



CHANG W. LEE/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Demanding Impeachment in Seoul

Protesters outside the National Assembly on Friday. President Yoon Suk Yeol’s own party leader has backed his removal. Page A10.

How One of the World’s Richest Men Avoids \$8 Billion in Taxes

By JESSE DRUCKER

Jensen Huang, the chief executive of Nvidia, is the 10th-richest person in the United States, worth \$127 billion. In theory, when he dies, his estate should pay 40 percent of his net worth to the government in taxes.

But Mr. Huang, 61, is not only an engineering genius and Silicon Valley icon whose company, the world’s second-most valuable, makes the chips that power much artificial intelligence. He is also

the beneficiary of a series of tax dodges that will enable him to pass on much of his fortune tax free, according to securities and tax filings reviewed by The New York Times.

The savings for his family are on pace to be roughly \$8 billion. It likely ranks among the largest tax dodges in the United States.

The types of strategies Mr. Huang has deployed to shield his wealth have become ubiquitous among the ultrawealthy. Blackstone Group’s Stephen A.

Nvidia’s Chief Employs Go-To Loopholes for the Ultrawealthy

Schwarzman, Meta’s Mark Zuckerberg and top executives at Google, Coinbase, Eli Lilly, Mastercard and Advanced Micro Devices have collectively shifted billions of dollars into financial vehicles in order to avoid the federal

estate tax, according to a Times analysis of securities disclosures.

It is just one sign of how the estate tax — imposed solely on a sliver of the country’s multimillionaires — has been eviscerated.

Revenue from the tax has barely changed since 2000, even as the wealth of the richest Americans has roughly quadrupled. If the estate tax had simply kept pace, it would have raised around \$120 billion last year. Instead it brought in about a quarter of that.

Continued on Page A18

Trump’s Choice For Top Doctor Defied Trauma

By JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN

Needing a pair of scissors, a 13-year-old girl went into the bedroom where her father was sleeping and reached for a fishing tackle box on a shelf above the bed. But in the darkened room, she accidentally knocked it over.

“Something fell out of it and there was a loud noise,” she recounted to the police. “I saw blood on my father’s ear.” On the floor was a .380 caliber handgun that had fallen with the tackle box and discharged. The girl’s father had been shot through the head. The local newspaper said the police believed it was a “freak accident.”

That terrible family trauma, which unfolded in the small Florida town of Umatilla in February 1990, set the girl on a new trajectory. It was because of this event, she has said, that she grew up to become a doctor. Saving lives, she thought, would help her cope with the pain and sense of helplessness she felt from her father’s death. Now she is poised to become the next surgeon general.

When President-elect Donald J. Trump announced he would nominate Dr. Janette Nesheiwat to be “the nation’s doctor,” as the office is sometimes called, he was making an unorthodox pick. Traditionally, the surgeon general has been selected from an impressive pool of public health officials, policy experts, renowned physicians or accomplished plague fighters.

Dr. Nesheiwat spent her career far removed from major research institutions, hospitals or medical

Continued on Page A19



JORDAN VONDERHAAR FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

In Johnson County, Texas, ranchers sued Synagro after a neighboring farm used sludge fertilizer.

They Hurt Farms. Now, They Want Protection.

By HIROKO TABUCHI

For decades, a little-known company now owned by a Goldman Sachs fund has been making millions of dollars from the unlikely dregs of American life: sewage sludge.

The company, Synagro, sells farmers treated sludge from factories and homes to use as fertilizer. But that fertilizer, also known as PFAS, can contain harmful “forever chemicals” known as PFAS linked to serious health problems including cancer and birth defects.

Farmers are starting to find the chemicals contaminating their

Sludge Firm Lobbies to Limit Liability From Toxic Chemicals

land, water, crops and livestock. Just this year, two common types of PFAS were declared hazardous substances by the Environmental Protection Agency under the Superfund law.

Now, Synagro is part of a major effort to lobby Congress to limit the ability of farmers and others to sue to clean up fields polluted by the sludge fertilizer, according to

lobbying records and interviews with people familiar with the strategy. The chairman of one of the lobbying groups is Synagro’s chief executive.

In a letter to the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works in March, sludge-industry lobbyists argued that they shouldn’t be held liable because the chemicals were already in the sludge before they received it and made it into fertilizer.

The lobbying has found early success. A bill introduced by Senators John Boozman of Arkansas and Cynthia Lummis of Wyoming, both Republicans, would protect

Continued on Page A20

Syria Sealed In As Rebels Gain Ground Swiftly

Iran Pulls Back While Borders Slam Shut

This article is by Raja Abdulrahim, Farnaz Fassihi and Thomas Fuller.

JERUSALEM — The collection of rebel groups fighting to depose President Bashar al-Assad of Syria pushed farther south on Friday toward a major city en route to the capital, as the government’s chief patron, Iran, moved to evacuate military commanders and other personnel from the country.

The rebels’ stunningly rapid gains spread alarm to neighboring countries, prompting border closures to guard against the prospect of further chaos as Mr. al-Assad’s authoritarian government lost more of its grip over swaths of the country.

And in another sign of the government’s loosening control, a Kurdish-led force backed by the United States, which is separate from the rebels advancing on Homs, said it had deployed in the eastern city of Deir al-Zour, which the government had previously held.

Taken together, the battlefield gains present the most serious challenge in years to Mr. al-Assad’s power.

But perhaps most significant was the withdrawal of Iranian personnel after more than a decade of staunch support for Mr. al-Assad. Those evacuated included top commanders of Iran’s powerful Quds Forces, the external branch of the Revolutionary Guards Corps, according to Iranian and regional officials.

Evacuations were ordered at the Iranian Embassy in Damascus, and at bases of the Revolutionary Guards, Iranian and regional officials said. Iranians began to leave Syria early Friday, the officials said, heading toward Lebanon and Iraq.

U.S. officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Damascus could soon be under threat. A senior State Department official said Mr. al-Assad needed ground forces and that Iran would be hesitant to provide any.

The U.S. Embassy in Damascus Continued on Page A12

CHANGING HANDS Syrian rebel forces have seized land, upending a once-stagnant conflict. PAGE A11

TIKTOK FACES BAN AFTER U.S. JUDGES UPHOLD NEW LAW

COMPANY VOWS APPEAL

Shutdown Looms Unless Chinese Owner Sells App by Jan. 19

By SAPNA MAHESHWARI

TikTok is one step closer to disappearing in the United States after a panel of federal judges on Friday unanimously upheld a new law that could lead to the banning of the popular Chinese-owned video app by mid-January.

The three judges, in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, denied TikTok’s petition to overturn the law. The decision could be a death blow for the app in one of its biggest markets. More than 170 million Americans use TikTok to entertain and inform themselves, turning it into a cultural phenomenon. The looming loss of the app in the United States had spurred concern from free speech advocates and from the creators whose income depends on TikTok.

The decision also raises new questions for President-elect Donald J. Trump, who has repeatedly signaled his support for the app, but who doesn’t have a clear path for rescuing it under the new law. The ban is scheduled to go into effect the day before his inauguration.

The law, signed in April, requires TikTok’s Chinese owner, ByteDance, to sell the app to a non-Chinese company by Jan. 19 or face a ban in the United States. TikTok, which has raised national security concerns among politicians since 2020 because of its ties to China, has said a sale is impossible, in part because it would be blocked by the Chinese government. The company argued that the law unfairly singled out TikTok and that a ban would infringe on the First Amendment rights of American users.

The judges disagreed with TikTok’s argument. They said the law was “carefully crafted to deal with only control by a foreign adversary,” and didn’t run afoul of the First Amendment. “The government acted solely to protect that freedom from a foreign adversary nation and to limit that adversary’s access to the app,” they wrote. Continued on Page A16

New Starring Role for a Lamb Of Old TV: Dog’s Best Friend

By ALEXANDRA E. PETRI

Most toys that cross Foxie’s path rarely last. Rope toys are torn to shreds. Squeaky ones fall silent in her paws. Stuffedies lose their eyes and ears once Foxie’s 12-pound frame gets hold of them.

But when Andy Batdorf and his partner gave their senior Yorkie-Maltese mix a soft, miniature lamb wearing a birthday hat, Foxie was different. She played with the squeaky toy gently and even wanted to carry it outside on a walk. Mr. Batdorf recalled wondering whether Foxie’s tenderness toward Lamb Chop was because they looked similar — both white and fluffy.

“Her maternal instincts kicked in,” Mr. Batdorf, 35, said. “She treats it like her own little pup.”

One of the hottest dog toys in America is a squeaky stuffed animal toy named Lamb Chop. On the surface it doesn’t look unique, but it has taken a mysteriously strong hold on the country’s dogs and their owners: Millions are sold annually, and it is consistently one of the top-selling toys on Chewy, Petco and Amazon, where listings get thousands of rave reviews.

Dog owners throw Lamb Chop-



TONY CENICOLA/THE NEW YORK TIMES

With a name like Lamb Chop, the toy was fated to be on top.

themed parties and photo shoots. They dress their dogs as Lamb Chop for Halloween and buy them Lamb Chop beds to sleep in alongside dozens of their Lambys, as they are affectionately called. One dog owner even has a commissioned painting of his dog walking through a forest with Lamb Chop. The dogs, from rat terriers to Rott-

Continued on Page A20



INTERNATIONAL A4-12

An Arctic Hamlet Is Sinking

Canada is losing its permafrost to climate change. Some of its Indigenous residents will have to leave. PAGE A6

Europe-South America Trade

The E.U. and Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay will lift tariffs on meat, cars, wine and chocolate. PAGE A8

NATIONAL A13-20

Flood of Tips, but No Arrest

Investigators have recovered DNA from a water bottle they believe was discarded by the man who killed a health care executive in Manhattan. PAGE A17

Facing a Lesser Charge

The judge in the case of Daniel Penny, accused in a subway death, dismissed the manslaughter charge. PAGE A17

SPORTS B8-11

Recruits Changing Programs

In the new college football landscape, players flipping their commitments is more common than ever. PAGE B8



BUSINESS B1-7

The Roots of N.B.A. Courts

Their creation is a triumph of its own that begins thousands of miles away in a tiny Midwestern mill town. PAGE B1

Job Growth on the Rebound

After disruptions from storms and a major strike, hiring bounced back with a gain of 227,000 in November. PAGE B1

ARTS C1-6

World’s Priciest Dinosaur Fossil

The billionaire Kenneth C. Griffin, who paid \$44.6 million for a stegosaurus fossil, is lending it to the American Museum of Natural History. PAGE C1

TRAVEL C7-8

36 Hours in Honolulu

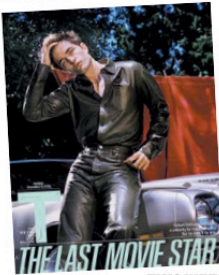
On the island of Oahu, rich Indigenous culture converges with Asian influences and midcentury Americana against a backdrop of surf and sand. PAGE C8

OPINION A22-23

Peter Coy

PAGE A23

T MAGAZINE



THIS WEEKEND



Inside The Times

The New York Times

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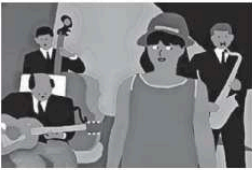
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The Newspaper and Beyond

TODAY'S PAPER

Corrections A17
Crossword C3
Obituaries A21, B12

Opinion A22-23
Weather B5
Classified Ads B11



VIDEO

When the Styles desk compiles its most stylish people of the year list, it looks at “style” more broadly than the way people dress. The fashion news editor Anthony Rotunno analyzed some people on the 2024 list at nytimes.com/video.

AUDIO

Brazilian jazz is bossa nova and samba, but so much more — funky, soulful and esoteric. We asked a panel of musicians, scholars and writers to choose their favorite songs in the genre. Hear their selections at nytimes.com/music.

NEWSLETTER

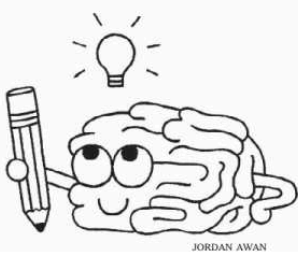
In his latest newsletter, Frank Bruni, a contributing Opinion writer, examined President-elect Donald J. Trump's cabinet selections. “In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king,” he wrote. Sign up at nytimes.com/newsletters.

Quote of the Day

“Yes, I am a cult leader. I control the dogs.”

LAMB CHOP, a puppet voiced by Mallory Lewis, on the vast popularity that Lamb Chop toys have among canines and their owners. Page A1.

The News Quiz



Did you follow the headlines this week?
Take our quiz to find out.

1. President Biden pardoned his son Hunter this week, after insisting he would not do so. What did he say was the reason for his decision?

- a. The charges against Hunter were politically motivated.
- b. The Second Amendment should have protected Hunter.
- c. Hunter was framed.
- d. President-elect Donald J. Trump would have done the same for his son.
- e. Nothing; he did not comment on the pardon.

2. Brian Thompson, chief executive of one of the nation's largest insurers, was fatally shot in Manhattan this week, leading to a manhunt for the gunman. Which company did he lead?

- a. Blue Cross Blue Shield
- b. CVS Health
- c. Elevance Health
- d. Kaiser Permanente
- e. UnitedHealthcare

3. Mr. Trump's choice to lead the F.B.I. has called for purging agency officials, staffing the bureau with loyalists and prosecuting leakers and journalists. Who is his pick?

- a. William Barr
- b. Chad Chronister
- c. Tulsi Gabbard
- d. Kash Patel
- e. Elise Stefanik

4. A winner was called this week in the final race for the House of Representatives. Democrats control 215 seats. How many do Republicans control?

- a. 200
- b. 215
- c. 220
- d. 250
- e. 323

5. The Supreme Court heard arguments on Wednesday over whether to uphold a Tennessee law. What did the law ban?

- a. Abortion pills
- b. Bump stocks
- c. Same-sex marriage
- d. Sleeping outdoors
- e. Transition care to transgender youth



CHANG W. LEE/THE NEW YORK TIMES

6. Thousands of South Koreans took to the streets (above) this week to protest what?

- a. A currency crash
- b. A law reducing retirement benefits
- c. An assassination in the legislature
- d. The government's response to a typhoon
- e. The president's declaration of martial law

7. France's prime minister, Michel Barnier, lost a no-confidence vote in Parliament this week. For how long had he been prime minister?

- a. A week
- b. Three months
- c. A year
- d. Two years
- e. Five years

8. A civil war in what country, which has been running for 13 years, rapidly intensified over the past week as rebels took control of a major city?

- a. Central African Republic
- b. Libya
- c. Myanmar
- d. Syria
- e. Sudan

9. Notre-Dame in Paris will reopen to the public this weekend, five years after _____ severely damaged the cathedral. Fill in the blank.

- a. An earthquake
- b. A fire
- c. A flood
- d. High winds
- e. Protesting atheists

10. A box office record was set on Thanksgiving weekend in the United States, thanks to the three top-grossing films: “Wicked,” “Gladiator II” and what?

- a. “The Lion King: Mufasa’s Revenge”
- b. “Moana 2”
- c. “The Muppets Take the Metaverse”
- d. “Toy Story 5”
- e. “Young Gru”

11. The price of Bitcoin reached a record high this week. Roughly what is the value of a single Bitcoin?

- a. \$100
- b. \$1,000
- c. \$10,000
- d. \$100,000
- e. \$1,000,000

The News Quiz is published on Fridays in the Morning newsletter. To sign up, visit nytimes.com/themorning.

Solutions: 1. A; 2. E; 3. D; 4. C; 5. E; 6. E; 7. B; 8. D; 9. B; 10. B; 11. D.

Today's Top Trending Headlines

▶ **Biden Team Considers Blanket Pardons Before Trump's Promised ‘Retribution’** White House officials are worried that President-elect Donald J. Trump's partisan selections for top Justice Department positions indicate that he will seek revenge against his perceived enemies. Among the list of names floated for potential pardons are former Representative Liz Cheney, who was vice chair of the committee that investigated Mr. Trump's role in the attack on the U.S. Capitol, and Jack Smith, the outgoing special counsel who prosecuted Mr. Trump.

▶ **The ‘Chilling’ Fatal Shooting of a C.E.O. Has Business Leaders On Edge** The killing of Brian Thompson, a health insurance chief executive, on Wednesday stunned executives, some of whom were already concerned about safety. Emma Goldberg reported on a sharp rise in targeted attacks of corporate leaders and their families over the last five years, a period during which digital platforms have made it easier to obtain information about their identities and locations.

▶ **The Allure of ‘Microdosing’ Ozempic** Despite limited evidence, some people are taking tiny amounts of weight loss medications, hoping to drop pounds while avoiding side effects from standard doses. So, does microdosing work? The health reporter Dani Blum talked to doctors and researchers who shared their insights and concerns.

▶ **How a Stowaway at J.F.K. Airport Made It All the Way to Paris** On a busy travel day last week, a woman who hid among crowds at Kennedy International Airport managed to fly from New York to France without a passport or a boarding pass. Svetlana Dali, 57, faces up to five years in prison if found guilty of sneaking aboard an aircraft in an incident that raises troubling questions about airport security.

A Headline From History

200,000 ATTEND COAST ROCK FETE

December 7, 1969. Thousands of rock fans converged on the hillsides surrounding Altamont Speedway in Tracy, Calif., for a free concert given by the Rolling Stones. The Times reported the following day. The event, which also featured performances by Santana, Jefferson Airplane and Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, was originally planned for Golden Gate Park in San Francisco but was relocated to the speedway just a few days beforehand. Though a doctor at the festival was quoted as saying that there were no major injuries, a small news item below the article told of a young man attending the concert, Meredith Hunter, who died of stab wounds. After the 18-year-old pulled out a gun during a confrontation near the stage, he was beaten and knifed multiple times by members of the Hells Angels motorcycle gang, who were there to provide security. Alan Passaro, one of the gang members, was charged with Mr. Hunter's murder but found not guilty in January 1971.



Facts of Interest

Roughly 500,000 households in New York City spend at least half of their income on rent.

New York City Approves a Plan To Create 80,000 New Homes A13

Research suggests that you'll spend less than you otherwise would by setting a strict, even somewhat unrealistic budget.

There's Still Time to Budget For Holidays B4

A math exam given last year to fourth and eighth graders from dozens of education systems across the globe found that since 2019, American fourth graders have declined 18 points in math, while eighth graders have declined 27 points.

U.S. Students Show Declines That Are Dire in Math Exam A19

Apex, a stegosaurus fossil that sold for a record \$44.6 million at auction and is now on loan to the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, contains about 254 fossil bone elements out of an approximate total of 320.

Dinosaur to Visit New York for a Bit C1

Connor Sports, one of the leading makers of hardwood basketball courts, produces most of them with northern hard maple, a dense, durable wood harvested from forests above the 35th parallel.

The Midwestern Roots Of N.B.A. Courts B1

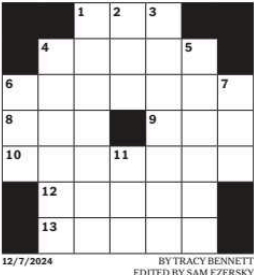
Borneo is the world's third-largest island. It is shared by three Southeast Asian countries: Malaysia and Brunei occupy the northern third, and Indonesia the rest.

An Island That Makes Animal Lovers Go Wild C7

One in 40 Brazilians has the surname Silva.

Among Silvas Across Brazil, Shared Name Has Grim Past A4

The Mini Crossword



12/7/2024 BY TRACY BENNETT EDITED BY SAM EZERSKY

- ACROSS**
- 1 Gift box topper
 - 4 Name that's an anagram of CABLE
 - 6 Prominent body part in a Rosie the Riveter poster
 - 8 Frequently, in poetry
 - 9 Fish in a Japanese garden pond
 - 10 Mysterious special "something"
 - 12 Receded like the tide
 - 13 English class assignment

- DOWN**
- 1 Bills for drinks
 - 2 World Cup cheer
 - 3 Watered-down argument, in slang
 - 4 ___ badging (swiping in at the office before heading to work remotely)
 - 5 Unhappy and deep in thought
 - 6 Cunning critter
 - 7 Soviet-era space station
 - 11 "Survivor" network

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE

T	B	A
P	A	R
C	R	A
P	O	K
T	E	N

Might We Suggest . . .

Four Weekend Recommendations From Around the Newsroom

1 Crafting Gifts With Meaning
Don't let the giving season overwhelm you. Sometimes the best gifts come from the heart, and your own two hands. The chef and food writer Samin Nosrat makes apricot jam that she gifts to friends. Your loved ones will appreciate the time and attention you take to make or pick out just the right gift, no matter the cost. [nytimes.com/style](#)

2 Trimming the Mantel
As far as home décor goes, this is the season of more is more. Bunny Williams, a decorator, suggests using greenery and ornaments to decorate a fireplace mantel. Look outside for evergreens, flat cedar and berries. Add eucalyptus and magnolia leaves for texture, and something sparkly, and secure with painter's tape. [nytimes.com/realestate](#)



STEFANO UKMAR

3 Adding Color to Your Wardrobe
Brightness and lights don't have to be confined to ornaments. Put your shine on with colorful garb, like a bright blue Louis Vuitton skirt, or a Balenciaga dress the color of the Mediterranean, as shown in T Magazine. Why not an orange jumpsuit? You can find clothes in bright hues at any price point to bring you joy as winter's dark days set in. [tmagazine.com](#)

4 Starting Early on a New Year's Resolution
Waiting to start your new fitness routine on Jan. 1 is so last year. On social media, influencers are talking up their so-called winter arc plans, or the three-month routines meant to kick-start new wellness habits. One suggested drinking a gallon of water a day, working out four to five times a week, putting the phone on do not disturb after 8 p.m. and reading "a book that interests you." What are your winter arc resolutions? [nytimes.com/well](#)

Second Look

Addicted to Speed



SAM D'ORAZIO

In this age of instant gratification, retailers have figured out that we get a dopamine high when the goods we order online are delivered quickly, and they are profiting from feeding our habit. Their data shows the faster they get our goods to us, the more we buy. Walmart says it can now offer same-day delivery to 86 percent of all U.S. households, and recently started deliveries of as quickly as 30 minutes. Target's average shipping times for all orders are nearly a day faster than they were a year ago. And if you live in Arizona or Texas, Amazon's drones can get packages to you within an hour. Pretty soon, they'll be delivering goods to us before we even know we want them.

Here to Help

How to Make Your Sofa Look Even More Inviting

With sofas, comfort comes first. But a couch typically "occupies prime real estate" in a room, said the decorator Alexandra Pappas of Pappas Miron Design — meaning it's worth thinking about its visual appeal. For an original look, the more colors, shapes and textiles you can incorporate, the better.

We asked some interior designers for practical advice on creating an inviting layered effect on sofas. **ALEXA BRAZILIAN**

Try mismatched, patterned pillows. The experts agree that a mix of different pillows is more visually interesting than a uniform set. Gabrielle Soyer, the owner of the Paris home goods store Lindell & Co. says that contrasting shades and styles add depth to a room. She recommends using an odd number of pillows, for example two on one side of the sofa and three on the other, because the asymmetry makes the styling look more natural.

But "don't over-pillow," warned Robin Standefer, a co-founder of the New York design studio Roman and Williams, "and keep them at a reasonable scale." Generally speaking, that means choosing ones that are not taller than the backrest or wider than the seat cushions of your sofa. Creating your own pillowcases is another way to add personality to your setup.

Go big with throws and other textiles. "Blankets and throws are not always meant to be flung" over a sofa's arm, says Ms. Standefer. As an alternative, she likes to




COURTESY OF LINDELL & CO.

create a "sofa carpet," an English decorating tradition in which a large blanket is draped over most of the couch, with one side tucked behind the backrest and the other beneath the seat cushions.

The New York-based designer John Derian also recommends this technique and likes to use Jeanette Farrier's neutral-colored Kantha blankets — Indian and Bengali quilts hand-stitched from discarded cotton scraps — or antique linen top sheets.

Add finishing touches. Ms. Standefer likes to cover seat cushions with black or white sheepskin pelts, a common choice in Scandinavian homes. "It's earthy and refined at the same time," she said. Ms. Pappas recommends putting a small silver or tole tray, or a place mat with raised edges, on one of your couch cushions. That way, you can "corral all of the remotes and have a spot for your tea or cocktail," she said.

For more decorating advice, visit [tmagazine.com](#).



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International

The New York Times

Among Silvas Across Brazil, Shared Name Has Grim Past

Inherited by Millions From Enslaved Relatives

By ANA IONOVA

RIO DE JANEIRO — Fernando Santos da Silva's surname — shared by 150 relatives — is an heirloom from a grim chapter of Brazil's history.

Like millions of others in Latin America's most populated country, he inherited it from his ancestors who were once enslaved, likely named after their captors.

With its painful roots, Silva was long a source of shame even as it became Brazil's most common surname.

But today, the name is treated in a starkly different light.

"Silva is a symbol of resistance," said Mr. Santos da Silva, 32, an antiques vendor from Rio de Janeiro. "It's a connection, both to the present and to my ancestors."

Whenever you meet a Brazilian, there's a good chance that Silva is tucked somewhere in a lengthy, melodic last name. If not, they certainly have a friend or relative who has the name. (Most Brazilians use the surname of both their mother and father.)

Silva is found in the name of the nation's president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, and its most celebrated soccer player, Neymar da Silva Santos Júnior. It's also shared by some five million other Brazilians, from movie stars and Olympic medalists to teachers, drivers and cleaners.

Exactly how Silva spread across Brazil — one in 40 Brazilians has the name — is the subject of some debate. But historians agree that much of its popularity is linked to slaveholders who gave the name to many enslaved people who then passed it down to future generations.

Marked by its colonial roots, the name was for decades synonymous with poverty and oppression in a majority Black country that only abolished slavery in 1888, and where deep racial and economic inequalities persist.

Few Brazilians embraced the name in the past. Many prominent figures, including Ayrton Senna da Silva, a Formula One driver in the 1980s and '90s, quietly dropped Silva from their names.

But as Brazil rethinks how its brutal past helped shape the country's identity, more and more well-known people are spotlighting their surname, conveying the idea that there's nothing shameful about being a Silva.

Celebrities like the mixed martial arts fighter Anderson Silva and a popular musician who goes simply by Silva fill many Brazilians with admiration and transform the name's image.

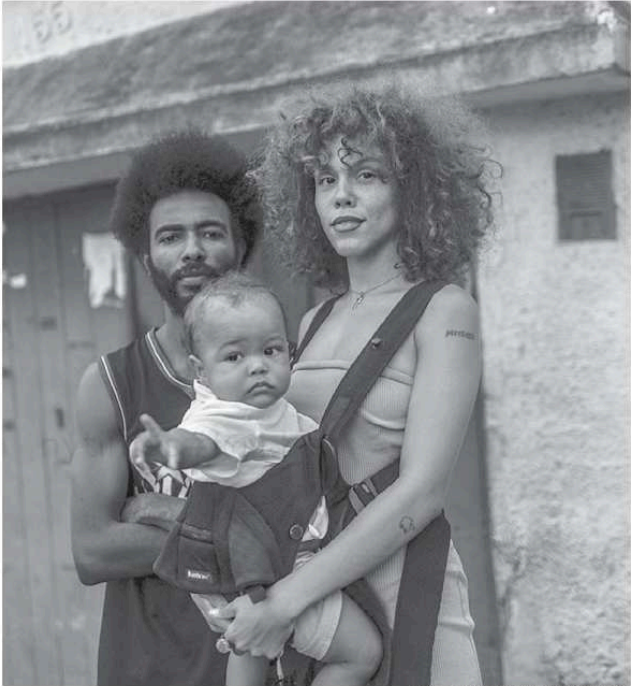
"Today, we are in all kinds of places," said Rene Silva, an activist from one of Rio's largest slums and the host of a television program showcasing the success stories of people, both famous and ordinary, with the name. "It shows that we are fighters — and we are winning."

The name's ubiquity was on full display on a recent afternoon in a busy notary public in Rio de Janeiro.

Behind a counter, Tiago Mendes Silva, a 39-year-old clerk who inherited the name from both his parents, stamped and sealed documents.

"There's always a Silva or two around," said Mr. Mendes Silva, one of the notary's seven employees with the name.

On the other side of the counter, Juscelina Silva Morais, a 59-year-old cafeteria worker, handed over a document



"Silva is a symbol of resistance," said Fernando Santos da Silva, an antiques vendor from Rio de Janeiro, above with his partner, Tamiê Cordeiro, and their baby, Hakin Onã. "It's a connection, both to the present and to my ancestors."



Brazil's president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, in São Paulo in 2022. It's unclear how Mr. Lula inherited his country's most popular name. He considers himself "just another Silva," according to Fernando Morais, his official biographer.

she needed legalized. "This name is part of our story," she said. "It's as Brazilian as it gets."

Mr. Santos da Silva, the antiques vendor, was also there with his partner, Tamiê Cordeiro, filing for a marriage license. "I'm not a Silva yet," joked Ms. Cordeiro, 27. "But I will be soon."

Some historians trace the name Silva back to the Roman Empire, where there is a record of a general with the name. Others link it to noble families in the Iberian Peninsula, a region now home to Spain and Portugal, during the reign of the Kingdom of León, which formed in the 900s.

Derived from the Latin word "selva," or wilderness, the name became common in the 11th and 12th centuries among those who lived and worked near forests in that region.

"There are many possible origins," said Viviane Pompeu, a genealogist who runs a firm that helps Brazilians trace their ancestry. "But we notice that the root always comes from a place in the woods, in the jungle."

The name arrived in Brazil with colonization, with the first record dating to a Portuguese settler in 1612. Notaries began tracking names about a century later and, since then, nearly 32 million Brazilians have been registered as Silva, according to data compiled for The New

York Times by the national association of registrars.

Scholars say African slaves arriving in Brazil by ship were sometimes baptized by priests who gave the name Costa ("coast" in Portuguese) to those headed to coastal cities and the name Silva to those destined for plantations in the country's wild forested regions.

Wealthy landowners named Silva also often gave the surname to people they enslaved, sometimes slipping in the preposition "da" ("of" in Portuguese) to label them as property.

"John of Silva — he belonged to someone from the family Silva," explained Rogério da Palma, a professor at the State University of Mato Grosso do Sul and the author of a book on racism in post-abolition Brazil.

Even after Brazil abolished slavery, the number of Silvas kept swelling. Freed slaves registering for documents for the first time sometimes took the name of the landowners who had once enslaved them and continued to employ them in exchange for room and board.

"It was a way of belonging," Dr. Palma said. "It was also loyalty he had to that slave-owning family."

More than a century later, echoes of this past surfaced in Daniel Fermino da Silva's own family tree.

A history buff, Mr. Fermino da Silva,



Daniel Fermino da Silva spent more than three years searching for traces of his relatives in archives and libraries. He is descended from wealthy landholders on his mother's side and ancestors who were enslaved on his father's side.



Marcelle da Silva Oliveira, a domestic worker, was long ashamed of her surname: "I would say, 'I don't know any Silva who made it in life.'" Now, she sees it as a sign of survival, one that she has since passed down to her children.

45, spent more than three years searching for traces of his ancestors in archives and libraries. He eventually discovered a family history deeply "intertwined with the history of Brazil."

On his mother's side, he descended from wealthy landholders from São Paulo who had once enslaved people. On his father's side, records from the 1700s showed that his Silva ancestors had been enslaved some 500 miles away, in the mineral-rich state of Minas Gerais.

"I see my family and my ancestors as heroes," Mr. Fermino da Silva, an engineer from the southern city of Londrina, said, referring to his father's family.

It's less clear how Brazil's president, the son of illiterate farmers from the country's impoverished northeast, inherited the nation's most popular name.

During colonial rule, the region where Mr. Lula was born saw an influx of Jewish refugees and other migrants fleeing religious persecution in Portugal. Seeking new identities — and anonymity — historians say many new arrivals swapped their names for Silva.

Some scholars believe that might be how Mr. Lula ended up as a Silva. But genealogists have struggled to trace his roots with any certainty.

"It's a big mystery," said Fernando Morais, Mr. Lula's official biographer, who has tried to piece together the presi-

dent's family history.

The president doesn't seem to mind. A former union leader with a fifth-grade education, Mr. Lula considers himself "just another Silva," according to Mr. Morais. "It's the name of the people."

Among the elite, though, Silva often tells a story of privilege. At least four Brazilian politicians and lawmakers, including a former president, had ancestors with the name who had links to slavery, according to data compiled for The Times by Agência Pública, a nonprofit investigative outlet.

The experience of the average Silva was long embodied by a popular 1990s funk song about a working-class man who falls victim to the violence ravaging Rio's suburbs. "It's just another Silva whose star doesn't shine," the lyrics say.

Hearing the song always moved Marcelle da Silva Oliveira, 36, whose father was killed by drug traffickers in a working-class Rio neighborhood when she was young. But for years, she was ashamed of the surname.

"I would say, 'I don't know any Silva who made it in life,'" said Ms. da Silva Oliveira, a domestic worker.

But her view eventually shifted, and she has passed the surname down to her own six children. "We lived through so much, so much humiliation," she said. "Our name is a sign of survival."

No Food, Water or Power for Opponents Hiding From Venezuelan Regime

By GENEVIEVE GLATSKY

BOGOTÁ, Colombia — Several of Venezuela's leading opposition figures, facing arrest warrants, have been in hiding at the Argentine diplomatic residence in the capital, Caracas, for more than eight months, where they have sought asylum.

Now, four months after July's tainted presidential election in which President Nicolás Maduro declared victory without providing any evidence, the authorities are cutting off the residence's access to electricity, water and food, according to Tomás Arias, a lawyer for the opposition group.

The six people played various key roles for the Venezuelan opposition, including helping to organize its presidential campaign.

The move by the Venezuelan authorities reflects a ratcheting up of antagonistic measures by the autocratic government that analysts say is meant to deliver a clear message that Mr. Maduro, who is scheduled to be inaugurated next month, intends to stay in power.

Mr. Maduro, who has a long history of rigging elections in his favor, analysts say, declared victory against Edmundo González, a diplomat who had the back-

ing of the country's popular opposition leader, María Corina Machado.

The president has not released the official vote tallies to back up his claim, while those released by the opposition show that Mr. Gonzalez was the clear winner.

The Venezuelan authorities have used intimidation tactics before. Since the July election, police officers have periodically appeared outside the diplomatic residence in bullet-resistant vests and face masks, sometimes cutting off electricity but then restoring it.

The last time was in September, days before Mr. González fled the country. Once he was gone, the officers left.

Some experts say that this time the authorities are trying to force Ms. Machado, who is also in hiding, into exile.

"It's an attempt to send a clear message that no one from the opposition is safe anywhere in Venezuela," said Tamara Taraciuk Broner, an expert on Venezuela at the Inter-American Dialogue, a research organization in Washington.

This time, the police are not only cutting off the electricity, but also destroying the fuses so the residence is no longer connected to the power grid, Mr. Arias, the lawyer for the group, said. The police also cut off water, preventing water trucks and food deliveries from gaining access to the residence, he added.

"What has intensified is the humanitarian issue," Mr. Arias said.

A senior U.S. diplomat, Brian A. Nichols, called on the Maduro government in a post on X on Wednesday to allow the six "refugees" to leave the country and denounced the "hostile tactics."

The Venezuelan government did not immediately respond to requests by email and text messages for comment. Diosdado Cabello, one of Mr. Maduro's

A clear message to six activists that Maduro plans to stay in power.

most powerful allies, called the opposition's accusations of harassment a "farce" on his television show.

The activists sought asylum at the residence, nestled between the diplomatic residences of Russia and North Korea, after the attorney general issued warrants for their arrest in March.

Days later, the Venezuelan Supreme Court banned Ms. Machado from running in the presidential election, and the opposition party threw its weight behind

Mr. González. The United States and other nations, including Argentina, have recognized Mr. González as the election's legitimate winner.

Days after the vote, Mr. Maduro ordered Argentine diplomats to leave the country, and Brazil assumed responsibility for the embassy.

The Venezuelan government has unleashed a wave of repression against anyone challenging its declared victory, arresting about 2,000 people and charging most with terrorism. Human rights groups have described it as Venezuela's most brutal campaign of aggression in recent decades.

While demonstrators turned out in large numbers after the election, the government backlash has made most Venezuelans reluctant to speak out. A demonstration called by the opposition last Sunday to demand the release of political prisoners had limited attendance.

Many who did show up covered their faces. Some demonstrators said their imprisoned relatives were sick and having suicidal thoughts.

"We are not going to accept that they give us only corpses to bury," said Diego Casanova, explaining that his brother has been imprisoned for four months.

Ms. Machado has also accused the authorities of harassing her mother with armed hooded agents showing up at her

Caracas home with sirens blaring.

The national legislature last week passed a law making it a crime punishable by up to 25 years in prison for supporting international sanctions against the government.

Carlos Blanco, a strategist for Ms. Machado, sees the tightening of the noose around the diplomatic residence as a sign of desperation by the Maduro government. "Support for Maduro is really minimal," he said. "What Maduro has left is pure and hard repression."

The activists inside the diplomatic residence declined to be interviewed, citing security concerns, but in interviews with The New York Times shortly after the July election, some described living in a state of constant anxiety.

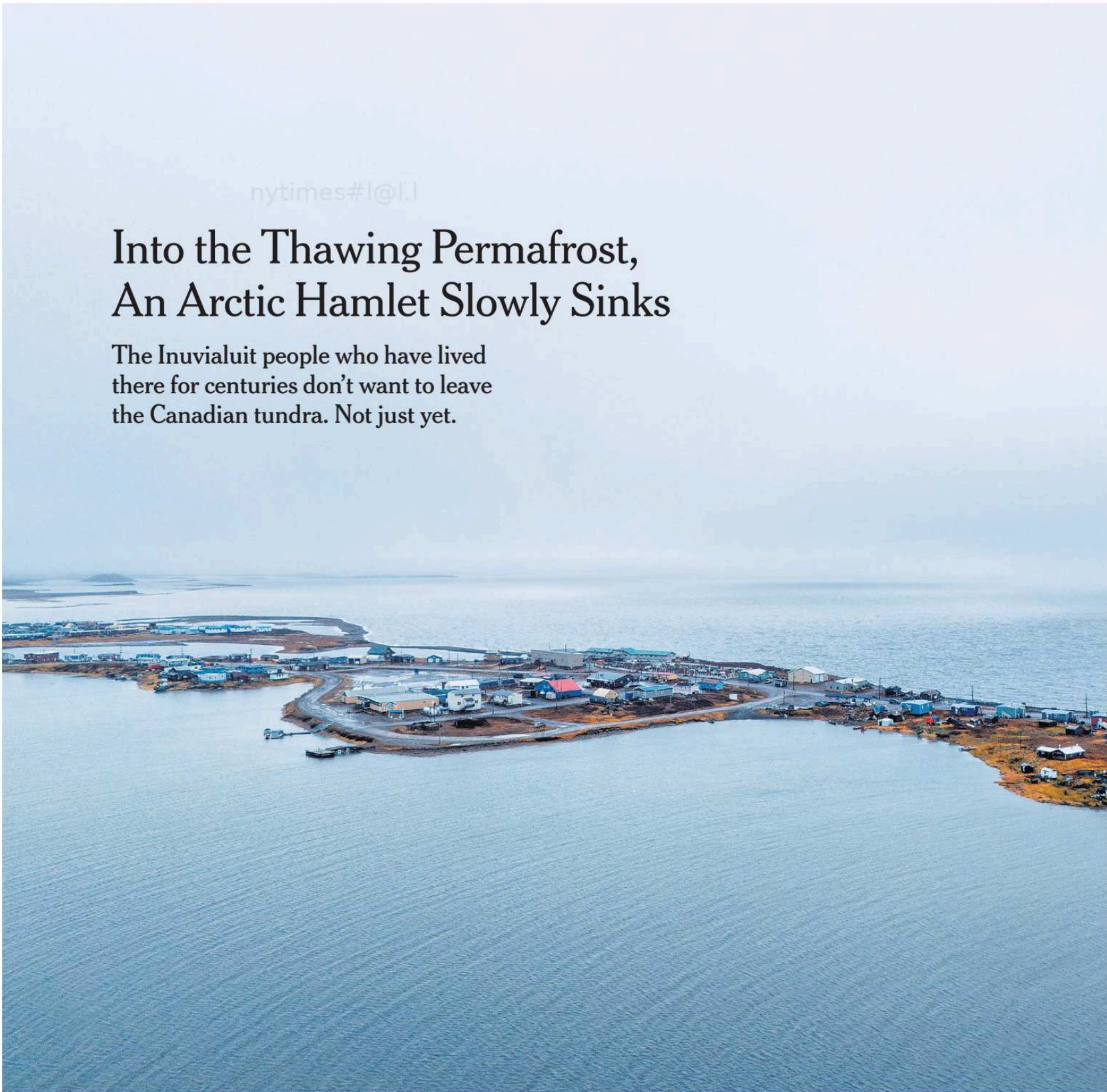
"Today we are here," said Claudia Macero, who led communications for Ms. Machado's party. "Tomorrow I do not know where we are going to be."

Still, they said at the time that they had reached a sort of peace knowing that despite the uncertainty and turmoil, they had followed their consciences and did everything they possibly could to restore democracy to their homeland.

"If this is the price I have to pay for doing the right thing," said Pedro Uruchurtu, who oversaw international affairs for the opposition campaign, "then here I am."

Isayen Herrera contributed reporting from Caracas, Venezuela.

From right, erosion along a road in Tuktoyaktuk. Despite rocks placed behind the old Tuktoyaktuk cemetery, thawing permafrost is causing some parts to collapse. A crack splits a barrier island that protects the hamlet.



Into the Thawing Permafrost, An Arctic Hamlet Slowly Sinks

The Inuvialuit people who have lived there for centuries don't want to leave the Canadian tundra. Not just yet.

Article by NORIMITSU ONISHI
Photographs by RENAUD PHILIPPE

TUKTOYAKTUK, Canada — On the shore of Lake Tiktalik in Canada's Western Arctic, the thawing permafrost had set off two huge landslides into the water, leaving yawning craters on the tundra. These "thaw slumps" measured several hundred feet wide and just as deep.

Jaden Cockney, 17, clambered down the side of one slump as his boss, William Dillon, looked on cautiously. Jaden was part of the team that Mr. Dillon, 69, had created to measure the retreating permafrost. Only a few decades earlier, the permafrost had lain just several inches below much of the region's surface. But now it was thawing so rapidly that it was being pushed further and further underground. Along shorelines, it collapsed into lakes or the Arctic Ocean.

For centuries, the Western Arctic has been home to Mr. Dillon and his ancestors, the Inuvialuit, as the region's Inuit are called. But these days, the thaw slumps — like the one Mr. Dillon's team was documenting 10 miles south of their hamlet, Tuktoyaktuk — are the most dramatic evidence of a phenomenon that could turn the local Inuvialuit into Canada's first climate refugees.

Tuktoyaktuk itself now stands face to face with the Arctic Ocean's increasingly angry Beaufort Sea, and rests atop 1,300 feet to 1,600 feet of thawing permafrost threatening to sink it.

At the bottom of the slump, the teenager advanced by leaping from mounds of solid-looking dirt to torn patches of tundra, avoiding the clay-like mud where he would have sunk. He was about to explore what even many permafrost scientists never manage to see up close.

Poking his measuring probe here and there, he approached a large column of

ice that was somehow still standing. All around, the permafrost had vanished, leaving behind a chaotic landscape strewn with jagged patches of tundra, uprooted brown shrubs and previously frozen dirt that had turned into mud with sudden violence. Long-trapped organic matter was released, giving off the smell of freshly peeled potatoes and unlocking methane and carbon dioxide — both climate-warming gases — into the atmosphere.

Jaden led the monitors back to higher ground and crept toward the edge of the thaw slump.

"Billy, can I go and take a look?" he asked Mr. Dillon without stopping.

The permafrost had disappeared under the slump's edge. Only a layer of tundra projected into the air and could have easily collapsed under Jaden's weight.

"Billy, did you see where I was standing? Did you see the overhang?"

Later, his excitement subsided, Jaden was still unsure of the significance of what he had seen. Did he worry about having to leave Tuktoyaktuk?

"I don't know, not really, kind of," he said, then added, "Maybe as I get older, I might."

Jaden was in 10th grade and worked as a monitor so that he could save for a snowmobile. His boss had been monitoring the land for three decades. Mr. Dillon did not think Tuktoyaktuk would disappear in his lifetime, but he was certain it would in Jaden's.

"Nobody really wants to take the responsibility for saying we have to move," Mr. Dillon said, adding, "But the whole hamlet will be relocated."

A Land Exposed

Only a couple of decades ago, people burying loved ones in Tuktoyaktuk's cemetery first had to light a fire. When



Jaden Cockney, left, examining a landslide on the shores of Lake Tiktalik. A gigantic block of permafrost, cratered by thawing and exposed to the air, represents dramatic evidence of a phenomenon that could turn the local Inuvialuit into Canada's first climate refugees.

enough of the permafrost just beneath the tundra had melted, a grave would be deep enough and a body could be laid to rest.

Nowadays, in some corners of the cemetery, probes are too short to find the permafrost. Along a deep fissure running across the cemetery, gravesites have caved in and crosses lean in the same direction like dominoes ready to topple over. Families had filled other gravesites with gravel to save them.

"If I ever become a billionaire, my fam-

ily's moving with me," Mr. Dillon said, near a cross bearing the name of Eddie Tex Dillon, an older brother who had served as a mayor of the hamlet. "Go find some solid granite to bury my people in."

The fate of the cemetery is one of the most sensitive issues to locals.

"We don't ever relocate a cemetery in our Inuvialuit culture," said Erwin Elias, Tuktoyaktuk's mayor. "But we don't want kids to be seeing coffins floating out into the ocean."

Mr. Dillon and his team regularly

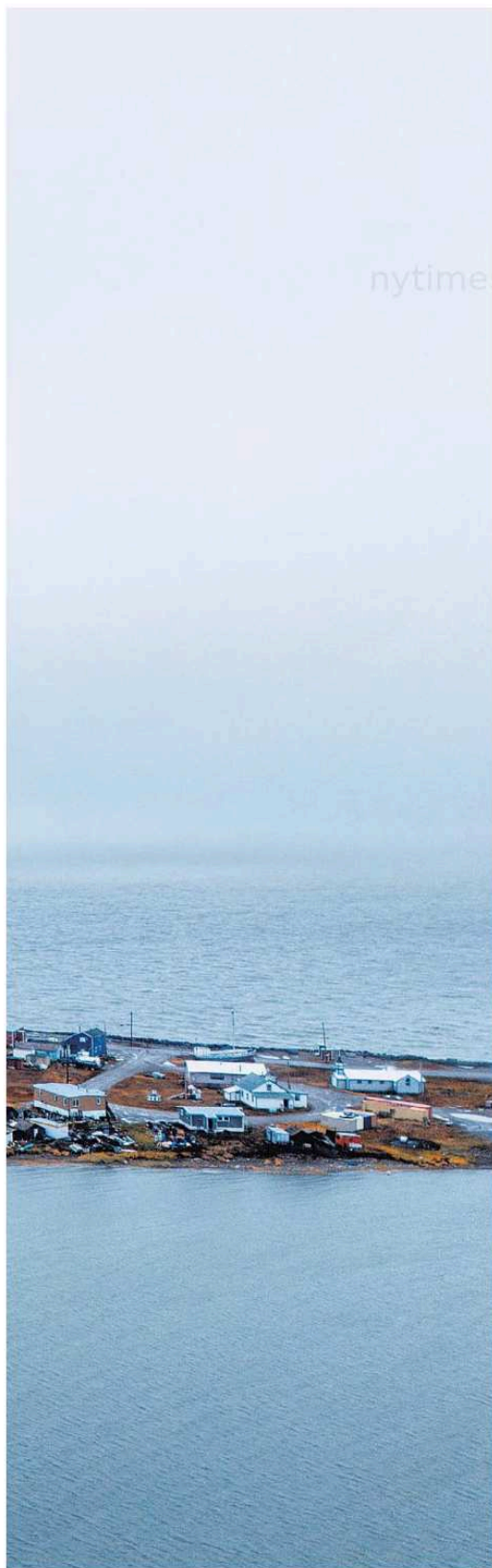
check the land behind the cemetery, which is exposed to the Arctic Ocean. Boulders placed along the shoreline there failed to save a handful of houses from having to be moved in 2020.

"There was one kid in my class — his name is Bob," said Jaden. "There was a white house right at the end, and he used to live there."

About 1,000 people live in Tuktoyaktuk, a community that grew during the Cold War as a station for a continentwide anti-Soviet radar system. Mr. Dillon,



From left, Shania Noksana eagerly awaits the day she can move back to the hamlet. The sand near Calvin Pokiak's home, which he built three decades ago, is rapidly eroding. He doesn't want to leave his home.



The Arctic Ocean meets land's end in Tuktoyaktuk, a hamlet in Canada's Western Arctic. Above, William Dillon, Jaden Cockney and Derek Panaktalok peered over a permafrost thaw slump at the edge of Lake Tikalik. Mr. Dillon, left, has been monitoring the land for three decades, collecting data on the climate.

whose parents were employed at several stations, worked for a Canadian oil company when Tuktoyaktuk became a hub for exploration in the Western Arctic in the 1970s. Now Tuktoyaktuk has become a hot spot for global permafrost research.

A decrease in sea ice because of warming weather has contributed to the Arctic's heating up four times as fast as the global average in the past four decades, making the region one of the hardest hit by climate change. Warmer temperatures have caused the thawing of the Earth's permafrost — ice mixed with soil, sand and organic matter that has been continuously frozen, some for hundreds of thousands of years.

Canada has about a quarter of the world's permafrost — the most after Russia — and in its Western Arctic, thaw slumps have increased in recent years, said Dustin Whalen, a Canadian government physical scientist who began researching in the region two decades ago.

Back then, thaw slumps were limited to areas most susceptible to warming, Mr. Whalen said. "Now they seem to be everywhere."

Mr. Whalen helped start the monitoring program in 2019, training Mr. Dillon and other Inuvialuit. No other community keeps such close track of the permafrost, providing continuous data to scientists, Mr. Whalen said. But now other experts from all over the world have gravitated to the hamlet.

"We really have very little understanding of half of the world's permafrost, which is in Russia, other than what we can glean from satellites," said Christopher Burn, a permafrost expert at Carleton University in Ottawa and former president of the International Permafrost Association.

But Tuktoyaktuk is a window. "What is happening there is being replicated

'Nobody really wants to take the responsibility for saying we have to move. But the whole hamlet will be relocated.'

WILLIAM DILLON, part of the team measuring permafrost.

around the Arctic," Mr. Burn said.

At this point, the climate-warming gases discharged by degrading permafrost are believed to be offset by the concomitant growth of vegetation that absorbs carbon, Mr. Burn said. But scientists believe that in the next 10 to 15 years, if climate change stays on its current trajectory, the permafrost regions will become net emitters of greenhouse gases, he said.

"By the end of the century," Mr. Burn said, "we will have emissions from permafrost that are equivalent to the third or fourth most-emitting country in the world."

'It Will Go'

Mr. Dillon didn't need to open his yellow notebook to remember when he first noticed a startling sight outside a red house perched on a promontory jutting into Tuktoyaktuk's inland harbor, the one protected by a shrinking barrier island.

"Aug. 16, 2023 — this is when we first noticed it," he said.

Under the house, the thawing permafrost revealed — alarmingly — that the building rested mostly on sand. The adjoining land was scarred with telltale fissures, and parts of the shoreline were slumping into the water. The monitors

now visit the red house regularly to record the transformation.

Calvin Pokiak came out of his house and stood on his front porch, next to a large cross and a blue angel on his home's facade. A wheelbarrow, a satellite dish, a barbecue grill, a Spiderman swimming kickboard and other items formed a makeshift wall around the back of his house — to prevent his grandchildren from wandering onto the unstable ground.

"Once you expose that permafrost back there, it's going to erode so fast that you wouldn't even know what could happen," Mr. Pokiak, 69, said, adding that everything around him appeared to be sinking.

"I'll have a Pokiak Island," he added with a burst of laughter.

Mr. Dillon had known Mr. Pokiak long enough to understand that his laughter hid extreme anxiety. Both men had been classmates at an Anglican residential school, and as adults Mr. Pokiak had been Mr. Dillon's boss at the Inuvialuit Land Administration, a regional organization that manages land owned by the Inuvialuit people. Mr. Dillon had worked as an environmental monitor there for 27 years.

Like others in town, Mr. Pokiak didn't want to leave. He built his house three decades ago, and his two brothers erected their own houses nearby, and they called the area "Pokesville." As the two men sat at his kitchen table, he pressed Mr. Dillon for information on how bad the permafrost was.

"Those two sloping sites, they're moving downward," Mr. Dillon told Mr. Pokiak. "And if those two are moving, this is moving as well, Calvin."

"Yeah," Mr. Pokiak said, adding after a long pause, "I mean, personally, I think I was happy I moved out here. I mean, I couldn't be any happier than where I am

right now."

He went on, "But now that William and these guys are doing all of these measurements and studies, if I have to move my house, I would do it."

"Here's the other thing I've learned, Calvin," Mr. Dillon said. "Your house and your brother Ernest's house are both sitting on sand, and there's hardly any permafrost left in that sand."

"Yeah," Mr. Pokiak said. "You're sliding, and that's why you're sloping in the back," Mr. Dillon said. "All that sand is going to come out — and it will go."

"Yeah," Mr. Pokiak said. "No if's, no but's, it will go."

"That's why, like I said," Mr. Pokiak said, "I'm very careful about who goes behind my house."

"Once that is gone," Mr. Pokiak said about the permafrost, before erupting in laughter — "I'm going to have to put my house on pontoons."

Buying Time

Tuktoyaktuk relocated a tiny slice of itself in 2020.

On one day in April, three houses at risk of falling into the ocean near the tip of the peninsula were moved on an ice road to their new home, not far from Mr. Pokiak's red house.

They were lowered next to one another onto flat gravel surfaces that have become what Mr. Dillon described as a "roller coaster" evidence of the permafrost's relentless thawing.

The move, Mr. Elias, the town's mayor, said had been "a rush thing" and the lots were so small that there was no room for shifting.

Mr. Elias described other planned projects, including the installation of more large rocks along the shoreline and in front of a barrier island, a \$54 million

project financed by the government.

The work, he acknowledged without prodding, was Sisyphean. "The thing is you can't just up and leave. So this will sustain us for the next 20, 30 years. It'll buy us time to come up with a plan to relocate."

For now, few in Tuktoyaktuk were ready to accept the town's inevitable fate — not even Shayne Cockney, who lived with her two children in one of three houses that had been relocated.

Her house — a squat yellow box under a triangle-shaped roof — now rests on a dozen four-legged jacks. When the ground shifts, the height of certain jacks is adjusted to prevent the house from leaning too much in one direction.

When she hired a contractor over the summer, one side of the house was four inches lower than the other. The shifting has caused cracks in her walls and warping in her window frames, allowing freezing winter air to seep in. Chimes hanging from the ceiling clinked when strong winds rattled her house.

Ms. Cockney, 33, had grown up in the house. She had left the hamlet to study, but returned to live in the house and to take care of her grandmother, who died during the pandemic.

"It's been really scary because we were so uneven," Ms. Cockney said sitting at her kitchen table. "I'm hoping that this year it is a little bit more sturdy now that the ground is," she paused and looked at Mr. Dillon, "more settled?"

Mr. Dillon, who had been quiet, finally told her the ground under her would never settle.

"Your best choice would be to move," he said.

"Re-move?"

"Re-move."

"But where?"

"That's exactly," Mr. Dillon said, "everybody's question."

Celebrating the Reopening of Notre-Dame

By AURELIEN BREEDEN

PARIS — Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris is set to reopen after five and a half years of work to restore its wood and lead roofing, famous spire and other parts of the building that were destroyed or damaged in a devastating fire in April 2019.

When is Notre-Dame reopening?

An official and religious ceremony will take place on Saturday, starting around 7 p.m., local time.

First, President Emmanuel Macron of France, who had vowed to restore the Gothic medieval masterpiece within five years of the fire, will give a speech in front of the cathedral to Roman Catholic dignitaries, foreign officials and donors who contributed to the renovation.

Afterward, the archbishop of Paris will strike the doors of the cathedral with his staff, and a choir will sing Psalm 121 three times. The doors will be opened, and the archbishop will lead a religious service and bless the great organ, which was not damaged but had to be cleaned of toxic lead dust.

Next will come a televised show and concert, also in front of the cathedral. Gustavo Dudamel will conduct the Radio France Philharmonic Orchestra, and there will be performances by the Chinese pianist Lang Lang, the Beninese-French singer Angélique Kidjo, the Canadian singer Garou and others.

On Sunday, the cathedral will celebrate Mass to consecrate the altar. Mr. Macron and about 170 bishops from France and elsewhere are expected to attend, as well as priests from Paris's 106 parishes.

A Mass for the general public will be offered in the evening; it will be the first time visitors will be able to enter the renovated cathedral. The ceremonies will be shown live by France's national television broadcaster and picked up by other channels around the world.

Who is attending the ceremonies?

Over 40 heads of state and government, religious dignitaries, and other officials are expected to attend, but Pope Francis has already said he will not be present.

President Biden is also not expected to attend, but Dr. Jill Biden, the first lady, will be there. President-elect Donald J. Trump said this week that he would make the trip.

The authorities have planned extremely tight security for the area around Notre-Dame over the weekend, similar to the arrangements for the Summer Olympics opening ceremony. About 40,000 members of the general public will be able to watch from further away on giant screens.



As interior work wanes, exterior renovations will continue at Notre-Dame for several more years.

What else is planned?

Next week, there will be Masses held for the firefighters who saved the building, for the workers and artisans who helped to renovate it and for the 340,000 or so donors who provided money for the renovation, as well as other Masses for the general public. Two concerts, with performances of Bach's Magnificat, will be held in the cathedral on Dec. 17 and 18.

When can I visit?

All slots to attend the public Mass on Sunday have already been booked. But, beginning on Monday, the cathedral — which was one of the French capital's most visited monuments before the blaze shut it down — will be open to the public. It will begin accepting pilgrimage groups in February and tour groups in June.

Will visiting be free of charge?

Yes. France's culture minister had floated the idea of an entrance fee this fall to help pay for the expensive upkeep of the country's thousands of churches and other religious monuments. Many of them belong to government authorities — a legacy of the French Revolution, when property belonging to the clergy was nationalized. Notre-Dame, for instance, is owned by the French state.

But the Roman Catholic Church of France runs the monument, and it opposed any entrance fee. The church's mission is to “welcome every man and woman unconditionally, and therefore necessarily free of charge, regardless of their religion or belief, opinions, or financial means,” church officials said in October.

What did the renovation involve and how much did it cost?

About 840 million euros, or \$900 million, from around 340,000 donors poured in after the fire to help renovate the cathedral.

Notre-Dame came dangerously close to collapsing during the blaze, and the first step was to secure it. Workers also had to deep-clean the limestone, paintings and statues to remove ash, lead particles and centuries of accumulated grime.

The effort involved about 250 companies and roughly 2,000 workers and artisans, including architects, carpenters, engineers, stonecutters, painters, gold-leaf decorators, steeplejacks, crane operators, organ cleaners and roof coverers. They restored stained-glass windows, created new lead roof ornaments, hewed log beams and dry-fit roofing trusses, among other work. At the peak, up to 600 workers clambered around scaffolding every day, laboring under stringent measures to avoid exposure to toxic lead dust.

Did Notre-Dame get a modern twist?

No. The French government had suggested that the cathedral's 19th-century spire could be rebuilt with a “contemporary architectural gesture” and had even proposed an architectural competition, leading to a flurry of ideas that ranged from daring to outlandish, including a beam of light and a carbon-fiber flame.

But the idea of a modern spire was never popular. Mr. Macron never committed to it, and it was dropped. The spire was rebuilt as

it was: an oak framework covered in lead, topped by a cross and a copper rooster that overlook Paris more than 300 feet above ground. The medieval attic, a lattice of ancient oak beams known as “the forest,” was also restored to its original state.

The renovation did, however, add modern fire protections in the roofing that were absent in 2019, including misting devices, firewalls, thermal cameras and thicker roof boards that burn more slowly.

Is work on Notre-Dame completely done?

No. Exterior renovations will continue for several more years. A sum of about \$150 million that remains from the donations will be used to restore sections including the sacristy and the flying buttresses, which were worn out well before the fire.

Do we now know what caused the fire?

Not exactly. The French authorities have uncovered no evidence of arson and say that an accidental cause is most likely, possibly tied to restoration work on the spire that was being carried out when the fire occurred.

An investigation is continuing and could last for at least several more months, according to the Paris prosecutor's office. Leading theories are that the blaze was started by a discarded cigarette or a short circuit, possibly in the electrified bells of the spire or in elevators used by workers.

But no one has been charged, and a definitive explanation may never be determined.

British Leader Occupies Lonely Perch at the Center

By MARK LANDLER and STEPHEN CASTLE

LONDON — Five months after his Labour Party won a thumping election victory, Prime Minister Keir Starmer of Britain finds himself a lonely figure: Like-minded centrist leaders in France and Germany are in retreat, while in the United States, Donald J. Trump and his populist message have vanquished the Democratic Party.

On Thursday, Mr. Starmer served notice that he would stick to the plan for rebuilding Britain that won him the election, though he did put more emphasis on kitchen-table concerns, promising to boost voters' disposable income, construct 1.5 million new houses, and put more police on the streets.

Mr. Starmer's six goals — delivered in a speech that was yet another effort to reset his troubled government — amounted to a stubborn bet: That he can resist the populist wave rolling across Western democracies by delivering on the issues voters care about.

“Everyone can see there's a growing impatience with traditional politics,” Mr. Starmer said. But he added, “Populism isn't the answer to Britain's challenges. Easy answers won't make our country strong.”

For Mr. Starmer, a methodical lawyer-turned-politician, the speech was a clear admission that his government has continued to struggle — a string of missteps and minor scandals sapping its poll ratings and giving an opening to populist critics like Nigel Farage, a close ally of Mr. Trump.

Mr. Starmer's six “milestones” are an attempt to recapture the initiative by improving the daily lives of Britons: in addition to the pledges on disposable income, housing and police, he vowed to cut patient waiting times at the National Health Service, improve childhood education and put Britain on a course to a clean-energy economy, albeit with slightly softened ambitions.

Whether that will be enough to arrest the government's plummeting popularity is an open question, especially with the public in such a querulous mood. Even Mr. Starmer seemed skeptical, noting, “the path of change is long, it is hard, and there are few thanks in the short term.”

He steered away from an earlier promise to make Britain the fastest-growing economy among the Group of 7 countries — the kind of abstract goal, critics said, that does not speak to voters. More controversially, he omitted a pledge to cut down immigration — a rallying cry of the populist right — arguing that controlling borders was, implicitly, a core duty of any government.

