

Thunder

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“I think, by kids who don’t know the ending,” Parker said. “Of course, the ‘I Survived’ series is very popular. ‘Wings of Fire.’” American Fidelity is the main sponsorship partner for the program. Parker said he wasn’t aware if the Thunder’s recent success was driving more attention to the bus, which he said was already pretty popular, especially in the metro area. “From last season to two seasons ago, we went out about two days a

week. This last season, we started going out three days a week, so we got a full schedule,” he said. “Typically, we don’t get the chance to go out this far during school year but during the summer, can make it out to places like, Stillwater, Lawton, Meeker.” The Stillwater Public Education Foundation organized the afternoon event. SPEF is a nonprofit that partners with the school to provide things like grants and equipment. “I looked into ways the Thunder could be involved in the school district. Saw the bus, wanted to do a back-to-school event. All the elementary students

have Meet the Teacher Night (Tuesday), this was just a welcome back to school,” SPEF Executive Director Emily Lewis said. The Cowgirl Softball team was there signing autographs and there were giveaways provided by Foundation partners BancFirst and Oklahoma Community Credit Union. “It was just kind of an idea, and hopefully something we can grow into now that we have this awesome space,” she said. SPEF will have its annual fundraiser banquet Sept. 23, and still has sponsorships available. More information can be found at spef.stillwaterschools.com/.



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The Stillwater Public Education Foundation hosted the Rolling Thunder Book Bus at Block 34 Tuesday.

Gerrymander

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Still, redrawing gerrymandered districts before a midterm isn’t illegal. The U.S. Supreme Court in a 2019 case ruled that federal judges have no authority to decide whether partisan gerrymandering goes too far. State supreme courts could make a ruling, but some have also determined they don’t have the authority to regulate gerrymandering. The one exception is maps that divide up districts based on race, which in some cases have been determined to violate the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Partisan practice

Political tampering with voting maps isn’t unique to either major party. Both blue

and red states where one party controls the legislature and governor’s seat have historically gerrymandered maps in favor of their party. Today, deep red states like Texas and Florida and deep blue states like Illinois and Oregon still have hyper-partisan congressional districts, according to The Gerrymandering Project at Princeton University. In total, 15 states received a failing grade on drawing congressional district maps without partisan motives. What makes the escalating redistricting showdown different from past efforts is the deep current political polarization in which both parties see each other as disloyal enemies, argued Kirby Goidel, a political scientist at Texas A&M University.

“Part of it is rooted in this idea that the people that I don’t agree with, the people of the other party, aren’t Americans who want the best for America,” he said. “They’re evil. They’re bad. They’re cheaters.” Hayden Padgett, chairman of the Young Republican National Federation, lives in Plano, Texas. He argued that the new congressional map is “more in line” with what the average Texas voter wants. He called Democrats who have fled the state “untrustworthy partners” who refuse to work with Republicans. Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker, a Democrat, on Sunday called Trump a “cheater” during an interview with NBC News, and said the new Texas map violates the Voting Rights Act and the Constitution. Republicans “know that they’re going to lose (Congress) in 2026, so they’re trying to steal seats. ... That is what these Texas Demo-

crats are trying to stand up against,” Pritzker said. In California, legislators have said they plan to unveil this week a proposed new congressional map favoring Democrats. The map would be decided on by voters during a special election in November. California Gov. Gavin Newsom on Monday told Trump in a letter that his state would call off its potential plan if the president ended efforts in Texas and other GOP-led states to redraw their maps. Newsom called Republicans’ efforts an “unprecedented” attempt to rig the 2026 election. “You are playing with fire, risking the destabilization of our democracy, while knowing that California can neutralize any gains you hope to make,” Newsom wrote. Garcia with the Hispanic Republican Club of North Texas argued the ability to gerrymander means the Trump-led tactic is fair game in order to keep a majority in

the House. She said Democrats have “done even worse things” to gain power, and it only makes sense Republicans do the same. “Why can’t we do what we need to do with Texas?” she said. “We’re just trying to help our party wherever we can.” But Goidel, the Texas A&M political scientist, worries that such an attitude could spell disaster for American democracy. Voters lose trust in the government when they believe the system is rigged, he noted. If states across the nation start redrawing voter maps as part of a partisan power grab, that distrust could reach a fever pitch, Goidel cautioned. “I don’t see how we end up at 2026 without a loss of faith in fair-and-free elections,” he said. “People will see it’s not fair. Everything’s a game of just trying to manipulate the outcome.”

