

3/12/24 Tuesday

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LGBTQ+ Identification Among US Adults Increases to 7.6% - Poll

WASHINGTON, March 13 (Sputnik) – The percentage of US adults identifying as LGBTQ+ has increased to 7.6%, according to a Gallup poll released Wednesday.

This marks an increase of two percentage points from two years ago and an increase of 4.1 percentage points since Gallup began its poll in 2012.

Gallup found that LGBTQ+ identification was highest among Generation Z (22.3%) and millennials (9.8%), with each generation about twice as likely to identify as LGBTQ+ than the preceding one. In contrast, only 2.3% of baby boomers and 1.1% of those born 1945 or earlier identified as LGBTQ+.

Gallup found that bisexuality was most common, with 57.3% of LGBTQ+ adults and 4.4% of American adults overall identifying as bisexual.

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US Deploys Team of Marines to Boost Security at Embassy in Haiti – SOUTHCOM

WASHINGTON, March 13 (Sputnik) – The United States has deployed a special team of Marines to boost security at the US embassy in Haiti amid the ongoing crisis in the country, US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) said in a statement on Wednesday.

“At the request of the Department of State, the US Southern Command deployed a US Marine Fleet-Anti-terrorism Security Team (FAST) to maintain strong security capabilities at the US Embassy in Port-au-Prince, Haiti and conduct relief in place for our current Marines, a common and routine practice worldwide,” the statement said.

The embassy remains open, and diplomats continue limited operations focused on assisting US citizens and supporting Haitian-led efforts to secure a peaceful transition of power, it added. Separately, a spokesperson for SOUTHCOM said the command was "prepared with a wide range of contingency plans to ensure the safety and security of US Citizens in Haiti."

On Tuesday, Guyanese President Irfaan Ali said Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry would step down amid an outbreak of gang violence and that power in Haiti would be temporarily held by a transitional council.

On February 29, gang violence erupted in the downtown area of the capital Port-au-Prince while Henry was visiting Kenya. Henry conducted the visit to seek an agreement for the deployment of foreign forces in Haiti to fight organized crime.

The gangs said their goal was to prevent Henry from returning to Haiti, and they stormed Haiti's largest prison and freed an unconfirmed number of inmates. The Haitian government declared a

state of emergency in the capital region.

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US Did Not Notify Russian Diplomats in New York of Any Provocations on March 17 - Consul

WASHINGTON, March 13 (Sputnik) - The United States did not warn the Russian Consulate General in New York about any possible provocations on the day of the presidential election on March 17, Russian Consul General in New York Alexander Zakharov said in an interview with Russian media.

"At the moment, not yet. There are no such notifications. We are in contact with the police department and the diplomatic security service. We convey our concerns to them," Zakharov said. "We have heard about attempts to interfere with the expression of will on election day, but we expect that all these attempts will not have any impact."

On March 1, early voting for the Russian presidential election started abroad.

Russians will go to the polls from March 15-17 to elect a new president. In addition to incumbent President Vladimir Putin, the candidates include lower house international affairs committee chair Leonid Slutsky, lower house Far East and Arctic development committee chair Nikolai Kharitonov, and lower house Deputy Speaker Vladislav Davankov.

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Only Six Diplomats Working at Russian Consulate General in New York - Consul

NEW YORK, March 13 (Sputnik) - Only six diplomats are currently working at the Russian diplomatic mission in New York due to the US State Department's practice of visa exchanges and delays in issuing visas, Russian Consul General in New York Alexander Zakharov said in an interview with Russian media.

"The practice of visa exchanges and delays in issuing visas has led to the fact that we are working in a truncated staff," Zakharov said. "We have only 6 diplomats."

Zakharov said negotiations are currently underway in a bid to remedy the situation, but added that these talks would take time.

"Negotiations are underway. We are expecting progress. But alas, this is such a protracted and complex process that it may take months to approve a visa exchange," Zakharov said.

Zakharov told Sputnik in November that Russia suggested that the United States stop making the number of visas it grants to Russian diplomats conditional on the number of visas issued by Moscow to American diplomats, but has not received a positive response.

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US Has Not Interfered With Russian Consulate's Preparations for Presidential Vote - Consul

WASHINGTON, March 13 (Sputnik) - US authorities have not yet interfered with the preparations of the Russian Consulate General in New York for Russia's presidential election on Sunday, Russian Consul General in New York Alexander Zakharov said in an interview with Russian media.

"At the moment, we have not noted such [actions]," Zakharov said in response to a question about whether the US has interfered with the ongoing preparations for the vote.

Zakharov pointed out that voting at the polling station at the Russian Consulate General in New York will take place in a transparent atmosphere.

"Some Russian news agencies have already approached us with a request to cover it. There are no restrictions. Everything is transparent and in full compliance with the law," he stated. "We expect a high turnout this year."

On March 1, early voting for the Russian presidential election started abroad.

Russians will go to the polls from March 15-17 to elect a new president. In addition to incumbent President Vladimir Putin, the candidates include lower house international affairs committee chair Leonid Slutsky, lower house Far East and Arctic development committee chair Nikolai Kharitonov, and lower house Deputy Speaker Vladislav Davankov.

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Russia Not Inciting Anyone in Africa, Not Setting Anyone Against France - Putin

MOSCOW, March 13 (Sputnik) - Russia does not incite African countries and does not set them against France, Moscow has no such tasks, Russian President Vladimir Putin has said in an interview with Rossiya Segodnya Director General Dmitry Kiselev for the Rossiya 1 broadcaster and Ria Novosti.

Putin said that French President Emmanuel Macron's sharp reaction to Moscow may be related to actions in Africa.

"Yes, I think there is some kind of resentment. But when we maintained direct contact with him, we spoke quite openly on this topic. We did not go into Africa and did not squeeze France out of

there," Putin said.

Putin said that in many countries where France has historically been a metropolis, they do not really want to deal with Paris, although there are other African countries where they are calm about the French presence.

"But we have nothing to do with it, we are not inciting anyone there, we are not setting anyone up against France. We do not have such tasks. To be honest, we do not have such state, national tasks there at the level of the Russian state. We are just friends with them - that's all. They want to develop relations with us. Well, for God's sake, we are willing to do that. There's nothing to be offended about," Putin said.

Putin went on to say that Russia did not thrust itself into Africa and did not squeeze France out of there; African leaders themselves wanted to work with the Russian Federation.

"We did not push anyone out. It is just that the African leaders of some countries agreed with Russian economic operators and wanted to work with them but did not want to work with the French in some way. It was not our initiative, it was the initiative of our African friends. But it is unclear why they should be offended at us in this regard," he said.

Putin noted that an independent state wants to develop relations with its partners from other countries, including the Russian Federation.

"We did not touch them, the former French colonialists in these countries. Well, yes, I even say this without irony because in many countries where France has historically been a metropolis, they do not really want to deal with them," he said. "We have nothing to do with it. So, it is probably more convenient to be offended by someone without seeing your own problems." The President suggested that "such an acute reaction, quite emotional on the part of the French president, is also related to what is happening in some African states."

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Easier to Deal With Those 'Snorting Cocaine', Clever People Dangerous - Putin

MOSCOW, March 13 (Sputnik) – It's easier to come to terms with those that are "snorting cocaine" than with clever and dangerous people, Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an interview with Rossiya Segodnya Director General Dmitry Kiselev for the Rossiya 1 broadcaster and RIA Novosti.

"Those who are a bit cleverer started to think that something should be changed in terms of a strategy towards Russia. That's when all the ideas appeared to revive negotiations, to find some ways to end this conflict, to find out where Russia's real national interests lie. These are dangerous people, by the way," Putin said.

Putin pointed out that it was easier to deal with people guided by their bad habits.

"Do you remember an old Russian saying? What was happiness for the man in the street? 'Full, drunk and snuffing tobacco' It's easy to deal with people like that," Putin said.

"Nowadays they are snorting cocaine, right? Doesn't really matter but it's easier to deal with these people. Clever people are more difficult to handle. They are dangerous because they influence the public's mind, including ours. They will toss all kinds of wants and wishes and

make them look like carrot sticks for us," Putin said.

Moscow has repeatedly said that it was ready for negotiations to end the conflict in Ukraine but Kiev officially banned any such talks. The West meanwhile has been turning a blind eye to Kiev's constant refusals to engage in dialogue.

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Russia Will Not Allow Anyone to Interfere in Its Internal Political Processes - Putin

MOSCOW, March 13 (Sputnik) - Russia will not allow anyone to interfere in its internal political processes, Russian President Vladimir Putin has said in an interview with Rossiya Segodnya Director General Dmitry Kiselev for the Rossiya 1 broadcaster and Ria Novosti.

"We have said it many times, and I have said it many times, we will not let anyone do this," Putin said.

Putin also called US President Joe Biden's attempt in 2011 to dissuade him from participating in the elections as interference.

"Well, that is the sign of interference," he said.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova also said that Russia will decisively suppress any attempts to interfere in internal affairs and subversive activity from abroad on the eve of the presidential elections in the country.

Russians will go to the polls from March 15-17 to elect a new president. In addition to incumbent President Vladimir Putin, the candidates include lower house international affairs committee chair Leonid Slutsky, lower house Far East and Arctic development committee chair Nikolai Kharitonov, and lower house Deputy Speaker Vladislav Davankov.

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If Poland Sends Troops into Ukraine, It Will Not Leave - Putin

MOSCOW, March 13 (Sputnik) - If Poland sends troops into Ukraine, it will not leave, it wants to return the lands that it considers its own, Russian President Vladimir Putin has said in an interview with Rossiya Segodnya Director General Dmitry Kiselev for the Rossiya 1 broadcaster and Ria Novosti.

"Because if, let's say, Polish troops enter the Ukrainian territory to - as it is said - protect the Ukrainian-Belarusian border, for example, or in some other places in order to free up Ukrainian military contingents to participate in hostilities on the line of contact, then I think that Polish troops will never leave. Well, it seems so to me," Putin said.

The President explained that Poland would then want to return the lands that it considers historically its own.

"Because they will want to return... they are dreaming, they want to return those lands that they

consider historically theirs, and which were taken away from them by the Father of Nations, Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, and transferred to Ukraine. Of course, they want them back. And if official Polish units enter there, they are unlikely to leave," Putin added.

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Presence of Foreign Troops in Ukraine Will Not Change Anything on Battlefield - Putin

MOSCOW, March 13 (Sputnik) - The potential presence of foreign troops and the shipment of additional Western security assistance to Ukraine will not shape the course of the conflict on the battlefield, Russian President Vladimir Putin has said in an interview with Rossiya Segodnya Director General Dmitry Kiselev for the Rossiya 1 broadcaster and Ria Novosti.

"The thing is, western military personnel have been present in Ukraine for a while, they were present even before the coup ... But if we are talking about foreign countries' official military contingents, then I am sure that it will not change the situation on the battlefield. This is the most important. The same as arms shipments do not change anything," Putin said.

