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Democracy Dies in Darkness

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## High court reverses state map decision

Ruling makes it harder to challenge districts on racial gerrymandering

BY PATRICK MARLEY, ANN E. MARIMOW AND JUSTIN JOUVENAL

The Supreme Court on Thursday allowed South Carolina to use a congressional map that a lower court had said weakened Black voting rights, bolstering the political fortunes of Republicans as they seek to maintain control of the House of Representatives and making it harder to challenge districts on grounds of racial gerrymandering nationwide.

The 6-3 conservative majority reversed a finding by a three-judge panel that South Carolina's GOP-led legislature had created an unconstitutional racial gerrymander when it "exiled" thousands of Black voters to another district to carve out one that was safer for a White Republican incumbent. The Supreme Court called the evidence that race motivated lawmakers weak and said courts needed to presume they acted in good faith.

The decision marked a victory for Republicans not only because it cleared the way for a map that is favorable to the GOP in a year when control of the narrowly divided U.S. House is on the line. It also set a high bar for determining when a map can be considered a racial gerrymander, rather than a partisan one. The court has previously found that the Constitution bars racial gerrymandering but that federal courts cannot police partisan gerrymandering.

Legal experts, as well as those who contested South Carolina's map, said the decision would make it much tougher to challenge maps, especially in light of a Supreme Court ruling five years ago that found federal courts have no authority to strike down maps for giving excessive power to one political party. Under Thursday's ruling, litigants will have to find over-

SEE SOUTH CAROLINA ON A6

### THE DROWNING SOUTH



JAH CHIKWENDU/THE WASHINGTON POST

## A HIDDEN HAZARD

Fast-rising seas could swamp septic systems in parts of the South

BY BRADY DENNIS, KEVIN CROWE AND JOHN MUYSKENS IN MIAMI

A park playground is flooded with water from the Little River, a Miami canal where researchers have measured high levels of contamination from leaking septic tanks and other pollution sources.

On the worst days, when the backyard would flood and the toilet would gurgle and the smell of sewage hung thick in the air, Monica Arenas would flee to her mother-in-law's home to use the bathroom or wash laundry.

"It was a nightmare," Arenas, 41, recalled one evening in the modest house she shares with her husband and teenage daughter several miles north of downtown Miami.

She worried about what pathogens might lurk in the tainted waters, what it might cost to fix the persistent problems and whether the ever-present anxiety would ever subside.

Residents in neighborhoods around Arenas's have similar tales to share — of out-of-commission toilets, of groundwater rising through cracks in their garage floors, of worries about their own waste running through the streets and ultimately polluting nearby Biscayne Bay.

For all the obvious challenges facing South Florida as sea levels surge, one serious threat to public health and the environment remains largely out of sight, but everywhere: Septic tanks.

Millions of them dot the American South, a region grappling with some of the planet's fastest-rising seas, according to a Washington Post analysis. At more than a dozen tide gauges from Texas to North Carolina, sea levels have risen at least 6 inches since 2010 — a change similar to what occurred over the previous five decades.

Along those coastlines, swelling seas are driving water tables higher and creating worries in places where septic systems abound, but where officials often lack reliable data about their location or how many might already be compromised.

"These are ticking time bombs under the ground that, when they fail, will pollute," said Andrew Wunderley, executive director of the nonprofit Charleston Waterkeeper, which monitors water quality in the Lowcountry of South Carolina.

To work properly, septic systems need to sit above an adequate amount of dry soil that can filter contaminants from wastewater before it reaches local waterways and underground drinking water sources. But in many communities, that buffer is vanishing.

SEE FLOODING ON A8

## Before disaster, a raft of red flags

PANEL HAD WARNED OF 'SHIP STRIKES'

No new protections for Key Bridge, files reveal

BY STEVE THOMPSON AND IAN DUNCAN

The warnings came, sometimes in eerily specific terms, years before a giant cargo ship struck Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge: A ship could lose power "in close vicinity to a bridge," an out-of-control vessel could cause "a bridge collapse," and the Key Bridge was "not designed to withstand collisions from large vessels."

After the strike caused the bridge's collapse in March, horrified officials described the catastrophe as one that couldn't have been anticipated. But a maritime safety committee, including experts from key government agencies, repeatedly raised the possibility of such a disaster over the past two decades, according to previously unreported records obtained by The Washington Post. For nearly 10 of those years, as ever-larger cargo ships visited Baltimore's port, the committee included "Recommendations for bridge protection from ship strikes" on a list of its action items. In 2016, that action item stopped appearing in meeting minutes without explanation.