Takeover

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Carjackings, for example, dropped about 50% in 2024 and are down again this year. More than half of those arrested, however, are juveniles, and the extent of those punishments is a point of contention for the Trump administration. Bowser, a Democrat, spent much of Trump’s first term in office openly sparring with the Republican president. She fended off his initial plans for a military parade through the streets and stood in public opposition when he called in a multi-agency flood of federal law enforcement to confront anti-police brutality protesters in summer 2020. She later had the words “Black Lives Matter” painted in giant yellow letters on the street about a block from the White House. In Trump’s second term, backed by Republican control of both houses of Congress, Bowser has walked a public tightrope for months, emphasizing common ground with the Trump administration on issues such as the successful effort to bring the NFL’s Washington Commanders back to the District of Columbia. She watched with open concern for the city streets as Trump finally got his military parade this summer. Her decision to dismantle Black Lives Matter Plaza earlier this year served as a

neat metaphor for just how much the power dynamics between the two executives had evolved. Now that fraught relationship enters uncharted territory as Trump has followed through on months of what many D.C. officials had quietly hoped were empty threats. The new standoff has cast Bowser in a sympathetic light, even among her longtime critics. “It’s a power play and we’re an easy target,” said Clinique Chapman, CEO of the D.C. Justice Lab. A frequent critic of Bowser, whom she accuses of “over policing our youth” with the recent expansions of Washington’s youth curfew, Chapman said Trump’s latest move “is not about creating a safer D.C. It’s just about power.”

Where the power actually lies

Bowser contends that all the power resides with Trump and that her administration can do little

other than comply and make the best of it. The native Washingtonian spent much of Monday’s press conference tying Trump’s takeover to the larger issue of statehood for the District of Columbia. As long as Washington remains a federal enclave with limited autonomy under the 1973 Home Rule Act, she said, it will remain vulnerable to such takeovers. “We know that access to our democracy is tenuous,” Bowser said. “That is why you have heard me, and many many Washingtonians before me, advocate for full statehood for the District of Columbia.” Section 740 of the Home Rule Act allows the president to take over Washington’s police for 48 hours, with possible extensions to 30 days, during times of emergencies. No president has done so before, said Monica Hopkins, executive

director of the American Civil Liberties Union’s D.C. chapter. “That should alarm everyone,” she said, “not just in Washington.” For Trump, the effort to take over public safety in Washington reflects an escalation of his aggressive approach to law enforcement. The District of Columbia’s status as a congressionally established federal district gives him a unique opportunity to push his tough-on-crime agenda, though he has not proposed solutions to the root causes of homelessness or crime. “Let me be crystal clear,” Attorney General Pam Bondi said during Trump’s announcement news conference. “Crime in D.C. is ending and ending today.”

The action fits a presidential pattern

Trump’s declaration of

a state of emergency fits the general pattern of his second term in office: He has declared states of emergency on issues ranging from border protection to economic tariffs, enabling him to essentially rule via executive order. In many cases, he has moved forward while the courts sorted them out. Bowser’s claims about successfully driving down violent crime rates received backing earlier this year from an unlikely source. Ed Martin, Trump’s original choice for U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia, issued a press release in April hailing a 25% drop in violent crime rates from the previous year. “Thanks to the leadership of President Trump and the efforts of our ‘Make D.C. Safe Again’

initiative, the District has seen a significant decline in violent crime,” Martin said. “We are proving that strong enforcement, and smart policies can make our communities safer.” In May, Trump abandoned his efforts to get Martin confirmed for the post in the face of opposition in Congress. His replacement candidate, former judge and former Fox News host Jeanine Pirro, was recently confirmed. On Monday, Pirro – standing next to Trump – called his takeover “the step that we need right now to make criminals understand that they are not going to get away with it anymore.” Associated Press writers Lindsay Whitehurst and Alanna Durkin Richer contributed to this report.

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