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Joe Biden, the 'goodest' of them all



Maureen Dowd

OPINION

When I saw the Michael Shear story in The Times on July 4, recounting how President Biden had stumbled talking to Black radio hosts days after his debate debacle, telling one he was proud to have been "the first Black woman to serve with a Black president," I knew it spelled trouble.

First of all, if any white man could claim to be "the first Black woman" in the Oval, it was Bill Clinton. Black fans called him "the first Black president" and feminist fans called him "the first woman president."

Second of all, we were entering a new post-debate examination period with President Biden, where his every word would be scrutinized.

Watching the White House desperately try to take word salad off the menu.

He was always a fast and voluminous talker, and as he has gotten older, the words and ideas sometimes tumble out in the wrong order. Also, he's more slurry now, so words

get smushed together, and words and thoughts collide; words get dropped, caesuras skipped, and sentences sometimes trail off into the ether.

The Times's chief White House correspondent, Peter Baker, told me he has started using translation headsets on overseas trips, even when he is 20 feet away from the president, because they offer a magnified volume when Biden starts to mumble.

The White House press corps, stung by critiques that they did not pull back the curtain enough on the president's diminished powers, are now on the alert, ready to tear down the Pollyanna scrim erected by Biden's family and aides.

The White House and the Biden campaign are so smotheringly protective that, as news outlets reported, Biden aides helped draft the questions that local radio hosts asked the president in the wake of his calamitous debate.

In going through Biden's verbal mistakes in his Times story, Shear used the phrase, "He appeared to mean..."

And that is going to be a big issue moving forward. A panicky White House is going to be pernickety, acting as though journalists are unfairly picking on the president about every gaffe, berating them when they don't properly DOWD, PAGE 11

The New York Times publishes opinion from a wide range of perspectives in hopes of promoting constructive debate about consequential questions.



Fishermen in Sri Lanka, where troubling cases of kidney disease are appearing. The trend is most striking in young men. Children as young as 10 show signs of kidney problems.

A killer stalks Sri Lankans

In areas of extreme heat and unclean water, a trend of insidious kidney failure

BY APOORVA MANDAVILLI

Something odd has been happening to young men in the sultry farming and fishing communities of Sri Lanka.

Since the 1990s, men in their 30s and 40s have been turning up at hospitals with late-stage kidney failure, needing dialysis or even transplants. In some communities, as many as one in five young men is affected.

Their condition has no clear cause; in fact, it is called "chronic kidney disease of unknown origin." But experts say the illness is most likely the result of exposure to extreme heat, exacerbated in recent years by climate change, and resulting dehydration, plus an overuse of toxic pesticides that have seeped into the groundwater.

The trend is most striking in young men, but some women, too, seem to have the disease. And children as young as 10 show early signs of kidney trouble.

These communities may be the most vulnerable and the first to show signs of damage, but their plight is a reminder of the dangers posed by rising temperatures across the planet.



The cases are most likely the result of extreme heat and contaminated water, experts say. Climate change compounds the risks for those who can't afford to hydrate or seek shade.

"Sri Lanka has made the perfect case for how climate change is affecting people in real time," said Nishad Jayasundara, an expert in global environmental health at Duke University, in North Carolina.

Young men in agricultural communities in Nicaragua and El Salvador also experience the illness, and a similar pat-

tern may be emerging in East Africa. But basic health care in Sri Lanka is free and ubiquitous, so there is a better lens on the problem there than in some other low-income nations.

Kidney disease is usually a consequence of obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes. It typically strikes people in their 50s or 60s, progresses slowly

and can be managed with some monitoring.

What fishermen and farmers in Sri Lanka are experiencing is far more insidious. They sometimes transition from showing early signs of damage to requiring dialysis or a transplant in just one to four years, Dr. Jayasundara said.

Women and children are less vulnerable, but about 5 percent to 10 percent of children — perhaps those helping out on the family farm — show early signs of kidney damage, Dr. Jayasundara said. His team is following more than 3,000 children ages 10 to 17 in farming communities.

Thenuka Nethsara Bandara, 12, is unluckier than most. He lives in Kadawala Wewa village with his parents, and about a year ago suddenly felt sharp pain in his abdomen. Now diagnosed with acute kidney damage, he is waiting for a transplant.

In his village and in many others, the sun is ablaze by midmorning and remains mercilessly hot till the evening, leading to cases of dehydration and heat stress. Climate change compounds the risks. It may fuel hotter days, and more of them, but few can afford to stop work to hydrate or seek shade.

Pests and weeds are more hardy, requiring farmers to use more and more pesticides. The runoff from the fields SRI LANKA, PAGE 2

France's left reunites to fight threat of far right

PARIS

Fractious alliance bands together to counter the rise of the National Rally

BY CATHERINE PORTER

As France's election results began to sink in, one thing was clear: The left-wing coalition called the New Popular Front had done much better than expected in Sunday's vote and had helped deny the far right a victory.

Results showed the coalition coming out in front and gaining a plurality of seats in the National Assembly — a feat for an alliance that was forged only last month with the goal of keeping the far-right National Rally from power.

The alliance includes four left-wing parties: Communists, Socialists, Greens and the far-left party, France Unbowed. While many in France cheered what appeared to be a loss for the far right, others feared what the far left might bring.

The results upended widespread predictions of a clear victory for the National Rally, Marine Le Pen's anti-immigrant party that dominated the first round of voting a week earlier. Instead, the left-wing New Popular Front won the largest number of seats in the 577-seat National Assembly.

The centrist coalition of President Emmanuel Macron, who cast the country into turmoil a month ago by calling the election, was in second place. Trailing it was the National Rally and its allies.

Last week, after the first vote, the New Popular Front coalition withdrew more than 130 of its candidates from three-way races in which the far right had a chance of winning — and pushed those candidates' supporters to vote strategically against far-right candidates.

Despite the win for the left, the results showed that no party or alliance had gained an absolute majority that would make it the likely choice to form a government.

Still, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, founder of France Unbowed, a pugacious and divisive figure, quickly declared that his party was not willing to negotiate to form a coalition government. Instead, he demanded that the left-wing alliance be given the reins to govern so it could implement its "entire program."

Olivier Faure, leader of the Socialist Party, also said the alliance would not negotiate to form a coalition government.

"That would betray the vote of French people and prolong the Macronist program," he said.

Some voters consider France Unbowed, which has members who have been accused of antisemitism, to be at least as dangerous as the far right. And some economists have worried about FRANCE, PAGE 4

Celine Dion stays committed to her own kookiness



Since her emergence as a child star, something about Celine Dion's essential nature has remained constant, impervious to both changing trends and scathing critique.

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

A film shows her sincerity, once viewed as uncool, is actually her superpower

BY LINDSAY ZOLADZ

"I always envy people who smoke and drink and party and don't sleep," Celine Dion tells her physical therapist with an exaggerated sigh, midway through the new documentary "I Am: Celine Dion." "Me, I have water and I sleep 12 hours."

This monastic constraint has long been a core part of the Celine Dion legend. A professional singer since 12, she spent decades meticulously caring for her voice as though it were an endangered hothouse flower, committing to long stretches of vocal rest, complicated warm-up rituals and a lifestyle of exacting discipline — all so she could leap octaves and belt soaring

notes with gobsmacking precision.

In a cruel twist of fate, though, even the ceaseless care Dion devoted to her voice could not preserve it. In 2022, she revealed in an emotional Instagram post that she has stiff person syndrome, a rare and incurable neurological disorder that causes painful muscle spasms and affects roughly one in a million people.

After watching "I Am: Celine Dion," a remarkably candid portrait directed by Irene Taylor on Amazon Prime Video, it is difficult to imagine a disease that would be more personally devastating to Dion, whose entire career has been one long exercise in control, sacrificing all for the ecstatic release of live performance.

Since her emergence as a Québécois child star with a precociously huge voice, something about Dion's essential nature has remained constant, impervious to both changing trends and scathing critique. Whether power ballads were in fashion or not — and by and large, they were not — she sang CELINE DION, PAGE 2

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PAGE TWO



In Sri Lanka, clockwise from top: washing rice in Kalpitiya, a fishing town; a lake in Medirigiriya, an area where pesticide contamination is a menace; and a beach in the northwest.

The killer stalking Sri Lankans

SRI LANKA, FROM PAGE 1

leaches into nearby wells from which families draw water. Frequent floods also speed the absorption of chemicals into groundwater.

But the problem is not just chemicals. In Kalpitiya, a tranquil fishing town on the country's west coast, the water is "hard," containing up to 700 milligrams of magnesium and calcium carbonate deposits per liter, compared with less than 40 in bottled water.

"Boiling water removes this to a certain extent, but not all," said Mangala De Silva, a researcher at the University of Ruhuna in Matara, Sri Lanka.

Many people in Kalpitiya are now dimly aware that contaminated water may explain the kidney problems in their community, but only about one in five has access to filtered water.

Even those who drink filtered water may continue to cook with well water. In any case, some filters are not up to the task of purifying water with astronomical levels of contaminants.

Sri Lankans often have too many urgent concerns to fret about a distant health problem, said Santhalingam Thanusanth, a fisheries biologist at the country's National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency.

"They would rather buy food than clean drinking water, not realizing the impact of their decision," Mr. Thanusanth said. "They may figure it out only

"Sri Lanka has made the perfect case for how climate change is affecting people in real time."

years later, and even then not link health issues to drinking water."

At Pasikuda beach, north of Batticaloa, the government provides water in large tanks that are replenished every two days. Still, the men set out to fish for calamari at 5 a.m., with just five liters to last till they return in midafternoon.

"Sometimes fishing is busy — we aren't drinking water or eating," said Christy Navil, 58. "We want to catch the fish."

Many turn to alcohol, rather than water, to avoid sea sickness, which intensifies their dehydration.

Pesticide contamination is a menace, particularly in agricultural areas like Medirigiriya in the central part of the country and Matara in the south.

High levels of glyphosate, which is a widely used broad-spectrum herbicide, are thought to damage the liver and kidneys.

Rising awareness of the problem has prompted the Sri Lankan government to provide filters and to set up more clinics in the affected areas.

Ajith Pushpakumara, a rice farmer in Ambagaswewa village in central Sri Lanka, found out about 15 years ago, at a government-sponsored clinic held at a local temple, that he had kidney problems.

He was advised to drink clean water

and take care of his health, but he ultimately lacked the means to do so. Medications are supposed to be free, but Mr. Pushpakumara missed out on many because of shortages. As the family's sole breadwinner, he could not stop working the fields.

About five years ago, his family began drinking filtered water, but continued to use well water for most other purposes, including cooking. Two years ago, when he suddenly began feeling weak and nauseated, doctors told him his kidneys were failing.

Now 40, Mr. Pushpakumara is at the hospital every four days for dialysis. His only hope for recovery is a transplant. His wife, Sulochanie Sandalatha, 39, shows early signs of kidney failure, so she cannot be a donor.

"People keep writing about it," he said, bitterness in his voice. "But why isn't anything happening?"

Kang-Chun Cheng contributed reporting from Sri Lanka.

Staying committed to her deepest self

CELINE DION, FROM PAGE 1

them with the conviction of someone who'd never even heard the word "restraint."

"At her best," wrote Elisabeth Vincentelli in a New York Times review of Dion's most recent New York performance in February 2020, "Dion projects a sense of bigness — besides fairly simple graphics, the background videos in her show often showed cosmic images, as if they were the only thing measuring up on the Dion scale." This bombastic approach gained her a worldwide fan base and a requisite backlash that she may have finally outpaced.

In 2007, the music critic Carl Wilson used Dion's 1999 blockbuster album "Let's Talk About Love" as the inspiration for an insightful, ultimately sympathetic book-length examination of musical taste, the assumption being that (at least 17 years ago) Dion's name was a symbol for all things gauche, sincere and uncool. (The book's subtitle? "A Journey to the End of Taste.") "Schmaltz rots faster than other ingredients in the musical pantry," Wilson wrote, "which may be why we doubt the possibility of a Celine Dion revival in 2027."

As the years have passed, I wouldn't bet against it. The sympathy engendered by her diagnosis aside, Dion is not nearly as polarizing as she was two decades ago. "My Heart Will Go On" has become a relic of kitschy '90s nostalgia rather than the unavoidable and tiresome cultural monolith it was during the reign of "Titanic." Musical tastes have become more elastic since Wilson's book was published, streaming has lowered the stakes for fandom and made it easier to revisit artists' catalogs, and listeners are less likely to see the industry bifurcated into us-versus-them binaries.

But one of the main reasons people have softened toward Dion over the years is her absolute, undaunted commitment to her own kookiness. In 2008, the writer Rich Juzwiak put together a supercut of wacky clips titled "Celine Dion Is Amazing": more than five minutes of Dion gesticulating wildly, indulging in nonsensical stage banter and, in one instance, launching into a spirited backstage cover of "Who Let the Dogs Out" mashed up with "Gonna Make You Sweat (Everybody Dance Now)." That over-the-top excessiveness at which Wilson and his hip Gen X-er peers once turned up their noses now seems like a virtue; denizens of the internet appreciate a reliably meme-able celebrity when they see one. Dion never seems to fear looking ridiculous. In an age of media-trained musicians careful not to speak out of pocket, her zaniness has become a mark of authenticity.

"I Am: Celine Dion" has plenty of those "Celine Dion Is Amazing"-type

moments, and thank goodness, because her singular, offbeat sense of humor balances out the film's more harrowing scenes. Rather than relying on other talking heads to put her stardom in context, Dion is the only person interviewed in the documentary.

One of the most memorable sequences finds her giving the cameras a tour — "I feel like Liberace!" she says and laughs — through the vast storage warehouse where she keeps her ruffled-and-sequin-encrusted costumes, custom designer outfits and stilt-like shoes. Oh, the shoes.

"When a girl loves her shoes, she always makes them fit," Dion says, imparting the wisdom of a true diva. "Every time I went to a store and I loved the shoes they said, 'What size are you, ma'am?' I said, 'No, you don't understand, what size do you have? I'll make them work, I'll make them fit.'"

It's a hilarious moment, but it's also bittersweet. Again, there is that sense of self-sacrifice — the insistence that even in the face of discomfort the show (and the shoe) must go on. As she walks among her old stage clothes, delighting in the minute details of craftsmanship, the joy Dion gets from performing is palpable, but so is the anxiety that she may never know that particular kind of release again.

"When you record, it sounds great," Dion says in the film. "But when you are onstage, it will be greater." What becomes clear — throughout many montages of Dion singing live, feeding off the energy of her audience — is that performing is her lifeblood, and the stage has always been the place where she can be her most quintessential self. And so she is putting the full force of her tenacity and self-discipline toward building her strength back, in hopes that she can someday return.

That is, however, a herculean task. Toward the end of the documentary, Taylor's cameras continue to roll while Dion experiences a severe attack of full-body spasms; her face is frozen in pain, her limbs stiffen and the only sounds she can make are awful moans. For an artist who has long valued the control she has over her body and the instrument of her voice, this level of candor is particularly striking.

In the film, Dion compares herself to an apple tree, proud of doling out the shiniest fruit for her fans. "I don't want them to wait in line if I don't have apples for them," she says. She still does, though. Dion's voice may no longer be the precise instrument she nurtured for decades, but "I Am: Celine Dion" shows that hitting those stratospheric high notes is not her only method of inspiration. There is strength, too, in sharing the bitter fruit of her struggles, and throughout them remaining gloriously, consistently herself.



A new documentary follows Celine Dion as she struggles with stiff person syndrome.

He was the oldest living Grand Slam tennis champion

VIC SEIXAS
1923-2024

BY RICHARD GOLDSTEIN

Vic Seixas, who won 15 Grand Slam tennis tournaments in the 1950s, died on Friday. The oldest living Grand Slam champion, he was 100.

His death was announced by the International Tennis Hall of Fame, which did not say where he died.

"From 1940 to 1968 Vic Seixas was the face of American tennis," the Hall of Fame declared when he was inducted in 1971.

At 6-foot-1 and about 180 pounds (185 centimeters and 82 kilograms), Seixas (pronounced SAY-shuss) was known for his superb conditioning and endurance and was frequently ranked among the top 10 players in the United States. The renowned Australian tennis figure Harry Hopman regarded him as the world's No. 1 amateur of 1954.

Seixas won two Grand Slam singles championships, eight mixed doubles titles and five men's doubles championships. He captured his first men's singles title when he beat Kurt Nielsen of Denmark at Wimbledon in 1953 and defeated Rex Hartwig of Australia in the 1954 singles final of the U.S. Nationals at Forest Hills, the forerunner of the U.S. Open.

Seixas, who remained an amateur

throughout his career, played in 28 U.S. championship tournaments at Forest Hills between 1940 and 1969. He missed the event only when he was serving in the military during World War II.

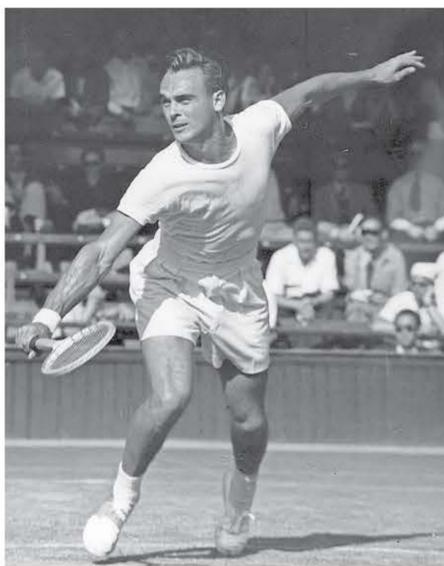
"Even when he was off form, he pulled out big matches by persevering long after most men would have given in and then, quite miraculously, forcing his way out of the slough of despond with a sustained streak of brilliant volleying," Herbert Warren Wind wrote in Sports Illustrated in 1958.

In addition to his two Grand Slam singles triumphs, Seixas captured eight mixed doubles titles, seven with Doris Hart and one with Shirley Fry. He also won a men's doubles championship with Mervyn Rose and four more with Tony Trabert.

He won 38 of 55 Davis Cup singles and doubles matches between 1951 and 1957, and he teamed with Trabert to defeat Ken Rosewall and Lew Hoad to end Australia's four-year Davis Cup reign in 1954.

In 1966, at 42, Seixas played 94 games over four hours to defeat 22-year-old Bill Bowrey of Australia, 32-34, 6-4, 10-8 in the Philadelphia Grass Championship. Later that year, at the U.S. Nationals, Seixas, the tournament's oldest entrant, defeated 19-year-old Stan Smith in five sets.

Seixas, who won 56 singles titles overall, retired from regular tournament competition in 1970 but continued to



LAWRENCE HARRIS/ASSOCIATED PRESS

play in senior matches. His career was nearing its end when Open tennis, and the huge purses that went with it, was created in 1968.

"In 1953, when I won Wimbledon, I got

a 25-pound voucher, which was worth about \$75 at the time," Seixas told the San Francisco television station KPIX in 2018. "I had to spend it in a store in Piccadilly connected to tennis. I purchased

a sweater." When he won the U.S. Nationals in 1954, he added, "I didn't even get a sweater — nothing."

Elias Victor Seixas Jr. was born on Aug. 30, 1923, in Philadelphia. His mother, Anna Victoria (Moon) Seixas, was of Irish background. He told The Philadelphia Inquirer in a 2019 interview that his father's family left Portugal and emigrated to the Dominican Republic before coming to the United States.

Although Seixas was at times referred to as Jewish, he told The Inquirer that neither parent was "particularly religious." He added, "It's quite possible my father's family was Jewish 500 years ago, but I was brought up and married in a Presbyterian church."

Seixas's father, who owned a plumbing supply company, played tennis at a local court, and Vic began hitting balls as a youngster. He was a tennis star at the William Penn Charter School in Philadelphia and at 17 played in his first U.S. Nationals, winning his opening match before being ousted.

He was a pilot in the Army Air Forces in World War II, stationed in the Pacific, and then attended the University of North Carolina, where he was a tennis all-American. He graduated in 1949.

Seixas considered tennis a part-time endeavor and had expected that he would eventually take over his father's plumbing company. Instead, he worked as a stockbroker in Philadelphia from

the 1950s to the early 1970s. He was later a tennis director for the Greenbrier resort in White Sulphur Springs, W.Va., and at a Hilton hotel in New Orleans.

He moved to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1989 and established a tennis program at a Marin County racket and beach club now known as the Club at Harbor Point. He taught tennis and tended bar there until his mid-80s, when knee problems limited his activities.

When Seixas was in his 90s and needed a full-time care giver, a GoFundMe page was created to help cover his medical expenses.

At the suggestion of Stan Smith, Adidas signed him as an ambassador for about \$2,000 a month. "I asked them, 'How long is this for?'" Seixas recalled in an interview with The San Francisco Chronicle in September 2022. "They said, 'Until you die or we go bankrupt.' As long as I can stay alive, I'm all right."

Seixas is survived by a daughter, Tori Seixas. His two marriages ended in divorce. Seixas drew on his longevity in the tennis world in the book "Prime Time Tennis: Tennis for Players Over 40" (1983), which he wrote with Joel H. Cohen.

In his last years, Seixas was invariably asked by interviewers how he felt about being the oldest living Grand Slam champion and the oldest member of the International Tennis Hall of Fame. His customary answer: "I'm proud of it, but I'd rather be the youngest."

World

A big power shift on small islands off Canada

HAIDA GWAII DISPATCH

HAIDA GWAII, BRITISH COLUMBIA

British Columbia grants Indigenous group's land title after long court battle

BY NORIMITSU ONISHI

The Raven, the story goes, alighted on the beach and heard sounds coming from a giant clamshell. He found creatures covering inside but, ever the trickster, he cajoled them out into the world. Liberated, they became the first people of the islands of Haida Gwaii.

The Haida people have lived for thousands of years on Haida Gwaii, a remote archipelago in the Pacific Ocean off Canada's west coast, just south of Alaska.

Nearly wiped out by smallpox after the arrival of Europeans, the Haida clung to their land — so rich in wildlife it is sometimes called Canada's Galápagos, coveted by loggers for its old-growth forests of giant cedars and spruce.

For decades, despite their geographic isolation, the Haida's unwavering fight to regain control over their land drew outside attention in Canada, raising questions about the country's long unacknowledged, brutal colonial history.

The Haida opposed clear-cut logging, building ties with environmentalists. They forged alliances with non-Haida communities at home and found common cause with other Indigenous groups across the world.

They sued British Columbia for title to their land in 2002, and supported their claims of ancient ties to the archipelago with a museum that showcased their art, artifacts and foundation myths, like the story of the Raven.

Their methodical and painstaking quest came to fruition in May when the government of British Columbia passed a law — the first of its kind in Canada — recognizing the Haida's aboriginal title throughout Haida Gwaii. No provincial or federal government in Canada had ever willingly recognized an Indigenous people's title to their land.

Over the next few years, the provincial government's authority over the land and resources is expected to be handed over to the Council of the Haida Nation, the Haida people's government.

