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Democracy Dies in Darkness

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Vital safety measure? Or invasion of privacy?

Residents, city officials at odds over police use of AI license plate readers

BY ANNIE GOWEN

TROY, N.Y. — The civic uproar began quietly, when a mom walking her newborn spotted a strange black contraption at the end of her block: a camera topped with a solar panel.

Dierdre Shea researched the camera and learned that it was an artificial-intelligence-assisted license plate reader — the type that have caused privacy concerns across the country in recent months, leading to laws limiting their use in more than a dozen states.

She emailed her neighbors, sparking fierce debate in this town of 52,000 overlooking the Hudson River. Residents called for the devices to be taken off the streets, and the Republican mayor, who supports the cameras, clashed with the Democratic city council, which tried to halt funding for them.

Last month, Mayor Carmella Mantello, flanked by officers in blue, accused the city council of “defunding” the police and declared a state of emergency to keep the cameras running, a designation usually reserved for floods and blizzards.

“I will not put our city in jeopardy and take these cameras away,” she said.

The cameras at the heart of the debate are run by Flock Safety, a technology company that has built a network of automatic license plate readers in more than 6,000 communities across the country in recent years.

Flock’s system uses AI-enabled cameras to snap photos of every vehicle that passes, creating a digital “fingerprint” that includes data as personal as bumper stickers or gun racks.

Flock cameras are beloved by police because officers can use the company’s national database to track vehicle movements to recover drugs and stolen automobiles.

SEE CAMERAS ON A8

“I don’t want to live in a country that tells me how I have to worship my God.”

Karen Irwin, 50, of New York City, protested the event



PETE KIEHART/FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

“Rededicate 250: A National Jubilee of Prayer, Praise & Thanksgiving” drew thousands Sunday on the National Mall.

National Mall meets Sunday service

BY MICHELLE BOORSTEIN, LAURA MECKLER AND MARIANA ALFARO

A crowd of thousands transformed a block of the National Mall into an evangelical-style worship service Sunday at an event backed by President Donald Trump and funded with millions of taxpayer dollars.

In an eight-hour lineup, speakers including top government officials framed America as a country founded to be explicitly Christian — and in danger if its population turns from their version of that religious faith.

Sitting, standing, dancing and praising with hands raised toward a blazing sun, attendees appeared riveted as speakers took the stage during “Rededicate 250: A National Jubilee of Prayer, Praise & Thanksgiving.”

Many said they were thrilled to see an event that tied the nation and its government so

Scholars say Trump-backed prayer festival inaccurately portrays country’s founding

overtly to Christianity.

“We welcome Jesus into this place!” worship leader Andy Frank said at the start of the event, belting from a stage with ivory-colored pillars that evoked the neoclassical architecture of the capital’s federal buildings.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio, speaking by video, said civilizations before Christianity saw history as a “wheel to nowhere,” and that “our faith” of Christianity has always been the “soul of our nation.”

Trump, who is not known for quoting the Bible, read a passage from Scripture in

which God promises to heal the ancient Israelites if they agree to pray and humble themselves before God.

Until Trump’s second term in office, it had been virtually unheard of in modern times for U.S. government officials to publicly tie the nation to a specific set of religious beliefs. Trump’s cabinet members have changed that norm.

On Sunday, aside from a couple of small groups of protesters outside the event, attendees at the jubilee seemed unfazed by or grateful for the government imprimatur on their faith system.

“It’s about time and sorely needed,” said Richard Nuccitelli, 87, a real estate agent from New Fairfield, Connecticut, who traveled to D.C. with four friends from his Bible

SEE JUBILEE ON A16

More photos: “Rededicate 250” attendees gather on the National Mall. C9

Left is split on election strategy

COMPETING PITCHES TO PARTY LEADERS

Democrats aim to woo working-class voters

BY RILEY BEGGIN

Government-made prescription drugs. \$20,000 for first-time home buyers. Capped child care costs.

These are among the proposals that a cohort of left-leaning congressional Democrats argue will help their party win back working-class voters in the mid-term elections and set the stage for success in the 2028 presidential election.

The suite of affordability proposals from the Congressional Progressive Caucus is the group’s opening bid in a debate within the party over what Democrats should offer voters frustrated with the current economic picture.

House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-New York) has directed the chamber’s Democratic policy committee to host listening sessions with members, with voters and with advocacy groups to inform a party-wide agenda expected to be released this summer.

