

A p.m. storm 78/65 • Tomorrow: A brief shower 77/66 B6

Democracy Dies in Darkness

MONDAY, MAY 6, 2024 · **\$3**

Tensions on rise in Maryland primary

Democratic hopefuls ramp up rhetoric in race for key U.S. Senate seat

BY ERIN COX, LATESHIA BEACHUM AND JOE HEIM

Voters on the bus chartered by Rep. David Trone (D-Md.) rolled deep into his opponent's home turf Friday in Bowie, past a cardboard cutout of Prince George's County Executive Angela D. Alsobrooks's profile towering over a sea of campaign signs

signs.

"Thank you, ma'am. Thank you for coming out," Trone said, welcoming the senior citizens arriving at an early voting site in the city's gymnasium. A campaign staffer retrieved a woman's collapsed walker and opened it, setting it on the sidewalk so that she could get to the polls.

A day before, Alsobrooks (D) had line danced with supporters outside the same gym, noting the historic potential of her candidacy as early voting began in the most expensive political race in state history. The once-overlooked U.S. Senate contest catapulted to national prominence with the surprise entrance of a formidable Republican opponent, the popular former governor Larry Hogan.

Whoever emerges victorious from the increasingly contentious primary battle May 14 will carry the weight of protecting Maryland's reliably Democratic seat against an onslaught of spending from Republicans who recruited Hogan into what's now among a handful of races that could tip the balance of power in the Senate.

With days remaining to sway voters, the race is increasingly barbed.

Attack ads have started to proliferate. Trone has already poured more than \$54 million of his personal fortune into the race, outspending Alsobrooks 10 to 1 and saturating airwaves

across the state for months.

A political action committee

SEE MARYLAND ON A5



SPENCER PLATT/GETTY IMAGES

In a troubled era, a cloud of chaos

his has been a superlative spring, in the worst ways. The largest campus protest movement of the 21st century. The first criminal trial of a former U.S. president. Some of the most restrictive abortion laws in the nation. And, on top of it all, two world-rattling wars whose horrific daily death tolls are so often overshadowed by domestic crises.

From coast to coast, Americans have been thrust under a cloud of chaos that seems to thicken with every breakingnews alert. And in an already contentious and consequential election year, there is seemingly no relief ahead.

"Everything is on fire," said Preeti Kulkarni, a freshman at George Washington University, whose campus in the nation's capital has been riven by clashes over Israel's war in Gaza.

For those who lived through the anti-apartheid protests in the 1980s, or the Vietnam War demonstrations of the '60s and '70s, the current tumult — and the way it has collided with broader social and political upheaval — echoes some especially tense times in the country's history.

But if the present moment has been one of discontent, it has also been one

Amid college protests, wars overseas and Trump's trial, is everything 'on fire'?

> BY REIS THEBAULT AND HANNAH NATANSON

Pro-Palestinian protesters last week at City College of New York as police there and across the United States crack down on demonstrations. In a

on demonstrations. In a tumultuous time, there seems to be no relief in sight from

crises both at home and abroad

of dissonance. Polling shows that nearly 80 percent of Americans are generally satisfied with their personal lives. Yet roughly the same share is dissatisfied with the direction the country is headed. Unemployment is at its lowest level in decades, yet voters continue to register their displeasure with President Biden's handling of the economy.

And despite wall-to-wall coverage of campus protests, in one national survey of young people — conducted before the latest round of uprisings — the Israel-Gaza war rated near the bottom of issues that respondents said were most important to them overall. In that same poll, just 17 percent of college students said they had attended a political rally or demonstration.

Still, historians confirm that this is a troubled and exceptional era, in which deep divisions have infected nearly every inch of public life, from politics to pop culture.

"There has been an erosion of democratic values and a rising political tribalism that I think is extremely SEE CHAOS ON A6

Columbia protests: Student radio station reports on occupation rivet listeners. **A3**

Car tech outruns federal oversight

RISKS, DEATHS WITH SELF-DRIVEN AUTOS

Critics say NHTSA is reactive, not proactive

BY IAN DUNCAN

Carl Hunter was driving his Tesla Model S home on a highway northeast of Seattle last month. The Autopilot system was turned on and he was looking at his phone, Hunter later told police. He heard a bang as the vehicle lurched forward, ramming into a motorbike.

"I'm not sure how it happened," Hunter said as he called 911 from the scene. "But I am freaking out."

Jeffrey Nissen, the bike's 28year-old rider, was trapped under the Tesla, according to police. He died at the scene

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The crash happened four months after scrutiny by federal regulators led Tesla to recall more than 2 million cars to fix safety risks in the Autopilot system. The death added to the toll of at least 20 Tesla crashes under review since the recall, raising concerns not just about the effectiveness of Tesla's fix, but also the adequacy of oversight by the nation's auto safety regulator, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)

tration (NHTSA).

