



President Biden at the Tribal Nations Summit in Washington last week. Even on the political sideline, his schedule can be intense.

Trump Attacks All but Doom Spending Bill

By CATIE EDMONDSON and CARL HULSE

WASHINGTON — A bipartisan spending deal to avert a shutdown was on life support on Wednesday after President-elect Donald J. Trump condemned it, leaving lawmakers without a strategy to fund the government past a Saturday morning deadline.

Mr. Trump issued a scathing statement ordering Republicans not to support the sprawling bill, piling on to a barrage of criticism from Elon Musk, who spent Wednesday trashing the measure on social media and threatening any Republican who supported it with political ruin.

It was not yet clear how Speaker Mike Johnson planned to proceed as the package, which was stuffed full of unrelated policy measures as well as tens of billions of dollars in disaster and agricultural aid, appeared to be hemorrhaging support. Some Republicans suggested he was mulling stripping the bill of everything but the spending extension and putting it to a vote, but the fate of such a measure was also very much in doubt.

The blowback from Republicans to the agreement underscored the complications top G.O.P. leaders will have to manage next year when they control all of Congress and face a president with a penchant for blowing up political compromises. It also showed the power of a circle of influential outside players in Mr. Trump's orbit who appeared willing to punish Republicans if they failed to accede to his wishes.

Even before Mr. Musk began making noise, a swirl of Republican lawmakers — both ultraconservatives and some mainstream members — had been furious about the funding measure, which was rolled out on Tuesday night. It began as a simple spending bill to keep government funds flowing past a midnight deadline and into mid-March, but it emerged from bipartisan negotiations laden with \$100 billion in disaster aid and dozens of other, unrelated policies.

The G.O.P. resistance meant that in order to pass the bill, Mr. Johnson was going to have to rely, yet again, on Democratic votes to pass it, using a special procedure that requires the support of two-thirds of those voting. But by Wednesday afternoon, the back-

Continued on Page A16

Biden, Wearing and Stinging, Prepares to Exit

By PETER BAKER and ZOLAN KANNO-YOUNGS

WASHINGTON — It was a long day in Angola. President Biden had already visited a port facility bracketed with cranes and toured a factory filled with conveyor belts. So by the time he sat down at a large wooden circular table in a warm, stuffy room with African leaders, he put his head in his hand and briefly closed his eyes as the speeches droned on.

Flying across the world would have tired even a president younger than 82. But the point, as he saw it, was that he came. He traveled thousands of miles to highlight a new U.S.-backed railway that could transform the economies of Africa and supply resources for America. He came. He did not have to. He insisted on

Pushing Himself With Global Travels and Securing Policy

it and was proud to be the first president to come.

This is the twilight of Mr. Biden's presidency, the final days of the final chapter of an epic half-century political journey that has had more than its share of twists and turns. Time is catching up with Mr. Biden. He looks a little older and a little slower with each passing day. Aides say he remains plenty sharp in the Situation Room, calling world leaders to broker a cease-fire in Lebanon or deal with the chaos of Syria's rebellion. But it is hard to imagine

that he seriously thought he could do the world's most stressful job for another four years.

That does not make it any easier as Mr. Biden heads toward the exit. Nothing that has happened since he was forced to drop out of the race in July has made that decision look wrong, yet Donald J. Trump's victory over Vice President Kamala Harris has been interpreted as a repudiation of Mr. Biden. It stung. It still stings. But unlike Mr. Trump four years ago, he accepts the outcome.

“Yes, this is hard,” said Ted Kaufman, his longtime friend, aide and successor in the Senate. “But he has been through tougher things than this. He has a long list of things he wants to do, and he is focused on getting them accomplished.”

Continued on Page A17



Mourners at the coffin of Olive, a 5-year-old who died at a measles treatment center in Congo.

A Stubborn Enemy Stalks the Children of Congo

By STEPHANIE NOLEN and ARLETTE BASHIZI

BIKORO, Democratic Republic of Congo — Werra Maulu Botey could not bear to close his daughter's coffin. Waiting to bury her, he slid the rough wooden lid back, again and again, to adjust her small head and smooth the cloth that cradled it away from her cheeks.

Olive died of measles, at the age

Thousands Die Without Measles Vaccine

of 5, the evening before. She was the first child to die that weekend in an emergency measles treatment center in the town of Bikoro, in the northwest Democratic Republic of Congo. The second was her cousin, a 1-year-old girl.

Measles is sweeping through the children of Bikoro, as it does every couple of years, creeping, then flaring, across this vast country.

It is on the rise in other parts of the world, too — including in some communities in the United States — though the measles vaccine has been in use since 1963 and is believed to have saved more lives than any other childhood immunization.

Continued on Page A12

Secret Payments Allowed Opioid Pills to Flow Freely

Drug Manufacturers Cut Deals With Benefit Managers, a Times Inquiry Finds

By CHRIS HAMBY

In 2017, the drug industry middleman Express Scripts announced that it was taking decisive steps to curb abuse of the prescription painkillers that had fueled America's overdose crisis. The company said it was “putting the brakes on the opioid epidemic” by making it harder to get potentially dangerous amounts of the drugs.

The announcement, which came after pressure from federal health regulators, was followed by

The details of these backroom deals — laid out in hundreds of documents, some previously confidential, reviewed by The Times — expose a mostly untold chapter of the opioid epidemic and provide a rare look at the modus operandi of the companies at the heart of the prescription drug supply chain.

The P.B.M.s exert extraordinary control over what drugs people can receive and at what price. The three dominant companies — Express Scripts, CVS Caremark and Optum Rx — oversee prescriptions for more than 200 million people and are part of health care conglomerates that sit near the top of the Fortune 500 list.

The P.B.M.s are hired by insurers and employers to control their drug costs by negotiating discounts with pharmaceutical manufacturers. But a Times investigation this year found that they often pursue their own financial interests in ways that increase costs for patients, employers and government programs, while driving independent pharmacies out of business. Regulators have accused the largest P.B.M.s of anti-competitive practices.

The middlemen's dealings with opioid makers reveal a lesser-known consequence of this pay-to-play system: Seemingly everything — including measures meant to protect patients and curb abuse — can be up for negotiation.

Continued on Page A20

In Trump Orbit, A Clash of Ideas To Curb Obesity

By GINA KOLATA

For Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the activist whom President-elect Donald J. Trump will nominate to serve as the secretary of health and human services, the solution to obesity in America — now at 40 percent of adults — is straightforward: “The first line of response should be lifestyle,” he told Jim Cramer in a Dec. 12 interview on CNBC.

Elon Musk, the technology billionaire who advises the president-elect, sees things differently: “Nothing would do more to improve the health, lifespan and quality of life for Americans than making GLP inhibitors super low cost to the public,” he wrote on X, referring to the new class of drugs that cause weight loss, including Ozempic. “Nothing else is even close.”

And there, with the contrasting views of two men in Mr. Trump's ear, lie two sides of an issue that is plaguing health and nutrition researchers. Is it even possible to change lifestyles and the food environment enough to solve America's obesity problem? And, if not, do we really want to solve it by putting millions of people on powerful drugs? What is the right balance between the two approaches?

Many people find that eating well is easier said than done. Food companies have saturated the United States and other nations with seductively cheap and tasty things to eat, available seemingly everywhere and around the clock. Obesity researchers suspect that the current food environment has allowed many Americans to be as overweight as they possibly can be.

But for the first time, there is an effective countervailing force — powerful new obesity drugs like

Continued on Page A19



The elusive painting is a portrait of the artist's physician.

A Top van Gogh Is Out of View. The Hunt Is On.

This article is by Michael Forsythe, Graham Bowley and Elisabetta Povoledo.

When the hammer fell at Christie's in Manhattan on May 15, 1990, a Vincent van Gogh painting, “Portrait of Dr. Gachet,” set the record at the time for the most expensive work of art ever sold at auction, going to a Japanese paper magnate for \$82.5 million.

Painted in the garden of the artist's physician in June 1890, it was completed just weeks before van Gogh's suicide by gunshot. The sense of melancholy radiating from the doctor conveys, van Gogh wrote to his friend Paul Gauguin, the “heartbroken expression of our time.” Considered to be among his masterpieces, it may now be worth \$300 million, or more, experts say.

For much of the 20th century, “Portrait of Dr. Gachet” was prominently displayed at the Städel Museum in Frankfurt and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, to which it was lent by a private collector before the

Continued on Page A6



INTERNATIONAL A4-12

Landing Safely in Aleppo

A Syrian Air flight's arrival from Damascus has put a spotlight on a country's transitional government. PAGE A9

France's Infamous Predator

Judges and lawyers have tried to grasp the true nature of Dominique Pelicot, who let others rape his wife. PAGE A4

NATIONAL A13-21

Trump Allies vs. Cheney

Donald J. Trump has never shied from his desire to see his enemies punished. Now, House Republicans have laid out a map to go after Liz Cheney. PAGE A14

Admission Based on Wealth?

Georgetown, Penn and M.I.T. are accused of giving special treatment to wealthy students who might not otherwise have been admitted. PAGE A15

Porsche Loan Leads to Charges

A car loan for the son of Ingrid Lewis-Martin, a former top adviser to New York's embattled mayor, is at the center of an expected bribery case. PAGE A14



ARTS C1-8

Leaps, Bounds and Laughs

Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo opened its season with a performance of Durante Verzola's “Symphony.” PAGE C8

A Cosmetics Heir's Gifts

Leonard Lauder created the model for the headline-grabbing donation that museums dream of today. PAGE C1

BUSINESS B1-4

A Rate Cut, With Fewer Ahead

The markets shuddered after Federal Reserve officials projected two cuts in 2025, making clear reductions would hinge on inflation progress. PAGE B1

SPORTS B5-9

‘No Friends on the Floor’

By following the example set by their Coach, Ime Udoka, the Houston Rockets are feisty and unapologetic, and winning basketball games. PAGE B5

OPINION A22-23

Nicholas Kristof

PAGE A23



THURSDAY STYLES D1-6

Making a Move Offline

Hungry for in-person interaction, Gen Z and millennial players have been joining old-fashioned chess, mahjong and backgammon groups. PAGE D5



Inside The Times

The New York Times

A. G. SULZBERGER
Publisher

Founded in 1851

ADOLPH S. OCHS
Publisher 1896-1935

ARTHUR HAYS SULZBERGER
Publisher 1935-1961

ORVIL E. DRYFOOS
Publisher 1961-1963

NEWS

JOSEPH KAHN
Executive Editor

MARC LACEY
Managing Editor

CAROLYN RYAN
Managing Editor

SAM DOLNICK
Deputy Managing Editor

MONICA DRAKE
Deputy Managing Editor

STEVE DUENES
Deputy Managing Editor

MATTHEW ERICSON
Assistant Managing Editor

JONATHAN GALINSKY
Assistant Managing Editor

HANNAH POFERL
Assistant Managing Editor
and Chief Data Officer

SAM SIFTON
Assistant Managing Editor

KARRON SKOG
Assistant Managing Editor

MICHAEL SLACKMAN
Assistant Managing Editor

ARTHUR OCHS SULZBERGER
Publisher 1963-1992

ARTHUR OCHS SULZBERGER JR.
Publisher 1992-2017

OPINION

KATHLEEN KINGSBURY
Opinion Editor

PATRICK HEALY
Deputy Opinion Editor

BUSINESS

MEREDITH KOPIT LEVIE
Chief Executive Officer

WILLIAM T. BARDEEN
Chief Financial Officer

DIANE BRAYTON
Chief Legal Officer

JACQUELINE M. WELCH
Chief Human Resources Officer

R. ANTHONY BENTEN
Chief Accounting Officer, Treasurer

ALEXANDRA HARDIMAN
Chief Product Officer

DAVID S. PERPICH
Publisher, The Athletic

JOY ROBINS
Global Chief Advertising Officer

DAVID RUBIN
Chief Brand and Communications Officer of
The Times, and Publisher, Wirecutter

JASON SOBEL
Chief Technology Officer

HANNAH YANG
Chief Growth and Customer Officer

Contact the Newsroom
To contact the newsroom regarding
correction requests, please email
corrections@nytimes.com.

Send a Confidential News Tip
Reach us through tools that will
help protect your anonymity at
nytimes.com/tips.

Submit a Letter to the Editor
letters@nytimes.com

Manage Your Subscription
nytimes.com/account

Contact Customer Care
nytimes.com/contactus
or call 1-800-698-4637

The Newspaper and Beyond

TODAY'S PAPER

Corrections A19
Crossword C3
Obituaries B10

Opinion A22-23
Weather B9
Classified Ads B8



AUDIO



The “Modern Love” podcast invited listeners to share stories about their worst dates. On a new episode, the actor Joel Kim Booster, who hosts the podcast “Bad Dates,” weighed in with tidbits of wisdom. nytimes.com/mlpodcast

QUIZ

How well do you know the London of Charles Dickens? The Book Review's latest Quiz Bowl challenges you to identify locations in the city that are mentioned in five of the author's works. Try it at nytimes.com/books.

ROUNDUP

Are you looking for fresh tunes to add to your holiday-themed playlist? Read what The Times's pop music critics think about 11 of this year's holiday album releases at nytimes.com/music.

Quote of the Day

“It is part of history, but it is also part of our lives now, and not knowing where it is is unbearable.”

WOUTER VAN DER VEEN, a van Gogh scholar, on the search for “Portrait of Dr. Gachet,” the artist's painting of his doctor, which the public has not seen in 34 years. [Page A1.](#)

The Story Behind the Story

Holiday Hints From a Gift-Guide Maker

Mari Uyehara, who writes for Wirecutter, likes holiday gifts you can't buy in more than one place.

By STEFANO MONTALI

You probably have gifts on your mind right now. Mari Uyehara is thinking about them all year long.

After more than 15 years writing and editing for food and lifestyle publications, Ms. Uyehara joined Wirecutter, a product recommendation site owned by The New York Times, in 2023. As a member of the gifts team, it's her mission to suggest presents that fit any occasion, or any recipient.

Before something makes a gift guide, Wirecutter staff members test the goods at home and in a warehouse in Queens. In lists and reported articles, as well as through a podcast, readers can find reviews of kitchen appliances, exercise machines, home décor and last-minute Christmas gifts.

While Wirecutter earns money from affiliate links on its site, it recommends products based on its independent research.

In an interview, Ms. Uyehara spoke about how she finds ideas, the popular presents this holiday season and how her father shaped her appreciation for “a well-made thing.” This conversation has been edited.

You recently published a guide for gifts under \$50. Can you break down what the selection process looked like?

We're trying to look for things that punch above their weight. And we're also trying to be very broad because all sorts of people are looking for gifts under \$50. We want tech stuff, pretty stuff, some fun stuff. We pull from our other guides, some of which are more identity driven, like gifts for Mom, gifts for boyfriends, that kind of thing.

We'll see what worked or did not work in the past, and take that as a gauge of how we can do better. But then, we're just making guesses, too. So some of it will be like, “Well, I got this for my boyfriend and he liked it,” and we'll put it in the guide.

What's on top of Wirecutter holiday shopping lists?

Custom-made Funko Pop figurines — you can get one made that resembles a friend or your dad or your child. We put them in the guide for engagement gifts, which has champagne glasses, art prints and then . . . Funko Pops. That's what people want to give for engagements. We have them on the dads guide and another, new guide called Gifts for Grown-Ups That Don't Wanna Grow Up (which is based on a lot of men in my life).

Books are one of my go-to ideas for gifting. But my siblings don't really read them.

I think people try to give gifts to shape people into the people they want them to be, instead of the people they are.



LENA YOKOYAMA

You're probably right. But it's hard to think of something that you know they'll enjoy, but that's also a bit more special than, say, some band T-shirt or a backpack they ask for. Any tips?

I've always been a person who has a spreadsheet of ideas and buys in advance. When I traveled abroad, I would try and buy all my gifts, because you can't get those things anywhere else. Some of my best gifts: I got napkins for my parents in Oaxaca, Mexico, and I got these papier-mâché crafts in Osaka, Japan. I've always shopped in advance and try to keep a running list for people.

Your author profile on Wirecutter reads in part: “She has long been a believer in the power of a well-made thing.” Can you tell me about that philosophy?

My dad's a potter, so I grew up hanging out in his pottery studio. My mom said when I was a baby, she'd come home and I'd be covered with clay, because he would pick

me up while he was working. I know how much work goes into handcrafted things. People are always looking for something that's cheap, and I get that. I also don't want to overpay. But when I'm looking for things, I ask, “What's the quality? Are you going to keep it for a long time?”

So my general philosophy is: Buy something *really* good instead of a lot of things that are good. Like a pan or a pot. A really good pot will last your lifetime. If you buy a cheap one, it might end up in the landfill and then you have to buy it several times over.

Sometimes in a Wirecutter guide, I'll add a small artisan or cool artist whose stuff costs just a little bit more. It's a single person who had an idea, and I respect that. Readers can decide whether they also think that's worth it.

Read Wirecutter's gift advice online at nytimes.com/wirecutter.

Today's Top Trending Headlines

▶ **A Rift in Trump World Over How to Make America Healthier** Robert F. Kennedy Jr., whom President-elect Donald J. Trump will nominate to serve as the secretary of health and human services, believes lifestyle changes will solve the obesity problem in America. Elon Musk, who advises Mr. Trump, wants to make Ozempic and other weight loss drugs more affordable. They are “two sides of an issue that is plaguing health and nutrition researchers,” Gina Kolata wrote.

▶ **Insurers Are Deserting Homeowners as Climate Shocks Worsen** With global warming delivering more wildfires, hurricanes and other threats, homeowners in many areas are seeing their insurance policies canceled. Since 2018, more than 1.9 million home insurance contracts nationwide have been dropped, Christopher Flavelle reported, with data analysis by Mira Rojanasakul.

▶ **Matt Gaetz Ethics Report to Be Released After House Panel's Secret Vote** The House Ethics Committee plans to release an investigative report into the conduct of former Representative Matt Gaetz of Florida, according to three people with knowledge of the matter. Reporters covered the news in a live blog.

▶ **The Year in Pictures 2024: Far From Ordinary** From the presidential campaign to the war in Gaza to women's basketball, Times photographers were there to capture the indelible images that told the story of 2024. For example: Doug Mills was just a few feet away from Mr. Trump when shots were fired in Butler, Pa., and his instincts took over. His image of Mr. Trump standing and raising his fist after being shot is one of the most iconic images of the year.

▶ **Don't Call It a Bachelor Pad. TikTok Says It's a 'Boy Apartment.'** Bachelor pads are no longer just a mattress on the floor and beer in the fridge. At least not on social media, where “boy apartments” are filled with modern furniture, walk-in closets and gadgets galore. Josh Ocampo featured the luxurious home of Ben Taylor Lebowitz.

A Headline From History

LITERARY NOTES.

December 19, 1892. “The new society journal of fashion called Vogue has for its illustrations pictures of New-York society accurate in details of the dress of men and women,” The Times announced in a roundup of news from the publishing industry. The first issue of Vogue, founded by Arthur Turnure, hit newsstands two days earlier and cost 10 cents. It was edited by Josephine Redding, who remained with the publication for nearly 10 years. In 1909, Condé Nast bought Vogue, then a weekly publication, and switched to a biweekly format that focused on women's fashion. “The glossy has spawned an industry of imitators, two documentaries” and a major Hollywood film, “The Devil Wears Prada,” The New York Times Style Magazine reported in 2014. Vogue currently has more than 20 global editions, and in the United States, it is published 10 times a year. American Vogue is helmed by Anna Wintour; the December issue featured the model Kaia Gerber on its cover.

THE NEW YORK TIMES COMPANY
620 Eighth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10018-1405

The New York Times (ISSN 0962-4331) is published daily. Periodicals postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to The New York Times, 620 Eighth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10018-1405.

Mail Subscription Rates* 1 Yr.
Daily and Sunday \$136.00
Monday-Saturday 1209.00
Sunday only 689.00
Times Book Review \$312.00
Large Print Weekly \$182.00

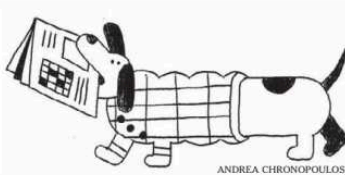
6 Mos. Higher rates, available on request, for mailing outside the U.S., or for the New York edition outside the Northeast:
6662.00 604.50 344.50
1-800-631-2580.

*Not including state or local tax.

The Times occasionally makes its list of home delivery subscribers available to marketing partners or third parties who offer products or services that are likely to interest its readers. If you prefer that we do not share this information, please notify Customer Service, 620 Eighth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10018-1405, or email help@nytimes.com.

All advertising published in The New York Times is subject to the applicable rate card, available from the advertising department. The Times reserves the right not to accept an advertiser's order. Only publication of an advertisement shall constitute final acceptance.
© 2024, The New York Times Company. All rights reserved.

A.G. Sulzberger, Publisher
Meredith Kopit Levien,
President and Chief Executive Officer
R. Anthony Benton, Treasurer
Michael A. Brown, Corporate Secretary



ANDREA CHRONOPOULOS

Facts of Interest

Board game sales in the United States surged more than 30 percent from 2019 to 2020, fueled by the Covid-19 pandemic, according to Circana, a market research firm.

The Offline Joy Of The Board Game Club D5

The country of Vanuatu is about 1,000 miles northeast of Australia and comprises a population of about 300,000 and more than 80 islands.

Quake Jolts Vanuatu, Killing at Least 14 and Badly Damaging U.S. Embassy A4

Bank “suspicious activity reports,” or SARs, are meant to alert law enforcement to potential criminal activities like money laundering, terrorism financing or sex trafficking.

Bank Flagged Payments to Epstein Only After He Died B3

A parasitic disease known as schistosomiasis, or bilharzia, affects more than 200 million people, especially in Africa. It is spread by freshwater snails that thrive amid invasive aquatic plants nourished by fertilizer runoff.

A Holistic Concept To Save the Planet A11

The horror film “The Texas Chain Saw Massacre” (1974), which was initially condemned by many for its violence, is among the 25 films selected for preservation this year in the Library of Congress’s National Film Registry.

‘Star Trek II’ and ‘Dirty Dancing’ Join Film Registry C2

While some top tier schools lost Black enrollment, across all law schools the number of Black students enrolling increased by about 3 percent, to 3,060 this fall from 2,969 in 2023.

