



Partly sunny 70/52 • Tomorrow: Rain 67/48 C8

Democracy Dies in Darkness

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Last hours of Baltimore's Key Bridge: Dark, quiet, then calamity

This article is by Emily Davies, Peter Hermann, Tom Jackman, Jasmine Hilton, Justin Jovenal and William Wan

The trouble began at 1:24 a.m. Tuesday as a cargo ship almost the size of the Eiffel Tower steered southeast on the Patapsco River out of Baltimore. Just ahead, spanning more than a

mile across the darkened water, stood the Francis Scott Key Bridge, 185 feet high, with a crew of overnight construction workers on the road deck, patching cracks and filling potholes.

Hundreds of times a year, gargantuan vessels like this one, laden with containers of freight, had eased beneath the Key, bound for open ocean and ports

around the globe. But as the Dali reached eight knots and drew closer to the bridge, what should have been a routine passage suddenly wasn't.

First, the giant ship's lights blinked out. About a minute later, electricity returned, then the lights went off again.

The ensuing catastrophe will long reverberate — in coming

months of economic disruption, vast rebuilding costs and incessant commuting headaches — but most profoundly in the lasting anguish of families, in their grief for lost loved ones.

Unable to maneuver with its power gone, the Dali plowed forward, borne by its momentum, and slammed into one of the bridge's support piers, collapsing

the towering metal structure into the river. Down with it into the frigid Patapsco went eight workers. Many of the workers were immigrants from Latin America, six of whom are confirmed or presumed to be dead.

SEE BRIDGE ON A6

Cleanup: The complicated and dangerous work gets underway. **C1**

ELECTION 2024

Democrats tout ACA, once reviled, on stump

BY DAN DIAMOND

President Biden and top Democrats have spent weeks mounting a full-scale blitz to tout the Affordable Care Act, including ads, social media posts, speeches — and a video that blasts rival Donald Trump for “running to ‘terminate’ the ACA.”

Trump — who as president pushed to kill the law and last November reiterated that he wants to “replace” it — has angrily countered on social media that Biden “DISINFORMATES AND MISINFORMATES ALL THE TIME,” and that all Trump wants to do is make the 14-year-old law better.

Biden's celebration and Trump's grudging acceptance of the ACA underline a striking reality: a law once derided as “Obamacare” and demonized as a big government power grab is becoming a politically untouchable part of the American safety net, like Social Security and Medicare before it.

More than 45 million people now rely on the ACA and its provisions for health coverage, according to a federal report released last week, and the law's protections for people who have preexisting conditions have transformed many Americans' experience of health care. Yet for nearly a decade, Republicans like Trump successfully ran on pledges to “repeal Obamacare” — and Democrats sometimes ran from it, scarred by the law's bumpy rollout, the constant political attacks and the struggle to communicate its benefits.

Just 33 percent of Americans held favorable views of the ACA in November 2013, weeks after the infamous crash of the Health-care.gov website intended to let Americans sign up for private health insurance through the law, according to KFF, a nonpartisan research organization.

SEE CAMPAIGN ON A18

The Sunday Take: Biden's slippage with Black voters spells trouble. **A2**

House GOP: Move against speaker reopens months of old wounds. **A3**



The mouth of the Bracuí River, where a team sought an American-piloted ship said to have enabled Brazil's illegal slave trade.

In Brazil's dark waters, a truth about America's role in slavery

BY TERRENCE MCCOY
WITH PHOTOS BY RAFAEL VILELA
IN ANGRA DOS REIS, BRAZIL

Gilson Rambelli motored out into the dark waters, thinking of the crime that had haunted him for years. The evidence of it was down there, in the bay's depths. That was where the researcher believed he'd find the Camargo, the long-lost slave ship of Nathaniel Gordon, the only American ever executed for the crime of trafficking enslaved Africans.

