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Democracy Dies in Darkness

MONDAY, AUGUST 18, 2025 • \$4

Called up in the nation's capital



JULIA DEMAREE NIKHINSON/AP

A tour bus passes members of the D.C. National Guard, mobilized by President Donald Trump, in Washington on Sunday. The number of troops in the city could nearly double in the coming days as Republican governors answered the administration's call for additional personnel in a city Trump portrays as crime-ridden. **Story, A5**

U.S. ready to give Ukraine 'robust' security pledge

LAND CONCESSIONS SEEN AS KEY TO PEACE

European leaders to join Zelensky at White House

This article is by David L. Stern, Mariana Alfaro, Anastacia Galouchka, Catherine Belton and Natalie Allison

U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff said Sunday ahead of a planned meeting at the White House with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and European leaders that President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed to "robust security guarantees" during their summit in Alaska last week.

"The United States is potentially prepared to be able to give Article 5 security guarantees, but not from NATO — directly from the United States and other European countries," Witkoff said in a "Fox News Sunday" interview.

Under Article 5 of the NATO treaty, if a member country is attacked, each member of the alliance "will consider this act of violence as an armed attack against all members and will take the actions it deems necessary." Ukraine is not a member of NATO but has been seeking support from allies since Russia launched

its full-scale invasion in 2022.

Witkoff said the security guarantee deal would be further discussed among the United States, Zelensky and European allies during the Monday afternoon meeting in Washington. European leaders will be joining that meeting to present a united front to help Zelensky navigate what Ukrainians anticipate could be a high-stakes and potentially emotional meeting on which Ukraine's future could hinge.

Separately, the U.S. is hoping that a trilateral meeting with Trump, Putin and Zelensky will take place this week, according to a White House official. The official, however, cautioned that the White House does not necessarily expect Monday's meeting to result in that. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal planning.

Working out the precise implementation of security guarantees is likely to be a lengthy process, which could allow Putin to continue his war while details are finalized.

SEE UKRAINE ON A11

Mass protests erupt in Israel as military readies plans to occupy Gaza City

BY CLAIRE PARKER, HEIDI LEVINE, ALON ROM AND ABBIE CHEESEMAN

JERUSALEM — Hundreds of thousands of Israelis stayed home from work, flooded city streets, and blocked roads and highways across the country on Sunday, according to local media, staging some of the largest anti-war protests in months as the military

Demonstrations, strike call for end to war and release of last hostages

prepared for a major assault on Gaza City, the humanitarian crisis there deepened and anxiety mounted over the conditions of the hostages still in captivity.

The widespread strike on Sunday, a workday in Israel, was organized by the Hostages and Missing Families Forum, an umbrella group representing many families of current or former Israeli hostages. The group called for action in response to the government's decision this month to seize control of Gaza's largest city, an operation that could take months and involve the forced displacement of an

estimated 1 million Palestinians.

Senior military leaders and a growing number of Israeli citizens oppose the plan, worried that it would endanger the 20 hostages authorities presume are still alive, strain army resources and erode prospects for recovering the bodies of 30 more hostages who were either killed in the Hamas attacks on Oct. 7, 2023, or died in captivity. "Hundreds of thousands of Is-

raeli citizens will shut down the country today with one clear call: Bring back the 50 hostages, end the war," the forum said.

By nightfall in Tel Aviv, Israel's cultural and financial hub, massive crowds had down one of the city's main boulevards and then gathered in the plaza now known as "Hostages Square."

"The people demand: Stop the fire!" protesters chanted. "Refuse, refuse. Save the hostages!" they

yelled. The calls came as Eyal Zamir, the chief of staff of the Israel Defense Forces, met with senior military commanders in Gaza on Sunday. "Today we are approving the plan for the next phase of the war," which will focus on Gaza City, he said, according to an IDF

SEE ISRAEL ON A10

Gazan visitors: U.S. pauses visas, including for medical care. **A10**

Frustrated by health costs, some leave U.S.

Americans who faced crippling debt, lack of coverage move abroad

BY KELLY KASULIS CHO

Jennifer Sontag cracked her skull and couldn't afford emergency brain surgery. Her doctors suggested she start a GoFundMe.

"Their advice was: 'You've got to get the surgery. You'll work it out later,'" she said. "And I'm like: 'Are you kidding me? Your advice to someone in a medical crisis is to beg for money?'"

Sontag, 52, was teaching business management in China in 2019 when she fell while exiting a bus and hit her head so hard that it caused a leak of cerebral fluid in her brain. She spent five days in a hospital in Shanghai before her worried family persuaded her to get the necessary surgery close to them in St. Louis.

