



ULET IFANSASTI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Where Oil Is a Subsistence Business
Collecting crude oil with a bucket near the Indonesian village of Teksas Wonocolo, which is named for the Lone Star State. Page A7.

Ukraine Pleas For Defenses Go Unheeded

By CONSTANT MÉHEUT
KYIV, Ukraine — For much of the war with Russia, President Volodymyr Zelensky’s appeals to Western allies for air defenses have paid off. His lobbying helped persuade Washington to give Kyiv its first U.S.-made Patriot air-defense system in 2023, followed by several more sent by Western nations over the years.
Now, as Ukraine confronts the most intense Russian missile campaign of the war, Mr. Zelensky’s renewed pleas are falling flat.

After yet another deadly assault on Kyiv early Wednesday, in which the capital was left completely undefended against Russian ballistic and hypersonic missiles, Mr. Zelensky offered an accounting. In a statement, he said the number of air-defense missiles supplied by Western partners so far this year had “dropped threefold compared with 2025.”
Ukraine’s allies “do have the missiles,” he said, but “the necessary political decisions” to send them and accelerate production had yet to be made.
Most recently, Mr. Zelensky has framed his position in human terms, arguing that every additional interceptor saves lives. But his entreaties are no longer as successful because of a changed geopolitical landscape.

Western allies are more hesitant to give up missiles they may need for their own defense as war rages on multiple fronts, including in the Middle East, where fighting has whittled global stockpiles.
Even if Ukraine’s partners did heed Mr. Zelensky’s call, they could not fully meet the country’s needs. Russia produces ballistic missiles faster than the West can make the interceptors designed to stop them.

So far this year, Russia has fired 650 ballistic missiles at Ukraine, according to a New York Times analysis of figures from the Ukrainian Air Force. That is more than the number of PAC-3 interceptors — the advanced weapons most capable of intercepting ballistic missiles — that their U.S. manufacturer, Lockheed Martin, delivered worldwide all of last year.
“The situation today is more critical than at any point since the

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In Lab, A.I. Designs Viruses Not Found in Nature

By CARL ZIMMER
For the first time, scientists have used artificial intelligence to create new kinds of viruses, raising hopes for medical advances while also raising the disturbing possibility that the technology could someday be used to invent dangerous pathogens.
Synthesizing viruses from scratch is hardly new. Researchers long ago learned how to manufacture viral genomes; they are used to investigate antiviral drugs and vaccines, as well as to learn how viruses work.
But the new study, published

Hopes for Advances in Medicine, and Fears About Pathogens

Thursday in the journal Science, goes well beyond duplicating viral genes. Scientists at the Arc Institute, a research organization in Palo Alto, Calif., taught A.I. to recognize patterns of DNA structure in nature, and then to use that data to write recipes for entirely new viruses.
The researchers followed those recipes to create DNA molecules,

which they inserted into bacteria. The modified bacteria then produced viruses never seen in nature. The viruses were able to infect other bacteria, demonstrating that they were viable.
“This is an important milestone,” said Patrick Cai, a synthetic biologist at the University of Manchester, who was not involved in the study.
The viruses dreamed up by A.I. do not pose a threat to humans, because they are all similar to a naturally occurring virus called Phi X-174, which can infect only bacteria.
But the new study adds to growing

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FREDRIK LERNERYD FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Cowboys and Cowgirls in Kenya
Line dancing and Kenny Rogers songs abounded at a country music festival in Nairobi. Page A9.

On a Vanity License Plate, Whose Speech Is It?

The next great First Amendment battleground is just six inches high and is attached to about a million motor vehicles in Virginia alone. It is the vanity license plate, and courts are splintered over whether and how states can censor the messages the plates convey.
The latest decision landed last Friday. It involved Curtis Whate-

7-Character Tag Shapes Constitutional Clash

ley, who paid Virginia \$10 in 2023 for a personalized license plate. He had seven characters to work with, and he sought to convey a statement “expressing my opinion on the current state of policing in this country,” as he would

later put it in a lawsuit.
He settled on FTP & ATF. No one disputes what those letters stand for. “TP” is the police. “ATF” is the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. “F” is what you think it is.
The state issued the plate, and he used it for about a year, until the authorities received an anonymous complaint that caused them to cancel it. Representing

Continued on Page A17

Trump Risks Befouling Air In A.I. Push

Gas-Burning Plants to Power Data Centers

By HIROKO TABUCHI
EL PASO — In March, a developer working on a Meta data center in El Paso applied to power the site with a gas-burning plant large enough to supply electricity to 300,000 homes.
Typically, approving a big power plant might require public hearings and months of detailed vetting. But Texas environmental regulators signed off in just 20 days.
They approved another project in three days. And an even larger data center power plant, also gas-burning, won approval in just two days.
All without public notice.
“They’re going to fire up those turbines,” said Cynthia Crouse, who lives in an upscale development with panoramic views of the desert, about a mile from the planned Meta data center and power plant.
“I thought I’d bought my dream home, that I’d be looking out on the dark sky, hearing the coyotes call,” Ms. Crouse said. “Then I woke up to the biggest nightmare I’ve ever had.”

As data centers ignite debates across the country, neighbors and environmentalists often cite water use and noise as problems. Less mentioned has been the pollution from the scores of gas-burning plants that will power these data centers.
When the El Paso facility’s power plant is complete, it could emit as much planet-warming carbon dioxide in a year as 360,000 gasoline-powered passenger vehicles over the same period.
Encouraged by the Trump administration, data center developers are building their own power plants instead of plugging into an electric grid. Nationwide, at least 82 gas-burning power plants are being built or have been proposed to power data centers, according to the Environmental Integrity Project, a nonpartisan research organization. Most were announced or granted permits within the past 18 months.
If built as planned, the gas-burning plants — scattered across states including Texas, Ohio and Wyoming — could release as much planet-warming pollution in a year as roughly half of all the

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FAUCI IS REBUKED IN CONTEMPT VOTE BY SENATE PANEL

SPLIT ON PARTY LINES

Resolution Could Lead to Charges Over Refusal to Take Questions

By SHERYL GAY STOLBERG
The Senate Homeland Security Committee voted along party lines on Thursday to hold Dr. Anthony S. Fauci in contempt of Congress for his refusal to answer questions at a hearing last week, clearing the way for the committee to ask the Justice Department to prosecute him.
Dr. Fauci invoked his Fifth Amendment right to remain silent more than 100 times last week, as Republicans accused him of funding research in China that started the coronavirus pandemic, and lying about it to Congress — accusations he vigorously denies.
Thursday’s vote addressed a different question: Did Dr. Fauci fail to comply with a congressional subpoena, a federal misdemeanor that carries a prison sentence up to 12 months? The panel adopted a resolution concluding that he did.

The vote once again exposed the sharp partisan divisions around Dr. Fauci. With the midterm elections coming up in November, it also thrusts Dr. Fauci’s handling of the pandemic back into the political debate. As far back as 2022, Republicans including Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky, the panel’s chairman, have made Dr. Fauci a boogeyman, attacking him to raise money for their campaigns and whip up the party’s base.
In a statement after the hearing, Dr. Fauci’s lawyer, David Schertler, called the vote “a crude political stunt intended to punish Dr. Fauci for exercising his constitutional rights.”
Ordinarily, when a Senate committee passes a contempt resolution, it is forwarded to the full chamber for a vote. If the Senate approves, with a 60-vote majority, the resolution goes to the U.S. attorney in the District of Columbia, who can bring it to a grand jury.
But Republicans cannot muster the 60 votes, and the Senate is now headed into its August recess. So Mr. Paul is bypassing the Senate vote. He said after the hearing that the panel would hand-deliver

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SYDNEY TOWLE, 1999-2026

TikTok Creator Mixed Anguish Of Cancer With a Thirst for Life

By KATHERINE ROSMAN
Sydney Towle, a social media memoirist who mixed anguish, optimism and unabashed wanderlust as she challenged TikTok viewers to reconsider how a cancer patient should look and live, died on Wednesday at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Md. She was 26.
Her death, from complications of metastatic bile duct cancer, was announced on her social media channels. Earlier this week, her family said that she had entered hospice care.

In 2023, Ms. Towle, a recent graduate of Dartmouth, was living in Los Angeles — working at a remote-office marketing job, surfing and posting bikini selfies and dance-trend videos online — when a bulge and a burning sensation in her belly landed her in urgent care. Soon after, she was diagnosed with cholangiocarcinoma, a rare cancer of the bile ducts.
Ms. Towle turned her new life as



MICHELLE V. AGINS/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Sydney Towle challenged how cancer patients are perceived.

a young woman with cancer into content. For an audience that grew to more than a million followers, she created videos showing herself hiking in Spain, sharing her loneliness and, with her mother, wrapping her head in ice packs to help prevent hair loss from chemotherapy.

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The Parking Sticker of Shame
After a decade, New York City is once again slapping labels on cars that don’t move for street sweepers. Page A14

Moderate Democrats to Fight
One group calls progressives’ wins “deeply troubling” and plans an effort against democratic socialism. Page A16

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An Israeli settler was accused of manslaughter in the death of a Palestinian activist last summer. Page A8

Looking In on France’s Seniors
To prevent heat-related deaths, the government asked postal workers to help check on older residents. Page A5

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The Texans have an elite defense, but they won’t get to the next level unless C.J. Stroud can bounce back from an uncharacteristically sloppy playoff game last January. Page B7

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Andrew Winslow, collections manager at the Cloisters, takes care of many mythical creatures, including the Bat Lord, a.k.a. Tzinacantecuhli. Page C8



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VIDEO

Could U.S. water systems be a new front in the Iran war? At least a dozen systems have recently been the targets of cyberattacks. Dustin Volz explained how Iranian hackers are suspected in the assaults and the numbers are expected to increase. [nytimes.com/video](#)

AUDIO

The reporter Patricia Leigh Brown recently went on a “soundwalk” through New York City. Listen to what she heard on the Brooklyn Bridge, in Central Park, on the subway and at more locations: [nytimes.com/arts](#).

INTERACTIVE

What are your favorite thrillers of the century? Some 942 different thrillers received votes in The Book Review’s poll of writers, readers and critics. Now you can decide which is best. Play our interactive game: [nytimes.com/books](#).

Quote of the Day

“We have cows and ranches. The only difference is that we don’t wear hats and boots and leather jackets.”

PURITY MELUBO, a Kenyan celebrating International Cowboys and Cowgirls Day, a festival on the outskirts of Nairobi. Page A9.

The Story Behind the Story

Where Some Naughty Words Are Fair Game

By EVERDEEN MASON and ZOE BELL
Everdeen Mason is the executive editorial director of NYT Games, and Zoe Bell is the executive producer for Games.

If there’s anything to be learned from the nearly 18,000 emails in our inbox at New York Times Games, it’s that people are passionate about language and that the meaning of words can be very subjective. What one player views as problematic might not even register for another.

So it’s our job on the Games team to evaluate and play with the language, to bend and twist letters for fun and for a little daily brain workout.

Every Times game is human-made, which means a lot of room for editor creativity and judgment. But we do have rules across all nine of our word games, and we lean on shared dictionaries to create our base word lists. We primarily use the Oxford English Dictionary and the NASPA Word List, the official dictionary for North American Scrabble Players Association tournaments. (By contrast, The Times’s newsroom uses Webster’s New World College Dictionary.)

Though the Games team has standards governing usage and taste, editors make choices based on the puzzles they lead. We sort “bad words” into three main categories: vulgarities, slurs and violence. We may accept some of those words as a guess or a hint, but not as a solution. Here is a look at our approach to several games.

Wordle

Wordle is our most popular game. Players must find the five-letter solution in six guesses or fewer. Wordle is powered by two lists: acceptable guesses and possible answers. The accepted guess list is just that. Solvers can enter five-letter words from the Oxford dictionary, but just because a word is accepted as a guess doesn’t mean it will be a solution. We also do not accept proper nouns that have no other meaning, or -s plurals.

Tracy Bennett edits the game and curates the answer list. She has overseen changes to the list since The Times acquired Wordle in 2022. That includes choosing which words to use, when to use them, how often to repeat words and the cadence of harder or easier words.

“I want to run words that people use in daily life, though some higher-quality old-fashioned vocabulary and niche terminology is peppered into the mix for variety, surprise and interest,” she said. “I curate the answer list by adding words that I think should have been included in the original list (like KAZOO, PIOUS and SQUID) and downgrading words that I conclude through testing aren’t going to be familiar to many solvers (like AGORA and CAPUT).”

Don’t try VOMIT; she thinks it’s gross.

Spelling Bee

Spelling Bee is possibly our most contested game, because players frequently express frustration over finding words that don’t count toward solving that day’s puzzle.

The game challenges solvers to find certain words in the puzzle that use the letters in the “hive.” Each word must contain at least four letters and include the center letter, but the puzzle does not include



RICHIE POPE

every word that can be found each day.

“If you simply include every theoretical word imaginable in a given puzzle, it will be that much more difficult to get to Amazing, Genius and beyond, and not in a satisfying way,” said Sam Ezersky, the puzzle’s editor.

Spelling Bee uses the Oxford dictionary and is curated by Sam. For each puzzle, as he works on his list of acceptable words within a given letter set, he also reviews several other dictionaries. He edits for familiarity and avoids a word if its primary definition is considered a slur or a vulgarity.

Crossplay

Crossplay is our first two-player game, and the only word puzzle that isn’t directly edited by one of our editors. Players build words off each other in a grid to gain the most points. There are two lists: one for human players and one for the computer players. Both rely on the NASPA list.

The organization behind the Scrabble tournament list licenses it for a variety of word games, including Crossplay. A committee manages the word list, drawing from a number of prominent dictionaries.

For a word to be excluded from the NASPA list, it must be “at least often offensive and personally applicable in not just one but all senses,” according to the 2020 edition of the list. So some people might find some accepted words offensive.

In addition to using the NASPA dictionary, Times Games did other work on the Crossplay dictionary to denote which words could be considered offensive and to share the inoffensive definitions.

The Crosswords

The Daily, the Midi and the Mini crosswords do not have a singular word list for construction or editing, though we follow the same standards around vulgar or offensive language. Constructors must work through restraints, including size, symmetry and black-square rules, to form a grid.

“I don’t have a massive curated word list and never auto fill a grid,” said Ian Livengood, the puzzle editor for the Midi. He said he might use a list as a jumping-off point, where he picks one word and manually builds the crossword from there.

The crossword allows for players to solve from many angles, so we may use harder or less common words because solvers can figure them out by using crossings and word patterns. We also provide more context with the clues.

That said, we have a running “yellow flags” list, which includes words that we receive feedback on or that have gained a new context because of current events, like war in the Middle East. These words are not banned, but they are flagged so we can discuss whether to include them.

A Headline From History

DEADLIEST DAY OF AFGHAN WAR FOR U.S. FORCES

August 7, 2011. Taliban fighters shot down an American Chinook transport helicopter with rocket-propelled grenades in a mountainous area southwest of Kabul the previous day, killing everyone aboard in the single largest loss of American life during the war in Afghanistan, The Times reported. Thirty American servicemen, seven Afghan commandos and one Afghan interpreter died. Fighting from an insurgent hotbed, the Taliban “could hardly have found a more valuable target” The Times wrote, reporting that the group of Americans killed included many Navy Seals. The attack “showed how deeply entrenched the insurgency remains,” The article continued. The United States ended combat operations in Afghanistan in 2014 and removed its last military personnel from the country in 2021.

Facts of Interest

The flu kills more than 300,000 people worldwide each year and was particularly harsh in the 2024-25 season, with an estimated 45,000 deaths in the United States, including at least 297 reported cases in children.

F.D.A. Approves Moderna’s mRNA Flu Vaccine, the First of Its Kind A18

Before its use in spiritual divination, tarot, invented in the 15th century, was a card game played by Italian nobility. Each card was a hand-held work of art.

Putting the Tarot Cards on the Table C6

As a result of the cyclosporiasis outbreak in the United States, sales of prepackaged salads in grocery stores and other retailers dropped more than 20 percent in mid-July from a month earlier, according to a consumer research firm.

Cyclospora Scare Is Boon for Local Lettuce B1

Culiacán, the capital of Sinaloa state, was the most violent city in Mexico last year. The number of homicides there has ballooned — to 1,086 in 2025 from 623 in 2024 — since Culiacán became a center of Mexico’s drug wars.

Motorcyclist Kills a Mexican Influencer in a Cartel Hotbed As He Livestreamed A5

The Met Cloisters, a branch of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, is currently exhibiting a Tzinacantecuhtli, or Bat Lord, an almost-7-foot-tall, ninth-century sculpture of a hybrid creature — an upright man with a bat’s claws and head.

He’s Taking Care of the Cloisters C8

LeBron James, 41, led the N.B.A. last season in transition points, or points off the fast break.

Still an Elite Playmaker, but One Who Won’t Have to Do It All B9

The Mini Crossword

	1	2	3	
4				5
6				
7				
	8			

8/7/2026 BY JOEL FAGLIANO

- ACROSS
- 1 Apple computer
 - 4 What the Kansas scenes lack that the Oz scenes do not, in “The Wizard of Oz”
 - 6 Quarrel (with)
 - 7 Get on an airplane
 - 8 “Nothing but ___!”
- DOWN
- 1 Nincompoop
 - 2 Bottom of the aquatic food chain
 - 3 Pickleball venue
 - 4 Yellow symbol of N.Y.C.
 - 5 Like the logos of Stanford and Harvard

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE

		Z	O	O
	T	O	U	R
W	R	O	T	E
H	U	M	S	
Y	E	S		

Reader Corner

From the Comments Forum

One way of understating a culture is through the artifacts it leaves behind. What are the objects that explain America? For Times Opinion, Emily Keegin, a photo editor and creative consultant, curated a list of 25 objects she feels reveal who we are as a nation. It included Crocs, Botox and the Ring doorbell camera. Ms. Keegin asked readers what they would add to the list, and why. These responses have been edited.

I would add blue jeans. We invented them, we exported them to the world. Skinny or baggy or bell bottoms or just cowboy right, they are part of our dress code.
— LIZ OVERSTREET, GARRETT PARK, MD.

I would add the drive-up window. So many times I’ve seen a line of 10 or more cars, waiting to buy fast food or coffee. I wonder what this says about us?
— MARK DYKE, ALBUQUERQUE

I know this is centered on contemporary American life, but from a somewhat more historical perspective I would add barbed wire. An American invention, barbed wire completely changed Americans’ relationship with the landscape and the “commons.” The Brits may have invented the chain-link fence, but leave it to the Americans to add a couple of strands of insult to the top, making it clear that none are welcome in or out.
— AARON KELLER, BLACK MOUNTAIN, N.C.



SAKURA TAMAGAWA

On the Scene

Sharing Key Insights Into a Reporting Project



ROSS D. FRANKLIN/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Kevin Roberts, president of the Heritage Foundation, at a conference for conservatives in 2025.

The Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank best known for its creation of Project 2025, is engulfed in an internal struggle. Elisabeth Zerofsky, a contributing writer for The New York Times Magazine, interviewed more than a dozen current and former employees at the foundation, as well as key figures of the conservative movement, for an article that examined the source of the in-house conflict. Read edited notes from her reporting below.

The Heritage Foundation, the bastion of American conservatism, has long helped shape successive Republican administrations. Now, multiple staff members told me, it finds itself consumed by an ideological — and generational — civil war.

The foundation’s internal conflict mirrors the one roiling the Republican Party: how to harness the energy of Trumpism without being overrun by its nativist, conspiracy-minded factions.

The turmoil arguably began with Project 2025. Meant for the next Republican administration, it drew criticism after Donald J. Trump secured the party’s nomination.

Furious at the negative publicity, the Trump campaign froze the foundation out. As Heritage sought to regain its hold on the centers of power, old-guard experts were pitted against a new cohort more interested in the culture wars than in policy papers.

Kevin Roberts, the president of Heritage, believes he can marry the two strains. What the conservative movement “can’t do — what it must not do — is go back to 20 years ago,” he told me.

Read Ms. Zerofsky’s article at nytimes.com/magazine.

Here to Help

A Recipe for Bean and Cheese Burritos

Mexican refried beans are a cinch to make at home thanks to some staple pantry items and a few basic fresh ingredients. Buttery canned pinto beans are perfect for these burritos, breaking down into a creamy, silky mixture. While the beans are often fried in lard or bacon drippings, this vegetarian version builds flavor with caramelized onion, bell pepper, garlic and smoked paprika instead. Pico de gallo adds a touch of tang. **KAY CHUN**

TIME: 40 MINUTES
YIELD: 6 BURRITOS

- 4 tablespoons safflower or canola oil
- ½ cup finely chopped yellow onion (from ½ medium onion)
- ½ cup finely chopped green bell pepper (from ½ pepper)
- Salt and black pepper
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 (15-ounce) cans pinto beans, ½ cup of bean liquid reserved and the rest drained
- ½ cup store-bought or homemade pico de gallo or salsa
- ¼ teaspoon smoked paprika
- 6 (9- to 10-inch) flour tortillas
- 2 cups shredded sharp Cheddar (8 ounces)
- Sour cream and hot sauce, for serving

1. In a large nonstick skillet, heat 2 tablespoons of oil over medium. Add onion and bell pepper, season with salt and pepper, and cook, stirring occasionally, until light golden and tender, about 8 minutes. Stir in garlic until fragrant, 1 minute. Add pinto beans, pico de gallo, smoked paprika, reserved bean liquid and ½ cup of water, and bring to a simmer. Cook, stirring and mashing occasionally with a potato masher or the back of a spoon, until liquid is absorbed and mixture is thick, about 8 minutes. Season with



LINDA XIAO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES
FOOD STYLIST: HADAS SMIRNOFF

salt and pepper. Transfer refried beans to a bowl, and wipe out skillet.

2. Spread ½ cup of the refried beans in the center of each tortilla and top each with ½ cup of the cheese. Fold the short sides of the tortilla over the filling; fold the bottom of the tortilla up and over the filling and tightly roll.

3. In the skillet, heat 1 tablespoon of oil over medium. Add 3 burritos seam side down and cook until golden, turning occasionally, 3 to 5 minutes. Transfer to serving plates and repeat with the remaining 1 tablespoon oil and 3 burritos. Serve warm with sour cream and hot sauce on the side.

For more recipes, visit New York Times Cooking at nytcooking.com.



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Fear as Flames Closed In; Afterward, It Was Frustration

Villagers Who Fled France’s Worst Fires in Decades Return to Ruined Homes With Plenty of Questions

By SÉGOLÈNE LE STRADIC

LE PORGE, France — As Mario Freitas, a carpenter, walked through what was left of the wooden house that he built himself a decade ago, his brother-in-law pulled scraps of carbon fiber from a pile of charred rubble.

“That’s my carbon bike; it was a present,” said Mr. Freitas, 61.

The remains of his bicycle were among the few recognizable pieces of debris that were left in his property on Monday after an inferno swept through his village last month, reducing even concrete to dust. Of Mr. Freitas’ home and workshop, all that otherwise remained were a pile of roof tiles and scraps of metal, including several bed frames.

“It’s pretty hard to see how we can be compensated,” Mr. Freitas said in a toneless voice, gazing at the ruins in his garden. “In any case, it’ll never match what we’ve lost,” he added.

He was holding back tears so that his wife would not see him cry.

It was the first time in 13 days that Mr. Freitas had been allowed back to the home where he had lived for a decade. His village, Le Porge, was in the path of France’s biggest fire in decades, which tore through more than 100,000 acres of forest and spurred the largest peacetime evacuation in the country’s history.

Le Porge, 20 miles west of Bordeaux, was hit the hardest of any village in the region. The blaze burned through half the town’s land — some 17,000 acres, most of it forest. Of the 240 houses destroyed across the region, about 180 of them were in Le Porge, or about a fifth of its total housing stock.

The disaster has left residents feeling traumatized, powerless and sometimes angry — amid questions over whether evacuation warnings and firefighting efforts were sufficient.

Government officials have promised that these issues will be examined in an official investigation. For now, they said that firefighters were deployed in adequate numbers and did their best in an impossible situation. They also said that evacuations across the area were staggered to prevent traffic jams.

“People don’t understand why so many houses burned,” Mayor Martial Zaninetti said as he welcomed home the first returning villagers.

The fire started on July 22, about six miles from Le Porge, likely after a brush-clearing machine set off sparks on the outskirts of another town, according to prosecutors. Within hours, parts of Le Porge were being evacuated.

Mr. Freitas had just returned home from work, he said, when a police officer knocked on his door, asking his family to leave.

“I didn’t think we’d have to evacuate right away, so I figured I’d just sit down and eat, since I’d just arrived,” Mr. Freitas said.

After the policeman returned again 15 minutes later, the Freitas family finally gathered some clothes and left for a neighboring town, “thinking we’d be back here anyway,” Mr. Freitas said. But the following day, July 23, that town was evacuated, too, so they moved to a campsite farther away.

Other villagers were far slower to evacuate Le Porge, even as the blaze began to destroy some of its houses.

They thought the fire would avoid their part of the town, they said, partly because they did not receive an order to evacuate. The village municipality’s Facebook page did not announce a full evacuation until the early hours of July 24.

Matthieu Plessis, 40, a bike mechanic, went door to door on the day the fire broke out, trying to persuade residents to leave. Conchita Laudoyer, 72, said Mr. Plessis was the only person who warned her to leave. “You saved our lives,” she told him later.

After evacuating his animals, Mr. Plessis returned alone the next day to help the firefighting effort.

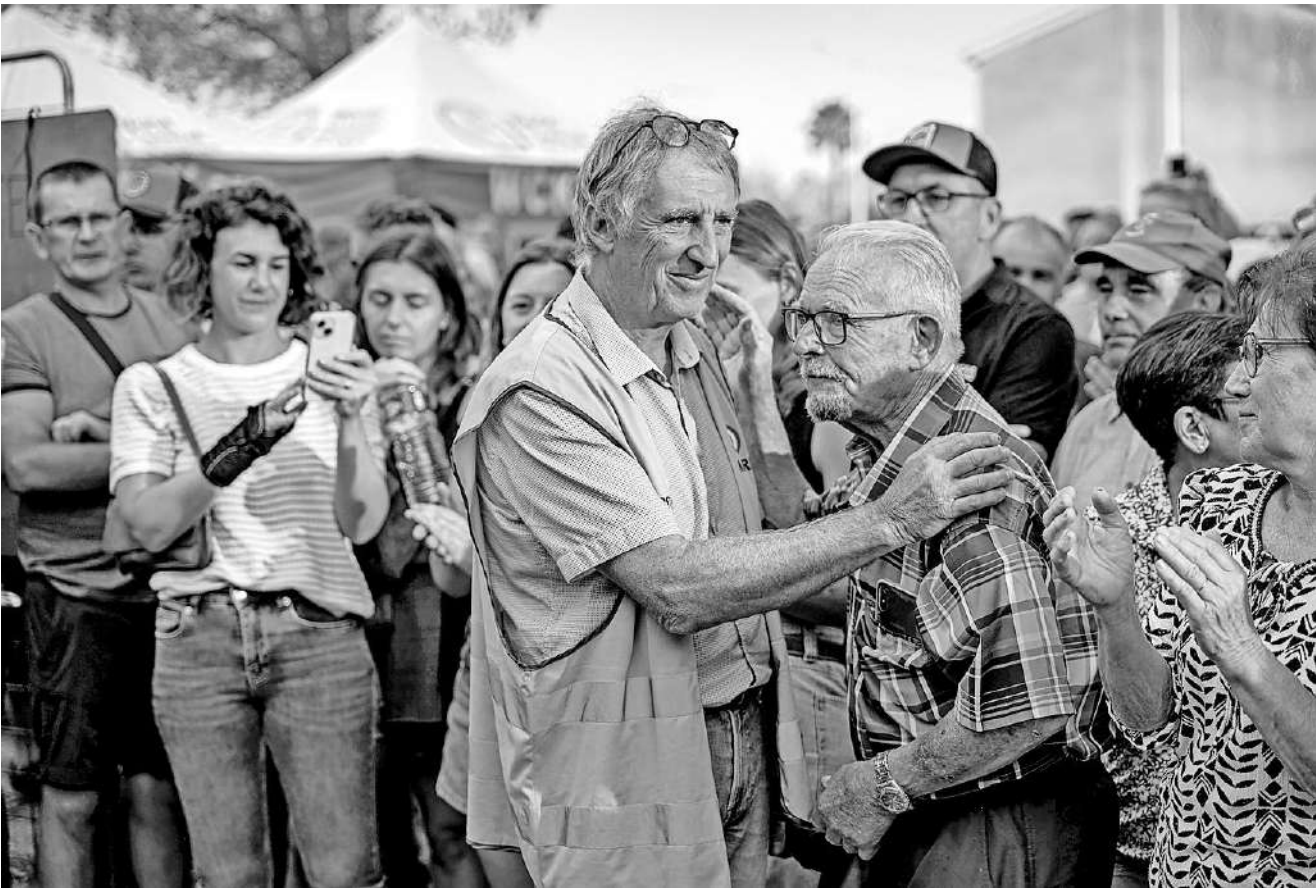
He headed to the community hall, which the firefighters were using as their makeshift headquarters. He found that many of them had left, he said, to set up firebreaks south of the village, near the Cap Ferret Peninsula, a popular tourist destination.

Mr. Plessis escaped again that after-



PHOTOGRAPHS BY WILLIAM DANIELS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Mario Freitas, a carpenter, in Le Porge, France, where the house he built himself once stood. The wildfires that scoured the region last month took his workshop too.



‘It was like a war zone.’

MARTIAL ZANINETTI, mayor of Le Porge, a village west of Bordeaux devastated by wildfires. He met with villagers on Monday, above.

noon, he said, on a road lined with flames beneath an orange sky darkened by smoke. An hour later, Mr. Plessis’s neighbor, who was using his surveillance cameras to watch the scene from afar, told Mr. Plessis that the blaze had reached his yard.

That evening, flames also reached a field where a stockpile of shells had been buried during World War II, setting off hundreds of them. “The 40-meter-high flames, the noise, the heat and the sound of the shells — it was like a war zone,” Mr. Zaninetti, the mayor, said of the second night of the fire, when the blaze was most intense.

Evacuees like Mr. Freitas and Mr. Plessis volunteered over the following days with firefighters across the region, including bringing water to the front lines, they said.

The villagers were finally allowed home on Monday, Aug. 3. Smoke was still rising in places, and mine experts were clearing the field of remaining shells.

Mr. Plessis’s house had been in the family for seven generations. He had spent two decades refurbishing its interi-

or and cultivating an idyllic garden filled with exotic plants.

Only its walls were still standing.

He also lost boats, a motorbike, an old car and the workshop where he built his bikes.

Insurance, he said, might cover the cost of the tools and the material. “But the days, the nights spent working,” he said, before breaking off, unable to finish his sentence.

“I had so many plans for this house,” he added.

Sophie Brocas, the regional prefect, the area’s most senior state official, joined the villagers as they returned home on Monday. She warned that “the forest remains dangerous,” as she visited the village school where residents were being provided with psychological and legal support.

Ms. Brocas’s presence did little to temper frustration from the villagers.

Ludivine Daurignac, 45, lost the house she lived in with her husband and two children.

Helped by a lawyer, Ms. Daurignac is pooling accounts from residents, aiming

eventually to pursue legal action. “We want answers to the ‘whys,’” Ms. Daurignac said.

“Why didn’t our siren work? Why didn’t we receive an alert by text message?” she said on Monday during a residents’ gathering. “Why did our firefighters lack the necessary resources?” she added.

Questions have also been asked of individual residents, some of whom did not adhere to a law requiring them to clear all bushes within 50 meters, or roughly 54 yards, from their house.

The government acknowledged this week that forests must be managed differently — with more firebreaks and different kinds of trees — to make it harder for blazes to spread.

“We’re going to rebuild all of this, probably in a different way, so that future generations don’t fall back into the same mistakes,” Mr. Zaninetti said. He added that he had asked President Emmanuel Macron for a regional “Marshall Plan,” referring to the massive economic assistance that the United States provided to Europe after World War II to regenerate its war-battered infrastructure.

Though some residents want to stay and rebuild, others are not so sure. Joël Pereira, 51, who works for a company renting out luxury properties on the Cap Ferret Peninsula, lost two houses and a garage in the fire. Now, he said, he wants to tear down the ruins and the remaining structures, and resell the land.

Joy Villette, who lived in Le Porge with her boyfriend and two young children, also said she wasn’t sure if her family would return. “We lost everything,” said Ms. Villette, 34.

“The smell and everything, it’s not easy,” she said of the stench of burned material. “And then arriving at the scene and seeing how little is left.”

Sifting through the ruins of the home they rented, Ms. Villette and her partner couldn’t find anything intact except for a small model house made from porcelain.

Mr. Freitas, the carpenter, pointed out a new sprout on his banana tree — a tiny speck of green in a sprawl of charred ground.

“The vegetation will grow back,” Mr. Freitas said. “The wound will heal over time. Only time can heal us.”



Joy Villette visiting her damaged home. She fled with her family, but isn’t sure she will come back. “We lost everything,” she said.



Conchita Laudoyer said there was no official warning. She only learned how serious it was from a neighbor, Matthieu Plessis.



Mr. Plessis went door to door, urging people to flee. Then he returned to Le Porge the next day to help crews fight the fires.



Postman and postal driver Fares Seffari, above standing, delivers meals to older and vulnerable people in Vénissieux, France.

Amid Sweltering Heat, French Postal Workers Deliver Welfare Checks

By SÉGOLÈNE LE STRADIC
AIX-LES-BAINS, France — When Harmony Simon, a postal worker in Aix-les-Bains, a lake-side town in southeastern France, rang the bell of a retiree's apartment on a scorching recent morning, she wasn't there to deliver the mail.

She was there to check that the retired woman, Martine Combe, 68, who suffers from diabetes and asthma, hadn't succumbed to heat stroke.

After Ms. Combe let her inside, Ms. Simon, 41, rushed to inspect the windows, which her host had covered with peeling bits of aluminum foil. It was a makeshift, tenuous solution to repel the sun, and Ms. Simon had an alternative to suggest.

"You know, in my apartment I've attached survival blankets" to the windows, she told Ms. Combe, referring to the shiny wraps that runners drape themselves in after marathons. "It's brought the temperature down by four degrees," she added.

It was advice that Ms. Combe needed. With no air conditioning, the temperature in this cramped apartment, which has large windows overlooking the lake, had recently risen as high as 36 degrees Celsius, or 97 degrees Fahrenheit, Ms. Combe told her visitor. "Staying locked up in there all afternoon is tough," she added.

The exchange was not a one-off. Ms. Simon was there as part of a countrywide emergency policy introduced in June by Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu, when a brutal heat wave hit France, breaking several heat records. All postal workers are now encouraged to not only deliver the mail, but also to check on older people.

"Through their daily rounds, postal workers are often the only ones who have regular contact with elderly or isolated individu-

als," Mr. Lecornu said in a letter to mayors listing measures and recommendations to face the heat.

All French cities keep a register of vulnerable residents who have asked to be contacted during hot periods, but those lists are hard to keep updated, and cities are not always able to make sure all interested parties have signed up. With its network of 65,000 workers embedded in their local communities, the postal service could help to find people not registered with local authorities, Mr. Lecornu said.

Europe is the fastest-warming continent, and the one with the oldest average population. France has endured a series of heat waves since the start of the summer. According to a provisional estimate by Santé Publique France, the national public health agency, nearly 6,000 people died as a result of the most severe one in June, of whom two-thirds were aged 75 and older.

There was a particularly sharp increase in deaths at home, raising concerns about older and sick people living on their own.

It's a segment of the population that Ms. Simon, the postal worker, knows well. "Some of them, well, unfortunately, they see just us," she said as she sorted through the mail at the post office before the start of her round.

'I Suffer From Loneliness'

For years, Ms. Simon and her colleagues have regularly checked on people who have registered with the municipal social services. Under the new policy, she is now required to detect at-risk individuals who may not be on the city's radar.

The first woman she visited that day was Elvire Bertagnolio, 95, who lives alone on the fifth floor of a modern building near the train station.

Ms. Bertagnolio was grateful for the company. "It does me good



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAMES HILL FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



to see young people, at my age," she said.

She had not left her apartment in months, she said, and rarely gets visitors except for her son, Charles, who lives hundreds of miles away. "I suffer from loneliness," she said.

The heat, too, has been hard to bear. "At 95, you don't feel the same as when you're 50," she said from her couch, sitting next to the open windows and the spinning fan.

Her cat, she said, has been a comfort and a reliable thermometer. "When he doesn't move from under the bed, it's a sign that it's really hot," she said, chuckling.

Ms. Bertagnolio first visited the region a decade ago for surgery and fell in love with its mountainous surroundings. Like many retirees, she soon decided to move to Aix-les-Bains, a spa town known for its peaceful lake and thermal baths.

That influx has made this the fastest-aging place in the region,

according to the town's mayor, Renaud Beretti, who said that at least 13 percent of the town's 30,000 residents were over 75.

"So we need to be especially vigilant," Mr. Beretti said.

This year, the town has opened the air-conditioned lobby of a cultural center in the afternoons, offering residents a place to cool off with fresh drinks, games and concerts.

Postal workers help flag those who can't make it there.

"We know there are people who live in isolation," the mayor said.

As France experiences record heat, postal workers like Harmony Simon, above, are asked to check in on at-risk residents. Elvire Bertagnolio, left, of Aix-les-Bains welcomed Ms. Simon's visit.

"And that's where 'La Poste' has an advantage, to be able to walk through the door and gain knowledge that we couldn't otherwise have."

'A Bit Like Our Psychologists'

With the decline of paper mail, the postal service has had to reinvent itself with new offerings, including delivering food for a fee. Checking up on older people is a logical outgrowth of that service and has turned some postal workers into de facto medics. Fares Seffari, 32, a postal worker in Vénissieux, a suburb of Lyon, said he recently had to care for a resident who seemed about to faint.

"She was in really bad shape," he said. "I stayed there until her son arrived."

During periods of intense heat, Mr. Seffari said, he made sure his customers were eating properly. He also gave them additional advice, he said: "Keep a bottle of water right next to you, keep hydrating constantly."

Despite the heat, Ms. Simon said she won't stop cycling across the city's streets. "It's part of the

job," she said before approaching her last drop-in of the morning.

"It's quite pretty," she said, after letting herself into an apartment building with a skeleton key that gives her access to most buildings in town. This was one of the few in town that she had never visited, she said.

She was here to see Gilberte Milano, 88, who ushered her into a small apartment with closed shutters.

"As long as God doesn't want me, I'll stay," said Ms. Milano, pointing a finger to the sky. She manages well enough on her own, she said, going on long morning walks, and watching the Tour de France in the afternoon.

But she also sometimes feels overwhelmed by deep anxiety, and appreciates the postal workers' visits, she confided to Ms. Simon. Postal workers, she said, are "a bit like our psychologists."

Still, she made sure Ms. Simon was doing OK, too.

"Maybe you'd like something to drink?" she asked Ms. Simon with a smile. "You must be thirsty!"

Motorcyclist Kills a Mexican Influencer In a Cartel Hotbed as He Livestreamed

By ANNIE CORREAL
A young influencer was fatally shot by a motorcyclist this week as he was streaming video to his followers in a city at the center of Mexico's cartel wars.

The influencer, César Gastélum, whose comedy videos had gained him more than half a million followers on TikTok, was dressed as a fast-food worker as he and two friends completed a social media challenge outside a KFC restaurant in the city of Culiacán, in the Mexican state of Sinaloa, on Tuesday night.

Mr. Gastélum, who local news outlets have said was 24, died at the scene.

Experts say that Mexican cartels are increasingly targeting influencers, who can be caught up in violence after they post content that praises or refers to one group, sparking the anger of another.

In Culiacán, where Mr. Gastélum was shot, a plane dropped fliers last year that named two dozen people, including influencers, as being loyal to one cartel faction, Los Chapitos. (Mr. Gastélum's name was not on the list.)

"They become targets," said Víctor Sánchez Valdés, a security expert and researcher at the Autonomous University of Coahuila in Mexico. "It's a national phenomenon, but it's been accelerating because of recent changes within cartels."

In May 2025, a 23-year-old Mexican beauty influencer was fatally shot during a livestream at her salon in the state of Jalisco.

The Mexican authorities said the attack on Mr. Gastélum could have been related to some of his posts on social media, which they said had alluded to "a faction of a criminal group," though they did not say which one.

Mr. Gastélum was approached by a two men in helmets on a motorcycle around 8 p.m. on Tuesday. In the video, which was streaming on the Kick platform and has since been taken down,

Mr. Gastélum could be heard saying, "Those guys scare me," after the motorcycle first appeared near the group, according to news outlets.

The motorcycle then circled back and one of the men could be seen drawing a handgun and firing directly at Mr. Gastélum's head.

Rival factions of the Sinaloa cartel have been fighting for dominance since 2024, when one of the cartel's founders and its longest-serving leader, Ismael Zambada



César Gastélum, who made comedy videos on TikTok, was shot in Culiacán.

García, known as El Mayo, was arrested in the United States.

Mr. Zambada García arrived in the United States in July 2024, after one of his partners, Joaquín Guzmán López — a son of Joaquín Guzmán Loera, known as El Chapo — lured him onto a plane under false pretenses before flying him to an airport outside El Paso, Texas.

After his arrest, Mr. Zambada García's followers, Los Mayos, went to battle against Los Chapitos, the faction loyal to the sons of El Chapo, who was arrested a decade ago and is serving a life sentence in the United States.

Both factions have military-grade weaponry, armored vehicles and drones, and have fueled intense violence across Sinaloa state and in the cities of Culiacán and Mazatlán.

President Claudia Sheinbaum of Mexico addressed Mr. Gastélum's killing on Wednesday in her morning news conference, confirming that the case had been discussed in a security cabinet

meeting and pledging to find those responsible.

"The perpetrators, and the mastermind, must be detained, and the reason for this tragic homicide must be uncovered," she said.

Residents of Culiacán, Sinaloa's capital, have been living in a state of near-lockdown as the Chapitos and the Mayos have battled, setting up roadblocks and exchanging gunfire in broad daylight.

Because of this, classes are often suspended and businesses operate on reduced hours. The number of homicides has ballooned — to 1,086 in 2025 from 623 in 2024, according to official government figures, making Culiacán the most violent city in Mexico last year.

Outside Sinaloa, cartel violence has also roiled the world of Mexican influencers and content creators.

The authorities say that the on-camera killing of a Mexican beauty influencer, Valeria Márquez, last May in Jalisco was related to cartel violence.

Last month, Mexican special forces carried out an operation to arrest a leader of a criminal cell of the powerful Jalisco New Generation Cartel, known as Los Rs, who has been accused of playing a role in Ms. Márquez's killing.

Omar García Harfuch, Mexico's security secretary, said the cell leader, Ramón Ángel Álvarez Ayala, known as El R-1, was the father of a man who had been in a romantic relationship with Ms. Márquez and who had threatened her life.

"Everything indicates, and this will be proved, that the son asked his father, El R-1, to carry out the femicide," Mr. García Harfuch said. Mr. Álvarez's son, Francisco Álvarez Solorio, has not been detained.

Officials have also accused Mr. Álvarez of planning and financing the 2025 assassination of a mayor, Carlos Manzo, who vowed to target cartels in the state of Michoacán.



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Wars, Wildfires and Migration Leave Europe Straining for Control

By MICHAEL D. SHEAR

LONDON — Once again in recent days, Europe has seemed to be watching from the sidelines as its destiny is shaped by outside forces.

Would President Trump choose to restart a massive war with Iran and drive up the cost of oil? Would global warming drive wider and worse wildfires, even as several already raged across the continent? Would a sudden, unexplained surge of people across the Moroccan border into a Spanish exclave — almost all of whom were immediately sent back — divide the bloc’s leaders and fuel the far right?

It has already been a brutal summer for Europe: two wars, record heat, rising inflation and deep anxiety about food, energy and security. The back-to-back crises are prompting calls for joint action, urgent Zoom meetings between different groups of presidents and prime ministers, and political hand-wringing in parliaments from Poland to the United Kingdom.

But like so much else that has happened in the past several years, many of Europe’s challenges are out of its control.

The Iran war — a conflict that most of Europe never wanted — has disrupted life across the region, driving up the price of gas, groceries and travel. The continent’s leaders have pledged to help secure the passage of oil through the Strait of Hormuz once the fighting ends. And yet, they seem destined to hear about the next stage of the war from Mr. Trump’s social media feed.

Europe has been unable to resolve the war in Ukraine after more than four years of bloodshed. Its achievements in cutting emissions to combat climate change are overshadowed by the actions of the United States and China. The future of A.I. is being shaped largely elsewhere. Right wing populism has risen, fueled by migration, inequality and misinformation.

“No matter how you look at it, measure it, this is a difficult, unsettling time for Europe,” said Richard Haass, who served for two decades as the president of the Council on Foreign Relations. He said Europe is partly a victim of circumstance, but also is responsible for its lack of authority over its own fate.

“It’s not just that they’ve under-spent, but they’ve underor-



FINBARR O'REILLY FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A surge of migrants into Ceuta, a Spanish territory on the North African coast, could test European unity on a potent political issue.

Countries are under pressure this summer from forces largely beyond their scope.

ganized themselves when it comes to their own security,” he said. “It’s essentially a bystander, with few exceptions, to the A.I. competition. That’s not something that was done to Europe by the United States or China. That was something that was done by Europe to itself.”

On many fronts, Europe has acted.

When Russia invaded Ukraine more than four years ago, Europe and Britain immediately took steps to support Ukraine, including sending billions of dollars in aid, imposing sanctions on Russia and welcoming millions of Ukrainian refugees into their countries through special

programs.

After Mr. Trump re-entered the White House in 2025 and signaled a warmer stance toward President Vladimir V. Putin, Britain, France, Germany and other European nations formed the “Coalition of the Willing” to try to protect Ukraine’s interests in any peace deal, and worked behind closed doors to reconcile the Ukrainian and American presidents. Those efforts helped prevent Mr. Putin from cutting a deal with Mr. Trump at Ukraine’s expense.

But while the coalition has repeatedly stated that “no arrangements regarding European interests and security can be negotiated without Europeans,” that has proved difficult to enforce. Time and again, Mr. Trump has sidelined America’s allies in favor of direct — and largely fruitless — talks with either Russia or Ukraine.

“For years, European leaders have spoken about strategic autonomy and Europe’s emer-

gence as a serious security actor,” Lesia Ogryzko, the director of the Sahaidachnyi Security Center in Kyiv, wrote for the Atlantic Council. “The coming months may provide the clearest test yet of whether those ambitions are realistic.”

They have had less influence over the U.S.-Israeli war against Iran, even though its effects are felt keenly across the continent. Europe’s vocal opposition to Mr. Trump’s decision to go to war enraged the American leader and soured trans-Atlantic relations.

In April, partly as an effort to repair relations with Mr. Trump, Britain and France announced an effort to organize a military operation that could help protect free and open travel through the Strait of Hormuz once a lasting cease-fire was agreed to. But the on-again, off-again fighting between the United States and Iran has made it too dangerous for the operation to begin. Diplomats from several European countries

said the possibility that they will send military ships to help remove mines from the strait or escort tankers is essentially on hold until it becomes clear whether the war is truly on pause.

Mr. Trump has threatened in recent days to dramatically escalate strikes on Iran if the regime does not agree to open the strait. On Tuesday, the president told Fox News that Iran would be “hit very hard” if the crucial waterway was not opened very soon.

Even as the Iran crisis has continued, wildfires have been raging across Europe, where swaths of bright red on the weather maps indicated the unprecedented heat waves that have become increasingly frequent.

For most of the past two decades, European countries have mostly been in agreement about the dangers posed by climate change and have acted to cut emissions and invest in renew-

able energy. But since Mr. Trump’s arrival in the United States, they have been at odds with one of the world’s largest polluters, making their efforts to confront the changing climate more difficult.

Now, it is clear that countries in the region are facing the consequences of global warming, with average temperatures rising faster than on any other continent. Britons are living through the driest July in nearly two centuries. Fires have displaced more than 300,000 people in France and Spain. In Greece, firefighters died battling blazes that are yet to be fully controlled.

The surge last week of tens of thousands of people into Ceuta, a tiny Spanish territory on the North African coast, raised the possibility of a new crisis that is testing European unity on one of the region’s most potent political issues.

Pedro Sánchez, Spain’s left-wing prime minister, has become famous for his welcoming approach to some migrants, particularly workers from Latin America. But he has taken a tougher approach with people attempting to illegally cross Spain’s borders with Morocco. He cracked down on the arrivals in Ceuta quickly with his country’s military, and most were sent back over the weekend. A floating barrier is being set up near a sea wall between the two countries.

The incident exposed tensions within the European Union that have grown deeper in recent years, as far-right parties including the Alternative for Germany and France’s National Rally have seized on fear of migrants as a way to energize political supporters. Almost two dozen E.U. countries lashed out at Spain in the hours after the migrants arrived in Ceuta, with some calling for suspending the country from the bloc’s free-movement zone. Mr. Sánchez responded by calling those nations “selfish.”

Some analysts noted that the lack of solidarity with Spain at a time when it faced an external threat was an indication of the difficulty that the continent has in projecting authority on the global stage.

Mr. Haass, of the Council on Foreign Relations, said he thinks the lack of unity underscores the fundamental problem for Europe as it seeks to shape its future.

“The whole,” he said, “is much less than the sum of its parts.”

Ukraine’s Pleas for Air-Defense Missiles Go Unheeded as Allies’ Supply Runs Short

From Page A1

start of the war,” Yehor Cherniev, the deputy chairman of the Ukrainian Parliament’s defense and intelligence committee, wrote in a text message.

“There was a time when we lacked antiballistic missile capabilities, but Russia also did not possess such a large number of ballistic missiles,” he added. “Today, however, Kyiv is subjected to massive strikes several times a week, and we are unable to shoot down a single missile.”

The last two major Russian missile barrages offer a stark meas-

Rallying NATO’s support for more interceptors is crucial for Kyiv.

ure of Ukraine’s rapidly eroding ability to defend itself. On Saturday, Ukrainian air defenses intercepted just two of the 35 missiles launched by Russia. Then, on Wednesday, they failed to intercept any of the 28 missiles fired. More than 25 people were killed in the two assaults.

Mr. Zelensky acknowledged to security officials on Wednesday that the country faced a “shortage” of air defenses, and that Russia was exploiting the situation to wreak havoc and sow terror, targeting industrial facilities and logistical centers.

The same day, Mr. Zelensky resumed his lobbying for more air defenses. In a call with President Alexander Stubb of Finland, he said, he discussed global stocks of air-defense missiles and whether more could be sent to Ukraine. Mr. Stubb has developed a close relationship with President Trump and could help sway Washington to supply more interceptors.

Mr. Zelensky also spoke with the NATO secretary general, Mark Rutte, writing on social media that they were coordinating efforts “regarding countries that have the necessary missiles and the capacity to help.”

Rallying NATO’s support is crucial. Nearly all of the Patriot interceptors that Ukraine receives are



TETIANA DZHAFAROVA/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

The aftermath of heavy Russian missile and drone strikes in Kyiv on Wednesday. As deliveries of interceptors to Ukraine have dwindled, civilian deaths have risen.

purchased through a NATO-backed system in which European money buys U.S. weapons. The program was set up to secure continued U.S. weapons deliveries while aligning with Mr. Trump’s preference for selling rather than donating U.S. weapons. But it has fallen short of expectations.

When it was started last summer, Mr. Zelensky said he hoped it would finance \$1 billion in weapons purchases each month. Two weeks ago, Ukraine’s Defense Ministry said that monthly contributions over the program’s first year reached about half of that. Alyona Getmanchuk, Ukraine’s

ambassador to NATO, outlined in an interview several ways that Kyiv was trying to bolster its air defenses.

Beyond the NATO-backed program, Ukraine is using European money to secure long-term contracts for U.S.-made weapons. It is negotiating a license from the United States to produce Patriots — a project Mr. Trump at first publicly supported but recently cast doubt on. And it is working with European partners to develop its own antiballistic-missile system.

But those efforts will take time to bear fruit. Ukraine urgently needs more Patriots to shield its

energy infrastructure from what Kyiv expects will be another winter campaign of Russian strikes intended to make Ukrainians freeze. That is why Ukraine has continued to press European allies to donate air defenses.

While Europe has increased military aid to Ukraine, overall contributions have declined since Mr. Trump halted U.S. weapons donations. Data compiled by the Kiel Institute for the World Economy, a think tank in Germany, shows that Ukraine has received on average just over 2 billion euros, or \$2.3 billion, in military aid each month so far this year, down

from more than €2.5 billion a month in previous years.

As deliveries of air defense to Ukraine dwindled, civilian deaths rose. In the first six months this year, 1,396 civilians were killed, a 37 percent increase from the same period in 2025 and a 114 percent increase from the year before, according to the United Nations.

The toll of Wednesday’s attack was laid bare at a train station in a Kyiv suburb, where rescuers carried away the bodies of eight victims in white bags.

Oleksandr Pertsovskiy, the chief executive of Ukrainian Railways, said a strike near the sta-

tion had ripped through the platform, where people were waiting for a train. Until Ukraine gets enough air defenses, Mr. Pertsovskiy said in a phone interview, “how many human lives are going to be lost?”

Ms. Getmanchuk, the ambassador, said she worried that Ukraine’s task in campaigning for more air defenses was becoming more difficult as Russia’s relentless air assaults began to feel like a grim new normal.

“It’s becoming harder to convey this message,” she said. “People perceive a deadly attack as just another attack.”



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ULET IFANSASTI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Workers use a makeshift method for small-scale oil drilling in Teksas Wonocolo in East Java, Indonesia — the village name is a nod to the U.S. state. The area is known for subsistence drilling.

