

Kansas City-area seniors voice fears for the country’s future. ‘I’m afraid’

BY JONATHAN SHORMAN
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Former Social Security Administrator Martin O’Malley and Rep. Emanuel Cleaver had spent over an hour at a Lee’s Summit retirement village talking about how President Donald Trump risked destabilizing the federal program when a small woman with an Austrian accent spoke up.

“My question concerns the constitutional issue,” asked 78-year-old Christl Webster. “What happens if the president does not obey a ruling by the Supreme Court? The Supreme Court does not have an army.”

Webster had her reasons for concern.

A former Fulbright scholar who came to the United States in the early 1970s to study, she became a citizen in 1981 after marrying an American. But her path to citizenship was treacherous – she recalled receiving deportation notices and having to hire an immigration lawyer.

She’s set to travel to Turkey in the coming weeks, Webster said in an interview, but her U.S. passport lists her country of birth as Austria, not America. U.S. citizens must be allowed back into the country, but the worry was evident in her voice.

“I have global entry, I have TSA, but I’m still...”



Former Social Security Administrator Martin O'Malley and Rep. Emanuel Cleaver speak to seniors at John Knox Village in Lee's Summit.

Webster said, her voice trailing off.

O’Malley and Cleaver, a Kansas City Democrat, hosted a town hall-style gathering at John Knox Village, a senior living community, to discuss Social Security. O’Malley, a former Maryland governor who ran the agency during President Joe Biden’s administration, has become a vocal critic of Trump’s approach to the agency, which he warns risks its ability to deliver benefits on time and without interruption.

But many of the ques-

tions from the roughly 100 seniors in attendance spoke to the deep unease, even fear, they feel over the country’s direction.

While O’Malley and Cleaver certainly fielded questions about Social Security – was something a scam, what’s Medicare’s role, how will artificial intelligence affect the program – several others struck a more ominous tone.

“I cannot understand why the Democrats don’t do more? Why don’t you get out front? Why?” one person asked.

“My question is for the congressman. Why don’t you develop a plan like the Republicans did, like Project 2025?” asked another.

Afterward, Webster said President John F. Kennedy had been her idol growing up. She had pictures of him and had seen him when he came to Vienna. Now the United States’ international reputation is suffering, she said.

“I always wanted to come to America,” Webster said. “Not to stay but to experience it, and then

I got married – it just happened – but we are losing something that is irreversible.”

TRUMP’S DEFIANT TONE

While the Trump administration faces legal challenges on numerous fronts, the White House has moved closest to open defiance of the courts on immigration policy.

For weeks, lawyers for Kilmar Abrego Garcia have sought to bring him back to the United States after the administration deported him to a prison in El Salvador despite a court order prohibiting the government from sending him to that country. The U.S. Supreme Court has ordered federal officials to facilitate his release but he remains in El Salvador’s custody.

The Trump administration has struck a defiant tone. The president has sought to link Abrego Garcia to the gang MS-13, despite a lack of evidence.

“This is the gang that is, perhaps, the worst of them all. What is wrong with our Country?” Trump asked on social media recently.

Republican lawmakers in Missouri have voiced support for Trump’s approach and instead attacked Democrats.

“The Democrats want unfettered mass migration and a problem so big they can pitch mass amnesty as the solution,” Sen. Eric Schmitt, a Missouri Republican, wrote on social media on Monday. “Hell No.”

During the Lee’s Summit event, Cleaver responded to Webster’s question by saying the country’s founders hadn’t anticipated a president who would defy the courts.

“It’s called a constitu-

tional crisis because there is no road. We don’t know what could happen,” Cleaver said.

At other points, Cleaver urged the audience to raise their voices while cautioning that change wouldn’t happen overnight. The 11-term congressman and former Kansas City mayor told reporters that he’s trying to explain that Democrats are doing everything they can do legally.

O’Malley said, “we all keep defaulting to the America in which we grew up” – with norms like the rule of law – but that Trump “has now taken it beyond any of those guardrails.” He said it made the transgressions of President Richard Nixon, who resigned amid the Watergate scandal, almost look quaint.

“I would support Nixon returning,” Cleaver joked.

More seriously, Cleaver said he has never seen the level of concern and worry from his constituents, even dating back to his time in local Kansas City politics.

“I’ve never seen anything remotely like this,” Cleaver said. “This is a nightmare compared to whatever we’ve dealt with in the past. Every meeting. Every meeting.”

As Webster prepares for her trip to Turkey, she said her level of concern is “very high – I’m afraid.”