Her hospital bill in China came out to roughly \$1,300, she said. In Missouri, she negotiated the price of her operation down to about \$100,000, resigning herself to a

SEE HEALTH CARE ON A13

A plantation's descendants take on slavery's legacy

Black and White families strike a deal, creating a reconciliation-focused nonprofit in Alabama

BY EMMANUEL FELTON

HARPERSVILLE, ALA. — Word travels fast in this small town, so when Theoangelo Perkins heard that the family of Bill Parker was visiting his grave, he jumped in his car and raced to the old cemetery.

The burial ground is divided into two parts. Parker was laid to rest near the entrance with other members of the White family whose ancestors, named Wallace, once owned this land and were the second-largest enslavers in Shelby County. Nearby lies a much larger area, where the Black people who worked the land, as enslaved people or sharecroppers, and their descendants have been buried for more than a century.

For decades, the Black families maintained their portion of the private cemetery and the White descendants of the Wallace family took care of theirs. But in the early 2000s, Parker put up a fence that blocked access to the Black portion of the cemetery, local residents say, though none know exactly why.

With Parker's family back in town on that day in 2018, Perkins hoped to persuade them to open the fence gate.

"My grandparents are buried at that cemetery. My great-grandparents are there. My great-great-grandparents are buried there. I have a great-



MICHAEL S. WILLIAMSON/THE WASHINGTON POST

Peter Datcher, surrounded by memorabilia, sits in his grandmother's home in Harpersville, Alabama.

great-great-grandmother who's buried there," said Perkins, who is Harpersville's mayor and the pastor of a local church. "And when I was small, my dad, my granddad and I would keep the cemetery up — at least the Black section of it."

At the cemetery, Perkins con-

fronted Nell Gottlieb, Parker's cousin, who inherited the Wallace plantation house and had clear memories of spending parts of her childhood there. Her views of the South had shifted dramatically since she moved away from Alabama more than 60 years ago. As Perkins told her

and her relatives about the pain caused by not being able to visit the Black graves in the cemetery, she felt deeply ashamed.

The family quickly agreed to stop blocking access.

Gottlieb asked what else they could do to try to make up for the

SEE PLANTATION ON A6

Shooting in Texas tied to left-wing activism

July attack outside ICE facility is part of increase in anti-fascist violence

BY ROBERT KLEMKO

DALLAS — Just after dusk on July 5, the crash of wood and metal suddenly reverberated through a predominantly Black and Latino neighborhood here known as The Bottoms. Neighbors peered out to see a small army of men in desert camouflage and tactical vests crouched behind a black armored vehicle, shouting commands toward a brick house.

A SWAT team had smashed through the front door of the residence, which neighbors say was occupied by several transgender women, part of a group of activists who initially united around trans and queer identity issues. Now, the women, dressed in bathrobes and pajamas, were being detained at gunpoint, neighbors said.

"It was weird enough that six or seven White, trans people

SEE ICE ON A4

IN THE NEWS

Trump's D.C. The president primarily sees the city from his armored limousine. A team of reporters retraced some of his likely routes with the goal of seeing his view firsthand. **A8**

Medicaid cuts The One Big Beautiful Bill and budget challenges are imperiling the future of the health care program in North Carolina. **A3**

THE NATION **Sheep's wool** and human hair could hold a key ingredient in up-grading toothpaste. **A2** **Florida GOP** "Depot Depot" merchandise was scrapped after Home Depot objected. **A5**

THE WORLD **The Sorbs**, a German national minority, are trying to save their vanishing language, which is threatened by assimilation and overt hostility from ultranationalists. **A9**

THE ECONOMY **The post-pandemic** slump in commercial real estate is now showing up in local government tax rolls. **A16**

STYLE **A musical** about Luigi Mangione, the accused killer of a health insurance CEO, is playing to sellout crowds. **B1**

What do Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce talk about? Now we know, thanks to the singer's appearance on the NFL star's podcast. **B1**

THE REGION **A guide** to the upcoming academic year, including policy changes at D.C.-area schools. **C7**

Adults are getting in on summer reading challenges via the D.C. Public Library. **C7**

HEALTH & SCIENCE **An anti-sunscreen** movement is growing on social media and causing concern among dermatologists, who warn of long-term health risks. **E1**

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Health cost concerns lead some Americans to move abroad

HEALTH CARE FROM A1

life of medical debt.

