The Washington Post

Prices may vary in areas outside metropolitan Washington.

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Shower, t-storm 86/76 • T-storm 94/76

Democracy Dies in Darkness

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 5, 2026 · $4

How the vandalism claims crumbled

Reflecting Pool project continues to be thorny issue for administration

BY DAN DIAMOND, LIAM BOWMAN, SALVADOR RIZZO AND JAKE SPRING

Standing on the basin of the Lincoln Memorial's Reflecting Pool in early May, President Donald Trump promised to fix the leaks and other problems that had long plagued one of the capital's most recognizable landmarks.

"It's going to last, I would say 50 years," he said. "It'll last, it's going to last a long time."

Trump vowed to finish the job in time for July Fourth celebrations on the National Mall. He and his aides cast the project, launched with a multimillion-dollar no-bid contract and without the normal review process, as a demonstration of how quickly the longtime real estate magnate could transform Washington.

Trump's changes instead lasted a few days. The basin's coating began to visibly peel, with chunks of Trump's new pool liner, tinted "American Flag Blue," littering the surface and algae blooms clouding the water.

Since then, the administration's response — to blame "vandals" for the damage — has morphed into a political headache, raising questions about what leaders in the administration knew as the government pursued criminal charges against four people, including former U.S. Olympian David Hearn.

The president is furious at one of his most ardent supporters, Jeanine Pirro, the U.S. attorney for the nation's capital, for dropping vandalism charges against the four people in recent days. Prosecutors in a Friday court filing blamed the damage on flawed installation work and said the Interior Department had not shared critical information in a

SEE POOL ON A8

Helipad headache

MANUEL BALCE CENETA/AP; PETER W. STEVENSON/THE WASHINGTON POST

President Donald Trump has directed contractors to redo weeks of work on his planned White House helipad. A granite presidential seal was installed July 30, but was removed Tuesday. **Story, B13**

Senate committee advances Blanche for AG after standoff

Full chamber must now hold a final vote on confirmation, potentially as early as this week

BY JEREMY ROEBUCK AND THEODORIC MEYER

A divided Senate Judiciary Committee voted Tuesday to advance Todd Blanche's nomination to become attorney general, putting President Donald Trump's former criminal defense lawyer one step closer to becoming the next confirmed head of the Justice Department.

The 12-10 party-line vote came after Blanche's prospects for the job were nearly derailed last week by lingering Republican concerns over the controversial deal the department brokered this spring to resolve Trump's legal claims against the IRS tax returns.

Two GOP holdouts, Sens. John Cornyn of Texas and Thom Tillis of North Carolina, threatened to vote against the acting attorney general — potentially killing his nomination at the committee stage — without written assurances that the Justice Department would not move forward with aspects of the agreement, including its proposed $1.8 billion fund for people who claimed they were victims of politicized prosecutions.

Both senators said Tuesday that Blanche had allayed their concerns with a pair of written statements issued late Sunday purporting to impose limits on the deal, as Blanche had previously resisted.

As Cornyn cast his vote in favor of Blanche, he appeared to acknowledge the chief criticism of those written commitments: that they had not been signed off on by Trump's legal team and could be reversed by the president.

Ultimately, Cornyn said, bringing stability to a Justice Department that has been without a permanent leader since Trump fired Attorney General Pam Bondi four months ago influenced his decision to vote for the nominee.

"We need a stabilizing force at the Department of Justice, and Mr. Blanche deserves the opportunity to provide that," he said.

Sen. Peter Welch (D-Vermont) made a related argument before joining the rest of the committee's Democrats in voting against the nominee: Rejecting Blanche, who brings considerable experience as a federal prosecutor earlier in his career, could prompt Trump to nominate someone less qualified.

"If we rejected Todd Blanche,

SEE BLANCHE ON A7

CDC reports leap in cases

EXPANDS OUTBREAK TO 15 STATES

Cyclosporiasis traced to shredded iceburg lettuce

BY LENA H. SUN AND RACHEL ROUBEIN

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is expanding the largest known cyclosporiasis outbreak to 15 states, adding six states where illnesses have been traced to shredded iceberg lettuce sourced from central Mexico, according to three individuals familiar with the investigation.