The progressive wing’s plan is competing with proposals from moderate Democrats who are prioritizing efforts aimed at reducing regulatory barriers and increasing competition in health care, agriculture, housing and energy.

The progressives also contend that campaigning on reversing President Donald Trump’s policies, including tariffs and Medicaid cuts, will not be enough to win voters.

“The Democratic Party needs to show that we’re not just anti-Trump, but that we also have an actual pro-working-class agenda.”

SEE DEMOCRATS ON A7

Larry Hogan finds his next act

The former Maryland governor says he’s done running for office. Now, he’s launching a nonpartisan leadership institute at Washington College.

BY ERIN COX

At the height of his political influence, Maryland’s former Republican governor Larry Hogan was courted as a presidential candidate to offer an antidote to Donald Trump’s takeover of the GOP.

But the brand that made him a popular blue state governor never made a splash outside the “Never Trump” world. Now Hogan is done trying to reshape his party as a candidate.

Instead, in what he calls his “Zen” era, Hogan is announcing Sunday the launch of the nonpartisan Hogan Institute at a small liberal arts college. Vowing to never run for office again, Hogan is instead focused on teaching leadership skills to Washington College undergraduates who he hopes can fix the “broken” two-party system that he’s leaving behind.

“It can be the storefront of the Hogan philosophy, even if it’s a little storefront,” Hogan, 69, said in a wide-ranging interview about the Republican Party, his

SEE HOGAN ON A2



MAXINE WALLACE/THE WASHINGTON POST

Larry Hogan, Maryland’s former governor, in his office in Annapolis. A “Never Trump” Republican, Hogan hopes the next generation can fix the “broken” two-party system he’s leaving behind.

What happened to RFK Jr.’s health agency overhaul?

White House has favored more-conventional health officials ahead of midterms

BY RACHEL ROUBEIN, LAUREN WEBER AND DAN DIAMOND

FDA Commissioner Marty Makary: resigned.

Surgeon general nominee Casey Means: withdrawn.

CDC director nominee Dave Weldon: didn’t make it to a congressional hearing.

All three were allies of Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. All three — and others who have been pushed out — were heralded as vanguards of Kennedy’s effort to remake the nation’s health agencies with those who questioned or outright opposed the medical establishment.

But more than a year into Kennedy’s tenure, Trump officials have increasingly swapped out his handpicked deputies for people with more traditional experience, seeking to tamp down the health agencies’ controversies

ahead of this year’s midterm elections.

The leadership overhaul has left some Make America Healthy Again allies worried that Kennedy’s influence, as well as the broader movement’s Republican alliance, is being diminished, according to three people familiar with the matter, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to talk candidly. Some say they are worried there is increasing attention within the administration on satisfying corporate interests.

Influential MAHA leaders are warning Republicans that if they don’t do more to appease the MAHA moms who make up their movement, they could lose critical votes in November.

“The GOP has historically had trouble with women. And dropping from the sky like manna from heaven — gluten-free, GMO-free manna from heaven — you have this coalition of voters who are willing to vote red as women,” said Alex Clark, a prominent conservative wellness influencer and podcaster aligned with the MAHA movement. “We should be doing everything we can to keep them happy.”

SEE MAHA ON A6

IN THE NEWS

PGA Championship Aaron Rai became the first English-born golfer in more than a century to win the title. C1

GOP senator loses in primary Bill Cassidy of Louisiana, who voted to convict President Donald Trump in his 2021 impeachment trial, failed to advance to a runoff. A3

THE NATION Hundreds of millions of dollars for the planned White House ballroom cannot be included in a GOP spending bill as it is currently written, the Senate parliamentarian ruled. A4

THE WORLD Chinese leader Xi Jinping scored diplomatic points during his frictionless summit with President Donald Trump last week while conceding nothing to his U.S. rival. A10

THE ECONOMY As the AI boom leads to growing profits for utilities, some states are looking to block proposed rate hikes. A13

STYLE Curators at the National Portrait Gallery have found a way to counter the Trump administration: with facts. B1

With his three-album, 43-track release last week, Drake is spreading himself — and his grievance — too thin. B1

SPORTS The Nationals-Orioles series in D.C. brought Craig Albernaz and Blake Butera back together. C1

THE REGION The fatal shooting of a star high school football player this month has left a D.C. neighborhood on edge. C7

HEALTH & SCIENCE Doctors and health officials are reckoning with the challenges of getting patients off anti-depressants. D1

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