# The Boston Blobe

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## Criticized, FDA curbs Biogen drug's use

Will restrict Alzheimer's treatment to early stages

> By Jonathan Saltzman and Anissa Gardizy GLOBE STAFF

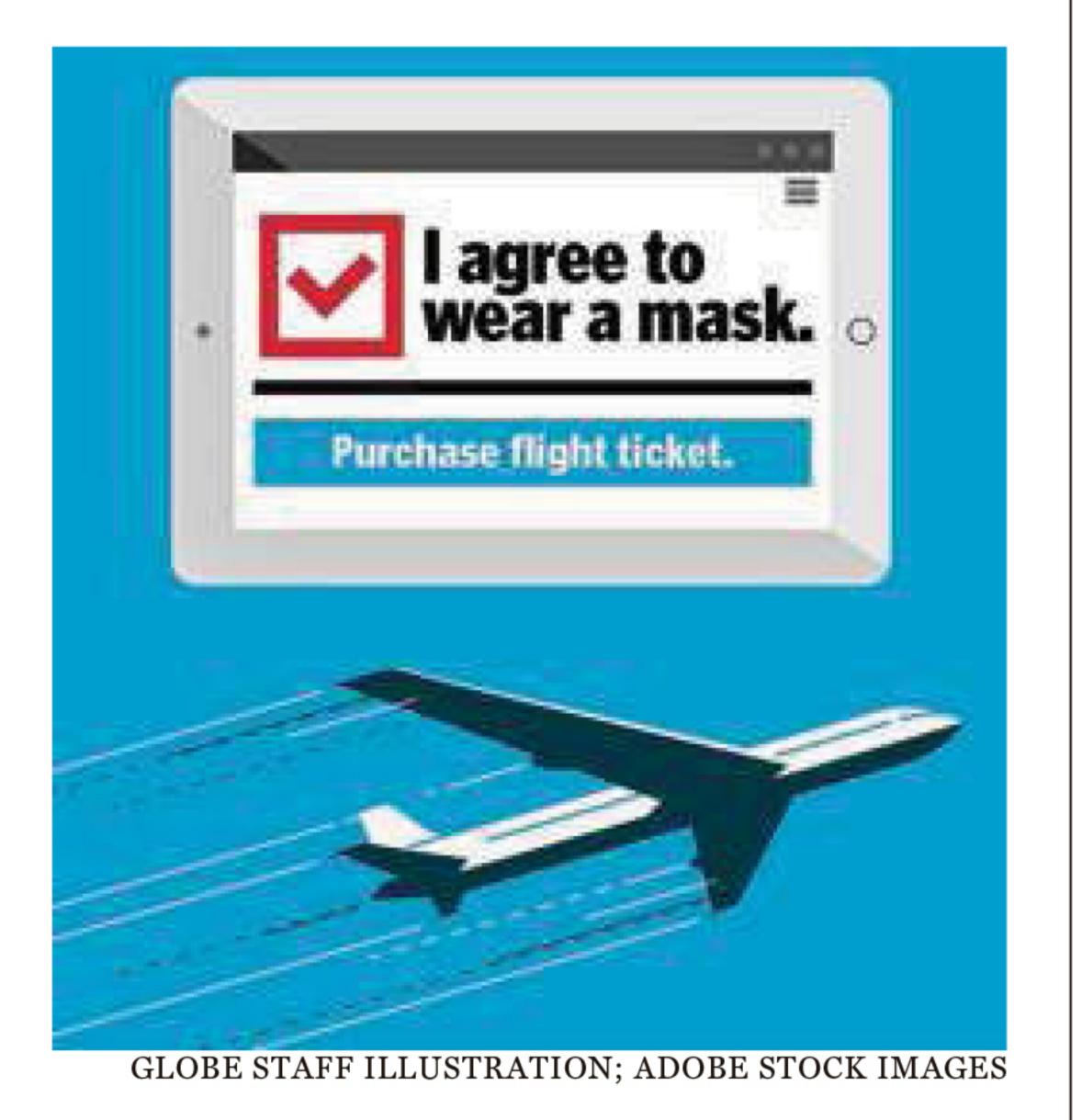
The US Food and Drug Administration, which approved Biogen's controversial new drug for Alzheimer's disease despite scant evidence that it works, narrowed its recommended use of the medicine on Thursday to patients with early symptoms, citing "confusion regarding the intended population for treatment."

