, Biden's administration will continue to expel people who cross the border illegally amid record numbers of apprehensions — a move to the center that could threaten support from liberal groups if he seeks a second term. The plans drew immediate outrage from Democratic and Republican lawmakers, who themselves have failed for decades to create a functioning immigration system.

"I'm left with only one choice," Biden said Thursday, "to act on my own."

Biden, Harris and Mayorkas have built their careers in Democratic politics. **SEE IMMIGRATION ON A5**

After slaying, tradition is pitted against modern love

BY ANANT GUPTA AND GERRY SHIH

NEW DELHI — On a Thursday afternoon several weeks ago, India's most sensational murder case in years kicked off in a South Delhi court.

Aaftab Poonawala, a 28-year-old chef and food blogger, was being tried for allegedly killing his 27-year-old girlfriend, Shraddha Walkar — the IT saleswoman whom he had met on the dating app Bumble in 2019 — and sawing her body into 35 pieces. News channels reenacted the grisly details using animated graphics; newspapers furrowed into the couple's stormy relationship. Even professional lawyers expressed outrage and gathered by the hundreds outside the judge's chambers to demand that Poonawala be summarily hanged.

But in India, Poonawala isn't all that is on trial.

Instead of viewing the brutal killing as a one-off, Indian society has been litigating a host of related questions. On social media, on cable news and within family WhatsApp group chats, the story of Walkar, a Hindu woman who defied her parents' wishes and moved in with Poonawala, a Muslim man she met online, has been the vehicle for intense, often inter-generational debates over women's independence, family, religion, domestic violence — and, above all, love in the age of apps.

In some ways, the Walkar saga has reflected a collision of two worlds. India, one of the world's most digitally connected countries, is witnessing a dramatic growth in the use of dating apps. Most Indian users hail from **SEE INDIA ON A14**

McCarthy's long road to win gavel



PHOTOS BY JABIN BOTSFORD/THE WASHINGTON POST



TOP: Newly elected House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.) celebrates with staff, family and House Republicans after winning in the 15th round of voting early Saturday morning. **LEFT:** Mike Rogers (R-Ala.) is restrained after getting into an argument with Matt Gaetz (R-Fla.). **RIGHT:** Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-N.Y.) congratulates McCarthy after handing him the speaker's gavel.

DILUTED POWER FOR NEW HOUSE SPEAKER

GOP hard-liners wring concessions for vote

BY ISAAC ARNSDORF, MARIANNA SOTOMAYOR, MICHAEL SCHERER AND JOSH DAWSEY

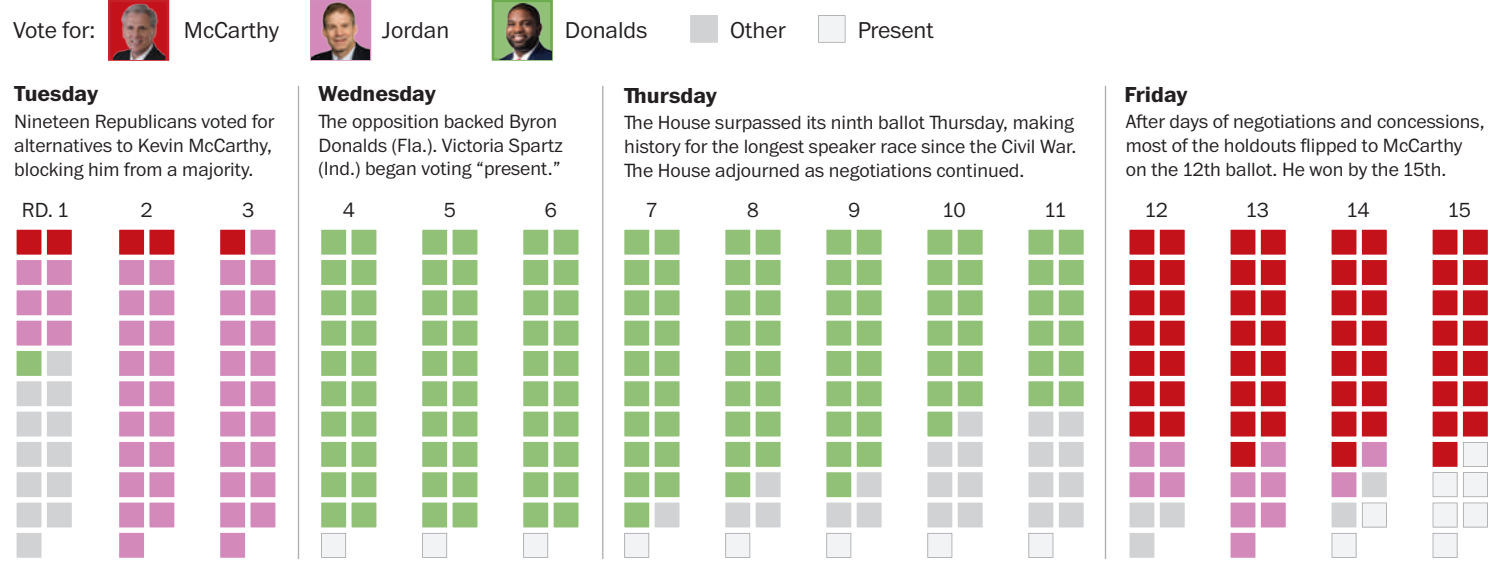
After two full days and six rounds of voting, with 21 Republican holdouts blocking Kevin McCarthy's long-held dream of becoming speaker of the House, the 57-year-old from Bakersfield, Calif., gathered a small group of lawmakers to hear his final pitch.

