

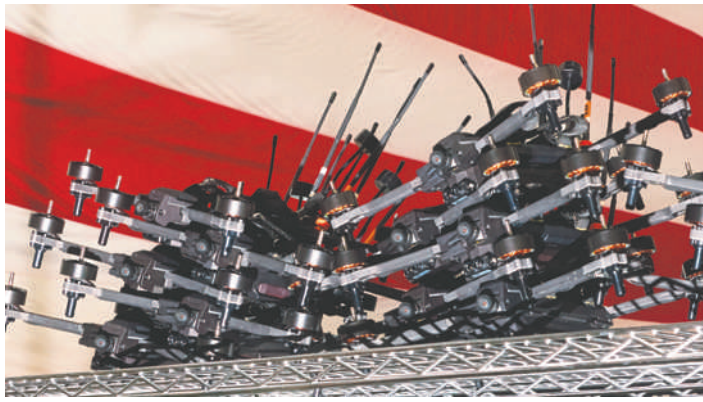
The Washington Post

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Mostly sunny 74/57 • Tomorrow: Mostly sunny 82/58 B20 Democracy Dies in Darkness TUESDAY, JUNE 2, 2026 • \$4

Seeking an arsenal of killer drones, Pentagon turns to former hobbyists



PHOTOS BY MAGGIE SHANNON / FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

A worker assembles a drone at the Neros factory in Torrance, California. The company entered the Pentagon's competition.

U.S. launches a contest to produce what are essentially cheap flying bombs

BY IAN DUNCAN

A company that uses drones to analyze golf course grass. Another linked to a firm that hosts aerial light shows. And one founded by a 23-year-old former drone racing world champion.

Any of them, the Pentagon says, could represent the future of warfare as officials

scramble to plug what they see as a gaping hole in the United States' military arsenal. Conflicts in Ukraine and Iran have shown the value of small, cheap drones, and the Trump administration has concluded that the U.S. desperately needs to catch up.

Officials are turning to an eclectic mix of companies — some launched by onetime hobbyists — and pitting them against one

another in Drone Dominance, an 18-month contest that launched this year. The prize is a share of \$1.1 billion in defense contracts, a sum the Pentagon hopes will be enough to buy 300,000 of what are essentially cheap flying bombs.

The administration's ultimate goals are even grander: Next year's defense budget

SEE DRONES ON A20

Trump's payout fund seems to be circling the drain

JUSTICE TO OBEY ORDER TO HALT INITIATIVE

A retreat would mark latest setback for president

BY CAT ZAKRZEWSKI, THEODORIC MEYER, JARRELL DILLARD AND MARIANA ALFARO

The Trump administration Monday signaled that its nearly \$1.8 billion payout fund was on shaky ground, as Republican lawmakers pushed the White House to abandon an idea that had prompted resistance from members of both parties as an inappropriate way to reward the president's supporters.

The Justice Department announced that it would abide by a judge's order Friday to temporarily halt the fund. The department has little choice but to obey a court order, so the unprompted announcement was seen by many lawmakers as a signal that the administration was backing away from the fund.

Sen. Rick Scott (R-Florida) said the White House assured him Monday that it was dropping the fund.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune (R-South Dakota) said he has been making it clear to the White House for several days that it should abandon plans for the fund, which has proved deeply unpopular, and suggested the administration is moving toward doing so.

"I do think that the best way to handle it is if the administration decides to shut it down themselves," Thune told reporters. Ideally, Thune added, the administration would simultaneously make clear that it will not try to resurrect the fund.

The Justice Department statement followed a three-hour meeting at the White House between House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-Louisiana) and Trump that included a discussion of the fund, according to a person familiar with the meeting, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive matter.

A retreat from the fund would

SEE TRUMP ON A8

Iran, U.S. trade strikes as negotiations falter

Expanded Israeli attacks in Lebanon threaten to derail stalled talks

BY STEVE HENDRIX AND SUSANNAH GEORGE

Escalating violence in the Middle East is threatening to derail stalled peace talks between Iran and the United States as negotiators struggle to extend a shaky ceasefire and end the war.

