

The Washington Post

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DOJ moves to relax rules on marijuana

Garland files measure to reclassify pot at federal level as lower-risk drug

This article is by David Ovalle, Michael Scherer, Tyler Pager, Dan Diamond and Fenit Nirappil

Attorney General Merrick Garland on Tuesday recommended loosening restrictions on marijuana, a historic shift in federal drug policy that could broaden access to the drug for medicinal use and boost cannabis industries in states where it is legal.

The measure, if enacted, would not legalize marijuana at the federal level but still represents a milestone that could prove to be a political win for President Biden, who is campaigning for reelection and has sought to ameliorate racial and criminal justice inequities wrought by the nation's long war on drugs.

The Justice Department submitted the formal recommendation to the White House on Tuesday, an agency spokeswoman said in a statement. It follows the Drug Enforcement Administration's approval of a federal health agency recommendation that marijuana be reclassified.

The White House's Office of Management and Budget must review the measure, according to people familiar with the matter who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal administrative matters. The proposal, if accepted, would be formally published and would not go into effect for months until the public has a chance to comment.

The DEA's approval was first reported Tuesday by the Associated Press. **SEE MARIJUANA ON A2**

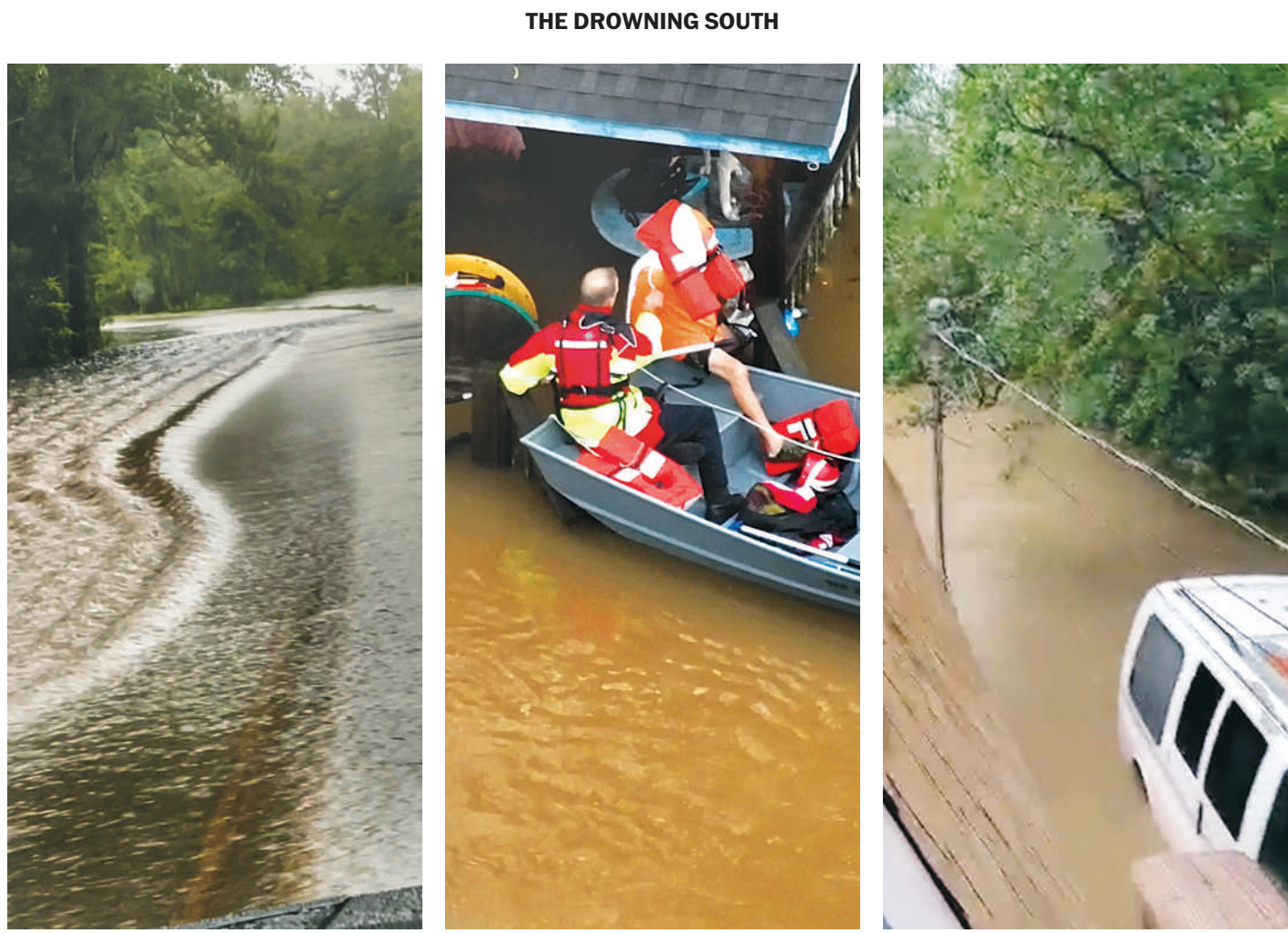
Lawmakers size up a health-care behemoth

