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The News & Advance

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Russia grinds deeper into Ukraine after 1,000 days of war

HANNA ARHIROVA
Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — When Russian tanks rolled into Ukraine in February 2022, the conventional wisdom was that the capital, Kyiv, would soon fall and the rest of the country wouldn't last long against a much larger enemy.

Instead, that narrative that quickly collapsed. The Ukrainian army proved it could slow the advance of Russia's forces and, if not drive them out completely, then — with enough support from the West — at least forestall defeat.

But nearly three years later, the

outlook is again grim. Russia is expending huge amounts of weaponry and human life to make small-but-steady territorial gains to the nearly one-fifth of Ukraine it already controls. Ukraine, meanwhile, is struggling to minimize losses, maintain morale and convince allies that, with more military aid, it can turn the tide.

As this brutal war of attrition marked its 1,000th day this week, neither side seems eager to negotiate. President-elect Donald Trump has said he could quickly end the

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A Ukrainian serviceman holds a child crossing the Irpin river March 5, 2022, on an improvised path under a bridge that was destroyed by Ukrainian troops to slow any Russian military advance. Soldiers were helping people flee the town of Irpin, Ukraine.

VADIM GHIRDA,
ASSOCIATED PRESS



PAIGE DINGLER, THE NEWS & ADVANCE

Aretha Eubanks at her home on Wednesday, Nov. 20, 2024.

Homeless to homeowner

With grit, determination, local woman living the American Dream

RACHAEL SMITH
The News & Advance

Despite earning \$16 an hour, a local woman has demonstrated discipline and resilience, going from being homeless to now owning a home, proving that homeownership is achievable with financial education and community support.

"I feel very powerful because I tell people now that I'm a homeowner and I got my own house and that feels good to say that," Lynchburg resident Aretha Eubanks said.

Through community partnerships coming alongside Eubanks, she was able to purchase her first

home located on Pansy Street right off Bedford Avenue in September.

When asked if she ever thought homeownership would be in her future, she simply replied: "I didn't really have a future. I was just trying to get out of my situation I was in."

Kristen Nolan, director of housing services at Miriam's House, has been a longtime advocate and support system for Eubanks.

"Aretha became homeless after her longtime partner passed away suddenly. She had no way to maintain her housing on her own," Nolan said. "She is a fighter and a survivor, someone with immense grit

and determination. I've worked in this field for 12 years, and I can confidently say I've rarely encountered someone as hardworking as Aretha."

In 2015, Eubanks moved into Miriam's House after spending time at the Salvation Army. With the help of the organization, she secured employment and moved into her own apartment by January 2016.

"We kept up through an after-care support group," Nolan said. "It helped her stay connected with resources and other women who had faced similar challenges."

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Fire, EMS funding plan gains momentum

JUSTIN FAULCONER
The News & Advance

BEDFORD — Bedford County officials spent heavy discussion this week on a plan to increase funding for volunteer fire and emergency medical services (EMS) agencies while also stressing a need to recruit more men and women to give of their time in serving those departments.

Janet Blankenship, chief of fire and rescue, presented the funding plan to the Bedford County Board of Supervisors at a work session Monday. The plan focuses on sustaining daily operations, training and maintenance of fire and rescue departments, helping fund apparatus, equipment and facilities upkeep and assisting in overcoming challenges of rising costs and volunteer retention and support.

The county is proposing to establish a new performance and percentage-based funding formula for agencies. The current base funding is \$25,000 for fire and \$34,000 for rescue, according to Blankenship's

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NewsVu QR code.
For video of the proposed Bedford County funding plan for fire and EMS point your smartphone at the QR code, then tap the link. **NEWSVU**

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Weather
Partly sunny
High 62 • Low 33
FORECAST • A12

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Love beyond Christmas.

History shows Trump nominee troubles not unique

MEG KINNARD
Associated Press

Losing a Cabinet nominee to the confirmation process isn't unheard of for incoming presidents — including for Donald Trump when he was elected the first time.

Matt Gaetz's decision to pull his name Thursday from consideration for attorney general — amid continued fallout over a federal sex trafficking investigation — represents the first indication of resistance the president-elect could face from his own party, including picks facing allegations of sexual misconduct or other questions.

Following is a look at some recent difficulties with presidential Cabinet picks and some of the criticism for Trump's current slate.

Republicans voicing their doubts

After Gaetz was chosen last week, Sen. Lind-

sey Graham, a Judiciary Committee member who is among Trump's top Senate allies, predicted Gaetz would "have to answer some tough questions" in a confirmation hearing.

Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, a Trump critic, said of Gaetz, "I do not see him as a serious candidate."

Other Trump picks face questions, too.

