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Medicine cabinet musts

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ANOTHER PA. PROGRESSIVE WAVE?

In wake of 2022 victories, progressives and emerging 'uncommitteds' pave way for a battle for 2024 votes

By Jonathan D. Salant, Michael Korsh and Mike Wereschagin
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

In an obscure race during an off-year election in a quiet corner of Pittsburgh, a long-simmering political movement that

would reshape Pennsylvania politics was about to emerge into public view.

It was 2017, just one year after Donald Trump's shocking win upended the political establishment and galvanized a generation of young activists on the fringes of both the right and left. In the neighborhood of Highland Park, the city's chapter of the Democratic Social-

More inside

Biden signs a package of spending bills just hours before shutdown deadline. **Page A-5**

Election 2024

ists of America had organized a campaign for a magisterial judge seat against a deeply entrenched Democrat with the goal of replacing him with an avowed progressive reformer.

Mikhail Pappas couldn't even run as a

SEE **ELECTION**, PAGE A-7



Emily Elconin/The New York Times

One in five people who voted in Minnesota's Democratic primary wrote in "uncommitted" in protest of the Biden administration's support for Israel's war in Gaza.

Low inventory, higher prices and intense bidding wars tighten grip on Pittsburgh's spring real estate market

Housing sales in southwestern Pa.

UNITS SOLD, JAN-FEB

County	2023	2024
Allegheny	1,628	1,437
Butler	235	194
Beaver	234	215
Washington	255	215
Westmoreland	374	390

Low housing inventory in Allegheny County led to a near record low number of home sales in 2023. However, bidding wars pushed average prices higher despite rising mortgage rates.

Source: West Penn Multi-List James Hilston/Post-Gazette

Sebastian Foltz/Post-Gazette

New class of grads brings hope, but big gaps remain

Pittsburgh's police staffing woes mirror U.S. trend

By Megan Guza and Laura Esposito
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The focus on the 24 recruits who graduated from the Pittsburgh police academy last week began before their classes even started — perhaps before some of them even applied to the academy.

They come to the bureau at a tumultuous time. Chief Larry Sciroto has been at the helm of the department for less than a year. Fallout from the 2021 death of Jim Rogers after a violent arrest continues. And they join a force that is losing officers far faster than it recruits them.

None of that is lost on the graduates as they head into 12 weeks of field training.

"Being a police officer is not just a job," recruit class president Robert Redman told his classmates at a graduation ceremony Wednesday night. "It's a solemn responsibility."

It's a responsibility that far fewer are seeking out. In the years leading up to and in the early part of the pandemic, the city was training and graduating 70, 80, 90 recruits each year. The last class before this most recent one graduated 32 recruits.

At the same time, the bureau was seeing

SEE **RECRUITS**, PAGE A-8

HOUSING HASSLES

By Tim Grant
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

When Jason Conlogue listed his McKeesport house for sale in January, buyers submitted four competing offers on the first day it hit the market.

"I wasn't surprised," he said. "I knew the house was listed under what it was going to sell for."

The two-bedroom, one-bathroom house had been in his family for 73

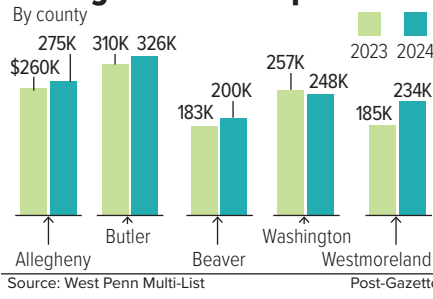
years and three generations. The bidding war pushed its sales price over the \$132,900 asking price.

Meanwhile, 22-year-old Leylah Yenceri started looking at homes around the Penn Hills and Forest Hills areas in January and faced intense competition for the properties available to buy.

"I kind of expected it to be bad because of stories I've heard," she said. "I just didn't expect so many people

SEE **HOUSING**, PAGE A-6

Average home sales price



Pa.'s path to legalizing cannabis facing hurdles

By Hanna Webster
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

To the cannabis-curious, possibilities are bountiful in a nation increasingly supporting the legalization of marijuana.

In some U.S. cities, nearly every block seems to boast cannabis dispensaries fashioned with a telltale

green cross symbol. Inside, many resemble the modern minimalism of an Apple Store, and customers can find strains with varying concentrations of THC, cannabidiol (CBD) and other cannabinoids, yielding the physiological gamut between calm and energetic.

Two dozen U.S. states and the District of Columbia have legalized

marijuana at the recreational level to date, with Ohio becoming the 24th just in November. With the exception of West Virginia, that leaves Pennsylvania surrounded by states that have in recent years passed bills legalizing adult-use pot — and vulnerable to losing out on potential

SEE **CANNABIS**, PAGE A-4



OhioCannabis.com held its first in a series of farmers markets on Feb. 18 in Cleveland. Vendors offered a wide variety of cannabis seeds. Ohio legalized recreational marijuana last year.