Biogen had already said Aduhelm was meant for Alzheimer's patients with mild cognitive impairment, the group studied by the Cambridge drug maker in three clinical trials. But the FDA didn't limit the medication to those people, who number 1 million to 2 million in the United States, when it approved Aduhelm on June 7, raising the specter that anyone diagnosed with the disease — an estimated 6 million Americans — might seek it.

A recent analysis by the news site STAT found that if all 5.8 million Medicare-eligible adults with Alzheimer's took the drug — with a price tag of \$56,000 a year for the average patient — it would cost the government \$334.5 billion, or nearly half the budget of the entire Department of Defense.

The FDA, which has been trying to justify Aduhelm's approval even though its own expert advisory panel recommended against it, conceded Thursday that its original usage language was confusing to some doctors and patients.

"Hearing those concerns," the FDA said in an e-mail to the Globe, the agency "believes that it was important to clarify the intent" of the label approved for Aduhelm. The FDA said "it is appropriate to initiate treatment in patients with the mild cognitive impairment or **BIOGEN, Page A8** 



## An innocent's mistake? Doesn't fly with me

Christopher Muther

**COMMENTARY** 

There are two sides to every story, except in the case of American Airlines Flight 893, where there really is only one side.

The tale begins with the flight from Charlotte, N.C., to the Bahamas and a pair of delays — one technical, and one caused by a student (or possibly students) from Winthrop High School refusing to wear a mask. For those who haven't flown since the pandemic began, when you buy an airline ticket, you are required to tick a box that says you agree to wear a mask during your flight. There's no rogue Nurse Ratched-like flight attendant roaming the aisle and enforcing this CDC mandate out of pure sadism.

Trust me, they dislike telling you to wear a mask as much as you probably dislike wearing

The action of the student (or students), who ticked the mask-agreement box when purchasing a ticket, reportedly prevented what should have been a two-hour flight from ever leaving the airport, resulting in a plane full of reasonable, mask-wearing people to miss a day of their Bahamas vacation when the flight was

**MUTHER, Page A7** 

### Taking on global cybercrime — from Davis Square



CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF

"This is an enormous opportunity," said Christopher Ahlberg, chief executive of Recorded Future in Somerville.

Security firm provides key data to US on Capitol insurrection, big breaches

> By Pranshu Verma GLOBE STAFF

As the United States grapples with a sharp rise in cyberattacks, one of the nation's first lines of defense operates out of an unlikely location: a former laundromat in Somerville, where an army of private-sector analysts track the world's most notorious hackers and criminals.

