



THE SUNDAY TAKE

Trump is set for cakewalk, but can Iowa still surprise?

BY DAN BALZ

DES MOINES — Donald Trump's expected march to the Republican presidential nomination will begin Monday night in snowy, frigid Iowa. Everything suggests that the competition could be short and uneventful. On this final weekend before the quadrennial caucuses, Iowa normally pulses with energy. This year, it lacks both the drama and suspense of years past.

That doesn't mean candidates aren't campaigning — or trying to. They are, but much of the intensity that existed despite the former president's overwhelming lead in the polls was zapped by a Friday snowstorm and a subsequent plunge in temperatures, which has forced the cancellation of many events.

Forecasts for caucus night say the wind chill could hit 20 degrees below zero, raising questions about who will show up Monday and who won't. Final polls show Trump well ahead, which means the battle for second is the animating competition.

The final Iowa poll, conducted by Ann Selzer for the Des Moines Register, NBC News and Mediacom, showed Trump leading with 48 percent of the vote, followed by former U.N. ambassador Nikki Haley at 20 percent and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis at 16 percent. Entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy was at 8 percent, and former Arkansas governor Asa Hutchinson was polling at 1 percent.

DeSantis and Haley, a former governor of South Carolina, are trying to one-up the other. A

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Deep freeze: Weather scrambles caucus turnout tactics in Iowa. A7

Business: Trump's proposals on inflation could make it worse. G1



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ELECTION 2024

Despite statistics, voters are sour on Biden's economy

This article is by Michael Scherer, Marianne LeVine, Jeff Stein, Meryl Kornfield, Sabrina Rodriguez and Clara Ence Morse



Where they stand: We surveyed the top GOP presidential candidates on abortion, the economy and more. A8

LAS VEGAS — Near the base of the Rainbow Mountains, Daniel Busby looks up longingly at his two-story "dream" townhouse, with the sliding glass door on its second floor, the balcony that wraps around the master bedroom, the five-minute walk from his kids' elementary school.

"I just fell in love," said Busby, 33, doing a chef's kiss and smacking his lips together. "And then we started doing the math."

The gregarious fry cook has enjoyed the windfalls of pandemic economic recovery overseen by President Biden. The president's stimulus plan gave lower-wage workers more leverage to demand higher pay from their employers, with those in the service sector — like Busby — seeing particularly robust gains.

He went from being unemployed and working part-time at \$15 an hour during the pandemic to a full-time job at the Paris Hotel, mostly at the Martha Stewart

Daniel Busby's children, Maja, 10, and Nyla, 6, play at their Las Vegas apartment. He and his wife are earning more, but not enough to buy a house.

art franchise, earning \$19 an hour preparing a risotto dish and, his favorite, the whole chicken dinner. Busby and his wife now make a combined salary of just under six figures — a previously unimaginable sum.

But the gains have not kept up with rising costs, and that has become a major issue for voters like him. When Biden took the oath of office in January 2021, the average monthly mortgage payment in Las Vegas was about \$1,200, according to calculations by Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Analytics. That number, for new mortgages, has soared to \$2,350 today due to rising interest rates and robust housing prices — the outer edge

SEE ECONOMY ON A10

Impossible job? College presidencies losing luster.

BY SUSAN SVRLUGA AND DANIELLE DOUGLAS-GABRIEL

As chancellor of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, on any given day Kevin M. Guskiewicz was reporting to at least a dozen important constituencies on campus. He used to tell people if he could keep 70 percent of the people happy 70 percent of the time, he'd consider it a victory.

But with all the challenges our society has been through in the last five years, he said half-jokingly the bar for success might have slipped — 50-50, or 40-40?

And his next job could be even harder. He's leaving North Carolina to lead Michigan State University — as its sixth president in six years. His experience in Chapel Hill, and the leadership turmoil in East Lansing, are examples of the hurdles university presidents face on numerous fronts at a time when public confidence in colleges has been diminishing.

The recent resignations of the presidents of Harvard University and the University of Pennsylvania, following their testimony at a blistering congressional hearing on campus antisemitism, was

SEE PRESIDENTS ON A16



MATT MCCLAIN/THE WASHINGTON POST

Ken Fritz worked for decades to perfect his home stereo system in Richmond. His obsession built a system that was widely acknowledged by audiophiles but also led to strain in his family.

Audiophile's dream comes at a high cost

A Va. man builds a perfect stereo, but what would it mean in the end?

BY GEOFF EDGERS

RICHMOND — Ken Fritz was years into his quest to build the world's greatest stereo when he realized it would take more than just gear.

It would take more than the Krell amplifiers and the Ampex reel-to-reel. More than the trio

of 10-foot speakers he envisioned crafting by hand.

And it would take more than what would come to be the crown jewel of his entire system: the \$50,000 custom record player, his "Frankentable," nestled in a 1,500-pound base designed to thwart any needle-jarring vibrations and equipped

with three different tone arms, each calibrated to coax a different sound from the same slab of vinyl.

"If I play jazz, maybe that cartridge might bloom a little more than the other two," Fritz explained to me. "On classical, maybe this one."

SEE STEREO ON A14

Within church, pope's authority under assault

Criticism over ruling on same-sex blessings comes in strident terms

BY ANTHONY FAIOLA, MICHELLE BOORSTEIN AND STEFANO PITRELLI

VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis is facing some of the most vociferous objection to papal authority in decades, in language that might have stunned past popes.

German Cardinal Gerhard Müller derided the pope's new guidance allowing priests to bless same-sex couples as "blasphemy." One Italian priest found himself rapidly excommunicated after he referred to Francis in his New Year's Eve homily as an "anti-Pope usurper" with a "cadaverous gaze, into nothingness." Still holding on to his title is Italian Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, who recently dubbed the pontiff a servant of Satan and announced a seminary to train priests free from the "deviations of Bergoglio" (Francis's name before becoming pope).

Some of this resentment is long-simmering. Almost as long as he's been pope, Francis has been confronted by dissenting church traditionalists. Viganò, for one, has previously called for

Francis's resignation.

The death of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI had been widely expected to clarify any muddiness about the hierarchy in Vatican City, leaving just one figure wearing papal white within its ancient walls. A year later, the voices questioning Francis's basic authority have only grown louder, at the same time that bold, legacy-cementing moves by the 87-year-old pope have prompted broader backlash within the church.

Francis is experiencing a level of reproach that some observers say is the fiercest since Pope Paul VI reaffirmed the church's ban on artificial birth control in 1968. Today's criticism is further amplified by social and digital media. An even more striking distinction, though, may be the overt disdain some clerics are showing to a man seen by Catholics as the Vicar of Christ atop the Throne of Saint Peter.

"What we're seeing under Francis is to a very high degree [the kind of dissent] we saw in 1968," said Austen Ivereigh, the pope's biographer. "But what's new is the lack of respect, the lack of deference to papal authority, which has become somehow permissible in this pontificate in a way that I've never seen before."

The opposition to Francis is

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OBITUARIES

Pulitzer-winning Post TV critic Tom Shales wrote with incisive wit. C1

SPORTS

Not just a "meathead," Dan Campbell has resurrected the Lions.

BOOK WORLD

A new year means new books. We'll help you create a reading list.

ARTS & STYLE

Angourie Rice is ready for her big test: a "Mean Girls" movie musical.

TRAVEL

Tokyo's curse of the lucky cats, overrunning the temple of their birth.

BUSINESS

"Cautious optimism" at a beleaguered IRS as tax season gets underway.



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