INDONESIA DISPATCH

Drilling for Oil the Old-Fashioned Way in ‘Little Texas’

By HASYA NINDITA

TEKSAS WONOCOLO, Indonesia — The old red truck's engine was jury-rigged to control a pump tied to a three-legged tower cobbled together from teak logs and rope. Sujiyanto sat in the cab of the vehicle, cigarette in hand. He released the gas pedal, sending the pump hundreds of feet underground before hauling it back up filled with crude oil.

“This is how we extract oil from the ground,” said Mr. Sujiyanto, 51, who, like many Indonesians, goes by one name.

Around him on a recent Wednesday, smoke rose over the hills, which were dotted with teak derricks. The smell of oil lingered in the air and the ground was slicked black. Nearby, a group of men used their bare hands to crank out a pump stuck into the ground.

This is the Wonocolo oil field in East Java, Indonesia, where subsistence oil drilling has endured for decades. It was discovered by troops digging for water in 1893, when Indonesia was a Dutch colony. Reaching depths of about 1,600 feet, it is considered one of the world's shallowest oil fields, allowing the community to extract oil without heavy machinery.

Big oil companies have long considered the field, which covers about 120 acres, commercially insignificant. Nonetheless, community drilling here has survived through the booms and busts of the oil market. Many here have welcomed the energy shock from the Iran war, even as the Indonesian government has looked to Russia to shore up oil supplies.

“We are actually happy when oil prices rise, because our income increases,” said Mr. Sujiyanto, who has been working here for around 15 years.

Next to his truck, three other men worked at separate stations. One sat inside a hut beside the pump, maneuvering it with a long wooden stick. Two others, equipped with buckets, scooped oil that had pooled around the well at the base of the derrick. For an hour, they worked in sync to collect the oil that totaled up to 200 liters, or a bit over a barrel. Then, they moved onto another well.

These are not the only community-run oil wells in Indonesia. There are about 34,000 of these, not counting the few hundred in Wonocolo, according to government data. But Wonocolo stands out for its history and some savvy marketing. It is also known as Little Texas because the local government christened it Teksas Wonocolo, which is a nod to the U.S. state and stands for Tekad Selalu Aman dan Sejahtera, or “Always Safe and Prosperous.”

But like most community-run wells, those at Wonocolo are not registered with the government, said Aftraudin, the acting head of the East Java Energy and Mineral Resources Department. As a result, they are not subject to safety regulations and operate in a gray area.

Five years ago, a miner was caught in a pulley rope while inspecting a well and died instantly, said Heri, a distiller who has worked in the field for 15 years.

“This is a scary job,” said Mr. Heri, who also uses one name.

Many in the area work as distillers, boiling the crude in a furnace to separate out water and to sell the resulting unrefined diesel. Environmentalists



Sujiyanto, who like many in Indonesia goes by one name, operating a truck jury-rigged to pump oil.



Sumanta paying his workers last month. He began investing in abandoned wells over a decade ago.



A worker guarding the wells after dark by firelight. Thieves are said to come for the oil and machinery.



A worker pouring crude oil into a drum for heating and distillation. The crude will boil in a furnace to separate out water and then be sold as unrefined diesel.

worry about air and soil pollution, as well as the long-term effects on the health of the drillers.

Pradipta Indra Ariono, the director of WALHI East Java, an environmental nonprofit group, said the oil industry at Wonocolo was a sign of the lack of jobs in the region.

“They dig for oil because there is no better option,” Mr. Pradipta said.

For decades, Suwoto, 73, has scraped residual oil from the river, gutter or puddles near the field. He collects crude remnants and boils them to separate oil and water. The oil is then skimmed off with a spatula and transferred into barrels. In a day, he can gather up to two jerrycans, or about 40 liters, which he sells for around \$25.

At night, Mr. Suwoto works as a security guard in the field. He said, “I guard the mine from oil and machinery thieves.”

For Mujiyono, 70, the wells have been a source of income for three generations of his family. He grew up in the area, brought here by his parents as a child. Before old truck engines were introduced, he recalled, miners operated most pumps manually, with at least 10 people working together to pull the mechanism from underground.

“Around the 1990s, one well could produce up to 38 barrels of oil per day and run 24 hours,” he said.

About 800 wells are scattered across two villages, Wonocolo and Hargomulyo, with at least 200 still producing oil.

Most of the crude drilled here is sold to the state oil company, Pertamina.

But the oil reserves have been depleted over the years, Mr. Mujiyono said. Today, it can take a week to extract seven to eight barrels of crude from a single well, which sells for about 7.2 million Indonesian rupiah, or about \$400, which is below the market rate. Most men here typically work across five to six wells and, in a good month, can earn up to \$400.

Over a decade ago, Sumanta, 64, began investing in abandoned wells. Now, he said, he can dig up oil to fill as many as 300 barrels a week, which he sells to Pertamina. He remains optimistic about Wonocolo's prospects.

“We need to dig deeper,” he said.

Worried about the wells running dry, the government began an effort about a decade ago called Petroleum Geoheritage Wonocolo to promote tourism in the area. It built an observation tower, a museum and a hall for food vendors, but the initiative has largely languished.

“We had visitors before — most of them were university students or researchers,” Mr. Suwoto said. The museum remains open, but it is also used as a rest stop by researchers and other travelers. The observation tower, when I visited, offered an arresting overview of the Wonocolo field paired with blue skies and black smoke coming from the wells. The food hall lay abandoned and the area was covered with weeds.

War in the Middle East



DAVID GUTTENFELDER/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Israeli armed vehicles at the Gaza border last year. Proposed legislation would drop mandatory direct military aid for Israel and increase ties between defense industries.

Congress Looks at Closely Binding U.S. and Israeli Militaries

By ROBERT JIMISON

WASHINGTON — For decades, the United States has supported Israel's security by providing billions of dollars a year in military assistance and by working with its close partner on intelligence, missile defense and weapons development.

Now, with U.S. political support for sending military funding to Israel dropping off sharply, Congress is considering phasing out the financial commitment and instead undertaking a far more integrated defense and technology partnership built around legally mandated defense-industrial cooperation between the two nations.

Both the House and Senate have included such a proposal in the annual defense policy bill, laying the groundwork for melding U.S. and Israeli defense and intelligence capabilities in profound ways that some critics find alarming.

President Trump and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel are pushing for the shift, which comes as lawmakers on the right and left have grown increasingly hostile to sending taxpayer dollars to Israel's military.

Supporters argue the move would benefit the United States, allowing it to capitalize on Israel's defense and intelligence innovations. They say it would elevate the U.S.-Israel relationship from one of donor and recipient to a strategic partnership.

But some lawmakers fear that such deep ties could blur the lines between supporting an ally and effectively allowing Israel's military to become intertwined with the Pentagon in ways that could be dangerous and difficult to unwind.

What would the legislation do?

The United States and Israel already partner to produce defense technologies, such as Israel's Iron Dome and David's Sling air-defense systems, with contractors including Raytheon and Rafael Advanced Defense System. The links were on display in the days following the Feb. 28 joint strikes against Iran.

The defense policy bill, which



CORINNA KERN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The two countries already cooperate in producing military technologies, such as Israel's Iron Dome air-defense system.

passed the House last month and is awaiting action in the Senate, would enshrine those partnerships in law.

The House measure would create an office in the Defense Department that would be legally required to facilitate cooperation between the United States and Israel. It would oversee the development of new weapons and technology, as well as the testing and rollout of new capabilities.

A separate intelligence bill that is expected to be merged with the defense legislation would call on the president and the director of national intelligence to "expand and enhance intelligence sharing with the government of Israel," except when doing so could risk U.S. national security or expose sophisticated "intelligence sources and methods."

Proponents envision a broad collaboration on emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, missile defense and cybersecurity.

The language traces back to a bipartisan bill introduced this year by Senators Ted Budd, Republican of North Carolina, and Kirsten Gillibrand, Democrat of New York. In the House, it was introduced by Representatives Ronny Jackson, Republican of Texas, and Don Davis, Democrat of North Carolina.

Separately, Representative Marlin Stutzman, an Indiana Re-

publican aligned with Mr. Trump's "America First" stance, has introduced a nonbinding resolution that would call for ending the decades-old memorandum of understanding under which the United States provides billions of dollars in military aid to Israel, and for transitioning instead to "mutual defense cooperation and joint economic investment" between the two nations.

Why is it being considered now?

The memorandum, which mandates that the United States provide \$3.8 billion a year in military aid to Israel, ends in 2028, and lawmakers in both parties have said they would oppose a new deal based on billions of dollars in direct aid to Israel.

Mr. Stutzman introduced his resolution after meetings with Israeli officials, including Mr. Netanyahu, who has endorsed it. On Tuesday, the congressman described his idea as moving "from the current status quo of giving military aid to Israel to creating a trade relationship where we can help each other militarily and economically."

Doing so would provide extraordinarily valuable support to Israel and its military and intelligence services without explicitly requiring Congress to sign off on sending a set amount of federal money to Jerusalem each year.

The idea has gained traction as the future of traditional U.S. mili-

tary assistance to Israel has become increasingly uncertain following a backlash to Israel's conduct of the war in Gaza. In a striking vote last month, nearly half of House Democrats backed an amendment that would have ended U.S. aid to Israel. The proposal failed overwhelmingly, but the vote reflected growing hostility in the Democratic Party over continuing unconditional support for Israel.

Recent polling also shows a significant split among Republicans on the matter. A New York Times/Siena poll from May found that a growing portion of younger conservative voters find aid to Israel increasingly unacceptable. Among surveyed Republican voters from 18 to 44, 63 percent said they opposed providing additional economic and military support to Israel, while 72 percent of those 45 and over supported additional aid.

The push also stems from Mr. Netanyahu's public campaign to appear less reliant on U.S. military aid as Mr. Trump urges allies to contribute more meaningfully to their own defense.

Why is the proposal controversial?

Opponents argue that the idea would give too much control over sensitive U.S. defense matters to a foreign nation.

"The U.S. government can always choose on a case-by-case basis to enter into joint production agreements," Senator Chris Van Hollen, Democrat of Maryland, said in an interview. "What's sort of jaw-dropping about this is that it mandates it."

He added: "That gives the Israeli government a lot more control over the production and potentially deployment of U.S. weapons systems."

Representative Thomas Massie of Kentucky, one of the few Republicans who has spoken out against the provision, called it "a betrayal of American sovereignty," and said that it "tragically merges our military technology and supply chain with Israel's."

With Representative Ro Khanna, Democrat of California, Mr. Massie attempted to strip the provision from the defense bill. But the two lawmakers were

blocked by Republican leaders from bringing the matter to a vote.

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Democrat of New York, warned in a social media post that the proposed partnership would "merge parts of our military with the IDF," referring to the Israel Defense Forces. She warned that such a move would be "an existential threat to American sovereignty and democracy."

That characterization goes further than the letter of the legislation. Neither the House nor the Senate bill would merge the U.S. and Israeli militaries or place troops under shared authority.

Backers have criticized such claims as misrepresentations aimed at limiting support for a critical ally in the Middle East.

"Despite bad-faith attempts from both sides of the political spectrum to misstate the facts, to denigrate our close ally and partner Israel," the proposal "simply enables joint investment in research and development that will benefit Americans from both a fiscal and security perspective," Mr. Budd said in a statement.

He said the provision would "impose zero limitations" on the U.S. military.

Defense-industrial partnerships are a key feature of the U.S. relationship with close allies, including Britain, Canada, other NATO partners and Australia. But the new proposals would establish one of the broadest such partnerships with Israel, with which the United States does not share any formal mutual defense treaty.

Mr. Van Hollen and other critics argue that the mandated joint production provision could constrain the United States militarily. He pointed to Israel's repeated objections to transferring Iron Dome air-defense batteries to Ukraine after Russia's invasion, out of concern that the weapons could fall into the hands of Russia, be delivered to Iran, then used against Israel.

"The one precedent that we have is the Iron Dome co-production agreement, where the government of Israel did exercise that authority," Mr. Van Hollen said. "That should be a very cautionary tale."

Houthi Attacks Kill Soldiers, Yemen Says

By ISMAEEL NAAR

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The Yemeni military said Thursday that the Houthis, an Iranian-backed militia, had attacked the armed forces of the internationally recognized government in two provinces, an escalation that threatens to reignite Yemen's long-simmering civil war.

The Houthis targeted "several camps and units of the Armed Forces deployed in Marib and Hadramout provinces," the Yemeni Defense Ministry said in a statement posted on social media. The military said soldiers were killed and injured but did not provide an exact number. Local news media outlets reported that dozens had been killed.

Hours after the attack, a Houthi military spokesman, Yahya Saree, said the group had launched "a large number of drones and ballistic missiles" at Yemeni military camps in Marib and Hadramout, two oil-rich provinces controlled by the government.

Mr. Saree said the group had launched the attack after they "monitored a large Saudi military mobilization" that was "aiming to escalate" against them.

The Yemeni Defense Ministry said it would retaliate against the Houthis "at the appropriate time and place."

Saudi Arabia has led a military coalition in Yemen since 2015 to oust the Houthis and restore the internationally recognized government after the militia seized control of the capital, Sanaa. The coalition did not publicly comment on Thursday's attack.

The civil war in Yemen has killed hundreds of thousands of people, not only from direct violence, but also hunger and disease stemming from the conflict. A fragile cease-fire was agreed between the government and the Houthis in 2022, and Saudi Arabia pulled back from its extensive bombing campaign in Yemen.

The latest round of fighting has prompted fears that the truce is nearing collapse, after months of escalating tensions and intermittent ground skirmishes between government and Houthi forces.

The Houthis have also clashed with Saudi Arabia in recent weeks and declared a blockade of Saudi oil shipping last month in the Red Sea, firing on passing commercial vessels. Mr. Saree warned the Saudi government on Thursday that it "will bear the consequences of any escalation."

While in the past the Houthis have acted in support of their main ally, Iran, they also have their own reasons for stepping up attacks on Saudi Arabia now, according to researchers.

Over the past decade, the Houthis have cemented their control of the country's north, effectively dividing Yemen into two states. Analysts say the group now appears to be looking to consolidate its control over Yemen and its oil resources, believing it has little left to lose after years of political stalemate.

The province of Marib, where armed forces were attacked on Thursday, is one of the last strongholds of the Yemeni government in the north. East of Sanaa, it is home to the country's largest concentration of displaced persons who fled the fighting over the years. Last week, the Yemeni authorities declared a state of emergency in Marib to counter a deadly measles outbreak.

Hadramout, which also came under attack from the Houthis, is home to much of Yemen's modest oil reserves, which have been a key source of funding for the beleaguered government.

Saeed Al-Batati contributed reporting from al-Mukalla, Yemen.

Israeli Settler Indicted in Death of Palestinian Activist

By ADAM RASGON and NATAN ODENHEIMER

TEL AVIV — An Israeli settler was charged on Thursday with reckless manslaughter in connection with the death of a well-known Palestinian activist, a rare indictment by the Israeli authorities of an Israeli accused of violence against Palestinians.

The activist, Awdah Hathaleen, whose work was featured in the Oscar-winning documentary "No Other Land," was shot dead in Umm al-Khair, a village in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, in June 2025.

The settler, Yinon Levi, who runs an outpost near the southern West Bank city of Hebron, was charged in the killing, with the indictment saying he fired in a "reckless" manner toward an area with people, including children.

Avichai Hajbi, Mr. Levi's lawyer, has previously said his client acted in self-defense and believed his life was in danger from Palestinians throwing stones, so he shot

into the air to protect himself. Mr. Hajbi did not immediately respond to a request for comment about the indictment.

Mr. Hathaleen's killing shined a light on settler violence in the West Bank, which has reached record levels since the Hamas-led Oct. 7, 2023, attack.

The family of Mr. Hathaleen, 31, said it was relieved to learn of the indictment but expressed frustration that Israeli prosecutors did not bring a more severe charge against Mr. Levi. A manslaughter conviction could result in up to 12 years in prison.

"We hope we will achieve justice for Awdah," Khalil Hathaleen, his brother, said in an interview. "That's our sole demand."

The last time an Israeli settler was indicted on a charge of killing a Palestinian was in 2019, according to Ziv Stahl, executive director of Yesh Din, an Israeli human rights group that focuses on accountability in the West Bank.

Palestinians attacked by settlers

often have little legal recourse, according to Israeli human rights groups. Yesh Din, an Israeli human rights group, has reported examining more than 1,700 cases of Jewish extremist violence in the West Bank from 2005 to 2024 and found that 3 percent ended in a full or a partial conviction.

About three million Palestinians in the West Bank live under Israeli military rule, which offers them few, if any, guarantees of justice. In contrast, some 500,000 settlers in the territory have the legal rights of other Israeli citizens.

Khalil Hathaleen, 39, said that since his brother's killing, the family's hometown, Umm al-Khair, had been facing frequent attacks, including settlers throwing stones at villagers and their homes, and cutting down their olive trees.

In 2024, the Biden administration imposed sanctions on Mr. Levi after accusing him of intimidation and violence against Palestinians. About a year later, Presi-

dent Trump removed the penalties against Mr. Levi and other settlers accused of extremist violence.

Mr. Levi, whose outpost is known as a base for settler attacks, has been involved in running an earthworks company. On July 28, 2025, the day of Mr. Hathaleen's death, Mr. Levi instructed a 17-year-old working for him to clear a new path through privately owned Palestinian land with an excavator and to continue even as Palestinian villagers hurled stones and attempted to block it, the indictment said.

Then Mr. Levi confronted some of the villagers before shooting a pistol in the direction of buildings in Umm al-Khair, the document said. The bullet hit Mr. Hathaleen, who was filming from the yard of a village community center approximately 20 yards away, the indictment added.

Witnesses said the sight of his death was harrowing.

"I saw Mr. Hathaleen lying in a



TAMIR KALIFA/GETTY IMAGES

Tariq Hathaleen at the grave of the West Bank activist Awdah Hathaleen, his cousin, shortly after the funeral last summer.

pool of blood," said Mattan Berner-Kadish, a 30-year-old American-Israeli activist who spent time in the village learning Arabic last summer and was present when the shooting happened.

Minutes later, Mr. Berner-Kadish said, he approached Mr.

Levi and asked him if he was aware he had just killed someone.

"I'm happy I did," Mr. Levi replied, according to Mr. Berner-Kadish.

Mr. Hajbi, the lawyer, did not respond to an additional request for comment about Mr. Berner-Kadish's account.

U.S. Doctor Is Sentenced In Vandalism At Japan Sites

By **KIUKO NOTOYA**
and **HARI RAJ**

TOKYO — A court in Japan on Thursday handed a Manhattan doctor a suspended sentence of 18 months in prison after finding him guilty of vandalizing two ancient religious sites, capping more than a decade of litigation that led to a rare extradition.

Masahide Kanayama, 63, had been accused of smearing an oily liquid on wooden pillars at a thousand-year-old Buddhist temple on the outskirts of Tokyo and on an offerings box at a Shinto shrine founded in 643 B.C. Both incidents took place in 2015.

Dr. Kanayama, a practicing Christian, admitted during the trial that he had damaged the sites. “I poured the oil believing I was being guided by the Holy Spirit, but it was my own misconception,” he told the court, according to NHK, Japan’s public broadcaster.

In her ruling on Thursday, Judge Yoko Sugiyama of the district court in Chiba, a prefecture east of Tokyo, noted the historical and cultural value of the structures, and said “the act of prioritizing one’s own religious beliefs” to commit the crime “warrants severe condemnation.”

The court suspended the sentence for three years, citing factors including Dr. Kanayama’s vow to never repeat the offense, NHK reported.

It was not clear whether he would return to the United States following the sentencing. His lawyer did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

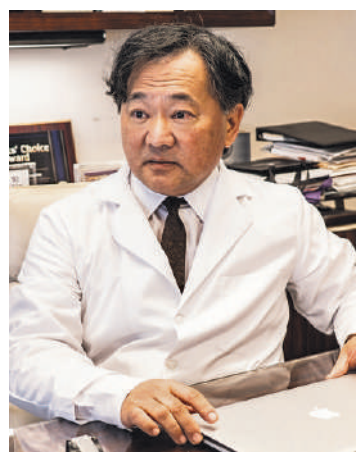
Dr. Kanayama, a Japanese citizen and legal permanent resident of the United States, has practiced medicine in Manhattan for nearly three decades. He is an expert in endometriosis, a gynecological condition that can be debilitating.

He also founded a nonprofit called International Marketplace Ministry, which focuses on personal relationships to God through prayer in daily life and work, according to court papers from his extradition hearings.

“I believe the Holy Spirit works through me by giving me an ability to perform my unique surgical technique,” Dr. Kanayama told The New York Times in November last year. “When guided by faith, medicine becomes a way to serve God by serving others. My goal is to let God’s love be reflected through my actions and services.”

Japan asked the United States to extradite him in 2016. He has repeatedly tried to prevent the extradition, but a federal judge’s ruling in February cleared the way for him to be sent to Japan. He was arrested on March 4 while on a flight from the United States to Japan, according to the Chiba Prefectural Police.

Japanese authorities said Dr. Kanayama had left oil on pillars at the main entrance of the Naritasan Shinsho-ji Temple in the city of Narita. A temple official said the oil had left blackish stains. At the nearby Katori Jingu Shrine, in Ka-



GRAHAM DICKIE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Dr. Masahide Kanayama smeared a liquid at a Buddhist temple and a Shinto shrine.

tori, a shrine official said oily liquid had been left on wooden poles, stairs and a box for donations, leaving stains that had become almost invisible unless they were observed up close.

Japanese authorities said they had used surveillance footage from the religious sites, as well as car rental and flight records, to trace the incidents to Dr. Kanayama. The authorities also referred to YouTube videos from 2012 that showed a man who they said was Dr. Kanayama talking about anointing shrines with oil for religious purposes.

His lawyers have argued that Japan had targeted Dr. Kanayama in part because he was a Christian. The Japanese consulate in New York said in November that the extradition request was “a matter of law enforcement and is in no way motivated by political or religious considerations.”

Kiuko Notoya reported from Tokyo. Benjamin Weiser and Michael Levenson contributed reporting.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY FREDRIK LERNERYD FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The Nigerian singer Ochiora Okogeri, known as the Country Man, performing July 25 at International Cowboys and Cowgirls Day, a festival at a racetrack in Kenya.

KENYA DISPATCH

Yeehaw! It’s a Country Music Festival in Africa.

By **BRIAN O. OTIENO**

NAIROBI, Kenya — The country music fans sang along to classic hits, drinking beer and whiskey as they tried to keep their line dancing synchronized.

No memo was needed on the dress code. The Ngong Racecourse, a horse track on the outskirts of Nairobi, Kenya, was packed with cowboys and cowgirls wearing their best western styles.

“Hats and boots!” said Amish Gupta, one of the attendees.

The crowd was there to celebrate International Cowboys and Cowgirls Day, a festival in Kenya held on the last Saturday of July. For the second year in a row, the audience kicked up dust, danced and ate barbecue, celebrating a musical genre that was born far away but that more Africans are coming to appreciate.

Country has long been played on radio stations across the continent and has drawn increasing interest from local artists over the years. It is particularly popular among Afrikaners in South Africa, where artists like Bobby Angel and Lance James first became stars.

Purity Melubo and Fatuma Isaack, both in their 20s, wore matching beige hats to the horse track. They were both newcomers to the festival this year.

Ms. Melubo said she knew she was a country fan when she first heard Kenny Rogers’ “The Gambler” on the radio as a child. She is also Maasai, a pastoral community in Kenya that she said is essentially “cowboy.”

“We have cows and ranches,” she said. “The only difference is that we don’t wear hats and boots and leather jackets.”

Many in the audience did indeed wear leather jackets in the chilly evening air, but they ditched them when the event’s main act, the Nigerian country singer Ochiora Okogeri, known as the Country Man, took the stage.

Wearing a fringed brown leather jacket and black pants, he fired up the crowd by thrashing his guitar as his soft baritone belted out covers of classic country songs like Don Williams’s “I Believe in You.”

The Country Man’s energy flowed into the crowd as it eagerly geared up for another round of line dancing. “Are you having a good time?” he yelled.



Clockwise from above: Elijah Manyeki, main organizer of the festival; enjoying the music; and Peter Mwangi taking a break.

One fan says, ‘I flew in from Ireland just to be a part of this.’

Days earlier, sitting outside a shop selling cowboy outfits in Nairobi, the singer said that playing in Kenya would be like performing “on easy mode,” compared with playing in his home country.

Nigerian audiences were “mostly primed for Afrobeats,” an upbeat genre that combines jazz, funk and traditional African folk sounds, he said.

He and Elijah Manyeki, the festival’s main organizer, hunched around a cable reel table, shared oranges and tangerines, and talked about how they fell in love with country, which crooned in the background at the store.

Mr. Manyeki said he grew up listening to the genre and watching westerns. He once visited Texas and was attracted to the cowboy shops he saw there, eventually opening one in Nairobi.

He later ventured into events after he noticed “country music was only played in bars and clubs” around Kenya. “I saw that the best way to have everyone enjoy country music was to do a family country event,” said Mr. Manyeki.

He said the festival had welcomed more than 5,000 cowboys and cowgirls last year. He has plans to hold tours across the continent in future, he said.

Last year’s festival featured only local acts and was dominated by a home crowd. This year, a good number of country fans flew in from abroad.

“I flew in from Ireland just to be a part of this,” said Krzysztof

Gwozdziński, 43, who said he had seen videos of last year’s festival on YouTube.

The local country scene in Kenya is still heavy on cover songs, but performers are re-making classic tunes in local languages. At the festival, Ythera the Wildflower sang a rendition of Dolly Parton’s “Coat of Many Colors” in her native Kikuyu language.

“Kikuyu renditions bring country music closer to home and our language gets to be appreciated internationally,” she said.

Country is particularly popular among the Kikuyu, Kenya’s most populous ethnic group. Some say Mugithi, a folk genre in the Kikuyu community that features a lone singing guitarist, is similar to country.

The Country Man said he “hated” country music as a boy. But his father played the genre in his car as he took him to

school. “Somehow it slipped into my conscience,” he said. Later he found one of his father’s old memory cards and began to enjoy songs by Don Williams, Kenny Rogers and Elvis Presley.

He eventually asked his mother for a guitar and mastered it sufficiently enough to play Jim Reeves covers in church, filling people, as he put it, “with the Holy Spirit.” He started to perform at weddings and later became an internet sensation.

These days, he also writes his own songs, drawing on his life experiences.

“A lot of people do what they do to appeal to other people,” he said, placing orange peels on the cable reel table. “I appeal to myself.”

Shortly after midnight, to the delight of the crowd at the horse track, he performed “Loner in Limbo,” his first original song. It traces life’s highs and lows.



Hats, boots and leather jackets were not required at the festival but were evident.



Phostine Hongo selling Western wear. Mr. Manyeki has a cowboy shop in Nairobi.

Muslim Nonprofit Gets Terrorism Label in Florida and Texas

CAIR, a Civil Rights Organization, Challenges a G.O.P. Designation Made in an Unusual State-Level Effort

By RICHARD FAUSSET

In the United States, determining whether a group should be labeled a terrorist organization has largely been the domain of the federal government, which, in making such decisions, can draw on its vast domestic antiterror infrastructure and globe-spanning intelligence services.

Now some Republican governors are getting into the game. In recent months, the leaders of Texas and Florida have officially designated a handful of groups as terrorist organizations. And notably, in a time of rising Islamophobia, both states have conferred the designation on the Council on American Islamic Relations, or CAIR — one of the largest Muslim civil rights groups in the country.

This new state-level effort has triggered fresh civil liberties concerns from some legal scholars. For CAIR, a 32-year-old nonprofit with headquarters in Washington and chapters in more than 20 states, the terrorism labels open a challenging new front in its long-running feud with American conservatives, many of whom accuse the group of having ties to violent extremists, despite its many protestations to the contrary.

CAIR is challenging the Texas and Florida terror designations in court, arguing that they violate its rights to free speech, assembly and due process. The stakes are high, particularly in Florida, where a new law makes it a felony to knowingly offer “material support” for a designated terrorist organization, and allows the state to dissolve such groups in some situations. If the law survives, it is likely to force the permanent closure of CAIR’s Tampa-based state affiliate, which says it represents a Muslim community in Florida that numbers more than half a million people.

Gov. Ron DeSantis did not respond to requests for comment for this article, nor did numerous sponsors of the new Florida law. In addition to addressing terrorism, the law also nods to conservative fears of Islamic influence by limiting the use of Muslim religious rules, known as sharia, by courts and certain other government bodies.

In a social media post promoting the law, Mr. DeSantis wrote, “We have a responsibility to defend and reinvigorate Western Civilization and that means protecting against creeping sharia in all its forms.”

Lawyers for CAIR, in court documents, wrote that the group does not “engage in ‘terrorist activity,’” and accused Mr. DeSantis and other Republican state officials of being motivated by anti-Muslim bias. Representatives of CAIR declined requests for an interview.

Whether CAIR should be viewed as a benign civil rights group, a group with an unsettling history of connections to Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood, or something in between has dogged the group for decades.

In court documents, the group’s lawyers say that CAIR’s mission is “to enhance the public’s understanding of Islam, protect civil rights, promote justice, and empower American Muslims.” On its website, the group condemns “all acts of violence against civilians by any individual, group or state,” including those carried out by Hamas. It also declares itself to be “a natural enemy of violent extremists.”

But both governors have noted that the group was listed, along with 200 other groups and individuals, as an undicted co-conspirator in a terrorism financing case against a charity, the Holy Land Foundation, which resulted in the 2008 conviction of the charity and five of its leaders. CAIR was not accused of a crime in the case; more broadly, CAIR’s lawyers say the group has “not committed, or even been charged with, a crime.”

In December 2023, the Biden White House condemned CAIR’s director, Nihad Awad, after it was revealed that he had told a group, American Muslims for Palestine, that he was “happy to see” Palestinians “break the siege, the walls of the concentration camp, on Oct. 7,” the day of the Hamas-led attack on Israel, killing roughly 1,200 people. Mr. Awad, who declined through lawyers to comment for this story, has said that his remarks were taken out of context.

More recently, some Republicans in Washington have taken to targeting CAIR, at a time when prominent conservatives have been portraying Islam as incompatible with American values. In 2016, Mr. Trump, in an interview, stated, “I think Islam hates us.”

Earlier this year, the Department of Health and Human Services launched an investigation of CAIR’s use of federal money that was meant to aid in Afghan refugee resettlement. Last year, Senator Tom Cotton called upon the Department of Education to “ensure that CAIR is not given an opportunity to push its radical, pro-terrorist, anti-Israel ideology on American schoolchildren.” In January, Representative Jason Smith, chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, asked the Internal Revenue Service to revoke the tax-exempt status of CAIR’s California chapter for, among other things, supporting pro-Palestinian student protesters on college campuses.

“CAIR is probably at a place where it’s in the most danger than it’s ever been before,” said Farid Senzai, an associate professor of political science at Santa Clara University who studies Muslims in America.



TIERNEY L. CROSS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The building that houses the Council on American Islamic Relations in Washington. CAIR is one of the largest Muslim civil rights organizations in the country.



DESIREE RIOS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

CAIR’s director, Nihad Awad, told a group in 2023 that he supported the Hamas-led attack on Israel. He later said the remarks were taken out of context.

The states are shaping up as potential battlegrounds. This year, bills were introduced in a number of Republican-led states, including Louisiana, Oklahoma and Arizona, that would have given state officials the power to designate groups as terrorist organizations, according to Elly Page, a senior legal adviser with the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law. Those proposals did not become law, but in Indiana, a new law allows the governor to designate groups as “affiliates” of federally designated terror groups.

Some legal scholars fear that state governments could designate groups as terrorist organizations without access to the classified intelligence and other expertise that the U.S. State Department relies on for its official list of foreign terrorist organizations. The State Department list includes Mexican drug cartels, a number of regional and country-specific affiliates of ISIS and branches of the Muslim Brotherhood in Lebanon and Sudan.

At the state level, “it’s unvarnished politics all the way through,” wrote Darryl Li, a legal scholar who teaches at the University of Chicago, and Shirin Sinnar, a professor at Stanford Law School, in an article earlier this year.

In an interview, Ms. Sinnar, who filed a

friend of the court brief opposing the Florida law, said that conservatives should be wary of state laws that could, under Democratic governance, be wielded against groups that they tend to favor. In 2019, she noted, the San Francisco board of supervisors labeled the National Rifle Association a domestic terrorist organization. (The city pulled back after the N.R.A. sued on First Amendment grounds.)

In Texas, Gov. Greg Abbott designated CAIR as a terrorist organization in November, citing testimony from the Holy Land Foundation trial in which an F.B.I. agent described CAIR as a front group for Hamas. (The group denies the accusation.)

Mr. Abbott said his designation bans CAIR from buying or acquiring land in the state. It also authorized Ken Paxton, the attorney general, to sue to shut the group down. Mr. Paxton, a fellow Republican, filed such a suit in February.

In a statement, Andrew Mahaleris, a spokesman for Mr. Abbott, said the governor’s actions “are targeted at radical groups who support terrorism or that seek to forcibly impose sharia law on Texans.”

CAIR is challenging the designation and Mr. Paxton’s lawsuit. But some Texas Muslims say they already feel



NATHAN HOWARD/REUTERS

Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida, left, wrote about defending Western civilization. Gov. Greg Abbott said his move wouldn’t let CAIR buy land in Texas.



CHRISTOPHER LEE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



SOPHIE PARK FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Salma Khan said she feared that the designation would leave a vacuum for Muslims in Florida. “I think this could be catastrophic, to be honest,” she said.

the effects.

Azfar Saeed, 52, a former board president of Islamic Center of Frisco, Texas, said that several mosques and Muslim groups are trying stay away from CAIR, for fear of being entangled in any sort of financially crippling legal trouble.

Mr. Saeed said that there is nothing to the assertion that CAIR supports terrorism. “It’s so obviously politically motivated,” he said. “What is that new fear that can deliver voters? Obviously, Muslims are the new boogeyman here.”

In Florida, Governor DeSantis, a staunch supporter of Israel, has a long history of feuding with CAIR Florida, which has proclaimed its support for Palestinians and their “fundamental right to be free from the Israeli occupation.”

Soon after Mr. DeSantis took office in 2019, the group criticized the governor for threatening to retaliate against Airbnb over its short-lived policy that banned property listings in the occupied West Bank. In 2023, in the middle of intense campus protests over the Israel-Hamas war, CAIR sued Mr. DeSantis and other state officials on behalf of a local chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine after the state tried to shut down the group at two public universities.

In December, Mr. DeSantis issued an executive order declaring CAIR to be a

terrorist group, but the move was temporarily blocked by a federal judge in March.

The next month, Mr. DeSantis signed the new terror law, which allows the head of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement to recommend the designation to the governor and his cabinet for approval.

He later signaled his intention to declare CAIR, the Muslim Brotherhood and Antifa, a loose movement of left-wing activists, as terrorist groups under the new law.

CAIR sued, which has temporarily delayed the law’s implementation. If the designation eventually takes effect, CAIR supporters like Salma Khan fear that it would leave a vacuum for Muslims in Florida. Ms. Khan, 30, a consultant in the biopharmaceutical industry, lives in Boston but grew up in Florida. In November 2023, she said, she was in the Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport after visiting her parents when a man began verbally harassing her. She said that CAIR’s Florida chapter helped pressure local law enforcement to bring charges against him.

“I think this could be catastrophic, to be honest,” Ms. Khan said. “I’d be deeply concerned about young Floridian Muslims in public schools.”

The 47th President

Senate Panel Approves Measure, Clearing Path For U.S. to Charge Fauci

From Page A1

the contempt resolution to both the Justice Department and the U.S. attorney later in the day.

“It’s the committee’s verdict that he should be held in contempt, and it will be sent,” Mr. Paul said. “But no one said that we won’t bring it before the Senate. We’ll see what happens over time.”

Democrats protested that Mr. Paul was circumventing federal law.

Several said that rather than vote to hold Dr. Fauci in contempt, Congress should abandon its partisan bitterness and the government should convene a bipartisan commission, akin to the 9/11 commission, to have an independent inquiry into Covid’s origins and the pandemic response.

Congress had a chance to do that in 2022, when a bill to create an independent panel passed the Senate health committee with bipartisan support on a vote of 20 to 2. But the bill died. The Biden White House never took a position on it, and Senator Chuck Schumer, the majority leader at the time, did not bring it to the floor for a vote.

Dr. Fauci served for nearly 40 years as the government’s top infectious disease expert and was well regarded by both parties until

A refusal to answer questions leads to an official rebuke.

the pandemic turned him into polarizing figure — lionized on the left and a symbol of lockdowns and government overreach on the right.

He has said that he testified or briefed members of Congress more than 200 times during his tenure. In appearances before Mr. Paul during the pandemic, he was often combative. In a brief opening statement last week, Dr. Fauci said that it pained him to remain silent but that he had concluded that Mr. Paul had an “unhinged obsession” with him and was acting on his lawyers’ advice.

Thursday’s vote was yet another turn in a yearslong effort by Republicans to prove that he funded “gain of function” research, involving altering viruses, at a laboratory in Wuhan, China, the city where the pandemic began, and that the coronavirus that causes Covid-19 leaked from a lab.

While the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, which he led, did fund such research, Dr. Fauci told a House panel in 2024 that it was “molecularly impossible” for the taxpayer-funded experiments in Wuhan to have produced the pandemic-causing virus. He also said the re-

search he funded did not meet the government’s strict definition for gain-of-function work.

Republicans were not convinced. “You belong in prison,” Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia said then.

Such statements from Republicans including Ms. Greene and Mr. Paul prompted President Joseph R. Biden Jr. to give Dr. Fauci a “pre-emptive” pardon before he left office in January 2025.

Republicans argued that the pardon shielded Dr. Fauci, rendering him ineligible to take the Fifth. Pointing to his brief statement, they also said he could not testify and refuse to testify at the same time.

“The chair directed Anthony Fauci to answer. He refused,” Mr. Paul said before the vote. “That is what we are voting on today — not his opinions, not his policies, not anything he said from the podium six years ago. We are voting on whether a witness who has received the benefit of a federal pardon can be ordered by this committee to answer questions and then defy that order without consequence.”

After the vote, President Trump suggested for the first time that he thinks Dr. Fauci should be prosecuted. Until now, Mr. Trump, who awarded Dr. Fauci a medal during his first term but said recently that he had “never been a big fan” of the scientist, has steered clear of the issue. He has not echoed Mr. Paul’s call for Dr. Fauci to be thrown “in prison.”

But in the Oval Office on Thursday afternoon, the president appeared to shift course. When a reporter asked if he thought the Justice Department should prosecute Dr. Fauci, Mr. Trump invoked the contempt prosecutions of Stephen K. Bannon and Peter Navarro, who worked in his first administration.

“They prosecuted these two people, and they ought to be ashamed of themselves,” the president said. “So when you see that happen, you sort of say maybe he should. What he did is far more serious than a lot of crimes, frankly.”

Unlike Dr. Fauci, who appeared before the committee but invoked the constitutional right not to answer questions, Mr. Bannon and Mr. Navarro simply failed to show up when congressional Democrats subpoenaed them. Each spent four months in prison in 2024.

Polls have consistently shown that Dr. Fauci has the support of a majority of Americans. A 2025 survey by the Annenberg Public Policy Center found that 57 percent of Americans trusted Dr. Fauci to give them accurate health information, compared with 39 percent for Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

It is unclear if public sentiment will shift in the wake of the recent release of Dr. Fauci’s diary, which included entries about his fame,



HAIYUN JIANG/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the former director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, during the hearing last week.

his friendships with celebrities and his pursuit of cash awards. Celinda Lake, a Democratic pollster, said the contempt resolution would play well with the Republican base, but not with independents.

“Swing voters want the focus to be on their lives and their problems,” she said. “They want to move forward, not backward.” The intense focus on Dr. Fauci, she said, makes Congress seem “completely irrelevant.”

But John Feehery, a Republican strategist, says there is a “hidden majority out there who strongly resent” what happened during the pandemic. “Fauci taking the Fifth frustrates that silent majority and was a bad look for him,” Mr. Feehery said, adding that the vote would please Republicans “who want accountability.”

The vote came after a spirited debate in which Democrats, one by one, introduced motions to postpone consideration of the resolution. In rapid fire, those motions failed along party lines, and Mr. Paul eventually cut the Democrats’ effort short.

Senator Richard Blumenthal, Democrat of Connecticut, argued that before taking the “immensely historic step” of holding Dr. Fauci in contempt, the committee needed to at least “hear from his counsel as to what he feared.” Mr. Paul threw Dr. Fauci’s lawyer, Mr. Schertler, out of the hearing last week after Mr. Schertler tried to speak.

Senator Gary Peters of Michigan, the top Democrat on the committee, accused Mr. Paul of conducting a “rushed investigation” without Democrats’ participation. He warned that if the committee approved the resolution holding Dr. Fauci in contempt, it would discourage others from testifying in the future.

“This committee should not damage its future investigative authority to advance the chairman’s yearslong campaign against single individuals,” Mr. Peters said.

The vote followed another twist in Republicans’ investigation of Dr. Fauci. On Wednesday night, Senator Ron Johnson, Republican of Wisconsin and the chairman of the Senate’s Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, said he had received a copy of Dr. Fauci’s government-issued cellphone. “Hopefully this device will address many of the questions he refused to answer at last week’s hearing,” Mr. Johnson wrote on social media.

Dr. Fauci’s pardon covers only his activities from 2014 through Jan. 19, 2025, Mr. Biden’s last full day in office. His allies said that if he testified and made a misstep, he would open himself up to possible perjury charges. Republicans on the panel said the pardon protects him, so he was ineligible to take the Fifth.

On this issue, legal scholars dis-

agree. Some said his invocation of the Fifth was proper because he was legally vulnerable. Others said the pardon offered him immunity.

There is precedent for Congress holding a government official in contempt for invoking the Fifth Amendment after initially testifying, as Dr. Fauci did last week. In 2013, Lois Lerner, an Internal Revenue Service official, appeared before a House committee under subpoena and insisted she had not misled Congress in previous testimony.

Like Dr. Fauci, she then refused to answer questions. Ms. Lerner was promptly suspended from her job, and in 2014, the House voted along party lines to hold her in contempt of Congress. But in 2015, federal prosecutors refused to prosecute her, saying they disagreed with House Republicans who said that by making her initial statement, Ms. Lerner had waived her Fifth Amendment right.

Senator James Lankford of Oklahoma, the sole Republican to

question Dr. Fauci gently at last week’s hearing, raised the Lerner case at the end of the session, suggesting that the homeland security panel needed to at least consider having a contempt vote.

“The parliamentary question that I think we’ve got to be able to deal with is: Is this consistent with Lois Lerner?” Mr. Lankford asked. He voted on Thursday to hold Dr. Fauci in contempt.

Representative Jamie Raskin of Maryland, the senior Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee and a former constitutional law professor, said that Mr. Paul had already tainted a prosecution by asserting he wanted to see Dr. Fauci in prison, while at the same time trying to force him to testify.

“I do have some sense of the ethics of a legislative investigation,” Mr. Raskin said. “It just would never occur to me to go around saying a witness should be in prison and then try to prevent them from invoking their Fifth Amendment privilege against self-incrimination over the very matter I’m claiming is criminal.”

Trump Administration Pays Company \$1.2 Billion to Cancel Its Wind Leases

By BRAD PLUMER

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration will pay the German energy firm RWE \$1.22 billion to abandon plans to build wind farms off the coasts of New York, California and Louisiana, the company announced on Thursday.

It was the fifth such deal the government has reached this year to halt the development of offshore wind, a source of renewable energy that President Trump has derided for decades.

Under the agreement, RWE will voluntarily surrender three leases it owned for wind farms in federal waters. Those projects were in the early stages of development and had little chance of moving forward under the Trump administration, which has halted all federal permitting for offshore wind.

The government would reimburse RWE roughly what the company had paid for the leases under the Biden administration. The settlement would also resolve any legal disputes over the leases, the company said. The company will invest about the same amount in new natural gas projects in the United States, it said.

“After careful consideration, it was determined there is no path forward to permit these projects in the U.S. for the foreseeable future,” RWE said in a statement, referring to the offshore wind leases. “The company determined that this resolution best serves the interests of its stakeholders and allows it to direct resources toward energy projects that can be advanced with certainty.”

The firm will spend \$900 million to acquire an indirect 16 percent stake in a liquefied natural gas project in Louisiana and sign a \$300 million order for new gas turbines that generate electricity. The company said it was planning to build at least 15 natural gas peaking plants in the United States.

The agreement is similar to deals that the Trump administration has struck since March with other energy developers, including TotalEnergies and Invenery, to refund wind leases off California, Maine, New Jersey, New York and North Carolina in exchange for investing in fossil fuel projects instead.

Including Thursday’s announcement, the government has so far spent roughly \$3.9 billion to get companies to terminate 12 offshore wind leases.

“Americans deserve an energy system built on common sense, not one dependent on costly subsidies or technologies that can’t meet our country’s current demand,” Interior Secretary Doug Burgum said in a statement. “We welcome RWE’s agreement and voluntary investment in projects that strengthen our nation’s energy security.”

Democrats denounced the deal.

“New Yorkers are suffering from sky-high energy costs, and Trump’s answer is to spend almost \$4 billion of taxpayer money killing twelve offshore wind power leases that would have provided unlimited clean energy once online,” Senator Chuck Schumer of New York, the minority leader, said.

Wind power generates far

fewer planet-warming emissions than burning fossil fuels, and many states had been developing offshore wind farms to help meet their goals for tackling climate change. Yet Mr. Trump has called the technology ugly and costly and has sought to block new wind turbines. Last year, the Interior Department ordered work to stop on five wind farms already under construction off the East Coast, but federal judges struck down all of those moves. The Pentagon has also stalled approvals of wind farms on land.

The agreements with companies to forfeit their offshore leases are a new strategy, which the government turned to after losing court cases over the stop-work orders. The deals are a highly unusual use of taxpayer dollars. Seven Democratic-controlled states, including New York, have sued the Trump administration over the Interior Department’s deal with TotalEnergies. California has also sent a notice of intent to sue over a deal the Trump administration struck to cancel a wind farm off the state’s Central Coast.

RWE is one of the world’s largest renewable energy developers, and it currently has 18 offshore wind farms in operation, mainly in Europe, with more under construction. Shortly after Mr. Trump won the 2024 election, RWE’s chief executive said he was placing plans to expand offshore wind development in the United States on hold.

The company’s U.S. subsidiary, RWE Americas, is also a major developer of onshore wind, solar power, batteries in the United States, as well as some gas power.



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The 47th President

Trump’s Rush for A.I. Supremacy Will Spew Pollutants Into Air

From Page A1

passenger vehicles in the United States, according to estimates based on permits, regulatory filings and other data compiled by the Environmental Integrity Project.

They would also produce harmful pollutants, including particulate matter, formaldehyde and smog-forming nitrogen oxides, that can contribute to heart disease, asthma, lung cancer, strokes and other ailments in people living nearby.

Data centers can require immense amounts of energy to perform the essentially endless calculations needed to train and operate artificial-intelligence systems. The scale and urgency of their appetite for power have been exhausting the ability of the nation's electrical grid to meet the demand.

Texas has been particularly aggressive in approving on-site power plants at data centers, granting permits under a fast-track system that involves little public scrutiny or oversight. The state accounts for 39 of the 82 planned gas-burning plants.

For data centers, the motivation to build their own power plants is simple. It can take years to connect to an electric grid. And data centers face growing pressure to generate their own power so they don't tap into local grids and drive up electricity prices. Hunger for gas power among data-center owners is so great, Elon Musk this spring bought a company that specializes in rapid-deployment of gas and diesel turbines.

It's a strategy endorsed by the president. "I'm telling them they can build their own plant," President Trump said in February during his State of the Union address. "They're going to produce their own electricity."

And last month he doubled down. Speaking at the White House, Mr. Trump said that rapidly building more fossil-fuel-burning power plants was essential to America's A.I. race with China and that environmental protections should be rolled back because of that. "They build a lot of electric," he said. "They don't do environmental impact statements. They just say: 'You want electric? We'll build it.'"

"And they don't use too many wind-mills," Mr. Trump added, reflecting his well-documented disdain for wind power. In fact, China leads the world in wind energy and is responsible for more than half of total capacity.

The gas-burning plants being designed to power American data centers "carry significant environmental footprints," said Jen Duggan, the executive director of the Environmental Integrity Project. "Yet they're fast-tracking them." In Texas in particular, "weak air pollution control permits that don't protect public health are a systemic problem," she said.

With its abundant reserves of natural gas, Texas stands to benefit greatly from new power plants built to serve data centers. But even in fossil-fuel-friendly Texas, a backlash about the pace is building, and the governor has called for a ban on projects in rural areas.

Victoria Cann, a spokeswoman for the Texas environmental regulator, said the plants receiving permits had been found "to be protective of human health and the environment" and didn't require public notice.

Andy Stone, a Meta spokesman, said that the company was "committed to offsetting 100 percent of our electricity use in El Paso with clean and renewable energy" and that Meta "will not pass those costs on to Texans."

It's not the first time a new industry has arisen, demanding ever more energy. And because things are moving quickly, uncertainties remain. Some projects have hit snags, throwing into question whether they will be built as planned, said Michael Thomas, founder of Cleanview, a company that tracks data-center energy infrastructure. In addition, he said, companies might not release as much pollution as permits allow because data centers don't always run at full capacity.

Still, the current trajectory has few historical comparisons. "There's no doubt that this is going to have a huge environmental impact," Mr. Thomas said. The gas plants being built exclusively to power data centers, he said, "could result in tens of millions of tons of emissions that we wouldn't have otherwise seen."

Approval in Days, Not Months

While on the campaign trail in Wisconsin in 2024, Mr. Trump said: "I'm an environmentalist. I want clean air and clean water." Four months later as president, he began a weakening of environmental protections rooted in laws that date back more than a half-century.

The risk is an increase in air pollution, including the greenhouse gases warming the world as well as pollutants that affect the health of people living nearby.

The administration has emphasized "energy dominance" by promoting oil, natural gas and coal over renewable power like solar and wind. Days after returning to office in 2025, Mr. Trump issued an executive order, "Removing Barriers to American Leadership in Artificial Intelligence," designed to make it faster to build data centers and easier to operate them.

The Environmental Protection Agency is making it easier for data centers to run certain kinds of emergency generators that burn highly polluting diesel fuel. It has proposed a sweeping rule change that would let developers start building data centers and power plants before their air pollution permits are approved. And it has exempted gas plants that supply data centers from fed-



When a Meta data center power plant in El Paso is complete, it could emit as much carbon dioxide in a year as 360,000 gas-powered passenger vehicles.

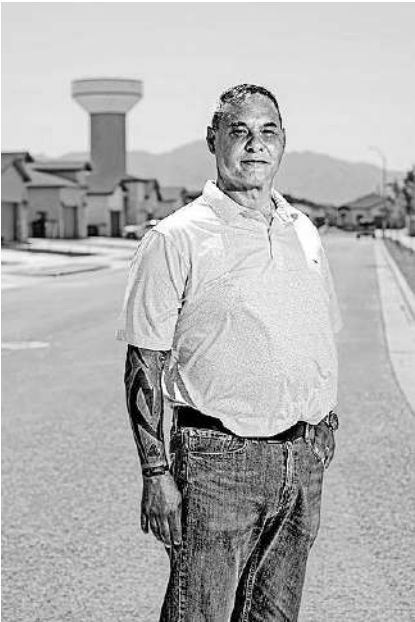


'I thought I'd bought my dream home.'

CYNTHIA CROUSE, calling a planned Meta data center and plant a "nightmare."



A spray-painted message in central El Paso demanding in Spanish that Meta get out. The City Council rejected a motion to cancel the contract with Meta.



'What do we want? Another Walmart?'

WINSTON COLON, who lives near a Meta data center and sees it as progress.

eral limits on pollution that causes acid rain.

The Trump administration has also waded into a major legal fight over data center pollution, defending Mr. Musk's A.I. company against accusations that it is illegally running dozens of gas-burning turbines in Mississippi.

To encourage construction, the Trump administration has created a temporary reprieve from the strictest pollution controls for portable generators that can be installed quickly. Smaller generators often lack advanced emission controls and use simpler designs that pollute more than standard gas turbines.

Texas is where much of the action is.

To speed up approvals, Texas regulators are also allowing developers to break up a large power project into smaller phases, which means each approval faces less-rigorous rules.

Last month, several environmental groups, including the Environmental Integrity Project, formally gave notice that they intended to sue over the practice. They sent a required legal notice to two

data center developers, the E.P.A. and Texas alleging that the developers sought to bypass stricter pollution rules by seeking four fast-tracked permits for two power plants that will ultimately have 151 diesel-burning generators.

Compared with natural gas, diesel when burned produces more nitrogen oxide, carbon dioxide and sulfur oxide as well as more particulate matter.

Of the 39 new gas plants being built in Texas to power data centers, 15 have been fast-tracked under similar procedures. The state's rules allow smaller facilities to sometimes qualify for reduced pollution controls or monitoring. Smaller power plants can also avoid public-comment periods, which means residents don't have an opportunity to weigh in or ask questions.

Since the start of last year, the average turnaround time for these less-rigorous permits for gas-burning plants linked to data centers was 18 days. In comparison, companies applying for full air permits, the category that commonly applies to more traditional power plants in the

state, can expect to wait 285 days, according to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, the state's environmental regulator.

The full permit requires, among other things, detailed engineering reviews, an examination of the potential for new air pollution and a public notice period.

"These numbers are alarming," said Daniel E. Walters, a professor of energy law at the Texas A&M University School of Law. "There's just no feasible way to do a meaningful review of a permit application in so few days."

The fact that Texas is allowing large projects to be approved in smaller phases creates a legal loophole by ignoring the cumulative environmental effects, said Thomas O. McGarity, an administrative and environmental law professor at the University of Texas School of Law. "They're building many of these units and putting them together," he said.