Harvard Law Reports A Plunge in Enrollment Of New Black Students A15

The Mini Crossword

1	2	3	4	
5				6
7				
8				
9				

12/19/2024 BY CHRISTINA IVERSON EDITED BY SAM EZERSKY

ACROSS

- 1 Common Christmas cookie cutter shape
- 5 Opera solos
- 7 “Forrest Gump” character who calls shrimp “the fruit of the sea”
- 8 Attire for a baker
- 9 Common Christmas cookie cutter shape

DOWN

- 1 Rum-soaked cakes
- 2 Spew lava
- 3 Zodiac sign associated with justice
- 4 What a doula might help you through
- 6 ___ Francisco

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE

V	I	O	L	A
A	N	N	O	Y
N	I	T	R	O
N	O	D		
K	E	Y		

Reader Corner

Responses and Replies



NOLIS ANDERSON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

To Carl Sandburg, Chicago of the early 20th century was “stormy, husky, brawling.”

In “Read Your Way Around Chicago,” the author Rebecca Makkai chose writers like Carl Sandburg, Theodore Dreiser, Gwendolyn Brooks and Studs Terkel to help readers understand the Windy City. She didn’t choose herself, or mention her heralded 2018 novel “The Great Believers.” Readers noticed, and felt the need to correct for Ms. Makkai’s professional omission. Here are two edited comments Chicago readers left on the article.

The author didn’t mention her own book, “The Great Believers” which chronicles the AIDS epidemic of the late 1980s and early ’90s. As an RN, I was caring for many of those patients during that time. The book brought back a lot of memories and highlights the progress we’ve made with this terrible illness.

— SHANA HELLER-OGDEN

I clicked on this article and started reading without checking to see who wrote it. The whole time I was reading, I kept thinking, where is “The Great Believers” on this list? Then I finally noticed who wrote the article! In my opinion, “The Great Believers” is one of the best Chicago books ever written, masterfully capturing a sense of place and a moment in time. I have recommended it so many times and will continue to do so.

— WENDY RIVARD

Listen In

Excerpts From New York Times Audio

After nearly 25 years as a Times Opinion columnist, Paul Krugman is retiring. On “The Opinions,” a podcast from New York Times Opinion, Mr. Krugman reflected on his career and discussed some of the columns he had written that he said illustrated “a pivot point in changing optimism” in America. This excerpt has been edited and condensed.

There’s a lot of things I wrote that I’m proud of, but I think what I’m proud of most is that I took some unpopular and certainly contrarian positions. I like to think that while I’ve staked out a lot of positions, and sometimes been willing to stick my neck out, that I’ve always done it based on evidence I tried to share with the readers.

I was brought on at the beginning of 2000, and it’s really difficult to capture the state of mind that we had, which was incredibly optimistic. A clear majority of people thought the country was headed in the right direction. We were seeing lots of successes in economic development.

During the period from around 2000 to 2003, housing prices in the United States began soaring. A lot of the explosion reflected new ways of lending: subprime. Basically, lending standards to home buyers were greatly relaxed.

And when housing prices started to come back down to earth, not only did it mean that a lot of people found that they had mortgages they couldn’t afford, but it also meant that there were huge stresses on the banking system.

So I have a column about the housing bubble, as it was just starting to lose air. I could see right away that housing had become a huge driver of the U.S. economy, and it was not sustainable. We were going to be in trouble. I didn’t foresee that it would be as bad as it turned out to be, but it was clear, and it was an extremely unpopular view.

I may have gotten more hate mail over calling the housing bubble than anything else I’ve written. A lot of people were financially and psychologically invested in the idea that using complicated financial footwork to invest in housing was a great idea.

Listen to the entire episode at nytimes.com/column/the-opinions.

Here to Help

How to Stuff Your Suitcase Silly

Whether you can’t bear to travel without your favorite board games or you shop too hard on vacation, there are plenty of good reasons to pack heavy. Here are a few tricks to make it work. **MARIA ADELMANN**

Upgrade your luggage. High-quality luggage is roomy and designed so that it rolls smoothly and doesn’t tip. With 360-degree spinner wheels, even stuffed suitcases feel almost weightless on airport floors. Spinner wheels also allow you to put your checked bag and carry-on back to back and roll them together with one hand.

Invest in packable gear. If you always travel with an umbrella, buy a small one. If you can’t stand wrinkles, purchase a travel-size steamer. If you fear running out of reading material, get an e-reader. You get the idea.

Compress, compress, compress! “Time and again, packing cubes beat out every other method for maximizing your packing space,” said Kit Dillon, Wirecutter’s luggage and packing expert.

Kit recommends rolling your lightest and softest stuff (tees, underwear) and folding bulkier items (jeans, dresses).

Many overpackers rave about compression sacks, which can shrink your stuff down to about a third of the original size. This is a great way to pack items you don’t mind getting a little wrinkled.



MARIA ADELMANN

Use (almost) every nook and cranny. If you’re out of space and can’t sacrifice a single thing, plan to wear your largest items (such as your coat) and get crafty about using your luggage’s dead zones.

Soft-sided suitcases sometimes have extra space in the interior lid. Meanwhile, internal trolley rails create an uneven packing surface on the bottom of luggage, which you can even up by stuffing in a few small items that didn’t fit in your packing cubes.

Pack for more packing. Know thyself. Set aside space or bring along a few compression bags to save room on the way home for souvenirs or other purchases.

Maria Adelmann is a writer at Wirecutter, a product recommendation site owned by The New York Times Company. For more advice, visit nytimes.com/wirecutter.



To keep her world *close*

The Slim Locket Collection
Designed 18k Gold or Sterling Silver

MONICA RICH KOSANN

Please call 866.598.2784 or Visit Us at
MONICARICHKOSANN.COM

Holiday shipping through 12/23 at 3pm ET for delivery by 12/24.

Paul Stuart



When the Weather Calls,
Answer with Style

NEW YORK CITY SOUTHAMPTON
CHICAGO WASHINGTON DC



Any occasion. Every interest.
Give the gift of The Times.

Need a gift? Choose from a variety of subscriptions to The Times — there’s one to suit nearly everyone, no matter what they’re into.

Visit nytimes.com/gift or call 855-698-5273.



The New York Times

International

The New York Times

The Dark Mystery of France’s Most Notorious Sexual Predator

Husband Set Up Rapes for Years

By CATHERINE PORTER

AVIGNON, France — Dominique Pelicot is France’s most infamous predator. He admits that he surreptitiously drugged his wife for almost a decade so that he could rape her, and that he invited dozens of strangers he met online to violate her limp, snoring body.

And yet, for more than three months, Mr. Pelicot, 72, has sat in the courtroom where he is on trial with 50 other men and painted himself as the honest one. The rapist among 51 rapists, he says, who had the courage to deliver the truth on what they all did. The one who loved his wife and family desperately but, after 40 years of resisting, was overcome by perverted impulses.

He is also the one who had nothing left to lose: He said he expected to receive a maximum sentence and spend 20 years in prison after the verdict is delivered this week.

“No one belongs to anyone else, but I did what I wanted when I had the urge,” Mr. Pelicot said one day during the trial, leaning back in his chair in the prisoner’s box, the same gray fleece jacket he had worn every day zipped up. “That’s what’s at the heart of this story.”

He told the court he had felt remorse the mornings after he drugged his wife, Gisèle Pelicot, but that had not stopped him. “The next day was terrible, because I saw what a bad state she was in,” he said, “but I won’t complain today, because that would be indecent. She is the one suffering, not me.”

During the trial, the judges and lawyers in the court in the French city of Avignon tried to grasp the enigma that is Mr. Pelicot, with only modest success.

Near the beginning of the trial, the court heard from psychiatrists and psychologists who described Mr. Pelicot’s psyche as cleaved into two distinct parts, though they did not diagnose him with a mental health disorder.

Side A was the man his friends and family knew before his second and final arrest in November 2020: an attentive and dedicated grandfather, father and husband who had been besotted with Gisèle since they met at 19.

The couple had modeled a strong, dedicated relationship to their three children over the decades, weathering difficult financial times and romantic affairs. Mr. Pelicot went to soccer games and movies with his older son, David, and picked up his daughter, Caroline, from night clubs to ensure that she got home safely.

Professionally, he never seemed to find his groove, working first as an electrician before turning to real estate and then sales. He would quietly ask his adult daughter for money, but that did not provoke a rupture in the close-knit family.

Then there was the other part of Mr. Pelicot’s psyche, the therapists said, his Side B: perverse, manipulative, incapable of empathy, addicted to sex.

This side, experts in court said, was rooted in what Mr. Pelicot and his half sister, Ginette Pelicot, described as a violent childhood home.

Mr. Pelicot grew up in the center of France, south of Paris. After his mother’s first husband abandoned her and their two children, she married his brother, with whom she had two more children — one of those was Dominique.

Ginette said she had left the house while young to escape her stepfather’s attempted sexual abuse.

Many times during the weeks of testimony, Mr. Pelicot mentioned a searing memory of glimpsing what he described as his father raping and humiliating his mother.

“In every man, there is a demon,” Mr. Pelicot testified. “Mine came from my childhood.”

His lawyer, Béatrice Zavarro, argued that Mr. Pelicot was also emotionally scarred by other alleged traumas.

The first was a rape that Mr. Pelicot said he suffered at age 9, while he was a hospital patient, at the hands of a male nurse. Then, five years later, when he was an apprentice electrician working on a construction site, he told the court, he was forced to participate in a gang rape. (No evidence that either crime happened was offered in court.)

Still, by Mr. Pelicot’s telling, he restrained his Side B for 40 years through the strength of his relationship with his wife, a woman he repeatedly called a “saint.”

“I have something inside me that I

Ségolène Le Stradic contributed reporting.



ALEXANDRE DIMOU/REUTERS

Gisèle Pelicot, the victim of gang rapes orchestrated by her then-husband, Dominique Pelicot, outside the courthouse in Avignon, France, last month.



YOAN VALAT/EPA, VIA SHUTTERSTOCK

A banner reading “A rape is a rape” at the courthouse. Mr. Pelicot recently admitted an attempted rape in 1999, and he is a suspect in a 1991 rape-killing.



CHRISTOPHE SIMON/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

Two of Mr. Pelicot’s dozens of co-defendants at a courthouse security portal. Some have confessed. Some have said they thought the sex was consensual.

fought for a long time, thanks to my wife,” he said one day. On another day, he said: “I loved her enormously, and I still love her.”

That restraint, his lawyer suggested, started to give way in 2011, when Mr. Pelicot connected with other men on a notorious, unmoderated website that was shut down last June after accruing more than 23,000 police cases in France from 2021 to 2024.

It was there, he said, that he learned from another user the method of drugging his wife for his own sexual pleasure, so he could do things to her that she would not permit while conscious. Over time, he offered her to other men he met online, the court heard.

What he described as his growing perversion was reflected on the courtroom benches, by the number of men he was

accused of recruiting per year: one from 2015, seven from 2017 and then 17 from 2019.

He was living a double life — driving his wife to medical appointments during the day to address the haunting symptoms he was causing her at night.

Even after he was arrested and charged with filming up women’s skirts in a grocery store in September 2020, and the police confiscated his phones and laptop brimming with incriminating evidence, Mr. Pelicot continued.

After he was released from jail, he again brought men to his home to join him in raping his near-comatose wife until the police arrested him a second time two months later, this time based on evidence of rapes found on his electronics.

Ms. Zavarro, Mr. Pelicot’s lawyer, argued that he wanted to be caught as a

way of stopping his harmful behavior. He even told the police where in his garage to find his external hard drive that held thousands of photos and videos he had taken of the rapes of his wife — the evidence that the police needed to track down and charge dozens of other men.

But the narrative that Mr. Pelicot had given in to his worse side starting only in 2011 hit a snag in court.

Since he has been in jail, his DNA was matched to a cold case of attempted rape in the Paris region in 1999. Mr. Pelicot admitted the attempted rape in a police interrogation, and that transcript was read aloud by the lead judge near the end of the trial.

According to those records, Mr. Pelicot lured a 19-year-old real estate agent into a building on the pretext that he was interested in buying it. He pinned her to the ground, bound her wrists with a rope, pressed a small bottle of ether to her nose and then pulled down her pants. But the effect of the drug soon dissipated, and she managed to escape.

He is also the main suspect in a second cold case from 1991, regarding another young female real estate agent who was raped and killed. She was put to sleep with ether while visiting an apartment in Paris with an unknown client. In court this month, Mr. Pelicot denied any involvement in that case.

Those two cases have yet to go to court, but Laure Chabaud, the prosecutor in the current case, said in her closing statement last week that it was clear that Mr. Pelicot’s “deviant behavior had persisted over several decades.”

Over the months in court, Mr. Pelicot mostly presented his Side A: polite, contrite and, he said, working with psychologists to understand himself.

“I am here for the truth effectively,” he said one day. “I am hiding nothing.”

He is one of more than a dozen defendants who have pleaded guilty in the trial. Those who say they are innocent have admitted to having sex with Ms. Pelicot but say they never intended to rape her.

Mostly, they say they were tricked by Mr. Pelicot into believing that they were participating in a threesome and that Ms. Pelicot was pretending to be asleep. They were manipulated, they’ve argued, directed or overpowered by Mr. Pelicot. Some have said they believe he drugged them, too, most likely in a drink he offered them.

After each defendant’s testimony, a microphone was passed into Mr. Pelicot’s glass box, where he repeated the same lines so many times that they became a chorus in the macabre trial: The men knew “perfectly well” that he had drugged his wife without her knowledge and they were coming to join him in raping her.

“In no way” did he manipulate them, he said. He didn’t offer a single one of them water, coffee or anything to drink,

he said. And, by his telling, he didn’t drug any of them, just his wife.

“I am a rapist like many in this room,” he said near the beginning of the trial. “They knew everything, all of it.”

“I am just as responsible as them,” he said months later, on his last day of testimony and cross-examination. “Without me, they wouldn’t be here. And without them, I wouldn’t be here.”

Many statements like those, casting blame equally around a courtroom packed with defendants, provoked loud jeers and guffaws from the other accused men.

Throughout the trial, Mr. Pelicot seemed to try to present himself in a more positive light. He jumped to the defense of his now ex-wife; when some defense lawyers questioned her aggressively, he said, “In no case was she complicit.” When the videos he had taken of others raping her were played in court as evidence, he covered his eyes. He said repeatedly that he was ashamed.

‘I did what I wanted when I had the urge,’ Pelicot said in the prisoner’s box.

Ms. Zavarro ended her closing statements with two poems that Mr. Pelicot had written in prison to members of his family, asking them to remember his better self. “I know one day, we will see one another again,” he wrote to his ex-wife. “I hope we can talk of all this.”

But over the months, there have been flashes of the other Mr. Pelicot in the courtroom, once when confronted with his children’s worries.

The police reconstituted deleted photos from his computer, capturing his daughter, Caroline, in bed, wearing underwear that was not her own and sleeping with the lights on. She has said she is convinced that he drugged and sexually assaulted her.

He has said he never drugged Caroline. But he has never offered a compelling reason for having the photos. He denied ever taking them.

And his son David publicly expressed concern that his own son was victim to Mr. Pelicot’s abuses. Time and time again, Mr. Pelicot has said that he never sexually abused any of his children or grandchildren.

When Antoine Camus, the lawyer representing Ms. Pelicot and their children, told him the children needed to heal and rebuild themselves, and “only you can liberate them from this nightmare,” Mr. Pelicot answered coldly.

“That’s their problem,” he said. “Not mine.”

Quake Jolts Vanuatu, Killing at Least 14 and Badly Damaging U.S. Embassy

By YAN ZHUANG and CHRISTINE HAUSER

A magnitude 7.3 earthquake struck near Vanuatu early Tuesday afternoon, triggering small tsunami waves, causing serious damage to the U.S. Embassy in the capital and knocking out most of the internet connectivity in the Pacific Island nation.

By early Wednesday, at least 14 people were confirmed dead and 200 people were treated for injuries at the main hospital in the

capital, Port Vila, Katie Greenwood, the head of the Pacific region’s International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, said in a social media post.

Ms. Greenwood, who is based in the neighboring archipelago of Fiji, quoted figures from the Vanuatu government as also reporting that several hundred people had been treated in the hospital in the capital as local organizations set up shelters.

The earthquake damaged an airstrip, electricity and communi-

cations, hampering flights into the country, while aftershocks of magnitude 5.5 were recorded, adding to concerns during search-and-rescue efforts, the I.F.R.C. said in an emailed statement on Tuesday.

The websites of government agencies and a major power company were offline after the earthquake, and the Australian High Commission said its communication systems in Vanuatu had been affected. NetBlocks, a cybersecurity monitoring organization, said that there was a “near-total

loss of internet connectivity” across the country.

Phone calls to government agencies and the police in Vanuatu did not go through.

The U.S. Embassy in Port Vila sustained “considerable damage” and was closed until further notice, the U.S. Embassy in Papua New Guinea said in an email. Videos posted online appeared to show that one floor of a section of the building had totally collapsed.

The Vanuatu Broadcasting and

Television Corporation, the national broadcaster, posted photos and videos on social media that appeared to show damaged and partially collapsed buildings, as well as people being treated for injuries.

The epicenter of the earthquake was about 18 miles off the coast of Port Vila, Vanuatu’s capital, according to the United States Geological Survey. The country is about 1,000 miles northeast of Australia and comprises more than 80 islands with a population

of about 300,000.

The quake briefly prompted a tsunami alert for parts of Vanuatu, according to the U.S. Tsunami Warning System, which is part of the National Weather Service. U.S. officials said about an hour later that the threat had passed.

Tsunami waves of up to 0.8 feet above normal tidal levels were recorded hitting Vanuatu’s coastline after the quake, the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center said.

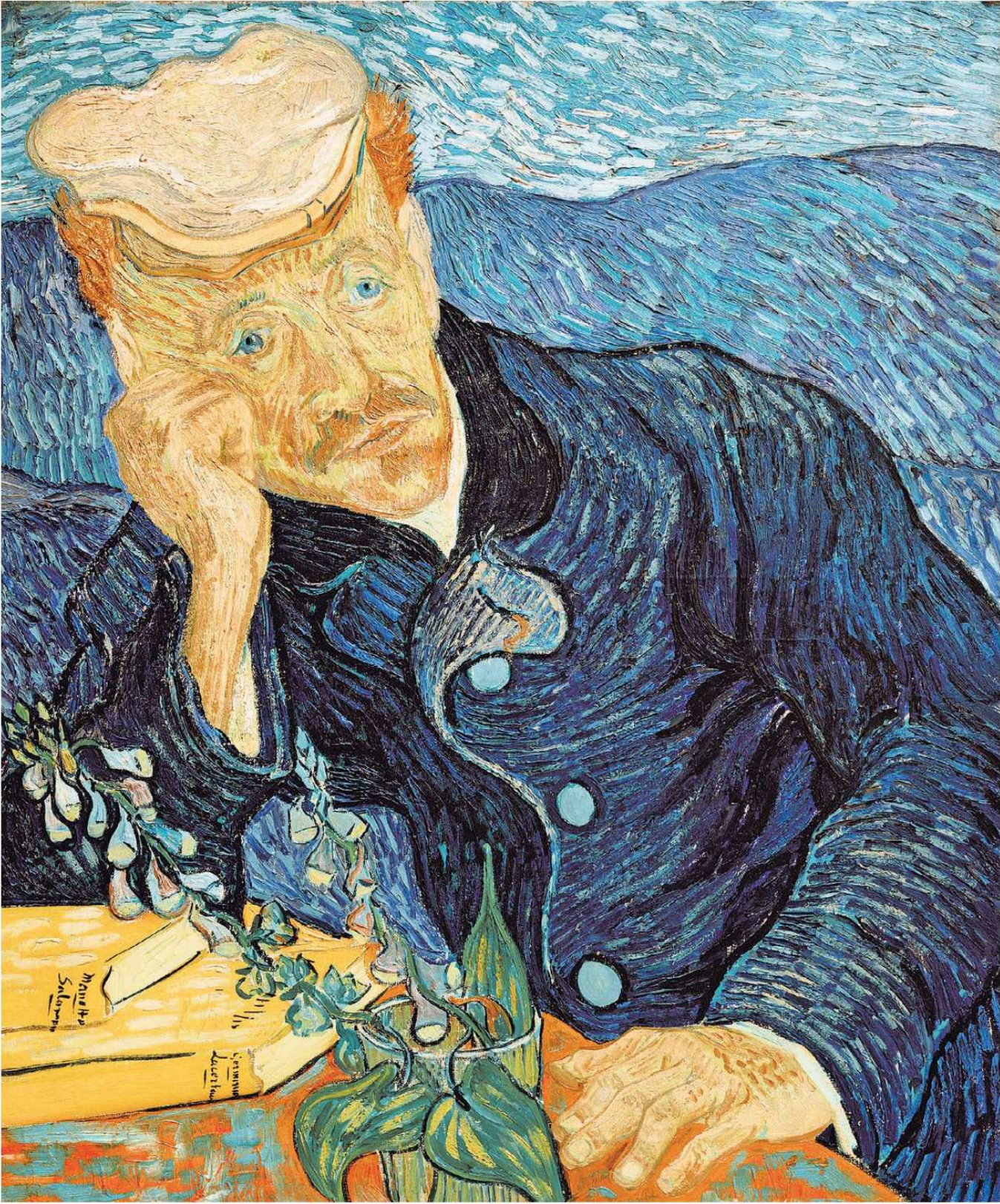


TALES OF PRECISION

This holiday season, let time bow to you with OMEGA's 38 mm stainless steel Aqua Terra. This Master Chronometer, driven by our Co-Axial Calibre 8800, is a certified masterpiece. Unwrap your new standard of excellence and let the festivities unfold on your wrist. You can't buy time, but you can gift precision.

Ω
OMEGA

THE QUARRY
Vincent van Gogh painted “Portrait of Dr. Gachet” in 1890, during one of his most productive periods. He fatally shot himself just weeks after completing the work.



FINE ART IMAGES/HERITAGE IMAGES, VIA GETTY IMAGES

The Hunt for a van Gogh Masterpiece That the Public Hasn’t Seen in 34 Years

From Page A1

1990 sale.
But it has all but disappeared since that day at Christie’s, and its whereabouts have become one of the art world’s greatest mysteries.
Curators putting together van Gogh shows have thrown up their hands at finding it. The Städel Museum, where it once hung, commissioned an entire podcast designed to ferret out its location.
Art sleuths over the years have confirmed this much: that the Japanese buyer from 1990 was soon undone by scandal and criminally sanctioned, and then died. His collection was sold by a bank, and the Gachet was acquired by an Austrian financier who soon found that he, too, could not afford to keep it.
In 1998, the van Gogh was sold privately to an undisclosed party. Since then, the trail has run cold.
At least publicly.
While the art market thrives on secrecy and protects privacy as a matter of honor, it also employs people whose mission is to collect reliable information on who owns what. Some are auction house representatives, others art advisers or dealers who have made a specific genre their niche.
For months, reporters for The New York Times have sought out the small group of people involved in the 1998 sale and the larger corps of experts who track such purchases. Their effort to find the Gachet — a journey taken over the years by many others — stretched from the auction houses and galleries of New York to a storybook Swiss villa alongside Lake Lugano.
Many experts encountered along the way had no clue what had happened to the painting. Four art world insiders said they suspect the painting is held by a private, very rich European family. All parties had an opinion on the core question that drives such a quest: Do collecting families have any responsibility to share iconic works of art with the broader public?
The question has grown more relevant

Nina Siegal contributed reporting. Alain Delaquerrière contributed research.