UnitedHealth's CEO is set to testify following crippling cyberattack

BY DAN DIAMOND, CHRISTOPHER ROWLAND AND DANIEL GILBERT

After becoming pregnant, Alexandra Day, a 31-year-old consultant living in South Carolina, sought out neonatal genetic testing that was covered in her health insurance policy. But her insurer, UnitedHealthcare, balked at paying for the December 2022 test, claiming there was no proof Day needed it, and billed her \$3,900, according to documents reviewed by The Washington Post.

Day succeeded in persuading the health-care colossus to reduce her bill after weeks of telephone calls, letters and paperwork, ultimately paying \$650 and abandoning her efforts to try to lower the bill further. The episode left a bitter taste, particularly after UnitedHealthcare became locked in a contracting fight and stopped covering care at South Carolina's largest not-for-profit health system, threatening Day's access to long-term care. **SEE UNITEDHEALTH ON A17**



John Corideo drove the solitary two-lane highways of southern Alabama, eyeing the roadside ditches. It had been raining off and on for days and Corideo, chief of the Fowl River Volunteer Fire Department, knew that if it continued, his department could be outmatched by floodwaters.

It kept raining. Water filled the ditches and climbed over roads, swallowing parts of a main highway. About 10 residents who needed to be rescued were brought back to the station in firetrucks. More remained stranded in floodwaters, out of the department's reach. "That week ... we just caught hell," Corideo said.

What the residents and rescuers of the Fowl River region faced on that day was part of a dangerous phenomenon reshaping the Southern United States: Rapidly rising seas are combining with storms to generate epic floods, threatening lives, property and livelihoods.

In the Fowl River's case, unusually high tides slowed floodwaters as they went downstream to drain. This increased the water's depth and flooded a wide expanse — even

THE NEW FACE OF FLOODING

On June 19, southern Mobile County, Ala., experienced torrential rain and severe flooding. Roads and some homes near the Fowl River were submerged.

But this was no ordinary flood.

BY CHRIS MOONEY, JOHN MUYSKENS, KEVIN CROWE AND BRIANNA SACKS IN THEODORE, ALA.

several miles upstream. The result was deluged roads, washed-out cars and damaged houses from a flood that was larger, deeper and longer-lasting due to rising seas.

These supercharged floods are one of the most pernicious impacts of an unexpected surge in sea levels across the U.S. Gulf and Southeast coasts — with the ocean rising an average of 6 inches since 2010, one of the fastest such changes in the world, according to a Washington Post examination of how sea level rise is affecting the region.

The Post's analysis found that sea levels at a tide gauge near the Fowl River are now rising four times faster in 2010 to 2023 than over the previous four decades.

The rapid burst of sea level rise has struck a region spanning from Brownsville, Tex., to Cape Hatteras, N.C., where coastal counties are home to 28 million people. Outdated infrastructure built to manage water, some of it over a century old, cannot keep up. As a result, the seas are swallowing coastal land, damaging property, submerging septic tanks and homes. **SEE FLOOD ON A8**

The Gulf Coast region has experienced a rapid burst of sea level rise, which contributes to supercharged flooding. Residents in southern Alabama said the June 19 storm and flooding were extreme, even in a rainy and flood-prone area.

Slowdown at the border eases pressure on Biden

With a hand from Mexico, crossings — while still high — are not seeing the usual springtime surge

BY NICK MIROFF

SAN DIEGO — Illegal crossings along the U.S.-Mexico border are down more than 40 percent since December and have remained relatively stable through the first four months of 2024, bringing a modest reprieve for President Biden on an issue regarded as a liability to his reelection campaign.

Crossings often increase sharply during early spring, but that did not happen for the first time since Biden took office.

In April, U.S. border agents encountered about 130,000 migrants who entered illegally from Mexico, a level that is high by historical standards but lower than February and March, according to the latest U.S. enforcement data obtained by The Washington Post.

U.S. officials say a crackdown on migrants by the Mexican government is the biggest factor. Using military patrols and high-tech surveillance, Mexico has



Two migrant girls, Sara Florez, 4, and Angie Florez, 2, eat oranges under a shelter their parents made near the U.S.-Mexico border in April. Illegal crossings have been relatively stable in 2024.

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Year 147, No. 53838



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