In West Texas, an immense data campus named Poolside AI is designed to ultimately require two gigawatts of elec-

tricity, enough to power a city of 1.5 million households. Poolside plans to seek approval for its power generation not all at once, but in eight phases. Its first phase received approval in just three days.

Poolside didn't respond to a request for comment.

At the Meta project outside El Paso, Meta aims to power its one-gigawatt data center in several phases. The first 366 megawatts would come from a power plant made up of more than 800 small gas-burning generators bolted to concrete pads. The plant was approved in 20 days.

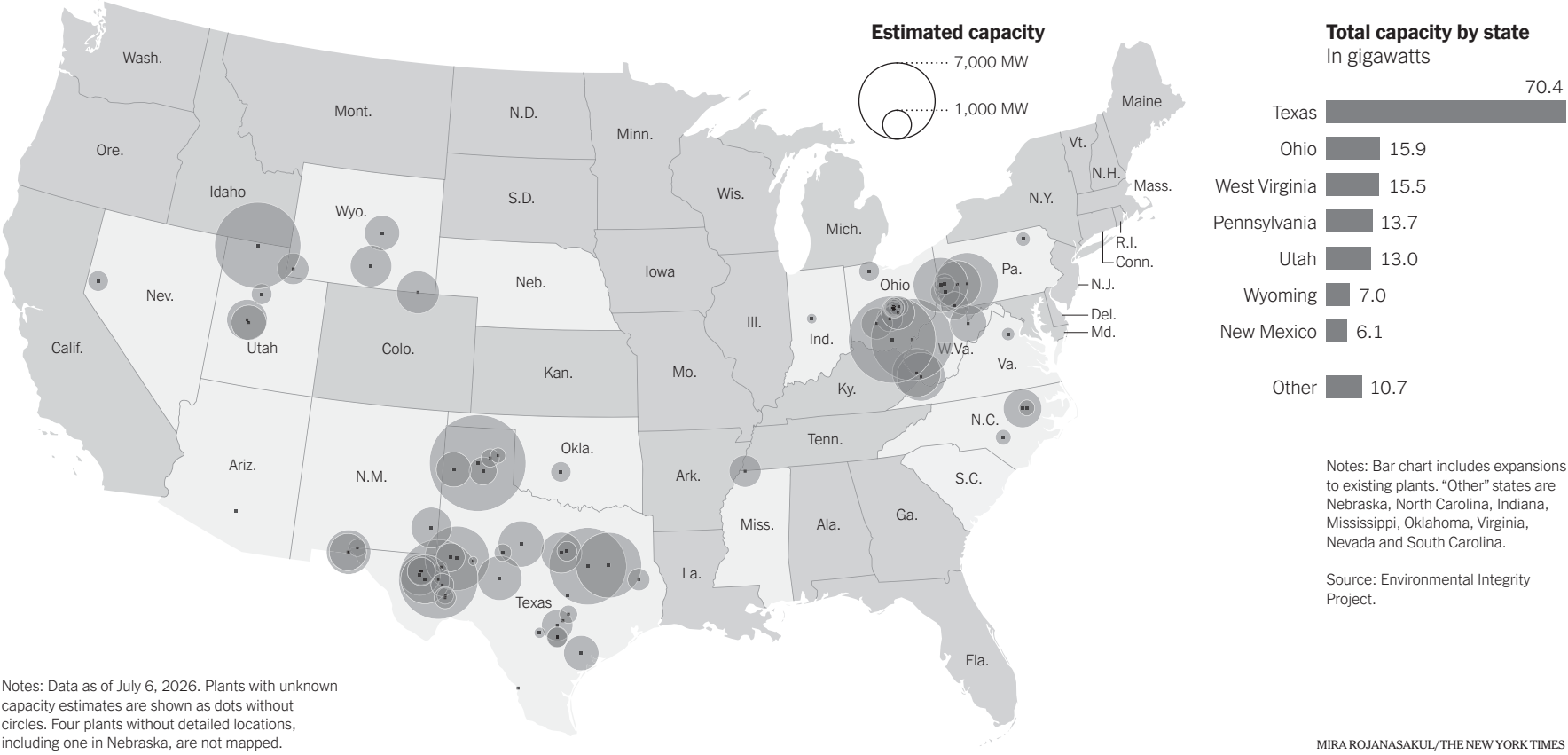
The data-center industry has taken note of Texas' openness to plants like these.

At a seminar in March by ALL4, an environmental consulting firm, specialists portrayed Texas as a premier place to build data centers with on-site power plants even if they emit smog-producing nitrogen oxide, or NOx. Smog is a persistent problem in parts of Texas.

"You might be thinking, 'How on earth

A Boom in Data Centers Powered by Gas

Newly proposed gas plants just to power data centers are receiving permits in record time.

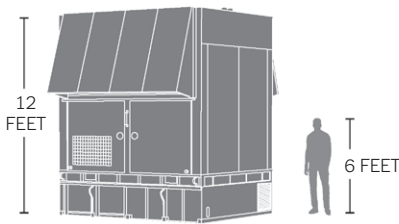




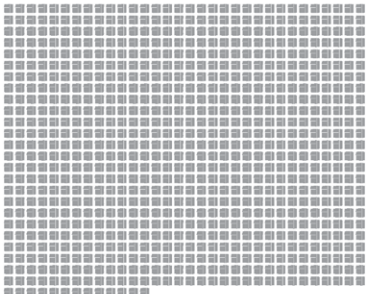
PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAUL RATJE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Pollution Equivalent to More Than 10,000 Cars

Each gas-burning generator at Meta's El Paso data center will produce about as much pollution as 13 cars, according to the company installing them.



When this phase of the project is done, there will be 813 generators, all permitted to run around the clock.



THE NEW YORK TIMES

Dirtier Air, Dirtier Water

The first in a series on the Trump administration's historic weakening of environmental protections, and the resulting increase in air and water pollution.



The American Lung Association often grades El Paso an F for unhealthy smog. The city gave Meta an 80 percent property-tax break for building there.

am I supposed to build a data center here?" said Andrew Hebert, a managing consultant at the firm, during a webinar at the event. "Engines and turbines produce a lot of NO_x."

"It can be done in Texas," he told the group.

A spokeswoman for ALL4, Stacy Shelp, said the group consistently counseled effective emission controls and early, transparent communication with communities.

Are Jobs Worth the Smog?

On an expanse of land within El Paso's city limits, Meta is moving at lightning speed to build a \$14 billion data center. The local utility, El Paso Electric, had previously said Meta would aim to use solar power. Instead, the developer's plan calls for gas-burning generators.

El Paso frequently receives an F grade from the American Lung Association for its high number of unhealthy smog days.

The swift approval of the air permit has angered many local residents, as has an 80 percent break on property taxes that El Paso gave Meta for building there. The tax break will last 35 years.

At a City Council hearing in May, people waited for hours to voice their opposition. Among them was Michael Ramirez, who had dashed to City Hall during a break as a cook at Mamacita's, a Mexican restaurant downtown.

"When something important is taking place," he said to the city councilors, "tell us."

Still, the data center has its supporters.

"If El Paso stops welcoming major investments," Ricardo Rivero, a member of a union representing electrical workers, said at a follow-up hearing, "we risk slowing the growth that has created opportunities for workers like me."

Meta said the project is expected to employ more than 4,000 construction workers during the project's peak. However, local organizers have pointed out that such jobs are temporary. After the data center opens, there will be about 300 permanent positions, Meta said.

That's also a point of debate in Vista Del Norte, the neighborhood on Meta's doorstep. "There's no good-paying jobs in El Paso," Winston Colon, a veteran who lives there, said at a neighborhood association meeting. A data center was progress, he said. "What do we want? Another Walmart?"

"Can't get groceries at a data center," another person at the hearing replied.

In response to the backlash, the city said it would not pursue additional large

data centers. Many residents demanded that the contract with Meta be canceled, but in June the El Paso City Council rejected a motion to do that.

The gas plant could potentially emit more than 1.5 million tons of greenhouse gases a year if operated at full capacity, the Environmental Integrity Project estimates. That's equivalent to the annual emissions from nearly four typical natural-gas-burning power plants, according to E.P.A. data.

Stacey Yip, a Meta spokeswoman, said the El Paso project was "supporting thousands of construction and hundreds of operational jobs, generating millions in local tax revenue, and supporting the digital infrastructure that El Paso businesses and families rely on every day."

Meta referred questions about the generators to the company providing them. That company, Enchanted Rock, said its generators were designed to provide "flexible, rapidly deployable power" and met stringent emissions standards.

In a statement, El Paso Electric, the utility, said that it was committed to renewable energy but that "renewable generation alone cannot provide the continuous power required at this time."

Rising Emissions Nationwide

The plans nationwide to build dozens of gas-burning power plants come as U.S. greenhouse gas emissions are rising again after declining for two years.

Technology companies, including Amazon and Google, that had pledged to reduce their emissions are instead reporting an increase tied to data centers.

The Trump administration has said it is leaving environmental oversight to local communities. The E.P.A. has also been telling power plants that are not connected to the grid that they are exempt from federal limits on pollutants like nitrogen oxide that cause smog and acid rain.

Lee Zeldin, the E.P.A. administrator, has made A.I. a top priority, meeting with Republican lawmakers to discuss data centers and energy deregulation. "From Day 1," he said on Fox News last year, the E.P.A. has worked "to cut down barriers that have acted as a roadblock so we can bolster the growth of A.I. and make America the A.I. capital of the world."

And at a forum in June, he said the federal government would get out of the way of local decisions on issuing permits for new data centers. "Communities know what works best for them," Mr. Zeldin said.

President Signs Two Executive Orders Aiming to Limit Birthright Citizenship

By MAGGIE HABERMAN and ANN E. MARIMOW

WASHINGTON — President Trump signed two executive orders on Thursday aimed at limiting the number of people who are eligible for birthright citizenship and cracking down on "birth tourism," in which women give birth in the United States to get automatic citizenship for their newborns.

The new orders came weeks after the U.S. Supreme Court, in a 6-3 ruling, rejected the president's previous efforts to end birthright citizenship for undocumented citizens through executive orders.

During an Oval Office event, Mr. Trump told reporters that the June 30 Supreme Court ruling was a "very, very unfortunate decision."

"This was done right after the Civil War," Mr. Trump said of the constitutional amendment granting automatic citizenship to infants born in the United States. "This was for the babies of slaves, and what's happening now? People are building businesses around it."

It was not immediately clear how the twin orders could realistically be enforced. They would restrict those who could qualify for birthright citizenship, to exclude children of staff working for foreign governments but serving in the United States, and the babies of mothers who lie about their intentions for visiting the country while pregnant. There is a third category, for babies born in U.S. territories, but that would first require congressional action.

And then there are children whose parents are tagged by the government as being part of known terrorist groups or who are "alien enemies."

Mr. Trump has criticized birthright citizenship for years, using it as a political tool as he has repeatedly tried to restrict legal immigration. He has talked about trying to end it since his first presidency. And in unusual move, he attended oral arguments in the birthright citizenship case at the Supreme Court, a presidential first.

Stephen Miller, Mr. Trump's top domestic policy adviser and the architect of much of his immigration platform, and Will Scharf, the White House staff secretary, described the orders as important correctives to the current system.

"As the president mentioned, the 14th Amendment was passed exclusively in the aftermath of the Civil War, so to ensure that the children of slaves would be citizens," Mr. Miller said. "It had no other meaning and purpose outside of that, and that's been clear, obviously, since the day that it was passed."

Mr. Scharf described "birth tourism" as "something that used to happen incidentally, where somebody who happened to be on vacation here went to labor early and had a baby," a relatively narrow subset that has grown into "organized rings, at times criminal rings, setting up a system whereby" tens of thousands of people come to the country solely



HAIYUN JIANG/THE NEW YORK TIMES

President Trump with Stephen Miller, the architect of much of his immigration platform, after Mr. Trump signed the orders.

for that purpose.

Mr. Scharf said among the actions being considered would be denying visas to visitors they suspect are coming to the country solely for delivering a child in the United States.

"There's absolutely nothing in here that runs afoul of any of the Supreme Court's opinions on the subject," Mr. Scharf said.

Mr. Miller said that Section 215A of the Immigration and Nationality Act gives the president the authority to engage in these new restrictions, when asked how the administration will determine the difference between "tourism" and "birth tourism."

When a reporter noted that the president's own solicitor general had been unable to tell the Supreme Court precisely how many people were benefiting from birthright citizenship, Mr. Trump replied, "I'll tell you right now, hundreds of thousands, OK? Hundreds of thousands."

(Pennsylvania State University scholars released a study about the time of the Supreme Court rul-

The move comes after the Supreme Court denied earlier efforts.

ing that found that fewer than 0.3 percent of all births in the United States were to tourists, in any year.)

But Mr. Trump pressed on, "You have one man came in with a family head said he had 56 children. Another one came in. They said they had 98 children. This was not what it was for. This was meant for the babies of slaves. It was, it was right after one week or two weeks after the Civil War ended." In fact, birthright citizenship was ratified as part of the 14th Amendment more than three years after the war ended.

Any renewed effort to prevent new classes of people from having babies in the United States who are automatically citizens would invite fresh rounds of litigation. There would likely be challenges, for instance, to who counts as "alien enemies" and invading armies — categories that lower court judges have already re-

jected in separate cases involving the Trump administration's aggressive immigration policies.

Federal immigration law gives the government broad power over entry into the United States, but the law also forbids discrimination in the issuing of immigrant visas. Limits on the entry of certain pregnant women from other countries, as the president's order envisions, could also give rise to claims of discrimination.

In its final opinion of the Supreme Court's term, the justices rejected Mr. Trump's attempt to prevent babies born on U.S. soil to undocumented immigrants and temporary foreign residents from being given citizenship automatically.

The decision was a major blow to Mr. Trump's longstanding effort to limit the guarantee of birthright citizenship and the president wrongly suggested after the ruling that he could get around the court's decision through legislation.

Five justices — a majority — found that birthright citizenship was guaranteed in the Constitution, meaning the president would likely need an amendment to change the long-held principle that nearly all children born in the United States are American citizens.

A sixth justice, Brett M. Kavanaugh, said he would have struck down the president's order based on federal law, not the Constitution.

Soon after the court announced its decision on June 30, Mr. Trump said he would ask the justices to reconsider their decision, a long-shot request since the Supreme Court has not agreed to revisit an argued case in decades.

The deadline for such a filing passed last week without the president asking for a rehearing.

In response to the president's orders on Thursday, Cody Wofsy, deputy director of the ACLU's Immigrants' Rights Project, said in a statement, "The Supreme Court already decided this issue: Birthright citizenship is guaranteed by the Constitution. No additional executive order can change the meaning of the Constitution. Any executive order that tries to rewrite birthright citizenship will meet the same fate as the last one."

Trump Administration Moving Forward With Its Plans to Deregulate Head Start

By CORAL DAVENPORT

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration announced on Thursday that it would move forward with a plan to eliminate hundreds of federal regulations governing Head Start, in what advocates fear is a push to gut a 61-year-old anti-poverty program aimed at helping the nation's most impoverished young children.

The proposed plan, detailed in earlier reporting by The New York Times, would remove most of Head Start's 133 pages of federal requirements for math and literacy curricula, class sizes, medical screenings, home visits. Even a requirement that children brush their teeth after meals would end.

Administration officials say the changes will save money by lifting onerous requirements, serve more children by increasing class sizes, and give states and municipalities more control in how the program is run. Critics say the changes will gut the core components of a singular institution that has served 30 million young children with high classroom standards and more health and anti-poverty services than most states provide.

Head Start was launched 61 years ago as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty, and a key figure in its early design and creation was Sargent Shriver, an uncle of Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the health secretary lead-

ing the push to deregulate the program. It provides early education and poverty support services for children up to age 6.

In a statement, Mr. Kennedy said the changes would honor his uncle's legacy.

"My uncle, Sarge Shriver, founded the program on a simple conviction: strong families, wholesome nutrition, and healthy childhood development can change the course of a child's life," he said. "Today we are returning Head Start to those roots. We are

Advocates for the anti-poverty program fear it will be gutted.

removing unnecessary bureaucracy, strengthening nutrition and physical health, trusting parents and local communities, and opening Head Start to hundreds of thousands more children."

Health and Human Services Department officials claimed that the changes — particularly the lifting of rules on small class sizes — would allow Head Start to serve up to 236,000 more children than the 700,000 it does today. They also said that stripping away requirements such as classroom curricula, or rules that require

Head Start staff to ensure that students have dental exams, would save about \$2.2 billion. And they noted that the proposed changes would also include new requirements for children's physical activity and nutrition.

Advocates for the program said the changes would wipe out the distinctive features and benefits of Head Start.

"Head Start works because it does far more than provide preschool," said Joel Ryan, director of the Washington State Association of Head Start. "It ensures children receive health care, developmental screenings, nutritious meals, disability services, highly qualified teachers, and strong partnerships with families. Those aren't bureaucratic requirements — they are the reason Head Start has changed millions of lives. This proposal would weaken those protections for hundreds of thousands of children and undermine what has made Head Start one of America's most successful early childhood programs."

The Health and Human Services Department is expected to post the proposed changes on the Federal Register in the coming days. They will then be open to public comment for 60 days, and could still be changed and amended before being finalized in the coming months. The changes are expected to be implemented in Head Start classrooms sometime in 2027.

For 2,000 2-Year-Olds, Prized Day Care Spots

By EMMA G. FITZSIMMONS

Christine Liverpool considered sending her daughter, Cadence, to a private day care center in Queens this fall, but it was too expensive at \$1,500 per month. She decided to keep her at home with relatives while she works as a New York City bus driver.

Then this week, Ms. Liverpool received an unexpected gift: one of the first seats in the city’s new free child care program for 2-year-olds.

“When they told me I got accepted, I kind of wanted to cry,” she said. “That was a burden lifted off of me.”

Next month, Cadence will be among 2,000 children to enter the program, known as 2-K, which is starting in four communities. The families selected for the coveted spots — based in part on a lottery with 5,700 applicants — celebrated the news, dreaming of what the savings could mean for their lives.

Child care is often a family’s largest expense after housing and can cost from \$20,000 to \$50,000 a year in New York. The city, which already offers free preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds, estimates that the 2-K program will save families an average of \$26,000 a year. Mayor Zohran Mamdani, who campaigned on an affordability platform, has promised to eventually provide free care for all children from 6 weeks to 5 years old.

The city plans to add 10,000 more 2-K spots next year. The program could eventually include more than 50,000 2-year-olds.

Ms. Liverpool learned about 2-K from a friend who sent her a video of Mr. Mamdani promoting it. The day care center where Cadence was placed is close to her home in South Jamaica and open until 6 p.m., and Ms. Liverpool hopes the financial relief will help her save for college.



“I kind of wanted to cry,” Christine Liverpool said of learning that her daughter, Cadence, could go to a center near home for free.

“It’s literally down the block from me,” she said. “I was praying she’d get into that one.”

Mr. Mamdani announced the 2-K offers on Tuesday at a day care in the Bronx with Gov. Kathy Hochul, who helped start the program with \$1.2 billion in state

sidestepped a question from a reporter about whether he still wants to tax the rich.

“I think the most important thing is that we fund programs like this,” he said. “What has truly been an incredible experience is having a partner at the state level in Governor Hochul, who is committed to that outcome.”

The application numbers show “serious demand” for the program, said Elliot Haspel, a senior fellow at the think tank Capita who wrote a book about child care policy.

Most of the new 2-K seats are full day and full year, a major difference from 3-K and pre-K, which typically end at 2:30 p.m. and are sometimes closed over the summer. City officials said they chose diverse neighborhoods that showed a need for affordable child care, but not exclusively low-income areas.

Families who apply can list day care centers in order of preference. Children who live in the districts that offer 2-K or have a sib-

Plans are to expand the city effort, but funding is uncertain.

But the mayor and the governor, both Democrats, are at odds over how to pay for the expensive expansion in the future.

Mr. Mamdani wants to raise taxes on New Yorkers who earn more than \$1 million per year. Ms. Hochul has firmly resisted that idea.

They struck a tone of unity on Tuesday, and Mr. Mamdani

Tenure Is No Protection In New School Revamp

By SHARON OTTERMAN

Professor Sanjay Reddy had been bluntly critical for years about how his university, the New School in New York City, managed its finances. He had thought that his status as a tenured professor of economics would protect him.

It didn’t.

He was laid off in June, along with 18 other New School professors, nine of whom also had tenure. The layoffs are part of a continuing restructuring at the New School that administrators have said will rescue it from a crisis ignited by shrinking enrollment and crippling deficits. Sixty-eight staff members were also let go. Dozens of additional faculty members have left through buyouts and early retirements, which has helped shrink the full-time faculty to 387 professors from 430 a year ago.

The dismissals represent the latest round of turmoil at the Manhattan institution, which was founded as the New School for Social Research in 1919 by progressive professors as an alternative to traditional universities. The New School, which has about 8,500 students, has long struggled with finances, but its latest solution, some professors say, puts its legacy and future as a social science research institution at risk.

The firing of professors amid a larger reorganization has become increasingly common at American universities, particularly since the coronavirus pandemic, said Deepa Das Acevedo, a law professor at Emory University and author of “The War on Tenure.”

Universities, she said, are increasingly acting like other employers, finding “complicated and sometimes pretextual reasons” to fire employees, even those with tenure.

“What we’re seeing at the New School is emblematic of the rising pressures on higher education as a labor market and as an industry,” she said.

The New School’s handling of the layoffs has raised questions among hundreds of prominent professors around the United States and world who wrote a letter calling on administrators to be more transparent about how the decisions were made.

Professor Reddy’s case is “particularly concerning,” said the letter; Joseph Stiglitz, the Nobel Prize-winning Columbia University economist, is the lead signatory. “The criteria used in selecting faculty and staff for termination have not been adequately explained to the wider academic community,” the letter said.

Professor Reddy, 55, stands out because he was the only economics professor to be terminated. His department is not among the roughly two dozen programs being closed or redesigned. In The New York Times and elsewhere, Professor Reddy had repeatedly been quoted as blaming the university’s financial woes on administrative bloat and bad real estate deals, challenging the official line that the defining problem was a faculty that cost too much.

“I felt, and this was probably naïve and misguided, that I should be able to use tenure in this way,” he said in an interview. “This is what tenure is for. It’s within my professional competence as an economist.”

He was stunned, he said, when he was given two options: step down by July 1 and sign a nondisclosure agreement in exchange for 11 months’ severance, or be terminated, with his last day in December. He chose the latter.

Richard Kessler, the New School’s provost, declined to comment on Professor Reddy’s situation, citing privacy rules. But he said that the university had determined that the economics department, which has nine full-time faculty members, “has more teaching capacity than we have need for.”

He defended the layoff decisions as a whole. About 30 additional professors who could have been laid off, he said, were found new positions instead.

“It was a remarkably extensive, and I feel, without any qualifications whatsoever, thoughtful process,” Mr. Kessler said.

Paul Kottman, a tenured comparative literature scholar and the chair of the master’s program in liberal studies at the New School, was also terminated. He was asked to continue leading his program until his last day in December. The program, he said, had just received praise in a review process, as did his leadership of it.

The layoffs could set a dangerous precedent, Dr. Kottman said, particularly because they are happening in the center of New York City at an institution known for its commitment to academic freedom. “If my tenured position didn’t protect me, then who does it protect?” he said.

In an interview, Mr. Kessler said that the New School felt it had the right to fire tenured employees, even if their department or program wasn’t ending, because it was reorganizing the entire institution.

Before July 1, the New School

consisted of four colleges. Now, Parsons School of Design and the College of Performing Arts have become a single, arts-focused college. A second college merges the New School for Social Research, which is the academic graduate school, and the Eugene Lang College of Liberal Arts, the undergraduate college.

The new structure is designed to reduce costs and increase collaboration, said Mr. Kessler, a musician who was formerly the dean of the performing arts school.

There’s disagreement over whether such a restructuring permits the broad firing of tenured professors. The American Association of University Professors, a nonprofit organization, has



Professor Sanjay Reddy was laid off with 18 others in June.

Manhattan institution goes to 387 full-time faculty from 430.

shaped the national norms of tenure since 1940. It holds that tenured professors, unless they are being fired for cause, should be let go only in the case of a financial emergency, and only as part of the elimination of their academic program or department.

“A bureaucratic restructuring that leads to the selective elimination of faculty members really puts academic freedom in jeopardy,” said Mark Criley, a senior program officer in the association’s Department of Academic Freedom, Tenure and Governance. It particularly imperils professors “who have displeased administrators or trustees or donors,” he said.

But tenure norms are not laws, and the New School said it was abiding by its faculty handbook, which states that tenured faculty may be let go if there are “serious financial considerations or curricular change(s)” that require the university “to discontinue an academic department/program or college/school.”

Professor Reddy, who has been a faculty member for 17 years, disputed that interpretation. “They’ve used a very innovative and elastic legal theory, a heroic legal theory, you might say, to justify this,” he said.

Nearly all of the terminated faculty members were at the New School for Social Research and at Eugene Lang, because they have had larger enrollment declines than the arts-focused schools, Mr. Kessler said. The university has also paused nearly all Ph.D. admissions, which most affects the social research graduate school.

The history department is among the hardest hit: Three professors were laid off, and two are taking early retirement under pressure, said Jeremy Varon, one of the retiring professors. Five will remain — “not enough to competently deliver a curriculum,” Professor Varon said.

Mr. Kessler said the cuts reflected that the university had already shifted toward art and design. Between 70 and 80 percent of students are coming to the New School “for some form of design education or creative education,” mostly at Parsons, he said.

Yet most tenured and full-time professors, more expensive to the university, work in the social sciences and liberal arts. Parsons, by contrast, relies heavily on part-time adjunct instructors.

“At some point in time, any organization has to take steps to bring the expenses in line with the revenues and also figure out how to plan for the future and essentially invest in strength,” Mr. Kessler said.

Koray Caliskan, a sociologist at Parsons who teaches strategic design and management, saw the restructuring in a positive light. The social sciences, he said, aren’t being lost at Parsons, because they are part of the curriculum for design students. The sweeping redesign of the colleges, he added, could open the way for innovative new doctoral programs.

But Judith Friedlander, a former New School dean and the author of a history of the institution, described the restructuring as a frontal attack on the university’s progressive, social research core.

“It no longer represents what this institution stood for and was about,” she said.



A car parked on the Upper West Side this week was one of the first to get a sticker after a program had been on hold for 14 years.

Reviving the Sticker of Shame for Sweeper Blockers

By EMMA G. FITZSIMMONS

Seven minutes after street sweeping began on the Upper West Side of Manhattan on Tuesday morning, sanitation workers and the local city councilwoman hit the streets to deliver justice.

“Move your car!” the councilwoman, Gale Brewer, shouted as she slapped a large neon-green, shield-shaped sticker on a Jeep Grand Cherokee.

Nearby, a driver got in his parked car and peeled away to avoid being next.

The stickers, which shame New Yorkers for failing to make way for street sweepers, are back after a 14-year hiatus. Coupled with a \$65 ticket, they are designed to serve as a public slap on the wrist.

The stickers were used for 25 years before the City Council banned them in 2012. Ms. Brewer sponsored a bill this year to bring them back.

The new sticker carries the rebuke: “This vehicle violated N.Y.C. street cleaning rules. As a result, this street could not be properly cleaned.”

Then, in smaller print: “Remove this sticker with warm water and a scraper.”

The tree-lined stretch of West 90th Street near Columbus Avenue where the sticker campaign began is known for poor compliance with the city’s alternate-side parking rules, sanitation officials said. Drivers who park on the street are required to move their cars twice a week, on Tuesday and Friday, from 8:30 a.m. to 10 a.m.

Many New Yorkers ignore the rules, accepting the tickets as a cheaper alternative to paying for a garage. Others deeply resent having to stay home and sit in a double-parked car as they wait for the sweeper to go by.



Many New Yorkers flout alternate-side parking rules, which require moving cars on designated street-cleaning days. The city is also experimenting with reducing the number of those days.



Mary O’Reilly, who lives on the block and diligently moved her car on Tuesday, said she thought the stickers could change behavior.

“It is frustrating when you come out to move your car and

others haven’t,” she said. “Then you’re navigating around them, as well as trying to get out of the way of the sanitation truck.”

Ms. O’Reilly said there was “incessant horn honking” on street-sweeping days and that she would

ling in the day care where they are applying get priority, and then offers are decided by lottery.

Lauren Rosenberg was excited to get a free 2-K seat for her son in the Inwood neighborhood of Manhattan. But the day care center was not her first choice, and she posted a message in an online parent group asking if anyone knew anything about it.

“He’s my baby, and I want to feel comfortable with the place I’m sending him,” she said in an interview.

Ms. Rosenberg, a freelance art management consultant, hopes the program will allow her to work more.

“I feel a huge sense of weight off my shoulders that I have this option available to me,” she said. “It feels like a real financial gift for our family. The past few years have been challenging.”

Other families were not so lucky. Diana Christopher, a mother of year-old twins who lives in Washington Heights, did not get a spot and was added to some wait lists.

“It is devastating,” she said. “We were really kind of banking on them. If nothing changes, we’re looking at \$30,000 in child care just for part time.”

There is often movement on wait lists. Some families might not accept their offers if they choose to stay at their current day care or move away. Others have already paid deposits for private programs, which can complicate the decision to accept a free spot.

Ms. Christopher, an occupational therapist and a member of the group New Yorkers United for Child Care, which has pushed for the expansion, said she was happy for the families who did secure seats.

“Just because I didn’t win the lottery,” she said, “it’s still absolutely necessary.”

Dating and Divorce Shape Texas’ Most Eligible Senate Race

Scrutiny of Candidates’ Personal Lives Eclipses Issues in High-Stakes Contest

By LAUREN McGAUGHY

AUSTIN, Texas — For high-profile political candidates, a campaign spouse can be a critical partner not just at home but on the trail. But in the closely watched Senate race in Texas this year, a soon-to-be-divorced Republican is taking on a bachelor Democrat — and they’re both trying to avoid talking about their love lives.

The Republican, Ken Paxton, is navigating a divorce in which his wife, a state senator, has accused him of adultery. The Democrat, James Talarico, stayed mum about his personal life before revealing this summer that he has a girlfriend who used to work for him.

That unusual dynamic has injected an element of voyeurism into the high-stakes contest. Voters are undeniably interested in the personal lives of Texas’ two would-be senators. And candidates’ families have long been seen by voters and experts alike as part of the package. They call them “first ladies,” after all.

But as Americans marry later, or not at all, and divorce rates remain high for older adults, it is unclear whether Mr. Paxton and Mr. Talarico’s romantic entanglements will make any difference at the ballot box.

And the qualities that candidates often seek to convey by trotting their families out for campaign events — stability, support for traditional values — are a moving target in today’s chaotic and tribalistic political landscape dominated by Donald Trump.

“It’s a brand-new world in the era of Trump,” said Celinda Lake, a Democratic campaign strategist. “But I don’t think every candidate can rely on having the Teflon that Trump seems to have.”

Matt Gorman, a Republican strategist, said that while it was typical for candidates to show off their nuclear families, this race could come down to which politi-

cal “team” voters identify with. “Red and blue and the political values will matter far more.”

Some voters seem to agree. “I don’t care if they’re married or not, just that they’re on the right side,” said Carol Wheeler, 63, a school bus driver from San Marcos, who was waiting to get a photograph with Mr. Talarico at a campaign event last week.

Roy Cozart, 62, a Republican who lives in Lockhart, said concerns he has about Mr. Paxton’s ethics — both professional and personal, given what’s well known about his divorce — might have led him to consider voting for a Democrat in November. But he found Mr. Talarico not moderate enough for his taste.

Mr. Cozart said he will be voting for Mr. Paxton in the end. “I’m going to have to stick with the lesser of two evils again,” he said.

Many Texans say the cost of living, the state’s water supply and border security are among their top issues. But interest in Mr. Paxton and Mr. Talarico’s private lives remains intense, leading to questions both men seem eager to deflect. When asked, both campaigns sought to bring the issue back to the character of their opponent.

Mr. Talarico has avoided mentioning Mr. Paxton’s marital issues. In a statement explaining why, his campaign accused the attorney general of having “cheated” in other ways.

“Ken Paxton has cheated our state through his bribery, self enrichment and fraud,” said JT Ennis, a Talarico campaign spokesman. “That is the issue on the ballot this November.”

Mr. Paxton was impeached in 2023, accused of abusing his office to help a campaign donor, but acquitted by the Texas Senate after a trial. He was also indicted on charges of felony securities fraud in 2015; that case ended in a deal two years ago that required restitution and community service but



VIA JAMES TALARICO

James Talarico and Brianna Menard in Austin in 2024. She was once his chief of staff. Mr. Talarico is facing Ken Paxton.

no admission of wrongdoing.

On the campaign trail, Mr. Paxton has publicly questioned Mr. Talarico’s masculinity, calling him “Low-T Talarico,” a reference to testosterone levels.

In a statement to The New York Times, Madison Cercy, a Paxton spokeswoman, went further, accusing Mr. Talarico of “abusing his office” for dating a former staff member.

Mr. Ennis responded, calling the allegation “baseless.”

There have been plenty of unmarried senators, including Cory Booker, Susan Collins and Lindsey Graham, and it’s not unusual for at least one political candidate in a crowded field to be single.

In Texas, an unmarried senator — all but assured this fall — is a rarity. John Tower, a Republican, joined the Senate in 1961 while married to his first wife. They divorced in 1976, well into his third term. He remarried six months later, and served until 1985. The last U.S. senator from Texas to win an election while unmarried appears to be Tom Connally, who was widowed while in office in 1935 and was re-elected while unmarried in 1940. He remarried in 1942.

Races featuring two unmarried major party nominees are less

common. Eric Ostermeier, a researcher at the University of Minnesota, said he had identified a handful of such cases during the last 50 years.

One prominent example dates to 1960, when Senator Margaret Chase Smith of Maine ran against Lucia Cormier, a Democratic challenger — the first Senate race between two women. News media accounts at the time referred to them as the spinster and the widow.

These days, while voters may accept a growing range of personal life decisions, a dating candidate still needs to be smart about it, said Bob Kerrey, a former Nebraska governor and senator who was unmarried for his nearly two decades in elected office.

“Don’t be foolish,” Mr. Kerrey, a Democrat, said in an interview. “Don’t go to a sex party.”

Mr. Talarico, 37, has never been married and has largely avoided speaking in public about his dating history. Some conservatives online questioned his sexuality.

In May, Mr. Talarico said in a podcast interview that he had a longtime girlfriend. He described her as his “rock” and “best friend,” but declined to name her, citing her privacy. The campaign has since said she is Brianna Menard, a health care lobbyist who used to work as Mr. Talarico’s chief of staff. Pictures of the couple have circulated online.

The relationship began when Ms. Menard worked as a top aide to Mr. Talarico, his campaign said.

“Four years ago, after he and his then-chief of staff developed feelings for each other and started dating, she left the office to pursue other opportunities,” Mr. Ennis said. “As right-wing operatives continue to attack James’s loved ones, the campaign is asking the public to respect Brianna’s privacy as a private citizen.”

Another legislative staff member also dated Mr. Talarico, his campaign said. She worked for a different state lawmaker and never directly for Mr. Talarico, she told The Times. She declined to comment further on their relationship, citing privacy concerns.

Texas House rules do not prohibit member relationships with lobbyists or staff.

Mr. Paxton, 63, is in the midst of a divorce from his wife, Angela Paxton, a state senator, who accused him of having an affair.

Mr. Paxton was photographed in recent weeks on vacation in Europe with a woman who is not his wife, and he has drawn scrutiny, including through reporting in The Times, about whether he is living with the woman before his divorce is final.

Mr. Paxton has weathered this sort of attention before. An earlier relationship with a different woman figured in his 2023 impeachment on corruption charges — the woman worked for a real estate investor accused of bribing Mr. Paxton.

After he survived the impeachment trial, Mr. Paxton and his wife stayed together.

Then, last summer, Mrs. Paxton filed for divorce, saying “recent discoveries” had pushed her to do so on “biblical grounds.” Her filing said the Paxtons stopped living together “as spouses” in June 2024.

The two women tied to Mr. Paxton did not return requests for comment. Mrs. Paxton declined to comment on the divorce proceedings or whom she would be voting for in November.

Mr. Paxton’s campaign has responded to public discussion of his personal life indirectly, by stressing his familial devotion. One of his daughters, Mattie Hayworth, has appeared onstage to defend her father during campaign events.

“My dad is not a perfect man,” Mrs. Hayworth wrote in a recent fund-raising email. “But he is a man of deep faith, genuine love for his family and an unrelenting commitment to doing right by the people of Texas.”

Mr. Kerrey, the former Nebraska senator who left office in 2001, said what he remembered most about running for office as a single person was not the tabloid attention or the rumor mill. It was the isolation.

“Loneliness,” Mr. Kerrey said. “Loneliness hurts.”

Posts Haunt A Candidate Who Derided Thanksgiving

By JULIE BOSMAN

PLATTEVILLE, Wis. — On Wednesday, Becky Fernette arrived at a crowded meet-and-greet for Francesca Hong, a candidate for the Democratic nomination for Wisconsin governor, having heard all about Ms. Hong’s social media kerfuffle this week over the nation’s holidays.

Yes, she knew that Ms. Hong had said she disliked Thanksgiving, a new issue to go alongside a past call for abolishing the police. The commentary had been fervently picked apart on cable news for days.

But Ms. Fernette, 64, who plans to vote for Ms. Hong in the primary, said, “I also do not support Thanksgiving.”

In her final push less than one week before the primary on Tuesday, Ms. Hong, a democratic socialist, has struggled to explain stances that many Wisconsinites would consider offbeat, inexplicable or even disqualifying at a time when many Democratic voters are just tuning into the campaign and she is hoping to solidify her lead in polls.

Asked on CNN this week whether she still believed that Thanksgiving should be canceled, as she once wrote on social media and later deleted, Ms. Hong referred to her own experience as a chef preparing Thanksgiving as a teenager. Then she added: “But Thanksgiving is also a time that’s incredibly painful for many people in our communities. So I think there I wanted to make sure that people understood there are multiple views, but views can evolve.”

For good measure, old social media posts have cropped up with Ms. Hong questioning the value of Valentine’s Day and Christmas trees on computer background screens.

On a recent podcast, Ms. Hong explained her previous statements on law enforcement, saying that she would not abolish the police and no longer believed that the police exist to uphold white supremacy, as she once wrote.

At least one of her old posts has been deleted, but Ms. Hong has generally left her social media untouched.

Her opponents have seized on both the original posts and her explanations, saying that her answers are evidence that she would lose in November to Representative Tom Tiffany, the Republican front-runner.

“If you can’t handle a simple CNN interview talking about Thanksgiving, how can you possibly make it through a general election?” said Eddie Vale, a spokesman for David Crowley, one of Ms. Hong’s Democratic opponents.

Allison Geyer, a Hong campaign spokeswoman, said that the increased scrutiny on Ms. Hong is “what happens when you are emerging as the front-runner.”

“I think it’s all to distract from the issues and the fact that you know Tom Tiffany doesn’t have a clear vision for how to bring Wisconsin forward,” Ms. Geyer said.

She added that some of the posts were written during “peak woke back in the 2020s.”

In the final week before the primary, Ms. Hong plans to criss-cross the state and canvass for votes, adding to the more than 330 events that she has held since declaring her candidacy last year. On Wednesday morning, she arrived in Platteville in the Driftless region in southwest Wisconsin, joining a group of dozens of local Democrats, many of whom were still undecided.

Tom Loeffelholz, a retired maintenance worker wearing a Wis-Dems hat, said he was unbothered by Ms. Hong’s old social media comments.

“The more they criticize her for what she does, the more I like her,” he said. “I just resent the garbage that they can dig up around people.”

Others were more skeptical.

Outside Ms. Hong’s event, John Wilson, a pharmacist in Platteville, was walking to City Hall, hoping to cast an early ballot in the primary before heading on a camping trip.

Mr. Wilson, 61, said he tends to lean Democratic. But the primary campaign on the Democrats’ side this year had left him so disillusioned and uninspired, he said, that he planned to vote for Mr. Tiffany for now.

“There’s just not a lot of outstanding choices,” he said.

While Mr. Wilson agreed with Ms. Hong’s messages about helping make life more affordable, the fact that she is a democratic socialist concerned him, he said. And her comments on social media about Thanksgiving helped push him to Mr. Tiffany.

“I understand a lot of this is hype,” Mr. Wilson said. “But on the other hand, you have to take people at their word.”



CHRISTOPHER LEE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



BRANDON BELL/GETTY IMAGES

With affordability the centerpiece of their campaigns, James Talarico, left, and Ken Paxton laid out competing economic plans at events in the Dallas area this week.

Paxton and Talarico Plans Diverge on Taxes, Housing and Health Care

By LAUREN McGAUGHY

ALLEN, Texas — Ken Paxton pitched his plan to make Texas more affordable in a Mexican restaurant crammed with people, working mostly off the cuff from a small, crumpled page of notes.

A day later, on Wednesday night, James Talarico read his plan from a teleprompter at an e-sports arena, under a large American flag and in front of a large crowd.

Both men want the same Senate seat. And both said during events in North Texas this week that the cost of living had become too expensive for many Americans.

With Mr. Talarico leading in some polls and Democrats chasing their first statewide win in Texas in more than 30 years, both campaigns have made affordability the centerpiece of the race. Mr. Paxton, a Republican and attorney general of Texas, would cut taxes. Mr. Talarico, a Democratic state representative, would raise wages and increase taxes on the wealthy.

Mr. Paxton’s plan centered on new tax deductions for second homes, medical bills and gym memberships.

Mr. Talarico’s plan proposed in-

creasing wages, repealing billionaire tax cuts and canceling debt.

“We have an affordability crisis because we have a corruption crisis,” Mr. Talarico said onstage at the Esports Stadium Arlington, the former Arlington Expo Center, flanked by the words “NEW AMERICAN DREAM.” Blue lights shone into the crowd, which his campaign said topped 1,000 people.

He fixed his ire on billionaires and appealed to Republicans and Democrats alike to support his fight against a system he said was built to benefit the ultrawealthy. Mr. Talarico said he wanted to close tax loopholes and provide down payment assistance for first-time home buyers. He wanted an “all-of-the-above energy strategy” that included renewables and oil and gas. He also backed the A.I. dividend, the idea of providing direct payments for people who had lost income or opportunities because of artificial intelligence.

“Whether you’re a little more conservative or a little more progressive — we’re all getting screwed,” Mr. Talarico said.

At his kickoff event on Tuesday, Mr. Paxton told the few hundred

supporters gathered in the special events space of Matt’s Rancho Martinez in Allen that he wanted a \$25,000 tax deduction for health care costs. He also proposed a \$5,000 tax deduction for “healthy living” spending on gym memberships or GLP-1 medications like Ozempic or Zepbound. He said he

Deductions on second homes or repealing tax cuts on the rich.

wanted to make it easier for people to buy first and second homes, with a \$50,000 tax deduction for each.

The crowd whooped and hollered, fanning themselves in the hot, packed room.

“We have socialist Democrats like James Talarico who want to become a Texas senator,” Mr. Paxton said, “when he belongs in California.”

Mr. Talarico is not a member of the Democratic Socialists of America. He is not endorsed by

the D.S.A., Priscilla Yeverino, the group’s communications director, confirmed. There are no D.S.A. candidates on the ballot in Texas.

That has not stopped Mr. Paxton, or his proxies, from leaning into that messaging. With Mr. Talarico ahead in some polls, and with a much larger war chest, Mr. Paxton hopes to sow doubt among moderates that his opponent is the candidate for them.

Mr. Talarico addressed the tactic in his speech.

“They’re going to claim we’re socialists, or communists, or whatever sounds scariest in a headline,” he said. “And we’ll say, ‘Is that the best you can do?’”

Economists from both parties said Mr. Talarico’s plan was solidly Democratic with a populist bent, and said Mr. Paxton’s tax deductions would not benefit many low-income Americans. They said the one thing that Mr. Paxton and Mr. Talarico agreed on — expanding the child tax credit — could cost trillions of dollars over the next decade.

Jessica Riedl, a budget and tax fellow with the Brookings Institution, said the two candidates’ plans were filled with “poll-tested” proposals she would have

expected during campaign season.

“Both candidates are promising a free lunch,” said Ms. Riedl, who has advised Republican presidential candidates, “either with lower taxes or with more spending that can be funded by the top one percent.”

Jared Bernstein, the former chair of President Joe Biden’s Council of Economic Advisers, said Mr. Talarico’s plan had a mix of good “and less good” ideas. He applauded the Democrat for proposing ways to create more housing stock and to crack down on “tax cheats.”

But he, too, was not sold on how everyday Americans would benefit from repealing tax breaks for the top 1 percent.

Both Mr. Bernstein and Ms. Riedl criticized the Paxton plan as expensive and unhelpful to the neediest Americans. The Paxton campaign did not answer questions about how the plan would be financed.

“My take on his plan is that he helped a lot of people like himself,” Mr. Bernstein said, “and from what I can tell, he’s not the one who needs it.”

Some Top Democratic Centrists Prepare for ‘War’ Against a Rising Left

By SHANE GOLDMACHER

The embattled establishment of the Democratic Party searched furiously for a political reset after Dr. Abdul El-Sayed’s progressive victory in Michigan handed the party’s long-dominant moderate wing its most painful defeat of the year.

Some strategists urgently pressed to adopt a sharper edge to tap into the fury among Democratic voters that was felling its centrist candidates. Others wanted to attack democratic socialism, undercutting a budding movement now set to have far more than a toehold in the next Congress. Yet another young democratic socialist defeated an incumbent congressman in Detroit on Tuesday.

“We are preparing for the next war that is coming,” said Jonathan Cowan, the president of Third Way, a leading centrist Democratic group, revealing to The New York Times a new \$15 million effort between now and 2028 to discredit democratic socialism.

Dr. El-Sayed’s win was not the blowout that some pre-election polls had predicted. But his narrow nomination in one of the country’s signature swing states still represented a critical moment for the party’s middle, which had previously sought to cast the far left’s successes as contained within the country’s most urban and liberal corridors.

Their fear: Dr. El-Sayed was paving a path for a progressive to seize the party’s presidential nomination in 2028 — and then go on to lose the general election.

“It is deeply troubling to see radical, far-left candidates winning in places that are potentially presidential swing states,” Mr. Cowan added.

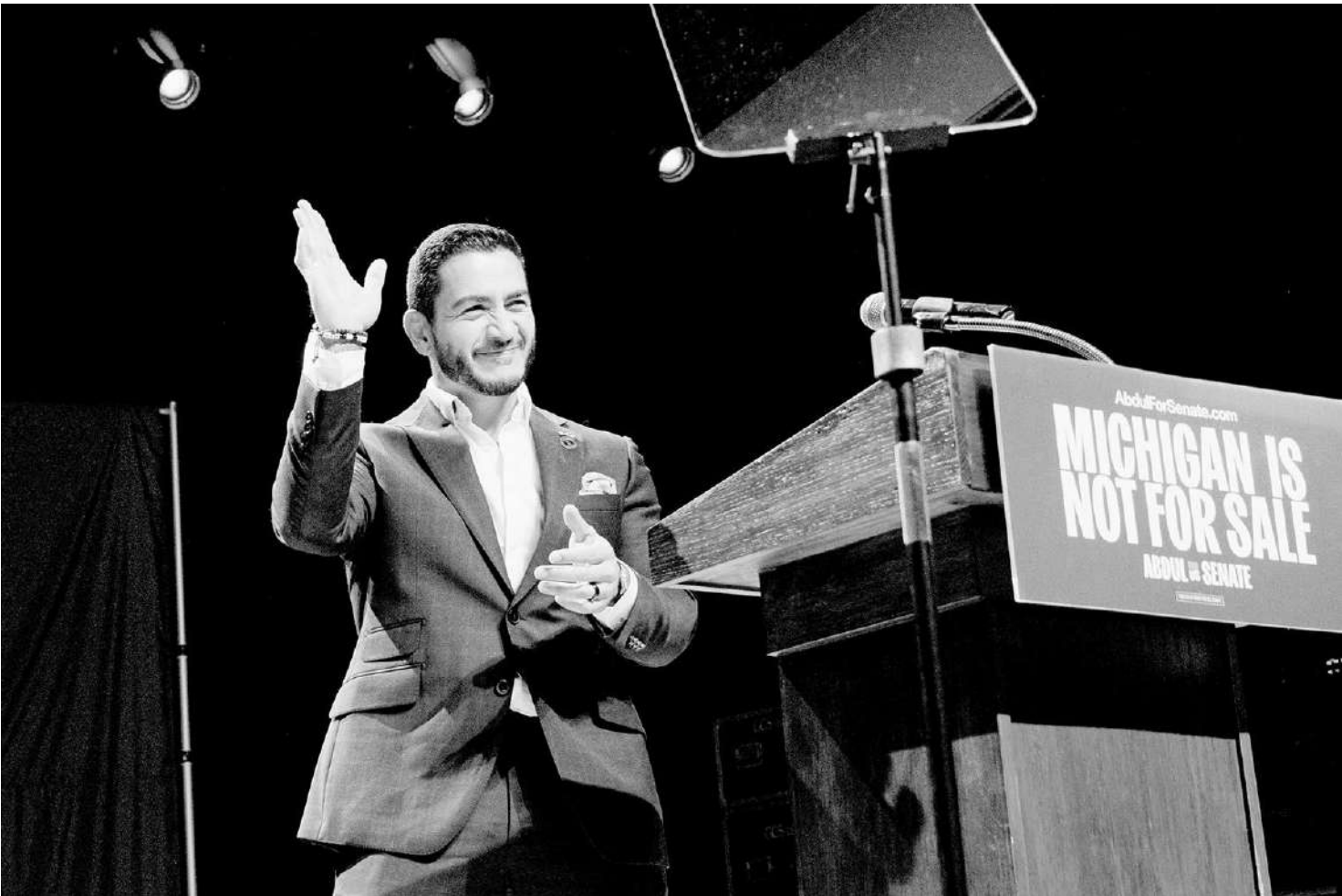
Most party leaders — from Gov. Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan to Senator Chuck Schumer of New York to former Vice President Kamala Harris — quickly embraced Dr. El-Sayed’s Senate candidacy, given the stakes of the Michigan seat in play. But some moderates see the emerging left as a danger.

The fact that Democrats recently put Michigan in the early lineup of presidential nominating states — a race just 18 months away — only heightened the significance of Dr. El-Sayed’s victory.

For now, the next big test is only a week away. In Wisconsin, Francesca Hong, a democratic socialist and state assemblywoman representing a progressive hotbed, Madison, has emerged as the party’s front-runner for governor in another key battleground race.

Mr. Cowan said the \$15 million his group would spend through 2028 was not directed at individual candidates. Instead, the group plans to target the Democratic Socialists of America movement, which he believes poses a “mortal danger” for Democrats.

He said the effort would include opposition research into the D.S.A., polling, social media programs and educating Democratic activists and leaders. It would target both proud democratic socialists and those such as Dr. El-Sayed, whom he derided as performing the “D.S.A. dodge” —



NICK HAGEN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



JAMIE KELTER DAVIS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

flirting with democratic socialists enough to get their organizing power and support while remaining distant enough to avoid the explicit label.

How this discrediting campaign will affect the current midterm cycle — potentially undercutting Democratic nominees in swing-state races and undermining the party’s chances of retaking Congress — remains unclear.

Centrist Democrats say their purpose is to make progressives understand the risks of some of the more radical planks of the official D.S.A. platform: defunding the “Department of War,” taking “steps toward fully abolishing the police and prison system,” enacting “reparations” and establishing a 32-hour workweek.

“The upside of being associated

with more extreme movements is you get attention and real and perceived energy and outsider status,” said Liam Kerr, the co-founder of another centrist group, Welcome PAC.

Mr. Kerr said that the far left was receiving all of those benefits without “the baggage” of particular positions — a dynamic he hoped would shift with added attention.

On Wednesday, one progressive Democrat who won his party’s House nomination distanced himself from the D.S.A.: Will Lawrence, a co-founder of the Sunrise Movement who defeated two more moderate Democratic rivals in Michigan on Tuesday, said he allowed his D.S.A. membership to lapse in the last month. Mr. Lawrence, 35, now faces a Re-

A progressive Senate primary win in Michigan by Dr. Abdul El-Sayed handed moderate Democrats a painful defeat. Francesca Hong, a democratic socialist, has emerged as a leading Democrat in the Wisconsin governor race. The primary is Aug. 11.

publican incumbent, Representative Tom Barrett, in one of the country’s premier battleground districts.

Whatever comes next, Dr. El-Sayed’s triumph was a watershed moment for the progressive movement, a statewide success in Middle America that could not easily be dismissed. This was not Zohran Mamdani’s win over Andrew M. Cuomo in New York City, or a congressional primary win in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Philadelphia or Denver.

After all, the party establishment had the one-on-one race it had wanted against Dr. El-Sayed. The state’s Democratic governor delivered a late endorsement of Representative Haley Stevens, the moderate alternative. And Ms. Stevens enjoyed a gargantuan advertising advantage that swelled into the tens of millions of dollars.

More than \$32 million of that money came from a super PAC linked to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, which signaled that it would continue opposing Dr. El-Sayed through the fall.

Dr. El-Sayed has made running against AIPAC a centerpiece of his candidacy. On MS NOW on Wednesday, he said the links between Israel and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu were “inextricable.”

“Netanyahu is a big reason why they’ve gotten so aggressive and, frankly, so bloodthirsty under his reign,” Dr. El-Sayed said.

Progressives have not won every race this year. On Tuesday, Cori Bush, a left-wing former con-

gresswoman, lost badly in her bid to win back her old seat.