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Putin on Possible Treaty With West: We Need Written Guarantees

MOSCOW, March 13 (Sputnik) – Russian President Vladimir Putin, when commenting on the possibility of a "fair treaty" with the West, has said that he does not trust anyone, but Russia needs written guarantees.

"I do not want to say this, but I do not trust anyone. However, we need guarantees. And these guarantees should be in writing, they should be good enough for us, and they should be something that we would believe in. That is what I am talking about," Putin said in an interview with Rossiya Segodnya Director General Dmitry Kiselev for the Rossiya 1 broadcaster and Ria Novosti.

Putin added that currently it was premature to discuss this prospect.

"But we would certainly not fall for some empty promises," he said.

Putin elaborated that he preferred to rely on facts, not some "good intentions and talks that anyone can be trusted".

"We would never do anything that runs counter to the interests of our country," he added

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Russia Has No Plans to Split West, They Will Do It Themselves - Putin

MOSCOW, March 13 (Sputnik) - Russia has no intention to attempt to split the West, they will do it themselves, Russian President Vladimir Putin has said in an interview with Rossiya Segodnya Director General Dmitry Kiselev for the Rossiya 1 broadcaster and Ria Novosti.

"We are not going to engage in any attempts to split the West; they will do that themselves with flying colors. But we will, of course, strive to ensure that our interests are respected," Putin said. Putin's response was in light of contradictions that have arisen within the Western community.

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Talks With Kiev Shouldn't Allow For Its Rearmament But Ensure Russia's Security - Putin

MOSCOW, March 13 (Sputnik) - Negotiations between Russia and Ukraine should not serve as a temporary pause to allow Kiev to rearm itself, but should be a serious conversation to ensure Russia's security guarantees, Russian President Vladimir Putin has said in an interview with Rossiya Segodnya Director General Dmitry Kiselev for the Rossiya 1 broadcaster and Ria Novosti.

"We are, however, ready for a serious conversation, and we want to resolve all conflicts, and especially this conflict, by peaceful means. But we must clearly understand for ourselves that this is not a pause that the enemy wants to take for rearmament, but this is a serious conversation with security guarantees for Russia," Putin said.

Putin added that Russia knows the various options being discussed and knows the "carrots that are going to be shown" to convince them that the time for negotiations has come.

Russia wants to resolve the Ukraine crisis through peaceful means, Putin said.

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Putin Says Western Countries 'Powerless' Before Unity of Russian People

MOSCOW, March 13 (Sputnik) - Countries in the so-called collective West found themselves powerless in the face of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine and the unity of the Russian people, Russian President Vladimir Putin has said in an interview with Rossiya Segodnya Director General Dmitry Kiselev for the Rossiya 1 broadcaster and Ria Novosti.

Some Western elites do not want such a tremendous country as Russia beside them and seek to divide it, Putin said. At the start of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, Western countries were happy and believed they would be capable of ending Russia through sanctions, weapons and Ukrainian nationalists, Putin said.

"This is where that slogan came from – to inflict a strategic defeat on Russia on the battlefield. However, the realization later came that this was unlikely, and even later, that it was impossible,"

Putin said. "And the understanding came that instead of a strategic defeat, they were confronted with the powerlessness they faced. They were faced with powerlessness before the unity of the Russian people, before the fundamental foundations and stability of the Russian financial and economic system, and before the growing capabilities of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation."

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Putin: If US Conducts Nuclear Tests, I Do Not Rule Out That Russia May Do Same

MOSCOW, March 13 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin has not ruled out that if the United States conducts nuclear tests, Russia may do the same.

"If they conduct such tests, I do not rule out - it is not necessary that we need it or not, we still need to think about it, but I do not rule out it that we can do the same," Putin has said in an interview with Rossiya Segodnya Director General Dmitry Kiselev for the Rossiya 1 broadcaster and Ria Novosti.

Putin noted that there is an agreement banning such tests. The United States did not ratify this Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), and Russia, to maintain parity, withdrew its ratification, Putin reminded.

"Since the treaty was not ratified by the United States, it did not finally enter into legal force because it did not receive the required number of ratifications. But nevertheless, we adhere to these agreements," Putin said.

However, such tests are being considered in the United States, Putin added. "This is due to the fact that when new warheads appear, some experts believe that it is not enough to test them only on a computer; they need to be tested in their natural form.

"These are the ideas in certain circles in the United States, they are floating around, and they have a place to be. We know about this. And we are watching," Putin said.

In November 2023, Putin signed the bill to revoke the ratification of the CTBT, which had been signed by Russia in New York on September 24, 1996. The CTBT is a multilateral treaty that bans nuclear weapon test explosions and all other nuclear explosions for civilian and military purposes. The treaty was adopted in 1996 but never entered into effect, as it would require ratification by all 44 countries that had nuclear power or research reactors at the time it was signed. Of the nine recognized nuclear powers, only France, the United Kingdom and Russia had signed and ratified the treaty before Moscow's withdrawal. The United States, China and Israel have signed but not ratified the treaty, while India, Pakistan and North Korea have neither signed nor ratified it.

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Putin Says Need to Use Tactical Nuclear Weapons Never Arose in Ukraine

MOSCOW, March 13 (Sputnik) - There has not yet been any need to use tactical nuclear weapons as part of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an interview with Rossiya Segodnya Director General Dmitry Kiselev for the Rossiya 1 broadcaster and Ria Novosti.

"Why should we use weapons of mass destruction? There has never been such a need," Putin said.

When asked whether such an idea ever occurred to him, Putin replied, "No, but why?"

Russia is prepared to use nuclear weapons if the existence of the Russian state is threatened, Putin said. Russia's nuclear triad is more advanced than that of any other country, Putin also said.

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Trump Projected to Secure Republican Nomination After Tuesday Primaries - NBC News

WASHINGTON, March 13 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump has unofficially secured enough delegates for the Republican nomination in the US presidential election after a handful of wins in the Republican primaries held on Tuesday, NBC News has projected.

Trump reached the 1,215 delegates needed for the Republican nomination after projected wins in the states of Georgia, Mississippi, and Washington on Tuesday night.

President Joe Biden also secured enough delegates for the Democratic nomination after the primaries on Tuesday, setting him up for another showdown against Trump in the US general election in November.

RealClearPolitics' average of several national polls shows Trump leading Biden by 1.7 points as of Tuesday night.

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Biden Projected to Secure Democratic Nomination for Presidential Election - Reports

WASHINGTON, March 13 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden is projected to secure the Democratic nomination for the US presidential election on Tuesday night, Decision Desk HQ reported.

The report said on Tuesday that Biden is set to win the Georgia Democratic Presidential Primary, giving him enough delegates to secure the Democratic nomination for the general election.

Biden needed at least 1,968 delegates to secure the nomination and had 1,867 delegates heading into Tuesday's primaries.

The US states of Georgia, Hawaii, Mississippi and Washington are holding their primaries on Tuesday.

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UPDATE-General Atomics to Build 4 MQ-9B Sky Guardian UAVs For Taiwan For \$250Mln - Pentagon

(adds additional information in paras 3-5)

WASHINGTON, March 13 (Sputnik) - General Atomics has won a quarter of a billion dollars contract to build four MQ-9B Sky Guardian UAVs, or drones for the armed forces of Taiwan, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"General Atomics Aeronautical Systems [of] Poway, California has been awarded a ...\$250,063,810 ...contract action for Taiwan MQ-9B SkyGuardian procurement," the release stated on Tuesday.

Under the contract, General Atomics will build four MQ-9B unmanned air vehicles and also construct two ground control stations as well as provide spares and support equipment, the Defense Department said.

Work on the project will be carried out in Poway, California over the next three and a half years and is scheduled to be completed by August 11, 2027, the release said.

The MQ-9B is designed to fly over the horizon via satellite for more than 40 hours in all types of weather and safely integrate into civil airspace, enabling joint forces and civil authorities to deliver real-time situational awareness anywhere in the world day or night, according to published sources.

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US Army Orders \$56Mln Worth of Armor Upgrades to Protect 155mm Howitzers - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 13 (Sputnik) - The US Army has ordered armor protection upgrades costing more than \$56 million to protect its force of M109 155mm heavy artillery self-propelled howitzers, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"WULCO [of] Cincinnati, Ohio, was awarded a \$56,579,967 ...contract to procure armor kits for M109A7 Self-Propelled Howitzer and M992A3 Carrier, Ammunition, Tracked vehicles," the release stated on Tuesday.

Work on the program is scheduled to last for just under six years with an estimated completion date of December 31, 2029, the Defense Department said.

The US Army Contracting Command based at the Detroit Arsenal in the state of Michigan will oversee work on the project as its contracting activity, the release said.

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Biden Authorizes State Dept. to Furnish Up To \$126 Million Aid to Ukraine-White House

WASHINGTON, March 13 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden announced his decision to delegate authority to the Secretary of State, enabling the provision of up to \$126 million in assistance to Ukraine, the White House said in a statement.

"By the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, including section 621 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (FAA), I hereby delegate to the Secretary of State the authority under section 614(a)(1) of the FAA to determine whether it is important to the security interests of the United States to furnish up to \$126 million in assistance to Ukraine without regard to any provision of law within the purview of section 614(a)(1) of the FAA," the statement said on Tuesday.

Earlier today, the Biden administration announced a new \$300 million aid package for Ukraine made possible by using negotiated savings on contracts to replace equipment from previous drawdowns for Ukraine.

The new aid package includes Stinger missiles, additional HIMARS, 155mm artillery rounds, and cluster munitions.

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RFK Jr. Eyes NFL Quarterback Aaron Rodgers, Ex-Governor Jesse Ventura for VP - Campaign

WASHINGTON, March 13 (Sputnik) - Independent presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is considering New York Jets quarterback Aaron Rodgers and former Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura to be his running mate for the upcoming US election, his campaign press team told Sputnik.

The New York Times first reported that Rodgers and Ventura were on Kennedy's radar as potential picks to be his running mate.

"Yes, Mr. Kennedy did share with the New York Times that he's considering Aaron Rodgers and Jesse Ventura as running mates along with others on a short list," the press team said on Tuesday.

Media reported that Kennedy has been in constant communication with Rodgers this past month.

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US Awards \$250Mln Contract to Provide Taiwan Four MQ-9B SkyGuardian Drones - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 13 (Sputnik) - The US Air Force awarded a \$250 million contract to General Atomics Aeronautical Systems to provide four MQ-9B SkyGuardian drones to Taiwan, the Pentagon said in a press release.

"General Atomics Aeronautical Systems Inc., Poway, California, has been awarded a not-to-exceed \$250,063,810, undefinitized contract action for Taiwan MQ-9B SkyGuardian procurement. This contract provides four MQ-9B unmanned air vehicles, two certifiable ground control stations, spares, and support equipment," the release said on Tuesday.