Pete Hegseth, Trump's pick for defense secretary, was accused by a woman of sexually assaulting her in 2017. Hegseth has denied the allegations.

Tulsi Gabbard, the former Democratic congresswoman chosen to be director of national intelligence, expressed sympathy for Russia and repeated false Russian theories about Ukrainian bioweapons. Gabbard, a military veteran who became

one of Trump's top 2024 surrogates, attracted criticism for meeting with Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad and has voiced skepticism that Assad was behind chemical attacks on his own people.

Nikki Haley, who was the last major GOP opponent against Trump for this year's presidential nomination, argued against confirming Gabbard, saying the post was "not a place for a Russian, Iranian, Syrian, Chinese sympathizer."

Haley also said Robert F. Kennedy Jr. — Trump's pick to lead the Department of Health and Human Services — should face "hard questions" from senators because of his opposition to vaccines and other views decried by public health officials.

"He's a liberal Democrat, environmental attorney trial lawyer who will now be overseeing 25% of our federal budget and has no background in health care," Haley said. "So some of you may think RFK is cool, some of you may like that he questions what's in our food and what's in our vaccines, but we don't know, when he is given reins to an agency, what decisions he's going to

make behind the scenes."

Republicans will have 53 votes in the Senate in January and can break 50-50 ties with Vice President-elect JD Vance. That means four Republicans would have to break ranks to defeat any nominee if all Democrats oppose a Trump pick.

This has happened before — including to Trump

Every recent president had some doomed Cabinet nominations — including Trump.

In early 2017, Trump's choice for labor secretary was the first Trump nominee to withdraw his name from consideration. Fast food CEO Andrew Puzder's exit came after Republicans expressed concern over his failure to pay taxes promptly on a former housekeeper who wasn't authorized to work in the U.S., and Democrats had complaints about his business record and remarks about women and workers at his company, which owns Hardee's and Carl's Jr.

Puzder's name was floated recently again as a

possible pick in Trump's second administration.

Trump also ousted his first national security adviser, Michael Flynn, after just weeks on the job because Flynn wasn't truthful about his contacts with Russian officials during the transition.

The first year of Trump's first term, Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price resigned after his costly travel triggered investigations that overshadowed the administration's agenda and angered his boss, serving less than eight months. According to the Brookings Institution, which tracks presidential administration turnover, Trump's first term resulted in the turnover of a total of 14 people, nearly twice the amount — eight — of President George H.W. Bush's term in office, a distant second place.

Other presidents' picks

Barack Obama, Bill Clinton and Bush and his son George W. Bush all had to come up with new names after nominees for their Cabinets ran into trouble.

Obama took three tries to find a secretary of commerce. New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson withdrew his name after word surfaced a grand jury was investigating allegations of wrongdoing in the awarding of contracts in his state. Republican Sen. Judd Gregg of New Hampshire backed out citing "irresolvable differences" with the policies of the Democratic president.

In 2001, Linda Chavez, George W. Bush's pick for labor secretary, swiftly withdrew after it emerged she had housed an immigrant living in the country illegally.

Bill Clinton went through several attempts at selecting an attorney general, nominating Janet Reno after his first two choices each withdrew over word that they hired people for household work and babysitting who were in the U.S. illegally.

The Senate rejected George H.W. Bush's defense secretary pick, former Texas Sen. John Tower, in 1989 after several waves of reports over allegations of alcohol abuse and womanizing.

Homeowner

From A1

But when her landlord sold the property where she lived, she was forced to move. With Nolan's help, Eubanks obtained a housing choice voucher and found a new place to live.

"Even when she lost jobs or faced discouragement, she kept going," Nolan said. "She once walked from Rivermont to Candler Mountain Road because her job at a hotel scheduled her on Sundays and there was no bus service. That's the kind of work ethic she has."

Eubanks' ultimate goal was to own a home. In 2019, she began working on improving her credit and exploring down payment assistance programs. Though progress was interrupted by job losses, Eubanks was always able to secure stable employment again.

Jennifer Eaton has a passion for her community and fostering genuine relationships and supporting neighbors in need. She works at Rivermont Evangelical Presbyterian Church as its director of neighborhood outreach.

"We call it in Rivermont, for Rivermont," Eaton said, referring to her church's localized mission. "We're trying to engage the streets and the people living around the building we occupy so that we're not irrelevant or distant."

One of those relationships began with a simple greeting to Eubanks, a neighbor who frequently passed Eaton's daughter's house on Early Street. Over time, this connection grew into a friendship.

"We got acquainted just by saying hello," Eaton said.

Weekly neighborhood cookouts hosted by Eaton and her family on their lawn deepened the bond. Eubanks, who at the time was living in Greenbrier Apartments, would occasionally stop by for a hot dog and conversation.