As dense clouds muffled the December morning sky, Rambelli and his research team approached a small island off the coastline of Rio de Janeiro state. There wasn't much to distinguish it from the dozens of

others dotting this vast bay. But it was here that the crew dropped anchor.

“This is it,” Rambelli said.

For decades, Rambelli and others have researched the shipwreck. According to contemporaneous accounts, Gordon sailed his American-made vessel into Brazilian waters in December 1852. As authorities closed in on him, Gordon sold his “cargo” — more than 500 enslaved Mozambicans — to the coffee barons who lived in the mountains beyond. Then he burned and sank his ship somewhere in the bay and escaped arrest dressed as a woman, scandalizing Brazil's government and leading to its first crackdown on the country's illegal slave trade.

The remarkable story is part of a

forgotten chapter in the history of America and slavery, when American ships and the American flag were used to illegally transport enslaved Africans to Brazil by the tens of thousands.

In the first half of the 19th century, after much of the world had banned the transatlantic slave trade but before the end of slavery, a highly lucrative contraband trade continued to supply Brazil with enslaved Africans. Some of its most important players, according to historians and a Washington Post review of thousands of pages of records, were American merchants and sailors.

They sold ships, captained slaving voyages and ultimately assumed such an active role in the illegal

SEE BRAZIL ON A10

Mnuchin aims to buy TikTok. ‘Good luck,’ wary expert says.

BY ELIZABETH DWOSKIN
AND DREW HARWELL

Former treasury secretary Steven Mnuchin is telling rich investors he has a plan to take over TikTok: rebuild the wildly popular video app from scratch.

The investment banker who served under President Donald Trump has told potential backers that he aims to maneuver around two giant obstacles facing those vying for the platform: its estimated price tag of more than \$100 billion — far beyond what most suitors, including Mnuchin, could afford — and the Chinese government's ban of the export of recom-

mendation algorithms, TikTok's secret sauce.

Mnuchin has indicated that he could overcome those hurdles by offering to buy the app without the export-blocked code, essentially forcing his consortium to remake a service built on billions of lines of code before it could be usable again.

He has told prospective investors that the provision might even let them get TikTok at a discount, according to two people familiar with the pitch who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss it.

SEE TIKTOK ON A13



EAKIN HOWARD/GETTY IMAGES

Kim Mulkey took a step toward an eighth national title as a player, assistant or coach when LSU beat UCLA on Saturday in the Sweet 16.

The Kim Mulkey way

The LSU women's basketball coach sows fear and holds grudges. She wins, but at what cost?

BY KENT BABB IN TICKFAW, LA.

In the two sisters' minds, the old house remains as it was: a one-story brick ranch a hundred yards off the road, white fence under two ancient oaks, tin roof long before it all caved in.

Their father built on the farmland he had inherited. dug a swimming pool, poured the concrete for a basketball court, carved two softball fields into pasture. His two girls, born less than a year apart, would grow up running and hiding and disappearing among the pines.

“I just miss the memories,”

Tammy, the 60-year-old younger sister, says.

They're in the backyard in her favorite, shooting baskets with Daddy by starlight. It feels so real, she says. So precious and warm.

“I wish I could have it all back,” she says.

SEE MULKEY ON A16

Up next: In a rematch of last year's title game, LSU will take on Iowa. **D1**

Champs roll on: Connecticut men rout Illinois, return to Final Four. **D1**

THE WORLD

U.S. considers allowing limited oil business to go on in Venezuela. **A8**

BUSINESS

Flood of Chinese imports could renew tensions and threaten U.S. jobs.



METRO

➔ An Annapolis family hits the sweet spot in our Peeps diorama contest.

BOOK WORLD

Hanif Abdurraqib's life in Columbus has gotten smaller — and stranger.



ARTS & STYLE

➔ Ralph Fiennes stars in a war-torn production of “Macbeth” soon in D.C.

TRAVEL

After the eclipse, there's still plenty to do in these six path-of-totality cities.

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