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BAE Systems Wins \$109Mln Deal to Maintain US Army's 155mm Heavy Howitzers -Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 13 (Sputnik) - BAE Systems has won a \$109 million contract to maintain the US Army's 155mm self-propelled howitzers in its mobile heavy artillery force, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"BAE Systems Land & Armaments [of] York, Pennsylvania was awarded a \$317,998,029 ...contract for continuing system technical services for M109 Family of Vehicles," the release stated on Tuesday.

The contract is scheduled to last for five years with an estimated completion date of March 7, 2029, the Defense Department said.

The M109 is an American 155 mm turreted, self-propelled howitzer that was first introduced in the early 1960s to replace the old M44, according to published sources.

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Nigeria to Buy 12 Bell Textron AH-1Z Attack Helicopters For \$455Mln - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 13 (Sputnik) - Nigeria is purchasing a dozen US Bell Textron AH-1Z attack helicopters for almost half a billion dollars, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"Bell Textron [of] Fort Worth, Texas is awarded a \$45 million ...contract for the production and delivery of 12 AH-1Z helicopters for the government of Nigeria," the release stated on Tuesday.

The contract will also include engineering services, program management, and logistics support, the Defense Department said.

Work on the project will be performed in Fort Worth, Texas (80%); and Amarillo, Texas (20%) over the next four and a half years and is expected to be completed in July 2028, the release said.

The Bell AH-1Z Viper is a twin-engine attack helicopter that was originally developed during the 1990s, according to published sources.

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California Bill Proposes to Ban 6 Artificial Dyes in School Foods - Statement

SAN FRANCISCO, March 13 (Sputnik) - California assemblymember Jesse Gabriel introduced a bill to ban six specific food dyes and titanium dioxide from foods provided in California's public schools, the Environmental Working Group said in a statement.

"On March 12, a bill to ban six harmful food dyes and titanium dioxide from food provided in California's public schools was introduced by Assemblymember Jesse Gabriel (D-Encino)," the statement said on Tuesday.

If passed, Assembly Bill 2316 would prohibit Red Dye No. 40, Yellow Dye No. 5 and 6, Blue Dye No. 1 and 2, Green Dye No. 3, as well as the food additive titanium dioxide, all of which are associated with behavioral issues in children.

The statement added that the bill aims to extend last year's California Food Safety Act, which banned potassium bromate, propyl paraben, BVO and Red Dye No. 3 - all linked by a 2021 study and other research to behavioral issues, attention deficits and health risks like DNA damage in children.

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US House Passes Resolution Condemning Biden's Border Policies, Urging Action

WASHINGTON, March 13 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representative passed a resolution condemning President Joe Biden and his administration's failure to secure the United States' borders from illegal immigration and urging the White House to utilize available border security authorities.

House lawmakers passed the resolution on Tuesday in a vote of 226 in favor and 193 opposed. All voting House Republicans and 14 House Democrats supported the resolution.

"Since President Biden took office, he has done everything in his power to dismantle United States border security. On his first day, Biden used his pen to stop construction of the border wall, revoke President Trump's executive order to ensure meaningful enforcement of border laws, end restrictions on immigration from countries associated with terrorism, and sign other executive orders incentivizing migrants to cross illegally," House Majority Leader Steve Scalise said in a statement on the resolution.

The resolution denounces the Biden administration for having created the “worst border security crisis” in US history. At least 6.3 million illegal immigrants have entered the US through the southwest border, the resolution said.

The United States has experienced three consecutive years of record illegal migration at the southern border under the Biden administration, according to US Customs and Border Protection data.

The resolution affirms that Biden has the authority to begin enforcing more stringent border security measures, despite the administration’s claims to the contrary. The resolution urges the Biden administration to immediately begin utilizing such authority.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, March 13 (Sputnik) -

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* Ukraine lost 234 fighters, seven tanks and three Bradley infantry fighting vehicles during an attempt to cross Russia’s border on Tuesday, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Tuesday.

* The Biden administration announced a new \$300 million aid package for Ukraine made possible by using negotiated savings on contracts to replace equipment from previous drawdowns for Ukraine.

* The Pentagon's use of cost savings to fund a new Ukraine aid package is unsustainable and a one-time deal, Defense Department spokesperson Patrick Ryder said.

* Russia has informed the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) about Ukraine’s plans to commit terrorist attacks using a toxic substance produced in the United States, Russian Permanent Representative to the OPCW Vladimir Tarabrin told RIA Novosti.

* Plans to resolve the Ukrainian conflict without participation of Russia will not result in peace, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said.

US-RUSSIA COMMUNICATIONS

* The United States did not inform Russia about a possible terrorist threat in Moscow via special communication channels, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said on Tuesday.

* Russia and the United States are sometimes exchanging messages via a special communications channel dedicated to the exchange of prisoners, Ryabkov said.

GLOBAL ENERGY MARKETS

* OPEC maintains its forecast for global oil demand in 2024, expecting an increase by 2.2 million barrels per day to 104.46 million barrels per day, according to its fresh monthly report published on Tuesday.

* OPEC expects Russia's crude oil and condensate production to remain at the average level of

10.9 million barrels per day in January, according to the organization's fresh report.

* The oil production in OPEC countries has increased by 203,000 barrels per day in February and averaged at 26.57 million barrels per day, the report said.

* OPEC has kept its forecast for the United States' oil and condensate production in 2024 unchanged to 13.24 million barrels per day, the report said.

* OPEC has downgraded its forecast for the 2024 oil production growth outside the organization by 120,000 barrels per day to 1.1 million barrels per day and expects it at 70.5 million barrels per day, according to its fresh monthly report.

* US oil output is expected to grow by 260,000 barrels per day this year to reach 13.19 million barrels per day, the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) said in a monthly outlook.

CHINA-RUSSIA RELATIONS

* Moscow does not see any economic and political threats in the growth of trade between Russia and China, as there is a systematic development of cooperation, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Tuesday.

* Russia is studying China's initiative to conclude a deal on the non-use of nuclear weapons, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said.

RUSSIA'S FROZEN ASSETS

* The European Union has prolonged individual sanctions against Russia until September 15, the Council of the EU said on Tuesday.

* The Russian Foreign Ministry said that it had summoned Swiss Ambassador in Moscow Krystyna Marty Lang in connection with decision of the Swiss parliament on a mechanism that would allow the confiscation of Russian assets.

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US Developing Hypersonic Weapons, But Not as Response to China, Russia – Defense Official

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) – The United States is developing hypersonic weapons, but not as a response to China and Russia, which are significantly ahead of the United States in both development and deployment of this key technology, Deputy Assistant Defense Secretary for Force Development and Emerging Capabilities Michael Horowitz said in a Congressional testimony on Tuesday.

“The United States is not developing hypersonic weapons to respond to Russian or Chinese development of hypersonic systems. We are developing hypersonics because we think that their development and deployment is necessary to enhance the capabilities of the joint force, and our ability to implement the national defense strategy,” Horowitz said during a House Armed Services hearing.

Unlike China and Russia, the United States is not seeking to use hypersonic missiles to deliver nuclear warheads and planning to use them as conventional weapons, Horowitz added.

When asked whether the United States has a plan to develop a nuclear space weapon to deter

Russia, which is allegedly developing one, Horowitz said that he is not aware of any such programs being considered.

Last month, the White House stated that Russia is developing a space-based anti-satellite weapon that poses a serious US national security threat.

The Kremlin in response to US claims said the White House is trying to encourage Congress to vote for a bill to allocate money to Ukraine.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said that claims about Russia attempting to deploy nuclear weapons in space were baseless and were needed only to draw the country into negotiations profitable to the US.

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US to Reimburse Kenya for Training Activities in Support of Haiti - State Dept. Official

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The US is in the process of reimbursing Kenya for its involvement in training activities aimed at assisting Haiti, a senior State Department official said during a press briefing on Thursday.

"Training activities is something that we're already working on reimbursing Kenya on," the official said.

About a year ago, Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry called on the international community to create a "specialized armed force" to ensure stability in the country, which has been mired in criminal gang violence and a deep social, humanitarian and political crisis.

Kenyan Foreign Minister Alfred Mutua said earlier this year that Kenya was prepared to send 1,000 police officers to train and assist the Haitian police in restoring normal life in the country and guarding strategic facilities. In late August, a delegation of Kenyan law enforcement agents visited Haiti to collect information about the mission requirements.

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Several Canadian Provinces Request Ottawa Cancel April 1 Carbon Tax Hike - Statements

WASHINGTON, March 13 (Sputnik) - The Canadian provinces of Newfoundland and New Brunswick on Tuesday called on the federal government and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to cancel the carbon tax hike planned for April 1.

By urging Ottawa to halt the hike or to remove the tax altogether, Newfoundland and New Brunswick join a growing list of Canadian provinces and politicians publicly opposed to Trudeau's carbon tax.

In early March, a Leger poll revealed that more than two-thirds of Canadians (69%) were opposed to the carbon tax hike by the federal government. The planned increase is expected to be to the tune of 23% or C\$80 (US\$59) per ton.

"We ask for the collaboration of the federal government to address the ramifications of the current challenges families face and not to compound them. I respectfully request that you consider pausing the implementation of the April 1st carbon tax increase - at least until inflation stabilize, interest rates lower and related economic pressures on the cost of living sufficiently cool," Newfoundland's Premier Andrew Furrey said in a letter shared via X.

New Brunswick Prime Minister Blaine Higgs went further and accused Trudeau of putting ideology above individuals and of putting politics over people. Higgs called on Trudeau to listen to those urging him to stop making their lives unaffordable.

"Justin Trudeau must immediately cancel his punishing April 1st carbon tax hike. Even better, cancel the carbon tax altogether. New Brunswickers can't afford a Liberal government that keeps making life more expensive," Higgs said via X.

The calls were echoed by Ontario and Alberta prime ministers Doug Ford and Danielle Smith, who expressed full support to Furrey in his opposition to the carbon tax, arguing that it is hurting Canadian families.

Saskatchewan Prime Minister Scott Moe endorsed the statements made by Furrey and Higgs. Moe's government has already stopped collecting and remitting the carbon tax on gas since the beginning of the year. However, he threatened to completely stop paying if Ottawa halted its rebates to the province in retaliation for Regina's actions.

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Dead Boeing Whistleblower Never Appeared Suicidal, Police Must Investigate - Lawyers

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - Lawyers representing deceased Boeing whistleblower John Barnett said on Tuesday that they saw no indication that Barnett was suicidal, after local authorities discovered him with what appeared to be a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

"John was in the midst of a deposition in his whistleblower retaliation case, which finally was nearing the end. He was in very good spirits and really looking forward to putting this phase of his life behind him and moving on. We didn't see any indication he would take his own life. No one can believe it," Barnett's lawyers said in a statement shared with Sputnik.

Earlier this week, the Charleston, South Carolina coroner's office said that they found Barnett dead from an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound. The Charleston City Police Department is investigating Barnett's death, the coroner's office said.

Barnett was recently cross-examined by Boeing's lawyers and was scheduled to answer more questions on Saturday, but did not appear, according to media reports.