PETER MORGAN/ASSOCIATED PRESS

THE AUCTION The last time the painting was publicly viewed was at the 1990 sale at Christie’s in Manhattan. It fetched \$82.5 million, a record at the time.



BERTRAND GUAY/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

WHERE IT ALL STARTED The home of Paul-Ferdinand Gachet, van Gogh’s physician and the subject of the portrait, in Auvers-sur-Oise, a village near Paris.

as it becomes clearer that most museums can no longer outbid billionaire collectors for the greatest works of art. Few paintings make that point plainer than Dr. Gachet’s portrait, a piece long on public display that has now vanished into someone’s private home or a climate-controlled warehouse.
For many in the art world, such a work is not just a creative expression, but part of a trade that survives because of the interest and deep pockets of collectors who may, or may not, choose to share their work.
“People are allowed to own things privately,” said Michael Findlay, who was involved as a specialist for Christie’s in the 1990 auction sale of the Gachet. “Does it belong to everybody? No, it does not.”
But the loss is palpable to people like Cynthia Saltzman, the author of the 1998 book “Portrait of Dr. Gachet.” She regularly viewed the painting at the Met. She had expected, even after it was sold privately, that the picture would surface here and there, at an exhibition or an auction.
“I wasn’t aware that it was going to disappear,” she said. “I think back on those times, and it reminds me of when somebody you know dies, and you didn’t expect it, and you think back on the last time you saw them, and you wish you had known it was going to happen because you would have paid a lot more attention and looked more carefully.”
Portrait of a Doctor and of Melancholia
Anyone looking to track the history, and whereabouts, of the Gachet would do well to start in Auvers-sur-Oise, a village outside Paris. When van Gogh stepped off the train there, on May 20, 1890, the rustic landscape and thatched-roof houses had already become a magnet for artists of the day. The deeply troubled artist, 37, would kill himself only weeks later. But he was about to enter one of his most productive periods during which he painted “Wheat Field With Crows” and “The Church at Auvers.”
That same day, he met with Paul-Ferdinand Gachet, a doctor who had studied nervous disorders. The two shared a love of art. Van Gogh was soon painting still lifes in the doctor’s garden — and the doc-

‘I’ve done the portrait of M. Gachet with a melancholy expression, which might well seem like a grimace to those who see it. And yet I had to paint it like that to convey how much expression and passion there is in our present-day heads in comparison with the old calm portraits, and how much longing and crying out.’

VAN GOGH, writing in June 1890.

tor's portrait.

Van Gogh didn't seek to make an accurate rendering. Cameras could perform that task by then; instead he depicted what he saw in the doctor, and in himself.

"I've done the portrait of M. Gachet with a melancholy expression, which might well seem like a grimace to those who see it," van Gogh wrote in June 1890. "And yet I had to paint it like that to convey how much expression and passion there is in our present-day heads in comparison with the old calm portraits, and how much longing and crying out."

Van Gogh gave a second version of the painting to Dr. Gachet. It is on display at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris.

"To me it reveals Vincent's strong humanistic impulse and his capacity for love," said Gary Tinterow, the director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. He was the Met's curator of 19th-century European paintings in 1990 when the portrait was taken off the wall to be auctioned.

After van Gogh's suicide, the painting passed to his brother Theo, then to Theo's wife, Johanna, who sold it in 1897 for 300 francs (about \$58 at the time). By 1904, it was in the hands of a German count, who had paid roughly \$400 for it.

Van Gogh's fame grew after his death, perhaps nowhere more than Germany. In 1911, the Städel acquired the portrait and placed it alongside greats like Dürer, elevating van Gogh to their level. The Gachet soon ranked among the museum's most prized works.

When the Nazis took power in the 1930s, though, they fueled a conservative pushback that disdained modern art's bold break from straightforward pictorial representation. Works by van Gogh and other artists were labeled "degenerate," so the museum tried to protect them by keeping them in a locked room under its roof.

When the Nazis began confiscating the art they despised, the Gachet escaped the first seizure in 1937. But by the end of the year it had been taken and sent to Berlin.

Months later, an art agent for Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering sold the Gachet to Franz Koenigs, a German banker living in Amsterdam. Its next owner, a German-Jewish banker, Siegfried Kramarsky, brought the portrait to New York when he immigrated, and for decades, on and off, the painting was displayed at the Met, typically in the summers when the Kramarskys were away, Tinterow recalled. In 1984, it was sent to the Met on full-time "indefinite loan."

When the Kramarskys sold the Gachet in 1990, the winning bidder was Ryohei Saito, the honorary chairman of Daishowa Paper Manufacturing Company. His criminal troubles would include a charge that he had paid a bribe to redistrict forestry land for, among other things, the "Vincent Golf Club." When those troubles escalated, his Gachet and other art passed to a creditor, the Fuji Bank.

It sold the painting in 1997 to Wolfgang Flöttl, an Austrian financier who had moved to New York, married Anne Eisenhower, a granddaughter of the president, and began his own art-buying spree.

When Flöttl's own finances suffered, the Gachet was sold again, privately, in a transaction arranged through Sotheby's. Neither the price nor the buyer was publicly disclosed, and the Gachet simply vanished from the art world — the cultural equivalent of the Earhart plane.

"It is part of history, but it is also part of our lives now, and not knowing where it is is unbearable," said Wouter van der Veen, a van Gogh scholar who is working to restore Dr. Gachet's home in France.

The portrait was conspicuously absent last year at exhibitions in Amsterdam and Paris that featured van Goghs created in Auvers-sur-Oise. More than half of the 74 paintings van Gogh made there were displayed, including a portrait of Adeline Ravoux, the daughter of his innkeeper, which, like the Gachet, had not been seen in public for decades.

"Sometimes you have to be patient for these things," said Teio Meedendorp, a researcher at the Van Gogh Museum. "I hope within my lifetime the Gachet portrait might pop up again."

The Keepers of Secrets

There has been over the years all sorts of speculation about who holds the Gachet.

Guido Barilla, the eponymous chairman of the pasta company, was identified as a likely candidate. But a German journalist, Johannes Nichelmann, disputed that in a



TRISTAN FEWINGS/GETTY IMAGES

THE ARTIST Van Gogh painted this self-portrait in 1889, nearly a year before the deeply troubled artist killed himself. His fame grew after his death.



AMIR HAMJA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

WHERE THE TRAIL GOES COLD The painting's last known sale was in 1998, a private transaction brokered by Sotheby's. The buyer was not disclosed.



RONALD WITTEK/EPA, VIA SHUTTERSTOCK

AN ART WORLD VOID For a van Gogh exhibit that opened in 2019, the Städel Museum could not display the Gachet portrait it once owned, only its frame.

2019 podcast on the painting commissioned by the Städel. In the podcast, David Nash, who was Flöttl's art dealer and former head of Impressionist and Modern Art at Sotheby's, told Nichelmann that the buyer of the Gachet was an Italian who lived in Switzerland. He did not name him.

A German art reporter, Stefan Koldehoff, wrote in 2019 that at Sotheby's the current owner was known as The Lugano Man.

It's no surprise that people at Sotheby's would know, or think they know, who holds the Gachet. For one thing, the auction house sold the work. For another, it's in a business that relies on tracking, and keeping secret, the identity of owners so that when death, divorce or other events lead to a sale, your company has the inside track.

Auction house specialists build relationships with owners, check in regularly and track masterwork whereabouts religiously, and over decades. Sometimes they just keep the information in their heads or scribbled on sales catalogs or index cards (old school) or in digital databases (new school) that record the buying and selling of important customers.

To foster such relationships, owners of important artworks are offered all manner of perks, from tickets and restaurant reservations, to insurance or loan appraisals, a courtship that can lead to inventory checks and house visits that help to confirm what an owner might own.

Sellers of masterworks like the Gachet might also be offered lucrative inducements, maybe a marketing campaign or a

portion of the auction house's own earnings — the so-called "buyer's premium" — or even a guaranteed minimum price, regardless of what happens in the bidding.

Melissa Chiu, the director of the Smithsonian's Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, said museums also seek to build relationships and track who owns what. "You are searching out specific dream pieces," she said.

The people who say they think they know who owns the Gachet are this sort of art world insider — not infallible but exceptionally well informed. Four of them said they believe it was bought by an Italian family, the Invernizzis, who have taken to living in Switzerland.

One person who does not have to guess is Diana D. Brooks, the former Sotheby's chief executive, who organized the 1998 sale. Reached by phone, she declined to discuss the transaction, citing her longstanding professional pledge to secrecy.

Another person who seems to know is Alexander Eiling, the head of modern art at the Städel, where the Gachet once hung.

He was interviewed for the museum's Gachet podcast, created by Nichelmann and a colleague, Jakob Schmidt. After many interviews around the world, they had returned to the museum with nothing too firm on the current owner.

They decided to check in with Eiling, who sought, unsuccessfully, to borrow the Gachet for an exhibition called "Making van Gogh: A German Love Story." Instead of the painting, the exhibition featured the

empty frame that had held the portrait until the Nazis arrived.

When Nichelmann, who had searched high and low for the Gachet, asked Eiling whether he had ever located the work, he was surprised to hear the answer.

"Yes," Eiling replied.

"Where is it?" Nichelmann asked.

"In Switzerland," Eiling replied. He balked at saying more.

"I'm not allowed to say," he said. "It wasn't Barilla."

Eiling declined to be interviewed by The Times, but he did take note when told that a reporter was headed to look for the painting in Switzerland.

"If he is going to be in Lugano," Eiling said through a spokeswoman, "he already knows where the painting is."

On the Lakefront, Beauty and Silence

If asked to track an art world mystery, one could do worse than to end up outside the imposing Villa Favorita. Built in 1687, it was once home to a Prussian prince, and its considerable grounds stretch alongside Lake Lugano, a sumptuous setting that has long attracted wealth and great art.

Decades ago, the villa's former owner, Baron Hans Heinrich Thyssen-Bornemisza, drew long lines of visitors to the villa to see exhibits of world-class art culled from his private collection.

The jewels of that collection are now in Madrid at the Thyssen-Bornemisza National Museum. The baron died in 2002, and his fifth wife, Baroness Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza, a former Miss Spain, sold the villa for \$90.4 million in 2014 to the Invernizzi family, which now operates it under the tutelage of a foundation.

The Italian family is also wealthy, and owns significant works of art, experts say, but so far family members, unlike the baron, have displayed no interest in showing it off.

The city is hoping the family might, like the baron, allow some exhibitions on the grounds, but the negotiations are ongoing. "They are very, very discreet," says Filippo Lombardi, head of development and planning for Lugano.

Local residents describe the family as very private, but down to earth.

"They are simple, not snobby," said Gabriele Elsener, a real estate agent whose office is only a few hundred yards from Villa Favorita.

The Invernizzi money is a legacy of their involvement in the production and sale of cheese — mozzarella, Gorgonzola and the mild all-purpose Bel Paese — that is manufactured by Galbani, a company that three Invernizzi brothers — Ermenegildo, Achille and Rinaldo — took over in the 1920s.

The Invernizzi stake in Galbani was obscured by holding companies in 1989, when the cheese manufacturer was sold for \$1.6 billion. At that time, Antonio Invernizzi, a son to Rinaldo, was on the company's board.

Antonio Invernizzi, who died some years ago, was still the patriarch in 1998 when the art world insiders say they believe the family purchased the van Gogh masterpiece. Neither he nor the Invernizzi name is mentioned in a new documentary about the painting by Nichelmann, who created the 2019 podcast. But the film shows the lake and refers to the rumored owner of the Gachet as being a Lugano family who made billions in the food industry. It also says the family denied owning it.

A spokeswoman for the family, Mara Hofmann, said she could not confirm any denial and declined to comment further. Other members of the family, such as Rinaldo Invernizzi, Antonio's son, and Minjung Kim, an artist who was married to Antonio when he died, also declined to comment.

Gardo Petrini, a lawyer in Lugano who represents the Invernizzi family, declined to discuss their artworks. "The family I represent is very surprised by such a request — for which it does not feel it should enter into the merits — and also by the ways in which you are trying to contact them," he wrote in an email.

A message left at the villa, where another son of Antonio Invernizzi, Marco, receives mail, was also not returned.

Findlay, the gallerist involved in the 1990 auction sale, said he does not know who bought the Gachet in 1998. But he offered a note of caution about deciding that the mystery had been solved.

"Several people have come and sat here over the years," he said, during an interview in the New York gallery where he is a director, "and told me they know where it is, and I believe they were wrong."

Findlay said that, actually, he had heard that the Gachet had most likely moved on to another owner since 1998. Asked to elaborate, he declined.



MAURIZIO FIORINO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

TRAIL'S END?

The gardens of the Villa Favorita in Switzerland on the waters of Lake Lugano. Members of the Invernizzi family, the villa's owner, declined to comment.

War in Ukraine

NEWS ANALYSIS

Despite Kyiv’s Deadly Message, Its War Doesn’t Change

By MICHAEL SCHWIRTZ

Ukraine's brazen assassination of a Russian general on a Moscow street this week was a triumph for Ukraine's intelligence services, showcasing a decade's worth of investment in developing the skills, technology and ingenuity needed to operate successfully behind enemy lines in wartime.

But it was a limited triumph. Killing the general, Igor Kirillov, 54, will no doubt enrage the Kremlin and spread a degree of fear among the country's military and political elites, military experts said. It also eliminates a top military leader, who, according to Ukrainian officials, had ordered the use of banned chemical substances against Ukrainian troops.

What it will not do, according to Western officials and experts, is improve Kyiv's position in its war with Russia. On the battlefield, Ukraine's forces continue to steadily lose ground to their larger and better-equipped adversaries. On Tuesday, Gen. Oleksandr Syrsky, the commander of Ukrainian forces, said active fighting was occurring along more than 700 miles of the front line, including major Russian offensive operations in several regions.

"I think there's a psychological impact that suggests to the elites that we can find you wherever you are and you're not safe," said Douglas London, who served as a C.I.A. station chief three times before retiring in 2019, referring to the assassination. "I don't think it's really going to have an effect on their war fighting capability."

On the battlefield, the situation has not looked this desperate for Ukrainian troops since the start of the invasion. Russian forces have moved into the outskirts of Pokrovsk, an important rail hub, and are threatening the major cities of Kramatorsk and Sloviansk, all in the eastern Donetsk region. Things are so dire there that officials have ordered the evacuation of more than 300,000 residents still living in the region.

Meanwhile, Russian forces, augmented with fighters from North Korea, have launched a counteroffensive aiming at pushing the Ukrainians out of their foothold in Russia's Kursk region, where they have occupied a significant patch of land since the summer. (Some North Korean soldiers have died in the fighting, American military officials have suggested.)

Given Ukraine's struggles on the battlefield, assassinations and other covert operations like sabotage might be among the few useful tools in Ukraine's arsenal, Western officials and experts said. They are skills that the Ukrainians have been honing for years.

Before President Vladimir V. Putin launched the full-scale invasion in February 2022, Ukraine and Russia engaged in a shadow war of tit-for-tat assassinations. Political and military leaders as well as intelligence commanders were blown up in car bombings or in more creative ways. In one famous case, Ukrainian operatives connected a remote trigger to a shoulder-fired rocket launcher aimed at the office of a Russian-backed rebel commander and killed him when he entered.

The bomb that killed General Kirillov showed a similar level of ingenuity. It was attached to a scooter placed next to a residential building and detonated, apparently by remote control, when the general exited the



Men loading the body of a Russian general, Igor Kirillov, onto a bus after he and an aide were killed on a Moscow street on Tuesday.

building early Tuesday morning, killing him and his aide. A camera set up in a car parked across the street apparently provided a video feed that allowed Ukrainian operators to observe the scene and know when the general was emerging.

Though there have been a number of assassinations in Russia since the war began, never has such a high-ranking military leader been killed so far from the battlefield. Ukraine's domestic intelligence service, the S.B.U., claimed responsibility for the operation. The same agency was behind the remote-triggered rocket launcher attack, as well as other sabotage operations and targeted killings.

For Valentin Nalyvaichenko, Tuesday's assassination was the culmination of work he began as commander of the S.B.U. starting in 2014. Under his leadership, the agency began to purge officers thought to have Russian sympathies and bring in young officers born after Ukraine gained its independence from Moscow in 1991. Mr. Nalyvaichenko, together with his longtime aide, Gen. Valeriy Kondratiuk, created a new paramilitary unit known as the Fifth Directorate, that would eventually receive training from the C.I.A. to conduct covert operations behind enemy lines.

Though American officials say they never intended such training to be employed in assassinations, the Fifth Directorate took a lead role in specifically those types of operations.

"We've spent a lot of resources and time," Mr. Nalyvaichenko said in an interview. "I'm glad that it's working and that all these efforts are starting to bring results."

Russian officials vowed to avenge General Kirillov's death. Dmitri Medvedev, a former president and currently the deputy chairman of the Russian Security Council, pledged "inevitable retaliation" against the "military and political leadership of Ukraine."

Mr. Nalyvaichenko, who is now a member of the Ukrainian parliament, urged military and civilian leaders to be vigilant, but he and others said that the Russian security services appeared less capable of carrying out such operations on Ukrainian soil than they had been in the past.

Both the S.B.U. and its sister service, the military intelligence agency, or HUR, have been linked to a number of assassinations on Russian soil and Russian occupied territory in Ukraine. U.S. officials believe Ukraine's security services were behind the 2022 killing of Daria Dugina,

the daughter of a prominent Russian nationalist. And last month the S.B.U. claimed responsibility for the assassination of Valery Trankovsky, a senior Russian naval officer, who Ukraine said had ordered missile strikes at civilian targets. Both were killed in car bombings.

In each case, Russian officials have vowed retaliation. But Russia's intelligence services have so far failed to match the success of their Ukrainian counterparts. Ukrainian officials claimed to have thwarted plots against the life of President Volodymyr Zelensky early in the war, in at least one case with the help of the C.I.A. In an interview with an Italian television channel earlier this year, Mr. Zelensky said his security services had told him of 10 such plots.

Experts and intelligence officials credited Ukrainian counterintelligence for thwarting such plots, but said Russia was also less reliant — intentionally so — on covert operations than Ukraine. Unlike Ukraine, Russia can fire long-range missiles that can hit anywhere, and were likely using their operatives for intelligence gathering and weapons targeting, rather than assassinations, said Ralph Goff, a former senior C.I.A. official, who stills travels frequently to

Ukraine.

For the Ukrainians, carrying out assassinations, he said, "is a strategy of necessity because it's all they got."

Still, the question lingers of whether such operations matter. Ukraine's American supporters have long warned that assassinations of this kind might provide a quick jolt of satisfaction, but in the end are provocative, counterproductive and a waste of limited resources.

"The Ukrainians see an opportunity here," Mr. Goff said. "They're trying to turn the heat up on the Russian elites to force Putin to make a deal. I think it's a flawed strategy. If they're not careful they'll create the opposite effect. They anger the Russians so much that they say we're not interested in negotiating."

The Biden administration has tried to use Ukraine's dependence on American aid as leverage to curtail such operations, with obviously limited success. Should the Trump administration significantly cut back America's assistance, Ukraine's intelligence services may feel even less restraint, and see such actions as one of the few ways of continuing the war and inflicting harm on Russia, Mr. London said.

"With the Trump administration coming in the Ukrainians are looking at how they can more effectively leverage asymmetrical operations, both assassination operations like they've been doing as well as long-distance strikes using their own home-grown developed drones and missiles," he said.

Even inside Ukraine, though, some question the wisdom of such operations.

A senior Ukrainian special forces officer, who spoke on condition of anonymity to provide a candid assessment, said they have "zero" impact strategically and tactically.

They will find a replacement for that general, the officer said, predicting that as a condition of any peace settlement Russia would insist not only on a cessation of military operations, but also of secret operations that kill their generals.



The explosive device that killed the general and his aide had been planted in a scooter, officials said.

Russia Detains Suspect It Says Killed General on Ukraine’s Order

By ANATOLY KURMANAEV

BERLIN — The Russian authorities said on Wednesday that they had detained a suspect in the killing of a senior military officer, Lt. Gen. Igor Kirillov, a major development in the most prominent political assassination case in the country since the start of the war in Ukraine.

The suspect, a 29-year-old citizen of Uzbekistan whose name was not released, was captured in a village outside Moscow, a spokeswoman for Russia's prosecutor's office said.

The spokeswoman said he had confessed that Ukrainian intelligence agencies recruited him to kill General Kirillov, 54, who was in charge of the Russian military's nuclear and chemical weapons protection forces.

An official with Ukraine's security service, known as the S.B.U., said on Tuesday that Ukraine had been responsible for the killing, which took place in central Moscow on Tuesday. He discussed

sensitive intelligence on the condition of anonymity.

The general's killing came days after reports began to emerge about the death of a rocket scientist in Moscow's outskirts. The scientist, Mikhail Shatsky, worked for the state-run military industrial firm MARS.

One current and one former senior Ukrainian official said Mr. Shatsky was killed in an operation organized by Ukraine's military intelligence service, known as the H.U.R., because of what they believed was his complicity in war crimes against Ukrainian civilians.

The Russian government has not commented on the death of Mr. Shatsky, and the H.U.R. declined to comment when asked about him.

The detainee accused of killing General Kirillov traveled to Moscow and placed a bomb under a scooter near the general's home, the prosecutor's office spokeswoman said.

He also installed a camera inside a parked rental car that transmitted the general's movements to intelligence agents in Ukraine, she added.

He was promised \$100,000 and safe passage to Europe for carrying out the plot, she said.

An aide to the general was also killed when the bomb was detonated.

"We got more proof that the Kyiv regime does not stop at anything, including terrorism," Dmitri S. Peskov, the Kremlin's spokesman, told reporters on Wednesday. He added that President Vladimir V. Putin had offered condolences to the general's family.

General Kirillov was the most senior Russian official to have been assassinated away from the battlefield since the start of the war. Previous assassination attempts have targeted Russian propagandists and more junior military officers.

