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Democracy Dies in Darkness

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ELECTION 2024

Will courtroom skills help Harris make case?

Allies hope her restraint, timing and humor set the tone in Tuesday’s debate

BY MAEVE RESTON

Near the end of their 2016 U.S. Senate debate in California, Loretta Sanchez cast Kamala Harris as a tool of the establishment and sought recognition for the controversial stances she herself had taken as a congresswoman. She then confounded Harris and the audience by closing her remarks with a dab.

Replicating the once-popular dance move, Sanchez extended her left arm straight out and bowed her head into the crook of her right elbow. Watching wide-eyed from across the stage, Harris pressed her lips together and raised her eyebrows — letting silence hang in the air for a few seconds.

“So there’s a clear difference between the candidates in this race,” Harris said after several

moments, turning to share a laugh with the audience. With timing and facial expressions, she relayed the message at the core of her campaign — that Sanchez was an unserious contender with a penchant for drama, while she was ready for the job. Harris won the election by a 23-point margin.

Harris will look to make a similar argument Tuesday in her one-on-one debate with former president Donald Trump, whom she has described as “an unserious man” who could create “extremely serious” consequences if he wins another term in the White House. But this time she will be facing a far more formidable debate opponent, who effectively ended the ambitions of other White House aspirants that he bulldozed on the debate stage. The vice president’s longtime allies hope the skills she honed in the courtroom during her years as a prosecutor — including how to use restraint, timing and humor to connect with audiences — will shape the outcome as they did in her winning races for state attorney general and Senate.

SEE HARRIS ON A4

Sales of merchandise help Trump cash in on campaign

The GOP nominee has monetized his run to an unprecedented extent

BY JOSH DAWSEY AND ASHLEY PARKER

With less than 10 weeks before the presidential election, Donald Trump had a message for voters in late August: He would be selling more digital trading cards for \$99 each.

“Fifty all new stunning digital trading cards — it’s really something,” Trump says in the ad. “These cards show me dancing and even holding some bitcoins.”

Buy 15 or more of the digital cards, he said, and he would mail a single physical trading card. Those came with a special perk: “An authentic piece of my suit that I wore for the presidential debate.” Five of the suit pieces would even be autographed, he promised. Those willing to buy

75 of the cards — at a total cost of \$7,425 — were invited to attend a gala dinner at his country club in Florida, he said. “Let’s have fun together,” he said.

On Tuesday, he again took to Truth Social for another post: selling a book — \$99 without his autograph, \$499 with his autograph — of pictures of himself. “A MUST HAVE on U.S. History,” he called it.

In both cases, the money was not going to his campaign but to for-profit ventures he earns millions from promoting. No presidential candidate has ever so closely linked his election with personal for-profit enterprises, selling a staggering array of merchandise that includes signed Bibles where he receives a royalty for hawking them, pricey sneakers, gold necklaces, cryptocurrency cards, pens, books, licensing fees on overseas properties and more.

SEE TRUMP ON A8

**Sowing doubt:** Trump suggests election will be stolen from him. A7

On social media, a bullied teenage boy found fame among child predators worldwide



ILLUSTRATION BY VARTIKA SHARMA FOR THE WASHINGTON POST; PHOTOS: COURTESY OF TYLER GARRETT; ERATH COUNTY JAIL RECORDS

A notorious persona, cultivated in isolation

BY SHAWN BOBURG AND CHRIS DEGHANPOOR IN STEPHENVILLE, TEX.

The idyllic image of Bradley Cadenhead’s close-knit family began to unravel when he was 10.

His mother moved out that year, in 2016. She began “drinking a lot and partying,” she later told authorities. Then in middle school, Cadenhead faced constant bullying. One former classmate said he was viewed as “an easy target.”

The boy whose family was once known in this small town dotted with churches and surrounded by dairy farms for never missing a Sunday service was, by his early teens, isolated and suffering breakdowns.

“I stopped caring about everything,” Bradley Cadenhead later told probation officers. At 15, he dropped out of school and retreated to his room.

It was from his bedroom in a cramped apartment that the once God-fearing boy from Stephenville underwent an extraordinary transformation — from a lonely, isolated teenager into what authorities describe as a notorious predator of the social media age.

Sitting at his computer, Cadenhead harnessed the social media platform Discord to cultivate a domineering online persona, one that soon built a global following among

sadists who prey on vulnerable children. Cadenhead and his followers, authorities say, convinced victims to share explicit images and then blackmailed them into harming themselves or committing degrading acts on video. The FBI has said the group, named “764” after the partial Zip code of Cadenhead’s hometown, meets the definition of domestic terrorism.