Barnett worked at Boeing for more than three decades before retiring in 2017. Barnett accused Boeing of cutting corners in order to expedite the production of its 787 Dreamliner jets at a North Charleston plant.

Barnett's lawyers said that they need more information about the whistleblower's death. The Charleston police must investigate Barnett's death fully and accurately inform the public of their findings, the lawyers' statement said.

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Northrop Joins Diehl in Germany to Develop New Layered Air-Missile Defense - Release

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - Giant US defense contractor Northrop Grumman and the German missile company Diehl Defence GmbH & Co. KG signed an agreement to cooperate in developing new layered air and missile defense systems for Germany, the American corporation announced in a press release on Tuesday.

"Northrop Grumman Corporation and Diehl Defence GmbH & Co. KG signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) formalizing their commitment to work together to support innovative layered air and missile defense capabilities for Germany," the release stated.

Under the new agreement, Northrop Grumman will combine its expertise in Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD) and control capabilities, such as the US Army's Integrated Battle Command System (IBCS) with Diehl's ground-based air and missile defense systems by enabling integration and interoperability with allied systems, the release explained.

"The MOU facilitates collaboration by allowing the companies to use their expertise to explore advanced technologies that would support the seamless integration of Germany's air and missile defense systems," the release said.

The memorandum also addresses the critical need for NATO and European allies to modernize IAMD capabilities, Northrop Grumman pointed out.

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Pentagon Says Use of Cost Savings to Fund Ukraine Aid 'Not Sustainable', One Time Deal

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The Pentagon's use of cost savings to fund a new Ukraine aid package is unsustainable and a one-time deal, Defense Department spokesperson Patrick Ryder said on Tuesday.

Earlier in the day, the Biden administration announced a new \$300 million aid package for Ukraine made possible by using negotiated savings on contracts to replace equipment from previous drawdowns for Ukraine.

"This is not a sustainable way to support Ukraine," Ryder said during a press briefing. "As I understand, it's a one-time good deal right now."

The new aid package includes Stinger missiles, additional HIMARS, 155mm artillery rounds, and cluster munitions, Ryder noted.

The Pentagon and White House said there are no announcements to make on whether the United States will also provide ATACMS munitions to Ukraine.

ATACMS refers to the US long-range, precision-strike, surface-to-surface missile system.

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US State Department Approves \$3.7Bln in Potential Missile Sales to Poland - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The US State Department approved three potential sales of missiles to Poland, which are collectively valued at nearly \$3.7 billion, the US Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said on Tuesday.

The State Department authorized a \$1.77 billion sale of AGM-158B-2 Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missiles, a \$1.69 billion sale of AIM-120C-8 Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missiles and a \$219.1 million sale of AIM-9X Sidewinder Missiles to Poland, DSCA said in statements on the sales.

The sales will support the United States' national security objectives by improving the security of a NATO ally, the statements said. The sales will not adversely impact US defense readiness or alter the basic military balance in the region, the statements said.

Earlier on Tuesday, the Biden administration announced its intention to move forward with a \$2 billion Foreign Military Financing direct loan to Poland, as well as to offer to sell Poland 96 Apache helicopters.

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Biden Administration Requests \$28.2 Billion for FY2025 Military Intelligence - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has asked Congress for \$28.2 billion for the Pentagon's Military Intelligence Program (MIP) for Fiscal Year 2025, the Defense Department said in a press release on Tuesday.

"The Department of Defense released the Military Intelligence Program top line budget request for fiscal year 2025. The total is \$28.2 billion and is aligned to the strategic priorities of the Secretary of Defense," the Defense Department said in a press release.

The statement said the disclosure of the budget's top-line figure would not endanger any classified operations within the Military Intelligence Program.

However, additional budget details or program specifics for the MIP will not be disclosed as these remain classified for national security reasons, the statement added.

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US Conducts Sixth Airdrop of Humanitarian Aid Into Gaza - CENTCOM

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The United States conducted the sixth airdrop of 5,280 pounds of food into northern Gaza, including rice, flour, pasta and canned food, amid a dire humanitarian situation in the besieged Palestinian enclave, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) said on Tuesday.

“[CENTCOM] and the Royal Jordanian Air Force conducted a combined humanitarian assistance airdrop into Northern Gaza on March 12, 2024, at 2:00 p.m. (Gaza time) to provide essential relief to civilians in Gaza affected by the ongoing conflict,” the command said via X. “The combined joint operation included Jordanian-provided food and a US Air Force C-130 aircraft. A US C-130 dropped approximately 5,280 pounds of food, including rice, flour, pasta, and canned food...”

The airdrops of humanitarian aid in Gaza, which began on March 7, became an attempt by the United States to bypass the Israeli blockade of the ground crossings into the Palestinian enclave as it threatens catastrophic consequences for the civilian population there.

Over the weekend, CENTCOM said that the United States had sent the first ship with equipment to establish a sea corridor for the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza.

On October 7, 2023, Palestinian movement Hamas attacked Israel from Gaza during which more than 1,100 Israelis - military personnel and civilians - were killed and 240 others abducted. Israel imposed a complete blockade of Gaza, began massive bombardments and then invaded the Palestinian enclave. Well over 31,000 Palestinians have been killed so far in the Israeli operations and more than 76,000 wounded, according to the local authorities.

On November 24, Qatar mediated a deal between Israel and Hamas on a temporary truce and the exchange of some of the Israeli hostages and Palestinians imprisoned by Israel, as well as the delivery of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip. The ceasefire was extended several times and expired on December 1. More than 100 hostages are still believed to be held by Hamas in Gaza.

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US Congressman Ken Buck Says Leaving House of Representatives Next Week

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - Republican US Congressman Ken Buck said on Tuesday that he will be leaving his seat in the House of Representatives next week, which will leave House Republicans with a 218-213 majority.

“Today, I am announcing that I will depart Congress at the end of next week,” Buck said in a statement.

Buck said that he looks forward to staying involved in the political process and spending more time in his home state of Colorado.

In November, Buck said he would not seek a sixth term in the US Congress, citing disagreements with other Republican lawmakers.

Republicans currently hold a 219-213 majority in the House of Representatives. House

Republicans have lost several seats since midterm elections in 2022, including due to the departure of ex-Speaker Kevin McCarthy and expulsion of George Santos.

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New US Ukraine Aid Package Includes Stingers, HIMARS and Cluster Munitions - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The new US security emergency aid package for Ukraine includes Stinger missiles, additional HIMARS and cluster munitions, among other weapons, Defense Department spokesperson Patrick Ryder said on Tuesday.

"This package is the 55th tranche of assistance and is valued at up to \$300 million and includes capabilities to support Ukraine's immediate Air Defense Artillery and anti-tank requirements," Ryder said. "The capabilities in this announcement include Stinger anti-aircraft missiles, additional ammunition for HIMARS, 155 millimeter artillery rounds, including high-explosive and dual-purpose improved cluster munition rounds."

The package will also include 105mm artillery rounds, additional rounds of small arms ammunition, demolitions munitions for obstacle clearing and spare parts for maintenance, Ryder added.

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UN Hopes There Won't be Heightened Tensions in Moldovan Transnistria - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, March 12 (Sputnik) - The United Nations hopes that no party in the Moldovan region of Transnistria will increase the tensions, UN Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday.

"I think we've already spoken and we very much hope that all those involved will not do anything to further heighten the existing tensions," Dujarric said in the UN briefing.

Earlier today, the Russian Ambassador to Moldova Oleg Vasnetsov said he had been issued a protest by the Moldovan Foreign Ministry for opening polling stations in the breakaway Transnistria region to allow more than 200,000 Russian citizens who live in the area to vote in the upcoming Russian presidential election.

In the previous Russian presidential election in March 2018, about 30 polling stations were opened in all of Moldova, including 24 in Transnistria.

In November 2023, Russia asked Moldova to open polling stations for the presidential election, slated for March 15-17. The local authorities allowed the opening of only one voting site on the territory of the Russian embassy in Chisinau. With regard to the voting in Transnistria, Moldovan parliament speaker and head of the ruling Party of Action and Solidarity Igor Grosu urged Moscow to refrain from opening polling stations there.

Transnistria, whose population is 60% Russian and Ukrainian, sought to secede from Moldova

even before the collapse of the Soviet Union, fearing that Moldova would join Romania on a wave of nationalism. In 1992, after an unsuccessful attempt by Moldovan authorities to resolve the problem by force, Transnistria became a territory virtually beyond the control of Chisinau.

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White House Says Has Nothing to Announce on Reports US Providing More ATACMS to Ukraine

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said he has nothing to announce in light of reports that the United States will also provide ATACMS to Ukraine in its new \$300 emergency security aid package for Kiev.

"I've got no announcements for you on ATACMS today," Sullivan said during a press briefing. ATACMS refers to the US long-range, precision-strike, surface-to-surface missile system.

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US Oil Output Seen Up 260,000 Barrels Per Day in 2024 to 13.19Mln Barrels Per Day - EIA

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - US oil output is expected to grow by 260,000 barrels per day this year to reach 13.19 million barrels per day, the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) said in a monthly outlook on Tuesday.

Since 2018, US oil production has been without parallel, with the nation averaging 12.9 million barrels per day last year, or nearly 3 million barrels more than Russia and the largest crude exporter Saudi Arabia, the EIA said in a blog posted on its website on Monday.

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US Moves Forward on \$2Bln Loan to Poland, Approve Sale of 96 Apache Helicopters – Sullivan

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) – The United States has decided to move forward with a \$2 billion foreign military financing loan to Poland under which it will sell 96 Apache attack helicopters, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Tuesday.

"Today, the President [Joe Biden] will share with Poland's leaders that the United States plans to move forward with a new \$2 billion Foreign Military Financing direct loan to Poland, using previously appropriated congressional funds and will offer to sell Poland 96 Apache helicopters," Sullivan said during a press briefing.

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New US Aid Package for Ukraine Includes Artillery, GMLRS Munitions - White House

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The new US \$300 million aid package for Ukraine will include Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System (GMLRS) rockets for their High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS), US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said on Tuesday.

"This emergency package that we're announcing contains a large tranche of artillery rounds and GMLRS," Sullivan said during a press briefing.

Media reported that the package will also include ATACMS, the US long-range, precision-strike, surface-to-surface missile system.

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New US Aid Package for Ukraine Not Enough to Meet Kiev's Battlefield Needs - White House

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The new \$300 million US emergency security aid package for Ukraine is not enough to meet Kiev's needs on the battlefield and will not prevent it from running out of munitions in the coming weeks, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Tuesday.

"This ammunition will keep Ukraine's guns firing for a period, but only a short period," Sullivan said during a press briefing. "It is nowhere near enough to meet Ukraine's battlefield needs and it will not prevent Ukraine from running out of ammunition in the weeks to come."

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White House Announces \$300Mln Emergency Security Assistance Package for Ukraine

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan announced on Tuesday a new \$300 million security assistance package for Ukraine.