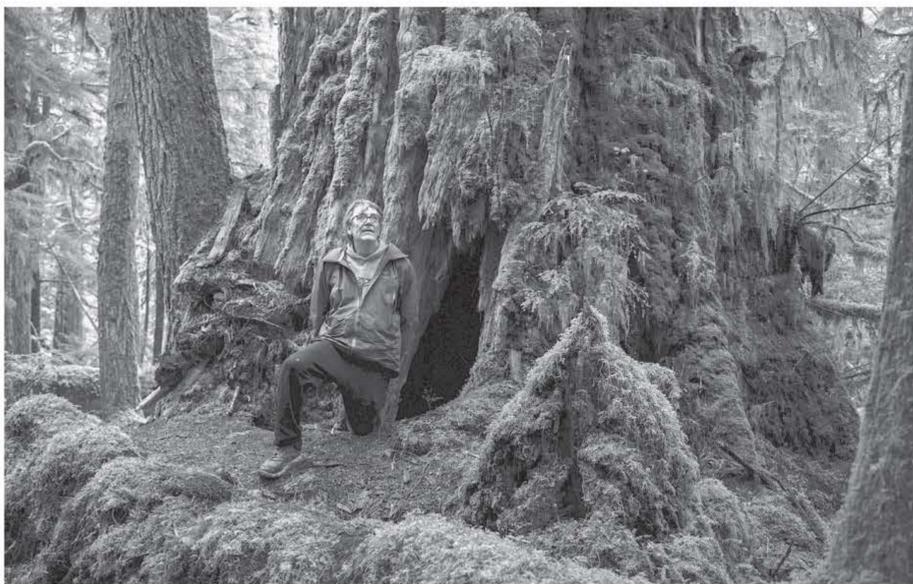
"On our side, we knew exactly what we wanted, who we were and why we were doing what we did," said Frank Collison, 89, a hereditary chief who recalled facing unresponsive provincial and federal governments for decades. "They just weren't interested in doing anything and quite satisfied to keep us under their thumb."

British Columbia's premier, David Eby, said title recognition meant the province was "moving beyond a place where the Haida Nation's rights were denied to a place where they are recognized and upheld."

Exactly how power shifts to the Haida still needs to be negotiated with British Columbia even as the province continues to provide services like health care and maintain infrastructure like highways.

Some legal experts say the provincial law leaves some critical issues unclear, including the impact of aboriginal title on private land owned by non-Haida people.

Others question whether the province can recognize aboriginal title — an Indigenous group's inherent right to land it occupied and used before colonization — without the federal government.



Top, the coastline near Skidegate on Haida Gwaii in British Columbia. The Haida people have lived for thousands of years on the archipelago in the Pacific Ocean. Above, Dale Lore, a former logger and a past mayor of Port Clements on Haida Gwaii.

Haida leaders say they are optimistic that they will reach an agreement with the federal government, which has also been moving toward recognition of aboriginal title.

Still, on Haida Gwaii, with a population of 5,000 divided evenly between Haida and non-Haida, the development is seen as a watershed.

The Indigenous community speaks of colonial liberation and of reclaiming its natural resources.

Among the non-Haida — referred to as "settlers" on the archipelago — many express support for the change, though some said they feared a future dominated by the Haida.

Court decisions over the years had indicated that the Haida would eventually win their claim. So British Columbia's government, led by the left-leaning New Democratic Party, decided instead to negotiate an agreement that led to the legislation.

"On our side, we knew exactly what we wanted, who we were and why we were doing what we did."

"It showed a basic amount of respect, which was welcome," said Jason Alsop, the president of the Council of the Haida Nation.

Mr. Alsop spoke from the council's headquarters overlooking Skidegate, a village on the archipelago's main island where smallpox survivors gathered in the 19th century.

Benefiting from an usually rich land and sea, the Haida had developed a prosperous society as traders, seafarers, artists and owners of enslaved people from their wars with other Indigenous groups. Haida Gwaii means Islands of the People in the Haida language.

Diseases introduced by Europeans

decimated their population of 20,000 to 600 by the late 1800s. In the 20th century, the Haida were further marginalized because of Canadian government policies and wide-scale logging.

It was in the 1970s that the Haida, along with some other Indigenous groups in Canada, started reaffirming themselves.

"We began putting ourselves back together," said Nika Collison, executive director of the Haida Gwaii Museum in Skidegate.

Leaders established the Council of the Haida Nation, an elected body that spoke on the community's behalf in negotiations with the provincial and federal governments. They built the museum, which shored up their claim to aboriginal title by not only exhibiting their culture but also by repatriating human remains and art objects from museums across the world.

They revived traditional knowledge



Top, Gloria and Randy O'Brien, owners of one of the biggest independent logging companies on Haida Gwaii. Above, Frank Collison, 89, a hereditary chief; and left, a raven, a key figure in Haida mythology.

ber has decreased and hurt their business, the O'Briens said.

They said the decrease had forced them three years ago to log cedars from half of a 320-acre property they had planned to pass on to their children and grandchildren.

As power began shifting toward the Haida, the O'Briens said that elected officials had grown indifferent to their complaints.

"They won't return phone calls, and Victoria, we can't even get in there to see anybody," said Ms. O'Brien, 73, referring to the provincial capital. The couple said they feared for their company's future after doing business on Haida Gwaii since the mid-1970s.

"When we first came here, we met a lot of Natives and they became our friends," said Mr. O'Brien, 76. "We partied with them, went fishing, went hunting, everything."

"But all of a sudden, now they're —" he said, with a laugh. "They're going to be our overlords."

Mr. Alsop, the council president, said the Haida wanted to move away from "a volume-based model" of logging.

Christian White, 62, a well-known Haida artist, said that for years he had watched barges leave Haida Gwaii with loads of cedar logs — even as the Haida themselves were limited by forestry rules in acquiring trees central to their culture.

In his studio, where one of his sculptures depicted people coming out of the clamshell upon which sat the Raven, Mr. White said, "We are a sharing people, but the others, they've gotten more than their fair share for way too long."

that had been nearly lost. For the first time in 75 years, they built a canoe from a cedar tree, "back-engineering" surviving ones, recalled Guujaaw, a former council president who goes by his Haida name.

Leaders framed their campaign as part of global independence and environmental movements.

Guujaaw said that they had exchanged strategies with Indigenous groups in the Amazon, New Zealand, Australia, Chile and Myanmar.

Guujaaw also secured unlikely allies like Dale Lore, a former mayor of Port Clements, a logging village north of Skidegate. It took 14 years for Mr. Lore to change from being a fervent defender of logging to being an opponent and a supporter of Haida autonomy, he said, explaining that Guujaaw had contributed to the transformation.

Not everyone, though, was happy with the change in the balance of power. Randy and Gloria O'Brien own one of the biggest independent logging companies on Haida Gwaii, a firm that has also long had a provincial contract to service the region's highways.

Over the years, as Haida leaders and environmentalists waged battle against clear-cutting, the overall supply of tim-

In sign of dissonance, Saudis praise and punish Netflix star

RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA

Satirical cartoon creator denies accusations that he has promoted extremism

BY VIVIAN NEREIM

From the outside, the past few years looked like the peak of Abdulaziz Almuzaini's career.

As the head of an animation studio in Saudi Arabia, he signed a five-year deal with Netflix in 2020. A sardonic cartoon franchise that he helped create, "Masameer," likened to a Saudi version of "South Park," was soon streaming to audiences around the world. And as the conservative Islamic kingdom loosened up, Mr. Almuzaini was being publicly celebrated — as recently as a few months ago — as one of the homegrown talents shaping its nascent entertainment industry.

Behind the scenes, though, he was on trial in an opaque national security court, as Saudi prosecutors — who accused him of promoting extremism through the cartoon series and social media posts — sought to ensure that he would spend the rest of his life in prison or under a travel ban.

Mr. Almuzaini, a dual U.S.-Saudi citizen and father of three, recently described his plight in a video pleading for the Saudi leadership to intervene, saying that he was awaiting a final ruling

from the kingdom's Supreme Court. "I might bear the consequences of what happens after this, and I'm ready," he said in the 18-minute video, which he said he was filming at his home in the Saudi capital.

The video was published on his social media accounts late last month and deleted the same day. In it, Mr. Almuzaini, sporting a black beard graying around the edges, spoke in front of a wall covered with colorful sticky notes.

"I haven't committed a single crime in the kingdom," he said. "I haven't even run a red light."

The Saudi authorities have imprisoned hundreds of citizens during a crackdown on dissent that began in 2017. Still, Mr. Almuzaini's video was shocking because he had appeared to be squarely in the good graces of Saudi leadership — attending government-hosted events and receiving glowing write-ups in state-backed media outlets. Despite facing grave charges, he was not jailed, although he was barred from leaving the country.

His story is the starkest example yet of the duality of the new Saudi Arabia, as the 38-year-old Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman opens up the kingdom socially while deepening political repression. In Mr. Almuzaini's case, those two trends have played out simultaneously, exposing a profound dissonance at the heart of the kingdom's transformation.

The New York Times was able to verify that a trial had taken place at the Special Criminal Court in Riyadh,

where Mr. Almuzaini was convicted last year of supporting extremist ideology, among other charges. He was sentenced to 13 years in prison, followed by a 13-year ban on traveling outside Saudi Arabia. An appellate court upheld his conviction and prison sentence this year, while lengthening his travel ban to 30 years. Usually, people embroiled in national security cases are detained when an investigation begins, often before they are formally tried. It is unclear why the Saudi authorities did not detain Mr. Almuzaini after his conviction. It appears that he was remaining out of jail while exhausting all avenues for appeal.

The Saudi government's Center for International Communication did not respond to a request for comment. Mr. Almuzaini did not respond to a request for an interview. It was not possible to reach his lawyer. Netflix declined to comment.

The American State Department said in a statement to The Times that it had been monitoring Mr. Almuzaini's case, adding, "Our embassies and consulates seek to ensure U.S. citizens overseas are subject to a fair and transparent legal process."

The prosecutors' accusations were tied to television content from the show Mr. Almuzaini produced and social media posts he wrote a decade ago, when the space for public discourse in Saudi Arabia was less restricted.

"I never thought it would reach this phase," Mr. Almuzaini said in his video. "Especially given that there are people and officials — whom I'm grateful to but



Abdulaziz Almuzaini in a screen shot from a video that was posted on his social media accounts in June and later deleted.

won't mention — who reassured me that the issue didn't deserve all this and to be patient and it will be resolved bureaucratically."

Since Prince Mohammed's rise to power, which began in 2015, he has significantly loosened social restrictions in Saudi Arabia — ending a ban on women driving, defanging the religious police and investing heavily in new sectors such as entertainment and tourism. He has also presided over a widespread political crackdown, which reached a peak with the 2018 murder of the Saudi writer

Jamal Khashoggi — a columnist who wrote critically about the monarchy in The Washington Post — by Saudi agents in Istanbul.

Prince Mohammed's advisers and supporters sometimes argue that an iron fist is necessary to push the state through a time of tumultuous change. But Mr. Almuzaini's case, among others like his, raises questions about how the kingdom intends to nurture art, creativity and entrepreneurship — key components of the prince's plans — while shrinking freedom of expression.

"Masameer" got its start on YouTube more than a decade ago when movie theaters were effectively banned and filmmaking was largely an underground effort. Through deliberately absurd plots, the show critiques aspects of life in the conservative Islamic kingdom.

Multiple television series and two movies from the "Masameer" franchise are still available on Netflix in Saudi Arabia. Mr. Almuzaini's animation studio, Myrkott, is part way through a five-year partnership with the streaming service, signed in 2020.

According to Mr. Almuzaini's video, some of the accusations he faced were related to an episode of "Masameer County," a spinoff Netflix-hosted show released in 2021.

That episode tells the story of a wealthy, coddled and lonely man named Bandar who develops a late-night craving for ice cream. He goes in search of it, only to get beaten up, dumped in the desert and taken in by a band of jihadists. He joins the Islamic State terrorist

group, and at the episode's conclusion, a helicopter he is traveling in explodes, catapulting him into a dreamlike scene where he finds a palatial ice cream cone.

The episode is openly derogatory toward the jihadists, portraying the Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who died in 2019, as a sleazy man with a harem of women.

But Saudi officials pursuing Mr. Almuzaini interpreted it to mean that "if you went and fought with the Islamic State and you died like Bandar in the ice cream episode, you'll go to heaven," Mr. Almuzaini said in his video. "I don't know how they read it this way."

In the video, Mr. Almuzaini pleaded for Prince Mohammed's aid, saying that he had sought to resolve his case through many avenues before going public.

Mr. Almuzaini's problems started in 2021, when an official in a Saudi media authority began to investigate him and his animation studio over regulatory violations that included "supporting terrorism and homosexuality," Mr. Almuzaini said in the video.

What was initially a regulatory issue turned into a criminal trial. In addition to complaints about "Masameer" content, prosecutors referred to social media posts that Mr. Almuzaini had made from 2010 to 2014, he said in the video.

In a second video, posted on June 30, Mr. Almuzaini emphasized his loyalty to the Saudi kingdom and its rulers, adding that he did not want to go anywhere else.

"I'll live in this country," he said. "And god willing, I'll die in this country."

WORLD

A scenario that France has few answers for

FRANCE, FROM PAGE 1
"chart a path in the fog of this crisis without end."

Prime Minister Gabriel Attal, from Mr. Macron's party and once a favorite of the president's, offered his resignation on Monday morning, but Mr. Macron asked him to stay on for the time being "to ensure the country's stability," the Elysée Palace said.

Mr. Macron has to appoint a prime minister capable of forming a government that the National Assembly's newly seated lawmakers won't topple with a no-confidence vote.

There is no clear picture yet of who that might be, and none of the three main blocs — which also have their own internal disagreements — appear ready to work with the others.

"Everything is possible and everything is imaginable," said Jean-Philippe Derosier, a professor of public law at the University of Lille, who was interviewed at length on a special radio program dedicated to the election on France Info.

Much of the country was in shock. Going into the election, all of the polls had suggested that the far-right National Rally was poised to win the most seats. The question was whether it would win enough to assemble an absolute majority and take over both the prime minister's office and cabinet appointments. "The flip — a spectacular reversal," read the headline of an editorial in *La Croix*, a Catholic daily.

To some, the results seemed a clear rejection of the National Rally's anti-immigration ideology, even though the party and its allies made big electoral gains, securing about 140 seats, about 50 more than the National Rally had before. The front page of the business daily *Les Echos* was covered by a large photograph of the party's president, Jordan



DMITRY KOSTYUKOV FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



Clockwise from top: a gathering at the Place de la République in Paris after the announcement of voting results on Sunday; Jean-Luc Mélenchon of France Unbowed, far right, and other members of the New Popular Front speaking in Paris after the election; and Marine Le Pen, the longtime leader of the National Rally party, on Sunday.

Bardella, with the short biting headline: "The slap."

The sense of relief and joy in Paris — which blocked out the far right — was palpable. People thronged into the city's perennial place of protest, the Place de la République. They danced, they

hugged, they congratulated one another. Fireworks exploded overhead.

"I am relieved," said Charlotte Cosmao, 33, a set designer, who was at the edge of the square drinking a celebratory beer with a friend. "I am happy."

In a different Place de la République



THOMAS PADILLA/ASSOCIATED PRESS

140 miles (225 kilometers) southwest of Paris in the city of Le Mans, a smaller celebration occurred. The region had also blocked the far right from getting any seats. One of the defeated candi-

dates was Marie-Caroline Le Pen, a daughter of Jean-Marie Le Pen, a founder of the party. (Another daughter, Marine Le Pen, is a longtime leader of the National Rally, and won her seat out-

right in the first round of the election.)

"It's unbelievable and completely unexpected," Damien Fabre, 36, a history teacher, said at the celebration in Le Mans, while someone nearby screamed

that there were no fascists in the region to a chorus of cheers. "It changes the whole political future of this country."

"We were beginning to get used to the idea of having a relative majority for the National Rally," said Mr. Fabre, who was involved in the campaign of a candidate for the far-left France Unbowed party. "Now a way for the left has opened; though it may not be able to implement its platform, at least it will be able to be in an offensive position and set the pace."

Though the night ended with some confrontations on the streets with the police in parts of the country, the vote did not give way to a surge of violence that many, including the interior minister, anticipated.

Some 30,000 police officers had spread across the country — 5,000 in and around Paris, where the far right is particularly unpopular and where the authorities worried that protests might turn violent if it won. Many shop owners in the city had boarded up their storefronts along the capital's most famous street, the Champs-Élysées, expecting looting and riots that did not happen.

"It's unbelievable and completely unexpected. It changes the whole political future of this country."

Among supporters of the far right, many drawn to its promises of tax relief, less immigration and increased state services, there was clear disappointment.

"They call us fascists, but that doesn't exist anymore," Claire Marais-Beuil, a newly elected National Rally politician, said at her small victory party in a local cafe in Beauvais, in northern France.

"I'm worried for my France," she added. "It's going to become ungovernable, and all of the things that we wanted to do will be blocked or difficult."

There was also a question of whether the left's win was more a rejection of the far right than an endorsement of the left-wing coalition's platform. The newly formed coalition had called on voters last week to help it form a barrier — the "dam" or "Republican front" — against the surging National Rally to keep it from power. It even pulled 130 of its candidates from three-way races and threw its support behind opponents to beat the National Rally.

The left-leaning *Libération* newspaper's editorial gave credit to the left for defeating what it termed a xenophobic right. The editorial began: "Thanks to whom? Thanks to the Republican Front."

But that vote, it said, obliged the left-wing New Popular Front to "live up to the maturity of voters." The editorial asked the coalition to be humble, tone down its partisanship and address many voters' deep feelings of downward mobility — *déclassement* in French — that feed the far right.

Do not forget, it tells the left's leaders, that the "extreme right is more powerful than ever in our country."

Liz Alderman contributed reporting from Beauvais, France; Ségoène Le Stradic from Le Mans, France; and Aida Alami from Paris.

Ukraine attempts to maintain neutrality in U.S. politics

KYIV, UKRAINE

With Biden future unclear, and Trump an uncertain ally, the strain is intense

BY MARC SANTORA
AND STEVEN ERLANGER

Ukraine, which depends on American military aid for its survival, has long tried to maintain bipartisan support in the United States. That has never been easy, but it is getting harder, especially with the increased possibility that Donald J. Trump, no great friend of Ukraine, will return to the White House.

Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, is asked in nearly every interview what a second Trump administration would mean for Ukraine. While Mr. Zelensky chooses his words carefully, sometimes the emotional weight of the assumption behind the question — that Mr. Trump could end American military assistance, allowing Russia to succeed in destroying the Ukrainian state — spills into view.

Mr. Trump's claim during his recent debate with Mr. Biden that he alone knew the path to peace is "a little scary," the Ukrainian president said in an interview with Britain's Channel 4 News.

"I've seen a lot, a lot of victims," Mr. Zelensky said. "But that's really making me a bit stressed."

"If there are risks to Ukrainian independence, if we lose statehood — we want to be ready for this, we want to know," Mr. Zelensky said in a subsequent interview last week with Bloomberg. "We want to understand whether in November we will have the powerful support of the U.S. or will be all alone."

President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, during remarks at a summit meeting in Astana, Kazakhstan, seemed to relish the prospect of Mr. Trump's return to the



President Biden and President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine at a summit meeting in Italy last month, above left; and the scene of a Russian aerial attack in the city of Kharkiv.

White House. "The fact that Mr. Trump, as a presidential candidate, says he is ready and wants to stop the war in Ukraine is something we take very seriously," Mr. Putin said on Thursday. "I haven't seen his ideas on how exactly he's going to do that, and that is the key question. But I have no doubt that he says that sincerely, and we support that."

Mr. Putin frequently feigns interest in negotiations to end the war he started. But he underscored his intention to force Ukrainian capitulation, saying on Thursday that Ukraine must agree to "demilitarization" measures that could not be reversed, as a precondition to a cease-fire.

Ukrainian officials, both publicly and privately, said the hyperpartisan environment in the United States, Russia's efforts to stoke those divisions, the turmoil of the presidential campaign and a distracted White House combined to make for an exquisitely difficult diplomatic challenge.

"Quite frankly, we are in a rather vul-

nerable situation right now," Oleksandr Merezhko, chairman of the Ukrainian Parliament's foreign affairs committee, said in an interview.

"If Trump becomes president, it should not be a shock for us," he said, motioning to a stack of books about Mr. Trump's presidency that he has been reading for insights. But reaching out to people close to Trump, he said, "needs to

be done in a delicate way, not to antagonize Democrats."

"We are very careful not to get involved in internal political struggle in the United States," he said. "We don't want to spoil the relations with anyone."

Ukrainian disappointments are bipartisan. It is as common to hear frustration with the slow pace of American aid and bitterness over restrictions on the use of

Western weapons demanded by the Biden administration as it is to hear concerns about Mr. Trump.

The Biden administration's policies, Ukrainian officials say privately, have left Ukraine in a cruel limbo, with neither the weapons necessary to win nor full American backing for a Ukrainian effort to begin settlement talks on terms favorable to Kyiv. Mr. Biden did not attend a Ukrainian-organized peace summit meeting in Switzerland last month, despite Mr. Zelensky's appeals for him to do so. Vice President Kamala Harris attended instead.

Ukrainian officials took some solace from Mr. Trump's brief statement in the debate that he would not accept Russia's terms for ending the war, and many have noted that Ukraine has a deep well of support in the Republican Party that they hope will influence Mr. Trump.

More important, they said, Mr. Trump is unpredictable, and if he fails to secure a deal with Mr. Putin and feels diminished in the process, he could step up as-



DANIEL BERZHILAK/THE NEW YORK TIMES

istance and would most likely be far less concerned by fears of escalation.

"It's a paradox," Mr. Merezhko said. "He is predictable in his unpredictability."

The most immediate concern for Ukrainians is that the swirl of debate about Mr. Biden's political future will be a distraction during a NATO gathering in Washington this week, just as the organization is moving toward a larger role in coordinating weapons and ammunition supplies for Ukraine.

The Biden administration is trying to avoid giving Mr. Trump an opening to accuse it of committing large sums to Ukraine over the long term, and new governments in France and Britain are both facing significant economic challenges.

Ukraine's Western allies have taken halting steps to try to ensure continued military assistance, regardless of what happens in the American election, but domestic politics are complicating collective actions.

Andrew E. Kramer contributed reporting from Kyiv, Ukraine.



Supporters of President Biden in Raleigh, N.C., a day after his June 27 debate. Some Democrats worry about replacing a presidential candidate just months before an election.

'He's frail. Pass the baton.'

PHOENIX

Some voters in swing states who backed Biden in 2020 are now wanting a Plan B

BY JACK HEALY, MITCH SMITH, EDUARDO MEDINA AND ROBERT CHIARITO

Jeanne Winograd, 72, a Democrat in Phoenix, is such a ride-or-die fan of President Biden that, on Valentine's Day, she mailed him a card to say his vigor, not his age, would shape the presidential election. But after a week of panic attacks after his dismal debate performance, she felt compelled to send him another card.

This one said: Thanks for everything, but it's time to go.

"I just love Biden, but he's frail," Ms. Winograd said. "Pass the baton."

As Mr. Biden and his allies have scrambled to fix the damage from the June 27 debate, and to insist he will not bow out of the race, dozens of Democratic voters have said they no longer believe he can accomplish the one thing they urgently want — a defeat of former President Donald J. Trump. They are desperate for the party to find a Plan B.

In 80 interviews at July 4 parades, pie-eating contests and political events in the political battlegrounds of Arizona, Michigan, Wisconsin and North Carolina, more than half of voters who had supported Mr. Biden in 2020 now said he should drop out of the race. About a quarter said he should stay in. The rest were unsure.

The turmoil engulfing the Democratic Party had left them divided about a path forward, with some saying it would be pragmatic to dump Mr. Biden and others arguing that he was Democrats' best — or only? — option in November.

Several voters said Vice President Kamala Harris was the smartest replacement for Mr. Biden. But others worried she could not match Mr. Trump and mentioned that the Democratic governors of Michigan or Pennsylvania might be a smarter choice. What about one of the Castro brothers from Texas, one voter suggested? Another asked, "What about Michelle Obama?"

Every voter but one said they would still vote for Mr. Biden if he remained in the race. They said they viewed Mr. Trump as a greater threat to democracy, women's rights and the future of the world than Mr. Biden, who would be 86 at the end of second term. They also said that they believed that Mr. Trump, 78, was not mentally equipped to serve another four years.