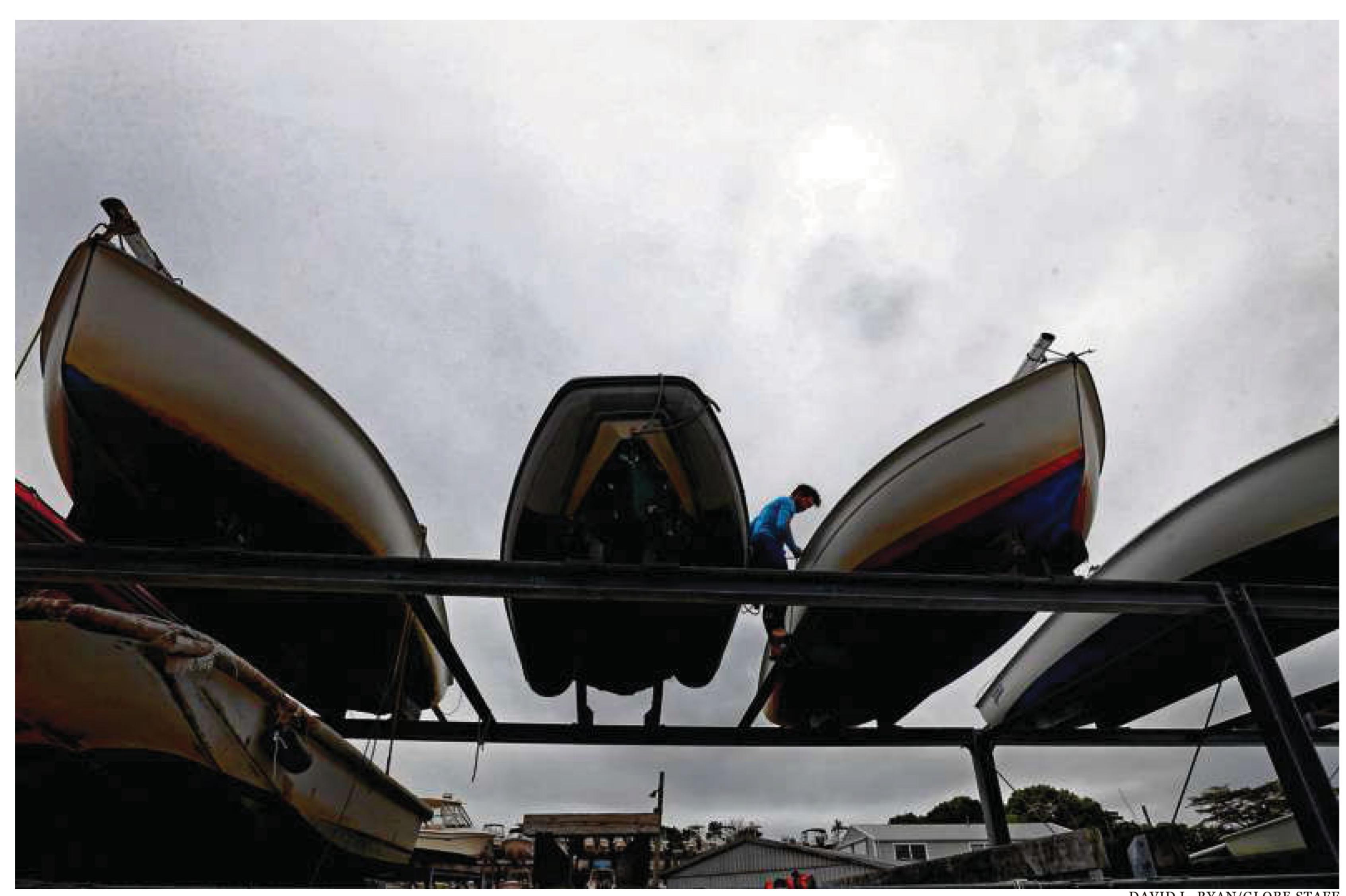
Despite the unassuming headquarters in Davis Square, the team at Recorded Future provides the highest reaches of the US government with intelligence on the country's most prominent breaches, both digital and physical.

The security firm tracked communications from pro-Trump rioters and other sources in online forums during the Jan. 6 insurrection, providing real-time information to US officials about their motivations once inside the Capitol.

In May, when DarkSide, a Russian cyber hacking group, shut down a major oil pipeline for ransom, US officials asked Recorded Future to help figure out who orchestrated the attack, employees

And on July 2, when another cyber criminal group launched what may be the largest ransomware attack in history, impacting hundreds of businesses, analysts at Recorded Future set about advising their many customers in the industry on how to protect themselves from a similar hack. They also confirmed for their clients that the Russian group REvil was behind the attack and was

CYBER DEFENSE, Page A9



DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

#### BRACING FOR ELSA

With the tropical storm making its way up the Atlantic Coast, Jim Flynn tied off boats taken from Duxbury Bay on Thursday. The storm is expected to bring high winds and heavy rain to much of the state Friday morning. **B1.** 

#### RC leader dismisses students' criticism as 'attack'

Offers no apology and says more counseling needed

By Laura Crimaldi, Naomi Martin, and James Vaznis GLOBE STAFF

The international organization that promotes Re-evaluation Counseling, an unorthodox brand of peer counseling, is dismissing criticism by Boston students who said they were pressured to participate in traumatizing sessions, calling it an "attack" on what they consider a powerful form of therapy.

In a five-page e-mail to RC members obtained

by the Globe, Tim Jackins, the leader of RC, referred only obliquely but unmistakably to the controversy in Boston, where the school district is investigating the use of Re-evaluation Counseling in the school-sponsored student government group, the Boston Student Advisory Council.

In the letter, Jackins said attacks on RC are brought on by critics' unresolved personal traumas, and advised members to stay level-headed and human "even when a large number of people are showing how bad their lives have been" by redirecting the "distress at us."

