Partly sunny 39/28 • Tomorrow: Partly sunny 42/31 B6

Democracy Dies in Darkness

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2024 · \$3

Photos released in hunt for N.Y. killer

Bullet casings may offer clues in brazen slaying of UnitedHealthcare CEO

BY SHAYNA JACOBS,
DANIEL GILBERT,
MARK BERMAN
AND SAMUEL OAKFORD

NEW YORK — Authorities on Thursday continued hunting for the attacker who gunned down health insurance executive Brian Thompson in Midtown Manhattan, releasing images of someone wanted in connection with the shooting and pleading with the public to help identify that person

Thompson, chief executive of the insurance giant United-Healthcare, was shot dead Wednesday morning outside a Hilton where he was scheduled to attend an investor conference. The brazen daytime slaying, just blocks from Central Park in one of the city's busiest areas, was a shocking act of violence that police say appeared to be targeted and planned. Officials have not publicly disclosed a possible mo-

With the search for the shooter stretching into a second day, police released photographs of someone they called "a person of interest" in the case. Officials have also focused their attention on words that were written on bullet casings on the sidewalk where Thompson was shot, according to a person with knowledge of the investigation, who spoke on the SEE SHOOTING ON A18

Reaction: To some, Thompson is a symbol of a despised industry. **A5**

Manhunt: Amateur sleuths are facing some backlash online. **A18**

White House hits the holiday lights



WILL OLIVER/EPA-EFE/SHUTTERSTOCK

Spectators on the Ellipse take in Thursday night's lighting of the National Christmas Tree, represented this year by a 35-foot red spruce from the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests in Virginia. The 102nd lighting, which was President Joe Biden's last, also included Vice President Kamala Harris and a roster of music luminaries.

Second major Syrian city falls to Islamist rebels

BY KAREEM FAHIM
AND MOHAMAD EL CHAMAA

ISTANBUL — An Islamist rebel group said Thursday that it had taken control of Hama, Syria's fourth-largest city, dealing another significant blow to President Bashar al-Assad less than a week after his forces ceded Aleppo in the face of a breakneck rebel advance.

The Islamist group, Hayat

Seizure of Hama redraws front lines and deals another blow to Assad

Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS, which is leading the offensive, released a series of short statements Thursday afternoon, saying it had entered neighborhoods in Hama after days of fighting on its outskirts and freed inmates from the city's central prison. Around the same time, the Syrian army announced it had withdrawn.

"Military units stationed there have redeployed and repositioned outside the city" to "preserve the lives of civilians," an army statement said. By nightfall, HTS said Hama was completely under its control.

under its control.

The rebels' seizure of the city

was the latest shocking turn in Syria's civil war, a nearly 14-year conflict that had appeared all but frozen until insurgent fighters streamed toward Aleppo last week and to other parts of northern and central Syria, redrawing the country's front lines and revealing the fragility of Assad's

security forces.

The rebels' capture of Hama, which sits on the strategic M5

SEE HAMA ON A9

Trump critics may see pardons

LIZ CHENEY, SCHIFF, FAUCI CONSIDERED

Goal would be to prevent threatened retribution

BY TYLER PAGER AND MERYL KORNFIELD

President Joe Biden and his top staffers are discussing whether to grant preemptive pardons to figures who might face the hostility of the incoming Trump administration, concerned that President-elect Donald Trump and others in his circle have threatened to go after their political adversaries.

adversaries.

Among those being weighed for potential pardons are Anthony S. Fauci, who helped coordinate the nation's covid-19 response; retired Gen. Mark A. Milley, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who has called Trump a "fascist"; Sen.-elect Adam Schiff (D-California), who led the first impeachment effort against Trump; and former congresswoman Liz Cheney (R-Wyoming), an outspoken GOP critic of Trump.

The discussions, first reported by Politico, were confirmed by two people familiar with the matter, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss private talks.

The effort is being led by White House chief of staff Jeff Zients and White House counsel Ed Siskel, the people said, suggesting that the issue is being treated seriously at the highest levels of the administration.

Hegseth toils to win over

skeptics on

Capitol Hill

BY LIZ GOODWIN,

MARIANNE LEVINE

AND LEIGH ANN CALDWELL

pick to lead the Department of

Defense continued his outreach

on Capitol Hill on Thursday,

picking up words of praise from

Republican senators but not sig-

nificant new pledges of support.

former Fox News personality and

combat veteran Pete Hegseth has

answered questions about his

personal life in days of back-to-

back meetings with senators and

has also said he would submit to

an FBI background check and

would eagerly defend himself in

danger of falling short of 50

votes, even in a GOP-controlled

Senate. Several key GOP senators

said they have not been lobbied

to support Hegseth, and Trump

has not publicly pushed them to

back the pick in recent days. On

Thursday, Trump posted a New

York Post article on Truth Social

defending Hegseth.