Some also worried about the risks of abruptly replacing a presidential candidate four months before an election, and the growing sense that the party did not know what to do.

"We can't agree on a way ahead, we can't agree on what to do about the current situation," said Raja Seshadri, 46, who works at the National Institutes of Health in Raleigh, N.C. "We're going to lose."

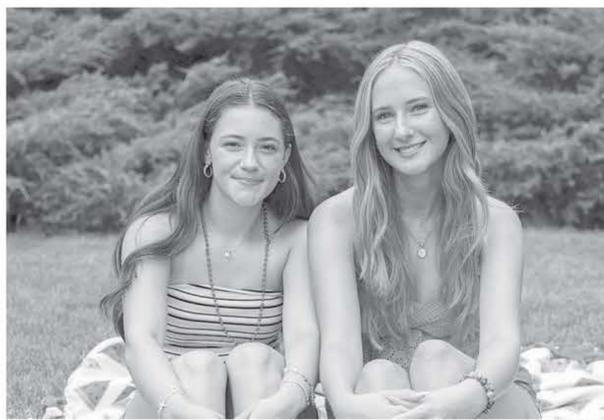
The willingness of Democratic voters to publicly contemplate cutting Mr. Biden loose stands in contrast to what they are hearing from their own leaders, who have mostly rallied to support him.

But the president's base of support among key Democrats on Capitol Hill began to crumble on Sunday as a half-dozen top members of the House privately told colleagues he should withdraw from the presidential race amid growing concerns about his age and ability to win re-election.

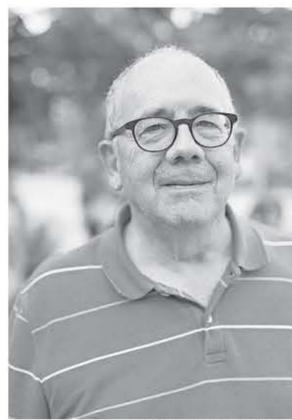
Jacky Healy reported from Phoenix; Mitch Smith from Traverse City, Mich.; Eduardo Medina from Raleigh and Durham, N.C.; and Robert Chiarito from Wauwatosa, Wis.



Michael John said that Mr. Biden has been supporting Native American-owned businesses like his with loan guarantees.



Sophia Artus and Emma Due of Wauwatosa, Wis., who are both 18, will vote for the first time in November. But they are unenthusiastic about their choices. Gerry Ford, above right, a 72-year-old engineer from Wauwatosa, said of Mr. Biden: "He should exit the race."



Some voters said they felt frustrated and betrayed by their party's efforts to short-circuit any public discussion about whether Mr. Biden should step aside. They said Mr. Biden's meandering answers during the debate could not be explained away as a bad night, or the product of jet lag or a cold, and that they were not reassured by his appearances at events afterward.

"It is disgraceful they've allowed him to get here and all of us to be here," Elaine Becherer, a 48-year-old who works in university planning in Phoenix, said as she and other Biden voters in Arizona discussed his candidacy on a video call last week.

"Our 'Dear Leader,'" Cristina Ospina, a 56-year-old neurologist in Phoenix who studies movement disorders, chimed in sarcastically, referring to North Korea's adulatory description of its leader, Kim Jong-un.

Frustrated, some Democratic voters have begun airing their concerns in the open.

Some said they wrote letters to the White House and reached out to local elected officials. In Traverse City, Mich., Greg Holmes, 71, a retired psychologist and a loyal Democratic voter, showed up to a campaign appearance by the first lady, Jill Biden, holding a sign that said, "Step Aside Joe!"

"If Biden says and does what I call the right thing, or courageous thing, and passes the baton, I will be ecstatic and fired up for the next person," Mr. Holmes said. "Because I think Trump really represents a terrible, terrible threat to our democracy."

In the heavily Democratic Milwaukee suburb of Wauwatosa, the Biden campaign's troubles were not far from many voters' minds as they watched bagpipers and high-school dance teams march in the city's annual Independence Day parade.

"He should exit the race," said Gerry Ford, a 72-year-old engineer (and not the 38th president of the United States). "The sooner the better. He doesn't meet the criteria for having the most important job in the world."

Mr. Ford said the White House and the Biden campaign had not been transparent after the debate. "It fulfills all of our suspicions about politicians that they can't be straight with voters," he said. "It's embarrassing for the country."

Down the street, Sophia Artus and Emma Due, who are both 18, said they did not feel enthusiastic about either presidential candidate in the first votes of their lives. They had been so dispirited by the debate that they turned it off halfway through. They said they would likely vote for Mr. Biden, but only because he was not Mr. Trump.

"Kamala Harris would carry the torch, and she's better than Trump," Ms. Due said. "There's a lot of new ideas that younger people express, but it's not reflected in our candidates."

Other Democrats have decided to swallow their concerns and stick with Mr. Biden.

Melissa Wickles, 21, of Raleigh, N.C., said that defeating Mr. Trump was so imperative that Democrats needed to rally around Mr. Biden and highlight his policy achievements. She said her Dem-

ocratic friends had also expressed their support for Mr. Biden.

"He has a stutter, he is older, that's no doubt, but overall, if you listen to what he says, I understand him," Ms. Wickles said. "Trump, on the other hand, just lies the whole time."

Liz Purvis, the chair of the Granville County Democratic Party in North Carolina, a purple county that Mr. Trump won in 2020, said her thought on the intraparty debate right now is simple: "Straight up, I think sticking with Biden is the right call."

"With the money they've raised, and the organizing power that the coordinated campaign is doing, our smoothest road toward a Democratic victory feels to me like it runs through a Biden campaign," Ms. Purvis said.

In Tempe, Ariz., Michael John, 35, said he had decided to cast his first vote this November after starting his own small business, Navajo Mike's, making frybread mix and barbecue sauce. He realized how deeply politics was intertwined with his life, family and success. Mr. John, a Navajo citizen, said that Mr. Biden has been supporting Native-owned businesses like his with loan guarantees and help with marketing and business development. But he also said he thought Mr. Biden should ease out of the race to avoid a loss to Mr. Trump.

"It would be ideal to have someone more coherent and involved, and there," he said, adding that President Biden should "go do something, cool, fun. You don't need the weight of the world on you."

Anti-regulation drive produces big payoff

WASHINGTON

Court architects welcome broad rulings against the 'administrative state'

BY CARL HULSE

Back in 2016, a colleague handed Donald F. McGahn II, then a top legal adviser to the presidential candidate Donald J. Trump, an appeals court opinion that eloquently and powerfully echoed much of what Mr. McGahn saw as the evils of an out-of-control federal bureaucracy.

The opinion from the Denver-based appeals court by the relatively unknown Judge Neil M. Gorsuch suggested it might be time for federal courts to confront the "behemoth" of a longstanding precedent conferring substantial regulatory power on federal officials.

One month later, Mr. McGahn placed Judge Gorsuch on Mr. Trump's list of potential Supreme Court nominees, should he be elected.

Four months later, he was President Trump's first nominee to the high court. And in late June, Justice Gorsuch wrote for the conservative majority on the Supreme Court the ruling that made sure the behemoth was slain.

While much of the attention to the conservative-dominated court has been about the sweeping decisions it has made to roll back abortion rights and now greatly expand presidential immunity, that was never the main goal for the architects of the effort to push the judiciary to the right.

For those who led the drive to place Justice Gorsuch and two other conservatives on the court during the Trump administration, a sweeping series of rulings by the Supreme Court this year that shrank the power of federal agencies was the true victory. Their longtime target, the so-called administrative state, has been beaten back with the overturning of the 40-year-old Chevron doctrine and a flurry of other decisions aimed at reining in federal government reach — just as they envisioned it.

"None of this was an accident," Mr. McGahn, a partner at Jones Day, said in an interview about the court's landmark rulings on administrative law — an arcane area but one that was a cornerstone of his campaign to place jurists skeptical about federal power on the bench. "It was a way to corral the runaway bureaucracy to get judges in place who were actually going to read the law as it was written."

Limiting the power of federal officials was a longstanding goal of members of the Federalist Society, the conservative group seen as an incubator for the type of judges whom Mr. McGahn and others sought when they moved to quickly populate the courts with conservative jurists after Mr. Trump's election.

"Dismantling the administrative state and empowering people who are actually elected to make decisions has been the motivating force" for nearly every "Federalist Society-type lawyer," Senator Mitch McConnell, the Kentucky Republican and minority leader, said in an interview.

Mr. McConnell spearheaded the judicial confirmation effort in the Senate as majority leader, beginning with his blocking President Barack Obama from filling a Supreme Court vacancy in 2016, followed by his working hand in hand with Mr. McGahn, once Mr. Trump was elected, to push scores of his judicial nominees to the bench.

"I think the left thought that all we ever talked about was Roe v. Wade," Mr. McConnell said. "Frankly, I can't even remember it coming up. This was the unifying issue," he said of the attempt to rein in federal agencies.

Mr. McGahn first grew leery of the extent of agency regulatory power during his own stint as a member of the Federal Election Commission. When he became White House counsel for Mr. Trump, he played a central role in vetting candidates for the Supreme Court and recommending them to the new president.

He searched for potential nominees who had demonstrated a zeal for chal-

lenging the reach of federal agencies and backed it up with strong legal arguments and decisions.

"It's not enough to say the right things in public speeches," Mr. McGahn said in November 2017 remarks to the Federalist Society, as he laid out his strategy for what had come to be known as deconstructing the administrative state. "Judges must apply those principles in concrete cases."

Judge Gorsuch had demonstrated his thinking in the 2016 opinion. Brett Kavanaugh, a former White House official sitting on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, had what Mr. McGahn considered a long paper trail that put him at the "vanguard of curtailing agency power," eventually earning him a spot on the Trump Supreme Court contender list as well.

Amy Coney Barrett, a Notre Dame law professor confirmed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit in 2017, did not have the judicial record of the other two, but Mr. McGahn liked what he heard during interviews for the appeals court post.

"She spoke favorably of the work of Gorsuch and Kavanaugh," he said. "These guys are cut from the same block of wood."

All three were eventually seated on the Supreme Court over the vociferous objections of Democrats, providing the critical mass of votes for the series of rulings that will mean significant changes in the way agencies exert power. They will also put new pressure on Congress to write laws with less wiggle room for agencies' interpretation and enforcement of them.

"It was a way to corral the runaway bureaucracy to get judges in place who were actually going to read the law."

Besides the landmark ruling overturning the Chevron doctrine, which required courts to defer to interpretation of laws by federal agencies, the justices blocked the Environmental Protection Agency from enforcing a rule intended to protect downwind states from pollution from neighboring states, a decision with broad implications for other environmental rules. They also required the Securities and Exchange Commission to try fraud cases in federal courts, rather than in-house tribunals, another consequential shift.

Then on July 1, the Supreme Court struck a significant blow against agency power in another ideologically divided decision, ruling that a six-year time limit on challenging agency regulations should begin when a regulation affects a company, not six years from the regulation's establishment.

"I think this is an issue that has the potential over the long term to kind of rearrange the power between those who are actually elected and those who are doing whatever they want to," Mr. McConnell said.

The string of anti-regulatory rulings has alarmed both the liberal members of the court and Democrats who see the potential for unraveling decades of agency work to protect the health and welfare of Americans.

In a dissent, Justice Katanji Brown Jackson warned that the decision could unleash "a tsunami of lawsuits against agencies" and had "the potential to devastate the functioning of the federal government."

Senator Chuck Schumer, the New York Democrat and majority leader, said the justices had "once again sided with powerful special interests and giant corporations against the middle class and American families. Their headlong rush to overturn 40 years of precedent and impose their own radical views is appalling."

But Mr. McGahn said the rulings should reset the federal regulatory system and restore power to its rightful place in the legislature.

"This puts Congress back in the driver's seat," he said. "It also gives them a real responsibility that they have to start doing their job and legislate with some sort of specificity."



"None of this was an accident," Donald F. McGahn II said of court curbs on regulation.

CORRECTION

• An article on Friday about the risks and rewards for Democrats if they select a new presidential nominee misstated Ohio's deadline for a candidate to

be certified. Ohio legislators passed a bill extending the deadline; it is no longer before the Democratic convention.

Business

Yen's collapse imperils military buildup

TOKYO

Japan struggles to fund big equipment purchases as regional threats increase

BY RIVER AKIRA DAVIS AND HISAKO UENO

The yen's collapse this year to a nearly four-decade low is undermining Japan's plans for its largest military buildup in postwar history.

The government has slashed orders for aircraft, and officials warn that further cuts may be imminent. Japan buys much of its military equipment from American companies, in transactions done in dollars. The government's purchasing power has been drastically eroded by the yen's diminishing value.

"What we are achieving in terms of actual defense capabilities and our original target — the two are not lined up," Satoshi Morimoto, a former Japanese defense minister, said in an interview. The value of the defense budget over five years "has effectively been reduced by 30 percent," Mr. Morimoto said.

Japan's currency headache comes at a critical juncture. The country's large increase in military spending was intended to fortify defenses as Tokyo confronts mounting missile threats from North Korea and other challenges posed by China, including fears of a potential China-Taiwan conflict.

In 2022, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan announced a new national security strategy that would more than double the amount set aside for defense. The budget of 43 trillion yen over five years, equivalent to around \$319 billion at the time, would help Japan deter attacks by giving it the ability to strike bases in enemy territory.

The new budget broke with longstanding precedent on spending restraints and dependence on U.S. forces. Mr. Kishida hailed the surge in military spending as a "turning point" in Japan's history.

The problem: The budget was based on an exchange rate of 108 yen to the dollar, which even then was far from the actual rate of around 135 yen to the dollar. Now, with the yen weakening to 161 to the dollar, the cost of equipment, including helicopters, submarines and tanks, has skyrocketed.

A weak yen helps Japan's big exporters like Toyota Motor by making their products cheaper and more competitive overseas. But it makes imports more expensive. The government's struggle to afford military equipment is one example of how those higher costs are squeezing Japan's economy. The slide in the yen's value over the past three years has raised the price of staples like food and fuel and weighed on household spending.

Recently, the Bank of Japan, the central bank, has become more concerned about the yen's impact on import prices. Many market analysts and traders expect the bank to raise interest rates at its policy meeting this month. Higher interest rates draw more investors to Japanese assets, increasing demand for the



Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan at an Army base last year. Two years ago, he announced a new national security strategy that would more than double military spending.



Japan's buildup plans break a longstanding pattern of relying on U.S. forces. Above left, a live-fire exercise in May; above right, Satoshi Morimoto, now an adviser on strategy, in 2012.



yen and propping up the currency's value.

"I am seriously concerned about this defense-budget issue, and especially the effect that the weak yen will have on dealing with North Korean and potential Chinese threats," said Maiko Takeuchi, a consulting fellow at Japan's Research Institute of Economy, Trade and Industry.

Several technologies central to Japan's ability to conduct counterstrikes — including U.S.-made Tomahawk missiles — have surged in price because of the weakened yen, according to Ms. Takeuchi, who previously worked in a government agency that oversaw military purchases.

"At this point, even Japan-made military equipment is going up in price, be-

cause many internal parts are sourced from overseas," Ms. Takeuchi said. "Japan is already cutting procurement of certain aircraft, and if you can't increase the budget, more cuts become inevitable," she added.

When it was first announced, Japan's five-year military budget was seen by security experts as a powerful statement: The officially pacifist country

was demonstrating its resolve to the United States and other allies rattled by China's recent military buildup and other territorial threats.

As China builds closer economic and military ties with Russia, other Asia-Pacific nations have also been increasing their military budgets. For Japan, the budget drawn up two years ago would put defense spending at about 2 percent

of the country's economic output in 2027, aligned with a target laid out for NATO countries.

"Japan's defense plan was a bold statement," said Jonathan Grady, founding principal of the advisory firm Canary Group, who has counseled the Japanese government on strategies related to funding defense spending. "The challenge now lies in honoring that commitment," he said. "Japan risks credibility right now if it can't do it."

Mr. Kishida has limited options for funding a bigger defense budget. Japan's public debt is more than twice its economic output, and tax increases have historically been both unpopular and damaging to its economy.

Funding for the defense budget was tied in 2022 to vague plans to raise taxes at "an appropriate time in or after 2024," according to cabinet office documents. That tax increase has already been punted beyond this year, and any further increases would probably be a hard sell for Mr. Kishida, who is already reckoning with record low approval ratings.

This week, Mr. Kishida is set to attend a NATO meeting in Washington. NATO officials have said the meeting will focus on strengthening allied defense and partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region.

"If you can't raise taxes and can't increase debt, you're stuck with very few options beyond pursuing deeper multi-lateral coordination," Mr. Grady said, referring to Japan's collaboration with the United States, Australia and other allies on initiatives like joint maritime exercises and trainings.

Late last month, the United States, Japan and South Korea held three-day joint air and naval drills in the East China Sea. The exercise, called "Freedom Edge," was intended to increase readiness against North Korea's missile and nuclear threats.

North Korea responded to the drills by launching two ballistic missiles last week. It vowed an "overwhelming" response to what state media described as a relationship of Japan, the United States and South Korea that was beginning to resemble "the Asia version of NATO."

Mr. Morimoto, the former defense minister, said he was considering how Japan could bear current financial constraints while keeping its military buildup intact.

Mr. Morimoto, 83, is a member of a panel of experts set up this year to advise on Japan's defense strategies. The group convened in February and will continue meeting through the end of the year, when it will need to decide what to recommend for next year's defense budget.

Mr. Morimoto said the lesson learned by Japan from recent currency fluctuations was that military spending could no longer be fixed to a precise number. Rather, he said, the focus needs to be on building military capabilities in terms of substance.

With regard to currency fluctuations, "no one expected such a big change in just three years, and I have no doubt there will be more unexpected things to come," Mr. Morimoto said. "But if this and that are postponed, this and that are delayed, our defense — Japan's defense — will not be complete."

U.K.'s first female chancellor finds inspiration in America

LONDON

Britain is likely to adopt a more activist approach to jobs and investment

BY ESHE NELSON

After 14 years in the shadows, Britain's Labour Party has returned to governing. And the country's first female chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves, is faced with the tough job of restoring Britain's economic growth prospects and ending a decade and a half of stagnation.

For inspiration, she has turned to another glass-ceiling-shattering woman, on the other side of the Atlantic: the U.S. Treasury secretary, Janet L. Yellen.

Ms. Reeves was named chancellor on Friday after the Labour Party won a majority in Thursday's general election. Now in charge of Britain's budget, she is expected to pursue an economic agenda influenced by Ms. Yellen, whose policies have encouraged job creation and a manufacturing investment boom in the United States.

Ms. Yellen's "modern supply-side economics" aims to bolster economic growth by increasing the number of workers and raising productivity while reducing inequality. In practice, that has meant giving companies incentives, through subsidies and tax cuts, to invest in the United States and generate jobs at home, particularly in emerging green sectors.

Ms. Reeves, 45, calls her version "securo-nomics," a portmanteau word that means ensuring "resilience for our national economy and security for working people," she said in March. It's also likely to mean a more activist government. The Labour Party has drawn up



Rachel Reeves, Britain's first female chancellor, has said that her agenda is influenced by the "modern supply-side economics" of Janet L. Yellen, the U.S. Treasury secretary.

an industrial strategy and has plans for a national wealth fund and a publicly owned energy company.

"Much of my securonomics approach has its roots in Yellen's modern supply-side economics," Ms. Reeves wrote in a book published last year.

She is also influenced by the Harvard economist Dani Rodrik, who calls for "productivism," a partnership between governments and businesses to create more productive jobs throughout an economy.

Since 2010, Britain had been governed by the Conservative Party, whose instincts favored a smaller state and the free market. Ms. Reeves has argued in favor of a greater role for the government, while it teams up with businesses.

For Ms. Reeves, the United States justifies this approach, even if many Americans have a poor view of the current

economy. While Britain has experienced sluggish growth, the United States recovered rapidly from the pandemic and has continued to expand. Its economy is nearly 9 percent larger than its pre-pandemic size, and nearly 16 million jobs have been created since President Biden took office, more than making up for the losses during the pandemic.

The shift in economic policy in Washington has led other countries to re-evaluate their approaches, said Carys Roberts, the executive director of the Institute for Public Policy Research. "It's really inspired the Labour Party to be stronger on its approach."

Ms. Reeves has already followed Ms. Yellen in one respect: Ms. Yellen is also the first woman to lead her country's treasury. But following her economic agenda might prove to be more difficult. Ms. Yellen's policies have lots of

policy behind them. The Inflation Reduction Act, with its incentives for manufacturers to build solar-panel or wind-turbine factories and for consumers to buy electric vehicles, is projected to cost more than \$800 billion over the next decade.

But no one, least of all the Labour Party, thinks Britain has the money to do something as bold. The government's debt is at its highest level since the early 1960s, and interest payments have ballooned. Taxes are historically high. Current spending plans suggest a squeeze on many public services amid urgent demands for more health care spending and pledges to increase military spending.

In some ways, Ms. Reeves has added to her constraints by vowing not to raise Britain's three main taxes and to keep her predecessor's "fiscal rule" of getting debt to fall in five years. To avoid worsening austerity, Labour is relying on economic growth to improve the public finances, and it is depending on a wave of private-sector investment.

Ms. Reeves is betting that stability can create the conditions for growth, investment and better-paying jobs. She did not respond to requests for comment on her policy plans.

In today's "age of insecurity," as she has called it, with intensifying geopolitical tensions and climate change, Ms. Reeves expects to be a manifestation of that stability. After Britain has had five chancellors in five years, she is expected to see out a full five-year term. She has also said she will strengthen Britain's institutions, like the Office for Budget Responsibility, a watchdog.

Otherwise, Ms. Reeves is expected to focus on changing policies that do not require big spending commitments, particularly overhauling the planning system for development to make it easier to build homes and improve the energy grid.

But for some, these constraints define Ms. Reeves more than her ambition does. Labour this year ditched a pledge to spend 28 billion pounds (about \$35 billion) a year on green investment, which Ms. Reeves announced two and a half years earlier.

The Biden administration "broke the rules and bet big," and Labour needs to do the same, said Danny Sriskandarajah, the chief executive of the New Economics Foundation, a British research organization.



Like Ms. Reeves, Ms. Yellen is the first woman to lead her country's treasury.

"If you want to shift the needle on poverty or inequality or green investment or crumbling public services, you're going to have to find either new money or redistribute money in far more ambitious ways," he said.

But the Labour Party, led by Keir Starmer, has been wary of making big bets or seeming too ideologically driven. "There are two ghosts that haunt her and Keir," Mr. Sriskandarajah said. They are Jeremy Corbyn, the former leader of the Labour Party, who pledged widespread industry nationalization and more spending, and Liz Truss, the former Conservative prime minister, who lasted 49 days in her job.

Instead of ideology, Labour promotes

pragmatism. Ms. Reeves, an economist by training, frequently refers to the six years she spent working at the Bank of England after college, during which she had a stint at the British Embassy in Washington.

Ms. Reeves returned last year to Washington, where she met with officials, including Ms. Yellen. In a speech there, she laid out her view of how the world was changing.

"Globalization, as we once knew it, is dead," she said in a speech. In its place, a "new multilateralism" is emerging with partnerships between nations with shared values and interests.

Ms. Reeves's denunciation of globalization is inspired by Mr. Rodrik, who has said that the era of "hyperglobalization" is over and that instead, a new economic order needs to put a priority on domestic social, economic and environmental objectives. That could lead to a new, "thinner" globalization, in which the government focuses on creating productive jobs.

For some economists, there are risks that these types of policies, which emphasize security and revive industrial policies, could escalate and slide into rampant protectionism.

Mr. Rodrik said this could be avoided if just a small number of critical technologies were protected and, as the Biden administration has said, the rules were not intended to economically weaken China.