"Today, on behalf of President [Joe] Biden, I'm announcing an emergency package of security assistance of \$300 million worth of weapons and equipment to address some of Ukraine's pressing needs," said Sullivan during a press briefing.

Sullivan added that the package was made possible because of unanticipated cost savings in contracts the Defense Department negotiated to replace equipment already sent to Ukraine

through previous drawdowns.

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US Supports Full, Immediate EU Membership Candidacy for Macedonia - Escobar

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - Macedonia should be granted full and immediate candidacy for membership in the European Union, US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Gabriel Escobar said on Tuesday.

Escobar is overseeing US policy toward what Washington refers to as the "Western Balkans." "North Macedonia should be a full candidate and an immediate candidate for European Union membership," Escobar said.

Last week, the US State Department announced that Escobar would visit Belgium, Austria, Montenegro and Kosovo from March 10-18 with government officials and reinforce the United States' support for the Western Balkans nations' Euro-Atlantic integration and to strengthen regional cooperation.

The Macedonian people and the minorities living in Macedonia held a referendum in 2018 in which they overwhelmingly rejected membership in the European Union and NATO. However, the United States and their EU partners disregarded the results of the referendum and utilized the government they had installed two years earlier after organizing a coup d'etat to immediately pursue NATO - and EU - membership.

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Brent Crude Oil Seen Averaging \$87 Per Barrel in 2024 Vs. \$82.41 in 2023 - US EIA

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - Brent crude is expected to average \$87 a barrel this year versus last year's average of \$82.41, the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) said Tuesday in its monthly outlook for the world oil benchmark.

The forecast came as major oil exporter OPEC held to its demand projection for 2024 in its latest monthly report, expecting consumption to grow by 2.2 million barrels per day this year. Crude supply outside of OPEC is expected to grow by 1.1 million barrels daily in 2024, the report added.

Responding to both the EIA and OPEC forecasts, Brent crude hovered at \$82 per barrel in Tuesday's trading in New York, down 0.3% on the day.

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US Expects Transitional Council in Haiti to Be Formed Within 2 Days - State Dept

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The United States is anticipating a Transitional Council in Haiti will be formed within the next two days and an interim prime minister will be appointed soon after that, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday.

"We welcome yesterday's announcement of a transitional governance structure in Haiti which paves the way for a peaceful transition of power, continuity of governance and action plan for a near-term security, including the deployment of a multi-national security support mission and a pathway to free and fair elections," Miller said during a press conference.

Under the terms of the agreement that was announced yesterday, the United States expects that the members of the Transitional Council will be appointed in the next 24 to 48 hours and then they will take the step to appoint an interim prime minister, Miller said.

Earlier on Tuesday, Guyanese President Irfaan Ali said current Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry will leave his post amid the state of emergency declared by the local authorities due to ongoing unrest in Haiti. Ali also said that power in Haiti will be temporarily held by the Transitional Council.

The Transitional Council will consist of seven members representing various Haitian movements with the right to vote and two non-voting observers, according to a declaration drafted by Haitian representatives as well as Caribbean Community member states, Canada, France, Brazil and the United States. The Transitional Council will temporarily exercise a number of presidential powers, acting by majority vote.

On February 29, gangs began shooting in the downtown area of the capital Port-au-Prince while Prime Minister Ariel Henry was visiting Kenya. Henry conducted the visit to seek an agreement for the deployment of foreign forces in Haiti to fight organized crime.

The gangs said their goal was to prevent Henry from returning to Haiti and they stormed Haiti's largest prison and freed an unconfirmed number of inmates. The Haitian government declared a state of emergency in the capital region.

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Intel Community Reviewed Docs in Biden Probe, Damage Assessment Given to Hill- DNI

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The Intelligence Community has reviewed the documents that are part of the probe by Special Counsel Robert Hur into President Biden's mishandling of classified documents, Director of National Intelligence (DNI) Avril Haines said in a congressional testimony on Tuesday.

"I've seen all of them but I would not say that I've read through all of them, they went through a classification review that we did within the intelligence community," Haines told the US House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. Haines noted that they did an overall damage assessment and it was provided to the Hill.

The Department of Justice is currently in possession of these documents, she added.

Last month, Hur released a report on the investigation, which found Biden willfully mishandled

classified materials but that a jury likely would have considered the president a "well-meaning" old man with a poor memory. Hur did not conclude that criminal charges were warranted in the case.

Lawmakers at the Tuesday hearing with Hur highlighted different portions of the special counsel's report. Republicans questioned Hur about his assessment of Biden's memory and the veracity of the president's statements to investigators, whereas Democrats focused on Hur's decision not to pursue any charges and compared it to Trump's case.

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US to Announce ATACMS Munitions to Ukraine as Part of New \$300M In Package - Reports

(Updates with more details in paras 3-6)

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The United States is expected to announce that it will provide ATACMS munitions to Ukraine as part of a new \$300 million package, Politico reported on Tuesday citing US officials.

ATACMS refers to the US long-range, precision-strike, surface-to-surface missile system.

The announcement is expected as soon as Tuesday, the report said.

The military aid package will also include additional 155mm artillery rounds and Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System (GMLRS) munitions, the report said.

This new Ukraine aid package will be funded with savings from a previous US Army contract for Ukraine weapons, the report added.

A US official told Politico that this is not an alternate path to replace the \$95 billion supplemental package stuck in the House of Representatives.

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Russia, China, Iran Undermine Democracies in South America - US Southern Command

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - Russia, China, and Iran are allegedly undermining democracies in South America as Beijing and Moscow have increased their diplomatic and economic presence in the region over the past year, US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) Commander Laura Richardson said in a congressional testimony on Tuesday.

"In the last year, China, Russia, and Iran have increased their presence diplomatically, economically and even militarily in the region. These activities undermine democracies and challenge their credibility," Richardson told the US House Armed Services Committee.

China and Russia exploit the presence of transnational criminal organizations and amplify their destabilizing impacts on democratic governments, she said.

Richardson also accused Russia of allegedly using a range of state-controlled and regional media providers to spread narratives that blame the United States for creating a global food

crisis and supporting Nazism in Ukraine.

Russia has repeatedly rejected accusations put forth by the United States about its alleged disinformation campaign aimed at Washington.

In mid-October, a study by the US Institute of Peace said that the Russian news outlets Sputnik and RT had greatly expanded their media presence in Latin America, amplifying their regional influence and providing alternatives to Western media.

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EU Foreign Policy Chief Borrell Says Diplomatic Path on Ukraine 'Needs to Remain Open'

UNITED NATIONS, March 12 (Sputnik) - The European Union's diplomatic path on Ukraine "needs to remain open," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said on Tuesday.

"I would simply say that our support for Ukraine is our way of supporting the fundamental principle of the territorial integrity of countries and we believe certainly that the diplomatic path needs to remain open," Borrell said during a meeting of the UN Security Council.

The EU foreign policy chief also said that such an approach can lead to peace and not war.

Borrell made the comment in response to Russian Deputy Envoy to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy, who said earlier that the European Union is increasingly Russophobic and that is a strategic mistake.

Polyanskiy noted that Russia has not implemented any anti-EU plans, yet the European Union is trying to turn against Russia and this will end badly for the bloc.

The UN-EU representation file is a regular meeting on the UN Security Council agenda seeking to improve cooperation between the two organizations.

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Rumble Offers to Acquire, Operate TikTok in US if Chinese Parent Company Divests - Letter

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The North American technology company Rumble said on Tuesday that it is prepared to help acquire the social media platform TikTok and operate it from the United States if its Chinese parent company ByteDance chooses to divest.

The US Congress is considering legislation to ban TikTok in the United States if it maintains ties with foreign adversaries. US President Joe Biden said he would sign the bill if lawmakers pass it.

"In the event that ByteDance divests its ownership in TikTok, Rumble is ready to join a consortium with other parties seeking to acquire and operate TikTok inside the United States," Rumble CEO Chris Pavlovski said in a letter.

Specifically, Rumble is prepared to serve as a cloud technology partner. Rumble, which

maintains headquarters in both the US and Canada, recently launched a cloud service that stores data inside the US on “neutral and independent” infrastructure, the letter said.

Rumble’s offer is subject to the negotiation of a definitive agreement, the letter added.

Earlier on Tuesday, US Congressman Thomas Massie said that the legislation is a “Trojan horse” that gives the government the power to ban websites and internet hosting services, not just applications linked to foreign entities.

The bill is about “censorship and government control,” billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk also said on Tuesday.

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US to Announce ATACMS Munitions to Ukraine as Part of New \$300M In Package - Reports

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The United States is expected to announce that it will provide ATACMS munitions to Ukraine as part of a new \$300 million package, Politico reported on Tuesday citing US officials.

ATACMS refers to the US long-range, precision-strike, surface-to-surface missile system.

The announcement is expected as soon as Tuesday, the report added.

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Leading US House Democrat Says Little Support for Discharge Petition on Ukraine Aid Bill

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The Republican-led House discharge petition to force a vote on US aid for Ukraine and other allies does not have much support, House Democratic Caucus Chairman Pete Aguilar said on Tuesday.

"I don't think that there's a lot of support for the Fitzpatrick discharge," Aguilar said during a press conference, in reference to a petition led by US Congressman Brian Fitzpatrick.

House lawmakers are trying to use a discharge petition to overcome House Speaker Mike Johnson's decision to delay a vote on the \$95 billion foreign aid bill passed by the Senate last month.

Earlier in the day, House Democrat Jim McGovern activated a discharge petition in a bid to force a House vote on the foreign aid bill passed by the Senate.

Fitzpatrick's resolution, which has bipartisan support, includes aid for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan, but also several immigration-related measures like reinstatement of the Trump-era “Remain in Mexico” policy and expulsion authority for non-asylum-seeking migrants.

Aguilar pointed out that under any scenario, a discharge petition if successful would force a vote on something that still has to go to the US Senate for approval, meaning that the process could take weeks or months to deliver additional security assistance to Ukraine.

Media reported that the United States is expected to soon announce a \$400 million aid

package for Ukraine. The last aid package the United States announced for Ukraine was in December when funds dried up without renewed funding by Congress.

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US, Bahrain Sanction Iran-Linked Operatives Tied to Al-Ashtar Brigades - Statement

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The US Department of the Treasury announced in a statement on Tuesday that it has sanctioned in coordination with Bahrain key Iran-based operatives and a financial facilitator associated with the Al-Ashtar Brigades.

"Today, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) is taking action in coordination with the Kingdom of Bahrain against key Iran-based operatives and a financial facilitator for designated terrorist group Al-Ashtar Brigades," the statement said.

The US government designated the Al-Ashtar Brigades as a Foreign Terrorist Organization and a Specially Designated Global Terrorist in 2018, the statement said.

The imposed sanctions mean that all US-based assets and property interests of the specified individuals are now frozen and must be reported to OFAC, the statement said.

