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★ CAMPAIGN 2024 ★

Face to face, a war of words

In first debate, Biden's struggles raise doubts as Trump stretches truth



ANDREW CABALLERO-REYNOLDS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

While Donald Trump was his usual bombastic self Thursday night, President Biden frequently lost his train of thought.

By Sam Brodey
GLOBE STAFF

President Biden came onto the debate stage in Atlanta with one job: stand firm against his hated rival, Donald Trump, and prove wrong all those who have argued he's too old to be president.

Ninety excruciating minutes later, Biden left the stage having sparked more doubts about his candidacy than at any other point in the 2024 campaign.

It wasn't just that Biden sounded hoarse. Or that he frequently lost his train of thought. Or that he made factual errors and outlandish misstate-

► **Democrats panic. Analysis, A5.**

ments. What was most striking was how often Biden let slide Trump's own arguments, which frequently included factually inaccurate statements, how little he pushed back against Trump's framing of issues,

and how few opportunities he took to put his opponent on the defensive.

The problems started early. During a segment on abortion — an issue Democrats see as their strongest asset this year — Biden never effectively countered Trump's repeated assertions about abortion limits. Astoundingly, Biden voluntarily brought up immigration — a tough issue for Democrats — in responding to a question about abortion, invoking a young woman who was allegedly killed by

an undocumented migrant in Georgia in February.

As expected, Trump pushed bombastic, unfounded claims and made sweeping, vicious accusations of Biden. But there was little pushback.

In the debate's first moments, at the end of a meandering answer on the COVID pandemic, Biden puzzlingly declared, "We finally beat Medicare."

Trump's response was barely sent. **DEBATE, Page A5**

Court rejects opioid deal

Says no shield for Sacklers; mixed emotions in Mass.

By Adam Piore
GLOBE STAFF

The Supreme Court on Thursday rejected a multibillion-dollar opioid settlement that would have provided Massachusetts with as much as \$110 million to fund prevention, treatment, and recovery programs but would also have shielded members of the Sackler family from any personal liability for the crisis.

The 5-to-4 decision negated a painstakingly negotiated deal hammered out during bankruptcy proceedings between state and local governments and lawyers representing the families of victims and the Sackler family, owners of Oxycontin-maker Purdue Pharma, which has been blamed for causing the opioid crisis. The deal would have allocated up to \$6 billion over 18 years to victims, states, and tribes to deal with a public health crisis that has claimed the lives of more than 1 million Americans since 1999, and continues to take 2,000 lives a year in Massachusetts.

In challenging the settlement, the US Trustee Program, a division of the Justice Department, claimed the deal constituted "an abuse of the bankruptcy system" because it also would have shielded the family from any lawsuits.

In the 79-page decision, Justice Neil M. Gorsuch, writing for the majority, agreed. The Sack- **SACKLERS, Page A7**

State settles driver suit with Uber, Lyft

Deal boosts minimum hourly pay to \$32.50, likely voids company's planned ballot measure

By Katie Johnston and Diti Kohli
GLOBE STAFF

In a landmark settlement that is expected to avoid a costly ballot fight this November, Attorney General Andrea Joy Campbell on Thursday announced an agreement with Uber and Lyft that will grant employment benefits and rights for gig drivers that Campbell says are among the best in the country and requires the companies to pay \$175 million in penalties and back pay for drivers.

The deal mirrors in some ways what traditional employees in Massachusetts are entitled to but, importantly, does not establish drivers as employees, allowing

the companies to continue to treat them as independent contractors. It also resolves a years-long legal fight between Massachusetts and Uber and Lyft while likely voiding the ballot measure on the issue that the state Supreme Judicial Court just hours earlier had approved for this fall's elections.

Under the deal, drivers for Uber and Lyft will earn a minimum wage of \$32.50 per hour — from the time a driver accepts a ride until they drop off passengers — and be entitled to an array of benefits. The agreement does not include delivery companies such as Instacart and DoorDash.

"For years, these companies have underpaid their drivers and denied them basic benefits," Campbell said in a statement. "Today's agreement holds Uber and Lyft accountable, and provides their drivers, for the very first time in Massachusetts, guaranteed minimum pay, paid sick leave, occupational accident insurance, and health care stipends."

Uber said in a statement the agreement preserves the flexibility and independence drivers want.

"This agreement is an example of what independent, flexible work with dignity should look like in the 21st century," Uber chief legal officer Tony West wrote. "We are thrilled to see more policymakers supporting portable benefits and innovative frameworks to improve independent

DRIVERS, Page A7



GLOBE STAFF/ADOBE

As reliable sources disappear, they're breaking the news

'Pink slime' producers churn out not-so-local stories with a slant

By Aidan Ryan
GLOBE STAFF

It was a shocking claim: schoolchildren would be graded differently based on the color of their skin.

The article about a Chicago-area school's "race-based grading system" was widely shared on social media, stirred outrage, and was published by a website that appeared to cover local news in the Chicago area.

But the 2022 story was not true, and the publication, the West Cook News, is no typical news organization. It's part of a sprawling network of more than 1,200 websites nationwide that purport to cover local news but have been accused of pushing slanted stories if not outright disinformation. Dubbed "pink slime" websites in a mock nod to filler used in processed ground beef, the sites mostly churn out low-quality articles without local journalists, many based on various state rankings such as school tests results and other data points. On rare occasions, like with the West Cook News, stories can

PINK SLIME, Page A6



CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF/FILE 2022

The Fairview Road house was sold in 2023, a year after the death of Officer John O'Keefe.

New owners of house in Read case getting more than they bargained for

Trial obsessives show 'no courtesy, no respect'

By Beth Teitell
GLOBE STAFF

Carolina wrens were singing, a Bernese mountain dog on a leash was sniffing, and a light breeze was tickling the treetops on peaceful Fairview Road in Canton. But the view from inside house number 34 was a different story.

At the home made infamous by the Karen Read case, when the new homeowner peers outside, she sees the web of conspiracies that stretch out from her

► **Jury still deliberating. B1.**

front door. The homeowner was out running errands when a reporter rang her bell on Wednesday morning, but she spoke remotely through a Ring camera she and her husband installed when they moved in last June, in part to record the stream of angry and suspicious tourists who come to ogle the crime scene. She declined to give her name to protect what little privacy they have left.

Some 7 miles away, at Norfolk Superior Court, jurors were beginning their second day of deliberations on the ques-

HOUSE, Page A6

Best in glow

Friday: Very pleasant. High 72-77. Low 59-64.

Saturday: Early sun, breezy. High 76-81. Low 68-73.

Sunrise: 5:10 Sunset: 8:25 **Weather and Comics, G6-7. Obituaries, C9.**

Health care provider Optum has backed away from its plan to buy Steward Health Care's national physicians group, dealing a setback to Steward's efforts to bolster its finances. **B5.**

Nearly half of US EV owners plan to buy a gas-powered car next time, a survey found. **B5.**

In a marathon meeting, the Boston City Council

forced back \$6.2 million of the \$13.3 million in budget changes Mayor Michelle Wu vetoed. **B1.**

Protesters returned to the streets of Kenya, with some calling for President William Ruto to resign, even after he dropped a tax bill. **A3.**

"The Bear" is back and it's still just as good as ever, writes TV critic Matthew Gilbert. **G1.**

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