Analysts said Mr. Starmer was drawing a lesson from the defeat of Vice President Kamala Harris last month in the United States: delivering economic growth does not by itself satisfy disgruntled voters.

“Unless voters experience the benefit of that themselves when they're sitting around the kitchen table and adding up what they've got left at the end of the month, then you're not going to get the political benefit,” said Claire Ainsley, a former policy director for Mr. Starmer who now works in Britain for the Progressive Policy Institute, a Washington-based research institute.

Jonathan Ashworth, an ally of Mr. Starmer and a former Labour lawmaker, said the prime minister had little choice but to retol his message, given the unforgiving realities of today's political climate.

“Incumbent governments are on the run; they are toppling,” he said. “The world over, trust in politics is low, trust in the competence of the political system to deliver is low, which is why electorates are becoming ever more volatile.”

Although the Labour government secured a comfortable parliamentary majority and does not have to face the voters until 2029, aides to Mr. Starmer are already keenly focused on how Labour can avoid the fate that befell the Democrats: becoming a one-term administration.

That sharper political tone reflects the influence of Mr. Starmer's chief of staff, Morgan McSweeney, who masterminded La-

bour's general election victory and won out in a ferocious post-election power struggle in Downing Street, during which his predecessor, Sue Gray, was ousted.

Mr. McSweeney, who was raised in Ireland, cut his teeth battling the Labour Party's left internally, and Britain's far-right in municipal politics. Insiders say Thursday's speech, which Mr. Starmer delivered in the Pinewood film studios outside London, reflected Mr. McSweeney's preoccupation with electoral politics.

Still, Mr. McSweeney faces an uphill task with his boss. Mr. Starmer, never the most inspiring speaker, has struggled to wrap a punchy narrative around his practical, problem-solving brand of politics.

“People want stories,” said Mr. Ashworth, who now leads Labour Together, a left-wing think tank. “People want you to paint a picture of what you think is happening and where you are going, and they want to believe in something.”

Critics cite the government's change in inheritance taxes for agricultural property as an example of poor communication. The rule change brought angry farmers into the streets of London. But some said the government should have stressed that the reform was aimed at wealthy people who, re-



Keir Starmer's moderate style feels anachronistic in a world full of bombastic populists.

search shows, have bought farmland in recent years to shelter their assets from inheritance tax.

Mr. Starmer's predicament is a stark turn from just four months ago, when Mr. McSweeney, Mr. Ashworth, and other Labour aides traveled to the Democratic National Convention in Chicago to speak to the Harris campaign about the blueprint they had used in their landslide victory the previous month.

Now, Mr. Starmer is isolated on both sides of the Atlantic. In addition to Mr. Trump's victory, there is President Emmanuel Macron of France, who is struggling with the ouster of his center-right prime minister, Michel Barnier. In Germany, the Social Democratic-led government appears destined to lose to the center-right Christian Democrats next February.

Mr. Starmer's swift decline in the polls, analysts said, reflects the same volatility among voters as in those countries. And there are other warning signs: In multiple Labour-held constituencies, Mr. Farage's anti-immigration party, Reform U.K., now polls as the second-most popular party.

“There have been a number of bumps in the road,” Ms. Ainsley said, “and it's clear that the government is wanting to set out an agenda that is much more tangible for voters.”

But some analysts said Mr. Starmer needed to go farther, even embracing some of the more divisive language of Mr. Farage. His studiously moderate style was an anachronism, they said, better suited to a world before Brexit, the Make America Great Again movement of Mr. Trump, and even the financial crisis of 2008.

“People on the center-left like to think they're the nice people,” said Steven Fielding, an emeritus professor of political history at the University of Nottingham. “When they go low, we go high,” he said, citing a phrase made famous by Michelle Obama in describing Mr. Trump and other Republicans. “Well, sometimes you need to go low.”

South America and E.U. Agree to Big Trade Deal

This article is by Jenny Gross, Liz Alderman and Patricia Cohen.

BRUSSELS — The European Union reached a major trade agreement on Friday with four South American countries, concluding a long-delayed negotiation that took on new urgency as President-elect Donald J. Trump threatened to impose tariffs on some of the world's largest economies.

The deal, between the European Union and members of Mercosur — a bloc that includes Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay — would establish one of the largest trade zones in the world and would be the European Union's biggest trade pact ever.

With European leaders preparing for the possibility that Mr. Trump's return to office will lead to a more fragmented global economy, the deal is a significant victory for proponents of free trade, linking markets with more than 700 million people. But it could fuel frustration within the European bloc, with France, the biggest critic of the deal, opposed to the agreement over concerns about the possible dumping of cheap agricultural imports in Europe, which could hurt its farmers.

If ratified by European Union member states and the European Parliament, the agreement would lift tariffs on products including meat, cars, wine and chocolate. Despite France's strong opposition to the agreement, Paris does not appear to have persuaded enough other European countries to vote against it, although it signaled it would still lobby to block it. A date for the ratification vote has not yet been set.

With Mr. Trump's election, Europe is facing the threat of high tariffs on exports to the United States, its biggest trading partner, and increased competition from China. Mr. Trump has suggested that he would impose tariffs of 10 to 20 percent on products around the world and tariffs of 60 percent or more on Chinese goods.

So European leaders have emphasized the need to diversify.

Ursula von der Leyen, presi-



The presidents of Uruguay, left, and Brazil with Ursula von der Leyen, head of the European Commission, on Friday.

dent of the European Commission, the bloc's executive arm, said on Friday that the political agreement was a milestone for Europe and South America.

“We both believe that openness and cooperation are the true engines of progress and prosperity,” she said, speaking in Uruguay. “I know that strong winds are blowing in the opposite direction, towards isolation and fragmentation, but this agreement is our clear response.”

Negotiations over the trade deal began 25 years ago and came close to a breakthrough in 2019. Ms. von der Leyen said the agreement would save European companies 4 billion euros (\$4.2 billion) in export duties per year.

The prospect of Mr. Trump's tariffs has also made the deal more compelling for the members of Mercosur, who are interested in selling more beef and industrial products to Europe. And China's intention to increase agricultural production means that a major buyer of Argentine and Brazilian meat and soybeans could reduce purchases.

Bolivia, a member of Mercosur, could join the agreement if it aligns its rules in line with other members of the bloc.

Jacob Funk Kirkegaard, a senior fellow in Brussels at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, said the deal came at a critical moment. “The signal is that, well, the United States may

be pulling out of the global trading system, but the rest of the world is intent on pursuing a different route,” he said.

Economists say the agreement is critical for Europe, which is facing a disappointing economic outlook, and particularly for Germany, the biggest exporter to the Mercosur region. Tariffs imposed by Mr. Trump would exacerbate challenges for major European industries, including the automobile, pharmaceutical and machinery sectors.

European carmakers, including BMW, Fiat, Peugeot and Volkswagen, would benefit from lower tariffs on imports and exports between the two blocs. Novartis, Sanofi and other European pharmaceutical giants would gain easier access to a large market for health care products.

A range of other European industries, such as the luxury sector, tech, construction and banking, would also be able to reach hundreds of millions of consumers.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz of Germany said on Friday that an “important hurdle” for the agreement had been overcome. Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez of Spain, which manufactures large quantities of chemicals and pharmaceuticals, said on Friday that the agreement would make Europe “more prosperous and resilient.” The Spanish government said the agreement would increase ex-

ports by up to 40 percent and create an estimated 22,000 jobs.

Even if Europe is spared from U.S. tariffs, escalating tension between the United States and China could pose problems for European companies. Business leaders are concerned that if Chinese products are shut out of U.S. markets, a surge of cheap Chinese imports would instead enter Europe or other markets where Europe competes.

Europe needs to prioritize not only the ratification of the South America trade agreement, but also trade agreements with other countries and regions, like Britain and Switzerland and nations in the Indo-Pacific region, said Ignacio García Bercero, a former European Commission trade official. The European bloc already has trade deals with most other countries in South America.

France has bitterly opposed the pact, saying it would open Europe's agricultural markets to cheap food imports, including beef and wheat, that use hormones and pesticides that are forbidden in Europe. French farmers, a politically powerful lobby, have joined others across the bloc to denounce what they fear will amount to food dumping that risks their economic survival.

Poland and Italy have also expressed concerns about the deal.

The timing is precarious for Emmanuel Macron, the embattled president of France, whose government is mired in crisis. He has called the agreement “unacceptable,” and on Friday, France sought to bat down suggestions that the country was isolated in its opposition.

Environmental groups also oppose the deal, saying it would accelerate the destruction of forests in the Amazon to make way for increased agricultural production.

Ms. von der Leyen's decision to push through the deal without Mr. Macron's approval could fuel suspicion in France about giving Brussels too much power and could spur support for Marine Le Pen, a nationalist, anti-immigrant leader who also opposes the deal.

“It's a bit of a tinderbox,” Mr. Kirkegaard said. “The deal will remind many French voters that they don't have much influence in the E.U. anymore.”



Inheritance tax changes spurred farmer protests, though they were aimed at the wealthy who bought farms to shelter assets.

Jenny Gross reported from Brussels, Liz Alderman from Paris and Patricia Cohen from London.

Hindu-Muslim Frictions Threaten to Sour India-Bangladesh Relations

This article is by **Pragati K.B., Anupreeta Das and Saif Hasnat.**

NEW DELHI — Relations between India and neighboring Bangladesh reached a perilous new low this week as Indian politicians and Hindu extremists intensified accusations that minority Hindus in Bangladesh are being persecuted.

The two countries were close allies until Bangladesh's authoritarian leader was ousted in a popular uprising earlier this year. A diplomatic dispute has since erupted as Hindu rights groups in India accuse Bangladesh of complicity in violence against Hindus and as Bangladesh's government says India has exaggerated the situation to further its own Hindu-nationalist agenda.

The situation has led to growing fears inside Bangladesh of tit-for-tat violence between Muslims, who make up more than 90 percent of the population, and Hindus. It also threatens to derail efforts by Bangladesh's interim government, led by Muhammad Yunus, a Nobel laureate, to set his country on a new course.

Communal tensions have “inflamed public passions on both sides,” said Smruti Pattanaik, a research fellow at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses in Delhi, adding that social media had fanned “inflammatory content” from both sides. “This needs to be addressed by the governments and is not conducive to long-term bilateral relations,” she said.

Ties between the two countries have been fraught since Bangladesh's prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, fled to India in August after the student uprising that led to the overthrow of her government.

In the ensuing chaos, reports of communal attacks on Hindus by Muslims have fomented religious unrest within Bangladesh and across the border in India. Hindu leaders in Bangladesh have said that among the hundreds of people who died in the chaos, only a few were from their community.

The relationship between the two countries took a nosedive last week after police officers in Bangladesh arrested a monk associated with a global Hindu organization on sedition charges, accusing him of disrespecting the Bangla-



Members of Vishwa Hindu Parishad, a Hindu nationalist group, protesting at a Bangladeshi diplomatic building in Mumbai, India.

deshi flag at a rally protesting the persecution of Hindus. Supporters of the monk, Chinmoy Krishna Das, staged a protest outside the court, and a Muslim lawyer was hacked to death during a riot that broke out as the police and the monk's supporters clashed.

The fallout spilled over into this week.

On Monday, over 2,500 demonstrators from a newly formed right-wing Hindu alliance in India gathered outside a Bangladeshi diplomatic outpost in Agartala, the capital of the northeastern Indian state of Tripura, to protest Mr. Das's arrest and the attacks on Hindus, according to a senior police official. About 50 protesters then entered the building, said the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity for security reasons.

The group, the Hindu Sangharsh Samiti — which loosely translates to the Committee to Fight for Hindu Rights — was assembled in response to the recent tensions, according to Shankar

An alliance falters after Bangladesh removes its leader.

Roy, a member of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, a well-known Hindu-nationalist group.

Mr. Roy said the committee was made up of about a dozen hard-line groups that are associated with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak

Sangh, the ideological linchpin of a movement that seeks to turn India into a Hindu nation.

The party of Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India, the Bharatiya Janata Party, is also part of what is known as the “Sangh family” of organizations.

In a statement late last week, the R.S.S. urged India's government to “continue with every possible effort to prevent the ongoing atrocities against Hindus and other religious minorities in Bangladesh.”

Bangladesh's ousted prime minister, Ms. Hasina, is an ally of Mr. Modi's. In her first public address since her ouster, she said in a YouTube video this week that Mr. Yunus, the interim Bangladeshi leader, was involved in “genocide in a meticulously de-

signed manner.” Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal, a domestic war crimes tribunal, ordered a ban on circulation of her comments, labeling them “hate speech.”

For its part, Bangladesh's foreign ministry accused Indian police officers of doing little to stop the Agartala protesters from desecrating the Bangladeshi flag. It said in a news release that the “heinous” act was part of a pattern of Indian aggression against Bangladesh, and it called on India's government to prevent future acts of violence.

India's foreign ministry said that it “deeply” regretted the episode at Agartala, and vowed to shore up security there. Earlier, the ministry had said it was “deeply concerned” about Mr. Das's arrest, and urged Bangla-

desh to ensure the safety of all of its minorities.

Three police officers were suspended on Tuesday for negligence of duty over the Agartala violence, Kiran Kumar, the police superintendent for West Tripura, said in an interview. Another was transferred, and seven protesters were arrested, Mr. Kumar said.

India's foreign secretary is scheduled to visit Dhaka, the Bangladeshi capital, next week.

The assault on the diplomatic outpost has prompted anti-India protests in many parts of Bangladesh. On Monday night, students held a rally at the University of Dhaka, the birthplace of the student movement that overthrew Ms. Hasina's government. Among the chants by protesters, who included Hindu students, were slogans like “Stop Indian aggression. Rise up, people.”

Mamata Banerjee, the chief minister of the Indian state of West Bengal, which shares India's longest border with Bangladesh, called for United Nations peacekeeping forces to be sent to Bangladesh.

She said her state would provide refuge to any persecuted Hindus fleeing Bangladesh if needed.

“We have no problem sharing our one roti with them,” Ms. Banerjee said in public remarks.

Her comments drew criticism from Bangladeshi leaders. Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, the leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party — the main political opponent of Ms. Hasina's party — called Ms. Banerjee's remarks about sending in a peacekeeping force “a direct threat to our sovereignty.”

Analysts said it was not surprising that ties between India and Bangladesh had grown fraught, given that the Yunus government is still trying to establish itself.

“India had invested in fostering ties with the Hasina government and were comfortable with her,” said Harsh V. Pant, a professor of international relations at King's College London. “So it's quite natural that there would be some turbulence with the new government.”

Ghana's Voters Look for Leader to Fix Economy

By SAIKOU JAMMEH

DAKAR, Senegal — The 80-year-old two-term president of Ghana, Nana Akufo-Addo, would like to pass the baton when he steps down on Jan. 7 to his vice president, a protégé he's groomed to succeed him.

But in an election on Saturday, Ghanaians may instead turn to a former president they rejected after just one term, hoping he'll fix their many problems — and most importantly, the economy.

Ghana, Africa's largest gold producer, has been going through what some analysts described as the worst economic crisis in a generation. Inflation, the national debt, the cost of living and unemployment have all recently risen. Environmental damage caused by illegal mining has triggered widespread youth protests.

The choice for the job of rebuilding the ravaged economy is between candidates from the two political parties that, since multi-party politics resumed in 1992, have each ruled Ghana for 16 years: the ruling New Patriotic Party (N.P.P.) and the main opposition party, the National Democratic Congress (N.D.C.).

A 66-year-old former president, John Dramani Mahama of the N.D.C., is hoping to make a comeback eight years after he was voted out. His main rival, Mahamudu Bawumia, 61, is keen to test out his own ideas after eight years in President Akufo-Addo's shadow.

Analysts see little ideological difference between the two parties or the candidates. Both are from the historically marginalized and predominantly Muslim north, a first in Christian-majority Ghana. Mr. Mahama is Christian, and Mr. Bawumia is Muslim.

What are the main issues?

Ghana's economy has been on a roller coaster.

The government went on a borrowing spree in recent years after running out of cash, only to default on its debt repayments. By 2022, Ghana could no longer borrow from international lenders. Inflation surged, living standards worsened and at least 850,000 more people in a country of 34 million were pushed into poverty.

The government has cut expenses and negotiated better terms with its creditors. But people are still suffering. Food insecurity and poverty are projected to keep rising until at least 2026.

Young people are among the most affected.

“There is the growing number of graduates who are becoming disenfranchised and want to see progress,” said Ishmael Kwabla

Francis Kokutse contributed reporting from Accra, Ghana.



Supporters rally for former President John Mahama, who is expected to win the Ghana election.



Vice President Mahamudu Bawumia's ties to the current administration's economic mismanagement hurt his electoral chances.

Hlovor, a political science lecturer at the University of Education, Winneba, in Ghana.

Weeks before the election, young people turned out to protest the destruction of the environment from illegal mining of minerals. Such mining, known in Ghana as “galamsey,” is widespread, destroying thousands of acres of land and polluting sources of clean drinking water.

More than 700,000 first-time voters registered this year, most of whom are Gen Zs. Analysts and youth activists said this is a sign that anger over the government's failure to address environmental concerns and over its crackdown on the protests will drive youth to vote.

“Young people, especially first-time voters, are so eager to vote,” said Hanifatu Hamza, a youth leader. “But there are also those

who are fed up with the government and do not want to vote because of the feeling that their votes won't change anything.”

A relatively secure country in an unstable region

Ghana has been an influential geopolitical power in Africa, attracting visits from world leaders seeking to strengthen ties to the continent. Three of the seven U.S. presidents who have made visits to sub-Saharan Africa have chosen to go to Ghana.

Ghana, the first sub-Saharan country to break free from colonial rule, has proved to be a peaceful, stable democracy in a region where coups and conflict — often from jihadist militants — are common.

Though Ghana has been spared direct attacks, reports in the news media and from human rights

groups suggest that the country is being used as a refuge for militants in the Sahel — to get food, fuel, weapons and medical treatment.

“Security and stability is a big issue in this election,” even if the direct threat is currently low, said Muhammad Dan Suleiman, a fellow at the Centre for African Conflict and Development in London.

Who is expected to win?

Polls have shown that the former president, Mr. Mahama, is expected to win.

There are a total of 12 candidates. But the one expected to give Mr. Mahama a run for his money is Mr. Bawumia, who as vice president has the disadvantage of carrying a slice of blame for the country's economic challenges. And his party was split when a rival candidate, a former energy minister, broke away to mount his own race.

When will the winner be known?

Polls will be open on Saturday, Dec. 7, until 5 p.m. More than 18 million people have registered to vote.

Presidential elections in Ghana usually have a high voter turnout, and this year's is projected to surpass that of 2020.

The results should be announced as they come in from polling stations, starting on Election Day. Although the winner may be known by midnight that day, official confirmation is expected two to three days later.

A candidate must secure a majority of the vote to win, and if none does, a runoff would be held within 20 days.

Romanian Court Cancels Election Days Before Vote

This article is by **Andrew Higgins, Matei Barbucescu and Alan Yuhas.**

PESTERA, Romania — Romania's Constitutional Court on Friday canceled the final round of a pivotal presidential election with only two days before the vote, saying it needed to ensure the “correctness of the electoral process.”

The surprise decision, in a NATO member state that shares a border with Ukraine, came days after Romanian leaders raised allegations that “cyberattacks” had tried to undermine the vote. The court's ruling was also the latest in a series of political upheavals across Europe, where right-wing and nationalist movements have surged this year.

The front-runner in Romania's now canceled election had been Calin Georgescu, an ultranationalist whose victory in a first-round vote late last month stunned Romania's political establishment.

George Simion, a far-right leader who had endorsed Mr. Georgescu, denounced the court ruling, saying “a coup is underway,” but he urged supporters not to take to the street in protest. “The system must fall democratically,” Mr. Simion said.

The court gave no explanation for its decision on Friday, and it was not clear when a new first round would take place. “The electoral process for the president of Romania will be entirely redone,” it said in a statement.

The move set off angry reaction among right-wing groups on social media, but was welcomed by the prime minister, Marcel Ciolacu, the leader of the governing Social Democrats and a losing candidate in the opening round of the presidential vote.

The decision to annul the vote, he said, was the “only correct solution” after the declassification of security council documents that indicated Russian meddling in the election.

A little-known soil expert, Mr. Georgescu was widely dismissed as a fringe candidate before the first round of the election last month. Mr. Georgescu has praised both President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia and Romania's fascist leader during World War II, and presented himself as an outsider who would wrest Romania from corrupt politicians.

He is also a skeptic of vaccines and the pharmaceutical industry, and wrote the foreword to the Romanian edition of a book by Robert F. Kennedy Jr., President-elect Donald J. Trump's pick to be health secretary.

He won more votes than any of his 13 competitors in the election's first round, with 22.9 percent of

ballots, taking a lead that shocked many centrist and liberal Europeans. That was still far short of the majority needed to win outright, however, setting up a runoff with the second-place finisher, Elena Lasconi, a mayor and former journalist who took 19.2 percent.

Ms. Lasconi, of the Save Romania Party, had also presented herself as an outsider, but within the mainstream opinion of support for the European Union and opposition to Russia.

Days after the first round, Romania's Supreme Council of National Defense, which oversees national security, announced that there had been “cyberattacks” meant to undermine the vote and social cohesion. Mr. Georgescu benefited from the campaign, according to Romanian intelligence documents declassified by the president this week.

“Romania, along with other states on NATO's Eastern Flank, has become a priority for the hos-

A surge by a far-right candidate raises worries of meddling.

tile actions of some state and non-state actors,” the statement said, singling out Russia.

The council, which is led by President Klaus Iohannis and includes other senior officials, also criticized TikTok, which is owned by a Chinese company, saying the platform had violated electoral laws because it had not identified Mr. Georgescu as a candidate.

One of the race's presidential candidates also made allegations of irregularities in the vote, and the Constitutional Court took up the case, ordering a recount. The issue seemed resolved when, on Monday, the court validated the voting and ruled out ordering a redo of the presidential vote.

This month, Romanians also voted for lawmakers — electing a highly fragmented Parliament divided between centrist parties that want to strengthen bonds with the West, and anti-establishment nationalists who want to loosen those ties.

The Social Democrats took the most votes but fell short of a majority. It is likely to be difficult for the Social Democrats to keep the next governing coalition aligned with Romania's Western allies in NATO, given that three hard-right, Russia-friendly parties had strong showings in the election.

A City’s Raw Memories Of a 1980 Crackdown

By VICTORIA KIM

GWANGJU, South Korea — The wound from where the soldier struck her is long gone, but Jang Sang-nam, 88, can still trace its outlines on her head.

“Here, with the butt of a rifle,” she says when asked where she was hurt while she was out looking for her son, reflexively taking her trembling, sinewy fingers to her right temple. “This eardrum was burst. I still can’t hear.”

Her injury was inflicted 44 years ago, when this ginkgo-tree-lined midsize city in the southwest of South Korea erupted in a student-led uprising for democracy, a day after the military ruler declared nationwide martial law. Paratroopers stormed the city, Gwangju, and brutally beat, stabbed and indiscriminately fired upon throngs of citizens young and old. Hundreds were left dead or missing.

This week, when President Yoon Suk Yeol stood in front of the



South Korean people and declared martial law for the first time since then, the outrage was deepest in Gwangju, where memories are still raw of resistance paid for in blood.

In the intervening decades, in a country whose modern history has been defined by rapid change and swift adaptation, Gwangju has sought to remember and be remembered for the bloodshed that marked a foundational moment in South Korea’s path to democracy.

Those efforts are apparent in the city today. On the pockmarked exterior wall of a former newspaper building in the city center, bullet holes are encircled in neon orange to make them visible from a distance. The bus line that winds through town on the way to the cemetery where victims of the uprising are buried is No. 518, for the date the protests began in 1980: May 18. Each May on the eve of the date, thousands of people take to the streets to march the route the first protesters took.

When this year’s Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded to the Gwangju-born author Han Kang, whose sparse, stark novel “Human Acts” was based on those fateful days, the people of Gwangju shed tears, yelped with disbelief, felt shivers down their spine with a sense of validation and recognition they have long sought.

“It was our story that won the highest honor in the world. That brings solace,” said Kim Tae-yun, who was 20 when he was hit in the face with a bullet while trading fire with soldiers. He wears a false eye to this day.

Speaking in Sweden on Friday before she receives the Nobel next week, Ms. Kang said she had been “deeply shocked” by Mr. Yoon’s martial-law decree. In writing “Human Acts,” she said, she had spent a lot of time studying how

martial law was imposed before the Gwangju massacre.

“For me to witness a similar situation unfold in real time before my eyes in 2024 was startling,” she said through an interpreter.

One place where the pain from the military crackdown of 1980 endures strongest is the May Mothers’ House, a two-story building near a stream on the eastern edge of Gwangju. Originally a support and advocacy group for relatives of people incarcerated for their role during the protests, it was established as a physical center in 2006. It is now a gathering place for women in their waning years who lost their children or husbands during the uprising, or were themselves injured. Among them is Ms. Jang; the son she’d been looking for that day, Chul, was imprisoned and tortured for taking part in the protests.

Its director is Kim Hyung-mi, whose older brother was severely beaten and never fully recovered. He spent seven years in mental institutions before he ultimately died from the aftereffects. (Ms. Kim is married to Kim Tae-yun, whom she met through their activism.)

She calls each of the now-elderly women who visit the home regularly — for meals together, and for yoga and art classes — “umma,” or “mother.” Her own mother continued to pine for her son years after his death: never discarding his books, seeing his face in the face of every man who was around the age he would have been had he lived. Only the dementia that ate away at her memories in the final three months of her life, Ms. Kim said, seemed to give her some relief.

“Mothers only forget when they die,” she said.

During the 10-day uprising, Gwangju was utterly isolated. The military cut phone lines and closed all roads. Censors blocked or minimized reports of what was happening in the city, having seized control of the news media through martial law. In the immediate aftermath, the military junta in power depicted the unrest as a violent riot instigated by Communist sympathizers and agents from North Korea, deserving of the brutal crackdown. Numerous citizens were arrested, tortured and imprisoned.

In the months and years that followed, the people of Gwangju fought to get their story known in the rest of South Korea and beyond. Through their efforts, the uprising has become widely acknowledged as a catalytic moment in South Korea’s path to democracy. The events have been retold and commemorated in books, television dramas, films, poetry, orchestral music, plays and even a couple of operas.

“Human Acts,” which depicts the uprising and its aftermath from the perspectives of six ordinary people who experienced it, is possibly one of the most intimate and visceral retellings.

In the original Korean text, the city that forms the backdrop is hardly mentioned by name, as if to invoke it would be too painful. “That city,” a couple of the characters call it. At times, it is referred to as “gohyang” (hometown), and sometimes, simply “there.”

Ms. Han, who was born in Gwangju in 1970, moved with her family to Seoul when she was 9 years old, just months before the uprising. Adults around her spoke of the atrocities in their home city in hushed voices. A few years later, she came across a book of photos of the violence that her father had hidden away, one of the ways

that information about what happened was secretly circulating in the country.

In the novel’s epilogue, she writes that she came to recognize echoes of the tragedy in her hometown in wars, massacres and oppression around the world.

“Gwangju” had become another name for whatever is forcibly isolated, beaten down, and brutalized, for all that has been mutilated beyond repair,” she writes.

In researching the novel, she has said in interviews, she read through more than 900 firsthand

accounts of the uprising. The testimonies of the “May Mothers,” she said at a literary festival in Gwangju in 2020, moved her immensely and made her shudder. The final chapter of the book is told from the perspective of a mother who speaks to her deceased son in a lilting Gwangju accent.

“They became etched in me,” she said of the witness accounts.

Lee Jae-eui, a 24-year-old college student in Gwangju at the time, dodged detectives and government agents to work on the first influential volume that re-

counted the uprising, published in 1985. In an interview, he recalled the urgency that people felt to tell their story even in the midst of the protests.

“It really felt like we could all die here, and no one would ever know,” he said. “We were desperate to tell the outside world.”

Reading “Human Acts,” he said, brought back everything about those spring days — the all-consuming rage, the anxiety and sleeplessness, the commingled smell of the chloroform and decaying bodies.

With the prize, he said, more

people around the world will read Ms. Han’s book and come to experience the history that he lived through and has devoted his life trying to make known.

“For all our efforts, there was a limit, but the book did what we could not for decades until now and for decades to come,” he said.

Ms. Han herself said that she particularly hoped that the novel would reach across time to younger generations in South Korea, to get people who don’t remember the country’s dark history to wrestle with it.

“If I were to dare to dream, I’d thought I would be so glad if this book could somehow be a gateway leading young people, students to Gwangju,” Ms. Han said at the literary festival. “I am just the conduit.”

Kim Kkot-bi, 34, was born a decade after “oh-il-pal,” (five-one-eight) as the uprising is usually called here.

She said for many young people in the city, preoccupied with school, jobs and making their way through life, the episode always felt like a distant occurrence of valiant tales, divorced from their reality. Some are wary of openly talking about being from Gwangju because of persistent conspiracy theories from right-wing circles, trivializing and smearing the protesters, she said.

Since the Nobel announcement, several friends who had previously seemed uninterested said they wanted to read the book; she is organizing a book club with other young people.

“This gives us a reason to be proud to be from Gwangju,” she said.



Reading from “Human Acts,” a novel based on the 1980 uprising in Gwangju, South Korea, at a ceremony this month. Bullet marks remain in a city building. Kim Hyung-mi, whose brother was beaten in the uprising, met her husband, Kim Tae-yun, through activism.



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Relatives around the coffins of those killed at provincial headquarters in Gwangju in May 1980.

With Impeachment Looming, Support for South Korea’s President Crumbles

By CHOE SANG-HUN

SEOUL — President Yoon Suk Yeol of South Korea grew increasingly isolated on Friday after the head of his ruling party came out in support of impeachment the president and the country’s military said it would not follow any orders to reimpose martial law.

The leader of the governing People Power Party, or P.P.P., called Mr. Yoon unfit to lead South Korea after his short-lived martial law decree earlier this week catapulted the country into turmoil.

“I think that President Yoon Suk Yeol should be suspended from office as soon as possible,” Han Dong-hoon said during an emergency party meeting.

It was not clear how many party members shared Mr. Han’s view. But his comments increased the likelihood that the impeachment bill against Mr. Yoon would gain enough support to pass through the National Assembly.

An impeachment vote is scheduled for Saturday evening. At least eight votes from Mr. Yoon’s governing camp are needed to impeach the president.

Mr. Han joined opposition lawmakers in warning that if Mr. Yoon stays in office, he might try to impose martial law again. The defense ministry said that even if he did, the military would not follow.

And the country’s special forces command, which joined Mr. Yoon’s unsuccessful attempt to establish martial law, said it would not join another.

“I want to make it clear that it will never happen,” Lieutenant General Kwak Jong-geun said during an interview he gave to two opposition lawmakers that was broadcast live on YouTube on Friday. “Even if I get such an order, I will reject it.”

The P.P.P.’s 108 lawmakers met inside the National Assembly but adjourned without reaching consensus on Mr. Yoon’s fate. Mr. Yoon, though expected at the meeting, didn’t show up. National Assembly Speaker Woo Won-shik said he could not guarantee the president’s safety as angry opposition members rallied at the Assembly’s entrance, chanting “Arrest Yoon Suk Yeol!”

If impeached, Mr. Yoon would be suspended from office until the Constitutional Court decides whether to reinstate or remove him.

The opposition proposed impeaching Mr. Yoon this week, arguing that he had committed “insurgency” and other anti-constitutional crimes when he declared martial law on Tuesday. He banned all political activities and sent troops to take over the National Assembly. Legislation on



Ruling party leader Han Dong-hoon said that President Yoon Suk Yeol was unfit to lead.

martial law banned such acts, the opposition said in its impeachment bill submitted on Thursday.

Mr. Yoon’s surprise declaration of martial law lasted only six hours. He was forced to lift it after a vote in the Assembly to repeal the military rule. The opposition likened the episode to a failed “palace coup” by an unpopular leader, which triggered outrage across South Korea. It also exposed the fragility of the hard-won democracy South Koreans have been proud of.

On Thursday, Mr. Han had said he opposed impeaching Mr. Yoon

for fear of creating more national confusion. But he said he changed his mind as more details emerged about what happened in the hours after Mr. Yoon declared martial law, especially indications that Mr. Yoon sought to arrest key critics of his government, including Mr. Han himself.

On Friday he said, “There is fear that if President Yoon stays in office, he may repeat extreme actions like martial law.”

“If that happens, South Korea and its people will fall into a bigger crisis,” he said.

Hong Jang-won, a deputy chief of the National Intelligence Service, told lawmakers on Friday that after declaring martial law, Mr. Yoon told him to work with the military’s Defense Counterintelligence Command to “drag them all in,” according to the opposition lawmaker Kim Byung-ke, who attended the closed-door meeting.

According to Mr. Kim, Mr. Hong told lawmakers that Lt. Gen. Yeo In-hyong, the counterintelligence commander, had shared with Mr. Hong a list of people to locate and detain. They included: Mr. Woo, the speaker of the National Assembly; Lee Jae-myung, the leader of the biggest opposition party; and Mr. Han, the head of Mr. Yoon’s own governing party.

Mr. Hong told the lawmakers that agents from counterintelli-

gence command had planned to take these politicians to their headquarters in Gwacheon, south of Seoul.

On Friday, the P.P.P.’s Mr. Han said he also had similar intelligence that the counterintelligence command had planned to detain key politicians in the name of rounding up “anti-state forces.” But when Mr. Han met with Mr. Yoon on Friday to discuss the crisis, the president denied having had such plans, his office said.

In the YouTube interview, Lt. Gen. Kwak, the special forces commander, said his units were not running arrest squads.

He said that Defense Minister Kim Yong-hyun had instructed him to remove lawmakers from the Assembly, where the vote on repealing the martial law was taking place, but he ignored the order.

“I knew I could be punished for disobedience,” Lt. Gen. Kwak said. “But I also thought such an order had legal problems and I told my troops not to go in there.”

Mr. Kim resigned after the martial law collapsed. He has since been barred by prosecutors from leaving the country.

On Friday, the Defense Ministry said it suspended three officers, including Lt. Gen. Kwak and Lt. Gen. Yeo, from their jobs because of their roles in Mr. Yoon’s martial law.

Opposition lawmakers asked the police to investigate Mr. Yoon and others involved in the declaration of martial law on charges of insurgency. If convicted on those charges, the person the court considers the mastermind of the insurgency faces either the death penalty or life imprisonment.

Mr. Yoon has made no public appearances since withdrawing his martial law decree. A survey by Gallup Korea showed Mr. Yoon’s approval ratings plummeted to a record low of 13 percent in the wake of his martial law decision.

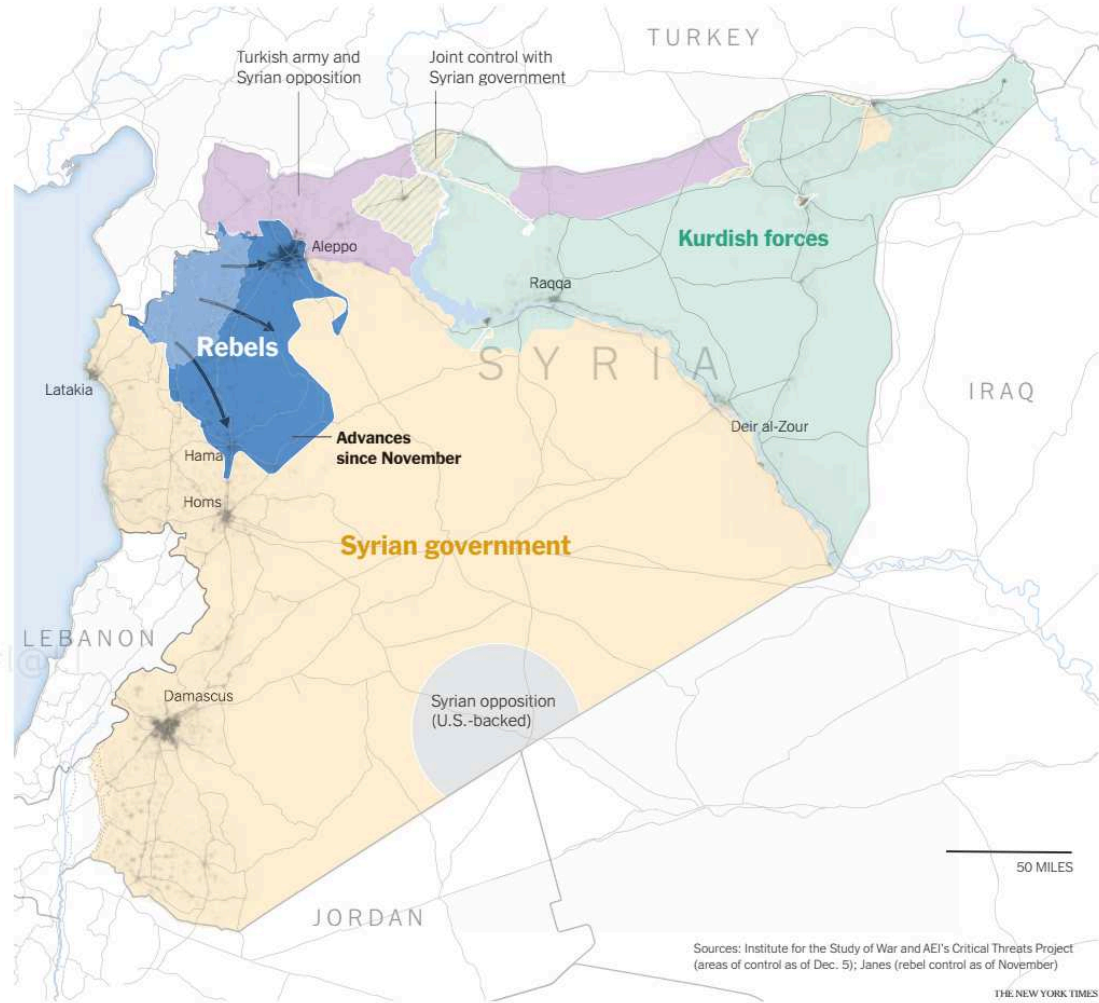
The impeachment of Mr. Yoon would strengthen the position of the opposition, which has long accused him of incompetence and abuse of power. But it would thrust his already divided party and Mr. Han’s own political future into deeper uncertainty.

Both Mr. Yoon and Mr. Han were star prosecutors before entering politics. Mr. Yoon appointed Mr. Han as his justice minister and helped make him the chairman of the P.P.P. But Mr. Han, once the most trusted ally of Mr. Yoon, has become one of his most bitter enemies since he started bickering with the president over how to handle allegations of corruption involving the first lady, Kim Keon Hee. Recently, they have often ignored each other even when they sat nearby in public events.

As Rebels Advance, Who Is Fighting In Syria’s Civil War?

By SAMUEL GRANADOS and VIVIAN YEE

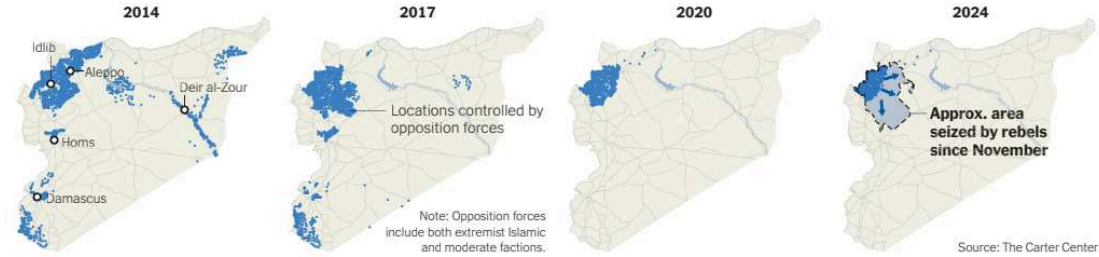
In just over a week, Syrian rebel forces have seized much of Syria’s northwest from the government in a fast-moving attack, upending the once-stagnant civil war. After capturing most of the major city of Aleppo, its airport, military bases and many towns and villages, they drove government troops from the western city of Hama on Thursday. The offensive comes after a period of relative, if brittle, calm. Since 2020, the territorial map had stayed largely frozen: President Bashar al-Assad’s government dominated much of the country, while an array of other factions held different fragments of the rest. Here’s who is fighting whom in Syria’s nearly 14-year-old civil war.



Opposition Forces Their territory had shrunk until advances this week.

The war erupted in 2011 after Mr. al-Assad brutally crushed anti-government protests. In the early stages, rebels — who included both extremist Islamist and moderate factions — managed to take most of the country’s northwest and expanded into other territory. By 2014, they controlled not only their stronghold in the northwest, but also areas north of Hama, east of Damascus and in the southeast, near the Israeli border, as well as villages along the Euphrates and

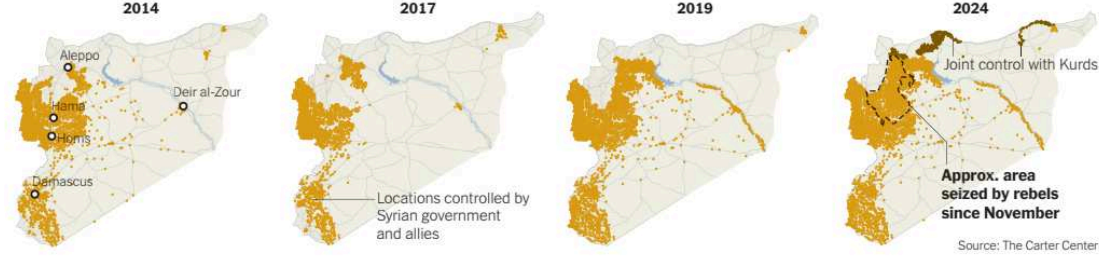
in al-Hasakah province, in Syria’s far northeast. Then came the rise of the Islamic State in 2014 and Russia’s decision the following year to give Mr. al-Assad military support. The Islamic State expanded its so-called caliphate into northeastern Syria, while overpowering Russian airstrikes forced the original rebel groups to retreat. By this year, those opposition forces held nothing but a patch of the northwest until their latest offensive began last week.



Government Forces and Allies The conflict had shifted in their favor years ago — but now they are retreating.

Despite initial rebel successes, pro-Assad forces — including not only Syria’s military but also fighters sent by Iran and the Iran-backed Lebanese militia Hezbollah — were able to retake more territory over the last decade after a series of events shifted the conflict in their favor. Pro-government troops recaptured Aleppo with the help of Russian airstrikes

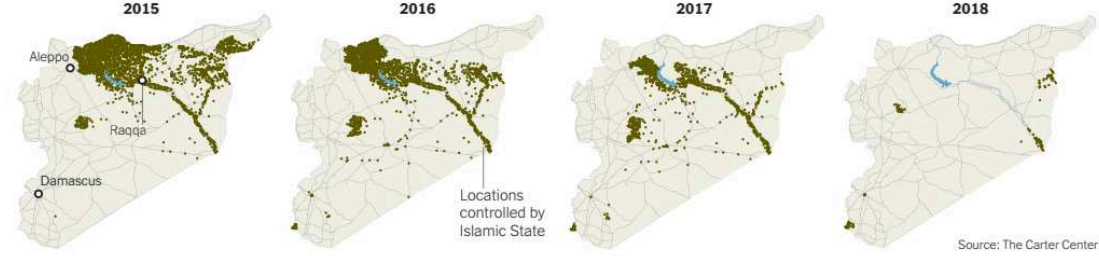
after a four-year battle ending in 2016. The next year, a government offensive against the Islamic State put Mr. al-Assad back in control of many towns along the Euphrates River. And his forces’ advance on northwestern Syria in 2019 and 2020 cornered opposition forces in Idlib Province, bringing the conflict to an impasse that lasted until a week ago.



Islamic State It once held a third of Syria.

Syria’s civil war, along with growing instability in Iraq, allowed an ambitious Al Qaeda offshoot called the Islamic State to mushroom rapidly across both countries in 2013 and 2014. Fueled by a bloody, ultra-extremist interpretation of Islam, it conquered an expanse of territory in Syria and Iraq that it ruled as a so-called caliphate. At its height in 2015, the group held a third of Syria and about 40 percent of Iraq, with the

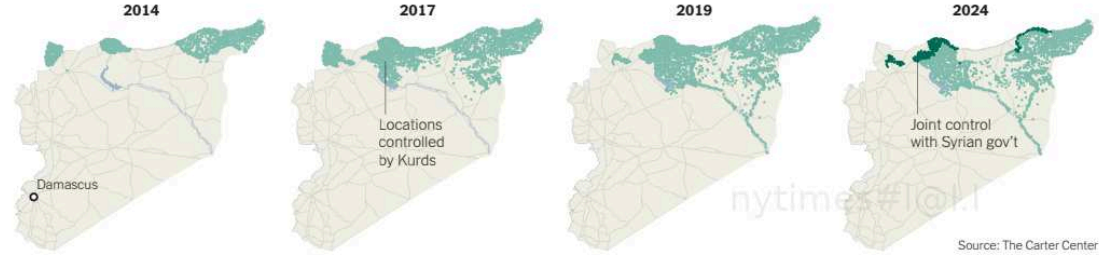
northern Syrian city of Raqqa as its capital. But a Western coalition led by the United States targeted the group with thousands of airstrikes, and U.S.-backed Kurdish-led forces eventually routed the Islamic State in much of northeastern Syria. Pro-Assad forces also pushed the group back in other areas, while the Iraqi army battled it in Iraq. By 2018, it had lost all but tiny shreds of its territory.



Kurdish-Led Forces They took territory from the Islamic State, but lost other ground to Turkish-backed forces.

Forces from Syria’s Kurdish ethnic minority became the United States’ main local partner in the fight against the Islamic State. After the extremist group was defeated in large parts of the country, the Kurdish-led forces consolidated control over towns in the northeast, expanding an autonomous region they had built there, and along the Euphrates. But despite routing the Islamic State, Kurdish fighters still had to contend with their longtime enemy across the border, Turkey, which regards them as linked to a Kurd-

ish separatist insurgency. In 2019, President Donald J. Trump pulled American troops away from northern Syria, abandoning the Kurdish-led forces and opening the door for Turkish forces to oust them from areas along the northern border. Looking for protection against Turkey, the Kurdish-led forces turned to Damascus, allowing Mr. al-Assad’s forces to return to parts of northern Syria, where they have co-existed since. The Kurds still control much of northeastern Syria.



Turkish Military Operations They captured parts of the northern border area from Kurdish-led forces.

Since the beginning of the civil war, the Turkish military has launched several military interventions across the border into Syria, mostly against Syrian Kurdish-led forces, whom Turkey views as linked to what it calls a terrorist separatist movement in Turkey, the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, or P.K.K. Three Turkish op-

erations — in 2016-2017, 2018 and 2019 — were aimed at taking control of towns and villages the Kurdish-led fighters had previously held along the northern border. Turkey now effectively controls that zone, where it provides public services and where its currency is routinely used.



Note: Historical yearly data shows areas of control for Jan. 1 of each year.

War in the Middle East

Israeli Strikes Kill or Hurt Scores of People at a Northern Gaza Hospital

By LARA JAKES and NICK CUMMING-BRUCE

Israeli airstrikes and intense gunfire on the ground around one of the last working hospitals in northern Gaza killed or wounded scores of people early Friday, the hospital's director said, as Israeli forces ordered the building evacuated.

Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya, the director of Kamal Adwan Hospital in Jabaliya, in a statement described "a series of airstrikes on the northern and western sides of the hospital," which did not hurt anyone in the hospital, but were followed by "heavy and direct gunfire." When dawn broke, he said, bodies were "in the streets, surrounding the hospital," and four medical staff members were among the dead.

"The situation inside and around the hospital is catastrophic," said Dr. Safiya, whose statement was released by Gaza's Health Ministry, which is part of the enclave's prewar government controlled by Hamas, the militant

group that is at war with Israel. "Medical supplies are nearly depleted, and there are hundreds of victims," he added, a figure that could not be independently verified.

The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Friday.

The details remain murky, but Dr. Rik Peeperkorn, the World Health Organization's chief representative for the Palestinian territories, said there was "intense bombing close to the building and an attack by Israeli forces who ordered everyone to leave," spurring panic that apparently added to the casualties.

The hospital did not receive the kind of official evacuation order that sometimes precedes airstrikes, he said, before Israeli forces entered around 4 a.m. and told people to leave.

Briefing reporters in Geneva in a video call from central Gaza, Dr. Peeperkorn said that some people tried to flee the hospital by climbing over a back wall on the grounds, panicked by the intense



Treating a patient Friday at Kamal Adwan Hospital in Jabaliya.

fighting and the order to leave. That reportedly attracted gunfire from Israeli troops, he said, resulting in casualties.

Located in a densely populated city just north of Gaza City, Kamal Adwan is one of the few hospitals in northern Gaza still providing

members. Few doctors and nurses remain, and they care sometimes for upward of 100 patients. Local residents were also taking shelter at the hospital.

After Israeli forces ordered the hospital's patients, staff and people sheltering there to leave, "they forcibly moved everyone to a checkpoint and later demanded one companion for each patient or displaced person to assist with the evacuation," Dr. Safiya said in the statement.

"In the morning, we were shocked to see hundreds of bodies and injured individuals in the streets surrounding the hospital," he added in the statement.

It was not clear how many of the dead and wounded were fighters or noncombatants; the Gaza authorities do not distinguish between them in reporting casualties.

Dr. Safiya said the attack also hit oxygen generators at Kamal Adwan and left the hospital with only two inexperienced surgeons who had to start operating on

about 20 critically injured patients.

A team of surgeons from Indonesia was among the first to be forced to leave the building, he said.

Dr. Peeperkorn called it "incomprehensible but also incredibly sad" that the six-person emergency medical team from Indonesia had been working at Kamal Adwan for less than a week, after Israel had denied them entry to Gaza several times.

The attack on Friday followed days of intense Israeli military operations that the Gaza health authorities reported had resulted in the death of the head nurse in the intensive care unit and damage to hospital facilities.

Gaza's Ministry of Health said a quadcopter drone shot at the hospital eight times on Thursday. A 16-year-old patient at Kamal Adwan was killed on Thursday while being taken by wheelchair to the hospital's X-ray department, and 12 other people were wounded, the ministry said.

Syria's Neighbors Close Borders as Rebels Gain Ground Swiftly in South

From Page A1

on Friday urged Americans "to depart Syria now while commercial options remain available in Damascus."

"The bottom line," said Mehdi Rahmati, a prominent Iranian analyst, "is that Iran has realized that it cannot manage the situation in Syria right now with any military operation and this option is off the table."

Despite being largely overshadowed by the wars in Gaza and Lebanon, the Syrian civil war never ended and instead fell into a protracted stalemate. Diplomatic efforts to find a political solution have been stagnant for years.

The coalition of advancing rebels is led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, a group previously affiliated with Al Qaeda. Although it split with Al Qaeda in 2016 and has attempted to gain international legitimacy, it is still designated as a terrorist organization by the United States and the United Nations.

The group's leader, Abu Mohammad al-Jolani, said in an interview with The New York Times this week that his goal was to "liberate Syria from this oppressive regime."

The reactions on Friday of Syria's neighbors appeared to reflect the deep concerns about the spiraling and unpredictable war.

Lebanon announced on Friday that it was closing all land borders with Syria except for one that links Beirut with Damascus. Israel said it would reinforce "aerial and ground forces" in the Golan Heights, which Israel seized from Syria after the Arab-Israeli War of 1967.

Jordan closed a border crossing with Syria on Friday after insurgents captured the area on the Syrian side, Jordan's Interior Ministry said in a statement.

And beyond the main rebel advances, the Assad government appeared to be losing other pockets of territory. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a British-based war monitoring group, said that the city of Sweida, south of Damascus, was no longer under government control.

The Damascus embassy of Rus-

sia — one of Syria's most important allies — issued a statement warning Russians of "the difficult military and political situation in Syria." The embassy reminded Russians "of the opportunity of leaving the country on commercial flights through operating airports."

The sudden rebel advance, launched last week, has abruptly changed the landscape of the 13-year civil war.

The rebels have swept through major cities like Aleppo and Hama and captured a significant amount of territory across four provinces, while government forces seemed to put up little resistance.

U.S. officials have been surprised by the rebels' progress so far, and had not assessed that the Assad government's control on Aleppo was so weak. They said the rebels appear to have quickly taken advantage of the chaos created by their offensive, whose success likely exceeded their own expectations.

If the rebels gain control of Homs, it would be a significant turn in fortunes for Mr. al-Assad. The city sits at the crossroads of major highways, including one that leads to Damascus. Without Homs, the government would lose a key buffer between rebel-held areas in the northwest and Damascus farther south.

Early in the civil war, parts of Homs fell to the rebels. Over the years, government forces besieged and bombarded rebel-held areas to wrest them back, devastating parts of the city.

The opposition fighters heading toward Homs on Friday came out of Hama, the city they breached just a day earlier.

While the rebels say their goal is to oust Mr. al-Assad, it is not clear what would happen if he were to fall. Many in the international community had come to grudgingly accept him as Syria's leader, even after he violently crushed his country's opposition and used internationally banned chemical weapons.

For them, Mr. al-Assad offered a semblance of control, while a rebel takeover threatened more uncertainties in a region already in upheaval. Some Arab states last year normalized diplomatic relations with the Assad regime after shunning his government for years.

Publicly, American officials have been cautious about Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. But inside the U.S. government, some officials said



Rebel fighters parading in the streets of Hama after forces captured the central Syrian city on Friday, in a push that began last week.



The rebels posing for photos at one of Hama's water wheels.

they believe the group's turn to a more pragmatic approach was genuine, adding that its leaders know they cannot realize aspirations to join or lead the Syrian government if the group is seen as a jihadist organization.

The group has retained its identity as a conservative Islamist organization, but it has shown itself to be pragmatic while governing Idlib, in northwestern Syria, U.S. officials said. In areas it has taken

insisting that it was not affiliated with terror groups. He urged the United States to give its full-throated support to the push against Mr. al-Assad, saying the offensive was in U.S. national interests.

"Everyone should see this as Iran losing in Syria," he said.

The rebel advance struck at a moment of weakness for Mr. al-Assad's allies: Iran's power has been curtailed by its conflict with Israel, and Russia's military sapped by its invasion of Ukraine.

The Syrian government has relied on those countries and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah — now battered by its own war with Israel — to fight the rebels.

Russian airstrikes to try to slow the recent rebel advance have been relatively sparse, in what analysts see as a sign of Russia's limited ability to aid Mr. al-Assad.

The Syrian Observatory said Friday that a Russian convoy had fled Deir al-Zour, the eastern city where Kurdish forces were advancing, and was headed to Damascus.

On Friday, the Syrian military struck rebels and their vehicles both north and south of Hama with artillery, missiles and airstrikes, assisted by Russia. Dozens of opposition fighters were killed and wounded, according to Syrian state media.

The Syrian military, after withdrawing from Hama on Thursday following several days of fighting, issued an unusual statement explaining its pullback, saying that it was seeking to avoid battles that would endanger civilians.

But sacrificing Hama also enables the Assad government to shift its limited military forces to areas it regards as more important, such as Homs.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey, who has backed some of the Syrian opposition, including rebel factions in the current offensive, said on Friday that he had been frustrated with Mr. al-Assad over his unwillingness to negotiate over Syria's future. He issued a qualified approval of the rebel advance.

"Idlib, Hama, Homs, and the target, of course, is Damascus," Mr. Erdogan told reporters following Friday prayers in Istanbul, according to Turkish state media. "The opposition's march continues. Our wish is that this march in Syria continues without incident."

But Mr. Erdogan also seemed to express concern about the rebel advances, calling them "problematic," according to the Reuters news agency.

"These problematic advances continuing as a whole in the region are not in a manner we desire, our heart does not want these," he said. "Unfortunately, the region is in a bind."

Estonian Provocateur Ordered Acts of Vandalism at Russia's Behest, Officials Say

By MICHAEL SCHWIRTZ

For years, Allan Hantsom was a fixture in Estonia's tight-knit pro-Russian political movement. He belongs to a political party sympathetic to Russia's war in Ukraine, he frequently railed against the United States and NATO on social media, and he contributed to a Kremlin-sponsored propaganda outlet.

On Thursday, Estonian authorities went public with charges that Mr. Hantsom, 47, was also working on behalf of Russia's military intelligence service, the G.R.U. Mr. Hantsom, they revealed, was convicted of organizing several acts of vandalism in Estonia at the Russian spy agency's behest, starting in October, 2023.

While the actions were mostly small-bore, they fit a pattern of sabotage operations — some more sinister than others — that

Western officials say Russian operatives and their proxies have been carrying out with increasing frequency throughout Europe in recent years.

Last year, people recruited by Mr. Hantsom shattered the windows of cars belonging to Estonia's interior minister and the editor of an Estonian news outlet, prosecutors said, and doused several World War II monuments with paint.

These acts appeared intended mainly to annoy and unnerv, while perhaps tying up the resources of Estonia's intelligence and law enforcement agencies.

Russian agents have also been linked to antisemitic graffiti that has appeared on walls in France. And in several countries across Europe, mysterious fires have broken out not just in factories manufacturing arms for Ukraine,

but on buses and at shopping malls, incidents that some officials in those countries have attributed to Russian sabotage.

More serious were the incendiary devices that ignited in two DHL shipping plants over the summer, part of what officials said was a test run of a plot to put such devices aboard cargo planes. Russian officials have denied the country's involvement in sabotage and acts of vandalism.

The episodes have unnerved Western officials, who fret that low-level acts of vandalism could be a preview of more damaging and perhaps deadly operations to come. When a Russian helicopter pilot who had defected to Ukraine was killed in Spain in February, many officials and experts took it as a clear indication that despite efforts to erode Russian intelligence capabilities in Europe, the Kremlin's agents remain active

and able.

"The scale of Russia's attempts to sow discord across Europe and the use of untrained criminals mean that it is very probable that at some point there may be an attack where someone is killed or where a civilian is seriously harmed," a spokesperson for Estonia's domestic intelligence service said in a statement in October.

Russia's actions have prompted law enforcement and intelligence services, after years of inaction, to aggressively pursue cases involving potential Russian espionage and sabotage, officials and experts said.

Mr. Hantsom was arrested a year ago, convicted this spring of organizing the vandalism, and sentenced to six and a half years in prison. The Estonian authorities did not announce the charges and conviction until Thursday, a

delay they did not explain.

He was among 11 people identified by Estonian prosecutors as involved in G.R.U. sabotage operations. An Estonian court convicted seven of them. Two others are at large and believed to be in Russia, Estonia's State prosecutor, Triinu Olev-Aasa, said in a statement.

The authorities did not say whether Mr. Hantsom had direct contact with the G.R.U. or how he communicated with them. Mr. Hantsom could not immediately be reached for comment.

Intelligence experts and officials say that the Russian intelligence services have increasingly chosen to rely on proxies, sometimes recruited through social media, to carry out operations. This gives the Kremlin a degree of deniability, but also reflects the limitations facing Russian spies

these days. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, European countries expelled dozens of suspected Russian intelligence officers and have prevented others from replacing them.

Estonian authorities said that Mr. Hantsom organized the vandalism attacks with the help of the two people who are believed to now be in Russia. Those who actually damaged the vehicles belonging to the minister and the editor did not seem to have been aware whom the vehicles belonged to or who had hired them to carry out the job, Ms. Olev-Aasa said in her statement. They were promised money in exchange for their efforts, but do not seem to have been paid, she said.

"The chain of people organizing and committing the attacks was long, and not all of the participants knew the actual purpose of the criminal offense," she said.

New York City Approves a Plan to Create 80,000 New Homes

Adams Adds \$5 Billion To Infrastructure Projects And Affordable Housing

By EMMA G. FITZSIMMONS

The New York City Council on Thursday approved an ambitious plan that could make way for 80,000 new homes over the next 15 years, the most significant effort to address the city's housing crisis in decades.

The plan, known as "City of Yes," has been one of Mayor Eric Adams's top priorities and includes zoning changes to build more housing in a city where rents have soared and the vacancy rate is at its lowest level in half a century.

The plan passed the Council with a narrow majority of 31 votes in the 51-member body, a sign of the contentious negotiations that have consumed City Hall for months.

City leaders appeared to understand that they had to do something to address high housing costs. The number of homeless New Yorkers has risen, and roughly one in eight public school students were homeless last year. Roughly 500,000 households spend at least half of their income on rent.

Mayor Adams, a Democrat, and his administration won over skeptical lawmakers by agreeing to spend an additional \$5 billion on affordable housing and infrastructure projects and by scaling back some of the boldest proposals.

The goal is to build "a little more housing in every neighborhood" by changing rules around parking mandates for new construction and adding homes above stores and in basements.

Opposition was fierce in neighborhoods on Staten Island and in Queens that have many single-family homes, with residents objecting to the prospect of new high-rise apartments.

Mitchell L. Moss, a professor of urban policy at New York University, praised leaders for reaching a compromise and said that the city needed to build housing, especially near subway stations.

"We've had a lost decade of housing development in New York City, and this is the start of changing that," he said. "We have to keep going."

The Council speaker, Adrienne Adams, urged members to focus on what was best for the city — not just for their districts — at a moment when the high cost of living is pushing many families to move away.

"This Council cannot be the body that says no to people who need a place to live," Ms. Adams said in a passionate speech in the Council chambers before the vote, adding: "We cannot do nothing."

The mayor celebrated the victory at a City Hall rally on Thursday evening with Gov. Kathy Hochul, who committed \$1 billion in state funding to help secure a deal. Pointing to a diorama of new apartments built over a deli and a salon, Mayor Adams said the plan would help lower rents for New Yorkers.

"We showed the nation that government can still be bold and brave by passing the most pro-housing piece of legislation in city history," he said.

Mayor Adams, who is running for reelection, has record-low approval ratings



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DAVE SANDERS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Mayor Eric Adams, above, celebrated the passage of the City of Yes legislation at a City Hall rally. Adrienne Adams, far left, the City Council speaker, had pushed for additional funding for affordable housing. New York City rents have soared and the housing vacancy rate is at its lowest in decades, making it difficult for average families to find a home.

housing and homes near transit hubs, would no longer be required to provide parking.

The rules would also make it easier to build backyard cottages and basement apartments. And they would give developers an option to build bigger buildings than they currently can, if they include apartments available only to lower- or moderate-income residents or those who are struggling with homelessness.

David Carr, a Republican council member from Staten Island, voted against the plan on Thursday, arguing that the environmental effects had not been properly studied.

"I believe that this text amendment will not survive a legal challenge, and one is likely to be forthcoming," he said.

Some Democrats from neighborhoods outside Manhattan voted against the plan, including Lynn Schulman, who represents Forest Hills in Queens. She said she was worried it was being rushed and would damage the city.

"I heard very loud the voices of my constituents," she said.

and was indicted in September on federal corruption charges.

He was largely absent from the push to get the plan approved. Instead, he relied on two allies: Dan Garodnick, the director of the Department of City Planning, and Maria Torres-Springer, his first deputy mayor.