Critics say incidents like Nissen's death show in stark terms how the agency is struggling to keep pace with risks introduced on American highways by Tesla's driver-assistance system, as well as similar technology being advertised to consumers by other car manufacturers, from Ford to Mercedes.

Some say NHTSA has taken an overly deferential approach to industry in an era of profound automotive innovation, one that promises to make driving easier but creates new risks on the road. Nearly a decade since Tesla first rolled out Autopilot, the agency has yet to set basic standards for self-driving technology.

"Their risk-averse approach to regulation puts drivers at greater SEE **REGULATORS** ON **A7**

At Vatican, transgender sex workers find acceptance

The pope's outreach has prompted backlash while also altering the lives of those he met

BY ANTHONY FAIOLA AND STEFANO PITRELLI IN VATICAN CITY

ea gulls soared over St. Peter's Square as Laura Esquivel, clad in tight leather pants, aimed herself toward the high walls of the Holy See. "It's not too much? My makeup?" she asked, self-consciously touching a rouged cheek. "I don't care what people think. But this is the pope."

She hurried into the Vatican's cavernous Paul VI Audience Hall and was ushered to the front row. Before her, a 23-foot-tall bronze sculpture of Jesus gazed down. Behind her, the faithful flashed curious looks.

It was the third papal meeting for Laura, 57, a saucy Paraguayan sex worker who, in her realest moments, described herself as "una travesti," outdated Spanish slang for "a transgender woman." She lived by a code: Tough girls don't cry. But the first time Pope Francis had blessed her, she couldn't suppress her tears.



ALESSANDRO PENSO FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Laura Esquivel prays inside the Church of the Immaculate Blessed Virgin in Torvaianica, Italy. She had lost her faith before her meetings with Pope Francis at the Vatican.

Residents accuse Israelis of West Bank executions

Military denies claims of using human shields in raid against militants

BY KAREEM FAHIM AND SUFIAN TAHA

NUR SHAMS, WEST BANK — When Israeli soldiers arrived at Mohamad Abu Sweilem's door and summoned his son during a raid on this Palestinian refugee camp, he pleaded with the soldiers to take him instead.

He could not fathom why the Israelis wanted Rajai, a 39-year-old father of four who worked at the family hardware store and was not a militant, he said. The soldiers, who had been in the camp for days, did not seem to know who his son was, or care much: They never asked for identification, his family said. Still, they led him away.

Less than a minute later, Mohamad heard gunshots, and his

son's voice crying out in pain, he said. The family found Rajai's body hours later, after the soldiers had withdrawn. They suspect soldiers used him as a human shield to confront militants in a downstairs apartment and then shot him, a claim the Israeli military denies.

Residents across Nur Shams accused the Israeli army of using brutal tactics during its raid on militants last month. For more than 50 hours, starting April 18, people were trapped in their homes as electricity, water and internet to the area were cut off. When they emerged, they found roads torn up, houses wrecked and bodies in alleyways.

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The incursion was the latest in a series of Israeli raids in West Bank cities that have made the past few years the deadliest in decades for Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied territory, with 2024 on pace to be even more SEE WEST BANK ON A9

Cease-fire talks: A breakthrough in negotiations is still elusive. **A12**

IN THE NEWS

Luncheon rant Former president Donald Trump lashed out at prosecutors and the Biden administration during a private event at his Mar-a-Lago Club in Florida. A4

Shear will At the "Sheep to Shawl" contest at the Maryland Sheep and Wool festival, contestants race to make sartorial art. B1

THE NATION

A study said increased school segregation in recent years has been driven by policy choices. A3 A rift with Trump led the RNC's top lawyer to resign, people close to the matter say. A4

THE WORLD

In Burkina Faso, a dance troupe threatened by Islamist violence performed at a nationwide competition. A8 Israel moved to shut down Al Jazeera's operations in the country. A12

THE ECONOMY

As passwords become passé, Microsoft is letting customers log into accounts with "passkeys" that use biometric authentication. Al3

The etiquette of AI political campaigning is still being hashed out, but there are still some dos and don'ts to it. Al3

THE REGION

D.C. leaders are endorsing an effort to raise the six-year college completion rate among the city's students to 80 percent by 2050. B1

An activist for animal

rights sued the University of Wisconsin and NIH for blocking her online comments. B1

STYLE TikTok's sponsorship of the Met Cole is india

of the Met Gala is indicative of the app's increasing influence in the world of high fashion. C1

SPORTS Sierra Leone's close loss at the Kentucky Derby wasn't the first heartbreak for veteran trainer Chad Brown. DI
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