When Webster asked her question during the meeting, she said that until recently, she was a “very, very proud” citizen, eliciting scattered chuckles.

“I’m still a very proud citizen,” she said.

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Russian missiles pummel Kyiv, prompting rebuke from Trump

BY KIM BARKER AND MARIA VARENIKOVA
NYT News Service

KYIV, UKRAINE

Russia killed at least 12 people and injured 90 others in a huge attack on the Ukrainian capital early Thursday, prompting President Donald Trump to issue a rare public critique of Moscow just hours after he lashed out at President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine.

The assault was the deadliest on the capital, Kyiv, since the summer. Explosions shook buildings and sent more than 16,000 people into the subway system to take shelter; clouds of smoke rose over the city as the sun came up.

One missile hit a two-story building with 12 apartments where emergency workers hunted for survivors. A five-story building next door lost all its windows. People stood outside, staring at the damage and talking on their

phones, telling loved ones that they were alive. No military target was visible nearby.

Zelenskyy said nearly 70 missiles, including ballistic ones, and about 150 attack drones had targeted cities across the country – although Kyiv was the hardest hit.

Before cutting short a trip to South Africa, Zelenskyy said at a news conference there that he saw no indication Russia was being pressured to agree to a ceasefire. He said with more pressure brought on Moscow, “we will be able to get closer to a complete, unconditional ceasefire.” To him, Zelenskyy added, the attack on Kyiv instead appeared intended to pressure the United States.

About the same time, Trump lashed out at President Vladimir Putin of Russia about the attack, showing how his administration’s positions can seem to flip-flop without warning.

“Vladimir, STOP!” Trump posted on Truth Social, saying that he was “not happy” with the Russian strikes on Kyiv. “Not necessary, and very bad timing,” the post added.

The attack came hours after Trump and his top aides demanded that Kyiv accept a U.S.-designed plan that would seemingly grant Russia all of the territory it has gained in the war, which started with Russia’s full-scale invasion in February 2022. The plan also offers Ukraine only vague assurances about future security. So far, Zelenskyy has said Ukraine cannot accept such a deal.

Since Trump took office in January, his administration has echoed Kremlin talking points in the war, a reversal of previous U.S. policy under the Biden administration. Over the past week, the Trump administration has repeatedly threatened to walk away from the peace process, claiming that the two sides were both intransigent. On Wednesday, planned peace talks in London were downgraded, largely because the United States decided not to attend.

Trump later called Zelenskyy “inflammatory” in

a post on social media and said the Ukrainian president would only “prolong the ‘killing field.’”

“The president’s frustrated; his patience is running very thin,” White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters later Wednesday. She echoed Trump in appearing to blame Zelenskyy, saying that Ukraine’s leader seemed to be “moving in the wrong direction.”

On Thursday, in his Truth Social post, Trump said he wanted to “get the Peace Deal DONE!”

Zelenskyy earlier pointed out that in March Ukraine accepted a U.S. proposal for a 30-day ceasefire but that Putin has refused to agree to that plan. While Putin did announce a temporary truce for Easter Sunday, it seemed more of a public relations stunt than a ceasefire along the front lines. Ukrainian cities, at least, were largely spared for the truce’s 30 hours.

Ukrainian officials have said that Russia has only intensified attacks against civilians since the start of U.S.-led peace negotiations.

Andriy Yermak, the Ukrainian president’s chief of staff, posted a video on social media showing emergency workers Thursday. “Once again, Russia strikes civilians,” he said. Other Ukrainian officials urged Western partners to replenish Ukraine’s air defenses.

Colombian man dies in ICE custody at jail in central Missouri

BY NATHAN PILLING
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A Colombian man being held in U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement custody at a local jail in central Missouri died earlier this month, the agency said.

The man, Brayan Rayo-Garzon, died April 8 after he was found unresponsive at the Phelps County Jail, in Rolla — which is about 100 miles west of St. Louis — the agency said.

ICE said Rayo-Garzon entered the country without authorization near San Ysidro, California, in November 2023.

Rayo-Garzon was being held in ICE custody after an immigration judge ordered he be deported to Colombia in June 2024, the agency said.

ICE said he was previ-

ously arrested for shoplifting in 2024. The agency then arrested him in March after another arrest for credit card fraud by the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department, it said.

Asked about the circumstances and cause of death, ICE spokesperson Alethea Smock told The Star in an email that no other information was available about the death.

“Consistent with ICE protocols, the appropriate components were notified about the death, including the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General and the ICE Office of Professional Responsibility,” ICE said in a news release. “Additionally, ICE notified the next of kin.”

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