

# The Washington Post

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## Once-spurned Trump is feted in Paris

Weeks before taking office, president-elect is a guest of honor at Notre Dame

BY CAT ZAKRZEWSKI

PARIS — As flames engulfed Notre Dame cathedral more than five years ago, the French civil defense agency seemed to mock President Donald Trump, who had tweeted to suggest using “flying water tankers” to put out the blaze. The agency warned Trump that using aircraft to drop water on the centuries-old building “could lead to the collapse of the entire structure of the cathedral.”

That sort of unfriendliness has

not survived Trump’s election victory last month.

The president-elect returned to Paris on Saturday not as a punchline but as a guest of honor for the reopening of the cathedral whose guardians had once had a laugh at his expense. Trump arrived at the Élysée Palace about 40 minutes late amid rain and blustering winds. He patted French President Emmanuel Macron on the back and shook hands with him on a red carpet before briefly posing for photos.

In a short appearance with reporters inside the Élysée Palace, Macron told Trump, “Mr. President, it’s a great honor for French people. We welcome you — five years later. ... I remember the solidarity and your immediate action so welcome back again.”

Trump in turn emphasized the “great relationship” between France and the United States, praising the French as “talented” and “extremely energetic people.”

SEE TRUMP ON A15



LUDOVIC MARIN/POOL/EPA-EFE/SHUTTERSTOCK

From left, first lady Jill Biden, Brigitte Macron, President-elect Donald Trump and French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris.

## Syrian rebels threaten capital

BIGGEST CHALLENGE YET TO ASSAD’S RULE

Fighters seize territories in the north and south

This article is by Loveday Morris, Mohamad El Chamaa, Liz Sly, Susannah George, Mustafa Salim and Suzan Haidamou

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad faced the most acute threat to his 24-year rule Saturday as rebels pushed into the strategic hub of Homs, seized a sweep of southern cities, and closed in on Damascus, the capital.

Rebels accumulated regime territory at lightning pace as an offensive from the north, led by the Islamist militant group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, ignited opposition factions elsewhere in the country. Syrian troops fled en masse, according to Iraqi officials, who said at least 1,500 entered Iraq.

Groups in the south seized Daraa, the birthplace of the 2011 protest movement to oust Assad, the southeastern city of Sweida and Quneitra, near the border with Israel.

HTS, which has made stunning gains in the north over the past week, said Saturday evening that its forces were conducting operations inside Homs, Syria’s third-largest city, around 90 miles north of Damascus. Sham FM, a news radio station that backs Assad, reported that the Syrian military was “repositioning itself to the outskirts” of the city — language it has used previously to describe withdrawals from cities and towns that have fallen to the

SEE SYRIA ON A16

Islamist takeover?: Rebels’ successes stoke U.S. fears. A15

## For some teens, AI bots act as a therapist

Despite known dangers, companies offer artificial companions to millions

BY NITASHA TIKU

An array of popular apps are offering AI companions to millions of predominantly female users who are spinning up AI girlfriends, AI husbands, AI therapists — even AI parents — despite long-standing warnings from researchers about the potential emotional toll of interacting with humanlike chatbots.

While artificial intelligence companies struggle to convince the public that chatbots are essential business tools, a growing audience is spending hours building personal relationships with AI. In September, the average user on the companion app Character.ai spent 93 minutes per day talking to one of its user-generated chatbots, often based on popular characters from anime and gaming, accord-

SEE AI ON A17



JABIN BOTSFORD/THE WASHINGTON POST

## Drownings rose amid crackdown

Eagle Pass has become a focal point, for Texas border policy — and migrant deaths

EAGLE PASS, TEXAS — Angelica had journeyed with her parents, older brother, aunt and uncle by foot from South America through a muddy jungle, ridden atop sooty train cars and slept in noisy city plazas hoping to reach the United States.

Now it was dawn and the 4-year-old girl’s family could see their destination from across the Rio Grande. The adults sent messages to relatives back in Venezuela before stepping into the river with the two children.

