



## Starmer settles in as leader of Britain

Transition is swift, calm as Labour Party chief vows ‘national renewal’

BY WILLIAM BOOTH AND KARLA ADAM

LONDON — Britain’s politics have been volatile and chaotic, but this country sure knows how to execute a swift, orderly transfer of power. On Friday, Labour leader Keir Starmer became the 58th prime minister in the nation’s history. The loser, the outgoing Conservative Rishi Sunak, told the people he was sorry. Then he went home.

Sunak took the official armored Jaguar to Buckingham Palace to tender his resignation. His meeting with King Charles III was private. It lasted 20 minutes. In and out. Sunak will continue to serve as a lawmaker in the House of Commons, and for a short time as leader of the Conservative Party, until his successor is chosen. His party — very cross with Sunak at the moment — might move expeditiously.

With Sunak dispatched, in quick order Starmer and his wife, Victoria, took another armored Jaguar through the swinging gates of the palace. In the “kissing of hands” ritual — which takes place without any kissing — the monarch asked him to form a new government. Away went Starmer, back to 10 Downing Street to give a six-minute speech. Then he got to work.

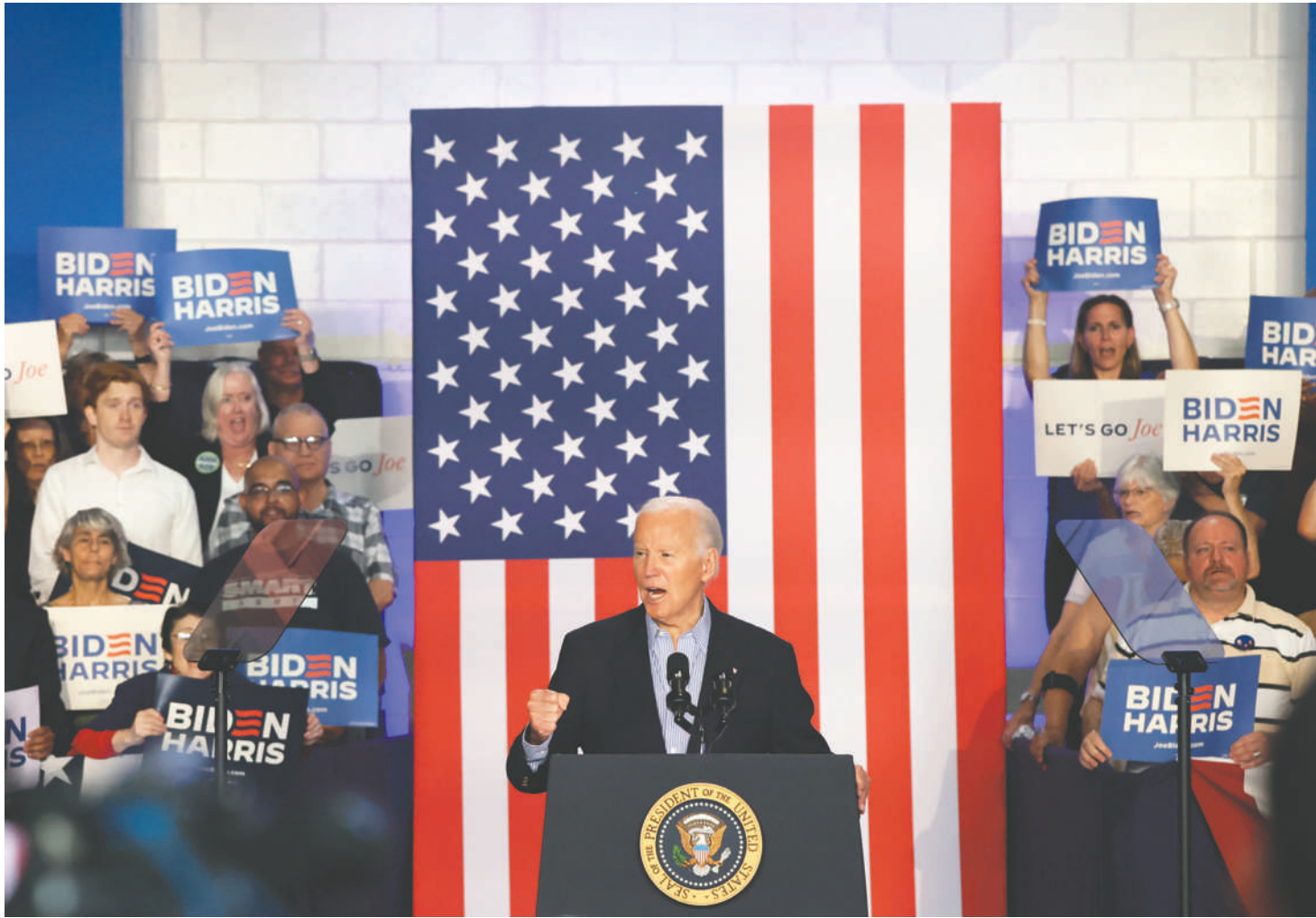
Starmer’s Labour Party won in a landslide, coming in just shy of the vote captured by Tony Blair in 1997.