On Wednesday, Russia's foreign ministry spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova, said the country would raise the killing of General Kirillov at the scheduled meeting of the United Nations Security Council on Friday.

"We are certain that all the organizers and executors of the murder of Igor Kirillov will be found and punished, whoever

they are and wherever they may be," Ms. Zakharova said.

The general's killing is the latest embarrassment for Russia's domestic intelligence agency, the F.S.B., which has assumed greater power and influence since the start of the war in Ukraine nearly three years ago.

The F.S.B. has blamed Ukraine for most terrorist attacks and major accidents in the country since the invasion, usually without providing evidence.

Critics have said such tactics have allowed Russia's intelligence agencies to deflect the blame for their own failures to detect domestic threats, often associated with Islamist groups.

Analysts have said that the F.S.B. has been blindsided by several attacks associated with Islamism, including the deadliest terrorist attack in Russia in more than a decade, because they were excessively focused on combating Ukrainian sabotage and terrorism operations.

The admission from a Ukrainian intelligence official that Kyiv orchestrated the killing of General Kirillov suggests that the F.S.B. has now failed to protect the coun-

try's leadership from precisely such a threat.

After the killing, some Russian ultranationalist commentators accused the country's secret services of ineptitude.

"The enemy's secret services are acting with impunity on the territory of the Russian Federation, and above all in the capital and the metropolises," Yuri Kotenok, a prominent Russian war correspondent, wrote on social media on Tuesday. "This is mayhem."

The suspect's citizenship of Uzbekistan could be consequential. A combination of nationalist war fervor and the participation of citizens of Central Asian countries in recent terrorist attacks have led to a rise in xenophobia and a tightening of immigration laws in Russia.

The backlash against Central Asian immigrants, by far the largest group of foreign workers in Russia, has come at a time of record labor shortages.

Russia's business groups have been concerned that new measures against migrants would tighten the labor market further, with destabilizing effects for the economy.

E.U. Leaders And Zelensky Discussing Kyiv’s Future

By JENNY GROSS and STEVEN ERLANGER

BRUSSELS — Mark Rutte, the head of NATO, met with President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine and other European leaders at Mr. Rutte's residence in Brussels on Wednesday to discuss the deteriorating situation in the war with Russia and how Europe can offer more support to Kyiv.

The meeting came at an uncertain moment for Ukraine as it faces U.S. President-elect Donald J. Trump's push for an accelerated timetable for peace negotiations with Moscow. Mr. Zelensky is scheduled to address European Union leaders during a full summit meeting on Thursday.

Mr. Rutte has argued that any serious negotiations on a ceasefire or settlement would require convincing President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia that he has little further to gain in Ukraine. And that, Mr. Rutte has noted, requires stepped-up Western support for Kyiv.

"What we should focus on now is making sure that Ukraine gets to a position of strength," Mr. Rutte said on Wednesday, suggesting it was premature to say whether European peacekeepers would be involved in any future deal. "If we now start to discuss amongst ourselves what a deal could look like, we make it so easy for the Russians."

Mr. Rutte said his priority was improving Ukraine's air defenses and delivering more weapons to Ukraine. "We have to do everything now to make sure that when it comes to air defense, when it comes to other weapon systems, that we make sure that we provide whatever we can," Mr. Rutte said, adding that Mr. Zelensky's request for 19 air defense systems to protect Ukraine's critical infrastructure would be discussed.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz of Germany, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni of Italy and President Andrzej Duda of Poland were also expected to attend the Wednesday night meeting. They were all in town for a summit with leaders from the Western Balkans, as well as with David Lammy, the British foreign minister.

President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, was also at Mr. Rutte's residence Wednesday evening. Earlier, Mr. Zelensky met with President Emmanuel Macron of France.

Given the uncertainty about U.S. policy next year under Mr. Trump's leadership, Mr. Rutte will likely use the meeting to coordinate the response of European members of NATO. The Europeans want to convince Mr. Trump that a bad deal for Kyiv would make the American president look weak to China. They also want to show Mr. Trump that Europe is stepping up its support for Ukraine and will continue to do so.

There also could be a discussion of what one European diplomat, speaking anonymously per diplomatic practice, called "scenario planning," on what Europe might do to support Ukraine after any cease-fire, like setting up a peace-keeping force to prevent another Russian attack in the future.

The European Union's chief diplomat, Kaja Kallas, said on Wednesday that the stronger Ukraine was on the battlefield, the stronger it would be around the negotiating table.

"I see there is the wish for some really short and fast solutions, but we are in this situation where Russia does not want peace, and that is a problem," Ms. Kallas said.

The Wednesday discussions about Ukraine's future may serve as a basis for a wider discussion at the summit with all E.U. leaders the following day.

According to a draft of what the summit's conclusions might be — seen by The New York Times — leaders will call for the urgent stepping up of delivery of air defense systems, ammunition and missiles, as well as more training and equipment for Ukrainian forces. The leaders will also call for "intensifying work to further support and develop Ukraine's defense industry and to deepen its cooperation with the E.U. defense industry," according to the draft.

Earlier on Wednesday, E.U. leaders and leaders of Western Balkan countries met to discuss enhancing cooperation. The six Western Balkan countries have been bidding to join the European Union, but the road to accession will be cumbersome and slow, in part because of the onerous criteria for joining. The last time the bloc added a new member was in 2013.

Jenny Gross reported from Brussels, and Steven Erlanger from Berlin.

Michael Schwirtz contributed reporting from New York and Milana Mazaeva from Istanbul.

War in the Middle East

First Domestic Flight Since Assad's Ouster Lands in Aleppo

By RAJA ABDULRAHIM

ALEPPO, Syria — Shortly before the first domestic flight since Bashar al-Assad's fall landed at Aleppo International Airport late Wednesday morning, the final preparations were still being made. Workers rushed to remove about a dozen empty ammunition boxes, gas masks and helmets from a grassy patch next to the runway.

When the Syrian Air flight from Damascus landed, more than an hour behind schedule, it was greeted by a large crowd of journalists and a phalanx of security personnel, including military police officers and civil defense workers, standing by in case anything went wrong.

But its arrival was otherwise smooth — a sign, the rebels who ousted Mr. al-Assad as president 10 days ago hope, that Syria's new transitional government will be able to run the country. They want to prove they can provide Syrians with basic services, including domestic and international flights.

"We consider this a big accomplishment — we are coming to rebuild this country," said Anas Rustum, who was appointed to oversee the Aleppo airport by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the rebel group that led the offensive against the Assad government and now leads the transitional government in Damascus.

Mr. Rustum, speaking outside the airport terminal as the just-landed Airbus A320 sat on the tarmac behind him, said Syria's leaders were open to welcoming flights from all countries and airlines, touting "these results you are seeing in front of your eyes."

In another sign of the new government's efforts to restore services, Syria's central bank said on Wednesday that A.T.M.s and electronic payment services had been brought back online.

But the challenges remain immense.

The new government does not control all of Syria. The rebel alliance that ousted Mr. al-Assad holds much of the northeast and parts of the east and south, but other groups hold large parts of the country. Israel's military seized territory in southern Syria last week, and its prime minister signaled on Tuesday that it would occupy the area for the foreseeable future.

The transitional government has also inherited crippling sanctions imposed on the country during Mr. al-Assad's rule. And the United States, the United Nations and others continue to designate Hayat Tahrir al-Sham a terrorist organization, which could prevent the country from getting help with reconstruction and make it harder for governments to send aid. The group's leaders have called for the sanctions to be lifted, and pledged that all armed groups would be dissolved.

Reminders of the war were

Matthew Mpoke Bigg contributed reporting.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY IVOR PRICKETT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



A domestic flight from Damascus to Aleppo arrived on Wednesday, top, signaling that Syria's new rulers are confident they can govern. A backup control tower was used since the main one is damaged, above left. There was a rush to remove ammunition boxes.

close at hand on Wednesday, even as the Aleppo airport marked a new chapter. Throughout Syria's nearly 14-year civil war, the civilian facility was used by the Assad government to stage attacks on rebels and civilians living in rebel-held areas.

Ahmed Ibrahim, an airport control tower operator for nearly three decades, said the Assad forces had positioned a machine gun atop the control tower to fire on nearby neighborhoods, and rocket launchers on a grassy patch near the runway.

Airport staff removed the launchers a few days ago. The empty ammunition boxes that had been left there were taken away on Wednesday morning. The flight itself was directed from a backup control tower as the primary one was damaged in an earthquake last year — and again

during brief battles after the rebels captured the city on Nov. 30, leaving its windows pocked with bullet holes.

The rebel offensive, and the fall of the Assad regime, grounded Syria's flights. Until Wednesday, the only aircraft flying over the country had been Israeli warplanes carrying out hundreds of strikes on Syrian military and naval positions. The United Nations has called on Israel to cease its attacks on Syria and to respect the country's sovereignty.

"Operating the airport is connected to operating the skies," Mr. Rustum said. "And the air corridors are connected to neighboring countries."

Mr. Rustum, a small, smartly dressed man who had served as the airport's communications manager until 2012, a year after the civil war broke out, brimmed

with excitement on Wednesday. He said Syrian officials had been in touch with neighboring countries that were ready to resume flights to Syria.

When the rebels captured Aleppo, the airport's employees were initially afraid, Mr. Ibrahim said. But they were soon reassured as the rebel leadership called on all airport staff members to return to work.

He said that domestic and international aviation could be a symbol of the new, post-Assad Syria.

"We're hoping for there to be an opening to other countries," he said.

Syrian Air is one of the country's two national airlines, but because of years of international sanctions, many of its planes could not be kept in operation for lack of parts, he said.

Abutting the civilian airport in Aleppo is the Nayrab military airport, which during the Assad years housed Soviet-era warplanes and helicopters of the type that government forces used to bombard rebel-held areas, killing untold numbers of civilians.

The military side, which was also used by the Russian forces that backed the Assad regime, is now deserted. Pro-Assad graffiti is scrawled on a wall. In a Russian outpost at the military airport, Russian-language newspapers are splayed across a desk. Crude dumbbells — fashioned from scrap metal and concrete — sit in a corner.

In the courtyard of the military outpost lay a poster of the Russian president, Vladimir V. Putin, his face ripped. Inside, a photo of Mr. Putin meeting with Mr. Assad had been smeared with eggs.

Truce in Syria Is Threatened By Conflicts In the North

By LARA JAKES and ERIC SCHMITT

Battles between Kurdish and Turkish-backed fighters in northern Syria threatened on Wednesday to upend already shaky ceasefire agreements and stymie American attempts to contain escalating violence just as the country's 13-year civil war is ending.

A spokesman for the American-backed, Kurdish-led fighters known as the Syrian Democratic Forces said skirmishes with a militia supported by Turkey had broken out in a number of sites around the city of Kobani and the nearby Euphrates River.

"Our forces are currently establishing defensive positions to counter ongoing attacks and safeguard all areas within north and eastern Syria, with a particular focus on the defense of Kobani," Farhad Shami, the Kurdish forces' spokesman, said on the social media platform X.

He accused Turkey and its allies of "attempting to exploit the current truce to continue its expansionist agenda and deceive the international community."

Efforts on Wednesday to reach Turkish officials for a response were not immediately successful.

Matthew Miller, a State Department spokesman, said earlier this week that the outgoing Biden administration was trying to help prevent "any increase in fighting in northern Syria at this point."

But a senior American official in the region said Wednesday that the Kurdish fighters faced a "not imminent but serious" threat from the Turkish-backed militia.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive situation, predicted that the commander of the Kurdish forces, Gen. Mazloum Abdi, would need to be embraced by the new rebel-led government in Damascus to "keep his people safe and ISIS detained."

The violence highlights the precarious condition of Syria just days after the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad. The rebel alliance that toppled him — which is not involved in the Kurdish-Turkish clashes — is struggling to assert control over the country and keep its government functioning.

For years, the Kurdish-led forces, who control the northeastern part of the country, have been America's most reliable partner in Syria, liberating cities seized by the Islamic State and detaining around 9,000 of its fighters. Around 900 American troops are based in Syria to prevent the extremist group from rising again.

But Turkey has long seen the Kurdish forces in Syria as an enemy, allied with the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party, or P.K.K., in Turkey. The P.K.K. has fought the Turkish state for decades and is considered a terrorist group by Turkey and the U.S.

Kobani is a Kurdish-majority city on the Turkish border and holds enormous emotional significance for the Kurdish fighters who reclaimed it from the Islamic State in 2016 after a monthslong siege.

Last week, the dueling Kurdish forces and Turkish-backed militia agreed to a pause in fighting in Kobani and a cease-fire in Manbij, about 37 miles to the southwest, in agreements that the United States helped broker.

Mr. Miller, the State Department spokesman, said on Tuesday that the cease-fire in the Arab-majority city of Manbij would last "into the end of this week," but did not give an exact day for when it would end, or whether it might be extended again.

Both Kobani and Manbij have long been flash points in Syria, especially after the Islamic State took advantage of the chaos of the civil war.

American officials have hoped the Kurds' withdrawal would ease tensions with the Turkish-backed fighters who, in recent days, have attacked Kurdish positions around Kobani, east of the Euphrates, prompting thousands of people to flee, according to Kurdish military officials, activists and Syria analysts.

But the Kurdish fighters' spokesman, Mr. Shami, said the fighting has continued, and General Abdi said his forces were willing to create a demilitarized zone in Kobani supervised by American troops "to address Turkey's security concerns and ensure lasting stability in the region."

A second U.S. official in the region said that plan would pull back the Kurdish fighters to about 18 miles outside of Kobani. The city's police forces would remain and residents would not be displaced. American troops would monitor the situation in hope of establishing a cease-fire across northern Syria.

Eve Sampson contributed reporting.

Biden Pushing Search For Journalist in Syria

By ADAM GOLDMAN

WASHINGTON — The White House has given the rebel group that toppled the Syrian government a list of former officials who might have knowledge about Austin Tice, an American journalist who was abducted in Damascus in 2012.

The list of names provided to the group, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, is short, officials said, because U.S. investigators believe that only a small group in the Assad government knows the details of the case.

The outreach to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, which the U.S. designated a terrorist organization in 2014, reflects the Biden administration's intense efforts to find out what happened to Mr. Tice and take advantage of the group's willingness to help in the search.

Among the former Syrian officials on the list are Ali Mamlouk, a former head of Syria's National Security Bureau intelligence service; Bassam al-Hassan, a close adviser to Bashar al-Assad, Syria's ousted leader; and Hussam Luqa, a general who ran the General Intelligence Directorate, U.S. officials said.

Jake Sullivan, President Biden's national security adviser, directed that the information be provided to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham in the days after the fall of the Assad government, according to U.S. officials, who were not authorized to talk publicly about the discussions with the group.

The White House hopes that the Russians might be able to help. Mr. al-Assad fled to Moscow, and U.S. officials have asked Russia to speak with him about Mr. Tice. They have also reached out to

Lebanese officials who might have insights into some of the people on the list who escaped to Beirut, such as Mr. Mamlouk. Mr. al-Hassan's location is unknown.

The United States also gave the rebels a list of possible places in Syria where Mr. Tice might be.

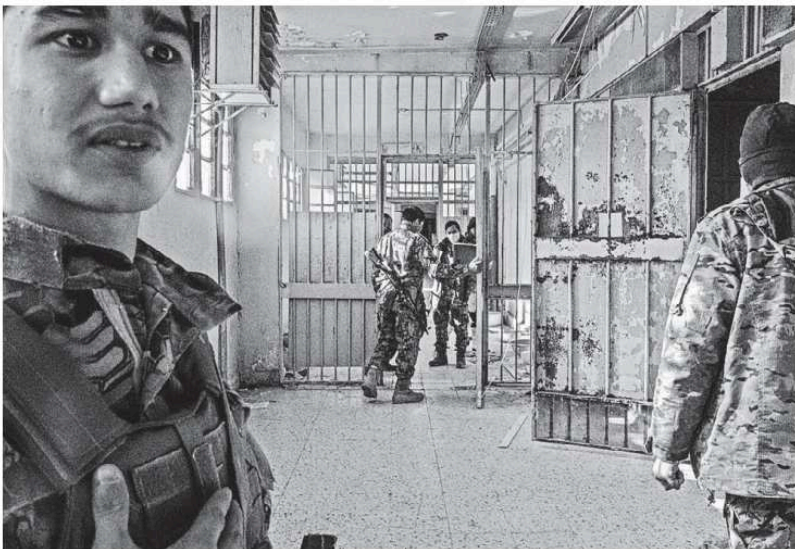
Journalists and nongovernmental workers have been searching prisons and other sites for clues about Mr. Tice but to no avail. The search has been complicated by Israeli bombings of Syrian military sites, which could contain clues about Mr. Tice.

The United States had previously asked Israeli officials to avoid striking prisons where Mr. Tice might have been held or that could have information about him.

In a letter to Mr. Tice's mother sent on Tuesday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel said he was coordinating with the Americans. He said the Israeli Army was not active in the area where Mr. Tice might be but did not provide details about the location.

The United States is weighing sending Roger D. Carstens, the special presidential envoy for hostage affairs, to Damascus, but the decision is complicated by security concerns and the U.S. designation of the rebel group as a terrorist organization, officials said. Since the Syrian government fell, Mr. Carstens has traveled to Beirut and Amman, Jordan, trying to advance the Tice case.

Officials said if credible information surfaced, the U.S. government could move quickly, pointing to the military's presence in Syria. Last week, when an American who had vanished nearly seven months ago emerged from a Syrian prison, the U.S. military flew



DANIEL BEREHULAK/THE NEW YORK TIMES

U.S. officials believe that journalist Austin Tice was at one point held at Sednaya prison in Syria.

him out of the country to Jordan.

Mr. Tice was abducted in August 2012. Weeks later, he appeared blindfolded in a video with masked men carrying assault rifles. Former American officials believe that the video was a ruse to blame militants for his abduction.

Investigators believe that Mr. Tice briefly escaped weeks after he was seized but was found by Syrian intelligence in a neighborhood in Damascus.

A witness who has spoken to the F.B.I. said Mr. al-Hassan was involved in Mr. Tice's capture and imprisonment. The witness said Mr. al-Hassan was furious when Mr. Tice escaped.

After he was recaptured, Mr. Tice was placed in a detention facility under the control of Mr. al-Hassan, who was in charge of Mr.

al-Assad's security.

F.B.I. agents have worked for years to piece together what happened to Mr. Tice and perhaps bring criminal charges as it has in other hostage cases. The F.B.I. and the Justice Department recently charged Syrian officials with committing war crimes.

The Biden administration has tried repeatedly to pry information out of the Syrians but failed. In 2022 and 2023, Brett McGurk and Joshua Geltzer, senior White House officials, traveled to Oman to meet with Imad Moustapha, a former Syrian ambassador, U.S. officials said.

The U.S. officials confronted Mr. Moustapha with a document showing that the Syrians had Mr. Tice in their custody in 2012. The document, one of the U.S. officials said, was the equivalent of what is

known in law enforcement circles as a "BOLO" — or be on the lookout — as Syrian officials combed Damascus looking for Mr. Tice after his escape.

Mr. Mamlouk has played a reoccurring role in U.S. efforts to learn more about what happened to Mr. Tice. In 2017, Mike Pompeo, the C.I.A. director at the time, spoke on the phone with Mr. Mamlouk about Mr. Tice. A senior C.I.A. official later traveled to Damascus during the Trump administration and spoke with Mr. Mamlouk.

Then in 2020, Mr. Carstens went to Damascus seeking answers from Mr. Mamlouk. As in previous encounters with U.S. officials, Mr. Mamlouk disclosed nothing about Mr. Tice.

Last week, the F.B.I. released an age-enhanced picture of Mr. Tice, who would be 43 years old.

Who Is Friedrich Merz, Top Candidate for Germany’s Next Chancellor?

By CHRISTOPHER F. SCHUETZE

BERLIN — The person most likely to replace Olaf Scholz as chancellor of Germany after the coalition government fell on Monday earned his fortune working in the private sector before returning to politics at 63.

That business background may be encouraging for many Germans as the political turbulence bedeviling one of Europe's most powerful economies has been caused, in part, by the country's stagnant economy.

If the polls hold, Mr. Scholz's successor as chancellor could be Friedrich Merz, 69, the leader of the rival conservative-centrist Christian Democratic Union. He is offering to get the German economic engine humming again after years of stagnation.

"You are leaving the country in one of the greatest economic crises in postwar history," he said to Mr. Scholz in front of lawmakers on Monday, shortly before he voted against him in the confidence vote.

"He's trying to bring back the Germany that works," said Sudha David-Wilp, the Berlin-based regional director of the German Marshall Fund, a research organization. She added that Mr. Merz was looking to create an environment "where the economy is producing and there's high growth."

How Germany Got Here

Mr. Scholz's loss of the vote of confidence in Parliament on Monday means the end of his coalition government and an early vote for a new legislature, most likely by February. Polls show that many Germans hold him responsible for the failures of his squabbling, three-party coalition, which included the Greens and the Free Democrats as well as Mr. Scholz's

Social Democrats.

Before this week's no confidence vote, the country's next elections had been set to be held in September, and the main political parties were already preparing, with the party candidates for chancellor already clear. The collapse of Mr. Scholz's government only accelerated the timing.

Presently, about 18 percent of German voters say they would cast ballots for the Social Democrats, far less than the roughly 32 percent who say they prefer Mr. Merz's Christian Democrats.

But when asked about his opponent, Mr. Scholz said recently that he was happy that it was Mr. Merz and not someone else from the deep conservative bench running against him.

"I think I'm somewhat cooler than him," Mr. Scholz said on public TV in November.

Unappealing Candidates

Among the four men leading the mainstream parties going into the elections, none are particularly popular, said Stefan Merz, a director at Infratest dimap, a polling company, who is not related to the leader of the Christian Democratic Union.

But in a recent survey by Infratest, 30 percent of respondents said they liked the work the other Mr. Merz was doing, putting him ahead in a field of four.

Stefan Merz noted that among a slate of unappealing candidates, the Christian Democratic leader was arguably the least weak. "If the Union should win the election, which at the moment everything points to, then it is mainly due to the political issues and not necessarily because of Friedrich Merz," he said.

Rising Through the Ranks

Mr. Merz was born and still lives in the Sauerland, a district of



Friedrich Merz, formerly a lawyer and a lobbyist, was chairman of BlackRock's German subsidiary. He is the leader of the Christian Democratic Union, the party of former Chancellor Angela Merkel.

western Germany known for hills, heavy food and natural beauty. It was from there that he was first elected to the European Parliament in 1989 and the German Parliament in 1994, which was then still in the West German capital, Bonn.

While he comes from the same party as former Chancellor Angela Merkel, Mr. Merz, a pugnacious old-school politician, is in many ways her polar opposite.