"I don't see any problems if Britain chooses to follow these principles as well," Mr. Rodrik said in an email exchange.

And Ms. Reeves seems intent on following where the United States leads. "A new Washington consensus is taking shape," Ms. Reeves said in a speech in March. "I believe it is in our interest to embrace that consensus," which will depend on having a more active state, she said.

Fight grows over leadership of seabed agency

WASHINGTON

Election could determine whether ocean floor will soon be mined for metals

BY ERIC LIPTON

Allegations of possible payments to help secure votes. Claims of abuse of agency funds by top diplomats. A possible job offer to entice a candidate to withdraw from a race.

These are not the shenanigans of a corrupt election in an unstable country. Rather, they are efforts in the seemingly genteel parlors of a United Nations-affiliated agency, meant to sway decisions related to the start of seabed mining for the metals used in electric vehicles.

It is all part of a nasty fight over who will be the next leader of the International Seabed Authority, which controls mining in international waters worldwide.

The accusations of trickery underscore the controversial nature of the agency's coming agenda and the billions of dollars at stake. Some countries are fiercely opposed to the idea of mining the world's deepest waters, while others see it as a badly needed economic opportunity. Whoever holds the agency's top post over the next few years will have considerable influence over these decisions.

Michael Lodge, the secretary general at the International Seabed Authority since 2016, is urging diplomats from the agency's 168 member nations to elect him to a third four-year term. From that perch, he hopes to help the agency complete environmental rules as it prepares to accept its first application, perhaps as early as this fall, to start industrial-scale mining in the Pacific Ocean, between Hawaii and Mexico.

His opponent, Leticia Carvalho, is an oceanographer and former oil-industry regulator from Brazil. She has called for a more deliberative approach, arguing that several years of work most likely remain to finish writing the rules. Her position is that no mining applications should be approved until that process is wrapped up.

In the midst of this already intense campaign, a former senior Seabed Authority executive filed a complaint with the United Nations in May, accusing Mr. Lodge and his top deputy of misusing agency funds.

Supporters of each of the two candidates have accused the other side of attempting to influence the outcome of the election by offering to pay travel costs for delegates or to pay delegations' past-due membership fees. Countries in arrears are generally prohibited from voting, and 38 nations were behind in payments as of May.

Each nation pays a different amount — depending on the size of the economy — as much as \$1.8 million this year for China or as little as \$831 for Rwanda, with the money used to support the agency's annual budget.

Adding to the intrigue, the ambassador of Kiribati, a small Pacific island nation that is sponsoring Mr. Lodge's nomination, attempted late last month



Kiribati is playing a critical role in the election of the International Seabed Authority's next secretary general. Its ambassador tried to persuade Leticia Carvalho to drop out.

to persuade Ms. Carvalho to drop out of the race, in exchange for a possible high-level staff job at the Seabed Authority.

If this clandestine move had worked, it would have left Mr. Lodge unopposed. Mr. Lodge did not respond when his office was asked in written questions about this effort. But in a six-page statement to The New York Times, Mr. Lodge and his office disputed any suggestions that he had misused agency funds or otherwise tried to improperly influence the election.

"You have a collation of vague, unsubstantiated, unfounded and anonymous rumors, gossip and hearsay which are demonstrably untrue, lack any foundation of fact or evidence and do not stand up to any objective scrutiny," Mr. Lodge said in the statement, adding that he and the Seabed Authority "follow the most rigorous standards of international good governance and management."

The attempt to persuade Ms. Carvalho to drop out brought an angry response from her and the Brazilian delegation. "We have a great candidate who has already received a great deal of support, and we will win this election," said Bruno Imparato, a Brazilian diplomat who is helping organize Ms. Carvalho's campaign.

Teburoro Tito, the Kiribati ambassador who urged Ms. Carvalho to leave the race, confirmed the job offer in an interview with The Times. He added that Mr. Lodge had signed off on the proposed deal as part of a strategy to assure Mr. Lodge's re-election at the next meeting of the Seabed Authority in late July and



Michael Lodge, the secretary general since 2016, is running for a third term.

early August at its headquarters in Kingston, Jamaica.

"We don't want someone to come in and break what I.S.A. is trying to do," Mr. Tito said in an interview, recalling what he said to Ms. Carvalho. "I come from an island. We always believe in reconciliation. We don't want too much dispute in the village."

Mr. Lodge, in his statement, said he "was not privy to the discussions referenced and is not party to the alleged proposal." The agency said all vacant positions were advertised through official channels.

The Seabed Authority is governed by the 168 member states that ratified the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, declaring that any ocean floor metals in international waters are "the common heritage of mankind" and that access is governed exclusively by the Seabed Authority.



Ms. Carvalho, Mr. Lodge's opponent, is a former oil-industry regulator from Brazil.

In the decades since, the Seabed Authority has approved 31 exploration contracts authorizing mapping and other preparatory work in the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Now the agency is preparing to consider applications for industrial scale mining, conducted by bulldozer-like machines dropped to the ocean floor, miles below the surface.

While some countries are eager to move ahead, at least 25 have proposed a moratorium or "precautionary pause," arguing that there is not enough data to ensure mining will not cause harm.

China has the most of these contracts — five in total. But the exploratory contracts are distributed among several countries including Russia, Poland, India, France, Germany, Japan and several Pacific Island nations. The United States never ratified the treaty, but it participates in the debate.

Member states can log the exploration

work themselves or hire contractors like The Metals Company, a Nasdaq-traded, Canada-based mining company that wants to start extracting millions of tons of nodules containing metals from the bottom of the Pacific Ocean as soon as 2026.

The company estimates that just one of its contract areas — a 46,000-square-mile (120,000-square-kilometer) section of the Pacific — would generate \$31 billion in net earnings over 25 years of mining. The company claims that its contract areas hold enough nickel, cobalt and manganese to supply all of the needs for car battery metals in the United States.

The Metals Company has relied on Mr. Lodge to push the Seabed Authority member states to complete the regulations. There is a certain urgency, as the company had only \$6.8 million in cash reserves as of the end of last year — a tiny percentage of the capital it will need to conduct its mining operation, as some investors have held back while the company waits for a green light.

Gerard Barron, the company's chief executive, said he had not played a role in lobbying for Mr. Lodge's re-election, knowing that would draw criticism from environmentalists. "That kind of move could backfire so massively," Mr. Barron said in an interview.

But Kiribati is one of three tiny Pacific island nations — the others are Nauru and Tonga — with which The Metals Company has struck deals to secure mining access to Pacific Ocean sectors governed by the Seabed Authority. So

Kiribati's helping Mr. Lodge secure a third term is a benefit to The Metals Company.

Mr. Tito said he first met Mr. Lodge decades ago when, as a lawyer living in Kiribati, Mr. Lodge helped represent Mr. Tito's family when his sister died while delivering a baby after being improperly sedated. Mr. Tito later went on to become president of Kiribati, a nation of about 120,000 residents, and now serves as its United Nations ambassador.

Mr. Lodge, who is British, was nominated for his first two terms by Britain. But the government supports leaders for international organizations for only two terms, Mr. Tito said, explaining why Kiribati has nominated Mr. Lodge this time. The secretary general is paid about \$213,000 a year.

Mr. Lodge has traveled since January to China, Cameroon, Japan, Egypt, Italy and the Caribbean nation of Antigua and Barbuda, among other stops — visits Mr. Lodge and his staff have described as educational and outreach missions, but which his critics consider improper.

"He's clearly campaigning — using the machine of the Seabed Authority as part of his campaign," Ms. Carvalho said.

Mr. Lodge responded that the office travel is a necessary part of his work and unrelated to the election. He added that "as secretary general, and as a candidate for election, Mr. Lodge condemns any attempts to influence voting by paying for delegations to attend meetings."

The German government, which supports Ms. Carvalho's election, has announced plans to ask for an investigation of what it considers questionable financial activities at the Seabed Authority, emails obtained by The Times show.

In recent speeches, Mr. Lodge cited the need for the Seabed Authority to complete its work on the regulations. "It has taken many decades to reach where we are today, and there seems no reason now to deviate from the evolutionary approach," Mr. Lodge said last month at the United Nations.

The allegations of misuse of Seabed Authority funds by Mr. Lodge and his top deputy, among others at the agency, came from a former human resources officer there. The complaint, a copy of which was obtained by The Times, says that Mr. Lodge has collected \$67,000 worth of excessive reimbursement since 2016 related to his housing and other costs in Jamaica and New York.

The complaint was sent to the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services. But it directed the complaint back to the Seabed Authority, emails obtained by The Times show. That meant Mr. Lodge was asked to handle allegations accusing him of misconduct.

In its response, the agency said it had robust and independent procedures in place to deal with staff grievances and complaints.

Ms. Carvalho, who now works at the United Nations Environmental Program as the head of its marine division, said her supporters had not attempted to pay the fees of other delegations. She said she would have a management style different from that of Mr. Lodge, who has faced accusations of being too closely aligned with the mining industry and failing to provide enough transparency for Seabed Authority operations.

U.S. weighs new penalty to curb oil from Russia

WASHINGTON

Treasury officials want to target tankers that help Moscow evade sanctions

BY JIM TANKERSLEY AND ALAN RAPPEPORT

Officials in President Biden's Treasury Department have proposed new actions aimed at crippling a fleet of aging oil tankers that are helping deliver Russian oil to buyers around the world in defiance of Western sanctions.

Their effort is aimed at punishing Russia but it has stalled amid White House concerns over how it would affect energy prices ahead of the November election.

In an attempt to drain Russia of money needed to continue fighting its war in Ukraine, the United States and its allies have imposed penalties and taken other novel steps to limit how much Moscow earns from selling oil abroad. But Russia has increasingly found ways around those limits, raising pressure on the Biden administration to tighten its enforcement efforts.

Treasury officials want to do that, in part, by targeting a so-called shadow fleet of oil tankers that is allowing Russia to sell oil above a \$60-per-barrel price cap that the United States and its allies imposed in 2022.

That cap was intended to restrict Moscow's ability to profit from its energy exports while allowing its oil to continue flowing on international markets to prevent a global price shock. But Russia has largely circumvented the cap, allowing it to reap huge profits to fund its war efforts.

While Treasury officials want to knock Russian tankers out of commission, economic advisers inside the White House worry that would risk inflating oil prices this summer and push up U.S. gasoline prices, which could hurt

Mr. Biden's re-election campaign. They have not signed off on the proposals, even as current and former Treasury officials present them with analyses suggesting the risks of a major effect on the oil market are low.

The debate reflects a tension that has always been at the core of the administration's novel effort to restrict Russian oil sales: How to weaken the Moscow war machine without the political backlash that could come from inflicting pain on American drivers.

The dispute is a rare public instance of internal administration disagreement over inflation and Ukraine policy. It pits Treasury officials against aides on the White House National Economic Council, which is led by Lael Brainard.

White House officials have privately described the process as routine and stress that no decisions have been made. But the delays have confounded officials elsewhere in the administration, who have been unable to get a straight answer from Ms. Brainard and her team about what is holding up the proposed action.

For now, according to multiple people familiar with the discussions, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly, the proposed penalties on the Russian shadow fleet remain under review, and are not imminent.

Ms. Brainard declined to speak on the record about the process. White House officials refused to answer direct questions about oil-price concerns and the Treasury proposal.

Instead, the White House issued a statement from Amos Hochstein, a senior adviser to Mr. Biden.

"Our actions to enforce energy sanctions are focused on exacting a price on Russia, Iran, and other bad actors while preventing a spike in the price of energy, which would not only hurt American consumers but increase the revenues of the same bad actors we are trying to hold accountable," he said.

The White House is under pressure from inside and outside the administra-



Russia's shadow fleet of tankers has allowed for robust oil profits to fund its war against Ukraine, in defiance of Western sanctions.

tion to do more to enforce the oil price cap, which Treasury Secretary Janet L. Yellen and her team drew up two years ago in the months after Russia invaded Ukraine.

After the invasion, the United States and Europe moved to ban imports of Russian oil, in an effort to reduce revenues for one of the world's largest oil producers. But Ms. Yellen and other leaders of wealthy democracies against Russia's invasion realized that the European ban, when fully implemented, risked knocking millions of barrels of oil off the global market — and triggering a price shock that could send gasoline as high as \$7 per gallon in the United States.

Their alternative plan was to use the maritime industry, including shipping companies and insurance carriers, to effectively allow Russia to only sell oil at a discount: \$60 per barrel, which is about \$25 a barrel less than the price on the global market.

The so-called price cap proved successful initially, but Russia soon found workarounds — including delivering oil to buyers via a group of aging Sovcomflot tankers, operating without Western insurance, that has come to be known as the shadow fleet.

The fleet of tankers along with alternative forms of maritime insurance have allowed the Kremlin to continue generating robust revenues from oil ex-

ports, helping it to finance its war against Ukraine.

Critics of the price cap have argued that the \$60 per barrel limit is too high and that the Biden administration has been too lenient in certain aspects of enforcing the cap. Some have called for the Treasury Department to impose more stringent oil sanctions on Russia akin to those on Iran's oil sector.

In an interview with The New York Times last month, Ms. Yellen defended the price cap, arguing that Russia's work to circumvent it still imposed costs and made it harder to sell oil.

"We've made it very expensive for Russia to ship this oil to China and India in terms of acquiring a shadow fleet and

providing insurance," Ms. Yellen said. "We still think it's working."

Still, current and former Treasury officials want the administration to go further, and target the shadow fleet tankers with specific penalties that could restrict their sales or force them out of commission. European officials moved last month to penalize Russian ships evading sanctions by carrying liquefied natural gas to market, an effort that could be complemented by Treasury's proposal for oil tankers.

Treasury officials have privately produced and circulated an economic analysis that contends, based on a history of enforcement actions under the price cap, that the proposed shadow-fleet penalties would be unlikely to knock Russian oil off the market, and would instead force Moscow back to selling much of its oil for lower prices under the cap.

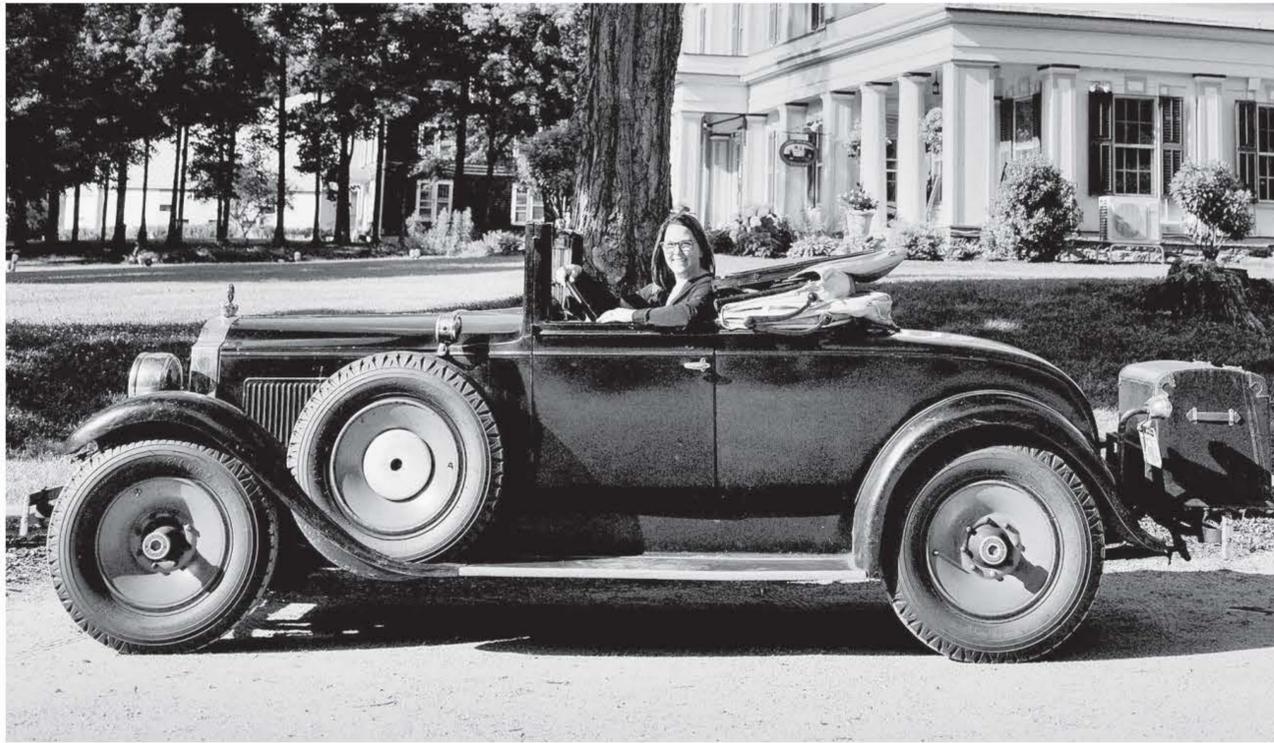
Robin Brooks, a senior fellow in the Global Economy and Development program at the Brookings Institution, and Ben Harris, a former top Treasury official who is now vice president and director of the Economic Studies Program at Brookings, released a similar analysis publicly late last month. It argues that historical evidence suggests that efforts to shut down shadow-fleet tankers are "unlikely to have even a modest impact on global oil prices."

Twenty shadow-fleet tankers are currently under sanction, out of a fleet of about 120. Mr. Brooks and Mr. Harris say the administration could penalize the additional 100 tankers in waves, in order to minimize price disruptions. They chart evidence from previous enforcement actions to show none of them have had large impacts on the oil market.

"While this is far from causal, we think it validates the notion that further sanctions on the Sovcomflot fleet are unlikely to cause oil price spikes," Mr. Brooks and Mr. Harris write.

White House officials have recently argued that the price cap — and related enforcement measures — has thus far hurt Russia, but not American drivers.

CAR COLLECTING



KELLY BURGESS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



JOSE LUCCI



VIA CAMERON LUTHER

Grandpa's car is a new must-have

Young people are buying vehicles that their parents and grandparents drove

BY ROB SASS

Acting on a tip from an acquaintance, Cameron Luther uncovered a butter-scotch yellow 1966 Porsche in a garage in Monterey, Calif. It was dusty and up on jack stands with the wheels off. It clearly hadn't run in a long time.

The owner was a retired pilot, who is now 94, who had started a brake job a decade ago. Not restored, but beautifully preserved, it was exactly the kind of car that Mr. Luther had always wanted. The owner, however, was not keen on selling, but said that if Mr. Luther could get the car running and give him one last ride, he would sell it to him.

Mr. Luther spent the next two months commuting up to Monterey, five hours from his job in Santa Monica, to fix the Porsche. True to his word, the retired pilot consummated the deal, and late last year, at just 23 years old, Mr. Luther became the owner of a 1966 Porsche 911.

In general, collectors are often attracted to the cars of their youth, the ones they wanted but could not afford. Cars from the "Fast & Furious" movies, video games like "Forza" and "Gran Turismo" and even dorm room posters appeal to many young car enthusiasts.

But a subset of millennial and Gen-Z car collectors have eschewed their own nostalgia and have aimed for the cars of their parents, grandparents and even great-grandparents. Citing the vehicles' inherent simplicity, quality and charm, these collectors are acquiring the skills to keep these cars on the road and use them as their daily drivers.

Kyle Blake, 40, who works in the health care industry in Cumberland, Md., said he grew up in the back of a rumble seat of antique automobiles, going on tours and playing with old cars with his grandfather. But his fascination with vintage vehicles predates even his grandfather's era.

Mr. Blake's garage resembles a near-century-old used-car lot. He owns a 1910 Hupmobile, 1914 Buick, 1920 Dodge Brothers, 1927 Ford Model TT pickup, two Ford Model A's and a 1932 Dodge Brothers. His "new" cars are a 1973 Mercedes-Benz 450SE and a 1973 MGB.

The Ford pickup had not run in over 45 years when he bought it, in 2015, but he made a cheeky bet with his friends that he could get it running in an hour. It took an hour and a half, but it speaks to the simplicity and serviceability of these old cars.

"I'm fascinated by all of the diverse approaches to what was a developing technology," he said. "Pedal functions and gear patterns had yet to be standardized, and there were so many different attempts at it before the manufacturers agreed on a standard. The excitement of driving, which includes wind, vibrations and in the case of my 1920 Dodge Brothers, the creaking of the wooden wheel spokes and body frame, gives you a horse-and-buggy sensation at a top speed of less than 50 m.p.h."

He said 1973 was a pivotal year for cars. "After 1973, emission controls became very complex, and cars became far more difficult to work on with lots of vacuum lines and computers," he said. "I prefer the simplicity of prewar cars."

Mr. Blake is also doing his best to draw other young people to the old car hobby. In 2015, he organized a tour with about 30 people of the Lincoln Highway,

an early transcontinental road, by an under-45 chapter of the Antique Automobile Club of America that he founded.

Tabetha Kanter, 36, an innkeeper in Arlington Vt., acquired her interest in vintage automobiles from her parents and grandparents when she was growing up in rural Colorado. She owns a 1973 Mini Cooper S, and a 1928 Packard convertible coupe, which is not restored and was bought from the daughter of the man who had owned it since the early 1960s.

"I find cars of the 1980s and 1990s are the beginning of the era when cars had just too much tech, and the driver was getting pushed more and more out of the equation," Ms. Kanter said. "The totally analog driving experience of old cars is wonderful, everything from the feel of old-style bias-ply tires on the road, to shifting a transmission without synchromesh for the gears, is unique."

Ms. Kanter said that she bought the Mini Cooper sight unseen in San Diego and then drove it back to Colorado, a trip of some 1,100 miles on mainly back roads, an impressive feat in a 50-year-old car that weighs about 1,450 pounds (featherweight, compared with the average contemporary car, which weighs

around 4,000 pounds) and rolls on diminutive 10-inch wheels.

Like Ms. Kanter and Mr. Blake, Mr. Luther, who is a car specialist for the classic-car auction house Gooding & Company, also uses his vintage Porsche much as one would a modern car, for tours, rallies, errands and pleasure drives.

"While it's not really fast by today's standards, it's more than powerful enough to keep up with modern traffic, and the brakes are safe and effective," he said. "In addition to the mechanical simplicity and quality engineering," its jewel-like gauges and wood steering wheel are gorgeous. "Unlike modern performance cars, you can experience most of the car's capabilities at legal speeds, going through most of the gears and shifting at high revs, without endangering yourself or others."

He has no intention of selling his prized car, which is worth about \$100,000. The previous owner was well into his 40s when he began his 50-year journey with the car. Given that Mr. Luther acquired it young, his time behind the wheel could last up to the dawn of the next century, or at least past the vintage Porsche's 100th birthday.

True classics

Clockwise from above left: Tabetha Kanter, 36, an innkeeper in Arlington, Vt., with her 1928 Packard convertible coupe; Kyle Blake, 40, with his 1932 Dodge Brothers DK-8 that his grandfather purchased in 1960; and Cameron Luther, 23, with Carlos Quintana and the 1966 Porsche 911.

A holy grail? Get one while they last.

There are only a few that are considered the top of the car collector world

BY ROB SASS

The news shocked the collector-car world. In May 2022, a 1955 Mercedes-Benz 300 SLR Uhlenhaut Coupé — named for its creator, the company's chief engineer Rudolf Uhlenhaut — sold for 135 million euros, (about \$143 million). That was more than double the previous record of \$70 million set by a 1963 Ferrari 250 GTO in 2018.

Perhaps even more surprising is that a car built in the mid-1990s, a McLaren F1, sold in 2021 for over \$20 million. Sales in the tens of millions of dollars are rare in the collector-car market, but then these three cars represent what high-end collectors call "holy grail" cars, so named because they are the most sought after in the vintage-car world.