Sontag, an entrepreneur who for years owned clothing boutiques in St. Louis and Kansas City, had moved to China largely because she had become fed up with the U.S. health care system.

A decade before her fall, in the United States, she married her boyfriend “purely to get health insurance,” she said, because she was already struggling to afford care for Crohn’s disease, a chronic inflammatory bowel condition.

Within a year of getting married, she suffered a ruptured bowel, had emergency surgery and was saddled with some \$20,000 in medical bills. She eventually filed for bankruptcy, unable to afford the costs as her illness stopped her from working. “Even with his medical insurance, the co-pays and deductibles were so high that we still could not keep up,” she said. Years later, the couple divorced, and Sontag said she knew she had “no other options” but to leave the United States.

Sontag is part of a small and largely unstudied group of Americans who have decided to leave the U.S. permanently because of their concerns over health care costs. They have instead chosen countries with socialized medicine, universal health care coverage or lower medical costs.

“For anybody who has a chronic illness, for people who are middle class, people maybe lower on the income scale, this might be a very, very strong motivation to move to a country that has a more comprehensive health care system that is also less expensive,” said Gerald F. Kominski, a professor emeritus at UCLA’s Fielding School of Public Health.

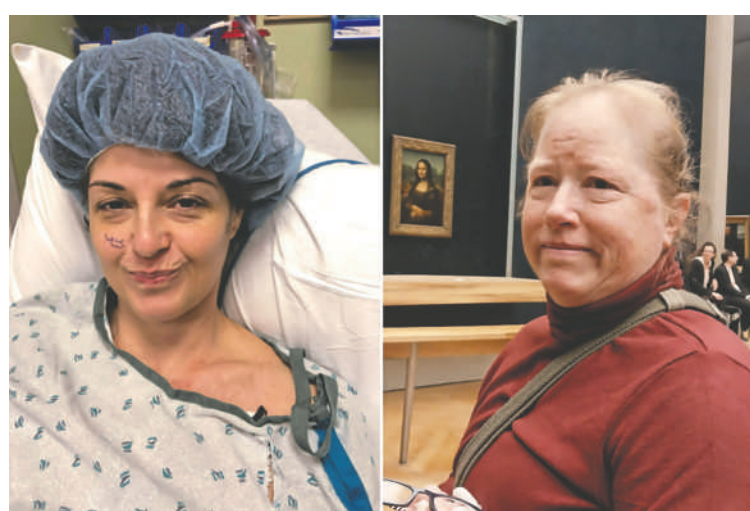
More than 30 countries have universal health care, according to a 2022 list from the New York state government, and many others offer some form of socialized medicine or subsidized care.

“It’s widely known and has been in our field for decades that the United States is the most expensive health care system in the world, any way that you want to measure it,” Kominski said.

In a system where most people pay into employer-provided health plans, those who are self-employed like Sontag can suffer



ILLUSTRATION BY LOCHLAN DONALD/ FOR THE WASHINGTON POST



FAMILY PHOTOS

Jennifer Sontag, left, and Amy Willard both decided leave the U.S. permanently because of concerns about the cost of health care.

long gaps in medical coverage. Many are too young to qualify for Medicare and too well-off for Medicaid.

And health insurance is not a complete safety net, either. More than 40 percent of Americans have some form of medical debt, according to a KFF survey, even though the latest Census Bureau figures show that about 92 percent of Americans were insured for all or part of 2023. Experts say the U.S. stands out from most other

developed nations in that it has no stop-loss provision, or limit, on the amount of medical debt a family can be burdened with.

“Even among the best-insured in the employment sector, there are still individuals who, depending on the condition they have — depending on whether their company provides generous benefits or only high-deductible plans — can find themselves facing very large health expenditures,” Kominski said.

Now, Sontag lives in the beachside city of Palermo, Italy, where she’s still paying off her U.S. medical debt but can access tax-funded national health care with no out-of-pocket costs. She declared citizenship through her family heritage and started a concierge business that helps other Americans apply for citizenship or obtain visas. Roughly three-quarters of her clients cited health care costs as one of their primary motivations, she said.

Business is booming, especially since President Donald Trump’s election, she said, and she recently expanded her relocation services to Spain. Clients have cited their concerns over the future of Social Security, protections outlined in the Affordable Care Act and children’s special-needs services.

“I live five minutes from the sea. I’m surrounded by the mountains, I can go to the doctor, I can eat good foods without pesticides — my Crohn’s disease is very under-control now,” she said in a video call from a beachside terrace. “But, you know, the resentment is always there. My mom has Alzheimer’s. I can’t be with her, and I’m afraid to go back to the U.S. because I don’t have health coverage when I’m there.”