TNS

DID YOU REMEMBER TO SET YOUR CLOCKS **02:00** **AHEAD ONE HOUR?**

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Daytime high, 36; tonight's low, 28. **Page A-20**

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Mideast Conflict



Samar Abu Elouf/The New York Times

Humanitarian aid arrives through the Rafah crossing into the Gaza Strip on Oct. 21. The number of trucks entering Gaza with food and other aid rose in early March compared to February, according to United Nations data.

As U.S. rushes to build Gaza port, challenges loom

By Aaron Boxerman and Victoria Kim
The New York Times

JERUSALEM — As the U.S. military rushes to assemble a temporary port on the Gaza Strip coast, daunting practical challenges to the seaborne humanitarian effort to stave off famine in the territory are becoming increasingly apparent. The obstacles include logistics, cost and security issues, diplomats and aid officials say.

But the desperate conditions in Gaza, depicted in images of starving children, make the U.S.-led international plan a necessity, they say, especially given the tight security imposed by Israel that is slowing land shipments of food, water and medicine.

Even if it can overcome the hurdles, the international initiative is likely to take several weeks, if not months, to reach its goal of delivering 2 million meals a day to the people of Gaza.

Citing the spiraling humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, Canada and Sweden are resuming funding for the main United Nations agency supporting Palestinian refugees in Gaza. The governments said the embattled agency had taken steps to improve accountability amid accusations that some of its employees had links to Hamas.

The two countries were among more than a dozen that suspended payments to the aid organization, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, known as UNRWA, after accusations in January by Israel that a dozen of its 13,000 employees in Gaza had been involved in the Oct. 7 Hamas-led attacks on Israel or their aftermath.

UNRWA has argued that Israel, which has long called for the agency's removal from Gaza, has targeted it with a "deliberate and concerted campaign" to undermine its operations when its services are most needed. Warnings of widespread hunger bordering on famine have become more urgent, and signs of desperation are growing as people resort to consuming animal feed or ambushing aid trucks.

In a government statement Saturday, Sweden said it would disburse a conditional first payment of about \$20 million. It said UNRWA had agreed to allow independent audits and to strengthen internal oversight.

"In this urgent situation, when the need is so great among the civilian population, it is first and foremost important to save lives," the statement said.

Canadian officials said Friday that they had received an interim report from the internal United Nations office investigating the claims, and that UNRWA had taken immediate steps to improve accountability. The United Nations has also commissioned an external review.

The Israeli Foreign Ministry reacted angrily to the countries' decision, issuing a statement calling it "a

serious mistake," reached before the investigations have been completed. "The resumption of funding to UNRWA will not change the fact that the agency is part of the problem and will not be part of the solution in the Gaza Strip," the ministry said.

The European Union, one of the largest donors to UNRWA, recently announced that it was substantially increasing funding to the agency, saying that Palestinians were facing terrible conditions and should not be made to pay for Hamas' crimes.

The first tranche of 50 million euros (\$54 million) was scheduled to be disbursed this past week.

The United States has said it would wait for the results of U.N. investigations before deciding whether to resume donations. It is the agency's single largest donor, having pledged \$344 million in 2022.

The multinational plan to build a functioning pier on the Gaza coastline is undeniably ambitious. But aid officials have criticized it, emphasizing that delivering food by truck is by far the most efficient way to help Gaza residents and calling for Israel to open new crossing points in northern Gaza and to ease its entry restrictions.

Warnings of widespread hunger bordering on famine have become more urgent, and signs of desperation are growing as people resort to consuming animal feed or ambushing aid trucks.

U.S. officials have conceded it will take time, but they say a maritime corridor will eventually enable them to massively increase the amount of aid.

Gaza does not have a functioning port and its coastal waters are too shallow for most vessels — particularly the large barges that would be necessary to ferry the enormous amounts of cargo necessary for hundreds of thousands of hungry Palestinians.

Ursula von der Leyen, president of the EU executive body, said Friday that officials expected to test the process in the coming days during what she described as a pilot project.

But it was not immediately clear how or where any vessels would unload their cargo or how it would be distributed with continuing Israeli bombardment and attacks on aid trucks by both ordinary Palestinians and well-organized gangs, according to aid officials. Hundreds of thousands of Gaza's 2.3 million people face the threat of starvation.

The effort will be costly, but it is uncertain how expensive. Initial estimates for the floating pier and shipping expenses run to tens of millions of dollars over several months.