For Conservatives — facing the worst defeat in the history of their party in its modern form — it felt like a culling. Top ministers and brand-name Tory “grandees” lost their seats — including a former prime minister, Liz Truss, infamous for lasting only 49 days in Downing Street after she almost crashed the economy with a plan for unfunded tax cuts.

The tally of the ballots took most of the night. But there were no wild recounts, no charges of a steal.

After it was all over, the two  
SEE TRANSITION ON A10

## President under a microscope



ALEX WROBLEWSKI FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

President Biden holds a campaign rally Friday in Madison, Wis., where he said he will “beat Donald Trump.” Many Democratic senators were waiting to see how he performed at the rally and in his interview with ABC’s George Stephanopoulos on Friday before committing to potentially pushing for his exit from the presidential race.

## Biden’s aging described as recently accelerating

This article is by Yasmeen Abutaleb, Josh Dawsey, Maria Sacchetti, John Hudson and Dan Diamond

President Biden, who at 81 is the oldest person ever to hold the office, has displayed signs of accelerated aging in recent months, said numerous aides, foreign officials, members of Congress, donors and others who have interacted with Biden over the last 3½ years, noting that he moves more slowly, speaks more softly and has moments when he loses his train of thought more often than even just a year ago.

None of those who spoke to The Washington Post said they had seen Biden appear as lost and confused as he did at the presidential debate against Donald Trump on June 27, where his halting performance sent panic

## Lapses more visible than months ago, some say, as aides defend his acuity

through the Democratic Party. They largely did not question his mental acuity, and several senior White House aides who interact with Biden regularly said that he continues to ask probing, detailed questions about complicated policy matters and can recall facts from previous briefings in minute detail.

Nevertheless, Biden has slowed considerably over the last several months, according to 21 people, many of whom spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive topic and

share candid assessments.

They said Biden’s physical signs of aging have become more apparent — the stiff gait; the need at times for assistance in moving from place to place; a raspy, softened speaking voice that can make the lifelong politician known for impassioned and at times seemingly unending speeches now difficult to hear and understand. In addition to these traits, he has exhibited occasional lapses in which he has appeared to briefly freeze up or suddenly veer off topic, instances some said they easily dismissed before the debate but have now caused them to question his ability to do the job for another four years.

During the Group of Seven nations summit in Italy last month, several European leaders

came away stunned at how much older the president seemed from when they had last interacted with him only a year or, in some cases, mere months earlier, several officials familiar with their reactions said. “People were worried about it,” said one person familiar with leaders’ reactions.

At an immigration event at the White House less than two weeks before the debate, some participants worried about the president’s frailty and how his energy ebbed and waned, wondering how he would be able to debate Trump. One person who attended termed Biden’s performance “terrifying.” Others said they thought the president seemed physically diminished but otherwise fine. At an internal meeting at the White House this spring, an official re-  
SEE DECLINE ON A5

## Biden insists: ‘I am running’

### DEFIANT DEFENSE IN INTERVIEW, RALLY

Warner leads effort to compel him to withdraw

BY MATT VISER

MADISON, WIS. — President Biden, in a defiant television interview Friday, emphatically rejected calls to withdraw from the presidential race — saying only “the Lord Almighty” could make him change his mind — as he repeatedly downplayed his recent shaky debate performance as a “bad night” and dismissed the notion that polls showed him losing to Republican Donald Trump.