The group, known as the Baltimore Harbor Safety and Coordination Committee, discussed the Key and Chesapeake Bay bridges, among others. Maryland pilots — specialists who board large vessels and then guide them safely in

SEE KEY BRIDGE ON A4

## U.S. seeks to topple empire of Live Nation

Ticketmaster parent is accused in antitrust suit of stifling competition

BY TONY ROMM

The U.S. government filed a sweeping antitrust lawsuit Thursday against Live Nation Entertainment, the parent company of Ticketmaster, seeking to break up the conglomerate over allegations that it has amassed and abused unrivaled power in the ticketing and concert industries.

The landmark case — joined by 30 state and district attorneys general — could dramatically reshape an ecosystem that has long sparked outrage from artists and fans alike, whose frustrations erupted in 2022 when high fees and site outages disrupted early sales for Taylor Swift's "Eras" tour.

Live Nation is an entertainment titan: It is a concert promoter, artist manager, venue owner, and ticket seller and reseller, constituting a sprawling empire that its executives publicly herald as the "largest live entertainment company in the world." Last year

SEE LIVE NATION ON A7

### ELECTION 2024

## GOP activists poised to reprise roles as electors

Despite zeal, many face criminal charges for bid to reverse 2020 results

BY AMY GARDNER AND YVONNE WINGETT SANCHEZ

Republican activists in at least three states where Donald Trump tried to reverse his defeat in 2020 — nearly all of them under criminal indictment for casting electoral votes for him despite his loss — are poised to reprise their roles as presidential electors this year.

Six activists in Michigan, Nevada and New Mexico have made clear to GOP leaders in their states that the investigations into their 2020 activities have not deterred them from seeking the position again. If anything, their view that the prosecutions are bogus has motivated them to step up, according to party leaders.

Their eagerness to serve — and encouragement to do so from

their parties — reflects a widespread belief among Republicans that the electors did nothing wrong in 2020, raising the question of what they might do or say if Trump once again loses any of those states. Would they be willing to convene again and cast electoral votes for Trump? Would the Trump campaign try to organize such an effort? What might Trump ask of them? How far would they go to help him return to power?

"There is no hesitancy at all to be put in that same position again," said Pete Hoekstra, chairman of the Michigan Republican Party. "They would be excited by the opportunity to do it."

The nation's presidential electors, apportioned to the states according to their number of congressional seats, make up the electoral college, which is empowered by the Constitution to determine the outcome of presidential elections every four years. Typically only the electors of the winning candidate meet and cast

SEE TRUMP ON A16



SHURAN HUANG FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

### Show of support for an African ally

Kenyan President William Ruto delivers a speech Thursday night at the White House during a state dinner hosted by President Biden and first lady Jill Biden. President Biden's promised trip to Africa has not materialized, and the continent has faded further into the background, as he faces a swirl of global challenges. **Story, A12** **State dinner coverage at washingtonpost.com.**

### IN THE NEWS

**Straddling the 'red line'** The White House claims Israel's actions in Rafah are "limited," even as humanitarian conditions worsen. **A13**

**A landmark NCAA deal** College athletes are set to be paid directly from schools as part of settlement agreement that all but signals the end of amateurism in college sports. **D1**

**THE NATION** **Trump** made promises to oil industry donors to approve their projects and expand drilling. **A2** **The Senate** voted down a bipartisan border security package for a second time. **A3**

**THE WORLD** **A look at** Rishi Sunak and Keir Starmer as their parties compete in Britain's elections. **A10** **A man** found the bones of at least three Stone Age mammoths in his Austrian wine cellar. **A14**

**THE ECONOMY** **OpenAI** did not copy Scarlett Johansson's voice for ChatGPT, documents and recordings show. **A15** **TikTok** said it has taken down accounts belonging to 15 covert influence operations in the first four months of 2024. **A15**

**THE REGION** **Marliyn Mosby**, the former Baltimore prosecutor, was sentenced to 12 months of home detention for perjury and mortgage fraud. **B1** **The House** voted on a bipartisan basis to block D.C. from allowing noncitizens to vote in local elections. **B1**

**STYLE** **A Taliban** revenge killing prompted questions and the removal of an acclaimed documentary. **C1** **WEEKEND** **This summer's** most buzzed-about films feature Beetlejuice, bad boys, and a Shyamalan double feature.

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