Missouri, which is reporting 1,095 cases, is one of the states being added, according to a state health department spokesperson. The number of state cases jumped dramatically in the past week. Patients who were interviewed at length by state and local investigators said they consumed Taco Bell before getting sick, spokesperson Lisa Cox said.

The other states are Arkansas, Iowa, Nebraska, New Hampshire and North Carolina, according to a fourth person familiar with the investigation.

The individuals spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss an ongoing investigation. The CDC did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The investigation is continuing to evolve, and the number of states could change.

The expansion marks a significant widening of the outbreak. On Monday, Michigan health officials announced that two people have died in the outbreak there, the first deaths confirmed in the United States related to the microscopic parasite. Both people had underlying health conditions that may have been affected by the intestinal illness

SEE CDC ON A9

Trump keeps making threats. World leaders aren't blinking.

Nations are shrugging off president's bombast that once raised global alarm

BY STEVE HENDRIX AND ANTHONY FAIOLA

LONDON — When President Donald Trump strode into the Rose Garden in April 2025 brandishing a poster board of tariff hikes, the world leaped as if a fire alarm had gone off. Markets shed trillions of dollars, envoys rushed to Washington, more than 75 governments scrambled to negotiate, some scrapping carefully prepped countermeasures in a rush to cut deals.

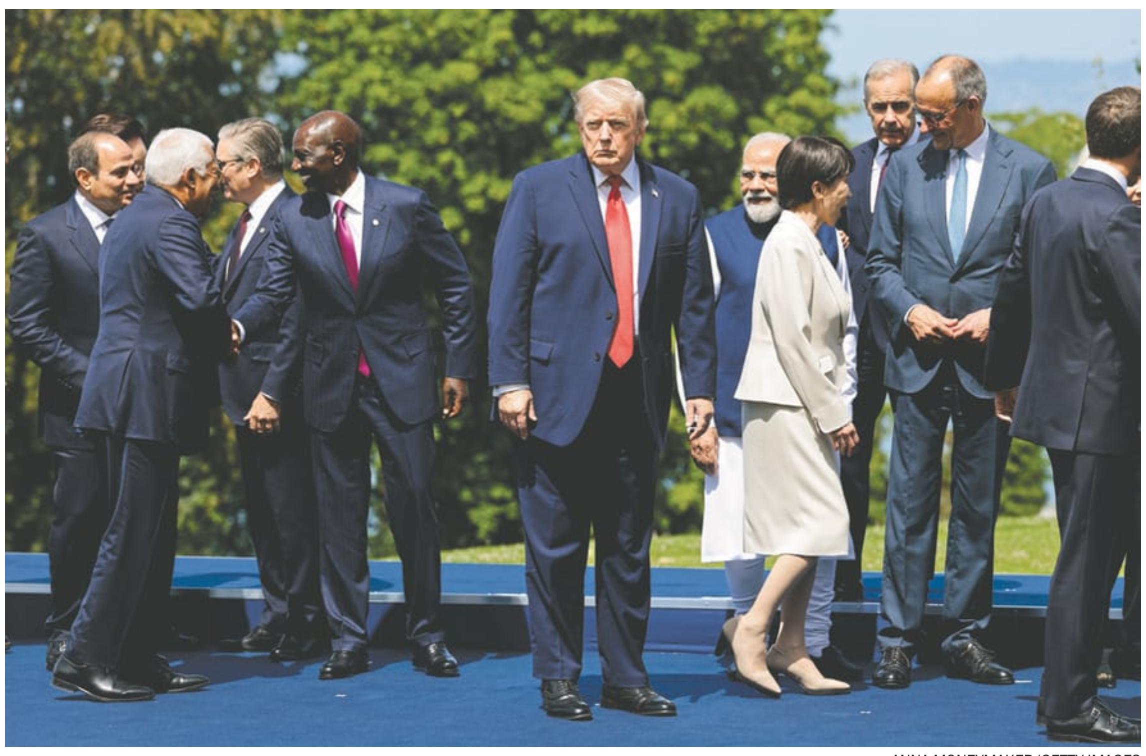
Sixteen months later, the flabbergasting threats keep piling up — to weaponize trade, annex Canada, seize Greenland, abandon NATO, annihilate Iran — but the alarm bells have gone quiet. World leaders are slower to rattle as they've seen the president increasingly fenced in by courts, rebuffed by Congress and strung along by Tehran — his ultimatums evaporating and poll numbers sinking.