Jason Kim, a 25-year-old crypto

trader who grew up in Texas, was first confronted with a big medical bill when he was 19. Unaware of the cost of an ambulance ride, he called 911 and was taken to a hospital in New York City, where he was diagnosed with jock itch. The bill was about \$50,000, he said.

The next day, he signed up for Medicaid. The bill ended up getting covered, but the experience made him afraid to go to the doctor for years. It wasn’t until he moved to South Korea — a place he had not lived since he was 13 — that he sought help for skin issues and an increasingly severe case of gastroesophageal reflux disease. He could easily afford an endoscopy and other treatments even before he got coverage under the government-subsidized national health insurance plan, which all residents are eligible for. He now lives in Seoul on a visa secured through his Korean heritage.

“I feel like health care in America is a kind of fraud,” he said. “They overbill you, and when you speak to them and try to negotiate, they lower the bill.”

Kim said he left the U.S. because he couldn’t afford quality health insurance while self-employed, and because of the overall cost of living. “I do miss America,” he said. “I miss the bigger roads, the bigger personal space, the better air quality. ... It’s livable if you have the right coverage.”

Amy Willard, 61, survived cancer three times between 2009 and 2011: breast cancer twice and metastatic melanoma, a disease that had taken her mother’s life.

In Colorado Springs, she ran a small housecleaning business for about three decades, never making over \$40,000 a year. She bounced in and out of health care coverage, often earning too much to qualify for Medicaid but too little to afford the \$600 to \$800 in monthly insurance premiums she was quoted. “If there’s a crack, I always somehow manage to fall right into it,” she joked.

At the peak of her health crisis, Willard had 11 cancer surgeries and was able to get Medicaid to cover them all. But she qualified only because she was too sick to work more than a few hours a week, causing her income to spiral. Once Willard was in remission and able to make more money, she lost her Medicaid coverage but

couldn’t afford private insurance plans, making follow-up care a financial burden. “It was a lot of food stamps, a lot of social help, a few donations from friends. There were definitely some lean times, that’s for sure,” she said.

After the coronavirus pandemic devastated her cleaning business, she started thinking about an out. That’s when she remembered her dreams as a preteen girl mesmerized by a French teacher “who brought in croissants and spoke this beautiful language.” She started making plans to move to a village in southwest France.

“We get older, things start going on, and we need more regular health care,” she said. “And I thought, ‘I really can’t afford to be here.’” She now lives in Saint Gaultier, about a four-hour drive southwest of Paris, on a renewable one-year visa that she hopes to roll into a more permanent status. She runs a small Etsy shop from her home along a small river.

Every time she visits the local clinic, she pays a flat fee of 25 euros (about \$29), and all of her medications total about the same per month — a price so “insanely reasonable” that she is okay living without comprehensive health coverage for now, she said.

The French government requires those who apply for her visa to initially obtain a private plan that covers serious medical emergencies and disasters, so she has a policy that costs about \$350 a year. She applied to join France’s national health care system last year.

In June, Willard was hospitalized for nine days with anemia so severe she needed four blood transfusions, she said. She was diagnosed with a gastrointestinal tumor about the size of a grapefruit and will need major abdominal surgery.

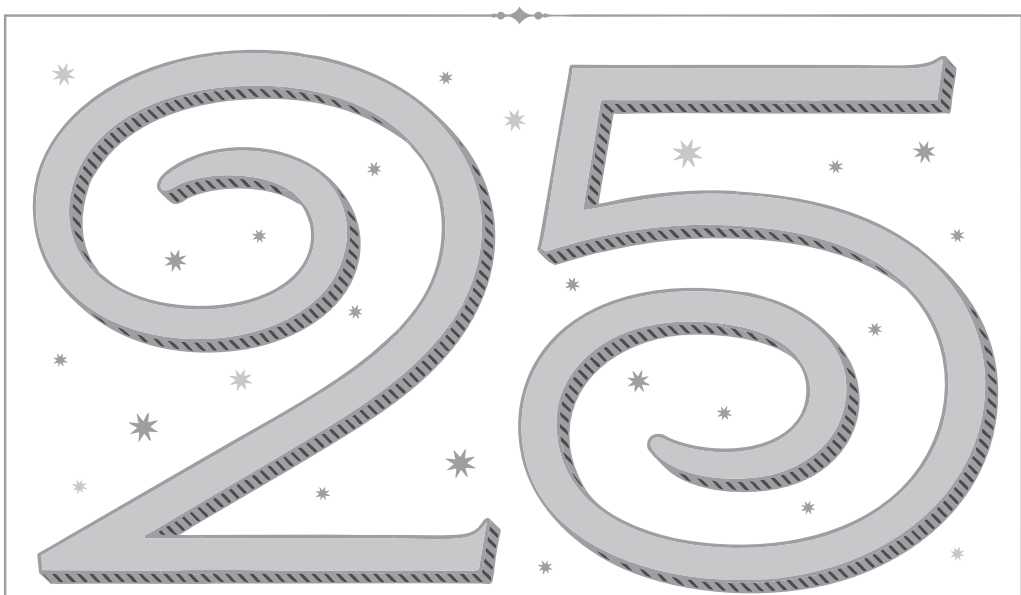
French health care workers told her not to worry about the costs, saying her national health insurance card was being expedited. So far, she has not had to pay for her hospitalization or her two ambulance rides, and she says she regrets waiting so long to go to the hospital.