Progressives who transformed Pa. politics are set to be a decisive force in 2024

ELECTION, FROM A-1

Democrat at the time; the aging party apparatus had rejected him in favor of 24-year incumbent Ron Costa Sr., prompting him to run as an independent. But his surprise win that year, powered by the insurgent liberal movement, presaged a transformation in the Democratic Party that was about to sweep across Pennsylvania, turning a crucial swing state with a long history of political moderation into a national hotbed of progressivism.

Less than eight years after those first, modest successes, the party's progressive wing is no longer merely challenging the establishment — it's firmly entrenched inside of it. As President Joe Biden's reelection campaign ramps up for a rematch with Mr. Trump, his political operation is scrambling to hold together this key portion of the coalition that elected him in 2020 as liberal activists voice increasing hostility toward him over issues from climate change to student loan debt to the brutal war in Gaza.

In a state as closely divided and electorally important as Pennsylvania, where the number of swing voters has been dwindling for a generation as voters become increasingly tribal, the danger candidates face isn't that the activists at the core of their party will defect to the other side — it's that they'll fail to rally to their candidate's side at all.

"We saw the downfall in 2016 for [Democratic nominee Hillary Rodham] Clinton of counting on voters who did not show up on Election Day because they were turned off by her candidacy. That could very well happen again," said Ashley Koning, pollster and professor at Rutgers University.

A decisive force

In the years since Mr. Trump's 2016 win, Pennsylvania progressives have proven themselves to be a decisive force in political races.

The movement's victories came swiftly, elevating once fringe politicians and first-time candidates to positions of influence they would use to launch themselves into key positions within their party.

Just months before Mr. Pappas won his judicial race, an outspoken public defender named Larry Krasner took on the Democratic Party's establishment and won the nomination for Philadelphia district attorney, a powerful position once held by former Democratic Gov. Ed Rendell.

Like Mr. Pappas' election, Mr. Krasner's victory was an early sign of the wave of electoral wins that have made Pennsylvania a keystone of the progressive movement and transformed the state's political landscape with stunning speed.

Consider: in 2016, the year Mr. Trump won the presidency, John Fetterman was the mayor of Braddock. Summer Lee and Sara Innamorato had never held elected office.

That same year, Mr. Fetterman — a hoodie-wearing, tattooed messenger of the progressive movement's economic agenda — got trounced in the Democratic primary for U.S. Senate as voters gravitated toward more establishment candidates.

Just two years later, after Mr. Krasner and Mr. Pappas won their races, Mr. Fetterman unseated a sitting lieutenant governor in his own party's primary and won the statewide office. Ms. Lee and Ms. Innamorato emerged from political obscurity and beat two other members of the politically powerful Costa family — incumbents who were reliable votes for their party's leadership but who ignited none of the passions of an activist base that was discovering its political power.

Fast forward six years — less than two presidential terms — and those long-shot candidates from Allegheny County are now three of the most powerful politicians in the most important swing



Stephen Maturen/AFP via Getty Images

A group called Uncommitted Minnesota organized people in the Democratic primary election Tuesday as a form of protest against the Biden administration's handling of the war in Gaza.

state in the country: Ms. Lee as the first Black woman elected to Congress in Pennsylvania's history, Ms. Innamorato as the first woman to serve as chief executive of Allegheny County and Mr. Fetterman as a U.S. senator with a rising national profile who was the only Democrat to flip a Republican Senate seat in 2022.

Less noticed but just as consequential, the movement that elevated them has been a driving force in local politics far outside the liberal bastions of the state's urban centers.

"Even in a meat-and-potatoes place like Erie [County], the left wing of the Democratic Party has control. It controls the party machinery. And that reality in Erie is the same in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia — all throughout the state," said Jeff Bloodworth, professor of American political history at Gannon University in the lakeside county.

Erie in recent years has proved to be as politically divided as anywhere in the state. Mr. Trump won it narrowly in 2016. Four years later, Mr. Biden eked out a 1,400-vote majority while at the same time the county's voters re-elected Republican state Sen. Dan Laughlin by a wide margin.

In recent years, chastened by Ms. Clinton's surprise loss, progressives have made a point of targeting more conservative enclaves that liberals had written off for generations. Mr. Fetterman had long been the most prominent example, publicly urging Democrats to show up even in places that reliably vote Republican and make the pitch not just for centrist policies, but for progressive ones.

Debating a war

As the movement's reach has stretched into more areas around the state, even local governments have become flashpoints for the causes that most animate Democrats' activist base. Something as simple as a local legislative resolution that has no real effect on national or international affairs can draw raucous crowds — as happened last week when the Allegheny County Council debated whether to vote in support of a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war.

With the help of allies they'd elected, including progressive Councilwoman Bethany Hallam, activists were able to turn a county council meeting away from mind-numbing government minutia and towards a war halfway around the world.

Dozens turned out to speak. Sheriff's deputies escorted out irate protesters. Some shouted from their seats at members of council — Democratic and Republican — who disagreed with them.