Before the McLaren F1 sold, the most fertile era for the priciest postwar collector cars was the 10 years from the early 1950s and the early 1960s, which included that Mercedes and Ferrari, and rivals like the Jaguar XKSS (the actor Steve McQueen owned one), with an example selling in 2023 for \$13.2 million.

The McLaren F1, which was produced in the 1990s, is a modern car and clearly an outlier, and in the quarter century since it went out of production, no other road legal car of equal appeal to collectors has emerged. Given the seemingly finite life of the internal combustion engine, the McLaren may be the last of the holy grail cars.

Cars capable of selling for eight and nine figures have several things in common, some are obvious even to noncar people, and some are slightly more nuanced. Rarity is a major factor. The Mercedes was one of just two built; Ferrari produced two series of 250 GTOs that totaled 36 cars; only 16 of the Jaguar XKSS were built before a fire at the factory ended production; and in the case of the McLaren, 106 were built.

All four cars are generally regarded



RM SOTHEBY'S



DEREK CATTANI/SHUTTERSTOCK



JONATHAN TENNANT/ALAMY



ZACH BRZEL/VIA RM SOTHEBY'S

Vintage

Clockwise from top left: a 1955 Mercedes-Benz 300 SLR Uhlenhaut Coupé, a 1995 McLaren F1, a 1957 Jaguar XKSS and a 1963 Ferrari 250 GTO.

as design triumphs.

"With one exception, the F1, all are actual or slightly modified competition cars, a category that by its very genesis means very limited production, very high performance, seductive no-compromise styling intended to beguile the wind, the very image of derring-do," said Miles Collier, author of the book "The Archaeological Automobile," in June. "And, of course, these cars are astronomically valuable in today's market, itself a reflection of the significance collectors attach to these machines."

Brian Rabold, vice president of automotive intelligence for Hagerty, the classic-car insurer and automotive entertainment brand, said the appeal of these holy grail cars was global.

"They're insulated from trends, they're the very definition of connoisseur's cars," he said.

Nathan Merz, a vintage car dealer near Seattle, said the acquisition of just one of these cars probably represented the ultimate purchase for most collectors.

"Once you add something like a Ferrari 250 GTO to a collection, where do you go from there?" he said. "Holy grail cars represent once-in-a-lifetime opportunities, the culmination of a long pursuit of what's bigger and better."

Mr. Collier said the Mercedes, Ferrari and Jaguar, all built to be raced, could still be operated in normal road traffic. "And, they are not so fast that they can't be driven vigorously by a normal, skilled driver," he said.

The owners of these apex cars can and do use them, and this usability contributes to their desirability. There are events specifically tailored to these types of cars, like the Goodwood Festival of Speed in England, which begins on Thursday, and the Le Mans Classic in France, which ended on Saturday, where the cars can be driven at close to their potential, Mr. Rabold said.

Neither Mr. Collier nor Mr. Rabold said they believed that modern ultra-high-performance cars had much in common with the Mercedes, Ferrari, Jaguar and McLaren.

"Cars like the Bugatti Chiron may have double the horsepower [almost 1,600] of the McLaren F1 and multiples more than a vintage Ferrari, Mercedes or Jaguar, but it doesn't necessarily make them better than their analog predecessors, nor is a car like the Bugatti directly related to any competitive racecar," Mr. Rabold said.

Mr. Collier said that "modern hyper cars have capabilities often beyond an owner's skill set and have equally un-touchable repair problems that consign them to the rubbish heap alongside all those smartphones, laptops and digital devices."

"In this modern world, our four candidates are handmade," he said. Their designs were drafted on paper, which has been preserved, and they can be repaired "as long as artisans are available."

Being easily repaired was part of the ethos of the McLaren F1.

"While the car was two full generations newer than the Mercedes, Jaguar and Ferrari, and beginning to enter the

modern era, the McLaren was intentionally designed with restoration in mind," Mr. Collier said.

And while it was not specifically designed as a racecar, a modified version of the F1 won the 24 Hours of Le Mans in 1995. And it was not just a class win, but the car took the overall race.

Mr. Collier said that victory cemented the F1's reputation as a holy grail car. "It is the only road car in living memory to have won the 24 Hours of Le Mans."

Aston Martin is trying to match that feat, announcing that it will enter Le Mans in 2025 with a competition version of its road-legal Valkyrie hyper car. Regardless of that car's success in France, with its sophisticated, electronics-laden hybrid drivetrain, it's far removed from the analog honesty of the McLaren F1.

"The Valkyrie has several traits working in its favor, namely: rarity, strong brand recognition of the Aston Martin name, world-class performance and a highly touted design team," Mr. Rabold said. "But it's far too early to write its legacy."

Making a car ready for its close-up

WAYNE, PA.

A vehicle must be perfect to win an award. That's where specialists step in.

BY NORMAN MAYERSOHN

Shining his work light into the deepest recesses of a Ferrari F512 M's engine bay, Tim McNair takes note of minor flaws that will warrant closer attention. There's an oily smudge on the intake plumbing, chipped paint where red shows through on the black chassis tubing, a damaged sticker on an ignition coil — typical signs of use in a 30-year-old car — and all readily dealt with.

Making them right won't be a problem for Mr. McNair, whose credits include preparing a Ferrari Enzo that was awarded a perfect 100-point score at the Cavallino Classic, where the brand's cars are evaluated by judges.

But the wrinkle-finish paint on the engine is another matter. That color, silver, and in that finish with an attractive crinkled texture found on many Ferrari engine castings, simply isn't available in a quality that satisfies him.

For Mr. McNair, owner of Grand Prix Concours near Philadelphia, it's all in a day's work. His livelihood is making sure that collector cars arrive at premier competitions as perfect as possible. Far removed from the casual bucket-and-sponge routine of an owner preparing for the local cars and coffee, the stakes of Mr. McNair's work run much higher. His subjects will be scrutinized at formal events like a concours d'elegance, a beauty showcase typically featuring classics revived by seven-figure restorations.

So when a client gives him a car to prepare, he cleans, polishes and corrects flaws. With judges — likely including experts steeped in the minutiae of just what type of hose clamp or headlight bulb is correct for that year and model of vehicle — working to exacting guidelines, a concours demands precise preparation. To be a best-in-show contender, a car must be more than spotless; it needs to be factory-accurate in myriad details.

Time to call in a specialist.

That's the niche Mr. McNair occupies. His decades of experience have accrued since his start as a 15-year-old, progressing through his time as a Mercedes-Benz technician and now providing high-end show preparation.

Mr. McNair takes his skills and encyclopedic knowledge of classics and racecars — as well as fastidiously organized cases of cleaners and obscure spare parts — to the garages and workshops of collectors, applying the finishing touches to cars that have already been refurbished or, in some cases, preserved in near-original condition.

"I'm the 2 percent," Mr. McNair says, emphasizing that his focus is on covering the post-restoration fine



PHOTOGRAPHS BY HANNAH YOON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



points, the crucial details that separate winners from the also-rans.

His portfolio includes a mastery of how a modern Ferrari should look, inside and out, yet it also ranges from an 1885 Duryea to a 2024 Bentley Continental GT Speed Edition 12. For his clientele of historically significant vehicles, Mr. McNair likens his work to that of an art conservator, an appropriate parallel for handmade creations worth millions. Each one presents challenges to preserving originality: Factory finishes can be fragile, and there are likely to be numerous materials in use, each requiring different cleaning agents and protective treatments.

The value of a top concours contender frequently runs into the millions of dollars, and expert restorations of rare models regularly reach seven figures. The costs of refinishing trim alone can be striking: Mr. McNair notes that a 1931 Duesenberg Model J at Reimel Motor Cars in Wayne, Pa., has \$100,000 worth of chrome plating in adornments like its grille and bumpers.

Even wrapping up that last sliver of work ahead of a major concours can require 40 to 60 hours of labor, for which he charges \$150 to \$250 an hour. The goal, Mr. McNair says, is to "ship it done." Ideally, when the car comes out of its transporter at the event, all it needs is to be

wiped clean of dust.

The particular advantage Mr. McNair brings to clients whose vintage machines vie for honors in top-level competitions is decades of experience as an official at concours, including Pebble Beach in California and Amelia Island in Florida. He knows what the judges will be looking for.

"Getting it right starts with research," he notes, tracking down documentation like period photos — color images from the period are the ultimate source — and manufacturer build sheets, all to bring a car to the "as delivered" state. For exclusive European brands, certification from the automaker's historical programs is sometimes available, verifying installed options, paint color and upholstery materials — even down to the part number stamped on a suspension arm.

With the available historical resources in hand, the guide for work to be done becomes the checklists used by judges. These worksheets are a reminder of the items that must be operable — horn, wipers, turn signals — and guide Mr. McNair's work. Judges use them to log the overall condition of the car as well as to note any mechanical flaws. Points are then often deducted.

Before the car can be cleaned, visible flaws are addressed. This is where experience is most valuable. A Sharpie is not the right touch-up (a noted rookie shortcut) for a black finish, for example, because the texture and sheen will not be correct — and will jump out to a judge's critical eye. Chips can be repaired with paint used by model builders, often

available in exact matches for factory colors.

Details like the wrinkle finish in the Ferrari engine compartment can be a greater challenge. Mr. McNair has not found a satisfactory silver in that texture, so he paints the removed parts with a red wrinkle paint, then a plain silver paint. Even that requires special precautions: If there are painted inspection marks left from factory assembly, they must be preserved.

The question of what constitutes proper surfaces — matte or gloss, whether paint is authentically imperfect or beyond what it looked like from the factory — is a major issue at a concours, where sensitivity to overrestoration is acute.

"The first step in getting it right is knowing what it should be in the first place," says Eric Peterson, manager of Leydon Restorations in Lahaska, Pa. "That may require a deep dive into any documentation on the car and knowledge of what was used in the time period: chrome, nickel, zinc or cadmium plating, for example. Even then, there will be questions about what is over-restored."

Preparing the surface is no less of a hand-wringing choice, explains Mr. Peterson, who also is a concours judge.

"Some processes can dull the finish of bare metal," he says, "so we have to rely on experience in choosing among techniques like soda blasting or vapor honing to achieve the desired finish."

"The takeaway," he says, "is that judges are looking closely, and if a finish is incorrect, they'll be wondering what else is wrong."

There is also an understanding by judges that cars will be driven onto the show field and that they may have covered miles in the tours and road rallies that often accompany these events.

"An entry should be well prepared for concours judging, but that doesn't mean surgically clean," says Ken Gross, a Pebble Beach judge. "Judges are not there to intimidate, but they can see the difference between honest dust and outright neglect."

Mr. McNair's kit to solve those problems holds cleaners and polishes as well as microfiber cloths. A degreaser used in restaurants to clean range hoods, SD-20, works well on engine-oil accumulations without damaging the surface underneath. And he uses black cotton swabs made with bamboo shafts that are less likely to break than white drugstore swabs with cardboard shafts.

Mr. McNair is clear that his role goes only so far. One wealthy client was so pleased with the revival of his car's leather seats that he asked for the leather chairs in his home movie studio to get the same treatment. Mr. McNair obliged, but that was not the end of the requests: Could he treat the owner's Ferragamo loafers as well, to keep them from getting soaked by the pre-dawn dew on the fairway at Pebble Beach?

Those shoes were seen with beads of water shimmering on their surface at the concours d'elegance there a few weeks later.



It's in the details

Clockwise from far left: a Ferrari F512 M, a Maserati GranSport Spyder, a Ford Mustang GT and a Jaguar E-Type at Reimel Motor Cars in Wayne, Pa. Above, Tim McNair, owner of Grand Prix Concours, helps owners of collector cars prepare to show them at premier competitions. Below, Mr. McNair working on the Ferrari.

RICHARD MILLE

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Opinion

How joining a Scottish softball team cured my loneliness from afar

Rec league sports are a cure for much of what ails us. Really.

Ken Ilgunas

Like many Americans, I spent my youth playing sports — baseball, ice hockey, football. But the demands of work and concerns about injury without adequate insurance led me to abandon my childhood passions.

I came out of sports retirement when I turned 35. After moving from the United States to Scotland I joined the Haar Hitters, one of 10 teams in Edinburgh's coed slow-pitch softball league. (In Scotland, "haar" refers to the fog rolling in from the North Sea.)

The Haar Hitters were mostly Brits who'd never held a softball and a few American expats past their heyday. We were a so-so team stuck in the weaker of two league divisions.

What started as a weekly diversion would become my gateway to building intergenerational friendships, getting fit and familiarizing myself with my new country. Even while living in Scotland, I learned useful lessons for my home country, too.

America is a country of sports lovers who don't play sports. Yet adult recreation leagues can be an inexpensive solution to so many of the things that worry us: that we don't have friends, that we're out of shape and that we're losing our vigor. According to a 2015 poll, while 73 percent of Americans played sports as kids, only 25 percent continue to do so as adults.

When the pandemic struck, half our players quit and the captain resigned. Another teammate and I took over and I soon realized that we had a golden opportunity to reinvent the team. When pandemic restrictions lifted, everyone in our city wanted to interact again. We had more recruits at our practices than we could take on.

My new leadership role brought out competitive instincts that I didn't know I had. I sought out experienced players from North American expat groups on Facebook, designed practices, obsessed over batting orders and played the long game by sending flattering emails to good ball players I hoped to recruit in later years. I felt like a cutthroat general manager with carte blanche and fantasies of league domination.

I was also getting into shape. I'd joined the Edinburgh Ogres, one of eight teams in the Scottish ball hockey league. (Ball hockey is like ice hockey, but with a ball instead of a puck and running shoes instead of skates.) I'd played ice hockey throughout my youth, so I thought I'd perform well against the Scots, whose country rarely produces professional ice hockey players and whose most noteworthy athletic accomplishment involves throwing heavy rocks.

But halfway through my first practice I felt like I had the cardiovascular system of an overweight dog. I was nauseated trying to keep up with the Scots, who ran into corners with reckless abandon as if barreling down a hill, sword in hand.

Between the nausea and the wounded pride from having minimal game time on the third line, I had good reason to get in shape. Imagine a mel-lower, less disciplined, middle-aged "Rocky" training montage: jogging alongside my local river but taking lots of bird-watching breaks, lifting weights in the garage listening to Esther Perel's couples therapy podcast, stretching to a "Yoga With Adriene" video on YouTube.

We encourage our kids to play sports to improve their physical health while we neglect our own. In America, 32 percent of adult men and 48 percent of adult women are physically inactive — defined as less than 150 minutes of weekly aerobic activity — costing the country some \$51 billion a year in health care costs associated with inactivity, according to the World Health Organization. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that 8.3 percent of adult deaths in the United States are attributable to inactivity.

I was out of shape, but I wasn't entirely useless. I liked to block shots with dramatic self-sacrifice by diving head-first into the ball's trajectory. After

Americans might take inspiration from European countries like Iceland, where the government and, especially, local municipalities invest heavily in recreational sports.

years of changing diapers and singing lullabies, I felt like I was reclaiming a bit of my wild side when fighting gritty battles along the boards for ball control and limping home with a few well-earned bruises.

My teams weren't just helping me reclaim some teenage vitality, they were also helping me make

friends at postgame pub gatherings and on long drives to tournaments. I became pals with Gregor, the player-coach of the Ogres who also runs a weekly roller hockey scrimmage. He told me how he's served as best man at a teammate's wedding, been a shoulder to cry on and even acted as a reference for a visa application.

"I've seen lifelong friendships made, romantic relationships form and flourish, and teammates grow from quiet, shy boys and girls into confident and assured adults," Gregor told me.

Sports can be a social glue in a time when Americans are spending, on average, 20 fewer hours a month with their friends than they did two decades ago, according to the surgeon general. Being lonely and socially isolated is estimated to have the same impact on our life spans as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

American kids aren't playing sports as much as they used to, either. Sports participation declined by 6 percent, or 1.2 million Americans ages 6 to 17, between 2019 and 2022, according to the Aspen Institute's 2023 "State of Play" report. Part of the participation decline may be due to the high cost of sports. Parents pay \$30 billion to \$40



KAMIL KOWALCZYK

billion a year in travel, equipment, lessons and camps — costs that exclude many kids from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds.

Americans might take inspiration from European countries like Iceland, where the government and, especially, local municipalities invest heavily in recreational sports. A country of some 360,000 people, Iceland shocked the soccer world when it qualified to play against much bigger countries and more professionally developed players in the 2018 World Cup. The country's sporting success has been attributed to cultivating a culture of almost universal sports participation. (About 90 percent of Icelandic kids play in sports clubs at some point in their youth.) In Iceland, sports facilities are open to

anyone, kids as young as 4 are mentored by highly trained coaches and teams promote personal development while placing importance on fun and friendship.

Barriers to sports are unfortunate because sports can be something close to a lifeline for people, as they were for me. When I left the United States, I lost my social network and my job connections. Rejected applications, a failed driving exam and financial anxiety made me feel like I was failing at life. Sports weren't a distraction. They were the only thing reminding me that I was a competent person.

I was struggling to meet many of society's typical marks of success, but I did manage to jump in the third line on my hockey team to the first. In soft-

ball, I had a batting average of almost .700, held my own at shortstop and watched as recruits formed into friends who get together to celebrate holidays and support one another on or off the field, where we now play in the premier league division.

I may not have fulfilled my dream of league domination, but I have friends, Thursday nights to look forward to and a cardiovascular system better than a heavy dog's. The pandemic may be over, but our epidemics of inactivity and loneliness continue. Rec leagues can be a part of the cure.

KEN ILGUNAS is the author of "Walden on Wheels" and "Trespassing Across America." He is a captain of the Edinburgh Ogres and Haar Hitters.

There is apparently no accountability, ever, for Trump

Impeachments, bankruptcies, fraud judgments, felonies. Nothing sticks. Nothing matters.

Frank Bruni

Contributing Writer

We tell children — or at least we used to — that actions have consequences. What goes around comes around. Watch your behavior. You'll answer for it someday.

Donald Trump is the living, lying contradiction of that. He answers for nothing. He's accountable to no one.

You thought that changed with a Manhattan jury's verdict some five weeks ago? With "guilty" on all 34 counts? How adorable. That only bound most of his supporters even closer to him. Only amplified the theatrical ardor with which Republican politicians pledged their devotion. Only increased donations to his presidential campaign.

Oh, and his sentencing has now been delayed and the conviction itself thrown into doubt, thanks to the supremely reckless U.S. Supreme Court.

Immunity, thy name is Trump.

The House of Representatives impeached him twice, but a cabal of collaborators in the Senate chose tribalism over justice and made it all go away. They said that it was up to others to decide if he'd committed crimes, up to others to punish him for those. It was up to them to get re-elected.

The voters repudiated Trump, but he simply pretended it hadn't happened. He invented dark conspiracies and embroidered wild fantasies to turn defeat — by seven million votes, no less — into supposed victory. Into full-blown martyrdom. He cried "rigged," he cried "stolen," he stood by as a mob stormed the Capitol and stood mute as it chanted for his vice president to be hanged. For that ethical savagery the members of his political

party lined up dutifully behind him once again. David Koresh never knew loyalty like this.

Trump schemed to steal the election himself. Prosecutors rightly charged him for that. But he has lawyers upon lawyers. He has gall atop gall. He has Fox News, Newsmax, Stephen Miller, Steve Bannon. He has that rogue Supreme Court stacked in his favor, thanks to his and Mitch McConnell's brazen stacking of it. Its justices have kicked the can so far down the road that it has tumbled into a different galaxy, a different cosmos, one where there's no moral gravity, where transgressions vanish and worries disappear with the abracadabra of executive privilege.

Trump's unpopularity with most voters should be a much bigger obstacle for him and a much bigger opportunity for Democrats than it is. Time worked in his favor, as it has so often in the past. It stiffened his political rival's gait. Weakened his political rival's voice. President Biden can't answer Trump's outrages with optimal passion, ideal precision, laser-guided disdain. He's Trump's better in decency, many times over. He's Trump's lesser in lung power, and in an age of invective, that matters.

Creditors left in the lurch. Accomplishes left holding the bag. (Here's looking at you, Rudy Giuliani.) Spurned associates. Appeals and delays and delays and appeals. Attorney General Letitia James of New York won her fraud case against Trump, but it doesn't seem to have hobbled him at all. It's seldom even mentioned anymore. E. Jean Carroll won her sexual abuse and defamation case. He swaggered (and slandered) on.

Trump has made a career of evasion. No, he has made a legend of it. And while there's a kind of smarts and a sort

of skill in that, it owes more to luck than to brilliance. It owes the most to the perverse freedom that comes with a total lack of conscience — with the readiness to stoke people's darkest fears and cruelest impulses, to shrug at the damage done, to bilk charities, to run a sham university, to tell little lies, to tell big ones, to place self-promotion and self-preservation so far above everything else that they're not so much his guiding values as his only ones.

All of that has gone around. When exactly is it coming around?

Perhaps we owe children a new adage, as oversimplified as the ones with which I began but no less true: The shameless shall inherit the earth, while the blameless grapple with the mess they make of it.

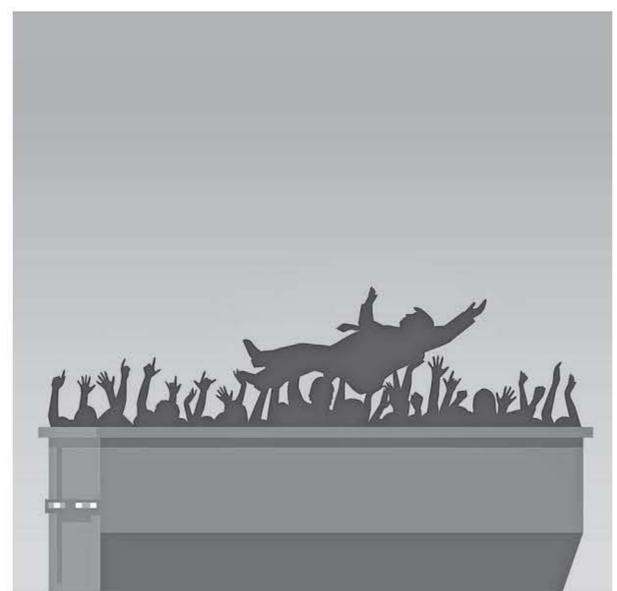
THE LONG TRUMP TEASE

The wait for Donald Trump's announcement of a running mate is continuing into this week.

Let's not pretend for a second that this is a normal process.

I don't mean Trump's hyping of the suspense, as if he's engaged in some reality-show reveal. I mean this: Whoever is willing to be considered has made that decision despite Trump's attempt after the 2020 election to get Mike Pence, his vice president the first time around, to ignore the will of American voters and violate the Constitution. Despite Trump's reported equanimity with calls for Pence's execution. That speaks not only a perilously high tolerance for risk but also a rapacity for power at odds with responsibly wielding it. Which is to say that the reputed finalists for the Republican vice presidential nomination complement Trump beautifully.

But the argument for many of them



BEN WISEMAN

ends there. J.D. Vance? His singular mix of contemptuousness and smarm should be patented — and then promptly outlawed. Doug Burgum? Proof that plutocrats can be as dull as the rest of us. Tim Scott? An unctuous blur. Tom Cotton? He scares small children and many forest animals.

Keep an eye on Marco Rubio, a Florida senator. Sure, he'd have to resign his Senate seat and establish a primary residence somewhere other than Flor-

ida to join the ticket, but that's nothing compared to stepping into Pence's old cement shoes. And while it took Rubio a while, he has now traveled — now completed — the modern Republican arc from being appalled by Trump to being in thrall to him.

FRANK BRUNI is a professor of journalism and public policy at Duke University, the author of the book "The Beauty of Dusk."