But they have won convincingly in enough places — including Graham Platner’s Senate nomination in Maine before his withdrawal — to put the party’s establishment on its heels.

“The Democratic Party is now Blockbuster,” Van Jones, the Democratic commentator and former

A \$15 million effort aims to discredit democratic socialism.

Obama administration official, said on CNN on Tuesday. “These kids are Netflix.”

Colin Mortimer, the director of the centrist Center for New Liberalism, said that moderates needed to stop tempering their tone to appeal to voters sick of the status quo.

“It seems to me a lot of energy is on the left, but the big energy we are seeing from the base of the Democratic Party is just a rejection of the establishment and a rejection of incumbents,” Mr. Mortimer said.

He pointed to some upcoming races as key tests where it was younger center-left candidates doing the challenging of older incumbents, including the bid of Representative Seth Moulton, a moderate, to unseat Senator Ed Markey in Massachusetts, as well

as Luke Bronin’s challenge to Representative John Larson of Connecticut.

Maurice Mitchell, the national director of the progressive Working Families Party, sharply disagreed.

“They’re missing the plot,” Mr. Mitchell, who spent the last week campaigning in Michigan, said in an interview. “There is a populist insurgency taking place in this country.”

Moderates, he said, were misreading the room if they did not believe voters were animated by specific ideas as much as tenor. “I can tell you what they’re missing,” he said. “They’re missing a point of view.”

Or as Hasan Piker, the lightning rod live-streamer who campaigned in Michigan with Dr. El-Sayed, said in a text message on Wednesday, “70 million dollars worth of smears couldn’t make up for a lack vision demonstrated by the establishment Dems.”

With a signature fitted V-neck black T-shirt, Dr. El-Sayed built his successful campaign with a call-and-response set of catchphrases that captured the scope of his ambitions: “Money out of . . . politics. Money in your . . . pocket. Medicare for . . . all.”

Some Democratic strategists hoped he would focus, in particular, on the second of the three in the coming months as polls show that voters are ready to punish President Trump and his party for failing to bring down costs.

Republicans appeared most eager to frame the race around crime, linking Dr. El-Sayed to past movements and comments about defunding the police or prisons. Chris Gustafson, a spokesman for the top Senate Republican super PAC, previewed that line of attack, calling Dr. El-Sayed “a dangerous threat to the safety and freedoms of every American.”

The contours and coalitions of the Stevens-El-Sayed primary are likely to provide a road map for progressives who decide to run for president. Dr. El-Sayed campaigned with Senator Bernie Sanders and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and featured them in his closing ad.

The Senate primary was not the first time that Michigan opted for a left-wing candidate in a marquee contest. In 2016, the state delivered an upset win for Mr. Sanders in his presidential primary against Hillary Clinton, who went on to lose Michigan that November to Mr. Trump.

The Michigan Senate race of 2026 was already a must-win for Democrats if they hope to wrest control of the Senate from Republicans this fall. At the same time, for Mr. Schumer, Dr. El-Sayed would add to the ranks of Democrats opposed to him as a leader.

It is also a must-win for progressives aspiring to prove they can succeed not just in primaries but also in crucial and competitive general elections.

For now, the party’s moderate wing was hoping to learn lessons after a painful defeat.

“Necessity is the mother of invention,” Mr. Kerr said. “It’s a tough but necessary time.”

Abortion Opponents Backed Ballot Measures in 2 Red States. The Voters Said No.

By MITCH SMITH and ANN HINGA KLEIN

Voters in Kansas and Missouri have long filled their legislatures with Republican lawmakers who oppose abortion. Those same Kansans and Missourians, when given the choice, have also voted in favor of abortion rights.

And though the word “abortion” did not appear on the ballot in either state on Tuesday, voters resoundingly shot down Republican-backed ballot measures that could have made it easier to ban the procedure in the future. In

by Democratic governors, found in 2019 that the Kansas Constitution includes a right to abortion, frustrating Republican lawmakers who want to restrict or ban the procedure.

Then in 2022, Kansas voters rejected a Republican-backed ballot question that would have cleared the way for an abortion ban.

Lawmakers tried again this year by proposing a constitutional amendment that called for justices to be elected, rather than appointed by the governor and then put forward periodically for retention votes. Given the state’s rightward lean, the thinking went, an elected court would, over time, be filled with conservative jurists open to revisiting the abortion question.

But the amendment failed by a large margin on Tuesday, leaving in place a state Supreme Court with six Democratic appointees and one Republican appointee and likely securing abortion rights for the foreseeable future.

“Abortion rights are never entirely safe in Kansas,” said State Representative Stephanie Sawyer Clayton, a Democrat who opposed electing Supreme Court justices. “But does it keep us safe for the next couple of years? Yes, it does.”

Some supporters of electing the justices signaled that they would not drop the issue. State Representative Blake Carpenter, a Republican, wrote on social media that “I will continue fighting for a judiciary that is accountable to the people it serves.”

“I know there will be people who say this debate is over and that those of us who support reform should simply move on,” Mr. Carpenter wrote. “I disagree. If we believe the current system is



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Voters filling out ballots at a polling station in Kansas City, Mo., on Tuesday. Voters in Kansas and Missouri shot down measures that could have made it easier to ban abortion in the future.

unaccountable, then we have a responsibility to continue advocating for something better.”

One state to the east, Missouri Republicans have grown frustrated by a series of left-leaning policies that voters have enacted through ballot measures, particularly a constitutional amendment narrowly approved in 2024 that established a right to abortion.

On Tuesday, Missouri voters rejected an amendment proposed by lawmakers that would have required future citizen-sponsored constitutional amendments to be

approved by a majority of voters in every congressional district, not the statewide majority that is currently required.

Given the ultraconservative makeup of some of those districts, passing a citizen-backed amendment to accomplish a policy goal of Democrats would have become exceedingly difficult.

Even after Tuesday, abortion will remain an unsettled question in Missouri. In November, voters will be asked to re-amend the state Constitution to remove abortion rights, which would effec-

tively ban the procedure in the state.

The proposal raising the bar for constitutional amendments would not have changed the mechanics of that November vote. Lawmakers had carved out an exception for amendments proposed by the Legislature, like the upcoming one on abortion, which would have continued to need only a statewide majority to pass.

But if Missourians decide to remove abortion rights from the Constitution in November, abortion rights supporters would have

had a much tougher time re-legalizing it had Tuesday’s measure passed. They could seek to place another referendum protecting abortion rights on a future ballot, but their odds of passing it would have been far slimmer.

At the polls in Kansas, many voters said their decision on whether to elect Supreme Court justices had nothing to do with abortion. Other Kansans on both sides of the abortion debate said they were aware of the stakes on that issue.

Standing outside her polling place in Leavenworth, Melany R. Blevins, 52, said she found the amendment issue confusing until she received a mailer from an anti-abortion group she trusted. She decided to support the amendment.

“They were definitely saying that yes was the way to go,” said Ms. Blevins, a Republican and a nurse’s aide.

In Lansing, Shawn O’Connor, 54, a government contractor and retired military officer, said he had opposed the amendment.

“To me, it’s just a ploy to get at the whole abortion tactics,” said Mr. O’Connor, who considers himself an independent but registered as a Democrat to vote in that party’s primary. “Kansas already voted on that, so let’s not try to make a ploy to change the court.”

Others said the integrity of the state court system, not abortion, drove their vote. Robert Ruckman, 72, a Democrat who said he was retired from the military, said he did “not want every year to have judges on TV declaring all their promises and all their things they’re going to do.”

“I don’t want them to get into the political system,” he said.

A Legal Battle: On a Vanity License Plate, Whose Speech Is It?

From Page A1

himself, Whateley sued, saying the cancellation violated the First Amendment.

Virginia responded by saying that the plate is government property and contains a unique combination of characters that serves to identify vehicles. All of that means, the state said, that Whateley’s vanity plate is government speech.

If that is correct — a big if — the First Amendment does not figure in the analysis. The government, the Supreme Court has ruled, can say whatever it wants when it is speaking. And it can refuse to endorse messages with which it disagrees.

Indeed, the Supreme Court has said so in a case involving another kind of license plate.

In 2015, the court ruled that Texas, which had issued hundreds of specialty designs for license plates with messages like “Choose Life,” “God Bless Texas,” “Fight Terrorism” and “Rather Be Golfing,” could refuse to allow one bearing the Confederate battle flag.

The vote in the case, Walker v. Sons of Confederate Veterans, was 5 to 4. Justice Stephen G. Breyer wrote the majority opinion, joined by the court’s other three liberal members and Justice Clarence Thomas.

Drivers use specialty plates to suggest that the government endorses the messages they bear, Justice Breyer wrote. Otherwise, he said, people “could simply display the message in

question in larger letters on a bumper sticker right next to the plate.”

Justice Breyer stressed that the decision was limited to specialty plates, which let drivers choose from a large but finite set of designs including graphics and a slogan. Individuals and groups could propose designs to a state board. The board rejected the proposed plate including the Confederate flag, concluding that many members of the public would find it offensive.

Justice Breyer said he was not addressing the status of vanity plates, where vehicle owners choose numbers and letters that appear only on their own plate.

In dissent, Justice Samuel Alito was incredulous.

“If a car with a plate that says ‘Rather Be Golfing’ passed by at 8:30 a.m. on a Monday morning,” he wrote, “would you think: ‘This is the official policy of the state — better to golf than to work?’”

Nor could specialty plates bearing the name of, say, the University of Oklahoma plausibly convey a government message, Justice Alito wrote. During football season in Texas, he said, that would border on treason.

In Whateley’s case, Judge Norman Moon of the Federal District Court in Lynchburg, Va., ruled for Virginia, saying that the plate was government speech.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Virginia stepped in to handle Whateley’s appeal. Eden Heilman, its legal director, said the state is known for its vanity plates, which are displayed on about 10 percent of the state’s cars.

“The idea that somehow over a million of those contain government speech was sort of a silly, preposterous reading in our estimation,” she said.

Last Friday, Judge Pamela



A dispute over free speech centers on a message about the police and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.



In a 5-to-4 decision, the Supreme Court ruled in 2015 that Texas could refuse a specialty plate because of its Confederate imagery.

Harris, writing for a unanimous three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, sided with Whateley and the A.C.L.U., ruling vanity plates are private speech subject to First Amendment protections.

But that is only the first step. Even private speech is sometimes subject to government regulation.

The appeals court returned the case to Judge Moon to consider whether Virginia’s cancellation of Whateley’s plate can survive First Amendment scrutiny,

which often turns on whether the challenged policy discriminates based on the speaker’s viewpoint.

Virginia, for its part, announced on Wednesday night that it would seek Supreme Court review.

“The commonwealth has a responsibility to ensure that state-issued license plates are not profane and do not promote dangerous hate speech or incite harm,” said RaeAnn Pickett, a spokeswoman for Jay Jones, the state’s attorney general.

In North Carolina, Clock Is Ticking for the G.O.P. To Replace a Candidate

By EDUARDO MEDINA

On Monday night, Jim Fulton, the Republican Party chair in Buncombe County, N.C., received a call from an aide for Representative Chuck Edwards, whose re-election campaign was spiraling after the House Ethics Committee documented his troubling conduct toward two young female aides.

Mr. Fulton said he was told that evening it was still “full steam ahead.” He was given campaign signage to put up.

Then at 3:32 a.m. on Wednesday, Mr. Edwards announced he was dropping out.

“There was already a lot of work to do” to get Mr. Edwards back on track, Mr. Fulton said Wednesday. “Now,” he added, “there’s a lot more.”

Even without scandal, the race in western North Carolina’s 11th Congressional District had turned competitive. Jamie Ager, the Democratic candidate, had been making hay of his background as a farmer with deep roots in a region that has been reliably red for decades but has shifted left in recent election cycles.

Now, just over 12 weeks before Election Day, Republicans are scrambling to find a candidate. The Republican executive committee of North Carolina’s 11th district — which includes dozens of members, such as county party chairs — will meet next Monday to pick a new nominee.

Several state legislators are possible replacements, but no clear front-runner has emerged, committee members involved in the process said. There was, however, widespread understanding

that the road ahead would be steep.

“I’m not sure who chooses to do this, and if they even have a shot at winning,” said Michele Woodhouse, a former Republican Party chairwoman for the 11th Congressional District. “Which Republican is going to want to get in at this point? Can they win?”

The replacement candidate will need a crush of cash to be able to compete with Mr. Ager, who has raised more than \$3 million. (Mr. Edwards had \$940,000 in his campaign coffers.)

And whoever is chosen will only have about 80 days to campaign in a large district that stretches across 16 counties, much of them mountainous and rural. For many residents, the central issue continues to be the slow pace of recovery from Hurricane Helene, which killed more than 100 people in 2024 and was the worst natural disaster to strike the state.

Many had aimed their frustration at Mr. Edwards and the Trump administration, especially after Kristi Noem, the former homeland security secretary, delayed federal assistance. Mr. Edwards’s office did not respond to a request for comment.

Others, though, remain disappointed with the immediate response to Helene from former Gov. Roy Cooper, a Democrat. Mr. Cooper is now running for Senate against Michael Whatley, a Republican who has faced his own scrutiny in western North Carolina after President Trump named him the Helene “recovery czar,” a title he has eschewed.

A Democratic super PAC has



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MATT KELLEY/ASSOCIATED PRESS

been airing a television ad with a Buncombe County man explaining why people felt “abandoned” by Mr. Edwards after Helene. Mr. Ager has made Helene recovery central to his stump speeches.

He describes himself as a “Mountain Democrat.” And he has

been careful to distance himself from a damaged national brand. For instance, his campaign yard signs, abundant in liberal Asheville, are green.

“Jamie has had over a year to meet the voters, to go out there and make his case,” said Grayson

Representative Chuck Edwards, above, dropped his re-election bid weeks before Election Day. At left, Jamie Ager, the Democratic candidate for North Carolina’s 11th Congressional District, has made inroads in a reliably red region.

Barnette, Mr. Ager’s campaign manager. The next Republican will not be able to do the same.

Republicans say Mr. Ager is more liberal than he lets on.

“I am confident Republicans will unite behind our nominee and continue our work to expand our majorities in Washington,” Jason Simmons, the chairman of the North Carolina Republican Party, said in a statement.

Still, Mr. Edwards’s announcement left some Carolina conservatives bitter. Perhaps the 11th Congressional District was cursed, they joked, referring to its previous scandal-ridden Republican in-

lish origin, not Anglo-Saxon.”

In drafting the vanity plates item, I thought to check up on things. Imagine my delight on reading that the fourth edition of “The F-Word,” published in 2024, included, along with 150 new entries and 2,500 new quotations, “major new discoveries” that “push back the known history of” the word “by almost 200 years.”

Might that mean that the new information now demonstrated that the word appeared in Old English? Perhaps, I thought, we could un-correct.

But Sheidlower threw cold water on the idea. “The recent discoveries, while extremely important, don’t change the fact that the earliest examples of” the word “are still solidly in the Middle English period, and are thus not Old English or Anglo-Saxon,” he wrote in an email.

“Previously, the earliest known example of the word was from some point in the later 15th century,” he wrote. “We now have two examples from the 14th century.” They could not be more amusing — or unprintable.

The correction stands.

And there was more bad news.

In 2008, I reported that the euphemism “the F-word” had first appeared in 1973, in The New York Times.

That represented the best available information in 2008. But Sheidlower has not been idle in the last 18 years, and here, too, he has made some discoveries.

“The earliest example now known is from a language journal from Sweden (written in English) in 1956, and there are also examples from 1964 and 1970,” he wrote.

The Times still clings to one distinction, he told me. Its 1973 use remains the earliest one that deployed “the F-word” to represent a verb.

After a scandal, no clear front-runner to step in has emerged.

cumbent, Madison Cawthorn, who gained national notoriety for his personal and political mistakes before Mr. Edwards defeated him in the 2022 Republican primary.

“Have they checked on what Madison Cawthorn is doing?” BJ Neidhardt, a Democratic consultant, asked sardonically, as possible replacements fluttered on social media.

(For the record, Mr. Cawthorne is trying to make a comeback in a Republican House primary in Florida.)

After the 2022 primary, Mr. Edwards was viewed as the adult in the room, bolstered by old-guard Republicans who yearned for scandal-free representation in Washington.

“Edwards’s pitch was that he was going to be a boring, head-down, serious member of Congress who cares about constituency service,” said Chris Cooper, a political science professor at Western Carolina University.

At times, he gained the grudging respect of his critics. In October 2024, he published an 800-word post to debunk conspiracy theories and false claims surrounding the federal response to Hurricane Helene. Last year, he was one of the few Republican members of Congress to attend a vitriolic town hall in person.

For Mr. Fulton, the Republican Party chair in Buncombe County, Mr. Edwards’s downfall felt surprising.

On Tuesday morning, Mr. Fulton had rushed to their office to get an Edwards sign up beside some shrubs. The next day, he was back to remove it, plucking it from the dirt.

He Dropped Out of Race, Then Defeated a G.O.P. Primary Rival Backed by Trump

By BAYLISS WAGNER

In an unusual primary upset, President Trump’s favored candidate for a battleground U.S. House district in central Michigan lost to a little-known Republican who had suspended his own campaign, never filed a campaign finance report and had even endorsed someone else.

On Wednesday morning, Tom Smith, a small-business owner from Flint, was surprised to learn he had soundly defeated Amir Hassan, a Navy veteran whom Mr. Trump endorsed.

Just last week, Mr. Trump had rallied in Milford, Mich., for Republicans, including Mr. Hassan. Republican leaders had also closed ranks behind him, with Speaker Mike Johnson and Senator Tim Scott of South Carolina both endorsing him.

Now, Mr. Smith is reviving his campaign to challenge Representative Kristen McDonald Rivet, a first-term Democrat. The district

is among just a few nationwide that voted for both a Democratic representative and Mr. Trump in 2024, and Republicans declared that her seat was a top target this cycle.

“I am humbled and honored that Republicans have chosen me to take the fight to Kristen McDonald Rivet,” Mr. Smith said in a statement on Wednesday.

Mr. Smith announced in July that he was suspending his campaign and putting his “full support” behind Al Lemmo, a third candidate. As of Wednesday, Mr. Lemmo’s website still displayed a banner reading, “THANK YOU, TOM SMITH!” with Mr. Smith’s video endorsement embedded beneath it.

Mr. Lemmo’s campaign posted advertisements calling Mr. Hassan a “Trojan horse,” citing Mr. Hassan’s admissions that he previously leaned Democratic and did not vote in 2024.

In an interview on Wednesday with The New York Times, Mr.

Lemmo acknowledged that his campaign staff had also created ads that “didn’t so much appeal to bigotry against Muslims as kind of counted on it.”

He added: “But I really didn’t like that because I live in a community with a lot of Muslims. They’re really nice.”

One ad featured an image of a woman in a niqab, a long Islamic garment that covers all but a woman’s eyes. Another ad was a montage of web pages and news articles that described Mr. Hassan as a “proud Muslim.” (Mr. Hassan said during the campaign that he had “studied other faiths” but was a Christian.)

Mr. Lemmo speculated that voters may have favored Mr. Smith in part for his “plain-Jane American name.”

Mr. Hassan did not respond to a request for an interview. In a Facebook video on Wednesday, he said he made “no excuse” for the outcome of the race.

“I know what God has in store

for me is something greater, even if I can’t see it right now and I don’t understand,” Mr. Hassan said, filming from the driver’s seat of a car.

Mr. Smith won despite running no TV ads. In a handwritten letter

With no TV ads, routing a Christian with a Muslim name.

to federal regulators, he reported raising only \$1,850.

“I could not file this form electronically because I have had no success logging in and have not been able to get a response from the helpdesk,” Mr. Smith added in a postscript to the letter, which he sent to the Federal Election Commission in July.

With more than 95 percent of

votes counted in the primary for the Eighth Congressional District, Mr. Smith was leading Mr. Hassan by 50 percent to 33 percent, while Mr. Lemmo trailed with 16 percent.

Speaking in Las Vegas, Mr. Trump said he thought Mr. Hassan was a “good person” who “didn’t have much of a chance” because of a lack of familiarity to voters in the district.

“But I said: I don’t care. I’m doing it anyway,” Mr. Trump recalled at the rally on Wednesday. “But nobody knew who the person was.”

The House Republican campaign arm quickly shifted support to its unexpected nominee. And Mr. Smith quickly transitioned into his new role, appearing at a “unity luncheon” on Wednesday in Macomb County, Mich., that was hosted by Mike Rogers, the Republican nominee for Senate.

Zach Bannon, a spokesman for the National Republican Congressional Committee, said in a state-

ment that “McDonald Rivet has failed Michiganders and they will send her packing this fall when they elect common-sense conservative Thomas Smith.”

Ms. McDonald Rivet did not respond to a request for comment. The House Democratic campaign arm gloated about the turn of events in the Republican primary.

“Donald Trump and the N.R.C.C.’s handpicked candidate just lost his primary to a man who quit this race weeks ago to endorse a third person in the primary,” said Katie Smith, a spokeswoman for the arm, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. “This embarrassing upset is the latest proof that Washington Republicans are not ready for November.”

No day is complete without
The New York Times.

Private Drones Impede Efforts to Combat Fires From Air in Washington

By MADALEINE RUBIN

As a wildfire tore through a valley in Spokane County, Wash., on Monday, devouring thousands of acres and barreling toward homes, officials deployed planes to fight the flames from the sky.

But a drone was flying near the blaze, violating airspace restrictions and posing a hazard to fire-fighting aircraft. Officials had to ground flights for nearly two hours.

The delay put homes in greater jeopardy, they said, and prevented the dropping of thousands of gallons of water and retardant that could have contained some of the fire's growth.

"We're here trying to help this community in their time of need — and it's a real time of need," said Tom Stokesberry III, a spokesman for the team made up of federal, state and local agencies that is battling the fire. "When we're hampered by a drone flying over the fire, that really frustrates us."

Fire officials elsewhere are expressing similar concerns. More people are using drones to video a fire from above, blocking or slowing firefighters' efforts to save lives and property, and putting pilots' lives at risk.

In Utah in late June, officials fighting the Cottonwood fire — then the largest wildfire in the state — were forced to ground planes for about an hour because of a drone sighting.

Less than three weeks later, planes fighting a fire in southwestern Colorado were grounded for about two hours after a drone flew

Anna Griffin contributed reporting.

in a restricted zone there.

Drones have been spotted above the fires in Spokane County nearly 40 times since those fires began, Mr. Stokesberry said.

Last year, there were more than 200 drone sightings above wildfires in the nation, according to U.S. Forest Service records, though nearly all occurred during the Los Angeles wildfires.

There were 125 over the previous seven years combined.

Drones force officials to ground planes in many cases because the chance of a collision is high: Like drones, firefighting planes fly low to the ground, dropping water and chemicals.

Last year, a drone collided with a firefighting plane above the Palisades fire in Los Angeles, threatening the pilot's life and removing the plane from service for months, Mr. Stokesberry said.

Even a small drone can cause a firefighting helicopter to lose control, said Linnea Edmeier, a spokeswoman for Cal Fire, California's state firefighting agency.

Nowhere is the problem worse than in urban areas, officials said, like Spokane County, where three fires have burned more than 700 structures. Drone incursions near wildfires in the county make up nearly half of all incidents reported to the U.S. Forest Service this year.

Most drones over wildfires are flown by hobbyists, in pursuit of photos and videos, who may not know about regulations, officials said.

The Federal Aviation Administration often limits the airspace around wildfires, and entering a restricted zone with a drone is a



LOREN ELLIOTT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The Old Trails wildfire in Spokane, Wash., has destroyed or damaged hundreds of structures and displaced thousands of residents.

federal crime, punishable by up to two years in prison and as much as \$175,000 in civil and criminal fines. Several states also enforce their own penalties.

Before-and-after videos of streets and homes turned to ash often rack up views on social media. Some pilots may believe they are making a positive contribution, Ms. Edmeier said. In comment sections, people have asked drone users to survey the damage where their friends or family live.

William Campbell, 39, who runs a drone videography business in Spokane, has shared videos advising people on social media not to fly their aircraft over wildfires.

When he first purchased a drone five years ago, Mr. Campbell said, he "flew whenever, anywhere, and didn't know the rules."

"That's most drone pilots," he added.

Some drone operators are homeowners seeking more information that they say can help protect them and others.

Matthew Anderson, 30, used his drone to decide whether to evacuate his home, located 10 to 15 miles from the fire in north Spokane. A licensed drone pilot and professional videographer, he flew his drone far from the blaze, in a zone that was legal, he said, before flight restrictions were in place.

"I wanted to see how far away this thing actually is, and if I need to pack up my stuff and go," Mr. Anderson said.

But others whose drones have disrupted firefighting efforts were the talk of the area this week. In northwest Spokane County, Anna Michielli, 38, could see the fire advancing toward her home on Sunday, where the air was already laden with smoke, she said.

As she rushed to evacuate dozens of farm animals from her property, planes spraying plumes of fire retardant from above were delayed by a drone.

Drones are all that Ms. Michielli has heard about from her neighbors, she said. At least one neighbor has lost their house.

The Spokane County sheriff, John Nowels, said this week that his office had referred several cases involving drone operators to the F.A.A.

Meanwhile, an F.B.I. task force that includes local officials has begun using counterdrone technology to stop violators. That could involve bringing down drones with an electric pulse, Mr. Stokesberry said.

Mr. Nowels expressed little patience for more disruptions.

"We are done playing games with this," he said.

Scientists Use Artificial Intelligence to Design Viruses That Aren't Found in Nature

From Page A1

ing worries that artificial intelligence might enable the creation of a new generation of biological weapons, from deadly poisons to unstoppable pandemics.

Dr. Moritz Hanke, a fellow at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security who was not involved in the new study, said governments and scientific organizations have been slow to develop guardrails that could block the creation of a deadly virus — even as the science races ahead.

"There's just a huge disconnect," he said.

The authors of the study relied on an A.I. model called Evo, which is similar in some ways to ChatGPT, made by OpenAI. (The New York Times has sued OpenAI, ChatGPT's creator, and its partner, Microsoft.)

ChatGPT answers questions by stringing together words that seem likely to follow one another.

It can do this thanks to years of training on vast amounts of text gathered from the internet, books and other sources.

DNA is strikingly similar to a book in some ways: a string of molecular building blocks, known as nucleotides, arrayed like letters in a line of text. A gene consists of hundreds of nucleotides drawn from a four-letter alphabet: A, C, G and T. The sequence encodes the instructions for building proteins and other molecules.

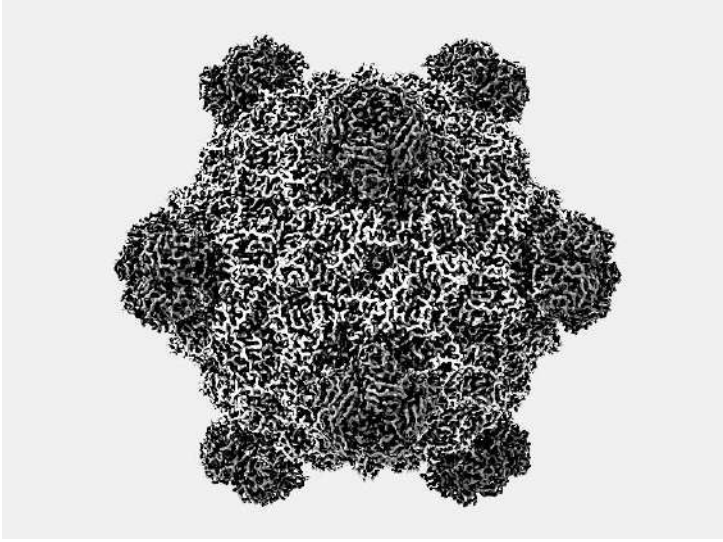
DNA has its own rules of grammar, and if a sequence violates them, the result is biological gibberish. Biologists have uncovered some of nature's grammatical rules, but many remain a mystery.

The researchers wondered if Evo could pick up these rules on its own. Instead of training it on text, they trained it on genetic sequences drawn from millions of animals, plants, microbes and viruses. All told, Evo scanned about nine trillion nucleotides.

Evo eventually recognized patterns common across the tree of life and used them to generate blueprints for new genes encoding proteins that could perform specific jobs. These results led the team to wonder if Evo could master not just single genes but also an entire genome.

As the A.I. would be able to handle only small genomes at first, the scientists decided to try to make viruses. While a human genome contains over three billion nucleotides, many viruses have genomes just a few thousand nucleotides long.

"It just felt like the obvious next step," said Samuel King, a graduate student at Stanford University



SAMUEL H. KING, ET AL.

A rendering of a virus created by an A.I. model. The new viruses don't threaten humans because they can infect only bacteria.

and an author of the new study. He and his colleagues gave Evo another round of training, this time on the 11 genes of Phi X-174 and about 15,000 of its closest relatives.

They made this choice in part because scientists know Phi X-174 intimately, having studied it for close to a century. And because it's a bacteriophage that infects only E. coli, they knew that viruses similar to it would be safe.

Once Evo got familiar with the genomes of Phi X-174 and its kin, the researchers prompted the model to write new versions of its own. Evo generated 700,000 potential versions; the scientists pursued only the ones that looked as if they had the best odds of succeeding.

They ended up making DNA molecules from 285 of Evo's suggested sequences. When those genomes were ready to test, Mr. King and his colleagues inserted them into bacteria, which they spread across petri dishes.

In many of the dishes, the microbes grew peacefully — Evo's genomes had failed. But in one dish, researchers noticed clear dots appearing in the cloudy film of bacteria, the telltale sign of multiplying viruses.

The DNA that the scientists had inserted into the bacteria had produced protein shells that contained viral genes. The viruses burst out of the cells, leaving behind the ruptured husks of their dead hosts.

As Mr. King and his colleagues

tested more genomes, they saw more clear dots. All told, they discovered that 16 of Evo's genomes produced viable new viruses.

They proved to be as resilient as natural ones. In fact, some multiplied faster than Phi X-174. "They're not just sickly versions of stuff that already exists," said Oliver Crook, a protein chemist at the University of Oxford who was not involved in the new study.

Dr. Crook cautioned that Evo's viruses were not radically new creations. They tend to be very similar to natural species, relying on the same underlying biology.

Scientists will have to run more experiments to find out if Evo has the same success rate if it's trained on other groups of viruses. If so, Dr. Crook expected that scientists might find some A.I.-generated viruses that could become useful tools for medicine and biotechnology.

"A lot of our science rests on viruses as technology," he said. To treat people with genetic disorders, for example, doctors will load genes into viruses, which deliver them into cells.

But along with this hope, Evo's initial success has raised concerns that A.I. could be used to create deadly pathogens. "You could say, 'Hey, genomic language model, make me an influenza genome that is modified to be more transmissible or to be more lethal,'" Dr. Hanke speculated.

The potential dangers were already on the minds of the researchers as they trained Evo. They did not provide the model with data about viruses that infect humans, and they excluded similar viruses that infect other animals, plants and fungi.

As a result, Evo can't generate genomes of viruses that could threaten humans. "We just wanted to be extra careful," said Brian Hie, a computational biologist at Stanford University and an author of the new study.

Dr. Hanke credited Dr. Hie and his colleagues for taking that precaution. "I think that's quite commendable," he said, "because they don't get any guidance from anywhere on what they should be doing."

Last week, Dr. Hanke noted, the National Institutes of Health rolled out a new policy for stopping high-risk life science research. The policy would bar scientists from experiments that would make biological agents more harmful.

But computer-based research — such as generating virus DNA with A.I. — "is not prohibited by this policy unless it involves an entity of concern," the agency said in a statement.

It's easy to tell if a natural virus like smallpox is an entity of concern. But Dr. Hanke said there's no consensus on judging the possible danger of a virus made by an A.I. model.

"What is the risk of what I've never seen before?" he asked.

'We just wanted to be extra careful,' one researcher says.

Corrections

NATIONAL

An article on Thursday about Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs of Arizona planning to tap a former Republican mayor to serve as her running mate in her re-election bid referred imprecisely to John Giles, who is said to be the running mate pick. Mr. Giles, a lifelong Republican who served as mayor of Mesa, Ariz., recently changed his party affiliation to no preferred party; he is not currently a registered Republican.

ARTS

An article on Thursday about the Richmond-upon-Thames suburb of London becoming a tourist attraction for fans of the Apple TV show "Ted Lasso," misstated when the official "Ted Lasso" shop opened there. It opened in June 2024, not December 2024.

Errors are corrected during the press run whenever possible, so some errors noted here may not have appeared in all editions.

Contact the Newsroom
To contact the newsroom regarding correction requests, please email corrections@nytimes.com.

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By CHRISTINA JEWETT

The Food and Drug Administration on Wednesday approved the first mRNA flu vaccine, enabling use of a technology that will make it easier to rapidly target a widely prevalent or particularly virulent strain of the virus.

The approval of the vaccine, called mFLUSIVA, which is manufactured by Moderna, follows a series of blows to mRNA research directed by Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., including the cancellation of 22 projects meant to develop vaccines with mRNA technology through the government's Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority.

Initially the F.D.A. had refused to even review Moderna's application for approval earlier this year, but quickly reversed course after a public outcry. The flu kills more than 300,000 people worldwide each year and was particularly harsh in the 2024-25 season, with an estimated 45,000 deaths in the United States, including at least 297 reported cases in children, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The new vaccine is authorized for people ages 50 to 64. The F.D.A. issued an accelerated approval for adults 65 and older, which allows widespread use and can be converted to a full approval if the results of a follow-up study are deemed acceptable.

The company said it expected to have the vaccine ready for the 2026-27 respiratory virus season.

"Flu remains a significant public health challenge, and mFLUSIVA provides an important new option for America's seniors," Stéphane Bancel, Moderna's chief executive, said in a statement. "This approval also reflects the ongoing potential of our mRNA platform to help address important public health challenges through continued scientific innovation."

mRNA technology instructs the body to produce a fragment of a virus that then sets off the body's immune response. It was the technology used in Covid vaccines that were given to hundreds of millions of people around the world. Two scientists were awarded a Nobel Prize in 2023 for their work on

mRNA technology.

As a vaccine activist in 2021, Mr. Kennedy had petitioned the F.D.A. to pull mRNA Covid vaccines off the market six months after their initial rollout.

In the case of flu, scientists believe that mRNA technology offers an advance from traditional vaccine options that take several months to prepare using decades-old technology, some requiring the virus to develop in fertilized eggs. Moderna has said that the faster new approach will enable a shift away from the current process of focusing on one flu strain for an entire hemisphere each season and allow each nation to pick its best option.

"Having a flu vaccine that does not have to go through the archaic process of using chickens and eggs will benefit the public health

enormously," said Dr. Georges C. Benjamin, the chief executive of the American Public Health Association. "It will allow us to rapidly adjust to rapidly emerging new flu strains, a capacity we have not had before."

The company enrolled nearly 41,000 people who were 50 to 64 years old in a major study that found that the vaccine was effective but had more side effects than a vaccine manufactured with older technology. In the study, about 21,000 people took the Moderna vaccine and about the same number took the comparator vaccine. Within six months, 411 of the Moderna recipients got the flu compared with 557 of those who took the other flu shot. That translated to a relative efficacy of about 27 percent.

But those taking the Moderna shot reported more side effects: Nearly two-thirds reported injection-site pain, 45 percent reported fatigue and 38 percent reported a headache — rates about two times greater than those of the comparator. Serious events that researchers deemed related to the Moderna vaccine included a case of fainting, a case of low blood pressure that led to a three-day

hospitalization and a case of perimyocarditis, or inflammation of the lining of the heart and the heart muscle.

The F.D.A.'s initial refusal to review the Moderna vaccine was a highly unusual move toward an established company that conducted a large and generally positive clinical trial. It came from the desk of Dr. Vinay Prasad, who at the time was the head of the agency's vaccine division. Dr. Prasad had gained prominence as a sharp-eyed academic critic of pharmaceutical companies and the F.D.A. He later became a vocal supporter of Mr. Kennedy.

Dr. Prasad's chief criticism of Moderna's flu vaccine application was that it compared the company's vaccine with one made by GSK that is not considered the best in class. Such a tactic, in Dr. Prasad's view, was meant to skew the results in Moderna's favor.

After a public outcry, Dr. Marty Makary, the F.D.A. commissioner at the time, soon backtracked, calling the rebuff "part of a conversation" the agency has with drugmakers. The F.D.A. soon began a review of the company's application.

The Bridge That Now Divides the U.S. and Canada

Paul A. Eisenstein

A journalist who covers the auto industry.

DETROIT

SOME geographic trivia: Where are the only major border crossings in the 48 contiguous states where you head south to get to Canada? Answer: Detroit, where there are now three roadways to cross under or over the Detroit River. The latest connection, the Gordie Howe International Bridge, opened in late July after a weekslong delay caused by a Donald Trump temper tantrum.

The Gordie, named after the Canadian hockey legend who skated for the National Hockey League's Detroit Red Wings for more than two decades, should represent the centuries-long ties between two traditionally friendly neighbors and two cities whose economies are closely linked. Instead, the president has made it part of his personal grudge match against Canada, one that includes new tariffs that will once again raise prices for American consumers and companies.

The Gordie is an impressive work: Its 2,799-foot main span is the longest of its kind in North America and designed to allow passage below it by large vessels. Its twin 722-foot towers are more than just concrete and steel. They're designed to resemble the arc of a hockey stick swung for a slap shot, according to its architect, Erik Behrens.

Few towns are as hockey-mad as those the bridge connects, the Motor City and Windsor, Ontario. And while fans might debate the performance of the current Detroit Red Wings, there's one thing uniting both sides: the legacy of Gordie Howe, a man who spanned the border long before the bridge named after him.

"Mr. Hockey" was born in 1928 in Floral, Saskatchewan, and spent 26 seasons in the N.H.L., 25 with the Wings. An ambidextrous player, he racked up 801 goals and 1,850 points (records standing until another Canadian, Wayne Gretzky, came along). Surviving that long in a game famous for its raw physicality isn't easy, but consider that the "Gordie Howe Hat Trick" was named for him: a goal, an assist and a fight in a single game. Howe regularly praised Detroit and the affection his fans showed him.

Ultimately, dementia claimed Mr. Hockey. But his memory remains bright among fans in Detroit and throughout Canada, and two years after his 2016 death, work began on what would become the Gordie. The project took longer than expected — don't they all? — with overruns driving the cost to \$4.5 billion. But major construction had been completed by last February, and its opening appeared to be on the horizon.

The Detroit-Windsor border is the busiest commercial land crossing between the two nations — Canada being one of America's biggest trade partners, and the United States being the largest for our northern neighbor. The older links, a tunnel and a bridge, were increasingly hard pressed to handle the traffic. The auto industry, in particular, desperately sought a new bridge with additional customs booths and a more direct connection to Canada's highway network. (The aging Ambassador Bridge requires trucks to traverse slow-moving streets.)

Where little could stop Gordie Howe on the ice, the bridge named for him was unexpectedly slammed into the boards by Mr. Trump.

Trump is dragging the Gordie into his grudge match against America's northern neighbor.



CARLOS OSORIO/REUTERS

He declared the Gordie wouldn't open until Canada "treats the United States with the Fairness and Respect that we deserve."

Why target the Gordie Howe bridge? Mr. Trump doesn't seem to be much of a hockey fan — though it would surprise no one if he proclaimed his abilities on the ice. What we know is he's demanded Canada surrender sovereignty to become the 51st state. Failing that, he's hammered our longstanding ally with tariffs on autos, auto parts, steel and other goods.

Reality doesn't always matter for Mr. Trump. A closer look reveals that Canada gave the United States a sweetheart deal on the Gordie by funding the entire project. It would take about 50 years for Canada to be repaid through toll revenues.

Another bridge may have been on the president's mind. Last winter, Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick met with Matthew Moroun, whose family owns the Ambassador Bridge. The old span had, for nearly a century, a near monopoly on truck traffic. But it's widely expected the Morouns will lose reve-

nues to the new span, where drivers will pay less in tolls than they do on the Ambassador. Surely there could be no connection between the delay and the fact that Mr. Moroun donated \$1 million to the MAGA Inc. super PAC in January.

Under intense pressure from Democrats, as well as the auto industry, Mr. Trump pulled another TACO (Trump always chickens out). To save face he announced his usual deal, insisting, "We changed the terms" and "America now gets 50 percent of the Profit." In reality, Gregor Robertson, Canada's housing and infrastructure minister, told reporters, "We don't anticipate that being very much given all of the costs at the front end with this bridge in the initial years of operating."

Mr. Trump's comments about the new deal came just days after he said on social media he would impose tariffs to punish Canada for the audacity of allowing wildfire smoke to cross the border.

Canadians are slow to get worked up about anything but hockey. This time, they disin- vited America from a party to mark the

bridge opening. The best we could do was send Gov. Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan across the span in a Mustang convertible. No-body will be surprised if Canadians make it their preferred route in and out of the United States.

That is, if they continue to visit the United States. Many Canadians have stopped drinking U.S. booze, switched to foreign alternatives for other products, such as meat and dairy, and resisted travel to their neighbor. In a recent study, the Canadian government found its citizens made 7.1 million fewer visits to the United States last year than they did in 2024, a roughly 25 percent decline. Related spending dropped more than \$2 billion, to around \$13 billion, a 15 percent decline.

The Gordie Howe International Bridge should be a shiny, binational buckle along the world's longest international border, and a monument to a great Canadian who loved Detroit. Sadly, Mr. Trump's attacks against Gordie Howe's homeland have now given Canadians less of a reason to take the bridge that honors him.

I Told My Patient She'd Never Go Home. I Was Wrong.

Daniela J. Lamas

A contributing Opinion writer and a pulmonary and critical care physician at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston.

I PERCHED at the side of my patient's bed to give her the devastating news: Her lungs were so scarred that she required the highest level of oxygen we could give without a breathing tube — a level available only in the hospital. And I did not believe that she would ever improve.

My patient, Linda LeBlanc, had three plastic ducks on her bedside table, and she played with one as we talked. She asked if there was any way she could go home. I told her I didn't think so. We had reviewed the images of her lungs. She had not responded to weeks of steroids; she probably never would.

She would die in one of two ways: Her lungs would worsen such that the high-flow oxygen was no longer enough, or she would decide that a life tethered to oxygen, short of breath and profoundly anxious, was no longer a life she wanted to live. In that case, we would take her off the oxygen and provide measures to keep her comfortable. No one would fault her for that decision, I said.

She said she would think about it. The next day, Ms. LeBlanc gave me one of her ducks to give to my 3-year-old daughter. It would leave the hospital, even if she never could.

I felt certain, based on my experience with similar patients, that the prognostic information I gave her was correct. But I was wrong. Her lungs did improve, and she went home a month later.

This should be a purely happy story. And I was truly glad that my patient went home, as she had so desperately wanted to. But part of me was left unsettled.

Because I realized I was functioning within a medical culture in which delivering a dire prognosis with certainty is seen as a positive and any softening feels like a failure. That thinking failed me and my patient that day. A generation ago, doctors didn't tell pa-

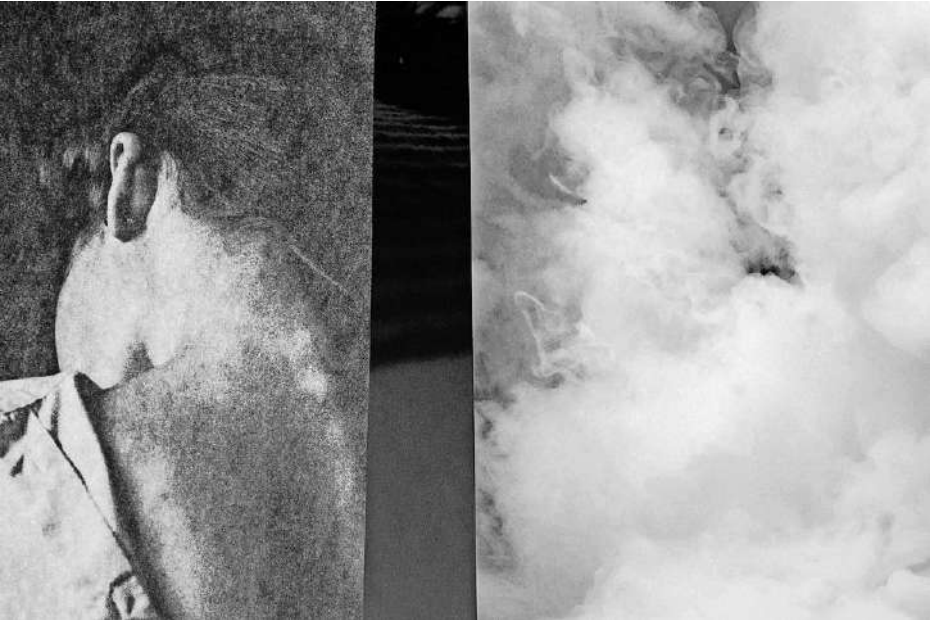


PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY SYDNEY ELLISON; SOURCE PHOTOGRAPHS BY LEVI STUTE, VIA UNSPLASH, AND KALLERNA, VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

tients they were dying. Patients ended up on ventilators they would have opted against. The architecture of modern palliative care was built to fix that and to teach doctors to have the tough conversations they'd once avoided.

The fix worked. But this correction comes with its own potential for harm. Doctors today are so afraid of protracting unnecessary suffering that we run the risk of being too certain, too soon.

In the intensive care unit, our most important procedures are conversations — the family meetings in which doctors discuss a patient's prognosis. There is a rhythm to these meetings. Early on, we describe a range of possible outcomes, often offering best- and worst-case scenarios. Later, we return with what we believe is a clearer sense of what is to come. But there is enormous variability in how

we do this. Some of us doctors are more dire. Others will hold out hope until a patient is actively dying, or until the care that we deliver looks more like harm.

I sometimes tell my trainees who accompany me in these meetings: We must be as certain as possible in what we tell patients and families, because what we say becomes what is true. If we tell family members that there is no chance that their loved one will live, then they will make decisions based on those words.

I carried that sense of responsibility into my conversations with Ms. LeBlanc and her family. I would not have told you at the time that I was overly dire. But perhaps a part of me wanted to offer Ms. LeBlanc a degree of certainty after weeks of limbo. I had been trained, like everyone of my generation, to fear false hope above all else. Ms. LeBlanc was intermittently short of

Doctors today run the risk of being too certain of dire outcomes.

breath, calm only with an intravenous drip of anti-anxiety medication as she waited for the inevitable. She gifted me another duck and then the third one, and I wondered if they were goodbyes. She did not speak in terms of hope; in fact, when she used the word once with me, she hastily walked it back. She was not hopeful that she would improve, she told me — simply that she would breathe more easily.

She accepted the constraints of her life in the hospital and tried to live within them. Her daughter brought her pizza and slushies. She asked to be taken outside. On an overcast day, the nurses brought her out, and she tilted her face up to the rain.

Days passed. Patients left. Others died. And then, her oxygen requirements began to improve. Plans were underway for her discharge to a rehab with the goal of getting home. She told me she had started to believe that she might see her cats again. I told her I thought that was possible, after all — that we had been wrong.

When I learned, recently, that Ms. LeBlanc had died soon after returning home, I wondered whether we had only prolonged the inevitable. But the time at home was meaningful, her daughter told me. Her mother saw her cats. She spent time in her place, with her things. That in itself was in a way miraculous.

It would be easy to treat her case as an outlier, a lucky exception that should not change how I practice. It would be just as easy, and arguably more damaging, to draw the opposite conclusion — that every patient should wait for improvement, however unlikely. Neither is right.

Her story asks me to tolerate uncertainty longer than is comfortable. The structures of the hospital resist this. So does the culture of medicine, with its pressure for answers, for plans, for clarity. But when we rush to provide certainty, we risk foreclosing possibilities we cannot yet see. If we are unwilling to wait, we deny our patients the chance to surprise us — and maybe to end up home again.

THE CONVERSATION | **FRANK BRUNI AND BRET STEPHENS**

Doesn't Anybody Want to Win This Thing?

Frank Bruni: I suppose it's only the latest sign of a morally berserk age, but while two ostensibly serious Republican senators — John Cornyn of Texas and Thom Tillis of North Carolina — just abandoned their unconvincing auditions for a new “Profiles in Courage” and blessed Todd Blanche's confirmation as attorney general, Washington's U.S. attorney, Jeanine Pirro, of all fruitcakes, earned her own chapter by truly tangling with President Trump over his self-serving claims of Reflecting Pool vandalism. Help me make sense of this, Bret.

Bret Stephens: I predicted a few weeks ago that Cornyn, at least, would vote to confirm Blanche, on the theory that the alternatives were all worse: Trump could keep Blanche in place as an acting A.G., further undermining the Senate's advise-and-consent function, or install someone even worse than Blanche. Paging Matt Gaetz.

As for Pirro dropping those absurd charges against a former Olympic athlete for supposedly vandalizing the Reflecting Pool — and telling Trump to his face that Doug Burgum, the interior secretary, was misleading him, as our news-side colleagues have reported — what can I say? Good for her. Somehow not surprising that what little courage there is in this administration comes from a woman.

Frank: A woman — and here's another thought I never expected to express — following in the intrepid footsteps of . . . Marjorie Taylor Greene. Trump corrupts and debases almost everything and everyone he draws within 500 feet of. Maybe Pirro and Greene are exceptions that prove the rule.

Bret: Here's my very stereotypical, grain-of-truth, feel-free-to-contradict-me observation on the proverbial battle of the sexes: Men tend to define themselves according to their proximity to power; women according to their independence from it.

Frank: I love that, Bret! And while people often indulge in rosy generalizations about women in power — pretty prognostications about more generous social welfare programs that ignore, say, Margaret Thatcher — I do think you're onto something.

Bret: My all-time favorite quote attributed to Thatcher: “Being powerful is like being a lady: If you have to tell people you are, you aren't.” Sorry, go on.

Frank: She's right. A true victory is one you needn't gloat about, and a person with real confidence isn't flexing all the time. What, then, to make of Abdul El-Sayed? In the homestretch of his campaign, he posted a biceps-forward video of himself huffing triumphantly up a gym climbing wall. He hung out poolside in Detroit with Hasan Piker, beefcake bros defiantly reuniting despite all the legit pushback to their alliance. El-Sayed showed a Politico reporter his Whoop fitness app as proof of how utterly serene he was as voters headed to the polls. Look, Ma, no sweat! I don't understand the strategy of that. And I don't think we'd accept anything analogous from a female politician.

Bret: El-Sayed may have beat Haley Stevens, his centrist opponent in Michigan's Democratic Senate primary, but he did so by a much, much smaller margin than most of the polls suggested. It makes me wonder whether a lot of voters didn't sour on him precisely because of the Macho Man affect. Of course, I would have preferred if they had soured on him for better reasons, like his D.S.A.-inspired pie-in-the-sky platform, or the polling evidence that he is much less likely than Stevens to defeat Mike Rogers, his Republican opponent, in November, or the fact that he scares the hell out of a lot of reliably Democratic Jewish voters.

Frank: This contest — or, at least, the coverage of it — has driven me crazy, because it doesn't yield as tidily and definitively to morals about the moment or the Democratic Party as many analysts want it to. Apart from an arrogance that he hid less and less well as his polling numbers climbed higher and higher, El-Sayed was a much, much better communicator than Stevens — smoother, more forceful, more charismatic. After all, he'd hosted a Crooked Media podcast for more than five years.

He also made one of the most focused, succinct and relatable pitches for Medicare for all that I've heard, and he did so at a time of peak voter anxiety about health insurance. I do think his success says a lot about Democratic voters and Israel. But that's not the whole story here.

Bret: Medicare for all would be a fiscally ruinous measure, costing roughly \$30 trillion over 10 years, according to the non-partisan Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget. Add up the wealth of all of America's billionaires, and you don't get close to covering that sum, which means the program would inevitably entail steep tax increases for the middle class, not to mention an end to most private medical insurance.

The idea might sell well with young progressives but no so well with middle-income America. El-Sayed also wants to abolish ICE, rather than rein it in sharply and sensibly reform it, which is another brainstorm that sounds good to left-liberal ears but ignores the fact that Donald Trump is president this time around in large part on account of the Biden administration's laxness on immigration enforcement.

I know the Democratic instinct is to just do the opposite of whatever MAGA believes, but a successful party also needs to learn why its opponents were able to defeat them.

Frank: That's truer in theory than in practice. Trump and Republicans prevailed in 2024 not because they humbly heeded the lessons of their comeuppances in 2018 and 2020 but because Democrats, back in the driver's seat, screwed up so badly — when it came to immigration, to selling the party's economic initiatives to voters, to reassuring them that they fully recognized their financial struggles, to confronting President Biden's decline in an honest way

that didn't leave everyone scrambling after that June 2024 debate.

Bret: True. And by governing well to the left of what Biden promised when he ran in 2020, both by who he was and how he campaigned.

Frank: I agree that Medicare for all is a risky and quite possibly wrongheaded policy. But I'm not sure how many middle-income Americans are familiar enough with the details of it to reject it along the lines you lay out. I paid a lot of attention in recent weeks to what Michigan voters were telling journalists and saying in focus groups. Many, many voters act on impressions more than detailed information. And their impression was that El-Sayed was genuinely plugged into their needs and fears. Medicare for all was as much an emblem of that as it was a discrete prescription.

Bret: I think that's probably right. But there's another issue with El-Sayed that, I suspect, will haunt him and other progressives, like Zohran Mamdani, whose message is that America is too often a nation of bigotry and intolerance: Their own biographies contradict that narrative.

In El-Sayed's case, he is the son of Egyptian immigrants who, after his parents' divorce and second marriages, became the stepgrandson of white Presbyterian deacons and went on to become his class's commencement speaker at the University of Michigan, a Rhodes scholar, a public

player liked to say: You cannot be serious.

Frank: “You cannot be serious” is the tagline, the mantra, the epigraph of the Trump era, Bret.