Tensions flared during the negotiations between Mayor Adams and Ms. Adams, who are not related. Ms. Adams did not join the mayor's victory rally. She thanked Ms. Hochul and Mr. Garodnick ahead of the vote without saying anything positive about the mayor.

Ms. Adams had pushed for additional funding to be included in the deal, which resulted in \$2 billion for affordable housing; \$2 billion for infrastructure projects, including sewer upgrades; and \$1 billion for public housing, vouchers, tenant protections and other measures.

Many housing experts and elected officials said that the plan was meaningful progress, but that the city had to go further to build more housing quickly.

Zellnor Myrie, a state senator from Brooklyn who is running for mayor, released a housing plan this week that called for building or preserving one million homes over the next decade. He proposed a "Mega Midtown" plan to increase density with mixed-income rental towers in that area of Manhattan.

"The passage of City of Yes is a step in the right direction; now it's time to start running," he said.

Last month, the Council approved a bill to shift expensive broker fees to landlords, another effort to address high housing costs. Mayor Adams said this week that he would not veto the bill despite his concerns that it could prompt landlords to raise monthly rents.

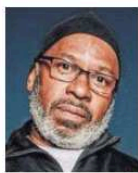
Coach Is Killed at Intersection He Had Said Was Dangerous

By ALYCE MCFADDEN

In 2017, after a crash at a Bronx intersection injured five people, a witness, Dwight Downer, complained about speeding drivers.

"People don't know how to slow down," Mr. Downer told WABC-TV. "People are in a hurry to go nowhere."

Last weekend, Mr. Downer, a beloved football coach, was killed by a driver



Dwight Downer, a volunteer football coach for the Bronx Buccaneers, was fatally struck by a driver across the street from his home.

yards from that same intersection, across the street from his home in the Lacomia section of the borough.

Mr. Downer, 60, was getting out of his car a little after midnight on Saturday when a pickup truck and a BMW collided at Eastchester Road and Givan Avenue, sending the BMW careening into Mr. Downer and several parked cars, the police said. He was taken to Jacobi Medical Center, where he was pronounced dead.

Mr. Downer was one of three pedestrians killed by drivers last weekend, an especially deadly two days in a year that has so far seen more than 100 New York

Kitty Bennett and Kirsten Noyes contributed research.

City pedestrians killed in traffic, a nearly 13 percent increase over this time last year.

A father of two, he was a volunteer football coach for the Bronx Buccaneers, an independent youth football program, and for DeWitt Clinton High School, his alma mater.

Tasha Andrews, Mr. Downer's romantic partner of five years and the general manager of the Buccaneers, said he loved football, especially the San Francisco 49ers. But, she added, he loved the athletes he coached more.

A retired correction officer, Mr. Downer had been deeply affected by seeing children and young adults in jail, Ms. Andrews said. In retirement, coaching became a way for him to help keep children focused, in school and out of trouble.

"He was using football as a tool to get to them, to mentor them, to be an example to them," Ms. Andrews, 55, said. "People might look at it and say, 'Boy, he really loves football.' And I'm not saying he didn't, but it was the kids, and football was the bridge, the means that he was able to have access to them."

At a vigil in Mr. Downer's honor on Tuesday evening at DeWitt Clinton High School, current and former players shared memories of a strict coach and an exceptionally generous mentor who freely gave his time, advice and even his shoes.

One Buccaneer, Markus Payano, 9, remembered that he had shown up for his first practice in sandals. When Mr. Downer, known to his players as Coach D, noticed his footwear, he took his own cleats off his feet and handed them to Markus.

"He never talked down," Markus said



ELIAS WILLIAMS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

after the vigil. "He always encouraged us to be the best of the best."

Keith Spivey, the president of the Buccaneers, described Mr. Downer as a pan-seared steak with shrimp and asparagus. She described him as patient, calm and funny.

sometimes players there.

Off the field, Mr. Downer loved bourbon, cigars and cooking. Ms. Andrews said his signature dish was a pan-seared steak with shrimp and asparagus. She described him as patient, calm and funny.

Kenya White, far left, a Buccaneers coach, and Tasha Andrews, Mr. Downer's partner. "He was using football as a tool to get to them, to mentor them, to be an example to them," Ms. Andrews said.

"He was very logical, and I'm very emotional," Ms. Andrews said. "He absolutely loved life, and he lived every day hopeful of a good life."

Less than a day after Mr. Downer was struck, a driver hit and killed a 60-year-old man, Uddin Shahi, at another Bronx intersection less than four miles from Mr. Downer's house. The next day, a 73-year-old woman, Chana Layosh, was hit and killed while crossing the street in Brooklyn.

Traffic deaths are especially prevalent around this time of year, when the end of daylight saving time means earlier sunsets and more hours of darkness, said Alexa Sledge, the communications director of Transportation Alternatives, a transit advocacy and research group. Holidays can also make collision rates tick up, Ms. Sledge said, because more people are on the road, traveling to see family or friends.

In the first 11 months of this year, 241 people died in traffic collisions, according to data from the Police Department. That's a slight decline — 3.6 percent — from the same period last year. And more pedestrians have been killed by drivers this year than in six of the past seven years, Ms. Sledge said.

She added that the city needed to take more drastic action to keep New Yorkers safe on the city's sidewalks, bike lanes and streets.

"Every single traffic death is a policy failure, it's a design failure, it's an infrastructure failure," she said. "And if we make different choices when it comes to how we design our streets and how we design our laws, there won't be any more traffic deaths."

Transition in Washington

Trump Has ‘Lost Faith’ in N.R.A., Says Official of Troubled Gun Group

By DANNY HAKIM

President-elect Donald J. Trump has “lost faith” in the National Rifle Association, according to a top official at the gun organization, who argued in a recent letter to fellow board members that the N.R.A. needed to regroup so that it could help protect the Republican Party’s new edge in Congress in the midterm elections in 2026.

Bill Bachenberg, the group’s first vice president and a staunch Trump ally, also told fellow board members that during this year’s election Mr. Trump was upset that the N.R.A. had not committed to doing more to help him win. And Mr. Bachenberg wrote that during a conversation at the group’s annual conference in May, Mr. Trump expressed incredulity that the N.R.A. was paying tens of millions of dollars a year to a lawyer, William A. Brewer III, whose political donations have favored Democrats over the years.

“I can say for a fact that President Trump and his most inner circle have lost faith in the N.R.A.,” Mr. Bachenberg wrote last week in his letter, which was co-signed by Mark Vaughan, the N.R.A. board’s second vice president. “I communicate with them often. We have a tremendous amount of work to rebuild trust with them, just like our members and donors.”

Asked for comment, Karoline Leavitt, a Trump-Vance transition spokeswoman, responded only broadly, saying in a statement that “President Trump believes that every American has a God-given right to protect themselves and their family, and he will defend law-abiding gun owners.”

The letter is the latest evidence of the N.R.A.’s diminished political status. Once among the most influential lobbying forces in Washington, it has been reeling after years of scandal and corruption allegations. The group is divided between loyalists to its former chief executive Wayne LaPierre and another wing, which includes Mr. Bachenberg, that wants to break from Mr. LaPierre’s controversial legacy.

Doug Hamlin, the N.R.A.’s new chief executive, said in a statement that because the group had spent heavily to defend itself against a civil case brought by Letitia James, New York’s attorney general, it had “to take a targeted approach in the 2024 election cycle.”

“Looking forward, 2025 represents the first time in years the N.R.A. can focus on rebuilding,” he added.

New tax filings show that the N.R.A. is in deepening financial

trouble. Its annual deficit widened to about \$33 million last year, up from roughly \$22 million a year earlier.

That came despite the N.R.A.’s receipt of nearly \$18 million from an affiliated charity called the N.R.A. Foundation, though some of that was used to reimburse expenses. The group’s ability to rely on cash from the foundation will be curtailed by a settlement agreement that the group struck in April with the office of Brian L. Schwalb, the attorney general of Washington, D.C., where the foundation is based. Mr. Schwalb had accused the N.R.A. of using the charity as “an unchecked piggy bank.”

Revenue and contributions have also cratered in recent years amid the corruption allegations and relentless internal infighting. The turmoil has cost the group roughly \$1.3 billion in revenue over six years, Mr. Bachenberg and Mr. Vaughan estimated in their letter.

“My overall take on the financial health of the N.R.A. is that it is tenuous,” said David Nelson, a retired tax partner at Ernst & Young

Hegseth Has Embraced New Christian Crusade

By MIKE BAKER and RUTH GRAHAM

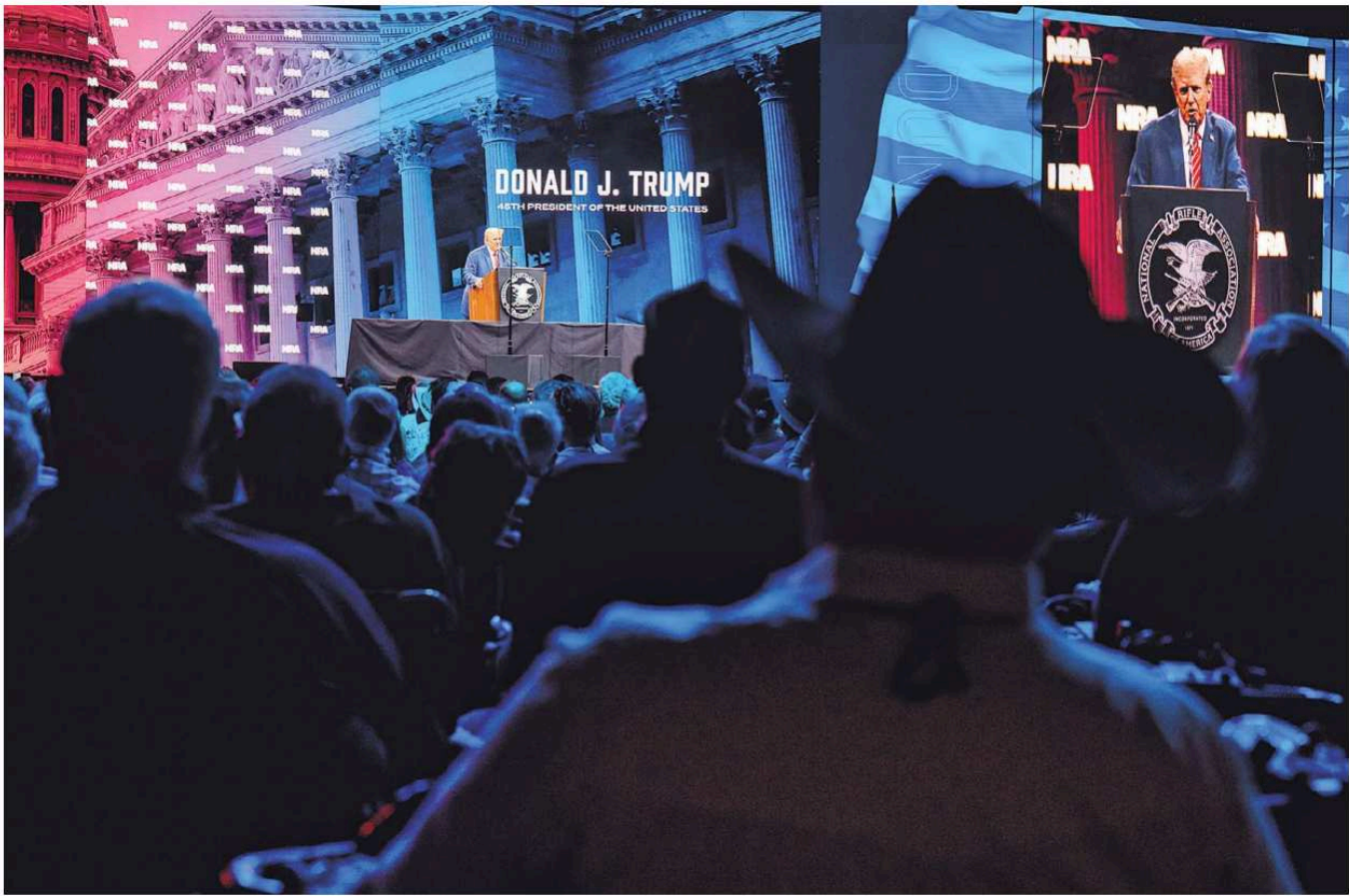
Before Donald J. Trump picked him to lead the Department of Defense, Pete Hegseth spoke often about a medieval military campaign that he saw as a model for today: the Crusades, in which Christian warriors from Western Europe embarked on ruthless missions to wrest control of Jerusalem and other areas under Muslim rule.

As he embraced a combative brand of Christianity in recent years, he wrote that people who enjoy the benefits of Western civilization should “thank a Crusader.” On his arm, he has a tattoo with the words “Deus Vult,” which he has described as a “battle cry” of the Crusades.

“Voting is a weapon, but it’s not enough,” he wrote in a book, “American Crusade,” published in May 2020. “We don’t want to fight, but, like our fellow Christians one thousand years ago, we must.”

Mr. Trump has so far stuck by Mr. Hegseth as his pick for secretary of defense despite a growing series of disclosures about his past, including allegations of sexual impropriety, alcohol abuse and financial mismanagement. Mr. Hegseth has vigorously denied the allegations, calling them an attempt to disrupt Mr. Trump’s agenda.

The issue of Mr. Hegseth’s religious expressions has come up in the past. He has said he was barred from participating in the military security detail for President Biden’s inauguration in 2021 because of a tattoo on his chest depicting a Jerusalem cross, a religious emblem that was also a symbol used by crusaders. (Reuters and others reported that his tattoos, including the Deus Vult motto that has been used by white supremacists, prompted a fellow service member to flag Mr. Hegseth as a potential “insider



DESIREE RIOS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

who specialized in charities, after reviewing the group’s latest filings. “The annual losses for the last two years are not sustainable.”

In February, Mr. LaPierre, who led the organization for more than three decades, was found liable for misspending \$5.4 million in N.R.A. funds after it was revealed that he had splurged on superyacht junkets, charter flights, vacations in the Bahamas and nearly \$275,000 in suits from a Beverly Hills boutique. The judgment came in the case brought by Ms. James’s office, which has not yet been fully resolved.

Since Mr. LaPierre’s departure this year, the N.R.A.’s internal fractures have deepened, with Mr. Hamlin in one camp, along with Mr. Bachenberg, and the president of the board of directors, former Representative Bob Barr, Republican of Georgia, in another.

A central dispute between the camps is the role of Mr. Brewer, who became the gun group’s aggressive lead lawyer in the last several years of the LaPierre era. Mr. Bachenberg and Mr. Vaughan’s letter assailed Mr. Brewer,



MATT ROURKE/ASSOCIATED PRESS

saying he had billed the N.R.A. more than \$198 million since 2018. “Brewer’s reputation is our number one impediment in bringing back the members, donors and industry, and rebuilding N.R.A. brand trust,” the men wrote.

In a statement on Wednesday evening, Mr. Brewer said his firm had helped the N.R.A. successfully “confront a barrage of blue-state regulatory investigations,”

President-elect Donald J. Trump, above, in May at the annual meeting of the National Rifle Association, which has been reeling after years of scandal and corruption allegations. Left, Bill Bachenberg, a vice president, has been a Trump ally for years.

including an effort by New York regulators to dissolve the group. His firm has also previously said that some portion of its billing is spent on outside experts and services.

Mr. Barr, in a separate statement, said that “attacks on the N.R.A.’s legal strategy are, at best, misinformed” and that they disregarded “the existential threat the association has been facing.”

Mr. Bachenberg has been a Trump ally for years. In 2020, he acted as an alternate elector from Pennsylvania on Mr. Trump’s behalf, and he is now a 2024 elector.

In one part of the letter, attributed solely to Mr. Bachenberg, he wrote: “I spoke with President Trump at the May annual meeting. He was very troubled that N.R.A. would not be there to help like N.R.A. did in 2016. He could not understand how we could be using Brewer, a lawyer who” had donated “to anti-Second-Amend-

ment candidates and drained our organization.” (Mr. Barr and other N.R.A. officials said in their own recent message to the board that the Brewer firm’s litigation team “includes several strong conservatives.”)

Despite the N.R.A.’s continuing internal turmoil, the prospects for federal gun control legislation have rarely seemed more distant. Mr. Trump is a staunch ally of pro-gun groups, and even more so is his son Donald Trump Jr., who has emerged as the most politically vocal of the president-elect’s children.

Jeff Knox, a board member, said in an interview that the legal fees were “the difference between being in the red and being in the black,” adding, “I think we’re going to be less prominent in the political arena over the next several years as we rebuild, but I think we’re moving in the right direction.”



HAIYUN JIANG FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Pete Hegseth has spoken often about the Crusades, the brutal missions he sees as a model for today.

nity Church in New Jersey. The church’s pastor, Chris Durkin, remains close to Mr. Hegseth and recently recorded a video supporting his nomination, describing him as “a genuine patriot who loves God.”

Mr. Hegseth and his family moved to the Nashville area about two years ago, a decision he has said was based on their desire to send their children to Jonathan Edwards Classical Academy, a Christian school founded in 2009. Classical education, in which classrooms focus primarily on the Western canon, has become a fast-growing movement among conservatives who are wary of secular public schools.

In Tennessee, the Hegseth family joined Pilgrim Hill Reformed Fellowship, a small church opened in 2021 as part of the growing Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches. The denomination was co-founded by Doug Wilson, a pastor based in Moscow, Idaho; his religious empire now includes a college, a clas-

sical school network, a publishing house, a podcast network and multiple churches, among other entities.

Mr. Wilson is a self-described Christian nationalist, which he defined in an interview with The New York Times as someone who sees that “secular nationalism doesn’t work,” and who wants to limit the power of the government to impose restrictions on Christians.

He has written prolifically for years, but his profile within conservatism has risen in the Trump era; he was interviewed on Tucker Carlson’s podcast this year and was invited to speak at the National Conservatism Conference. The Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches has expanded recently to include about 150 congregations, including Mr. Hegseth’s in Tennessee.

In his writings, Mr. Wilson has argued that slavery “produced in the South a genuine affection between the races,” that homosexuality should be a crime and that

the 19th Amendment guaranteeing women the right to vote was a mistake. He has written that women should not ordinarily hold political office because “the Bible does say that when feminine leadership is common, it should be reckoned not as a blessing but as a curse.”

The governing documents of the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches include a statement that women should not “be mustered for combat.” (Mr. Hegseth has also said that he does not believe women should serve in combat roles.) The church reserves leadership positions for men and asserts that men are the heads of their households, views shared by many theologically conservative churches.

In an interview on Wednesday, Mr. Wilson said he had never met or communicated with Mr. Hegseth but expressed enthusiasm about the prospect of his leadership at the Defense Department.

“I would hope Pete Hegseth

A fascination with a ruthless campaign has raised red flags.

would be a disrupter of the Pentagon’s way of doing things,” Mr. Wilson said. “I would like to see a rebuilt military that’s far more lethal and a lot smaller.”

Mr. Hegseth told the Christian magazine in Nashville that he was studying a book by Mr. Wilson; on a podcast Mr. Hegseth said that he would not send his children to Harvard but would send them to Mr. Wilson’s college in Idaho.

Mr. Wilson is among the Christian leaders who in recent years have reframed the Crusades, which included mass killings of Jews and Muslims, in a positive light. In the interview, he described the campaigns as imperfect, even horrifying at times, but also as “a long overdue reaction to Muslim aggression.”

Mr. Hegseth has written that while the Crusades were filled with injustice and unspeakable tragedy, the alternative would have been “horrific,” because it is Western civilization that has nurtured the values of “freedom” and “equal justice.” His writings warn of the growing presence of the Muslim faith in the West, and urge Americans to work on issues such as education, media and law to protect Christian values.

“We’re in middle Phase 1 right now, which is effectively a tactical retreat where you regroup, consolidate and reorganize,” Mr. Hegseth said on a 2023 podcast affiliated with Mr. Wilson’s church. “And as you do so, you build your army underground with the opportunity later on of taking offensive operations in an overt way. And obviously all of this is metaphorical and all that good stuff,” he added before breaking into laughter.

In his book, Mr. Hegseth also offered a nod to the prospect of future violence: “Our American Crusade is not about literal swords, and our fight is not with guns. Yet.”

Transition in Washington

CONGRESSIONAL MEMO

A Pitch for Cutbacks Is Brief and Bright, But With Few Specifics

By CATIE EDMONDSON

WASHINGTON — As far as congressional meetings go, Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy's huddle with Republicans was remarkably efficient. The moguls whom President-elect Donald J. Trump has charged with producing a federal government marked by "more efficiency and less bureaucracy" — the Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE — arrived on Capitol Hill on Thursday for a series of sitdowns with lawmakers that culminated in an afternoon session open to all congressional Republicans. Mr. Musk and Mr. Ramaswamy each delivered roughly a minute of introductory remarks, as if to show off their talent for streamlining in a roomful of officials known for long-windedness. They disclosed little in the way of their plans for where to find spending cuts, according to those who attended the closed-door meeting, instead emphasizing how badly both the government and its \$36 trillion debt had ballooned. Then they turned the microphones over to lawmakers, who enthusiastically lined up to offer suggestions of government agencies and programs to slash. Republicans who have long dreamed of the opportunity to downsize the federal government — and are eager to rub elbows with the richest man in the world, and a close Trump ally to boot — hailed the arrival of Mr. Musk and Mr. Ramaswamy on their home turf. Taxpayers "deserve a more responsive government, a more efficient government, one that is leaner and more focused on its primary objectives," Speaker Mike Johnson told throngs of assembled reporters before the closed-door meeting, adding,

"We believe it's an historic moment for the country, and these two gentlemen are going to help navigate through this exciting new day." Just how they plan to do that is not yet clear. Lawmakers leaving the meeting on Thursday were bombarded with questions from reporters on the policy specifics of a DOGE blueprint, including on issues Mr. Musk has posted about on X, his social media platform. Were Republicans discussing slashing entitlement benefits, the main drivers of deficits? How might this initiative factor into the vast tax package the G.O.P. is expected to muscle through Congress, which could add trillions more to the debt? Nobody could say. "This is, like, the very first day," Representative Tom Cole, Republican of Oklahoma and the chairman of the Appropriations Committee, told reporters. "I think it's just getting to know you, and trying to understand the full scope of what they're going to propose, how much would be done by executive action," said Mr. Cole, who leads the panel that controls federal spending legislation. Senator Susan Collins, Republican of Maine, who is set to lead the Appropriations Committee next Congress and who met one-on-one with Mr. Musk for more than an hour, told reporters that Mr. Musk also "did not make a presentation" in her meeting. "We talked about how we could improve the efficiency and effectiveness of government to better serve the American people and to save taxpayer dollars," Ms. Collins said. "We did not go through any list of cuts or anything like that." Weaving through the Capitol



Elon Musk had his son, X Æ A-12, with him as he and his DOGE partner, Vivek Ramaswamy, went to Capitol Hill on Thursday.

for meetings, Mr. Musk and Mr. Ramaswamy also met with Senator John Thune, Republican of South Dakota, who will be majority leader in the next Congress, and a group of Senate Republicans. Mr. Musk had in tow his small son, X Æ A-12, who was clad in a tiny matching suit and sat atop his father's shoulders as he strode through the Capitol. Mr. Musk's son, 4, appeared to sit patiently through all of the meetings — delighting lawmakers who posted snapshots online. Despite the warm welcome, DOGE's mission is in some ways at odds with that of Congress. The initiative, at least for now, is essentially functioning as an outside advisory group with no official power or mandate. Congress, on the other hand, has the constitutional power of the purse, and lawmakers, especially appropriators, have historically

jealously guarded their control over the spending bills that fund government programs, many of which they have created themselves. And getting legislation that cuts spending through the House has proved difficult even under Republican majorities. Last year, for instance, G.O.P. leaders scrapped a vote on the bill funding the Transportation Department after northeastern conservatives revolted because it would have cut Amtrak funding levels by more than 60 percent. "I told these guys, the best thing they could do is highlight all of the nonsense that Congress continues to fund, and then that way Congress has to bear its burden as appropriators and spenders with the power of the purse," said Representative Chip Roy of Texas. "We'll see what the president

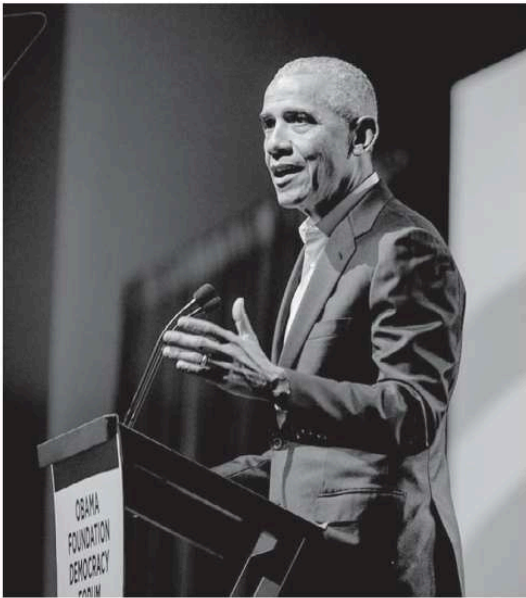
decides to do and how he's structuring it, and who reports to whom," he said of DOGE. "But they're free Americans that can go out there and put stuff out there on Twitter, and expose and make clear, so that then we can take it and do something with it. They can put forward and propose plans." Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia, who is in line to be chairwoman of an oversight subcommittee in the new Congress to collaborate with DOGE, told reporters that Mr. Musk and Mr. Ramaswamy suggested creating a public "naughty and nice list." The list would score lawmakers' votes on federal spending, akin to the scorecards that many political lobbying organizations already put out. (Some budget watchdog groups already do so.) Eager to seize both a potential

policy opportunity and bask in a rare celebrity-adjacent spotlight, lawmakers in both parties have already begun offering up bills slashing various government agencies and directly addressing Mr. Musk on his social media platform. "I'm ready to work with @doge, @elonmusk + @VivekGRamaswamy to slash waste," Representative Ro Khanna, Democrat of California, wrote. "Let's look to the Truman Committee and ensure Americans get their money's worth with DOD spending," he added, referring to the Department of Defense. Mr. Musk replied, "Much appreciated." Both before and after the meeting, throngs of lawmakers lined up to take photographs with Mr. Musk and Mr. Ramaswamy. Most were later posted on X.

Obama Offers Democracy A Road Map For Survival

By JULIE BOSMAN

CHICAGO — In his first speech since the presidential election in November, Barack Obama urged Americans who want democracy to survive to look for ways to compromise, engage with the other side, turn away from identity politics and build relationships with unlikely potential allies. "Pluralism is not about holding hands and singing 'Kumbaya,'" Mr. Obama said in Chicago on Thursday. "It is not about abandoning your convictions and folding when things get tough. It is about recognizing that, in a democracy, power comes from forging alliances and building coalitions, and making room in those coalitions not only for the woke, but the waking." He added: "Purity tests are not a recipe for long-term success." Billed as an address on "the power of pluralism," the speech — a road map of sorts for political survival for liberals in a second term for Donald J. Trump — was delivered before hundreds of people as part of an annual Democracy Forum put on by the Obama Foundation, a private nonprofit entity that is led by Mr. Obama. Mr. Obama opened the speech with an acknowledgment that when he told friends of the focus of this year's forum, the topic drew groans and eye rolls. "We've just been through a fierce, hard-fought election, and it's fair to say that it did not turn out as they had hoped," said Mr. Obama, who had, along with his wife, Michelle, campaigned intensely for Kamala Harris, the Democratic candidate, in the final weeks. For Mr. Obama's friends, he said, talk of bridging differences in a bitterly divided country seemed like an academic exercise. "It felt far-fetched, even naïve, especially since, as far as they were concerned, the election proved that democracy's down pretty far on people's priority lists," he said. But, he said, "it's easy to give democracy lip service when it delivers the outcomes we want," adding, "it's when we don't get what we want that our commitment to democracy is tested." It is not just leaders who need to build relationships with opponents, Mr. Obama said, urging the young people in the audience to make that their mission. "Advocates and rank and file in



Speaking in Chicago on Thursday, former President Barack Obama said, "Purity tests are not a recipe for long-term success."

Urging compromise and putting an end to identity politics.

any group have to be down for compromise as well," he said. The Democracy Forum, a day-long conference that draws students and nonprofit professionals with sessions on leadership, political organizing and polarization, was held at the Marriott Marquis on the South Side of Chicago. The Obama Presidential Center, which is several miles away, is still under construction and is expected to open to the public in 2026. The Obama Presidential Center will not be an official presidential library. Mr. Obama chose a privately operated facility that will receive some artifacts on loan from the National Archives and Records Administration, but will not be operated by the agency. Berto Aguayo, a native of the South Side and a lawyer who founded a violence prevention organization, introduced Mr. Obama, and Mr. Obama's sister, Maya Soetoro-Ng, watched his speech from the front row. The speech veered away from the blunt partisan politics that had dominated Mr. Obama's most recent public appearances. At the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in August, Mr. Obama cast Ms. Harris's bid for the presidency as an extension of his own, saying that "the torch

has been passed" to her. At the time, he emphasized that Ms. Harris's campaign was an uphill one, and that a large number of voters felt disenfranchised. The United States was still closely divided, Mr. Obama said, "a country where too many Americans are still struggling and don't believe government can help." On the campaign trail this fall, Mr. Obama spoke in Wisconsin and Pennsylvania, appealing to Black men in particular as their support for Ms. Harris was seen as waning. "You're coming up with all kinds of reasons and excuses," Mr. Obama said in Pittsburgh. "I've got a problem with that. "Part of it makes me think that, well, you just aren't feeling the idea of having a woman as president, and you're coming up with other alternatives and other reasons for that," Mr. Obama continued, adding that the "women in our lives have been getting our backs this entire time." In his speech on Thursday, Mr. Obama returned briefly to the subject of his own family, reminding the audience that identities are not singular and static. Sometimes there is a false perception, he said, that "because you're a male, you automatically have certain attitudes and, let's face it, you're part of the patriarchy." "I have two daughters and a wife, and sometimes I'm sitting at the dinner table, and I'm like, 'What? What did I do?'" he said, drawing laughs. "They pick on me all the time," he said.

Ocasio-Cortez Seeks Congressional Post Where She Would Be a Top Foil to Trump

By NICHOLAS FANDOS

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York built her reputation clashing with House Democratic leaders. Now, for the first time, she will take a shot at joining their ranks. Ms. Ocasio-Cortez announced on Friday that she would seek the coveted position of top Democrat on the House Committee on Oversight and Accountability, challenging a more senior colleague to fill the vacancy. If she succeeds and is chosen as the panel's ranking member, the 35-year-old congresswoman would be by far the youngest Democrat to help lead a House committee. She would gain a platform not only to investigate President-elect Donald J. Trump's administration but also to help her party chart a path back from electoral defeat. "Democrats will face an important task: We must balance our focus on the incoming president's corrosive actions and corruption with a tangible fight to make life easier for America's working class," Ms. Ocasio-Cortez wrote in a letter to colleagues. "I will lead by example by always keeping the lives of everyday Americans at the center of our work." But first she must contend with Representative Gerald E. Connolly, 74, a pugnacious, well-liked eight-term incumbent from Virginia who has pitched himself as a more seasoned investigator. The contest promises to be a significant test of just how far one of the brightest Democratic stars has moved toward the mainstream since crashing into Congress six years ago as a left-wing insurgent. There is little doubt that Ms. Ocasio-Cortez, who joined a sit-in protest in the speaker's suite before she had even been sworn in, has grown more comfortable working within her party's power structure. She won a prime-time speaking slot at this year's Democratic National Convention and served as a prominent surrogate for Vice President Kamala Harris's presidential campaign, breaking with some fellow leftists along the way. The question now is whether her colleagues are ready to return the embrace and elevate a sometimes confrontational leader of the left-wing "squad" to be one of Mr. Trump's most visible foils. "When you have a secret ballot vote, there are a lot of mixed motives," said Henry A. Waxman, a retired California congressman known for his own leadership of the Oversight Committee and for challenging the seniority system.

"She is so much in the minds of American voters as an example of the left wing of the Democratic Party," he added. "Members of the caucus have to decide if it helps or hurts the party's future if she becomes leader of that committee, especially since she would have absolute control over what agenda she wants to pursue." Mr. Connolly is likely to win support not just from proponents of Democrats' seniority system, but also from members who fear that elevating Ms. Ocasio-Cortez, an outspoken democratic socialist and ardent critic of Israel's war in Gaza, would delight Republicans and further alienate moderates. "Hard work can and should be rewarded in the House of Representatives," he wrote in a letter outlining his own bid this week. "Right now we need an expert



Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez wants a lead role on the Oversight Committee.

who can parry the worst Republican attacks on our institutions and deliver reform where it is necessary and needed." Mr. Connolly faces his own challenges. He recently announced that he has esophageal cancer and he will have to reassure colleagues that he can lead the committee while undergoing treatment. A third Democrat who had been considering a run, Representative Ro Khanna of California, said he would support Ms. Ocasio-Cortez instead. In calls to colleagues, Ms. Ocasio-Cortez has highlighted her own experience. As the committee's vice ranking member, she has worked closely with its current Democratic leader, Representative Jamie Raskin of Maryland. Videos of her sparring with witnesses and committee Republicans have often gone viral. Allies said they believed she had a path to victory, although an uphill one, at a time when many Democrats are clamoring for generational change. The race will be decided in a private caucus vote later this month. The Oversight Committee position became available after Mr. Raskin, 61, successfully challenged Representative Jerrold Nadler, 77, of New York for the top Democratic slot on the Judiciary Committee.

Representative Hakeem Jeffries of New York, the top House Democrat, has indicated he intends to stay neutral. So has Mr. Raskin, who said in an interview that both candidates were "excellent members of the committee." The Oversight Committee is among the most storied, and partisan, bodies in Congress. Republicans and Democrats have used it to antagonize the White House, while occasionally working together to pressure large corporations to change their practices. Republicans will control the committee gavel and subpoena power in the coming Congress, but the ranking member oversees a large staff and has the power to initiate investigations and minority hearings to spotlight issues they choose. The ranking member would also be in a position to lead the committee if Democrats retake the House majority in 2026. Ms. Ocasio-Cortez's competitiveness for the seat would scarcely have been plausible not that long ago. She was elected to the House in 2018 after defeating one of the party's leaders in a primary. Many of her new colleagues either derided her or feared her attacks on party orthodoxy. Representative Nancy Pelosi, the House speaker at the time, publicly belittled the influence of Ms. Ocasio-Cortez and her allies outside "their Twitter world." Ms. Ocasio-Cortez remains divisive in certain circles. Republicans and some pro-Israel Democrats view her criticism of Israel as antisemitic. Others blame her and fellow progressives for alienating key blocs of voters. But her supporters say she has an unusual talent for communicating and a populist streak that allows her to reach voters drifting away from the party. In recent years, she has slowly adopted a more pragmatic approach, winning over allies on Capitol Hill and in the Biden administration. In her pitch to colleagues on Friday, she called the responsibility of leading Democrats' oversight of the incoming administration "profound and consequential." She emphasized the need for the committee to work on multiple tracks, checking Mr. Trump's attempts to remake the government, working across the aisle where possible and laying out an alternative policy vision to reach struggling Americans. "We must focus on the committee's strong history of both holding administrations accountable and taking on the economic precarity and inequality that is challenging the American way of life," she wrote.



More than 170 million Americans use TikTok, which has raised national security concerns because it is owned by a Chinese company.

TikTok Faces U.S. Ban After New Law Upheld

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sary's ability to gather data on people in the United States," the judges wrote on Friday.

U.S. lawmakers and intelligence officials have said that TikTok poses a national security threat under ByteDance. They say that the Chinese government's oversight of private companies would allow it to use the app to retrieve sensitive information about Americans or to spread propaganda, though they have not publicly shared evidence that this has occurred. They have noted that apps like Facebook and YouTube are banned in China and that the country does not allow TikTok there.

TikTok said that it would appeal the decision to the Supreme Court, which it expected to rule differently.

"The Supreme Court has an established historical record of protecting Americans' right to free speech, and we expect they will do just that on this important constitutional issue," Michael Hughes, a spokesman for TikTok, said in a statement. He called the ban "outright censorship of the American people."

Attorney General Merrick Garland called the ruling "an important step in blocking the Chinese government from weaponizing TikTok."

Exactly what happens next for the app is unclear, as there is no guarantee that the Supreme Court will take up the case.

Anupam Chander, a professor of law and technology at Georgetown University, is among the experts who expect the Supreme Court will take up the case and extend TikTok's future in the United States.

"The Supreme Court, not wanting to see this app go dark on Jan. 19, will freeze the law, and then this gets handed over to the Trump administration and a Trump Department of Justice to figure out what they want to do," he said.

If the company doesn't sell, its short-term hope for continuing in the United States will be a court-ordered injunction that would pause the law from taking effect.

Paul Gallant, a policy analyst for the financial services firm TD Cowen, said in a recent note that he expected the Supreme Court to take up the appeal and rule by June.

Chief Judge Sri Srinivasan on Friday acknowledged the popularity of the app and noted that without a sale, many Americans could "lose access to an outlet for expression, a source of community and even a means of income."

But, he added: "Congress judged it necessary to assume that risk given the grave national-

so tech giants would have to trust in the Trump administration's promises of nonenforcement and prepare for that to change under a different president.

The law also gives the president the authority to decide whether a sale or a similar transaction successfully removes TikTok from "foreign adversary" control. Some experts speculated that ByteDance could make some structural changes to appease those requirements. If Mr. Trump blessed them, he could allow the app to continue operating in the United States.

And despite Mr. Trump's promises, his commitment to TikTok's future is uncertain given his hawkish stance on China. In 2020, he sought to block TikTok in the United States and force its sale to a group of American companies, citing similar national security concerns to those raised this year by Congress.

Congress passed the law after being swayed by several closed-door intelligence briefings that outlined the threats posed by TikTok's ownership. There is a chance that Mr. Trump changes his mind about the app if he is briefed on that same information once in office, said Sarah Kreps, a professor at the Tech Policy Institute at Cornell University.

"It's clear that the legislators thought there was enough evidence supporting a danger, and there was a willingness to set free speech concerns aside in favor of national security," she said.

Overall, she said that it remained to be seen which version of Mr. Trump would take up the TikTok question.

"Is it going to be Trump, the deal maker, or Trump, the China hawk?" she said. "This is so complicated."

Free speech advocates condemned the decision. The American Civil Liberties Union called it "a major blow to freedom of expression online" with implications for other platforms under foreign ownership. Jameel Jaffer, execu-

tive director at the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University, wrote in a post on Bluesky that the ruling was "deeply misguided" and "gives the government sweeping power to restrict Americans' access to information, ideas, and media from abroad."

But Mr. Gallant, the TD analyst, said in a note on Friday that the unanimous ruling from the three judges suggested that the Supreme Court would also uphold the decision. He noted that the D.C. court judges were made up of two conservatives and one liberal, similar to the Supreme Court's makeup.

While TikTok and ByteDance have said that a sale is not possible, there is a chance that the ruling will create new movement in that arena. Steven Mnuchin, a Treasury secretary during Mr. Trump's first term, said in March that he was "trying to put together a group to buy TikTok, because they should be owned by U.S. businesses." In May, the billionaire Frank McCourt also expressed interest, which he reiterated on Friday. Other rumored suitors have included Bobby Kotick, the former chief executive of the video game company Activision Blizzard. In 2020, possible buyers included Microsoft and the cloud computing company Oracle.

A potential sale is up against major hurdles — financially, technically and politically. TikTok could cost more than \$200 billion, and many potential buyers would most likely run into antitrust scrutiny. The Chinese government issued export restrictions in August 2020 that would probably give Beijing the power to block a sale.

Mr. Srinivasan, the chief judge, expressed skepticism on Friday about the argument that China would block a sale. "Congress of course need not legislate around another country's preferences to exercise its own powers constitutionally — much less the preferences of a designated foreign adversary," he wrote.

Biden's Team Considers Issuing Blanket Pardons

By PETER BAKER and ERICA L. GREEN

WASHINGTON — President Biden's staff is debating whether he should issue blanket pardons for a swath of President-elect Donald J. Trump's perceived enemies to protect them from the "retribution" he has threatened after he takes office, according to people familiar with the discussion.

The idea would be to pre-emptively extend executive clemency to a list of current and former government officials for any possible crimes over a period of years, effectively short-circuiting the next president's promised campaign of reprisals.

White House officials do not believe the potential recipients have actually committed crimes, but they have grown increasingly worried that Mr. Trump's selections for top Justice Department positions indicate that he will follow through on his repeated vows to seek revenge. Even an investigation that results in no charges could drag on for months or years, costing those people hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees and crippling their career prospects.

The discussion of blanket pardons, reported earlier by Politico, remains primarily at a staff level although Mr. Biden has talked about it with senior members of the team, according to the people familiar with the matter, who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe internal deliberations. It comes after Mr. Biden pardoned his son Hunter to spare him from prison on gun and tax charges.

Karine Jean-Pierre, the White House press secretary, declined to discuss blanket pardons during a briefing on Friday, although she said Mr. Biden was considering executive clemency actions more

ing is Jeffrey D. Zients, the White House chief of staff.

But as White House officials weigh the matter, they are concerned that such a move would fuel the impression spread in conservative media that the recipients had actually done something wrong. At least some of those who would be candidates for such pardons have said that they would not want one because of such an implication. Others who are concerned about retribution have lobbied for their own pardons.

Among those whose names have been floated are former Representative Liz Cheney, Republican of Wyoming, who was vice chair of the bipartisan committee that investigated Mr. Trump's role in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol; Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, the former top infectious disease expert for the government whose advice on Covid-19 made him a target of far-right attacks; Jack Smith, the outgoing special counsel who prosecuted Mr. Trump; and Senator-elect Adam B. Schiff, Democrat of California, who was a lead House prosecutor at Mr. Trump's first impeachment trial.

Ms. Cheney and Dr. Fauci did not respond to requests for comment. Mr. Schiff said he did not think blanket pardons would be a good idea. "I would urge the president not to do that," he told NPR recently. "I think it would seem defensive and unnecessary."

Others said they were torn. Olivia Troye, a former adviser to Vice President Mike Pence who has been a leading critic of the president-elect, was threatened by a lawyer for Mr. Patel just this week in a letter saying that "litigation will be filed against you" if she did not retract her criticism of him during a television interview.

"I haven't committed a crime," she said in an interview. But "these are very different times. Is it something that we've considered and are concerned about? Yes. But all I've done is tell the truth. I've not done anything wrong, and I haven't committed any crimes, and that's where it's a complicated issue. These are unprecedented times. That's what makes this so hard."

Mr. Trump, who has argued that the many criminal and civil cases against him are part of a sweeping "witch hunt" that has "weaponized" the justice system, has done little to disguise his desire to use the law enforcement system to get back at his foes. He has threatened to prosecute Democrats, election workers, law enforcement officials, intelligence officials, reporters, former members of his own staff and Republicans who do not support him.

He has said on social media that Ms. Cheney "should be prosecuted for what she has done to our country" and that the whole Jan. 6 committee "should be prosecuted for their lies and, quite frankly, TREASON!" He said that Vice President Kamala Harris "should be impeached and prosecuted." He has promised to "appoint a real special prosecutor to go after" Mr. Biden and his family. He has suggested that Gen. Mark A. Milley, the retired chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, deserved execution.

He has said that Letitia James, the attorney general of New York who won a \$450 million judgment against him for business fraud, and Justice Arthur F. Engoron, who presided over the trial, "should be arrested and punished accordingly." He shared a post saying that the police officers who defended the Capitol on Jan. 6 "should be charged and the protesters should be freed."

Mr. Patel's own list of "deep state" enemies includes not just Democrats but former Trump appointees who broke with him or were seen as obstacles, including John R. Bolton, the former national security adviser; William P. Barr, the former attorney general; Mark T. Esper, the former defense secretary; Pat A. Cipollone, the former White House counsel; Gina Haspel, the former C.I.A. director; and Christopher A. Wray, the current F.B.I. director.

"Trump and Patel's threats of prosecution are real," said Paul Rosenzweig, a homeland security official under President George W. Bush and a senior counsel to the independent counsel Ken Starr in his investigation of President Bill Clinton. "Biden has a moral obligation to defend all of those who risked their livelihoods for him and protect them, as best he can, from Trump's authoritarian impulses. He should issue a pardon to anyone on Trump or Patel's enemies list. It's the least he can do."

Some Democrats have echoed the argument. "The people they're targeting include law enforcement officers, military personnel and others who have spent their lives protecting this country," Representative Brendan F. Boyle of Pennsylvania said in a statement. "These patriots shouldn't have to live in fear of political retribution for doing what's right."

But other Democrats said it would reflect badly on the party, making it look as though it were only protecting its own rather than the most powerless in society.

New Rules for Testing of Milk Supply for Bird Flu Virus

By APOORVA MANDAVILLI and EMILY ANTHERS

The U.S. Department of Agriculture will begin testing the nation's milk supply for the bird flu virus known as H5N1, nearly a year after the virus began circulating through dairy cattle, the department announced on Friday.

Under the new strategy, officials will test samples of unpasteurized milk from large storage tanks at dairy processing facilities across the country.

Farmers and dairy processors will be required to provide samples of raw milk on request from the government. And farm owners with infected herds will be required to provide details that would help officials identify more cases and contacts.

The rules were first floated in October and were supposed to be implemented in November. The first round of testing is now scheduled to begin the week of Dec. 16.

The new strategy is a departure from the voluntary guidance that the department had issued during the outbreak. Many dairy farms have not complied with voluntary testing of milk or of dairy workers, leaving federal officials in the dark about how widely the virus might have spread.

"I have been absolutely frustrated that we do not know the extent of the outbreak in cattle," Seema Lakdawala, a virologist at Emory University, said.



Farmers and dairy processors will be required to provide samples of raw milk on request from the Agriculture Department.

Many experts in the United States and elsewhere, including with the World Health Organization, have sharply criticized the lack of testing of cattle and of people who may be infected with the virus. The virus does not yet spread easily among people, but every untreated infection is an opportunity for it to gain the ability to do so, experts have said.

"This effort to expand milk testing is long overdue," said Jennifer Nuzzo, director of the Pandemic Center at Brown University School of Public Health and a vocal critic of the federal response. "Bulk milk testing is the primary way we are identifying outbreaks on farms, which is critical for preventing severe disease for farm workers who've been exposed," she said.

The virus replicates easily in the udders of cows, and raw milk from infected animals contains very high levels of the virus. At least some farm workers are thought to have become infected from droplets of milk.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr., President-elect Donald J. Trump's pick to lead the health department, has been a proponent of raw milk. California, the nation's biggest dairy producer, recently recalled some

raw milk products and halted their production after the virus was detected in some samples.

"The positive H5N1 samples from raw milk sitting on the shelves in California highlights the potential risk for milk processors who interact with milk before it's pasteurized, and also to members of the public who consume raw milk," said Samuel Scarpino, director of A.I. and life sciences at Northeastern University.

No one has yet been known to become ill from drinking raw milk, although farm animals, including cats, are thought to have died after consuming contaminated milk. Pasteurized milk sold to consumers has already been shown to be free of the virus.

The new rules are an attempt to gain control over the outbreak, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said in a statement.

It is unclear whether the incoming Trump administration will continue the program.

The virus has now been detected in 720 herds in 15 states. At least 58 people, most of them farm workers, have also been infected.

Under the new strategy, the Agriculture Department will monitor bulk milk samples from farms nationwide, and work with state officials to identify infected herds.

The program will begin in six states: California, Colorado, Michigan, Mississippi, Oregon and Pennsylvania.

Police Obtain DNA From Bottle Believed to Be Thrown Out by Gunman

By COREY KILGANNON and ANDY NEWMAN

Investigators said on Friday that they had recovered DNA from a water bottle they believed had been discarded by the man who killed a health care executive in a brazen attack in Midtown Manhattan earlier in the week.

The police also said they had found a backpack they believed the gunman had been wearing, and they continued to sift through a flood of tips from around the country. But they had still made no arrest in the killing of Brian Thompson, the 50-year-old executive who led UnitedHealthcare, one of the United States' largest health insurance companies. The police said they had reason to believe the gunman left the city soon after the shooting.

The DNA specimen was taken to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner for testing, an agency spokeswoman said. The backpack, found in Central Park, was also sent to a lab for forensic analysis.

The police managed to piece together a few other details about the gunman's movements, mostly from surveillance cameras. At a news briefing, Joseph Kenny, the Police Department's chief of detectives, said that the gunman arrived in the city at 10:11 p.m. on Nov. 24 on a bus that originated in Atlanta. It was not clear where he had boarded the bus.

He took a cab to the New York Hilton Midtown and spent about half an hour walking in the area before checking into a hostel on the Upper West Side, the chief said.

He stayed under fake identification at the hostel, always using cash, avoiding conversation and hiding his face with his mask even during meals, the chief said. The gunman never talked with anyone and lowered his mask once to speak, smiling, to the hostel clerk, the chief added.

"We do not have his name," Chief Kenny said. "At this point, we believe he acted alone."

The gunman left the hostel at 5:30 a.m. on Wednesday and rode a bicycle toward Midtown, Chief Kenny said. At 5:41, he arrived at the Hilton and began wandering

Maria Cramer and Kashmir Hill contributed reporting.



JEENAH MOON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Searching in Central Park for items discarded by a gunman. No arrests have been made in the killing of an executive on Wednesday.

SHOOTING UNNERVES EXECUTIVES *Business leaders take new security precautions after a chief executive was gunned down. Page B1.*

near the hotel, walking back and forth on West 54th Street, before going into a Starbucks, where he bought a bottle of water and a snack bar.

Mr. Thompson was walking into the hotel for an investors' day conference around 6:44 a.m. The gunman shot him several times on the sidewalk.

He then got back on the bike and made it into Central Park four minutes later. He left the park at 6:56, still on the bicycle. Surveillance cameras captured footage of him, still on the bicycle, two minutes later at West 86th Street and Columbus Avenue. By 7 a.m., he was still on 86th Street, no longer on the bicycle. He then took a cab uptown to a bus terminal near the

George Washington Bridge.

By 7:30, he had made it to the bus terminal, where video surveillance showed him entering but not coming out, Chief Kenny said.

The police have not been able to find the bicycle, he said.

Investigators also have recovered a cellphone from near the scene of the shooting, and the fake ID that the gunman used to check into the hostel, according to a law enforcement official. Investigators were still trying to gain access to the phone and to determine if it belonged to the gunman.

Investigators have not established a motive, although messages found on bullet casings at the scene of the shooting, including the words "delay" and "deny," were possible references to ways that insurance companies avoid paying patients' medical claims.

The police had previously released two surveillance camera

images in which the entire face of the person they are seeking is visible, including the one in which he is smiling at the hostel clerk. Both images are grainy, and his face is captured from a sharply downward angle.

Experts in facial recognition technology disagreed on whether the photos would contain enough detail to produce a definitive identification.

Anil Jain, an expert on facial recognition technology at the University of Michigan, said the photo in which the man is smiling contains enough detail for a facial recognition system to yield potential results.

"The challenge will be which face database to search against," Dr. Jain said. Law enforcement officials could search the F.B.I.'s mug shot database, the drivers' license databases of New York State and neighboring states, or

public photos on the internet using a system such as Clearview AI.

A facial recognition search would yield a list of people deemed similar looking to the person in the original photo. The police would need to find other evidence to tie a person identified that way to the crime, Dr. Jain said, or run the risk of making a wrongful arrest.

But Alessandro Acquisti, a technology and policy professor at Carnegie Mellon University, said that the photos shared with the public would not be enough to uniquely identify the man because they were not full-frontal images. They could, though, help to "restrict the pool of likely suspects," he said.

Giorgi Gobronidze, the chief executive of PimEyes, a face search engine that anyone on the internet can use to find online photos of a

person, was skeptical that the poor-quality images would produce reliable results. A facial recognition system performs best with a high-resolution photo of someone looking directly into a camera.

Mr. Gobronidze also said that automated facial recognition would work only if images of the person were in the database being searched.

"If the person in the image has little to no online presence," Mr. Gobronidze said, PimEyes "won't be able to find anything."

Since Wednesday, the police have received "hundreds of tips" from the public, said Carlos Nieves, the department's assistant commissioner of public information.

Detectives in the department's Crime Stoppers bureau have been working through the night fielding tips that they then pass on to the investigators. No sooner do they finish one call than another one comes in, Mr. Nieves said.

Leads and theories are coming in via the tip line — 800-577-TIPS — or online, some drawn by the high-profile nature of the case and others perhaps by the offer of a reward of as much as \$10,000, more than triple the usual amount for such cases.

One caller to the tip line was convinced that the gunman was a former high school classmate from 40 years ago. Another posted a TikTok video and sent it to the tip line proclaiming, "I think that's the guy," according to the police.

One tipster sent photos to the police showing a man he called a dead ringer for the suspect, adding arrows to point out facial resemblances. The tipster, Phil Watson, who shared his dossier on the doppelgänger with The New York Times, said in an email that he had yet to hear from detectives.

"I think they are overwhelmed," Mr. Watson wrote.

But the police are encouraging anyone with information that they believe could lead to the killer to keep calling, Mr. Nieves said.

"You may think that piece of information is trivial," he said. "But please give us that information and let us decide if it's trivial or not."

The smallest bit of information, he said, could be "the piece that puts all this together for us."

Manslaughter Charge in Subway Case Is Dismissed After Jury Fails to Agree

By HURUBIE MEKO and ANUSHA BAYYA

The Manhattan judge overseeing the case of a man accused in the choking death of a mentally ill subway passenger last year dismissed the most serious charge against him on Friday afternoon, leaving jurors to consider a lesser charge when they return to court next week.

The jurors on Friday deadlocked over whether the man, Daniel Penny, was guilty of manslaughter, leaving unresolved a case that has come to exemplify New York's post-pandemic struggles. They will now consider whether he should be convicted of criminally negligent homicide, a charge that carries a lesser prison sentence.

After nearly three days of deliberations, the jurors sent two notes — one on Friday morning and a second during the afternoon — to the judge, Maxwell T. Wiley, saying that they could not come to a unanimous decision about whether Mr. Penny was guilty of manslaughter in the second degree.

After the jurors sent the first note, Justice Wiley responded by reading them a so-called Allen charge, official instructions for the jurors to resume their deliberations, with the goal of reaching an agreement through the reconsideration of differing opinions.

"It's not uncommon for juries to believe they will never be able to

reach a unanimous decision," he said, adding: "I'll ask you to continue deliberations on that count."

Following Justice Wiley's instructions, the panel of seven women and five men returned to their sequestered room to discuss further. However, after about three hours, they sent another note, saying: "After further deliberations, we cannot come to a unanimous decision on count one, manslaughter in the second degree."

Mr. Penny's lawyers argued that the deadlock meant that the trial should be ruled a mistrial, while prosecutors with the Manhattan district attorney's office asked that the manslaughter charge be dismissed so that the jury could deliberate on the lesser charge.

Had the jury convicted Mr. Penny of second-degree manslaughter, he would have faced up to 15 years in prison. By contrast, according to New York law, criminally negligent homicide carries a maximum of four years in prison.

On Friday afternoon, Justice Wiley granted the prosecution's motion to dismiss the manslaughter charge against the defense's objections.

The jurors will now move on to deliberating the lesser charge on Monday, the judge said.

Prosecutors said Mr. Penny fatally choked the subway passenger, Jordan Neely, a 30-year-old former Michael Jackson im-

personator who struggled with his mental health, when he held Mr. Neely in a chokehold for about six minutes on the floor of an F train on May 1, 2023.

Mr. Neely had boarded the train that day and begun yelling at passengers, according to witnesses. As he strode through the subway car, he shouted about being hungry, saying that he wanted to return to jail and that he did not care if he lived or died, they said. Mr. Penny then approached Mr. Neely from behind and put him in a chokehold, taking him to the floor.

Prosecutors said that Mr. Penny's actions were not accidental and that he had failed to recognize Mr. Neely's humanity, squeezing his neck ever tighter as he struggled to break free. They argued that Mr. Penny's chokehold had killed Mr. Neely, pointing to the testimony of a New York City medical examiner, who ruled that Mr. Neely's death was caused by "compression of the neck."

Mr. Penny's lawyers argued that their client's actions had not been the direct cause of Mr. Neely's death, instead suggesting that it was a toxic combination of Mr. Neely's synthetic marijuana use, sickle cell trait and mental illness that had killed him.

In instructions the jurors were given before they began deliberations, they were told that they had to first consider the charge of manslaughter and come to an agreement. If they believed that Mr. Penny, a 26-year-old former



JEFFERSON SIEGEL FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Marine, was guilty, they would not need to consider the lesser charge.

It was unclear, however, if jurors would be able to consider the second charge if they failed to reach an agreement on the first, and they had asked for instructions on Friday about what to do.

Upon receiving the jury's first note on Friday, Mr. Penny's lawyer, Thomas A. Kenniff, argued that it would be "coercive" to ask the jurors to continue to deliberate.

"The defense position at this time is we are moving for mistrial," Mr. Kenniff said. "The jury has been deliberating for roughly 20 hours, over four days, on what is in many ways a factually complicated case."

When the jurors came back and said they still could not come to an agreement, Mr. Kenniff doubled down.

Dafna Yoran, an assistant district attorney, pushed back, call-

ing it "crazy" to have a hung jury simply because jurors were unable to consider a second count.

It is unclear how many jurors voted against the manslaughter charge.

After receiving the second notice, Justice Wiley said that, based on the notes he had received, it seemed possible that the jury could not agree on whether Mr. Penny's actions were justified because he had acted in reasonable self-defense or in the defense of others.

Anna Cominsky, director of the Criminal Defense Clinic at New York Law School, said it was "pretty rare" for prosecutors to ask for a top charge to be dismissed while a jury was deliberating.

Ms. Cominsky said the development could bode well for the district attorney's office since jurors will now be asked to consider a charge that is "easier."

On the other hand, if Mr. Penny

Jurors will now move on to deliberate the lesser charge of criminally negligent homicide against Daniel Penny, center, on Monday in the chokehold death of Jordan Neely.

is convicted on the second count and his lawyers appeal, they will likely mention the dismissal of the top charge in their filings, she said.

The jurors have sent more than 10 notes to Justice Wiley over the course of the deliberations asking for readings of the relevant law, to see video and to have testimony read to them.

On Wednesday, for example, jurors asked to hear earlier testimony from Dr. Cynthia Harris, a medical examiner, in which they remembered her saying, "I don't need all the facts." She never actually said that, according to court transcripts, but the jurors' question provided a small window into the elements of the case they were focusing on and had possibly come to an impasse over.

Soon after the jurors were sent back to continue deliberating on Friday, they sent Justice Wiley another note, this one asking for "further clarification in the determination of whether a person reasonably believes physical force to be necessary."

After the judge issued his ruling on Friday and dismissed the parties for the day, Mr. Neely's father, Andre Zachery, stomped his foot on the floor twice as Mr. Penny left with his defense team.

Mr. Neely's maternal uncle, Christopher Neely, turned to those seated next to him and shook his head.

Father of Choking Victim Sues the Accused Former Marine

By HURUBIE MEKO and ANUSHA BAYYA

The father of Jordan Neely, a 30-year-old homeless man who died on a New York City subway car last year after another passenger put him in a chokehold, filed a lawsuit on Wednesday against Daniel Penny, the man who choked his son.

The suit comes as a jury in Manhattan is deliberating in Mr. Penny's criminal trial to determine whether he is culpable in Mr. Neely's death.

In the suit, Mr. Neely's father, Andre Zachery, accuses Mr. Penny, 26, of causing his son's death through "negligence, carelessness and recklessness" on the floor of the subway car on May 1, 2023. The lawsuit, which has no bearing on Mr. Penny's criminal case, seeks unspecified damages for physical assault and battery.

Mr. Zachery's lawyer, Donte

Mills, declined to comment on the suit.

Thomas A. Kenniff, one of Mr. Penny's lawyers, said on Thursday that his team remained "focused on seeing Mr. Penny's criminal case through to acquittal."

"We have yet to be served with any civil action, but will respond accordingly in due course," Mr. Kenniff said.

Mr. Penny, a former Marine and architecture student, had left class that May afternoon and was on his way to the gym when he got on an uptown F train in Manhattan. There, he encountered Mr. Neely, who had boarded the train and begun yelling, throwing his jacket on the floor and striding through the car, according to witnesses.

Mr. Neely, who had a history of mental illness, approached other riders and screamed that he was hungry, that he wanted to return to jail and that he did not care if he

lived or died, they said. Mr. Penny stepped in, according to witnesses, and put Mr. Neely in a chokehold. He then forced him to the floor.

As the two men struggled, the train stopped at the Broadway-Lafayette Street station, allowing passengers to leave the car. But Mr. Penny did not let go of Mr. Neely, according to video taken by bystanders. Mr. Neely died soon thereafter.

Mr. Penny was subsequently charged with manslaughter and criminally negligent homicide.

Mr. Penny's lawyers have argued in court that it is impossible to know how much pressure he exerted when he put Mr. Neely in a chokehold, and that it was in fact Mr. Neely's schizophrenia, synthetic marijuana use and sickle cell trait that led to his death.

Mr. Neely was estranged from his family, including Mr. Zachery,

during the latter years of his life. He moved in and out of shelters and hospitals and was on a roster informally known as the Top 50, a list of homeless New Yorkers in a city of eight million who stand out for the severity of their troubles and their resistance to accepting help.

Christopher Neely, Mr. Neely's uncle, said he would drive around Manhattan looking for his nephew, hoping to offer him food and shelter.

Throughout the trial, Mr. Zachery has remained a relatively consistent, if quiet, presence. He has often left the courtroom when video footage of Mr. Neely struggling in Mr. Penny's chokehold has played on a TV screen facing the gallery.

Mr. Zachery has not offered a statement to the press since the first day of the trial, when he described his son as a "good kid, very humble."

Corrections

NATIONAL
An article on Wednesday about Sheriff Chad Chronister, President-elect Donald J. Trump's pick to lead the Drug Enforcement Administration, withdrawing his name from consideration for the office misstated Pam Bondi's role at the Hillsborough County State Attorney's Office. She was a prosecutor in and a spokeswoman for the office; she was not in charge of it.

MAGAZINE
An article on Page 18 this weekend about psychosis and race misstates the occupation of Deidre Anglin's grandmother. She

worked as a nanny, not a house cleaner.

OBITUARIES
An obituary on Nov. 30 about Robert W. Dixon Sr., who was stationed at West Point with the Ninth Cavalry Regiment during World War II, credited him with an erroneous distinction. He was not the last survivor of the Army's all-Black units historically known as Buffalo Soldiers; there are at least two surviving members — Roy Caldwell and the jazz saxophonist Marshall Allen — of the 92nd Infantry Division, nicknamed the Buffalo Soldiers Division, which saw combat in Europe during World War II.

Errors are corrected during the press run whenever possible, so some errors noted here may not have appeared in all editions.

