

IN BRIEF

Biden honors Cheney and others with Presidential Citizens Medal

WASHINGTON – Former Rep. Liz Cheney, who bucked her Republican Party to strongly criticize President-elect Donald Trump and some of his allies, was one of 20 people awarded the Presidential Citizens Medal, one of the country's highest civilian honors, by President Joe Biden on Thursday.

The medal is given to Americans for their service to the country or its citizens, the White House said.

Biden, speaking in the East Room of the White House, praised the honorees for courage, leadership, service and empathy.

"I think it's pretty damn simple: Our democracy begins and ends with the duties of citizenship," he said. "Our work continues."

The presidential medals, which go through a less rigorous approval process than Medals of Honor or acts of clemency, give a president the opportunity to honor people who have fought for causes he championed.

Cheney is a one-time Republican member of Congress who served as vice chair of the House of Representatives select committee that investigated the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol by Trump supporters.

She received a standing ovation at Thursday's ceremony. In October, she urged Americans to reject Trump's "depraved cruelty" as she campaigned in support of Democratic presidential candidate Vice President Kamala Harris, who later lost to Trump.

Former US soldier accused of attempting to support Hezbollah

WASHINGTON – A Pennsylvania man who previously served in the U.S. Army was indicted by a grand jury on charges of attempting to support Lebanese militant group Hezbollah and making false statements to the FBI, the U.S. Justice Department said on Thursday.

Jack Danaher Molloy, 24, was a dual citizen of the U.S. and Ireland and traveled to Lebanon and Syria in 2024 to attempt to join Hezbollah, which is designated by the U.S. as a "foreign terrorist organization," the Justice Department said in a statement.

The department said Molloy returned to the U.S. in late 2024 and continued making attempts to join Hezbollah. He had also promoted hatred and violence against Jews, the Justice Department said, adding he was formerly enlisted as an active-duty soldier in the U.S. Army from mid-March to late April in 2019.

The Justice Department said Molloy lied to the FBI about his intentions to join Hezbollah when questioned upon his return to the United States in late 2024. It said he was arrested on Dec. 6 in Chicago.

If convicted, Molloy faces a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison for a material support charge. For false statement charges, he faces a maximum penalty of eight years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, or both. A representative of Molloy could not immediately be contacted.

Over 300,000 migrants crossed Darien Gap in 2024, down 42%

PANAMA CITY – Over 300,000 migrants crossed the Darien Gap into Panama in 2024, 42% fewer than the record number who made the perilous jungle crossing from South America a year earlier, Panama's migration authorities told Reuters on Thursday.

The dangerous Darien Gap connects Colombia with the Central American nation of Panama and increasing numbers of migrants were making the journey north to reach the United States.

Panamanian President Jose Raul Mulino has taken a harder stance on migration since taking office last July, including fencing parts of the Darien with barbed wire, imposing fines and using flights funded by the United States to deport migrants.

Officials with Panama's National Migration Service told Reuters that 302,203 migrants crossed the Darien last year, down 42% from the record 520,085 in 2023. Some 69% of migrants in 2024 were Venezuelans, they said.

Many Venezuelans have been fleeing a prolonged economic collapse in the once-prosperous South American oil-producing nation.

"We are working every day to ensure that illegal migration does not reach Panama City or the rest of the country," Mulino said in a speech to lawmakers on Thursday.

Mulino added that his government has deported 1,548 migrants on flights arranged through an agreement with the United States.

Reuters

Supreme Court's Thomas won't be referred to Justice Dept.

Nate Raymond
REUTERS

A judicial policymaking body on Thursday rejected a request by Democratic lawmakers to refer conservative U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas to the Department of Justice to examine claims that he failed to disclose gifts and travel provided by a wealthy benefactor.

The secretary to the U.S. Judicial Conference, the federal judiciary's top policymaking body, in a pair of letters cited amendments Thomas had made to his annual financial disclosure reports that addressed several issues raised by Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse and Rep. Hank Johnson.

It also in a separate letter declined to refer liberal Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson to the Justice Department based on claims by a conservative group that she failed to disclose the source of her husband's consulting income. Jackson has since amended her disclosures, the letter noted.

The Democratic lawmakers had made their request in an April 2023 letter following reports by ProPublica and others that Thomas, a member of the Supreme Court's 6-3 conservative ma-

majority, had not reported gifts including luxury travel from wealthy Texas businessman and Republican donor Harlan Crow.

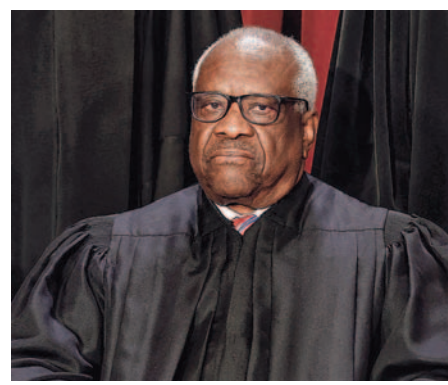
His letter argued that a referral to the Justice Department was warranted on the grounds that Thomas had willfully failed to comply with the financial disclosure requirements of the Ethics in Government Act of 1978.

Thomas has said that he had been advised he did not have to report that type of "personal hospitality" and said he would do so going forward starting with his 2022 annual report, which was filed in August 2023.

U.S. District Judge Robert Conrad, who heads the judiciary's administrative arm and acts as the Judicial Conference's secretary, wrote that the judiciary had been busy since 2023 updating its financial disclosure requirements and making clear when the personal hospitality exemption does not apply.

