



President Trump held a rally, his favored way of talking to his base, in an arena that never filled on Saturday night in Tulsa, Okla.

Trump’s Plan
For a Big Rally
Sputters Badly

This article is by Michael D. Shear, Maggie Haberman and Asteed W. Herndon.

TULSA, Okla. — President Trump’s attempt to revive his re-election campaign sputtered badly on Saturday night as he traveled to Tulsa for his first mass rally in months and found a far smaller crowd than his aides had promised him, then delivered a disjointed speech that did not address the multiple crises facing the nation or scandals battering him in Washington.

The weakness of Mr. Trump’s drawing power and political skills, in a state that voted for him overwhelmingly and in a format that he favors, raised new questions about his electoral prospects for a second term at a time when his poll numbers were already falling. And rather than speak to the wide cross-section of Americans who say they are concerned about police violence and systemic racism, he continued to use racist language, describing the coronavirus as “Kung Flu.”

While the president’s campaign had claimed that more than a million people had sought tickets for the rally, the 19,000-seat BOK Center was at least one-third empty during the rally. A second, outdoor venue was so sparsely attended that he and Vice President Mike Pence both canceled appearances there.

Tim Murtaugh, a spokesman for the Trump campaign, falsely blamed the small numbers on “radical protesters” and the news media who he said frightened away supporters. But there were few protests in the area, a strong security presence and no one blocking entrances.

Mr. Trump was furious about the unused outdoor stage and the comparatively thin crowd in the stadium, according to two people familiar with his reaction. News broadcasts carried video of the partially-empty stadium, and even the Drudge Report, a reliably conservative website, carried an all-caps headline that said “MAGA LESS MEGA” with a picture of rows and rows of empty blue seats.

The disappointing turnout came as Mr. Trump already found himself under siege about his sudden firing of the U.S. attorney in Manhattan and his losing legal battle over the release of a memoir full of damaging revelations by

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Culture Wars Reach the Pews, and Empty Them

By NICHOLAS CASEY

WILLIAMS, Ala. — In early 2017, a pastor in the Alabama countryside named Chris Thomas prepared to give his Sunday sermon. President Trump had been inaugurated the week before, and the new administration was already making headlines with a travel ban that included refugees from Syria.

Mr. Thomas knew of no one in his congregation who had ever met a Syrian refugee. Still, the ban deeply bothered him. So did the prospect of speaking against it from the pulpit, which he preferred to keep clean of politics.

And so that morning at First Baptist Church of Williams, a relatively liberal church with a mostly white congregation, he carried

Divisions of Trump Era
Challenge a Pastor
in Alabama

with him a sermon on the Beatitudes, eight blessings for the needy Jesus is said to have given to his followers on a hillside in Galilee.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted,” went one.

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth,” went another.

To these, the pastor added a verse of his own: “Blessed are those who seek refuge and have the door shut on their face.”

What Mr. Thomas, a 35-year-old preacher with cropped sandy hair and a trimmed beard, didn’t know was the degree to which Mr. Trump’s election had already polarized his small church. Nor did he know how the Trump presidency would continue to fracture the congregation for the next three years — a rift that would widen and threaten his own stewardship of Williams Church as the culture wars spilled into its pews in ways he could not control.

A few days after the sermon on the Beatitudes, a group of congregants wanted to talk.

“They more-or-less said, ‘Those are nice, but we don’t have to live by them,’” Mr. Thomas recalls church members saying about the verses, a cornerstone of Christian

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CALLA KESSLER/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Chris Thomas, right, upset some members of First Baptist Church of Williams with his sermons.

Latin America Also Confronts a Graft Epidemic

By NATALIE KITROEFF
and MITRA TAJ

Of all the schemes that have siphoned resources from Latin American countries fighting the coronavirus, the body bag conspiracy might be the most brazen.

Last month, prosecutors in Ecuador announced they had identified a criminal ring that had colluded with health officials to win a contract selling body bags to hospitals at 13 times the real price.

Then one of the men implicated, Daniel Salcedo, fled Ecuador in a

small plane that crashed in Peru. Mr. Salcedo is now recovering in the custody of the Ecuador police.

Even as Latin America has emerged as an epicenter of the pandemic, with deaths and infections soaring, efforts to contain the crisis have been undermined by a litany of corruption scandals.

Dozens of public officials and local entrepreneurs stand accused of exploiting the crisis for personal enrichment by peddling influence to gouge hospitals and governments for medical supplies including masks, sanitizer and ventilators. Some of the gear was so

flawed that it was rendered useless — and may have contributed to even more sickness and death.

“People are dying in the streets because the hospital system collapsed,” said Diana Salazar, Ecuador’s attorney general. “To profit from the pain of others, with all these people who are losing their loved ones, it’s immoral.”

Fraud inquiries have reached the highest levels of government. The former Bolivian health minister is under house arrest awaiting trial on corruption charges af-

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BACKLASH GROWS
AFTER PRESIDENT
FIRES PROSECUTOR

U.S. Attorney Who Pursued Trump Allies
Had Refused a Request to Resign

This article is by Alan Feuer, Katie Benner, Ben Prosser, Maggie Haberman, William K. Rashbaum, Nicole Hong and Benjamin Weiser.

President Trump on Saturday fired the federal prosecutor whose office put his former personal lawyer in prison and is investigating his current one, heightening criticism that the president was carrying out an extraordinary purge to rid his administration of officials whose independence could be a threat to his re-election campaign.