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Miracle Whip, onboarding and the English language

John McWhorter

On a Zoom call recently, someone mentioned the “onboarding” of a new workplace policy. She pronounced it with the accent on the first syllable — “ON-boarding” — even though we pronounce the original expression “on BOARD.” Believe it or not, this got me thinking about mayonnaise.

More specifically, it reminded me of an old radio commercial that has always stuck in my mind for the way, in the last line, the announcer pronounces the name of the product with a subtle emphasis on the last word: “Miracle WHIP!” (He made it sound rather exquisite: “Miracle Whip has such a wonderful flavor — lively and teasing, peppy and yet not a bit too sharp. It’s a flavor that’s just exactly right!”) Today we put the weight on the first word, “MIRACLE Whip.”

If you listen for it, you can hear a similar shift in many different places. A character in a 1930s gangster movie I saw accused another of acting like a “big SHOT.” I distinctly remember a friend excitedly telling me in 1977 that he had just seen a neat new movie called “Star WARS.”

They all follow the same pattern: As names and phrases become familiar, speakers tend to start shifting the emphasis to the front. It happens

gradually, but the result can be unmistakable, leaving the original pronunciation to sound odd and dated.

That radio commercial is from 1951, when the condiment was still newer to the market. Initially one referred to it as a kind of whip that was designated a miracle, a miracle WHIP, like a magic CARPET or a silver FLUTE. But many people encounter Miracle Whip more often than magic carpets or silver flutes. As the condiment became familiar to American consumers, the emphasis shifted.

In that same commercial, the announcer calls it a “salad DRESSING” instead of our more common “SALad dressing.” And the same goes for the communication platform that people are today more likely to call “WHATS-app,” rather than “WhatsAPP” as they did when it first came into wide circulation. The shift happened as the term became commonplace.

It’s one of the fascinating idiosyncrasies of the English language, and a perfect example of how big and weird and interesting grammar really is. In schools, Anglophone students learn grammar mostly as a series of errors to avoid, such as saying “less books” instead of “fewer books” or “him and me sang” rather than “he and I sang.” The underlying message is that we are for some reason given to using language incorrectly, and that it is the work of a cultivated person to learn a better way.

But almost all of the blackboard grammar rules are things some people made up 200 or more years ago. (I can’t resist noting that you can learn more about that in my forthcoming book “Pronoun Trouble,” including the “him and me” issue.) The focus on these dos and don’ts distracts us from the complexity and nuance under the lan-

guage’s hood, the things that make it actually interesting rather than just a minefield.

Emphasis shift, for example, does more than mark something as having become familiar. It can also be a way of turning a verb into a noun. You reJECT something; that thing then becomes a REject. You perMIT something, or get a PERmit for it. The accent shift makes something into “a thing,” so to speak.

Another thing students are often taught is that though English spelling is a bit of a nightmare, English grammar is relatively simple compared to, say, Spanish or Russian grammar. But that, too, underestimates the language. Take the future tense. Look in a textbook and you’ll find that the way to express the future is with “will”: “Tomorrow I will buy an umbrella.” Notice, however, that though that sentence is correct, it’s not how a native speaker would be likely to express the thought.

Much easier to imagine is “Tomorrow I’m going to buy an umbrella.” Simple, straightforward. You could also say “Tomorrow I’ll buy an umbrella,” which hints that the purchase was overdue. “Tomorrow I buy an umbrella” implies that it will be a major milestone in your development. “Tomorrow I’m buying an umbrella” is what you’d say as a threat if you were thinking about hitting somebody with it. The Duolingo “Tomorrow I will buy an umbrella” sounds, in comparison to these other options, as if you have decided upon the action after a long period of deliberation. And frankly, I don’t know what “I shall buy an umbrella” means at all.

Marinating in these complexities (which I sometimes do by curling up with Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey Pullum’s magisterial yet crisp “The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language”) opens us to the realization that someone saying “ONboarding” is not just a random quirk. It’s a sign of a change, the emergence of a new distinction, of a kind that makes the language an infinitely expanding tool rather than a gloomy obstacle course. The supply is endless: Did you ever notice how often adjectives have their own private substitute for “very” — brand new, dirt cheap, hopping mad, jet black? And isn’t that just a little more interesting than a (concocted!) rule about when to use that and when to use which?

BY THE WAY, I have come across another book that teaches us new ways of looking at things. It taught me that matter consists of the accumulation not of bits of stuff but of standing vibrations. Unlike other kinds of vibrations, standing vibrations cannot penetrate one another. They can thus cluster, forming atoms and therefore matter. I get this — if I got it right! — from Matt Strassler’s marvelous new “Waves in an Impossible Sea.” What makes the vibrations “stand” is the force that drives those Higgs bosons we heard so much about some years ago. Mr. Strassler’s book makes it possible to understand such things without expertise in physics or math. The book picks up where “The Dancing Wu Li Masters” left off and deserves the same dedicated readership.

JOHN MCWHORTER is an associate professor of linguistics at Columbia University and the author of “Woke Racism: How a New Religion Has Betrayed Black America.”

Welcome to stucktopia

Hillary Kelly

The hallways on the television shows I watch have been driving me mad. On one sci-fi show after another I’ve encountered long, zigzagging, labyrinthine passageways marked by impenetrable doors and countless blind alleys — places that have no obvious beginning or end. The characters are holed up in bunkers (“Fallout”), consigned to stark subterranean offices (“Severance”), locked in Escher-like prisons (“Andor”) or living in spiraling mile-deep underground complexes (“Silo”). Escape is unimaginable, endless repetition is crushingly routine and people are trapped in a world marked by inertia and hopelessness.

The resonance is chilling: Television has managed to uncannily capture the way life feels right now.

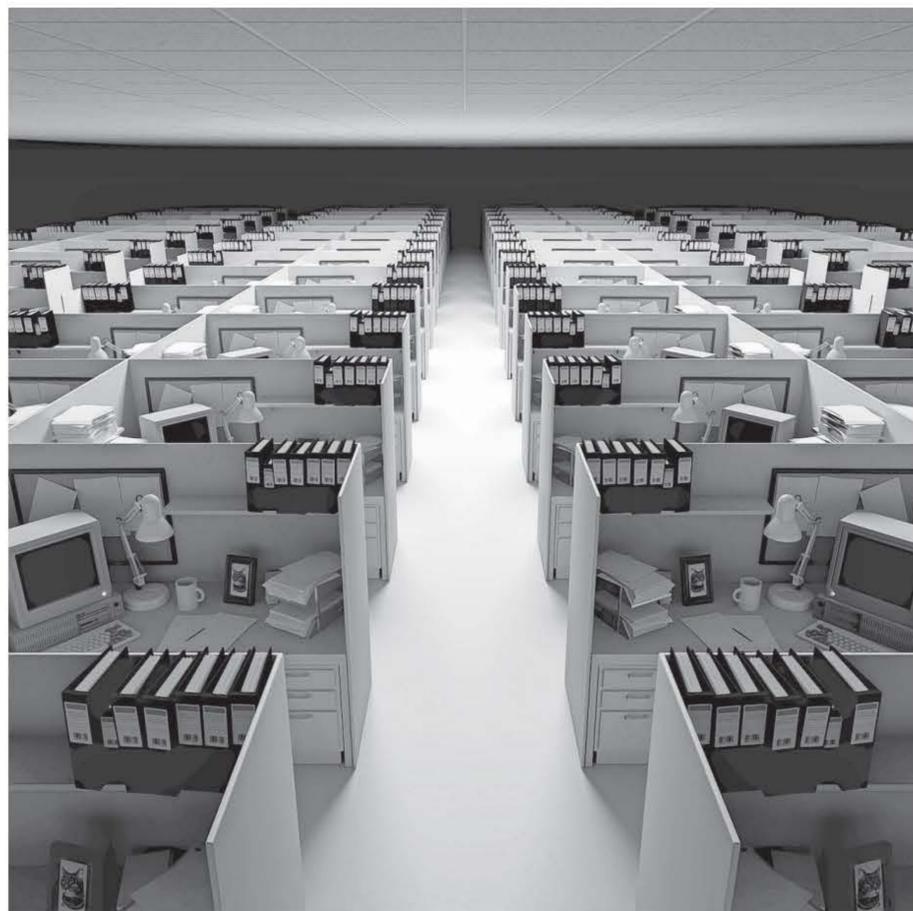
We’re all stuck.

What’s being portrayed is not exactly a dystopia. It’s certainly not a utopia. It’s something different: a stucktopia. These fictional worlds are controlled by an overclass, and the folks battling in the mire are underdogs — mechanics, office drones, pilots and young brides. Yet they’re also complicit, to varying degrees, in the machinery that keeps them stranded. Once they realize this, they strive to discard their sense of futility — the least helpful of emotions — and try to find the will to enact change.

The stucktopia might seem resonant to you, too. Time is a flat circle. The same two political candidates are running for president, while parodic commentary is once again being provided by Jon Stewart, who first hosted “The Daily Show” in 1999. Congress produces little more than increasingly outlandish sound bites. There are protests nearly every day, yet no resolution or change. Mass culture has come to a standstill, with endless reboots and resuscitations. Thanks to knockoff mania and fast fashion, clothes and décor look like copies of copies. We spent a pandemic locked up in our homes, and the outside world — with superstorms and deadly heat waves — is no longer the respite Thoreau once envisioned. If we retreat into our phones, we end up algorithmically chasing ourselves down familiar rabbit holes.

Pop culture, performing its canary-in-the-coal-mine function, has been trying to warn us about stucktopia. Every age gets the dystopian nightmares it most fears: In the 1930s and ‘40s, it was George Orwell and Aldous Huxley’s visions of totalitarianism; at the millennium, it was dark imaginings of societal collapse, whether a zombie apocalypse or the hunger games. Our new fictional nightmares are all about being trapped: mice running in an endless maze, too cowed by the complexity of the system to plow through the dead ends and find freedom.

Televized portrayals of stucktopia can’t defeat authoritarian governments or teach us how to do so ourselves. But they do offer a first step toward action — a way to recognize what parts of us are purposely staying stuck. Considered together, these shows force us to consider whether we’ll stay content with our meager daily doses of cold comfort in a larger, broken system — or toss



TIMO LENZNER

them aside and find a new way to live.

A common thread on stucktopian TV is the contrast of two worlds: an inside world, held together with delusion, and an outside world that’s unknown, potentially fraught and full of imagined dangers. On “Severance,” Mark S. has willingly had his consciousness bisected; “innie” Mark sits at an outdated computer terminal in the shadowy subterranean offices of Lumon Industries, blissfully unaware of the rest of his life, while “outie” Mark grieves for his dead wife in his empty house. The severance procedure is Mark’s bleak hope to trade emotional pain for perpetual numbness; it doesn’t help.

On “Andor,” the hero Cassian Andor is exiled to a floating prison, where he is sentenced to perform menial labor for the galaxy-controlling Empire. On “Silo” and “Fallout,” life in the inside world — large bunkerlike complexes built in response to a toxic environment — is humdrum and limited, while the outside world is verboten and only visited by the foolish and the reckless.

Stories like these are, of course, heirs

to Franz Kafka and Samuel Beckett, the great chroniclers of meaningless make-work and the labyrinthine nature of modern life. But they also capture something essential about our current moment, in which we’re too often defeated by the sense that we’re too small to crack the structures that entrap us.

In these shows, the characters summon the will to recognize the oppression inherent in these systems and to challenge their conditions. Juliette, the rebellious protagonist of “Silo,” who’s responsible for maintaining the bunker’s generators that keep the underground population alive, ultimately heads outside, opting for potential death in the barren landscape over continued compliance. On “Fallout,” Lucy, who has led a charmed existence as a “vaulite” in a hermetically sealed hide-out, decides to walk off into the unknown of the desert and face the world’s barbarity. Andor leads the other inmates to revolt, and they choose to jump into the surrounding sea rather than continue to labor for their oppressors. A teaser for Season 2 of “Severance” suggests that Mark is finally getting closer to rejecting his self-imposed psychological exile.

In our world, the small comforts offered by a real-life stucktopia can feel like consolation for staying trapped. I’ve felt this inertia and complied with it every time I’ve griped that our attention

is constantly co-opted by the affirming banality of social media and meme-sharing, then passed along a dozen memes a day. Or when I’ve planned a carbon-dense family jaunt to ski on the disappearing powder, even as I recognize that the planet is being rendered uninhabitable.

I know these behaviors are perpetuating my own mental stuckness, but they feel too good to give up — which is exactly the problem. That’s something else we can learn from stucktopian TV: We aren’t just cogs in the machine because that’s our assigned role. We’re cogs because breaking out from our prescribed slots seems deeply difficult and uncomfortable.

We’re not stuck in our circumstance. We’re stuck in the ways of living that perpetuate it. If enough of us give up the sense that things are inevitable — that we’re stuck — it’s possible that we can course-correct humanity, or at least nudge it toward a hopeful path.

There’s another more realistic option that offers a thrill and reward of its own. If we don’t let the stucktopia keep its hold on us, if we rebuke it, maybe we shift ourselves ever so slightly toward optimism, and give the system whatever small hell we can.

HILLARY KELLY is a literary critic.

Joe Biden, the ‘goodest’ of them all

DOWD, FROM PAGE 1 interpret the president’s elisions and jumbles. Joe Scarborough, a supporter and confidante of the president, took to X to mock the “breathless NYT syntax blogs.”

But how the president puts words together — or doesn’t — happens to be a life and death matter. We’re now dwelling in a murky area of what the president intended to say, or what he said that was incomprehensible, and whether we should take the White House interpretation.

Journalists are going to be appropriately resistant to making corrections based on what the White House asserts Biden said, or its version of what Biden intended to say. It’s not our job to play Mad Libs with the president.

Ronald Reagan’s press aides would issue a lot of clarifications after news conferences, but those were not because it was hard to hear what he was saying. Even in his 70s, he spoke in a clear baritone. His clarifications were more to correct remarks he made, as when he said trees cause more pollution than automobiles do.

Biden’s word salad and sudden drops in volume to pianissimo are relevant for reporters to cover because they’re a microcosm of the questions at the heart of the 2024 Democratic campaign: Is the president’s mental state strong enough to beat Donald Trump and can he serve for four more years? The desperate Biden team is ready to go to war over every syllable.

In my Saturday column, I quoted Biden’s line to ABC’s George Stephanopoulos, about how he would feel if Trump were sworn in as president because he refused to step aside: “I’ll feel as long as I gave it my all and I did

the goodest job as I know I can do, that’s what this is about.”

Now, “goodest” isn’t a word. But my researcher, Andrew Trunsky, and I listened to the video, our ears up against the computer, 10 times, and that’s what it sounded like. We also checked the ABC News transcript and that’s the word they used. Times news reporters and reporters for other news outlets took their cue from the ABC transcript.

The confusion was so universal that on Axios Saturday, there were two different versions: Mike Allen’s newsletter used “goodest” and another story used “I did as good a job as I know I can do.”

After my column posted Saturday morning, T.J. Ducklo, a Biden campaign spokesman, emailed me to “flag” that ABC News had updated its transcript to read: “I’ll feel as long as I gave it my all and I did the good as job as I know I can do, that’s what this is about.”

Ducklo asked if I could “tweak” the column and change the word “goodest” to make my piece “consistent with the corrected transcript,” even though the revised version was also gobbledygook.

When I said we would tell our editor what he thought, Ducklo wrote back: “Yeah again, it’s not what I think. It’s what ABC News, who conducted the interview, thinks. I think it would be quite unusual if the Times asserted the president said something that the news organization who conducted the interview says he didn’t say . . .”

Andrew and I both emailed Ducklo, asking whether ABC had changed the transcript on its own or if the Biden team had asked them to change it.

“ABC News, like any news organization, makes their own independent editorial decisions,” Ducklo replied to



ERIC LEE/THE NEW YORK TIMES

us. “Surely you are not suggesting otherwise.” He emailed again to add: “Had another convo on this. ABC News received the tape and confirmed the error to us. Then made the correction.”

I was more confused than ever. What tape? From whom?? Why the run-around?? Given the White House’s egregious coverup about Biden’s sag from aging, the spokesman’s coyness seemed de trop. By Saturday night, Shear and Michael Grynbaum had a Times story clearing up things. Indeed, the White House had asked ABC News to check whether the president said “goodest” or “good as,” after the White House stenographers, who had re-

corded the president on ABC News, noticed the discrepancy between their recording and the network’s transcript.

The Times attached notes on my column and all the news stories that had used “goodest,” explaining the befuddlement.

Whatever the president meant, his answer to that question went over like a lead balloon. No one cares if he feels good about himself in a losing cause.

It might seem like much ado about goodest. But it’s a harbinger of tense times between a White House in bunker mode and a press corps in ferret mode.

Maybe the White House should think about closed captioning.

Onboarding

TECH

A new arm from the 'sunny side of A.I.'

LONDON

She learned how to use a prosthetic limb, and the software learned from her

BY ADAM SATARIANO

Sarah de Lagarde was rushing to a train in September 2022 when she slipped and fell through a gap between the platform and the train. For 15 horrifying minutes, she was stuck on the tracks undetected. Two trains ran over her. She survived, but her right arm and the lower portion of her right leg had to be amputated.

Lying in a hospital bed after multiple surgeries, Ms. de Lagarde, who had hiked Mount Kilimanjaro with her husband, Jeremy, a month earlier, wondered what the rest of her life would be like.

"I had thought I was invincible," Ms. de Lagarde, a public relations executive at an investment firm in London, said in an interview. She began thinking about what she could do. "I said, 'OK, I lost this, I need a replacement, and it's not going to be like some dud that has no function,'" she said.

Eighteen months later, Ms. de Lagarde, now 44, has regained some sense of normalcy thanks to major advancements in prosthetics that incorporate artificial intelligence. She has a new arm and hand, which she uses confidently to open containers, make morning coffee, water plants and put her clothes on hangers. Her 9-year-old daughter,

"Every day, there is a moment where I think, oh my gosh, I miss my arm so much."

Daphne, will sometimes hold the hand as they walk down the street.

The prosthetic hand, the most important and intricate piece, is powered by machine learning, a form of A.I. that excels at pattern recognition and making predictions based on past behavior. TikTok uses machine learning for its recommendation algorithm.

The advancements show how A.I. is seeping further into fields like health care. While many have raised alarms about A.I.'s risks, researchers said those concerns must be weighed against the technology's potential to improve lives.

"When we get the opportunity to show people A.I. that is truly assistive for helping somebody, that's positive," said Blair Lock, the co-founder and chief executive of Coapt, which made the machine learning software used in Ms. de Lagarde's arm. "Health care is a good place to look for the sunny side of A.I."

Before being fitted with her prosthetic last year, Ms. de Lagarde spent months visiting a London clinic to help train the software that would eventually power her arm. With electrodes attached to the end of her remaining limb, which was amputated at her bicep, technicians told her to think about making basic movements like picking up a glass or turning a door handle. The process triggered her muscles as if her arm were still there and provided data to teach her prosthetic how to react when she made certain actions or gestures.

Now when Ms. de Lagarde moves, sensors embedded in the arm send a signal to her hand to perform the job. The



more she uses the arm, the better the software gets at predicting what she's trying to accomplish.

"It would take me like 10 seconds and a lot of brain power to complete a movement like opening my hand," she said. "Now I just open up the hand and I realize I didn't even think about it."

The technology is not perfect. The arm is heavy, making Ms. de Lagarde's

shoulder and back ache, and it has to be charged at least once a day. When the weather is hot, it is uncomfortable.

There is no tactile function that would enable her to feel what she touches. She has dropped her phone several times after forgetting that she was holding it in her right hand. Any hardware or software glitches can affect her.

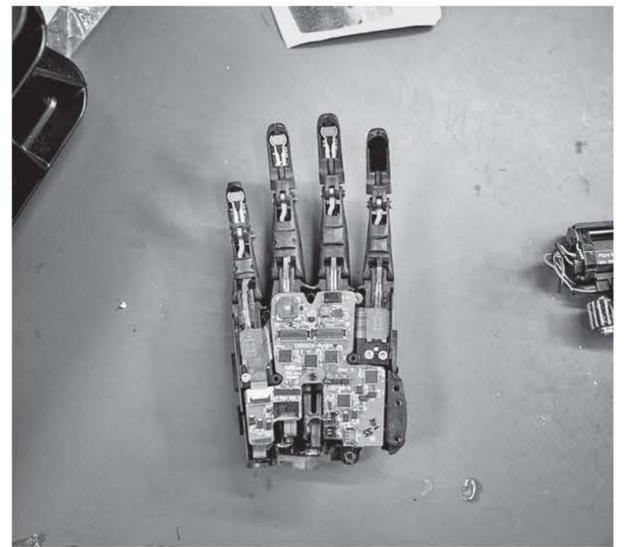
"Every day, there is a moment where I

think, oh my gosh, I miss my arm so much," she said. "It makes you realize, as sophisticated as this is, our bodies are incredible."

Cost is also an issue. The arm, elbow, hand and A.I. software are made by separate companies, driving up the expense. A full prosthetic arm like Ms. de Lagarde's can cost more than 150,000 pounds, or about \$190,000.



Clockwise from left: Sarah de Lagarde wearing her prosthetic limb; with her 9-year-old daughter, Daphne, at their home in London; a hand being repaired at Covvi, the British company that created a hand for Ms. de Lagarde; the High Barnet underground station in London, the location of her accident; and chopping vegetables with her Covvi hand.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALICE ZOO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Clean up your phone's photo library to free up space

Tech Tip

BY J. D. BIERSDORFER

Are you getting ominous warnings about your phone's storage? Have you ever whipped out your phone to show someone a certain photo and had to scroll for minutes to find it? If you've accumulated gigabytes of images over the years, streamlining your photo library and dumping other unnecessary apps and files can let you reclaim that space. Here's a guide to doing just that by using free tools that are probably already on your phone.

CHECK STORAGE

Start your cleanup process by noting the space on your device — and what's filling it up.

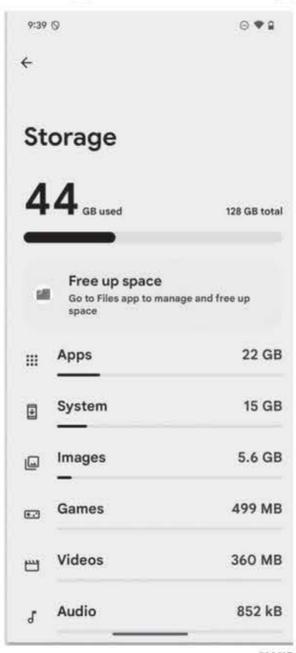
On many Android devices, open the Settings app and select Storage to check your available space.

On a Samsung Galaxy device, open the Settings app, select either Device Care or Device Maintenance and then tap Storage. On some phones, you can scroll right down to Storage.

On an iPhone, open the Settings app and select General and then iPhone Storage to see the amount of space left on your phone. The steps are similar for an iPad.

DELETE DUPLICATES

Zapping identical copies of photos is an easy way to reclaim turf. While subscription apps for rounding up duplicate files of all types are available (like Duplicates Cleaner for Android or Phone Cleaner for iOS), consider the free options on your phone.



In Apple's iOS Photos app, tap the Albums icon at the bottom of the screen and scroll down to the Utilities area. Tap Duplicates. The next screen shows the photos and videos with multiple copies in your library, all next to a Merge button. The Merge option preserves the highest-resolution copy (and embedded information) and moves the lesser versions to the app's

Left, the Storage area of a device's system settings reveals apps and files that take up room; right, the Duplicates tool in the Utilities area of Apple's Photos app finds extra copies; far right, the Clean option in Google's free Files app for Android scans for old, duplicate or very large photos.

Recently Deleted album.

