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Democracy Dies in Darkness

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2023 • \$3

ELECTION 2024

Biden team works to quell party anxieties

Campaign faces calls to more actively compare president with Trump

BY ASHLEY PARKER, TYLER PAGER AND MICHAEL SCHERER

Over the last full weekend of September, Hollywood titan Ari Emanuel — brother of former Chicago mayor and current Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel — co-hosted his annual, off-the-record power conference, gathering fellow luminaries of entertainment, finance, politics and technology in sun-dappled Aspen, Colo.

At one point, during a political panel that included Ron Klain, President Biden's former chief of staff, an audience member worried aloud that the Democratic Party had a serious problem. Biden is too old and could lose the election, this person fretted, before asking the question that has been disquieting Democratic circles for more than a year: What is the backup plan?

Klain's rebuttal was swift, recalled one attendee, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to share candid details of the private event. The president is the party's nominee, Klain said, and a strong nominee at that. There is no backup plan.

The audience rumbled with exasperation and disbelief, grumbling about the lack of a Plan B. But some Democrats later approached Klain to thank him for his forceful defense of Biden, a second person familiar with the moment said.

Similar scenes have been playing out repeatedly since then, as Biden's allies play whack-a-mole with the bubbling anxiety — reflected in early polling — that

SEE BIDEN ON A4

No traction: Former Trump staffers' worries go unheeded. **A3**



LOAY AYYOUB FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

More than two dozen premature babies were evacuated from the besieged al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, where a lack of fuel meant there was no electricity to power incubators, leaving the children in critical condition.

A Gaza family's painful choice

Their premature son could be treated in Egypt — but that would mean separation

BY LOUISA LOVELUCK AND HAJAR HARB

JERUSALEM — Even amid a war of searing brutality, the images shared around the world were striking: babies in a Gaza City hospital removed from their incubators, tiny arms straining and beating at tiny chests.

But less than 15 miles away, the parents of little Anas Esbeita had not seen them. Communications were too shaky for the widely circulated news photos to reach them. From their corner of a packed displacement shelter, they thought their newborn, like others at Gaza's largest hospital, was

SEE BABIES ON A5

Worrisome escalation: Heightened conflict on Israel-Lebanon border. **A9**



AFP/GETTY IMAGES

On the Egyptian side of the Rafah border crossing, medics stand with incubators at the ready to receive the infants evacuated from the Gaza Strip.

Saudi Arabia's tightening grip on the sports world

WWE's long, strange night in Riyadh helps explain the kingdom's global ambitions

BY GUS GARCIA-ROBERTS

One night in the fall of 2019, more than a hundred professional wrestlers and their handlers, exhausted from a grueling show, headed to a private airport in Saudi Arabia to catch a charter flight back to the United States.

Then the delays began — 15 minutes at a time at first before hours started to slip by with explanations they found dubious about technical malfunctions. Armed men appeared, the wrestlers later said, appearing to block the exits. The wrestlers' handlers were in heated, hushed conversations with one another and airport officials. And rumors flew of a storyline worthy of pro wrestling, pitting their own flamboyantly macho boss against an autocrat recently implicated in bloody vengeance by bone saw.

By then, the year-and-a-half-old partnership between World Wrestling Entertainment, the publicly traded corporation behind Hulk Hogan, and the kingdom of Saudi Arabia had already survived plenty: staged confrontations used as propaganda to ratchet up regional tensions, death threats and the alleged state-sponsored murder of a journalist that caused other Ameri-