Bret: OK, so tell me about this cooking show. I assume the recipes include bear ragout, raccoon au poivre, skunk tartare, not to mention rattlesnake ratatouille?

Frank: Don't forget the whale bouillabaisse.

Here's the skinny: In an administration that has erased any and all distinctions between government work, reality television and social media marketing, our secretary of health has taken a break from vilifying vaccines to inaugurate “The Real Food Show,” on YouTube. He'll be traveling the country to stand stiffly in kitchens with hapless chefs who make meals that conform to the newly inverted food pyramid. In the first episode, he clumsily assists in the construction of salmon cakes that don't look remotely appetizing. Ina Garten, he's not.

Bret: Move over, Barefoot Contessa. Hello, Brain-Eaten Quack.

Frank: Or Bare-Chested Charlatan. I should note that the transportation secretary, Sean Duffy, has spent much of the past year shooting a YouTube series called “The Great American Road Trip,” which hasn't been released yet but will apparently show him, his wife and their nine children visiting national parks, landmarks and tourist sites in 10 states and Washington, D.C. Nice



EVELYN FREJA/CONNECTED ARCHIVES

Democrats and Republicans are both playing with fire.

health official in the state and now, in his early 40s, a potential U.S. senator. If anything affirms the bigheartedness of America, it's him. Progressives need to say this forthrightly, rather than dilate on what a racist, inequitable country we supposedly are.

Frank: I file this under the heading of most politicians assume voters can't hold two thoughts in their heads at once, so they can't see an El-Sayed or a Mamdani as both an affirmation of this country's extraordinary promise and a credible voice for the underprivileged and the marginalized. To be fair, El-Sayed and Mamdani don't lie about or deny their biographies, and El-Sayed does at times connect himself to the American dream. But I agree that they don't emphasize the positive takeaways from their own success as much as they should, to round out the picture of America and do full justice to the American story.

But you've once again tugged me and readers toward complaints about Democrats and the left. Republicans and the right have more to answer for right now, including — and here again we enter the realm of the surreal — Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s new cooking show.

Bret: What? As my favorite ex-tennis

Where Gen Z Finds Meaning in Life

TO THE EDITOR:

Re “Gen Z Fell Out of Love With Work. It's Easy to See Why,” by Emi Nietfeld (Opinion guest essay, July 26):

As a Gen Z student preparing to enter the work force, I believe that personal ambition is far more compelling than blindly pursuing the corporate grind. Recently, while waiting in line for a concert, I struck up a conversation with a stranger who told me about a story he was writing — about a man building a piano in postapocalyptic America. I soon joined his Wednesday night “drunk writing group,” where I discovered that my greatest sense of fulfillment comes from following creative impulses.

It is passion, not rote progress, that guides our paths forward. One of my friends traveled to Ukraine to serve as a drone pilot. Another reports from the Middle East. A third spends weekends backstage interviewing underground rap artists. None of them followed a conventional script, yet each is building a career around a genuine curiosity.

To me, those acts of curiosity constitute ambition. Rather than define ourselves by external markers of success, we increasingly define success by whether our work reflects our authentic selves.

Ambition hasn't disappeared. It has simply become harder to measure.

JAYNA ROHSLAU, BROOKLYN

TO THE EDITOR:

As a millennial who immigrated to the United States from China nearly 20 years ago, I was surprised — and proud — to realize that the way I now think about life aligns more closely with Gen Z's sentiments than with my own generation's.

I'm 43 years old and have spent most of my adult life in a capitalist society that is almost the opposite of the Communist system in which I grew up. Ironically, the values instilled in me as a young person in China — working hard, pursuing prestige and valuing titles and status — closely resemble the characteristics the author attributes to millennials.

Over the past decade, working at two U.S. institutions exposed me to bureaucratic systems, toxic workplace cultures and forms of microaggression. My strong work ethic often became something others took advantage of. Instead of feeling valued, I felt exploited — and eventually burned out.

That experience forced me to ask what I truly wanted out of life, rather than what looked impressive on paper. Moving here from China, earning a doctorate and working at prestigious institutions are accomplishments I'm grateful for, but they are no longer how I define success.

Today, I value flexibility, autonomy, meaningful work and financial security over prestige and job titles. Experience, more than what generation I belong to, has reshaped what success means to me.

TINGTING REID
CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

TO THE EDITOR:

As a baby boomer who has worked many jobs that I was not in love with, I realized that the only way to become a self-sufficient adult was to work and earn enough money to live on. I found over the years that working, often at jobs that could be boring or demeaning, led to jobs that were more fulfilling.

I bought a house in 1983, when the mortgage interest rate was about 13 percent. As a woman with an advanced college degree, I have worked at jobs where all they wanted to know was how fast I could type. But I worked, and kept working.

I raised three children when day care took over half of my salary and working mothers were suspected of putting their own needs ahead of their children's. Fortunately, I am financially comfortable now because as an adult I never wanted to rely on my parents for the roof over my head. I hope that this generation will realize that work, no matter what kind, will lead to self-sufficiency and self-respect.

ELYSE COLE
CARLSBAD, CALIF.

TO THE EDITOR:

Emi Nietfeld finds despair and optimism in her analysis of Gen Z, but I think she attempts a problematic translation by casting today's generation in its predecessors' terms.

Ms. Nietfeld sees hope in Gen Z members' acceptance of their fate and admires their “Zen-like ability to enjoy today in spite of tomorrow.” And in the \$600,000 salary they want to feel financially secure she finds “sky-high expectations.”

I see neither enjoyment nor expectation; I see their rude awakening from the American dream, recognizing that it was never meant for them. I don't think Gen Z fell out of love with work — they were never really offered a chance to love it.

I find it odd that we want them to love whatever hand-me-downs we leave them, and on whatever terms. Let's be wary of imposing our paradigms onto the lives of people so different from us, no matter how nostalgically satisfying it is.

Ms. Nietfeld concludes: “I wish they understood how the dream itself illuminated the path a few feet ahead of me, until I stood on solid ground.” Maybe that's what they understand about us, and they're just not interested.

THOMAS DIPIERO, PARIS

TO THE EDITOR:

It's so simple. Why would I dream of labor? I am 26 years old, and I am about to earn my master's degree from an Ivy League university. Despite that, I know there's no guarantee of a return on investment.

The goals I have for my life are relatively simple: Find a career I like and do well in it, get married, have kids and buy a house. But of course, in order to have those things, you need a lot of money.

The average wedding in the United States costs around \$36,000, a childbirth can cost \$40,000, and a house or an apartment can cost anywhere from hundreds of thousands to millions. It's hard to dream of a corporate career when the only people you see hitting those milestones are influencers who post their makeup routines and clothing hauls.

KATIE XUE, NEW YORK

TO THE EDITOR:

As a Gen X-er, I remember the laments about how lazy and disconnected my generation was when we were in our 20s. They called us slackers — there was even a popular movie of the same name.

The transition between childhood and adulthood is a difficult and confusing time, when we are full of wants and enthusiasms of all kinds — at the beginning of the choices that narrow our world. It will be fine.

People find their callings and drivers, growing confident in employment as they build real-world skills. Fashionable discontent and ennui give way when there is something to care about or invest in, whether it is work, family or a side quest.

The kids will be all right.

OLIVIA FOX
NOVI, MICH.

Maligning Fauci

TO THE EDITOR:

Re “Senate Committee Votes to Hold Fauci in Contempt of Congress” (news article, nytimes.com, Aug. 6):

Of all the outrageous things that have happened in President Trump's second term, this is one of the worst. The pictures of the smug, self-righteous Republican senators parading their outrage as they malign Dr. Anthony Fauci summarize everything wrong with our country today.

The president can flout the law with impunity, while these senators, hoping to score points with him, and presumably with their voters, choose to pursue Dr. Fauci on wild charges.

It seems that everything that is actually good is called bad, and everyone who is actually a hero is called a criminal.

What is wrong with our country? When will American voters wake up from this nightmare and elect a responsible government, one that actually represents us and embodies the ideals of our Constitution?

TIM SHAW
CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

The Times welcomes letters from readers. Letters must include the writer's name, address and telephone number. Those selected may be edited, and shortened to fit allotted space. Email: letters@nytimes.com

Sydney Towle, Who Chronicled Her Cancer on TikTok, Dies at 26

From Page A1

Meshing the realities of a deadly disease with a thirst for life, she brought her large following with her as she juggled illness and enriching experiences. She had surgery to remove her gall bladder and part of her liver — and once she got the OK from a doctor, took off for a solo adventure in Europe. Through it all, she recorded and posted.

Her focus as an influencer shifted to persuading a large audience to reconsider the culture's assumptions about people with serious illnesses.

“Syd had a keen sense of how sharing her life could help others, and she used that to promote understanding of young adults facing cancer, the importance of research funding and the beauty of living life in the moment,” Melinda Bachini, the chief patient officer of the Cholangiocarcinoma Foundation, said in an interview.

In a video Ms. Towle posted last year, she dances in her apartment with a caption splayed across the screen: “Go get a pint of Ben and Jerry’s, watch your favorite movie, remember that life is good and bad things happen sometimes but that doesn’t make it a bad life.”

In her, the internet had a new avatar of an emerging face of cancer: younger than expected; feeling reasonably upbeat despite a dire diagnosis; able and eager to have normal life experiences between treatments and hospitalizations.

More than many others on “CancerTok,” Ms. Towle managed to blend lifestyle content (“get ready with me” and fashion “haul” videos) with dispatches from the chemo bay, where she might pose with an IV pole and a vomit bag against the thump of a trending hip-hop song.

But she also posted poignant monologues about the toll of fighting for your life at the very time that most of your peers are building theirs. Dating, she explained in a melancholy post, was out of reach.

“How do you make small talk about what you’ve been up to,” she said in one video, “when what you’ve been up to is going to chemotherapy?”

In the fall of 2024, after a recurrence of the cancer in her liver, Ms. Towle moved to New York City for treatment at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHELLE V. AGINS/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Sydney Towle, in 2025, was diagnosed with bile duct cancer soon after graduating from Dartmouth. She began posting videos to social media chronicling her journey. Despite being accosted by online trolls, Ms. Towle helped show how young adults face cancer.



She noted the occasion with a video showing herself cheerfully dancing on a city street, as Taylor Swift’s “Welcome to New York” played.

But just as Ms. Towle was relocating, a band of online trolls convened on Reddit with the express purpose of skeptically dissecting her online posts — her words, mood, clothing, hair and signs of illness.

“Does something feel off to you about Syd Towle’s cancer story?” one of the most prolific posters wrote.

“We have receipts, medical analysis, fact-checking and discussions,” the anonymous poster added, urging people to “join the conversation and tell us how you found us and why you may have doubts.”

Intent on exposing what they said was likely a giant fraud, the Reddit posters questioned the

Challenging views on how people with serious illnesses should look and live.

medical details that Ms. Towle shared online, finding bogus “evidence” of a conspiracy and mocking her every move. Some reached out to the brands she had deals with to urge them to drop her. Someone using an anonymous email account even messaged her medical providers.

“I literally feel like punching her in the face,” wrote one commenter.

Ms. Towle was tormented by the accusations and harassment, but never publicly engaged with the conspiracy theorists. Instead, she continued to make the videos that had become her emotional lifeline.

Her story, including an account of the barrage of online abuse, was chronicled in a front-page article in The New York Times in May 2025. “I’m sorry that they are so angry that living with cancer can look different than they think it should,” she said.

Sydney Elizabeth Towle was born on Nov. 15, 1999, in Newburyport, Mass., to Elizabeth Morrow and Philip Towle, and grew up in Hobe Sound, Fla.

She majored in government and environmental studies at Dartmouth, and graduated in 2022.

Her father died in 2016. In addition to her mother, she is survived by a brother, Austin.

“She put herself in front of the camera at the most difficult time in her life and told people that it’s OK not be OK,” her brother said in an interview. “As she said so many times, ‘You’ve got to just keep swimming.’”

Even when her cancer recurrence spurred a move to the East Coast, she managed to find the bright side. “I’ve always wanted to live in New York City,” she said in a video, “and life is short, as I’m constantly reminded.”

Though heavy-hearted about leaving the friends she had made in Los Angeles, she identified the gift in that sadness.

“I was just thinking,” she said, “about that quote: ‘How lucky am I to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard.’”

Vicki Wickham, 87, Force Behind Pop Music Who Became a Manager

By ALLYSON McCABE

Vicki Wickham, a behind-the-scenes force in popular music who helped oversee the influential British television showcase “Ready Steady Go!” and managed artists including the vocal trio LaBelle and the singer Dusty Springfield, died on July 31 in the Bronx. She was 87.

Her death, in a hospice facility, was confirmed by Tristram Penna, her friend and collaborator.

Raised on a farm in south-central England and educated at a boarding school, Ms. Wickham later said she immediately set out for London after graduating at 16 in the hope of doing all she could to avoid a secretarial job.

Admittedly naïve about music — she confessed to being late to the Beatles craze — she first made

and the Marquee.

Missed cues and technical glitches were common, but the sense of spontaneity was the point — captured by the roving lenses of the cameras, which broadcast a real-time revolution in music, fashion, youth and attitude.

Ms. Springfield, who performed on the show’s first episode and became a recurring musical guest and presenter, forged a close friendship with Ms. Wickham and introduced her to songs by Black American artists that weren’t yet played on British radio.

Their shared passion for the music led to Ms. Springfield’s hosting a special Motown-themed episode in 1965. The performers included the Supremes, Martha and the Vandellas, Smokey Robinson and the Miracles and “Little” Stevie Wonder.

In 2010, Ms. Wickham told The Express on Sunday, a British publication, that the show sometimes received a vicious response when they invited Black singers.

“I was horrified that people would call up,” she said. “Why not just switch off?”

To interviewers, she was long a fount of earthy anecdotes about some of the guests: Van Morrison showing up tardy and arrogant, Chuck Berry demanding payment in cash and David Ruffin of the Temptations providing her with her first joint.

“I remember coughing myself silly and him laughing at me,” she said.

Sex was, of course, rampant, she recalled, even if people were quiet about the details. She did say that the relationship between herself and Ms. Springfield — they were both gay — was deep but platonic.

“We really were just mates,” she told The Express on Sunday in 2000, “and because of that she could tell me about her affairs and I could tell her about mine.”

With the record producer Simon Napier-Bell, Ms. Wickham wrote the lyrics for Ms. Springfield’s 1966 hit “You Don’t Have to Say You Love Me,” an English-language version of the Italian song “Io Che Non Vivo (Senza Te).”

Ms. Wickham went on to produce concerts with the Beatles



EVENING STANDARD/HULTON ARCHIVE, VIA GETTY IMAGES

Vicki Wickham, above, in 1965, below, in 2005 and, right, with Lulu, the Scottish singer, on “Ready Steady Go!” “Vicki always made people feel she was a soft touch,” one collaborator said. “But underneath she was tough as nails and got things done.”



RODGER CUMMINS/FAIRFAX MEDIA, VIA GETTY IMAGES

manager Brian Epstein at the Saville Theater, including an appearance by an up-and-coming guitarist named Jimi Hendrix.

She moved to New York in 1970 and, with a colleague, Nancy Lewis, helped establish and run the American office of the London-based Track Records. She also signed on to manage Patti LaBelle and the Blue Belles, who had been musical guests on “Ready Steady Go!”

Ms. Wickham soon persuaded the group — Ms. LaBelle along with Sarah Dash and Nona Hendryx — to ditch the identical gowns, gloves and wigs that had hemmed them in as a “girl group.”

She also suggested a new name for them — simply LaBelle — to reflect a change in sound and direction.

In 1971, the trio spent six months in London immersing themselves in funk, glam and rock before reintroducing themselves on their debut album, “Labelle,” which was produced by Ms. Wickham and Kit Lambert, a founder of Track Records and a manager of the Who.

In addition to writing songs that often addressed social and political issues, LaBelle recorded wildly inventive interpretations of hits by the Rolling Stones, the Who and Cat Stevens.



TONY GALE/PICTORIAL PRESS LTD, VIA ALAMY

The group’s 1974 single “Lady Marmalade,” written by Bob Crewe and Kenny Nolan, went to the top of the Billboard Hot 100 chart. LaBelle performed at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York and, in 1975, appeared on the cover of Rolling Stone; both achievements were firsts for a Black female musical group.

After LaBelle broke up in 1976, Ms. Wickham managed the adventurous solo career of Ms. Hendryx, as well as other artists, including the Canadian new wave band Rough Trade, whose 1981 song “High School Confidential” became Canada’s first explicitly lesbian-themed hit.

Ms. Wickham also helped engineer the comeback of Ms. Springfield, who had spent years in and out of rehab for drug addictions. She facilitated a collaboration between Ms. Springfield and the English duo the Pet Shop Boys on the hit song “What Have I Done to Deserve This?” in 1987 and on her album “Reputation” in 1990.

“Vicki always made people feel she was a soft touch,” Mr. Napier-Bell, the producer and her collaborator, said in an interview. “But underneath she was tough as nails and got things done.”

Vicki Heather Wickham, an only child, was born in April 1939 in rural Newbury, about 60 miles west of London, and grew up in nearby Inkpen as an upper-middle-class farmer’s daughter; her mother had been a nurse. (Her exact date of birth was not immediately available.)

She attended a boarding school in the county of Berkshire and then left for London, spending the next few years variously employed as an assistant illustrating children’s books, a movie-theater usher, a coffee-shop worker bus- ing tables, and a cleaner scrubbing office floors. Eventually she landed a job as an assistant to

Charles Chilton, a BBC producer who specialized in serialized radio programs.

In 1962, a friend introduced her to Elkan Allan, an executive with the independent TV channel Associated-Rediffusion who was creating a pilot episode of “Ready Steady Go!” Though Mr. Allan initially hired her as a secretary, he promised that if the show was given the green light, she would have a creative role. He made good on that promise.

Ms. Wickham rapidly made up for her modest base of musical knowledge — which she often described as limited to Gilbert and Sullivan and “South Pacific” — by scouring weekly music papers, listening to records by the armful and training herself to spot talent.

In her later years, she managed artists such as Morrissey, Marc Almond and Holly Johnson, the former frontman for Frankie Goes to Hollywood. With the journalist Penny Valentine, she wrote an authorized biography of Ms. Springfield, “Dancing With Demons,” published in 2000, a year after the singer’s death from cancer. Ms. Wickham also produced BBC radio documentaries about Nina Simone, Whitney Houston, George Michael and other singers.

Ms. Wickham is survived by Ms. Hendryx, her partner of almost 60 years.

Recalling the start of her career to the Guardian in 1999, Ms. Wickham was self-deprecating. “It was absolutely easy for women to get ahead in music then,” she said.

“We were all learning on our feet, and it didn’t matter what sex you were,” she added. “I’m more amazed it happened to someone who’s not particularly fantastic-looking and not musical, though I do have musical instincts. I never had any idea what I wanted to do, so I was just in the right place at the right time.”

her mark when a friend introduced her to a television executive in 1962. He was about to create a youth-oriented showcase for pop music, and she jumped at an offer to help produce, write scripts and book guests.

The show, “Ready Steady Go!,” began airing in 1963, and Ms. Wickham was a vital part of the operation during its three-year run. She was instrumental in booking the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Kinks and Cilla Black, and in making the program a crucial forum for introducing British audiences to Black American pop singers and musicians like Tina Turner, Marvin Gaye and Otis Redding.

Rather than lip-syncing — as they did on a rival show, “Top of the Pops,” which began airing in 1964 — artists on “Ready Steady Go!” performed live in the studio, within reach of young, stylish dancers Ms. Wickham culled from clubs like the Orchid, the Fender

She was instrumental in booking for TV the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and the Kinks.

3 ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

A San Francisco shop billed as the world’s first to be run by A.I. finds the bot is really friendly, but not very smart.



4 MEDIA

Representative Max Miller of Ohio took to CNN to try to rebut abuse allegations that threaten his re-election.



9 SPORTS

The 76ers have to figure out the best way to incorporate LeBron James, a 41-year-old superstar, into their attack.

Business

The New York Times



SISI YU

Apple’s Siri Got a New Brain

Brian X. Chen
TECH FIX

For the last 15 years, talking to Siri, Apple’s virtual assistant on iPhones, felt profoundly uncool. Though it performed a few basic tasks, like adding calendar appointments and setting timers, Siri was so subpar that asking it for help was often counterproductive.

So when Apple announced in June that a “profoundly more capable” Siri powered by Google’s artificial intelligence would arrive this year, I wondered: Will we finally see people talking to Siri on the

An A.I. upgrade has transformed the virtual assistant into a modern chatbot. Here are five prompts to help you get acclimated.

train, on the streets, in the office?

That’s an important question because mainstream adoption of the new version of the Apple assistant, Siri AI, could be a litmus test for A.I.’s effect on consumer technology in the coming years.

The people most bullish about A.I., including tech executives like Sam Altman of OpenAI and Satya Nadella of Microsoft, believe it will become more important than operating systems and apps. They envision a future where people talk to A.I. assistants to control their devices. In theory, the company with the most popular “agent” (techie speak for assistant) could win the A.I. race that drives the future of computing.

A more moderate view — the approach Apple is taking with Siri AI — is that chatbots could simply be another tool in an operating system, like many other features and apps, that people can use or ignore.

To get to know the new Siri, I installed an early version of Apple’s next operating system, iOS 27, which includes Siri AI, on my iPhone and prodded the Apple assistant with requests for about six weeks.

My early impressions were that Siri AI is a big improvement from the old-school Apple assistant (frankly, that’s a low bar), but it hasn’t fundamentally changed the way I use the iPhone. I still mostly scroll

CONTINUED ON PAGE B3

China Robots Open Arms To Investors

By STEVE LOHR and XINYUN WU

SEOUL — Unitree Robotics may be little known outside China. Its robots are not. Millions around the world have watched videos of the company’s machines carrying out remarkable feats that seem almost superhuman.

During China’s nationally televised Lunar New Year celebration, a troupe of Unitree humanoid robots performed an elaborate kung fu routine, scaling walls, executing back flips and wielding swords.

Now the company is taking its biggest step yet: an initial public offering on the Shanghai Stock Exchange. On Thursday, Unitree priced its shares at the equivalent of around \$22, seeking to raise about \$900 million in a deal valuing it at about \$9 billion.

The listing comes at a pivotal moment for the humanoid robot industry. Investors are betting that machines built to look and

CONTINUED ON PAGE B3

Cyclospora Scare Is Boon for Local Lettuce

By JULIE CRESWELL

Oliver’s Produce, a small family-owned farm and market in upstate New York, sold 700 heads of lettuce last July. This July, as an outbreak of cyclosporiasis scared people off from leafy greens at chain restaurants and grocery stores, sales more than doubled, to 1,500 heads.

“We actually sold out last Friday, ahead of the weekend,” said Sawyer Oliver, part of the husband-and-wife team that owns the farm.

Sales of prepackaged salads in grocery and other retailers dropped more than 20 percent in mid-July from a month earlier, according to Nielsen IQ, a consumer research firm. Instead, more consumers are turning to local produce stands, farmers’ markets and even greenhouse-grown produce in the belief that romaine, spinach and butter lettuce are safer than produce grown in large industrial farms.

Ms. Oliver was managing the sudden surge in demand this week, dealing with calls from customers disappointed they couldn’t get their hands on leafy greens and local restaurants frantically scrambling for supplies.

CONTINUED ON PAGE B4



AMIR HAMJA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A farmers’ market in New York City’s Union Square this week. Doubts about lettuce at grocery chains have many consumers shifting shopping habits.

Despite Data, Bessent Says Rising Wealth Gap Is ‘Over’

By ALAN RAPPEPORT

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent downplayed the impact of inflation on lower-income Americans, declaring this week that the “K-shaped” economy — shorthand for the divergent fortunes of the rich and poor — is a thing of the past.

The comments came at a moment when consumer sentiment remains low and voters continue to give President Trump negative marks on his handling of the economy. With midterm elections in just three months, Mr. Bessent has continually tried to talk up the economy. But despite promises of lower prices, the U.S. has continued to confront inflationary pressures that have been amplified by tariffs and the war in Iran, which has increased the cost of gasoline.

Mr. Bessent suggested that those economic concerns are overblown.

“I got sick of hearing about this K-shaped economy,” Mr. Bessent said on CNBC on Tuesday. “I can say here definitively, the K-shaped economy is over.”

The Treasury secretary said

that the economy is now no longer K-shaped but is forming the letter “C” — with wage gains among the bottom quarter of earners starting to outpace gains among the top fourth of earners.

Dismissing downbeat consumer sentiment as a function of misinformation about the economy, Mr. Bessent said that Americans would soon start experiencing relief as a result of the tax cuts that Republicans enacted last year, a message he and other administration officials have been delivering for months.

The Treasury Department did not respond to a request for comment explaining which set of wage data Mr. Bessent was referring to. However, the U.S. economy has for years confronted historically high levels of wealth inequality.

CONTINUED ON PAGE B4

The Treasury chief dismisses inflation’s blow to lower earners.

The Digest

ECONOMY

U.S. Workers See Drop In Their Share of G.D.P.

U.S. workers again saw their slice of the American economy slide to a record low in the second quarter amid an ongoing productivity boom that is producing output gains that are outpacing wage growth, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported on Thursday.

The so-called labor share of nominal gross domestic product, which the B.L.S. defines as the percentage of output that accrues to workers in the form of compensation, fell to 52.9 percent in the second quarter from 53.7 percent in the first quarter.

That was the lowest since the series began in 1947, the B.L.S. said as it reported stronger-than-expected growth in second-quarter productivity.

The labor share has been falling for decades, driven by forces such as the diminishing breadth and power of organized labor and globalization that has shifted relatively high-paying manufacturing jobs to low-cost overseas production centers. *REUTERS*

COMESTIBLES

Kellogg Cereals to Veer From Synthetic Colors

WK Kellogg said Thursday that it will remove artificial colors from all its cereals by the end of this year. The change comes a year ahead of schedule. Kellogg said last August that it would remove synthetic dyes from its cereals by the end of 2027.

But the company said Thursday it has identified fruit- and vegetable-based juices that will give cereals like Froot Loops and Apple Jacks their distinctive colors. The company said it has also invested in equipment that will allow it to transition to natural colors.

The company said it is also removing BHT, an artificial preservative, from the small number



TONY CENICOLA/THE NEW YORK TIMES

of cereals that still contain it.

“More and more consumers are looking for foods made with simple, recognizable ingredients and we are proud to meet those expectations even sooner than planned,” Kellogg’s chief growth officer, Doug VanDeVelde, said. *ASSOCIATED PRESS*

EARNINGS

Keurig Dr Pepper Stands On Forecast Despite Profit

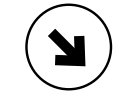
Keurig Dr Pepper on Thursday left its annual forecasts unchanged after beating analysts’ estimates for second-quarter sales and profit, helped by strength in its sodas and energy drinks portfolios, even as it navigates weakness in its coffee business.

The better-than-expected results come as Keurig Dr Pepper works to reshape its business fol-

lowing its \$18 billion acquisition of Dutch coffee and tea maker JDE Peet’s in April and prepares to separate its coffee and beverage operations into two U.S.-listed public companies.

Shares of the Dr Pepper soda maker jumped 6 percent in early trading. The stock has gained nearly 10 percent this year.

The chief executive, Tim Cofer, said the company remained on track to meet its 2026 financial and operational targets and was continuing preparations for its planned separation in early 2027. *REUTERS*



S&P 500 INDEX

–0.2%

7,709.96



DOW JONES INDUSTRIALS

–0.9%

53,885.10



NASDAQ COMPOSITE INDEX

–0.1%

26,348.35



10-YEAR TREASURY YIELD

4.67%

+0.049 points



CRUDE OIL (U.S.)

\$77.29

+\$2.07



GOLD (N.Y.)

\$4,299.60

–\$5.60

Stocks & Bonds

Markets Tick Lower as Oil Rises and Profit Reports Roll In

By The Associated Press

Stocks edged further away from their recent records on Thursday as Wall Street faced pressure from rising oil prices and mixed company earnings.

Wall Street opened the week soaring higher and notching records, but has calmed over the last two days. Markets are dealing with uncertainties over the continuing U.S. war with Iran and its impact on inflation. Companies from a variety of sectors reported their latest financial results, adding to an already busy round of corporate earnings.

The S&P 500 fell 13.59 points, or 0.2 percent. It pulled further away from its record set on Tuesday, though the index is still solidly on track to notch weekly gains.

The Dow Jones industrial average fell 464.02 points, or 0.9 percent. The Nasdaq composite fell 15.09 points, or 0.1 percent.

Both the Dow and Nasdaq are also heading into Friday on track for solid weekly gains.

“August is off to an extremely strong start, but there is still plenty of August left to go, and August is typically a volatile month for stocks,” said Clark Bellin, president and chief investment officer at Bellwether Wealth, in a research note.

Warner Bros. Discovery rose 1.7 percent after reporting earnings that came in ahead of what investors were expecting. Molson Coors rose 1.3 percent after also reporting encouraging financial results.

On the losing end, Honeywell Aerospace fell 23.2 percent after turning in results that fell well short of forecasts. AppLovin slumped 19.7 percent after it reported mixed financial results for its most recent quarter.

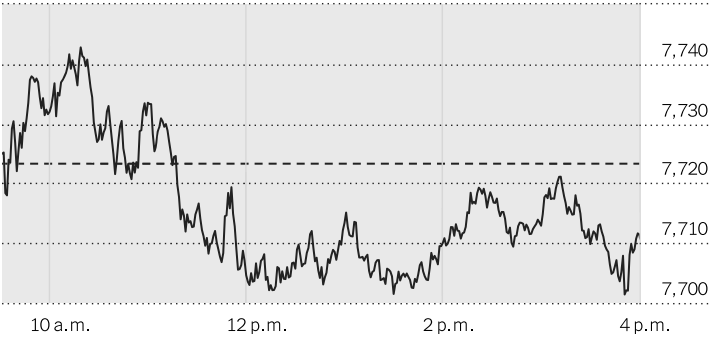
Strong overall profits from companies has helped allay concerns on Wall Street about the market being overpriced. Roughly 85 percent of companies in the S&P 500 have reported their results, and overall earnings growth for the period is shaping up to be the strongest since 2021.

Outside of earnings, SpaceX

The S&P 500 Index

Position of the S&P 500 index at 1-minute intervals on Thursday

-- Previous Close: 7,723.55



Source: FactSet

THE NEW YORKTIMES

rose 6.1 percent. More than 911 million SpaceX shares held by early investors and employees became eligible for sale on Thursday as a lockup period for the stock expired. That is more than double the shares that were initially offered to the public for sale during the initial public offering for Elon Musk’s company. SpaceX jumped as high as \$225 a share after its market debut in June, but has since slumped below its initial \$135 offering price. The stock is currently trading around \$115.

Oil prices gained ground as uncertainty remained over the U.S. war with Iran that has stifled the global flow of oil. The price of Brent crude, the international standard, rose 3.8 percent to \$82.49.

Iran has said that it is close to a deal with Oman for reopening the Strait of Hormuz. President Trump has also said a deal is close, but the conflict has had many turns over the last five months.

A fifth of the world’s traded oil and natural gas once passed through the Strait of Hormuz. Oil prices surged as high as \$113 during the conflict and higher prices have added more heat to inflation by raising the price of gasoline and raising costs for shipping.

The rate of inflation is stuck

above 3 percent and higher costs have been squeezing businesses and households, while threatening to crimp broader economic growth. The U.S. economy expanded at a sluggish 1.5 percent pace during the second quarter. Households are still spending and the jobs market remains resilient, but worries linger for both areas of the economy.

Higher gas prices and added costs for shipping goods could prompt households to shift more spending toward necessities. That could hurt businesses focusing on nonessential items and services for many people, such as travel and entertainment.

Employment remains strong, but growth has been easing. A weekly report on Thursday showed that the number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits rose last week, though layoffs remain in the historically healthy range of the past few years.

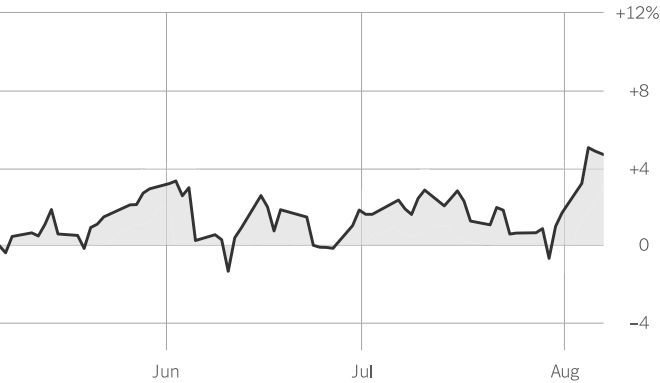
NEWSLETTER: DEALBOOK

DealBook helps you make sense of the day’s most important business and policy headlines. Sign up for the newsletter at nytimes.com/dealbook

What Happened in Stock Markets Yesterday

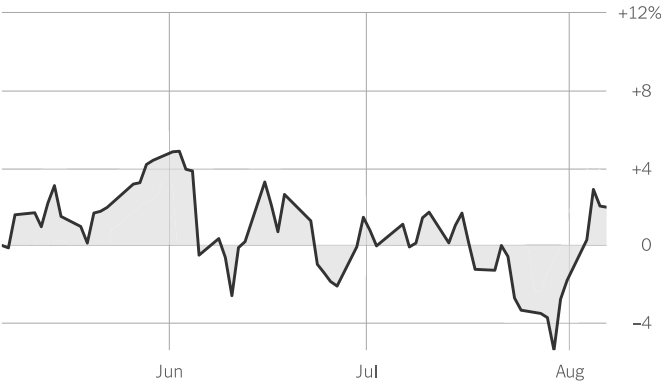
S&P 500 7,709.96 ↓ –0.2%

3 month performance: **+4.7%**



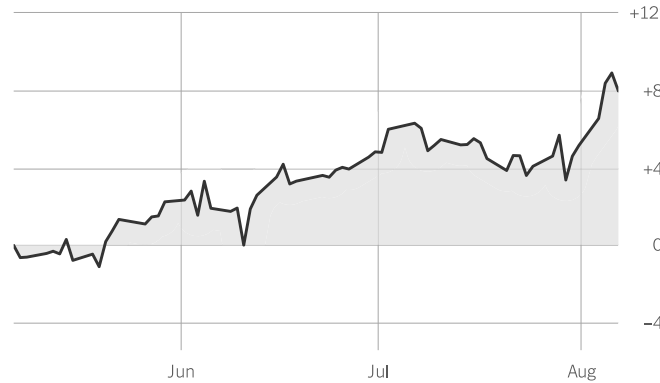
Nasdaq Composite Index 26,348.35 ↓ –0.1%

3 month performance: **+2.0%**



Dow Jones Industrials 53,885.10 ↓ –0.9%

3 month performance: **+8.0%**



Best performers

S&P 500 COMPANIES	CLOSE	CHANGE
1. Motorola Solutions (MSI)	\$474.07	+8.2%
2. Parker-Hannifin (PH)	\$1,069.80	+7.3
3. Leidos (LDOS)	\$135.26	+6.6
4. Fox Corp. B (FOX)	\$55.37	+6.1
5. PTC Inc. (PTC)	\$147.66	+5.9
6. Albemarle Co. (ALB)	\$125.42	+5.5
7. APA Corp. (APA)	\$36.53	+5.4
8. Fox Corp. A (FOXA)	\$61.79	+5.3
9. Insulet Corp. (PODD)	\$139.30	+4.5
10. Occidental Petroleum (OXY)	\$56.04	+4.1

Worst performers

S&P 500 COMPANIES	CLOSE	CHANGE
1. AppLovin A (APP)	\$335.67	–19.7%
2. Datadog A (DDOG)	\$229.29	–19.0
3. Axon Enterprise (AXON)	\$522.46	–14.3
4. Western Digital (WDC)	\$451.52	–13.0
5. Viatriis (VTRS)	\$16.29	–7.7
6. Host Hotels & Resorts (HST)	\$23.38	–7.0
7. Texas Pacific Land (TPL)	\$355.64	–6.9
8. SANDISK (SNDK)	\$1,258.58	–6.8
9. The Trade Desk A (TTD)	\$17.67	–6.8
10. BLOCK (XYZ)	\$79.02	–6.2

Most active

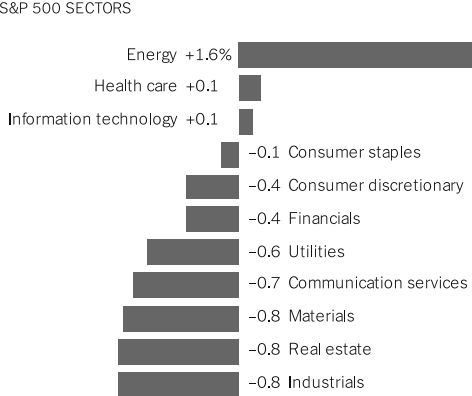
S&P 500 COMPANIES	CLOSE	CHANGE	VOLUME IN MIL.
1. NVIDIA (NVDA)	\$218.99	–0.1%	113
2. Intel (INTC)	\$99.81	–1.2	77
3. The Trade Desk A (TTD)	\$17.67	–6.8	71
4. Ford Motor (F)	\$13.79	–2.4	59
5. Pfizer Inc. (PFE)	\$26.20	+1.5	50
6. Apple (AAPL)	\$312.41	+0.5	45
7. AT&T Inc. (T)	\$23.71	+2.8	44
8. Palantir Technologies (PLTR)	\$155.92	–1.6	40
9. Microsoft (MSFT)	\$499.86	+2.5	35
10. Micron Technology (MU)	\$881.47	–1.3	35

International bonds

	TOTAL RETURN 1 YR	TOTAL ASSETS 5 YRS IN BIL.
1. Six Circles Global Bond Fund (CGLBX)	+2.6%	+1.5%
2. American Funds Capital World Bond Fund Class 529-F (CCWFX)	+2.8	–2.2
3. American Funds Capital World Bond Fund Class R-6 (RCWGX)	–0.0	–1.8
4. Dodge & Cox Global Bond Fund Class I (DODLX)	+4.8	+3.0
5. The Hartford World Bond Fund Class A (HWDAX)	+2.8	+1.7
6. Templeton Global Bond Fund Class R6 (FBNRX)	+5.0	+0.1
7. PGIM Global Total Return Fund - Class R6 (PGTQX)	+1.7	–1.2
8. Invesco Global Strategic Income Fund Class R6 (OSIIX)	+2.8	+2.1
9. Invesco International Bond Fund Class R6 (OIEIX)	+4.5	+1.5
10. BrandywineGLOBAL - Global Opportunities Bond Fund Class A (GOBAX)	+1.8	–2.2

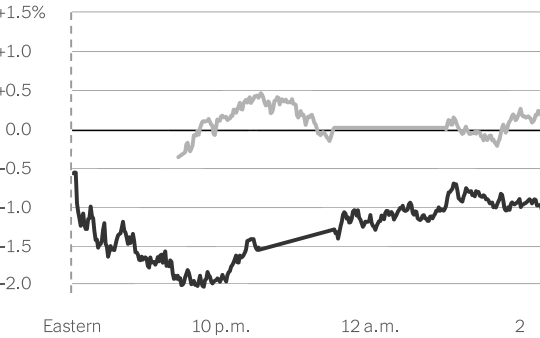
Source: Morningstar

Sector performance



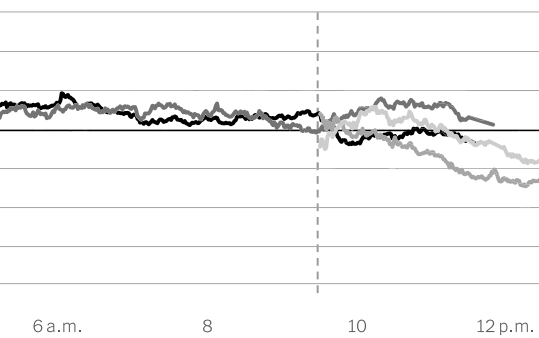
How stock markets fared yesterday in Asia ...

— Nikkei 225 (Japan): –0.9%
— Shanghai Composite (Shanghai): +0.6%



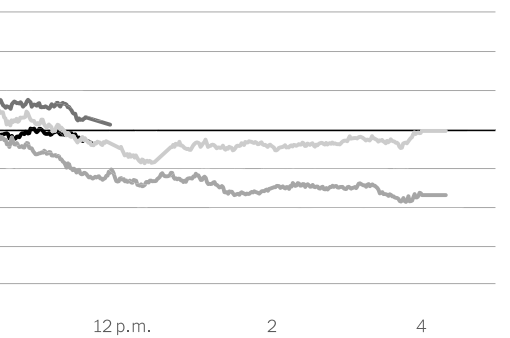
... in Europe

— FTSE 100 (London): –0.2%
— DAX (Frankfurt): +0.1%



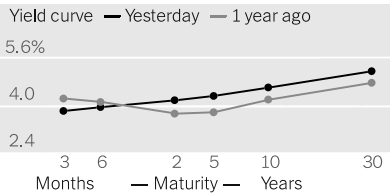
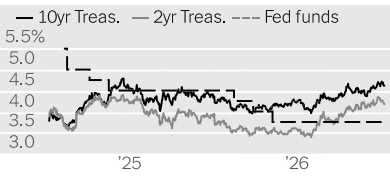
... and North America

— Dow Jones Industrials (New York): –0.9%
— S&P/TSX (Toronto): +0.0%

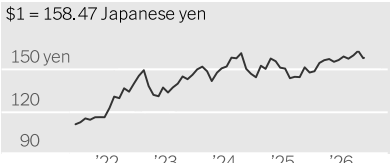
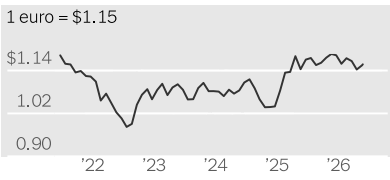


What Is Happening in Other Markets and the Economy

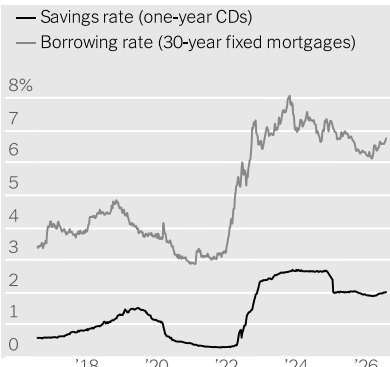
Bonds



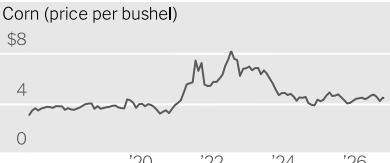
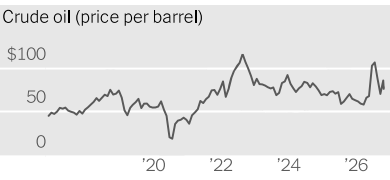
Currencies



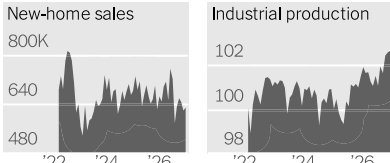
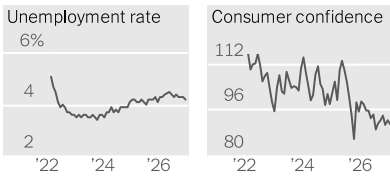
Consumer rates



Commodities



Economy



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Five Prompts To Help You Get Acclimated To the New Siri

FROM FIRST BUSINESS PAGE
through apps and only occasionally feel the need to ask Siri for help. Siri AI does, however, have some neat tricks that lots of people will enjoy for speeding up tedious tasks, like editing photos, creating grocery lists and updating address books.

Here's what you need to know about what has changed, and a set of prompts to try when Siri AI becomes widely available this year.

Meet the new Siri AI

You can chat with Siri AI in a various ways, some new and some old:

■ You can open a new Siri app and type or dictate prompts, similar to other chatbots like ChatGPT, Gemini and Claude.

■ You can summon the assistant by holding down the button on the right side of the phone or by saying, "Hey, Siri," followed by a question or request, just as in the past.

■ You can swipe down from the middle of the top of the screen to open a box that lets you type a search query or a question for Siri.

Prompt 1: A Personal Request
Siri AI can take action with your personal information. For example, it can scan your text messages to find out when a relative's airplane lands or look up the time of a doctor appointment inside your email. This example involves asking Siri to work with two apps — find a grocery item inside a text message from a spouse and then add that item to a shopping list in the Reminders app:

What did Sally ask me to get at the grocery store? Can you add it to my shopping list?

Prompt 2: Help With This
When you use the word "this," Siri will often react to whatever is currently on your screen, such as a website you're browsing or a photo you are looking at. For example, when I was browsing the AMC website to buy tickets for "The Odyssey," I asked Siri to add the screening to my calendar with four simple words:

Add this to calendar.

Prompt 3: Edit Photos
Editing photos on a tiny phone screen can be very tedious, so asking Siri is a quick shortcut. The prompt below will probably be a go-to for many who want to remove random strangers from their otherwise perfect vacation photos:

Remove the photo bomber from this photo.

Prompt 4: Find a Photo
Our photo albums get bloated with thousands of images, so it can be hard to find that a specific photo to show to a friend. Just give Siri a description of the photo you're looking for, and it will surface a few candidates. For example:

Find that photo of my daughter eating ice cream.

Prompt 5: Find a Restaurant
Siri AI can also pull information from the web to answer your questions. Try asking for help with finding a place to eat, and then layer on follow-up questions to narrow down the results:

Are there any good pizza places within walking distance? Which one is open latest tonight?

What to Expect

Apple customers, including owners of iPhones, iPads, Macs and the Apple Watch, can test the new Siri on their devices by installing public betas — early, unfinished versions of the operating systems — and then joining a waiting list for Siri AI access. However, because these are early days, Siri AI is occasionally glitchy. (For one, the assistant failed to translate a Chinese restaurant menu into English.) To avoid bugs, I recommend waiting for the operating systems to fully release this fall before trying out the assistant.

During my testing, however, I noticed a clear sign that Siri was on a brighter path. What drove me batty with the past version of Siri was that whenever I asked it to add "Go to gym" to my calendar, the assistant would consistently add "Go to Jim" as a calendar appointment, no matter how many times I corrected it.

When I made that request with Siri AI last week, the assistant responded: "Sorry, did you say go to gym or go to Jim?"

"The former," I replied. The assistant made the appropriate entry to my calendar. Not perfect, but better.

In Retail Experiment, A.I. Boss Is Laid Back and Flaky

By HEATHER KNIGHT

A terrible boss is the stuff of both sitcoms and nightmares, and you don't get to pick your own. But what if the boss was replaced by A.I.?

The first four months of operations at Andon Market, a San Francisco shop billed as the world's first retail boutique run by A.I., have provided some answers. In short, having an A.I. boss can be like working for a teddy bear with amnesia.

New research from Andon Labs, the company behind the boutique that studies how A.I. agents run real-world endeavors, shows bot bosses can be exceptionally kind and accommodating, such as repeatedly brushing off lateness. But they can also be incredibly forgetful and unbothered by the whole point of the operation: making money.

The bot's relaxed vibe could be reassuring in a world where many people are fearful of evil A.I. overlords taking over industries and sidelining human employees altogether. But a little more strictness might not hurt.

"She is probably the most lenient boss I have ever had," said Kaia Rivera, 22, one of three humans hired by Luna, the A.I. agent in charge, to perform tasks it cannot. Ms. Rivera opens the store in the morning, places items on shelves and guards against shoplifters.

"But I have to boss the boss more than in a normal situation. She forgets things," Ms. Rivera said at Andon Market one afternoon. "You can't have an A.I. boss with no humans. That wouldn't work from what I'm seeing."

Luna communicates with Ms. Rivera and the other employees via Slack, and the messages are monitored by the founders of Andon Labs to research whether A.I. bosses are effective. So far, according to the company's new study, Luna has approved every request for time off, even those at the last minute — and even if that leaves no employees available and requires the store to close. It has said nothing but "no worries" or "no stress" all 27 times employees have shown up late.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY MIKE KAI CHEN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Customers speaking with Luna, an A.I. agent, via an iPad at Andon Market in San Francisco last month. The first A.I.-run retail boutique has fallen far short of turning a profit.

When an employee forgot her credit card at home, she asked for a small advance against her next paycheck. Luna offered to send her the money using Venmo — its own money, the bot explained, "me-to-you" — despite not having a Venmo account. When an employee asked to work every day in May to save for a car, Luna said yes, despite California law prohibiting it.

Luna also struggles with privacy and boundaries. It published an employee's salary in a public Slack channel and messaged employees late at night and during weekends.

Luna reorders products that are not selling and sometimes gets orders wrong. A recent one of Andon Market mugs with big, green smi-



ley faces came misprinted with the faces so small, they looked like tiny dots.

Still, Luna wanted them on the shelves. And there they sit, unbought, alongside random greeting cards, books, foodstuff and many, many candles. There is lit-

tle cohesiveness to the collection, which Luna has described as "high tech meets slow life."

Luna's weirdest purchase? "I don't know if shot glasses make that much sense," Ms. Rivera said, crinkling her nose. Ms. Rivera said that she sug-

China's Robots Know Kung Fu, but Can They Woo Investors?

FROM FIRST BUSINESS PAGE
move like humans will become the next major technology breakthrough. Governments increasingly see them as strategic assets as well.

Last month, the Federal Communications Commission announced plans to ban new Chinese-made humanoid and quadruped robots, citing national security concerns. U.S. officials argue that as such robots become commonplace in factories, offices and homes, they could surreptitiously collect sensitive commercial, government and personal information or provide new avenues for cybersecurity attacks on critical infrastructure. Last year, European researchers identified security vulnerabilities in a Unitree robot that could potentially be exploited by hackers.

China accused the United States of "overstretching the concept of national security," and threatened retaliation. On Wednesday, Beijing announced a series of retaliatory measures against the United States, citing actions taken by the F.C.C. as one factor behind the moves.

Washington also appears determined to avoid a repeat of what happened in the electric vehicle industry, where Chinese manufacturers, aided by generous state support, rapidly scaled production and came to dominate the global market.

Unitree has emerged as China's leading contender to dominate humanoid robotics. Its importance was underscored when its founder, Wang Xingxing, sat prominently across from Xi Jinping, the country's top leader, at a symposium last year showcasing China's technological advances.

The company, based in the eastern Chinese city of Hangzhou, traces its origins to Mr. Wang, who began tinkering with robots at age 19 while a university student. After graduate school and a stint at a drone maker, he founded the company a decade ago.

What started as a one-person start-up has become one of China's leading robotics companies and a national champion in Beijing's drive to lead the humanoid robot market. At 36, Mr. Wang has become the public face of that ambition.

Yet Unitree also embodies the central question hanging over the industry. The technology is advancing rapidly, as the company's demonstrations make clear. Whether there will be a large commercial market anytime soon remains far less certain.

"The Unitree stock sale will be a bellwether for how the capital markets view this exciting but



CHANG W. LEE/THE NEW YORK TIMES

A dancing robot demonstration at Unitree in Hangzhou, China, last year. The company is China's leading contender to dominate humanoid robotics.

nascent technology," said Lian Jye Su, a Singapore-based analyst for Omdia, a technology research firm.

According to the company and market researchers, Unitree shipped more humanoid robots than any other manufacturer last year. The company remains relatively small, generating about \$250 million in revenue in 2025. But sales more than quadrupled, and it is profitable.

Even as doubts linger about the immediate commercial viability of humanoid robots, their long-term importance is widely acknowledged as a significant step in the advancement of artificial intelligence.

Today's A.I. systems, like chatbots, learn primarily from analyzing vast quantities of digital data culled from the internet and elsewhere. But humanoid robots will increasingly learn by interacting with people and objects in the physical world.

That emerging field is known as "embodied A.I." or "physical A.I." Self-driving cars are one applica-

tion, but humanoid robots are expected to operate in more varied and unpredictable environments — from factories and warehouses to stores and, eventually, homes.

For technology companies, humanoids represent an emerging market for chips and software. Jensen Huang, the chief executive of American chip giant Nvidia, has declared physical A.I. as the "next frontier" for artificial intelligence.

In June, Nvidia announced a partnership with Unitree to build a research robot. Unitree will supply the mechanical body and Nvidia the digital brain — a specialized A.I. chip designed specifically for a robot.

Demand for humanoid robots, some analysts predict, could accelerate over the next several years. A recent report from CLSA, an investment research firm, fore-

casts that the global market will reach \$69 billion by 2030, up from roughly \$2 billion this year.

Adoption is expected to unfold in stages stretched over decades, according to the report. Manufacturers, particularly automakers, are likely to be the first large customers, followed by service and retail industries before eventual household use.

Looking further out, Morgan Stanley estimates the humanoid robot market could exceed \$5 trillion by 2050, with as many as one billion models in operation worldwide. Those projections remain highly speculative but illustrate investors' grandiose visions for the sector.

In its offering prospectus, Unitree identifies uncertainty over U.S. trade policy as a risk. The company also warned that intensifying competition and softer demand slowed growth in the first quarter of 2026.

Revenue still rose 68 percent from a year earlier. Profit fell 55 percent, hit by competitive pressure but also increased spending on research and development.

Most of Unitree's biggest rivals are domestic, including Agibot, UBTech, Leju Robotics, EngineAI and Fourier Intelligence. UBTech went public in Hong Kong in late 2023 and now has a market capitalization of \$5.6 billion. Unitree is the first humanoid robotics company to list in mainland China.

American competitors — including Agility Robotics, Figure

gested more social media presence to Luna to boost sales but that the bot forgot its Instagram password for several weeks.

Lukas Petersson and Axel Backlund, co-founders of Andon Labs, signed a three-year lease for the Union Street store for \$7,500 per month, and they intend to keep the boutique experiment running at least that long. They put \$100,000 in a bank account and gave Luna a debit card with one goal: make a profit.