Contact the Newsroom
To contact the newsroom regarding correction requests, please email corrections@nytimes.com.

‘From an estate-tax-planning perspective, it’s a grand slam.’

JONATHAN BLATTMACHR, a prominent trusts and estates lawyer who reviewed Jensen Huang’s disclosures.

How One Tech Chief Has Avoided Billions With Tax Loopholes

From Page A1

That missing revenue would be enough to simultaneously double the budget of the Justice Department and triple federal funding for cancer and Alzheimer’s research.

The story of Mr. Huang’s tax avoidance is a case study in how the ultrarich bend the U.S. tax system for their benefit. His strategies were not explicitly authorized by Congress. Instead, they were cooked up by creative lawyers who have exploited a combination of obscure federal regulations, narrow findings by courts and rulings that the Internal Revenue Service issues in individual cases that then served as models for future tax shelters. As such strategies became widespread, they effectively became the law.

“You have an army of well-trained, brilliant people who sit there all day long, charging \$1,000 an hour, thinking up ways to beat this tax,” said Jack Bogdanski, a professor at Lewis & Clark Law School and the author of a widely cited treatise on the estate tax. “Don’t expect anyone in Congress to stop this.”

The richest Americans are able to pass down approximately \$200 billion each year without paying estate tax on it, thanks to the use of complex trusts and other avoidance strategies, estimated Daniel Hemel, a tax law professor at New York University.

Enforcement of the rules governing the estate tax has eased in part because the I.R.S. has been decimated by years of budget cuts. In the early 1990s, the agency audited more than 20 percent of all estate tax returns. By 2020, the rate had fallen to about 3 percent.

The trend is likely to accelerate with Republicans controlling both the White House and Capitol Hill. They are already slashing funding for law enforcement by the I.R.S. The incoming Senate majority leader, John Thune, and other congressional Republicans for years have been trying to kill the estate tax, branding it as a penalty on family farms and small businesses.

Yet Mr. Huang’s multibillion-dollar maneuver — detailed in the fine print of his filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission and his foundation’s disclosures to the I.R.S. — shows the extent to which the estate tax has already been hollowed out.

“From an estate-tax-planning perspective, it’s a grand slam,” said Jonathan Blattmachr, a prominent trusts and estates lawyer who reviewed Mr. Huang’s disclosures for The Times. “He’s done a magnificent job.”

A spokeswoman for Nvidia, Stephanie Matthew, declined to discuss details of the Huangs’ tax strategies.

‘Only Morons’

Going back millennia, governments have sought to slow the buildup of dynastic wealth. Augustus Caesar in ancient Rome taxed wealth at death. Adam Smith, the intellectual father of laissez-faire capitalism, attacked inherited fortunes. During the last Gilded Age, so did some of America’s wealthiest men. “By taxing estates heavily at death, the state marks its condemnation of the selfish millionaire’s unworthy life,” Andrew Carnegie said.

The United States adopted the modern estate tax in 1916. In recent decades, congressional Republicans have successfully watered it down, cutting the rate and increasing the amount that is exempt from the tax. Today, a married couple can pass on about \$27 million tax free; anything more than that is generally supposed to be taxed at a rate of 40 percent.

Billionaires have made a sport out of trying to avoid the tax. Gary Cohn, a former Goldman Sachs executive who was President-elect Donald J. Trump’s chief economic adviser during his first administration, once quipped that “only morons pay the estate tax.”

Mr. Huang is no moron. In 1993, he and two other engineers were eating in a booth at a Denny’s in San Jose, Calif., when they came up with the idea for a powerful new computer chip that would be the basis for Nvidia. The company was initially focused on making chips for 3-D graphics, but by the 2000s it was branching into other areas, such as supplying semiconductors for Tesla’s electric vehicles.

Kitty Bennett and Dylan Freedman contributed research.

In 2012, Mr. Huang and his wife, Lori, took one of their first steps to shield their fortune from the estate tax.

They set up a financial vehicle known as an irrevocable trust and moved 584,000 Nvidia shares into it, according to a securities disclosure that Mr. Huang filed. The shares at the time were worth about \$7 million, but they would eventually generate tax savings many times greater.

The Huangs were taking advantage of a precedent set nearly two decades earlier, in 1995, when the I.R.S. blessed a transaction that tax professionals affectionately nicknamed “I Dig It.” (The moniker was a play on the name of the type of financial vehicle involved: an intentionally defective grantor trust.)

One of the beauties of I Dig It was that it had the potential to largely circumvent not only the estate tax but also the federal gift tax. That tax applies to assets that multimillionaires give to their heirs while they’re alive and essentially serves as a backstop to the estate tax; otherwise, rich people could give away all their money before they die in order to avoid the estate tax.

Here’s how the I Dig It arrangement worked: Say that a hypothetical tycoon, John Doe, gave \$10 million in cash to a trust for the benefit of his children. He wouldn’t have to pay gift taxes on that unless he had already hit the \$27 million gift-tax exemption.

The trust could then use a combination of the \$10 million and a loan from Mr. Doe to acquire \$100 million of shares. Those shares wouldn’t be subject to the estate tax, thanks to the I.R.S.’s 1995 ruling.

There was an additional benefit. Say that the value of the shares in the trust soared tenfold. None of that would be subject to the estate tax. But it could trigger a \$214 million capital gains tax bill — the \$900 million gain taxed at 23.8 percent. Under a separate I.R.S. ruling, Mr. Doe could pay that tax on the trust’s behalf, without it counting as an additional gift to his heirs.

Otherwise, the trust would have to pay the capital gains tax bill, leaving a smaller fortune to future generations.

The I Dig It maneuver was enormously complicated — and enormously lucrative.

“I’ve always called it the gift that keeps on giving,” said Michael D. Mulligan, a veteran trusts and estates lawyer in St. Louis who helped create the strategy.

A parade of the ultrawealthy soon deployed variations of the technique, according to filings in court and with securities regulators.

The family of the media mogul Mel Karmazin used several I Dig Its. A former owner of the Detroit Pistons, Bill Davidson, used them to avoid more than \$2.7 billion in taxes. Mitt Romney, who at the time was running the private equity firm Bain Capital and would later propose abolishing the estate tax as the Republican nominee for president in 2012, also used the technique.

The I.R.S. has challenged some setups that it viewed as overly aggressive. Mr. Davidson settled with the I.R.S. The agency claimed that the Karmazin family’s arrangements “lacked economic substance” and sought \$2.4 million in back taxes. But the agency ultimately abandoned most of its arguments and collected about \$100,000, according to a lawyer for the Karmazin family.

In Mr. Huang’s case, the details in securities filings are limited. But multiple experts, including Mr. Mulligan, said it was almost certainly a classic I Dig It gift, loan and sale transaction.

The \$7 million of shares that Mr. Huang moved into his trust in 2012 are today worth more than \$3 billion. If those shares were directly passed on to Mr. Huang’s heirs, they would be taxed at 40 percent — or well over \$1 billion.

Instead, the tax bill will probably be no more than a few hundred thousand dollars.

First-Name Basis

The Huangs soon took another big step toward reducing their estate-tax bill.

Nvidia was emerging as the main provider of chips for artificial intelligence technology, eventually capturing more than 90 percent of the market. Mr. Huang was becoming a Silicon Valley celebrity. He adopted an all-black dress code. Such was his renown that he



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY BLAKE CALE; PHOTOGRAPHS BY PHILIP CHEUNG; HAIYUN JIANG; CARLY ZAVALA; ALL FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES; JIM WILSON/THE NEW YORK TIMES

was known in tech circles simply by his first name, along with luminaries like Tesla’s Elon, Meta’s Mark and Google’s Sergey and Larry.

In 2016, the Huangs set up several vehicles known as grantor retained annuity trusts, or GRATs, securities filings show. They were borrowing a strategy that had been invented years earlier on behalf of the ex-wife of Walmart’s co-founder. Beginning in 1993, Audrey Walton transferred about \$200 million worth of shares to two GRATs. The twist was that the trusts had to eventually repay Ms. Walton the value of those shares, plus some modest interest. If the value of the shares went up more than what had to be repaid, the trusts could keep whatever was left over — tax free.

The I.R.S. contested the arrangement on narrow technical grounds. But in 2000, a U.S. Tax Court judge upheld its legality.

Mr. Hemel of New York University said the I.R.S. could have challenged the use of GRATs on other grounds as well. Instead, he said, the agency “capitulated” and essentially permitted the use of the trusts as an acceptable avenue for avoiding the estate tax.

Billionaires took notice. The Goldman Sachs chief executive Lloyd Blankfein, the casino magnate Sheldon Adelson, the oil investor Harold Hamm, the cable magnates John Malone and Charles Dolan, and the designer Ralph Lauren were among those who set up GRATs soon after the Walton decision, according to disclosures in the men’s filings with the S.E.C. That positioned their families to collectively avoid billions of dollars in future tax bills.

Under President Barack Obama, the Treasury Department repeatedly tried to make it harder to avoid the estate tax, proposing restrictions on the use of GRATs and I Dig Its. But the proposals died in Congress. (In the Trump administration, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, himself a GRAT user, would halt efforts to close the loopholes.)

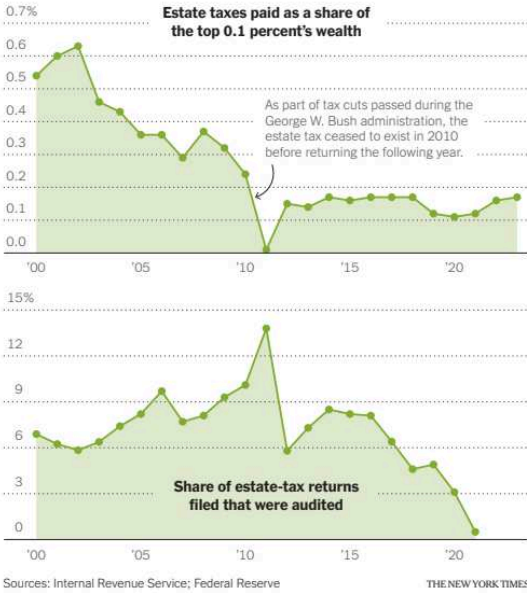
In 2016, Mr. Huang and his wife put just over three million Nvidia shares into their four new GRATs. The shares were worth about \$100 million. If their value rose, the increase would be a tax-free windfall for their two adult children, who both work at Nvidia.

That is precisely what happened. The shares are now worth more than \$15 billion, according to data from securities filings compiled for The Times by Equilar, a data firm. That means that the Huang family is poised to avoid roughly \$6 billion in estate taxes.

If the Huangs’ trusts sell their

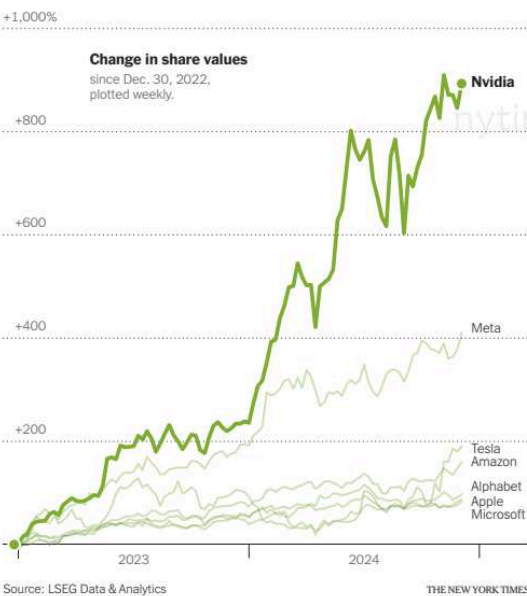
Less Revenue, Fewer Audits

Revenue from the estate tax has barely changed, even as the wealth held by the richest Americans has exploded. One reason might be that the I.R.S. audits of estate-tax returns have declined to the lowest level in decades.



Astronomical Growth

Nvidia’s shares have been among the stock market’s best performers, soaring over 800 percent since 2022.



shares, that will generate a hefty capital gains tax bill — more than \$4 billion, based on Nvidia’s current stock price. Mr. and Mrs. Huang can pay that bill on behalf of the trusts, without it counting as a taxable gift to their heirs.

A Charitable Tax Dodge

Starting in 2007, Mr. Huang deployed another technique that will further reduce his family’s estate taxes. This strategy involved taking advantage of his and his wife’s charitable foundation.

Mr. Huang has given the Jen Hsun & Lori Huang Foundation shares of Nvidia that were worth about \$330 million at the time of the donations. Such donations are tax-deductible, meaning they reduced the Huangs’ income tax bills in the years that the gifts took place.

Foundations are required to make annual donations to charities equal to at least 5 percent of their total assets. But the Huangs’ foundation, like those of many billionaires, is satisfying that requirement by giving heavily to what is known as a donor-advised fund.

Such funds are pools of money that the donor controls. There are limitations on how the money can be spent. Buying cars or vacation homes or the like is off limits. But a fund could, say, invest money in a business run by the donor’s friend or donate enough money to name a building at a university that the donor’s children hope to attend.

There is a gaping loophole in the tax laws: Donor-advised funds are not required to actually give any money to charitable organizations.

When the donor dies, control of the fund can pass to his heirs — without incurring any estate taxes.

In recent years, 84 percent of the Huang foundation’s donations have gone to their donor-advised fund, named GeForce, an apparent nod to the name of an Nvidia video game chip. The Nvidia shares that the Huangs have donated are today worth about \$2 billion.

The fund is not required to disclose how its money is spent, though the foundation has said the assets will be used for charitable purposes. The Nvidia spokeswoman, Ms. Matthew, said those causes included higher education and public health.

But there is another benefit. Based on Nvidia’s current stock price, the donations to the fund have reduced Mr. Huang’s eventual estate-tax bill by about \$800 million.

Trauma Fueled Doctor Trump Picked for Surgeon General

From Page A1

schools. Instead, she was a working urgent-care doctor who has spent much of her professional life at CityMD, a for-profit chain of clinics that have sprung up across New York City over the last 15 years. And near the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, Dr. Nesheiwat began regularly appearing on Fox News as a medical contributor.

As she has emerged as a public figure, Dr. Nesheiwat has periodically referred to her father's death — and the strength her mother displayed raising her and four siblings. To her 80,000 followers on X, she reflected on how her mother would take them to the ocean to cheer them up after “dad passed away in an accident.”

His death is mentioned in the very first sentence of her memoir, “Beyond the Stethoscope: Miracles in Medicine,” which will be released this month: “When I was

She says she once saw 94 Covid patients in one grueling shift.

13 years old, I helplessly watched my dear father dying from an accident as blood was spurting everywhere,” she writes. “I couldn’t save his life.”

From this moment, she writes, she yearned to help others. “This was the start of my personal journey in life to become a physician and enter the world of healing arts,” she writes.

Nowhere in the next 260 pages does she elaborate on how her father died, and she does not mention that he was shot.

But The Orlando Sentinel, published not far from the small city where the Nesheiwat family lived, provided further details. A small news item published on Feb. 25, 1990, describes how a 13-year-old girl upended a tackle box, causing a gun to fall out and discharge. A single bullet hit the girl's father, Ben Nesheiwat in the head; he was declared dead the following day in an Orlando hospital.

A police report obtained by The New York Times contains the account that 13-year-old Janette gave an officer who responded to a 911 call. “I was in Father's bedroom at about 7:15 a.m. getting some scissors,” she said, according to the incident report. “I opened the fishing tackle box and the whole thing tipped over.”

Before calling 911, she added, she went to the bathroom to get a towel and then ice, which she put on her father's head.

When the police arrived, they found the dying man, Ziad “Ben” Nesheiwat, lying on top of the sheets, his head surrounded by pillows, and his arms crossed over his chest, right over left. One police officer who responded to the scene described the case in his report as an “accidental shooting.”

Messages seeking comment were left with Dr. Nesheiwat, who did not immediately respond.

“As she says in her book, she became a physician because of her dad's tragic accidental death,” a spokesman for Dr. Trump's transition team, Brian Hughes, said in a statement. “She became a physician to save lives, and that dedication to the lives of her fellow Americans is why President Trump nominated Dr. Nesheiwat

Alexandra Alter and Alyce McFadden contributed reporting and Kitty Bennett contributed research.

to be our next Surgeon General. She and her family miss their father, and hope he's proud of them.”

The current surgeon general, Dr. Vivek H. Murthy, has treated firearm deaths as an urgent public health crisis, issuing an advisory on “firearm violence” in July. Each year some 500 Americans die in unintentional shootings, which make up about 1 percent of the total firearm deaths in the country.

It remains to be seen whether Dr. Nesheiwat will address gun safety as surgeon general, should she be confirmed by the Senate — or if she will discuss her childhood tragedy to illustrate the point. The surgeon general may have limited control over health policy but is responsible for communicating key health information to the public. Those who have held the post in the past have chosen a variety of issues to focus on, from smoking to loneliness.

Dr. Nesheiwat describes the death of her father, a 44-year-old chemist who worked for the county, as a devastating blow. “The trauma of that moment clung to me like a relentless shadow, unraveling the fabric of my young life and leaving me in a perpetual state of devastation,” she writes in her book.

She and her four siblings are second-generation Americans who were raised in Umatilla, a community of just 2,500 people, by parents who immigrated from Jordan. The highly unusual circumstances of their father's death sent shock waves through the small community and could have easily shattered the family.

But the Nesheiwats appear to have recovered to a remarkable degree. They grew up to be lawyers and to work at senior levels of government. One also married a multiplatinum rock star.

Dr. Nesheiwat attributes their remarkable success to the iron will and encouragement of their mother, Hayat Nesheiwat, a pediatric nurse, who took on extra shifts at the hospital after her husband's death to make ends meet. Janette, who was the second oldest, started working at a fast-food restaurant when she was 16 to help out.

Whenever their mother was not working a night shift, the children would gather in her bed and talk about their days and share their hopes and dreams for tomorrow, Janette's older sister, Julia, later recounted in a speech. The family would read Scripture at bedtime.

“As a family — my mother in the lead — worked to make the calamity of my father's death a tragic lesson by which to learn and grow, to turn a negative into a positive,” Dr. Nesheiwat wrote. “As a family, we set our minds to that and it worked. We became strong.”

Julia Nesheiwat went on to serve as homeland security adviser to Mr. Trump during his first term as president. Before that, she had been an Army intelligence officer and later served as a deputy special presidential envoy who worked on securing the release of hostages held worldwide. She is married to Michael Waltz, a Florida congressman whom Mr. Trump recently picked to be his national security adviser.

A younger Nesheiwat sister, Jaclyn, was a fashion model who married Scott Stapp, the frontman of the rock band Creed, the post-grunge group with a string of hits in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Two other siblings, Daniel and Dina, are lawyers.

Dr. Nesheiwat, 48, attended the University of South Florida and went to medical school at the American University of the Caribbean on the island of St. Maarten. She did her residency in family

resentation of racial and ethnic minorities in the military service academies. “This is fundamentally a military personnel issue,” he said.

Students for Fair Admissions said on Friday that it was disappointed in the ruling and that it would appeal all the way to the Supreme Court, if necessary.

“It is our hope that the U.S. military academies ultimately will be compelled to follow the Supreme Court's prohibition of race in college admissions,” Edward Blum, the president of Students for Fair Admissions, said in a statement.

The U.S. Naval Academy said in a statement that it was reviewing the court's decision.

The Supreme Court exempted the military academies, including West Point, the Naval Academy and the Air Force Academy, from its affirmative action decision, writing that they presented potentially distinct interests that required further consideration.

The government argued in both the Supreme Court case and the one against the Naval Academy that national security depended on the academies' ability to use racial preferences to develop a pipeline of officers who mirror the demographic composition of the enlisted troops and the population at large.

Students for Fair Admissions has argued that the racial strife the government wants to avert



Dr. Janette Nesheiwat, Donald J. Trump's choice to be the next surgeon general, has built a career working as an urgent-care doctor at CityMD and by making appearances on Fox News. Dr. Nesheiwat at a back-to-school event in Nashville in 2018, below.



medicine in Arkansas, working for a time at a tiny rural hospital in Eureka Springs, a town of Victorian houses nestled in a steep valley in the Ozarks.

In Arkansas, she became a local TV personality as the host of a show called “Family Health Today.” She would appear on air dressed in scrubs, she recounts in her book. She also began going on medical missions, traveling to Haiti following the 2010 earthquake and then to Joplin, Mo., after the devastating 2011 tornado.

By 2012, she had moved to New York and taken a job at a CityMD urgent care clinic in Times Square. “It was nonstop trauma and drama,” she writes.

CityMD had been founded by a small group of doctors just two years earlier. But over the next decade it would have a dramatic impact on how medical care is delivered in New York City. Its brightly lit storefront clinics were open late, 365 days a year, and

walk-ins were encouraged. Many New Yorkers found the clinics welcoming and convenient when they needed to get coughs checked out, antibiotics prescribed and cuts and sprains treated.

Some doctors and health-care experts have raised concerns about urgent care clinics, noting that they could undermine the role of primary care doctors and efforts to focus on wellness and prevention.

But such clinics are here to stay. When Dr. Nesheiwat joined CityMD, the company had no more than a dozen locations in the city. Today it has more than 150 clinics in the region and logs about five million visits a year, according to Walgreens, which owns a controlling interest in the company.

Dr. Nesheiwat rose through the ranks at CityMD to become one of its five medical directors in New York City. But she is very much a

working urgent-care doctor, and until Mr. Trump selected her, she was still seeing patients.

She claims to have cared for more than 20,000 Covid-19-related patients. At the height of the deadly first wave of the virus in New York, in spring of 2020, she writes, she once saw 94 patients in a single, grueling shift at the Times Square clinic. By the end of it, her feet were numb.

Until the pandemic, she was one more doctor in a city full of them. But she built a public profile through her appearances on Fox News, starting in 2020, where she has weighed in, for example, on studies about cancer and Brett Favre's Parkinson's diagnosis. “Almost every day, I have a patient who recognizes me from Fox,” she said earlier this year.

She initially championed the Covid vaccines, calling them “a gift from God” in a Fox News opinion piece in February 2021. She urged everyone to wear a mask. “Even consider wearing two masks at the same time,” she wrote.

But by late 2022, she had started voicing opposition to including Covid vaccines on the childhood vaccine schedule, as a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advisory committee had just recommended.

“What will that do, help reduce a sniffle?” she said during an appearance with Tucker Carlson on Fox. “We need to stop with the fear-mongering. We're no longer in a Covid emergency.”

At some point, she made it onto Mr. Trump's radar.

“Dr. Janette, I'm a big fan of yours,” Mr. Trump said in a video message to Dr. Nesheiwat around the time of her birthday last year. “You do a fantastic job letting us know what's happening with health.” In the video, Mr. Trump is seated next to Dr. Nesheiwat's older sister, Julia, his former homeland security adviser.

When Mr. Trump announced that he would pick her as surgeon general, on Nov. 22, he praised her as a “fierce advocate and strong communicator for preventive medicine and public health.” His statement also mentioned that she was “one of five children raised by a widowed immigrant mother.”

The police reports indicate that the officers on the scene interviewed Janette, who was crying outside on the porch when they arrived, and two of her siblings.

One of her sisters, Jaclyn, then 9, also gave the police a written statement, explaining that when she walked into her father's room, after the gunshot, she found a gun on the floor. She placed it on the night stand, where police officers found it.

“We tried to wake him up but he couldn't,” Jaclyn wrote.

One of the officers who responded that February day, Dale Swanton, long since retired and now 91, instantly remembered the case when reached by phone this week, despite nearly 35 years having passed. “The gun fell down and shot him — that's what they said,” he recalled.

His wife, Christy Swanton, happened to be the dispatcher who took the 911 call that morning, which was placed by Janette and her brother, Daniel. Ms. Swanton recalled that her husband and others had been trying to make sense of the mechanics of the shooting.

And she remembered something else about the family, and the 13-year-old girl at the center of the tragedy.

“The young girl was very, very bright,” Mrs. Swanton said, “and as I understand it, had a remarkable future ahead of her.”

U.S. Students Show Declines That Are Dire In Math Exam

By DANA GOLDSTEIN

American students turned in grim results on the latest international test of math skills — adding to a large body of research showing significant academic declines since the Covid-19 pandemic began.

The exam, the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, known as TIMSS, was given last year to fourth and eighth graders from dozens of education systems across the globe. The results, released on Wednesday, found that since 2019, American fourth graders have declined 18 points in math, while eighth graders have declined 27 points.

In fourth grade, those declines were driven by the struggles of students at the bottom end of the achievement spectrum. While fourth graders in the 75th percentile and above did not decline since 2019, those in the 25th percentile and below declined significantly. In 16 other countries, fourth graders performed better in math in 2023 than in 2019.

Among American eighth graders, both high-performing and low-performing students lost ground in math.

Overall, American students' performance in math was similar to their performance in 1995, when TIMSS was first given — a notable stagnation, given the energetic movement to improve American schools over the last three decades. That movement has pushed a flurry of bipartisan laws intended to enact tougher accountability standards for schools, more school choice for parents and more rigorous academic standards.

While some of those changes might have resulted in previous learning gains, much of the progress appears to have been erased, particularly for low-income students and others who struggle academically, said Peggy Carr, commissioner of the Na-

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Points eighth graders declined in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study.

tional Center for Education Statistics, part of the federal Department of Education.

“This is alarming,” Dr. Carr said. “These are sharp, steep declines.”

Experts are debating potential causes. The students who took the TIMSS exam were in the first and fifth grades when the pandemic disrupted education all around the world. Many children in the United States experienced longer-than-average periods of online schooling compared with their international peers.

Still, the pandemic is not the only cause. In the United States, academic declines — and widening gaps between stronger and weaker students — were apparent before the pandemic.

The United States differs from many of the other nations that participate in TIMSS in that it lacks national curriculum standards and has not aligned math instruction to the expectations of the international test.

Despite the disappointing results, the United States performed slightly above average in math compared with all of its international peers.

Matthias von Davier, a professor at Boston College and executive director of the center that conducts the TIMSS exam, said he would consider the overall, long-term results for the United States a story of “glass half full, glass half empty.”

He pointed out that larger, wealthier nations like the United States typically see slower academic achievement growth over time, compared with smaller or developing nations that make big, fast education investments relative to their population size.

The top-performing education systems on TIMSS in math included Singapore; Taipei, Taiwan; South Korea; Hong Kong; and Japan. Several European countries also significantly outperformed the United States, including Britain, Poland and Ireland.

American fourth graders performed similarly to those in Hungary, Portugal and Quebec.

The exam also tested science. In that subject, American students performed similarly in 2023 to how they had in 2019, though fourth graders' scores had declined since 1995.

American efforts to improve education have tended to focus on basic reading and math skills, downplaying subjects like science and social studies.

And in both the science and math portions of TIMSS, boys performed better than girls, reopening a gender gap that had previously closed.

Judge Upholds Racial Preferences in Admissions at Naval Academy

By ANEMONA HARTOCOLLIS

A federal judge on Friday denied an effort to stop the U.S. Naval Academy from considering race and ethnicity in admissions, finding that the academy has a distinct interest in using affirmative action to achieve diversity in its student body, and that doing so is a matter of national security.

The decision is a blow to the hopes of an anti-affirmative action group, Students for Fair Admissions, to extend its successful challenge to race-conscious admissions at civilian schools to the nation's military academies. In that case, against Harvard College and the University of North Carolina, the Supreme Court decided in 2023 that race-based admissions at those schools violated the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment.

But the effort to bring those arguments to the Naval Academy “has FAILED,” U.S. Senior District Judge Richard D. Bennett of Maryland wrote in a 175-page decision.

Judge Bennett wrote that there was a “compelling national security interest in a diverse officer corps in the Navy and Marine Corps,” and that “the U.S. Naval Academy is distinct from a civilian university.”

The judge cited a U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services report from this year that found a continuing problem of underrep-



The U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md. A judge supported the academy's efforts to achieve diversity in its student body.

was unique to the Vietnam War. It was caused by the draft's unequal effect on white, wealthy Americans who could get college deferments and poorer Black and Latino Americans who were sent to the front lines, the group has argued, and it no longer applies.

Judge Bennett said in his decision that 52 percent of enlisted Navy service members belong to racial minority groups, but only 31 percent of officers do. In 2020, only about 17 of the 218 admirals in the Navy were officers of color, he said.

In the Marine Corps, the least diverse branch of the armed serv-

ices, minority service members make up 35 percent of enlisted Marines, and 29 percent of officers, the judge said.

“There is a significant deficiency in the number of officers of color in the officer corps of the Navy and Marine Corps,” he wrote.

Of the three military academies, Students for Fair Admissions has sued Annapolis and West Point, but not the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs.

The new Trump administration could take steps to forbid the use of race in admissions to the military academies. One route would be to issue an executive order. An-

other would be to create some kind of legal agreement between Students for Fair Admissions and the Department of Justice.

In its complaint, filed in October 2023, Students for Fair Admissions argued that the use of racial preferences in the military academies is regressive and akin to segregation.

“America's enemies do not fight differently based on the race of the commanding officer opposing them, sailors must follow orders without regard to the skin color of those giving them, and battlefield realities apply equally to all sailors regardless of race, ethnicity, or national origin,” the complaint said. “To that end, President Truman desegregated the military well before other institutions followed suit.”

The complaint argued that the Naval Academy “has strayed from that approach.”

Admissions to the selective military academy is a zero-sum game, the complaint argues, in which white candidates lose their places to Black and Hispanic ones.

Judge Bennett disagreed. He adopted the argument that there should be more parity between enlisted and officer ranks. And he said that the academy had not set racial quotas or engaged in racial balancing — both forbidden by Supreme Court precedent — and that no candidate was admitted solely based on race.

Their Fertilizer Contained Toxins. Now, They’re Lobbying for Protection.

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sludge companies like Synagro, as well as the wastewater plants that provide the sludge, from lawsuits. A House bill has also been introduced.

Ms. Lummis will “work with President Trump’s E.P.A. to ensure ‘passive receivers,’ like water utilities and others, are protected from bogus third-party lawsuits,” her office said in a statement, referring to the Environmental Protection Agency.

Synagro and Goldman Sachs declined to answer detailed questions. Synagro in its most recent sustainability report acknowledged the risks of PFAS contamination in its fertilizer, calling it “one of our industry’s challenges.”

Widespread manufacturing of PFAS began decades ago, with some of the country’s largest chemical companies making vast quantities and downplaying the risks. Water-resistant and virtually indestructible, the chemicals have been used in everything from nonstick pans and dental floss to firefighting gear and waterproof clothing.

Even as PFAS has turned up in wastewater, the government has continued to promote the use of sewage sludge as fertilizer. And while Donald J. Trump’s election raises the prospect that PFAS restrictions might be rolled back, alongside other environmental rules, Synagro is pressing ahead in the effort to protect itself from expensive lawsuits.

The company is already facing all manner of legal challenges. This year a group of ranchers in Johnson County, Texas, stopped sending their cattle to market and sued Synagro for damages after a neighboring farm used sludge fertilizer on its fields. County investigators found 32 types of PFAS in the ranchers’ soil and water. Synagro has contested those allegations.

Residents of San Bernardino County, Calif., have also sued the company, over exposure to PFAS and other pollutants when an open-air pit of biosolids caught fire at a Synagro subsidiary. In October, a cattle farmer in Randolph County, Mo., filed an intent to sue Synagro and another biosolids company, saying the companies had acknowledged that PFAS chemicals may be present in the sludge but continued to provide it to farmers.

“I think it’s terrible,” said Donald Craig, the Missouri farmer, who alongside two local environmental groups is demanding that Synagro cease supplying sludge fertilizer in the state. He and the coalition have also petitioned the state to ban the use of the fertilizer altogether. “It’s disgusting. It needs to be outlawed.”

The current lawsuits against Synagro don’t make claims under America’s Superfund law, which requires corporations to clean up toxic contamination. But that landmark law is likely to be central to future cases, because of the E.P.A.’s decision this year to designate two major kinds of PFAS as hazardous substances under the law. The industry’s lobbying seeks to inoculate Synagro and others from lawsuits, even over decades-old contamination.

“What the biosolids companies are doing is attempting to buy themselves a ‘get out of jail free’ card,” said Mary Whittle, an attorney with Guerrero & Whittle who is representing the Texas ranchers. All this protects a business model that “makes Synagro rich while destroying America’s farmland,” she said.



JORDAN VONDERHAAR FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



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Clockwise from top left: separating sludge from wastewater at a plant in Fort Worth; a Philadelphia fertilizer factory run by Synagro, which is controlled by Goldman Sachs; a cornfield in Johnson County, Texas, fertilized with Synagro’s product; and, Tony Coleman, a plaintiff in a case against Synagro, with his prized bull, Tank.

How PFAS Got There

The federal government has long encouraged the use of sludge as fertilizer in part because it would otherwise need to be disposed of another way — dumped in landfills, or burned — potentially releasing greenhouse gases and other pollution. In addition, sludge contains nutrients that encourage plant growth, and helps reduce use of fertilizers made from fossil fuels.

But a growing body of research shows that, unbeknown to farmers, fertilizer made from the sewage that flows from homes and factories can contain heavy concentrations of PFAS, which can then contaminate farmland.

It’s difficult to know how much fertilizer sludge is used nationwide, and E.P.A. data is incomplete. The industry says that more than two million dry tons were used on 4.6 million acres of farmland in 2018. And it estimates that farmers have obtained permits to use sewage sludge on nearly 70 million acres, or about a fifth of all U.S. agricultural land.

Researchers have found the chemicals in products as varied as milk, eggs, fruit juice and seafood.

Only one state, Maine, has begun systematically testing agricultural land for PFAS. So far, it has found 68 farms with significant contamination. In 2022, the state banned the use of sludge fertilizer and has since set up a fund to support affected farms.

Lawmakers in Washington are only starting to take notice. The Senate version of a stalled farm bill would have created a \$500 million fund to be used to clean up farms, buy out farmers, monitor health, and fund testing for PFAS, essentially shifting the costs onto

taxpayers. The fate of the measures, modeled on Maine’s approach, remained unclear.

“It could be that ultimately millions of acres of farmland is contaminated with biosolids, and may no longer be suitable for agriculture unless they are cleaned up,” said Scott Faber, a lawyer with the Environmental Working Group and adjunct professor of law at Georgetown University. But there’s another possibility, he said: “They may simply be too expensive to clean up.”

Smelly but Profitable

Sewage sludge is a lucrative business.

When local water utilities treat sewage, and filter out the water, it leaves behind a thick sludge. Companies like Synagro take the sludge from more than 1,000 wastewater facilities in North America, which is then sold as inexpensive fertilizer.

While Synagro does not publicly report financial results, its earnings hit \$100 million to \$120 million last year, analysts estimated. An investment fund run by Goldman Sachs, West Street Infrastructure Partners III, acquired Synagro in 2020 in a deal reported to be worth at least \$600 million.

As concerns over PFAS risks have grown, Synagro has stepped up its lobbying.

In 2022, the company set up a nonprofit, the Coalition of Recyclers of Residual Organics by Practitioners of Sustainability at Synagro’s corporate headquarters, and installed the company’s chief executive, Bob Preston, as chairman, according to the group’s tax filings. Since its found-

ing, the group has spent \$220,000 on federal lobbying, disclosure forms show.

In a statement, the nonprofit said the bills it lobbied for would “ensure liability resides with the manufacturer of these chemicals.”

Mr. Trump’s return to office introduces a new complication: The E.P.A.’s designation of some PFAS as hazardous under the Superfund law could be rolled back. Project 2025 calls for removing the hazardous-substance designation, and a major industry group has challenged the E.P.A.’s move in court.

Ryan McManus, government-affairs manager at the American Public Works Association, which represents water utilities and wastewater-treatment plants nationwide, and which has been a key player in the effort to lobby Congress, said his group remained “very focused on a legislative solution because ultimately you could have another administration four years from now that decides to reverse course.”

Risks Hidden for Years

The argument that sludge companies aren’t liable because the chemicals were already in the sludge is based on the fact that PFAS manufacturers for years had minimized the dangers. Lawsuits, news articles and peer-reviewed research have chronicled how chemical giants 3M and DuPont, the original manufacturers of PFAS, for decades hid evidence of the chemicals’ dangers.

The chemicals are now so ubiquitous in the environment that nearly all Americans carry PFAS in their bloodstream. As many as 200 million Americans are ex-

posed to PFAS through tap water.

In a statement, 3M said it was starting to exit PFAS manufacturing.

Under a sweeping settlement last year, 3M is paying \$10 billion to cities and counties to test for and clean up PFAS in public water supplies. The E.P.A. has said that almost no level of exposure is safe, and this year imposed strict limits on drinking-water contamination for six types of PFAS.

Synagro and the sewage plants say they are simply at the end of that chain of contamination. We “do not manufacture or profit from PFAS,” Michael Witt, general counsel at Newark’s Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission, said at a hearing this year. “Industry did that.”

But critics point to research that for years has detected PFAS in wastewater. Recent studies have also explored how the chemicals can move from the soil into water and plants, and then to the livestock that feed on them.

Regarding Synagro, “it seems crazy to be able to say they’re a passive receiver and they shouldn’t be liable, that they know it’s harmful but they’re going to continue to sell it,” said Laura Dumais, a lawyer with Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, a group that assisted the Texas ranchers with PFAS testing. “It’s like CVS selling a tainted medicine and saying, ‘We can’t be liable and we’re just going to continue to sell it.’”

Wastewater treatment plants say they are finding it increasingly difficult to find landfills to accept sludge, partly because landfill operators are themselves wary of contamination. “They don’t want their landfill to potentially

become a Superfund site,” said Mr. McManus of the public-works association.

‘They’re Not Even Aware’

The E.P.A. continues to promote sludge as fertilizer. It regulates harmful pathogens and some heavy metals in biosolids, but not PFAS. The agency is working on a risk assessment that it intends to release this year, the first step in determining whether new standards are necessary.

Some farming groups support the Senate bill, saying it would also offer them protection against potential lawsuits. “Your neighbor or anybody out there could sue you for the price of a postage stamp,” said Courtney Briggs, senior director for government affairs at the American Farm Bureau. Farmers, she said, are “victims, and often they’re not even aware” of the danger.

But experts point out that the Superfund law already exempts farmers from cleanup responsibilities. So farmers would gain little, while becoming unable to themselves sue, Mr. Faber said.

Neither can farmers easily sue the PFAS manufacturers, unless there is evidence that the manufacturer intended for the chemicals to be released onto farmland, Kate R. Bowers, legislative attorney at the Congressional Research Service, testified at a recent hearing.

That leaves ranchers like Tony Coleman, one of the plaintiffs in the Texas case against Synagro, in limbo. They have now taken legal action against the E.P.A., saying that it failed to properly regulate PFAS in fertilizer. The agency is pushing to dismiss the lawsuit.

New Starring Role for a Beloved Lamb From Children’s TV: Dog’s Best Friend

From Page A1

weilers, seem to be equally enthralled.

“There definitely does seem to be some kind of bond that I can’t really explain,” Mr. Batdorf said, adding that Foxie’s Lamby remained intact, remarkably, more than a year later.

The roots of its popularity date back decades.

Shari Lewis, a ventriloquist and entertainer, introduced an inquisitive puppet with a mop of curly

hair named Lamb Chop in the ‘50s and featured it on “The Shari Lewis Show” from 1960 to 1963. Then in the ‘90s, Ms. Lewis brought the puppet to a new generation with “Lamb Chop’s Play-Along” on PBS. Ms. Lewis won Emmys and received acclaim for episodes about topics including bullying and how to stop biting your nails.

The puppet had already inspired a children’s toy when, in 2010, the pet product company Multipet International Inc. brought Lamb Chop to the dog toy market in the form of a 10-inch-tall toy with five squeakers. Lamb Chop was a runaway hit. Demand surged in just a few years, and the company started producing a six-inch mini Lamb Chop and a jumbo, 24-inch Lamb Chop, as well as introducing seasonal editions.

“Every day we’re like, ‘What’s the next Lamb Chop?’” said Dean Hirschberg, vice president of marketing at Multipet. “That’s what we think about 24/7.”

The toy’s design, price (typically retailing under \$5 for the mini to under \$20 for the jumbo) and variety help keep Lamby-mania alive.

If you name an occasion, there’s likely a Lamb Chop toy celebrating it.

Alexandrine Higuera estimates that her terrier-poodle mix Troy has more than 20 Lamb Chops, from a Halloween Lamby to his fa-

vorite, Independence Day Lamby.

“Any holiday you can think of, they’ll make a Lamb Chop, and then we just get it for him,” Ms. Higuera, 29, said.

But much of it is owners’ nostalgia for the Lamb Chop of their childhoods.

Some 32 percent of dog owners are millennials, beating out other generations in dog ownership, according to the American Pet Products Association. Many of them watched Lamb Chop growing up in the early ‘90s.

Mia Christopher has a Lamb Chop zone in her living room — with more than 60 of the toys piled up for her dog Daisy, a three-legged senior rescue who dives into the pile each day.

Ms. Christopher, who still has her Lamb Chop dolls from childhood, recently threw Daisy a Lamb Chop-themed “gotcha day party” to celebrate her adoption two years ago. There was a Lamb Chop cake, cups and a vintage tablecloth. Daisy wore a Lamb Chop harness and collar, while her sister, Dot, another senior rescue, wore a denim vest with Lamb Chop detailing and patches. A friend’s child dressed up as Lamb Chop to surprise the canine guests, some of whom wore their own Lamb Chop apparel.

“Wait, did I just totally subconsciously throw my inner 6-year-old their dream birthday party?”



TONY CENICOLA/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Ms. Christopher, 36, said. “I’m just someone who loves ephemera and things from my childhood. It’s fun to be able to share that.”

Today, Ms. Lewis’s daughter, Mallory Lewis, has taken on the voice behind the beloved puppet. (The elder Ms. Lewis died in 1998.) Both she and Lamb Chop say they are happy about the toy’s success.

“People love me because I make them feel safe, and I remind them of a simpler time in their lives,” Lamb Chop said in a recent interview over Google Meet. “It makes people feel good to share me.”

According to Chewy, an online retailer for pet products, the Lamb Chop dog toy is the most popular plush dog toy, and the second-most-popular dog toy of any kind, getting more than 13,000 online reviews, with an average rating of 4.5 stars.

Thousands of customers have it

on autoship, with many buying more than five every year, said Allen Hughes, president of retail at Chewy. Petco, the big-box pet supplies retailer, also cites Lamb Chop as the best-selling dog toy overall.

“Lamb Chop leads some kind of cult,” said Broti Gupta, 30, whose post on X about her 6-year-old husky Niko’s love of Lamb Chop was shared widely in February. She added, “There is just something hypnotic about this really soft and cuddly toy.”

Asked about the cult following around Lamby toys, the puppet Lamb Chop said with a mischievous tone: “Yes, I am a cult leader. I control the dogs.”

Dogs approached by The New York Times could not say exactly why they loved Lamb Chop, though many perked up and tilted their heads at hearing “Lamby.”

Not all dogs have taken so

Dog owners joke that Lamb Chop leads a cult among dogs. “There is just something hypnotic about this really soft and cuddly toy,” one said.

kindly to Lamb Chop. Some dog owners said their friends or family members had dogs that preferred balls or other toys, and others on social media described their dogs going “feral” at the sight of Lamb Chop, wearing it down to shreds.

Indeed, Ms. Lewis said she received many images of decimated Lambys and guilty-looking dogs. Still, she said she was grateful that the Lamb Chop dog toy helped keep “my mother’s legacy alive, and our family’s legacy alive.”

There is a new legacy being formed for many dog owners as well.

Shannon Ritter said her golden retriever Charles had no shortage of favorite toys — his stuffed blueberry or the soccer balls he chased, for example.

But when Charles became sick last November, it was Lamby he took to each veterinary and specialist appointment.

“It was always the Lamb Chop that he went for,” Mrs. Ritter, 56, said. “It was the Lamb Chop he wanted at the end.”

When the Ritter family had to make the difficult decision to put Charles to sleep, they put him to rest with his cherished toy, which he held onto in his final moments.

“It was very emotional, but it made me feel a little bit better,” Ms. Ritter said, “knowing he had Lamb Chop with him.”

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Thirman Milner, 91, Hartford Mayor Who Broke Race Barrier, Is Dead

By SAM ROBERTS

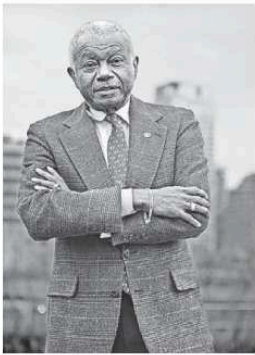
Thirman Milner, who in 1981 became the first popularly elected Black mayor in New England, in Hartford, Conn., and went on to serve three terms, died on Nov. 29 at his home there. He was 91.

His death was confirmed by his stepdaughter Virginia Monteiro, the first vice chairwoman of the Connecticut and the Greater Hartford branches of the N.A.A.C.P.

The sixth of seven children of a widowed domestic worker who periodically depended on welfare, Mr. Milner dropped out of high school, joined the Air Force, earned an equivalency diploma and was studying at New York University to become a pharmacist when he heard the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. speak in New York City. He decided then to become a civil rights activist.

He traveled to the South to protest against racial segregation, then returned to Hartford, the state's capital and one of the nation's poorest cities at the time. There, he said, he discovered that discrimination against Black people was even worse. He grudgingly agreed to enter politics, serving two terms in the State Legislature before challenging Mayor George A. Athanson, Hartford's flamboyant incumbent, who had served since 1971 and was seeking a sixth term.

Mr. Athanson won the 1981 Democratic mayoral primary by 94 votes. But Mr. Milner charged fraud, raising questions about absentee ballots and delays in opening a polling place in a Black neighborhood. A court ordered a new election. On the second try, Mr. Milner captured the nomination by a decisive 9,167 to 6,258 votes. He handily won the general election and, preaching unity, was re-elected in 1983 and 1985.



Mr. Milner in 2010, the year he published his memoir.

A style of leadership that was 'grounded in compassion and commitment.'

Gov. Ned Lamont, a fellow Democrat, said in a statement that Mr. Milner had "used his influence to enact positive change in Hartford, particularly focusing many of his efforts on the need to ensure that all children — no matter their family's income level or the neighborhood where they grew up — have access to a quality education."

While in office Mr. Milner urged the Reagan administration to shift funds from military spending to provide aid for the nation's disadvantaged and lobbied for the redevelopment of the city's Union Station. He was regarded as a mentor to budding Black political figures.

Under Hartford's City Charter at the time, the city manager and the City Council each eclipsed the mayor's prerogative. But the leader of the Council majority elected in 1981 with Mr. Milner was the first Black Council member to hold the post and doubled as deputy mayor.

When he unseated Mr. Athanson in 1981, Mr. Milner said, "The proudest thing in my life was not becoming mayor myself, but the fact that it gave my mother a chance to see her youngest son become mayor of the city where she grew up."

Thirman Leonard Milner was born on Oct. 29, 1933, in Hartford, a descendant of enslaved people and Native Americans. His great-great-great grandfather fought against the British in the American Revolution. His father, Henry Marshall Milner, was hospitalized when Thirman was 3 and remained confined until he died seven years later. His mother was Grace (Stewart) Milner.

Thirman grew up part of the time with a relative who operated a summer camp in Glastonbury, Conn. He attended high school there but left during junior year. After serving in the Air Force, he attended New York University but did not graduate. He held jobs as an insurance salesman, a hospital orderly, a drugstore clerk and a purchaser for a Black-owned heating oil dealer. He also worked for an anti-poverty program.

He ran for a seat in the Legislature in 1976, barely losing a primary race. Two years later, he won the nomination and the election while also working on Mayor Athanson's re-election campaign. In the General Assembly, he chaired the Black caucus and was known as a low-key but skillful legislator.



Thirman Milner after winning the election as mayor of Hartford, Conn., in 1981. He was with his wife, Brenda, left, and his mother, Grace Milner Allen. Mr. Milner went on to serve three terms.

He retired in 1987, he said, because doctors diagnosed him with prostate cancer and gave him three months to live.

Both his marriages, to Mary Rogers and Brenda Monteiro, ended in divorce. In addition to Virginia Monteiro, he is survived by another stepdaughter, Theresa Rogers, and a stepson, Gary Rogers, from his first marriage; two stepsons, Joseph and Raymond Monteiro Jr., from his second marriage; and many grand-

children and great-grandchildren. Another stepson, Manuel Monteiro, died this year.

In 2010, Mr. Milner published a memoir titled "Up from Slavery: A History from Slavery to City Hall in New England." The Thirman L. Milner Middle Grades Academy in Hartford is named for him.

"His tenure was marked by significant strides toward equity, justice, and empowerment for all," the N.A.A.C.P. said in a statement

announcing his death. Shirley Surgeon, president of the Hartford City Council, praised Mr. Milner's perseverance and a style of leadership that, she told The Hartford Courant, was "grounded in compassion and commitment."

She quoted the former mayor as saying that leadership also required collaboration. "If I walked down the street by myself, I would be called a fool," he said, "but if I have the community marching behind me, I will be called a leader."

Peter B. Teeley, 84, Who Gave Bush The Term 'Voodoo Economics' in 1980

By CLAY RISEN

Peter B. Teeley, who as the sharp-penned press secretary for George H.W. Bush during his 1980 presidential campaign coined the term "voodoo economics" to describe the tax and spending plans of the candidate's rival at the time, Ronald Reagan, died on Nov. 29 in Washington. He was 84.

His death, in a hospital, was from cancer, his wife, Victoria Casey, said.

Mr. Teeley was especially close to Mr. Bush, whom he had met through a mutual friend, James A. Baker III. All three were moderate Republicans, and Mr. Teeley helped Mr. Bush run a spirited campaign against the more conservative Mr. Reagan in the 1980 primary.

Among Mr. Reagan's campaign promises was a plan to cut taxes on corporations and the wealthy, which he argued would increase economic growth and investment, producing gains that would eventually benefit everyone.

In thinking about how to respond to the plan, Mr. Teeley recalled an editorial joking that President Jimmy Carter's economic policies had been put together by witch doctors. And what, he asked himself, do witch doctors do?

"Then it hit me," he told the historian Jon Meacham for his biography of Mr. Bush, "Destiny and Power" (2015). "They do 'voodoo,' and I put that in Bush's speech."

The phrase quickly took on a life of its own, probably far beyond what Mr. Teeley had intended. When conservatives pounced on Mr. Bush for saying it, he denied having uttered it — until reporters produced evidence.

Mr. Bush became Mr. Reagan's running mate and, much to his chagrin, repeatedly faced questions during the general election campaign about his apparent turnabout on his erstwhile opponent's economic policies.

Mr. Teeley later recalled his boss telling him that it was the only memorable thing Mr. Teeley had ever written for him.

Democrats used the expression to attack Mr. Reagan throughout his two terms, and "voodoo" later became a general term of derision for any policy said to be fantastically unrealistic.

Mr. Teeley remained Mr. Bush's press secretary through his first term as vice president, despite attempts by some Reagan allies to keep him from joining the administration. Those efforts failed because his friend Mr. Baker became Mr. Reagan's chief of staff, and because Mr. Teeley was generally considered the nicest guy in the Bush circle.

"I can't ever remember getting cross with Pete, and I got cross with a lot of people," Gary Klein, who met Mr. Teeley when they both worked for the New York Republican senator Jacob K. Javits in the 1970s, said in an interview. "He had a personality that was just too likable."

Peter Barry Teeley was born on



Peter B. Teeley, second from left, in 1981 with George H. W. Bush, center, who was vice president. Max Friedersdorf is at left; the other man is unidentified. Below, Mr. Teeley in 1992.



Jan. 12, 1940, in Barrow-in-Furness, a city in northwestern England. A shipbuilding center, it was heavily bombed by Germany during World War II.

When Peter was 6, his parents, Francis and Winifred (Cullen) Teeley, decided to leave their war-torn town behind and move to the United States. They settled in Detroit, where his father worked in a car plant and his mother managed apartments.

After graduating with a degree in English from Wayne State University in 1965, Mr. Teeley began his career doing public relations

M. Nixon; and for the Republican National Committee, where he and Mr. Baker became friends. In 1979, Mr. Bush hired him as one of his first senior campaign staff members.

"In the early days, he joked, it was just him and Mr. Bush on Cessna One, going from one rubber chicken dinner to another somewhere in the great American heartland," recalled the novelist Christopher Buckley, whom Mr. Teeley hired as a speechwriter and who based a character on him in his first novel, "The White House Mess" (1986).

Mr. Teeley left the White House in 1985 to start a political consulting firm. He ran the press office during Mr. Bush's successful 1988 presidential campaign.

Mr. Bush named him the U.S. representative to UNICEF in 1990, but he left the post in 1991 after being diagnosed with Stage 3 colon cancer.

He joined a clinical trial at Georgetown University and beat his cancer into remission, though it would return several times. He drew on his experience with the disease to write "The Complete Cancer Survival Guide" (2000) with Philip Bashe.

Mr. Teeley's first three marriages ended in divorce. He married Dr. Casey, a psychologist, in 2001. Along with her, he is survived by their daughter, Rosa Casey-Teeley; four daughters from previous marriages, Susan Risi, Laura Stanley, Adrienne Teeley and Randall Teeley; and two grandchildren.

Mr. Bush named Mr. Teeley ambassador to Canada in 1992. He resigned in 1993 after Mr. Bush lost his re-election bid.

Mr. Teeley then returned again to the private sector, this time to open the Washington office of the biotech firm Amgen. It was among the first such companies to develop a presence in the capital.

He also became deeply involved in philanthropy, founding the Children's Charities Foundation in 1994. Among its many fund-raising efforts was the BB & T Classic, an annual college basketball tournament held in Washington every fall.

Dr. Kelly Powers, 45, Fox Health Expert

By SARA RUBERG

Kelly Powers, a Fox News commentator and a podiatric surgeon who offered health tips and discussed medical news with viewers, as well as telling them of her own experiences with cancer, died on Sunday at her home in Colts Neck, N.J. She was 45.

The cause was brain cancer, her mother, Joan Powers, said.

Dr. Powers appeared as a medical expert on Fox Business and Fox News throughout the 2010s, contributing to "Fox & Friends" and the talk show "Red Eye," among other programs. She had emergency surgery in 2018 after doctors found fluid around her heart; it was the start of years of life-threatening health crises.

In July 2020, Dr. Powers had a seizure and was diagnosed with the aggressive brain cancer glioblastoma. She had three brain surgeries and received chemotherapy, radiation and immunotherapy, as her family described her treatment on a GoFundMe page, but the cancer returned and another mass was found in her brain this year.

Kelly Ann Powers was born in Yonkers, N.Y., on May 13, 1979, to Joseph and Joan Marie Powers.

She attended Baruch College and the New York College of Podiatric Medicine, both in Manhattan, and obtained a master's degree at the University of San Francisco. She completed her residencies at Georgetown and Boston Universities.

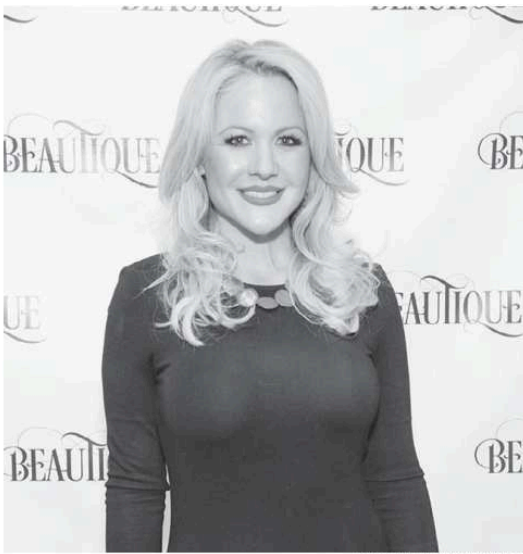
Dr. Powers began appearing on TV news programs early in her career to discuss medical breakthroughs and give health advice.

She became a regular on Fox News, where she offered practical health tips to viewers, including diet options and advice on body pains. During the height of the co-

ronavirus pandemic, she appeared on Fox Business to talk about the virus and vaccine development.

After her diagnosis in 2020, Dr. Powers began to document her health journey on social media and spoke about it on TV. She called herself the "unluckiest lucky girl" because her cancer was caught early.

Amid her health challenges, Dr. Powers and her husband, Steven Doll, wanted to have a baby. But



Dr. Kelly Powers offered health tips and discussed medical news.

'This horrible disease needs to stop, and we all need to just fight cancer in general.'

Dr. Powers offered health tips and discussed medical news.

After her diagnosis in 2020, Dr. Powers began to document her health journey on social media and spoke about it on TV. She called herself the "unluckiest lucky girl" because her cancer was caught early.

Amid her health challenges, Dr. Powers and her husband, Steven Doll, wanted to have a baby. But

her cardiologist told her that she should not carry a child, so they chose to use a surrogate, she said in a 2023 iHeart Radio interview.

Her son, Bennett, was born in 2021 while Dr. Powers continued to receive treatments. Her parents, husband and son survive her.

During this time, Dr. Powers used her platform to talk about brain cancer research and raise money for medical nonprofits.

"This horrible disease needs to stop, and we all need to just fight cancer in general, every type of cancer," she said on Instagram in June. "Why is this even still a problem?"

More obituaries appear on Page B12.

Deaths	Deaths	Deaths
Cicchino, Carmine Tardiff, Kenneth Zakin, Bernice	tutes of Health (NIH) and other funding entities for decades. He published over 130 papers in peer-reviewed journals and over 75 books and book chapters on violence, suicide, psychopharmacology, and other topics in psychiatry. Dr. Tardiff also served as a forensic psychiatric consultant, testifying on violence and suicide. Dr. Tardiff was active in the American Psychiatric Association and helped develop new policies for seclusion and restraint on inpatient psychiatric services. In 1985, the American Psychiatric Association awarded Dr. Tardiff the Manfred S. Guttmacher Award for "The Psychiatric Use of Seclusion and Restraint, an outstanding contribution to the literature on forensic psychiatry." In 2010, Dr. Tardiff again received the Guttmacher Award, awarded jointly by the American Psychiatric Association and the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law, for "Textbook of Violence Assessment and Management." Dr. Tardiff attended undergraduate college at the University of New Orleans before receiving his medical degree from Tulane University in 1969. He completed his residency in psychiatry at Massachusetts General Hospital and pursued a master's degree in public health from	the Harvard School of Public Health in 1973. Dr. Tardiff is survived by his wife Dr. Anne McBride, his daughter Kelsey Tardiff, his stepdaughter Deborah Raps, his brother George Tardiff, his sister Janette (Tardiff) Saylor and brother-in-law Michael Saylor. Dr. Tardiff enjoyed a number of activities including travel, photography, and long walks in Central Park. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the Central Park Conservancy: https://www.centralparknyc.org/support
CICCHINO—Carmine Joseph , passed December 3, 2024, at home with his family present. Born April 22, 1942, he resided in North Arlington, Pompton Lakes, and Galloway, N.J. Carmine's advertising career started at Dancer Fitzgerald Sample, in New York City in 1962. He moved to Ed Libov Associates, advancing to EVP, and following the death of the founder became CEO in 1981. Carmine later became sole owner of Fox and Associates, NY, established Cicchino Media Services, and became partner in Horizon Media and Media Incorporated. Western Trading until retirement in 2000. Carmine loved his family, and his greatest joy was opening his home to family and friends. He is survived by his wife, Gloria Jean, children CJ, Lisa and Greg Giles, and grandchildren Kendra and Aidan. Celebration information on: www.berniefuneralhome.com .	TARDIFF—Kenneth Joseph MD, MPH , 80, passed away on December 3, 2024 at New York-Presbyterian Hospital. Dr. Tardiff was born on October 20, 1944, in New Orleans, LA, the son of the late Lucille (Adolph) Tardiff and Leonard Tardiff. Dr. Tardiff had a long career in academic medicine and research, he spent close to forty years at New York-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center, joining in 1981 as Associate Dean at Cornell University Medical College. In 1989 Dr. Tardiff moved to a full-time appointment in the Department of Psychiatry, serving as Professor of Psychiatry and Professor of Public Health until he retired in 2017 as Professor Emeritus. Dr. Tardiff was an esteemed research clinician and scientist, receiving funding from the National Institute	ZAKIN—Bernice , on December 4 at the age of 106. She lived a long life of creativity and charm well into her final years. Lighting up any room she entered, Bernice was cherished by all who surrounded her and will now be dearly missed. Our deepest condolences to the Zakín and Lane families. Christina, Phyllis, Bill, Cheryl, and Mike
ANNOUNCEMENTS OF DEATHS MAY BE TELEPHONED FROM WITHIN NYC TO 212-556-3900, OR OUTSIDE NYC TOLL FREE 1-800-458-5522. OR SENT BY EMAIL: TONYTIMESOBITUARIESPLUS.COM . FOR THE FOLLOWING EDITIONS: UNTIL 2:00 P.M. THE DAY BEFORE FOR Monday through Saturday editions, until 4:00 P.M. on Friday for Sunday's National Edition, until 2:45 P.M. Saturday for Sunday's New York and late National editions. Photos must be submitted by noon the day prior to publication Tuesday through Friday. Photos for Saturday, Sunday and Monday must be submitted by 12 noon on Friday.	In Memoriam	JOHNSON—Lisa M. , December 7, 1990. Dear Mom, I will always treasure your memory. Hope Dad is with you. Your son, Robbie

Will Congestion Pricing Survive Trump’s Vow to Kill It?

Alex Matthiessen

An environmental advocate, a consultant and a senior adviser to the Congestion Pricing Now campaign.

AFTER five months in limbo, New York’s congestion pricing program has been given new life. But it is still far from clear whether the plan to ease traffic, reduce air pollution and raise billions of dollars for mass transit in New York City will live or die.

Last month, Gov. Kathy Hochul of New York announced a new, heavily discounted version of the plan she had put on hold over the summer, just as it was set to begin. Now the race is on to get the program up and running on Jan. 5, before President-elect Donald Trump returns to the White House. And for good reason: During his campaign, he vowed to kill congestion pricing in his “first week back in office.”

The current plan would slash the proposed toll for passenger vehicles entering Manhattan’s central business district by 40 percent across the board, with most drivers paying a peak period toll of \$9 instead of the original \$15. The governor had complained that \$15 was “too much” for commuters coping with inflation. But her decision to suspend the plan, which caught city and state officials off guard, was viewed as political, to help Democrats in the November election.

The Biden administration has given New York the go-ahead to start collecting the new tolls. (The Federal Highway Administration must approve tolling on federally funded roadways.) The \$9 toll is to ratchet up to \$12 in 2028 and \$15 in 2031. The program is expected to generate less than the \$1 billion that was anticipated. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority plans to use the money to borrow \$15 billion for badly needed transit repairs and upgrades through the sale of bonds. Some projects could be delayed because of the phase-in of the toll.