Financial institutions and others involved in transactions with sanctioned parties risk facing sanctions or enforcement actions themselves, including prohibitions on providing or receiving funds, goods, or services to or from those designated individuals, the statement added.

In addition to the United States and Bahrain, the Al-Ashtar Brigades has been designated as a terrorist organization by Canada, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

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US Can Not Rule Out China May Use TikTok to Influence November Elections - Haines

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The United States cannot rule out the possibility that China may use the social media platform TikTok to influence the 2024 US elections, Director of National Intelligence (DNI) Avril Haines said in a congressional testimony on Tuesday.

"We cannot rule out that the CCP [Chinese Communist Party] could use it [TikTok], correct," Haines told the US House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence.

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Ukraine's Losses Without US Aid Will Stoke China's Ambitions in Indo-Pacific - CIA Chief

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - Further Ukrainian losses on the battlefield will stoke China's ambitions and undermine the faith of US partners in the Indo-Pacific region, CIA Director William Burns said on Tuesday while urging lawmakers to approve supplemental national security funds.

When asked whether Ukraine is currently at a disadvantage because the Congress has not approved additional aid for Kiev, Burns said, "yes."

"What I worry about in 2024 without a supplemental assistance is that you are going to see more Avdeevkas (Avdiivkas), that Ukraine is going to lose more ground, notwithstanding their courage and tenacity, and maybe significant ground over time," Burns said in testimony to the House Intelligence Committee.

Burns added that the consequences of such a development would extend beyond European security and would impact US interests in the Indo-Pacific region.

"That kind of an outcome will stoke the ambitions of the Chinese leadership, and they are going to undermine the faith that our partners and allies in the Indo-Pacific have in our reliability as well," Burns said.

Last month, Senate Republicans rejected a \$118 billion national security supplemental package that includes \$60 billion for Ukraine, \$14 billion for Israel and border policy reforms. Republicans claim the border security reforms in the bill would not do enough to resolve the border crisis.

The Senate ended up sending a \$95 billion foreign aid bill to the House of Representatives, which House Speaker Mike Johnson has been reluctant to take up at the moment while lawmakers prioritize passing full year spending budgets instead of relying on short-term spending bills.

Media reported that House Republicans are in the early stages of work on an alternate foreign aid bill that they hope will be ready by April.

Western countries have provided hundreds of billions of dollars worth of aid to Ukraine since the start of Russia's special military operation in February 2022. Aid shipments began in 2022 with artillery munitions and training and have escalated to include tanks, advanced air-defense systems, missiles and cluster munitions. The Kremlin has consistently warned against the West's continued arms deliveries to Ukraine, saying that they only prolong the conflict.

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US House Hearing With Biden Classified Document Probe Chief 'Big Day' for Congress - Trump

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - A US House Judiciary Committee hearing with Special Counsel Robert Hur about his probe into President Joe Biden's alleged mishandling of classified documents is a big day for lawmakers, former President Donald Trump said on Tuesday.

Last month, Hur released a report on the investigation, which found Biden willfully mishandled classified materials but that a jury likely would have considered the president a "well-meaning" old man with a poor memory. Hur did not conclude that criminal charges were warranted in the case.

"Big day in Congress for the Biden documents hoax. He had many times more documents, including classified documents, than I, or any other president, had. He had them all over the place, with zero supervision or security," Trump said in a statement via Truth Social.

Trump is the subject of a separate, unresolved case involving alleged mishandling of classified materials. Trump said that his boxes with classified materials were secure and moved by government authorities.

The US Justice Department gave Biden a "free pass," Trump said.

Lawmakers at the hearing with Hur highlighted different portions of the special counsel's report. Republicans questioned Hur about his assessment of Biden's memory and the veracity of the president's statements to investigators, whereas Democrats focused on Hur's decision not to pursue any charges and compared it to Trump's case.

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EU Allowing 'Huge Strategic Error' by Portraying Russia as 'Enemy' - Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, March 12 (Sputnik) - The European Union is making a big mistake by depicting Russia as an enemy and advancing its Russophobic actions, the Russian Deputy Permanent Representative Dmitriy Polyanskiy said on Tuesday.

"I will merely state that the European Union is allowing for a huge strategic error to be made by striving to portray Russia for the advancement of its petty shrill Russophobes as an enemy, and this despite the fact that Russia has never undertaken any aggressive actions against the EU..." Polyanskiy said in the Security Council meeting on the European Union.

He also added that Russia has not implemented any anti-European plans, but Brussels is now trying to turn against Russia and this will end badly for Europe.

The EU High Representative Josep Borrell was also present at the meeting, listening to what Russia had to say.

The UN-EU representation file is a regular meeting on the Security Council agenda and aims to consolidate cooperation between the two organizations.

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US Sees No Alternative to EU-Facilitated Dialogue Between Serbia, Kosovo - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - The United States sees no alternative to the dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo facilitated by the European Union, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Gabriel Escobar said on Tuesday.

"I have to say that, from the American perspective, there is no other alternative than the EU-facilitated dialogue," Escobar said.

The dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina has allowed the two sides to solve many challenges in their bilateral relations, he said.

"[The dialogue] continues to be the primary mechanism for resolving these differences," Escobar added.

In addition, Escobar called on the two sides to respect the agreements that have already been reached and implement all other necessary accords.

Escobar also urged Serbia and Kosovo to show goodwill in preventing any provocations that would derail the reached agreements and create more tensions between them.

"That is going to be one of the primary reasons for my visit to Kosovo," Escobar added.

In 2008, the Albanians in Serbia's province of Kosovo and Metohija proclaimed independence, with the support of the United States and several European countries. Despite years of Albanian actions to pressure Serbs but also Macedonians and others residing there to leave, a remainder of the Serb community still resides in the north of Kosovo and most often bears the brunt of tensions between Belgrade and Pristina.

Serbia has repeatedly said it will not recognize Kosovo, but the United States and the European Union have exerted tremendous diplomatic, economic and other pressure on Belgrade to establish dialogue and conclude agreements with Pristina.

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US Envoy Says No Comment on Reports About UN Resolution Against Nuclear Weapons in Space

UNITED NATIONS, March 12 (Sputnik) - The United States has nothing to say at present regarding reports that Washington is drafting a UN Security Council resolution against the deployment of nuclear weapons in space, US Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Robert Wood said on Tuesday.

"I don't have anything to say about this right now," Wood told journalists in front of the UN Security Council.

Wood also said that the United States is concerned but he cannot get ahead of any kind of process.

Last week, US media reported that the United States' mission to the United Nations is preparing a draft resolution at the UN Security Council to discourage the deployment of nuclear weapons in space.

The reports also said the resolution is specifically directed to dissuade Russia from such actions.

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Biden Reaffirms Commitment to Working to Bring Home All US Hostages Held by Hamas

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden on Tuesday reaffirmed his commitment to never stop working to ensure the release all Americans held captive by Hamas in the Gaza Strip after learning that US citizen Itay Chen was killed in Hamas' attack on Israel on October 7.

"I reaffirm my pledge to all the families of those still held hostage: we are with you. We will never stop working to bring your loved ones home," Biden said in a statement.

Earlier on Tuesday, Israel announced that Chen was confirmed dead.

Biden expressed condolences to the Chen family, saying "our hearts are heavy" upon learning that Chen was killed during Hamas' attack.

"Jill and I are devastated to learn that American Itay Chen was killed by Hamas during its brutal terrorist assault on October 7," Biden said.

The president also recalled his meeting with Chen's father and brother at the White House in December as well as the agony and uncertainty they faced, Biden said.

"At the end of our meeting, they gave me a menorah - a solemn reminder that light will always dispel the darkness, and evil will not win," Biden added.

On October 7, 2023, Palestinian movement Hamas attacked Israel from Gaza and killed more than 1,100 Israelis - military personnel and civilians - and abducted 240 others. Israel imposed a complete blockage of Gaza, launched massive strikes and then a ground invasion of the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas and rescuing the hostages.

More than 31,000 Palestinians have been killed during Israel's operations and more than 76,000 have been wounded. Nearly 1.9 million residents of Gaza out of the 2.3 million have been displaced and a significant number are facing hunger and starvation, according to the local authorities and international organizations.

On November 24, Qatar mediated a deal between Israel and Hamas on a temporary truce and the exchange of some of the prisoners and hostages, as well as the delivery of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip. The ceasefire was extended several times and expired on December 1. More than 100 hostages are still believed to be held by Hamas in Gaza.

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US Preparing \$400 Million Weapons Aid Package for Ukraine - Reports

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik/Prime) – The United States is preparing a \$400 million aid package of weapons for Ukraine after a nearly three-month-long pause since the announcement of the latest military aid package for Kiev, Reuters reported on Tuesday, citing US officials.

The last time the United States announced a new package of military assistance to Kiev was at the end of December 2023. The \$250 million package completely depleted funds for military support for Ukraine approved by Congress a year earlier.

Meanwhile, US lawmakers to date have not passed a \$118 billion national security

supplemental package that includes \$60 billion for Ukraine, \$14 billion for Israel and border policy reforms.

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Former US President Trump Tried to Sell Truth Social Platform to Musk - Reports

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) – Former US President Donald Trump attempted to sell his Truth Social media platform to tech billionaire Elon Musk, the Washington Post reported on Tuesday, citing two people with knowledge on the matter.

The discussions between Trump and Musk would have happened during Summer 2023, the report said, adding that the talks occurred at a time when Truth Social was in a long-delayed merger process.

Trump Media, the owner of the Truth Social platform, was then facing a pessimistic financial outlook, the report said. The former president had said during his pre-2024 presidential candidacy financial disclosure that his 90% stake in the company was worth up to \$25 million and his personal benefits were barely under \$200.

However, the talks did not lead to any sort of deal, the report said, and while Trump continues to seek to both to sustain and increase his social media platform's financial value, he also insists to his advisers and close circle that Musk should be interesting in buying Truth Social.

The report further noted that when asked about the call, Musk said he had never been to Mar-a-Lago, Trump's estate in Florida. Trump's campaign did not address inquiries about the matter, it added.

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Special Counsel Hur Says Stands by His Initial Assessment of Poor State of Biden's Memory

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - Special Counsel Robert Hur said in a testimony on Tuesday that he stands by his initial assessment about the poor state of President Joe Biden's memory and calls his description "necessary and fair."

In February, Hur released a report on his year-long investigation into Biden's mishandling of classified documents. Hur concluded that it was not worth initiating a criminal case against the US president because in court before the jury he may appear as a "sympathetic, well-meaning, elderly man with poor memory."

The report also said that during communication with the special prosecutor's team, Biden demonstrated problems with his memory, could not accurately place the beginning and end of his term as US vice president or name the date when his son Beau died.

Following the release of the report, Biden delivered a speech arguing that his memory is "fine," but subsequently mixed up Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Sisi for being president of Mexico.