But he still appears to be in

a confirmation hearing.

With his wife by his side, the

Donald Trump's embattled

The discussions are still evolv-SEE **PARDONS** ON **A4**

Macron won't exit, will pick new prime minister

French president scolds hard-line factions that splintered government

BY ELLEN FRANCIS
AND ANNABELLE TIMSIT

French President Emmanuel Macron pledged Thursday that he would name a new prime minister within days, railed against the far-right and left factions that brought down the government and ruled out resigning early himself.

The French leader addressed the nation a day after a no-confidence vote in parliament brought down the government, spawning political chaos and piling pressure on Macron to act fast.

"The world, Europe, are moving ahead, and we need a government that can make decisions," he said. "We cannot allow ourselves neither division nor immobility." He said he would appoint a prime minister who could quickly assemble a cabinet and oversee a rollover of the budget into next year, as the country faces a deadline to avert a government shutdown.

The president promised to tap a candidate "in the coming days," after Prime Minister Michel Barnier's government became the first to be toppled by a no-confidence vote in six decades. It will be tricky to find a

candidate who could command enough support from lawmakers in a bitterly polarized land-

On Thursday, Macron defended his summer gamble in calling for snap legislative elections. The July election concluded with a fragmented National Assembly in which no bloc held a governing majority — and Macron has since faced a drumbeat of calls for his resignation from his fiercest critics on both ends of the political spectrum.

"I do recognize that this decision wasn't understood," he said. "Many people criticized me for it. I know many continue to criticize me for it. It's a fact. And it's my responsibility."

Still, he added that "some were tempted" to blame him for the upheaval. "It's much more comfortable," he said. "I will never assume the irresponsibility of others"

others."
He scolded lawmakers who he said "chose disorder" by torpedoing the budget and government before the holidays. And he said he intended to serve as president until his term ends in 2027, repeatedly noting that there were 30 months left.

"The mandate that you have democratically entrusted to me is for five years, and I will exercise it fully until its end," he told the French people.

The government fell just three months after Macron appointed Barnier in a bid to restore stability.

SEE FRANCE ON A12



ILLUSTRATION BY CHANTAL JAHCHAN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Spies work to stop a sanctioned Russia from smuggling weapons parts

BY JOBY WARRICK AND SERHIY MORGUNOV

Early this year, Ukrainian air defense crews began noticing something odd about the one-way attack drones that Russia regularly launches against Ukrainian cities. The latest arrivals from Russia's arms factories would swoop in, just as before. But then something would go wrong.

The newest Geran-2 drones were more likely to spin out of control whenever they went into a sharp turn. Some would crash harmlessly. Others

would level off, becoming easy prey for air defense batteries. And yet the drones kept coming sometimes as many as 100 in a single day.

The higher failure rate eventually was linked by Western and Ukrainian military analysts to inferior components, specifically a small steering motor not much bigger than a cigarette pack. Russia had recently switched to a Chinese motor after SEE WAR ON A10

"We're going to earn those SEE **HEGSETH** ON **A6**

Bronze Star: For officers, medals such as Hegseth's are common. **A6**

Sexual assault: Pick for Pentagon worries advocates for survivors. **A7**

IN THE NEWS

A trans teen at the high court L.W., a plaintiff in a case that aims to blunt a law barring transition treatment for minors, spent an emotional day watching oral arguments. A3

Tarrio testifies The imprisoned former Proud Boys leader served as a defense witness in the trial of a former D.C. police lieutenant. **B1**

THE NATION

Senators grilled the FDA on ultraprocessed food, a key part of Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s agenda. A2 A thin majority in the House could complicate Trump's agenda. A4

THE WORLD

Amid a slowing economy, some Chinese millennials are trying to eat on \$70 a month. As

Romanian authorities arrested two men in the stabbing of an Iranian journalist in London. A12

THE ECONOMY

A start-up is pitching a home security system that uses tech you might expect to find at a military base. A13 Bitcoin, the most valu-

able cryptocurrency, surpassed \$100,000 per coin in a rally that accelerated after Trump's election victory. A14

THE REGION

The D.C. Council could mandate training for officials who run the city's charter schools. B1

OBITUARIES A. Cornelius Baker,

63, devoted his life to advancing treatment, services and compassion for people with HIV/AIDS. B1

SPORTS

Tulane QB Darian Mensah came to campus with zero NIL deals. Then he went and won the Green Wave's starting job. D1

WEEKEND

Sensory-friendly programs can help neurodivergent kids see movies, museums and more on their own terms.

CONTENT © 2024 The Washington Post Year 148, No. 54057

0 70628 21100 3