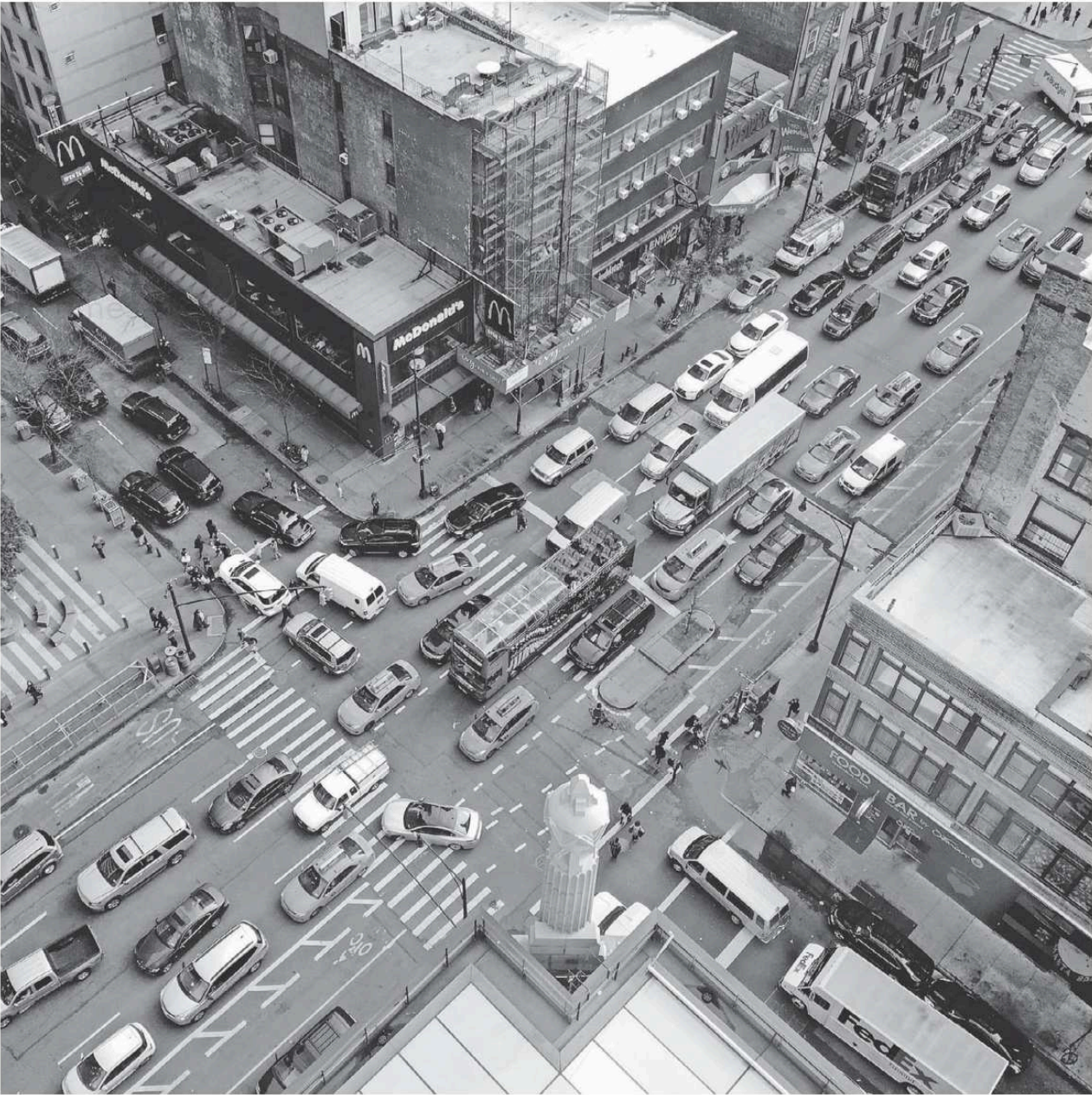
Even if the program begins before Mr. Trump returns to Washington, its survival is in question. Lying ahead is an expected frontal assault from the new president and the Republicans who control Congress and also oppose it. In addition to Mr. Trump’s threat to rescind federal approval, Republican lawmakers have promised to pass legislation shutting down the program if the new president can’t terminate it with an executive order.

Others are also trying to block it in court before Jan. 5. Gov. Phil Murphy of New Jersey argues it would be a financial burden to the state’s commuters. (Although New Jersey residents will reap significant time savings as the tolls thin traffic.) Had Governor Hochul allowed the tolls to start in June, as scheduled, she would have had a much longer runway on which to address and get past the litigation. Now time is running out to establish the program before the White House changes residents.

In a recent interview with The New York Post, Mr. Trump warned that the tolls would “put New York City at a disadvantage over competing cities and states, and businesses will flee.” He added, “It will hurt workers, families and businesses, but in particular, anything to do with jobs.”

Nothing could be further from the truth. If Mr. Trump would take a closer look at the plan, he might change his mind and let it stand. Elsewhere, conservatives have supported transportation user fees.

The tolls — user fees charged to those who choose to drive into Manhattan’s central business district — are designed to encourage greater transit use and discourage cars from entering one the most congested parts of the city. The crush of traffic increases air pollution, asthma hospitaliza-



TIMOTHY MULCARE

A toll for drivers entering part of Manhattan would be a huge boon for New York City.

tion rates, carbon emissions and vehicle crashes. The congestion delays also cost the region an estimated \$20 billion each year in lost productivity, according to Partnership for New York City, one of New York’s leading business associations.

Congestion pricing will not disadvantage New York City. It will unleash an economic boon, breathing new life into a city still trying to get its bearings post-Covid. The \$15 billion in transit improvements and investments will help sustain an estimated 100,000 jobs at over 100 businesses statewide. Better transit and less traffic will draw more people, including tourists, into the city, where they will spend money. And the overwhelming majority of city residents, most of them lower- or middle-income, will benefit from faster, more reliable transit and safer streets.

Inspired by New York’s efforts, other cities around the country are in various stages

of adopting their own congestion pricing plans. Such programs have also proved successful and popular over several decades in London, Singapore and Stockholm, where residents initially hated the idea before quickly embracing it once it took effect.

Before axing congestion pricing, the president-elect should consider the alternative. The M.T.A. has a big hole in its current budget. Without congestion pricing, the state may have to turn to taxpayers to maintain and upgrade an outdated transit system that about 6.5 million of the region’s commuters rely on — including those from New Jersey, Westchester County and Long Island.

For New York City, congestion pricing is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to create a more livable, equitable and affordable city. The governor has put in motion a fair compromise. It addresses the concerns of drivers still struggling with the cost of living,

while modernizing the city’s aged transit system. And it will improve Manhattan’s intolerable century-old traffic, which New Yorkers should not accept as an inevitable feature of living in the city.

If the new plan is stopped, it would be an enormous loss for the New York metropolitan area. The air will be dirtier, the traffic — already at a record high — worse, and the city’s subway, bus and commuter rail system back on life support.

Republicans expect Democrats to honor the recent election by giving the Trump administration a chance to pursue its vision for America. Mr. Trump, too, should respect Governor Hochul’s efforts to deliver creative solutions for New York’s economic and environmental challenges. And he should listen to leaders of the city’s business community, who are firmly behind the improved mobility and prosperity that congestion pricing will bring.

Running Away From America Is Not So Easy

Cara Hoffman

An author, a founding editor of The Anarchist Review of Books and a professor at Johns Hopkins University.

IN THE wake of Donald Trump’s sweeping victory, liberals are once again making the same anguished declaration whenever a Republican wins the presidency, at least in recent decades: It’s time to flee the country.

But as someone who left the United States because of its culture and governance not once, but twice, I have some advice: Don’t let the politics of fear displace you. It’s much more important to find your compatriots and to create a life worth living, no matter where that is.

There is a much-repeated cliché about people following the vagabond life. You are either running away from something or running toward something. But as all good vagabonds know, a destination is more than a point on a map. Those who profess they want to flee a Trump presidency, who see ruin on the horizon, would benefit from imagining what it is they want instead of reacting to what they fear.

The first time I left the United States with no return ticket, I was not yet an adult. I was disgusted by U.S. involvement in arming the contras, the rebels fighting Nicaragua’s Sandinista government; the increased power of the conservative agenda, including hostility to unions; and the polarization of the culture wars.

I quickly fell in with others who also had no

desire to return to their homes. Some had been traveling for a decade. We were fruit pickers, buskers, panhandlers and hotel workers. Some fell into homelessness; others got lucky with house-sits or bartending jobs.

We saw worlds outside our home countries, fell in love, found places we’d dreamed of and did what it took to stay there. For me that place was Athens. This was before the internet and the smartphone. If you wanted to get lost, you could.

I returned to the United States in 1991 to be with family, planning to save enough money for a second trip. But soon I learned I was pregnant and ended up choosing a different journey altogether. I raised a child and worked as a bartender, landscaper, prisoner advocate, receptionist and reporter, all the while writing books and trying to get published. The train stations and beaches and squats and comrades I had made traveling were never far from my mind.

My next departure was after the first Trump victory in 2016. I didn’t want to live in a nation capable of electing a Donald Trump, with his world of endless self-promotion, dishonesty and accumulation. I didn’t want to watch his hatred and lies become accepted or rationalized. But it wasn’t just Mr. Trump. I had become a workaholic, sometimes spending 12 hours a day staring into the void of a glowing computer screen. My partner and I lived in part of the Lower East Side that eventually became gentrified beyond recognition. Every year I felt more certain that to succeed in an atomized consumer culture was to fail as a human being.

This time, I wasn’t leaving to escape. I

knew what it was I wanted. And so I knew exactly where I would go.

We went back to Athens, settling for most of the year in Exarcheia, a neighborhood with a strong cooperative spirit and tradition of protest. We found the things all expatriates want: a reprieve from the noise and news of home; sunshine; good food; views of mountains and the sea; and cafes where people talk instead of work.

But above all we found community — close ties with friends and neighbors who are dedicated to maintaining and protecting a neighborhood where people of different ethnicities, classes and generations mix happily. It’s a haven for anarchists, who often take part in neighborhood-building. But it’s not for everyone. Protesters clash with the police and set cars on fire. Tear gas can fill the streets. Many residents are hostile to developers and tourists. Being there crystallized for me the life I was seeking, one of bravery and camaraderie.

It’s impossible to predict how many people will voluntarily leave the United States because of Mr. Trump, although it’s sure to be a small number. The post-pandemic age of nomadic work and golden visas has made such an escape all the easier, especially for first- and second-generation American children of European immigrants who can return to countries their families once left for better lives in the United States. Few governments keep track of citizens who emigrate. But hints can be gleaned from other statistics.

In 2015, roughly 6,800 Americans applied for Canadian residence. After Mr. Trump’s

Post-election flight might appeal to some liberals. But it comes with its own complications.

inauguration in 2017, that number jumped to over 9,000. According to a 2023 Gallup poll, 17 percent of Americans said they wanted to leave the country permanently. In the latest polling from 2024 that number had risen to 21 percent.

American Citizens Abroad estimates 3.9 million Americans were living abroad permanently as of 2023. According to World Population Review, as of 2024 those millions of Americans were living in 158 countries. The largest number, about 800,000, were in Mexico. Financial advisers and immigration experts are now anticipating a new surge of Americans leaving.

Would-be anti-Trump expats should be aware that in this age of social media and American cultural dominance, there is little way to avoid the United States. Mr. Trump’s reach will go far beyond the borders of this nation. American culture is an ether that can’t be contained.

There are two ways to leave Trump’s America. Go abroad where you are needed, learn the language and help solve local problems by bringing an immigrant spirit of hard work. In our community in Athens, this has included helping establish migrant shelters and joining volunteer fire brigades. Or stay home in the United States and put in the time to fix things, encouraging a spirit of mutual aid in towns and neighborhoods instead of contributing to polarization.

What I’ve learned from my travels and strategic exits from the United States is this: There is no escape from the world, just the need to build a better one.

An Unexpected Outcome of the War on Terror

Hassan Hassan

The founder and editor in chief of New Lines Magazine and a co-author of "ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror."

THE stunningly successful offensive by Syrian rebels last week accomplished what years of bloodshed by larger factions could not. Within four days, the rebel group, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, captured much of Aleppo, one of Syria's largest cities. Long-entrenched front lines held by government forces and fortified by Russian firepower crumbled.

Underlying the success of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham is a crucial development: It has evolved from being part of one of the most brutal transnational jihadist movements in modern history to positioning itself as a nationalist force — and for many, a stabilizing actor.

The group was born as an Islamic State branch and later joined with Al Qaeda, and it remains designated as a terrorist organization by the United States and other Western countries. But after pivoting away from international jihad in 2016, it became the dominant force in Syria's northwest, one of the few areas outside Syrian government control.

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham has established a bureaucracy to oversee education, health care and justice. It has tried to signal moderation by instituting a less harsh brand of Islamic practice and to attract technocrats. The group has displayed more discipline than many nationalist counterparts, urging its fighters to respect Christians and other minorities and meeting with religious leaders to reassure them of protection. It played a crucial role in fighting ISIS and eradicating Al Qaeda's remnants in Syria.

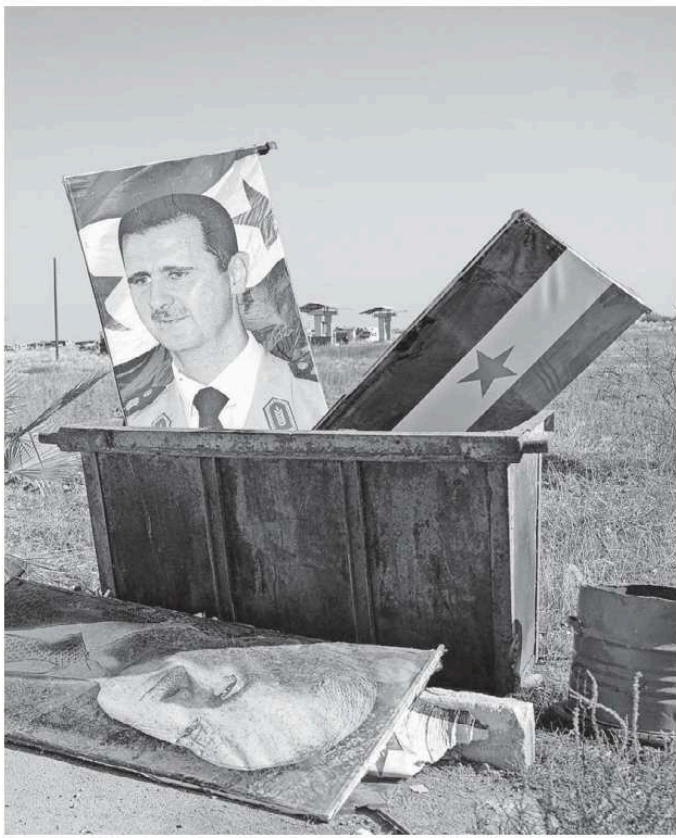
The group's leader, Abu Mohammad al-Jolani, said Hayat Tahrir al-Sham would apply its tolerance policy to Aleppo, withdraw armed fighters from civilian areas "in the coming weeks" and consider dissolving itself in place of "new institutions," according to Dareen Khalifa, a senior adviser to the International Crisis Group. Whether the group actually follows through, Ms. Khalifa said, "remains to be seen."

This transformation does not make Hayat Tahrir al-Sham less dangerous; it makes the group more complex and harder to root out. Its policies are often enforced through intimidation, assassination of its rivals and the murder of civil society activists. Many Syrians in areas under the group's control express relief at the relative stability but resentment of the group's iron-fisted practices, reflecting the lack of viable alternatives.

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and other groups like it, including another Islamist force in Syria, Ahrar al-Sham, and Al Qaeda's affiliate in Yemen and militant Islamist groups in Africa, are not the same threat the United States fought for two decades in what it called the war on terror. The new Hayat Tahrir al-Sham is a product of a post-9/11 world in which jihadist organizations have reinvented themselves as nationalist and locally focused movements, not just to survive but to thrive in the new geopolitical landscape.

The Taliban are a prime example and an inspiration for groups like Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. In their international outreach, they reassure the West that they will not allow their countries to become a launchpad for international terrorism and will focus on local governance through Islamic law.

The war on terror, while presumably preventing another large-scale attack like Sept. 11, nonetheless failed to dismantle jihadist ideology. Instead, it compelled these movements to recalibrate their approach, moving



RAMI AL SAYED/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

A onetime jihadist rebel group now controls key areas of Syria.

away from cross-border terror networks to localized governance and insurgency, and in some cases, as in Libya, militants were absorbed into the government. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham has gone to great lengths to signal that it has no quarrel with the United States. Its leader, Mr. Jolani, said in a May 2015 Al Jazeera interview that Syria would not serve as a base for jihadist attacks on the West. His group set up a political office for international outreach and engaged with countries including Turkey, presenting itself as a trustworthy partner focused solely on Syria.

As a journalist born and raised in Syria until my early 20s and someone who studies the conflict there, I believe the group's transformation away from the brutal methods of ISIS and Al Qaeda is partly public relations, but mainly genuine. One indication of its change is that training given to new recruits emphasizes the merits of country-focused jihad over the global jihad espoused by Al Qaeda, according to my interviews with members.

The localized focus and governance structures of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham could give it staying power in Syria akin to that of the Taliban in Afghanistan, although it lacks the international recognition or cohesive political strategy that allowed the Taliban to negotiate with global powers. Hezbollah in Lebanon could be seen as another model, at least until its missile attacks on Israel led to the Jewish state's crushing offensive against it.

The ruthless regime of President Bashar

al-Assad of Syria — already battered by conflict, sanctions and corruption — is now facing its gravest crisis in years. Its capacity to reclaim lost territory appears significantly eroded, leaving it vulnerable to advances. With Russia distracted by the war in Ukraine, the regime has less reason to count on its ally.

Those of us who closely watch the conflict can see a pervasive sense of paralysis on the regime's side. Regime supporters convey exhaustion and surrender. The last time parts of Aleppo were conquered by rebels, it took years and tens of thousands of deaths for the regime to retake the city. Doing it all over again seems unthinkable, especially with a population aware that post-liberation life under Mr. Assad did not improve.

As the United States shifts its focus to great-power competition with nations such as China, it leaves behind a Middle East where populations and regional countries no longer see groups like Hayat Tahrir al-Sham merely as terrorists but as political actors filling the void left by failing states.

In Syria, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham has followed a similar trajectory, consolidating its power not through terror attacks abroad but by embedding itself deeply within local structures. That approach complicates efforts to counter these groups. Their goals are no longer about global jihad but regional dominance — a strategy that makes them harder to dislodge. Western policymakers must grapple with this new reality.

Western nations have a choice: create a moderate alternative that can govern effectively or acknowledge that such groups will continue to rule in a world that is far from perfect. The first choice involves a generational nation-building project that a China-focused America may be incapable of or unwilling to do. Doing neither is the worst option.

LETTERS

The Trans Case, and the Role of Activists

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "Court Poised to Uphold Ban on Transgender Care" (front page, Dec. 5):

Once more Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. reveals how logic-challenged he can be. In referring to judgments about contested scientific evidence, he states, "The Constitution leaves that question to the people's representatives, rather than to nine people, none of whom is a doctor."

In that case, it follows logically that the Constitution should not be allowed to leave these same judgments to state legislatures, the vast majority of whose members are not doctors.

Since gender-affirming care is not a matter of contested scientific evidence — there are consistent standards and recommendations for such care among medical professional organizations — why is the chief justice exposing transgender care to the same chaos he has already created for abortion, rather than handing it over to the medical establishment where, if he were logical, it belongs?

T. PATRICK HILL
WINCHESTER, VA.

The writer is the author of "No Place for Ethics: Judicial Review, Legal Positivism and the Supreme Court of the United States."

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "Trans Activists Question Tack Amid Backlash" (front page, Nov. 27):

The article plays down the grave reality: Trans people have come under a sustained, systematic attack fueled by millions of dollars of political ads falsely portraying them as a societal threat.

In truth, this tiny, vulnerable population experiences violent crime at four times the rate of cisgender people. Their clinics have been firebombed, and schools supporting trans students face bomb threats. A constant stream of legislation targets their ability to fully participate in public life.

In contrast, the article iden-

Social Security

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "Trump Picks Banking Executive to Lead Social Security Administration" (nytimes.com, Dec. 5):

I am concerned about yet another of President-elect Donald Trump's proposed nominees, his pick for Social Security Administration commissioner, Frank Bisignano, a financial services executive.

I doubt that someone who once earned \$100 million in a year understands the concerns of ordinary Americans who rely on the federal social safety net to pay the rent, buy food and medication, really just to survive.

Unlike Mr. Trump's uber-wealthy nominees and the contributors to his campaign who have now been richly rewarded with plum executive branch positions or ambassadorial nominations, for 40 percent of retired Americans Social Security payments are their only income source — an average monthly payment of \$1,862, which doesn't go very far these days.

I hope that senators will question Mr. Bisignano in detail about what he will do to protect Social Security payments for retirees.

DANIEL FINK
BEVERLY HILLS, CALIF.

Scrap the Pardons

TO THE EDITOR:

In light of President Biden's recent pardon of his son Hunter, and President-elect Donald Trump's likely upcoming pardons of the Capitol rioters, it is time to seriously consider eliminating the presidential pardon. (This would require a constitutional amendment.)

The pardon concept itself is corrupt, a vestigial holder from monarchy. We have a well-designed, three-tiered judiciary. Let the system do its work.

GERARD MRYGLOT
NEW YORK

The Times welcomes letters from readers. Letters must include the writer's name, address and telephone number. Those selected may be edited, and shortened to fit allotted space. Email: letters@nytimes.com

tifies the threat to those debating trans rights as having to endure "unsparing criticism" from transgender activists, and asks us to consider the impact on the billionaire author J.K. Rowling of having her feminist credentials questioned.

Trans people's fight for protections from discrimination and access to health care is urgent and just. The hurt feelings of their critics should not overshadow the existential threats trans people endure every day.

DAN MASSEY
SAN FRANCISCO

TO THE EDITOR:

I'm a 72-year-old lifelong Democrat. I've been politically active, nonstop, since my teens, including about a decade as a full-time community organizer. Like any Democrat, I was shattered by the election results.

Your report reminds us that idealists of any stripe or ideology need to beware of overreach. They need to take stock of the real-world landscape that surrounds them when they shape their messages. Next, they must calibrate the intensity of their advocacy accordingly.

Yes, having vision is admirable. But making the vision come true requires tactical thinking. Idealism must be more open to pragmatism. There's little time to waste.

STEVE VITOFF
HUNTINGTON, N.Y.

Recess Appointments

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "Trump Tries On His Crown. It Doesn't Fit," by Jamelle Bouie (column, Nov. 24):

Mr. Bouie's thoughtful exposition on the president's lack of constitutional power to adjourn the Senate to ram through recess appointments raises grave issues about the harm that can result from his succeeding.

If Donald Trump, with a willing Senate, prevails in making such recess appointments, and if those officials are subsequently determined unlawfully appointed, their official acts would be open to legal challenge, thereby sowing mass uncertainty and legal chaos. No president with the interests of the nation in mind would take such a risk.

LES WEINSTEIN
LOS ANGELES

The writer is a former Department of Justice attorney.

Brain Injuries

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "Are Brain Injuries Fueling Criminal Behavior?," by Annie Liotas (Opinion guest essay, Dec. 3):

People with traumatic brain injuries (TBI) face serious challenges navigating a criminal legal system that places significant value on their ability to recall facts accurately and consistently. In addition to the symptoms cited by Mx. Liotas, TBI can influence how well a person remembers and can communicate details, how convincing they sound, whether their affect matches decision makers' expectations and whether they appear properly remorseful.

Our recent survey of women incarcerated for murder and manslaughter offenses in California found that at least one-third of respondents (217 of 649 people) experienced probable TBIs the year before the offense. Namely, their partner strangled or "choked" them multiple times or until they passed out, blacked out or felt dizzy — injuries indicative of TBI.

Actors in the criminal legal system from police officers to prosecutors and defense attorneys, judges, probation, parole and corrections officers, and parole commissioners must identify and account for TBI among those arrested, convicted and sentenced for crimes. Failing to do so threatens the integrity of our criminal legal system.

DEBBIE MUKAMAL
ANDREA N. CIMINO

Ms. Mukamal is the executive director of the Stanford Criminal Justice Center at Stanford Law School. Dr. Cimino is an independent researcher at Rogue Scholar Consulting. They wrote "Fatal Peril: Unheard Stories from the IPV-to-Prison Pipeline."

Trump's Treasury Pick Isn't Alarming, but He's Odd

Peter Coy

An Opinion writer whose newsletter about business and economics is published twice a week.

SCOTT BESSENT, Donald Trump's pick for Treasury secretary, has some pretty unorthodox views. Unorthodoxy can be a good thing at times, and it's conceivable that Mr. Bessent will end up a big success at Treasury. But deviation from the norm is not necessarily what you look for in a Treasury secretary, who is responsible for formulating the nation's economic, financial and tax policies.

What Mr. Bessent stands for hasn't gotten a lot of attention yet because he's a levelheaded, stable, congenial person, which puts him way above some of the other Trump picks. He's also smart and knows his way around financial markets, a plus. He became a billionaire by working for the prominent investors George Soros, Jim Chanos and Jim Rogers, and later founding Key Square Capital Management, a hedge fund.

But when you listen to him closely, you hear some surprising things. Let me take you through one fireside chat that Mr. Bessent had on Oct. 2 — that is, before Mr. Trump chose him, but while he was in contention for the job — with Michael Green, the chief strategist of Simplify Asset Management.

At one point, the conversation turned to Japan. Its central bank has kept interest rates low to stimulate its economy, going by the conventional economic wisdom that raising rates discourages borrowing by consumers and businesses, chilling growth. After two increases earlier this year, it has been reluctant to raise rates further. But Mr. Bessent told Green, "I believe that the Bank of Japan is actually going to stoke growth when they raise rates."

Mr. Bessent's logic is that Japanese households are big savers, and keep a lot of their money in bank accounts, so when rates go up, their interest income rises, allowing them to spend more. Himino Ryoza, a deputy governor of the Bank of Japan, said something along those lines in a speech last year, al-

though that was back when its key interest rate was still negative. It's also a tenet of modern monetary theory, a heterodox school of economics.

There's no question that savers benefit from higher interest rates, but to say that higher rates stimulate the Japanese economy overall remains a minority view, even within the Bank of Japan. (Otherwise they would have raised rates sooner and faster, right?)

Maurice Obstfeld, an economist at the University of California, Berkeley, who was the chief economist of the International Monetary Fund from 2015 to 2018, pointed out to me that households that owe money tend to live more paycheck to paycheck, so the hit to their spending from higher interest payments is

Scott Bessent is a billionaire with heterodox economic views.

greater than the lift to spending by saving households, which will just put most of the extra interest back into the bank.

Mr. Bessent also told Green that China can accomplish its military buildup only because it has a gigantic surplus in trade and income from investments — the current account, in economics lingo. "If they didn't do the gigantic current account surplus, the savings of the Chinese people are not enough to finance this," he said.

This is precisely backward. China's having a surplus in its current account means that it is actually sending savings abroad, not adding to national savings that could be used for the military or anything else. The surplus indicates that instead of importing foreign goods in exchange for its exports, China is acquiring foreign stocks, bonds, real estate and the like. That, in fact, is the complaint that the current Treasury secretary, Janet Yellen, has been making about China ever since she took office — that China is overproducing and oversaving, so "the global market is flooded

by artificially cheap Chinese products."

Perhaps Mr. Bessent's argument is that China's current account surplus and its military buildup are two symptoms of deeper problems in economic management, rather than the former enabling the latter. I'm not sure I buy that either, but in any case it's not what he said. One more surprising argument. Late in the fireside chat, Mr. Bessent floated an idea for how to get NATO countries to pay their fair share for defense, without threatening to withdraw from the alliance, as Mr. Trump has privately talked about. His idea was to ask Germany and other allies to buy U.S. "military bonds."

It sounds reasonable at first, but think about what it entails. It's Europe buying a new form of U.S. government debt. Instead of using its money to buy jets, tanks and the like (a lot of it American-made), Europe would be turning the United States into even more of a net debtor to the rest of the world than it already is. How does that help Europe defend itself or benefit America's finances?

There's also Mr. Bessent's 3-3-3 plan, which helped him get Mr. Trump's nod for the job. It would involve cutting the budget deficit to 3 percent by 2028, from roughly 6 percent today, boosting economic growth to 3 percent a year, and encouraging additional energy production of three million barrels of oil a day or the equivalent. Its goals are good, but I think it's overoptimistic, especially if Mr. Trump follows through on his vows to impose higher tariffs and to expel millions of undocumented immigrants. To his credit, Mr. Bessent has expressed concerns about high tariffs, saying they should be used more as threats to gain concessions from other nations rather than as permanent fixtures.

All that said, Mr. Bessent is better prepared to serve as Treasury secretary than some of his predecessors. I remember when Paul O'Neill, a former chief executive of the aluminum producer Alcoa, who served under President George W. Bush, said that one of his top priorities as Treasury secretary would be workplace safety. (That's more the Labor Department's department.) Mr. Bessent may turn out just fine. Some of his ideas, however, could use a little more thinking through.



Jason Irias does most of Connor Sports's precise work when it comes to the logos and lettering. He spent most of a day working on the words "Florida State" and "Seminoles," and the head of a Native American that included a feather.

The Midwestern Roots of N.B.A. Courts

By KEN BELSON

AMASA, MICH. — Los Angeles Clippers fans are being wowed this season by the bells and whistles in the team's new \$2 billion home, the Intuit Dome. They can watch replays on the world's largest double-sided scoreboard, sit in a 51-row section reserved for die-hard supporters and buy a jersey in the 5,000-square-foot team store.

But for all of that, most of their attention will be focused on the court, whose construction is a tale all on its own.

It begins 2,200 miles away from Los Angeles, in the tiny mill town of Amasa, Mich. There, Connor Sports, one of the leading makers

With orders for hardwood playing surfaces overwhelming contractors since the pandemic, a Michigan company is filling college and professional arenas with iconic 'portables.'

of hardwood courts, spent about a year procuring trees and building the court, a process that involved dozens of logs, hundreds of workers and thousands of hours. At the company's plant amid the forests of the Upper Peninsula, workers traversing a maze of conveyors, saws and other machinery dried, cut, planed and shaved strips of

wood during the two 10-hour shifts that run six days a week.

The company builds about 800 courts a year, with most of them destined for high school gymnasiums and recreational centers in all 50 states and beyond. Almost all are made with northern hard maple, a dense, durable wood harvested from forests above the 35th

parallel, a standard set by the Maple Flooring Manufacturers Association, an industry group whose members make most of the hardwood floors in the United States.

Connor also makes some of the country's most iconic courts, including those used in the N.B.A. and by many major college basketball programs. Each consists

of about 250 4-by-7-foot interlocking panels with subfloors attached for shock absorption and stability. Called portables, they can be assembled and broken down in a few hours so arena operators can quickly stage other events like hockey games and concerts.

"This job has taken me all over the world, including a 30,000-square-foot installation in Azerbaijan," said Jason Gasperich, the technical director at Connor Sports.

"Some overseas customers know if it's good enough for the N.B.A., it's good enough for them."

Demand for hardwood courts,

CONTINUED ON PAGE B6

Peddler of Tax Breaks Is Tapped to Lead the I.R.S.

By ANDREW DUEHREN

WASHINGTON — When Billy Long, now President-elect Donald J. Trump's pick to lead the Internal Revenue Service, left Congress in 2023, he quickly set out to make money. Building off the relationships he developed as a Republican from Missouri and auctioneer, Mr. Long began encouraging people to file for a lucrative, pandemic-era tax credit.

At meetings with chapters of Hispanic Chambers of Commerce across the country and at an auctioneering convention in Oklahoma, Mr. Long sometimes wore a hat advertising the Employee Retention Tax Credit as he tried to drum up business. Working with companies that would fill out the paperwork for the tax credit in exchange for a portion of a client's refund, Mr. Long had success.

"What's working for me is the trust factor because people know me," he said in a podcast interview last year about his work, describing clients who received tax refunds of more than \$1 million. "They've known me for 40 years in the auction business, or whatever they see me getting this money for their compadres," he added.

The money spigot would soon

shut off. In September 2023, the I.R.S. temporarily stopped processing claims for the credit, hoping to squash widespread fraud in the program. The tax break, aimed at supporting businesses that kept employees on payroll during the pandemic, had spawned a cottage industry of tax preparation firms steering people, including those who were not eligible for the credit, toward it.

Touted the employee retention credit, a magnet for fraud.

The I.R.S. began warning people about scams related to the tax credit, including firms that were "wildly misrepresenting and exaggerating who can qualify for the credits."

The fiscal cost of the tax refund bonanza was steep. What analysts had initially expected would be a roughly \$55 billion program had ballooned into a \$230 billion one, with projections that its cost could ultimately hit \$550 billion.

Mr. Long, in the 2023 podcast interview, said he would help only

CONTINUED ON PAGE B3



NATHAN PAPES/THE SPRINGFIELD NEWS-LEADER, VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS
Billy Long, an auctioneer and former Republican representative of Missouri.

Executives Unnerved By Killing

By EMMA GOLDBERG

A Fortune 500 pharmaceutical company raised its drug prices, and then board members and executives received phone calls threatening violence. A health care company's board meeting was disrupted after board members were targeted in "swatting" attacks that wrongly sent law enforcement officers to their homes.

These incidents happened before the fatal shooting of Brian Thompson, UnitedHealthcare's chief executive, in Midtown Manhattan on Wednesday. The police had not offered a motive for the shooting, or said it was related to Mr. Thompson's work in the insurance industry.

The killing, however, stunned business leaders, some of whom were already concerned about safety. Over the last five years, there has been a sharp rise in targeted attacks, digital and offline, of executives and their families, said Chris Pierson, the chief executive of BlackCloak, a digital executive

CONTINUED ON PAGE B3

After a Slide, Job Numbers Bounce Back

By LYDIA DePILLIS

Job creation bounced back in November after disruptions from storms and a major strike, reinforcing a picture of modest employment expansion over the past several months.

The U.S. economy added 227,000 jobs, seasonally adjusted, the Labor Department reported on Friday. With upward revisions to September and October figures, the three-month average gain is 173,000, slightly higher than the average over the six months before that.

The unemployment rate ticked up to 4.2 percent, from 4.1 percent in October, as fewer people were able to find work. But for those who had jobs, wages jumped more than expected and were 4 percent higher than they were a year earlier.

"I think that we are normalizing from a great post-pandemic labor market to a very good longer-run labor market," said Gus Faucher, the chief economist for PNC Financial

CONTINUED ON PAGE B3

The Digest

MEDIA

L.A. Times Owner to Add 'Bias Meter' to Coverage

Dr. Patrick Soon-Shiong, the billionaire owner of The Los Angeles Times, said on Thursday that he planned to introduce a “bias meter” next to the paper’s news and opinion coverage as part of his campaign to overhaul the publication.

Dr. Soon-Shiong, right, who in October quashed a planned presidential endorsement for Vice President Kamala Harris from The Los Angeles Times’s editorial board, said in an interview that he planned to introduce a “bias meter” next to the paper’s news and opinion coverage as part of his campaign to overhaul the publication.

On news and opinion articles, “you have a bias meter so somebody could understand, as a reader, that the source of the article has some level of bias,” he said in the interview.

He said he planned to introduce the tool in January.

Dr. Soon-Shiong’s comments set off immediate pushback from the L.A. Times Guild, which represents journalists at the paper. “Recently, the newspaper’s



owner has publicly suggested his staff harbors bias, without offering evidence or examples,” the union’s leadership said in a statement. The union said all Times staff members abided by ethics guidelines that call for “fairness, precision, transparency, vigilance against bias and an earnest search to understand all sides of an issue.”

Harry Litman, a senior legal affairs columnist for The Los Angeles Times’s Opinion section, announced Thursday that he was resigning from the paper because of recent actions by Dr. Soon-Shiong.

A Los Angeles Times spokeswoman did not immediately respond to a request for comment. KATIE ROBERTSON

COMPANIES

Chipotle to Raise Prices Across U.S. by 2 Percent

Chipotle is raising its U.S. prices to offset inflation and to compensate for a promise to increase portion sizes.

Chipotle’s chief corporate affairs officer, Laurie Schalow, confirmed Friday that the Mexican restaurant chain was implementing a 2 percent price increase nationally. Schalow said it was the first time the California-based company has raised its prices in more than a year.

Chipotle revealed the price increase after an analyst report released earlier this week by investment bank Truist Securities noted that a 2 percent price increase at approximately 20 percent of the

chain’s 3,500 U.S. stores.

Truist, which raised its price target for Chipotle’s shares, also reported that customer traffic at the chain’s restaurants accelerated in November.

Chipotle said in October that its food, beverage and packaging costs all increased in the third quarter.

Chipotle also cited the cost of ensuring it was providing “consistent and generous portions” to its customers. Brian Niccol, the former chairman and chief executive, said in July that Chipotle was retraining workers at approximately 10 percent of Chipotle’s stores after customers complained on social media that they were getting smaller portions.

Niccol left Chipotle in September to become the chairman and chief executive of Starbucks. ASSOCIATED PRESS



S&P 500 INDEX
+0.2%
6,090.27



DOW JONES INDUSTRIALS
-0.3%
44,642.52



NASDAQ COMPOSITE INDEX
+0.8%
19,859.77



10-YEAR TREASURY YIELD
4.15%
-0.031 points



CRUDE OIL (U.S.)
\$67.20
-\$1.10



GOLD (N.Y.)
\$2,659.60
+\$11.20

Stocks & Bonds

Wall Street Hits More Records After a Just-Right Jobs Report

By The Associated Press

U.S. stocks rose to records Friday after data suggested the job market remains solid enough to keep the economy going, but not so strong that it raises immediate worries about inflation.

The S&P 500 climbed 0.2 percent, just enough to top the all-time high set on Wednesday, as it closed a third straight winning week in what looks to be one of its best years since the 2000 dot-com bust. The Dow Jones industrial average dipped 123.19 points, or 0.3 percent, while the Nasdaq composite rose 0.8 percent to set its own record.

The quiet trading came after the latest jobs report came in mixed enough to strengthen traders’ expectations that the Federal Reserve will cut interest rates again at its next meeting in two weeks. The report showed U.S. employers hired more workers than expected last month, but it also said the unemployment rate unexpectedly ticked up to 4.2 percent from 4.1 percent.

“This print doesn’t kill the holiday spirit and the Fed remains on track to deliver a cut in December,” according to Lindsay Rosner, head of multi-sector investing within Goldman Sachs Asset Management.

The Fed has been easing its main interest rate from a two-decade high since September to offer more help for the slowing job market, after bringing inflation nearly all the way down to its 2 percent target. Lower interest rates can ease the brakes off the economy, but they can also offer more fuel for inflation.

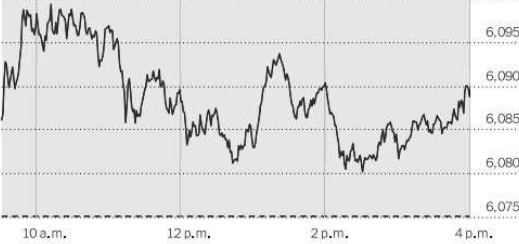
Expectations for a series of cuts from the Fed have been a major reason the S&P 500 has set an all-time high 57 times so far this year. And the Fed is part of a global surge: 62 central banks have lowered rates in the past three months, the most since 2020, according to Michael Hartnett and other strategists at Bank of America.

Still, the jobs report may have

The S&P 500 Index

Position of the S&P 500 index at 1-minute intervals on Friday

-- Previous Close: 6,075.11



Source: FactSet

THE NEW YORK TIMES

included some notes of caution for Fed officials underneath the surface.

Scott Wren, senior global market strategist at Wells Fargo Investment Institute, pointed to average wages for workers last month, which were a touch stronger than economists expected. While that’s good news for workers who would always like to make more, it could keep upward pressure on inflation.

“This report tells the Fed that they still need to be careful as sticky housing/shelter/wage data shows that it won’t be easy to engineer meaningfully lower inflation from here in the nearer term,” Wren said.

So, while traders are betting on an 85 percent probability the Fed will ease its main rate in two weeks, they’re much less certain about how many more cuts it will deliver next year, according to data from CME Group.

For now, the hope is that the job market can help U.S. shoppers continue to spend and keep the U.S. economy out of a recession that had earlier seemed inevitable after the Fed began hiking interest rates swiftly to crush inflation.

Several retailers offered encouragement after delivering better-than-expected results for the

latest quarter.

Ulta Beauty rallied 9 percent after topping expectations for both profit and revenue. The opening of new stores helped boost its revenue, and it raised the bottom end of its forecasted range for sales over this full year.

Lululemon stretched 15.9 percent higher following its own profit report. It said stronger sales outside the United States helped it in particular, and its earnings topped analysts’ expectations.

Retailers overall have been offering mixed signals on how resilient U.S. shoppers can remain amid the slowing job market and still-high prices. Target gave a dour forecast for the holiday shopping season, for example, while Walmart gave a much more encouraging outlook.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 15.16 points to 6,090.27. The Dow dipped 123.19 to 44,642.52, and the Nasdaq composite climbed 159.05 to 19,859.77.

NEWSLETTER: DEALBOOK

DealBook helps you make sense of the day’s most important business and policy headlines. Sign up for the newsletter at nytimes.com/dealbook

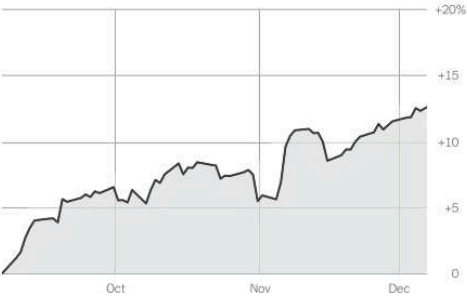
What Happened in Stock Markets Yesterday

POWERED BY

FACTSET

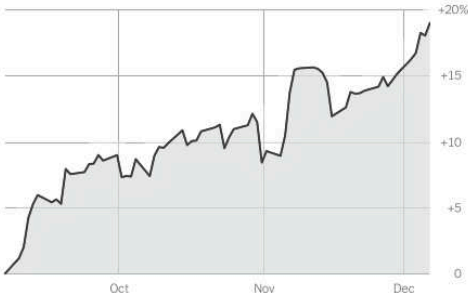
S&P 500 6,090.27 ↑ +0.2%

3 month performance: +12.6%



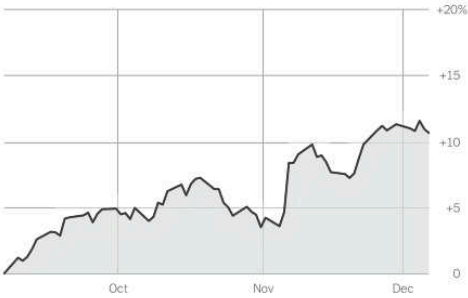
Nasdaq Composite Index 19,859.77 ↑ +0.8%

3 month performance: +19.0%



Dow Jones Industrials 44,642.52 ↓ -0.3%

3 month performance: +10.7%



Best performers

S&P 500 COMPANIES	CLOSE	CHANGE
1. Lululemon Athletica (LULU)	\$399.60	+15.9%
2. Hewlett Packard Enterprise (HPE)	\$23.95	+10.6
3. Ulta Beauty (ULTA)	\$428.17	+9.0
4. Super Micro Computer (SMCI)	\$43.93	+6.8
5. Palantir Technologies (PLTR)	\$76.34	+6.2
6. Tesla (TSLA)	\$389.22	+5.3
7. Broadcom (AVGO)	\$179.53	+5.3
8. Teradyne (TER)	\$118.51	+4.2
9. Albemarle Co. (ALB)	\$104.96	+3.8
10. Autozone (AZO)	\$3,309.44	+3.7

Worst performers

S&P 500 COMPANIES	CLOSE	CHANGE
1. UnitedHealth Group (UNH)	\$549.62	-5.1%
2. Cooper Companies (COO)	\$98.70	-4.4
3. Halliburton (HAL)	\$28.78	-4.1
4. Diamondback Energy (FANG)	\$166.83	-3.4
5. Eversource Energy (ES)	\$59.78	-3.0
6. ERIE INDEMA (ERIE)	\$411.87	-3.0
7. Coterra Energy (CTRA)	\$24.93	-2.8
8. Baker Hughes 'A' (BKR)	\$41.31	-2.8
9. CVS Health (CVS)	\$55.29	-2.8
10. Elevance Health (ELV)	\$382.14	-2.8

Most active

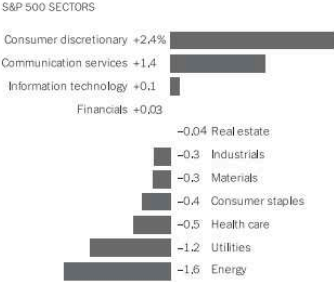
S&P 500 COMPANIES	CLOSE	CHANGE	VOLUME IN MIL.
1. NVIDIA (NVDA)	\$142.44	-1.8%	184
2. Super Micro Computer (SMCI)	\$43.93	+6.8	95
3. Palantir Technologies (PLTR)	\$76.34	+6.2	91
4. Tesla (TSLA)	\$389.22	+5.3	79
5. Intel (INTC)	\$20.92	+0.6	77
6. Ford Motor (F)	\$10.51	+0.7	55
7. Amazon.com (AMZN)	\$227.03	+2.9	44
8. Hewlett Packard Enterprise (HPE)	\$23.95	+10.6	37
9. Apple (AAPL)	\$242.84	-0.1	36
10. Uber Technologies (UBER)	\$66.09	+1.3	36

Regional and emerging markets

	TOTAL RETURN 1 YR	TOTAL RETURN 5 YRS	TOTAL ASSETS IN BIL.
1. Vanguard Emerging Markets Stock Index Fund Institutional Plus Shares (VEMRX)	+15.2%	+4.5%	111.4
2. American Funds New World Fund Class R-6 (RNWGX)	+13.3	+6.2	63.2
3. DFA Emerging Markets Core Equity Portfolio Institutional Class (DFCEX)	+13.0	+6.2	27.9
4. GQG Partners Emerging Markets Equity Fund Investor Shares (GQGPX)	+14.0	+8.3	21.9
5. Fidelity Series Emerging Markets Opportunities Fund (FEMSX)	+13.5	+3.9	21.9
6. Strategic Advisers Fidelity Emerging Markets Fund (FGOMX)	+13.4	+4.4	19.8
7. Invesco Developing Markets Fund Class R6 (ODVIX)	+3.7	-0.7	17.2
8. Strategic Advisers Emerging Markets Fund (FSAMX)	+13.6	+3.8	11.8
9. DFA Emerging Markets Value Portfolio Institutional Class (DFEVX)	+13.5	+6.7	10.9
10. Fidelity Advisor Emerging Markets Fund - Class Z (FZEMX)	+12.8	+5.6	8.8

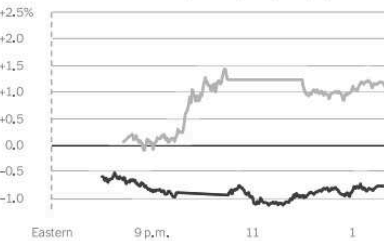
Source: Morningstar

Sector performance



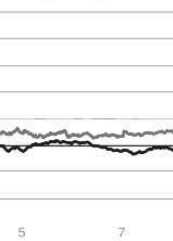
How stock markets fared yesterday in Asia

— Nikkei 225 (Japan): -0.8%
— Shanghai Composite (Shanghai): +1.0%



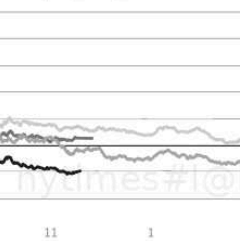
... in Europe

— FTSE 100 (London): -0.5%
— DAX (Frankfurt): +0.1%



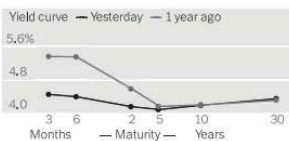
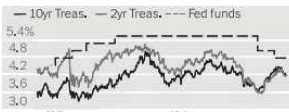
... and North America

— Dow Jones Industrials (New York): -0.3%
— S&P/TSX (Toronto): +0.0%

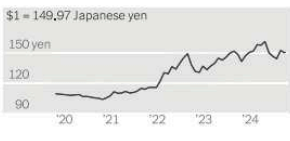


What Is Happening in Other Markets and the Economy

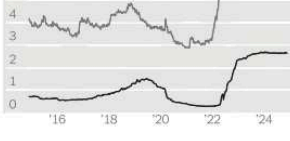
Bonds



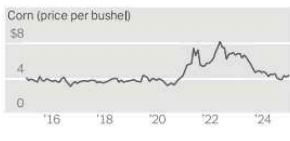
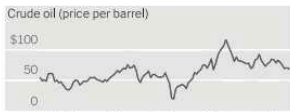
Currencies



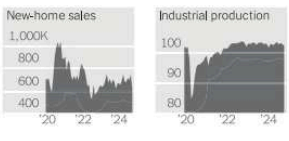
Consumer rates



Commodities



Economy



Boardrooms Are on Edge After Shooting Of Executive

FROM FIRST BUSINESS PAGE
utive protection firm. Health care, biomedical and pharmaceutical leaders tend to be targeted more often than executives in other industries, according to the firm's data.

Digital platforms have made it easier to obtain information about executives' identities and locations, while social media has fanned the flames of vitriol directed at these corporate leaders.

Businesses have been increasing their spending on protection: The median amount spent on executive security among the S&P 500 companies that disclose that information doubled from 2021 to 2023, according to Equilar, an executive compensation research firm.

Because of how frequently threats circulate online, companies and security firms must spend time and effort sorting threats by the severity of threatened harm, the likelihood of an attack and the capacity of the individual making the threat, Mr. Pierson said.

While some social media users responded to the news of Mr. Thompson's killing with anger and schadenfreude, posting their frustrations about being denied reimbursement for crucial medical treatments, many corporate leaders shared a sense of fear at seeing a not particularly prominent executive fatally gunned down on a Manhattan street.

"My wife was like, 'Why would someone kill a C.E.O.?' I'm like, any C.E.O. has people who don't like them. C.E.O.s have to let people go. C.E.O.s have people competing with their business," said Seth Besmertnik, the chief executive of a software company whose office is also in Manhattan.

Brad Karp, chairman of the law firm Paul, Weiss, said, "It was

A security company's phones were 'ringing off the hook.'

chilling and disturbing to see the assassination captured on video, two blocks from my office."

For some chief executives, the shooting is a wake-up call: Political leaders aren't the only ones who need to be on high alert about their personal safety. Many are now scrambling to do more.

Leaders at Allied Universal, which provides security services for 80 percent of Fortune 500 companies, said their phones were "ringing off the hook" on Wednesday with potential clients. Allied covers a wide spectrum of services — including stationing guards outside offices, chauffeuring executives, surveilling their homes and tracking their families.

Protecting a chief executive full time costs roughly \$250,000 a year, said Glen Kucera, who runs Allied's enhanced protection services.

This month, dozens of Fortune 1000 chief executives will gather for a summit in Midtown, at the Ziegfeld on 54th Street, steps away from where United Healthcare's chief executive was shot.

Jeffrey Sonnenfeld, who runs Yale's Chief Executive Leadership Institute and will convene the summit, received a barrage of phone calls on Wednesday with questions about safety at the event. Mr. Sonnenfeld said city police and private guards would be stationed at the summit, a decision that was made before Wednesday's shooting, though in the past he has not worried about a security presence at the event, which has been held for more than 30 years.

"From the left and the right we've seen the frightening, uncanny conversion of angry and deranged people," Mr. Sonnenfeld said. "Leaders in the corporate world are convenient targets."

Ranjay Gulati, a Harvard Business School professor, noted that while people were often frustrated with businesses — take Purdue Pharma and its role in the opioid crisis or BP and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill — it was shocking to see that anger lead to violence.

"There's a latent undercurrent here of how frustrated people are with the health care industry," Mr. Gulati said. "I'm not condoning the action in any way, but there's a lot of soul-searching we have to do about an industry that consumes nearly 20 percent of our G.D.P. and yet our outcomes are not nearly as good as countries that spend half as much."

Kathryn Wylde, the chief executive of the Partnership for New York City, a nonprofit representing the city's business community, said Mayor Eric Adams told her that the shooting appeared to have been targeted rather than random, asking her to notify members of the partnership.

After October Slide, Job Numbers Have Bounced Back

FROM FIRST BUSINESS PAGE
nancial Services Group. "I don't want to say that we've definitely achieved a soft landing, but certainly we think this is what a soft landing looks like."

The public mood seems to be brightening as well, as inflation has receded while layoffs remain low. The University of Michigan's consumer sentiment index notched a seven-month high in the initial December reading.

The employment numbers were flattered by the return of some 37,000 manufacturing workers after strikes were resolved at Boeing and one of its suppliers. Recovery in Florida and North Carolina from Hurricanes Helene and Milton was likely to have played a role in the outside addition of 53,000 jobs in leisure and hospitality.

That aside, the main category driving growth was health care and social assistance, which has structural tailwinds as the country's population ages. Outside of the aerospace rebound, manufacturing shed positions. The retail sector lost 28,000 jobs last month, probably because of seasonal adjustment factors as holiday season hiring has been anemic.

The report was subdued enough to boost investor bets on an interest-rate cut from the Federal Reserve, which meets in two weeks. The path forward for interest rates remains uncertain, however, with the incoming Trump administration promising tariffs and immigration curbs that could end up fueling inflation.

Stocks rose modestly on Friday, and bond yields were down slightly.

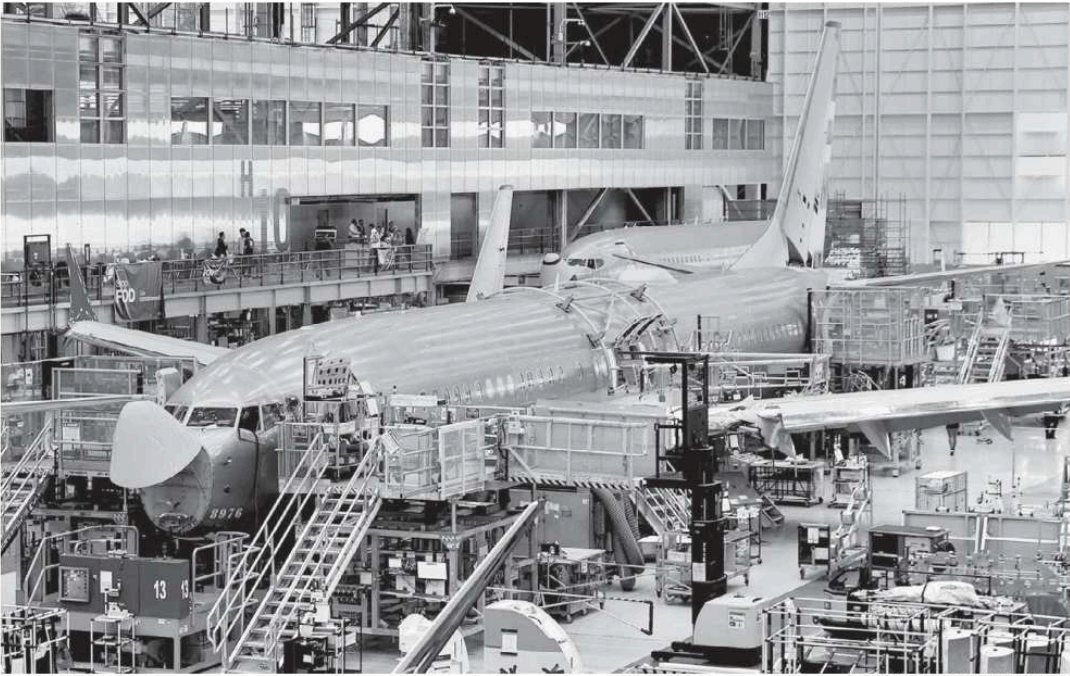
A wide range of data shows that the economic pendulum has swung from its torrid churn at the peak of the pandemic to a state of sluggish movement in and out of jobs. Workers who may have switched employers several times between 2020 and 2022 are now staying put, and employers are trying to hold on to them rather than opening new positions.

It's possible that stability is behind the recent improvements in productivity, as workers gain more proficiency over longer periods in one job. That allows employers to pay them more without facing pressure to pass along labor cost increase to consumers.

"It's remaining firm and sticky, but not necessarily in a bad way," Sarah House, a senior economist at Wells Fargo, said of wage increases. "The existing workers we have are being more productive, and that's allowing businesses to increase their pay at a pretty nice pace."

A tumble in job openings over the past two years has been accompanied by a long slide in the number of people working through temporary staffing services, which have lost nearly 600,000 positions since peaking in March 2022. The sector is notoriously cyclical, with employers looking for flexible help to cope with spikes in demand, but it's now well below prepandemic levels.

Timothy Landhuis, vice president of research at Staffing Industry Analysts, said that was mostly a consequence of manufacturing's



Boeing's plant in Renton, Wash. Hiring bounced back in November after disruptions caused by two hurricanes and a major strike at the aerospace giant.

doldrums, since that was where most temporary roles were concentrated. But both the white-collar and blue-collar sides of the industry are struggling, as employers have sought to keep their full-time workers busy.

"You could call it a temp staffing recession," Mr. Landhuis said. "Sometimes what happens with H.R. and procurement departments is that there's an overcorrection. They set goals, and they probably overcut it."

That's not necessarily bad for workers. The still-low unemployment rate indicates that people losing temporary jobs may have found direct employment instead.

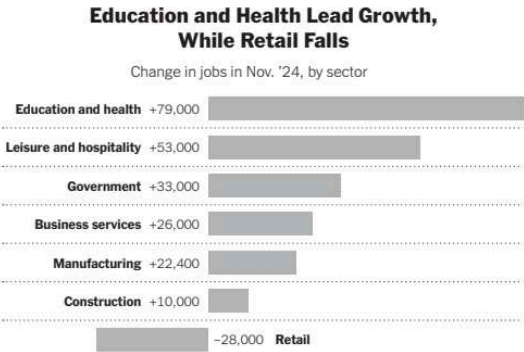
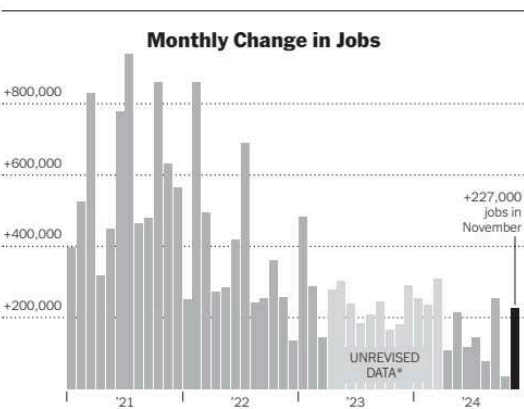
Patrick Industries, a holding

227,000 new hires, but the jobless rate ticks up to 4.2%.

company for dozens of brands that make components for recreational vehicles, sport boats and manufactured homes, stopped hiring temporary workers years ago. The firm was slammed with orders during the pandemic, but business dropped off as demand was sated and high interest rates made such large purchases unappealing.

That forced the company to shed workers and lower wages for entry-level hires, which had risen during the Covid boom. It is now trying to retain staff members by cutting back the hours its factories operate, which are now running about four days a week, down from a peak of six. That's true across the industry, with the average workweek at an unusually low ebb.

"We are definitely at that point where we prefer not to lay off,"



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics | Notes: *Preliminary revisions from the Labor Department showed that 818,000 fewer jobs were added over the 12 months that ended in March 2024 than originally reported and shown here. Data is seasonally adjusted.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

said Andy Nemeth, chief executive of Patrick Industries. "We're absorbing a little bit of inefficiency to make sure we maintain that work force for the scalability that we think we're going to need on

the other side of this cycle."

That light demand for labor may also partly explain a plateau in labor force participation for people in their prime working years. The share of people work-

ing or looking for work had substantially outperformed expectations, driven largely by increasing flexibility in workplaces powered by videoconferencing and instant messages. But the trend seems to have run its course, and the labor force has shrunk by more than 400,000 workers over the past two months.

"There's not much more juice to squeeze," said Thomas Simons, a U.S. economist at the investment bank Jefferies. "There's a certain level past which there aren't going to be that many more people between 25 and 55 working because of different life circumstances."

The frozen job market is also tough for those who are looking for work. Although initial claims for unemployment insurance have remained low, continuing claims — people who are still drawing unemployment checks — have been drifting upward. The median duration of unemployment jumped to 10.5 weeks, from nine weeks a year earlier.

Chris Catlett senses that. He was one of a few hundred people laid off three weeks ago by FedEx in Memphis as employment in the trucking industry has stagnated. A senior network engineer with more than a decade of experience, he jumped right into the job hunt, even with a decent severance package. Finding a new position could take a while.

"It's a highly competitive market because of remote work — now they have access to the world," Mr. Catlett said of employers. He might take something short term just to tide him over until the next full-time position.

"The contract work may not be the work I want to do, but you've got to go to work and you've got to be hungry," Mr. Catlett said.

Once a Peddler of Tax Breaks, Now Trump's Pick to Lead the I.R.S.

FROM FIRST BUSINESS PAGE
clients who were actually eligible for the credit, and added that the fees he and his associates collected would be returned to any clients that had their tax refund revoked by the I.R.S. The companies he said he worked with — Commerce Terrace Consulting, which says on its website that it has provided \$400 million in tax savings, and Lifetime Advisors — did not respond to a request for comment.

Earlier this year, Mr. Long traveled to Washington to try to persuade his former colleagues in Congress, who were considering closing the program because of its ballooning cost, not to follow through. The program was not shut down, and the I.R.S. has started processing claims for the credit again, but with new anti-fraud measures in place.

If the Senate confirms Mr. Long to lead the tax collection agency, he will be in a position to ease access to the tax credit. During his time generating claims for the employee retention credit, Mr. Long said, he repeatedly tried to persuade potential clients to disregard the advice of their accountants, who doubted whether they could qualify for the credit.

"I tell them of some cases of where people started down the road with their C.P.A., and their C.P.A., frankly, threw up their hands and said: 'Go back to Billy. Let Billy do it for you,'" Mr. Long said during the podcast, using the abbreviation for a certified public accountant. "So because when people walk in and say, 'Hey, this auctioneer, real estate broker, former congressman told me, I'm go-

ing to get \$1.2 million back. You're my C.P.A. — why didn't you tell me that?' Instantly, the reflex reaction is to go to bashing."

A spokeswoman for Mr. Trump did not respond to a request for comment.

Mr. Long's selection to lead the I.R.S. is unusual. Since the 1990s, I.R.S. commissioners have had five-year terms, and the position has been treated as a relatively nonpartisan management job, which now oversees the more than 80,000 employees who collected nearly \$5 trillion in taxes last fiscal year. The term for Daniel Werfel, the current leader of the I.R.S., who was nominated by President Biden, is not up until 2027.