Huddled in the office of Majority Whip Tom Emmer (R-Minn.), McCarthy told the three moderates and four holdouts that his offer was to become the 55th speaker by significantly weakening the position and empowering his party's hard-liners.

The meeting, according to people present and briefed, became a turning point in breaking the impasse as much for the terms of the deal as for how it reestablished trust between the two factions. The small group was selected among those who had shown good faith in weeks of negotiations, and turned into what was described as a "therapy" session. The holdouts explained that McCarthy had offended them by rejecting their wish list of committee assignments after he'd been the one to ask for it, and for delivering a fiery speech to the Republican conference saying he'd "earned" the job. The moderates, in turn, gained assurances that the concessions to the hard-liners weren't unreasonable and wouldn't be abused.

"The moment I knew it was going to be his is when we got it down to a handful of members that Kevin could work personally," Rep. Patrick T. McHenry (R-N.C.), a close McCarthy ally, said early Saturday. "The crux of all the **SEE SPEAKER ON A12**

How 21 Republican holdouts delayed McCarthy's eventual speakership win



A divided party in denial and the curse of Jan. 6

BY DAN BALZ

No one could have written a more dramatic script for the final hours of Rep. Kevin McCarthy's long quest to become speaker of the House.

The last act alone came with crushing disappointment, ultimate elation, and, in between flashes of treachery, incompetence and a threat of a fistfight. The Republican Party was left frozen in its own divisions in full view of the American people.

Scenes from floor fight: After a tense day, McCarthy settles in. **A8**

It seemed almost too ironic that this made-for-television drama played out on the second anniversary of the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol, in which followers of Donald Trump sought to block certification of President Biden's 2020 victory. The entire four days and the 15 ballots that finally resulted in McCarthy's victory underscored how little the Republican Party has absorbed the full implications of how **SEE SUNDAY TAKE ON A10**

Takeaways: What four wild days showed us, and what's ahead. **A10**

The last-minute drama that led to a near-brawl on floor

BY PAUL KANE AND DYLAN WELLS

The House turned into a near-brawl late Friday after another failed vote to elect a speaker as Republicans held back one of their most senior members from a potential clash with Matt Gaetz of Florida.

Gaetz had just delivered the fatal last vote that left California's Kevin McCarthy one vote shy of the bare majority he needed to win the gavel, after the flamboyant Republican had

spent the long roll call maneuvering to make himself the last vote that mattered.

Instead of the anticipated victory, on the painstakingly long trek through 14 ballots, Gaetz voted "present." Some Republicans thought that was enough to deliver a victory, since Gaetz had previously been voting for other conservative alternatives, but McCarthy knew right away that something was wrong.

He had 216 votes out of 432 **SEE DRAMA ON A4**

The holdouts: In their districts, cheers, jeers and shrugs. **A9**

Next up for the House GOP: Fiscal showdowns

BY TONY ROMM

House Republicans are set to steer the country toward a series of fiscal showdowns as they look to force the White House to agree to massive spending cuts, threatening a return to the political brinkmanship that once nearly crippled the economy and almost plunged the U.S. government into default.

The prospect for a catastrophe rose dramatically after conservatives brokered a deal with Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.) that clinched his election as the speaker of the House early Saturday. To put an end to days of raucous debate, party lawmakers said they agreed to drive a hard line in upcoming budget talks, including by demanding potentially significant changes to Social Security and Medicare.

"That is the biggest challenge in this Congress," said Rep. Patrick T. McHenry (R-N.C.), a top ally to McCarthy, shortly after the speaker vote, adding that "debt, deficit and the fiscal house — that is a major priority for House Republicans."

In the hours before the 15th and final speaker vote, Republicans sketched out the early contours of what they might pursue over the next year — slashing **SEE BUDGET ON A11**