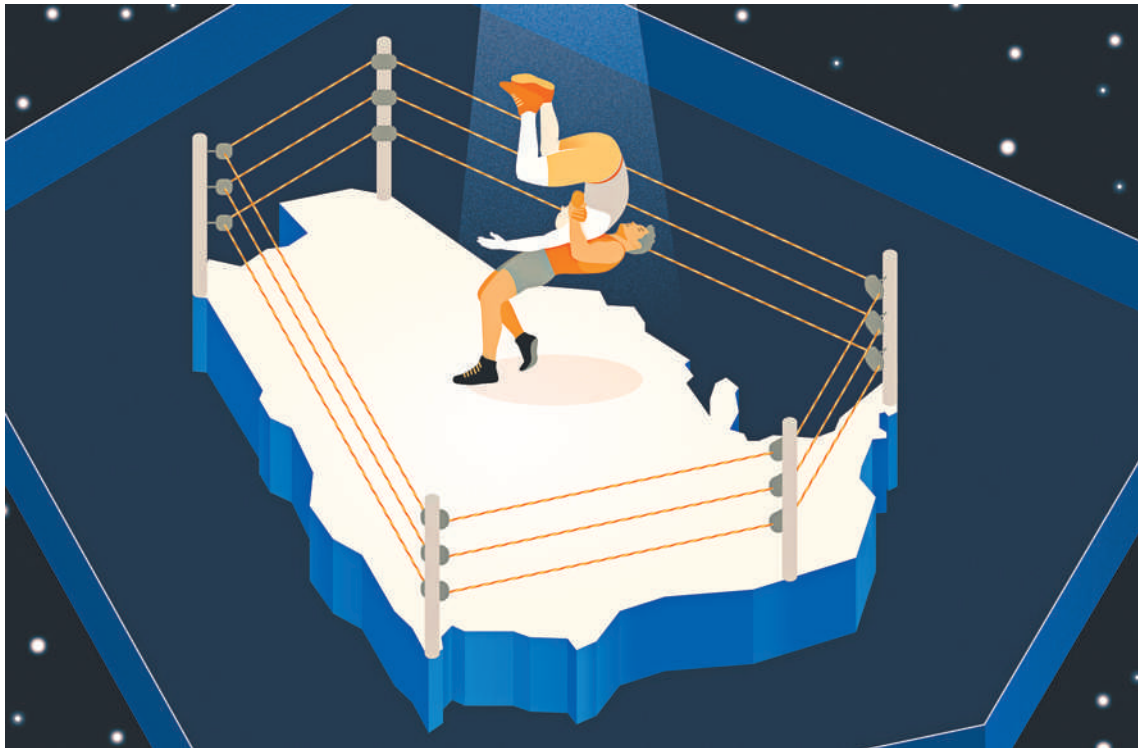


ILLUSTRATION BY JOEY GUIDONE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

The New Kings of Sports

A series examining how investments by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar are upending global sports.

can corporations to shirk Saudi investment.

None of it, though, had led WWE to end its "strategic multiplatform partnership" with the kingdom that was struck months before the assassination of Washington Post contributor Jamal

Khashoggi and called for the broadcast of at least one Saudi-held WWE mega-event per year.

The Saudis, eager to whip up nationalism as they strove to modernize the country, saw great potential in WWE's rigged

SEE SAUDI ARABIA ON A10

UAW ratifies record pacts with automakers

Bitter strike ends with raises of at least 25% over 4½ years

BY JEANNE WHALEN

The United Auto Workers said its members have ratified new contracts with all of the Big Three automakers, ushering in raises of at least 25 percent over 4½ years and ending an acrimonious strike that brought some of the labor movement's biggest wins in decades.

The union's combative president, Shawn Fain, said the UAW will now turn its attention to attempting to unionize the U.S. auto sector beyond General Motors, Ford and Stellantis, as well as other industries.

"The Stand Up Strike was just the beginning," Fain said in a statement Monday. "Now, we take our strike muscle and our fighting spirit to the rest of the industries we represent, and to millions of nonunion workers ready to stand up and fight for a better way of life."

More than two-thirds of UAW workers at Ford and Stellantis

backed the contracts, but the vote was closer at General Motors, where some large plants voted against the deal out of concern that veteran workers are receiving a lower raise relative to others.

Heightened strike activity and workplace activism this year have helped workers across several U.S. industries win lucrative contracts. Fueled by a tight labor market, two years of high inflation and resurgent enthusiasm for unions, workers are striking in elevated numbers this year and reaping big gains for their pocketbooks.

The UAW contracts include raises of at least 25 percent for the highest-paid workers, to more than \$40 an hour, and even bigger gains of up to 160 percent for the lowest-paid, who will also reach more than \$40 an hour by the end of the contract.

The deals come after a long period of worker wages not keeping up with inflation, and after the union gave up some of its benefits around the time of the Great Recession, when the automakers were struggling to survive. The union managed to claw back many of those perks in the new deals,

SEE UAW ON A15

A brazen leader: Inside Shawn Fain's game plan for the UAW. **A14**

IN THE NEWS

Fruit of hard labor Açaí, a bright spot for wellness, has a dark side in the nation where it's grown: child labor. Brazilian officials are investigating the harvest. **A6**

'Unimaginable loss' Two children were struck and killed by a van as they walked to school in Prince George's County. **B1**

THE NATION An appeals court suggested it may narrow a gag order imposed on Donald Trump. **A2**
Enforcement of the Voting Rights Act could be severely curtailed by an appellate ruling. **A5**

THE WORLD Getting new U.S. aid to Kyiv is taking longer and stoking fears that continued assistance is far from guaranteed. **A7**
Nations are far from meeting much-hyped climate pledges. **A13**

THE REGION Former College Park mayor Patrick Wojahn was sentenced to 30 years in prison after he pleaded guilty to 140 counts related to child pornography. **B1**
D.C. sued the renovation company Curbio, alleging it takes advantage of homeowners. **B1**

STYLE Jimmy Carter moves on to a life without Rosalynn, who for 77 years was his companion, his confidante and, later in life, his caregiver. **C1**
Meghann Cuniff has become the internet's favorite court insider. Now she's translating legalese for the masses. **C1**

SPORTS Sunday's loss was a heat check for Sam Howell, the Washington Commanders' first-year starting quarterback. **D1**

HEALTH & SCIENCE The deceptively simple phrase "profound autism" is at the heart of a heated debate between advocates. **E1**

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