

# The Washington Post

Prices may vary in areas outside metropolitan Washington.



Rain 61/52 • Tomorrow: Showers 60/48 DETAILS, B8

THURSDAY, APRIL 28, 2016

washing

## Congo's critical juncture

The Obama administration should press Mr. Kabila to cede power.

**P**ROGRESS TOWARD stable and democratic governance in Africa has been repeatedly interrupted by the attempts of rulers to remain in power after their constitutional terms expire. The latest episode came in Burundi, which still dances on the brink of conflict months after President Pierre Nkurunziza's decision to run for an unconstitutional third term. Now the continent's troubled giant, Congo, appears headed down a similar path.

President Joseph Kabila, whose term ends this year, has raised fears that he will attempt to stay in power past the constitutional limit of two terms. In January of last year, Congolese security forces brutally cracked down on protests in the capital, Kinshasa, after a draft law was released that would have drawn out the electoral process by requiring a nationwide census before holding elections, which could have taken years. Forty people were killed. The census requirement was withdrawn, but Mr. Kabila has still not publicly announced whether he will seek another term or respect the constitution and step down.

Mr. Kabila late last year called for an "inclusive national political dialogue," supposedly to organize a committee to help set an election timetable and discuss funding. But these efforts have borne little fruit — most of Congo's opposition parties refused to participate — and to date, no firm date for the elections has been set. Instead, Mr. Kabila's government now claims that the election must be postponed due to what it claims is the need to reconfigure the voting registry, a process that the Congolese electoral commission says could take 13 to 16 months and cost as much as \$290 million.

The resource-rich Congo, which is home to 68 million people in a territory nearly the size of Western Europe, has been racked with political instability for the better part of the past 50 years. Should Mr. Kabila, who has been in power since the assassination of his father, Laurent, in 2001, step down by Dec. 19 as the constitution mandates, he could help usher in the

first democratic transfer of executive power in Congo since its independence. He could set an important precedent not only for peace in Congo but also for democracy on the continent.

Last week at the United Nations, Secretary of State John F. Kerry stressed the need for "timely and credible elections" in a meeting with Mr. Kabila, according to a State Department spokesman. The Obama administration should be pressing for specific actions by the president, including the fixing of a

firm timetable for the elections, a public commitment to leave office when his term ends, and allowing the Congolese people to express themselves freely without threats or crackdowns on peaceful protest.

Congo is at a critical juncture in its history. Mr. Kabila must decide whether he will take his country down the path of peace and respect for the rule of law or set it on a course toward political chaos. Africa, and the world for that matter, cannot afford the latter.

TOM TOLES



environment that fueled the rise of Mr. Trump.

James

## Football, robots and A

In their April 24 op-ed, "Football safer," Gary Belsky and Neil Fine argue that the best solution to reduce concussions is to return the helmet "to its right" — a helmet designed against unintentional collisions. Without this change, they propose "reconsider papier-mâché."

Contrast that position with the article "Ivy League dummy" and "ball." This innovative and effective solution could have easily appeared in the past, augmenting the possibilities of the technique without human-to-human contact in football practice.

Will making papier-mâché helmets or robotic football dummies reduce concussions? I can't say. Mr. Belsky and Mr. Fine's diminishing set of solutions is a step in the right direction while the robotic football helmet's abundance of intriguing possibilities is the future of football.

Which solution would you

**I played football** at a school in the 1950s. In the three seasons I played, I wore face masks. Only once did I wear a helmet with some teeth. Each of those helmets had a small hole to protect the player's teeth.

My brother-in-law was a coach during the transition from face masks to helmets. He was remarkable. They played

Gary Belsky and Neil Fine argue that the best solution to reduce concussions is to return the helmet "to its right" — a helmet designed against unintentional collisions. Without this change, they propose "reconsider papier-mâché."

Rugby and Australian football are fast, and they wear minimal padding. Australia. Why not try it

James