He said Thomas had filed amended financial disclosure reports since the issues first emerged and that he has agreed to follow the relevant guidance issued to other federal judges, including the new policies.

"We have no reason to believe he has



U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas has said that he had been advised he did not have to report that type of "personal hospitality."

EVELYN HOCKSTEIN/REUTERS

done anything less," Conrad wrote.

In declining to make a referral to the Justice Department, Conrad cited "constitutional questions" about whether the Judicial Conference could do so that require further study.

He also said the lawmakers' request was mooted when Whitehouse with another senator wrote directly to Attorney General Merrick Garland asking him to appoint a special counsel to investigate the same matters.

US appeals court blocks effort to restore landmark net neutrality rules

David Shepardson
REUTERS

WASHINGTON – A U.S. appeals court ruled on Thursday the Federal Communications Commission did not have legal authority to reinstate landmark net neutrality rules.

The decision is a blow to the outgoing Biden administration that had made restoring the open internet rules a priority. President Joe Biden signed a 2021 executive order encouraging the FCC to reinstate the rules.

A three-judge panel of the Cincinnati-based 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals said the FCC lacked authority to reinstate the rules initially implemented in 2015 by the agency under Democratic former President Barack Obama, but then repealed by the commission in 2017 under Republican former President Donald Trump.

Net neutrality rules require internet service providers to treat internet data and users equally rather than restricting access, slowing speeds or blocking content for certain users. The rules also forbid special arrangements in which ISPs give improved network speeds or access to favored users.

The court cited the Supreme Court's June decision in a case known as Loper Bright to overturn a 1984 precedent that had given deference to government agencies in interpreting laws they administer, in the latest decision to curb the authority of federal agencies.

"Applying Loper Bright means we can end the FCC's vacillations," the court ruled.

The decision leaves in place state neutrality rules adopted by California and others but may end more than 20 years of efforts to give federal regulators sweeping oversight over the internet.

Incoming FCC Chair Brendan Carr voted against the reinstatement last year and praised the decision to invalidate what he called Biden's "internet power grab." He vowed to unwind additional regulations.

FCC Chair Jessica Rosenworcel called on Congress to act after the decision.

"Consumers across the country have told us again and again that they want an internet that is fast, open, and fair. With this decision it is clear that Congress now needs to heed their call, take up the charge for net neutrality, and put open internet principles in federal law," Rosenworcel said in a statement.

The FCC voted in April along party lines to reassume regulatory oversight of broadband internet and reinstate open internet rules. Industry groups filed suit and successfully convinced the court to temporarily block the rules as they considered the case.

USTelecom, an industry group whose members include AT&T and Verizon, said in a joint statement with other groups that sued that the ruling is "a victory for American consumers that



FCC Chair Jessica Rosenworcel called on Congress to act after the net neutrality decision.

ALEX WONG/POOL VIA REUTERS FILE

will lead to more investment, innovation, and competition in the dynamic digital marketplace."

Former FCC Chair Ajit Pai said the court ruling should mean the end of efforts to reinstate the rules, and a focus shift to "what actually matters to American consumers – like improving internet access and promoting online innovation."

The Trump administration is unlikely to appeal the decision but net neutrality advocates could seek review by the Supreme Court. The rules would have given the FCC new tools to crack down on Chinese telecom companies and the ability to monitor internet service outages.

A group representing companies including Amazon, Apple, Alphabet and Meta Platforms had backed the FCC net neutrality rules.

FBI shares video, seeking new leads on suspect in Jan. 6 pipe bombs

Andrew Goudsward
REUTERS

WASHINGTON – The FBI on Thursday released new surveillance video in a bid to reinvigorate its four-year hunt for a suspect who placed pipe bombs in Washington the night before the Jan. 6, 2021, assault on the U.S. Capitol.

The previously unreleased footage from Jan. 5, 2021, showed an individual putting a bomb near a bench outside the Democratic National Committee building. The suspect placed another bomb at the Republican headquarters. Both sites are near the Capitol.

Police deactivated the bombs and neither exploded.

Despite receiving more than 600 tips and offering a \$500,000 reward, the FBI has not been able to identify the suspect over the four years since the discovery of the bombs on the same day supporters of then-President Donald Trump stormed Congress trying to stop it from certifying his 2020 election defeat. "We're really hoping we can jog someone's memory," David Sundberg, assistant director in charge of the FBI Washington field office, said. "We do



Security fencing encircles the U.S. Capitol in Washington on Thursday. President-elect Donald Trump's 2024 election victory is set to be certified in Congress on Monday.

EVELYN HOCKSTEIN/REUTERS

believe there are people out there who do know more than has been shared."

It is unclear if the bombs were linked to the Capitol riot, but their discovery nearby on Jan. 6, 2021, diverted police resources and remains one of the enduring mysteries of the day.

President-elect Trump's 2024 election victory is set to be certified in Congress on Monday, before he is sworn in for a second term on Jan. 20.

The FBI said the suspect was about 5 feet, 7 inches tall and released a map of the individual's walking route that night. The suspect's nondescript cloth-

ing and the 15-hour gap between the planting and the discovery of the bombs have impeded investigators.

The FBI has previously released other video of the suspect, who wore distinctive black and gray Nike Air Max Speed Turf shoes.

In the Jan. 6, 2021, melee at the Capitol, rioters surged past police barricades, assaulting about 140 officers and causing more than \$2.8 million in damage. Trump has promised to pardon at least some of the nearly 1,600 people who have been criminally charged for participating in the riot.