He rose through the ranks to lead the Christian Democrats' parliamentary group but was soon ousted by another star in the party — Ms. Merkel. It was then that Mr. Merz pivoted from politics and started a lucrative law ca-

reer.

"I liked the fact that he was also power-conscious," Ms. Merkel wrote about Mr. Merz in her recently published autobiography. "But there was a problem right from the start: We both wanted to be the boss."

Mr. Merz got rich working as a lawyer and a lobbyist. Before returning to politics, he was the supervisory board chairman of the German subsidiary of BlackRock, the American investment company.

It was only when Ms. Merkel was getting ready to retire that Mr. Merz got back into politics. When he returned to the political stage, in 2018, he promised he

could reduce the success of the far-right Alternative for Germany party, known by its Germany initials AfD, by moving his party further right on key issues like migration.

While his leadership has not resulted in lower poll numbers for the AfD, it might help stop his C.D.U. party from losing more voters, as it did to the far right during the Merkel years, analysts say.

Mr. Merz re-entered Parliament in 2021 and — after two failed attempts — won the party leadership in 2022 and worked to unify members around him.

"On the one hand, he has to get past his profile as being a man from yesterday and convince

women and maybe some left-leaning voters that his brand of conservatism is not going to put those voters in jeopardy," said Ms. David-Wilp.

"And at the same time," she added, "he also wants to convince voters of his knowledge of a Germany that worked well."

Merz Missteps

As party leader, however, Mr. Merz has made a number of gaffes and is known for statements that those on the left can find particularly irksome.

In September 2023, he claimed that refugees were having their teeth redone at taxpayers' expense while regular German patients were unable to get appointments (the head of the German Dental Association denied this).

Early last year, he used an outmoded term for young immigrants in describing what he said was sexist behavior toward German teachers in school.

Despite his significant personal means, Mr. Merz, who has sat on the boards of nearly a dozen big companies and flies a personal two-propeller plane, has insisted that he is just a regular member of the middle class. This has angered many Germans, who see him as being divorced from the economic reality many members of the middle class face.

Despite all that, Mr. Merz has managed to coalesce his party around him and shift it to a more traditional conservative posture after Ms. Merkel's long tenure took the party further to the left.

"In the past few years, Merz has used his time in opposition to rebuild the C.D.U.," said Marianne Kneuer, a political scientist at the Technical University in Dresden. "He has also had the time to gain his own experience and to learn from the mistakes of his political opponents."



A clash on Aug. 4 during an anti-immigration protest in Rotherham, England, days after a fatal attack wrongly ascribed to a migrant.

British Police Chiefs Faulted for Response to Riots

By MEGAN SPECIA

LONDON — A national plan to mobilize the British police was triggered three days too late during anti-immigration riots that shook the country this summer, an official report said Wednesday, in part because intelligence assessments didn't accurately predict the scale of the violence.

The report, which was published by the institution that oversees policing in England, underscores the challenge facing law enforcement in an era when online misinformation spreads rapidly and can result in real-world disorder.

Unrest gripped Britain for the better part of a week in late July and early August, after a 17-year-old killed three girls and wounded others at a dance class in Southport, near Liverpool. After false information about the attacker spread online, anti-immigrant and far-right mobs set fires, attacked the police and mosques, looted stores and targeted hotels housing asylum seekers.

The report, commissioned by the U.K. government after the riots, examined the response of eight police forces in areas where the unrest unfolded.

While it praised the work of officers for displaying "immense bravery in the face of extreme violence," the report criticized the National Police Chiefs' Council, which coordinates the response of police across the country, for not launching a national plan to tackle the riots earlier.

The mobilization effort, which involved greater deployments

around the country and using more specially trained officers, was not triggered until Monday, Aug. 5, a week after the attack. The report concluded that the council should have acted on Aug. 2, when it became clear that the disorder was escalating.

"With hindsight, the national mobilization plan should have been activated earlier," wrote Andy Cooke, the chief inspector of policing, in the report. He added: "Once the police service mobilized resources, it did this well. The professionalism of those leading the response deserves credit. But the systems and processes they work under need to change."

Mr. Cooke also expressed concern that "intelligence assessments didn't predict the rising tide of violent disorder well enough," and noted: "These assessments influence the timeliness of national mobilization decisions."

A second report, to be published in 2025, will focus specifically on intelligence about the riots and how social media misinformation inflamed the disorder. "It is crucial that forces are able to better anticipate these threats so they can prepare effectively," he said.

BJ Harrington, the National Police Chiefs' Council lead for public order, said in a statement that "scrutiny and reflection must always be expected after responding to major incidents such as this summer's major disorder."

"The report states that, with hindsight, the national mobilization plan should have been made earlier, and this is a helpful recommendation," he added. "Hindsight can be useful, and these learnings

are important, but we are pleased that the inspectorate also recognize how complex of a situation this was for policing to respond to, and that on the whole, the service did so well."

The riots began just weeks after Britain's general election in July and were seen as the first test of the newly elected Labour government and Prime Minister Keir Starmer.

Hours after the Southport attack took place on July 29, false claims about the identity of the

A mobilization was ordered three days late, a report says.

perpetrator began spreading online, with far-right agitators amplifying rumors that he was a Muslim asylum seeker who had recently entered the country by boat. The attacker was later identified as a 17-year-old named Axel Rudakubana, who was born in Cardiff, Wales, to a family originally from Rwanda.

A peaceful vigil was held in Southport on July 30, but later that night, violence flared near the site of the attack, with a mob setting police vehicles alight, damaging property and injuring dozens of police officers. The following night, violence broke out in Hartlepool, Manchester, and London, among other places, and by Aug. 2, riots had unfolded in Liverpool

and Sunderland before spreading to other locations.

The prime minister met with police officials on Aug. 1 and announced the creation of a nationwide unit that would allow police forces to share intelligence to crack down on what he called "gangs of thugs" intent on disruption.

But it wasn't until Aug. 5 that the full national mobilization of specialized police forces was ordered — by which time, hotels housing asylum seekers had been attacked and violent clashes between rioters and police had led to injuries and dozens of arrests around the country.

The report noted that the national mobilization plan, as well as the quick identification and prosecution of people taking part in criminal violence, "was instrumental in ending the disorder and restoring peace." But the failure to act quicker, it said, made it clear that "the police service hasn't learned all the lessons it should have from previous incidents of disorder."

The report also said that the police should have recognized that several violent incidents across Britain during 2023 and 2024, including displays of "extreme nationalist sentiment" and attacks on hotels housing asylum seekers, had increased the risk of disorder.

In the spring of 2024, a police risk assessment noted an uptick in cultural nationalism and a moderate increase in activity by "extreme right-wing groups," but the threat and risk of violent disorder was still described as "low."

Court Lets Police Seize Millions From Influencer

By LYNSEY CHUTEL

LONDON — A London court ruled on Wednesday that the police in Britain can seize more than 2 million pounds, about \$2.5 million, from bank accounts associated with Andrew Tate, the misogynistic online influencer who has bragged about evading taxes in the country.

The court found that Mr. Tate and his brother Tristan had failed to pay taxes on more than £21 million in revenue from a slew of businesses that include sexualized adult entertainment and online payment methods. The brothers, who are facing criminal charges including human trafficking in Romania, have failed to pay taxes there and in Britain, the court ruled.

Judge Paul Goldspring said in his decision that it was clear that the brothers had "engaged in longstanding, deliberate conduct in order to evade" their tax liabilities. He described the matter as "a relatively straightforward case."

The police in the Devon and Cornwall district of southwestern England had approached the court for an order to seize cash and cryptocurrency from frozen bank accounts belonging to Mr. Tate and his brother, as well as a woman identified only as "J" in court documents.

An American and British former competitive kickboxer, Mr. Tate has flaunted his wealth in ostentatious displays, including a fleet of luxury cars. Now an influencer and conspiracy theorist, he has used his online platform to brag about evading tax and to coach others on how to do so. Those videos were used against him in court as evidence.

"When I lived in England, I refused to pay tax," Mr. Tate said in one video quoted from in the ruling. In another, he incorrectly advised that setting up an online business in the United Arab Emirates would mean not having to pay tax.

Misogyny and demeaning comments about women are a fixture of Mr. Tate's online messaging,

and that extended to his stance on taxes, court documents showed.

"Tax is also another important element for controlling your woman," he said in a YouTube video that was used as evidence.

He went on to tell his followers, most of whom are men, that he paid women who worked for him only a third of their salaries, and bragged that he lied about tax deductions while keeping the rest of the money for himself.

Lawyers for the Devon and Cornwall police also questioned how Mr. Tate and his brother, who are in their 30s, had amassed their fortunes in less than a decade, "despite having no significant qualifications, business experience, shares, intellectual property or similar assets."

The lawyers said the brothers had purchased land in Romania and bought assets that had nothing to do with their businesses, transactions that the lawyers said bore "all the hallmarks of money laundering."

After the ruling, Mr. Tate accused the British government of stealing his money.

"When they fail to control your influence, they audit your influence," he said in a lengthy post on social media.

He also used the opportunity to condemn the charges that he is facing in Romania. "I'm a human trafficker supposedly. Where's the evidence?" he wrote in another post. "Remember that the government hates you."

Prosecutors in Romania and Britain have brought multiple charges against Mr. Tate and brother, including human trafficking and rape. Mr. Tate's case in Romania began in 2022, while the charges in Britain were filed in 2012 and 2015 but later dismissed.

The police in England now say they are working with their counterparts in Romania to revive that investigation and have obtained an arrest warrant. A court in Bucharest said this spring that Mr. Tate and his brother could be extradited to Britain, but only once legal proceedings in Romania are concluded.



Andrew Tate, left, and his brother Tristan in a Romanian court last week. They are accused of evading taxes there and in Britain.

China's Nuclear Arsenal Continues Rapid Growth

Pentagon Cites 3 Vast Fields of Missile Silos

By CHRIS BUCKLEY and JOHN ISMAY

China's nuclear arsenal and other elements of its armed forces have grown robustly despite anti-corruption investigations that have shaken the People's Liberation Army at its highest levels, the Pentagon said on Wednesday.

China's navy "continues to develop into a global force, gradually extending its operational reach beyond East Asia," the Defense Department said in an annual report assessing Beijing's military strength. It said China also seemed to be exploring the production of conventionally armed intercontinental ballistic missiles, which would give it another option — alongside its 135 or so nuclear long-range missiles — that could be used to threaten the continental United States.

China does not disclose how many nuclear weapons it has. The Pentagon report estimates that it has added about 100 nuclear warheads since last year, bringing its stockpile to more than 600 by mid-2024. That is still much smaller than the arsenals of the United States and Russia, but China appears to be on track to deploy more than 1,000 warheads by

sary in a nuclear exchange," the report said. China's "expanding nuclear force will enable it to target more U.S. cities, military facilities and leadership sites than ever before in a potential nuclear counterstrike," it added.

The advances reported by the Pentagon came despite recent corruption scandals in the Chinese military.

China's Ministry of National Defense revealed last month that Adm. Miao Hua, a member of the Central Military Commission — the Communist Party body that controls the armed forces — had been suspended on suspicion of "serious violations of discipline," a phrase that usually means corruption.

In June, party leaders officially accused two recent Chinese defense ministers — Gen. Li Shangfu and Gen. Wei Fenghe — of taking bribes and selling military promotions. Last year, Mr. Xi abruptly replaced two commanders of the People's Liberation Army Rocket Force, which controls nearly all of China's nuclear missiles.

Some of the corruption may have involved the silos built for ballistic missiles, but any issues with compromised silos have probably been addressed, the Pentagon report said. The report did not say how U.S. officials had reached those conclusions. The United States uses satellites and other technologies to closely monitor Chinese nuclear sites.

"The extent of the current wave of corruption cases, touching every service in the P.L.A., may have shaken Beijing's confidence in high-ranking P.L.A. officials," the report said, referring to the People's Liberation Army.

Still, disruption to China's military programs from the scandals seems to have been limited, said Andrew S. Erickson, a professor of strategy at the U.S. Naval War College. "They are fundamentally a speed bump, not a showstopper," he wrote in an email. "With some of the world's greatest military resources at his command, Xi is pressing ahead with determination."

Much of China's military planning is focused on Taiwan, a self-governed island democracy that Beijing claims as its territory. Leaders in Beijing have long said that they want to peacefully absorb Taiwan into China, but they also say they may resort to war. China has been stepping up naval and air force forays near Taiwan to increase its pressure on the island.

But the Pentagon report concluded that China remains some distance from being able to confidently consider invading Taiwan. It said China had shortcomings in urban warfare, which could be needed to seize Taiwanese cities, and in its ability to sustain supplies at long distances.

An amphibious invasion of Taiwan would be "a significant political and military risk" for the Communist Party and Mr. Xi, "even assuming a successful landing and breakout past Taiwan beachhead defenses," the report said.

Enabling Beijing 'to target more U.S. cities,' a report says.

2030, the report said. Russia and the U.S. each deploy 1,550 strategic nuclear weapons under a treaty that could expire in 2026.

To counter China, the Biden administration has been expanding U.S. security partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region, making deals that would allow U.S. forces to disperse across small islands and strike China with anti-ship weapons and cruise missiles. The Pentagon report may feed into calls for the incoming Trump administration to focus on China's rising military strength, even as the United States grapples with Russia's war in Ukraine and turmoil in the Middle East.

China's nuclear buildup indicates that its leaders see a need to expand the range of destructive options they could deploy against the United States in a crisis or a war, the Pentagon said. China's leader, Xi Jinping, has developed the country's arsenal more quickly than any previous leader.

The Pentagon said China seemed to have finished constructing three missile fields with 320 launch silos in its northern deserts and had placed missiles in some of the silos. It said China's rocket force was building dozens more silos to house Dongfeng-5 intercontinental missiles, each of which can rain multiple warheads on an enemy.

China's "force modernization suggests that it seeks the ability to inflict far greater levels of overwhelming damage to an adver-



Lining up for drinking water in Doujani, Mayotte, on Wednesday after Tropical Cyclone Chido slammed into the French territory.

France Rushes Aid to Mayotte After Deadly Cyclone

By AURELIEN BREEDEN

PARIS — The authorities in the French archipelago of Mayotte have introduced a curfew as they rush to get food and water into the territory in the aftermath of a tropical cyclone that killed at least 22 people and flattened entire neighborhoods.

Hundreds or even thousands are feared dead as a result of Tropical Cyclone Chido, which barreled into Mayotte, a series of islands off the eastern coast of Africa, over the weekend. French officials have said it could take days to know the true death toll, because roughly a third of the territory's 320,000 residents are undocumented immigrants, and many live in shanty towns.

The cyclone also slammed into Mozambique with heavy rains and strong winds, killing at least 34 people and completely or partly destroying over 35,000 houses, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Aid agencies fear that number also may increase as the scale of the disaster becomes clearer.

Officials who toured Mayotte said the devastation had spared no corner of the tiny archipelago, France's poorest territory. Videos released by France's interior ministry showed emergency workers sawing through fallen trees to disentangle them from power lines and clear roads. About 70 percent of the road network has been cleared of debris from the storm, the ministry said on Tuesday.

Communication in the territory is still hampered by downed networks. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said on Tuesday that it had lost contact with over

200 volunteers in Mayotte.

The curfew, introduced on Tuesday, is to be enforced from 10 p.m. to 4 a.m., France's interior ministry said, although it said that unrest and looting had been minimal. President Emmanuel Macron of France is expected to visit in the coming days.

Ambdilwahedou Soumaila, the mayor of Mamoudzou, the capital, told RFI radio on Tuesday that more than 1,400 people had been injured in the storm. About 8,000 people have taken shelter in schools, the authorities said.

The territory is often sheltered from the brunt of storms by neighboring Madagascar, he noted — but this time, the cyclone passed above the tip of Madagascar and hit Mayotte with full force.

"This natural phenomenon didn't give our territory a chance," Mr. Soumaila said.

He said that rescue workers had not yet reached many of the hillside shanty towns around Mamoudzou, where the storm uprooted trees and left piles of twisted, corrugated metal.

"Some areas are completely devastated," he said. "The priority today is food and water."

Réunion, a French island about 900 miles southeast of Mayotte, has become a staging area for rescue efforts and aid equipment, including thousands of tarps. France's interior ministry said on Monday evening that it expected half of Mayotte's drinkable water supplies to be restored within the next 48 hours, and 95 percent within the week. The authorities also said that the territory's single hospital would be bolstered by a field hospital in the coming days.

But the local authorities worry about the spread of disease if aid does not reach residents and if rescue workers cannot pull dead bodies out of the wreckage quickly.

"We could be facing a health crisis very soon," Ben Issa Ousseni, the president of Mayotte's local council, told local television.

As the rain has dissipated, aid agencies worry that stagnant water could lead to the spread of diseases like cholera and malaria.

Mozambique had just recently overcome the worst cholera outbreak in 25 years.

In recent years, Mayotte has experienced high levels of illegal immigration from nearby Comoros. Bruno Retailleau, France's departing interior minister, said on Monday that some undocumented residents had not gone to officially designated shelters in time. That has raised questions about whether fears of arrest or deportation hampered the territory's preparedness efforts.

In Mozambique, the coastal province of Cabo Delgado was worst affected, with 28 people killed by the storm and at least 300 injured.

The region is already struggling to house thousands of people displaced by a yearslong insurgency waged by a group backed by the Islamic State. The fighting has already displaced more than half a million people in the region of Northern Mozambique, leaving more people vulnerable to extreme weather and natural disasters.

A Holistic Concept to Save the Planet

By CATRIN EINHORN

Sometimes, human needs can make problems like climate change and biodiversity collapse seem insurmountable. The world still relies on fossil fuels that are dangerously heating the planet. People need to eat, but agriculture is a top driver of biodiversity loss.

But what if we're looking at those problems the wrong way? What if we tackled them as a whole, instead of individually?

A landmark assessment, commissioned by 147 countries and made public on Tuesday, offers the most comprehensive answer to date, examining the sometimes dizzying interconnections among biodiversity, climate change, food, water and health.

"Our current approaches to dealing with these crises have tended to be fragmented or siloed," said Paula Harrison, a co-chair of the assessment and an environmental scientist who focuses on land and water modeling at the UK Center for Ecology & Hydrology, a research organization. "That's led to inefficiencies and has often been counterproductive."

For instance, consider a parasitic disease known as schistosomiasis, or bilharzia, which affects more than 200 million people, especially in Africa. Spread by freshwater snails that thrive amid invasive aquatic plants nourished by fertilizer runoff, the disease is typically seen through the lens of the health sector and treated with medication, Dr. Harrison said. But a project in rural Senegal looked at the problem from additional angles. Clearing the invasive plants from bodies of water reduced infection rates in children by 32 percent. After composting, the vege-

tation can be used as a cheap alternative to cattle feed, increasing food production.

The report, by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, an independent panel that advises governments on biodiversity issues, focuses heavily on solutions. It includes scores of potential interventions along with their cascading effects.

For example, the authors note that efforts like incorporating prairie strips, areas of native vegetation amid crop rows, or strategically locating trees on farmland can help with biodiversity, food production, human well-being, water quality and climate change all at once.

Not all situations will have multiple wins. Often, negative consequences are unavoidable. But people should be aware of the trade-offs and make them deliberately, from national governments all the way to local communities, the authors said.

"Right now, we don't take account of a lot of the trade-offs," said Pamela McElwee, also a co-chair of the assessment and a professor of human ecology at Rutgers University. "And so, they get passed on to somebody else."

Overlooked costs to biodiversity, climate, water and health from the fossil fuel, agriculture and fisheries sectors were estimated at \$10 trillion to \$25 trillion per year.

Negative health consequences were especially costly, Dr. McElwee said. For instance, she pointed to the nine million people a year who die from air pollution, and the rise in obesity and diabetes because of unhealthy diets that also harm biodiversity and

contribute to climate change.

Direct public subsidies that are damaging to biodiversity amount to about \$1.7 trillion per year, incentivizing the private sector to invest even more in harmful activities.

Governments approved the report, which joins assessments on global biodiversity loss, invasive species and the use of wild animals. The latest negotiations, held in Windhoek, Namibia, hit tensions between business interests and nature and ran into overtime.

The purpose of such reports is to evaluate and synthesize the sprawling universe of existing and sometimes contradictory research. Governments use the findings to inform their policymaking at home and in global negotiations.

The latest report, three years in the making, had to overcome the very problem it sought to examine: the entrenched silos separating sectors.

"The biodiversity literature is quite separate from the water literature, which is quite separate from the health literature, which is quite separate from the food literature and climate change and so forth," Dr. McElwee said.

Such divisions were also apparent among the 165 experts who contributed, she said. They had to learn new language and sometimes found themselves outside their comfort zones as they engaged with people and ideas from other fields.

Adding to the urgency of the work is the reality that as these crises worsen, they often amplify one another. Collapses in pollinator numbers and droughts fueled by climate change make it harder to grow food, for example.

Lynsey Chutel and Nazaneen Ghaffar contributed reporting from London.

Dubai Duty Free

WORTH FLYING FOR

Over 40,000 sq. metres of spectacular shopping. Thousands of limited editions and travel exclusives. Hundreds of the world's most desirable brands. But only one glorious destination: Dubai Duty Free.

SHOP AT DUBAI DUTY FREE

WIN-THIS CAR

Full of surprises.

A Stubborn Enemy, Measles, Stalks the Children of Congo

From Page A1

zation.

There were more than 311,000 reported cases of measles in Congo last year. Some 6,000 of them ended as Olive's did: with a child buried in a small coffin days after first running a fever and breaking out in a red rash. This year, cases have been fewer — about 97,000 — but the virus has become more lethal, killing more than 2,100. It's not clear why.

Globally, there were 20 percent more measles cases in 2023 than in the year before, according to the World Health Organization, for a total of 10.3 million, and more than 107,000 people died. Fifty-seven countries had “large or disruptive” outbreaks, the W.H.O. said, nearly 60 percent more than in 2022.

There are more measles outbreaks in places such as Minnesota and New Brunswick because parents mistrust vaccines or don't believe their children will be seriously affected if they catch the virus. In the United States, President-elect Donald J. Trump's choice for federal health secretary, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., has fought vaccine mandates and said parents should have the right to choose not to vaccinate their children.

But many parents in places such as Congo never have the chance to vaccinate their children, however much they want to.

Olive lived about 28 miles from Bikoro, in a village called Ikoko Ipenge, where there is no health center. Her father worked in Bikoro, her mother far off in Mbandaka, the regional capital, so she stayed mostly with her grandmother. On Nov. 29, when her breathing turned to shallow gasps, her grandmother gathered her up at dawn and persuaded a neighbor to take them, balanced on the back of a bicycle, to a slightly bigger village. That took four hours. There she hired a motorbike driver to take them one more hour to Bikoro.