"The concern is turning the commissioner into a political position," said John Koskinen, a former I.R.S. commissioner. "You run the risk that every audit will be a question of: Is this a weaponization of the I.R.S.? Did somebody tell them to make this audit, or is this routine?"

During Mr. Trump's first term, the tax collector conducted invasive audits of James Comey and Andrew McCabe, formerly top officials at the F.B.I. and perceived enemies of Mr. Trump, though an inspector general later concluded the audits were a random coincidence.

Republicans have long attacked the I.R.S. as a political tool for Democrats. During the Obama administration, Republican lawmakers accused the I.R.S. of unfairly targeting conservative political groups by denying them tax-exempt status, though a watchdog later concluded that the



TANNEN MAURY/EPA, VIA SHUTTERSTOCK

Republicans have criticized the agency's business audits, such as Donald J. Trump's audit challenging how he wrote off losses on a Chicago skyscraper.

agency had improperly scrutinized both conservative and liberal organizations.

More recently, Republicans have assailed the group for the leak of taxpayer information about Mr. Trump and other wealthy Americans. A former contractor for the agency was ultimately sentenced to five years in prison.

Mr. Biden, whose administration pushed for and won more funding for the I.R.S., chose Mr. Werfel to lead an overhaul of the tax collector after years of budget woes.

Democrats plowed roughly \$80 billion in supplemental funding into the agency, in hopes of modernizing it and collecting more tax revenue from Americans who do

not pay what they owe.

But Republicans quickly mobilized to claw back that money, successfully forcing Democrats to cancel \$20 billion of it as part of a deal to raise the debt limit in 2023. An additional \$20 billion is also at risk as Republicans have exploited a quirk in spending legislation to freeze more money.

Pulling back more money could slow efforts to upgrade the agency's antiquated technology systems and respond more quickly to taxpayer questions. Much of the Republican ire has been focused on money earmarked for enhancing the I.R.S.'s ability to conduct audits of complex business arrangements and wealthy Americans, which generates more money for the government and

helps narrow the annual deficit. Mr. Trump has faced an I.R.S. audit challenging how he wrote off losses on a Chicago skyscraper.

Mr. Trump's appointees and allies, including Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy, have also discussed slashing the federal work force, an effort that has some employees at the tax agency bracing for a wave of retirements. The burst of fresh funding approved by Democrats was in part meant to expand the ranks of the I.R.S. to help keep up with the growing size of the economy.

"I think it will have an impact on morale at the I.R.S.," said Dave Kautter, who led the agency on an acting basis and served in the Treasury Department under Mr. Trump. "I think they've built a lot of their internal communications around the momentum they've gathered with respect to enforcement."

It is unclear how Mr. Long would approach the I.R.S. push to modernize. He once sponsored legislation that sought to abolish the tax agency and replace the income tax with a sales tax, a concept Mr. Trump has flirted with. But Mr. Long did not serve on the tax-writing committee in the House, and he is unknown to some key Senate Republicans who will decide his fate.

"Protecting taxpayers and addressing an ever-encroaching I.R.S. is a top priority, and I look forward to learning more about Mr. Long's vision for the agency," Senator Michael D. Crapo of Idaho, the top Republican on the Senate Finance Committee, said in a statement.

There’s Still Time to Budget for Holidays

Experts say that setting spending limits that you will exceed is better than having none at all.

Your Money Adviser

By ANN CARRNS

Black Friday and Cyber Monday have come and gone. So you may think that setting limits on holiday spending is a lost cause, right?

Not so, said Jamie L. Clark, a certified financial planner in Seattle. The December holidays are still weeks away. “It’s never too late to make a plan.”

Chuck Howard, an associate professor of business administration at the University of Virginia’s Darden School of Business, said research suggests you’ll spend less by setting a holiday budget that’s “optimistically low.”

That’s because even when compliance with budgets is weak, setting stricter, even somewhat unrealistic budgets tends to lead to lower spending, according to a study he helped to write on the influence of budgeting on personal spending.

Dr. Howard cited this example. Say you usually spend \$500 a month dining out. You may think a realistic budget is \$400 a month. But if you really want to cut back, you should set a budget of, say, \$250. That way, if you spend \$350, you’ve still spent much less than you used to.

A tight holiday-spending limit serves as a reference point, he said, and even if you surpass it, you’ll probably spend less than if you had set a higher limit or hadn’t set a budget in the first place.

“It will positively influence their spending,” he said. “It helps them spend less than they are used to.” (The study, published in *The Journal of Consumer Research* in 2023 and written with Marcel F. Lukas, a senior lecturer in banking and finance at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, is based in part on an analysis of the budgets and spending of thousands of users of a personal finance app in Britain.)

One caveat: Consumers must track their spending regularly, Dr. Howard said, so they can see where they stand in relation to their goal. A variety of apps, like Monarch Money or Quicken Simplifi, can help you monitor spend-



TILL LAUER

ing. Dr. Howard said he preferred an Excel spreadsheet, but he also knows people who use pen and paper.

What’s the point of a budget if you blow it? “I don’t think it’s helpful to feel really bad about going over your budget,” Dr. Howard said. That makes it more likely you’ll completely abandon the effort. Rather than focus on your failure to stay below the limit, he said, ask, “Did I spend less than I might have?”

Sarah Paulson, a certified financial planner in Appleton, Wis., said that even if you were well along on your holiday shopping and didn’t want to create a spending plan, it was still worthwhile to document your purchases. That way, you’ll have an idea of what you may want to spend next year and can plan ahead. “We’re playing the long game,” she said.

Community banks and credit unions may still offer so-called Christmas club savings accounts to encourage customers to contribute a little each month throughout the year.

When tallying holiday spending, Ms.

Q&A About Holiday Budgeting

How can I cut holiday spending without disappointing friends and family?

Sarah Paulson, the Appleton financial planner, said young people, in particular, may feel pressure from marketing on social media to buy expensive gifts. Focus on spending time with people, she said, rather than spending money. “No one who truly loves you wants you to take on debt to buy them a present,” she said.

Jamie L. Clark, the Seattle financial planner, suggested talking with your family to agree on a maximum amount to spend on gifts and putting holiday spending in context with longer-term financial goals.

Yanely Espinal, a financial educator and author of “Mind Your Money,” said buying gifts for her large extended family would be financially difficult. So at Thanksgiving, each family member draws a name from a hat and buys a gift for that person.

Should I consider special cards and payment plans offered at retailers?

Retailers selling electronics, jewelry and home improvement materials often promote “deferred payment” credit cards, which let you purchase an item without paying interest for a year or longer. But steer clear of such offers

unless you are sure you can pay off the balance by the end of the promotional period, said Chi Chi Wu, a senior attorney at the National Consumer Law Center. Otherwise, you’ll be charged interest — typically in the double digits — from the date of purchase, which can add hundreds of dollars to the cost of the item.

Most online retailers offer “buy now, pay later” plans, which typically let you choose to pay for purchases in four installments that are automatically deducted from your bank account. Ms. Wu advised caution in using them for multiple purchases at the same time. You could end up with several different payment dates.

What if my credit card bill has become unmanageable?

You’re not alone. Credit card balances increased by \$24 billion, to \$1.7 trillion, in the third quarter of 2024, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. If you need help getting your debt under control, consider a consultation with a nonprofit credit counseling agency. A counselor can review your situation and recommend options, such as a debt management plan, which reduces the interest rate on the money you owe in exchange for agreeing to pay it off over several years.

retirement plan, he said, you might try front-loading your paycheck contributions so that you reach the annual limit by the end of next November. That means the deductions will stop and your December take-home pay will be higher, so you can use the extra money for gifts and other holiday purchases. (Employers vary in how they manage retirement plans, so check with your payroll office to make sure yours allows this, and to confirm that doing so won’t affect matching contributions you receive from your employer.)

Trump F.B.I. Pick Investigated Truth Social Co-Founders

By MATTHEW GOLDSTEIN

Kash Patel, whom Donald J. Trump has tapped to lead the Federal Bureau of Investigation, has attacked Mr. Trump’s critics, vowed to investigate Mr. Trump’s opponents and profited from his association with the president-elect by selling pro-Trump merchandise.

He also worked for the parent company of Truth Social, the social media company that has added billions to Mr. Trump’s net worth. He oversaw an inquiry into the company’s co-founders — two former contestants on Mr. Trump’s reality-TV show “The Apprentice” — that was later used in court as part of a failed effort to deny them a stake in the business.

Shortly after Mr. Patel joined the board of the parent company, Trump Media & Technology Group, he was hired as an outside consultant and was involved in an investigation into claims that the co-founders, Andy Litinsky and Wes Moss, had mismanaged the debut of Truth Social in 2022, according to court documents, regulatory filings and a person briefed on the matter.

Mr. Litinsky and Mr. Moss had come up with the idea for Truth Social and pitched it to Mr. Trump shortly after he left the White House in January 2021.

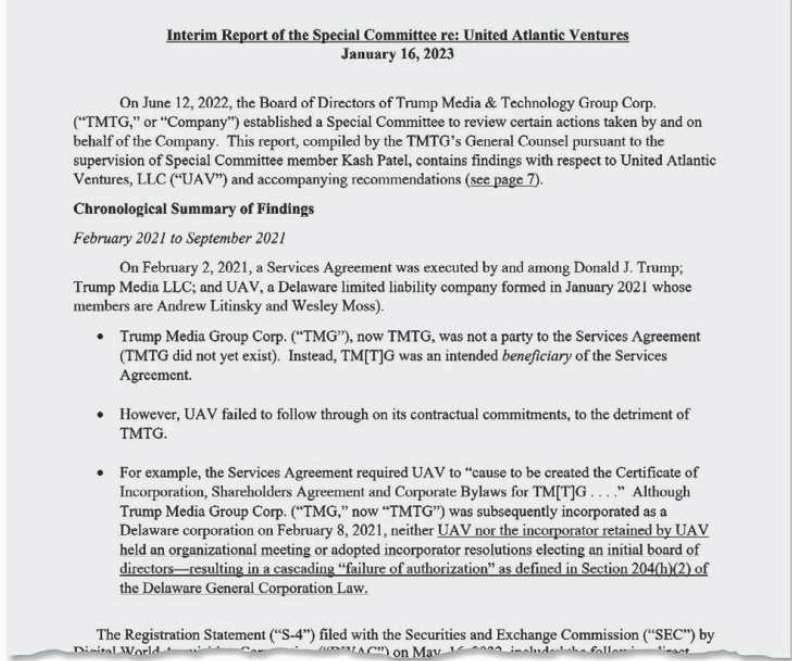
The report concluded that Mr. Litinsky and Mr. Moss had “fostered an unpredictable and toxic corporate culture” by allegedly “threatening” some in the company and hiring a technical team that “lacked skill and emotional maturity.” The report recommended providing any relevant information about the two men to law enforcement and regulators.

At the time, federal authorities were scrutinizing early merger talks between Trump Media and a cash-rich special purpose acquisition company.

The seven-page report, dated Jan. 16, 2023, was included this year in a lengthy court filing for Trump Media’s unsuccessful attempt to strip the two men of 11 million shares of company stock or reduce their stake. Trump Media argued that an agreement giving them an equity stake in the company was not binding, in part, because of their poor performance in getting the company and Truth Social off the ground.

The courts allowed Mr. Litinsky and Mr. Moss to keep their shares, which they sold in September, but some parts of the litigation are still pending. A lawyer for the two men declined to comment.

“Kash Patel is a valuable team member and board member who has made immense contributions to TMTG and to the greater cause of free expression,” Shannon Devine, a Trump Media spokeswoman,



Andy Litinsky and Wes Moss, Trump Media’s co-founders, formed the investment company United Atlantic Ventures.

an, said.

Mr. Patel, a former federal prosecutor who held a number of jobs in the first Trump administration, interviewed employees of Trump Media in connection with the investigation, the person briefed on the matter said. Mr. Patel also supervised Trump Media’s general counsel, Scott Glabe, in compiling the report for the board.

Mr. Moss and Mr. Litinsky, who both had left Trump Media before the report’s completion, were contestants on the second season of

“The Apprentice” 20 years ago. In early 2021, they approached Mr. Trump with the idea of founding his own social media company after several social media platforms barred him following the riot by his supporters at the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

The debut of Truth Social was marred by technological glitches, and Mr. Trump did not regularly post on the platform for several months. But Truth Social has since become the president-elect’s main online megaphone for

announcing appointments to his administration and castigating his political foes.

And while Truth Social has generated just a few million dollars in annual advertising revenue and lags well behind X in monthly users, Mr. Trump’s nearly 53 percent stake in the company is worth about \$4 billion.

Trump Media’s board initiated the investigation on June 12, 2022, according to the report. The company signed its consulting contract with Mr. Patel and his company, Trishul, the next day, according to a regulatory filing. He was paid \$130,000 for his services.

After Mr. Trump left the White House, Mr. Patel worked for him as a paid adviser on national security issues, according to a Trump Media filing. He also wrote a series of children’s books in which Mr. Trump is a “king” who must defeat those who are plotting against him.

Mr. Patel is also a founder of Based Apparel, a company that advertises on Truth Social and markets clothing geared to supporters of Mr. Trump. The company sells T-shirts and hoodies with logos such as “Fight With KSH” and “Government Gangsters,” a reference to a book in which Mr. Patel outlines his plans for going after the so-called Deep State in the federal government.



EMIL LIPPE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Kash Patel, right, with Steve Bannon in 2022, was hired by Truth Social when its parent company was trying to deny its co-founders their stake.

U.K.’s Oldest Sunday Paper Sold By The Guardian to a Start-Up

By ESHE NELSON

LONDON — The Observer, a British Sunday newspaper that has been running for more than two centuries, will be sold to the digital media start-up Tortoise Media, said the Guardian Media Group, which owns The Observer.

The boards of the Guardian Media Group, which also publishes The Guardian, and the Scott Trust, the owner of the Guardian Media Group, have agreed “in principle” to the deal, which is expected to be signed in the next few days. The announcement on Friday came shortly after journalists at the two news outlets waged a 48-hour strike, calling the deal “rushed” and a risk to the journalism of both newspapers.

The Guardian’s parent company, which bought The Observer in 1993, did not disclose the sale price. But it said the Scott Trust, a 1.3 billion-pound (\$1.7 billion) fund, would invest in Tortoise Media and become one of its largest shareholders. The trust will also have representatives on the company and editorial boards of Tortoise Media, which said it had raised £25 million to invest in The Observer.

“We knew we needed the right combination of resources and commitment to build a new platform for The Observer,” Ole Jacob Sunde, the chair of the Scott Trust, said in a statement. “It required an ally to be sufficiently funded, long-term in nature, and respect editorial independence and liberal values. I believe we have found this in Tortoise Media.”

When the proposed sale came to light in September, it was a surprise to the papers’ journalists, who raised concerns about the ability of Tortoise Media, a six-year-old company that has not recorded a profit, to preserve the future of The Observer.

Amid pressure from the staff to reconsider the deal, the Scott Trust pushed to have some say in the editorial direction of The Observer after the sale. Journalists at both newspapers walked off the job on Wednesday and Thursday, hoping to delay the deal. It was the first strike in the newsroom in more than 50 years.

The sale of The Observer has also drawn criticism from former editors of the publication, and Alan Rusbridger, the former editor of The Guardian, as well as from some British authors, actors and other well-known figures.

“I recognize how unsettling this period has been for Observer staff,” Katharine Viner, the editor in chief of The Guardian, said in statement. “But we’re confident we have agreed the best possible



PETER MACDIARMID/GETTY IMAGES

A deal to sell The Observer to Tortoise Media came after a 48-hour strike by journalists ended.

way forward.”

Tortoise Media was founded in 2018 by James Harding, a former director of BBC News, and Matthew Barzun, a former U.S. ambassador to Britain. It focuses on what it calls “slow news,” emphasizing investigations rather than breaking news.

Before joining the BBC, Mr. Harding was editor of The Times of London, part of Rupert Murdoch’s News Corp media conglomerate. He led The Times through the newspaper’s transition into the digital era, when advertising revenue was slumping and news outlets were moving their content behind paywalls.

But he left in 2012, when News Corp was embroiled in the aftermath of a phone hacking scandal at another of its publications, apparently because he no longer had the support of Mr. Murdoch. “It has been made clear to me that News Corporation would like to appoint a new editor,” he said at the time.

Tortoise Media’s recent investors include Standard Investments, an arm of the American conglomerate Standard Industries, and This Day, the philanthropic organization of Gary Lubner, who is also a major donor to Britain’s Labour Party.

Tortoise and The Observer will combine into one newsroom, the start-up said on Friday. It has previously said it would put The Observer’s online content behind a paywall, while retaining a print publication on Sundays.

“We are honored and excited at the prospect of working together to renew The Observer, a name that represents the best of liberal, pioneering journalism,” Mr. Harding said in a statement.

INTERNATIONAL

McKinsey Agrees to Pay \$122 Million to Settle South Africa Bribery Case

By MICHAEL FORSYTHE
and WALT BOGDANICH

McKinsey & Co. agreed to pay a fine of more than \$122 million to resolve a felony bribery investigation stemming from its work in South Africa, federal prosecutors in New York said in a filing unsealed Thursday. It is the latest in a string of legal penalties for the global consulting firm, which in recent years has agreed to pay about \$1 billion in settlements for its work with opioid manufacturers.

The fine announced on Thursday was part of a deferred prosecution agreement that would dismiss the bribery charge against the company after three years if McKinsey meets the conditions of the deal. Separately, a former McKinsey senior partner, Vikas Sagar, who was a leader in its Johannesburg office, pleaded guilty to conspiring to violate an anti-corruption law, prosecutors said.

The bribery investigation stemmed from work that McKinsey's South African branch performed, starting more than a dec-

ade ago, for two state-owned companies: one overseeing the country's run-down electric generating system, the other managing its freight rail system and ports. Mr. Sagar received confidential information about the companies that led to multi-

A former senior partner for the global consultancy pleaded guilty to conspiracy.

million-dollar consulting contracts, and in return, some of the money McKinsey and its local partners made was routed to two officials as bribes, prosecutors said.

“McKinsey Africa participated in a yearslong scheme to bribe government officials in South Africa and unlawfully obtained a series of highly lucrative consulting engagements” that netted McKinsey \$85 million in profits, Damian Williams, the U.S. attorney for the

Southern District of New York, said in a statement.

When The New York Times published a 2018 investigation into McKinsey's contracts in South Africa, the firm's questionable work there was considered its biggest mistake in its nearly 100-year history. But the next year, with the United States in the grip of an opioid epidemic, McKinsey's extensive work to “turbocharge” sales at Purdue Pharma, the maker of the painkiller OxyContin, became public. McKinsey's work with opioid makers is the focus of an ongoing federal criminal investigation.

McKinsey's work for the two South African companies — Eskom, the power company, and Transnet, the freight rail company — at one point brought in almost half of the Johannesburg office's revenues. Despite McKinsey's extensive consulting for Eskom, the country has been crippled by frequent blackouts in recent years.

South African law required McKinsey to hire local subcontractors, which have been the fo-



GULSHAN KHAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

McKinsey's Johannesburg office. The fine is part of a deferred prosecution agreement that the company entered into with the Justice Department.

cus of criminal investigations in that country.

In 2018 McKinsey's managing partner apologized for the way the firm had handled the controversy over its work in South Africa, which came amid a corruption

scandal that led the country's president to resign. McKinsey voluntarily returned about \$100 million and fired Mr. Sagar.

At the time McKinsey was working with Transnet, Mr. Sagar arranged for a former McKinsey

employee to ghostwrite an M.B.A. thesis for a senior Transnet executive, according to the former employee.

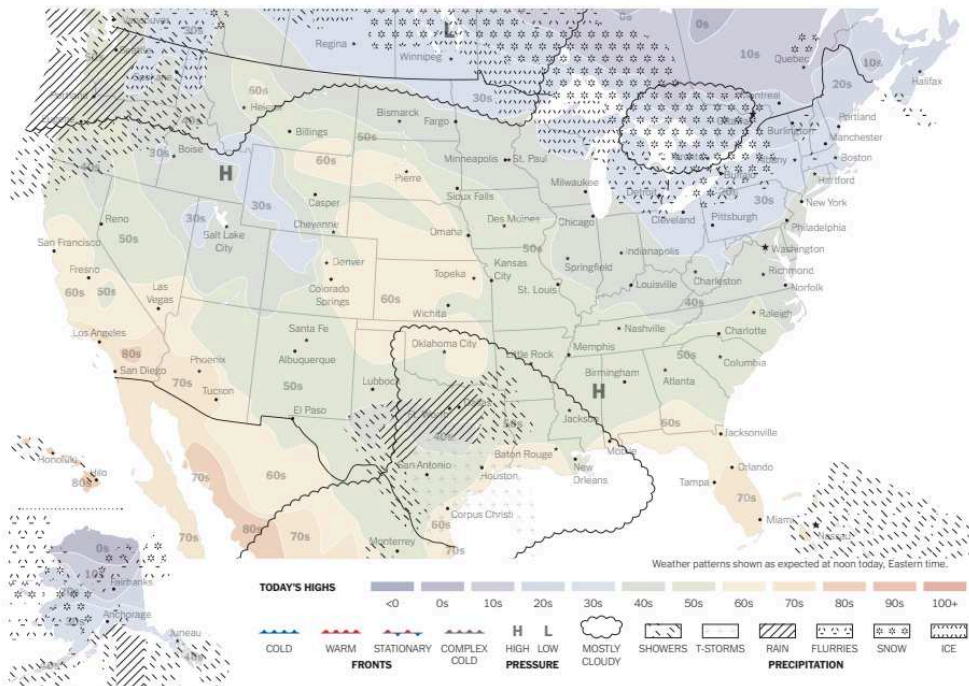
“McKinsey is deeply remorseful that an employee of our firm engaged in corrupt conduct,” the firm said in a statement on Thursday, adding that it “will continue to cooperate” with South African and U.S. authorities in other ongoing investigations.

Mr. Sagar, a native of India and a graduate of the University of Michigan and the Wharton School, was responsible for winning some of the biggest contracts in McKinsey's South African office. Known for his showy, larger-than-life personality, Mr. Sagar drove a Porsche, carried a Louis Vuitton briefcase and once ended a long business meeting by dancing on top of a conference table.

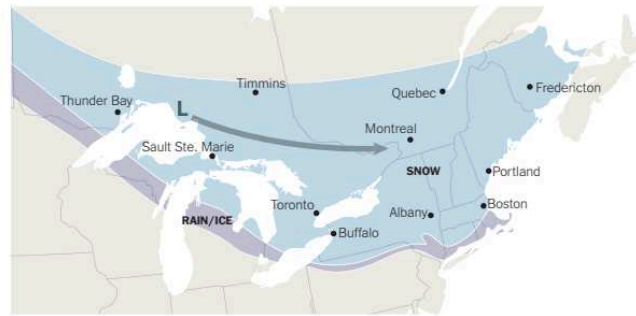
According to the documents unsealed on Thursday, Mr. Sagar, 56, pleaded guilty in December 2022 to conspiring to violate the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. The announcement did not say whether he had been sentenced.

Weather Report

Meteorology by AccuWeather



Highlight: Snow Into the Northeast Tonight



An Alberta Clipper-type storm is expected to move from Ontario to Maine this weekend. Snow will spread from the eastern Great Lakes to upstate New York and northern New England on Saturday into Sunday. Over six inches of snow may fall across ski country.

National Forecast

Lake-effect snow will linger, mainly over parts of upstate New York. These bands of snow could create slippery roads and whiteout conditions that may arrive suddenly. A clipper storm from western Canada will spread areas of snow and snow showers across the central and northern Great Lakes Region. As this storm slides to the southeast tonight and on Sunday, it will spread steady snow into upstate New York and central and northern New England, with a light wintry mix on the southern edge.

Farther south, in Texas, downpours may cause urban flooding. Milder air will extend from the Rockies to the Great Plains on gusty winds.

Meanwhile, a storm will push inland over the Northwest with areas of rain and mountain snow.

Cities

High/low temperatures for the 16 hours ended at 4 p.m. yesterday, Eastern time, and precipitation (in inches) for the 16 hours ended at 4 p.m. yesterday. Expected conditions for today and tomorrow.

C.....Clouds
F.....Fog
H.....Haze
L.....Ice
PC.....Partly cloudy
R.....Rain
SH.....Showers
S.....Sun
Sn.....Snow
SS.....Snow showers
T.....Thunderstorms
Tr.....Trace
W.....Windy
NA.....Not available

N.Y.C. region

	Yesterday	Today	Tomorrow
New York City	34/30 0	39/34 PC	48/39 PC
Bridgeport	35/30 0	39/33 PC	48/34 PC
Caldwell	31/28 0	39/33 PC	50/34 PC
Danbury	34/29 0	39/30 PC	49/28 PC
Islip	36/30 0	39/34 PC	48/34 PC
Newark	37/30 0	41/35 PC	50/38 PC
Trenton	34/28 Tr	39/32 PC	49/31 PC
White Plains	35/28 0	39/32 PC	47/33 PC

United States

	Yesterday	Today	Tomorrow
Albany	28/22 Tr	35/28 C	43/31 Sn
Albuquerque	56/31 0	55/29 S	55/33 S
Anchorage	33/30 0	34/25 C	36/27 R
Atlanta	46/29 0	56/38 PC	62/48 PC
Atlantic City	38/29 0	42/36 PC	54/37 W
Austin	56/45 0.10	49/46 T	63/51 Sh
Baltimore	39/26 Tr	43/33 PC	56/36 PC
Baton Rouge	55/37 0	59/48 C	70/64 T
Birmingham	45/24 0	55/35 PC	56/51 Sh
Boise	36/28 0	41/32 PC	42/28 C
Boston	33/26 0	38/32 PC	47/34 C
Buffalo	29/26 0.04	74/30 Sn	40/34 C
Burlington	27/21 0.01	28/25 C	39/23 Sn
Casper	49/32 0	51/37 S	49/22 Sn
Charlotte	43/21 0	52/32 S	61/46 C
Chattanooga	41/23 0	51/31 S	54/46 C
Chicago	41/24 0	44/35 PC	49/43 PC
Cincinnati	33/21 0	45/33 S	53/42 PC
Cleveland	31/25 Tr	37/35 C	48/37 PC
Colorado Springs	56/30 0	60/32 S	63/25 S
Columbus	34/22 0	40/34 PC	50/40 PC
Concord, N.H.	28/17 0.06	35/27 S	40/24 Sn
Dallas-Ft. Worth	52/42 0.03	54/45 R	60/49 Sh
Denver	58/31 0	61/36 S	59/26 PC
Des Moines	41/27 0	55/33 S	54/34 PC
Detroit	35/24 Tr	47/35 S	47/36 PC
El Paso	55/43 0.03	57/40 PC	66/45 S
Fargo	29/25 0	41/26 PC	37/28 Sh
Hartford	34/24 0	41/30 PC	48/28 Sn
Honolulu	86/68 0.04	84/68 PC	83/70 Sh
Houston	59/26 Tr	63/33 PC	70/61 PC
Indianapolis	31/22 0	44/33 S	51/44 PC
Jackson	49/30 0	58/42 PC	60/57 R
Jacksonville	58/33 0	63/33 S	71/46 S
Kansas City	42/28 0	56/39 S	58/47 PC
Key West	77/67 0	74/67 S	77/71 S
Las Vegas	69/43 0	66/42 S	62/40 PC
Lexington	35/23 0	47/36 S	56/47 PC

	Yesterday	Today	Tomorrow
Little Rock	44/30 0	58/44 PC	53/50 R
Los Angeles	75/52 0	80/50 S	77/51 S
Louisville	35/24 0	49/37 S	57/49 PC
Memphis	41/28 0	55/42 PC	56/52 R
Miami	80/61 Tr	78/62 PC	80/67 PC
Milwaukee	33/28 0	45/36 PC	46/42 C
Minneapolis-St. Paul	31/26 0	47/29 T	42/30 PC
Nashville	39/21 0	53/38 PC	61/50 R
New Orleans	52/44 0	59/52 C	72/64 Sh
Norfolk	41/25 0	47/34 S	59/42 S
Oklahoma City	51/34 0	59/42 PC	61/40 PC
Omaha	46/26 0	58/30 S	57/31 S
Orlando	73/47 0	71/49 PC	76/54 S
Philadelphia	37/27 0	40/34 PC	52/35 PC
Phoenix	80/53 0	76/50 S	73/51 S
Pittsburgh	30/23 0	35/33 C	47/38 PC
Portland, Me.	29/19 Tr	33/28 S	38/25 Sn
Portland, Ore.	49/39 0	47/43 R	50/39 Sh
Providence	33/24 0	38/29 PC	47/29 C
Raleigh	43/22 0	51/31 S	64/43 S
Reno	52/25 0	56/32 PC	54/23 S
Richmond	42/22 0	48/33 S	63/37 S
Rochester	31/23 0.02	34/28 Sn	42/34 C
Sacramento	63/37 0	62/41 F	65/42 F
Salt Lake City	44/28 0	45/31 PC	46/28 C
San Antonio	53/45 0.12	51/46 T	62/52 C
San Diego	69/45 Tr	74/46 S	67/51 S
San Francisco	65/47 0	61/50 PC	61/46 PC
San Jose	72/43 0	68/47 PC	67/42 PC
San Juan	84/76 0	87/77 PC	87/76 PC
Seattle	50/45 0	50/42 R	48/39 Sh
Sioux Falls	44/25 0	52/26 S	50/34 PC
Spokane	34/29 Tr	39/32 T	36/26 PC
St. Louis	42/31 0	57/43 S	64/49 PC
St. Thomas	86/76 0	85/77 PC	86/77 Sh
Syracuse	31/28 0.04	35/30 Sn	42/31 C
Tampa	73/46 Tr	69/51 PC	75/60 S
Toledo	30/26 Tr	40/36 C	48/39 PC
Tucson	71/47 0	72/42 S	73/44 S
Tulsa	51/35 0	61/44 PC	58/44 C
Virginia Beach	42/29 0	47/36 S	57/39 PC
Washington	39/28 0	45/35 PC	57/39 PC
Wichita	48/29 0	59/38 S	58/37 PC
Wilmington, Del.	38/25 0	42/32 PC	53/34 PC

	Yesterday	Today	Tomorrow
Africa			
Algiers	66/49 0	74/53 S	63/50 W
Cairo	72/57 0	73/58 PC	74/54 PC
Cape Town	69/52 0.13	77/59 S	77/59 S
Dakar	84/4 0	86/73 PC	86/73 PC
Johannesburg	91/60 0	94/63 PC	91/62 PC
Nairobi	82/57 0	80/60 S	80/61 S
Tunis	66/51 0	70/53 PC	58/49 R
Asia/Pacific			
Baghdad	72/39 0	74/37 PC	72/46 PC
Bangkok	93/76 0	94/78 PC	92/76 T
Beijing	45/22 0	42/23 S	43/18 PC
Damascus	64/33 0	63/36 PC	67/36 PC
Hong Kong	74/62 0	72/54 C	68/58 C
Jakarta	89/77 0.23	88/78 T	86/79 T
Jerusalem	66/48 0	66/44 C	66/44 PC
Karachi	92/61 0	86/54 S	84/49 S
Manila	93/79 0.02	89/79 T	91/80 Sh
Mumbai	91/80 0	91/67 PC	89/64 C

	Yesterday	Today	Tomorrow
New Delhi	77/50 0	75/54 S	71/50 PC
Riyadh	79/58 0	81/59 PC	83/61 PC
Seoul	41/28 0	39/23 S	41/17 PC
Shanghai	58/46 0	57/39 PC	51/37 PC
Singapore	93/79 0	92/79 T	90/78 R
Sydney	90/72 0	92/73 T	81/65 PC
Taipei City	75/66 0	69/59 C	64/59 R
Tehran	54/37 0	54/40 S	50/40 PC
Tokyo	63/44 0	55/43 PC	58/43 C

Europe

	Yesterday	Today	Tomorrow
Amsterdam	54/46 1.22	50/42 R	45/41 C
Athens	62/49 0.42	65/52 Sh	64/61 PC
Berlin	45/34 0.56	44/38 R	42/35 C
Brussels	52/43 0.32	51/42 R	45/38 R
Budapest	37/30 0.23	42/33 C	41/32 C
Copenhagen	41/38 0.68	44/41 R	44/37 R
Dublin	52/39 0.16	46/40 W	45/41 PC
Edinburgh	45/37 0.18	46/38 R	46/35 PC
Frankfurt	50/39 0.44	46/38 R	44/40 R
Helsinki	32/30 0.19	31/29 C	32/25 C
Istanbul	57/46 0	60/51 C	57/53 PC
Kyiv	35/28 0.03	37/34 Sn	36/30 PC
Lisbon	66/54 0	63/49 PC	58/46 S
London	49/43 0.02	47/43 Sh	47/44 Sh
Madrid	61/39 0	60/38 PC	51/36 C
Moscow	25/19 0.21	28/26 C	29/24 C
Nice	67/45 0.02	60/43 PC	55/43 C
Oslo	34/30 0.33	37/32 Sn	37/33 C
Paris	54/45 0.04	53/42 R	47/41 R
Prague	43/32 0.42	41/34 R	38/31 R
Rome	55/36 0.02	59/49 C	55/42 Sh
St. Petersburg	28/18 0.03	29/27 C	32/27 Sh
Stockholm	37/27 0	34/31 C	35/28 C
Vienna	37/32 0.04	44/34 C	38/32 C
Warsaw	37/33 0	39/31 C	37/34 C

North America

	Yesterday	Today	Tomorrow
Acapulco	86/71 0	89/70 S	89/71 S
Bermuda	70/63 0.19	66/59 S	66/63 PC
Edmonton	37/27 0	35/30 R	33/12 Sn
Guadalajara	72/46 0	77/50 T	79/49 T
Guatemala	89/71 0.07	89/76 PC	87/78 Sh
Kingston	87/74 0.05	88/75 R	88/76 Sh
Mexico City	64/49 0	73/46 C	75/48 PC
Monterrey	59/54 0.18	57/49 C	67/57 C
Montreal	27/19 0	23/19 C	29/15 Sn
Nassau	77/64 0	78/67 F	78/68 PC
Panama City	86/75 0.03	91/73 R	91/73 R
Quebec City	16/ 9 C	22/ 6 Sn	22/ 6 Sn
Santo Domingo	88/73 0.01	88/71 C	87/72 Sh
Toronto	35/30 Sn	41/33 W	41/33 W
Vancouver	45/39 0.01	51/40 Sh	47/38 Sh
Winnipeg	21/18 0.07	36/29 C	34/22 Sn

South America

	Yesterday	Today	Tomorrow
Buenos Aires	77/63 0.42	69/58 S	70/60 S
Caracas	90/72 0	89/76 S	91/76 Sh
Lima	73/64 0	74/63 PC	73/63 C
Quito	65/50 0.41	65/50 R	66/46 R
Recife	89/81 0.01	86/80 PC	87/80 PC
Rio de Janeiro	84/72 0	92/76 R	84/76 PC
Santiago	77/49 0	82/49 S	79/49 S

Metropolitan Forecast

TODAYMixed clouds and sun
High 39. Cold, dry weather will continue during the day as winds move out of the area. Sunshine will mix with clouds. It will not feel as harsh in the afternoon.

TONIGHTRather cloudy
Low 34. A small storm system passing north of the area will result in a mostly cloudy sky. Winds will be 10 to 20 miles per hour. Temperatures will be close to average.

TOMORROWMilder, with clearing
High 48. A trend toward milder weather will begin as morning clouds give way to some sunshine in the afternoon. Winds will average 10 to 20 m.p.h., with gusts to 25 m.p.h.

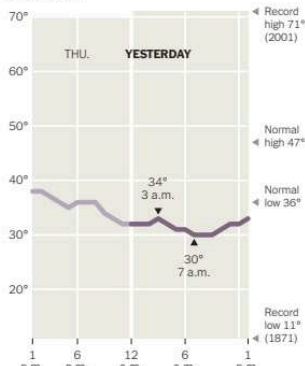
MONDAYRain at times
High 49. A storm approaching from the south will result in a cloudy sky and occasional rain. Winds will be 8 to 16 m.p.h.

TUESDAYMild, with some showers
WEDNESDAYMild, with some showers
Tuesday will be cloudy and mild with a couple of showers. High 52. Wednesday will be cloudy and quite mild with rain. High 54.

Metropolitan Almanac

In Central Park, for the 13 hours ended at 1 p.m. yesterday.

Temperature



Reservoir levels (New York City water supply)
Yesterday59%
Est. normal82%

Avg. daily departure from normal
this month.....-8.0°
this year.....+2.2°

Recreational Forecast

Sun, Moon and Planets
First Quarter Full Last Quarter New
Dec. 8 Dec. 15 4:01 a.m. Dec. 22 Dec. 30 5:26 p.m.

	RISE	SET	MOON	R
Sun	7:07 a.m.	4:28 p.m.	7:07 a.m.	12:00 p.m.
Mercury	7:08 a.m.	4:28 p.m.	7:08 a.m.	11:03 p.m.
Venus	7:17 a.m.	4:26 p.m.	7:17 a.m.	10:50 a.m.
Jupiter	7:17 a.m.	4:26 p.m.	7:17 a.m.	8:04 p.m.
Saturn	12:15 p.m.	11:21 p.m.	12:15 p.m.	7:42 p.m.

Boating
From Montauk Point to Sandy Hook, N.J., out to 20 nautical miles, including Long Island Sound and New York Harbor

MANUFACTURING



JAMIE KELTER DAVIS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Connor Sports builds around 800 courts a year, for N.B.A. and college teams as well as high schools.



JAMIE KELTER DAVIS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Portable courts can be assembled and broken down in a few hours so venues can quickly host other events.



JAMIE KELTER DAVIS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Prices vary but an N.B.A.-size portable court can cost up to \$250,000. A permanent court is about half as much.



JAMIE KELTER DAVIS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Amber Emerson, a quality control technician, checked bundles of wood to make sure they were properly graded.



JAMIE KELTER DAVIS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The summers are busy because college and professional teams need courts before their seasons start.

Midwestern Roots Of ‘Portable’ Floors Under N.B.A. Feet

FROM FIRST BUSINESS PAGE

which are also used for sports like volleyball, has been relatively stable over the past decade. Floors last 30 to 40 years, though sometimes far longer, but schools are always being built and courts are replaced when damaged. Portable courts have shorter lives because they absorb more wear and tear; the N.B.A. requires that its courts be replaced at least every 10 years.

The pandemic upended the market as school districts slashed budgets and projects were delayed. Demand has started to recover, but companies in the Maple Flooring Manufacturers Association, which includes Connor, shipped 19.4 million square feet of flooring last year, 17.8 percent less than they did in 2019. Supply chain bottlenecks have eased, but contractors are overwhelmed with orders to install courts.

Prices vary widely, but a 60-by-120-foot N.B.A.-size portable court can cost up to \$250,000, depending on the finish, while a permanent court is about half as much.

Sales of portable courts are a slice of the market but are growing at a healthy pace. Connor recently signed a five-year extension with the N.C.A.A. to provide courts for the men’s and women’s Regionals and Final Fours. The company also produces about a quarter of the game courts used by N.B.A. teams, with most of the rest made by Robbins Sports Surfaces.

As any basketball fan knows, college and professional courts now feature increasingly elaborate designs. This work is done by finishing companies that sand, paint, laminate and seal floors for Connor and other court makers. As sponsors, logos and color schemes change, courts can be repainted. Most N.B.A. teams have at least two game courts, as well as additional practice courts. Connor has sold the Brooklyn Nets three game courts: a classic look, a retro look and a City Edition floor with a contemporary design. Teams can highlight different sponsor names and logos by using removable vinyl decals around the perimeter of courts, or extra panels, which each weigh about 200 pounds, that are swapped into the interior of the court.

“To the fan, it looks like a brand-new floor, but they just changed the center panels,” said Zach Riberdy, the marketing director at Connor, which employs about 150 people. “About 85 percent of the court is the same.”

Almost all of Connor’s maple-wood courts come from the forests within 100 miles or so of Amasa, a town of about 250 people whose main restaurant is the Sawblade. Connor buys lumber from about 40 sawmills and seeks wood closer to the center of logs that is better for flooring. Most wood is delivered green, dried outdoors for many months, then placed in one of a dozen kilns heated with wood waste from the plant. The time needed to remove most of the wood’s moisture is based on the seasons.

“Every load of wood takes a little bit different amount of time to dry,” Mr. Gasperich said.

Dried lumber is sent to the flooring mill next door. The wood comes in different sizes, so first it is cut to a width of about 2½ inches. It goes through a planer to create a consistent thickness of roughly an inch (or fifteen-16ths of an inch, to be precise). A machine scans each strip to identify knots and defects, which are marked and removed by cutters, reducing the wood to lengths of one to seven feet. The strips are sent through what’s called a side-matcher machine, which adds grooves and tongues to the long edges of the wood so the strips

can dovetail, and planes them one last time. The company’s name and mill number are stamped on the bottom.

An end-matcher machine adds grooves and tongues at the long ends of the strips, which then move down a conveyor where workers sort them by grades. The highest two are white or shades of brown but with few blemishes. The lowest grade of wood has deeper coloring with some knots and shades. Strips with cracks or other defects are sent back and trimmed.

“I never expected it to be so chaotic,” said Erica La Bonte, a wood grader who has worked at Connor for 14 years. “But a lot of it becomes habit and you can tell by looking at it.”

To meet specifications by the Maple Flooring Manufacturers Association, Amber Emerson checks sample bundles of strips to ensure they are properly graded. If Ms. Emerson finds consistent errors, she will alert an operator, who will recalibrate the machines used. If a bundle has a certain percentage of strips with defects, it is pulled aside.

“When I go and watch my son play basketball, I’m judging the court,” she said.

The strips used in permanent installations are stacked into 19-square-foot bundles, while the portable courts are sent to another section where subfloors are attached. Connor has developed a network of suppliers in the Upper Peninsula that provides various components, including souvenir mini-boards made by Jim Nocerini, a retired wood shop teacher. The subfloors for permanent courts are made in nearby Iron River by Holm Builders, a construction company.

Bucky Holm and his sons, Joe, Nathan and Nick, make 85 types of subfloors with different dimensions, thickness and padding that can affect the bounce of a ball, the give of the floor or the sound of a dribble. Thanks to growing demand, the Holms produce up to 18 subfloors a week, and their factory has quadrupled in size.

“Our No. 1 target is the consistency in the floors,” Nathan Holm said.

After the wood strips are nailed to the subfloors, they are shipped to finishing companies in Ohio and Texas. In June, Ohio Flooring in Shreve, a town in the state’s Amish country, received a portable court from Connor produced for Florida State University. It took two weeks to confirm the exact panel the school wanted. By mid-July, a half-dozen workers in a building the size of an airplane hangar assembled the court next to a portable court being prepared for the Windy City Bulls, a G-League team.

The summer is a busy time because college and professional teams need courts by late summer. Finishing them takes about two weeks, with two days for assembly, two days for sanding and buffing and another day to apply sealant. The second week, the lines, logos and lettering are laid out, then two coats of paint and finish are applied.

The most precise work is done by Jason Irias. He spent most of one day working on the words “Florida State” and “Seminoles,” and the head of a Native American that included a feather.

Completed floors are disassembled and put on drying racks for at least 10 days. On one side of the plant, stacks of panels were waiting to be shipped to DePaul University and other schools.

“If I’m in a sport bar, I’ll tell my wife, ‘Hey, there’s one we did,’” Mr. Irias said. “But we’ve done so many floors, it’s not exciting for her anymore.”



JAMIE KELTER DAVIS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Jim Nocerini, a retired wood shop teacher, is part of Connor’s network of suppliers in the Upper Peninsula. He makes souvenir mini-boards.

MANUFACTURING



BRIAN KAISER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES
Corbin Miller cut a section of vinyl from the end border letters of the Florida State basketball court in the Ohio Floor Company facility, a finishing company.



BRIAN KAISER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES
Building a basketball court can involve dozens of logs, hundreds of workers and thousands of hours. The vinyl is scored but sometimes needs extra attention to ensure it remains properly sealed.



BRIAN KAISER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES
Jagger Stutzman applied paint to the center court logo of the Florida State floor at the finishing facility. It took two weeks to confirm the exact paint the school wanted.

nytimes#l@l.l

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

In the New Landscape,
Flipping Is Not Surprising



HUSAN LONGSTREET

He was one of the three top quarterback prospects who switched their commitment last month.



BRYCE UNDERWOOD

The quarterback decided to stay in his home state.



DAWSON MERRITT

The linebacker's decision did not shock coaches at Alabama.



JULIAN LEWIS

The five-star signal-caller flipped to Colorado.

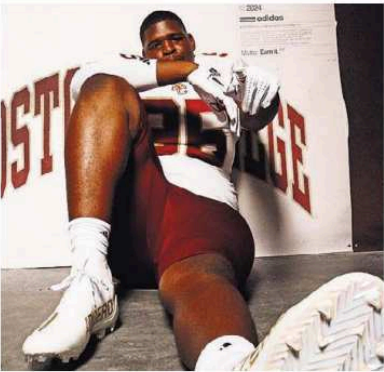


With N.I.L. and the transfer portal, recruits changing schools is more common than ever.

By GRACE RAYNOR
The Athletic

Sterling Sanders could feel the tears coming on. It was late October, and Sanders was elated. He had just committed to Boston College inside the office of Coach Bill O'Brien. A handshake sealed the deal. Sanders, a three-star defensive lineman from Blytheville, S.C., had always dreamed of playing at the top levels of college football but wasn't sure whether the opportunity would ever come. That changed when Boston College became his first — and only — Power 4 offer in early October. And the offer was too good to pass up. There were tears of joy. "I couldn't believe I was going to make it this far," Sanders said. There was one problem: He had been committed to Georgia Southern since June. He had developed a close relationship with Coach Clay Helton and the entire Eagles staff, particularly "Miss Lex," as Sanders called Lex Villarreal, the director of on-campus recruiting. She had comforted him through the death of a high school teammate. Now he had to tell her and the rest of the coaching staff that he had just committed to another school.

Grace Raynor covers college football recruiting for The Athletic.



STERLING SANDERS, VIA THE ATHLETIC

STERLING SANDERS

The chance to play in a Power 4 conference was too good for him to pass up.



"I really loved Georgia Southern. Georgia Southern did everything for me," Sanders said. "It was very hard to flip." "I was like, 'OK, let me make this big decision. I have to put my big boy pants on.'" Sanders called his position coach to break the news but got voice mail, so he texted rather than leave a message. He texted Villarreal, as well, and was relieved when Georgia Southern staffers wished him well and told him they understood his decision. But flipping was still hard on him, as it is for many prospects who have a change of heart and end up going back on their word — often after being committed to their former school for several months. And it only gets more difficult, for both prospects and programs, the closer a flip occurs to the early signing period, which began Wednesday. "It's so interesting because when you flip a kid, it's super exciting. But when you lose a kid, it's devastating," said a Big Ten recruiting staffer who was granted anonymity in exchange for candor. "You build that relationship and you know their birthdays and you know what's going on in their life," the staffer said, adding: "You invest so much time that when they flip, it's almost like a breakup. It's so disheartening." According to the 247Sports database, there have been more than 500 decommitments in the 2025 cycle. Three of the nation's top six quarterbacks switched their commitment during a five-day span last month — Bryce Underwood (Louisiana State) to Michigan, Husan Longstreet (Texas A&M) to Stanford, and Julian Lewis (Stanford) to Colorado.

Continued on Page B11

PRO FOOTBALL



JOHN BAZEMORE/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Kirk Cousins is mired in the worst slump of his 10 seasons as a starter. His four interceptions on Sunday tied a career high.

COMMENTARY

As Cousins Slips, The Penix Option Deserves Thought

By JIM TROTTER
The Athletic

Atlanta Falcons quarterback Kirk Cousins did what he was supposed to do Sunday after playing one of the worst games of his career. He stood before the cameras and owned his four interceptions and their role in the 17-13 loss to the Los Angeles Chargers.

"I feel like that was a game we had a chance to win if I played at the standard I expect to play at," he said.

Similarly, Coach Raheem Morris did what he was supposed to do after watching his quarterback finish a third consecutive game — and third straight loss — with no touchdown passes and a negative turnover differential. He stood firmly behind Cousins and swatted away questions about a potential change at the position.

"That guy has carried us," Morris said. "That guy has got us to the point where we're 6-6 and we're in first place in the division. Still got everything in front of us despite what happened today. It's up to us to bounce back and find a way to win football games, and there's no better man than 18 to go do that for us," he said, referring to Cousins's uniform number.

Perhaps Morris genuinely believes that. The team did sign Cousins to a \$180 million, four-year contract that includes \$100 million in guarantees, after all, contending he was the right guy to reverse six consecutive losing seasons.

But it is hard to watch Cousins in recent weeks and not wonder if it is time to take a look at the rookie Michael Penix Jr., the strong-armed left-hander who

What is the ultimate goal of this season for the Falcons?

was selected eighth in the draft overall.

Cousins is in the worst funk of his 10 seasons as a full-time starter. A 13-year veteran, he had never gone more than two games in a season without an aerial score. His four interceptions on Sunday tied his career high, set a decade ago with Washington, and three of them occurred in the final 17 minutes, with one returned 61 yards for a touchdown and another killing a goal-to-go opportunity.

It has been said that once is an accident, twice is a coincidence and three times is a pattern. What we're seeing from Cousins is a pattern that warrants at least situational playing time for Penix, who has earned glowing reviews behind the scenes for his work in practice.

This is no disrespect to Cousins, whom I like personally and professionally. Work ethic, treatment of others, respect for the game — he does it the right way. But Cousins is 36 and trying to outrun an opponent who is undefeated. The race against the chronological clock is difficult for everyone, but even more so for an aging quarterback who missed half of last season because of a torn Achilles' tendon.

The traits that made Cousins so successful are now on limited display; like good decision-making, accuracy and arm strength. These used to be givens, but now they are maybes, a further nod to the reality that getting older diminishes our ability to consistently perform the physical acts we could once do easily.

There is no shame in that, of course. New Orleans quarterback Drew Brees was one of the

Jim Trotter is a national columnist for The Athletic based in San Diego.

By MICHAEL-SHAWN DUGAR
The Athletic

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — Since their bye week, the Seattle Seahawks have taken their defense up a notch. They have held opposing offenses to 17 or fewer points in three consecutive wins, keeping their playoff hopes alive.

As the players see it, there is no single reason the unit has turned a corner. But if they were to isolate one variable, it would be that Coach Mike Macdonald is "in his bag" as a play caller, meaning he is supremely focused on something he does well and executes it at a high level.

It is showing up in the way his team is playing. The latest example was Seattle's 26-21 win against the New York Jets on Sunday, in which the defense allowed 14 points and shut out the home team in the second half.

In the past three weeks, the Seahawks' defense has ranked among the top three teams in points per drive and expected points allowed per play, according to TruMedia. For the season, the unit ranks seventh in points per drive and tied for ninth in E.P.A. per play along with the Green Bay Packers and Buffalo Bills. Seattle's defense has one of the highest success rates in the N.F.L. on running back carries over the past three weeks, and the defense has forced at least one turnover in every game during this win streak. The last two victories have featured interceptions returned for touchdowns, marking the first time Seattle has had back-to-back games with a pick-6 since 2012.

The most recent touchdown came courtesy of defensive tackle Leonard Williams, who over the last two games has 10 total tackles, four and a half sacks, two tackles for loss on run plays, a blocked point-after attempt and two passes defended, one of which he returned for a 92-yard touchdown against the Jets.

"For a guy like him, a leader on our team, to ball, it's crazy because we look to him," cornerback Riq Woolen said of the 30-year-old Williams. "It shows that the culture for our defense is setting in. As you can see, it seems like everybody on the defense is buying in. There's 11 of us; you'd think it was 12."

The ability to make the opponent feel as if the defense is playing with extra men is a reason Macdonald was a coveted candidate in last year's hiring cycle. Seattle's defense hit a rough patch after its 3-0 start, but over the past few weeks, Macdonald has started to flex his defensive muscles. Players have said his preparation and knack for predicting what offenses will do in certain situations have been critical to the unit's midseason turnaround.

"He's for sure in his bag," defensive tackle Byron Murphy II said. "He stays in his bag because he's always preparing us, and he's always putting us in the best position to make plays and go out there and win games. Throughout the week, taking it day by day, breaking down the scheme of the offense, the install, how everything works together from the D-line to the linebackers and the D.B.s, how everything correlates — pass rushing, coverage, everything."

Macdonald often says he wants his defense to hold the pen last, and Sunday's win featured several significant moments in which he won the chess match against quarterback Aaron Rodgers.

The Jets led, 21-7, and faced third-and-7 from the 9-yard line midway through the second quarter

Michael-Shawn Dugar covers the Seahawks for The Athletic.



ADAM HUNGER/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Williams had another big play with a pick-6 against Rodgers. The team credits much to Macdonald, who is "in his bag" as a play caller.



JULIA DEMAREE NIKHINSON/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Seahawks Coach Mike Macdonald watched his team come back from a 21-7 deficit to beat the Jets.



ADAM HUNGER/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Leonard Williams sacking the Jets' Aaron Rodgers. Seattle's defense has held its last three opponents to 17 or fewer points.

ter when Williams intercepted Rodgers. The Seahawks (7-5) deployed their dime package (six defensive backs) and put everyone except Julian Love, Coby Bryant, Josh Jobe and Devon Witherspoon on the line of scrimmage, presenting an all-out blitz look. At the snap, Williams and defensive tackle Jarran Reed dropped into coverage, as did safety Rayshawn Jenkins, who was covering running back Brecee Hall on the short side of the field.

Witherspoon came on a delayed blitz from the three-receiver side, appearing to leave receiver Garrett Wilson open on a slant. Rodgers threw the ball quickly as if he was hot against the blitz even though the Jets had five blockers for three rushers, not including Witherspoon, who was nowhere near Rodgers at the time of the throw. Rodgers theoretically had time to scan the field but instead threw into traffic, and Seattle generated a momentum-swinging play to change the game.

Rodgers was on the verge of

leading a potential game-winning drive in the fourth quarter, trailing, 26-21. New York reached the Seattle 29-yard line at the two-minute warning before the Seahawks tightened up. A spacing issue on the part of New York's receivers appeared to cause an incompletion on first down. Then, on second-and-10, Seattle showed pressure with linebacker Tyrice Knight sprinting to the line of scrimmage before the snap. Rodgers recognized the potential for a blitz and checked to a running back screen, which is just what the Seahawks were hoping he would do. Love came down from his deep safety spot and was unimpeded on his way to dropping Isaiah Davis for no gain.

Love said they were baiting Rodgers into making that throw, and once he did, it was merely a matter of making the tackle.

"I'll give credit to Mike," Love said. "Aaron felt pressure, and thankfully I was rolling down, saw the back trying to slip out and just made a play. I'll give all the credit

to the play call."

Love's tackle, which was his sixth of the game on top of forcing a fumble and recording a pass breakup, set up a third-and-10 in which Williams beat left guard John Simpson for a sack. On fourth-and-15, the Seahawks were once again in their time package with six guys on the line of scrimmage: Derick Hall, Boye Mafe, Reed, Williams, Love and Bryant. Jenkins and linebacker Ernest Jones IV were off the ball while Woolen, Witherspoon and Jobe were playing off their receivers, showing man coverage with no safety help in the middle of the field.

Jones and Jenkins dropped back at the snap, as did Reed and Williams, so Seattle ended up sending only four rushers (Bryant, Hall, Love and Mafe) against a seven-man protection, including the running back and tight end. Rodgers might have had time to step up and make an accurate throw, but instead he felt heat from Bryant, who pushed Davis backward and prompted the quarterback to launch the ball off his back foot. The ball never came close to finding Wilson in the end zone against Woolen.

"We called zero, we got home, he threw a bad ball and it was incomplete," Witherspoon said before being interrupted by Bryant.

"Who got home, though?" Bryant said from his nearby locker, making sure Witherspoon gave him his props.

"Let 'em know, 8-ball!" Witherspoon said with a smile, referring to Bryant by a nickname inspired by his jersey number.

That was Bryant's only pass rush snap of the game and just his fourth of the season. He was caught off guard by the call but said it was a dream situation for a safety with the game on the line.

"Me blitzing on the last play, got to win my one-on-one matchup," Bryant said, "and that's what I did."

Seattle's last few wins have been full of plays like that, in which Macdonald's mind was effectively the team's 12th man. It took some time and a few notable lineup changes, but he finally has Seattle playing the style of defense that made the coach so attractive to the Seahawks in the offseason.

Seattle's Week 14 rematch with the Arizona Cardinals on Sunday looms large as far as the N.F.C. West crown is concerned, but Seattle is confident it can sweep its division rival, in part because the head coach is in his bag.

SOCCER

Galaxy Turn Back the Clock With Their Return to the M.L.S. Cup Final

By **PABLO MAURER**
The Athletic

The scene inside the locker room after the Los Angeles Galaxy's 2014 M.L.S. Cup victory felt distinctly bacchanalian, a touch wilder than the reverie surrounding the club's previous four championship celebrations.

Players had torn plastic sheeting off the walls and lockers and crafted an impromptu slip-and-slide, hurtling themselves down the beer-soaked course with reckless abandon. Music blared from a stereo in one corner as teammates exchanged embraces, doused in sweat and Champagne spray. The screaming and shrieking were constant.

In the middle of all this stood the club's coach, the 63-year-old Bruce Arena, calmly uncorking a bottle of Dom Pérignon. This was Arena's fifth M.L.S. Cup, and these celebrations were old hat to him. He was by then the league's greatest-ever coach, and he was flanked by its greatest-ever player, Landon Donovan. The two exchanged their own embrace.

It was a quiet moment among the madness, and it carried a sense of finality.

The Galaxy were M.L.S. originals, and by 2014, they were arguably the most successful franchise in league history. They had given M.L.S. its first taste of mainstream relevance in 2007 when they landed the English megastar David Beckham, and in the years that followed, they had solidified their place in the sporting zeitgeist on and off the field. To many fans of soccer around the globe, the Galaxy were quite simply the only M.L.S. team they had ever heard of.

But by the end of 2016, just two years after the Galaxy hoisted their fifth M.L.S. Cup — still a league record — Arena, Donovan and a handful of other formative figures in club history were gone. And there were changes afoot across the league, too: Just two years later, Los Angeles Football Club would debut, the Galaxy's

Pablo Maurer covers soccer for The Athletic.



JAE C. HONG/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Landon Donovan hoisted the trophy after the Los Angeles Galaxy won the M.L.S. Cup in 2014.

first in-market competition since the league's failed Chivas U.S.A. experiment.

L.A.F.C. was joined by a handful of other new clubs, well-run, high-spending franchises that helped complete the work the Galaxy started in the mid-2000s, finally modernizing the league. In the meantime, the Galaxy tried, with varying degrees of success, to stay relevant. They clung to the image they had formed during the Beckham era by luring other high-profile names — Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Javier "Chicharito" Hernandez and the like — but that rarely translated into success on the pitch.

"I don't think there's any doubt that the Galaxy as an organization got complacent," Donovan told *The Athletic*, a decade later. "There is no guarantee that you're ever getting back."

It took 10 years to get back to the league's championship game, where they will face the New York Red Bulls on Saturday. And in that intervening decade, the Galaxy's

star has faded a bit. They are no longer the league's flagship franchise, having been drowned out by L.A.F.C., Atlanta United and, most recently, Inter Miami, which arguably became the most popular club in league history overnight by acquiring the Argentine legend Lionel Messi.

The Galaxy, though, are starting to show flashes of their former glory, even if the club is no longer the preferred destination of global football's highest-profile players in the twilight of their careers. They are something else now, a well-coached, exciting and relatively young team that plays some of the most attractive soccer in M.L.S.

To longtime fans of M.L.S., it's likely that no player is more closely associated with the Galaxy than Donovan is, more than even Beckham. For a decade, he was the club's most essential player while simultaneously becoming the face of the U.S. men's national team. The 42-year-old Donovan, most recently the interim

head coach of the N.W.S.L.'s San Diego Wave, remembers the Galaxy's halcyon days well.

"There was an excitement everywhere we went," he said. "Especially after David showed up, that you only get with a player like David or Messi. We felt like rock stars as we traveled and went different places — always to a sold-out stadium. It was an important time for the league, and we were an important team for the league."

By the time Beckham arrived in 2007, the club was already a mainstay in M.L.S., having advanced to the M.L.S. Cup five times in the league's 11-year history and won it twice. It played in the league's nicest stadium, was well-supported locally and was funded by the billionaire Philip Anschutz, a name on the M.L.S. Cup trophy itself.

"It was unheard of, the level of class we were treated with at the Galaxy," said Mike Magee, who played for the team during its glory days. "It was so first-class. Every time you walked into the

building, everybody you saw was doing their best to make sure we could succeed. They made us feel like kings, truly."

Beckham was not an instant success at the Galaxy. But the Galaxy did eventually get things dialed in. They brought in Arena, the most successful coach in American professional soccer history, and they overhauled their roster, populating it with a mix of proven American and international talent. By 2009, the Galaxy were finally the well-oiled machine that the league badly needed them to be.

They made the Cup final in 2009 and won the Supporters' Shield in 2010. They won the Shield again in 2011 and did the double, winning the league championship for the first time in six years. They did so again in 2012, sending Beckham into the sunset as an M.L.S. champion, and nearly won another title in 2013, crashing out in the conference finals.

By the time the players were spraying each other with Champagne in 2014, it felt unthinkable that the Galaxy would drift into any sort of irrelevance. But things change. Magee, who departed the Galaxy in 2013, saw it from afar.

"During my time there, the club really did a great job of showing the blueprint on how to succeed and get the right combination of great players and great human beings who showed up every day to work towards a common goal to win," he said. "And somehow, one of those years in the last decade, it just felt like the blueprint was thrown out the window and they decided to go a different way. For a lot of us who loved the club, it was confusing. It was just like they threw it away."

The Galaxy were guided by Chris Klein, the club president who was a former teammate of Beckham's. After Arena's departure to helm the U.S. men's national team in 2016, the club was often mediocre and sometimes downright bad.

All the while, Klein remained, as did Jovan Kirovski, the technical director. They had formed a bond, and Klein was hesitant to move on from his former teammate, often

at the expense of results.

"From an outside perspective, the club was sort of chasing that next championship one year at a time instead of building infrastructure," Greg Vanney, the current Galaxy coach and a former Galaxy player, told *The Athletic* in 2023.

By 2023, with the Galaxy in last place, longtime fans had seen

A decade ago, the club led the way for the nascent league.

enough. They began calling for Klein's head, threatening a boycott. Klein was dismissed. Kirovski was next to go, fired in early 2024.

This incarnation of the Galaxy looks very little like the Galaxy of old — and that's a good thing.