Samsung has a similar tool for tracking down duplicate files on its Galaxy devices. Tap the My Files icon and choose Analyze Storage from the menu. On the next screen, select Duplicate Files to see the list.

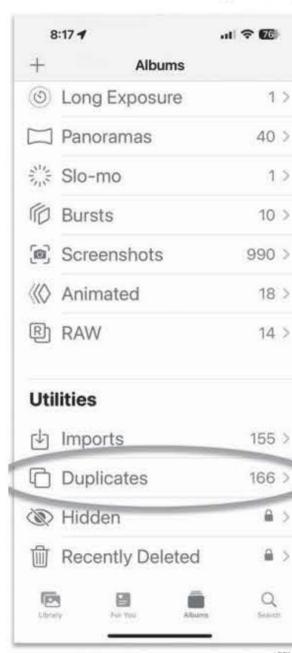
Google Photos has a duplicate-detection feature designed to spot an identical photo and prevent it from being added to the library. With Google's Files app for Android — free in the Play store if it hasn't already been installed — you can quickly check for photo duplicates and get other file-deletion suggestions.

Open the Files app, tap the Menu icon in the upper-left corner and choose Clean. The next screen offers a variety of things you can delete to conserve space, including any duplicates, downloads, screenshots, little-used apps and large files.

PERSONALLY REVIEW

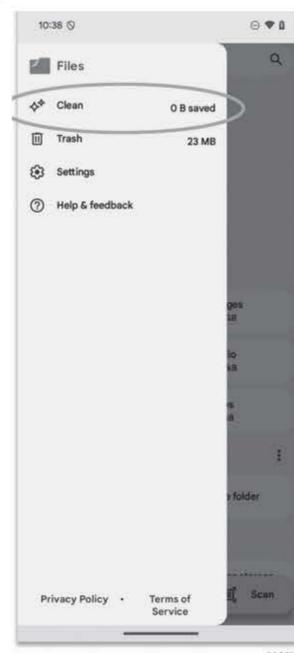
It can be tedious, but scrolling back and deleting the duds by hand is a precise way to prune your pictures and videos. If you have a huge library, breaking up the project into daily sessions when you're on mass transit (or otherwise waiting around) whittles down your collection incrementally. Don't forget to also check any third-party photo apps that store pictures.

A deleted photo doesn't evaporate immediately. Most systems keep all



recently deleted photos and videos around for at least 30 days before permanent deletion, unless you manually empty the trash or deleted-items folder.

If you have photos you want to preserve and don't use online backup, export copies to a computer via email, Android Quick Share, Apple's AirDrop or another transfer method. (And be



sure you have a backup system in place for your computer.)

TAKE SUGGESTIONS

Need more help? Apple's support site has tips, and the iPhone Storage screen offers recommendations for purging old files and apps. Samsung's site has ideas for Galaxy owners. In the user account settings, Google

diabetes patients and accident victims. Researchers are examining how to embed micro sensors directly into a person's arm to provide even richer data for the A.I. systems to improve.

Ms. de Lagarde is closely watching the latest advances, hoping she can be among those who benefit. "This technology is the silver lining for what happened to me," she said.

Photos has Free Up Space and Manage Storage tools that list files to review and delete.

Suggestions typically include relocating your photos from the phone to an online server or to an external SD memory card if your phone has a card slot, which lets you regain the space on your phone when you offload the files.

Apple's iCloud for Photos, Google Photos, Samsung Cloud or a service like Dropbox frees up space because the device is not physically storing the files, even though you can see the images on it. You get a complimentary amount of space to start, but must pay for more once you fill it.

When you delete a backed-up or synced photo — on an iPhone, in Google Photos or wherever — it disappears on all the devices connected to that account.

GET SORTED

After cleaning the photo library, you can further organize it. For years, Android and iOS have been automatically grouping images together into albums based on who's in them, where they were taken and other factors, but you can also create your own collections.

To move pictures into your own albums in Google Photos, Samsung's Gallery app or Apple's Photos, tap the option for a new album, name it and select the pictures you want to add to it. Apple's Photos can also create folders and then make separate albums inside those folders for grouping similar albums together.

Yes, it takes time to declutter your device, but you'll be able to find your pictures faster when you want to show them off and have room to install more stuff.

Sports

Canada's prolific backcourt raises its Olympic outlook

TORONTO

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander and Jamal Murray give team chance to win medal

BY ERIC KOREAN
THE ATHLETIC

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander handles incoming questions the way he handles defenders. He will not be rushed. He will survey the landscape, think things through and get to his spot.

Last weekend, he was at OVO Athletic Centre, where the Canadian men's basketball team is holding its training camp. The two-court gym was packed — not only by his teammates, but also by many of the 49 Olympians in Toronto who represented Canada from 1976 to 2000. The team's general manager, Rowan Barrett, wanted the alumni in town to give the program a sense of lineage, which was understandable given the quarter-century between appearances by the men's team in the Olympic basketball tournament.

"They didn't really say this, but they all seem like it was the best time of their lives," Gilgeous-Alexander said. "And a lot of times, you have so much stuff going on in your life, you tend to zone out or look ahead or look behind. And I think it'll be important for us to just stay in the moment and really enjoy the opportunity. I think if we do that together, then we'll get the most out of it."

No wonder Gilgeous-Alexander, who plays for the Oklahoma City Thunder, can dissect what is in front of him so well. As much as the experience is to give the current players a sense of the past, it is also a chance to show the alumni what their hard work has yielded.

They are watching a Canadian team with a decent chance to become the country's first men's team to win an Olympic medal since 1936. That possibility starts with the superstar backcourt of Gilgeous-Alexander and Jamal Murray.

Despite their making three-year commitments to the program in 2022, they have not played together for Canada in either of the last two summers because of Murray's injuries and long playoff runs. Hopefully for Canada, that will change this summer. That reality is a good reminder that as patient as Gilgeous-Alexander is, he also has a dynamic first step.

"I drive, he shoots," Gilgeous-Alexander said of the pairing. "Simple as that." "I would say he's on point," Murray said a day later.

The two guards will propel the Canadian offense at the tournament. If any team is going to upset the stacked U.S. team, it may be Canada. The Americans



MICHAEL CONROY/ASSOCIATED PRESS

At last year's World Cup, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, above, helped Canada win a bronze medal. Right, injuries and long playoff runs have limited Jamal Murray's availability to Canada's national team. With these two in Canada's backcourt, the group has a chance to be the country's first men's basketball team to win an Olympic medal since 1936.

will have, conservatively, a dozen of the best 35 players in the world on their roster, with no other country at that level. They will score in bunches and have more than enough excellent defenders.

But Gilgeous-Alexander led Canada to the best offense (and a bronze medal) at last year's FIBA World Cup. While Germany's Dennis Schröder was the most valuable player at the tournament, Gilgeous-Alexander was its best player, averaging 24.5 points per game on 54.4 percent shooting. He added 6.4 rebounds and 6.6 assists per game and had the biggest moments in a comeback win over Spain that clinched the Olympic berth. But Canada struggled to create when he was not on the floor, so he played 34 or more minutes in each of Canada's last four games. The FIBA games are only 40 minutes.

Coach Jordi Fernández of Canada has repeatedly blamed himself for the

team's comparatively poor defense in the tournament, saying he relied too heavily on his best players, running them into the ground. With Murray, it is easy enough to imagine the coach being able to stagger the two — each running the show for 10 minutes each game and sharing the duties for the other 20.

It is one thing to say that now, and another to do it in real time when a game feels as though it is getting away from you. Murray gives Canada more margin for error, an answer when possessions go nowhere.

"He can get hot, and he's a guy that can get it going along with Shai," said the Canadian wing Nickeil Alexander-Walker, whose Minnesota Timberwolves beat Murray's Denver Nuggets in seven games in the second round of the N.B.A. playoffs this year. Alexander-Walker had some of the defensive assignments on Murray.



DAVID ZALLIBOWSKI/ASSOCIATED PRESS

It has helped that Murray has been at training camp in the last few years when he has not been rehabbing an injury. Still, it requires more than just reps in a scrimmage to build chemistry.

The two guards are different enough

and talented enough that they should be able to find a rhythm. Broadly, Gilgeous-Alexander is more of an isolation scorer while Murray operates more in the pick-and-roll. Gilgeous-Alexander took 75 catch-and-shoot 3s compared with 194

pull-up jumpers, this season while Murray took 141 and 184.

Murray was fairly efficient this year as he battled injuries, with a 58.6 true shooting percentage. Gilgeous-Alexander was at 63.6 percent. He suffered a little dip in the playoffs, but it was mostly from shooting just 79 percent from the free-throw line. He still posted metro-nomic production.

"The things he does, he does every single night," said the Canadian forward Dwight Powell, whose Dallas Mavericks knocked out Gilgeous-Alexander and the Thunder in six games. "He's extremely consistent, and it's a little frustrating how consistent when you know exactly where he wants to go. You know his spots, but he finds a way to get there. So it was a frustrating series for that, but also quietly exciting knowing how important he is to this team right here and our plans for the summer."

There must be more to the Canadian team than two players. Canada was weaker on the defensive end in the World Cup, and will not have the big

The two guards are different enough and talented enough that they should be able to find a rhythm.

man Zach Edey to provide some rim protection off the bench. Edey has said he had to focus on his rookie season with the Memphis Grizzlies.

Murray is a relatively weak defender, although Canada has no shortage of perimeter support with the likes of Alexander-Walker, Luguentz Dort and Dillon Brooks. Canada has a versatile roster, but one that will most likely play aggressively on defense as opposed to laying back.

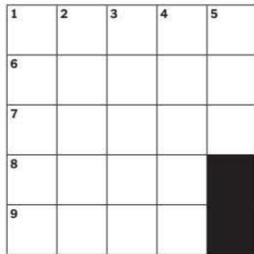
Outside of the United States, no country has the luxury of having a great version of every type of player there is. Whoever winds up filling out the roster, this will be the deepest team Canada has sent to a major international tournament. Still, the guards will be the offensive focal points, and that should give Canada a sense of order.

There is no doubt that those Olympic veterans who have kept up with the program have been familiar with the dominant discussion. So many times in the years between Olympic appearances many have wondered whether Canada could get even one N.B.A. cog to show up. There were conversations about whether Steve Nash, Jamaal Magloire, Samuel Dalembert or Andrew Wiggins would play. They felt like the only conversations that mattered.

Now, finally, Canada has two stars signed up and ready to make music together.

Alexander-Walker said: "It's going to be fun. It's going to be cool. As a teammate, I just got a better view."

The Mini Crossword



7/9/2024 BY WYNA LIU EDITED BY SAM ZERSKY

ACROSS

- 1 Substance used by violin players
- 6 One of the world's largest land animals, familiarly
- 7 Trojan War epic
- 8 N.B.A. team that recently agreed to its first trade with the Knicks in over 40 years
- 9 Lyric poems

DOWN

- 1 One of the world's largest land animals, familiarly
- 2 Well-___ machine
- 3 Petty ill will
- 4 "Skip me," in a game
- 5 Nonverbal agreement

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE



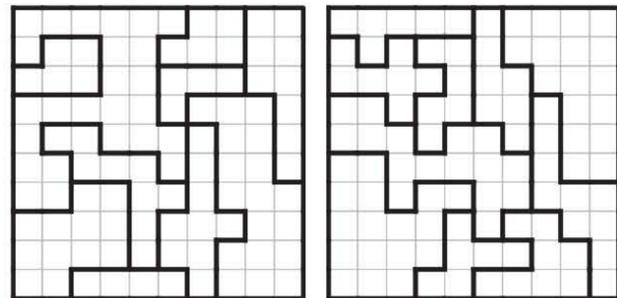
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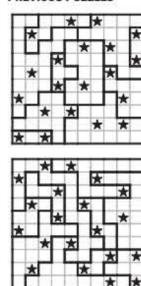
Two Not Touch



Put two stars in each row, column and region of the grid. No two stars may touch, not even diagonally.

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ANSWERS TO PREVIOUS PUZZLES



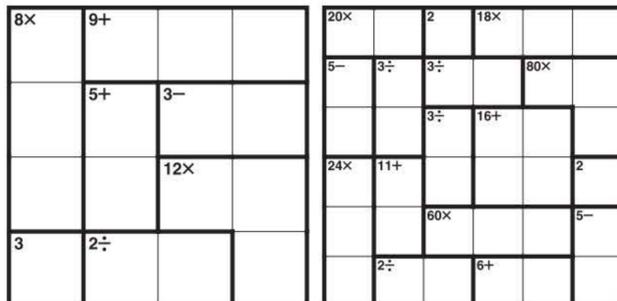
Cryptogram

ORANXRY ZL Z ENE YBXZ, FZPBZM KZPRW LRPRIAW
PRKNPYRY Z VPHGVR ZAOHF YHPBGV IMR GBGRIBRL.

PUZZLE BY BEN BASS

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER 1. "Rocky" 2. "Dune" 3. "Barbie" 4. "Frozen" 5. "Grease" 6. "Jaws"

KenKen



ANSWERS TO PREVIOUS PUZZLES



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.

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Crossword Edited by Joel Fagliano

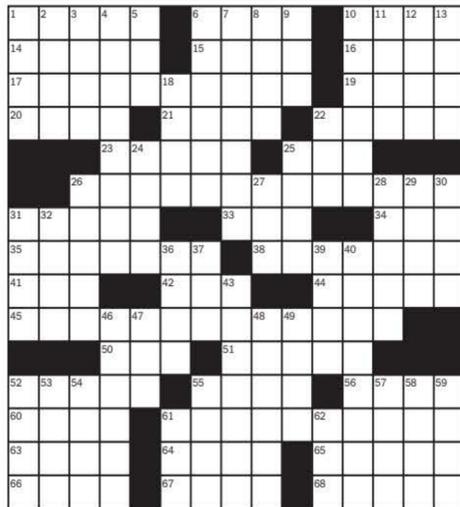
PUZZLE BY GARY LARSON AND AMY ENSZ

- 1 Average grade for a 3.3 G.P.A.
- 6 Office sub
- 10 Big shindig
- 14 Thrice-repeated words in one of Gertrude Stein's truisms
- 15 Diva's delivery
- 16 Kind of sax
- 17 Sting operation at a senior center?
- 19 English playwright Coward
- 20 Stone of "Poor Things"
- 21 Mountain range along much of the France/Italy border
- 22 Uniting idea
- 23 Button on the back of many appliances
- 25 Intention
- 26 Mission for an F-16?
- 31 Circular gasket
- 33 Doomed to the start, for short
- 34 "Go team!"
- 35 What the first call to a receptionist might come in on
- 38 High bar at the circus
- 41 Base card in solitaire
- 42 Prey for a mountain lion
- 44 Tidy one's feathers
- 45 Powdered wigs, petticoats, etc.?
- 50 Worn, maybe
- 51 Like some flushes and screw-ups
- 52 Capital of South Korea
- 55 House of ____, ruling family of the Mideast
- 56 SEP and Roth, for two
- 60 Long things for a long shot
- 61 Quarterback's interception?
- 64 Delight
- 65 Official language of India
- 66 Instrument for Orpheus
- 67 The smallest bit
- 68 Ensemble of eight

DOWN

- 1 Nickname for George Herman Ruth
- 2 Busy "season" for limo drivers

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE



7/9/24

- 3 Weaving machine
- 4 Many a role in "Jarhead"
- 5 "What you ___ is what you get"
- 6 One of two for the Ten Commandments
- 7 Blew one's top
- 8 ___ America
- 9 Unit of butter
- 10 Vietnamese sandwich
- 11 Common ingredient in after-sun gel
- 12 Hold back, as the tide
- 13 Bad thing to be in, in poker ... or good thing to be in, in golf
- 18 Impulsive
- 22 "Shop ___ you drop!"
- 24 Breakfast brand with a "Thick & Fluffy" variety
- 25 Way, way off
- 26 Of higher quality
- 27 Go bad
- 28 Like a newbie
- 29 State of confusion
- 30 After that
- 31 Count played by Jim Carrey in "Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events"
- 32 Puerto ___
- 36 Jock's counterpart
- 37 Christmas movie starring Will Ferrell
- 39 Capital of Samoa
- 40 Like Stephen King and Isaac Asimov
- 43 Body of water north of Siberia
- 46 Hairstylist's foam
- 47 Right-angled bend
- 48 Three sheets to the wind
- 49 Jekyll's counterpart
- 52 Worm's habitat
- 53 Small whirlpool
- 54 Reason to say "Pee-yew!"
- 55 Margarita garnish
- 57 Something to go off on
- 58 Senate helper
- 59 Narrow opening
- 61 Competitor of LIV Golf
- 62 Greek "P"

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Culture

The man behind the Minions

Pierre Coffin helped invent the creatures that he has voiced for nearly 15 years

BY CALUM MARSH

When the French animation studio Illumination was developing “Despicable Me,” an ingratiating family comedy about a second-rate supervillain and his adopted children, the team decided that the movie needed some lighthearted relief to help make the movie’s antihero, Gru (Steve Carell), more sympathetic.

So the directors Pierre Coffin and Chris Renaud, alongside the character designer Eric Guillon and the producer Chris Meledandri, came up with the Minions, a flock of mischievous yellow creatures that would scurry about in the background and cheer on their nefarious leader.

Coffin, a French Indonesian animator, offered to improvise some high-pitched gibberish dialogue for the characters, which he’d occasionally done working previously in commercials, until a celebrity voice actor could be added at a later date.

But as it turned out, Coffin’s voice stuck: Test audiences loved his distinctive staccato giggle and melodic nonsense speak. And so, since 2010, Coffin has been the unlikely star of one of the largest pop cultural phenomena of the century, reprising the role for the sixth time on the big screen in the new sequel “Despicable Me 4,” which arrived in theaters last week.

“After the last movie, I told Chris Meledandri, ‘I have to stop doing anything Minion-related, I’ve got to do something else,’” Coffin said in a recent video interview from an animation festival he was attending in southeastern France. “But there’s something very appealing that I really like about those characters. So even when I say that I want to get out of it, then I think, ‘Oh, I should do that, it’s fun!’”

Born in France in 1967 to the novelist Nh. Dini and the diplomat Yves Coffin, Pierre spent his childhood partly in the United States, which made an outside impression on his young mind. “I was overwhelmed, like ‘This is the greatest country ever: They have all these movies!’” he said.

He loved musicals and Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, and after seeing “The Pirates of Penzance,” became enamored with “I Am the Very Model of a Modern Major-General,” its famous rapid-fire patter song. “I knew that if I ever got to make a movie myself,” he said, “I would put that song in there somehow.” Decades later, he made it the rousing centerpiece of the 2017 sequel “Despicable Me 3.”

The first “Minions” movie, directed by Coffin and Kyle Balda, is one of the highest-grossing movies of all time.

The “Despicable” films, as well as the spinoffs “Minions” and “Minions: Rise of Gru,” have been enormously lucrative for Illumination, and Universal, their distributor. They have earned \$4.6 billion worldwide, making them one of the most successful film franchises ever.

The Minions themselves have also become ubiquitous beyond the films: omnipresent as licensed merchandise, theme park rides, TikTok trends and Facebook memes. “The design of them and the feel of them is very toy-friendly,” said Renaud, who also directed “Despicable Me 4.” “It’s got this simplicity. You can create memes, they’re easy to draw — it’s something you want to park on your desk.”

But while the ubiquity of the Minions may be a testament to their popularity, Coffin seemed to have some regrets, creatively. “When ‘Minions’ came out, I had two reactions,” he said. “Firstly, the marketing is overwhelming, and I think they’ve overdone it. And second: How in

the hell did we make a billion dollars with this movie?”

Yes, the first “Minions” movie, directed by Coffin and Kyle Balda, is one of the highest-grossing movies of all time. But in Coffin’s view, “it was the marketing that made the movie a financial success, and not necessarily a creative one.” In short, he said, “we could have done better.”

When Coffin catches “Minions” on TV in Paris, where he lives with his family, he finds himself thinking about what the film might have been: simpler, less conventional, maybe more like “Shaun the Sheep,” an 84-minute British comedy featuring no dialogue, just pure pratfalls. Renaud disagreed. “I think ‘Shaun the Sheep’ is great,” he said. But, “our films swung for the fences in a way that ‘Shaun the Sheep’ did not. If you’re going for a broad audience, it would be very tricky to do it straight-up with no dialogue.”

Meledandri, the producer, suggested that Coffin’s resistance to the conventional style of the Minions movies is emblematic of a “rebellious quality” that is “so important to who Pierre is as an artist.” He described working with Coffin as a process involving “a really healthy tension” between his independent spirit and the demands of a broadly accessible family film.

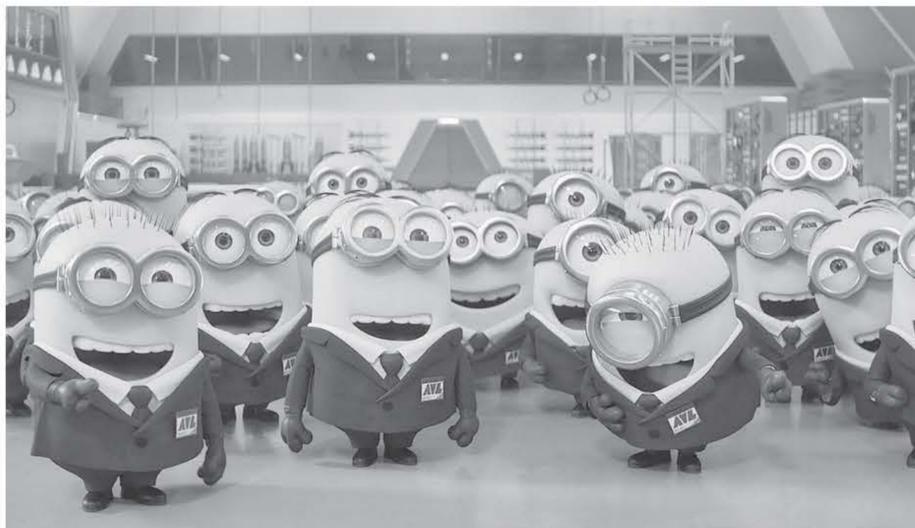
“He would not like me saying this, but there’s a lot about Pierre that reminds me of the Minions,” Meledandri said. “At the core he’s incredibly sweet, but that sweetness is combined with a subversiveness. His fierce independence is an essential part of continually surprising us as we worked on the films — and ultimately surprising the audience.”

Meledandri said that Coffin might feel “constrained” by the needs of the studio — but Coffin is clearly thrilled by the creative possibilities of those little yellow critters. He compared them to the classic Bugs Bunny cartoons by Tex Avery: loose, imaginative, even daring.

“I feel like with the Minions,” Coffin said, “I can do anything.”



Pierre Coffin at the Illumination studio in Paris last month. Left, a gaggle of Minions in “Despicable Me 4.”



ILLUMINATION/UNIVERSAL PICTURES

French museum collides with New Jersey politics

State lawmakers rescinded funding for an outpost of the Pompidou Center

BY ZACHARY SMALL

Plans to build an outpost of the Pompidou Center in the heart of Jersey City, N.J., have been put on hold after the State Legislature voted to rescind \$24 million in funding for the Paris museum’s project.

An additional \$34 million in state and federal assistance for what would have been the Pompidou’s first satellite location in North America was also put in jeopardy by the vote.

Tim Sullivan, chief executive of the New Jersey Economic Development Authority, addressed a letter to museum officials saying that the project was called off.

“Due to the ongoing impact of Covid and multiple global conflicts on the supply chain, rising costs, an irreconcilable operating gap and the corresponding financial burdens it will create for New Jersey’s taxpayers, the Legislature has rescinded financial support,” Mr. Sullivan wrote, “leaving us to determine that this project is unfortunately no longer feasible.”