There, they reached a measles treatment center, which was set up by the international medical aid organization Doctors Without Borders a few months ago when the disease began to overwhelm the pediatric ward of the hospital next door.

The center was made of wood and tarpaulin. There were 10 children already admitted when Olive arrived; she was one of 18 more who came throughout the day.

She needed oxygen and a blood transfusion, but the hospital had no blood bank, and so a donor had to be found.

Her aunt came to sit by her bedside, gently holding the child's hands at her sides so that she could not pull out the tube from her nose.

By 7 p.m., Olive was dead.

Her mother, Gisele Mboyo Ekongo, arrived from Mbandaka the next morning, having traveled through the night. The cellphone network is so weak in the region that the first she heard of her child's illness was news of her death.

She said she had done her best to have her children immunized, but it was difficult for people who farmed or traveled for work to seek out vaccines.

“The vaccines don't come; the care is so far away,” she said.

Measles causes a high fever, vomiting and diarrhea, as well as a characteristic rash that is provoked by the immune system's T cells trying to fight viral infection in skin cells.

It is a serious illness anywhere — 40 percent of children in the United States who catch measles are hospitalized. But it is particularly brutal for children who live in places with little or no medical care.

Measles causes “immune amnesia,” wiping out immunity to other infections that children may have built up and making them vulnerable to gastrointestinal and respiratory infections such as pneumonia — which seems to have been what killed Olive. Diarrhea can quickly kill a child who is already frail from undernutrition; an estimated 4.5 million Congolese children are acutely malnourished.

Severe cases of measles can also cause deafness, blindness and encephalitis. But those are seen less often in Congo, said Dr. Eric Mafuta, a professor at the school of public health at the University of Kinshasa, because a child such as Olive will succumb to what he called “the lethal cocktail” of pneumonia and diarrhea before the other conditions have time to develop.

Congo is one of four big, populous countries that have never managed to rein in measles (the others are Ethiopia, Nigeria and Pakistan). Stopping the disease requires vaccination coverage above 95 percent, far higher than Congo has achieved. (In the United States, coverage has slipped to 93 percent.)

UNICEF and the W.H.O. estimate Congo's measles vaccine coverage rate at 52 percent. Research based on analysis of children's blood showed that in the most isolated or poorest provinces, as few as 13 percent of children had measles antibodies, from either vaccination or infection.

The measles vaccine costs less than a dollar and is given at no cost to families. Congo's government is helped by Gavi, the international organization that buys vaccines for low-income countries, to purchase them, and by UNICEF to deliver them.

But many things stand in the way of delivering those vaccines to Congolese children.

The first is logistics: All vaccines sent to Congo enter through Kinshasa, the capital, but getting them beyond the cities to rural health posts is daunting.

Congo is the size of Western Europe, yet the United Nations estimates that it has only about 1,800 miles of paved roads. In the lengthy rainy season, those roads often become impassable.

To be most effective, the measles vaccine must be kept chilled until it is used, which can be challenging in a country with a hot climate and a frail electrical grid.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ARLETTE BASHIZI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Werra Maulu Botey, center, at the coffin of his daughter, Olive, 5, on Dec. 1. In the past two years, the disease has killed over 8,000 people in Congo.



Left, Gisele Mboyo Ekongo with her only remaining child, a measles survivor, in Bikoro, Congo. Right, Jean-Paul Bolamba with his son, who recovered from measles a few weeks after the death of his 5-month-old nephew from the disease. In remote parts of Congo, vaccinations and medical care are scarce.

Vaccination relies on nurses, and on outreach workers who visit communities, traveling on motorbikes with megaphones to tell parents to bring their children to a central point. But nurses rarely receive their nominal salaries, and outreach workers are not paid at all unless an aid agency gives them a stipend during an emergency vaccine campaign. So they are not always motivated to do the job, which can involve arduous travel, Dr. Mafuta said.

Congo has had civil conflicts within its borders for decades, and at least seven

million Congolese are internally displaced — 740,000 people have had to flee their homes this year alone. The fighting can put children beyond the reach of the health system, although aid organizations do targeted immunizations in camps where displaced people live.

Even when vaccines arrive and health workers are on hand, the inoculations still need to reach the children. Olive's parents, agricultural laborers, leave home before dawn and return at dusk. If a worker passes through the village to vaccinate children, they won't be there.

Dr. Mafuta, who leads annual surveys of Congo's vaccination coverage, described arriving in villages to find only a handful of elderly people and small children. Infants are taken to the fields with their mothers; 6- and 7-year-olds are left in charge of toddlers.

“You see this, and then you know there is no possibility those children are getting vaccinated,” Dr. Mafuta said. “Perhaps a mother knows there will be a vaccination that day, and her choice is: I go to gather food, or I go to sell some things in the market, so that my children eat to-

day, or I take them to the vaccination. Which will she choose? At the root of it, it's a question of survival.”

The first measles shot is routinely given at 9 months (before that, maternal antibodies can interfere with the effectiveness), and by that point, parents who took newborns to get shots may have stopped thinking about vaccination.

That, he added, is a failure of public education, because parents worry about measles, but do not realize their child is not protected. “If you ask any parent in Congo what illnesses they are afraid of, they will say first measles, then malaria,” he said. “Because the ones at the forefront of their mind are the ones they see kill children.”

The situation could improve. Rapid diagnostic tests for measles should be available in a year or two, helping countries identify outbreaks more quickly. Dr. Natasha Crowcroft, who leads the measles response at the W.H.O., said another significant shift would be the delivery of the vaccine in a patch, which would eliminate the refrigeration requirement and ease distribution. The patches are in clinical trials.

Controlling measles in a country such as Congo is doable, she said, but will require political commitment and the strengthening of basic aspects of the health system. Currently, the country relies heavily on sweeping catch-up campaigns every few years, but those are disruptive and pull attention and resources away from the weak routine immunization program, she said.

When her extended family gathered to take Olive's body to a field to be buried, her mother stayed behind, unable to watch her daughter be put in the ground.

Olive, she said, loved the family's plot of land, where she had her own small collection of cassava plants. Olive loved to play football in the rain. And she loved to dance. Just before the burial, her friends and her cousins gathered in three rows, and danced for her.



Mboyo Binteka, 2, being treated for measles and severe malnutrition at a Doctors Without Borders center.

Cabinet Picks: Fact vs. Theory

What do they think of the agencies they hope to lead?
Here is the truth behind the views of four candidates.

By LINDA QIU

As President-elect Donald J. Trump returns to Washington, his picks for high-ranking cabinet positions have put into sharp relief his vow to shake up the establishment: Many of his would-be nominees have been fierce critics of the very agencies they are seeking to helm. But some of the claims they have leveled are faulty to start. Among the more controversial candidates are Pete Hegseth as defense secretary, Tulsi Gabbard as director of national intelligence, Kash Patel as F.B.I. director and Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as the secretary for health and human services.



President-elect Donald J. Trump selected loyalists to lead his cabinet next term.

Pete Hegseth

Defense Secretary

Mr. Hegseth, a Fox News host and veteran, wrote a book decrying the “cultural chaos and weakness” invoked by top military brass obsessed with “woke” ideologies. Earlier remarks over whether women should serve in combat and his suggestion that top officials involved in the withdrawal of Afghanistan should be removed have also elicited scrutiny.

He has accused the Biden administration and the news media of inflating extremism in the military.



FOX NEWS JAN. 5, 2024

“So then they do this study, which confirms what we all know, that they’re actually less racist in the military because you’re taught to focus on merit and your responsibility, and then they bury it and don’t want to talk about it.”

He was referring to, and imprecisely describing, the findings of a study commissioned by the Pentagon and released in December 2023. The study found “no evidence that the number of violent extremists in the military is disproportionate to the number of violent extremists in the United States as a whole.” But it did find that the rate of participation among veterans in “extremist ideologies and behaviors” was “slightly higher and may be growing.” It also noted that “racism and sexism continue to be problems in the military.”

In other instances, Mr. Hegseth has singled out what he calls “poisonous ideologies” of climate change and gender parity.

FOX NEWS JUNE 2, 2024

“Our military is pumping out electric tanks. China is building a military specifically designed to defeat us and our defense industry because of our generals who’ve given into ideologues is focused on climate change.”

The Army does have a goal to incorporate hybrid tactical vehicles by 2035, and fully electric ones by 2050. But those are not tanks. Moreover, the impetus has more to do with concerns about fuel supplies in combat and the tactical advantage of silence that an electric vehicle confers.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

Health and Human Services Secretary

Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who ran for the Democratic nomination before endorsing Mr. Trump and joining his transition team, is a leading vaccine skeptic whose views on medicine and health swerve far outside the mainstream. Like the president-elect, Mr. Kennedy is prone to sharing baseless theories based on little evidence.

In voicing skepticism of vaccines, he has promoted misinformation.

TESTIMONY TO LOUISIANA HOUSE DEC. 6, 2021

“If you look at their post-licensing record, it confirms that this is the deadliest vaccine ever made.”

Mr. Kennedy, in testifying before state lawmakers during the coronavirus pandemic, pointed to a chart that purported to show “19,000 deaths reported from Covid vaccines, more than from all other vaccines combined in 30 years,” citing data from the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System.

But the database allows anyone to post a report, and is not verified. A disclaimer on the vaccine reporting website cautions that “no proof that the event was caused by the vaccine is required in order for VAERS to accept the report.”

At the time of Mr. Kennedy’s comments, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had confirmed that six deaths had been caused by the vaccine, out of more than 450 million doses and a far cry from the 19,000 figure, PolitiFact reported.

Mr. Kennedy advanced a groundless theory that elicited accusations of antisemitism and racism.



NEW YORK POST VIA YOUTUBE

VIDEO PUBLISHED BY THE NEW YORK POST JUNE 15, 2023

Covid-19 is targeted to attack Caucasians and Black people. The people who are most immune are Ashkenazi Jews and Chinese.

On social media, Mr. Kennedy defended his remarks by citing a 2020 study that he said showed the structure of the virus was “most compatible with Blacks and Caucasians and least compatible with ethnic Chinese, Finns and Ashkenazi Jews.” But scientists dismissed his claims about the study, which did not say that Chinese people were less susceptible to the virus. The study did say that one receptor for the virus did not appear to be present in Amish or Ashkenazi Jews.

Kash Patel

F.B.I. Director

Mr. Patel, a right-wing pugilist, has promised to reshape the F.B.I. by firing its top officials, closing its headquarters in Washington and going after Mr. Trump’s rivals. His statements reflect a suspicion of the institution he would be in line to run, undermining its work as biased and marginalizing the F.B.I.’s efforts to hold to account members of the pro-Trump mob who threatened the transfer of power.

He has cast the agency as corrupt and its investigations as politically motivated by mischaracterizing agency procedures and records laws.

THE SHAWN RYAN PODCAST SEPT. 2, 2024

President Trump gets his home raided on a bogus WhatsApp warrant, which the F.B.I. leaks to the media. Then they go in there and they stage that photo display and everybody’s like, “Oh my God, look at all this classified materials.” What they don’t explain to the American public is he’s a president, former president, Presidential Records Act — Bill Clinton did the same thing. Every president before him has done the same thing. They can take what they want. That’s the law. So you can’t be prosecuted for possessing classified documents.

Mr. Patel was referring to, and mischaracterizing, several elements of the F.B.I.’s search of Mar-a-Lago and the federal case against Mr. Trump for mishandling classified documents.

By “bogus WhatsApp warrant,” Mr. Patel appeared to be referring to the disclosure that an F.B.I. agent used WhatsApp to swear out the warrant application before a judge. The F.B.I. did not “leak” the warrant, as Mr. Patel said; rather, the Justice Department sought to unseal it and a judge approved the request — after Mr. Trump encouraged its release. And it is standard practice for the F.B.I. to take photos of evidence obtained in searches.

Mr. Patel is also wrong that the Presidential Records Act of 1978 allows departing presidents to “take what they want” and that other presidents have done the same thing as Mr. Trump. The law gives the National Archives and Records Administration ownership and control of presidential records. The agency has said that “it assumed physical and legal custody of the presidential records” from every one of Mr. Trump’s predecessors dating to Ronald Reagan.

A spokesman for the Trump transition cited a case in which a conservative legal group sued former President Bill Clinton for access to audiotapes of interviews between Mr. Clinton and a historian. But that case is not particularly relevant to Mr. Trump’s, as a federal judge ruled that the audiotapes were personal records. Mr. Trump was accused of taking classified documents and presidential records.

He has sought to rewrite the history of the Capitol attack, falsely pinning blame on Speaker Nancy Pelosi for the violence.



KASH PATEL Real America's Voice Contributor

“WAR ROOM” OCT. 7, 2024

There was no insurrection. They ginned it up. Pelosi was too busy filming her movie on Jan. 6 in the halls of the Capitol. That’s how scared she was of everyone outside. And this is what the deep state does: They buried it. Nancy Pelosi on Jan. 6 was recording a movie she as a speaker was making, and in it she said on video, I’m responsible for the security failures of Jan. 6. And the Jan. 6 committee withheld that information for three years, as did she and she lied about it. We’ve got the receipts from Bowser in the book, her own letter, where Mayor Bowser rejects Donald Trump’s authorization of additional National Guard.

This exchange on Steve Bannon’s podcast referred to footage captured for a documentary about Nancy Pelosi, the former House speaker. In multiple clips, released by House Republicans this summer, Ms. Pelosi is seen on the day of the riot huddled with other lawmakers in a secure room, walking briskly down a hallway surrounded by security guards, and sitting in a moving car, all the while expressing frustration about security lapses. She was not actively filming a movie, unbothered by the riot unfolding, as Mr. Patel suggested.

The clips do include Ms. Pelosi saying, in an apparent reference to the Capitol Police’s lack of preparation: “They clearly didn’t know and I take responsibility for not having them just prepare for more because it’s stupid that we should be in a situation like this” and “Oh my god, I can’t believe the stupidity of this. And I take full responsibility.” But securing the Capitol is the job of the Capitol Police and a three-member governing board that includes the architect of the Capitol, one official appointed by the speaker and one appointed the Senate leader. Moreover, it is the president who is authorized to deploy the D.C. National Guard, not Ms. Pelosi.

Mr. Patel also referred to a letter Mayor Muriel Bowser wrote to Trump administration officials. But that letter was dated and posted on Jan. 5, 2021, a day before the riot, stating that the city had not asked for additional law enforcement for planned protests and requesting that federal agencies coordinate with the city police for further deployments. The letter does not contain evidence that Ms. Bowser turned down Mr. Trump’s authorization of additional National Guard troops.

Tulsi Gabbard

Director of National Intelligence

Ms. Gabbard is known for her outlier positions, especially on foreign policy. Once aligned with the Democratic Party as a congresswoman from Hawaii, she is now a Trump loyalist who has drawn particular scrutiny for embracing talking points that echo disinformation from Russian state media. If confirmed, Ms. Gabbard would oversee more than a dozen spy agencies and have access to highly sensitive intelligence.

Ms. Gabbard has been critical of the Biden administration’s support for Ukraine in its war against Russia.



TULSI GABBARD | U.S. ARMY RESERVES LT COL MITT ROMNEY CALLS TULSI GABBARD ASONOUS LIAR” FOR VOICING BIOLAB

FOX NEWS MARCH 14, 2022

GABBARD “The danger in the media, lying so blatantly to the American people, these so-called journalists who have a responsibility to the public, is it poses a very direct threat to our democratic republic because they continue to get away with it. They continue to parrot and propagate these lies, and they need to be held accountable. They need to be exposed.”

TUCKER CARLSON “And by the way, the U.S. government has said that there are bioweapons in Ukraine. There are Soviet-era bioweapons —”

GABBARD “Over and over.”

CARLSON “That we’re going to destroy that we haven’t. So they’ve said that.”

Ms. Gabbard appeared on “Tucker Carlson Tonight” to rebut criticisms that she had repeated an unfounded claim, promoted by Russian state media, that the United States was funding bioweapons laboratories in Ukraine. She argued that she had said “no such thing” but rather that she had merely warned that laboratories conducting biological research could be compromised in a warzone.

A spokeswoman for the Trump transition cited comments Victoria Nuland, then the under secretary for political affairs at the State Department, made in congressional testimony. Ms. Nuland said that Ukraine had biological research facilities and that the government was working with Ukraine on how to prevent materials from falling into Russian hands.

But Mr. Carlson had mischaracterized Ms. Nuland’s remarks as an admission of the existence of bioweapons labs — and Ms. Gabbard concurred, despite her earlier precision to avoid conflating the two terms. Officials had said that the labs in Ukraine may contain pathogens once used for Soviet-era weapons programs, but that the labs did not have the ability to manufacture bioweapons. A United Nations official said it was also not aware of any biological weapons program in Ukraine.

Ms. Gabbard has also accused the “security state” of targeting perceived political enemies.

FOX NEWS AUG. 11, 2022

“You are not allowed to disagree with the F.B.I. That is the new message. The security state will label you an extremist for daring to challenge or disagree with the regime’s weaponization of law enforcement.”

Ms. Gabbard was referring to and mischaracterizing remarks made by Attorney General Merrick B. Garland about the F.B.I.’s court-approved search of Mar-a-Lago, Mr. Trump’s Florida estate, earlier that month. She played a clip of Mr. Garland saying: “Let me address recent unfounded attacks on the professionalism of the F.B.I. and Justice Department agents and prosecutors. I will not stand by silently when their integrity is unfairly attacked.”

Ms. Gabbard portrayed the remarks as a “stark warning to anyone who dares to disagree” with the Biden administration and the Washington establishment.

But Mr. Garland was speaking specifically about the search, which occurred in early August 2022 as part of an investigation into whether Mr. Trump had improperly retained classified documents after he left office.

For days, Mr. Garland stayed silent about the search as Mr. Trump advanced numerous false and unsupported claims. Three days later, Mr. Garland announced that the Justice Department would seek to unseal the warrant.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Revenge Tour Maps Its Case Versus Cheney

By **ALAN FEUER**
and **MAGGIE HABERMAN**

For years, President-elect Donald J. Trump has made it known that people he believes to be his enemies should be prosecuted.

This week, his allies in Congress laid out a template for how to go after one of them in particular: Liz Cheney, the former Wyoming representative who has been a focus of Mr. Trump's anger.

In a report released on Tuesday, House Republicans said Ms. Cheney should face an F.B.I. investigation for work she did for the congressional committee that examined Mr. Trump's attempts to cling to power after he lost the 2020 election. They accused her of tampering with one of the committee's star witnesses who gave damning testimony about Mr. Trump.

The recommendation had no binding authority, and any investigation of Ms. Cheney would have to be opened by Mr. Trump's Justice Department once he enters office. Still, the House subcommittee's report detailed a road map for what an inquiry might ultimately look like — while also relieving Mr. Trump of the potentially fraught step of explicitly ordering the inquiry himself.

Appearing to have it both ways, Mr. Trump seized on the House report on Wednesday morning, saying that it could present problems for Ms. Cheney, but avoiding responsibility for having been the cause of them.

"Liz Cheney could be in a lot of trouble based on the evidence obtained by the subcommittee, which states that 'numerous federal laws were likely broken by Liz Cheney, and these violations should be investigated by the FBI,'" he wrote in a post on Truth Social.

While Mr. Trump has never been shy about his desire to see his enemies punished, he has often exercised a measure of caution when it comes to taking credit for potential prosecutions.

In an interview this month on NBC's "Meet the Press," for instance, the host Kristen Welker asked him whether he planned to order prosecutions against his adversaries, such as the Biden family.

"I'm not looking to go back into the past," Mr. Trump said. He was also asked whether he wanted Kash Patel, his choice to lead the F.B.I., to launch investigations into his opponents.

"I mean, he's going to do what he thinks is right," Mr. Trump responded, distancing himself from the process. Then, after explicitly saying he would not direct investigations, Mr. Trump added that if people had been "dishonest or crooked," there was probably "an obligation" to investigate them.

Mr. Trump likes Mr. Patel as the person to run the F.B.I. because the two share a similar vision of how — and against whom — to use the bureau's powers, said Daniel C. Richman, a former federal prosecutor and a law professor at Columbia.

"Putting loyalists like Kash Patel in office means that barely articulated whims are likely to be acted on," Mr. Richman said.

A spokesman for Mr. Trump said on Wednesday that the nation's "system of justice must be fixed and due process must be restored for all Americans." Still,



Representative Liz Cheney of Wyoming during a December 2022 hearing of the House panel investigating the Capitol attack.

he added that Mr. Trump has often said that the Justice Department and the F.B.I. "will make decisions on their own accord because he actually believes in the rule of law."

Prosecuting political rivals or detractors was a theme of Mr. Trump's first term in the White House.

During his first presidential campaign, he often joined crowds at his rallies in chanting, "Lock her up!" — a reference to his opponent Hillary Clinton, whom he and other Republicans believed should have been investigated for using a private email server while she was secretary of state. After he won that election, however, Mr. Trump appeared to soften his stance, telling The New York Times editorial board that he did not want to "hurt the Clintons."

But Mr. Trump, facing a special counsel investigation of his own, changed his mind again in 2018, telling his White House counsel that he wanted to order the Justice Department to investigate Mrs. Clinton. He also wanted them to investigate James B. Comey, the F.B.I. director whom Mr. Trump had fired, leading to the appointment of the special counsel Robert S. Mueller III.

Mr. Mueller investigated whether Mr. Trump's 2016 campaign had ties to Russia, which the intelligence community had already determined had interfered in the election in order to hurt Mrs. Clinton.

While the White House counsel ultimately declined to approve his plans to investigate Mrs. Clinton, Mr. Trump made clear on social media during his years in office that he believed various people should be prosecuted.

In recent weeks, Mr. Trump has singled out Ms. Cheney in a similar fashion, saying outright that she and other leaders of the Jan. 6 committee should go to jail. He has also suggested, over the course of several months, that Gen. Mark A. Milley, his onetime chairman of the Joint

Chiefs of Staff, should be tried for treason, even executed.

Mr. Trump has called for Jack Smith, the special counsel who brought two criminal cases against him last year, to be "thrown out of the country." And after he was arraigned on the first of Mr. Smith's indictments, he said that, as president, he would appoint "a real special prosecutor" to "go after" President Biden and his family. (He has since backed away from his position on specifically investigating the Bidens.)

In Mr. Trump's first term, critics were concerned that he

A path to an inquiry leaves the decision out of Trump's hands.

was seeking to violate the post-Watergate norm of Justice Department independence.