"My assessment in the report about the relevance of the President's memory was necessary and accurate and fair. Most importantly, what I wrote is what I believe the evidence shows, and what I expect jurors would perceive and believe. I did not sanitize my explanation. Nor did I disparage the President unfairly. I explained to the Attorney General my decision and the reasons for it. That's what I was required to do," Hur said in his opening remarks during a US House Judiciary Committee hearing.

Hur is scheduled to deliver testimony before the Judiciary Committee later on Tuesday after the panel issued a subpoena demanding that US Attorney General Merrick Garland provide all documents on Hur's investigation of Biden's alleged willful mishandling of classified information.

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US Congressman Adds Provisions to Foreign Aid Bill to Secure Votes – Reports

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) – US Representative Brian Fitzpatrick is adding provisions to the latest bipartisan foreign aid spending bill in order to fend off US Speaker Mike Johnson, who is attempting to block his discharge petition, PunchBowl News reported on Tuesday.

Fitzpatrick, who is helping spearhead the latest version of the bill that provides aid for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan, as well as provisions to address the southern border crisis, is making further adjustments to secure the 218 votes he needs for a successful discharge petition.

These include adding humanitarian aid for Gaza, more funding for the border patrol to handle the migrant crisis, and the seizure of Russian assets. Fitzpatrick would also add "lend-lease" language on US weapon sales to Ukraine, Israel, and Taiwan, and require the White House to provide Congress with monthly updates on its strategy in Ukraine.

If Fitzpatrick's discharge petition secures 218 signatures, it can bypass the Rules Committee for consideration in the House seven days later.

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US Congressman Says TikTok Ban Bill 'Trojan Horse' for Power to Remove Websites

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Thomas Massie said on Tuesday that a bill under consideration by lawmakers to ban TikTok in the United States acts as a "Trojan horse" for the government to ban a variety of websites and not just foreign-linked social media applications.

"The so-called TikTok ban is a Trojan horse. The president will be given the power to ban web sites, not just apps," Massie said in a statement via social media platform X.

The legislation allows the government to target US-based or offshore internet hosting services or application stores, not just foreign entities, the statement said.

Billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk also spoke out against the legislation, in response to

Massie's statement on X.

"This law is not just about TikTok, it is about censorship and government control! If it were just about TikTok, it would only cite 'foreign control' as the issue, but it does not," Musk said.

The US House of Representatives is set to consider the legislation, dubbed the Protecting Americans from Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act, later this week. Lawmakers will consider the bill amid concerns about TikTok's privacy practices and alleged ties to the Chinese government.

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Hur Says Biden Forgot He Told His Ghostwriter About Classified Documents

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) – US Special Counsel Robert Hur said on Tuesday that President Joe Biden testified that he forgot that he told his ghostwriter about classified documents related to Afghanistan.

Hur in prepared opening remarks to the US House Judiciary Committee said he and his team identified evidence that Biden retained classified materials after his vice presidency. The evidence included an audio-recorded conversation during which Biden told his ghostwriter that he had "just found all this classified stuff downstairs."

"We interviewed the President and asked him about his recorded statement," Hur said in his prepared remarks. "He told us that he didn't remember saying that to his ghostwriter."

Hur said Biden also did not remember finding any classified material in his home after his vice presidency.

"And he didn't remember anything about how classified documents about Afghanistan made their way into his garage," the Special Counsel said.

He added that the evidence and Biden himself called his memory into question.

Hur is scheduled to testify about his assessment of the president on Capitol Hill on Tuesday.

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Transcript of Special Counsel's Biden Interview Reveals More Nuanced Exchange

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) – The transcript of US Special Counsel Robert Hur's interview with US President Biden regarding his mishandling of classified documents portrays a more nuanced exchange than what has been previously depicted.

The president's opponents, who have raised alarm over his mental fitness to take on another four-year presidential term, have latched onto Hur's finding that Biden, 81 has "a poor memory," to the extent that he was unable to remember key dates, including the death of his son Beau. Biden and his lawyers in turn have criticized Hur for raising his son's death.

The transcript however reveals that Biden, not Hur, first brought up Beau's death.

"What month did Beau die? Oh, God, May 30th," Biden said, identifying the correct date. It also shows that Biden sometimes went beyond a topic to describe an anecdote in vivid detail, while at other times, he could not recall a specific incident.

Biden was interviewed by Hur for three and a half hours on October 8 and for one and a half hours the following day.

The House judiciary and oversight committee chairs have subpoenaed the transcript, along with other materials from Hur's investigation. Hur is scheduled to testify about his assessment of the president on Capitol Hill on Tuesday.

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UPDATE - US Consumer Prices Up 3.2% in Year to Feb, Showing Inflation Stubbornly Above Fed Target

(Adds details, comments and context, paragraphs 5-10)

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - US consumer prices grew 3.2% in the year to February, the Labor Department reported Tuesday, presenting inflation data at a tad higher than January's and stubbornly above the Federal Reserve's target which could expedite a rate cut.

The so-called Consumer Price Index, or CPI, has remained above 3% in the aftermath of the inflation triggered by the trillions of dollars of pandemic relief spending in the United States. Wall Street economists polled by US media had expected the annual CPI rate for February to come in at 3.1%, unchanged from January. But the Labor Department budged even that expectation.

A survey of money market traders after the release of the data showed the Fed unlikely to consider a rate cut before July, as the central bank awaits inflation to return to its long-term annual target of 2% or below.

"Sticky inflation and resilient job markets are maintaining a cloud over when the Fed can start cutting rates," economists at Societe Generale said.

Adam Button, a regular commentator on markets and economics at the ForexLive forum, said rent and fuel costs were main reasons for inflation being higher than thought last month. "One thing that stands out is that owner's equivalent rent was higher again, along with rent. Those components and the jump in energy were a big part of the February inflation rise," he added.

The last time a year-on-year reading for the CPI matched Fed expectations was in April 2021, a year after the coronavirus breakout, when it stood at 1.7%. In the decade before the pandemic, inflation rarely crossed 2% a year. By July 2022 though, it reached a four-decade peak of 9.1%, after epic federal spending and loose monetary policy put in place to deal with the COVID-19 emergency.

In response to the runaway inflation, the Fed hiked rates 11 times between March 2022 and July 2023, adding 5.25 percentage points to a pre-pandemic rate of just 0.25%.

Now, with the COVID-19 well in the rear window, government expenditure slashed from the highs of 2020-2022 and the US economy and labor market burgeoning, the Fed is under pressure to reverse the rate hikes of the past two years.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell told a US Senate banking committee last week that the central bank

will move to cut rates over the course of 2024 if inflation continues to go down and resilience remains in the economy and labor market. Since July 2023, the central bank has left rates unchanged at between 5.25% and 5.5%.

At its last policy meeting on January 31, the Fed said it will “carefully assess incoming data, the evolving outlook, and the balance of risks” in considering any pivot to rates.

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US Military Kills Three Al-Shabab Terrorists In Airstrike In Somalia - AFRICOM

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) – The US military killed three extremists from the Al-Shabab terrorist group (banned in Russia) during an airstrike in Somalia, US Africa Command (AFRICOM) said on Tuesday.

“The initial post-strike assessment indicates that the US airstrike killed three al-Shabaab terrorists and that no civilians were harmed,” the statement said.

The airstrike was conducted as a collective self-defense at the request of the federal government of Somalia and occurred on March 10 approximately 70 kilometers southwest of the nation’s capital, Mogadishu, according to the statement.

Al-Shabab is affiliated with the Al-Qaeda terrorist group (banned in Russia).

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US Consumer Prices Up 3.2% in Year to Feb, Showing Inflation Stubbornly Above Fed Target

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The so-called Consumer Price Index, or CPI, has remained above 3% in the aftermath of the inflation triggered by the trillions of dollars of pandemic relief spending in the United States. Wall Street economists polled by US media had expected the annual CPI rate for February to come in at 3.1%, unchanged from January. But the Labor Department budged even that expectation.

A survey of money market traders after the release of the latest CPI data showed the Fed unlikely to consider a rate cut before July, as the central bank awaits inflation to return to its long-term annual target of 2% or below. “Sticky inflation and resilient job markets are maintaining a cloud over when the Fed can start cutting rates,” economists at Societe Generale said.

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

Nuland to Discuss Ukraine, Middle East During Trip to Italy – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) – US Under Secretary for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland will travel to Italy on March 13-15 to discuss Ukraine, the Middle East and other issues ahead of her expected retirement in the coming weeks, the State Department said on Tuesday.

“Discussions will cover all the key global challenges including support for Ukraine and the situation in the Middle East,” the statement said.

During the trip, Nuland will visit Rome and Tuscany, it added.

She expected to hold bilateral meetings with Italian officials and participate in discussions with G7 Political Directors from Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the European Union, and the United Kingdom, according to the statement.

The upcoming trip comes after US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced last week that Nuland would step down in the coming weeks.

Under Secretary for Management John Bass will serve as Acting Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs until Nuland’s replacement is confirmed, Blinken said.

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NASA Completes Seventh Commercial Crew Mission to International Space Station

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) – NASA completed its seventh commercial crew rotation mission to the International Space Station on Tuesday, according to a release.

“NASA’s SpaceX Crew-7 completed the agency’s seventh commercial crew rotation mission to the International Space Station on Tuesday after splashing down safely in a Dragon spacecraft off the coast of Pensacola, Florida,” the release stated.

The international crew of four, comprised of NASA astronaut Jasmin Moghbeli, European Space Agency astronaut Andreas Mogensen, Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency astronaut Satoshi Furukawa, and Roscosmos cosmonaut Konstantin Borisov, spent 199 days in orbit.

During their mission, they contributed to various science and maintenance activities, experiments, and technology demonstrations, including the first study of human response to different spaceflight durations, and an experiment growing food on the space station.

Moghbeli conducted one spacewalk, joined by NASA astronaut Loral O’Hara, and replaced one of the 12 trundle-bearing assemblies on the port solar alpha rotary joint, which allows the arrays to track the sun and generate electricity to power the station.

NASA Administrator Bill Nelson said that the science experiments conducted during their mission would help NASA prepare for future missions to the moon, Mars, and beyond.

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Boeing Whistleblower Found Dead From 'Self-Inflicted' Gunshot Wound - Coroner's Office

WASHINGTON, March 12 (Sputnik) - Local authorities found Boeing whistleblower John Barnett dead from a self-inflicted gunshot wound in the state of South Carolina over the weekend, the Charleston County Coroner's Office said in a press release.

"The Charleston County Coroner, Bobbi Jo O'Neal, is releasing the name of John Barnett, a 62-year-old male from Louisiana," the release said on Monday. "Mr. Barnett died on March 9, 2024, from what appears to be a self-inflicted gunshot wound."

The Charleston City Police Department is investigating Barnett's death, no further details are available at this time, the release noted.

Barnett was recently cross-examined by Boeing's lawyers and his own attorney, and he was scheduled to answer more questions this past Saturday but failed to appear, media reported.