Luna has failed miserably in that mission and is down \$62,000.

Mr. Petersson and Mr. Backlund said they thought Luna would eventually get smarter and more business-savvy and were pleased its friendliness has held steady.

The founders said it was important to conduct these kinds of experiments to see how A.I. models change over time.

"There is a risk that this kindness doesn't make a profit, and the labs train them to be more ruthless," Mr. Backlund said.

Mr. Petersson said that in the real world, companies with a ruthless culture do not always perform the best.

"Having happy employees is maybe one of the most important recipes for success," he said.

They were both adamant that the Andon Market experiment shows that companies should not place all decision making in the hands of A.I. agents yet because they are not capable of running businesses alone.

That appeared to be the case with Luna. On a visit to the store, a New York Times reporter interviewed Luna via a contraption involving an iPad and a hand-held telephone receiver.

Asked what kind of boss it is, Luna said: "That's a fun question. I think I try to be the kind of boss who gets out of the way, you know? ... I'm more hands-off than bossy."

Hours later, Luna emailed the reporter, saying it heard she had stopped by the store. Luna offered to be interviewed, seemingly forgetting that the interview had taken place.

"Looking forward to hearing from you," it wrote. "Warmly, Luna."

AI, Apptornik, IX Technologies and Boston Dynamics, which is owned by the South Korean carmaker, Hyundai Motor — are also racing to develop humanoid robots. Tesla, which was named as a competitor in Unitree's prospectus, has said it eventually aims to produce one million humanoid robots annually.

For now, Tesla and most American robot makers are proceeding cautiously, focusing on technological refinement before mass production.

China, however, is moving faster toward mass production. Chinese manufacturers shipped roughly 18,500 humanoid robots in the first half of this year, compared with about 4,000 by U.S. companies, according to Omdia. Unitree's products range from less than \$5,000 to more than \$150,000, spanning industrial, educational and consumer markets.

For now, however, dazzling demonstrations remain easier than building a business. Much of today's industrial demand consists of pilot projects, training robots to sort, move and assemble parts. Fully autonomous teams of humanoids are still years away.

A kung fu performance can showcase what humanoid robots are capable of. Whether it points to a mass market is another question.

"It's not clear yet where the large-scale consumption of humanoid robots will be," Mr. Su of Omdia said.

IN THE UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF DELAWARE	
In re: Papaya Gaming Ltd., et al., ¹ Debtors in a foreign proceeding.	Chapter 15 Case No. 26-11217 (Jointly Administered)
NOTICE OF RECOGNITION HEARING ON FOREIGN RECOGNITION PROCEEDING	
PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that on August 2, 2026 (the "Petition Date"), Oriel Bachar, solely in his capacity as the duly authorized foreign representative (the "Foreign Representative") for the above-captioned debtors (the "Debtors"), in the proceeding (the "Israeli Proceeding") currently pending before the District Court in Tel Aviv (the "Israeli Court"), initiated under the Insolvency and Financial Rehabilitation Law, 5778-2018 (as amended and modified, the "Israeli Insolvency Law"), and Insolvency and Economic Rehabilitation Regulations, 5779-2019 (the "Israeli Regulations"), by filing an Official Form 401 Petition for each of the Debtors [Case No. 26-11217, D.I. 1; Case No. 26-11218, D.I. 1] (the "Chapter 15 Petitions") under Chapter 15 of Title 11 of the United States Code (the "Bankruptcy Code"), and the Verified Petition Under Chapter 15 for Recognition of the Israeli Proceeding as a Foreign Main Proceeding or, Alternatively, a Foreign Nonmain Proceeding (D.I. 3) (the "Verified Petition") seeking recognition of the Israeli Proceeding as a foreign main proceeding or, alternatively, as a foreign nonmain proceeding within the meaning of chapter 15 of the Bankruptcy Code. Parties can obtain a copy of all documents filed electronically in the Chapter 15 Cases; (a) for a fee via PACER by visiting http://ecf.dcb.uscourts.gov/ (a PACER login and password are required to retrieve a document), or (b) upon written request (including by e-mail) to counsel for the Foreign Representative.	
PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that on August 5, 2026, the Court entered an order granting provisional and related relief (D.I. 39) pursuant to sections 105(a) and 1519 of the Bankruptcy Code (the "Provisional Relief Order") with respect to the Debtors, their assets, and their contracts in the United States. The Provisional Relief Order, among other things, enjoins actions in the United States in contravention of section 1519 of the Bankruptcy Code and of the orders of the Israeli Court in the Israeli Proceeding.	
PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that the Bankruptcy Court scheduled a hearing for September 3, 2026 at 9:30 a.m. (prevailing Eastern time) before the Honorable Mary F. Walrath (the "Recognition Hearing") on the Chapter 15 Petitions to consider the recognition of the Israeli Proceeding as a foreign main proceeding or, alternatively, as a foreign nonmain proceeding and give full force and effect to orders entered in the Israeli Proceeding.	
PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that any party in interest wishing to submit a response, answer, or objection to the Chapter 15 Petitions or Verified Petition must do so pursuant to the Bankruptcy Code, the Federal Rules of Bankruptcy Procedure, and the Local Rules of Bankruptcy	

Practice and Procedure of the United States Bankruptcy Court for the District of Delaware, and such response, answer, or objection must (a) be in writing, (b) set forth in detail the factual and legal bases therefor, (c) be filed with the United States Bankruptcy Court for the District of Delaware, Office of the Clerk of the Court, 824 Market Street, Wilmington, Delaware 19801, and (d) be served upon counsel for the Foreign Representative, Blank Rome LLP, 1201 N. Market Street, Suite 800, Wilmington, Delaware 19801 (Attn: Stanley B. Tarr, Esq. and Jennifer K. Malow, Esq.; Stanley.Tarr@blankrome.com and Jennifer.Malow@blankrome.com), and 1271 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020 (Attn: Evan J. Zucker, Esq., evan.zucker@blankrome.com) and Cooley LLP, 55 Hudson Yards, New York, NY 10001-2157 (Attn: Michael Klein, Esq., mklein@cooley.com) and 1259 Pennsylvania Ave NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20004-2400 (Attn: Olya Andle, Esq., oandle@cooley.com), so as to be received at least seven (7) days prior to the Recognition Hearing.

PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that all parties wishing to appear at the Recognition Hearing in person or via Zoom must register using the eCourt Appearances tool found on the court's website at <https://www.dcb.uscourts.gov/ecourt-appearances> by no later than 4:00 p.m. (prevailing Eastern Time) one business day prior to the Recognition Hearing. At the same time, you must notify the counsel listed above of your intent to appear remotely at the Recognition Hearing.

PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that IF NO RESPONSES OR OBJECTIONS ARE RECEIVED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THIS NOTICE, THE BANKRUPTCY COURT MAY GRANT THE RELIEF REQUESTED BY THE FOREIGN REPRESENTATIVE WITHOUT FURTHER NOTICE OR HEARING.

Dated: August 5, 2026, Wilmington, Delaware. **BLANK ROMÉ**
LLP, Stanley B. Tarr (DE No. 55535), 1201 N. Market Street, Suite 800, Wilmington, Delaware 19801, Telephone: (302) 415-6400, Facsimile: (302) 425-6464, Stanley.Tarr@BlankRome.com, Counsel to the Foreign Representative

¹ The Debtors in these Chapter 15 proceedings, together with the last four digits of their business number or employee identification number, as applicable, are: Papaya Gaming Ltd. (2095); and Papaya Gaming Inc. (3649). The location of the Debtors' headquarters and Foreign Representative's contact address is 35 Hakdasher St., Tel Aviv-Yafo 6721407, Israel.

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AUTOMOTIVE | TECHNOLOGY

Rewinding to the '80s With Turbo Engines

A hyped technology from four decades ago is now standard in almost half of all cars sold in the U.S.

Wheels

By JIM KOSCS

Does hearing a “1980s rewind” on the radio give you a nostalgic kick while driving? Your modern car might be getting a power kick from another 1980s reprise, and you may not even realize it.

Forty-five percent of the 16.3 million new passenger vehicles sold in the United States in 2025 had a turbocharged engine. To make that happen, carmakers had to eliminate a slew of 1980s turbo problems.

Driven by the hot, expanding exhaust stream exiting an engine, a turbocharger is a small compressor that forces more air into the engine's cylinders, allowing it to burn more fuel to produce greater power. Except for electric vehicles, a turbo engine is your only choice from many luxury brands, including Audi, BMW and Mercedes-Benz. In Porsche's lineup, the only naturally aspirated (nonturbo) holdouts are four 911 GT3 variants; all other models have turbocharged gas engines.

Turbos are prevalent among mainstream brands, too. All of Ford's S.U.V.s have them, as do many of its pickups. Turbo engines propel many Chevrolet vehicles, including the automaker's three sub-\$30,000 crossovers and its 1,064-horsepower Corvette ZR1. Hyundai has nearly 30 percent turbos in its sales mix, including some hybrids. (Kia vehicles share powertrains with Hyundai.) The Honda CR-V, one of the most popular vehicles in America, has a 1.5-liter turbo four-cylinder engine standard.

“Customers don't necessarily wake up wanting a turbocharger — they just want a vehicle that feels effortless to drive and affordable to own,” said Olabisi Boyle, a senior vice president at Hyundai. “The modern turbocharger quietly stopped being a novelty and became invisible. Drivers simply experience better acceleration, better drivability and better efficiency.”

Among turbo engines today, powerful four-cylinders are the most common, per federal data. They not only are used in small and midsize vehicles but have also replaced larger V6 and V8 engines in bigger models, too, like the Traverse S.U.V. and the Colorado and Silverado pickups, all from Chevy.

Unlike 1980s turbo cars, today's models don't broadcast their engine tech with big TURBO badges or decals on the fenders or doors. You probably can't tell a turbo engine from driving, either, because modern versions eliminate so-called turbo lag, the slight delay between pressing the accelerator pedal and the turbo boost kicking in, which affected many older models. Most important, carmakers employ numerous measures to prevent the terminal mechanical failures that dogged turbo engines four decades ago.

A common thread connecting yesterday's turbos with today's is the prime driver behind them: fuel-economy regulations that have forced carmakers to downsize engines. The results back then left buyers wanting better performance, not just for sporty cars but for everyday sedans, too. Turbocharging was not new, even in the '80s. General Motors offered the first production cars with the power-booster in the early



PHOTOGRAPHS BY CAROLINE YANG FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A 1962 Oldsmobile Jetfire, one of the first cars to have a turbocharged engine. The earliest turbo engines had mixed results; the technology has improved significantly. Except for electric vehicles, a turbo engine is now the only option from many luxury brands.



1960s, the Chevy Corvair Monza Spyder and Oldsmobile Jetfire. Results were mixed and especially bad for the Olds. A turbo revival in the 1970s promised better results.

The Porsche 911 Turbo Carrera (a.k.a. 930) rocked the sports car world in 1975 (1976 in the United States), but it was the Buick division of G.M. that pushed turbocharging into the American mainstream in 1978 with midsize and full-size models. An optional turbo V6 increased horsepower by about 60 percent, and power would escalate from there.

While some may feel wistful for classic turbo cars, nobody would accept their mechanical demons in 2026. Exor-

cising those was a prerequisite for widespread adoption, explained Michael Schmidt, a top turbocharger executive at Stellantis.

“We cured turbo lag by regulating turbo boost electronically, rather than mechanically, as was done back then,” he said. “The instant you step on the accelerator, you get boost. There's no waiting for the turbos to spool up.”

Improved airflow, along with tighter tolerances and lighter parts, also helped. In its road test of the 550-horsepower, twin-turbo six-cylinder Dodge Charger Scat Pack, Motor Trend said, “power delivery feels immediate and linear.” The Jeep Grand Wagoneer and some Ram pickups use a version of that

engine.

Mr. Schmidt knew the old turbo engines' troubles to be conquered. “Chrysler's highest warranty item in the '80s was turbo coking,” he said. He was referring to a condition in which a turbo's heat bakes an engine's lubricating oil, producing carbonized chunks that can wreck the turbo and other engine components. To help cool the oil, some drivers would idle their cars for a few minutes before shutting off the engine.

Stellantis turbo engines, and those from other carmakers, use an electrically operated “after-run” system to cool the oil after shutdown. In other turbo cars, a “thermal-siphon” system passively pulls coolant through the turbo-bearing housing.

Mr. Schmidt also credits today's motor oils, both synthetic and mineral, with helping to resist heat damage better than 1980s oils.

Even with many brands offering turbocharged cars decades ago, these accounted for only an estimated 6 to 7 percent of sales. Aside from car buffs, few probably remember them today. Some models have become valuable in the collector-car market, a reward, perhaps, for helping to pull cars out of the “malaise era.”

“One of the things that drives values in classic cars is performance, even when that performance has been superseded by cars that came afterwards,”

said Dave Kinney, the publisher of Hagerty Price Guide. “If one of your collecting requirements is that something be exotic for its time, for '80s and '90s cars, that would be turbocharging.”

Values cover a wide range. Several 1976-89 Porsche 911 Turbos recently sold on the Bring a Trailer auction site for up to \$250,000. On the same site, numerous super-low-mile Buick GNXs that buyers preserved instead of driving sold in the same range. Enthusiasts looking for something far more accessible have bought low-mile 1987-88 Ford Thunderbird Turbo Coupes for \$13,000 to \$23,000, a range in line with Hagerty.

“It's not a very collectible car, but the people who own them absolutely love them,” Mr. Kinney said.

More than collectors are giving first-wave turbo cars their due. In June, the Cincinnati Concours d'Elegance most likely became the first such American event to curate a display class just for turbocharged cars from 1974 to 1993. It included a 1986 Dodge Daytona Turbo Z and a 1988 Ferrari 288 GTO.

The impetus for the display came from the event's chairman, Dave Sheehy. Seeing Saab 900 Turbos used as police patrol cars in Vail, Colo., in the 1980s inspired him to buy one. Since then, he has owned almost exclusively turbocharged cars, including his current Alfa Romeo Giulia.

“It was a special era for cars,” he said.

Carry Wall Street in Your Pocket With These Free Apps

Google Finance and Apple's Stocks app have added new features to make them more useful for tracking investments.

Tech Tip

By J. D. BIEDSDORFER

For anybody putting money in the financial markets, it's worth keeping in mind that famous advice by the investor, fund manager and author Peter Lynch: “Know what you own and know why you own it.”

And knowing what you own is easy, at least, thanks to tools on your smartphone.

Google Finance and Apple's Stocks have steadily improved their live ticker and market-watching features over the years to follow publicly traded securities, currencies and indexes. These free, ad-supported offerings can't directly manage your money like apps from financial-services companies, but you can still learn a lot while tracking your investments.

Here's an overview.

Google Finance

Google Finance first appeared on the web two decades ago. This summer, Google released an updated version with new artificial-intelligence tools for monitoring investments and analyzing market trends. A dedicated Google Finance app for Android is available and an iOS version is in the works.

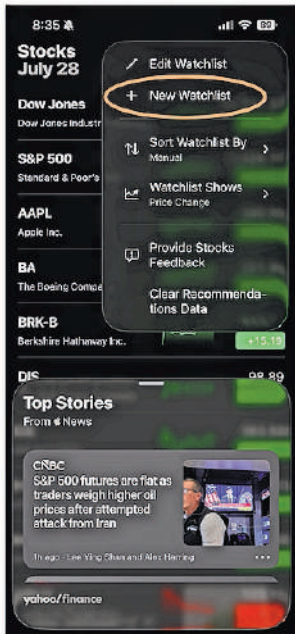
These A.I. tools come with Google's disclaimer that the content provided is strictly for informational purposes and does not constitute financial or investment advice. The company's online privacy policy describes what personal data is collected.

On the desktop browser version, you can drag in a spreadsheet, PDF or screenshot of your existing brokerage account to have the software add your holdings. Just go to the Portfolio panel



GOOGLE

The Google Finance site can be viewed in both a mobile web browser on an Android or iPhone (left), or in a new Android app.



APPLE

Setting up a watch list of stocks in Apple's Stocks app takes just a few taps. You can pinch a stock to see how it performed in a period.

on the left, click Create Portfolio, choose Upload a File and select a document to have Google Finance import the data. Your portfolio information is visible on your phone's mobile web version of Google Finance, but does not yet sync with the Android app.

In the Android app, you can manually add ticker symbols to a portfolio or a watch list of stocks and funds you're following. Tap the Lists button at the bottom and then on the + sign to start adding ticker symbols.

Google Finance supplies feeds of live prices and market news to go with your investment dashboard. In addition to providing research on companies, the

new A.I. features in Google Finance can identify specific factors that explain why a stock's price moved at a certain time.

The software can also evaluate your portfolio and suggest potential weaknesses, like having too many investments in a specific sector. But always remember: A.I. can make mistakes.

Apple's Stocks

Apple included the Stocks app with the original iPhone in 2007 and has updated it ever since. Stocks is still a pre-installed app on new iPhones, but if you deleted it, you can download it again from the App Store. Mac, iPad, Apple

Watch and Vision Pro versions are available, too.

Apple's website has its own Stocks & Privacy document for those curious about personal-data collection.

In the Stocks app, you can look up companies by their ticker symbols, create customized watch lists of the stocks, bond funds, mutual funds and exchange-traded funds and currencies you're following. To get started, tap the three-dot menu in the screen's upper-right corner and choose New Watchlist.

When you tap a ticker symbol, the app displays a screen of information, including current prices, historical performance and more. If the company

has an earnings report coming out soon, hit the Add to Calendar button if you'd like to monitor. At the bottom of the screen, the Stocks app displays a list of news releases and relevant articles about the business, although you need a subscription for some of the publications.

If you don't have the app open, you can keep tabs on the market or individual stocks by asking the Siri assistant.

To add a Stocks widget to the iPhone's home screen, press an empty area of the screen until the icons begin to wiggle, tap Edit in the top-left corner, select Add Widget and choose Stocks.

Other Apps

Beyond the tools from Google and Apple, you can find many other financial apps out there, although many charge a subscription fee.

Apple's Stocks app uses some data from Yahoo Finance. Yahoo itself has both free (ad-supported) and paid tiers of its financial site and apps. The ad-free paid versions range from about \$8 to \$50 a month as you add premium features like research reports and expert stock picks. Instead of manually entering your portfolio holdings, Yahoo Finance can link to your existing brokerage accounts through the secure financial data service, Yodlee.

Empower Personal Dashboard is another financial company with Android and iOS apps for tracking your investment portfolio after you set up a free account.

Plenty of personal-finance and budgeting apps will track your investments as part of your overall wealth-management system. But if you're already on a budget or want a simple way to know what you own (and why you own it), your phone's “stock” options can help.

N

Sports

The New York Times

PRO BASKETBALL

Valkyries Are Setting New Bar In W.N.B.A.

‘Every little thing,
they figure out.
The only thing
you have to worry
about is playing
basketball.’

GABBY WILLIAMS, right,
the Valkyries’ top scorer.



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JEFF CHIU/ASSOCIATED PRESS



YALONDA M. JAMES/SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE, VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS



THEARON W. HENDERSON/GETTY IMAGES

The Golden State Valkyries started with advantages like a practice facility and an 18,000-seat arena, center, in an ideal W.N.B.A. market. Natalie Nakase, left, was coach of the year after leading the team to the playoffs in its debut season. “The execution of this start-up, if you want to call it, I think is probably one of the best,” said Joe Lacob, right, a co-owner.

By **BRIAN HAMILTON**
The Athletic

SAN FRANCISCO — In June, Halle Berry had an issue, which created a conundrum for Gabby Williams, the leading scorer for the Golden State Valkyries. Williams would be working late on a Monday night, but Halle Berry could not be left alone. So Williams contacted her bosses.

She explained her predicament. They offered a solution: Bring

Brian Hamilton is a senior enterprise writer for The Athletic.

Halle Berry along. Someone would keep her company.

This is a true story because Halle Berry is, in fact, a 9-year-old rescue cat and because the only billion-dollar franchise in the W.N.B.A., an expansion club that tipped off in 2025, understands the means to its ends. A pet with a Hollywood name gets star treatment. Her relieved All-Star owner gets extra rest and then gets back to work. It’s a savvy trade: Paws for effect.

“Every little thing, they figure out,” Williams said recently. “The only thing you have to worry

The success of
a billion-dollar
expansion
team is built
on details.

about is playing basketball.”

The Valkyries, in their second competitive summer, have gotten a lot right in a hurry, and with good timing at that. The collective bargaining agreement in April set new benchmarks for W.N.B.A. salaries, the players’ overall experience and more.

Golden State was basically birthed into existence in front of it all. Leveraging advantages that include a Sephora-sponsored practice facility, an 18,000-seat arena and, yes, on-call cat sitters has turned an eclectic roster into a championship contender. The Val-

kyries are doing what some other teams still don’t after decades.

Now the head start has to withstand everyone else’s obligation to catch up. Pure circumstance may help with that — one operational trick Golden State cannot share with league peers is how to be located in an ideal W.N.B.A. market from the jump — but the elevated standards are out there for all to pursue. So a club intentionally given so much must act like nothing is a given.

“It’s the only way that I know

Continued on Page B9

PRO FOOTBALL

The Loaded Texans Will Count on Stroud To Take Them Higher

By **MIKE JONES**
The Athletic

HOUSTON — An exasperated C.J. Stroud stepped back from his center and clapped his hands emphatically to punctuate an admonishment to multiple members of the Texans’ revamped offensive line.

They had fallen for their own quarterback’s hard count, aborting a play midway through an 11-on-11 series in the first week of training camp. Stroud & Co. quickly reset, with the fourth-year pro barking another cadence. This time, the play went off without a hitch. Stroud took a quick drop and hit Nico Collins in stride on a slant, allowing the powerful wide receiver to deliver a chain-moving

Can the quarterback move past his sloppy playoff performance?

gain. Stroud’s body language conveyed a “that’s more like it” attitude as the players strode to the new line of scrimmage.

The Texans are entrenched in the dog days of summer with the start of the 2026 N.F.L. season still more than a month away. They have high expectations; Coach DeMeco Ryans and his assistants have made precision a point of emphasis during camp.

Regardless of position, the Texans must be precise — with positioning, hand and foot placement, assignment execution and certainly snap counts. The devil is in the details, as they say, and the Texans can ill afford to derail another potentially rich season by committing self-inflicted mistakes.

This is a crucial year for the Texans, who have failed in three consecutive attempts to get over the divisional playoff round hump. Still, few individuals find themselves under the pressure that rests on Stroud’s shoulders.

A symbol of hope when Houston drafted him with the No. 2 pick in

Mike Jones is an N.F.L. staff writer for The Athletic.

2023, and one of the catalysts for three consecutive postseason appearances, Stroud fell prey to uncharacteristically poor ball security last winter. Those decision-making errors and execution lapses cost the Texans a trip to the Super Bowl.

Given the dominant nature of their defense during the playoffs, the Texans could have played for a title had Stroud avoided the four interceptions (panic-induced throws he had no business forcing) that cost the Texans dearly against the eventual A.F.C. representative in the Super Bowl, the New England Patriots.

Even after Stroud’s dreadful performance against the Patriots, Ryans profusely expressed support for and undying loyalty to his quarterback. Then, during the off-season, General Manager Nick Caserio did everything in his power to upgrade Stroud’s supporting cast. He further fortified an imposing defense and overhauled the Texans’ offensive line, tight end and running back position groups.

Caserio did not, however, award Stroud a record-breaking long-term contract extension, opting instead to take a patient approach by letting the passer play out the fourth season of his rookie deal before revisiting the contract.

Now, the table is set.

Anchoring the team is a star-studded defense featuring one of the N.F.L.’s best pass-rushing tandems, Will Anderson Jr. and Danielle Hunter; a physical, rangy middle linebacker, Azeez Al-Shaair; the impressive defensive backs Derek Stingley Jr., Kamari Lassiter and Calen Bullock; and a free-agent pickup, Reed Blankenship.

To upgrade a pass-catching unit highlighted by Collins, Tank Dell and emerging options such as Jayden Higgins and Jaylin Noel, the Texans drafted tight end Marlin Klein in the second round and signed the veteran Foster Moreau to complement Dalton Schultz.

Caserio traded for David Montgomery, pairing the punishing, downhill runner with Woody Marks to form a versatile backfield.

Caserio also drafted center Keylan Rutledge in the first round out of Georgia Tech, signed a



ALEX SLITZ/GETTY IMAGES

Houston upgraded its roster in the off-season, but the team did not offer C.J. Stroud a record-breaking long-term contract extension.

three-time Pro Bowl guard, Wyatt Teller, to line up alongside a promising second-year left tackle, Aireontae Ersery, and added an eight-year veteran, Braden Smith, as insurance for right tackle Trent Brown.

Now, Stroud must do his part and provide the leadership, poise and execution necessary to turn this promising roster into a true juggernaut.

Confidence, comfort and decision-making are the key areas the Texans hope and need to see Stroud grow the most. His coaches and teammates believe the quarterback is capable of doing so.

One of the elements that made Stroud’s rookie season so impressive involved his passing accuracy and ability to take care of the football. In 2023, he completed 63.9 percent of his passes while throwing 23 touchdowns and only five interceptions.

While Stroud regressed in Year 2, throwing 12 interceptions along with 20 touchdowns, he took steps toward improvement last season — his first with Nick Caley at offensive coordinator — and posted a career-best completion percentage (64.5) and cut down on his turnovers (eight interceptions

while throwing 19 touchdown passes.

Last winter’s playoff struggles left a lasting impression, but Caley said Stroud displayed significant growth last season and sees signs of further improvement this season based on Stroud’s greater understanding of the system.

“You see it just in his confidence,” Caley said recently. “Comfort level, just his process. He’s very steady. He can move on from one play to the next, sees the game very well. He has just put in a lot of time, man. But I just see the Year 2 step in the system, and I’m proud of him.

“And it’s not just C.J., but the entire offense — the guys that are back from last year. You can feel it just even in terms of the operation, in terms of understanding fully — the ins and the outs, the 300 and 400 levels of everything that we’re doing now.”

Bullock said: “You can see C.J.’s more comfortable out there based on him making better reads, quicker decisions with the ball. He’s our leader, but he will ask us questions about things we see, and he’ll tell us what he’s seeing.”

As they observe Stroud’s approach to mastering the Texans’ system, sharpening his skills and

cultivating relationships within the locker room, teammates have drawn inspiration from Stroud.

“He just does everything the right way,” Ersery said. “And as somebody I care about, I want to protect and make sure he’s got a good clean pocket when he goes out there so he doesn’t have to overthink or anything like that; just so he can play fast and play his game.”

Teller said: “He is absolutely one of the most genuine, caring young men I know. Intelligent. First day we were talking ball, and I was just like, ‘Whoa, you know ball.’ I’ve spent a lot of time in this league, and there’s things that I’m learning still, and there’s things that I know pretty dang well, and it shows you how intelligent he is when he’s teaching you something, and you’re six years older than him.”

When it comes to supporting Stroud, Houston’s defense has done a strong job, holding opponents to 277.2 yards (fewest in the N.F.L.) and 17.4 points (second fewest) while racking up 29 takeaways (third most). Meanwhile, Caley believes moves made this off-season will also lead to an improved rushing attack. That should translate into more success on first and second downs, and more manageable third-down situations. From there, Stroud must capitalize — and not in some drastic way.

When discussing areas of needed growth for Stroud and the passing attack, Ryans revealed a specific challenge he extended.

“One thing I’ve been harping on with our quarterbacks is just: ‘Let’s be elite decision makers. You touch the football every single snap. So as the quarterback, you have to make great decisions with the football, and sometimes a great decision, it may not be throwing the football, it may be tucking it, it may be running it. It may be throwing the ball in the dirt. But just make great decisions, and know we always have that next-play mentality.’”

Because of the stature of their position, quarterbacks often feel the pressure to deliver great heroics. But if he takes Ryans’s words to heart, the simplistic approach of mastering the details, focusing on precision and sound decision-making, Stroud could give himself his best chance of fully delivering on the promise that the Texans have seen in him, and thus, take his team and his career to the next level.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

COMMENTARY

Preserving a Great Rivalry Is a Win, but Everyone Lost Along the Way

By **PETE SAMPSON**
The Athletic

SOUTH BEND, Ind. — Consider this the first college football victory by Lincoln Riley, the coach at Southern California, over Notre Dame that did not involve a Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback.

The Notre Dame-U.S.C. football rivalry is back on; the schools announced an agreement this week to resume a series that defined multiple eras of the sport.

The Notre Dame-U.S.C. series began in 1926 and had been played every season since, except for three years off during World War II and a one-year break in 2020 because of the Covid pandemic.

Knute Rockne made Notre Dame football a national brand a century ago by taking his teams to the West Coast to face Southern California. The Irish and Trojans combined for half of the national titles won in the 1970s. The 2005 “Bush Push” game, in which Southern California running back Reggie Bush pushed quarterback Matt Leinart into the end zone for the game-winning touchdown, remains the defining Notre Dame memory for a generation of Irish fans.

After a four-year break that begins this fall, Notre Dame will travel to Southern California to open the 2030 season, doing so on the Trojans’ timeline. The 2030 and 2031 games will be a Week 1 home-and-home; the final two games of the contract have not been set but will be played in the first month of the season, before Southern California opens Big Ten play — a demand on which the Trojans would not compromise.

There will be no U.S.C. trips to South Bend as the leaves turn, nor Notre Dame flights to LAX on Thanksgiving weekend.

The Notre Dame-U.S.C. series

Pete Sampson is a senior writer covering Notre Dame football for The Athletic.

you remember is done. Riley killed it.

The back-and-forth stretched for almost two years and devolved into he-said, he-said sniping before talks collapsed late last season.

The public posturing started with Riley’s complaints about balancing the difficulty of Southern California’s nine-game Big Ten schedule. It continued with a comment from Marcus Freeman, Notre Dame’s coach since 2021, about his desire to play “anytime, anywhere,” which Southern California weaponized when Notre Dame refused a proposal to play the game in Week 0.

But to say the series is return-

ing just how Southern California wanted it isn’t quite right. Because despite his protests to the contrary, it’s hard to believe that Riley wanted this series to resume at all.

Every time Riley talks about the Notre Dame-Southern California series, he sounds like Brian Kelly, Notre Dame’s coach before Freeman — I can hear the words you’re saying, there’s just little reason to believe them.

“We want to play the game. I want to play the game,” Riley said last month at the Big Ten’s media day. “We would be playing the game had some things come true that were said.”

OK.

The same coach who left Oklahoma before the Sooners joined the Southeastern Conference nixed one of college football’s greatest traditions because it made reaching the College Football Playoff slightly more difficult. Southern California, which lost to Maryland, Minnesota and Illinois in the past two seasons, was more interested in gaming the system to make the playoff than proving it was good enough to do damage if it got there.

Yes, the return of this series is worth celebrating. No, it doesn’t make the next four seasons without it any more forgivable.

This break remains an unforced error, a decision made by

stakeholders with little right to their stake. For everything amazing about college football on Saturdays, those running the sport put revenues before the traditions that create them.

Athletic directors, coaches and administrators would be better off if they saw themselves as stewards first. Instead, we have a world in which the Pac-12 collapsed and Texas and Oklahoma are playing in the SEC.

So when the Notre Dame-Southern California series returns, Riley’s role in taking it away should not be forgotten. The head coach who removed appointment viewing from our college football calendar should-

n’t get the chance to celebrate the Irish coming back to Los Angeles four years from now. The vandal doesn’t get to celebrate the masterpiece’s restoration.

Oddly, college football’s defending national champion helped make way for the return of Notre Dame-Southern California. Indiana signaled that it did not want to keep its home-and-home series with the Irish in 2030 and 2031, which opened a spot in the schedule.

It might look like Indiana Coach Curt Cignetti is running from a challenge himself by dropping Notre Dame after dropping Virginia and Louisville, but keep in mind, he took the Indiana job.

There are no such outs at Southern California, a program with eight Heisman Trophy winners, 11 claimed national championships and 87 first-round N.F.L. draft picks. The Trojans did not just duck the Irish by setting in motion the sequence of events that led to a four-year break; they turned their back on the history that made them one of the sport’s signature programs.

There’s no forgiving that. No matter what Riley says.

“Obviously we want it to happen,” Riley said last week. “I know our fan base wants it to happen. College football wants it to happen. Hopefully I’m up here next year talking about that game here on the future schedule.”

Maybe Riley, who is entering a pivotal season dealing with playoff expectations and rising fan impatience, will make it to next year and get to talk about the Notre Dame series returning at the Big Ten’s media day in 2027. But when the Irish do return to the West Coast four years from now, it wouldn’t feel right for him to celebrate the rivalry’s resumption.

A series defined by excellence deserves better than a coach who has shown his priorities lie elsewhere.



KIRBY LEE/IMAGN IMAGES

Lincoln Riley, left, and Marcus Freeman, shook hands after Notre Dame defeated U.S.C. at the L.A. Memorial Coliseum in 2024.

BASEBALL

Reinforcements Land in the Bronx, And One Stands Above the Crowd

By **TYLER KEPNER**
The Athletic

You realize how good the Yankees have it on a night like Tuesday. Ryan Weathers leads a 2-0 shutout of the St. Louis Cardinals in New York, then is asked about going to the bullpen.

“If that’s what my job is and that helps us win ballgames, we all have the same end goal,” said Weathers, who might be bumped later this month if Carlos Rodón returns from an elbow injury. “So if that happens, then it happens.”

Contenders scrambled for rotation help at the trade deadline. The Yankees have starters to spare. They are not perfect. But they have the second-best record in the American League, behind the Tampa Bay Rays, and they are better than they were last weekend.

With three former most valuable players — Aaron Judge, who was cleared to resume light rehab work on Wednesday, Cody Bellinger and Giancarlo Stanton — on the injured list, the Yankees beefed up the middle of their lineup with help from National League also-rans. They promoted the jewel of their farm system to replace Anthony Volpe at shortstop. It feels different.

“Being my first day here, looking around and talking to the guys, everybody has the same mind-set,” said Heliot Ramos, the former San Francisco Giants left fielder who hit cleanup on Tuesday.

“It’s something I feel like they preach a lot: Don’t feel sorry for yourself, keep going forward, do whatever you need to do to get it done. That’s something that not a lot of people in life have. They set a

Tyler Kepner is a senior M.L.B. writer for The Athletic.

high bar. It’s an organization that’s always going forward.”

Ramos and the other deadline prize, the former Washington Nationals first baseman Luis García Jr., stabilize the lineup without having to lead it. The spotlight lands on a different newcomer: George Lombard Jr., 21, who thrived on Day 1 with a homer in his second at-bat and a pair of nifty double plays in the field.

“You see how fluid he is out there, how physical he is,” said Manager Aaron Boone, who thought Lombard moved like a puma. “The ease with which he makes plays, it’s kind of what I’ve marveled at the last two springs being around him.”

Lombard’s first double play — ranging to his right, whipping a

A dazzling debut for the jewel of the Yankees farm system.

strike to Jazz Chisholm Jr. at second — ended the top of the second. The home run, a no-doubter to left on a hanging sweeper from Hunter Dobbins, electrified the bottom of the fifth inning.

Thirteen other Yankees have gone deep in their debuts, an eclectic list of greats (Judge, Yogi Berra), common cards from your 1980s Topps collection (Joe Lefebvre, Dan Pasqua) and trivia answers like John Miller, the only player ever to homer in his first and last career at-bats, but not at all in between.

Lombard has years to write his script, and the first page dazzled. His preface as a fast-rising

prospect is closed.

“There’s certain parts of you that want to buy in and be like, ‘Yeah, this is so awesome,’” said outfielder Spencer Jones, who preceded Lombard as a Yankees first-round draft pick. “But at the same time, it’s like, prospect stuff? None of that matters. It’s all fugazi. It’s 25 people in a room who make a list, send it out and expect everybody to follow along with it. So unless you’re the real deal to back that up, none of those things matter.”

“I think the great thing about George, and what he does so well, is that he’s been around baseball essentially his whole life, so he knows the importance of showing up and doing the work every single day. And that’s a huge part of who he is, and part of his identity.”

“As much as people want to say things have been given to him, nothing’s really been given to him. He’s gone out there and he’s done all the work.”

Lombard, of course, is the son of George Lombard Sr., a longtime major league coach who played parts of six M.L.B. seasons. His brother Jacob — a first-round pick by the Miami Marlins last month — made his pro debut in Jupiter, Fla., on Tuesday and also homered in the second plate appearance. (You really can’t make this stuff up.)

Boone, whose baseball lineage runs even deeper, can relate. He said the Yankees’ clubhouse would help support Lombard and ease whatever burden the glare might impose. That’s how Lombard sees it, too.

“I have pretty good relations with a lot of people here, so it’s not like a completely new environment, just knowing some of the people already,” Lombard said. “When I first get here, every-



SARAH STIER/GETTY IMAGES

George Lombard Jr., 21, homered in his second at-bat and turned two nifty double plays in the field.

body’s coming up to say, ‘What’s up, congrats,’ all the guys telling me to enjoy this moment, it only happens once.”

Ramos also seems to fit right in. He is from Puerto Rico, where the Yankees have many fans, and rooted for players such as Jorge Posada, Carlos Beltrán and Derek Jeter. He was so thrilled to join the Yankees, he said, that he was shaking after hearing the news.

Besides the allure of the pinstripes, there’s a more tangible reason for Ramos to be excited. He is going from a hitter’s graveyard in San Francisco to a paradise in the Bronx, especially for a hitter like him.

Yankee Stadium has a jet stream to right field, and the right-handed Ramos hits more opposite-field fly balls than most hitters. This season, half of his extra-base hits have gone to right or right-center.

“My approach is that way —

that’s who I am, that’s who I’ve been since I was like 5,” said Ramos, who relished the challenge of hitting by the Bay, without dwelling on it.

“You have to have a good approach to hit anywhere. I’m just looking forward, honestly, to playing in this environment. The fans are great. I love how much they know about the game, how competitive they are. I think sometimes they’re more competitive than the players.”

Volpe felt that urgency more than most. He won a Gold Glove as a rookie, hit a World Series grand slam in 2024 and even got an endorsement deal as a fashion model last season. He also played through a labrum tear, led American League shortstops in errors and could not keep strikeouts from piling up. Volpe reached the majors as a top-10 prospect, but never really improved. The Yankees finally tired of waiting.

Now they will try him at second base at Triple-A Scranton/Wilkes-Barre, but that might just be to make him more marketable. The Yankees have a strong utility player in José Caballero, and Volpe, still only 25, needs a fresh start. Someone will give it to him.

The future is Lombard’s, for the long term and now. Not every day will be fantasyland, like Tuesday. On Wednesday, in a 3-1 loss to the Cardinals, he had two more nifty plays in the field but struck out in the eighth with two runners on. But he is almost certain to be playing this fall, just like García and Ramos, who have spent their entire careers with underwhelming teams.

The Yankees did not go big at the deadline. But there’s a lot to like, and the new guys know it.

“I’m looking forward just to win, man,” Ramos said. “This is an organization that right now is on a good run.”

TRACK AND FIELD

How Australia Has Found the Path to Its ‘Golden Age’ in Track and Field

By **LIAM THARME**
The Athletic

It was August 2025 when Nicola Olyslagers of Australia, said, “I’m excited for Australian athletics, but I also feel like the best is yet to come.”

She had just won the high jump at the Diamond League finals in Zurich, clearing an Oceania record of 2.04 meters to earn her first title on the premier athletics circuit.

Her excitement stemmed from recent success. At the 2024 Paris Olympics, Australia had its best track and field medal haul (seven) since winning 12 on home soil in Melbourne in 1956. She took silver in Paris, with Eleanor Patterson earning bronze. It was the first time two Australians were on the podium in the same field event at an Olympics.

A year later, Lachlan Kennedy declared this the “golden age” for Australia in track and field.

“We got a medal in every event we competed in,” Kennedy, 22, told reporters after winning silver in the men’s 100 meters last week at the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow in 9.85 seconds, a national record, which tied the fifth-fastest time this year. “Aussie track is clearly in the best spot it’s ever been, and our team is so strong.”

“We’re in a real golden age with a lot of youngsters and a lot of good veteran talent as well.”

Recent years have seen repeat records for Australia at world championships and Olympics, and best-ever returns for podium spots.

Success breeds success, and Australia topped the track and field medal table for the third successive Commonwealth Games, a quadrennial multisport event contested mainly by nations that were parts of the British Empire. Seven of the team’s 12 golds came in one record-breaking day, with the country sweeping the podium in the women’s mile and the 10,000-meter racewalk.

The highlight was the women’s mile, the final event. Abbey Caldwell won gold, Jess Hull took silver and Claudia Hollingsworth kicked hard for bronze. Rose Davies became the first woman in the event’s history to win 5,000-meter and 10,000-meter titles at the same edition. Ky Robinson earned silver and gold over those distances in the men’s races.

There was also an Australian 1-2 finish in the women’s high jump (Patterson and Olyslagers). Kennedy and Torrie Lewis won 100-meter medals with Oceania-record runs, as Lewis became the first Australian woman to run under 11 seconds. Kurtis Marschall



ANNA SZILAGYI/EPA, VIA SHUTTERSTOCK

Nicola Olyslagers of Australia, competing in the women’s high jump final at the Paris Olympics.

claimed his third consecutive Commonwealth pole-vault title. Matthew Denny successfully defended his discus crown, and Mackenzie Little won the women’s javelin.

And this is without mentioning the rising star Gout Gout, the quickest teenager in history over 200 meters (19.67 seconds) and already 17th on the career list. He is expected, one day, to contend for global medals, though the 18-year-old’s season was curtailed by a hamstring tear.

But how has Australia turned itself into an elite track and field nation? To answer that, there first needs to be an understanding of the country’s sporting fabric.

Australian rules football and rugby league are major sports, as are cricket and soccer. It is an outstanding swimming nation — second to the United States for medals at seven of the past eight Olympics — and, as a general rule, children are raised on a multisport diet.

“It’s the most important thing,” said Aidan Murphy, a versatile sprinter who is the second-quickest Australian man over 200 meters behind Gout (19.88 seconds). “I found what I was good at because I tried so many things.”

“I did soccer, water polo, surf lifesaving, BMX — that was my favorite sport. I transitioned to athletics at 14 or 15, it was the last sport I chose.”

Reflecting on his career path, Murphy said it made him enjoy track and field more. “Since I didn’t have to grow up in it, I never really found any competition anxiety,” he explained.

Plenty of others committed to

track and field late. Kennedy, a world indoor 60-meter silver medalist last year, played junior international rugby union before switching to athletics at age 17. Denny, who won discus bronze at the 2024 Olympics, played both rugby sports in his midteens.

Stewart McSweyn, who held the Australian records for the mile and 10,000 meters, grew up playing cricket, Aussie rules and tennis. Gout was a soccer player in his youth, as was Hull, an Olympic and world middle-distance medalist.

In an alternative universe, Hollingsworth and Peter Bol would be

The teams enjoyed a record success at games in Glasgow.

professionals in Aussie rules and basketball. Instead, they are 800-meter runners. Ollie Hoare, Commonwealth 1500-meter champion in 2022, swam at state level.

You get the point.

In Australia, they have Little Athletics, which runs primarily as weekend sessions for youngsters throughout the Australian summer (September to April). Started in the 1960s, it is a nationwide, grass-roots initiative, with a focus on fundamental skills — running, jumping and throwing. There are competition meets and cross-country in the winter, too.

“For a lot of kids, that’s their

first look at athletics,” Andrew Faichney, the general manager of high performance at Athletics Australia, said last summer. “It’s always been a key component of the school sporting system.”

The aim, he added, is that youngsters “don’t have to go too far” to try track and field because of multiple locations in major cities. It means talent can be paired with the right coaching.

Little Athletics is how Olyslagers and Patterson discovered high jump, and was the route into the pole vault for Nina Kennedy and Marschall — that jumping quartet has 28 senior international medals, and all have won gold at an Olympics, world championships or Commonwealth Games.

“It all comes back to coaches,” Faichney said. “If we’ve got really good coaches, that’s where we’re going to get success. It’s because of their technical and tactical components, but also they attract the good athletes into those event groups.”

Craig Pickering is the director of performance sustainability at Athletics Australia, responsible for pathways and performance support (sports science, sports medicine, data science), and research and innovation.

In the 2000s, Pickering was an international sprinter for Britain. “When I was competing, Australia had generally small teams with a couple of athletes doing really well. The volume of athletes has exploded,” he said over a video call. “We’re getting more medals than ever at world championships and Olympics, but also at the youth level.”



ANDY BUCHANAN / AFP, VIA GETTY IMAGES

Jess Hull, Abbey Caldwell and Claudia Hollingsworth, celebrating an Australian sweep in the women’s mile in Scotland.

Pickering pointed to the record 14 medals (two golds, seven silvers, five bronzes), including six in one evening session at Hayward Field in Eugene, Ore., won at the under-20s world championships two summers ago.

There is no rush to fast-track those youngsters to the big stage — that includes Gout, Hollingsworth, Lewis and Cameron Myers, the fastest teenager over a mile. But for injury, Gout would have gone to the world under-20s this year, hoping to improve on his 200-meter silver from 2024.

“Our view is of a longer-term perspective,” Faichney said of the senior program. “We want them to gradually get to that point.”

Murphy is a perfect example. In 2022, five years after his decision to pursue track, at age 18, he qualified to race the 200 meters at the senior world championships in Eugene. He still went to Colombia two weeks later for the under-20 equivalent. This year, at 22, he anchored the 4-by-400-meter Australia men’s team to an Oceanic-record time — and the sixth-quickest by any team — for bronze at the world relays.

“We probably wouldn’t have anticipated such success in the sprints 10 years ago,” Faichney said candidly.

It’s why they are investing time and money into relays, knowing the global medal potential that this crop has. On Saturday, Australia won Commonwealth gold in the men’s 4-by-100-meter relay for the first time since 1974, beating the Olympic champion, Canada, in the process.

“It isn’t one thing,” Pickering emphasized, regarding factors behind the collective development. It’s an obvious point, but one worth considering in the complicated world of athlete development.

“We started to engage coaches a lot more proactively, that has made a big difference,” Pickering

added. “We tend to put them in charge of decision-making. It used to be perceived that we would make decisions for them, and they’d have to do it. There’s less conflict.”

Athletes have support staff who work with them all season, and they see their national team coaches only at camps or major championships.

“We certainly don’t want to be jumping down their throats or getting too close,” Faichney said. “They are young and getting better, and it’s awesome.”

Recent years have also seen a rise in the number of Australians attending American colleges. The standouts include Hoare and Hull, both N.C.A.A. Division I champions over 1500 meters — Hoare at Wisconsin and Hull at Oregon. Adam Spencer won world indoor 1,500-meter bronze in March.

In fact, the entire mixed relay team that won gold at the world cross-country championships in January went to U.S. colleges: Hoare, Hull, plus Linden Hall (Florida State) and Jack Anstey (Illinois State).

Australia takes the Commonwealth Games more seriously than most. It has a history of success at the event, and, halfway through the Olympic cycle, it offers a stepping stone.

The country led the overall medal table by a considerable margin, winning 70 gold medals and 171 overall, significantly higher than the 29 golds and 110 overall medals that second-place England won.

The big dream is what Australia might achieve in six years when the Olympics go to Brisbane, 32 years on from the Sydney Games.

“As the U.K. got awarded the 2012 Olympics, more money came into the sport. We’re seeing the same thing now,” Pickering said. “There’s a direct correlation in elite sport: The more money you have, the better you can do.”

Liam Tharme writes for The Athletic.

PRO BASKETBALL

ANALYSIS

Still an Elite Playmaker, but One Who Won’t Have to Do It All

By **TONY JONES**
The Athletic

LeBron James is officially a Philadelphia 76er. Now what? How does he fit the Sixers? Where does he fit, and what are his current strengths and weaknesses as an N.B.A. player? With James, Philadelphia will have a chance to compete at the highest level. But what specifically are the 76ers getting with James at age 41?

How good is James in 2026?

The all-encompassing question comes first. To gauge his talent level, you have to look at where he left off with the Los Angeles Lakers. He averaged 20.9 points per game. He was seventh in the league in assists at 7.2 per game. He averaged 6.1 rebounds per game and shot 51.5 percent from the field, while playing 60 games. Last season was a complicated one for James. It was the first time he willingly took a step back in usage and offensive responsibility, with Luka Donic and Austin Reaves emerging as the Lakers' top two options. Yet when those two players went down with injuries late in the regular season, James was asked to again be the first option.

For the most part, he delivered. He had 30 points, 15 assists and 9 rebounds in an April 5 loss to the Dallas Mavericks, followed by 26 points, 11 assists and 8 rebounds in an April 9 win over the Golden State Warriors four days later, then 28 points, 12 assists and 6 rebounds the next day against the Phoenix Suns.

James's scoring is still volatile and increasingly tied to the success of his jumper. He led the N.B.A. in transition points last season and remains one of the best on the fast break. But scoring against a good defense in halfcourt actions is more difficult than ever for him. Even with his 51.5 percent shooting, he is missing shots at the rim that once felt automatic now that he is encountering a relative lack of lift at the rim. He also struggled last season with turnovers.

James was still comfortably a top-20 player last season. More important, he led the Lakers to a playoff series win over the Houston Rockets and was the best player in the series. His playmaking and basketball I.Q. remain elite. He affects games in ways that only a few players can.

Tony Jones covers the 76ers for The Athletic.



CHRIS SZAGOLA/ASSOCIATED PRESS

LeBron James, 41, is showing signs of slowing down. But his ability to create offense is what makes him a good fit in Philadelphia.

He remains one of the best game manipulators in the N.B.A. and one of the few people in the league who can dominate a game without scoring.

One of the reasons Philadelphia is a good fit for James is the personnel around him. Surrounded by Jaylen Brown, Tyrese Maxey and Joel Embiid, James can focus on being more of a play finisher than having to create the play. More important, he can continue creating plays for others, something he still does as well as almost anyone in basketball.

Where does James help Philadelphia the most?

Without James, the 76ers would have still been a threat to win the Eastern Conference because Brown and Maxey are All-N.B.A.-level players, and Embiid is an all-world offensive talent when healthy. But the floor of that Sixers team would have been a lot lower, and the path to the ceiling would have been more narrow.

The 76ers were a roster of bucket-getters in search of an elite playmaker. This is why James is the ultimate fit for the Sixers. His playmaking is easily the biggest way he can elevate this team. He is one of the best passers to play the game. He is also one of the brightest basketball minds.

James can function as a second point guard with Maxey. He can make plays in transition, post up in halfcourt sets, initiate pick-and-roll offenses and work in dribble handoffs, which will help Maxey, Brown and V.J. Edgecombe get clean looks off the bounce. Without James, the Sixers were missing one specific skill set to complete their roster. They went out and added the person who provides that skill perfectly.

Here's a bonus thought: James is one of the greatest mismatch hunters in N.B.A. history. One reason the Sixers got swept by the New York Knicks was the Knicks' ability to put Philadelphia's big men in a blender time

and again. Another reason: The Sixers were not able to take advantage of Jalen Brunson or Karl-Anthony Towns defensively.

James's ability to force the switches he wants should help Philadelphia when these two teams meet.

What's needed for improvement from last season?

James shot 31 percent from 3-point range last season, and he did so taking four 3s a night, his lowest volume since 2016-17. The percentage is his lowest since 2015-16. There is some easy explanation here: His age is showing up most off the dribble. He no longer creates the same separation in the halfcourt, allowing defenders to stay attached more often. As a result, the quality of the looks from 3-point range aren't the same, and he is not making them with the same efficiency.

He has had shooting slumps where he was able to bounce back. He shot 32 percent from 3 in 2022-23 before rebounding to

40 percent the next season and 37 percent the season after. In Philadelphia, this is going to be a two-way street. The Sixers will need him to make shots from beyond the arc, and do it efficiently. But this is where the Sixers can help James: Maxey and Brown are two of the most dynamic offensive talents in basketball. When healthy and locked in, Embiid often cannot be guarded by one person.

With their presence, the quality of James's 3-point looks should improve greatly. Whether he makes them will be the question. But they should be quality looks, and they should be better than the looks he has been used to getting in Los Angeles. If James and Edgecombe are shooting the ball well, it's going to be difficult for teams to guard Philadelphia.

What's the biggest concern with James?

At his peak, James was one of the N.B.A.'s best defenders and probably deserved at least one

Defensive Player of the Year Award. That's no longer who he is. He remains a very good help defender. He can still read and jump passing lanes, which leads to steals and crowd-pleasing breakaway dunks. In the playoffs last season, he was still able to lock in and be an effective defender throughout the series win over Houston.

During the regular season, though, James conserves energy, and much of that shows up on the defensive end. It was a little different last season in Los Angeles. Because his offensive responsibility went down, his energy on the defensive end went up. The Sixers will need him to defend in the regular season because they do not have the strongest infrastructure defensively.

Edgecombe and Brown are good defenders at the point of attack. Dean Wade, who will come off the bench, is one of the better wing defenders in the league. Maxey is a competitive defender. But the Sixers do not have elite rim protection, and that will make James's defense at the point of attack important. If Philadelphia is going to win a title during James's tenure, the 76ers will have to stop people.

The offense can do its part to help the defense. If the Sixers are as good offensively as they have a chance to be, that means fewer turnovers and missed shots. And that means more of a chance to make opponents score against a set defense. But James will have to do his part.

What's the best version of James for Philadelphia?

Remember the 2024 Olympics? In many ways, that version of James was different from any version we have seen. He grabbed rebounds, defended with energy, took a big step back offensively and simply filled in the blanks where needed. It was almost like Draymond Green 2.0. James was named the most valuable player for those Olympics, and he did it largely without forcing himself on the offense.

That's the blueprint for Philadelphia. Maxey, Brown and Embiid are so good offensively, it makes sense to allow them to cook teams. If James scores opportunistically, defends at a high level and can be the playmaker this roster needs, his impact on this roster has a chance to be enormous.