Americans “often must weigh the risk of financial ruin against how sick we feel,” Willard said. “It’s shameful that this is so deeply ingrained to us ‘poorer’ folk. I nearly died.”

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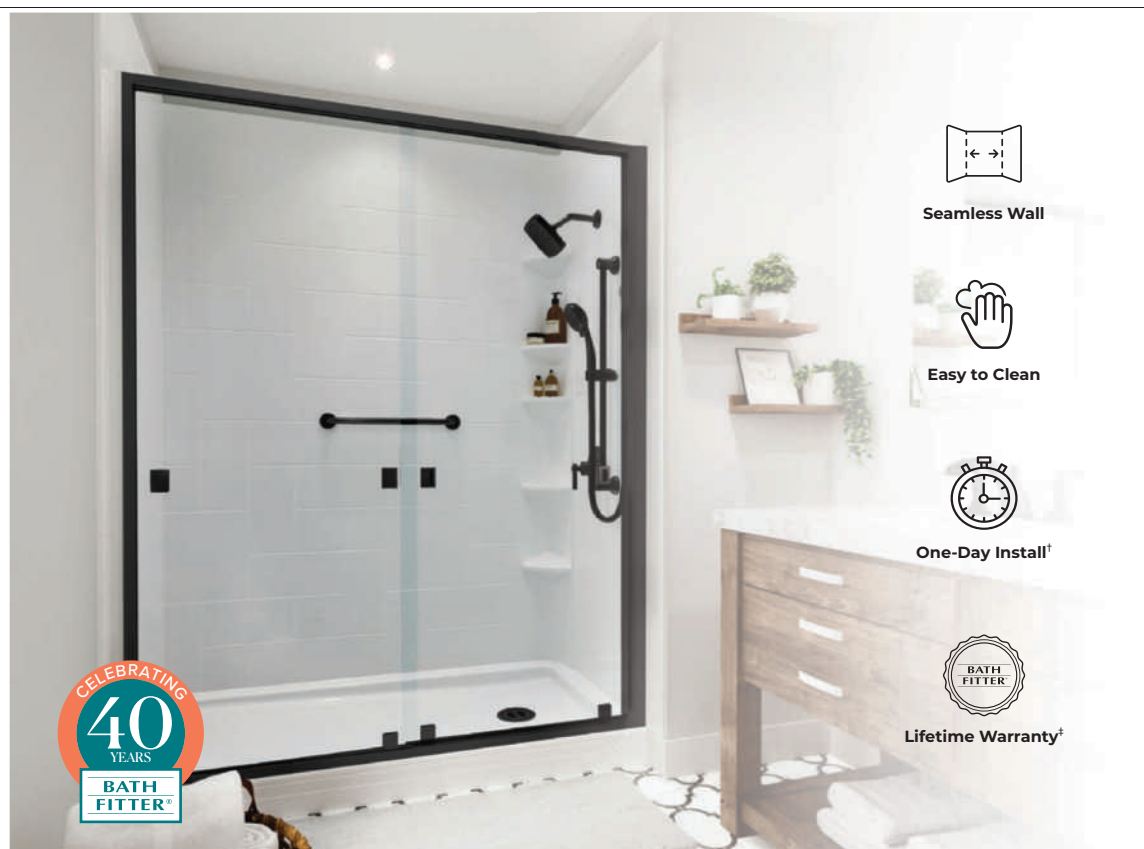
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