In fact, he suggested that the best way to resolve the situation is for all involved to participate

in more RC sessions to neutralize that distress. He encouraged members to support those who have made mistakes, though he did not specify or acknowledge any particular missteps. And he referred RC members to a new website that offers positive perspectives on RC, urging members to

tell friends and family what RC truly is about. Jackins, who is based near Seattle and leads a movement that claims to have a presence in 93 countries, cast the situation as an opportunity to "push ourselves forward, learning and growing together, so we come out of this period in better

shape [condition] than we were before." COUNSELING, Page B4



**CRISIS IN HAITI** — Two suspects in the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse were taken to the police station in Port-au-Prince on Thursday. The political storm intensified as two competing prime ministers claimed the right to run the country. A4.

#### Sacklers agree to pay \$4b for role in opioid crisis

Mass. will get \$90m for addiction programs

By Priyanka Dayal McCluskey GLOBE STAFF

More than a dozen states, including Massachusetts, have reached a settlement with the Sackler family and its disgraced drug company, Purdue Pharma, that requires the Sacklers to pay more than \$4 billion for their role in perpetuating the devastating opioid crisis.

The agreement bans the Sacklers from the opioid business, requires Purdue to make public more than 30 million documents, and orders the company to stop operating or be sold by 2024, Attorney General Maura Healey said Thursday.

The Sacklers must pay \$4.325 billion to combat the opioid epidemic over the next nine years, including an estimated \$90 million directed to Massachusetts.

The settlement caps years of legal disputes as states tried to hold accountable the country's most notorious manufacturer of prescription painkillers for its part in the opioid epidemic. More than 500,000 people in the United States have died from overdoses of legal

**PURDUE PHARMA, Page A8** 

The man accused of attacking a rabbi outside a Jewish day school in Brighton was motivated by antisemitism and acted alone, prosecutors said. **B1.** 

The US military operation in Afghanistan will end on Aug. 31, President Biden said as he gave his reasons for exiting the nearly 20-year war. A2.

All fans were banned from the Tokyo **Olympics** as Japan reinstituted a state of emergency as it continued to struggle with a resurgence of COVID-19. C1.

Genetic factors increase the likelihood that someone will be infected with **COVID-19** and develop a serious case of the disease, a new study found. **B5.** 

#### Into the wild

Friday: Windy and rainy. High 73-78. Low 67-72.

Saturday: Some sun, humid. High 74-79. Low 63-68. Sunrise: 5:16 Sunset: 8:22

Weather and Comics, G6-7.

Obituaries, C11.

Suggested retail price \$3.00



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## Taking on global cybercrime — from Davis Square

**► CYBER DEFENSE** 

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charging a \$70 million ransom. Those episodes underscore how Recorded Future, which received a \$50 million contract last year to advise US Cyber Command, has seen skyrocketing demand for its intelligence products. And now, as President Biden looks to strengthen US cyber defenses and corporations look to protect their networks and supply chains, Recorded Future is looking to cement its own dominance in the market.

"We're trying to be the Bloomberg of cyber," said Christopher Ahlberg, the company's chief executive, referencing Bloomberg LP, the data and news organization that is the dominant source of financial information for global trading markets. "This is an enormous opportunity."

Recorded Future was formed in 2009 to predict significant events, such as civil unrest, for defense and financial analysts by analyzing social media and other public forums. It was backed by GV, formerly known as Google Ventures, and the CIA's venture arm In-Q-Tel, among others. But the company hit its stride after focusing on cybersecurity.

In 2019, Recorded Future was bought out by Insight Partners, a New York-based venture capital firm, for \$780 million. The company has nearly 600 employees, with satellite offices in Washington, D.C., Sweden, London, and Singapore. Prior to starting Recorded Future, Ahlberg ran Spotfire, a business intelligence firm that was acquired by TIBCO in 2007.

The premise of Recorded Future is to use analysts and software to scour the dark web, chat forums, and social media, and provide a real-time view of cyberattacks and other events. (The dark web hosts websites that require special software to find.)

When logged onto the company's platform, its customers which range from financial institutions and manufacturers to government intelligence entities gain access to a vast array of cyber intelligence, searchable through different modules.