When Trump announced a fresh barrage of tariffs last month, this time based on accusations of child labor violations to skirt limits imposed by the Supreme Court, the world didn't shriek — it shrugged. France's central bank governor predicted little impact. Britain proclaimed its exporters largely unaffected. Mexico's economy minister waved it off as one tariff simply replacing another.

The financial markets, inured to the bluster, hardly moved.

As Trump nears the midpoint of his second term, officials and analysts say, one of his signature powers — to bluster on social media, shock, spark panic and convert that panic ("thank you for your attention to this matter") into the outcomes that he wants, has begun to fade. The bully pulpit of the presidency remains, but the audience is no

SEE TRUMP ON A13



ANNA MONEYMAKER/GETTY IMAGES

President Donald Trump during the Group of Seven summit in June in Évian-les-Bains, France.

Predatory schools cheated veterans out of job training

Institutions defrauded VA of $300 million, Post investigation finds

BY CRAIG WHITLOCK AND ANDREW BA TRAN

For-profit trade schools that educate military veterans under the GI Bill have bilked the federal government out of more than $300 million, often by charging eye-popping sums for basic classes that last only a few days or weeks, according to a Washington Post investigation.

In New Hampshire, an "organic lawn care institute" taught veterans how to grow grass in a course that took, at most, five days. The school typically billed the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) $14,900 per student, more than triple what it charged civilians not covered by the GI Bill. The federal government paid the school more than $2 million before it came under investigation and closed, records obtained under the Freedom of Information Act show.

Another GI Bill trade school based in New Hampshire charged $18,500 in tuition to teach veterans how to make fake rocks out of concrete, federal documents show. That course lasted eight days. The school owner, a convicted tax evader, exploited veterans as free labor on building projects, according to public records and interviews. Before officials forced it to shut down, VA paid the school $17.8 million over nearly seven years.

In Texas, a destitute high school dropout opened a "boot camp" that trained novices to become heating and air-conditioning technicians in just six weeks. Tuition and fees ran around $20,000. Within three years, the school had reaped $72 million from the GI Bill to enroll more than 3,500 veterans. The owner bought a Lamborghini, a Ferrari and a Bentley — and spent almost $200,000 at strip clubs — before being arrested and convicted of fraud, court records show.

At the owner's trial, several veterans described the boot camp as a slapdash operation that duped them with hollow promises of a good-paying career.

"I feel bamboozled," testified

SEE GI BILL ON A10

IN THE NEWS

Primary elections For coverage of Tuesday's state contests, go to washingtonpost.com.

Arson arrest Authorities in Spokane, Washington, charge a man in connection with the Old Trails Fire, one of the three major wildfires consuming parts of the region. A3

THE NATION

Federal officers are outfitting Haitian immigrants in Ohio with ankle monitors. A2

Rep. Max Miller is under investigation by the House Ethics Committee for allegations of domestic abuse. A4

The White House told tech companies that certain AI systems will be exempt from security review. A6

SpaceX reports loss of more than $500 million in first quarterly earnings report since taking its stock public. A6

THE WORLD

Regional tensions in the Middle East cast a shadow over the annual Arbaeen pilgrimage in the Iraqi holy city of Karbala. A14

THE ECONOMY

Thinking of taking out a personal loan to cope with credit card debt? That could backfire. A18

STYLE

Ariana Grande plans to "step back from visibility." Cue the criticism and concern. B1

SPORTS

The Ocho will return to ESPN this week, bringing obscure sports — and the broadcasters who cover them — to the spotlight. B7

THE REGION

Dupont Circle is getting a new park inspired by a 60-year-old painting in the space above an underpass. B13

FOOD

Iced coffee is having a moment. See which brand rose above the pack to be crowned our favorite.