Now, Mr. Trump will be entering the White House again with his allies having spent the last four years in search of lawyers who are willing to abide by a maximalist view of presidential power. Some of those lawyers take the view of the unitary executive theory, which argues that the president is the person with lone control over the executive branch, including pockets of seeming independence like the Justice Department.

Mr. Trump is not just relying on the levers of government to go after those he has publicly said are his enemies. He has also taken a direct hand in civil lawsuits against his perceived adversaries in the media in particular.

Over the weekend, ABC News agreed to pay \$15 million in damages and \$1 million in legal fees to settle a defamation suit he brought against the network, accusing its star anchor George

Stephanopoulos of making on-air statements that damaged his reputation.

Mr. Stephanopoulos said several times in a March segment that Mr. Trump had been found by a civil jury to be "liable for rape." Mr. Trump was found liable for sexual abuse, and while the jury ruled that Mr. Trump had not committed rape under the narrow definition of that term in New York law, the judge later said he had concluded that Mr. Trump's actions constituted rape as the term is ordinarily understood.

Seemingly emboldened by the victory against ABC, Mr. Trump filed another lawsuit on Monday against The Des Moines Register, saying that the newspaper had engaged in "election interference" by publishing a poll just before Election Day that showed him trailing Vice President Kamala Harris.

The House report on Ms. Cheney, prepared by a Republican-led subcommittee on oversight, was specifically focused on the former representative, who broke with her G.O.P. colleagues over their ongoing support of Mr. Trump in 2021. But she has also infuriated Mr. Trump not only because she helped to lead the congressional investigation into him, but because she crossed party lines in the election and campaigned against him in support of Ms. Harris.

The report claimed that Ms. Cheney may have violated "numerous federal laws" by secretly communicating with Cassidy Hutchinson, a star witness for the Jan. 6 committee, without the knowledge of Ms. Hutchinson's lawyer.

When Ms. Hutchinson was first approached to provide testimony to the committee, she was represented by a lawyer who had once worked in the Trump administration's White House Counsel's Office.

After meeting with Ms. Cheney, she hired a different lawyer and her subsequent public testimony was damaging to Mr.

Trump. It included allegations that he had been warned his supporters were carrying weapons on Jan. 6, but expressed no concern because they were not a threat to him.

The report asked the F.B.I. to investigate whether Ms. Cheney's dealings with Ms. Hutchinson were carried out in violation of a federal obstruction statute that prohibits tampering with witnesses. The report also accused Ms. Hutchinson of lying under oath to the committee several times and suggested that investigators examine whether Ms. Cheney had played any role in "procuring another person to commit perjury."

Ms. Cheney has denounced the report, saying it "intentionally disregards the truth" about her own committee's work and "instead fabricates lies and defamatory allegations in an attempt to cover up what Donald Trump did."

Setting aside the details of Ms. Cheney's interactions with Ms. Hutchinson, Alan Z. Rozenshtein, a former Justice Department official who teaches at the University of Minnesota Law School, said that the speech or debate clause of the Constitution would likely hinder any inquiry into Ms. Cheney. That provision, which is intended to protect the separation of powers, generally shields lawmakers from being questioned outside of Congress about official conduct.

"The speech or debate clause is very broad," Mr. Rozenshtein said, "and would be a substantial, if not insurmountable, obstacle to any investigation into Liz Cheney for her actions as part of the committee."

Chuck Rosenberg, a former U.S. attorney and F.B.I. official, also said that an investigation of Ms. Cheney could be difficult to push toward criminal charges.

"I believe that in order to go to jail there has to be compelling evidence that you committed a crime," Mr. Rosenberg said. "That does not seem to be the case here."

House Panel Quietly Voted To Release Gaetz Report

Details Coming At Week's End

By **LUKE BROADWATER**
and **ROBERT DRAPER**

The House Ethics Committee secretly voted this month to release an investigative report into the conduct of former Representative Matt Gaetz of Florida, according to three people with knowledge of the matter.

The panel's vote, which was reported earlier by CNN, paved the way for the release of the report after House members cast the final votes of the Congress this week and have left Washington to return to their districts, two of the people said.

It is an abrupt turnabout for the panel, which had previously declined to release the report. It came less than two weeks after House Republicans banded together to block a Democratic move on the floor to force the release of the report, instead returning the matter to the Ethics Committee for further consideration.

The haggling on Capitol Hill over the report intensified after President-elect Donald J. Trump announced last month that he had chosen Mr. Gaetz to lead the Justice Department, prompting anger and concern among members of both parties on Capitol Hill who were aware of serious allegations against him.

Since the spring of 2021, the Ethics Committee had been investigating Mr. Gaetz over an array of accusations, including that he engaged in sexual misconduct and illicit drug use, shared inappropriate



The House Ethics Committee had previously declined to release a report into the conduct of Matt Gaetz.

ate images or videos on the House floor, misused state identification records, converted campaign funds to personal use and accepted gifts that violated House rules.

Mr. Gaetz has denied the charges.

On Wednesday, he decried the news of the report's impending release and noted that he had already been investigated by the Justice Department, which brought no charges against him.

"The Biden/Garland DOJ spent years reviewing allegations that I committed various crimes. I was charged with nothing: FULLY EXONERATED," Mr. Gaetz wrote on the social media site X.

The Justice Department made the decision not to prosecute Mr. Gaetz after investigators concluded they could not make a strong enough case against him in court, in part because of a concern that some potential witnesses might not have stood up well under cross-examination, according to people familiar with the case who spoke about it at the time on the condition of anonymity.

In his post on Wednesday, Mr. Gaetz denied some of the central allegations against him, including that he had paid an underage girl for sex and solicited prostitutes, dismissing them as a distortion of youthful indiscretions.

"In my single days, I often sent funds to women I dated — even some I never dated but who asked. I dated several of these women for years. I NEVER had sexual contact with someone under 18," he wrote, adding: "My 30's were an era of working very hard — and playing hard too. It's embarrassing, though not criminal, that I probably partied, womanized, drank and smoked more than I should have earlier in life. I live a different life now."

Mr. Gaetz abruptly resigned after Mr. Trump picked him to be attorney general, prompting House Republican leaders to argue that the Ethics Committee should not release the conclusions of its investigation, since Mr. Gaetz was no longer a member of Congress and therefore outside its jurisdiction.

Mr. Gaetz withdrew his name from consideration in the face of Senate opposition and is now set to join the conservative One America News Network as an anchor in January.

\$100,000 Porsche Loan at Center of Charges Against Ex-Adams Aide

This article is by **William K. Rashbaum**, **Dana Rubinstein** and **Michael Rothfeld**.

Ingrid Lewis-Martin, the former chief adviser to Mayor Eric Adams, is expected to surrender on Thursday on bribery charges involving two businessmen who gave her son a \$100,000 loan to buy a Porsche, several people with knowledge of the matter said.

Her son, Glenn Martin II, and the other two men were also expected to surrender on Thursday for arraignment on the charges, which are being brought by the Manhattan district attorney, the people said.

The charges accuse the businessmen of providing the loan to Ms. Lewis-Martin's son after she helped them resolve an issue with the city's Department of Buildings in connection with a construction project in one of their hotels, the people said. It is unclear if Mr. Martin has made payments on the 2023 loan, which was memorialized in a promissory note, one of the people said.

The accusations grew out of a broad corruption investigation focused on Ms. Lewis-Martin, who abruptly announced her resignation on Sunday — hours before The New York Times reported that a grand jury was hearing evidence against her.

Ms. Lewis-Martin, 63, was one of roughly a dozen members of Mr. Adams's inner circle who have been ensnared in federal or state corruption investigations in recent months, inquiries that have led to the searches of homes, the seizures of phones and the resignations of some of the most powerful officials in City Hall.

When she surrenders, she will be the highest-profile city official to face charges since Mr. Adams himself was indicted on federal corruption charges in late September — the first sitting mayor in the modern history of New York City to face criminal charges.

The district attorney's investigation into Ms. Lewis-Martin appears to be ongoing, and there has been no indication that the inquiry has focused on Mr. Adams.

Ms. Martin's lawyer, Arthur L. Aidala, declined to comment on Wednesday. On Sunday, he said, "The only thing of which we are certain is that Ingrid Lewis-Martin has served this city admirably for decades in an ethical, moral and law abiding manner."

A lawyer for Mr. Martin did not respond to requests for comment. A lawyer for one of the businessmen, Mayank Dwivedi, a hotelier with properties in New York City and the Hamptons, said in a statement that Mr. Dwivedi had engaged in no wrongdoing.

The district attorney "has an incomplete and inaccurate view of the facts," said the lawyer, Teny



Ingrid-Lewis Martin, a former top aide to Mayor Eric Adams.

Geragos. "We look forward to setting the record straight and proving Mr. Dwivedi's complete innocence."

Jonathan S. Sack, a lawyer for the other businessman, declined to comment.

Spokeswomen for the office of the district attorney, Alvin L. Bragg, and the city's Department of Investigation, which is conducting the inquiry with Mr. Bragg's prosecutors and investigators, declined to comment.

Mr. Bragg and the investigation commissioner, Jocelyn Strauber, are expected to announce the charges on Thursday afternoon.

Ms. Lewis-Martin and the others are expected to be arraigned later in the day before Acting State Supreme Court Justice Daniel P. Conviser.

On Monday, Ms. Lewis-Martin convened reporters in a conference room in her lawyer's offices and declared herself "falsely accused of something. I don't know exactly what it is."

"I have never done anything illegal in my capacity in government," she said.

Ms. Lewis-Martin added that she had worked in government for 35 years, including as an aide to Mr. Adams in the New York State Senate and at the Brooklyn borough president's office, and as Mr. Adams's chief adviser in City Hall. "During my tenure, I have never taken any gifts, money, anything," she said, adding that she had never arranged for any gifts or money to be given to a family member or friend.

At the news conference on Monday, Mr. Aidala said the Manhattan district attorney's office was targeting his client for political reasons. "These decisions are obviously coming from the top, whether it's to get headlines, whether it's to figure out a road to get to the mayor, we don't know," he said.

Ms. Lewis-Martin and Mr. Adams have been close for about 40 years. Her husband and Mr. Adams, a retired police captain, first met as police cadets in 1984, Ms.

Lewis-Martin and Mr. Adams have said.

Ms. Lewis-Martin served as Mr. Adams's campaign manager during his successful 2006 run for the New York State Senate and then became a top aide at his State Senate office in Albany.

When he rose to become Brooklyn borough president, she served as his deputy and enforcer. She also helped raise money for One Brooklyn Fund, a nonprofit that promoted the borough and Mr. Adams, and which the city's inspector general later found to have improperly solicited funds from groups with business before his office.

Ms. Lewis-Martin also worked closely with Brooklyn Democratic Party officials while in her role, helping to organize campaigns and holding political meetings in Borough Hall, former aides have said.

When he was elected mayor in 2021, several of Mr. Adams's supporters urged him not to put her in a position of authority at City Hall. They cited concerns about her history of divisiveness and her ethical probity, according to the supporters who spoke to The Times for a 2023 profile of Ms. Lewis-Martin. Mr. Adams ignored their advice and, according to Ms. Lewis-Martin, let her choose any office she wanted. She became his chief adviser, a role in which she was often considered his second-in-command.

Susan C. Beachy contributed research.

Harvard Law Reports A Plunge in Enrollment Of New Black Students

By STEPHANIE SAUL
and ANEMONA HARTOCOLLIS

The number of Black students entering Harvard Law School dropped sharply this fall after last year's Supreme Court decision banning affirmative action in college admissions, according to enrollment data released Monday.

Harvard Law enrolled 19 first-year Black students, or 3.4 percent of the class, the lowest number since the 1960s, according to the data from the American Bar Association. Last year, the law school's first-year class had 43 Black students, according to an analysis by The New York Times.

While changes in data calculation might explain some year-to-year changes, the decline at Harvard was much sharper than at other elite law schools. It was notable not only for its severity but also because of the school's past role in educating some of the nation's best-known Black lawyers, including former President Barack Obama, the former first lady Michelle Obama, Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson and the former Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick.

The Supreme Court decision, and the fact that Harvard College was named in the case, played a role, according to David B. Wilkins, a Harvard law professor who has studied Black represen-

Supreme Court ruling to outlaw affirmative action leaves its mark.

tation in the legal profession. "This obviously has a lot to do with the chilling effect created by that decision," Mr. Wilkins said on Monday.

"This is the lowest number of Black entering first-year students since 1965," he added, pointing to numbers compiled by the Center on the Legal Profession at Harvard, where he also serves as faculty director. That year, there were 15 entering Black students. Since 1970, there have generally been 50 to 70 Black students in Harvard Law's first-year class, he said.

The law school also saw a steep decline in Hispanic students, to 39 students, or 6.9 percent, this fall, from 63 students, or 11 percent of the total, in 2023. Enrollment of white and Asian students increased.

A spokesman for Harvard Law, Jeff Neal, said in a statement that the school continued "to believe that a student body composed of persons with a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences is a vital component of legal education."

Mr. Neal also noted that it was difficult to draw conclusions from one year of enrollment data, and added: "Harvard Law School remains committed both to following the law and to fostering an on-campus community and a legal profession that reflect numerous dimensions of human experience."

A look at enrollment at other top law schools showed that the number of Black and Hispanic students declined less severely at several, according to the bar association numbers. But at a few schools, enrollment for Black and Hispanic students actually increased. At Stanford, for example, the number of Black first-year students nearly doubled to 23 this year, from 12 last year.

Black and Hispanic enrollment also decreased at the University of North Carolina. The university was also named as a defendant in the cases decided by the Supreme Court, brought by the anti-affirmative action group Students for Fair Admissions. Black first-year students at U.N.C. dropped to 9 students this year, from 13 last year; Hispanic students dropped to 13 from 21 last year.

Each year, the American Bar Association compiles and releases information on its 198 accredited law schools that includes not only demographic data but also infor-

mation on acceptance rates, Law School Admission Test scores, faculty and expenses.

The A.B.A. changed its reporting categories this year to include students who were not U.S. residents in the racial and ethnic breakdown of the class. Last year, they were a separate category. The change complicates year-to-year comparisons, and could help explain why some schools, like New York University, Columbia University and the University of Pennsylvania, had big increases in Asian students.

The share of Black first-year undergraduate students at Harvard this fall also dropped, to 14 percent from 18 percent last year, according to data released in September.

Mr. Wilkins said the admissions numbers at Harvard illustrated the negative impact of the Students for Fair Admissions litigation and the additional barriers it had created for prospective Black lawyers.

But Richard Sander, a law professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, and a critic of affirmative action, said that the racial breakdown of the new law school classes showed a number of positive trends.

While some top tier schools lost Black enrollment, across all law schools the number of Black students enrolling in law school increased by about 3 percent, to 3,060 this fall from 2,969 in 2023, according to the A.B.A. It was tricky to say whether this was a meaningful increase, partly because of reporting changes, Mr. Sander said. He also noted that the Black enrollment data did not include students who said they were multiracial or declined to report their race.

"But the real point is that there was no meaningful decline," he said.

It appeared, he said, that the overwhelming majority of law schools had not changed their admissions practices, but rather that applicants rejected by top schools no longer considering race had cascaded down to less competitive schools.

He argued that the drop in Black enrollment at Harvard and U.N.C. might ultimately be beneficial, "because those students are going to go to another school where they're better matched and they're poised to succeed."

Mr. Sander is one of the architects of the hotly disputed "mismatch" theory, which holds that students do better at schools that closely match their credentials on entry tests and grades. He argued that students who ended up at less competitive schools would more likely receive higher grades and pass the bar at higher rates.

"Students prefer going to a school where they are not going to get a preference, because they think they'll be more competitive there, which I think is true," Mr. Sander said.

Mr. Sander said he agreed with critics who warned that a drop in the number of Black lawyers would be bad for society. But he said that the opposite seemed to be happening and that there could, on the contrary, be an increase in the number of Black lawyers.

At Harvard Law, professors had been bracing for the numbers after the university released a statement in September revealing that the enrollment of "students of color," a broad category, had dropped by 8 percentage points. At the time, the law school had not provided a more complete class profile.

Mr. Wilkins said that professors teaching first-year sections noted a noticeable decline in Black students, particularly a very small number of Black men: six.

The president of the Harvard Black Law Students Association, Sean Wynn, called the enrollment decline a "crushing loss" and referenced the Supreme Court ruling.

"With this marked decline," he said in a statement, "the ruling has broken something fundamental about the experience of attending this law school."



SHURAN HUANG FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Georgetown University and 16 other top universities are accused of circumventing need-blind admissions and financial aid policies.

Suit Accuses Elite Colleges of Admissions Based on Wealth

By STEPHANIE SAUL

For years, Georgetown University's longtime president, John J. DeGioia, flagged 80 students to be added to a special admissions list — but not, apparently, for their academic or athletic prowess, documents in a lawsuit claim.

Those on Dr. DeGioia's president's list were virtually assured of admissions simply because of their family's wealth and donation potential, according to a motion filed on Monday in a long-running lawsuit against a set of 17 selective universities, including the University of Pennsylvania, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Notre Dame, Cornell, Johns Hopkins and Caltech.

The new motion argues that the universities were supposed to be "need blind" and not take into account a family's income when they decided who to admit and how much financial aid to offer. The plaintiffs argue that the schools gave preference to wealthy students in a way that violated provisions of a now-expired law permitting them to agree on financial aid formulas.

Defendants argued that considering student wealth in admissions was not a violation of the law, which required instead that universities would not discriminate against poorer students because they needed financial aid, and that the plaintiffs are attempting to redefine it.

At M.I.T., two children recommended by a wealthy banker with ties to a university board member got special treatment, according to the documents. In a deposition, the school's director of admissions said the children, who appeared on a "cases of interest" list, were among those who "we would really have not otherwise admitted."

At the University of Pennsylvania, some students designated "B.S.I.," or bona fide special interest, had a dramatically higher rate of admission than other applicants, according to expert testimony filed in the lawsuit.

Penn's former associate dean of admissions, Sara Harberson, testified last year in a deposition in the case that a B.S.I. tag meant the student's family was a big donor or had connections to the board. Those students "were untouchable," Ms. Harberson said, and "would get in almost 100 percent of the time."

Ms. Harberson said the admissions office was powerless to deny the student "even if the student was incredibly weak, even if the student had a major issue in the application."

In an emailed statement, Penn said it saw "no merit in this lawsuit," arguing that the case was intended to "embarrass the university about its purported admission practices on issues totally unrelated to this case."

"The actual evidence in the case makes clear that Penn does not favor in admissions students whose families have made or pledged donations to Penn, whatever the amount," the statement added. "In fact, the University takes great precaution to ensure that no such preference is given. As a result, only qualified candidates are admitted."

M.I.T. also issued a statement on Tuesday denying any history of "wealth favoritism in its admissions," adding that after years of discovery and millions of documents released in the case, the plaintiffs could cite "only a single instance in which the recommendation of a board member helped sway the decisions for two undergraduate applicants."

"Contrary to what the plaintiffs claim," Kimberly Allen, an M.I.T. representative, said, "the potential for philanthropic gifts had no bearing on these isolated cases, and in fact our records reflect that the children of wealthy individuals routinely receive disappointing news from M.I.T."

In an emailed statement, a spokeswoman for Georgetown, Meghan Dubyak, said the documents in the lawsuit "provide a

limited and inaccurate view of Georgetown admissions."

She said the school admitted only "students who will thrive in, contribute to and further strengthen our community," adding that the university "does not knowingly solicit or accept gifts from individuals who have or may soon have a relative or person of close personal interest applying for admission to the university."

Georgetown officials also pointed to court documents in which they have disputed the claims, including the suit's contention that the universities ever shared a financial aid formula.

The motion on Monday is part of an ongoing case that accuses schools of cheating students out of millions in financial aid money over more than two decades.

The plaintiffs contend that the schools violated an antitrust exemption that allowed them to share financial aid formulas and methodology as long as they admitted students without factoring in their individual financial needs. The group of 17 schools formed a group to share formulas under this exemption.

The plaintiffs dubbed the schools a "cartel" and accused them of driving up students' costs

by banning universities in the group from reducing a family's expected financial contribution below an agreed-to aid formula.

The universities have disputed the claims.

Ten of the original 17 universities have already settled and paid \$284 million to the plaintiffs, a group of students who formerly attended the universities and received financial aid. Some 200,000 students are estimated to have been affected over a period of more than 20 years.

As a result of the settlements by several of the universities named in the case, some students who attended the schools already are eligible to apply for up to \$2,000 to reimburse them for financial aid they otherwise would have received.

Robert Gilbert, a lawyer for the plaintiffs, issued a statement saying that the newly filed documents revealed how the schools displayed a "pattern of favoring students from wealthy backgrounds."

The case has been pending in federal court in Chicago since 2022, but the documents filed on Monday provided more details about the behavior of the schools.

At Georgetown, according to

the documents, Dr. DeGioia, who stepped down as president this year after a stroke, met with a student at the annual Allen & Company conference in Sun Valley, Idaho. Few college applicants would have access to the event, known as "mogulfest," where billionaires arrive by private jets, according to the suit. But this was a special case.

The student's early action application had been deferred, the lawsuit says, but after the Sun Valley meeting and a subsequent exchange of emails between Dr. DeGioia and the girl's father, she was admitted from Georgetown's president's list. In a deposition, Dr. DeGioia explained that the applicant had been admitted because of "obstacles overcome" — her parents had been divorced.

In 2020, Penn withdrew from the group of universities, which had agreed on standardized financial aid formulas under a 1996 statute exempting them from antitrust regulations. Penn said it needed more flexibility in offering financial assistance to students, according to the lawsuit.

Since then, the group has been disbanded because the provision permitting the universities to exchange information has expired.



BILLY HICKEY FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Harvard's law school has educated some of the nation's best-known Black lawyers, including former President Barack Obama.

The Greatest
GIFT EVENT

She told us exactly what she wants
and it's on sale!

3 CARAT LAB-GROWN DIAMOND
STUDS IN PLATINUM OR 14KT GOLD

Lowest Price Ever
\$1,995
Compare at \$2,995

ROSS + SIMONS
Fine Jewelry | Fabulous Prices

FREE EXPRESS SHIPPING — ORDER TODAY!
To receive this special price use offer code: **LAB57**
1.800.556.7376 or visit ross-simons.com/lab57
Shown larger for detail. Item **#984913**

Trump Condemns Spending Package, All but Dooming It

From Page A1

lash to the legislation had spread so far and wide in G.O.P. ranks that it was unclear whether he would even be able to muster a bare minimum of Republicans to partner with Democrats and push it across the finish line.

