

The Washington Post

Prices may vary in areas outside metropolitan Washington.

RE V1 V2 V3 V4



Partly sunny 57/45 • Tomorrow: Mostly cloudy 63/44 **B20**

Democracy Dies in Darkness

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2026 • \$4

Rubio tries to boost Orban in Hungary

The prime minister, a Trump ally, is facing tough reelection bid

BY JOHN HUDSON

BUDAPEST — Secretary of State Marco Rubio sought to throw Viktor Orban a political lifeline on Monday, as the Hungarian prime minister trails in most polls ahead of an election this spring that could see Europe's most pro-Russian and longest-ruling prime minister voted out of power.

The top U.S. diplomat praised Orban's leadership, signed a civilian nuclear cooperation agreement with his government and defended issuing Hungary an exemption from U.S. sanctions despite Orban's decision to continue buying Russian energy.

"We want this country to do well," said Rubio standing alongside Orban during a news conference in Budapest, "especially as long as you're the prime minister and the leader of this country."

"President Trump is deeply committed to your success, because your success is our success," Rubio added.

Rubio's support for Orban marks the latest example of the Trump administration working to keep in power right-wing populist leaders who have praised President Donald Trump and are seen as ideologically aligned. In summer, political neophyte Karol Nawrocki narrowly won a presidential runoff in Poland after being invited to the White House by Trump.

In a post on Truth Social last week, Trump endorsed Orban for the April elections and called him a "truly strong and powerful Leader" and "a true friend, fighter, and WINNER."

Whether the efforts by Trump

SEE HUNGARY ON A10

Welcoming in the Year of the Horse



AJENG DINAR ULFIANA/REUTERS

A worshiper lights incense sticks on the eve of the Chinese Lunar New Year on Monday at Boen San Bio temple in Tangerang, on the outskirts of Jakarta, Indonesia. Tuesday marks the start of the Year of the Horse.

'Us versus them' battle tears small Va. town apart

Purcellville drama involves 'Team Mayberry,' felony charges, lawsuits and an attempted citizen revolt

BY PAUL SCHWARTZMAN

The town council meeting had reached the point on the agenda where the public could speak on any topic, and emotions, to put it mildly, were a tad raw.

"It's not too late to resign!" a woman shouted at the lawmakers, four of whom, including the mayor, are the focus of a recall campaign.

"Stop screwing our town!" a

man railed.

"We are broke and sicker of you than ever!" someone else yelled.

Small towns often are known for their quirky, insular intrigue, but the drama unfolding in Purcellville, a Virginia exurb that's a 50-mile drive west of Washington, is a brass-knuckled version of quaint.

The battle is rooted in tensions that often divide communities across the country — change

versus status quo, growth versus no growth — only in Purcellville the weapons are lawsuits, an attempted citizen revolt, and the kind of ferocious rhetoric that defines much of public life in contemporary America.

Residents could be forgiven for needing a whiteboard to chart the dizzying developments.

Over the past year, state police accused the vice mayor and town manager of orchestrating a bid-

rigging scheme — charges both men deny. The vice mayor has filed a \$42 million lawsuit against a gaggle of town and law enforcement officials, alleging that his rights have been violated. The interim police chief has filed a \$20 million defamation lawsuit against the vice mayor.

Then there are the more than 1,100 residents who signed petitions seeking to recall the mayor,

SEE PURCELLVILLE ON A4



LUCIAN PERKINS/THE WASHINGTON POST

ROBERT DUVALL | 1931-2026

A chameleon of the silver screen dies at 95

Duvall became one of the most respected acting talents of his generation

BY ADAM BERNSTEIN

Robert Duvall, an Oscar-winning actor who disappeared into an astonishing range of roles — lawmen and outlaws, Southern-fried alcoholics and Manhattan boardroom sharks, a hotheaded veteran and a cool-tempered mob consigliere — and emerged as one of the most respected screen talents of his generation, died Feb. 15. He was 95.

His wife, Luciana Pedraza Duvall, said in a Facebook post that Mr. Duvall died at home, without citing a cause. He had long lived at Byrnley, a horse farm in Fauquier County, Virginia, near The Plains.