When Eubanks shared her struggles with housing, Eaton stepped in, not with expertise, but with friendship and connections. Eaton introduced Eubanks to Davina Hunt Bare, a neighborhood friend and the founder of DBHomes4Hope.

Bare specializes in helping individuals navigate barriers to homeownership.

"When people have financial foundation, it's not going to just change Aretha's life, her daughter's life is going to be changed. This is straight from Proverbs that a good man or woman,

in this case, will create an inheritance for his children's children," Bare said.

As Eubanks became a client of Bare, the two met weekly and worked steadily toward her goal of owning a home.

"At first, when I started off with Davina, she said, 'Well, you gotta put this much money up! I said, OK, what I'm going to do now?' So I couldn't do my shopping like I used to. That was out," Eubanks said.

The process wasn't without challenges and Bare wasn't going to hold Eubanks' hand.

"I don't want people to feel coddled. I don't want that because life is going to throw us curveballs and we need to still keep moving forward," Bare said. "I really believe that God allows challenges to happen in our lives so that we can be the best version of ourselves that he's created."

Eubanks started taking \$500 out of her earnings and putting it into savings every time she was paid, the rest would go toward paying bills.

"And then I would sit there until the next pay period," she said, adding that Bare never required her to do that through the program.

Committed to building community with every rental by offering opportunities to create financial stability and generational wealth, DBHomes4Hope has a goal of selling or renting affordable luxury houses to families for a fair price thereby enhancing their lives and offering the hope of homeownership to those who might not otherwise be able to achieve it.

When a house on Pansy Street went up for sale, Eaton saw an opportunity.

"I called the Realtor and shared what we were doing in this part of Rivermont," she said. "We wanted someone invested in the neighborhood, not just an investor, to buy it."

Through a series of introductions, Bare connected with the property's owner and secured an arrangement for Eubanks to purchase the home. Eaton described the process as a testament to faith and community.

"These connections, it's the Lord working on Aretha's behalf," she said.

Through a chance connection, Michael Gillette helped make homeownership a reality for Eubanks offering a pathway that combined his real estate investments with his commitment to empowering others.

"I've been investing in

real estate as part of my retirement portfolio," Gillette said. "I got a call from Davina, who was referred to me by MaryJane Dolan, likely through their connection on the housing authority. Davina asked if I had properties that might fit her model of helping clients improve their credit and ultimately buy homes."

Bare introduced Gillette to Eubanks, a potential homeowner who had been working diligently to improve her credit and financial stability. Though Eubanks wasn't quite ready for a conventional loan, her dedication and progress inspired Gillette to explore an alternative.

"It sounded like such a compelling story," he said. "I was preparing to sell a small house and it seemed like a mutually beneficial arrangement to offer her 100% owner financing. It would help her get into the house now, further build her credit and allow her to refinance with a traditional loan in a couple of years."

On moving day, a local organization, No Walls, provided a truck and volunteers to help Eubanks settle into her new home. Despite the pouring rain, the community came together to celebrate her move.

Eaton laughed about a detail in the house's real estate listing.

"It described the neighborhood as one full of people who know and love each other, host weekly cookouts and engage the children in activities," she said. "We're an amenity!"

For Eaton, this work is personal.

"This neighborhood is special," she said. "Many families have lived here for decades. Our heart is for people to be able to stay and thrive in their homes."

Bare continues to help others who hope to achieve the same goals as Eubanks in either homeownership or just financial freedom.

"I want other people to know that if they're making \$15 an hour, they can become a homeowner too," she said. It's not out of reach, because some people think that it's just for those type people. But no, the goodness of America is for everybody. Just help your neighbors."

Gillette said that Eubanks' determination played a critical role in the process.

"She deserves a lot of credit," he said. "She's paying a fair interest rate and is fully taking on the responsibility of homeownership."

Pride of ownership is

beneficial not just for the homeowner, but for the whole neighborhood, Gillette said.

"Homeownership can help build intergenerational wealth, which is a powerful way to break cycles of poverty," he said.

Gillette said the collaborative effort required to make stories like this possible, come from Bare's guidance, the city's commitment to affordable housing and organizations such as Miriam's House.

"It takes all these partners working together — housing authorities, dedicated individuals like Davina and homeowners willing to work hard to achieve their dreams."

Eubanks now works 40 hours per week in the kitchen at Truss on Bedford Avenue, a short walk from her new home on Pansy Street.

"Every time I see her, she shows me pictures of food she's learned to prepare. She's thriving in her job and it's so fulfilling to see

her excited about her work," Nolan said.

Nolan said she has worked with thousands of clients and Eubanks is the only one she knows who has achieved homeownership.

"The biggest achievement here is Aretha's unyielding determination," Nolan said. "She never gave up and I couldn't be prouder of her."

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