In a sign of the challenges facing that resolve, Sen. Mark R. Warner (D-Va.) is attempting to pull together Democratic senators to approach Biden about withdrawing, according to two people with direct knowledge of the effort, arguing that Biden can no longer remain the party’s presumptive nominee in the wake of the debate. Rep. Mike Quigley (D-Ill.) added his name to those calling for Biden to leave the race, saying it would cement his legacy and “prevent utter catastrophe.”

But Biden was not moved. “If the Lord Almighty came down and said, ‘Joe, get out of the race,’ I’d get out of the race,” he told ABC’s George Stephanopoulos. “But the Lord Almighty is not coming down.”

Biden’s events Friday — the interview, along with a fiery rally in Wisconsin and a prickly exchange with reporters on an airport tarmac — showed clearly that he has no intention of ending his reelection bid, putting him on a collision course with many in his own party and suggesting they may have to force him out if they want to replace him at the top of the Democratic ticket.

In the ABC interview, Biden said last week’s debate performance, when he stumbled over  
SEE BIDEN ON A4

**Warner’s mission:** Top senator may rally peers to add pressure. **A4**

## Archbishop who challenged pope is excommunicated

BY ANTHONY FAIOLA, STEFANO PITRELLI AND MICHELLE BOORSTEIN

ROME — The Vatican on Friday excommunicated Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, exacting a severe punishment on the most vociferous internal critic of Pope Francis for refusing to recognize the authority of the pope and liberal reforms made by the Roman Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s.

Such drastic steps are exceedingly rare in the church and illustrated the extent to which Viganò — the Vatican’s former ambassador to the United States — is perceived to have crossed a line. He has called on the pope to resign and excoriated him in harsh terms, including calling him “a servant of Satan.”

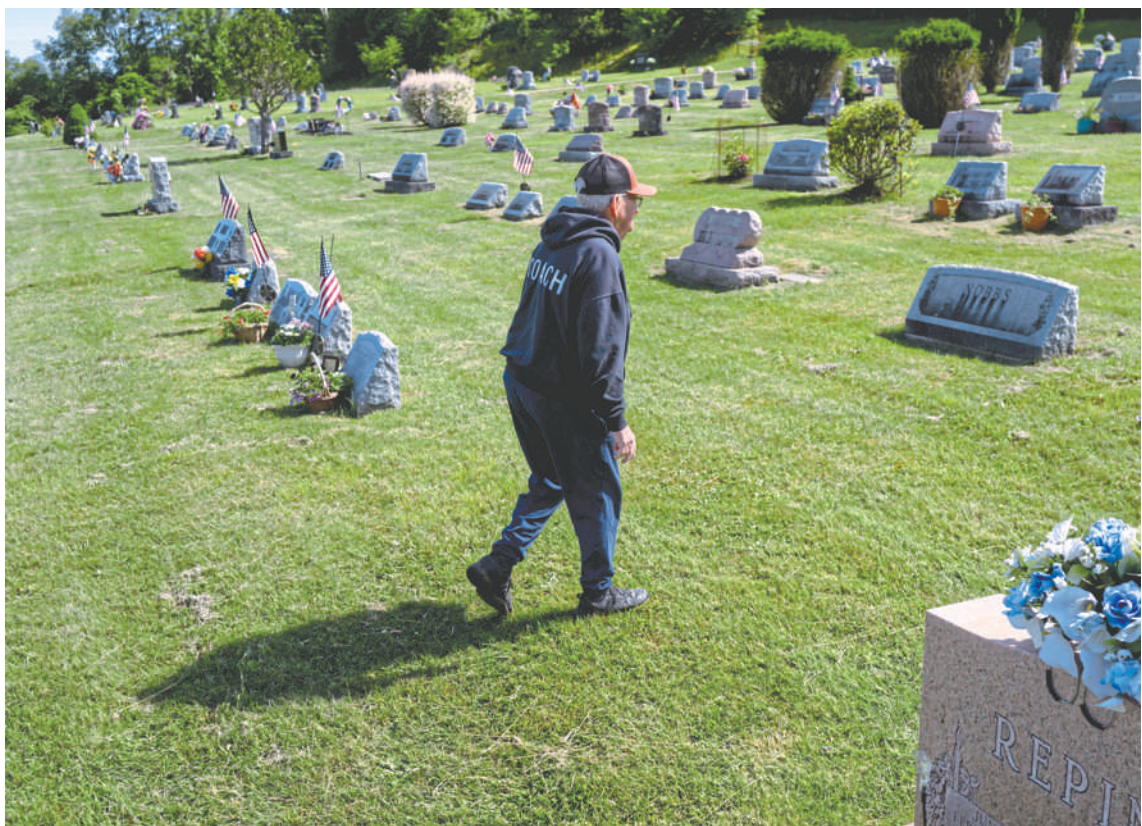
Viganò’s punishment suggests that Francis, who has faced conservative criticism since early in his papacy, may be losing patience with his sharpest critics in the church hierarchy who have challenged his papal authority in sometimes shocking and irrever-