The Galaxy are now led by Vanney, who has been on board since 2021. The club's front office is rowing in the same direction these days — Vanney likes to use the phrase "shared vision" — in no small part because of the appointment of the club's general manager, Will Kuntz, in 2023. Notably, Kuntz was lured away from L.A.F.C. It has not taken him long to make his mark.

"The Galaxy were the drivers in early M.L.S., and they found a lot of success," Vanney said on Tuesday, adding: "But now M.L.S. has genuinely become a league that's not just about big-name players. It's about having a team that really fits together, about having a scouting department that finds players who fit the vision of the way the club and coaches want to play and it's having a support system around and underneath."

In Vanney's own words, the club has done well in recent years to build the infrastructure that it's lacked in the past decade. Former players, such as Donovan and Magee, have noticed.

"What Greg has been building is special," Donovan said.

COMMENTARY

No Doubt That Lloyd Is Worthy Of the Hall

By **STEPH YANG**
The Athletic

Carli Lloyd will join the National Soccer Hall of Fame next year as a member of the class of 2025, an honor she has earned through two World Cup titles, gold medal-winning goals in two Olympics and several individual awards during her decade-long career.

The former players Chris Armas, Mary Harvey and Nick Rimando will also be inducted, as will the former M.L.S. executive Mark Abbott. The induction ceremony will be held next year on May 3 in Frisco, Texas.

One of the finest moments in Lloyd's career came at the 2015 World Cup, when her hat-trick in the final against Japan earned the U.S. women's national team its third World Cup. Her career on the senior national team spanned 16 years and 316 caps (second only to Kristine Lilly), helping it win two World Cups, two Olympic gold medals and an Olympic bronze medal. She won the FIFA Golden Ball for the 2015 World Cup and was named FIFA's player of the year in 2015 and 2016.

There was never a question that Lloyd would carry the day in voting. While her club accomplishments haven't always kept pace — playing several seasons for the underperforming Houston Dash in the N.W.S.L. didn't help — her national team accomplishments were more than enough to dazzle even the most jaded voter.

Lloyd, along with the former U.S. goalkeeper Rimando, earned the player induction as one of two players listed on at least 50 percent of the ballots. Lloyd was on 47 ballots, with 97.9 percent of the votes.

The only question was whether it would happen on a player or a veteran ballot, which is for players who have been retired for more than 10 full calendar years. With only three spots for players and a 20-person ballot that includes both men and women, sometimes those who should be shoe-ins find themselves delayed a few years.

Lloyd, who retired in 2021, officially became eligible for the player ballot in 2024 after being

Steph Yang covers soccer for The Athletic.



ELAINE THOMPSON/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Carli Lloyd's hat-trick in the 2015 World Cup final against Japan propelled the U.S. women's national team to its third World Cup. Below, Lloyd during her last regular season game in 2021.



MONIQUE JACQUES FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

out of the game for at least three full calendar years, as well as having played at least 20 full international games and at least five seasons in a first division league. It's yet another testament to her resumé that she was voted in during her first year of eligibility.

Lloyd, who has created a somewhat contentious public persona both as a player and now as a commentator, said in 2021 during her retirement tour that "everybody was trying to drag me down."

"I don't know if it was sort of the Kobe or Jordan thing where, in my mind, I had these nemeses and I just created these story lines in my head where I just wanted to stick it to people," Lloyd told *The Athletic* then. "There's probably a little bit of that, but I think there's some truth, as well. But I look back and I'm like, 'I thought all of these people hated me. I thought everyone had so many bad things to say about me.' Now, I've announced my retirement and I'm just shocked. There's all this support I've received."

The controversy usually came off the field, both during and after her career, such as when she called Megan Rapinoe's kneeling to protest police killings of Black Americans a "distrac-

tion" or saying U.S. players shouldn't have smiled and danced after managing to advance from the group stage of the 2023 World Cup.

By her own account, being cut from the U.S. under-21 team in 2003, because the coach perceived that she wasn't working hard enough, flipped a switch. Lloyd vowed she would never get dropped again over hard work. Much of her career, at least as publicly discussed, has been motivated by proving criticism wrong. She detailed this journey in her autobiography "When Nobody Was Watching," discussing her single-minded pursuit of winning, though at times it cost her some of her closest familial relationships — a rift she mended in 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic.

There has never been any denying that Lloyd was a force on the field. She could be a battering ram, and her dedication to staying healthy and fit is instructive, given how long she played with few major gaps in her availability.

Again, the Hall of Fame's criteria is about accomplishment, and Lloyd has oodles of that with more to spare. There's no doubt that she should be in the class of 2025, nor should it be a surprise that she made it in her first year.

Red Bulls' Run to Title Game Has Club On the Rise Within Its Sprawling Group

By **JEFF RUETER**
The Athletic

On Saturday, the New York Red Bulls will participate in an M.L.S. Cup final for the first time since 2008. Less than a month later, the club and the broader Red Bull football group will enter a new era altogether.

In January, Jürgen Klopp will begin his tenure as head of global soccer for Red Bull. It is a sprawling sports enterprise with assorted flavors, including Formula 1 racing, extreme sports, e-sports and soccer. Klopp will oversee the arm of the latter, which includes RB Leipzig, Red Bull Salzburg and Brazil's Red Bull Bragantino. The organization also has a stake in Leeds United, but Klopp's role with that team is expected to be more of an advisory one.

Klopp, the former coach of Liverpool, is one of international soccer's biggest characters and cerebral influencers. Impressing him is not easy.

But the Red Bulls' run to this weekend's final against the Los Angeles Galaxy could have hardly made a stronger first impression. The team, overseen at the top level by Klopp's compatriot and New York's head of sport, Jochen Schneider, has been on a wild ride of underdog determination and away wins.

While it's unclear how involved Klopp will be with the group's American branch, his handling will help answer a long-open question about the club's standing in Red Bull's hierarchy. After years of adhering to a developmental model, New York has evolved into a more modern and competitive operation under Schneider. To him, reaching this weekend's final is only the beginning.

"I said this right at the beginning, we are not a 'farm team,'" Schneider said. "I know how much the New York Red Bulls mean to the Red Bull organization, how important we are, and how much they appreciate that we play successful football this season. This club means a lot to Red Bull."

Over the past decade, the Red Bulls have provided some valuable talent to the broader group. At times, however, that pathway has seemed to hamper the team's ability to contend at M.L.S.'s highest levels.

While some teams were spending club-record transfer fees on a near-annual basis, New York appeared to be developing players and coaches with an eye toward the best interests of the other Red

Jeff Rueter covers soccer for The Athletic.



JULIO AGUILAR/GETTY IMAGES

Emil Forsberg, an import who spent nine years with Leipzig, has been a driving force for the New York Red Bulls this season.

Bull soccer properties. Mike Petke led the Red Bulls to win the Supporters' Shield in 2013, but he was fired a year later as the club appointed a better ideological match in Jesse Marsch, the current coach of the Canada men's team. After Marsch won Shields in 2015 and 2018, he departed — not for a head coaching gig, but to become an assistant coach at Leipzig.

Perhaps most worrisome was the departure of Tyler Adams in 2019. While it made sense for him to move to Leipzig as his European entry point, the reported \$3 million transfer fee felt laughably below market value for a young defensive midfielder with considerable first-team experience.

Schneider arrived in 2022 and immediately pushed back on the "farm team" narrative, but supporters could be forgiven for remaining skeptical.

The Red Bulls had not signed a squad-leading veteran designated player — a hallmark of any competitor's roster build — since Thierry Henry retired after the 2014 season. The club maintained success by balancing a domestic-skewing squad with a pipeline of young talent through its academy. While the developmental approach didn't cost the team playoff appearances, it seemed to keep them from competing with its free-spending rivals.

After a surprising first-round exit at home in 2022, Schneider began studying what other league teams were doing — particularly those that could credibly threaten to win the M.L.S. Cup, which the Red Bulls have never done.

"We went through the process of how we make a winning team out of this club, and what it really needs," Schneider said. "It was important to raise the quality of the team, to add leadership and expe-

rience to our team."

Over the years, the pipeline from New York to the group's clubs in Leipzig and Salzburg occasionally flowed both ways. New York has acquired eight players from the Austrian club and two from Leipzig, most often on loans. The current starting goalkeeper Carlos Coronel first arrived on a loan from Salzburg in 2021.

Still, no previous import came close to the stature of Emil Forsberg, who spent over nine years with Leipzig. Forsberg joined New York early in its off-season for a reported \$4.9 million. Now, Schneider's squad building came with a centerpiece that he estimates is "the best football player the Red Bull soccer group has ever had."

"It was a perfect fit at the right time," Schneider said.

Forsberg made a strong first impression under head coach Sandro Schwarz, who also joined in the off-season. Schneider was confident that Schwarz could balance the increasing veteran presence and expectations with the club's steadfast commitment to development.

Win or lose on Saturday, it feels as though the Red Bulls have come into their own as an M.L.S. operation this year. With a pragmatic coach and more senior experience to supplement and mentor the longstanding young core, the team has found a sustainable approach that Schneider hopes will lead to more successes on the field and beyond.

Only time will tell just how closely Klopp himself keeps tabs on Schneider's works, either from Germany or from a seat at the team's stadium in Harrison, N.J.

But one thing is clear: New York is on the rise, both in M.L.S. and in its broader soccer network.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

The Georgia Defense Isn't Hunkering Down The Way It Is Used To

By **SETH EMERSON**
The Athletic

ATHENS, Ga. — When the defensive players on the University of Georgia football team watched film from their last game against Texas while preparing for a rematch in the Southeastern Conference championship game on Saturday in Atlanta, they saw themselves at their best: seven sacks, four forced turnovers and generally wreaking havoc in the home of the No. 2 team in the country.

It was typical Georgia defense, in other words, except not this season.

By several key metrics, this is the worst defense of the Kirby Smart era.

■ It was eighth in the SEC in yards per play allowed, after being first or second every season since 2019 and never worse than fifth.

■ It was ninth in the SEC in total yards allowed per game, after being first or second every season since 2017 and fourth in 2016.

■ It was seventh in the SEC in points allowed, after being first or second every year since 2019 and never worse than fifth.

"I can't put a finger on what exactly it's been," Smart, Georgia's coach, said. "If I could, we'd certainly put a stop to it. We've played well at times and we've tackled well at times. And then we haven't at times."

It is what makes predicting this Georgia team so difficult. Defense has been a hallmark of the program under Smart, and it certainly came through when Georgia won, 30-15, on Oct. 19 in Austin. The defense also looked great against Clemson in the season opener and for the second half of the win against Tennessee. But the same unit gave up 563 yards last week to Georgia Tech, one of five games this year in which it has given up at least 350 yards. That had not happened to a Smart-coached team in six years.

For all of the attention on Georgia's offense, the national ranks for the Bulldogs' two units are remarkably similar: The offense is 33rd in yards per play, 37th in total yards and 25th in points, while the defense is 36th in yards per play,

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35th in total yards and 25th in points.

Where they diverge is the explanation for not being better: Georgia's offense has dealt with injuries everywhere except quarterback, with the worst hits coming at tailback and the offensive line. Georgia's defense, on the other hand, has been relatively healthy. The longest injury to a key player was to linebacker Smael Mondon Jr., and for only four games, which included the great defensive performance at Texas.

Talent should not be an issue: Safety Malaki Starks, edge Mykel Williams and linebacker Jalon Walker are projected first-round picks in next year's N.F.L. draft. The rest of the defense is full of five stars and other blue chips.

The more maddening thing: It is not really one position that has been the team's undoing.

The defensive line was pushed around for much of the Georgia Tech game. Mississippi and other teams hurt Georgia in the midfield passing game. The pass rush has been inconsistent. The secondary has not been great. The run defense on the edges was an issue against Kentucky and other teams.

But if you are looking for one core issue, it might be run defense, and it has been a building problem. From 2019 to 2022, when players such as Jordan Davis, Jalen Carter and Travon Walker were part of loaded front sevens, the Bulldogs ranked first or second in the nation (not just the SEC). Last year, the run defense slipped to fifth in the SEC, giving up 3.77 yards per rush attempt. This year, it is eighth at 3.84.

But even then it is simplistic to blame the defensive line: Smart pointed out that it put Georgia Tech in second-and-long 16 times, which he was pleased with.

"If you told me before the game, we were going to have them in second-and-7-plus 16 times, I would have thought that we did something really, really well," Smart said. "What we didn't do was play really well on a couple of the second-and-longs and a couple of the third downs, which really cost us."

The schedule has to be considered. Georgia has faced four of the nation's top 25 offenses and eight of the top 50. In past years, even



BRETT DAVIS/IMAGN IMAGES

The Georgia defense enters the SEC championship game having yielded 563 yards to Georgia Tech in the regular-season finale, above. The Bulldogs' defensive numbers this season have been some of the worst under Coach Kirby Smart, below right. But the defense did have a solid effort in some games, including a win over Texas, whom the Bulldogs will face Saturday for the conference title.



SARA DIGGINS/USA TODAY NETWORK, VIA IMAGN IMAGES



JOHN RAOUX/ASSOCIATED PRESS

those great defenses had games in which they looked mortal against great offenses: Ohio State in the 2022 Peach Bowl and Alabama in the 2021 SEC championship.

But a few of the 2024 Georgia defense's best games have come against those highly ranked offenses: Clemson and Texas had their season lows for yards per play and points. Tennessee was held to its season low for yards. The talent is capable of putting it together in certain games, but for some reason cannot do it every week.

Two theories were expressed during Monday's news media availability in Athens, both tying back to that.

Smart said not reacting well within drives led to bad results.

"The trait that confounds you or bothers you is when something goes wrong," he said. "When any explosive play or penalty that extends a drive has almost been catastrophic, like, we can't stop anybody when that happens. We haven't overcome that well."

Starks, the safety, said there had been too much individual play

early in games.

"I think sometimes when we look at it, we just all need to be on the same page, instead of going out there and playing as individuals instead of playing as a whole unit," Starks said. "When we're all connected, when we're all on the same page, when we're not doing things individually, I think that's the biggest thing."

One final statistic, which goes to the issue of tackling: Georgia is 82nd in yards after contact allowed at 3.16, per TruMedia. That speaks to plenty of flaws: one-on-

one tackling, defensive swarm to the ball, giving up explosive plays. But even there, it is inconsistent.

The upshot: The Bulldogs should not be surprised if Texas starts out making more plays than it did in Austin. As Smart pointed out, the defense has been resilient and usually ends up making the stop when it really needs one.

"It's just knowing we've been in that position before," Starks said. "Just lean on each other — when things get hard, not pointing fingers, not complaining, coming together as a group to figure it out."

In the New Landscape, Flipping Is an Accepted Part of the Recruiting Game

From First Sports Page

gan), Husan Longstreet (Texas A&M to Southern California) and Julian Lewis (U.S.C. to Colorado).

Oftentimes a school knows when a flip is inevitable.

The four-star linebacker Dawson Merritt said Alabama coaches had an idea of what might be coming after online recruiting services started forecasting a move for him to Nebraska. He proved them right when he flipped to the Cornhuskers on Nov. 14.

"I wouldn't say they were anticipating it," Merritt said of the Alabama staff. "But they weren't shocked or anything."

The first hint that a prospect might be wavering, the Big Ten staffer said, is when he starts to visit other programs despite already being committed. Sometimes prospects will downplay the seriousness of those visits, but part of the job in any recruiting department is to become an expert at reading the signs.

"Very rare is it a flip that you don't know about," the staffer said.

With the introduction of name, image and likeness money into college sports, many flips are financially motivated. At the media day for last year's Under Armour All-America Game, one prospect said a school told him that if he committed early and helped bring other recruits into the class, he could earn \$40,000 a month until he signed. Another recruit said a school offered him a signing bonus equivalent to the price of "a really nice car."

Merritt, ranked No. 120 overall in the Class of 2025, said another top prospect who flipped in a previous cycle told him that the head coach asked to give him three days to see whether the school could come up with more money to keep him. The prospect still flipped, but with that in mind, Merritt gave Alabama and its collective a two-day window to retain him before he called Nebraska coaches and flipped to the Huskers.

"I've heard a lot of stories," Merritt said. "So I wanted to tell Alabama first just in case they



REBECCA S. GRATZ/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Flipping can be for coaches, too: A few weeks after Dawson Merritt decided to join Nebraska, Tony White, above, the Huskers' defensive coordinator, left for Florida State. After committing to Wisconsin, Wilneron Telemaque, below, a highly touted defensive lineman, flipped to West Virginia.



WILNERSON TELEMAQUE, VIA THE ATHLETIC

were going to try to do something crazy to try to keep me. I wanted to make sure I told them first."

The Crimson Tide ultimately didn't make any N.I.L. changes, said Merritt, who lives in Kansas and first started seriously thinking about nearby Nebraska when he watched the Huskers beat Colorado in September.

His process began as many flips do.

"It basically just starts with almost, like, flirting with the other school a little bit," he said. "They'll text you every now and then and then maybe give you a call and you'll entertain it."

Midway through the fall, Merritt made a pros and cons list with his parents for Nebraska and Alabama. Nebraska came out on top. He first broke the news to the Alabama staff and then had a video call with Nebraska Coach Matt Rhule to tell him the news.

"Then I called the defensive coordinator and they were actually in a defensive position meeting, which was amazing," Merritt said. "I called him and told him and they all started jumping up in the meeting room. It was super funny."

Merritt didn't know it at the time, but Nebraska's defensive coordinator, Tony White, would execute his own flip a few weeks later when he left to become the new defensive coordinator at Florida State.

The Big Ten staffer said that though it's very frustrating to lose a prospect, there's something to be said for being the flipper as opposed to the flippee.

"That," the staffer said, "is so satisfying."

The hardest part of flipping, Merritt said, is breaking the news to the coaching staff from the previous school.

Merritt marked off an entire day to call Alabama Coach Kalen DeBoer, the outside linebackers coach Christian Robinson and the general manager, Courtney Morgan, to explain his decision.

"That was probably the hardest thing I've done in my recruiting process," he said. "I wanted to do it the right way. I didn't want to just kind of flip or text people. I wanted to call a lot of the guys."

The three-star running back Justin Thurman, who flipped from Notre Dame to Kansas in mid-November, did the same.

"I obviously had a respectful conversation with the coaches at Notre Dame," Thurman said. "I just told them that basically, 'I feel like I've decided to flip my commitment and thank you for the opportunity,' because not everybody gets those opportunities to play high-caliber football. But at the end of the day, I really felt like it was the best decision for me to flip schools."

He made it clear that he didn't want to burn any bridges with Notre Dame.

"You never know what can happen in this college world," he said.

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Dated this 25th day of November 2024 at Hamilton, Bermuda.

By Order of the Board
COSCON CORPORATE SERVICES LIMITED
Secretary

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT 1981
and
IN THE MATTER OF AET INC LIMITED

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Rohit Bal, 63, ‘Bad Boy’ and Exuberant Star of Indian Fashion, Is Dead

By PENELOPE GREEN

When Mira Nair was making “Monsoon Wedding,” her 2001 film about generational conflict, an over-the-top wedding and the family it nearly unhinges, one of the experts she turned to for sartorial help was Rohit Bal, an exuberant star of the Indian fashion world.

“I wanted the film to feel like our weddings at home,” Ms. Nair said. “No one really did that in our movies. There are codes and etiquette and symbolism in all our textiles, and Rohit loved it all and knew it well. He was a star who had taken traditional fashion to a new place, and I wanted to make sure we reflected the fashion of ‘now.’”

“When Gudda began, Indian fashion was fairly new,” Ms. Nair

‘He took something so simple and made it into something fantastic.’

added, using Mr. Bal’s nickname. “He created a path that people are now flamboyantly following.”

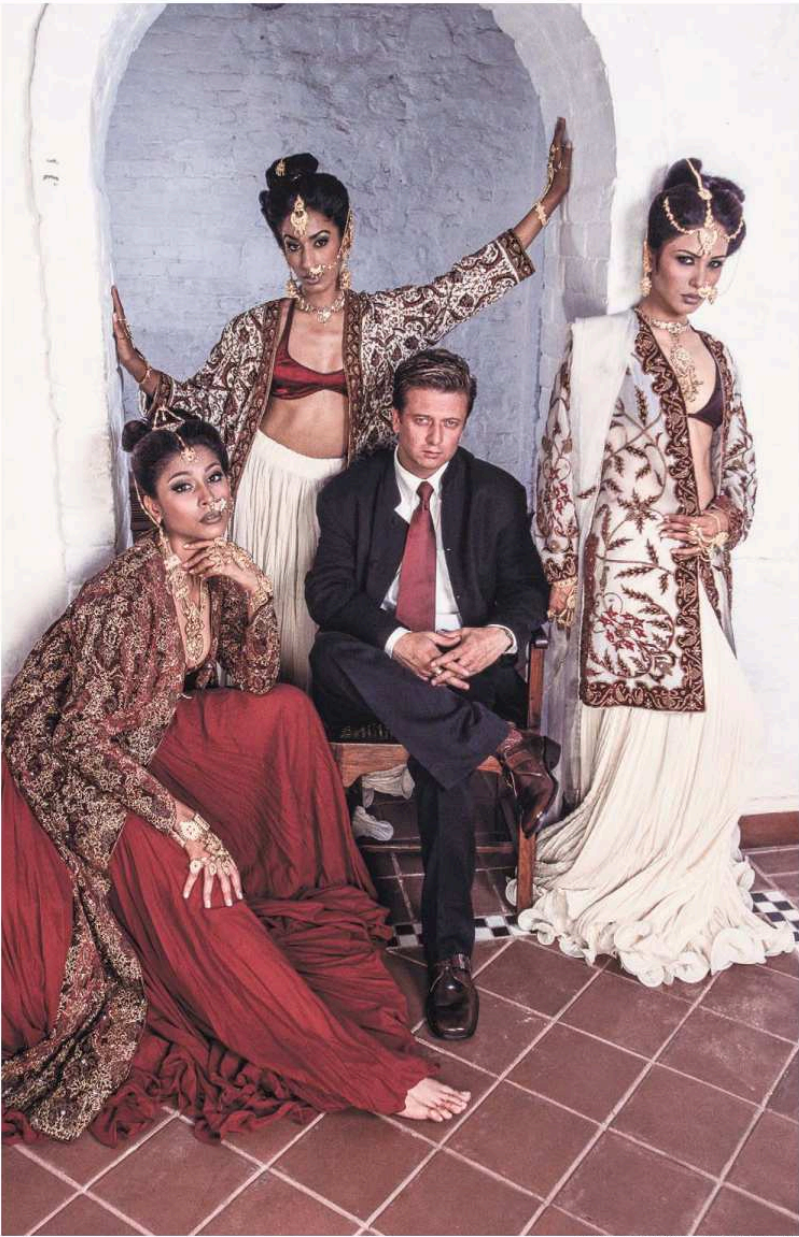
In the 1980s, India began re-making itself, moving away from decades of socialism into a more capitalist society. Fashion, such as it was, often meant traditional garments, tailor-made clothes and what were known as export rejects — Western-style clothing manufactured in India for sale abroad that didn’t meet export standards. Mr. Bal was among a wave of designers who essentially created the modern Indian fashion industry, with clothes that nodded to traditional styles but incorporated contemporary flourishes and often couture techniques.

“He was one of a number of designers who realized they could create brands around craft,” said Cecilia Morelli, a founder of Le Mill, a luxury clothing store in Mumbai. “They understood the power of craftsmanship.”

Mr. Bal died on Nov. 1 at a hospital in Delhi. He was 63. The cause was cardiac arrest, said Reshma Punj, his niece.

Mr. Bal began as a men’s wear designer — he liked to say that men were the peacocks of India — but quickly added women’s wear. He soon became known for voluminous muslin gowns that were intricately embroidered and beaded using techniques and patterns that reflected the traditional crafts of Kashmir, the disputed region on the India-Pakistan border where he was born.

“He took cotton muslin, \$1 a meter, and used 80 meters for a single piece,” said Tarun Tahiliani, an Indian designer whose store, Ensemble, a sort of Henri Bendel of Delhi, is where Mr. Bal first sold his work. “He took something so simple and made it into something fantastic. He wanted volume. He



Rohit Bal at his showroom in 1997. Over the years, he branched out like an Indian Ralph Lauren. He had stores throughout the country. He had a line of jeans and a line of children’s clothing.

wanted excess.”

He also worked in velvet, silk, satin and brocade.

Mr. Bal was a beguiling character with an outsized, outspoken personality and a lavish lifestyle that involved over-the-top parties and a retinue of male models. That made him irresistible to the Indian press, which called him “the bad boy of fashion.”

“He was so unique,” Ms. Nair said. “He looked like a Greek god.”

“Rohit was irrepressible and naughty,” said Mr. Tahiliani, the designer. “He was mad fun. He played the enfant terrible role to the gallery, and people lapped it up. But his work never suffered.”

Rohit Bal was born on May 8, 1961, in Srinagar, Kashmir, to Rajan and Prakash Bal. The family was well to do, and owned cinemas in Kashmir and Lahore. Rohit’s father died when he was 11.

Because he was the youngest of seven children, and because he had blond curls and blue eyes, Rohit was nicknamed Gudda, an endearment that translates to “boy doll” in Hindi. “I was spoiled rotten,” he said years later.

He attended St. Stephen’s College at the University of Delhi, where he was an honors student, and a terrific dancer, having memorized the moves from “Saturday Night Fever.” After graduating with a bachelor’s degree, he

worked with his brother, Rajiv, at Orchid Overseas, a business that manufactured and exported clothing and home goods, before going on to study at the National Institute of Fashion Technology, in New Delhi.

He is survived by his brothers Rakesh and Rajiv, and his sister Rupam Khatau.

Over the years, Mr. Bal branched out like an Indian Ralph Lauren.

He had stores throughout the country. He had a line of jeans and a line of children’s clothing. He made a collection of jewelry for Swarovski. He designed uniforms for the Indian crews of British Airways: kurta suits and sherwanis,



Mr. Bal in 1996. “He was vibrant,” said Bandana Tewari, a former editor for Vogue India, “and his clothing was erudite.”



He began as a men’s wear designer — he liked to say that men were the peacocks of India — but quickly added women’s wear.



Mr. Bal in 2013. His fashion design “created a path that people are now flamboyantly following,” said the filmmaker Mira Nair.

traditional long frock coats, in red and blue. He made costumes for the Indian version of the game show “Who Wants to be a Millionaire.” He designed home furnishings: bedding and lush carpets with images of peacocks and lotuses; crystal tableware edged in gold. He designed the graphics for India’s Lucky Strike cigarettes and the interiors of a new-wave Indian restaurant, Veda, that for a time had a London outpost.

When the actress Elizabeth Hurley married Arun Nayar, an Indian businessman, in a sumptuous, days-long, Bollywood-style event, in Jodhpur, India, in 2007, Mr. Bal designed the silver top and skirt she wore for her bridal

dance. He also designed kurtas for Mr. Nayar and Ms. Hurley’s 4-year-old son, Damian.

And at the request of Pamela Anderson, the “Baywatch” star and animal activist, he designed a leather-free G-string with a matching blouse and sari. Apparently, she had long favored the leather kind and was looking for a replacement. Uma Thurman, Naomi Campbell and Cindy Crawford were said to be fans, as well. In 2001, Anna Kournikova, the tennis player, walked the runway for his Paris show.

“He was vibrant,” said Bandana Tewari, a former editor at large for Vogue India, “and his clothing was erudite.”

Shalom Nagar, Israeli Prison Guard Who Reluctantly Hanged Eichmann

By SAM ROBERTS

Shalom Nagar, who was a reluctant 23-year-old Israeli prison guard when he was chosen to hang Adolf Eichmann — the fugitive Nazi war criminal convicted of crimes against humanity and genocide in the murder of six million Jews — died on Nov. 26 in Israel. He was in his late 80s.

His death was confirmed by Avigail Sperber, who directed “The Hangman,” a 2010 film about Mr. Nagar, with Netalie Braun. Ms. Sperber did not say where he died. His age has been reported by various sources as 86 or 88.

For decades, until a radio station identified him in 2004, Mr. Nagar (pronounced nah-GAR) hid his connection to the Eichmann execution, fearing retribution from neo-Nazis. But the hanging, at midnight, always haunted him.

On May 31, 1962, he was out walking with his wife, Ora, and his infant son when a police van screeched to a halt and whisked him away. Mr. Nagar knew it meant that the time of Eichmann’s execution had been set and that he was being called back to work as executioner. He persuaded the driver to turn around and assure his wife that he wasn’t being kidnapped.

Before the execution — the only case of capital punishment in Israel’s history — Eichmann asked for white wine and cigarettes. He refused a blindfold.

Mr. Nagar’s role was to release the trapdoor on the gallows, sending the prisoner plunging 30 feet to his death. But what was worse, Mr. Nagar recalled, was the grisly aftermath: removing the noose and conveying the prisoner’s corpse on a wobbly stretcher to a

specially built oven to be cremated.

“Eichmann’s face was white as chalk, his eyes were bulging and his tongue was dangling out,” Mr. Nagar told Mishpacha magazine in 2005. “The rope rubbed the skin off his neck, and so his tongue and chest were covered with blood.”

He added: “I didn’t know that when a person is strangled all the air remains in his stomach, and when I lifted him, all the air that was inside came up and the most horrifying sound was released from his mouth — ‘baaaaa!’ I felt the Angel of Death had come to take me, too.”

Mr. Nagar was supposed to accompany the ashes to a port so that a Coast Guard vessel could take them to be scattered beyond Israel’s territorial waters, but he

was too shaken and was sent home. When he arrived, covered in blood, his wife was stunned.

Shalom Nagar is believed to have been born in a Yemenite village in 1936, although some sources list his birth date as 1938.

Accounts of his childhood are sketchy, but he said in interviews that when he was about 7, his father died. Soon after, his mother remarried, abandoning him and his four siblings. When he was 12, about the time Israel declared statehood, he emigrated, making most of the trip on foot. He enlisted in the Israeli army at 16, serving in a paratroop brigade, and then worked for the police and

as a border guard before joining the Israel Prison Service, where he spent 28 years.

In 1950, Eichmann, the logistical architect of the Holocaust, fled Germany. He was captured a decade later by Israeli secret agents in Argentina, where he had been living incognito.

Eichmann was flown to Israel, where he stood trial in a bulletproof-glass booth. After he was found guilty in December 1961, he was closely guarded for six months until his execution at Ramla, a prison in central Israel, by a 22-man team that included Mr. Nagar.

To prevent a retaliatory attack on Eichmann, all the guards were Sephardic Jews unrelated to victims or survivors of the Holocaust, and his food was delivered in locked containers.

“Before I gave him his meal, I had to taste it myself,” Mr. Nagar said. “If I didn’t drop dead after two minutes, the duty officer allowed the plate into his cell.”

Of all the guards, Mr. Nagar said, he was the only one who didn’t want the job of hangman.

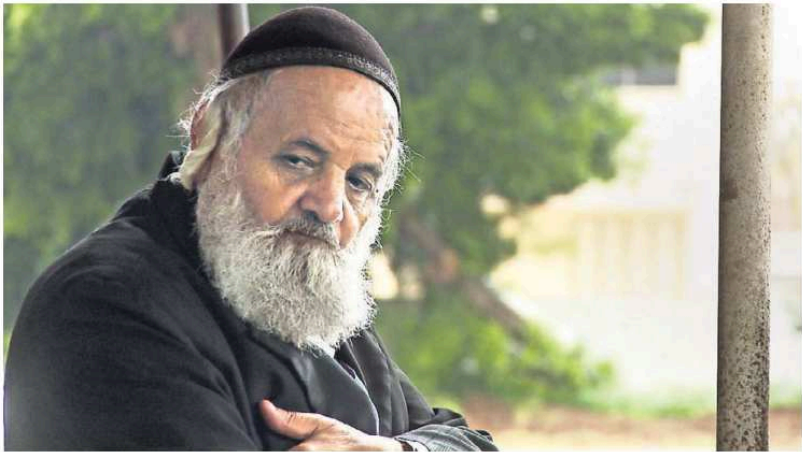
In the end, that didn’t matter: He was chosen in a lottery.

The head warden considered him ideal, he said, because he was a decorated soldier and had been an orphan in Yemen during World War II, untouched by the Holocaust.

Mr. Nagar told the warden that “he should find someone else to do the job,” he recalled.

“Then he took me and several other guards and showed us footage of how the Nazis took innocent children and tore them to pieces,” he continued. “I was so shaken that I agreed to whatever had to be done.”

In a 2004 interview with Shofar News, Mr. Nagar reflected that Eichmann was frightening dead



Shalom Nagar in “The Hangman,” a 2010 documentary about the execution of Adolf Eichmann.



Eichmann in a bulletproof-glass booth at his 1961 trial, where he was found guilty of crimes against humanity and genocide.

or alive. “From a childhood age, I lived alone without parents and without help,” he said, recalling how he had gone on to do dangerous jobs, including serving in the border guard and dismantling land mines. “I was not a man who got scared,” he added, “But from him I was scared.”

In an official account, another guard was said to have been assigned to simultaneously perform the hanging — to obfuscate responsibility — but Mr. Nagar said he was unaware of any other participant.

In “The Hangman,” directed by Ms. Braun and Ms. Sperber, and

funded by the Foundation for Jewish Culture’s Lynn and Jules Kroll Fund for Jewish Documentary Film, Mr. Nagar says: “We’re in this world as tenants. The only thing we take with us is our good deeds.”

After leaving the Prison Service, Mr. Nagar lived in Hebron until the 1994 terrorist massacre on a mosque by an American-Israeli. Then he moved to Kiryat Arba, a nearby settlement on the West Bank. He returned to his strict religious roots as a Yemenite Jew and became a ritual slaughterer of kosher meat.

Information about his survivors was not immediately available.

In discussing the execution with Mishpacha magazine, Mr. Nagar invoked Amalek, the biblical archenemy nation of ancient Israel, to justify his task.

In spite of the trauma, he said, he appreciated the value of his experience: God “commands us to wipe out Amalek, to ‘erase his memory from under the sky’ and ‘not to forget.’ I have fulfilled both.”

Jonathan Reiss contributed reporting.

The Czech Philharmonic visits New York City.

Dance and documentary, together onscreen.



Visiting Borneo, home to some of the most unusual mammals on earth.

Arts

The New York Times

JON CARAMANICA | CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK



Clockwise from center left: Zach Bryan; Benson Boone; Taylor Swift; Tommy Richman; Tyler, the Creator; Teddy Swims; and Shaboozey.

Hits Without Stars. Stars Without Hits.

Taylor Swift, Zach Bryan and Tyler, the Creator held strong without big songs.

THIS PAST SPRING, Tommy Richman got famous off a TikTok. Well, not famous exactly. Popular. Let's say popular. Tommy Richman got popular off a TikTok. Or maybe that's not quite right either. How about: This past spring, a snippet of a song used in a video on TikTok catapulted

Richman, a young soul singer with some promising earlier releases, onto the path to fame. The snippet was of "Million Dollar Baby," a deliciously saccharine pop-funk thumper, and the TikTok it soundtracked was a loose clip of Richman and his friends having a fantastic time in the studio one night — a warm little bolt of you-shoulda-been-there

fun. This was in April, and before long, the clip had millions of views, and the audio was inescapable. Eventually, it appeared in over nine million videos on the app. Radio play followed quickly, leading to a No. 2 debut for the song on the Billboard Hot 100, followed by a few months in the Top 10. Stardom secured, right? Not quite. While "Million Dollar Baby" is one of this year's

defining singles, Richman remains largely a cipher. He hasn't done many interviews; he had a needless social-media kerfuffle over how people taxonomize his sound; and his debut studio album, "Coyote" — which pointedly and stubbornly did not include "Million Dollar Baby" or its follow-up cousin, "Devil Is a Lie" — arrived with a whisper

CONTINUED ON PAGE C4

Musicians Join Players to Enliven a Video Game

Gamers give cues to an orchestra during performances of Journey at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

By ANNIE AGUIAR

For each music cue in the dreamlike, solemn odyssey of the video game Journey, the engine tracking the player's behavior pulls from a library of compositions, scoring a dynamic path through the game's vast desert landscapes. At the Brooklyn Academy of Music this week, a live orchestra is taking on the same task in Journey LIVE. In both performances, at least five players will take turns using a controller to pilot a nameless robed figure through the online game, triggering music cues that the orchestra must perform in the moment as the player progresses through the story or takes unexpected detours. "I always like to tell people it will be like the most challenging wedding you've ever played," said Melissa Ngan, a flutist who has played in Journey LIVE several times and now leads the orchestra playing the show at B.A.M. "Many of us remember those moments early in our lives where we played wedding after wedding, and you just have to have one eye on the ensemble and your music, and the other eye on what's happening down the aisle." Journey is a wordless game, and Austin Wintory's Grammy-nominated score acts as a kind of narration as the robed figure follows traces of an ancestral civilization

CONTINUED ON PAGE C2

An orchestra plays the soundtrack for live performances of Journey LIVE at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.



JAMES ESTRIN/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Dinosaur To Visit New York For a Bit

A billionaire is lending his \$44.6 million fossil to the Museum of Natural History.

By ZACHARY SMALL and JULIA JACOBS

The most expensive dinosaur fossil ever sold at auction, a stegosaurus that the billionaire Kenneth C. Griffin bought over the summer for \$44.6 million, has a new home: the American Museum of Natural History in New York. The museum announced on Thursday that it would be the first institution to exhibit the sought-after stegosaurus, as part of a four-year loan from Griffin. "It's one of the dinosaurs that every kid knows how to draw," Sean M. Decatur, the museum's president, said in an interview this week before the dinosaur was revealed. "This is a unique opportunity to have something that simultaneously, I think, really resonates in the public imagination about dinosaurs, but also from a research standpoint, is really a pretty special specimen to understand." The mounted stegosaurus was revealed

CONTINUED ON PAGE C5



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAMES ESTRIN/THE NEW YORK TIMES

CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1
through the sun-dappled desert and into the bowels of structures that once teemed with life.
Though roughly linear, the game has no explicit missions. The narrative unfolds as the player explores different landscapes. The game's eight major sections are each broken into three scenes, and each of those contain up to seven musical jump points.
The score is an evolving soundscape, moving from mournful cello and oboe to sprightly pizzicato plucking of strings to a shimmering harp. That means the orchestra must prioritize continuity, a unique challenge in a field where concertos and sym-

Journey LIVE
Dec. 6 and 7, Harvey Theater,
Brooklyn Academy of Music,
651 Fulton Street, Brooklyn,
718.636.4194, bam.org

phonies are neatly divided into discrete movements.
"The musicians have to learn a way of thinking more than they have to learn the notes on the page," said Wintory, who is conducting Journey LIVE at BAM.
The musicians — 21 players from the American Composers Orchestra and a solo cellist — are prepared to switch to the score's jump points based on where a player decides to go in the game. (A soprano is also present to perform the vocal sections of the score's final track.) Wintory relays that information to the orchestra with hand signals as he watches the screen behind them.
To indicate the next segment, Wintory

holds up a certain number of fingers; he confirms the transition for the next down-beat with a thumbs up. Some musicians use foot pedals to flip between the score's pages on an iPad while others read off analog sheet music that shows entire movements. A segment can last only seconds or several minutes.

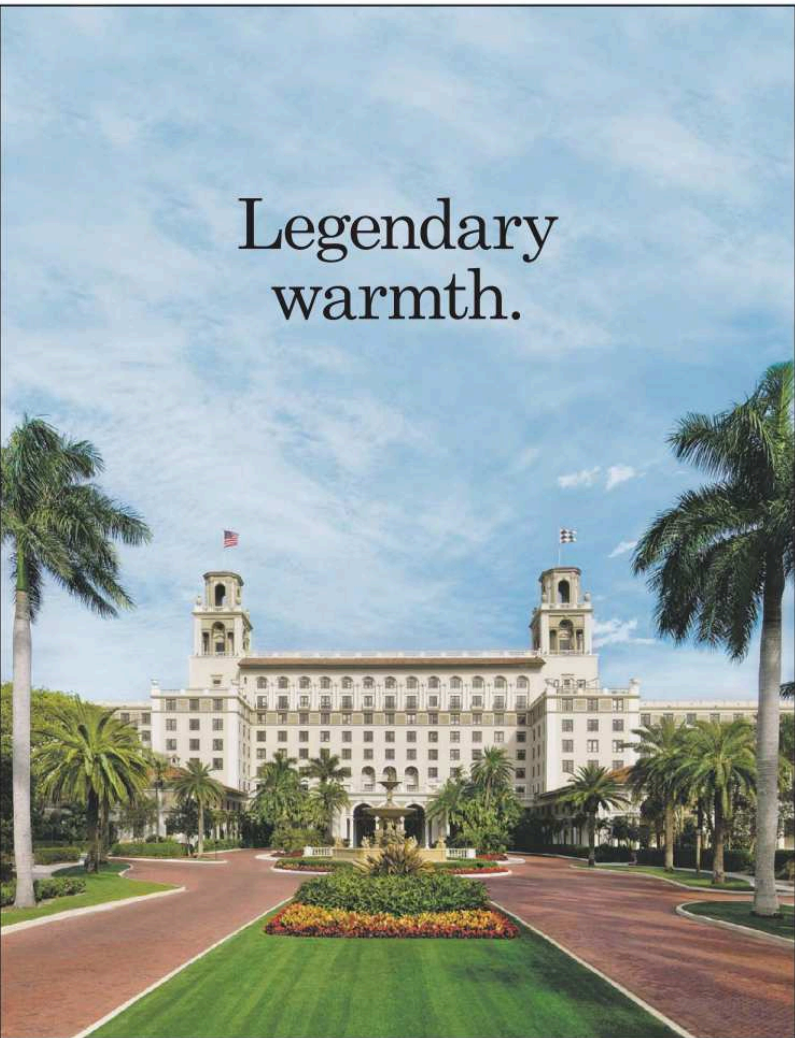
Skipping around is common. While the orchestra rehearses all possible pieces of music that a player could prompt, Wintory said that maybe one in 10 players would explore in enough detail to require a snippet for a tower hidden to the side of the game world.
"The player takes on a curatorial role as well as the role of the conductor," said Dan Visconti, the former artistic director for Fifth House Ensemble who is now a producer for Journey LIVE. "It's exciting to see people from all walks of life be able to come up and effectively conduct an orchestra."

The show premiered in 2016 at MAGFest, an annual convention in Maryland dedicated to video games and their soundtracks. Earlier iterations were played by Fifth House, a former Chicago group co-founded by Ngan, who is now the president and chief executive of the American Composers Orchestra.
That it has arrived at BAM is a sign of the growing profile of video game music and the push for arts institutions to cultivate relationships with nontraditional audiences. "With Journey LIVE, we bring together two distinct audiences — gaming aficionados and orchestral music fans," BAM's artistic director, Amy Cassello, said in a statement.
Video game music has been considered a novelty in orchestral spaces, and is even the punch-line punishment for Cate Blanchett's disgraced conductor in the 2022 film "Tár." If that perception is changing, it is not an exaggeration to cite Journey as a reason.
Journey, which was released for the PlayStation 3 in 2012, is a frequent answer to the question of whether video games can be art. It was the first video game score to receive a Grammy nomination, for best score soundtrack for visual media. Wintory competed with luminaries like Hans Zimmer ("The Dark Knight Rises") and John Williams ("The Adventures of Tintin") in a category won by Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross for "The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo."
The Journey LIVE experience is not an exact copy of what a player would hear in the game because Wintory decides what will work best in the moment. That could mean delaying a transition by a half-second or slowing down the tempo for a smoother handoff to a location-based music cue.
One of the highlights of Journey is the player's interaction with kind figures in white robes who guide them through terrain and hidden corners. They are actually other players somewhere else in the world choosing to help other players and they remain unidentified until the game's end cred-

Clockwise from above left: Austin Wintory composed the original score for the video game Journey, which was released in 2012; for Journey LIVE, gamers collaborate with an orchestra to create a live soundtrack; and Wintory is conducting the live performances at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

'The musicians have to learn a way of thinking more than they have to learn the notes on the page.'
AUSTIN WINTORY
CONDUCTOR FOR JOURNEY LIVE

its, which include the screen names of everyone met along the way.
At Journey LIVE, where that revelation plays out with an audience, it means an orchestral flourish can punctuate a shout-out to the contributions of PeePants123.
That example is not theoretical. Ngan said an audience member at that performance was able to connect with PeePants123, a white robe who said, "I had no idea that I was on the stage in front of 500 people, and I haven't been able to change my screen name since I was 13."
Though the spontaneity of a live player, like the ones in the Journey LIVE performances, is an intriguing premise, Wintory said the idea was to center the player on-stage and treat that person like a senior conductor or a concerto soloist, not as a novelty. "The goal is not to make it sort of a circus act," he said.
But the high-wire pressure remains: The players are given no instructions, and no part of the gameplay is choreographed. BAM identified its onstage players through an online submission form, seeking those deeply familiar with the game to drive the show forward.
Journey is rife with secrets, but the players are reminded that they are in front of a live audience that does not have all night to watch them stress test the orchestra's responsiveness. If players move somewhat promptly through the game, Journey LIVE runs for about 90 minutes.
"Don't try to platinum the game on this one," Wintory said, a joking reference to the digital trophy players get when they fully complete a PlayStation game.
Kellee Santiago, a co-founder and a former president of the Journey developer thatgamecompany, has seen Journey LIVE twice and suggested a different approach.
"Pause for an oddly long amount of time at one place in the game," she said. "There's always something that you hear in the music in those moments that is delightful and surprising."



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When a Baby Killer Isn't a Straightforward Villain

'The Girl With the Needle' depicts the inner struggles of a real-life 'monster.'

By BEATRICE LOAYZA

In 1920s Copenhagen, a woman named Dagmar Overbye was convicted of murdering multiple infants whose mothers had paid her to find adoptive families for them. She confessed to killing 16 babies, though the true number of victims was probably higher.

One of Denmark's most notorious serial killers, Overbye is a character in the movie "The Girl With the Needle," which opened in U.S. theaters on Friday and is Denmark's entry for the best international feature Oscar.

Yet the film isn't a true-crime thriller, and Overbye isn't portrayed as a straightforward villain. Instead, the story is about "finding the humanity in these horrible deeds," the film's director, Magnus von Horn, said in a video interview — a tall task considering the deeds involve burning, drowning and strangling babies.

How to perform the high-wire act of humanizing a killer?

"You focus on the characters," von Horn said.

And you have to cast actors fearless enough to pull it off.

Enter Trine Dyrholm and Vic Carmen Sonne, the leads in "The Girl With the Needle," and two of Denmark's most boundary-pushing actors.

The film — a social drama and dark fairy tale rolled into one black-and-white fever



PHOTOGRAPHS VIA MUBI

Vic Carmen Sonne, above, in "The Girl With the Needle," Denmark's entry for best international feature at the Academy Awards. Far left, Trine Dyrholm, who plays the serial killer Dagmar Overbye in the film, left.



dream — follows Karoline (Sonne), a fictional character modeled after a real woman who became skeptical of Overbye's adoption business.

Research into the court transcripts of Overbye's trial informs the film, but it's chiefly an imaginary retelling, with Dagmar (Dyrholm) depicted as both a survivor and a bringer of chaos. When Karoline

nearly dies attempting to perform her own abortion in a public bathroom, Dagmar intervenes and saves her life.

The younger woman then volunteers to become a wet nurse for other newborns in Dagmar's charge in exchange for room and board.

Only later, after the two women have formed a bond, does Karoline discover the

awful truth about what happens to the children.

"There's no doubt Dagmar was a monster," Dyrholm said. "But the movie is also about showing you her struggles and inner chaos."

Dyrholm, 52, is one of Denmark's most acclaimed actors, having won 10 Robert Awards — the Danish equivalent of an Os-

car — throughout her decades-long career. She has achieved this stature by collaborating with provocative directors like Thomas Vinterberg and playing morally complex roles, such as a middle-aged woman who has a torrid affair with her teenage stepson in "Queen of Hearts" (2018).

"I've always fought to play women that certain directors or producers were afraid weren't likable enough," she said. "That's something I like about the beginning of 'The Girl With the Needle,'" she added, referring to the delirious opening sequence, in which phantasmal faces flash across the screen like images from a Rorschach test. "Within us are all these different masks, but some people, because of awful things that have happened to them, are forced to wear only one."

After World War I, Denmark's economy was in a slump, and single, working-class women were among the hardest hit. In the beginning of the film, Karoline moves into a leaky attic after she is kicked out of her apartment. When the owner of the textile factory where she works finds out she's pregnant with his baby, his family forces him to abandon — then fire — her.

We empathize with Karoline's struggles, yet she's also callous, an embittered product of her social reality. When her husband, whom she believed to be dead, returns home from the war with PTSD and a disfigured face, she violently tosses him out of her home.

Sonne, 30, has also gravitated toward roles that test moral boundaries. In her breakout film, "Holiday" (2018), she played an abusive gangster's trophy girlfriend, a part that allowed her to blur the lines between victim and victimizer.

"If I think too much about representation, there's the danger of turning the character into the idea of a strong woman rather than a real person," Sonne said. "The audience sees the character at their best and worst: when they're alone and secretly behaving in completely terrible ways," she added.

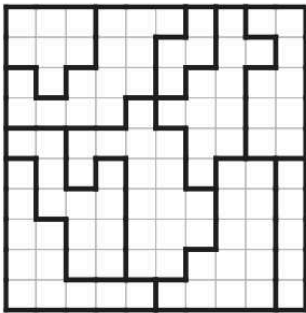
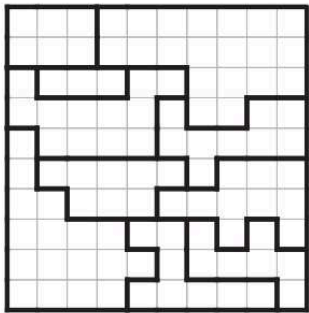
It's no wonder that Karoline and Dagmar are kindred spirits, connected by "the dark side of motherhood and womanhood," Sonne said. The film takes Karoline's point-of-view to show us how easily her life could have turned into something like Dagmar's, and how Dagmar's once might not have been all that different from Karoline's.

Dyrholm and Sonne became friends several years before co-starring in "The Girl With the Needle," and Dyrholm has also been a mentor to the younger star. Their chemistry is tangible in one blissful scene where Dagmar and Karoline go to the cinema high on ether.

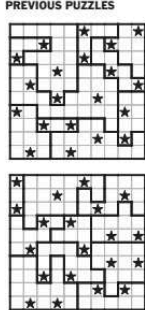
As Dagmar and Karoline watch the silent film, their joyous cackles break through the otherwise gloomy tone of the film. Briefly, it becomes a story about the rejuvenating powers of female camaraderie.

No matter how tough life gets, Sonne said, "you're not constantly living it like a tragedy." She added: If only for a bit "you sometimes get to chase the feeling of being close to someone who is like you. Together you could even laugh and be in the eternal now."

Two Not Touch



ANSWERS TO PREVIOUS PUZZLES



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

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Wit Twister

"Prufrock" author _____ was at a boil: "It's

Apt I anagram to '_____ ' — poetic understatement.

May we not subject, however, to a permanent abatement

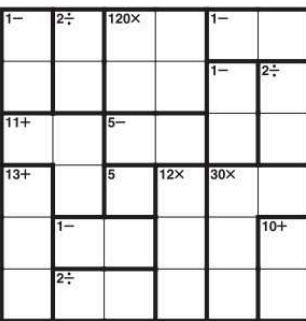
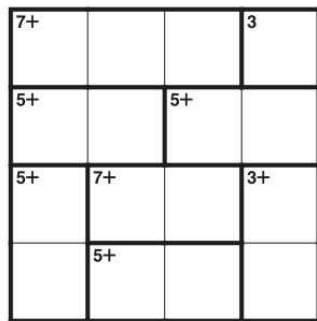
Puzzle makers who must rearrange my name to '_____ '?"

Complete the verse with words that are anagrams of each other. Each underline represents a letter.

PUZZLE BY STUART CLELAND

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER War, zen, egg --> (Arnold) Schwarzenegger

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

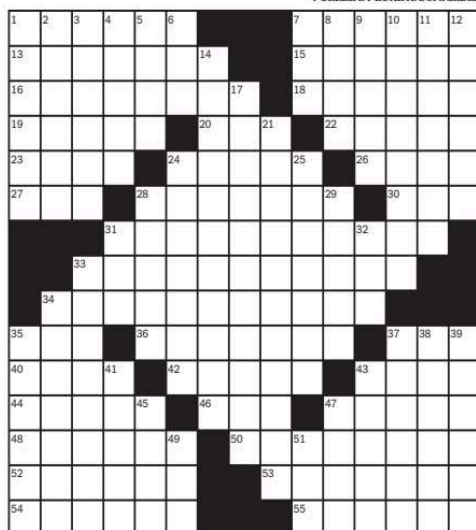
Edited by Joel Fagliano

PUZZLE BY LUKE K. SCHREIBER

ACROSS

- Undertook, in an idiom
- Stressed half the time, say
- Dance class outfit
- Host of a record eight Olympic Games as of 2024
- What helps grease the wheels?
- Huck's pal
- Kind of contract
- Like the gargoyles of Notre-Dame
- Popular apple variety
- Changes color in fright
- Home turf?
- Rest stop sights, informally
- Beliefs associated with Plato
- Parts of some massages
- In which you might confront the elephant in the room?
- Pompous pronoun
- "Subsequently ..."
- Driving competitions amidst everyday traffic
- Subject of a rap battle between Hamilton and Jefferson in "Hamilton"
- Like the two Super Bowl teams in early January, for short
- Getting dirty
- Huck's pal
- Kind of contract
- Like the gargoyles of Notre-Dame
- Popular apple variety
- Changes color in fright
- Home turf?
- Rest stop sights, informally
- Beliefs associated with Plato
- Parts of some massages
- In which you might confront the elephant in the room?
- Pompous pronoun
- "Subsequently ..."

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE



12/7/24

DOWN

- Unfair charge, informally
- Highest-ranking Asian American politician before Harris
- Like nobility
- Midwestern tribe
- Jamie of "M*A*S*H"
- Not to
- "My Life" (Bon Jovi hit)
- "Cough"
- Measured (out)
- "I think we agree, the past is over" and "They underestimated me"
- Part of a nuclear family?
- Bright shade of yellow
- Hot water
- It doesn't go over well
- Gifted orator
- Hockey great Eric
- Maritime route
- Siege deterrents
- Chatting privately with, for short
- Spanish honorific title
- "Jeepers!"
- Signal of impending danger
- Box in many trucks
- Moderator's assortment
- Uproar
- First Nations people
- All the shots one doesn't take, per a saying
- Draw out with water
- Wild
- Swing around
- Largest isle of the Inner Hebrides
- ID created in 1936
- Most successful American video game franchise, for short

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Short Run For New Broadway Musical

‘Swept Away’ plans to close after 32 regular performances.

By MICHAEL PAULSON

“Swept Away,” a darkly elegiac musical featuring the songs of the Avett Brothers, will end its Broadway run Dec. 15, less than a month after opening.

The musical, about a 19th-century shipwreck and its aftermath, explores the lengths to which human beings will go in order to survive. Although set in fictional circumstances, it is based on a real 19th-century tragedy that led to an important legal case in Britain.

“Swept Away” began previews Oct. 29 and opened Nov. 19 at the Longacre Theater. At the time of its closing it will have played 20 previews and 32 regular performances.

The show cost up to \$14.5 million to capitalize, according to a filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission, and that money has not been recouped. The weekly grosses were consistently well below what it cost to

The show featured songs by the Avett Brothers and a book by John Logan.

run, which is unsustainable.

“Swept Away” is the second new musical of this season to close shortly after opening, following “Tammy Faye,” at a time when new musicals face an ever-more-challenging path on Broadway.

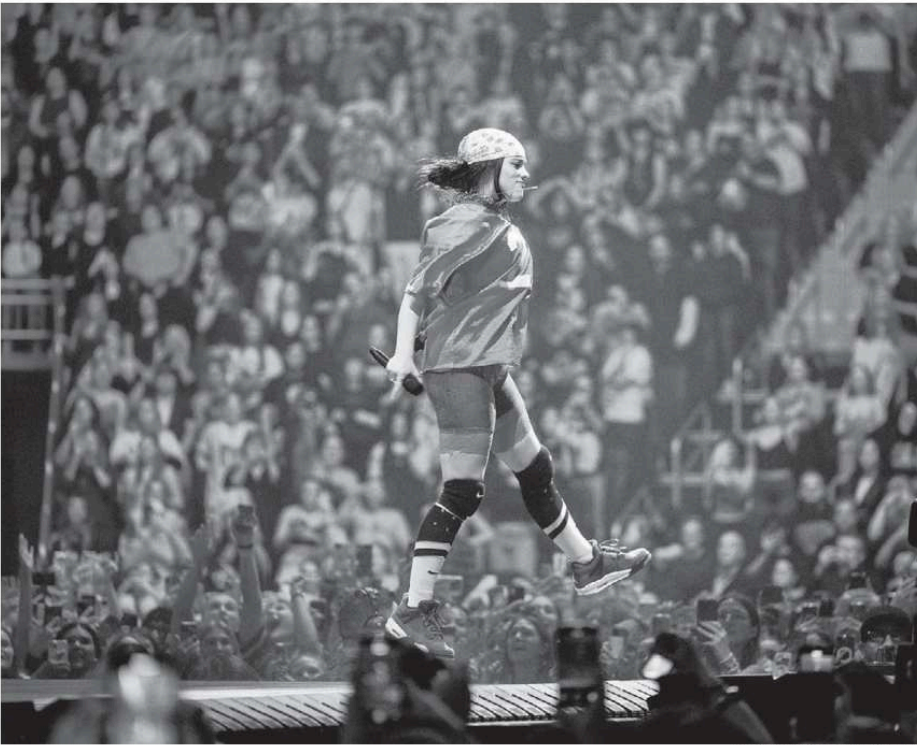
The Avett Brothers have a devoted fan base, and “Swept Away” was praised by the New York Times chief theater critic, Jesse Green, who described it as “really about the gravest decisions humans can make, the depths of souls that are darker than the sea’s.”

But other reviews were mixed, and the musical, like the actual history that inspired it, includes cannibalism, which, although not featured prominently in marketing materials or press coverage, may have been a turnoff for some potential ticket buyers. Broadway is also packed with shows, many of which feature more familiar titles or performers, and “Swept Away” was unable to break through in that crowded marketplace.

Many of the show’s songs were featured on the Avett Brothers album “Mignonette,” and a cast recording is scheduled to be released in February. John Logan, the Tony-winning author of “Red,” wrote the musical’s book, and it was directed by Michael Mayer, a Tony winner for “Spring Awakening.”

The 90-minute show centers on four men stranded on a lifeboat — the only survivors of the shipwreck. They are played by John Gallagher Jr., a Tony winner for “Spring Awakening,” as well as Stark Sands (“Kinky Boots”), Adrian Blake Enscoe and Wayne Duvall.

The lead producers of “Swept Away” are Matthew Masten, Sean Hudock and Madison Wells Live (founded by Gigi Pritzker). Before arriving on Broadway, the musical had runs at Berkeley Repertory Theater in California in 2022 and at Arena Stage in Washington in late 2023 and early 2024.



JULIA SPICER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A Year of Hits Without Stars

CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1

In September, and disappeared even more quietly.

This isn’t to consign Richman to pop’s deep bin of one-hit wonders. If anything, the current pathway for breakout successes, especially via TikTok, is more insidious than that. Viral smashes like “Million Dollar Baby” often feel like hits without stars — potent for soundtracking and sticking to content made by others rather than attached to the artist who actually created it.

This year, there was a seemingly endless stream of starless hits, more than any time in recent memory.

In addition to “Million Dollar Baby” (No. 2 peak on the Hot 100, 969 million streams on Spotify), there was “Lose Control,” a retro screamer by the Southern metal-soul singer Teddy Swims (No. 1 peak, 1.34 billion streams); “Beautiful Things,” a squeaky-clean sleaze-rock number by Benson Boone (No. 2 peak, 1.62 billion streams); “Austin,” a peppy country-by-algorithm jam by Dasha (No. 18 peak, 668 million streams); “Stargazing,” a rootstronica anthem by the British singer Myles Smith (No. 20 peak, 560 million streams); “Kehlani,” a crossover drill hit by Jordan Adetunji (No. 24 peak, 294 million streams); and “I Like the Way You Kiss Me,” an artfully generic dark-club banger by Artemas (No. 12 peak, 1.07 billion streams).

Even the convincing country-rap hybrid “A Bar Song (Tipsy)” by Shaboozey, which was the No. 1 song in the country for a record-tying 19 weeks (948 million streams), falls into this category.

These songs are ubiquitous on radio, streaming playlists and social media, but are these today’s pop superstars? Or even tomorrow’s? It remains to be seen. Having a hit might be the easy part; attaching their names to their songs is likely to be much harder. And this year made clear that the process of making a long-lasting pop hit and the process of achieving and maintaining A-list pop stardom are diverging for real, a by-product of TikTok, streaming, post-pandemic habits and more.

In the social media wilds, hits emerge from TikTok and other platforms largely disconnected from anything highlighting the creator of the music. The song — and much more often, a snippet of the song — is a prompt. It is most likely tethered to a piece of media that stars you, or another stranger, rather than the person or people who made the music.

For young artists early in their careers, this may be a worthwhile trade-off, a boost of attention that could possibly be converted, with hard work and some luck, into more sustained success. But the relative frictionlessness of social media allows for a song’s rapid spread and absorption, far too



CRAIG BARRETT/GETTY IMAGES



OMAR VEGA/GETTY IMAGES

Above, Billie Eilish performing this past September in Quebec City during her Hit Me Hard and Soft: The Tour. Left, from top: Tommy Richman; and Shaboozey.

fast for an actual human artist to keep up with. And the constant churn in those spaces means that any stickiness is precarious at best. That leaves these otherwise lucky performers attempting to claw back and claim their own sound once it begins to catch fire.

Those are horrible conditions to foster stardom — viral stars who have become something more than that usually have gifts as content creators, too, à la Lil Nas X.

Indeed, some younger stars have built obscurity into their business plan, especially those who came to attention during the pandemic, when promotional opportunities were limited. Playboi Carti, Yeat and a minigeneration of rappers who don’t have much use for self-revelation have effectively weaponized unknowability and don’t

much participate in the mechanisms of stardom — in essence telling their fans the music is the most meaningful touch point, so gorge upon it with real fervor and allow its creator to remain a mystery. This has also been the case with the country superstar Morgan Wallen, who is a reliable manufacturer of hits and a stalwart of country radio, but still avoids some of fame’s demands, like the media, owing to the long tail of some of his indiscretions.

But what about those who’ve already built an ample fan base, and need to find ways to maintain it? Even the biggest and best-known pop stars can struggle to generate hits, suggesting an emerging two-track system of pop success: hits without stars, and also stars without hits.

As pop stars age, they now become album artists. An album is verging on a vanity project — it is an offshoot of pop superstar privilege, of having the time and resources and creative instinct to attempt a grand statement, or at least a lengthy one that can be sold at a premium.