By his own account, Mr. Duvall was a late-blooming youth, a Navy rear admiral's son whose only discernible talent in childhood was for

SEE DUVALL ON A20

Robert Duvall dances with his wife, Luciana Pedraza Duvall, in their Virginia ranch home.

'Affordability' surges to prominence

BY JULIE Z. WEIL

"Affordability" is the political word of the moment.

The prices of everyday essentials, such as housing and health care, are at the top of Americans' concerns. And "affordability" has become many politicians' favorite term to refer to the issue, rather than older buzzwords such as "cost of living," the more basic "prices" or specific economic measures such as "inflation."

"Affordability" rocketed up in Google Trends in November, when Democrats Abigail Spanberger, Mikie Sherrill and Zohran Mamdani all won elections (as governor of Virginia, governor of

The term has become a campaign buzzword as key costs keep rising

New Jersey and mayor of New York City, respectively) in part on the strength of campaigns that centered on the word. The New York Times noted that email newsletters from members of Congress almost never used the word before Joe Biden's presidency and used it fewer than 10 times a month before President Donald Trump's second term. In November and December, they

mentioned it 70 times a month.

Why this word, and why now? The term speaks to an uncomfortable gap between certain key costs, such as housing, and people's incomes. With inflation much cooler than its sky-high 2022 peak of 9 percent — on Friday, the latest report showed annual inflation at 2.4 percent — "affordability" speaks to people's ongoing complaints about costs without referencing economic benchmarks.

Trump won the presidency in part because of surging prices during the Biden administration, and promised to bring down prices. But he has downplayed

SEE AFFORDABILITY ON A5

Trump offers Potomac sewage spill response

BY DANA HEDGPETH

President Donald Trump said Monday that federal authorities will respond to a major sewage spill that occurred four weeks ago in the Potomac River, which flows between Maryland, Washington and Virginia.

In a post on his social network, Truth Social, Trump said the Federal Emergency Management Agency would play a key role in a response involving "Management, Direction, and Coordination" to protect the Potomac. FEMA is one of the agencies affected by the current partial gov-

Federal authorities will respond to major breach, the president said

ernment shutdown; in past shutdowns, its employees have largely been required to work without pay.

White House officials did not immediately respond to questions about what the federal response to the spill would entail.

Trump blamed "local Democrat leaders" for "gross misman-

agement" in his post, and he singled out Maryland Gov. Wes Moore (D), suggesting that the governor is incapable of handling the situation. On Air Force One on Monday afternoon en route to Washington from Mar-a-Lago, Trump again criticized Moore.

"I don't like the fact that he did that horrible, you know, with the pipes and the Potomac, and he's not doing the job," Trump said. "I'm going to have to get the federal government involved in getting it fixed, because he can't fix anything."

Moore, who often spars with

SEE POTOMAC ON A5

IN THE NEWS

Ballroom redesign New renderings offer the clearest look yet at President Donald Trump's White House addition, which faces legal challenges and questions on Capitol Hill. **B13**

Obama believes The former president said the universe is too vast for alien life not to exist, but he hasn't seen proof of it. **A2**

THE NATION
A federal judge in Pennsylvania ordered the Trump administration to restore displays discussing slavery to the site in Philadelphia where George Washington lived during his presidency. **A6**

THE WORLD
The abduction of Mexican mine workers remains a mystery and has raised fears locally and more widely generated questions about the security improvements touted by President Claudia Sheinbaum. **A8**

FINANCIAL
More companies are allowing weeks or months of paid or unpaid leave as a perk to valued employees. **A15**

STYLE
The Y2K 'it' jeans 7FAM, which millennials associate with a particular moment in celebrity history, are back. **B7**

SPORTS
The U.S. women's hockey team seems like the only sure thing at the Winter Olympics after thrashing Sweden to reach Thursday's gold medal game. **B1**
Barry Svruga asks: Can you simultaneously love and loathe the Olympics? **B1**

LOCAL
Maryland's two largest school districts are facing backlash for using a Muslim holiday to make up for lost class time after last month's winter storm. **B13**
A man's body was found beaten and burned in his Logan Circle condominium. **B13**

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