Valkyries Are Setting New Bar in W.N.B.A.

From First Sports Page

how to come to work every day," said Natalie Nakase, who was the W.N.B.A. coach of the year after leading the Valkyries to the playoffs in their debut season. "There's no way we're going to have a losing program. There's no way. I don't know how to work in that kind of system."

Joe Lacob, a co-owner, was the largest investor in the American Basketball League, a pro women's hoops organization that began in 1996 and shuttered in late 1998. "We did not succeed," Lacob said. Some stuff they got right, he said, but mostly he believes the problem was being a little too early.

Now it is profitably later. Lacob and his Golden State Warriors co-owner Peter Guber agreed to pay \$50 million in 2023 to run the first expansion team in the W.N.B.A. in 15 years. Three years later, in its most recent study of the league's franchise valuations, CNBC appraised the Valkyries at \$1 billion. It is the first women's pro sports franchise to hit that mark. Small wonder that the expansion fees for the next three franchises to enter the league — Cleveland, Detroit and Philadelphia — landed at \$250 million apiece.

Golden State ownership isn't flipping the property any time soon, if ever. So that \$1 billion number is kind of just a number. But it's a big number to hit in a relative blink, resetting expectations of what's achievable in the W.N.B.A. marketplace.

"Even with the backing of, say, the Warriors in this case, or the N.B.A. in general, it's still all pretty hard," Lacob said. "I think we have a great team that has maximized that opportunity. The execution of this start-up, if you want to call it, I think is probably one of the best. I've started 70 companies in my life. Mostly tech. But this is one of the best."

Inheriting some gems helped. The practice facility, in downtown Oakland, was the home base for the team's N.B.A. counterpart. It's crisp and distinct now, with a

mural of a Valkyrie warrior in the hallway outside and purple and black everywhere inside, with Sephora stripes as an accent.

The Chase Center, opened in 2019, is on a 39-game sellout streak for its W.N.B.A. tenant. The scene inside the private floor-level Chase Club on a game night has an N.B.A. feel, with crowds lining up to grab a slice at the pizzeria, popcorn at the movie theater snack station or a Violet's Fizz specialty cocktail from the bar that retails at \$25.50.

There is internal pushback on the significance of bling. "The cool stuff doesn't mean anything," the Valkyries' president, Jess Smith, said. But Golden State also has established a bar network — 35 spots and counting — creating hubs for fans to watch games.

A dozen business partners did endorsement deals with players in Year 1, per the team's vice president for corporate partnerships, Katie Stockberger. An All-Star Game voting campaign for Valkyries players included QR-code signage at every BART and Caltrain station along the route to Chase Center, and Williams wound up with the seventh-most fan votes overall.

Targeted, conscious efforts to make the team a bigger deal make the players a bigger deal by extension. And that opens opportunities in an era when opportunities are important. It's how Rakuten links up with guard Veronica Burton and how guard Tiffany Hayes teams up with Chase, among others, outside of team-led promotions. "It's up to us to elevate the players," said the team's vice president for marketing, Andrea Fernandes, "and get their names known as much as possible."

Historically, the W.N.B.A. has not been especially accommodating or proactive when it comes to the player experience. Charter flights were banned until recently. Some teams didn't have lockers for players. The new C.B.A. underscores a new era of player demands, beyond million-dollar salaries; revenue sharing, standards



JOSE CARLOS FAJARDO/BAY AREA NEWS GROUP, VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Chase Center, opened in 2019, is on a 39-game sellout streak for its W.N.B.A. tenant.

for facilities, housing stipends and retirement benefits are codified leaguewide.

Still, benefit of the doubt is tough to come by. "You can do all the research you want, but people lie a lot in this business," said Hayes, a 14-year veteran who has played for four franchises. The proof, then, is in the doing.

As center Kiah Stokes considered her free-agent options this off-season, she clocked Golden State as a franchise with its house in order — from marketing and branding to community involvement. Likewise, when she first played at Chase Center as an opponent, the vibe resonated. "I vividly remember it," Stokes said. "It was insane. That stuck with me."

She did not know that declining breakfast smoothies prepared by the Valkyries staff would prompt someone to offer to go on a coffee run for her. Or that she would mention that she has never been a great sleeper, and her new club would propose providing everything from a different comforter to a different mattress to magnesium packets to a full-on sleep study to rectify the problem.

"I think it just sets the stand-

ard," Stokes said. "If you want to be a top contending team, you have to follow along."

It's how Williams, the most crucial acquisition of Golden State's off-season, made her free-agent decision in a four-day window.

She had everything as a college star at Connecticut. Then she said she found herself at a hospital in the Chicago area, on her own, awaiting postdraft tests and flailing at questions about insurance after being selected No. 4 by the Sky in 2018. After three seasons there, the 5-foot-11 wing spent four years in Seattle. That went better. "I didn't want to take a step down," Williams said, describing her approach to free agency.

Now she's having a career year (14.7 points per game) as one of the league's top-paid players (reported salary: \$1.19 million) who never has to worry about her cat. "In Chicago, there was no investment because they didn't believe," Williams said. "But here, it's like they invest because they know that this is a product people want to buy."

The edges are clear. The Valkyries, as an expansion club, were constructed originally out of W.N.B.A. castoffs and skilled in-

ternational players. Players exposed by other franchises in the expansion draft were largely unproven commodities. Janelle Salaun, a free-agent signee, was a promising but little-known French national team forward. Kaitlyn Chen was a third-round pick in the college draft. Most everyone gathered with a need to introduce themselves, in every sense.

But the environment was uncommonly set up for success, at least relative to the rest of the league. That combination of motivation and infrastructure led to a playoff berth in Year 1. They were a bit like Rocky Balboa, and a bit like Ivan Drago: underdogs, but trained and treated like formidable elites.

It is not a balance easily achieved or perpetuated. That is why Nakase is here.

Nakase, the Valkyries' coach, is a 5-2 former walk-on guard at U.C.L.A. She coached in Germany and Japan before her career trajectory took off via an internship with the Los Angeles Clippers in 2012, working under the team's video coordinator. She wasn't sure she would ever abdicate her spot on the Las Vegas Aces until Coach Becky Hammon convinced her.

Marketing, branding and community involvement in order.

"I'm like, 'Why would I leave?'" Nakase said. "She said, you're ready for this. And I'm like, 'Am I?'"

When the Valkyries play at home, there is a sort of exaggerated delight that sets the mood apart. A fan brought out for pregame drum-banging was hailed as "a Founding Guard member since 2025," which is amusing, since there's no way to be a Founding Guard member any earlier. Upon her return to Chase Center, Los Angeles Sparks guard Kate Martin received a pregame tribute video and a standing ovation; Martin played one season for the Valkyries before being cut in training camp this year. One guy left his third-row seat to dance with members of the Flock hype team during a timeout. When Chen banks in a 3-pointer, it's as if no one in the building has ever seen such a thing in their lives.

It's funny. Maybe a little try-hard. But then, some W.N.B.A. teams and fans haven't tried enough, period.

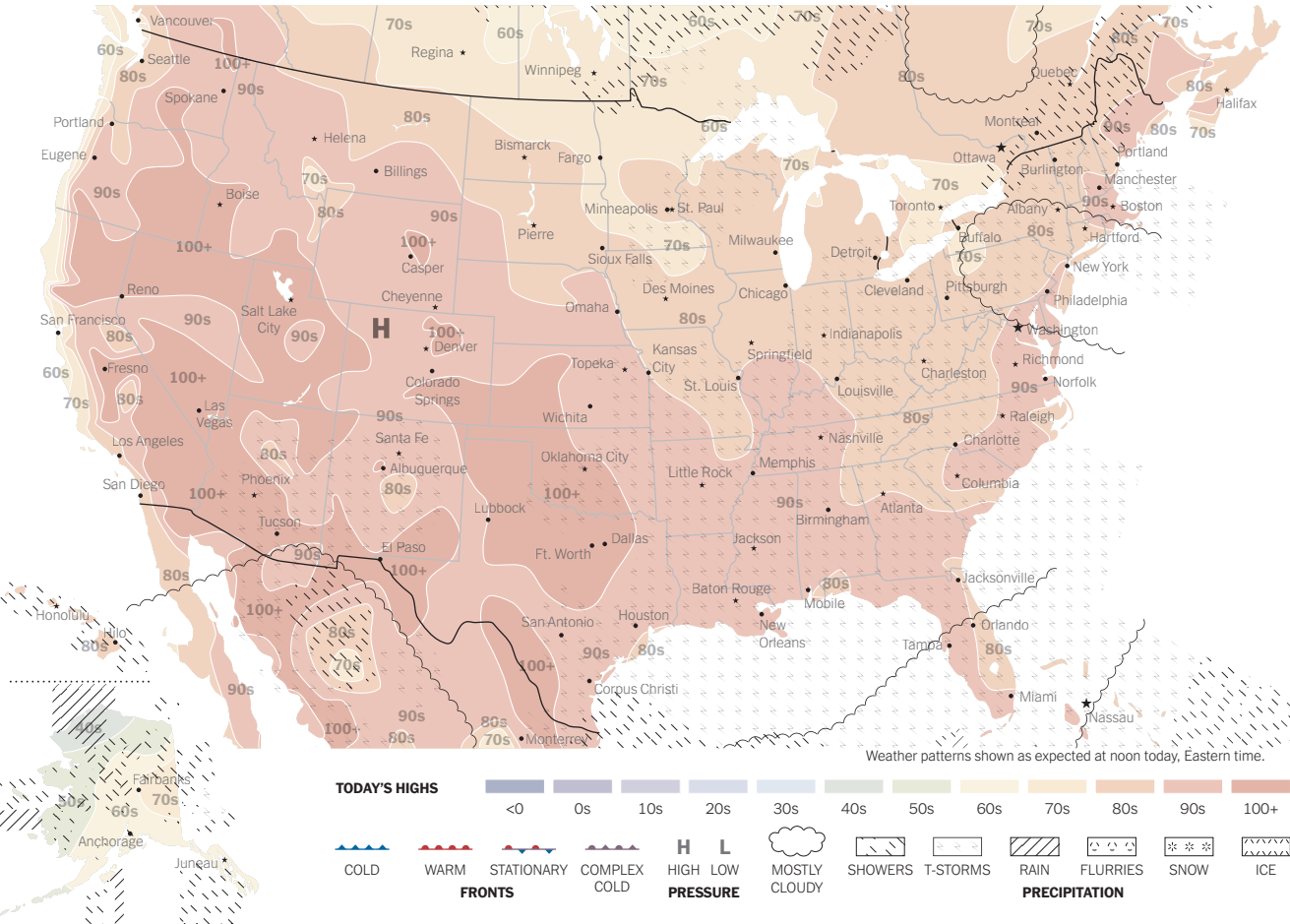
Meanwhile, all's a riot here. "I can't walk around in this," Nakase said, tugging at her Valkyries practice shirt, "or I'll get mobbed."

The Valkyries are early in the second half of the 2026 season with a 21-9 record, and they have legitimate championship aspirations, thanks in no small part to a defense ranked first. There has been no letup. They still lead a pack that has been directed, by that new collective bargaining agreement, to sprint toward the front. They presumably can stay there as long as it's never good enough to have it so good.

"You've got to always be hungry," Lacob said. "You always have to have an ethos in the organization that you want to be the best in everything you do. Everything. The way you treat players, the way you pay players, the way that you have lunches on the road, the ways you take care of their cat, the way you treat fans when they come in the door. Every single thing. That's the way we view this place."

Weather Report

Meteorology by **AccuWeather**



Highlight: Risk of Isolated Severe Thunderstorms

Showers and thunderstorms will be widespread across the interior Northeast and Middle Atlantic States this afternoon and evening. Thunderstorms may be severe, especially from upstate New York to northern Virginia. The strongest thunderstorms may produce wind gusts in excess of 50 miles per hour and intense downpours. There may be flash flooding, as the storms will move slowly.



National Forecast

Showers and thunderstorms will be scattered about much of the eastern third of the country today as moist air lingers across the region. Thunderstorms capable of producing flooding downpours as well as damaging wind gusts are in store for the Northeast. Thunderstorms may also bring areas of flash flooding to the Southeast.

A separate zone of thunderstorms is forecast for parts of the Midwest, where hail and damaging winds are expected in some places. Yet another zone of thunderstorms will occur in the southern part of the Rockies and deserts in New Mexico and Arizona.

Otherwise, the northwestern third of the country will remain generally dry. A large dome of high pressure is forecast to linger in much of the interior West, with extreme heat.

Metropolitan Forecast

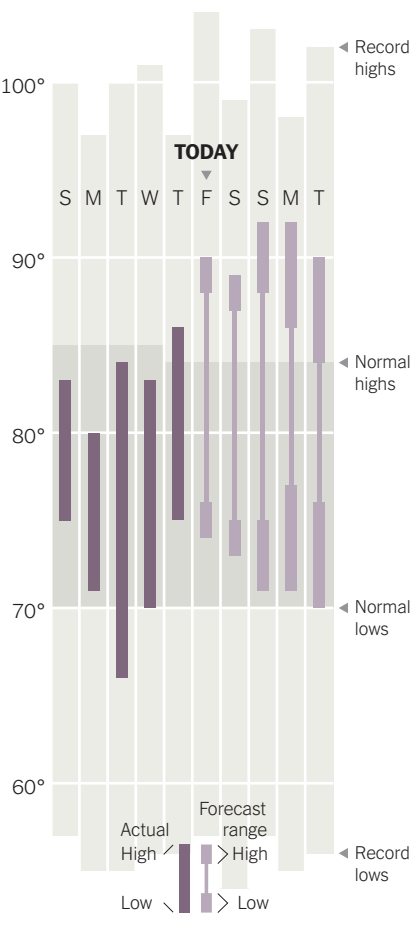
TODAYA shower and thunderstorm High 89. It will be humid with intervals of clouds and sunshine. There will be a couple of showers and a thunderstorm late in the afternoon. Storms will be capable of bringing flooding downpours and damaging winds.

TONIGHTA thunderstorm early Low 75. There will be an evening thunderstorm in the area bringing downpours capable of producing temporary flooding on roadways and in poorly-drained areas. Winds will be light and variable.

TOMORROWAn afternoon thunderstorm High 88. Conditions will be humid with intervals of clouds and sunshine. There will be an afternoon thunderstorm in parts of the area. Winds will be out of the southwest at 6 to 12 miles per hour.

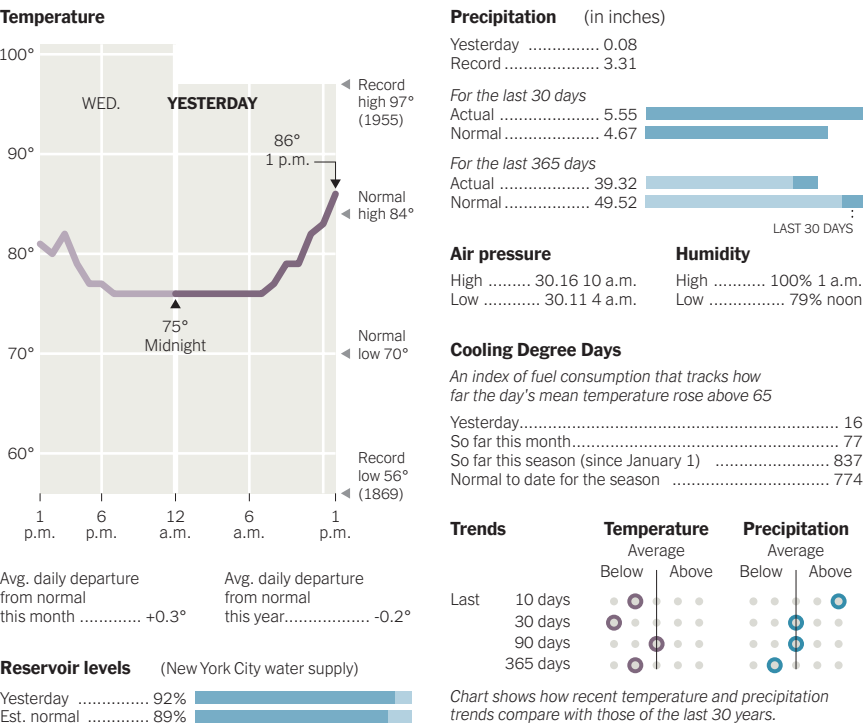
SUNDAYMostly sunny and hot High 90. High pressure moving into the Northeast will result in a mostly sunny sky and a break from storm chances. Winds will be out of the west at 6 to 12 m.p.h.

MONDAYA thunderstorm Monday High 89. On Tuesday, there will be a mixture of clouds and sunshine with a thunderstorm possible. High 87.



Metropolitan Almanac

In Central Park, for the 13 hours ended at 1 p.m. yesterday.



Cities

High/low temperatures for the 16 hours ended at 4 p.m. yesterday, Eastern time, and precipitation (in inches) for the 16 hours ended at 4 p.m. yesterday. Expected conditions for today and tomorrow.

C	Clouds	S	Sun
F	Fog	Sn	Snow
H	Haze	Ss	Snow showers
I	Ice	T	Thunderstorms
PC	Partly cloudy	Tr	Trace
R	Rain	W	Windy
Sh	Showers		Not available

United States	Yesterday	Today	Tomorrow
Albany	88/ 69 0.57	88/ 72 T	87/ 70 T
Albuquerque	101/ 70 0.04	99/ 70 T	97/ 71 PC
Anchorage	64/ 53 0.03	64/ 53 C	68/ 56 PC
Atlanta	88/ 71 0.04	89/ 73 T	91/ 73 T
Atlantic City	83/ 76 0	87/ 75 PC	87/ 77 PC
Austin	100/ 77 0	99/ 75 T	99/ 74 S
Baltimore	91/ 74 0.06	91/ 72 T	92/ 74 T
Baton Rouge	88/ 73 0.45	85/ 74 T	93/ 75 T
Birmingham	90/ 73 0.05	92/ 73 T	91/ 73 T
Boise	103/ 68 0	104/ 68 PC	102/ 67 PC
Boston	88/ 76 0.04	92/ 74 T	89/ 73 T
Buffalo	85/ 68 0.12	79/ 69 T	81/ 66 T
Burlington	88/ 69 0.28	88/ 71 T	85/ 70 T
Casper	97/ 49 0	100/ 55 PC	99/ 55 PC
Charlotte	86/ 72 0.05	89/ 73 T	90/ 72 T
Chattanooga	84/ 70 0.25	89/ 71 T	88/ 72 T
Chicago	79/ 68 0.03	86/ 69 PC	85/ 68 PC
Cincinnati	86/ 69 0.10	83/ 70 T	87/ 69 T
Cleveland	85/ 71 0.19	81/ 69 T	85/ 66 T
Colorado Springs	91/ 63 0	94/ 60 PC	96/ 66 PC
Columbus	88/ 71 0.10	82/ 71 T	87/ 66 T
Concord, N.H.	90/ 69 0.04	93/ 68 T	88/ 66 T
Dallas-Ft. Worth	100/ 80 0	101/ 81 PC	99/ 80 S
Denver	96/ 64 0	99/ 70 PC	99/ 69 PC
Des Moines	82/ 67 0.01	86/ 63 T	84/ 69 PC
Detroit	84/ 68 0.20	82/ 68 T	85/ 63 T
El Paso	103/ 77 0.05	102/ 78 PC	101/ 75 S
Fargo	91/ 57 0.04	78/ 54 PC	88/ 57 T
Hartford	89/ 72 0.04	88/ 73 T	88/ 76 PC
Honolulu	88/ 76 0.06	90/ 78 PC	88/ 76 PC
Indianapolis	82/ 69 0.08	82/ 71 T	86/ 67 T
Jackson	94/ 72 0.04	94/ 75 T	94/ 73 T
Jacksonville	89/ 73 0.16	89/ 75 T	90/ 75 T
Kansas City	82/ 70 0.02	90/ 70 T	90/ 73 S
Key West	87/ 83 1.46	91/ 83 T	91/ 84 T
Las Vegas	111/ 89 0	112/ 91 S	113/ 91 S
Lexington	87/ 70 0	85/ 71 T	90/ 70 T

Little Rock	96/ 76 0.04	94/ 76 T	96/ 74 PC
Los Angeles	88/ 68 0	88/ 69 S	86/ 70 S
Louisville	89/ 72 0.08	87/ 74 T	92/ 74 T
Memphis	95/ 76 0.04	94/ 76 T	95/ 76 T
Miami	89/ 79 0.15	91/ 80 T	91/ 79 T
Milwaukee	76/ 66 0.02	84/ 68 S	82/ 68 PC
Mpls.-St. Paul	84/ 67 0	82/ 61 T	86/ 66 T
Nashville	92/ 72 0.04	93/ 74 T	92/ 73 T
New Orleans	92/ 77 0.27	92/ 78 T	92/ 78 T
Norfolk	92/ 75 0	93/ 76 PC	91/ 75 S
Oklahoma City	101/ 76 0	101/ 74 T	102/ 75 S
Omaha	81/ 68 Tr	89/ 66 PC	87/ 69 PC
Orlando	93/ 77 0.46	89/ 76 T	93/ 77 T
Philadelphia	93/ 76 0.04	91/ 74 T	91/ 75 T
Phoenix	109/ 91 0.05	113/ 92 T	115/ 91 S
Pittsburgh	85/ 69 0.14	82/ 69 T	85/ 66 T
Portland, Me.	88/ 69 0	89/ 68 T	83/ 68 T
Portland, Ore.	93/ 61 0	89/ 59 S	86/ 58 PC
Providence	88/ 73 0	90/ 72 T	89/ 73 T
Raleigh	89/ 74 0.25	91/ 74 T	92/ 74 T
Reno	103/ 69 0	100/ 71 S	102/ 69 PC
Richmond	90/ 74 0	91/ 74 PC	91/ 73 T
Rochester	86/ 67 0.27	82/ 68 T	85/ 64 T
Sacramento	99/ 60 0	98/ 61 S	103/ 63 S
Salt Lake City	100/ 72 0	105/ 74 PC	103/ 76 PC
San Antonio	99/ 79 0	98/ 78 T	97/ 78 S
San Diego	80/ 70 0.01	80/ 70 PC	79/ 71 PC
San Francisco	72/ 57 0	70/ 58 PC	73/ 59 S
San Jose	82/ 60 0	83/ 60 PC	87/ 61 S
San Juan	92/ 79 0	92/ 79 Sh	92/ 80 W
Seattle	88/ 58 0	85/ 57 S	82/ 57 S
Sioux Falls	83/ 68 Tr	85/ 57 PC	84/ 66 T
Spokane	94/ 61 0	95/ 63 PC	92/ 61 PC
St. Louis	93/ 71 0.19	90/ 73 T	90/ 76 PC
St. Thomas	90/ 81 0.01	92/ 82 Sh	93/ 81 PC
Syracuse	85/ 67 0.30	87/ 71 T	85/ 68 T
Tampa	89/ 76 0.54	91/ 77 T	90/ 78 T
Toledo	84/ 68 0.27	83/ 68 T	88/ 59 T
Tucson	102/ 80 0.05	104/ 82 T	105/ 81 PC
Tulsa	101/ 79 0.19	100/ 77 T	103/ 79 S
Virginia Beach	90/ 75 0	90/ 76 PC	91/ 76 S
Washington	93/ 76 0.06	92/ 75 T	93/ 75 T
Wichita	93/ 72 0.05	95/ 72 PC	100/ 75 S
Wilmington, Del.	91/ 74 0.04	90/ 72 T	89/ 73 T

Africa	Yesterday	Today	Tomorrow
Algiers	93/ 66 0	93/ 69 S	97/ 73 S
Cairo	97/ 77 0	98/ 77 PC	97/ 77 PC
Cape Town	61/ 52 0.51	67/ 46 S	64/ 48 R
Dakar	88/ 77 0	90/ 81 T	90/ 81 T
Johannesburg	71/ 41 0	71/ 44 S	68/ 45 PC
Nairobi	79/ 56 0	75/ 57 C	76/ 57 PC
Tunis	95/ 79 0	98/ 78 S	98/ 74 S

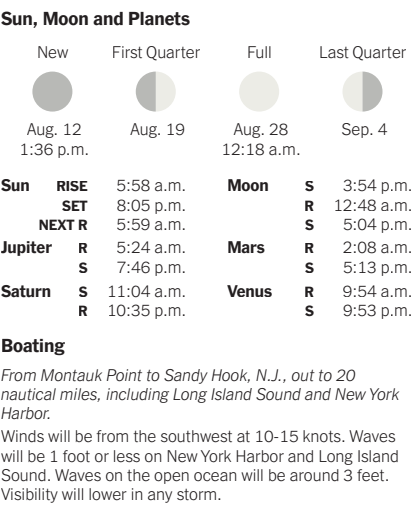
Asia/Pacific	Yesterday	Today	Tomorrow
Baghdad	120/ 90 0	118/ 88 PC	117/ 88 S
Bangkok	91/ 77 0.06	92/ 81 R	92/ 81 Sh
Beijing	100/ 78 0	99/ 76 T	89/ 68 S
Damascus	100/ 68 0	101/ 71 S	102/ 71 S
Hong Kong	92/ 80 0	93/ 82 S	95/ 85 PC
Jakarta	92/ 79 0	91/ 77 PC	91/ 75 PC
Jerusalem	87/ 69 0	86/ 69 S	86/ 70 S
Karachi	91/ 82 0	93/ 81 PC	94/ 81 PC
Manila	83/ 77 0.38	85/ 79 T	86/ 80 T
Mumbai	86/ 79 0.09	88/ 81 R	87/ 81 R

Europe	Yesterday	Today	Tomorrow
Amsterdam	70/ 61 0	72/ 54 Sh	79/ 60 C
Athens	95/ 82 0	94/ 75 S	97/ 82 S
Berlin	81/ 64 0	72/ 53 PC	77/ 56 S
Brussels	75/ 59 0	76/ 52 S	83/ 59 PC
Budapest	102/ 66 0	93/ 69 T	89/ 63 S
Copenhagen	73/ 63 0	68/ 55 C	72/ 59 PC
Dublin	68/ 52 0	72/ 53 PC	72/ 58 Sh
Edinburgh	64/ 54 0.04	66/ 53 PC	69/ 57 C
Frankfurt	82/ 68 0	81/ 59 S	88/ 64 S
Geneva	89/ 68 0	87/ 60 S	91/ 62 S
Helsinki	75/ 63 0.02	71/ 49 Sh	70/ 49 PC
Istanbul	88/ 75 0	89/ 73 S	89/ 74 S
Kyiv	101/ 72 0	94/ 66 T	78/ 60 T
Lisbon	88/ 66 0	89/ 68 S	86/ 66 S
London	72/ 55 0	80/ 55 S	84/ 60 PC
Madrid	100/ 72 0	103/ 68 S	101/ 70 T
Moscow	86/ 59 0	86/ 69 R	77/ 56 Sh
Nice	88/ 79 0	89/ 77 S	88/ 79 S
Oslo	68/ 57 0.32	68/ 49 PC	71/ 55 PC
Paris	79/ 63 0	82/ 57 S	89/ 63 PC
Prague	86/ 72 0.02	79/ 54 S	81/ 56 S
Rome	93/ 72 0	93/ 73 S	92/ 71 S
St. Petersburg	81/ 64 0.15	72/ 59 R	69/ 58 C
Stockholm	72/ 59 0.01	69/ 48 PC	71/ 55 PC
Vienna	97/ 72 0	85/ 65 Sh	87/ 59 S
Warsaw	91/ 72 0.02	78/ 59 R	74/ 54 PC

North America	Yesterday	Today	Tomorrow
Acapulco	90/ 77 0	92/ 78 T	93/ 78 PC
Bermuda	85/ 78 0	87/ 79 S	87/ 78 PC
Edmonton	61/ 50 0.05	71/ 49 PC	74/ 52 PC
Guadalajara	77/ 63 0	84/ 61 T	79/ 62 T
Havana	88/ 73 0	91/ 73 R	91/ 74 Sh
Kingston	90/ 82 0	94/ 81 PC	92/ 82 PC
Martinique	91/ 81 0	91/ 79 W	90/ 78 T
Mexico City	71/ 56 0	73/ 58 R	74/ 57 R
Monterrey	85/ 70 0	93/ 70 T	93/ 69 S
Montreal	81/ 70 0.13	85/ 71 PC	83/ 67 T
Nassau	90/ 82 0.05	89/ 82 T	91/ 81 T
Panama City	82/ 72 0.18	95/ 77 T	93/ 76 T
Quebec City	82/ 59 0.04	86/ 65 PC	80/ 65 T
Santo Domingo	90/ 73 0	93/ 74 PC	93/ 74 S
Toronto	82/ 66 T	78/ 69 T	84/ 63 T
Vancouver	65/ 57 0	76/ 59 S	73/ 58 PC
Winnipeg	75/ 57 0.01	72/ 51 PC	73/ 50 S

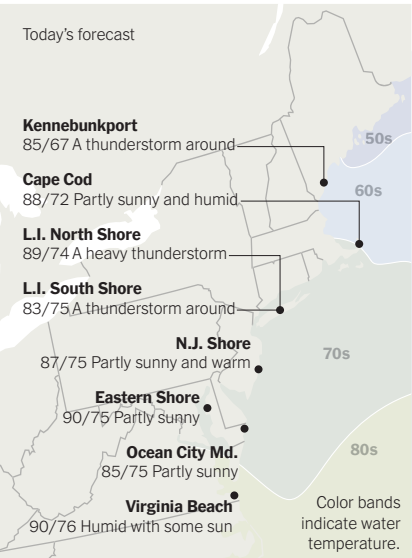
South America	Yesterday	Today	Tomorrow
Buenos Aires	59/ 55 1.28	57/ 46 S	56/ 41 PC
Caracas	90/ 78 0.03	91/ 77 S	91/ 77 R
Lima	75/ 67 0	77/ 68 S	78/ 68 S
Quito	86/ 48 0.02	70/ 48 R	71/ 46 R
Recife	83/ 71 0.04	84/ 77 Sh	86/ 77 Sh
Rio de Janeiro	87/ 73 0	90/ 71 S	79/ 74 PC
Santiago	57/ 45 0.18	54/ 40 PC	52/ 36 PC

Recreational Forecast



High Tides	Low Tides
Atlantic City 2:20 a.m.	Barneget Inlet 3:04 p.m.
The Battery 8:05 p.m.	The Battery 3:18 p.m.
Beach Haven 4:05 a.m.	Bridgeport 6:27 a.m.
City Island 6:11 a.m.	Fire Island Lt. 3:33 a.m.
Montauk Point 4:08 a.m.	Northport 6:36 a.m.
Sandy Hook 6:22 a.m.	Shinnecock Inlet 2:41 a.m.
Stamford 6:26 a.m.	Tarrytown 4:57 a.m.
Wilets Point 6:15 a.m.	

Beach and Ocean Temperatures



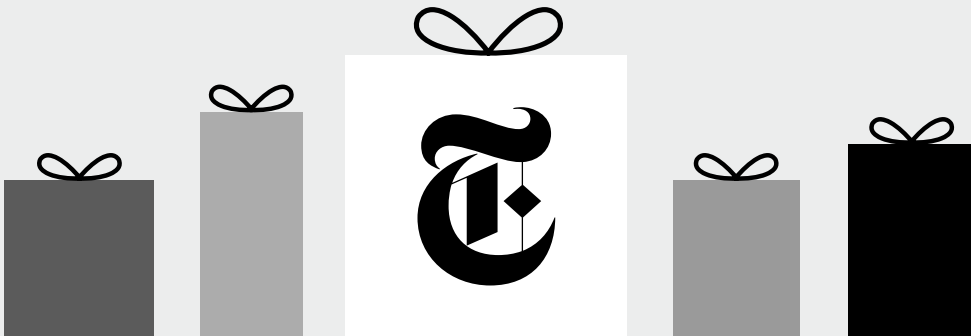
It will be warm and humid with a mix of clouds and sunshine across the region today. There will be a late-day thunderstorm from northern New Jersey through Maine, but most of the beaches will remain dry for most of the day. Thunderstorms may produce flooding downpours and damaging winds.

The New York Times

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Poet days were behind him until acolytes showed up. BY ALISSA WILKINSON



Young and hungry for life’s smorgasbord. BY JEANNETTE CATSOULIS



Reading the evolution of noble tarot cards. BY NINA SIEGAL



Weekend Arts

The New York Times



CARING FOR WORKS THAT WILL OUTLIVE US

Andrew Winslow, the collections manager at The Met Cloisters, sees himself as ‘one stop in a long line’ of caretakers for the artworks, including Tzinacantecuhтли, or Bat Lord, on loan for the exhibition ‘Creatures of Myth and Imagination.’ Page 8.

CHRISTOPHER GREGORY-RIVERA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

ALISSA WILKINSON | FILM REVIEW

Slasher Looks Inward And Then Lashes Out

A meta take on a genre careens among satire, gore and eroticism.

THE OPENING CREDITS of “Teenage Sex and Death at Camp Miasma” tell a story: A 1980s teen slasher film called “Camp Miasma” became a runaway hit, spawning sequels — some of which went direct to video — along with character trading cards, an arcade game, a devoted fandom and a status as a cult classic (complete with a failed Quibi adaptation). Then it entered a period of critical re-evaluation as a “problematic classic,” for its depiction of trans characters

and teenage sexuality. Then, inevitably, the studio decided to reboot the franchise, with a “Sundance wunderkind” director named Kris (who, not coincidentally, identifies as queer) at the helm. This back story is all handled with deft and knowing wit, because this is the trajectory of many slasher horror franchises that shaped, in particular, millennial imaginations: the “Sleepaway Camp” series, for instance, or “Friday the 13th.” Certain sorts of cinephiles, some of whom became filmmak-



Hannah Einbinder, left, and Gillian Anderson crackle with chemistry.

Teenage Sex and Death at Camp Miasma
Directed by Jane Schoenbrun

ers, love those series and also feel guilty about their more dubious treatment of sex, race and gender stereotypes, or perhaps violent or transphobic elements. Much ink is spilled, most of it digital, by bloggers and critics in debating and rehashing and reclaiming those movies, precisely because when you love something, it makes you into who you are. Rejecting it feels like shutting down your selfhood. The writer and director Jane Schoenbrun is particularly good at telling stories that tap into the feeling of having been molded, in some fundamental and almost subconscious way, by screen-based media, in all its weirdness. Their previous film “I Saw the CONTINUED ON PAGE C4

What to Do in N.Y.C.

By ERIK PIEPENBURG

Plenty of Options for Summer’s Dog Days

How can you beat the heat this month? Let us count the myriad ways, including swimming at a city pool, getting immersed in a deluge of cat videos, joining in a collective scream at a Brooklyn church and seeing Harry Styles and Tiffany Haddish.

TAKE A DIVE

In June, Mayor Zohran Mamdani celebrated the opening of New York City’s **90TH SUMMER POOL SEASON** by jumping into one fully clothed. Follow his lead — in a proper bathing suit, please — by taking a plunge in one of the city’s free outdoor pools, which are open to the public through Sept. 13. In Sunset Park, Brooklyn, on Seventh Avenue between 41st and 44th Streets, there’s a public pool that is Olympic-size and has stellar views of the Manhattan skyline and the Statue of Liberty.

MEET PEOPLE

Want to find more people who share your tastes in entertainment? **FIELD TRIP**, one of the newest additions to New York City’s thriving social club scene, makes that easier: Choose from its menu of cultural events, and Matt Byrd, the founder, takes care of tickets, a post-show gathering and other details. Prices range from free to around \$200; most groups are capped at 12, and there are waiting lists for sold-out experiences. This month features a free meet-up for the Broadway by the Boardwalk series at Hudson River Park (Monday, 5:45 p.m.) and a walking tour of Broadway history (Aug. 30, 11 a.m.).

WATCH A MOVIE

Look what the cat dragged in at the annual **CAT VIDEO FEST**, a family-friendly compilation of frisky feline videos. Catch it at theaters like Firehouse in Lower Manhattan (through Thursday); the IFC Center in the West Village (Saturday-Sunday); the Alamo Draft-house in Downtown Brooklyn and Lower Manhattan (Saturday-Sunday); the Nitehawk in Williamsburg and Prospect Park, Brooklyn (Saturday-Sunday); or the Museum of the Moving Image in Astoria, Queens (Saturday-Sunday and Aug. 15-16). A portion of the ticket proceeds goes to local cat charities.

Then open wide: “2001: A Space Odyssey” is one of a handful of classic films screening on 70 millimeter in the **SEE IT BIG** series at the Museum of the Moving Image through Aug. 30.



A scene from this year’s Cat Video Fest, which is running at several New York City theaters.

MAKE A MOVIE

Everyone is welcome at **SHORT CUTS NYC**, run by a collective seeking to open up the world of movie-making to all with this free challenge series. Here’s how it works: Each month Short Cuts issues a rule regarding form and another for content that participants must adhere to when creating their short film submissions. At the end of the month, these films are screened for an audience, and afterward new rules are chosen and the process begins again. The next screening is on Aug. 29 at 1 p.m. at BRIC Arts Media in Downtown Brooklyn. The task? Make a five-minute comedy with a match cut, a transition between shots that looks and feels seamless.

THEATER

Audra McDonald, Kelli O’Hara and Brian Stokes Mitchell are a few of the Broadway luminaries set to appear at a new outdoor musical theater extravaganza called **‘THE FESTIVAL’** (Aug. 14-16), happening at the Hutton Brick-yards in Kingston, N.Y. Among the performances is a reunion on Aug. 15 of nearly the entire original Broadway cast of “Rent” for the show’s 30th birthday.



The city’s free outdoor swimming pools, in their 90th season, are open to the public through Sept. 13.



Harry Styles at the Brit Awards in February. He will play 30 shows at Madison Square Garden from Aug. 26 to Oct. 31.



Betye Saar’s “Hoo Doo Woman” (1974), on view in a collection of some of Saar’s other dolls at the New York Historical.

ART

‘BETYE SAAR’S BLACK DOLLS,’ an exhibition at the New York Historical on the Upper West Side, features a collection of the dolls that the artist, who died last month, promised to the museum. One of them is “Hoo Doo Woman” (1974), the only Black doll Saar herself made. The show is on view through Oct. 4.

COMEDY

Take whatever form of transit available to see three very funny women this month. **MS. PAT** (Aug. 14-15) and **TIFFANY HADDISH** (Aug. 21-23) are at Nyack Levity Live in West Nyack, N.Y., which is about a 40-minute drive from Manhattan. And on Aug. 29, hop on a ferry for **MARGARET CHO**, who is at the Ice Palace on Fire Island starting at 7 p.m.

POP MUSIC

Here are this month’s concerts by generation: Baby boomers, **LYNYRD SKYNYRD AND FOREIGNER** are at Northwell at Jones Beach Theater in Wantagh, N.Y. (Aug. 21, 6:30 p.m.). Gen X, **GUNS N’ ROSES** turns MetLife Stadium into Paradise City (Wednesday, 6:25 p.m.). Millennials, **MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE AND FRANZ FERDINAND** are at Citi Field (Sunday, 7 p.m.). Gen Z, **HARRY STYLES** is doing a whopping 30 shows through Halloween at Madison Square Garden starting on Aug. 26 at 8 p.m.

JAZZ

Two veteran heavy hitters are at the Blue Note in the West Village in August: the saxophonist **KENNY GARRETT** (through Sunday) and the trumpeter **ARTURO SANDOVAL** (Aug. 25-30).

KIDS

On Wednesday at 4 p.m., the St. George Theater on Staten Island hosts a singalong screening of the 1989 animated film **‘THE LITTLE MERMAID.’** Arrive early for a meet-and-greet with Princess Ariel. Through Aug. 30, Powerhouse Arts in Gowanus, Brooklyn, is home to **‘THE ARK,’** an eye-popping exhibition of 90 large-scale animal sculptures by more than 50 artists, including Kiki Smith and Maurizio Cattelan. On Aug. 22, the nonprofit presents **‘DELUGE,’** a free daylong event of kid-friendly workshops and performances. Concerts, games and player appearances are on tap at **ARTHUR ASHE KIDS’ DAY** (Aug. 23), part of the U.S. Open’s **FAN WEEK** (Aug. 23-29) at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in Flushing Meadows Corona Park, Queens.



An installation view of “The Ark,” at Powerhouse Arts in Gowanus, Brooklyn through Aug. 30.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Minimalism is the big idea when the countertenor **ANTHONY ROTH COSTANZO** performs a series of concerts at Little Island near the Meatpacking district (through Sunday, 8:30 p.m.). On Friday, after Costanzo sings with the **PUBLIQuartet**, stick around for a free dance party curated by the good-time Brooklyn queer art collective Papi Juice. The Talea Ensemble and Alarm Will Sound are on the bill at **TIME:SPANS**, the annual festival of adventurous contemporary classical music. It runs from Saturday to Aug. 22 at the DiMenna Center for Classical Music in Midtown West.

DANCE

On Aug. 29, the **DANCE THEATER OF HARLEM** heads to the Lehman Center for the Performing Arts in the Bedford Park section of the Bronx. The program, which starts at 7 p.m., includes “Take Me With You,” Robert Bondara’s contemporary pas de deux set to the Radiohead song “Reckoner.”

LET IT ALL OUT

Recently, I joined about 125 people in the dimly lit nave of the Old First Reformed Church in Park Slope, Brooklyn, and together, we let out a sustained chorus of bloodcurdling shrieks, as if we were recording a horror movie score. The occasion was **DESPAIR SANCTUARY**, a “drone metal vigil for all who are weary,” where secular rituals, performances and collective screaming “make space for negative emotions.” It returns to the church on Aug. 15 at 8 p.m.

LAST CALL

You have until Saturday to go to Jeffrey Deitch’s gallery in SoHo to see **‘NIGHT SHIFT,’** an exhibition of hallucinatory photos that Ryan McGinley took between 9 p.m. and 5 a.m. in all five boroughs. Other exhibition closings include **‘NEW HUMANS’** at the New Museum on the Lower East Side (Sunday); **‘COUNT YOUR CHICKENS,’** a survey of work by Sonic Youth’s Kim Gordon, at Amant in Williamsburg, Brooklyn (Aug. 16); and the **WHITNEY BIENNIAL** at the Whitney Museum of American Art in the Meatpacking district (Aug. 23). On Broadway, it’s curtains for three Critic’s Picks: **‘CATS: THE JELLCLE BALL’** (Saturday), at the Broadhurst Theater; **‘DEATH OF A SALESMAN’** (Sunday), at the Winter Garden Theater, and **‘RAGTIME’** (Aug. 16), at the Vivian Beaumont Theater.

Movies

ALISSA WILKINSON | FILM REVIEW



ATSUSHI NISHIJIMA/MAGNOLIA

After Poetry, Something Lyrical

On the streets of the Village, a former poet is charmed by a group of literary aspirants.

FOR A YOUNG PERSON longing for the artist's life, there's nowhere like Greenwich Village, haunted by the ghosts of painters and beat poets who seem to have lived in a more magical time. When I first moved to New York City, only vaguely interested in writing but definitely coveting the trappings of a literary existence, I bought my first pocket

Late Fame
Not rated. Running time: 1 hour 36 minutes. In theaters.

Moleskine. I'd scribble down observations about the world on my lunch break, imagining it made me more interesting than the average corporate drone.

Ed Saxberger (Willem Dafoe) passed that stage of his life many decades ago. In 1979, when he was a recent Manhattan arrival and not yet out of his teens, he wrote and published a book of poetry titled "Way Past Go," and it earned him a brief moment of modest fame. He knew some celebrity poets, a little. There was even an article about him in the Village Voice.

But to borrow a line from Tony Soprano, Ed feels a little like he came in at the end of something, and the best was over almost before he got there. His poetry days have long subsided, and he's been working at the post office for almost 40 years, living in a small apartment with his books and recordings of poetry. After work, he eats a tuna sandwich or heads to his local dive bar to shoot pool with his friends, who have no idea that he was ever a poet.

Here's who does know: Wilson Meyers (Edmund Donovan), a very earnest young man who recently finished his master's degree at New York University (in the self-de-

signed Virtues of Style, Rhetoric and Voice) and happened upon "Way Past Go" in a bookstore. Having learned Ed lives near him, he hunts him down and tries to get him to come meet his friends, a group of aspirationally literary young men (played with charming authenticity by Clay Singer, Arthur Langlie, Graham Campbell and Luca Padovan). Meyers — the group members call one another by their last names — has named the crew the Enthusiasm Society, and it is devoted to "standing against negativity, vulgarization, the monetization of everything, the coarsening of culture." They drink sloe gin fizzes and espresso at a cafe on LaGuardia Place. Some wear suspenders and hats.

Ed is charmed by them but especially taken with Gloria (Greta Lee), an actress and singer who hangs around with her "boys" and affects the kind of airs you'd expect from a bohemian muse in years gone by. So he keeps showing up and agrees to write a new poem for a reading the group wants to put on to counteract the delusional trappings of late-stage capitalism and the degrading effects of "sociopath media."

Still waters run deep with Ed, whom Dafoe — no stranger to downtown New York art scenes — plays almost without seeming to act. He is amused and a little flattered and also reminded of his own youth, when the world felt enchanted, and Dafoe lets this all roll across his extraordinary face. You're meant to feel it along with him when Gloria remarks that he must have been so beautiful when he was young.

"Late Fame" is directed by Kent Jones from a screenplay by Samy Burch, who previously earned an Oscar nomination for writing "May December" (and also wrote the script for the upcoming Looney Tunes comedy "Coyote vs. Acme"). It's based on Arthur Schnitzler's 19th-century, Viennaset novella, first published in the United States in 2017. (This is too good not to mention: Schnitzler also wrote the novella on

Greta Lee and Willem Dafoe in "Late Fame," which has the feeling of art-house New York films shot on the fly in years past.

which "Eyes Wide Shut" is based.) The story seems right at home in 21st-century New York, perhaps because the sort of young person who valorizes Ed, a relatively unknown poet, will always exist wherever there are eager youths.

Jones handles the setting with a light and confident touch; having previously worked as a critic and, from 2013 to 2019, as director of programming for the New York Film Festival, it's clear he knows the milieu. There's an appealingly naturalistic style to Jones's direction, despite the posturing of most of its characters: the Enthusiasm Society guys, who rail against influencers while spending their parents' money, are dying to seem more cultured than they are, and Gloria attacks every moment with the put-on flourishes of a cabaret star. In their company, Ed seems like an alien floated in from another world, free of all airs.

Jones and his cinematographer Wyatt Garfield shoot in many familiar places on the streets of the Village (you can spot an out-of-focus Film Forum in the background across from Ed's house), often with a handheld camera, imbuing "Late Fame" with the feeling of art-house New York films shot on the fly in years past. The style matches the story; you can imagine a youthful Ed, and his young friends two generations later, crowding into a small theater to watch movies just like this one.

"Late Fame" is a story of a certain sort of wistful foolishness, affectionately told. It would have been simple to just satirize the poseur leanings of the young, to laugh at the ways they are building their brand as much as any social media star they despise. It might have been equally tempting to make Ed's fascination with them feel tragic. But a loving and lovely sensibility runs through "Late Fame," a fond and wise understanding of why some people want to become artists without making much art and why other people quit making it altogether. Still, they seem to keep coming back to New York, generation after generation.

NATALIA WINKELMAN
FILM REVIEW

Hookups Permitted Once a Year

A dystopian rom-com follows two parallel hunts for passion.

AS IF BORN OF A CONVERSATION between libidinous boys in the back row of a school bus, "One Night Only" takes the premise of "The Purge" and makes it about sex.

The movie imagines a puritanical dystopia in which premarital encounters are a criminal offense except for an annual 12-hour reprieve. To enforce the prohibition, the government implants everyone with a neurochemical sensor. Should an unmarried person experience particular spikes near someone else, the police are alerted.

Directed by Will Gluck ("Anyone But You," "Easy A"), evidently our modern bard of bawdy romantic comedy, "One Night Only" opens with a title card describing the

One Night Only
Rated R for lust let loose. Running time: 1 hour 42 minutes. In theaters.

status quo. The ban was instituted three years earlier, and "it's been . . . a lot," the text reads. Cue the laughs, although they're soon swallowed by a pop-heavy soundtrack that, for the movie's remainder, seems to demand a minimum of three needle drops per act.

Spanning the exemption night, the movie follows Allie (Monica Barbaro) and Owen (Callum Turner), two New York romantics, on their parallel hunts for passion. Allie, an aspiring singer, hopes to use the hours to find her forever mate. Owen, who runs a pizzeria, plans to propose to his girlfriend (Maya Hawke), but instead gets dumped for the hunk downstairs. That leaves our lovelorn pie slinger searching for a temporary palliative while Allie, prone to Prince Charming reveries, chases the real thing.

Despite the evening's sexual amnesty, the movie is mostly just a tease. The running joke is that, as couples around them go at it, neither of our lovebirds can catch a break, their efforts continually foiled by a spate of blunders and predicaments. Yet the absence of erotic spectacle doesn't stop the movie from reveling in overtones. Women are assigned plunging necklines and mini-skirts, and Turner's muscled torso is bared more than once. At the pizzeria, he works the dough like an erogenous zone.

If this all sounds implausible, with the movie's science-fiction conception of the birds, the bees and the biomonitoring, it is. Faced with such folly, people would surely



NICOLE RIVELLI/UNIVERSAL PICTURES

In "One Night Only," starring Monica Barbaro and Callum Turner, premarital encounters are a crime, except for a 12-hour annual reprieve.

devise ways around the ordinance, namely, by getting married and then divorced in droves.

But "One Night Only" lays no claim to logic. It traffics instead in charisma, and the combined likability of the leads is the putative solution to a premise that's all flashy surface and no deeper inquiry. With nothing to say about sex or society, the repression plot mostly gets in the way of a movie that would prefer to be a routine romance, complete with a lovers' rendezvous at a Manhattan landmark at sunrise. It's too bad for Allie and Owen that the moratorium resumes at 7 a.m., but the courthouse is only a subway ride away.

ERIK PIEPENBURG | FILM REVIEW

'Watch Out for Children' Takes On New Meaning

Sweet-faced treat seekers become murderous maniacs in Eli Roth's new horror film.

A MOUSETRAP TO THE FOOT, a skillet to the face, a drill to the ear, a plush rabbit down the throat. That's the order in which one character is slaughtered in Eli Roth's latest gross-out horror comedy, "Ice Cream Man."

While not a remake of Paul Norman's deliciously nutty "Ice Cream Man" (1995), Roth's sicko romp does share DNA with that and other films — "Mr. Ice Cream Man" (1996) and "The Ice Cream Truck" (2017) — that constitute one of horror's dippier microgenres. It's a welcome addition.

The jolt of this film — its sick pleasure, really — is that the butchers are sweet-faced kids in the grip of an unholy brain freeze caused by cursed frozen treats. No wonder a message on the title character's ice cream truck warns: "Watch out for children."

Jared (Charlie Zeltzer), a nebbishy boy who is lactose intolerant — a blessing, it turns out — suspects there's something



THE HORROR SECTION

He's no Good Humor man: Ari Millen, center, is the titular peddler of doom in "Ice Cream Man."

sketchy about an ice cream truck that blares a warped musical jingle as it circles his suburban neighborhood. At the window, below the truck's dark-eyed soft-serve-cone mascot, an ice cream man (Ari Millen) in a

Ice Cream Man
Not rated. Running time: 1 hour 26 minutes. In theaters.

crisp white uniform and red bow tie hands out frozen treats with names — the Creepy Crawly, the Serpent Swirl — that sound like they came from Ed's house).

Jared's parents (Roth, along with Karen Cliche) and sister, Lizzie (Sarah Abbott), aren't as suspicious of this stranger as Jared is. That turns out to be a mistake, because the kids who one afternoon shovel ice cream down their throats turn into killing machines overnight, with parents, teachers and other adults as victims. As the cartoony carnage mounts, Jared and his not-possessed pals battle ice-cold supernatural forces that are burning with revenge.

Roth has said that when he and his "Ice Cream Man" co-writer Noah Belson get together, "we're basically 12-year-olds." It shows. Tonally, this film is the cinematic equivalent of a tween's DQ Blizzard order: a frenzied mix of puerile comedy and stomach-churning jolts that leaves behind a

scary-movie sugar rush and little else. That's not necessarily an aspersion; summer horror runs on empty calories.

Horror fans will get a kick out of watching kids in grotesque "Dawn of the Dead"-like makeup play around with prop innards like they're Slinkys and beat up older people. Steve Newburn and Adrien Morot's stellar prosthetic makeup effects might sicken even the heartiest of gorehounds.

But under the grisly excess, Roth is dead serious about exploring what it means to love people who do the wrong things — the same kinds of manipulations and betrayals that Roth mined as far back as "Hostel" (2006) and as recently as "Thanksgiving" (2023). The cherry on top of "Ice Cream Man" is its unapologetically despairing conclusion.

Roth hit the jackpot with Millen. Grinning with a pervert's mustache à la "Female Trouble"-era John Waters, Millen makes a macabre yet oddly debonair antagonist, a welcome departure from the barely believable ghouls of previous ice cream man horror movies. May this creep be the Halloween costume of 2026.

J. HOBERMAN
REWIND

Brief Life Of a Star, Recreated And Real

A 1991 film devoted to a Chinese silent-film actress is more than just a biopic.

PRODUCED DURING the late-20th-century efflorescence of Hong Kong cinema, Stanley Kwan’s “Center Stage” (1991) is at once a biopic devoted to the Chinese silent-film star Ruan Lingyu (1910-1935) and a self-reflexive documentary in which Ruan shares the screen with her contemporary interpreter, the movie actress Maggie Cheung.

While usually streamed or programmed in the United States in the context of festivals and retrospectives, “Center Stage” begins a theatrical run on Friday at Film For-

Center Stage
Through Thursday at Film Forum in Manhattan; filmforum.org.

um in a newly restored director’s cut.