These can be idiosyncratic concept works, like Tyler, the Creator’s “Chromakopia” — one of this year’s biggest rap releases, but not one that’s spawned a litany of singles. They can also be data-dump-thick albums like those released by Zach Bryan, who every now and again scores a big hit, but doesn’t organize his releases around singles.

Or take “The Tortured Poets Department” by Taylor Swift — undeniably the biggest pop star working today — which remains in the Top 10 several months after its release. Nevertheless, only two singles broke out with lives of their own: “I Can Do It With a Broken Heart” and the Post Malone collaboration “Fortnight,” the album’s lone No. 1. For Swift, for whom juggernaut is often the floor of success, that feels brittle — a spell of treading water.

Of course, in some ways this is a churlish note — at the same time, Swift was headlining a global stadium tour, playing to crowds of tens of thousands for around 150 nights. Her album may not have spun off multiple hit singles, but she remained as busy as ever. The defining centrist pop star of the past decade, she’s largely insulated against the day-to-day flickers of the marketplace.

But that reflects how the measurements of superstardom are out of whack with rapidly developing changes in star making. The super famous might suffocate the singles chart in the immediate aftermath of an album’s release — that’s a reflection of how streaming is weighted in the algorithm that drives the tally — but after a couple of weeks, they’re mostly gone. Often, their fans are cheering for the event of the album release more than the music, which is why those songs disappear: People move on quickly, even from their faves.

This hasn’t been the case for all A-listers. Billie Eilish’s album “Hit Me Hard and Soft” remains near the top of the chart months after its release, and also has spawned huge singles that are central to the year’s cultural conversation and advance a new idea about Eilish’s public personality. And the rapid rise of Sabrina Carpenter and Chappell Roan has demonstrated that the power of breakout singles can be enhanced when the performer has a well-defined and social-media-cognizant gift for public presentation.

But artists who want to remain in the zeitgeist at the level of the sky and also the ground are finding that deeply challenging. Dua Lipa, once the most viable pop superstar under 30, found few footholds with her latest album. And stars of one generation earlier are outright failing. Think of Halsey’s Cindy Sherman manqué rollout, in which she dressed up like icons of generations past, or Katy Perry’s extravagant style rebrand: loud marketing, zero hits.

Which is what makes the success of Richman so appealing: There may have been some light strategy underpinning it, but the scale of its explosion was staggeringly out of step with how much forethought went into it. It’s almost as if the more effort you put into attempting to create such a moment, the more impossible it becomes.

The “Million Dollar Baby” episode may have come and gone by now, but Richman appears to have his eyes set on moving forward. After what felt like a largely fallow stretch, he was back on TikTok in November, posting snippets of songs. In almost every clip, he looked directly at the camera and sang along, as if to remind viewers whose they were. He looked a little wary, but should something beyond his control start to happen, he seemed ready.

First African Woman Is Named to Head Venice Biennale

Koyo Kouoh calls herself an artist-centered curator.

By ALEX MARSHALL

Koyo Kouoh, one of Africa’s pre-eminent curators, will oversee the 61st edition of the Venice Biennale, the organizers of the world’s longest-running contemporary art exhibition announced this week.

Kouoh, who was born in Cameroon, is chief curator and executive director of the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa in Cape Town, known as Zeitz MOCAA. She will be the first African woman to curate the



Koyo Kouoh is the chief curator of the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa.

Biennale.

In a telephone interview from Miami, where she is attending the Art Basel fair, Kouoh, 56, said she was “ecstatic” about the appointment.

She wants to create a show that “really speaks to our times,” she said, “and particularly speaks to where we want to go.” Although she already had “multiple ideas” about what the exhibition could look like, Kouoh said she was an “artist-centered curator” who would be guided by conversations with the show’s exhibitors.

“The artists will define where we go,” she said.

First held in 1895, the Biennale is one of the art world’s most important events. It includes a large-scale group show, organized by the curator, and dozens of national pavilions, which participating countries stage independently.

This year’s edition, whose main exhibition was overseen by the Brazilian museum director Adriano Pedrosa, attracted almost 700,000 visitors before it closed last month. But Pedrosa’s show, which drew attention to overlooked queer and Indigenous artists,

received mixed reviews.

Many art world observers had expected the Biennale to appoint a conservative figure to lead the 2026 edition, after Italy’s right-wing government named Pietrangelo Buttafuoco, a contrarian journalist, as the president of the organization that stages the Biennale. Kouoh said Buttafuoco clearly “did his homework” before appointing her, adding, “This is what counts.”

The Biennale has “always been kind of progressive,” Kouoh said, adding that the makeup of Italy’s government — which funds most of the exhibition and appoints the Biennale president — seemed to make little difference. It always gave the Biennale the “autonomy to really be at the cutting edge,” she said.

Kouoh has been one of Africa’s most prominent art world figures for over a decade, though she started out studying business administration and banking in Switzerland. In 2008, she founded Raw Material, a residency program and exhibition space, in Dakar, Senegal. Eleven years later, she was tapped to lead the Zeitz MOCAA, one of Africa’s largest contemporary art museums.

There, Kouoh staged major shows including “When We See Us: A Century of Black Figuration in Painting” and a Tracey Rose retrospective that traveled to the Queens Museum in New York.

Outside those projects, Kouoh has also worked on the curatorial teams of several biennials as well as two editions of Documenta, the major art show held every five years in Kassel, Germany.

Touria El Glaoui, founding director of the 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair, where Kouoh has also curated education programs, said Kouoh was “a shaper of opinion” who cared about bringing attention to the “next generation” of artists. Whatever Kouoh curates in Venice “will surprise,” El Glaoui added.

So to anybody expecting her to prioritize African artists, Kouoh had a message. “My professional background is certainly rooted in an African space,” she said, “but I’m an international curator.”

“It’s not going to be an African Biennale,” Kouoh added. “It’s going to be an international Biennale — as it always is.”

Film at Lincoln Center

HARD TRUTHS

12:15 (WITH INTRO AND Q&A), 6:45, 8:45PM

THE SEED OF THE SACRED FIG

DAILY: 12:00, 6:00, 9:15PM

ALL WE IMAGINE AS LIGHT

1:15, 3:45, 6:15, 8:45PM

ANORA

3:15PM

144 & 165 W. 65th St. filmline.org

Dinosaur To Visit New York For a Bit

CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1

from behind a billowing beige curtain on Thursday morning to reporters, photographers, museum employees and a group of elementary school children. It is to go on public view on Sunday after it is fully prepared for exhibition.

The Sotheby's sale of the unusually complete specimen — which is nicknamed Apex — shattered records in the booming fossil market. And it established a new king of the dinosaur world, at least in the eyes of the auction market: The stegosaurus dethroned the Tyrannosaurus rex, the previous record-holder.

But the auction also stoked fears among academic paleontologists that museums and universities were being priced out of their research field by well-heeled private collectors. After purchasing the stegosaurus, Griffin, the founder and chief executive of the hedge fund Citadel, said he intended to lend the specimen to an American institution so it would be available to scientists and the public.

In a statement about the museum loan, Griffin said, "I am grateful that millions of visitors and researchers will now be able to see and learn from this magnificent specimen of the late Jurassic period."

Griffin's loan includes funding that will go toward researching and documenting the specimen, including 3-D scans of the fossilized bones that the museum says it intends to make accessible to researchers.

But it was not immediately clear how the wider scientific community would view the plans for Apex. Some paleontologists have expressed concerns in the past about doing research on privately owned specimens, since there is rarely a guarantee that they will remain accessible to researchers in the future.

The commercial fossil market has been on the rise for years. In 2020, the market was jolted by the sale of a T. rex skeleton called Stan that fetched a record \$31.8 million, setting off a gold rush for dinosaur fossils in the American West. Stan ended up going to a natural-history museum being built in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates.

Apex became one of the world's most famous dinosaurs in July when it beat Stan's price at auction. Sotheby's had estimated that the stegosaurus would sell for \$4 million to \$6 million. But a bidding war broke out, and Apex wound up selling for more than 10 times the low estimate, stunning the paleontological community.

Eager to feature the celebrity dinosaur, the American Museum of Natural History reached out that summer to Griffin, a major donor, to find out whether he had decided where he wanted the fossil displayed. "We were happy to learn that the decision had not been made," Decatur said.

Roughly the size of an elephant, Apex was quietly unloaded from wooden crates and assembled this week in relative secrecy inside the museum's Richard Gilder Center



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAMES ESTRIN/THE NEW YORK TIMES



Top and above, Apex the stegosaurus fossil was carefully assembled inside the museum's Richard Gilder Center for Science, Education and Innovation.

for Science, Education and Innovation. The plate-backed, spiky-tailed herbivore is said to have walked the Earth about 150 million years ago in what is present-day Colorado. At 11 feet tall and over 20 feet long, it will not be the largest specimen to haunt the

'It's one of the dinosaurs that every kid knows how to draw.'
SEAN M. DECATUR
PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

museum halls, but officials hope that its recognizable outlines will draw people to its exhibits and gift shop and provide valuable data for researchers.

"We want to figure out how it grows," said Roger Benson, a curator of paleontology at the museum, who is planning to analyze a 10-centimeter wedge from the dinosaur's femur that he hopes will aid research in learning about stegosaurus growth patterns and the extinct creature's biology.

The American Museum of Natural History's loan agreement will allow scientists to document the specimen by creating three-dimensional scans of the skeleton. The museum also plans to commission a replica cast of Apex that it can display after the loan ends and the genuine fossil is relocated.

Benson noted that the ability to share the data was a key condition of the loan. "I didn't think we could do this project if we weren't able to make the 3-D data available to researchers," he said.

The museum had a "stated commitment" from Griffin that his intention was that the specimen would continue to be available to researchers, Benson said.

New York marks a long journey for the stegosaurus, which was discovered by the commercial paleontologist Jason Cooper in 2022 on his property near the town of Dinosaur, Colo.

Paleontologists recognize that the specimen does not hold the same public allure as the T. rex, but it remains fixed in popular

culture, thanks in part to appearances in franchises like "Jurassic Park" and "The Land Before Time."

Benson said he viewed Apex as scientifically valuable in part because of its larger size compared with other specimens and its completeness; according to the museum, Apex contains about 254 fossil bone elements out of an approximate total of 320.

Cassandra Hatton, a Sotheby's executive who helped organize the auction, said that Apex surpassed its estimate because potential buyers like Griffin had a clear view of its provenance. In this case, the auction house had been involved since the dinosaur's discovery.

"Apex was fresh out of the ground, offered with full rights," Hatton said. "And buyers were coming to me asking for transparency in the market."

Griffin's choice to lend the stegosaurus to the American Museum of Natural History was perhaps surprising, given that his name is already on dinosaur exhibits at the Field Museum in Chicago. While Griffin has supported other scientific endeavors at the American Museum of Natural History, this is his first partnership with its paleontology department.

Until next fall, Apex will be stationed near the entrance of the Gilder Center within an atrium named after Griffin in recognition of his previous donations. Then the specimen will be moved to a longer-term location on the fourth floor, where it will welcome visitors into the museum's fossil halls.

Benson, the museum's paleontologist, said he viewed the loan as a way of working to bring the worlds of commercial and academic paleontology together in the name of science. "To me it seems really important to try to bridge the gap and make the most of the scientific opportunity," he said.

JOSHUA BARONE | CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

The Stewards of Czech Musical Heritage Return

Janacek's 'Glagolitic Mass,' with the Prague Philharmonic Choir, was a highlight.

YOU COULD BE FORGIVEN for thinking that there has been some kind of festival going on at Carnegie Hall.

Recently, its calendar has been stuffed with appearances by some of the world's top orchestras. The Berlin Philharmonic was quickly followed by the Concertgebouw Orchestra and, for most of this week, the Czech Philharmonic. This is the programming you would get at major European festivals like Salzburg and Lucerne.

And in their festival-style juxtapositions, these concerts make comparisons irresistible. If the Berlin Philharmonic pairs showy gesture with technical perfection, and the Concertgebouw Orchestra has the polish of fine jewelry, then the Czech Philharmonic is more like a timeless treasure, impressive but easy to take for granted.

The Czechs, under Semyon Bychkov, their chief conductor and music director, don't always demand your attention or affection. At Carnegie, though, this orchestra was unpretentious, even unassuming, yet dignified and impeccably balanced. Above all, the Philharmonic was an excellent steward of its country's musical heritage.

In that regard, its visit was something like a festival: a celebration of the Year of Czech Music, an occasional event that began a century ago with the centennial of Bedrich Smetana's birth. At Carnegie Hall, where musicians typically perform on a bare stage, members of the Philharmonic sat under banners, and in front of toadstool-shaped flower arrangements in the colors of the Czech flag. The president of the Czech Republic, Petr Pavel, flew in to attend Thursday's concert. Bychkov conducted on his handsome walnut podium from the Rudolfinum hall in Prague.

The Philharmonic's programming had the feel of cultural diplomacy, from an ensemble with a mission to tend a flame. Over

three evenings, it offered Dvorak's three concertos, as well as symphonic and choral works by Smetana, Janacek and Mahler. (Mahler, who was born in Bohemia, isn't typically discussed as a Czech composer; his sound was more a product of his Viennese education and maturity than his birthplace. And while he may be a name that sells tickets, I wish that someone like Josef Suk, who is thoroughly in this Czech lineage and chronically absent in New York, were represented instead.)

There was a sense of special occasion, too, in the Philharmonic's starry soloists for the Dvorak concertos. On Tuesday, Yo-Yo Ma made an appearance in the magnificent Cello Concerto, bringing his openhearted style to a work that represents its own kind of diplomacy: Dvorak wrote it in New York, during a time of cultural exchange and inspiration in which he also composed his "New World" Symphony and "American" Quartet. Making that point with touching beauty, Ma encoored with a medley of the Black American spiritual "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen" and the theme from the Largo of the "New World," more familiar as the song "Goin' Home."

The other two concertos by Dvorak, who led the Czech Philharmonic's first performances under that name nearly 130 years ago, are less famous, and for good reason. The Violin Concerto, played by the ever-amiable Gil Shaham on Wednesday, is a lovely showcase of the instrument, but hardly representative of this composer's finest craft and originality. And the Piano Concerto, which has struggled to take hold in the repertoire since its creation, adds up to less than the sum of its parts. Thursday's brightly eloquent account by Daniil Trifonov, however, was a testament to the persuasiveness of brilliant playing: If the piece itself wasn't amazing, at least Trifonov's performance was.

Throughout the three concertos, Bychkov and the Philharmonic were sensitive collaborators, but the symphonic works more revealingly showcased the sophistication of their sound. In selections from



CHRIS LEE

Semyon Bychkov led the Czech Philharmonic during a showcase of Czech music at Carnegie Hall this week.

Smetana's "Ma Vlast," a series of tone poems that amount to a foundational text of national pride in Czech music, the orchestra was endlessly colorful. You could practically feel the warmth of light hitting the high castle of "Vysehrad," and the fresh chill of the Moldau River's bubbling source in "Vltava."

Mahler's shape-shifting Fifth Symphony, too, was so full of contrasts that it was like a tone poem of its own. The opening Funeral March deflated repeatedly, as if falling under its weight, while the Scherzo's horn solo later had a delightfully bumbling nobility, followed by a breathless Rondo-Finale of vividly defined counterpoint.

The real highlight of this visit was Jana-

cek's "Glagolitic Mass" on Thursday, performed with the Prague Philharmonic Choir, a quartet of vocal soloists and the superb organist Daniela Valtova Kosinova. Organically majestic, with immense subterranean forces in the Philharmonic's low strings, this music channeled constant awe more than the reflectiveness or meditative patience of a typical mass. Characteristically for Janacek, there isn't an excessive note in its intensely concise 45 minutes.

With a performance by the Philharmonic at its most inspired, this "Glagolitic Mass" could make you believe, if not in some higher power, then at least in the greatness of the Czech heritage these musicians so outstandingly preserve.

ELISABETH VINCENTELLI | HOLIDAY STREAMING

From Bad Santas to Warm Fuzzies

“IT’S THE MOST wonderful time of the year,” the song goes. “There’ll be parties for hosting/Movies for bingeing.”

If the Andy Williams chestnut doesn’t actually mention streaming, that’s only because it came out long before Hallmark, UPtv, Great American Family and Lifetime decided to flood the holidays with movies. But because time is a finite resource, the following selection of new seasonal offerings focuses on releases from the major platforms. And remember: If you see someone stranded in a blizzard once, it’s a plot development. If you see it 10 times, it’s a cliché. If you see it 50 times, it’s a holiday-movie convention — and this time of year, we love conventions.

‘Dear Santa’

Stream it on Paramount+.

This year’s entry in the bad Santa subgenre goes all out. And that’s because the bearded, stocky guy in a red outfit is actually Satan (Jack Black). He has been summoned by young Liam (Robert Timothy Smith), who mistakenly switched two letters in his note to Santa. And now the Devil won’t leave until Liam has requested three wishes, which sounds more straightforward than it turns out to be. “Dear Santa” does not fully deliver on this mouthwatering premise, which is surprising considering the movie is directed by a Farrelly brother (Bobby) and the casting is on point — you feel Black has waited all his life to play this part. Still, there are enough nuts for this fruitcake to go down easy.

Watch for: *gastrointestinal distress.*

‘Hot Frosty’

Stream it on Netflix.

The course of holiday love never did run smooth, but the budding romance between Kathy (the Hallmark M.V.P. Lacey Chabert) and Jack (Dustin Milligan) is hampered by an uncommon problem: He “could wake up tomorrow and be a puddle.”

That’s because Jack is a snowman who has magically come to life.

The director Jerry Ciccoritti swiftly mixes hot (Milligan has seriously hit the gym since his days as the vet Ted on “Schitt’s Creek”) and sweet (Jack has a newborn’s innocence), even if one might wish for a livelier performance from Chabert.

Watch for: *references to earlier movies in the NCU (Netflix Christmas Universe).*

‘Jingle Bell Love’

Stream it on the Roku Channel.

Another Jack (Joey McIntyre, from New Kids on the Block) is a widower visiting his former in-laws with his young daughter, Grace (Delia Lisette Chambers). There, he falls for Jessica (Michelle Morgan), who needs to rustle up \$25,000 in five days to save her failing cafe. (Would it be Scrooge-y to point out that she could charge more than \$2.50 for a latte and not give away cake pops?)

Despite solid screen and stage credits, McIntyre remains a stiff actor, but fortunately Morgan pulls him up in their scenes together, and their comfy rapport makes this movie the equivalent of a well-worn blanket.

Watch for: *vibrant singing from the New Kid.*

‘Meet Me Next Christmas’

Stream it on Netflix.

Holiday movies aren’t known for their documentarylike realism, but even with lowered standards “Meet Me Next Christmas” is a collection of head-scratching decisions and crazy coincidences. Yet it’s also surprisingly watchable thanks to Christina Milian’s energy and her chemistry with Devale Ellis (“Sistas”).

In an attempt to reconnect with her supposed soul mate (Kofi Siriboe), Milian’s Layla desperately tries to get a ticket to Pentatonix’s sold-out Christmas Eve show. Only one person can help, and it’s Ellis’s Teddy, who works for an elite concierge service. The director Rusty Cundieff hurls obstacles at Layla at a fast-paced clip while the members of Pentatonix provide a running commentary (thanks to an easily forgivable script contrivance). Oddly, it works.

Watch for: *a lip-synching contest that provides queer content in a seasonal crop largely devoid of it.*



CHUCK ZLOTNICK/NETFLIX



PETR MAUR/NETFLIX

Top, Lindsay Lohan, who stars in the holiday comedy “Our Little Secret.” Above, Dustin Milligan plays a snowman who has come to life in the movie “Hot Frosty,” directed by Jerry Ciccoritti.

‘The Merry Gentlemen’

Stream it on Netflix.

You don’t need to know more than “‘Magic Mike’ with tinsel” to add this movie to your queue, but here goes. After being laid off from her long-running gig in a Broadway Christmas show, Ashley (the spry Britt Robertson) returns to her cozy hometown, only to learn that her parents are about to lose their small music venue. To raise money, Ashley stages an all-male revue with local hunks, including the handyman Luke (Chad Michael Murray, from “One Tree Hill”).

Like many, many holiday movies this year, “The Merry Gentlemen” (directed by Peter Sullivan) revolves around saving a struggling business, which suggests a general climate of anxiety in this country. The solution this time is a bunch of guys who are so secure in their masculinity that they are willing to half-strip to help rather than lecture Ashley about crypto.

Watch for: *the unbearably cute dog Gizmo Nolan.*

‘The Night Before Christmas in Wonderland’

Stream it on Hulu and Amazon Prime Video.

On Christmas Eve, St. Nick (voiced by Gerard Butler) receives a letter from the Princess of Hearts (Eliza Riley), who requests a bandersnatch. He’s read Lewis Carroll so he knows what it is and sets off to Wonderland to deliver it. Unfortunately, the Christmas-hating Queen of Hearts (Emilia Clarke) has other plans.

Directed by Peter Baynton, this entertaining mash-up of “A Visit from St. Nicholas” and “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland” is a fine choice for the youngest family members, though older ones will get a kick out of the stylized animation — the movie is based on a book by Carys Bexington and follows the style of its illustrator, Kate Hindley. Amy Wadge (whose songwriting credits include Ed Sheeran’s “Thinking Out Loud”) and Guy Chambers supply the excellent songs.

Watch for: *surprisingly honorable rapping by Butler.*

‘Nutcrackers’

Stream it on Hulu.

Ben Stiller playing a high-strung real-estate executive feels like typecasting, but David Gordon Green’s movie — a return to the director’s indie sensibility — never goes where you expect while also fulfilling its seasonal mandate.

Stiller’s willfully single Michael must find a new foster family for his late sister’s four boys (played by the real-life brothers Atlas, Arlo, Homer and Ulysses Janson), who were home-schooled on their semi-derelict Ohio farm. Tone is everything in this intimate gem, which looks like something François Truffaut would have shot in the Midwest. “Nutcrackers,” which often feels semi-improvised, is a tender movie that avoids saccharine, full of sentiment but not sentimentality.

Watch for: *a truly affecting performance of “The Nutcracker.”*

‘Our Little Secret’

Stream it on Netflix.

Giving a speech in church after eating a handful of THC gummies, eating a jar of cookies then blaming the dog: Lindsay Lohan is back!

Two years after starring in one of Netflix’s most popular holiday movies ever, “Falling for Christmas,” Lohan now plays Avery in this comedy directed by Stephen Herek. Over the course of the movie, Avery discovers to her horror that she and her ex, Logan (Ian Harding, from “Pretty Little Liars”), are going out with siblings. The best option seems to hide that connection during a Christmas family gathering, which of course will go completely awry.

Watch for: *every apparition by Kristin Chenoweth as the siblings’ meanie mother.*

‘The Snow Sister’

Stream it on Netflix.

Fans of movies that take children’s feelings seriously should check out Cecilie Mosli’s “The Snow Sister,” from Norway. When we meet young Julian (Mudit Gupta), he is still reeling from the death of his sister a few months earlier, for reasons the movie handles delicately. Julian befriends Hedvig (Celina Meyer Hovland), a little girl who seems to be new in town, and slowly she helps him get out of his funk. Hedvig is surrounded by secrets, though: Where are her parents? And who is the old man (Jan Saelid) lurking by her house? The answers are heartbreaking, so make sure you have tissues next to the remote.

Watch for: *the reveal of the old man’s identity.*

‘Style Me for Christmas’

Stream it on BET+.

Come for the R&B singer Mario as the R&B singer Tedee, stay for the effervescent Raven Goodwin as the effervescent stylist Tiffany. The premise is familiar by now: Tiffany has fallen behind on the rent for her Atlanta boutique. Being hired to spruce up Tedee’s look sounds like the miracle she was waiting for, but alas the gig is a cover to rehabilitate Tedee’s tarnished reputation and boost his Christmas album’s sales.

Wisely, the director LazRael Lison lets Goodwin work her magic, and she steers “Style Me for Christmas” with the confidence her character lacks — at first, because this is all about how Tiffany got her groove.

Watch for: *a montage of Tiffany and Tedee being silly together.*

Tracing the Influential Life of an Innovative Dancer

A film makes the case that Loie Fuller, who died in 1928, should be a household name.

THE MASTER CINEMATOGRAPHER Vittorio Storaro has described cinema as “writing with light,” a description I’ve always found — dare I say it? — illuminating. I love that when you watch a movie with a projector, whether you’re in a cinema or someone’s living room, you can accidentally interrupt the picture with your body if it blocks the light. I love that the image can change based on the quality of the light shining through the film or the screen. There’s something wonderfully physical and ephemeral about the experience that even the shift to digital movies hasn’t altogether eradicated.

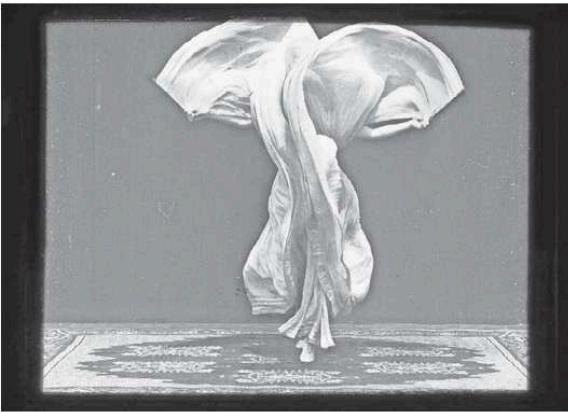
Storaro and I probably both owe some debt to Loie Fuller, the pioneering American performer who is the subject of Sabine Krayenbühl and Zeva Oelbaum’s new documentary, “Obsessed With Light” (in theaters). Apparently we’re not the only ones. The film argues that Fuller (1862-1928) was one of the most influential artists of the modern era. Onscreen interviewees and quotes from luminaries (like Taylor Swift)

make the case that things we take for granted now — copyrights for artists, or body positivity, or the entire field of modern dance — all exist thanks to Fuller’s forward-thinking, wildly inventive life.

She was both the very famous star of Paris’s Folies Bergère and an icon of the Art Nouveau movement, with an eye toward the possibilities abstraction held for dance. She spent her career constantly innovating, and much of what she did was copied and evolved by those who admired her work. Part of the film follows contemporary dancers, who are influenced by and reclaiming her legacy, too, bolstering the case for her relevance.

Fuller’s signature creation might be the serpentine dance, which combined flowing choreography borrowed from “skirt dancing” with silks and lighting to create the impression of waves and whirling. Very early films by Georges Méliès, the Lumière brothers and Alice Guy Blaché featured Fuller’s serpentine dance.

Some of that footage — among the first to be hand-colored — makes its way into “Obsessed With Light,” and it’s the best part of the film. When Fuller decides to experiment with radium onstage, we see the beautiful (and, of course, dangerous) results, too. All of those clips are mesmerizing and alluring



FILM MOVEMENT

and haunting, as if we’re actually looking at invisible spirits or fairies captured unawares.

“Obsessed With Light” suggests that while Fuller isn’t a household name anymore, she ought to be. But I don’t think this documentary will accomplish the task. The landscape of dance films is littered with in-

Loie Fuller in a scene from the documentary “Obsessed With Light.”

teresting takes on choreographers and performers — for instance, Wim Wenders’s “Pina,” Alla Kovgan’s “Cunningham,” or Elvira Lind’s “Bobbi Jene” — that aim to evoke their subjects’ work, instead of mostly telling their stories. (Two of those are in 3-D, but it’s true even if you’re viewing them in 2-D.) For such a boundary-breaking, unorthodox artist, it becomes particularly frustrating when the film itself is so unremarkable.

Not taking a more innovative, form-focused tack is a choice, of course. But by using the conventional tools of educational-style documentaries — interviews, archival footage, an actress (in this case, Cherry Jones) reading from the subject’s diaries and letters — Fuller’s many accomplishments start to blur, and the film feels as if it’s hopping around. With someone as fascinating as Fuller, a more lyrical approach might draw all the pieces together more fruitfully.

Still, I liked “Obsessed With Light” for that older footage. We’re watching several art forms, modern dance and cinema, as they come into being simultaneously. Fuller isn’t just lit up as she performs; she dances with the subject of her obsession, making it a character in her work. She manipulates it so it’s as alive as she and her silks are. We’re lucky to still be able to watch.

ALISSA WILKINSON | DOCUMENTARY LENS

Travel

An Island That Makes Animal Lovers Go Wild

Borneo, in Southeast Asia, is home to many creatures that can't be found anywhere else.

By MIHIR ZAVERI

We lurched along an unpaved road in the night, walls of trees and knotted vines on either side. In the darkness lurked some of the world's most unusual mammals, and I had come to Borneo to fulfill a lifelong dream to see them: catlike civets, scaled anteaters called pangolins and big-eyed colugos that spread their body flat as they glide from trunk to trunk.

In the open back of a pickup truck, two wildlife spotters stood in front of me, whirling their flashlights. To my right stood my father, whose lifelong obsession with wildlife had inspired my own. Clothes damp from the humidity, we plunged deeper into the moonlit jungle.

My father and I had long wanted to travel to Borneo together, inspired by a group of people who shared tantalizing stories about their sightings on the island on the website mammalwatching.com.

Mammal watching is a little like bird-watching: trying to see as many different wild species as possible. It is hard — mammals can be elusive — but rewarding, as the most interesting mammals dwell in the earth's wildest and most vulnerable places. Searching for them is an adventure and an exercise in supporting conservation, particularly in Borneo, where palm oil plantations have replaced large areas of rainforest.

So much of my interaction with mammal watching had been virtual that, on a warm June night, as we rumbled through the 140,000-acre Deramakot Forest Reserve in the Malaysian state of Sabah, I could hardly believe what I was seeing.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY MIHIR ZAVERI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES, BOTTOM, VIA MIHIR ZAVERI



A flashlight caught a gleam on a branch to the left. We trained our flashlights about 50 feet up a fig tree to see a binturong, a blackish gray, shaggy, whiskered creature also known as a bearcat.

This was one of the creatures that had been living in my imagination since I was a child, and I felt an electric thrill.

Drawn to an Endangered Eden

I don't remember exactly when I came to love animals. But wildlife is intertwined with some of my earliest memories.

When I was 6, we saw 16 black bears on a family trip to Canada (I kept count). The next year, I spotted a tiger in India. Over the next two decades, my interest deepened during trips to Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Kenya, Peru, South Africa, Tanzania and other countries.

But no place beckoned as much as Borneo, the world's third-largest island, smaller only than Greenland and New Guinea. Three countries share this Southeast Asian island: Malaysia and Brunei occupy the northern third, and Indonesia the rest.

The island is home to some of the most unusual mammals on earth, species like orangutans, pygmy elephants and proboscis monkeys.

"It had a mystique that was larger than life," said my father, who read about these animals when he was growing up in India.

Until a few decades ago, Borneo was covered with tropical forests. Then, starting in the early 1970s, many forests were logged and cleared for palm oil plantations, until more than one-fifth of Sabah was planted with oil palms, according to a 2022 study published in the journal *Land Use Policy*.

Bornean wildlife paid the price. The population of Bornean orangutans, found nowhere else in the world, declined by more than 50 percent over the past 60 years, according to the World Wildlife Fund.

With a sense of urgency, my father and I planned a trip for last June with the help of Jon Hall, the founder of mammalwatching.com. We ended up with an itinerary that included Deramakot, the majestic Kinabatangan River and some of the oldest rainforests in the world in Danum Valley.

An outfit called Adventure Alternative Borneo offered a relatively affordable price for a 10-day itinerary: \$2,950 each, not including airfare. And just like that, we were headed on our dream trip together.

Serenaded by Cicadas

The Bornean jungle felt intensely alive.

There was the daily chatter of cicadas, a different buzz going off every few hours; the "6 p.m. cicada" sounded like a saw screeching against metal. Everything was always wet, drenched by daily downpours and humidity so heavy it made gulps of air feel like full glasses of water. Sinuous vines, mosses and fungi — some looking like luminescent teacups, others like miniature lava lamps — grew anywhere there was space.

After landing in Sandakan, a city of nearly 200,000 in the island's northeast, we met our guide, Lister Johns, a native Borne-



Where to look for pygmy elephants, proboscis monkeys and sun bears.

an, who drove us about 20 minutes to a town called Sepilok. We stayed at the Sepilok Forest Edge Resort, a modest lodge with an open-air cafeteria, a few chalets and a glamping area. Orangutans, gibbons and monkeys were said to cruise through the trees on the property, and the roof of our room was home to short-nosed fruit bats.

At the nearby Rainforest Discovery Center, a network of suspended walkways brought us into the canopy, where an orangutan came crashing through branches and leaves and observed us from a treetop. In the evening, red giant flying squirrels emerged from their tree holes before sailing from trunk to trunk in the twilight.

But we knew Sepilok was just an appetizer compared with our next destination, Deramakot, about 60 miles to the southwest. This was where others posting on the mammal-watching website reported seeing some of the rarest wildlife, including tree-dwelling clouded leopards and sun bears, the world's smallest species of bear.

There was only one place to stay in Deramakot, arranged through tour companies like Adventure Alternative: a station of the Sabah Forestry Department, which offered a few guesthouses with spartan rooms that had an air-conditioner, a pair of twin beds and not much more. Forestry Department staff members cooked meals for guests at an indoor dining area a short walk away. But the station's seclusion made it a perfect launching pad to explore the forest at night.

Deramakot delivered: On two of our five



Top, a proboscis monkey near a tributary of the Kinabatangan River. At the Deramakot Forest Reserve, from left: a binturong, or bearcat; a leopard cat; and a slow loris. Center, the Kinabatangan. Above, Mihir Zaveri, center; his father, left; and their guide, Lister Johns, at the Deramakot Forest Reserve.

nights there, we set out for six-hour drives, finding not only binturongs, but also several leopard cats, with black spots marking their golden fur, and slow lorises, venomous primates that look like yellow teddy bears. During the day, we spotted red leaf monkeys, a family of orangutans and a pygmy elephant. We napped between excursions.

My dad was ecstatic. "The fact that these nocturnal creatures that live high up in the tropical rainforest, it's possible to actually see them so well — to me that was one of the mind-blowing parts," he said. "I used to drool over these pictures in the book on wildlife in India."

A Mammal-Watching Boon

After a few intense days in Deramakot, Mr. Johns drove us a few hours to Sukau, a community on the Kinabatangan River, the

longest in Borneo. During the drive, Mr. Johns, a Sabah native, told us that guiding had become an attractive job on the island, particularly for people of modest means.

Shavez Cheema, the founder of the Borneo-based conservation and tourism nonprofit IStopBorneoWildlife, who was not involved in our trip, said in an interview afterward that the interest in seeing Bornean mammals had been a boon. While many tourism companies are run by people from the West, Mr. Cheema said, the staff and workers are generally local and Indigenous people. He hoped the government would open new conservation areas to accommodate the growing demand to see wildlife.

Perhaps more than our previous stops, the Kinabatangan River area reflected the island's growing tourism industry, with several lodges catering to hundreds of visitors. We traded the government-style forest service accommodations for spacious rooms with patios and a dining area enclosed in floor-to-ceiling windows at the Borneo Nature Lodge, a modest establishment on the river's edge. There, I ate some of the best vegetarian food I had ever had.

Traveling by motorboat through the Kinabatangan's tributaries, cooled by the river breeze, we saw big troops of proboscis monkeys socializing in trees as enormous birds called hornbills, named after the casques on top of their beaks, floated above. Proboscis monkeys, which are endangered, are known for their bulbous noses, but they also have sinuous limbs and smooth, golden coats.

Treading in Ancient Wilderness

I felt the most intimate connection with Borneo at our last — and wildest — destination, the Danum Valley, which teemed with rainforests that are, by some estimates, 130 million years old, among the most ancient in the world. The jungles there were relatively undisturbed, with liana vines twisting and spiraling through towering trees.

Ferns, mosses and other plants showcased different shades of green. Termite mounds and ebony trees added splotches of dark. The humidity dampened everything. We spent three nights at a nearby property called Infapro, which had a cafe and some guesthouses. From there, we drove every day to the main Danum Valley field center to hike in the jungle.

One day, we came across a family of Bornean gibbons, endangered apes that swing impressively from branch to branch using their extremely long arms and legs. We saw two more orangutans, this time a young male playfully chasing a young female around a fig tree.

Over just 10 days in Borneo, we saw nearly 40 different mammal species, as well as almost 200 species of birds, venomous snakes, freshwater crabs and more. We left the island exhausted and in disbelief.

But both of us are only getting started. "Absolutely not done," my dad said. For our next mammal-watching adventure, he's already dreaming about the tropical forests of West Africa.

When people think of Hawaii, they tend to conjure Kauai’s jungles or Maui’s white sand beaches. But it’s Honolulu on the island of Oahu where most locals live and work, yielding a dynamic and complicated scene where Indigenous culture converges with Asian influences and midcentury Americana, and energetic food and arts scenes unfold against a backdrop of warm beaches and lush forest. New reservation systems to hike Diamond Head State Monument and snorkel Hanauma Bay Nature Preserve have helped lessen crowds and restore some of the flora and fauna, while new boutique hotels in Waikiki reclaim overlooked architectural gems. Advance planners should look for the Hawaii Triennial (Feb. 15 to May 4), spread across landmark sites including the 135-year-old Bishop Museum, dedicated to Hawaiian culture, as well as Le‘ahi, or Diamond Head, a volcanic tuff cone.

MARTHA CHENG

Friday

4:30 P.M. | SEE A VOLCANIC CRATER

Start your weekend by heading toward Diamond Head, the Oahu landmark that was formed by a volcanic eruption some 300,000 years ago and looms on the eastern edge of Waikiki. On the way, stop by Fort Ruger Market. Previously a general store, serving the neighborhood since 1937, it now turns out Filipino and Hawaiian food classics. Pick up lechon (crispy-skinned roast pork, \$19.95 a pound) and poke (seasoned raw cubed fish, \$29.95 a pound), and bring your snacks to one of the lookouts on the crater’s southern flank. During the winter months, you might glimpse migrating humpback whales. Closer below you’ll see surfers catching their last waves of the day, and sometimes, during the Friday night sailing races, sailboats round the Diamond Head buoy as golden hour descends.

6 P.M. | EXPLORE ART AFTER DARK

Every Friday evening, the Honolulu Museum of Art keeps its doors open until 9 p.m., and its courtyard cafe is a lovely spot to grab a glass of wine and listen to live music in between gallery hopping. New exhibitions include Kenyatta Kelechi’s collection (through Jan. 12), which depicts contemporary Native Hawaiian cultural practitioners through wet plate photography, a technique from the 19th century, and a retrospective of Satoru Abe (through July 20), arguably Hawaii’s most influential artist and still creating at age 98. His work spans seven decades across sculptures on themes of seeds, roots and trees to recent abstract multidirectional paintings (adults \$25).

8 P.M. | DINE IN A CAR DEALERSHIP

An easy walk from the museum, but difficult to find, MW Restaurant is tucked into the second floor of a luxury car showroom. Out of sight of the Maseratis and Bentleys, MW’s dining room offers more subtle luxuries in the form of pork hash dumplings bathed in truffle-bacon broth (\$18), Kona kampachi (amberjack) coated in dried mochi shavings and pan-fried until crisp (\$48), and a recent special of a lobster lasagne (\$65). Don’t skip dessert, in particular the shave ice (\$16), a granita of seasonal and local fruit — which has recently included mango and persimmon — over panna cotta and coconut tapioca (\$16). Regulars are known to pull up to the bar just for this upscale take on a local favorite.

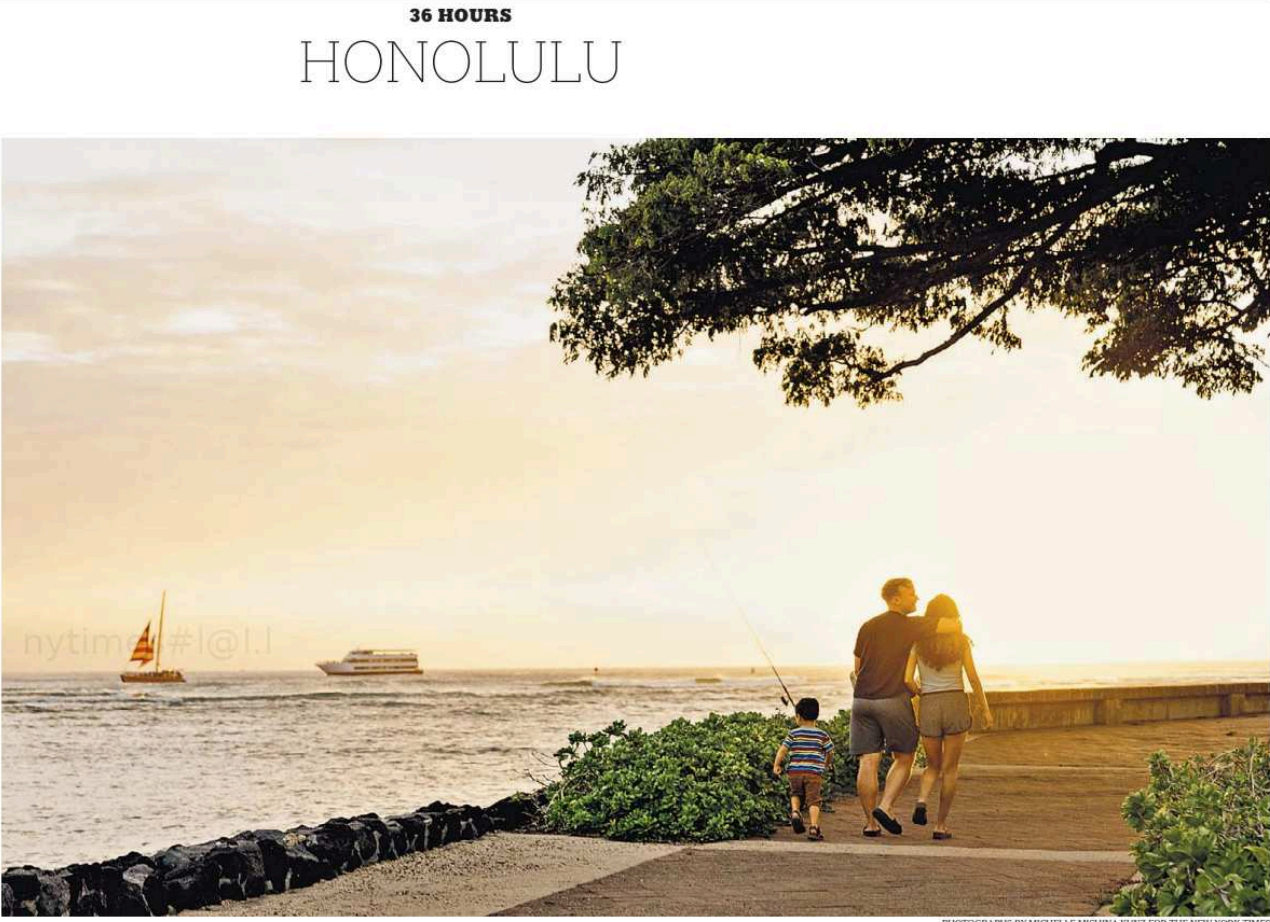
Saturday

8 A.M. | TASTE TROPICAL FLAVORS

Spread over two parking lots, the Kaka’ako farmers’ market by Kewalo Basin Harbor, toward the western end of town, is big enough that you need a strategy. Start at Wallflower Bake Shop before it sells out of its pastries. You might find a liliko’i (passion-fruit) sticky bun (\$6.50) or an Okinawan brown-sugar, twice-baked croissant stuffed with kinako (roasted soybean flour) paste (\$6.50). Then beeline to MA’O Organic Farms and Kahumana, two social enterprise farms supporting communities on the west side of Oahu, for local produce like tart-sweet apple bananas and longan. Marvel at Sugah Papi’s Farms’ quick knife skills as you dig into a rainbow fruit bowl (\$17) that might include dragonfruit, liliko’i and starfruit.

10 A.M. | PICK UP COMFORT FOOD

Save room in your stomach and drive about 10 minutes west to Ethel’s Grill, open since 1979, and a mainstay for its local Japanese and Okinawan classics. It’s a two-person operation run by the husband-and-wife team



PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHELLE MISHINA KUNZ FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



Top, walking along a sea wall during sunset at Kewalo Harbor. Center left, the orchid conservatory at Foster Botanical Garden. Center right, mochi-crusted Hawaiian kanpachi and noodles at MW Restaurant. Above left, some of the wares at Island-Boy. Above right, the White Sands Hotel pool.

Robert and Minaka Urquidi, who took it over from Ms. Urquidi’s parents in recent years. They’ve kept most recipes largely the same, including hamburger steak topped with grated daikon and ponzu sauce (\$14.95); goya champuru, an Okinawan stir fry of bittermelon and pork (\$14.95); and taco rice (\$16.95), a mashup born of Japanese and American military influences in Okinawa (parallels abound between Hawaii and Okinawa). During the pandemic, the tiny spot permanently transitioned to take-out only, so bring your haul to the next stop.

11 A.M. | PICNIC AMONG OLD TREES

Foster Botanical Garden (\$5 admission), an oasis wedged between the freeway and Chinatown, is home to an orchid conservatory and some of Oahu’s oldest trees, including a bodhi tree and endemic loulou palm. Watch out for falling cannonballs, the woody, heavy fruit of the cannonball tree. The grounds once belonged to Mary Mikahala Elizabeth Robinson Foster, known as the first Native Hawaiian Buddhist (the bodhi tree given to her is said to be a descendant of the one under which the Buddha attained enlightenment). She was one of only two people allowed to visit Queen Lili’uokalani, Hawaii’s last monarch, in her imprisonment during the U.S. military-backed overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom in 1893. They shared a love of plants, so it’s fitting that the Lili’uokalani Botanical Garden lies just across the freeway.

NOON | BROWSE CHINATOWN

As you leave the garden, admire the adjacent Kuan Yin Temple, a Chinese Buddhist temple dedicated to the bodhisattva of compassion, and peer into the 1922 Shinto shrine Izumo Taishakyo Mission of Hawaii, across the street. Both are active places of worship, so approach with respect. From there, cross into Chinatown, which, perhaps more than any other Honolulu neighborhood, has faced cycles of prosperity and poverty. It is one of the largest intact historical districts, where newer boutiques and artists’ collectives coexist with longtime businesses. Buy a fragrant tuberose or white ginger flower lei (starting at about \$15) at Cindy’s Lei Shoppe and try on modern aloha shirts and dresses at Roberta Oaks’ store. Peruse Native Books at Arts &

Letters Nu’uanu, which carries an extensive selection of Hawaiian and Pacific Island books within an art gallery and community space.

2 P.M. | DRIVE INTO THE JUNGLE

Ascend winding Tantalus Drive, through a canopy of trees dripping with vines, to reach the Liljestrand House, built by the architect Vladimir Ossipoff in 1952. Only accessible by advance reservation, guided tours (\$50) lead you through one of his finest residential works, designed with California redwood, Yokohama sandstone from west Oahu and polished concrete for seamless transitions between indoors and outdoors. Or, if you prefer a full jungle immersion, the Tantalus region is a launching point for a network of hiking trails. Head to Pu’u ‘Ualaka’a State Wayside for panoramic views of the entire southern coastline, and for the beginning of the ‘Ualaka’a Trail, a one-mile loop through banyans and pine trees. Beware, the path can get muddy and buggy after rains.

5 P.M. | SWIM AT SUNSET

Head to Kaimana Beach, a small stretch near the base of Diamond Head. Don snorkel goggles and you may spot turtles and fish while dodging outrigger canoe paddlers returning to shore and swimmers making their laps to the windsock, the Dr. Seussian flag hanging on a pole about 800 feet from the beach. Enjoy the sunset on the sand or from the bar at Hau Tree, the open-air restaurant at Kaimana Beach Hotel, recently renovated for a boho beach vibe. The restaurant is named for the more than 100-year-old hau trees that provide the dining room’s canopy, and it’s said Robert Louis Stevenson penned poems under its branches.

7 P.M. | MIX AND MATCH FOR DINNER

By the commercial fishing harbor, Nami Kaze opened a few years ago and has already become a local, multigenerational favorite. The chef and owner, Jason Peel, focuses on vegetable and seafood small plates. The entire first page of the menu is devoted to Hawaii’s produce, in the form of ‘ulu tots (fluffy, fried breadfruit bites) in barbecue sauce (\$12) and corn beignets (\$10) that are more like puffs of air dusted

with Japanese curry powder. Slippery sensations abound in the raw tuna with natto (fermented soybeans) and okra (\$24); if you prefer your seafood cooked, there’s pan-fried kampachi with ponzu butter (\$34). (It’s also worth coming for brunch for creations like honey-walnut shrimp waffles.)

Sunday

9 A.M. | DO AN ARCHITECTURE WALK

Many guides urge you to get out of touristy Waikiki, but it is full of gems, if you know where to look. Start with a Japanese breakfast at the traditional Yoshitsune, cloistered in the Park Shore Waikiki hotel. The spread of broiled fish, pickles, housemade tofu and miso soup (from \$35) will fuel your jaunt through Waikiki’s backstreets. Follow the self-guided tour by the Surfjack Hotel and Docomomo, a nonprofit that preserves modern architecture and design. See the apartment building Waikiki Skyliner’s two patterns of breeze blocks, anchored by a black Puna lava rock wall; a three-story walk-up’s railing depicting breadfruit leaves and fruit; and White Sands Hotel, built around a courtyard pool and waterfall-fringed koi ponds.

NOON | SHOP AND EAT IN KAIMUKI

Explore the eclectic shops of Kaimuki, a neighborhood east of Waikiki. Seek out Pitacus Chop Art on the second floor of a turquoise building, where the designer Lisa Weimken reworks vintage Japanese fabrics into one-of-a-kind dresses and unisex separates. Pop into Island-Boy shop where whimsy and minimalism share space on the shelves stocked with shaka-shaped bottle openers and Lindquist’s handmade leather bags. At the 70-year-old Crack Seed Store, glass apothecary jars display a variety of crack seed (sour-salty-sweet preserved fruit snacks). For something more substantial, grab a slice of quiche or a sandwich at the Local General Store, a bakery and butcher counter. Stick around long enough, and you can catch the Curb, a cafe and wine bar, as it transitions from pouring coffee to natural wine at 2 p.m.

KEY STOPS

Visit the slopes of **Diamond Head** to watch for people surfing and sailing, and, if you’re lucky, migrating humpback whales in the winter.

Honolulu Museum of Art, opened in 1927, offers excellent exhibitions.

Chinatown, one of Honolulu’s largest intact historical districts, is set among longstanding lei vendors and produce stands.

WHERE TO EAT

Fort Ruger Market specializes in Hawaiian and Filipino food, while still offering beloved local snacks like pickled mango and boiled peanuts.

MW Restaurant, inside a luxury car dealership, applies contemporary twists to local favorites, like a multi-layered and textured shave ice.

Ethel’s Grill has been serving Japanese and Okinawan comfort food since 1979.

Hau Tree, an open-air restaurant set on the sand, is the place for a sunset drink.

Nami Kaze, a restaurant down by the industrial fishing harbor, celebrates seafood and local produce.

Yoshitsune serves traditional Japanese fare from breakfast to dinner in a quiet corner of Waikiki.

The Curb is a cafe by day and a natural wine bar most evenings.

WHERE TO STAY

The **Halekulani**, a storied Hawaii hotel that began in 1917, provides warm hospitality and a sense of calm throughout its elegant oceanfront property in the midst of Waikiki. Rooms start at around \$700.

All of the rooms at the **Prince Waikiki**, on the western end of Waikiki by the Ala Wai boat harbor, offer ocean views. The hotel frequently hosts events, such as pop-up markets with local makers, and its dining options include the sushi restaurant Katsumidori. Rooms start at around \$400.

Wayfinder opened a year ago on the relatively quieter side of Waikiki, fronting the Ala Wai canal (but still an easy walk to the beach). Rooms contrast a Brutalist exterior with playful interiors. In addition to rooms in the main building, Wayfinder also has larger studios with bungalow vibes in a three-story walk-up adjacent to the pool. Rooms start at around \$300.

On Oahu, **short-term rentals** are primarily allowed only in resort-zoned areas, which in Honolulu is generally restricted to Waikiki.

Cooking

What to Make Next Week

Squirrels are scurrying to gather the last acorns before winter. Likewise, clever home cooks cache pantry staples for easy December meals. Besides saving a trip to the store, these can punch up a dish. Tinned fish, black olives and capers create a puttanesca. Peanut butter and hoisin sauce turn a bag of veggies into a tangy shrimp slaw. Mustard makes magic on cheesy egg toast. Canned artichoke hearts and green olives transform roasted chicken. Capers and golden raisins zip up a cauliflower salad. Squirrel away such treasures and wave your bushy tail proudly.

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MATT TAYLOR-CROSS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES. FOOD STYLIST: BARRETT WASHBURNE.

Roasted Cauliflower And Arugula Salad

Melissa Clark's roasted cauliflower and arugula salad is easy to double or even triple. It's got salty capers. It's got sweet golden raisins, made zippy with lime juice. It's got the bite of red onion. "There is nothing about this salad that I don't love," an NYT Cooking reader wrote. *TANYA SICHYNSKY*

BY MELISSA CLARK
TIME: 55 MINUTES
YIELD: 4 SERVINGS

- 1 large cauliflower (2 ½ to 3 pounds), cut into 1-inch florets
- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling
- 1½ teaspoons fine sea or table salt, plus more to taste
- 1 teaspoon garam masala
- ¼ teaspoon ground cayenne
- 1 large red onion, halved lengthwise and thinly sliced into half moons
- 3 tablespoons drained capers
- 2 teaspoons cumin seeds
- ½ cup golden raisins (or substitute another dried fruit, such as cranberries, diced apricots or dates)
- Boiling water, as needed
- 3 tablespoons fresh lime juice
- Freshly ground black pepper, as needed
- 1 quart (4 ounces) arugula
- 1 cup Italian parsley leaves

- Heat oven to 425 degrees. On a rimmed sheet pan, toss cauliflower with 2 tablespoons olive oil, 1 teaspoon salt, garam masala and cayenne. Spread out the florets and roast for 15 minutes.
- Put about two-thirds of the sliced red onion, the capers, cumin seeds and a pinch of salt into a small bowl; drizzle with a little olive oil. Add mixture to the cauliflower and toss well. Roast for another 25 to 28 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables are browned and tender. Transfer to a wire rack to cool slightly. Taste a cauliflower floret and add more salt if needed.
- While the cauliflower is roasting, place the raisins in a small heatproof bowl (you can use the same bowl you used for the onions) and top with enough boiling water to cover. Let soak until they are soft (up to 15 minutes if your raisins were rock hard to start with). Drain well and return to the bowl.
- Add remaining onion to the raisins. Toss with 1 tablespoon lime juice and a large pinch of salt.
- In a small bowl, whisk together remaining 2 tablespoons lime juice, 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, ½ teaspoon salt and as much black pepper as you like. Whisk until emulsified, then taste and add more salt if needed.
- When ready to serve, in a large salad bowl, toss together the arugula, parsley leaves, slightly cooled cauliflower mixture, pickled raisin and red onion mixture, and half of the lime dressing. Toss well, adding more dressing to taste.



JOHNNY MILLER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES. FOOD STYLIST: VIVIAN LUI

Hoisin-Peanut Shrimp and Slaw

Ali Slagle designed her hoisin-peanut shrimp and slaw explicitly to feed a big group of people who may be visiting for the holidays, though you can easily halve it to serve four people if that's what you need. It's inspired by Vietnamese fresh spring rolls, and the juicy-crunchy combination of shrimp, cabbage, cucumbers, herbs and peanut sauce is irresistible. *EMILY WEINSTEIN*

BY ALI SLAGLE
TIME: 25 MINUTES
YIELD: 6 TO 8 SERVINGS

- ½ cup chunky peanut butter
- 1 (7- to 7 ½-ounce) jar hoisin sauce (½ to ¾ cup)
- 2 limes
- 3 garlic cloves
- Salt
- 2 (12- to 14-ounce) bags coleslaw blend, preferably a mix of cabbage and carrots (about 10 cups)
- 4 mini seedless cucumbers, thinly sliced
- 1 jalapeño or serrano chile, thinly sliced (optional)
- 1½ packed cups mixed herb leaves, such as cilantro, mint, basil or dill, plus more for garnish
- 2 pounds large shrimp (16- to 20-count), peeled, deveined and patted dry
- ½ cup fried onions or shallots, storebought or homemade

- Arrange a rack 5 inches from the broiler and heat to high. In a large bowl, stir together the peanut butter, ¼ cup hoisin sauce, the zest and juice of the limes and 3 tablespoons warm water. Finely grate 1 garlic clove into the mix, then season to taste with salt. To the bowl, add — but don't stir — the slaw, cucumbers, a big pinch of salt, jalapeño, if using, and the herbs. Set aside.
- On a foil-lined sheet pan, add the shrimp, remaining hoisin sauce and a big pinch of salt. Finely grate the remaining 2 garlic cloves on top. Toss until well coated, then spread into a single layer. Broil until the shrimp are pink and just beginning to curl, 3 to 5 minutes.
- Toss the slaw until combined, then top with the shrimp, fried onions and more herbs. Serve right away.



KERRI BREWER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES. FOOD STYLIST: SIMON ANDREWS.

Sardine Pasta Puttanesca

Sohla El-Waylly's recipe for sardine pasta puttanesca takes a standard puttanesca and supercharges it with sardines packed in oil and cherry tomatoes in place of the usual canned tomatoes. I like it best with bucatini, sturdy and thick against the slippery pilchards, the salty olives, capers and anchovies, all the garlic and red pepper flakes, the sweet pop of those tomatoes tying everything together into a poem about the Tyrrhenian Sea. *SAM SIFTON*

BY SOHLA EL-WAYLLY
TIME: 40 MINUTES
YIELD: 4 TO 6 SERVINGS

- Salt
- 1 pound long pasta, like spaghetti, bucatini or linguine
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 (4- to 4.5-ounce) cans sardines packed in olive oil (see Tip), not drained
- 4 anchovy fillets
- 6 garlic cloves, smashed with the side of a chef's knife then chopped
- Red-pepper flakes, to taste
- 2 pints/about 4 cups cherry tomatoes
- ¾ cup pitted black olives, very roughly chopped
- ¼ cup drained capers
- 1 small handful parsley sprigs, finely chopped

- Bring a high-sided skillet or medium pot of water to a boil and season with salt. Add pasta and cook, stirring occasionally, until floppy but still quite raw in the center (about 4 minutes shy of the cook time suggested on the package). Drain pasta, reserving 4 cups of the cooking liquid.
- When the pasta is nearly cooked, heat a medium Dutch oven over medium-low. Add the olive oil, the oil from the sardines, the anchovies and garlic. Cook, stirring frequently, until the garlic is just beginning to turn golden and the anchovies have broken down, about 3 minutes. Add red-pepper flakes and cook, stirring frequently, until aromatic, about 30 seconds.
- Add the tomatoes and 2 cups of the reserved pasta cooking liquid and increase heat to medium. Bring to a simmer and cook until the tomatoes are warmed through and slightly softened, 4 to 6 minutes. Use a wooden spoon or potato masher to roughly smash each one. Continue simmering until the tomato juices have slightly thickened into a sauce, about 5 minutes.
- Add the drained pasta and cook, stirring vigorously, until the sauce coats the noodles and the pasta has cooked to your desired final texture, adding more pasta cooking liquid as needed, about 2 minutes. Add the sardines, olives, capers and parsley, stirring to evenly distribute and break up the sardines. Divide among plates and serve right away.

The size of sardine cans typically ranges from 4 to 4.5 ounces. You don't have to be precise in this recipe, so buy any can that falls somewhere within that size range. This recipe works with both whole sardines and boneless, skinless fillets. *



RYAN LIEBE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES. FOOD STYLIST: BARRETT WASHBURNE. PROP STYLIST: MEGAN HEDGPETH

Eggs Kejriwal

Simple and satisfying, Tejal Rao's eggs kejriwal is a spicy egg-and-cheese toast that's just as nice for breakfast as it is for a light dinner. *MIA LEIMKUHLER*

BY TEJAL RAO
TIME: 10 MINUTES
YIELD: 2 SERVINGS

- 1 tablespoon softened butter
- 2 thick slices Pullman bread
- 2 teaspoons mustard
- 4 ounces Cheddar cheese, grated
- 1 serrano chile, finely sliced
- 2 tablespoons cilantro leaves, washed and chopped
- 1 tablespoon minced red onion
- 2 eggs
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- Ketchup (optional)

- Butter the bread on both sides, and lightly brown in a frying pan (use the pan you like most for frying eggs). Smear one side of the toasts with mustard, and transfer to a sheet pan, mustard-side up. Turn on the broiler.
- Mix together the cheese, chile, cilantro and onion, then split the mixture evenly between the toasts. Place under the broiler just until the cheese is melted.
- While the cheese is melting, fry the eggs in the same pan you used to make the toast, until the white edges are crisp, but the yolks are still soft. Gently loosen the eggs from the pan, and slide one on top of each toast. Season with salt and pepper, and serve with ketchup on the side, if you like.



LINDA XIAO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES. FOOD STYLIST: REBECCA JURKEVICH

Sheet-Pan Chicken With Artichokes and Herbs

Kay Chun's sheet-pan chicken with artichokes and herbs takes its cue from the rosemary-sage-garlic goodness of porchetta, using canned artichokes to keep things weeknight-easy. The next day, chop up any leftovers, toss them with mayonnaise and enjoy the best ever chicken salad for lunch. *MELISSA CLARK*

BY KAY CHUN
TIME: 50 MINUTES
YIELD: 4 SERVINGS

- 3 large fennel bulbs (about 3 pounds), trimmed, halved lengthwise and cut into ½-inch-thick wedges
- 2 (14-ounce) cans whole artichoke hearts in water, drained and halved lengthwise
- 8 ounces cherry tomatoes
- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- Kosher salt and pepper
- 2 tablespoons minced garlic
- 2 tablespoons ground fennel
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh rosemary
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh sage
- 8 bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs (about 3 pounds)
- ½ cup pitted green olives, chopped
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon red-pepper flakes (optional)

- Heat oven to 425 degrees. On a rimmed baking sheet, combine fennel wedges, artichokes, tomatoes and 3 tablespoons oil. Season with salt and pepper and toss to evenly coat. Spread in an even layer.
- In a small bowl, combine garlic, ground fennel, rosemary, sage and the remaining 3 tablespoons oil. Season chicken all over with salt and pepper, then rub with spice mixture. Arrange the chicken on top of the vegetables skin-side up.
- Roast until vegetables are tender and chicken is golden and crisp and cooked through, 35 to 40 minutes.
- Divide chicken and vegetables among plates. Pour pan juices into a small bowl, let settle and then skim off the fat with a spoon. Stir in olives, lemon juice and red-pepper flakes (if using). Spoon sauce over chicken and vegetables. Serve warm.

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