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BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

Biden warns Israel over Rafah push

President halts bomb shipments, fearing use to assault city

By Zeke Miller and Aamer Madhani
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden said Wednesday that he would not supply offensive weapons that Israel could use to launch an all-out assault on Rafah — the last major Hamas stronghold in Gaza — over concern for

the well-being of the more than 1 million civilians sheltering there. Biden, in an interview with CNN, said the U.S. was still committed to Israel's defense and would supply Iron Dome rocket interceptors and other defensive arms, but not bombs if Israel goes into Rafah. "Civilians have been killed in Gaza as a consequence of those

bombs and other ways in which they go after population centers," Biden told CNN. "I made it clear that if they go into Rafah — they haven't gone in Rafah yet — if they go into Rafah, I'm not supplying the weapons that have been used historically to deal with ... the cities." The interview marked Biden's toughest public comments yet

about the potential Israeli military operation and followed his decision to pause a shipment of heavy bombs to Israel last week over concerns that the U.S. ally was moving closer to an attack on Rafah despite public and private warnings from his administration. Earlier Wednesday, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin was the first to confirm that the Biden administration paused a shipment of bombs to Israel over concerns that the country was approaching

a decision on launching a full-scale assault on Rafah, a military operation against United States wishes. The shipment was supposed to consist of 1,800 2,000-pound bombs and 1,700 500-pound bombs, according to the official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive matter. The focus of U.S. concern was the larger explosives and how they could be used in a dense urban

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Dog owner Mark Larson, center, keeps an eye on his dog and others as they play at Horner Park in Chicago on Wednesday. Days earlier, a young girl was bitten by a different owner's unleashed dog at this park. **TERRENCE ANTONIO JAMES/CHICAGO TRIBUNE PHOTOS**

FRUSTRATIONS RISE AFTER 9-YEAR-OLD GIRL ATTACKED BY UNLEASHED DOG IN HORNER PARK

'She was traumatized'

By Kate Armanini
Chicago Tribune

Nine-year-old Natalie Sieracki spent her sister's softball game cartwheeling on the grass in Horner Park on Saturday evening. She didn't notice the large, unleashed dog nearby until it attacked her. When she broke away from the animal, she raced toward her parents in the bleachers, screaming and crying. Her back was covered in bite marks. Blood gushed from her leg. "She was traumatized," her mom, Marci Sieracki, recalled Tuesday. "She was writhing in pain. It was just awful." The attack has left some residents with mounting frustrations

toward unleashed dogs in public. Just a few hundred feet from the attack is a gated, 25,000-square-foot designated dog park. "There's no reason this should have happened," Sieracki said. "A kid should be able to go play on the grass and do cartwheels and not have to worry about being attacked by dogs." Residents across the city have fought for dog park access in recent years, with virtually no green space otherwise accessible to unleashed animals, and today, the Chicago Park District maintains more than 30 dog parks for unleashed pets. The Horner Park Dog Park, which was first enclosed in

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Natalie Sieracki, 9, who was severely bitten by an unleashed dog at Horner Park in Chicago, plays with her dog, Teddy, at home on Tuesday.

Sexual hazing alleged in new filings

25 accusers total have sued Northwestern over football program

By Megan Crepeau
Chicago Tribune

That first night in Kenosha, Nathan Fox remembers, was like something from a horror movie. A horde of older teammates was outside his dorm room, he said, screaming and sounding a siren and pounding the wall so hard it actually shook. It was 2015, and Fox had just arrived at training camp for the Northwestern University football squad. He had heard the older players' taunts of "wait for Kenosha," he told the Tribune. He knew something could be coming. He and his roommate locked their door. He didn't respond when the first upperclassmen came and asked him to open it up. But once the shouting and the pounding and the shaking began, it felt like a force of nature, "apocalyptic," he said. He looked at his roommate. "Sorry, bro," he remembers saying. "I don't know what to do." He opened the door. What happened next, Fox and others allege, was part of a pattern of sexual hazing on the Northwestern football team, a scandal that has ballooned in scope since it first surfaced last summer. Three new lawsuits were filed against Northwestern this week — including one from Fox and another from the whistleblower whose report started it all — bringing to 25 the number of hazing accusers who have sued the school. The lawsuits' recent history has been somewhat chaotic. Settlement talks broke down this spring, Northwestern is also being sued by ex-head coach Pat Fitzgerald, who accuses the school of wrongfully firing him after the hazing scandal escalated. In a move with wide-ranging implications for all the lawsuits, a judge ruled last month that the hazing accusers' cases should, for now, be consolidated with the Fitzgerald case.

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INSIDE



BRIAN CASSELLA/TRIBUNE 2014

Legendary music producer dies at 61

Steve Albini, an alternative rock pioneer and legendary producer who shaped the musical landscape through his work with Nirvana, the Pixies, PJ Harvey and more, has died. He was 61. **Obituaries, Page 9**

Mayor talks budget needs in Springfield

Mayor Brandon Johnson met with Gov. J.B. Pritzker and state lawmakers to make his pitch for more state funding for critical city operations and to discuss the Bears' domed stadium proposal. **Chicagoland, Page 3**

Mixed views on proposed tower

A developer's proposal to put a 36-story skyscraper next to the Moody Church on the edge of Chicago's historic Old Town neighborhood drew jeers and cheers at a community meeting this week. **Business**

New COVID variants spreading; health experts urge vaccination

By Angie Leventis Lourgos
Chicago Tribune

A new family of COVID variants nicknamed "FLiRT" is spreading across the country, as vaccination rates in Chicago — as well as nationwide — remain concerning low for some public health experts. While symptoms and severity seem to be about the same as previous COVID strains, the new FLiRT variants appear to be more transmissible, said infectious disease expert Dr. Robert Murphy. "A new, more contagious variant is out there," said Murphy,

executive director of Northwestern University's Institute for Global Health and a professor of infectious diseases at the Feinberg School of Medicine. "COVID-19 is still with us, and compared to flu and RSV, COVID-19 can cause significant problems off-season." Murphy urged the public to get up to date on COVID shots, particularly individuals who are at higher risk for severe complications from the virus. While much of the population has some immunity from vaccination or previous COVID infections, Murphy noted that "with COVID-19, immunity wanes over

time." One FLiRT variant, KP.2, is estimated to account for roughly a quarter of recent COVID cases, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data from late April. That means it has outpaced the previously most common strain, JN.1, which spurred much of the winter respiratory season's spike in COVID cases and hospitalizations nationwide, coinciding with a spate of flu and RSV infections around the same time. The JN.1 variant is estimated to account for about 22% of

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