The willingness of progressives to turn on members of their own party who don't hew closely enough to their beliefs has been one of the movement's hallmarks. Their candidates wouldn't be in office otherwise. That political engagement has been a crucial asset to politicians who've harnessed it — and a warning to those who haven't.

"Joe Biden knows that he wouldn't be president today without winning progres-

sives in 2020 — including suburban working families, young people, and communities of color," Adam Green, co-founder of the Progressive Change Campaign Committee, said. "It's simply a fact that he needs to do that again."

Israel's war in Gaza, launched after a devastating attack by the Palestinian terror group Hamas on Oct. 7, has exposed perhaps the sharpest rift between the party's left-most flank and its elected leaders since Mr. Biden took office.

Mr. Fetterman, once a darling of the movement, has become a top target of pro-ceasefire progressives over his support of Israel's offensive. Ms. Innamorato, once a member of the Democratic Socialists of America, was accused on social media of supporting genocide in the waning days of her campaign when she condemned a DSA statement that called violence against Israelis an "inevitable response to the conditions imposed by Israeli occupation."

For Mr. Biden, the backlash has come most forcefully in the form of a growing movement to get progressive Democrats to vote "uncommitted" in their primaries, rather than cast a ballot for the president. In Michigan, a state Mr. Biden won by 154,000 votes in 2020, more than 100,000 Democrats voted uncommitted. One in five Minnesota Democrats did the same. In the blue bastion of Hawaii, that share rose to nearly one in three.

"That could be a real problem for Biden if the core of the base is not showing up for him. Whatever he is making up with middle-of-the-road voters or suburban voters, he could be hemorrhaging with the voters who are core to the Democratic Party or that are presumed to fall in line with the Democratic Party come November," Ms. Koning said.

At the same time, progressives are pressuring Mr. Biden to take a more populist economic approach that pits tax breaks for the wealthy against strengthening and expanding the social safety net and healthcare programs.

"Obviously, in the campaign, you've got to motivate your own base," said Nancy Altman, president of Social Security Works, the day after Mr. Biden's fiery State of the Union speech. "He was talking about issues that will motivate all voters. We need to get the word out on that. And of course, the contrast is stark. You care about climate change? It's going to be worse under Trump. You care about Palestinian rights? It's going to get so much worse under Trump."

In 2020, the backlash to Mr. Trump that ignited the wave of progressive victories across Pennsylvania helped hold together the sometimes fractious Democratic coalition — something party leaders are counting on again as they figure out how to handle the deep disappointment the liberal base feels with elements of Mr. Biden's record.

"I think that the reality of what Donald Trump represents, what he's telling people he will do to this nation, that he's literally invoking using tactics that are anti-democratic and pro-authoritarianism, I think that

should be enough to move progressives," U.S. Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J., a member of the Biden campaign's national advisory board, told the Post-Gazette. "Ultimately, when they're given a choice and the consequences of Donald Trump being elected, I think people will come home."

At the same time, organizers and lawmakers within the progressive movement are making a two-pronged pitch to their base voters: the administration has accomplished more than you're giving them credit for — and it can do even more if they elect more Democrats in November.

"The top issues that I hear about from the progressive communities back home often are issues like climate change, which we were able to get a lot done with the Inflation Reduction Act," the largest single investment in combating climate change in U.S. history, said Rep. Andy Kim, D-N.J., a member of the Congressional Progressive Caucus. "I tell them, 'Look, we can flip the House of Representatives, keep the Senate, keep the White House. We can do a 2.0. We can keep going.'"

The most critical state

No state is more critical to that project than Pennsylvania. The day after Mr. Biden's State of the Union address — a speech that showcased some of the populist economic messages progressives had called for — he made the Philadelphia suburbs his first destination, essentially using the state to kick off the 2024 general election campaign. Months earlier, he had used Valley Forge as the backdrop for a speech about preserving democracy pegged to the anniversary of the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol.

"I don't think there's a road or a path to victory for the White House that does not include Pennsylvania. I think that's why we've seen so much time and investment by both of the principals. Both Biden and [Vice President Kamala] Harris have been in the state repeatedly," said Ashley McBride, state director of For Our Future PA, the state chapter of a nationwide network of field organizers who try to mobilize voters around progressive causes.

In Pennsylvania alone, the group has spent more than \$30 million since 2016. Now, it's trying to help wrangle the progressive movement it fueled in the years after Mr. Trump's victory.

"The work that we do, it doesn't just start weeks before the election. We are actually ramping up right now," Ms. McBride said.

With just eight months left to convince disillusioned progressives to get behind a candidate who first emerged decades ago in a bygone political era, that outreach is crucial, said Danielle Deiseiroth, executive director of the progressive think tank Data for Progress.

"President Biden and Democrats have to make a case for them to turn out," she said.

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