

IN THE SPOTLIGHT



Vice President Kamala Harris and former president Trump are set to face off in their only scheduled debate tonight.

TIME: 9 p.m., for 90 minutes.
PLACE: National Constitution Center in Philadelphia.
FORMAT AND VIEWING: Microphones will be muted for the nonspeaking candidate. There will be no audience and candidates will not question each other directly. It will be hosted by ABC, which allows other networks and cable news channels to simulcast. Moderators are ABC anchors David Muir and Linsey Davis.
►Harris will seek to move beyond President Biden. Trump carries history of aggression against women in debates. **A2.**

O'Brien ousted as leader of troubled cannabis agency

Treasurer cites 'gross misconduct'; decision follows yearlong suspension

By Matt Stout and Diti Kohli
GLOBE STAFF

State Treasurer Deborah Goldberg on Monday fired the state's top cannabis regulator, formally removing Shannon O'Brien from her post a year after first suspending her and following months of upheaval at the agency.

In a statement, Goldberg said O'Brien "committed gross misconduct" and "demonstrated she is unable to discharge the powers and duties" of a member of the state's five-person Cannabis Control Commission. The third-term Democrat did not cite the exact reasons why she removed O'Brien, and her office declined to release a letter and report detailing her decision, saying it contained personal information.

Goldberg put O'Brien on paid suspension from her \$196,551-a-year post last September amid allegations O'Brien made a series of "racially, ethnically, [and] culturally insensitive" remarks during her year heading the commission — accusations that O'Brien has denied. The two eventually met in a series of closed-door hearings that ended in June.

Goldberg said Monday that she chose to remove O'Brien "with deep regret because she has a long history of public service, and when appointed I anticipated she would lead the Commission capably and in an appropriate manner."

"I expect my appointee's actions to be reflective of the important mission of the CCC and performed in a manner that in-

corporates the standards of professionalism required in today's work environment," Goldberg said.

In a statement, Max Stern, O'Brien's attorney, called the closed hearings "akin to the secret trials employed by autocratic regimes," saying that Goldberg credited every complaint against O'Brien unfairly.

"The decision by Treasurer Goldberg to remove Shannon O'Brien as Chair of the CCC whitewashes the unequivocal evidence that would lead any reasonable and fair fact-finder to conclude that there are no grounds for removal and would immediately reinstate her to steer the rudderless . . . CCC shipwreck," he said.

In an 11-page written statement she

O'BRIEN, Page A10

WALL NO BARRIER TO THE SPIRITS



DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

Jeffrey Gibson's "your spirit whispering in my ear" is the 10th public installation at Dewey Square near South Station in Boston. It's also the first by an Indigenous artist. A ceremony celebrating its opening will be held Sept. 19. Says the artist: "The colorful patterns reflect the rising and setting of the sun, the vibrations of energy all around us, they point to what is above us and also to what is below the ground underneath our feet."

Two-thirds of BPS buses arrived late on first school day

Performance was the worst for district in nine years; Flynn calls for hearing

By Christopher Huffaker and James Vaznis
GLOBE STAFF

About two-thirds of school buses arrived late for Boston's first day of school last week, the district reported Monday, a significant decline from the 61 percent on-time performance on the first day in 2023, and

a far cry from the 95 percent rate the district must hit under a state improvement plan that ends this year.

The on-time arrival rate Thursday morning was the worst first-day showing the district has reported in the last nine years and reverses substantial progress from 2022 to 2023.

Boston Public Schools transports 22,000 students daily on its 632 buses to about 200 public and private schools. Buses routinely run late on the first day as drivers familiarize themselves with their new routes, which the district redraws each year based on student assignments to schools.

Superintendent Mary Skipper attributed the worsened performance in part to the new real-time bus tracking app, Zum, which the dis-

trict rolled out this year, as well as drivers navigating new routes.

"We appreciate our families' patience as we work through these issues and we understand that many BPS families experienced frustrating transportation delays on the first day of school," Skipper said in a statement. "These delays that happen in the first days of school were largely expected due to drivers and bus monitors navigating new routes

BUSES, Page A10

JAMES EARL JONES 1931-2024

With voice and stature, he commanded stage, screen

By Robert D. McFadden
NEW YORK TIMES

James Earl Jones, a stuttering farm child who became a voice of rolling thunder as one of America's most versatile actors in a stage, film, and television career that plumbed race relations, Shakespeare's rhapsodic tragedies, and the faceless menace of Darth Vader, died Monday at his home in Dutchess County, New York. He was 93.

The office of his agent, Barry McPherson, confirmed the death in a statement.

From destitute days working in a diner and living in a \$19-a-month cold-water flat, Mr. Jones climbed to Broadway and Hollywood stardom with talent,

►Appreciation. **B6.**

drive, and remarkable vocal cords. He was abandoned as a child by his parents, raised by a racist grandmother, and mute for years in his stutterer's shame, but he learned to speak again with a herculean will. All had much to do with his success.

So did plays by Howard Sackler and August Wilson that let a young actor explore racial hatred in the national experience; television soap operas that boldly cast a Black man as a doctor in the 1960s; and a decision by George Lucas, the creator of "Star Wars," to put an anonymous, rumbling African American

JONES, Page A7



NEW YORK TIMES/2008

Mr. Jones (right) and Terrence Howard in a revival of the play "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" in New York in 2008.

\$8.5m given for battles on state ballot questions

Unions, businesses seek to influence voters on five initiatives in November

By Anjali Huynh and Matt Stout
GLOBE STAFF

Unions, businesses, and other contributors have poured \$8.5 million so far this year into the battle over five questions slated to appear on the November ballot, priming campaigns that could reshape Massachusetts' education system, restaurant industry, and more.

The unusually large slate of initiatives has proven to be a magnet for dollars, with ballot question committees reporting having raised nearly \$5 million from donors this year. But that haul doesn't include the millions of dollars the Massachusetts Teachers Association, Massachusetts Restaurant Association, and other groups have paid directly to cover legal fees, advertising, and other costs for campaigns they're driving.

It's not unheard of for groups to back a committee through so-called in-kind contributions, which could include offering specific services or staff time. What is notable this year, however, is that some are relying almost exclusively on them.

The campaign behind Question 2, which would scrap the MCAS exams as a graduation requirement, didn't raise a single dollar from outside do-

BALLOT QUESTIONS, Page A6

The state's high court justices heard arguments in a bid by accused clients of sex brothels to keep the initial stage of their legal proceedings behind closed doors. **B1.**

In Newton, Brookline, and Cambridge, more parents are sending their children to private schools since the pandemic, writes Kara Miller. **D1.**

An Israeli strike targeted a command center and killed dozens in a refugee zone, officials said. **A3.**



Array of sunshine

Tuesday: Sunny, beautiful. High 75-80, low 55-60.
Wednesday: Delightful. High 72-77, low 57-62.
Sunrise: 6:19. Sunset: 7:02.
Weather and comics, **D5-6.**
Obituaries, **C9.**

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