Today, at 19, Cadenhead is in his second year of an 80-year prison sentence — an unusually harsh punishment for a young offender but one that authorities say matches the gravity of his crimes.

“Very rarely do we get a chance to look evil in the face,” prosecutor Jett Smith told a judge at Cadenhead’s sentencing last year. “This may be one of those times.”

Cadenhead’s current attorney, Chris Perri, has said he is weighing an appeal of the sentence, citing “potential mental health issues,” but has declined to comment further.

To understand how a bullied teen in a small town in Texas was able to commit abuse on such a large scale — and how a social media company failed to stop him — The Washington Post interviewed friends,

SEE CADENHEAD ON A10

Maduro rival flees to Spain

GONZÁLEZ LEAVES IN BLOW TO OPPOSITION

Venezuela had moved to arrest election challenger

BY MARÍA LUISA PAÚL, NIHA MASIH AND SAMANTHA SCHMIDT

Edmundo González, the Venezuelan opposition candidate for president and likely winner of the July 28 election, fled the South American nation on Saturday and received asylum in Spain under threat of imminent arrest by his country’s authoritarian government.

González’s departure is a crushing setback for the U.S.-backed opposition movement, which had hoped his apparent landslide win would pressure Venezuelan strongman President Nicolás Maduro to negotiate a transition of power.

Instead, Maduro declared himself the winner of the election and unleashed a wave of violent repression that rights advocates say is the country’s worst since he rose to power more than a decade ago. A slew of opposition figures have been detained by Maduro’s security forces or forced into hiding.

González, a 75-year-old former diplomat, fled to exile five days after Venezuela’s attorney general filed a warrant for his arrest as part of what he said was an investigation into the opposition’s publication of voting machine receipts showing its candidate won more than twice as many votes as Maduro.

“My departure from Caracas was surrounded by episodes, pressures, coercion and threats,” González said in a recorded voice message after arriving in Madrid. “I trust that soon we will continue the fight to achieve freedom and recover democracy in Venezuela.”

González’s “life was in danger,” opposition leader María Corina Machado said in a statement Sunday morning.

SEE VENEZUELA ON A15



THOMAS SIMONETTI/FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Week 1 woes

Jayden Daniels and the Commanders lost the season opener. D1

3 Israelis killed in rare attack at Jordanian border

BY MIRIAM BERGER, ANNABELLE TIMST AND NIHA MASIH

JERUSALEM — A Jordanian gunman killed three Israelis on Sunday at the Israeli-controlled border crossing that connects Jordan with the West Bank, according to authorities from the two countries.

The Israel Defense Forces said in a statement that security forces fatally shot the gunman, identified by Jordan’s Interior Ministry as Maher Thiyab Hussein al-Jazi. The IDF said the man approached the Allenby Bridge from Jordan in a truck, exited the vehicle and

Key crossing point for aid heading to Gaza closed after ‘individual act’

opened fire on security forces operating the bridge.

The attack is the deadliest on record at the typically quiet crossing, which is the main point of entry and exit for Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Israel and Jordan are close allies with Washington and signed a U.S.-backed peace treaty in 1994. “Preliminary results of the in-

vestigation indicate that the incident is an individual act,” the Jordanian Interior Ministry said in a statement, adding that the investigation was ongoing. Israel’s Airports Authority, which operates the crossing, said the three victims were employees of a subcontracting company for the cargo terminal.

Israel closed Allenby and its two other land crossings with Jordan in response to the shooting, according to the Airports Authority, which said later that all three would reopen on Monday for people but not for cargo.

The Allenby Bridge, also known as the King Hussein

Bridge, is about three miles east of Jericho. It is a vital crossing point for goods to the West Bank, as well as for aid destined for Gaza.

In a meeting Sunday with U.S. Ambassador to Israel Jack Lew, Israeli President Isaac Herzog named the victims as Yuri Birnbaum, Yohanan Shchori and Adrian Marcelo Podsmesser.

“The peace agreements between Israel and its neighbors are a cornerstone of stability in the region, and we trust all parties will thoroughly investigate the incident and work to prevent future attacks,” Herzog said.

The last violent incident at the

SEE ISRAEL ON A14

IN THE NEWS

**Jannik Sinner wins U.S. Open** The No. 1 seed from Italy defeats Taylor Fritz to extend the Grand Slam drought of the American men. D1

**Afghanistan exit report** The GOP leadership of a House committee released a sprawling report on the U.S. withdrawal that Democrats dismissed as “nakedly partisan.” A3

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**A wildfire** in Southern California is growing quickly amid a searing heat wave. A16

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**Russia throttled** access to YouTube, alarming internet freedom advocates and dissidents. A12

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**Google**, in a federal trial set to begin Monday, faces monopoly charges related to its online advertising business. A19

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