“Ya no aguantamos más,” wrote Robiet Farías, Angelica’s uncle, saying he could not bear waiting anymore to enter the United States.

The family held one another’s hands and formed a chain with other migrants crossing the Rio Grande in Eagle Pass that November day in 2023. But as they got deeper into the river, something went

This article is by Arelis R. Hernández, Melissa del Bosque, Sarah Cahlan, Jack Sapoch, Charles Boutaud, Monica Camacho and Miriam Ramirez

wrong. Panic set in. The Farías family disappeared into the water.

This stretch of the Rio Grande has become a graveyard as the number of people dying while trying to cross rises. An investigation by The Washington Post; Light-house Reports, an investigative news organization, and the El Universal newspaper in Mexico found that hundreds more people have drowned than the U.S. and Mexican governments have reported. And nowhere in Texas have more people died than in Eagle Pass, where Republican Gov. Greg Abbott’s \$11 billion border security initiative, Operation Lone Star, is concen-

trated.

The news organizations collected death records from every Texas county and Mexican state that borders the Rio Grande since 2017, when President-elect Donald Trump first took office pledging to crack down on illegal migration, to examine the effects of enforcement and migration policies on asylum seekers, and whether these factors have increased drownings.

The data shows that at least 1,107 people drowned trying to cross the river in the seven years from 2017 to 2023. The deaths peaked in 2022 as the number of people trying to enter the United States soared. A rising number of women were among the dead. In 2023, more than 1 in 10 drownings

SEE BORDER ON A8

Obstacle for Trump: Nearly half slated to be deported can’t be, ICE data shows. A3

Migrants waded into the Rio Grande in Eagle Pass, Texas, on Sept. 28. Nowhere in Texas have more people died than in Eagle Pass, where the border security initiative of Gov. Greg Abbott (R) is concentrated.

## A 40-year war to curb federal power

Charles Koch’s network helped usher in seismic ruling on Chevron deference

BY JUSTIN JOUVENAL, JON SWAINE AND ANN E. MARIMOW

The 2019 Seafood Expo North America in Boston featured an oyster-shucking contest, while squid on ice and some surprising attendees: attorneys from the powerful political network of Charles Koch, a billionaire who has spent decades and millions fighting government regulation.

They weren’t there for the seafood samples. They were fishing for fishermen, seeking stories of

boat captains upset by federal regulations that would soon require herring fishermen to pay for onboard government monitors.

The outreach demonstrated the unusually broad coordination by the Koch network to challenge a bedrock legal precedent that had touched many aspects of American life — from drugs and the environment to banking and workplace safety.

That effort culminated in June when the Supreme Court struck down the principle known as

Chevron deference, which for 40 years had required judges to give federal agencies significant latitude in implementing laws in areas where Congress did not give specific guidance.

Other Supreme Court decisions last term garnered more attention, including on abortion pills and presidential immunity. But many legal experts say Chevron could be one of the most significant rulings of this generation because of its sweep.

The legal precedent had been

SEE KOCH ON A6

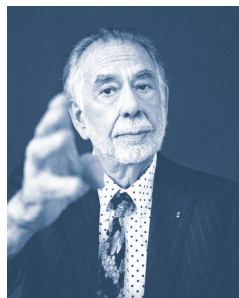


JOE LAMBERTI FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

A worker inspects herring in New Bedford, Massachusetts. The principle had required judges to give federal agencies wide latitude.

METRO  
D.C. Council renames bills to avoid scrutiny from Trump, Congress.

SPORTS  
Georgia overcomes Texas in overtime to win the SEC championship.



ARTS & STYLE  
Coppola, Raitt among Kennedy Center honorees this weekend.

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Lab-grown diamonds are getting popular. See how these gems are created.



BOOK WORLD  
Karl Ove Knausgaard shows us the books he loves (and hates).

TRAVEL  
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