Customers can read research reports, access intelligence data on hacking groups, and visually track emerging cyber threats across the world. In many cases, clients can see the IP addresses that digital criminals use, the domains from which they launch their malware, and even their physical locations. Access to the platform can cost anywhere from \$100,000 to \$5 million per year, Ahlberg said.

Lauren Zabierek, executive director of the Cyber Project at the Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center, said having this level of intelligence prevents US officials from having to "start out from zero" or spend time finding out essential information when defending against cyber threats.

"It's important to free yourself up . . . to be able to do higher-order analysis," said Zabierek, a former intelligence officer in the US Air Force and one-time Recorded Future employee.

Roman Sannikov, director of cybercrime and underground intelligence at Recorded Future, said that in recent months, as cyberattacks have spiked, the company has "seen an increase in inquiries" from the federal government.

Around May 7, when Dark-Side shut down Colonial Pipeline — one of the nation's largest providers of fuel — federal officials reached out to Recorded Future wanting to know if the ransomware attack was carried out by a foreign government, Sannikov said.

Based on research Recorded Future had done on the hacking group, they knew Russia hosted its operations. But it was unclear whether the attackers were based in the country, or doing it with the backing of the Kremlin, he added.

Analysts went onto the dark web, Telegram channels, and private chat rooms of ransom-



CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF

#### We're trying to be the Bloomberg of cyber.'

CHRISTOPHER AHLBERG, chief executive of Recorded Future

ware attackers they had previously infiltrated to see what was being said. If there was government coordination, it would likely be talked about there, Sannikov said, but nothing of the sort was mentioned.

"We were able to narrow down quickly" that a nationstate, such as Russia, did not orchestrate the attack, he said, adding that it was "clearly done for profit." (In the following days, Biden said that Russia had not orchestrated the attack, but still bore responsibility for hosting the group's operations.)

The company also tracks cyber activity, in real time, related to attacks and other events as they unfold.

On Jan. 6, as the pro-Trump

mob of insurrectionists moved from the White House to the Capitol, analysts at Recorded Future were tracking their every step. Sannikov huddled with his team — spread between Massachusetts, New York, and Washington, D.C. — to scour the dark web. They also scanned public forums such as 4chan, 8kun, Gab, and Twitter for clues of what could happen next.

They found Russian media outlets, such as RT and Sputnik, embedded in the Capitol mob and reporting live. Soon, the team started hearing "chatter" from Russian sources on various forums that protesters wanted to bring USB drives into the Capitol and take lawmakers' laptops out, Sannikov said.

Recorded Future provided that information in "pretty much real time" to clients, including intelligence officials in Washington, Sannikov said. "It seemed to me that they were not yet aware of that," he added.

Months later, after the Office of the Director of National Intelligence released its report documenting the Jan. 6 attack, the group's findings were featured, employees said. The report outlined how rioters used social media platforms to plan and carry out the breach. And sources familiar with the situation stated that Recorded Future's intelligence informed the US government's response to the threats.

While much of the informa-

tion Recorded Future gets can be accessed on the dark web, or through forums accessible to the public, its business model can be ethically tricky. To keep abreast of enemy technology, the company creates fake aliases to gather intelligence from potentially nefarious actors, such as North Korean hackers.

The privacy of US citizens is also a concern, experts say.

Tom Davenport, a professor of information technology and management at Babson College, said that while Recorded Future's products are "quite valuable" to the intelligence community, "there is some potential danger" of people innocently doing something on their computer and unknowingly looking like a cybersecurity threat.

"There ought to be some way you could appeal to organizations like Recorded Future and say, 'Here's the evidence that I wasn't doing anything bad or dangerous," he added.

Despite these concerns, Recorded Future has amassed nearly 1,000 clients. Last year, it brought in over \$140 million in revenue, a 50 percent increase from 2019. Recorded Future plans to become a public company within eighteen months, Ahlberg said.

The firm's ambitions are also widening. Last year, it started a news gathering operation, called The Record, to disseminate cyber intelligence news. In March, it acquired Gemini Advisory, a dark web intelligence firm, for \$52 million. In June, the group poured \$20 million into a venture fund to back early-stage startups in cybersecurity. And last week, Sir Alex Younger, the head of the British spy agency MI6 until last September, joined its board.

It all adds up to one thing, according to Ahlberg: "We want to be the intelligence platform of the free world."

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