Mr. Trump’s dismissal of the prosecutor, Geoffrey S. Berman, the United States attorney in Manhattan, whose office has pursued one case after another that have rankled Mr. Trump, led to political blowback and an unexpected result: By the end of the day, Mr. Berman’s handpicked deputy, not the administration’s favored replacement, was chosen to succeed him for now.

The abrupt ouster of Mr. Berman came as Mr. Trump sought to reinvigorate his campaign with its first public rally in months and days after new allegations by his former national security adviser that he had engaged in “obstruction of justice as a way of life.”

It was the latest move in a broader purge of administration officials that has intensified in the months since the Republican-led Senate acquitted Mr. Trump at an impeachment trial.

Since the beginning of the year, the president has fired or forced out inspectors general with independent oversight over executive branch agencies and other key figures from the trial.

Mr. Berman, who has been in office since 2018, had declined to leave his post after Attorney General William P. Barr announced late on Friday night that Mr.

Berman would be replaced by Jay Clayton, the chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Mr. Clayton is friendly with Mr. Trump and had golfed with the president at his club in Bedminster, N.J., as recently as last weekend, according to two people familiar with the matter.

But on Saturday, facing a stand-off with Mr. Berman, Mr. Barr shifted course. In a letter released by the Justice Department, Mr. Barr told Mr. Berman that Mr. Trump had fired him and that he would be replaced temporarily with the prosecutor’s own chief deputy, Audrey Strauss.

The choice of Ms. Strauss appeared to mollify Mr. Berman, who then issued a statement saying he would step down in light of the reversal.

In the statement, Mr. Berman said that under Ms. Strauss, the Southern District of New York, as the prosecutors’ office in Manhattan is formally known, “will con-

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HIROKO MASUIKE/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Geoffrey S. Berman arriving at his Manhattan office Saturday.

As Crisis Swirls,
Nursing Homes
‘Dump’ Patients

By JESSICA SILVER-GREENBERG
and AMY JULIA HARRIS

On a chilly afternoon in April, Los Angeles police found an old, disoriented man crumpled on a Koreatown sidewalk.

Several days earlier, RC Kendrick, an 88-year-old with dementia, was living at Lakeview Terrace, a nursing home with a history of regulatory problems. His family had placed him there to make sure he got round-the-clock care after his condition deteriorated and he began disappearing for days at a time.

But on April 6, the nursing home deposited Mr. Kendrick at an unregulated boardinghouse — without bothering to inform his family. Less than 24 hours later, Mr. Kendrick was wandering the city alone.

According to three Lakeview employees, Mr. Kendrick’s ouster came as the nursing home was telling staff members to try to clear out less-profitable residents to make room for a new class of customers who would generate more revenue: patients with Covid-19.

More than any other institution in America, nursing homes have come to symbolize the deadly destruction of the coronavirus crisis. More than 51,000 residents and employees of nursing homes and long-term care facilities have died, representing more than 40

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New York Effort
To Trace the Ill
Falters Early On

By SHARON OTTERMAN

New York City’s ambitious contact-tracing program, a crucial initiative in the effort to curb the coronavirus, has gotten off to a worrisome start just as the city’s reopening enters a new phase on Monday, with outdoor dining, in-store shopping and office work resuming.

The city has hired 3,000 disease detectives and case monitors, who are supposed to identify anyone who has come into contact with the hundreds of people who are still testing positive for the virus in the city every day. But the first statistics from the program, which began on June 1, indicate that tracers are often unable to locate infected people or gather information from them.

Only 35 percent of the 5,347 city residents who tested positive or were presumed positive for Covid-19 in the program’s first two weeks gave information about close contacts to tracers, the city said in releasing the first statistics.

Contact tracing is one of the few tools that public health officials have to fight Covid-19 in lieu of a vaccine, along with widespread testing and isolation of those exposed to the coronavirus. The early results of New York’s program raise fresh concerns about the difficulties in preventing a surge of new cases as states

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Cheese? Onion? Gloves?

Some restaurants in Eastern Europe offer customers disposable gloves to eat burgers. The coronavirus may bring the idea a wider following. PAGE 12

U.S. Roils Allies Over Balkans

The Trump administration is being accused of favoring Serbia over Kosovo in pushing for a peace deal. PAGE 14

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A Tight Race in Kentucky

Fury over the killing of Breonna Taylor has changed the contest to determine Senator Mitch McConnell’s rival. PAGE 15



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Tiz the Law Wins Belmont

The New York-bred horse, ridden by Manny Franco, prevailed in front of empty grandstands. PAGE 32

On Track for Change

Bubba Wallace, the only black driver in NASCAR’s top racing series, has become an unlikely activist. PAGE 34

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How to Remake Policing

The killing of George Floyd shows how far the country has to go to change law enforcement. Five experts and organizers come together to discuss solutions. PAGE 1

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Playtime in a World Undone

The Last of Us Part II, the long-awaited video game sequel set in a tribal, pandemic-ravaged world, takes violence to an uncomfortable new level. PAGE 1

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Self-Portraits in These Times

Images by black photographers reflect on America and identity at this extraordinary moment. PAGE 8

Thespians on Tape, at Least

The International Thespian Festival, nirvana for theater kids, goes on — but with screens instead of sets. PAGE 4

AT HOME

Grand Canyon Alternatives

Popular national parks are expected to attract crowds, but for any outdoor activity there is a lesser-traveled, and still awe-inspiring site for you. PAGE 5

SUNDAY STYLES

Juneteenth Now

This American holiday is a reminder that engaging in freedom is an everyday practice, even as the fight for racial justice and equality continues. PAGE 1



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