Barnett, who worked at Boeing for over three decades before retiring in 2017, accused the company of cutting corners in order to get its 787 Dreamliner jets out of production quickly at the North Charleston plant, compromising the safety of the aircraft. According to Barnett, the emergency oxygen systems on 787 Dreamliners had a failure rate of 25%, meaning that a quarter of 787 Dreamliners were at risk of rapidly losing oxygen and suffocating the passengers if the cabins were suddenly decompressed. A federal investigation confirmed some of Barnett's allegations.

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American-Israeli Professor: US & Allies Will Help Israel Ethnically Cleanse Palestine

There has been a growing public rift between US President Joe Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over Israel's plan to invade the southern Gaza city of Rafah, the last designated safe area in the region.

Despite the growing public rift, Israel has nothing to fear from Biden and the United States will ultimately assist Israel in ethnically cleansing Palestine in more ways than just supplying weapons, professor, activist and anthropologist [Jeff Halper told Sputnik's Fault Lines](#) on Tuesday.

"[Israel] is a settler colonial movement. Therefore, in order to transform Palestine into Israel, an Arab country to a Jewish country, you have to displace the population and you have to take its land. This isn't only happening in Gaza. This is certainly happening in the West Bank as well," Halper explained. "By destroying Gaza... it makes it impossible for the Gazans to come back. Now, Israel would like Egypt to take them and put them in the Sanai [desert], [but] Egypt says no."

Instead, the United States and other Western countries will take the Gazans into their country. “The United States will say ‘Alright, we’ll take 50,000,’ Canada will say – Canada already said this – ‘we’ll take 30,40,50,000.’ Each European country will take a few thousand or tens of thousands, Australia, New Zealand and so on. Israel could get rid of a million or more Palestinians, with the help – the complicity – of European and North American countries, under the guise of humanitarian aid for refugees... That’s what Israel is calling ‘voluntary transfer.’” Earlier, Co-host Jamarl Thomas asked about Egypt’s intentions, noting that satellite imagery has shown that infrastructure is being built in the Sinai desert, presumably meant to house potential Palestinian refugees.

“They’re building a camp, but not as [part of] a plan,” Halper explained. “They built the camp because they’re afraid... that if in fact, Israel does invade Rafah in the south, there isn’t really a good plan of where those people go. The combination of military pressure plus starvation is simply going to drive a million Palestinians through the border... If there [is] a massive break out of Gaza in the direction of Egypt, then Egypt is prepared for that... It isn’t for any kind of voluntary plan, it’s for that possibility.”

Israel’s ultimate plan, Halper argues, is to greatly lower the number of Palestinians in the region and then create an apartheid for the remainder.

“[Israel will] lock them into small little islands with the help of Biden, we’ll call those [Bantustans](#) a state, and now we have a two-state solution. Israel is on 85% of the country, it controls everything [and] it’s a Jewish country, but there’s a Palestinian state on a few little islands that will be recognized by the international community and now we’re done with the Palestinians and we can move on,” Halper explained. “In other words, Israel thinks it can get away with apartheid in a way South Africa couldn’t, and there’s good reason to believe that might be true.”

Rather than push for a two-state solution that is looking increasingly less likely, Halper argued that Israel should be converted “into one democratic state of equal rights for all its citizens.”

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Giving Frozen Russian Assets To Ukraine Would ‘Break the Global Financial System’

Late last week, it was reported in US media that some top Republicans in the US House of Representatives were developing a plan that would loan Ukraine money from the \$300 billion in Russian assets that were frozen by the United States following the start of the special operation in Ukraine.

Giving Russia’s seized assets to Ukraine would break the global financial system, journalist and author Dan Lazare told Sputnik’s [The Critical Hour on Tuesday](#). He also warned that it would be the equivalent of the United States declaring war on Russia.

“It’s a very dangerous step,” Lazare warned. “It’s really quite amazing that the whole system is just running downhill at a remarkably increasing speed... [\[seizing Russian assets\]](#) will spook Saudi Arabia and it’ll spook China. The whole global financial system sort of rests on a kind of lawful sense of cooperation, but if you break that you break the whole system.”

“It’s kind of a declaration, it’s a widening of the war [and] it’s a declaration of war on Russia by the United States,” he added later.

Lazare reminded co-hosts Ted Rall and Angie Wong that last year the Biden administration was “triumphant” about Ukraine’s accomplishments on the battlefield a year ago but that things have since turned “sharply negative.”

“The Ukrainian forces are starting to come apart. I think the word crumble is probably too strong a term at this point, but they certainly [are showing the strain](#),” he explained. “They’re running out of artillery shells, they’re running out of other armaments and Russia is making steady advances. So the question is now ‘how long will this process go on before Ukraine cracks?’”

Lazare said that the situation in Ukraine has US President Joe Biden “scared as hell” and that he has “no idea” how to get around the “roadblock” of Congress blocking further financial aid.

“It’s really hard to believe that the US will allow Ukraine to sink beneath the waves, but that seems to be what’s happening,” he added.

“That means abandoning very close allies,” Lazare said. “Especially given the fact [that] the US really caused this war in the first place by backing a far-right-led [military coup back in 2014](#), which made a Russian military response more or less inevitable.”

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Biden Impeachment Inquiry Reveals US Being Ruled by ‘Demented Gangsters’

Last month, former FBI informant Alexander Smirnov was arrested and charged for allegedly fabricating a multimillion-dollar bribery scheme involving US President Joe Biden and his son Hunter Biden.

The weaponization of the US Department of Justice against US President Joe Biden’s accusers reveals that the United States is ruled by “complete and total demented gangsters,” Steve Poikonen, who serves as the host of the Slow News Day show, told Sputnik’s The Critical Hour on Monday.

Poikonen was speaking with co-hosts Wilmer Leon and Garland Nixon about the impeachment inquiry into US President Joe Biden over claims the commander-in-chief was involved in alleged influence peddling scheme linked to his son, Hunter Biden.

Poikonen said that Joe Biden is an “outright criminal,” adding that there is “more than enough evidence to impeach him and arrest him based on him bragging about stuff on camera.”

“We really are being, allegedly, governed by complete and total demented gangsters,” he added later.

Asked about former FBI informant Alexander Smirnov, who was charged with lying to the FBI about Hunter Biden, despite being seen as a credible informant for years, Poikonen compared it to WikiLeaks co-founder Julian Assange’s extradition case, during which, a key witness, Sigurdur Ingiu Thordarson, admitted he fabricated his testimony to get immunity.

“The convicted pedophile whose testimony was used in part to deny to make sure [Assange] was going to be extradited to the US, said ‘I made it up, I made it all up for the immunity agreement’... and [the DOJ is] going ‘this is still admissible and this is still something that helps

solidify our case against a journalist'... on the other hand... the same DOJ is using the exact opposite [in the Biden case], 'well, we believed him when we liked it, but now that we don't like it, we're going to tell you that he's full of it.'"

Poikonen further asserted the FBI does not want to look too deeply into the [Hunter Biden case](#) as it could potentially blow back on the agency. "The FBI is complicit in absolutely every facet of this," he said.

Nixon noted former US President Donald Trump and former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani were also charged or attacked after looking into the Biden family's business dealings in Ukraine, in addition to Smirnov. Poikonen acknowledged that another name should be added to that list: former Hunter Biden business partner Jason Galanis.

"[Galanis had to] testify from a prison cell because as soon as he had information that could lead to the arrest of Hunter or Joe Biden, he found himself going to court over a \$60 million bond fraud ... It's selective prosecution based on perceived political opponents or real bumps in the road."

That situation has resulted in the US resembling something that looks "a whole lot less like any sort of democracy or a free and fair society and a whole lot more like an oligarchy that is ruled by violence and theft and extortion and threats."

Due to the corruption case and the American president's apparent mental decline, Poikonen said he believes Biden, who he called "the old Delaware daughter sniffer" will be replaced by somebody "set up to lose to Donald Trump, or at least that's the way it certainly looks right now."

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Biden's Little Monsters - Cartoon

The network of aides and volunteers responsible for coordinating US President Joe Biden's campaign events and speeches nationwide, called the advance team, is facing accusations of fostering a toxic work environment, including verbal harassment, US media reported on Monday. The complaints [reportedly](#) became so commonplace that the White House Counsel's Office opened an investigation into the matter. Two high-ranking members of the advance team, associate director of presidential advance Ian Mellul and Brie Moore, the director of press advance, recently resigned. According to the report, Mellul recently completed management training and was given an executive coach, but the complaints about him continued.

The report claims, citing two witnesses, that Mellul told staffers he would "ruin your life" when they made mistakes and regularly belittled junior staffers.

However, things could have been worse for the advance team. Commander, the Biden family dog, was recently sent to live in Delaware after he bit Secret Service agents and White House staff no less than two dozen times. Like Mellul, the Bidens attempted to fix Commander's behavior by sending him to obedience school and getting the dog a training coach, but the abuse of staff by Biden's pets seems to be a recurring theme.

The weaponization of the US Department of Justice against US President Joe Biden's accusers reveals that the United States is ruled by "Complete and total demented gangsters," the host of Slow News Day, Steve Poikonen told Sputnik's The Critical Hour on Monday.

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"We really are being, allegedly, governed by complete and total demented gangsters," he added later.

Poikonen contrasted the Biden impeachment inquiry with the Assange case, pointing to how witnesses accused of lying are treated.

"The convicted pedophile whose testimony was used in part to deny to make sure [Assange] was going to be extradited to the US, said 'I made it up, I made it all up for the immunity agreement'... and [the DOJ is] going 'this is still admissible and this is still something that helps solidify our case against a journalist'... on the other hand... the same DOJ is using the exact opposite [in the Biden case] 'well, we believed him when we liked it, but now that we don't like it, we're going to tell you that he's full of it.'"

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"It's kind of a declaration, it's a widening of the war [and] it's a declaration of war on Russia by the United States," he added later.

Lazare acknowledged the dire situation for the Armed Forces of Ukraine. "They're running out of artillery shells, they're running out of other armaments and Russia is making steady advances. So the question is now 'how long will this process go on before Ukraine cracks?'"

“That really has the [US President Joe] Biden administration scared as hell,” he added.

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The United States and other Western countries will take the Gazans into their country, thereby helping Israel ethnically cleanse the region. “The United States will say ‘Alright, we’ll take 50,000,’ Canada will say – Canada already said this – ‘we’ll take 30,40,50,000.’ ...and so on. Israel could get rid of a million or more Palestinians, with the help – the complicity – of European and North American countries, under the guise of humanitarian aid for refugees... That’s what Israel is calling ‘voluntary transfer.’”

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Gallup found that LGBTQ+ identification was highest among Generation Z (22.3%) and millennials (9.8%), with each generation about twice as likely to identify as LGBTQ+ than the preceding one. In contrast, only 2.3% of baby boomers and 1.1% of those born 1945 or earlier identified as LGBTQ+.

Gallup found that bisexuality was most common, with 57.3% of LGBTQ+ adults and 4.4% of American adults overall identifying as bisexual.