Steve Fulop, the mayor of Jersey City and a major supporter of the museum, blamed the cuts instead on his deteriorating relationship with the state’s governor, Phil Murphy, who had supported the Centre Pompidou x Jersey City initiative when it was announced in 2021 as a way to attract tourists and New Yorkers into a rapidly developing district.

Mr. Fulop said the situation changed after he rescinded his support for Tammy Murphy, the governor’s wife, in the state’s Democratic primary to replace Senator Robert Menendez, who is on trial for federal bribery charges. In



A rendering of Centre Pompidou x Jersey City. The former Pathside Building in Jersey City was to house the art museum.

March, Mr. Fulop pledged support for Representative Andy Kim, saying his initial endorsement of Tammy Murphy was “wrong.”

“There is no question in my mind that this is directly related to my support of Andy Kim,” Mr. Fulop said of the state’s decision to withdraw funding. (Mr. Fulop is also running in next year’s governor’s race to replace Mr. Murphy, who has reached his term limits.)

Natalie Hamilton, a spokeswoman for the governor, referred to comments he

made to reporters in April. “This has literally zero to do with any politics,” Mr. Murphy said.

Ben Dworkin, a professor of political science at Rowan University in Glassboro, N.J., said that while some public officials had questioned the Pompidou plan since its inception, the latest developments were a sign of the growing rift between the governor and mayor. “It is a convenient point of battle,” said Mr. Dworkin, who called it “one more notch in an ongoing feud.”

While both the city and state agreed that the museum’s \$176 million in construction costs would be fully funded by public money, they disagreed about the annual operating budget. The city said that \$19 million in annual expenses would be covered by ticketing, venue rentals, donations and a proposed tax on new buildings in the area. But the state, which recently passed a \$56.7 billion budget, viewed that amount as a regular deficit.

“As we sit here now, we still love the

project,” Mr. Murphy told reporters in April, “but we can’t marry ourselves to a \$19 million deficit forever and always.”

Records from the governor’s office showed that the New Jersey Economic Development Authority had been questioning the project’s feasibility in early March, discussing the possibility of withdrawing the funding.

“From the top of the administration and down, this is something where we think the idea is an extraordinary idea,” Mr. Sullivan said in an interview. “Where the rubber hits the road has been the math on the money. That’s just not working out, unfortunately.”

In a letter to the Jersey City Redevelopment Agency, Michael Greco, the deputy executive director at New Jersey’s state department, asked the city to return an additional \$6 million in funding allocated to the museum.

“Because the project is no longer viable and none of the disbursed funds have been expended, we ask that you return the funds to the state,” Mr. Greco wrote.

The Pompidou outpost was intended to become a jewel of Journal Square, a section of Jersey City that has received more than a billion dollars in private and public development deals in recent years. In 2021, the Fulop administration hired the architecture firm OMA to transform a 58,000-square-foot, or 5,400-square-meter, former transport hub, known as the Pathside Building, into a cultural center.

The satellite was originally expected to open there in 2024 — a year before the museum’s Paris headquarters closed for renovations — but an economic impact report about the museum that was commissioned by Jersey City this year said the target date was 2027.

While state and federal agencies would have provided much of the outpost’s funding, the museum’s galleries would have benefited from access to the Paris museum’s collection of more than

140,000 modern and contemporary artworks. (The Pompidou already has locations in Belgium and China, with others planned for Saudi Arabia and South Korea.)

In a statement, a spokesman for the Pompidou Center said the museum “remains committed to ongoing discussions with the mayor of Jersey City to jointly determine the project’s future direction.”

Mr. Fulop said that his team was looking at alternative locations for the museum in Journal Square, but that sticking to the original plan was currently impossible.

“This would have been a cultural center that enhanced the entire region,” the mayor said, “but it’s not possible without the governor and the state as partners.”

Several patrons have recently come forward to say they had planned to donate money for the museum. They include the sculptor Sassona Norton and Eliot Spitzer, a former New York governor whose company has helped build a skyscraper in Journal Square.

“The role that great cultural institutions like the Pompidou play in urban life is enormous, and bringing a museum of that stature and magnitude with its world-class collection to Jersey City would be wonderful,” Mr. Spitzer said.

But some local residents were skeptical about the Pompidou’s future because of the high costs of running a museum.

Amy Wilson, an artist who lives near Journal Square, recalled that the Jersey City Museum closed in 2010 because of financial difficulties and thin support from philanthropists.

“I don’t want to have a second museum fail,” Ms. Wilson said. “That would be absolutely devastating to anyone in the arts community in Jersey City if we became the place where museums come to die.”

This rocker also sparkles as a mentor

WASHINGTON

Mary Timony, a guitarist and songwriter, shares her gifts with young musicians

BY EVAN MINSKER

In the dining room of her cozy home here, Mary Timony retrieved her lute from an instrument case that, she joked, “looks like a cat coffin.” Timony, 53, has been on a learning kick recently. “Literally all I’m working on is this,” she said, demonstrating how the so-called thumb-under fingerpicking method strays from traditional guitar technique.

Timony is well known as a guitarist and frontwoman: In the 1990s she headed up the bands Autoclave and Helium, then released solo records before joining Wild Flag, an indie-rock supergroup. Ex Hex, her classic rock and power-pop trio known for catchy songs and rafter-reaching guitar solos, has released two albums since 2014; her latest solo LP, “Untame the Tiger,” written and recorded in the midst of a breakup as she cared for her dying parents, arrived earlier this year.

But to many people in Washington, Timony is highly regarded as something else: a mentor to the next generations of women pursuing their passion for indie rock.

For more than two decades, Timony has instructed students how to play licks from classic rock songs (among other things) in the guitar- and amp-filled basement of her 1920s home on a tree-lined street, under a framed portrait of a young Joe Walsh. Early pupils remember the experience fondly.

“She was supersupportive and made me feel excited about playing guitar,” Anna Wilson, 24, said. “She put me in my first band when I was 10.” Wilson now plays guitar and pedal steel guitar in Timony’s touring band.

Timony’s latest project has involved guiding Birthday Girl DC, a trio featuring Mabel Canty (daughter of the Fugazi drummer Brendan Canty) on guitar and vocals, Isabella MacKaye (daughter of the D.C. hard-core scene veteran Alec MacKaye) on bass and the drummer Tess Kontarinis.

Canty, 17, was supposed to be among Timony’s guitar students, but during their first lesson, she mentioned that she’d been working on a song called “Ibuprofen.” Timony switched gears and helped record it.

“I learned that recording is not scary,” Canty said, describing a low-stakes environment where Timony’s cats, Hildegard and Hieronymus, roamed. “She took away a lot of fright for me. I was actively getting over a bunch of fears and a lot of indecisiveness.” (With a laugh, Timony said Canty was probably at ease “because I’m not as good at recording as her dad.”)

After several years of teaching, Timony realized that her gifts didn’t lie exclusively in her guitar heroics. “The thing that I find the most healing in my life has been writing songs,” she said. “It took me a while to go, ‘Oh, wait, what do I actually have to pass on?’ It took coming into my own power, something that’s happened in the past five or six years through a lot of personal growth, to actually really value my own art and what I have to give.”

Chatting about songwriting with students began as something she was doing on the side during lessons. In 2023, she solidified her mentorship practice by taking an online course on creativity coaching with Eric Maisel, a therapist and author, that helped her overcome some of her obstacles. “Halfway through, I was just coaching myself,” she said over a cup of green tea with almond milk. She put an ad on Instagram offer-



RYAN PFLUGER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Mary Timony, above and near right, made her name in a number of indie-rock bands, including Wild Flag, right, with Rebecca Cole, center, and Carrie Brownstein in 2011.

ing songwriting coaching with lessons, which was flooded with replies, and now works with three adult students.

“I’ve always known this about me and teaching when it’s going well: I’m doing something that it’s my duty as a human to do,” said Timony, a warm and introspective conversationalist. “It’s not like a business that I’m trying to make money off.” She said she would still do it even if wasn’t bringing in much income. “It’s like a spiritual practice,” she said.

“It took me a while to go, ‘Oh, wait, what do I actually have to pass on?’ It took coming into my own power.”

One of her most prominent pupils is Lindsey Jordan, the 25-year-old singer-songwriter behind the indie-rock band Snail Mail. Jordan, who grew up in Baltimore, began working with Timony just as Snail Mail was beginning to blow up and sought her advice when she was meeting with managers and labels.

“I met up with every single person

who wanted to be involved in Snail Mail and carefully evaluated everybody,” Jordan said in a phone interview. “Mary was extremely helpful in all of that. And there are all these little things to figure out, like the social weirdness of dipping out of the D.I.Y. scene and heading into something else — even if you didn’t even mean to. She lived that.”

Timony didn’t have this kind of guidance when she was coming up in Washington in the early ‘90s, though she did have Fugazi’s Ian MacKaye and his brother, Alec, as childhood neighbors, and she recalled them lobbing magnolia-tree cones at each other in her front yard. Seeing Alec with dyed leopard-print hair and a performance by the band Rites of Spring lit a fire under her to go to countless shows and start making music.

“It was like an island of kids doing their own thing,” she said. “We were all doing this thing and learning about it from each other rather than learning about it from an older generation.”

Timony’s mentees say she has imparted all kinds of wisdom about writing, performing and the music business.



CHAD BATKA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

When Birthday Girl DC opened for her, the group learned how to be kind while remaining assertive during a soundcheck and noted that it was important to take a moment to rehearse before a set. The band also observed how to talk to people who run venues.

“We’ve been played,” Isabella MacKaye, 17, said. “We’ve been taken advan-

tage of a little because of our age.” Timony has long been an inspiration for her — even before she knew it. “My sister and I were obsessed with Ex Hex,” she said. “I always loved her band without really making the connection between that music and the Mary that lives down the street.”

Jordan added that at a time “when

people are trying to become TikTok-fied,” the lessons Timony had taught about sustaining success were crucial. “Like damn, dude, she’s just keeping the legend alive in cool ways,” Jordan said. “It’s artistry, and that’s the only cool thing there is in music.”

The members of Birthday Girl DC refer to Timony as their “music mama” (Canty sent her a “Happy Mother’s Day” text this year), and Timony said being a role model as a woman in rock was important to her. She has taught boys guitar in the past, but she currently teaches and mentors only women.

“When I was their age, there weren’t as many women in bands,” she said. “It was like going to get your car fixed and having a woman be the mechanic. It was like, ‘Oh, there’s a woman in this band!’ It’s hard to even imagine because it’s so very different now.”

Though the landscape has changed, Timony still wants to ensure that her mentees feel confident making and sharing their art. “The underlying thing now in working with these women is it’s my little bit in untangling patriarchy,” she continued. “My favorite thing about it is getting someone to find their own power and heal themselves, because that’s what music did for me. I’m trying to help other people find that.”

The con artist who keeps on giving

BOOK REVIEW

Madoff: The Final Word
By Richard Behar. Avid Reader Press. 384 pp. \$35.

BY ALEXANDRA JACOBS

We don’t yet have “Madoff: The Musical,” but years after his 2021 death from kidney disease in a federal prison hospital, Bernie the Ponzi-scheming potentate keeps yielding cultural dividends. An experimental film shown at Lincoln Center. A Netflix documentary series, “The Monster of Wall Street.” And now, adding to a fat stack that includes a coloring book and an exposé by a New York Times reporter that generated its own Robert De Niro movie, a new prose probe entitled “Madoff: The Final Word.”

Final? As its own author, Richard Behar, admits: doubtful.

A longtime investigative journalist who has taken on, among other formidable institutions, the litigious Church of Scientology, Behar spent 15 years seemingly half-shackled to and half-tickled by this, his first book. Along with many, many secondary interviews, he visited Madoff in prison thrice; talked to him on the phone about 50 times; and received from him

dozens of handwritten letters and hundreds of emails. (He’s far from the first or only reporter to have visited the man in the clink, but the passage of time has loosened some auxiliary tongues — though death has stilled others.)

For every dollar he stole, Madoff seems to have generated at least one piece of regular paper. The hoard of 30 million documents he didn’t manage to destroy, Behar writes, “is nearly half the size of the printed material collection of the U.S. Library of Congress.” The shredding operation Madoff ran starting in the mid-90s, in a Brooklyn facility now called Tuck-It-Away, was like an A.S.M.R. orgy: burlap bags of the scraps taken to a nearby recycling plant, his secrets “dissolving to mulch.”

Who knew he was so eco-conscious? Behar approaches this towering mountain of material with rigor, but also a certain informality. He delights in its wackier crags, like the auction of Madoff goods, the proceeds going to claw back money for those he’d ripped off, at which even his boxer shorts were for sale. Andres Serrano, the artist known for “Piss Christ,” paid \$700 (“which seems crazy cheap”) for 22 pairs of the shoes in Bernie’s large collection, including leopard-print loafers.

Madoff’s reading material in jail, Behar reports, included Leon Uris’s



RUBY WASHINGTON/THE NEW YORK TIMES

1953 novel, “Battle Cry.” But the gruesome deaths of various players in the Madoff saga — the overmedicated multimillionaire floating in a Palm Beach pool; the French financier’s office wastebasket filling with blood from his slashed wrists — are more John Grishammy.

“Madoff: The Final Word” carefully explains complicated matters like the turned cheek of J.P. Morgan Chase,

which Behar calls “a gluttonous hydra when it came to Bernie,” and the trial of the Madoff Five, but it also includes exclamations, asides and expressions like “Poof!” and “amirite.” Behar’s conversational intimacy — he discloses, for example, that his subject’s prison shrink reassured him he was just a compartmentalizer, not a sociopath — would have been fortified considerably by footnotes to distin-

guish between new material and old.

Not until the middle of the book do we learn that Madoff-invested money paid for the author’s own modest down payment on an apartment; his Aunt Adele was one of those who lost her life savings, which she took remarkably well. “I call Bernie ‘My Little Gonif,’” she told him, “using the Yiddish word for a thief or scoundrel. ‘A gonif steals someone’s lollipop but does it cutely!’”

Behar, too, seems determined to see Madoff’s humanity, and the tragedy of his family.

An older son, Mark, died by suicide in 2010, on the anniversary of his father’s arrest; the younger, Andrew, succumbed to lymphoma four years later, and Bernie was not permitted to attend either funeral. “Losing your only children is a life sentence in itself,” Behar writes, “but to mourn them from a literal cage has to be unbearable, even for a financial cannibal.”

He finds a grim humor in Madoff’s widow, Ruth, whose level of complicity remains undetermined. Behar interviews the lawyer who is trying, so far futilely, to return to her the canopied marital bed — “shorter than a queen” — and quotes the hard-boiled F.B.I. agent who chides her for smoking. “Ruth, that’s gonna kill you,” he says. “If only,” she replies.

“No wonder Bernie doesn’t mind prison,” the agent says later. “She

won’t shut the [bleep] up.”

Perhaps most provocatively, Behar takes chapter-long issue with the characterization of Madoff’s wiped-out clients as “victims,” preferring the term “losers.” After all, he writes, “these poor unfortunates had been pulling in massive, impossibly consistent profits without a peep — often for decades.”

He’s right that investors should conduct due diligence. But there’s a weird unacknowledged echo with one of Donald J. Trump’s favorite disparagements that makes Behar’s own, late-in-the-narrative attempt to yoke together Madoff and the former president as avatars of a national mental-health crisis seem shallow.

In a large crowd that includes accountants, key punch operators, secretaries, traders, turncoats, quants, S.E.C. officials, lawyers, court officers and the dear departed Aunt Adele — who worked with neuroscientists and calls for a forensic examination of the warped folds of Bernie’s brain — the psychiatrist Behar consults seems like a last-minute and somewhat awkward invitee.

Even with various quirks and jerks, though, “Madoff: The Final Word” boils a story of mythic proportions down to a bowlful of golden nuggets. If this is the first time you’re being served, so much the better.

TRAVEL

Can a trip really untether you from your phone?

A travel company offers tours to Costa Rica, as long as you store away devices

BY CHRISTINE CHUNG

We were on a quintessential girls' trip to Costa Rica. Together, we gulped icy drinks by the hotel pool, were battered by waves during a surf lesson, had our tarot cards read aboard a catamaran and danced our hearts out, powered by espresso martinis, to early 2000s anthems on a rooftop.

But we didn't capture any of this on our phones. No Instagram stories were posted of the fun being had. No TikToks either. We didn't text photos to friends and family in far colder climates back home.

And if there wasn't a picture, well, did it happen? I had wondered if a vacation without my phone would reprogram my iPhone-addled brain, whether it might deepen the connections I made or improve my travel experiences. So, in mid-April, I joined a group of 10 other women in their 20s and 30s for a four-day, phone-free tour of Guanacaste Province, on Costa Rica's northwestern coast, a picturesque place of breathtaking beaches, tropical forests and, everywhere around you, the chance of a surreal wildlife sighting.

To document my vacation, I brought only a pen, a notebook and a disposable camera.

"MORE PRESENT IN THE MOMENT"

FTLO Travel, which started offering group tours in 2016 for solo travelers 25 to 39 years old, organized our phone-free trip. Most FTLO clients are women, said Tara Cappel, the company's founder and chief executive, and the majority of them are traveling solo for the first time.

The company has long had a rule prohibiting phones at dinner, she said, and the phone-free trips, which began this year, are an extension of this.



The author joined a four-day, phone-free tour of Costa Rica's Guanacaste Province to see if a vacation without her phone would improve the experience. Clockwise from top: travelers at a resort in Tamarindo, which borders the Pacific Ocean; Guanacaste Province in northwest Costa Rica, where surfing is a popular activity; travelers exploring a forest; a Costa Rican breakfast of eggs, beans and rice; and horseback riders along a beach.



CHRISTINE CHUNG

"Removing that sort of temptation has always helped facilitate better bonding and conversation," said Ms. Cappel, 35.

The hope in providing an entirely phone-free experience, she continued, is that travelers could "be present in the experience and the destination and with each other."

She added that FTLO's phone-free trips this year, which start at \$1,699 and also head to Iceland, Mexico, Cuba and Puerto Rico, are in strong demand. My Costa Rica trip was sold out and overall, the company anticipates a total of about 3,000 travelers on the hundreds of trips they're offering this year.

The interest in these trips stems in part from a growing trend among travelers to try to escape technology's tether on daily life. Operators are moving beyond offering meditation retreats and truly remote locations — even cruises and hotels in buzzy vacation hot spots these days market their disconnection experiences. At the Grand Velas Resorts, on Mexico's Riviera Maya, guests can opt for a detox concierge, who will remove the hotel room's flat screen television and lock all personal electronics in a safe. With Unplugged, a company specializing in tech-free escapes, you can book a "digital detox cabin" to spend three tech-free days in the English countryside.

Heather Orton, a nurse practitioner and my roommate in Costa Rica, said that going phone-free was the main reason she'd booked the FTLO trip. She'd previously gone on two trips with FTLO, to Crete and to Morocco, experiences where she made lasting friendships.

"At work I have to always have my phone on, be responsive to texts, emails and calls," said Ms. Orton, 37, of Ohio. "It's nice to turn that off and get away." She said she felt she was "more present in the moment" and fully immersed in Costa Rica.

A BIT LIKE SLEEPAWAY CAMP

We'd come from all over the United States, including Texas, Alabama,



CHRISTINE CHUNG

California and Minnesota, and most of us were meeting for the very first time.

It felt like sleepaway camp, or college orientation — it was a social situation structured around group activities that quickly gave rise to new friendships, even if they were brittle ones.

Two ebullient trip leaders corralled us to various activities and recited facts about local flora and fauna, all adding to the feeling of a camp for adults, and at times like being chaperoned on a school trip.

They directed us to their favorite restaurants and watering holes and attempted to draw everyone into conversation and ensure no one felt left out.

One afternoon, Mandy, one of the co-leaders and a certified yoga instructor, led a trio of us in a restorative flow at our hotel. Dani, the other trip leader, who was born in Costa Rica, was on crutches because of a recent ankle injury, but he hobbled along energet-

ically on nights out, swaying to dance music on one leg.

Companies catering to younger travelers, like FTLO, G Adventures, Flashpack and others, aren't touting their ability to get you to a place, but the connections they can deliver.

"The inspiration was really to help people go abroad who had the desire but didn't necessarily have people to go with," Ms. Cappel said of creating FTLO.

Sambavi Venkatesen, a 32-year-old therapist who lives in Austin, Texas, told me she had booked the trip after turning to TikTok to research group travel for people of color.

"The opportunity to meet other diverse women is not something that's easily accessible in your 30s. That was kind of a big appeal," she said, adding that she felt a real connection to other tour participants by trip's end. "I genuinely want to see people again and hope they visit me."



CHRISTINE CHUNG

fluidly than I expected they would without the crutch of a phone for idly filling silence. I slept more deeply than I had in months. But my phone's phantom presence loomed large. I swiveled my head, a Pavlovian response, when I heard the ping of another tourist's phone. My bag felt too light, which made me feel uneasy.

Mainly, I missed a good camera. Others had wisely brought digital cameras along, but I had to ration the pictures on my disposable camera and allowed myself to take only one food photo. It's fuzzy. Not everyone on the trip was fully committed to the screen time ban. One night, as I tried to capture sunset using my disposable, one of my trip mates pulled out her phone and took a picture. I'm sure her photo is better than mine. Toward the end of the trip, I learned that some other travelers had surreptitiously used their phones throughout (to text and call their moms, mostly).

But we delighted in seeing a drowsy



HEATHER ORTON

UNSCHEDULED TIME

We were based in Tamarindo, a lively tourist playground set along the Pacific Ocean that spanned just a few blocks, making it easy to navigate without GPS. We were given a printed map of the town, which I barely used. With my phone and laptop locked in the hotel room safe, gone were all the tools I usually rely on while traveling (and check frenetically): map and translation apps, social media and internet, for restaurant and activity searches. But thanks to the tour, this work had already been done.

We spent an afternoon ziplining through canyons and then crossed a rickety suspension bridge to plunge into the icy, refreshing waters by a waterfall. We surfed and drank beer — two activities I do not generally voluntarily sign up for. We lounged on the netted deck of a catamaran, where we watched a deep-red sun sink into the sea. Nearly every night we frequented a different nightclub.

We started the trip knowing nothing*

about one another's lives, from our ages to interests. Our first night was characterized by icebreakers ("share a fun fact about yourself") and the occasional awkward silence. But by the third night, we were screaming the lyrics to Lil Jon's "Get Low" in the club. And the conversation grew more nuanced, as we shared stories about jobs, relationships, beloved pets and the rhythms of lives back home.

Some of the best moments happened during the time left unscheduled, when I made my own decisions about activities. A highlight of the trip was an excursion my roommate and I booked on our own, through the hotel, to kayak in a mangrove-bordered estuary, where we spotted iguanas, howler monkeys and a crocodile, watchful and still in the murky waters.

A FUZZY FOOD PHOTO

Overall, I didn't miss my phone. The absence of Slack notifications and countless other digital intrusions was bliss. Conversations unspooled more

tapir, a large mammal almost mythical because of its rarity, wake from an afternoon nap in Hacienda Guachipelin, a private property by Rincon de la Vieja National Park. There were also dozens of howler monkeys perched atop mangroves swaying in the wind, and one night, a man who was absolutely shredding on the guitar at a beachfront bar. All were incredible moments that I've already revisited in my memory.

On the last day of the trip, we switched our phones back on, jolting us back to real life with pings and vibrations. We shared Instagram handles to connect online, and I returned, almost without realizing it, to a stream of information, push notifications, digital itineraries, unfettered scrolling and the expectation of a quick reply to a message. I've tried, however, to maintain the feeling of being phone-free in Tamarindo: the delicious lack of immediacy, the way time seemed to expand languidly.

Simply put, I'm using my phone less.