Iran suspended talks with the United States Monday after Israel intensified attacks in Lebanon, according to state media reports and an Iranian official who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to brief the press.

President Donald Trump insisted that negotiations were ongoing. "Talks are continuing, at a

rapid pace, with the Islamic Republic of Iran," Trump wrote Monday in a social media post.

Trump also said Monday that Hezbollah and Israel pledged to hold off on expanded military operations, but Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said shortly afterward that his forces "will continue to operate as planned in southern Lebanon."

Netanyahu had previously announced imminent strikes on Beirut, orders that sent large numbers of civilians fleeing from southern parts of the Lebanese capital. Over the weekend, Israeli ground forces made their deepest incursion into Lebanese territory in decades.

Trump said he spoke by phone with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and with Hezbollah "through highly placed Representatives."

Hezbollah "agreed that all shooting will stop — That Israel

SEE IRAN ON A12

Board of Peace, lacking resources, founders in Gaza

BY KAREN DEYOUNG AND GERRY SHIH

Seven months after President Donald Trump announced his peace plan for Gaza and more than four months since he convened his Board of Peace to implement and pay for it, the plan is stalled and expected donations to the fund it created are nonexistent.

Disarmament negotiations with

The president's plans for a grand reconstruction in the region appear distant

Hamas, a crucial part of the plan, have remained deadlocked. The heavily armed militants still control Gaza's 2 million people, now confined to less than half of what

was, before the war, already one of the most densely populated places on Earth.

Israel's military has expanded its occupation of 60 percent of the enclave that has been cleared of Palestinians and says it intends to take more. Despite the ceasefire declared on Oct. 9, Israel's near-daily strikes have killed more than 900 Palestinians, according to Gazan health authorities.

Security and reconstruction of the destroyed territory seem a distant dream. The glitzy proposal of apartment complexes, high-tech industries and waterfront tourist resorts displayed by Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and Gaza negotiator, at the board's February meeting has been shelved. For now, the most ambitious proposal is to build temporary housing for tens of thou-

SEE BOARD OF PEACE ON A12

D.C. MAYORAL RACE

McDuffie, a son of D.C., argues he has the experience for the job

BY JENNY GATHRIGHT

Kenyan R. McDuffie reminds voters often that he used to deliver mail — an homage to his blue-collar roots, and to the opportunity that turned his life around.

The former D.C. Council member started delivering letters out of Friendship Station when he was a year out of high school, struggling to find work and making what he has called "horrible decisions." The Postal Service offered solid pay and benefits, taking him from a neighborhood scarred by the crack epidemic to a law degree and a career in politics — one he hopes will turn a son of the city into its next mayor.

"This city needs to be more



ALLISON ROBERT/ FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Former D.C. Council member Kenyan R. McDuffie.

affordable, it needs to be more opportunity-rich, and we need a government that is more accountable to residents across

D.C., but you don't get it by just talking about it," McDuffie, 50, told supporters at a recent get-

SEE MCDUFFIE ON A7

Lewis George is fueled by union support and progressive energy

BY MEAGAN FLYNN

Janeese Lewis George stepped out of her campaign manager's car next to the Walter E. Washington Convention Center and into a picket line against a food service giant.

She draped a sign over her neck — "Aramark Has No Union Contract" — and walked a couple dozen laps in a circle in the shadow of the giant inflatable union mascot Scabby the Rat.

"This moment is to let Aramark understand, if you're going to do business in D.C., D.C. is a union town!" Lewis George, the Ward 4 D.C. Council member and a top mayoral candidate in June's Democratic primary, bellowed from a bullhorn.

Here, Lewis George was in her



MICHAEL S. WILLIAMSON/ THE WASHINGTON POST

D.C. Council member Janeese Lewis George (Ward 4).

element.

Running with an unwavering focus on workers' and tenants' rights, Lewis George, 38, has built

a campaign fueled by rock-solid union support and progressive grassroots energy in a bid to

SEE LEWIS GEORGE ON A6

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A test before November A Democratic Senate primary in Iowa is the first of a trio of such elections. A5

Raymond Berry dies The Hall of Famer was integral to Baltimore Colts' championships and later coached the New England Patriots to their first Super Bowl appearance. B7

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