ent terms. It is also an indication of how Viganò has morphed over the years from being a critic of the pope and the church’s shortcomings on dealing with clerical abuse into a fringe conservative firebrand who has embraced conspiracy theories and recently retweeted a post from Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.), claiming that “the covid vaccines are killing people.”

The Vatican’s decision came after its disciplinary body, the Dicastery of the Doctrine of the Faith, had issued a formal decree June 20, assigning the senior cleric to a penal canon trial for the “crime of schism” and “denial of the legitimacy of Pope Francis.”

“His public statements manifesting his refusal to recognize and submit to the Supreme Pontiff, his rejection of communion with the members of the Church subject to him, and of the legitimacy and magisterial authority of the Second Vatican Council are well known,” the Dicastery of the Doctrine of the Faith said in statement. “At the conclusion of the  
SEE VATICAN ON A9

## A rural Pa. town reckons with population loss



JUSTIN MERRIMAN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Lee Goldthwaite is a cemetery caretaker in Pennsylvania’s Sheffield Township. The population of the county it’s in is expected to decline in the coming years by a double-digit percentage.

BY TIM CRAIG IN SHEFFIELD, PA.

Lee Goldthwaite might have the most stable job in this remote corner of northwestern Pennsylvania.

The caretaker of Sheffield Cemetery is busier than ever directing crews clearing trees to make space for more graves as deaths dramatically outpace births here and in other vast stretches of rural America. Each time he buries a newly deceased resident he wonders how the town that once drew scores of young families will survive.

“We already lost our bank,” Goldthwaite said as he took a break from trimming the grass around headstones. “We lost our liquor store, and we may be about to lose our high school.”

Across rural Pennsylvania, there is a deepening sense of fear about the future as population loss accelerates. The sharp decline has put the state at the forefront of a national discussion on the viability of the small towns that have long been a pillar of American culture.

SEE RURAL ON A6

## IN THE NEWS

**GOP abortion squabble** Donald Trump wants the party platform to endorse leaving the issue to the states rather than a federal ban, angering some social conservative leaders. **A3**

**Gaza framework ‘in place’** Israel and Hamas resumed talks over a cease-fire and hostage deal, but new sticking points emerged. **A9**

**THE NATION** The former watchdog of Social Security abused her authority, an investigation found. **A2**  
**Scientists** discovered a giant salamander-like predator that lived 280 million years ago. **A2**

**THE WORLD** **Iranians** voted in the second round of their presidential race. Will turnout improve? **A8**  
**Viktor Orban**, Hungary’s prime minister, angered E.U. allies with a visit to Moscow. **A10**

**THE ECONOMY** One year after the launch of Threads, the platform’s chief says it can surpass X by eschewing politics. **A11**  
**Employers** added 206,000 jobs in June, reflecting a gradual cool-down of the labor market in the first half of 2024. **A12**

**THE REGION** After four years of debate, Loudoun County approved a zoning change to save farmland from development. **B1**  
**A July Fourth** party in a close-knit Prince George’s County neighborhood turned violent, when a child and two adults were shot. **B1**

**STYLE** **Jill Biden** returned to the campaign trail, where calls for her husband to drop out faded into the background. **C1**

**SPORTS** **Frances Tiafoe** showed flashes of his best form at Wimbledon before succumbing to No. 3 seed Carlos Alcaraz. **D1**

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