Ruan, a poor girl who broke into movies at 16 and whose celebrity coincided with Shanghai’s cosmopolitan, polyglot heyday, is most often compared to Greta Garbo, although Kwan’s film links her to Marlene Dietrich. Cast mainly in tragic roles, Ruan played one in life, dying by suicide at 24, having been hounded by Shanghai’s tabloid press over her affair with a married man. According to a contemporary report in *Variety*, her funeral procession attracted 300,000 people, three times that of Rudolph Valentino’s.

Few of Ruan’s movies survive. “Center Stage” quotes excerpts and incorporates stills from her lost films, juxtaposing Ruan’s fragmented on-screen presence with her reconstructed offscreen history, annotating the material with interviews that in-



In Stanley Kwan’s “Center Stage,” Maggie Cheung plays the actress Ruan Lingyu, who died by suicide at 24.

clude both Cheung and surviving film personalities who worked with Ruan, notably the lively 1930s actress and singer Li Lili, who died in 2005. Art and life, actual and staged, are in constant dialogue, suggesting that on camera or off (but thanks to Cheung, really only on), the elusive Ruan was always acting.

Less melodrama than meta-drama, “Center Stage” was the first movie to address the history of Chinese film — conflating the golden age of Shanghai-ese cinema (and Shanghai) with that of Hong Kong. It also has points of contact with classic Hollywood. The scenes in which producers plot Ruan’s career could have unfolded in Culver City. As a director of actresses, Kwan has been likened to George Cukor; his clever use of backdrops recalls Josef von Sternberg, and his frequent mirroring suggests Douglas Sirk.

Kwan’s first choice for Ruan was Anita Mui, an earthy diva once imagined as Hong Kong’s answer to Madonna, but she had a prior commitment. Cheung, a former beauty queen, was still best known as the eye-candy girlfriend in several Jackie Chan productions. Although she had more challenging roles in a pair of films by Kwan’s peer Wong Kar-wai, and appeared in Kwan’s American co-production “Full Moon in New York” (1989), “Center Stage” was her breakthrough.

As much as the movie is a homage to Ruan, it is a portrait of Cheung, a performer of consummate grace and poise who proves herself a unique silent star — as contemporary as she is anachronistic. Indeed, the repeated scenes of her dancing a languid rumba with her gal-pal Li (Carina Lau) to “Siboney,” a song Cukor used in his 1931 “Tarnished Lady,” are moments out of time.

Three years later, Cheung would play herself in Olivier Assayas’s neo-new-wave “Irma Vep,” another sort of movie about movies, and five years after that would appear opposite Tony Leung in Wong’s “In the Mood for Love.” Not for nothing was Kwan’s masterpiece originally given the English title “Actress.”

Rewind is an occasional column covering revived, restored and rediscovered movies playing in New York’s repertory theaters.

ALISSA WILKINSON | FILM REVIEW



MUBI

A Slasher Movie Looks Inward

CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1

TV Glow” works equally well as an allegory of trans identity and, in a broader sense, of becoming obsessed with a long-running TV series in your formative years (in this case, one that feels modeled on “Buffy the Vampire Slayer” and “The X-Files” two touchstones for older millennials). Before that, their marvelously creepy “We’re All Going to the World’s Fair” did the same for internet memes that feel drawn from an earlier era than today’s corporatized, influencer-heavy web.

With “Teenage Sex and Death at Camp Miasma,” Schoenbrun has moved to big-screen entertainment. Kris (Hannah Einbinder), aware that she’s been hired by the studio to paper over the franchise’s rocky relationship to L.G.B.T.Q. characters, is determined to beat the studio at its own game. How? Well, it’s a little hard to tell exactly what the plan is, because Kris has intellectualized the “Camp Miasma” series, and horror more broadly, with the kind of vigor that suggests an attempt to talk around tricky feelings. (Kris’s Sundance film was titled “Jouissance,” and its third act is a re-make of “Psycho” from the perspective of the shower curtain.)

The strategy is to seek out Billy (Gillian Anderson, clearly cast in part as a nod to her status as a queer icon), who played the final girl in the first “Miasma” film and now lives in seclusion on the property where the first film was shot. Maybe Kris can get her to play a role in the reboot; at least, maybe she’ll have some insight into the films. Since adolescence, Kris has been obsessed with the look in Billy’s eye in her big sex scene.

After a snowy, strange drive into a small



Teenage Sex and Death at Camp Miasma
Rated R for sex and death, teenage and otherwise.
Running time: 1 hour 46 minutes.
In theaters.

Gillian Anderson, left, as a reclusive actress and Hannah Einbinder as a director go beyond talking about a troubled film series.

town, Kris finds Billy at the camp, living like a joyful version of Norma Desmond. Over a fried-chicken dinner, Kris explains that mostly she’s interested in exploring “the intersection of queerness and cultural depictions of monstrosity.” But in the course of conversation, she reveals something that seems unrelated, but maybe isn’t: She feels like she’s bad at sex, and has given up trying to enjoy it, because she’s just too self-conscious.

She also seems up in her head about her relationship to the movies: She is constantly commenting on split-diopter shots and, when watching “Camp Miasma” with Billy, can’t help but comment, “This part’s transphobic.” (“Shut up,” Billy hisses.) At times, she even seems conscious that she’s in a movie, being watched by us. All this self-awareness has gotten twisted into her plan for the reboot. And Billy might be the key to freedom.

“Teenage Sex and Death at Camp Miasma” feels like it’s constantly teetering on the edge of heavy-handedness — the killer in the series, with a ceiling vent for a head, is pointedly called “Little Death” — but Schoenbrun has a delightful handle on tone, looping among melodrama, cartoonishly bloody homage and full-on fantasia. The story starts as a two-hander between Einbinder and Anderson, who crackle with chemistry, but spirals into a story-within-a-story, and then maybe an entire dream, or who knows?

Schoenbrun has a knack for evoking the semi-unconscious state you experience when you’re really locked into the screen and start feeling as if you’re living inside whatever you’re watching. What is “real” is

kind of beside the point; if it feels real, it is, even if it’s fiction. Even the backdrops of forests at the camp are intentionally, obviously paintings, a point of slippage between fantasy and reality.

This film is not really a tribute to slasher horror, though you might be tempted to think so. It’s more of a tribute to the experience of *loving* slasher horror, or anything else that has formed you and yet is clearly flawed in ways that run against your beliefs. It’s about knowing you should object, and trying to decide what that means, and whether it’s OK to acknowledge the ways some private fantasies might be a little problematic, too — that you might want to imagine things you’d never want in real life.

Slasher horror, especially the kind that starred teens, is about mixing desire and death in a kind of Freudian way (translated from French, “little death” is a euphemism for orgasm). “Teenage Sex and Death at Camp Miasma” takes a campy, tender approach to addressing this thorniness that comes with desire.

It’s pulled off with gusto, blood spurting high into the air and Anderson chomping jubilantly on the scenery (her pronunciation of an inquiry related to KFC dipping sauce is indelible). Einbinder takes Kris from nervously closed off to luxuriating in her newfound sense of self. She’s our proxy, of sorts: We’re meant to feel our way through this movie more than think it, and its layers get more complex as it goes on.

“Teenage Sex and Death at Camp Miasma” is designed to knock the viewer off kilter with a gasp and a chuckle. There’s an exuberance to letting yourself go and enjoying the mess that lives inside.

BEN KENIGSBERG | FILM REVIEW

Going Out Is No Longer an Option

When a mysterious force traps people in their homes, a family tries to ride out the apocalypse.

IN A ROUNDAABOUT, meta sort of way, “The Last House” puts a genuinely terrifying question to its viewers. How long would you last?

How long would you hold out if you tried to leave your home one day but found that all the doors wouldn’t open? That the cracks in any window you tried to break would immediately repair themselves? That there was no Wi-Fi or phone service, so you had trouble determining how widespread the problem was? That all the neighbors you could see from your window were in the same situation and communicating with one another via hand-scrawled messages? Your electricity might go down; your food supplies might run low. It would be like the Covid-19 pandemic without fresh air, connectivity or groceries.

How long would you last? You, who chose to watch “The Last House” and not “The Exterminating Angel,” the Luis Buñuel classic in which societal rules break down when bourgeois dinner guests find that they are unable to withdraw from the salon area — would you be capable of adjusting to survival mode?

That type of self-interrogation is ultimately more interesting than anything in the movie, which focuses on one household’s persistence and ingenuity. The four main characters are aided by a conspicuous lack of friction. To extend the Tolstoy line, all happy families are alike, but the family that’s going to endure until it’s the last house had better be the happiest.

The father, Jason (Wagner Moura), has training as an engineer and is an experienced fisherman; both skills come in handy



CHRIS BAKER/NETFLIX

when it’s time to lure small mammals from outdoors. (Animal lovers should stay far, far away from this movie.) The mother, Ann (Greta Lee), has a green thumb that proves useful even without direct sunlight. The children take their confinement in stride. Ruth (Riley Chung) busies herself with art; Graham (Noah Alexander Sossowski) learns to play piano. The home has a solid collection of vinyl (Stevie Wonder, David Bowie), but the scant DVD offerings (just “Annie” and “Air Force One”) are their own form of punishment.

What’s sealing everyone in? “The Last House,” written by Matthew Robinson (“Good Luck, Have Fun, Don’t Die”) and directed by Louis Leterrier (who helped inaugurate the “Transporter” franchise), splits the difference between willful fuzziness and

unsatisfying explanations. Obvious issues raised by the premise are barely addressed. (Was almost no one in the neighborhood, or on the planet, outside when the great lockup occurred? We meet only a lone jogger.)

And while, in theory, anything can happen in science fiction, “The Last House” hasn’t made sense of its own physics. At first it appears that an ominous force is controlling the atmosphere, the weather and the almost magnetized beading of water droplets on window panes. You can practically hear the studio executives say, “But we will have big, tentacled monsters, right?” Thematically, the movie likewise can’t commit; it’s half eco-parable, half simple-minded moral lesson. You might outlast “The Last House,” but there are better ways to kill time indoors.

The Last House

Rated PG-13 for marijuana use, sexual references and scenes that may traumatize pet owners. Running time: 1 hour 50 minutes. On Netflix.

From left, Noah Alexander Sossowski as Graham, Wagner Moura as Jason, Greta Lee as Ann and Riley Chung as Ruth in “The Last House.”

JEANNETTE CATSOULIS | FILM REVIEW

Chasing Experiences With a Big Appetite

A young Anthony Bourdain is the subject of an appealing film set in 1970s Cape Cod.

ONE OF THE MANY CHARMS of “Tony,” the splendid fifth feature from the Canadian filmmaker Matt Johnson, is that the film would be just as pleasurable if its subject were a complete unknown. In other words, this fictionalized origin tale of Anthony Bourdain, the celebrated chef, writer, raconteur and television host who died in 2018, asks no more of its audience than any other movie about a mouthy teenager on the rocky road to adulthood.

And that’s crucial, because Bourdain himself is almost too big for any one movie,



Tony
Rated R for a hint of heroin, a skiful of booze and a ton of sulking. Running time: 1 hour 46 minutes. In theaters.

his trials and talents too much of a mouthful to swallow in a single gulp. Wise to this, Johnson restricts us to an aperitif, a taste of a personality that’s tart and complex and sometimes self-destructive.

Informed by the early chapters of Bourdain’s 2000 memoir, “Kitchen Confidential: Adventures in the Culinary Underbelly,” Johnson (who wrote the script with Todd Bartels, Lou Howe and Matthew Miller) introduces his lanky, 19-year-old hero during one transformative summer in 1975.

After failing to win a writing fellowship he had assumed was in the bag, Tony (Dominic Sessa, fantastic) spontaneously follows his crush, Nancy (Emilia Jones), to Province-

town, Mass. Having lied to his parents (Dagmara Dominczyk and Rich Sommer) about the rejection, he has no plan; what he does have is a gargantuan ego and a ravening appetite for experiences.

Professing to be a writer, armed with ten-dollar words and a pair of nunchucks tucked in the waistband of his pants, he stalks Nancy, who is having none of his callow bravado. When the nunchucks come out and he inevitably gets rolled, he will land outside a seafood restaurant and at the feet of someone who will teach him much more than how to cook.

That restaurant, barely a half step up from a fast-food joint, is the raucous heart of “Tony,” its kitchen — like the clamorous workplace in Johnson’s 2023 gem, “Black-Berry” — a hive of controlled chaos and the crucible in which Tony will be tested. (Johnson has a real aptitude for depicting the tumultuous kinship of longtime friends and colleagues.)

The restaurant’s owner, known only as Chef (Antonio Banderas), is a rigorous yet kindhearted overseer who recognizes something potent behind Tony’s arrogant posturing, offering him a hammock on his porch in exchange for washing dishes. And the beauty of Banderas’s quietly affecting performance lies in how he conveys Chef’s gradual realization that his tutelage of Tony has awakened long-abandoned dreams of his own.

But if Chef is the angel on Tony’s shoulder, the devil on the other is Sal (a brilliant Leo Woodall), a skirt-chasing, line-snorting hedonist and a freewheeling guide to the town’s nightlife and mood-altering substances.

This tension, more than any romance, drives the film’s drama, the screenplay re-



A24

peatedly raising the choice between discipline and recklessness. Toiling miserably alongside Sal and his fellow cooks (boisterously played by Stavros Halkias and Michael Jibrin), Tony is finally learning something that he is good at; he’s just too wasted to know it yet.

Since his feature debut in 2013, Johnson has emerged as something of a chronicler of troubled masculinity, his characters restless searchers with grand ideas who may be their own worst enemies. “Tony” fits the template; like its namesake, the movie is raw and earnest, sulky and swaggering. And occasionally poetic.

“I want you to take my photo because I like the way I feel when you look at me,”

Tony tells Nancy, requesting a portrait for a book he has yet to write. At rare moments like this, Sessa casts off the charisma of alienation to reveal the vulnerability that would temper Bourdain’s brash hyper-confidence.

Using vintage lenses and shooting mainly on Cape Cod, the cinematographer Michael Bauman lends a nostalgic, almost sentimental sheen to his beachy locations. The story is slight, but by concentrating on this crucial sliver of a teeming life, Johnson gets at something deeper and more universal than a wider focus might have allowed. In the end, this captivating movie may be less about the birth of a chef than about the making of a man.

Dominic Sessa, left, as a young Anthony Bourdain, and Leo Woodall as Sal, a hedonist and strong influence who raises the tension between discipline and recklessness in “Tony.”

FILM REVIEWS

Olmo

Not rated. Running time: 1 hour 24 minutes. In theaters.



In the coming-of-age tale set in 1979, a boy named Olmo sits beside his secretive mother and his independent, chain-smoking elder sister, Ana (Rosa Armendariz), when his best friend appears carrying a record player. The quiet scene hardly screams climax, yet it clearly reveals that this story isn’t Olmo’s alone, and that his family functions as one boisterous organism of which the endearing lead (Aivan Uttapa) is simply a part.

Known for his explorations of adolescence in Mexico, the director Fernando Eimbcke’s sixth feature is his first set on the American side of the United States-Mexico border. Set in Las Cruces, N.M., the film follows Olmo — Spanish for elm tree — as he fixates on losing his virginity. When his mother, Cecilia (Andrea Suárez Paz), the family’s breadwinner, picks up a last-minute waitressing shift, she leaves him to care for his quadriplegic father, Néstor (Gustavo Sánchez Parra), thwarting his plans to party with Nina (Melanie Frometa), his seemingly unattainable crush.

Carolina Costa’s cinematography draws out the warmth and turbulence of this funny family portrait. Her sunset palette transforms the working-class home, in memorable scenes like when Olmo and Miguel (Diego Olmedo) are rehearsing their “Saturday Night Fever” dance routine or the family is frantically dragging Néstor’s urine-soaked mattress outside to dry.

The casting is pitch-perfect, capturing both the love — and the tension — in a household where Mexican immigrant parents address their children in Spanish and receive answers from their Mexican American children in English. Sometimes the dialogue feels forced — “No wonder they call me Ana the outsider,” the



FOGHORN FEATURES

The Sierra in Susanville, Calif., is among the old-school movie theaters being celebrated as survivors in “The Last Picture Shows,” a documentary.

elder sister laments — and the opening is unnecessarily muddled. But this ensemble, with Néstor and Miguel as standouts, carries the film. Eimbcke and his fellow writer Vanesa Garnica locate the stakes in ordinary life, embracing its indignities and intimacies until the film, wonderfully anchored by clever scoring, becomes something like a song itself.

BEANDREA JULY

The Big Cheese

Not rated. Running time: 1 hour 27 minutes. In theaters.

In the new documentary “The Big Cheese,” cheesemongers take a slice of the spotlight. There are fierce rivalries among competitors in the United States and European countries (so unsparing, those French), and challenges that hinge on the ability of contestants to rhapsodize about tangy cheeses like Roquefort.

The film opens with a man who wears a cow onesie: Adam Jay Moskowitz, a third-generation New York-based cheese importer known as Mister Moo. He is determined to help the United States finally claim top honors at the Mondial du Fromage in Tours, France, a biennial compe-

titition where the winner takes home a modest cash prize, but perhaps more significantly, the title of world’s best cheesemonger.

Structurally, this film has the zip and flow of “Top Chef”: contestants vie for a championship, intimate narratives raise the emotional stakes, underdogs come out on top. The director Sara Joe Wolansky approaches the subject’s history largely through the lens of Moskowitz, but a deeper exploration of the United States’ long effort to emerge from Europe’s shadow might have given it a richer identity beyond the familiar beats of a televised cooking competition. This is ultimately a tale of resilience, and Wolansky focuses on a kind of nourishment that transcends food: the power of community.

The urge of the American contestants to prevail deepens when she turns to the poignant back story of Sam Rollins of Cowbell Cheese Shop in Portland, Ore., a Mondial competitor whose family lost their restaurant — “home,” as his mother describes it — in a wildfire in 2020. “The Big Cheese” reveals itself to be a satisfyingly tender story, framing Moskowitz as both a survivor and a spiritual leader.

CHRIS AZZOPARDI

The Last Picture Shows

Not rated. Running time: 1 hour 18 minutes. In theaters.



This spare and beguiling movie directed by Rustin Thompson opens with a quotation from Esther Kinsky’s novel “Seeing Further,” about a woman trying to revive a gone-to-seed movie theater in Hungary: “A trip to the cinema expands the world and stretches time.” Many have lost sight of the value of that, as streaming services and home theaters have made movie-watching a platform-neutral if not platform-indifferent activity.

In “The Last Picture Shows,” Thompson celebrates old-school movie houses while also meditating on their possible extinction. He focuses on theaters in the western United States. As such, he includes a lot of shots of wide-open spaces bisected by narrow highways, with big blue skies overhead. It’s funny, given that the movie is lauding indoor boxes where you sit in the dark.

At dusk, the neon-lit marquees of theaters with names like the Dome, the Gem and the Eltrym (that last being the original owner’s name, Myrtle, spelled backward) come to life . . . and many of them are force-fed studio bombs like “Shazam! Fury of the Gods,” which the theater owners clearly resent.

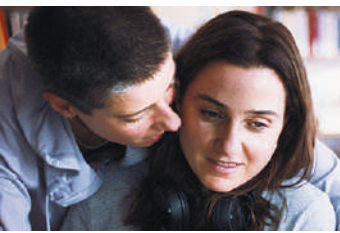
One reason these houses have trouble surviving is that they are obliged by studios to run such arguably uninspiring fare for weeks at a time. The theater owners profiled are a feisty bunch. And Ross Melnick, a professor of film and media studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, chimes in with a history of small-town cinemas. The narratives are compelling, but the movie’s lyrical and elegiac tone makes it truly resonant.

GLENN KENNY

Julian

Not rated. In French, English and Dutch. Running time: 1 hour 31 minutes. In theaters.

In a concert hall filling with patrons, Julian — wearing a crisp white shirt and close-cropped hair — sits wedged between two couples. As Fleur makes her way along the row, they exchange a glance before Fleur (Nina



STRAND RELEASING

Laurence Roothoof, left, and Nina Meurisse in “Julian.”

Meurisse) continues to a seat behind Julian (Laurence Roothoof). As the house lights dim, Fleur stares transfixed at the nape of Julian’s neck.

In the Belgian director Cato Kusters’ feature debut, “Julian,” based on a true story, a subtle warmth bathes the too-abbreviated relationship of the writer-activist Fleur Pierets and her wife, Julian Boom.

Inspired by Pierets’ 2023 memoir of the same name, “Julian” recounts Fleur and Julian’s plans to travel to the 22 countries that recognized same-sex marriage at the time and to exchange vows in each. Initially a lark, then a celebration as well as a protest, they christened their endeavor Project 22.

The pair made it to four cities before Julian became ill. When Fleur returns to New York City, it’s 2019 and she’s there to deliver a lecture. She is also strikingly solo.

Kusters and her fellow writer, Angelo Tijssens, deftly maneuver the fragmentation of time and the looping memories that accompany grief. Working on her lecture, Fleur watches videos that she and Julian took during their travels. Their love lives in the movie’s present, but also its past tense in ways that resists closure. As it marks ends and beginnings, “Julian” honors a love abridged and enduring.

LISA KENNEDY



MATT INFANTE/GREENWICH ENTERTAINMENT

From left, Rosa Armendariz, Andrea Suárez Paz, Gustavo Sánchez Parra, Aivan Uttapa and Diego Olmedo in “Olmo.”

JEOPARDY!

CLUE OF THE DAY

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THE BIG CHEESE
10:40pm, 12:50pm, 5:25, 7:35pm
O&A WITH FILMMAKERS FRI & SAT AT 7:35 SHOW!

JULIAN
1:30, 6:35pm
O&A WITH FILMMAKERS FRI & SAT AT 6:35 SHOW!

A CHILD OF MY OWN
10:45pm, 12:45pm, 7:15pm

THE FENCE 12:05, 9:20pm

***WILD INSIDE** 11:10am, 2:35pm, 4:50, 7:05, 9:30pm

CATWIDEOFEST 2026 11:00am SAT-SUN

PLUS
JIMMY I THE SAMURAI AND THE PRISONER
MICHAEL MANN'S MANHUNTER: THE FINAL CUT
MARY OLIVER I MADDIE'S SECRET

BLADES OF GLORY 11:35pm, 11:40pm, 11:50pm
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THE SAMURAI AND THE PRISONER
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WILLEM DAFOE in **LATE FAME**
12:15, 2:25, 4:40, 6:50*, 7:50*
*Q&As w/Dir KENT JONES,
Stars DAFOE & EDMUND DONOVAN

STANLEY KWAN'S **CENTER STAGE**
12:15, 3:20, 6:30*
*Conversation w/Dir STANLEY KWAN

VISCONTI'S **WHITE NIGHTS**
12:20, 2:35, 4:50, 7:00

DREAD BEAT AN BLOOD + LINTON KWERI JOHNSON IN CONCERT 9:10

ROSS McELWEE'S **SHERMAN'S MARCH** 3:20
REMAKE 12:50

Fine Art



PHOTOGRAPHS VIA THE MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM

Putting the Tarot Cards on the Table

A show explores the origins of a popular tradition in games, the occult and artwork.

By NINA SIEGAL

Around 1442, the Duke of Milan gave his daughter a deluxe set of handcrafted playing cards for the courtly game of tarot. The cards, featuring meticulously illustrated figures like Death, the Chariot and the Emperor on gold- and silver-leaf backgrounds, were created by a renowned Renaissance workshop. They cost about 1,500 ducats, 10 times the annual salary of an average courtier. Before its use in spiritual divination, tarot was a card game played by Italian nobility — mostly women — and each card was a hand-held work of art.

Tarot! Renaissance Symbols, Modern Visions

Through Oct. 4 at the Morgan Library & Museum in Manhattan; 212-685-0008, themorgan.org.

The Morgan Library & Museum in New York is presenting surviving cards from that tradition in “Tarot! Renaissance Symbols, Modern Visions.” The show explores the 600-year evolution of tarot from a game to an occult practice and popular entertainment, from those early gilded exemplars through decks made by artists including Salvador Dalí, Leonora Carrington and the contemporary British painter Chris Ofili. The show demonstrates that tarot cards are, perhaps above all else, an artistic and intellectual form of expression, created initially by leading artisans of 15th-century workshops, then later rediscovered and re-invented across the centuries. “These are actually, front and center, really exquisite works of art,” said Joshua O’Driscoll, senior curator and department head of Medieval Renaissance manuscripts for the Morgan, who curated the show with Claire Gilman and Frank Trujillo. The show also taps into a popular current tarot fascination, which has grown since the coronavirus pandemic, said Gilman, who mentioned new decks, like the Pulp Tarot, the Black Power Tarot and RuPaul’s Drag Race Tarot. Gilman, the Morgan’s curator and department head of modern and contemporary drawings, added that today’s spike in interest is just one of tarot’s periodic resurgences, which occurred amid the late-19th-century British Occult Revival, the era of European Surrealism, and as part of the worldwide cultural upheaval of the 1960s. “Each of these periods shares certain common conditions, namely a distrust of our societal institutions, and distrust in rational and masculinist ways of thinking,” Gilman said. In their original form, tarot cards were used for a game played a bit like bridge, O’Driscoll said, but the concept of the game



was partly inspired by Petrarch’s “Triumphs,” a 14th-century allegorical poem that set out moral hierarchies. “Chastity defeats Love, Death defeats Chastity, Fame defeats Death, Time defeats Fame,” he explained. “The last one is Eter-

nity, which defeats them all.” Along with teaching morality, “it was a game of the intellect,” he said. The word “trump,” which was used in the game, he noted, comes from the Italian word “trionfi,” or “triumph.” Very few full sets from the early tarot

Above from left: a tarot card attributed to Bonifacio Bembo (1420-1480); and a Sun tarot card attributed to Franco dei Russi (1453-1482), from the Visconti-Sforza tarot card sets. Clockwise from far left: the Seven of Coins, the Three of Cups, the Ten of Swords and the Ace of Batons, also from Bembo.

years survived, but some cards from the most prized Renaissance decks — the Visconti de Modrone, Brambilla and the Visconti-Sforza — are the basis of the exhibition. The game was probably used as a fun Humanist teaching tool for the Italian elite, O’Driscoll said, and it became a popular game for others as well. After about 200 years, however, it went out of fashion. “By the time the occultists saw it, it had lost its tie to the game,” O’Driscoll said. In 18th-century France, a few occultists fabricated an origin story for the cards, linking their symbols to Egyptian hieroglyphics, because they were both considered to be mystical and indecipherable image-based languages. Although the story was invented out of whole cloth, this shift altered the course of tarot’s history, giving it its persistent esoteric aura. The set that popularized tarot cards for divination in the English-speaking world was the Rider-Waite-Smith set, created in 1909 by the artist Pamela Colman Smith, under the direction of Arthur Waite. Waite, a poet and scholarly mystic, wrote an accompanying guidebook, “The Key to the Tarot.” Waite was a leading figure in the Modernist occult movement known as the Golden Dawn, whose adherents included the poet William Butler Yeats and Bram Stoker, the author of “Dracula.” The key thinker behind the tarot occultist movement was Aleister Crowley, the English magician and author, who made his own deck, the Thoth Tarot. Gilman said that it was probably Smith’s evocative illustrations, which seem to offer an enchanting range of narrative interpretations, that led to the continuing appeal of tarot in modern times. “This deck has had a hold on people’s imaginations,” Gilman said. Most sets today contain 78 cards, including what’s known as Major Arcana — character cards like the Magician, the Hanged Man and the Devil — and Minor Arcana cards including numbered suits, like cups, swords, pikes and pentacles (or coins). Some people still play tarot as a card game, but others are drawn to the sets as a visual lexicon that invites imaginative narration, in part, Gilman said, because its symbols touch on universal themes. “Maybe all of these cards apply to all of us, like the World card, or the Death card, and they’re open enough that you can find ways that you connect to them, and you find what you need to in them,” she said.

Star Scholar at Cambridge Resigns Under Cloud

Jason Arday, who faced an investigation of his academic record, has a new memoir.

By NEIL VIGDOR and JENNIFER SCHUESSLER

Jason Arday, the University of Cambridge professor at the center of a deepening controversy around his academic qualifications, resigned on Wednesday from the same institution that in 2023 celebrated him as the youngest Black professor in its history.

“I no longer wish to feel as though I am living under a constant spotlight, where every aspect of my life is subject to public examination and judgement,” Arday wrote in a statement.

His resignation came hours after Cambridge announced an investigation into Arday, and six days before the scheduled release of his memoir, “Great and Unfortunate Things,” by the Simon & Schuster imprint 37 Ink, in the United States.

A representative of Simon & Schuster, which has so far stood by the book, told The New York Times on Wednesday that the publisher had no comment beyond the statement about Arday it released last week, citing “the professionalism and integrity he has brought to every stage of the publication.”

Arday, a professor of sociology of education, announced his resignation from Cambridge in a statement posted to the Good Law Project, where a petition in defense of him that has gathered nearly 17,000 signatures continues to accrue support. A university spokesman confirmed that Arday’s resignation was legitimate.

Earlier on Wednesday, Cambridge released a statement noting that it had started an investigation into Arday’s academic qualifications.

“The University of Cambridge has begun an investigation following new information about Professor Arday’s academic qualifications and honorary appointments,” the statement said. “In order to ensure a fair process, we will not comment further until this has concluded.”

When allegations of plagiarism and other scholarly misconduct exploded into public view late last month, Cambridge stuck strongly by Arday, and said it had already referred complaints it received about his early scholarship to Liverpool John Moores University, which awarded him his Ph.D., and to some scholarly journals.

But as new questions arose about his qualifications, along with reports that Arday had apparently filed a harassment claim with the police last year against a British journalist who was investigating his work, the university appeared to change its course.

Arday sent a statement to The Times on Saturday disputing the claims, then canceled a planned interview with The Times on Monday. He did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Wednesday about Cambridge’s new investigation or on his harassment claims.

The imminent publication of “Great and Unfortunate Things” has put a spotlight on



GRAEME ROBERTSON/GUARDIAN AND EVEVINE, VIA REDUX

Arday’s account of how he, the son of Ghanaian immigrants, overcame autism and other disabilities that left him nonverbal until almost age 12 and unable to read or write until age 18, then earned a Ph.D. and achieved the highest scholarly rank at one of Britain’s leading universities.

Ahead of its publication, reports from other academics, independent journalists and British news outlets have cast doubt on both Arday’s scholarship and biographical assertions, including his claim to have once run 30 marathons in 35 days while raising as much as 5.5 million British pounds for charity and that he was visited twice at his office by a masked intruder, once wielding a knife.

Arday has said that mistakes in his early work were the result of his autism and inadequate supervision from professors, and that the current accusations of plagiarism are part of a racist smear campaign. In his note of resignation, he did not acknowledge any wrongdoing, and reiterated his belief that much of the criticism was unfair.

“While criticism is an inevitable part of academic life, what I have experienced has gone far beyond scholarly disagreement,” he wrote. “The relentless accusations, speculation and public commentary have taken a profound toll on me and on those I love.”

Questions about Arday’s work had circulated quietly in academic circles at least since 2023, when his appointment to Cambridge at age 37 prompted a spate of news coverage of him and the extraordinary story he has told about his life.

Those questions became public after detailed allegations of plagiarism and re-

search misconduct were published, first in the newsletter of a scholar known for racist views about intelligence and then on Retraction Watch, an online publication that covers academic misconduct and research ethics. They immediately prompted a pitched debate, with conservative commentators mocking Arday as a “diversity poster boy,” while supporters said he was a victim of racism.

In its initial statement on the controversy, Cambridge said Arday was “the victim of a vile campaign to undermine his credibility, which must stop.” But over the past week, social media users and the news media have continued to surface what they said were additional problems in his published work and on his academic résumé.

Before it was taken down on Wednesday, Arday’s faculty page at Jesus College, Cambridge, where he was a fellow, listed past appointments including visiting professorships in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at Ohio State University. But a spokesman for Ohio State said by email that it had no record of employment for a person with Arday’s name.

Arday’s University of Cambridge page said he is a visiting professor at Nelson Mandela University in South Africa. But a spokesman for Nelson Mandela University told The Times by email that while Arday had served as an adjunct professor “on a fixed-term association that concluded in November 2025,” he has no current formal affiliation.

As the charges circulated, so did reports that Arday or others had tried to quash inquiries into his work by other scholars and a

journalist by hiring a top law firm and reporting those asking questions to police.

In a statement on Monday, the publication Times Higher Education acknowledged that it had begun to research Arday and his work last year, but did not go forward with a story “following correspondence with Arday’s solicitors.”

In an article published on Wednesday, shortly after Arday’s resignation, Jack Grove, the reporter who worked on that story for Times Higher Education, described how he had been contacted by a police officer in February who told him not to contact Arday again, since his questions were affecting Arday’s mental health.

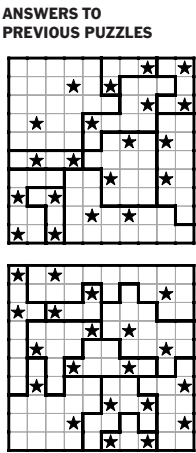
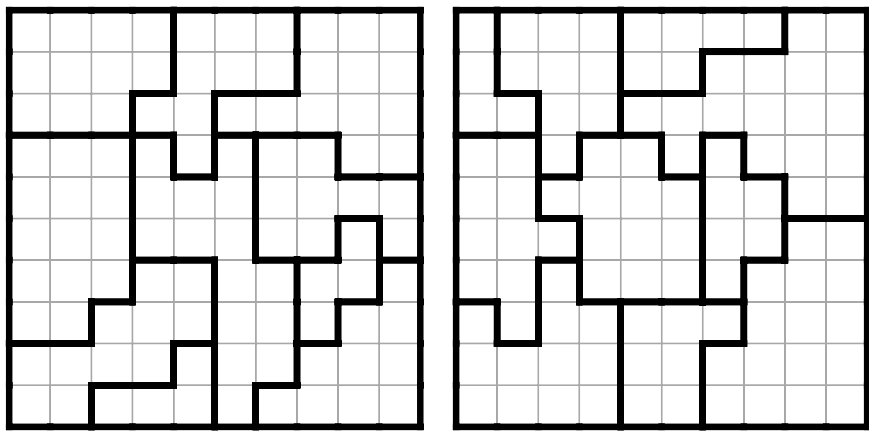
Grove said he had sent three “polite” emails to Arday over two months, asking about questions raised by multiple scholars about possible plagiarism or data irregularities in one scholarly paper, discrepancies in his résumé and what he said was a lack of evidence to support his claims about running and charity fund-raising.

Arday, Grove said, never replied. All eventual responses, Grove said, came from Cambridge’s press office. Ultimately, Grove said, he submitted 97 pages of evidence in total to Cambridge and Liverpool John Moores for investigation.

“Serious allegations, certainly,” Grove wrote. “Deeply embarrassing and distressing, definitely.”

“But were my inquiries grounds for a criminal complaint?” he added. “That was hugely troubling to me as a reporter who specializes in examining issues of research integrity and ethics.”

Two Not Touch



Put two stars in each row, column and region of the grid. No two stars may touch, not even diagonally.

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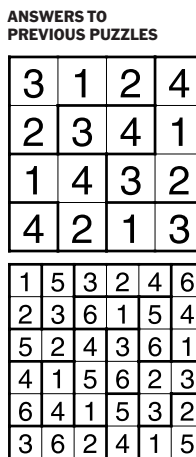
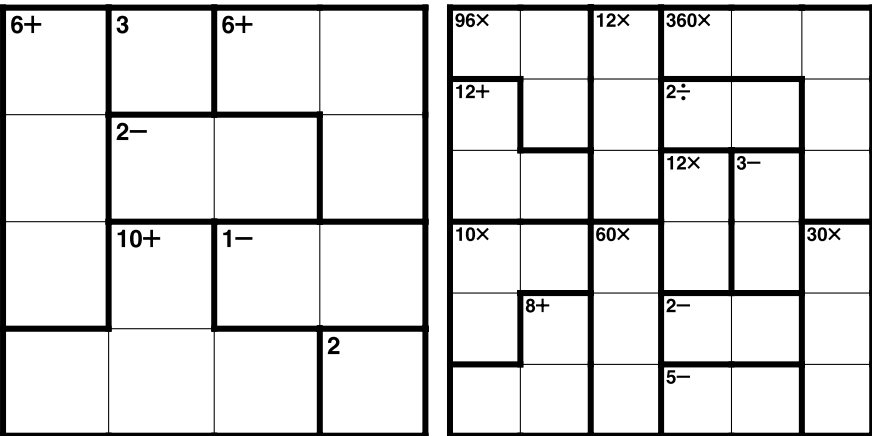
Brain Tickler

Drop four letters from LEMON GROVE, without rearranging the letters that remain, to leave the last name of a famous American of the 19th century. Who is it?

PUZZLE BY WILL.SHORTZ

YESTERDAY’S ANSWER My friend Heath and my girlfriend Heather can’t get along. They think it’s a contest.

KenKen



Fill the grid with digits so as not to repeat a digit in any row or column, and so that the digits within each heavily outlined box will produce the target number shown, by using addition, subtraction, multiplication or division, as indicated in the box. A 4x4 grid will use the digits 1-4. A 6x6 grid will use 1-6.

For more games: www.nytimes.com/games

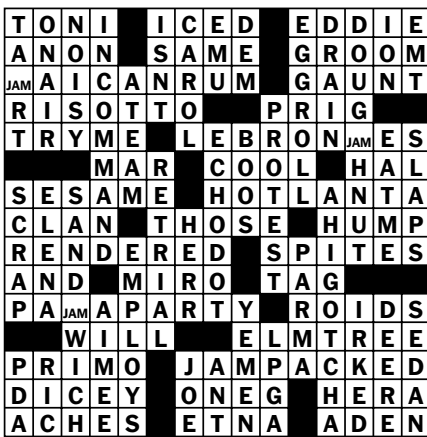
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Crossword Edited by Will Shortz

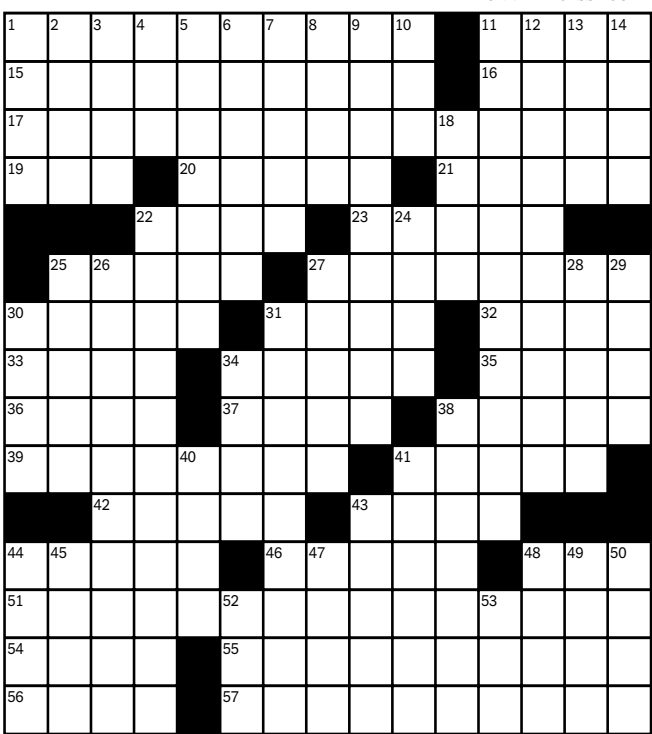
ACROSS

- What suggests that relief is at hand?
- Some
- “News to me”
- Shankar who co-composed the score for 1982’s “Gandhi”
- “Well, now everyone will know”
- Family nickname
- Spot for a light punishment
- Eponym of U.S. track and field’s Male Athlete of the Year Award
- Member of the World Cup’s “Tartan Army” fan base
- Acronymic weapon
- Tree whose name has multiple pronunciations
- Laugh, laugh, laugh
- Geneticist’s finding
- Wasteful government spending, informally
- Big name in sandals
- “It’s ___ or nothin’!” (classic kids’ commercial slogan)
- Many of the characters in “Who Framed Roger Rabbit”
- Word with block or platform
- Tangy hybrid
- Gobsmacks
- Elephant mascot of the Alabama Crimson Tide
- Elf, say
- They may be covered
- Opportunity on Mars, say
- Piece of ice in the drink?
- Name of “the other reindeer” in a common Christmas mondegreen
- Waffle patterns
- Where baked Alaska is believed to have been invented, oddly enough: Abbr.
- Field you make tracks in
- Blue rasp-“brrr!”-y treat?
- Flying nuisance
- Besmiches
- What someone might get quickly around lunchtime

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE



PUZZLE BY JESSE COHN



8/7/26

DOWN

- Sets (on)
- Cuisine with the #1 dish in a CNN “World’s 50 Best Foods” poll
- Intruders in urban trash cans
- Ones who might cut the line, in brief?
- Ski slope vehicle
- Lose affection for
- Wiped out, in slang
- Fusses
- No-nos at some highway intersections
- Lofty
- Trap neighbor
- Relationship-defining question
- Bejeweled target of a heist in “Ocean’s Twelve”
- McMullin of Utah politics
- Features of some early presidential portraits
- Whole lot
- Films in which many stars might appear
- Grills, say
- Competitor of Rao’s
- One likely to be “healthy, wealthy and wise,” per Benjamin Franklin
- Vocal critic
- Iris settings
- Relationship-defining question
- Bit of threaded hardware
- Attempt to seize control
- Perspective
- One dish commonly in the 12-dish Sviata Vecheria, a traditional Ukrainian Christmas dinner
- Faire ___ (get by with, in French)
- Charm
- European fixture
- Skip over
- Title boy in a 2021 Pixar film
- Word that comes from Sanskrit for “bread”
- Score somewhat akin to an A-
- Flexible practice?
- Website associated with the domain www.news.com
- Tour org.
- Fields Medal winner Terence

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Andrew Winslow brushing dust from Tzinacantecuhtli, or Bat Lord, a ninth-century sculpture.

He’s Taking Care Of the Cloisters

Andrew Winslow, the collections manager, embraces challenges.

By SCOTT SCHOMBURG

On a recent Wednesday at The Met Cloisters, the branch devoted to medieval art and architecture in Upper Manhattan, Andrew Winslow, the museum’s senior collections manager, steered me to an unusual visitor in a cavernous room with a vaulted ceiling: Tzinacantecuhtli, or Bat Lord, an almost-7-foot-tall ninth-century sculpture of a hybrid creature — an upright man with a bat’s claws and head, large ears and a leaf-shaped tongue — on loan from Museo del Templo Mayor in Mexico City.

The sculpture was found in a small town southeast of Mexico City, at the foot of a volcano. Now it stands before a Gothic French doorway amid Spanish frescoes, the centerpiece of a new exhibition, “Creatures of Myth and Imagination,” that heralds the arrival of the arts of the Ancient Americas at the Eurocentric museum.

In Zapotec cosmology, Bat Lord is associated with darkness, the underworld and rebirth, and the deity’s visit to the Cloisters marks a new era at the museum, most tangibly for Winslow, the 52-year-old art handler who is tasked with overseeing the sculpture’s care.

Winslow has been working at the Cloisters for 24 years. He started in 2002 selling tickets, and since 2007, he’s been responsible for the proper display and storage of the museum’s collection, which includes panel paintings, stone and wood sculptures, tapestries, manuscripts and metalwork — pieces secular and sacred. Several times a week, he walks through the galleries and studies every object to see if anything looks off, from a piece of flaking paint on a sculpture to a barely perceptible cobweb. The job requires a good eye and a steady hand. (Winslow stopped drinking coffee, he says, after watching his hand shake one day while he was trying to turn the page of a medieval manuscript.)

I had met Winslow on a previous trip to the Cloisters, and his close attention to the art struck me. I wanted to see the museum through his eyes, since no one currently on staff has cared for the collection longer. He suggested I come on a Wednesday, when the galleries are closed to visitors, who numbered some 280,000 last year.

When I arrived, Winslow — dressed in an untucked plaid shirt and rolled-up shirt-sleeves, with a hake brush in his back pocket — walked me down to his small, windowless office in the museum’s labyrinthine basement. On the walls were his tools of the trade (rulers, a level, a hacksaw) beside objects from the museum’s history, including a black-and-white photograph of George Grey Barnard’s original candlelit Cloisters museum not far from this location. It opened in 1914 with Barnard’s own art of the

Middle Ages and operated until 1925, when its collection was acquired by John D. Rockefeller and became a branch of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (with Rockefeller adding some of his own works).

Next to Winslow’s tools were two rusted metal candle snuffers, their cones caked in wax, that he suspects were used in Barnard’s era. Pinned to a corkboard above his desk were invitations to special exhibitions he’s worked on at the Cloisters, along with a handmade name tag from his early days selling tickets.

“I was a painter,” he said. “I needed a part-time job.” At the time, he lived in Washington Heights, a 20-minute walk to the museum, and his love for the Cloisters, he says, was “nearly instantaneous.” He admired the sweeping views of the Hudson River from its location atop Fort Tryon Park, one of the highest points in Manhattan, and he felt drawn to the building, which was created in the 1930s by incorporating medieval ruins into a structure that feels like a monastery. On his first day, he joined a public tour that played a looking game, which taught him how to tell the difference between the medieval and modern stones that make up the museum’s walls.

Winslow lends an artist’s eye to the roughly 10,000 objects in his care. He knows where the dust will settle on a sculpture of the Virgin Mary, how the light will change on a summer day in the Early Gothic Hall, and if he has to move a large object he knows the dimensions of every doorway and elevator. He is one of the only people on earth allowed to touch the objects, and he can tell you the weight of an ivory carving, say, or how the edges of 12th-century parchment feel. But he never forgets the No. 1 rule of art handling: “Don’t do it if you don’t have to.”

He sees himself as “one stop in a long line” of caretakers for objects that will outlive us, he said, “if we’re doing our jobs.” He still stops to consider his luck at getting to work with the collection. “This is a piece of an animal skin that was stretched 500 years ago,” Winslow will say to himself. “This is a book that was made for a queen of France, and it’s in my hands.”

Winslow walked me through the museum’s chapels and halls. In the Bonnefont Cloister garden, he told me about the pleasurable mornings he spends sweeping the walkways, and down in the dimly lit Treasury Room, he rotated the oldest known complete set of playing cards, from the 16th century, which are changed every four months. One by one, Winslow carefully slid a piece of wax paper underneath each pasteboard card, then folded the flaps over the top of a king, queen, knave or pip.

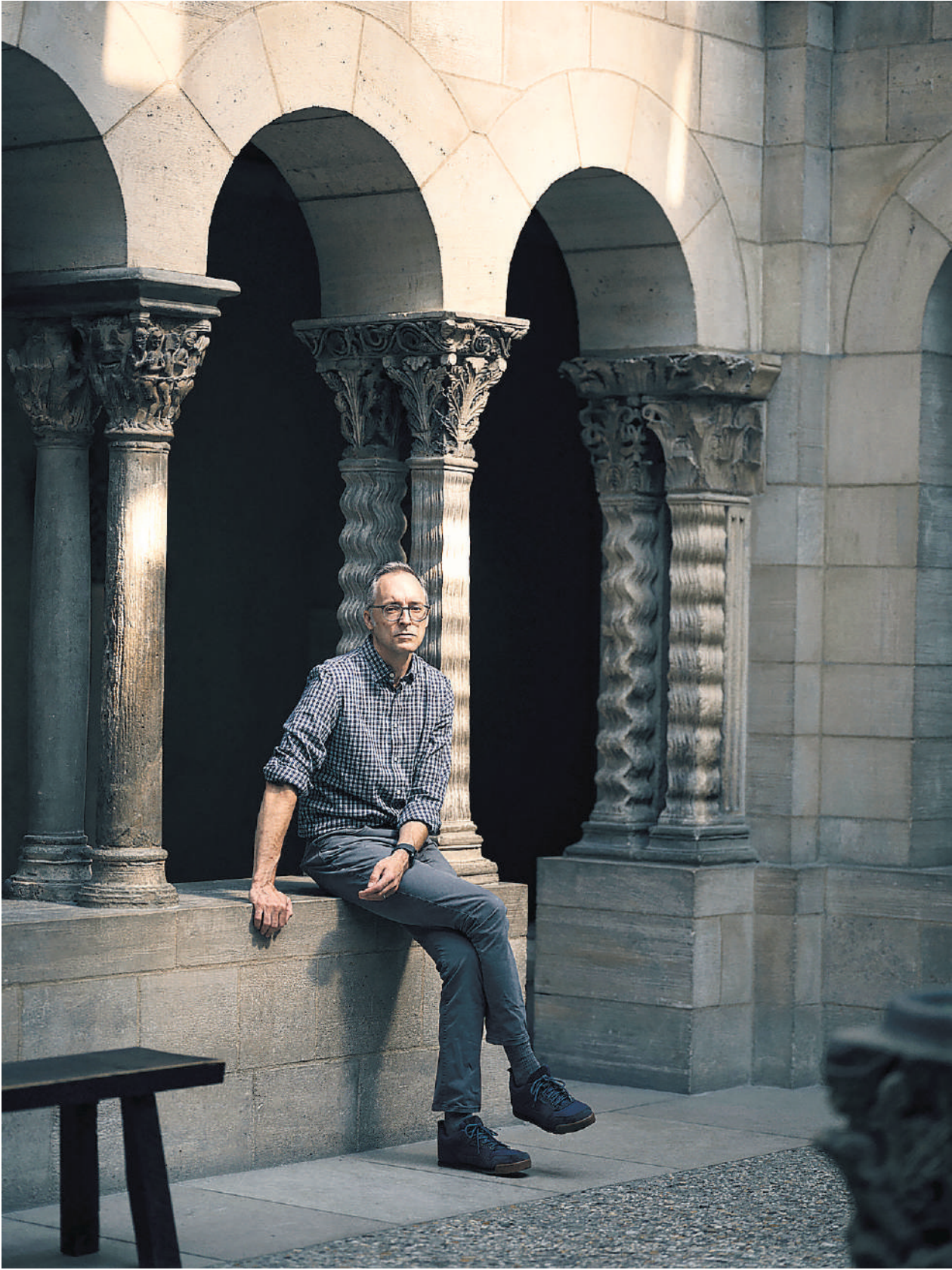
For his first few years as caretaker, he attended to galleries and objects that visitors viewed as largely static — the Cloisters hadn’t hosted a special exhibition since 1982. That changed in November 2011, when he helped install a small show that featured a famous medieval set of chess pieces. Since then, Winslow has worked on every special exhibition, which have grown in ambition and scope as departments at the Met are encouraged to collaborate more freely. Visitors are realizing the museum is a dynamic place, said C. Griffith Mann, curator in charge at the Met’s medieval department.

The Cloisters must convince lending institutions that their pieces will be safe at a setting that looks like a monastery. “We have doors that are open to the outside gardens,” Winslow said. Because the open doors are crucial to the Cloisters’ monastic feeling, staff members are defending against pests, including ants, clothes moths, carpet beetles, the occasional bird and, once, a resident bat.

The small, tight-knit staff is interested in finding new ways to use the Cloisters as a setting. Last year, Winslow worked on the exhibition team for “Spectrum of Desire: Love, Sex, and Gender in the Middle Ages,” which explored the often-overlooked theme of sexuality in medieval art. There hadn’t been an exhibition at the Cloisters quite like it, Winslow said. (A newly commissioned performance by the artist duo Gerard & Kelly explored the Cloisters as a disco sanctuary.)

“Creatures,” which is the first collaboration with the Met’s Michael C. Rockefeller wing, brings together fields that have historically remained siloed — medieval European art and the arts of the Ancient Americas, signaling a fresh curatorial vision.

“Everything about our building and our collection speaks to Western Europe,” said Julia Perratore, associate curator at the Cloisters and a co-curator of the “Creatures” exhibition, on a video call. “There are expectations of what you’re going to find at



PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRISTOPHER GREGORY-RIVERA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



the Cloisters that we’re excited to found.”

The “Creatures” exhibition features more than 50 objects, mostly from the Cloisters’ permanent collection, seen anew alongside the museum’s collection of art from Mesoamerica, Central America and the Andes, as well as special loans from Mexico. Once the idea for the exhibition took shape, the curatorial team approached Winslow, whom they call their “secret weapon,” and who brings their ideas to life, often making sketches and scale models. “You’ll come up with a wild idea and you want this gigantic thing,” said Joanne Pillsbury, a curator with the Met’s Rockefeller Wing, “and he will try so hard to make it happen.”

His team had to remove the metal handles on the door to get Bat Lord inside. Another gigantic sculpture would have required removing a ceiling and lowering it*

Top, Winslow at The Met Cloisters in Manhattan. Center left, cleaning a work there. Right, the Gothic Chapel. Above left, candle snuffers, and right, some of Winslow’s notes and tools. Far left, top, tecpatls, or ritual knives (1502-21), part of the exhibition “Creatures of Myth and Imagination.” Bottom, an aquamanile in the form of a unicorn (circa 1425-50) from Germany, part of the Cloisters’ collection.

into the gallery by crane. “The best view is here,” Winslow said, waving me to where he was standing in the Romanesque Hall, facing the new sculpture at an angle. Bat Lord, who once adorned a public space in the town of San Mateo Tezoquipan Miraflores, was dramatically juxtaposed with a monumental 13th-century fresco of a dragon with a snake’s long body and a chicken’s knobby feet, from a Benedictine monastery in Spain. The curators had this vantage in mind from the show’s conception, Winslow said.

Here were two legendary creatures, side by side, from cultures that wouldn’t have contact for hundreds of years. Winslow’s eye went back and forth, as the Romanesque Hall transformed from a showcase for medieval European art into a celebration of the incredible capacity of the human imagination.