The bill appeared doomed when Mr. Trump weighed in late

A president-elect’s attacks raise fears of a federal shutdown.

Wednesday afternoon, saying lawmakers needed to pass a “temporary funding bill WITHOUT DEMOCRAT GIVEAWAYS,” and said it should be combined with an increase in the debt ceiling, the cap on how much money the United States is authorized to borrow to meet its financial obligations.

“We should pass a streamlined spending bill that doesn’t give Chuck Schumer and the Democrats everything they want,” Mr. Trump wrote in a lengthy statement on social media that he issued jointly with Senator JD Vance, the vice president-elect.

They spoke up after Mr. Musk, who Mr. Trump has tapped to scale back the scope of federal government, had gone on a day-long rampage against the bill, posting nearly nonstop on his so-

cial media platform X about how lawmakers needed to kill it. He was joined by Vivek Ramaswamy, another billionaire who is partnering with Mr. Musk on the effort to streamline the government and slash spending.

Republicans gauging support for the legislation said they were bleeding votes as a result of Mr. Musk’s barrage.

“Any member of the House or Senate who votes for this outrageous spending bill deserves to be voted out in 2 years!” Mr. Musk wrote in one post.

Mr. Johnson appeared on “Fox and Friends” on Wednesday morning to make a case for the bill, and said he had spoken to Mr. Musk and Mr. Ramaswamy earlier in the day.

“They said, ‘It’s not directed to you, Mr. Speaker, but we don’t like the spending,’” Mr. Johnson recounted. “I said, ‘Guess what, fellas, I don’t either. We’ve got to get this done because here’s the key: By doing this, we are clearing the decks, and we are setting up for Trump to come in roaring back with the America First agenda.’”

Even before Mr. Trump got involved, typically reliable Republican votes for stopgap funding measures had begun to balk. Senator John Cornyn of Texas called the bill a “monstrosity.”

And anti-spending conservatives were livid.

“The American people wanted change,” said Representative Ralph Norman, Republican of South Carolina. “They didn’t say go out and spend more money, put us more into debt. It’s the opposite



HAIYUN JIANG FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Speaker Mike Johnson made his case for the deal, but was probably always going to have to rely on Democrats to push it through.

of what the American people voted for.”

But just as conservative Republicans and Mr. Musk were railing against the bipartisan deal for adding too much spending to the national debt, Mr. Trump called for raising the debt ceiling, insisting that Republicans must increase it as part of the spending package so the borrowing limit would go up while President Biden was still in the White House.

It reflected a recognition by the president-elect that his party

would have a difficult time raising the limit next year when they have full control of Congress, and that he would not want to sign such a measure. Many Republicans refuse to back debt ceiling increases, viewing them as politically toxic.

The borrowing limit is expected to be reached sometime in January, and a failure to increase it would cause a default on the nation’s debt. Mr. Trump acknowledged that he did not want to shoulder the responsibility for do-

ing so.

“Increasing the debt ceiling is not great,” Mr. Trump said in his statement, “but we’d rather do it on Biden’s watch.”

Later, in a separate social media post, he said that any Republican who “would be so stupid” as to vote for a funding extension without raising the debt ceiling “should and will” face a primary challenge.

Democrats, for their part, appeared in no mood to start any new negotiations.

“House Republicans have now unilaterally decided to break a bipartisan agreement that they made,” Representative Hakeem Jeffries of New York, the Democratic leader, said on Wednesday evening. “House Republicans have been ordered to shut down the government and hurt every day Americans all across this country. House Republicans will now own any harm that is visited upon the American people that results from a government shutdown.”

Where the Money Would Go: Hurricane Relief, Farmers, Child Care and a Raise

By CATIE EDMONDSON

WASHINGTON — The stopgap spending bill congressional leaders agreed on this week began as a simple funding measure to keep government funds flowing past a Friday night deadline and into early next year, long after House Republicans elect a speaker and President-elect Donald J. Trump is sworn in.

But by the time it was rolled out to lawmakers on Tuesday night, it had transformed into a true Christmas tree of a bill, adorned with all manner of unrelated policy measures in the kind of year-end catchall that Republicans have long derided. It is a 1,547-page behemoth of a package with provisions including foreign investment restrictions, new health care policies and a stadium site for the Washington Commanders.

The package was on life support Wednesday night as G.O.P. lawmakers balked at its details, a backlash further fueled by a condemnation by Mr. Trump, who called it full of “DEMOCRAT GIVEAWAYS,” and his close ally Elon Musk.

End-of-year spending bills often become magnets for unrelated measures, fueled by last-minute

Karoun Demirjian contributed reporting.

spasms of deal-cutting by lawmakers who recognize it could be their last chance to get something done. That was even more true this year with Democrats bracing for a Republican governing trifecta come January, and Speaker Mike Johnson arriving at the negotiating table sapped of leverage because a large group of his members refuses to vote for any spending measure.

Mr. Johnson had another incentive to allow the package to balloon: He could satisfy some longstanding bipartisan desires with minimal Republican fingerprints, merely blaming a Democratic Senate and White House for any bloat in the deal. He will not have that luxury in a few weeks, when Republicans control all of Congress and Mr. Trump is in the White House.

“We’ve got to get this done because here’s the key: By doing this, we are clearing the decks, and we are setting up for Trump to come in roaring back with the America First agenda,” Mr. Johnson said on “Fox and Friends” on Wednesday morning.

Here are some of the provisions that made it into the bill.

Disaster aid

One of the biggest chunks of funds — and one of the more politically popular — is the aid portion of the

legislation, which provides \$100 billion for communities ravaged by Hurricanes Milton and Helene and other disasters. Included in that money is \$21 billion to help farmers whose crops were ravaged by natural disasters.

The bill also provides full funding for the reconstruction of the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore that collapsed in March.

Payments to farmers

Lawmakers set aside \$10 billion in direct economic assistance, available to any farmer who applied for a federal agricultural funding program such as crop insurance, subsidies or disaster assistance in 2024. The aid would be distributed based on how many acres of eligible crops they grow. Proponents argued it was necessary in part because Republicans and Democrats had failed to reach agreement on a new farm bill, leaving subsidy payments at a level set six years ago.

A pay raise for lawmakers

It has been more than a decade since members of Congress have gotten a cost-of-living increase in their salaries. Lawmakers, loath to be seen giving themselves a pay raise while their constituents face economic challenges, have routinely included language in spending bills that exempts them

from the wage increases that other federal employees receive.

In a legislative sleight of hand reported earlier by Bloomberg Government, the spending bill’s drafters omitted that provision this time, positioning themselves for a raise of 3.8 percent, or about \$6,600 for most members, whose current salary is \$174,000.

Some lawmakers have long argued that they should be allowed to receive cost-of-living increases to ensure that average people — not just the ultrawealthy — can afford to serve in Congress. Others have contended that the appearance of self-dealing has made the issue too toxic.

Already one centrist House Democrat, Representative Jared Golden of Maine, who narrowly held his seat in November in his Trump-won district, has said he will oppose the bill because of this measure.

Restrictions on investment in Chinese tech companies

The bill would broaden the scope of restrictions President Biden imposed last year on American investment in key Chinese technology industries, expanding the list of prohibited technologies to include many that could be used in integrated circuits for military, intelligence or mass surveillance purposes.

Child care

Two of the top Democratic appropriators, Senator Patty Murray of Washington and Representative Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut, have worked to shoehorn additional money for child care and early education programs into virtually every major spending bill that Congress considers.

Tucked into this legislation is \$250 million in emergency spending to increase access to child care for working families and another \$250 million for renovations to child care facilities damaged by natural disasters and temporary child care services in affected areas.

Other measures include:

- Allowing E15 ethanol — gasoline blended with 15 percent corn-based ethanol — to be sold year-round.

- An additional \$25 million to protect the residences of Supreme Court justices.

- Requiring vendors selling tickets to “concerts, sports and other large gatherings” to disclose to consumers the total ticket price — including additional fees — at the beginning of a transaction.

- Transferring control of Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium from the federal government to

the District of Columbia, paving the way for the Washington Commanders football team to move their stadium from Maryland to play home games in the capital.

- Criminalizing the publication of “nonconsensual intimate visual depictions,” including deepfake pornography, and requiring social media platforms to have procedures in place to remove the content after being notified by a victim.

- Imposing new restrictions on pharmacy benefit managers, the companies hired by employers and government programs like Medicare to negotiate drug prices and oversee prescriptions. The measures would discourage those companies from steering patients toward more expensive drugs.

- Throwing out a requirement that lawmakers buy health coverage on an insurance exchange established by the Affordable Care Act and allowing them to get coverage from the traditional federal employee benefits plan.

- Adding to the existing responsibilities of the assistant secretary of commerce for travel and tourism the additional mandate of promoting “locations and events in the United States that are important to music tourism.”

Supreme Court Fast-Tracks TikTok Case

By ADAM LIPTAK and SAPNA MAHESHWARI

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court agreed on Wednesday to hear TikTok’s challenge to a law that could ban its U.S. operations, putting the case on an exceptionally fast track that will culminate in oral arguments next month.

In setting aside two hours for the argument on Jan. 10, the justices signaled that they viewed the questions in the case as extraordinarily critical, pitting the Constitution’s protection of free expression against the government’s assertions of threats to national security.

The court’s move came only two days after TikTok and ByteDance, its Chinese parent company, filed an emergency application asking the justices to temporarily block the law. In another break with its usual practices, the court did not ask the government to respond to the application, instead treating it as a petition seeking review and granting it.

The law, which passed with wide bipartisan support, calls for ByteDance to sell it to a non-Chinese company or otherwise face a ban in the United States. TikTok has said the law violates the First Amendment. But the Biden administration and lawmakers have countered that given its Chinese ownership, TikTok raised national security concerns because of the breadth of user data available and the risk that the Chinese government could use the app to spread covert disinformation.

The court did not block the law while the case moves forward, which suggested that it may issue a ruling before the Jan. 19 deadline

set by the law. That would mean the case would be resolved before President-elect Donald J. Trump is inaugurated on Jan. 20.

The law allows the president to extend the deadline for 90 days in limited circumstances. Mr. Trump has sent mixed messages about his support for the app, including

A law that could ban the social media company by January.

by meeting this week with executives of TikTok at his Florida residence, Mar-a-Lago.

The case will have far-reaching consequences. Since TikTok landed in the United States in 2018, it has become a cultural phenomenon that wields influence over nearly every aspect of American life. Users, especially younger generations, turn to it for news, entertainment and shopping, lured by its canny recommendation engine, which compiles short videos for users in a main feed. The app can quickly become addictive, as it gauges users’ interests, down to the number of seconds they spend on each video.

The United States represents TikTok’s biggest market, and an exit would damage ByteDance’s future and put in question the global popularity of the app. In 2020, India, at the time TikTok’s biggest market, banned the platform after a conflict with China, making the app go dark for about 200 million users.

The court ordered the parties to file simultaneous briefs on Dec. 27 addressing whether the law, known formally as the Protecting Americans From Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act, violates the First Amendment.

President Biden signed the law this spring after lawmakers across both sides of the aisle sounded the alarm about the risks to national security. They said the Chinese government’s oversight of private companies like TikTok would allow it to retrieve sensitive information about Americans or to spread propaganda, though they have not publicly shared evidence that this has occurred. They have also noted that American platforms like Facebook and YouTube are banned in China, and that TikTok itself is not allowed in the country.

TikTok has said that it cannot be sold for legal, technological and financial reasons — and in part, because a sale would most likely be blocked by Beijing. It has asserted that ByteDance is majority-owned by global investors and that concerns around the app are overblown and unfair.

The government has pushed back on TikTok’s characterization of the law as a “ban,” saying a sale is possible. Judge Sri Srinivasan, in an opinion concurring in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit’s ruling rejecting TikTok’s challenge to the law, was skeptical of the argument that China would block a sale. Congress “need not legislate around another country’s preferences to exercise its own powers constitutionally,” he wrote.

American technology companies like Meta, the owner of Face-



THURNEY L. CROSS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

TikTok filed an emergency application as a Jan. 19 deadline looms for it to sell or face a U.S. ban.

book and Instagram, and Google, which owns YouTube, have tried to unseat TikTok, but the app has retained its foothold. Creators on TikTok have been preparing for a potential loss of the app, though, calling on their fans to follow them on Instagram and YouTube.

TikTok has been trying for years to assuage the government’s security concerns through a proposal known as Project Texas, which aims to separate sensitive U.S. user data from the rest of the company’s operations. But government officials have said the proposal is not sufficient.

The Supreme Court has shown keen interest in recent terms in the application of free speech

principles to giant technology platforms, though it has stopped short of issuing definitive rulings. It has also wrestled with the application of the First Amendment to foreign speakers, ruling that they are generally without constitutional protection, at least for speech delivered abroad.

The court agreed to hear both TikTok’s challenge and a separate one from content creators and users of the site.

A brief filed in that second challenge stressed the broad consequences of the court’s ruling.

“The vast majority of the content that creators and users share on TikTok does not remotely have any geopolitical implications,” the

brief said. “United States residents use the app principally to exchange ideas about daily diversions and activities such as entertainment, health and cooking.”

In a brief urging the court not to block the law, Senator Mitch McConnell, the Republican leader, said the law “is entirely consistent with the First Amendment.”

“The right to free speech enshrined in the First Amendment does not apply to a corporate agent of the Chinese Communist Party,” he wrote. “And even if it does, the Foreign Adversaries Act was the measured and deliberate result of careful legislation that would satisfy all manner of heightened scrutiny.”



HAIYUN JIANG FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

President Biden is in the final days of his half-century political journey. While aides say he has remained sharp in the Situation Room, with each passing day he looks a little older and a little bit slower.

Biden, Wearied and Stinging, Closes the Final Chapter of a Long Career

From Page A1

Determined to finish on a high note and shape his legacy as a consequential president, Mr. Biden wants to “sprint to the finish line” in these final weeks, as his chief of staff, Jeffrey D. Zients, put it. He is checking a few last boxes on his presidential bucket list. Angola? Check. A visit to the Amazon rainforest, another presidential first? Check.

The biggest box left is a cease-fire in Gaza, and if he manages that, it would be a validating triumph for a departing president. Otherwise, he is wrapping up his time in office by claiming credit for the healthy economy that he is turning over to his ungrateful successor and by getting money previously approved by Congress out the door for roads and bridges at home and arms for Ukraine abroad.

Tying a bow of forgiveness around his pending departure, Mr. Biden has extended a record number of commutations to prisoners who were already on home confinement — and more defiantly pardoned his son Hunter after convictions on firearms and tax charges, only to be surprised at the blowback from his fellow Democrats.

Like other lame-duck presidents, he is fading from the political scene, all but leaving the stage before the final curtain. While Mr. Trump already dominates the conversation more than incoming presidents typically do, making policy pronouncements and huddling with world leaders without waiting to take office, the president actually occupying the White House has become a national afterthought. “President — Still?” the comic Michael Che referred to him on “Saturday Night Live.”

Mr. Biden has absented himself from the debate convulsing the country. After warning again and again that Mr. Trump posed an existential threat to American democracy, he has now gone silent on the matter, and even aides decline to answer questions on whether the incoming president is still a danger. A traditionalist to his bones, Mr. Biden has opted for the grace and reticence he believes are befitting the departing president of a defeated party, even as the incoming president threatens to imprison opponents and tries to install conspiracy-minded

Katie Rogers and Michael D. Shear contributed reporting.

acolytes in positions of power.

Some of Mr. Biden’s allies and fellow Democrats wish he would use his position more assertively in the time he has left.

“He ought to be dramatically pushing until the last day on the things that he represented to seal his legacy and the memory of it in the American public because it is so diametrically opposite to what Trump is bringing into the White House,” said the Rev. Al Sharpton, a civil-rights leader and Biden ally.

Even when pushing for his priorities, Mr. Biden has found it hard to break through. During his visit to the Amazon rainforest last month, his fragility appeared painfully clear to those traveling with him.

After speaking for seven minutes on a day of draining humidity, a blue shirt hanging loosely over his frame, he turned to slowly shuffle away down a dirt path as several people in the audience not used to seeing him up close said they held their breath, worried that he would trip. (Aides said his gait was no more unsteady than usual.)

During an arrival ceremony on his trip to Angola this month, on the day after a long, tiring transoceanic flight that would have taxed any octogenarian, President João Lourenço suddenly clutched Mr. Biden’s arm to help guide him up a step.

When Mr. Biden visited the National Museum of Slavery that afternoon, he did not actually enter the main building to view the exhibitions; instead, artifacts were brought outside to show him, which two people familiar with the planning attributed to fear that the steep stairs would be too much of a challenge. (The White House denied that the stairs were a concern and said he was not brought inside for scheduling and logistical reasons.)

Yet Mr. Biden is still making those arduous journeys to far-off destinations like the Amazon and Angola when others might not have bothered. His meetings in Brazil forged international climate change commitments and his trip to Angola was meant to highlight a U.S.-backed railway being built across the African continent, competing for influence with China, both major challenges of this era.

“It was a very important moment for me, for our institution,” said Vladimir Fortuna, the director of the Angolan slavery museum. “That was a very important

moment in the museum’s history.” He added that he was impressed by Mr. Biden and did not understand why there was so much concern about the stairs. “I didn’t see someone that was not ready to go up and to go in the museum.”

Several of those who traveled with Mr. Biden on those two trips took note that he maintained a light schedule at times and sometimes mumbled, making him hard to understand. With the end of his career in sight, he seemed ruminative. At one point, during a private meeting, he drifted into a reminiscence about the famous 1960 debate between John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon.

At the same time, those accompanying him said, he was focused on the issues at hand and demonstrated command of the details. Before meeting with President Xi Jinping of China on the sideline of a summit in Rio de Janeiro, he insisted on a briefing that stretched on for about 90 minutes.

In meetings at the White House, aides said, he is likewise still astute, still dictating specific actions and still editing speeches to suit his preferences. He made calls to other world leaders as part of a successful effort to broker a cease-fire to stop the war in Lebanon and again to consult on the aftermath of the fall of President Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

At a ceremony honoring the Special Olympics last week, he

struck some guests as fully engaged. “He seemed fine,” said Elaine Kamarck, a longtime Democratic National Committee member who attended. “To my amazement, he stayed through the whole dinner. We all thought maybe he would disappear, but no, he sat down, he ate with everybody, he stayed through all of dinner. And he seemed just fine.”

Still, he grew emotional at one point during the ceremony. At this time of year, friends say, Mr. Biden can become a little seasonally de-

The biggest box left to check for the president is a Gaza cease-fire.

pressed, remembering the 1972 car accident that killed his first wife and his daughter shortly before Christmas. During his brief speech at the Special Olympics event, he brought up the tragedy and choked up for a few moments. On Wednesday, he was in Wilmington, Del., for the anniversary, and visited the family graves.

While some close to Mr. Biden said he had made peace with the coming end of his presidency, others said he had been moody. He is currently angry at Democratic

members of Congress who have publicly denounced his decision to pardon Hunter Biden despite promises not to, according to one person who has spent time with him recently.

White House officials said that while Mr. Trump attracts the headlines, Mr. Biden and his staff are busy making sure money approved as part of his major legislation is spent as intended for clean energy, manufacturing and infrastructure projects before the next team can try to block it.

In a memo to the White House staff last week, Mr. Zients, the chief of staff, reported that the administration has announced awards for 98 percent of the money made available through the end of the fiscal year from four major laws passed by Mr. Biden: the American Rescue Plan, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the CHIPS and Science Act, and the Inflation Reduction Act.

“The president has been very focused on how we implement these bills,” Natalie Quillian, the White House deputy chief of staff overseeing the process, said in an interview. “He’s impressed upon all of us that we need to run through the tape, we need to get the money out the door, we need to sign the contracts, and we need to get these impacts delivered to communities, red and blue, across the country as quickly as possible.”



ERIC LEE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Mr. Biden’s fragility was evident to those traveling with him to the Amazon rainforest last month.

California Declares an Emergency Over the Outbreak of Bird Flu in Its Dairy Cattle

By APOORVA MANDAVILLI

In a stark acknowledgment of the increasing seriousness of bird flu’s spread, Gov. Gavin Newsom of California declared on Wednesday that the outbreak of infections among the state’s dairy cattle constituted an emergency.

The announcement followed news earlier in the day that an individual in Louisiana had been hospitalized with bird flu, the first infected American to become severely ill.

The virus, H5N1, cannot yet spread easily among people, and it still poses little danger to the average American. Pasteurized dairy products are still safe to consume.

But the past few weeks have brought a steady drumbeat of

cases in people, dairy cattle, birds and other animals. Each infection gives the virus a chance to take on a form that could cause a pandemic, experts warned.

“All these infections in so many species around us is paving a bigger and bigger runway for the virus to potentially evolve to infect humans better and transmit between humans,” said Dr. Nahid Bhadelia, the director of the Boston University Center on Emerging Infectious Diseases.

“That represents an escalation in the situation, even if risk to general population remains low,” she said.

California has borne the brunt of the outbreak in cattle.

The first herds in the nation infected with the bird flu virus were

identified in March. California identified its first infected herd in late August.

But since then, the state’s agriculture department has found the virus in 645 dairies, about half of them in the past 30 days alone.

California has also recalled raw milk products from two companies after the virus was detected in samples.

Earlier this month, a child in Alameda County, in the Bay Area, tested positive for bird flu, but the source of infection was unclear. The child had no known exposure to infected animals.

A second child in the state was thought to have become infected from drinking raw milk, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was unable to confirm

the pathogen as H5N1.

The declaration of an emergency gives state and local health authorities additional means to contain the outbreak, including hiring staff and issuing new contracts.

“This proclamation is a targeted action to ensure government agencies have the resources and flexibility they need to respond quickly to this outbreak,” Mr. Newsom said in a statement. “While the risk to the public remains low, we will continue to take all necessary steps to prevent the spread of this virus.”

Federal and state governments may declare a public health emergency as a way to gain extra muscle to deal with a disaster. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the decla-

ration of a nationwide emergency allowed the government to provide free tests, treatments and vaccines to Americans.

The outbreak in dairy cattle is thought to have begun in Texas early this year. As of Wednesday, 865 infected herds had been identified in 16 states.

The C.D.C. has also confirmed H5N1 infection in 61 people, and has indicated another seven as “probable” cases. More than half of the confirmed cases have been in California.

Only 37 of the 61 cases have been traced to interaction with infected cattle; the remaining cases either have been attributed to exposure to diseased birds or other animals, or are of unknown origin.

The Louisiana resident who

Mr. Biden gave a “legacy speech” last week at the Brookings Institution outlining what he sees as the successes of his economic program — and warning about the dangers of Mr. Trump’s. The roughly 40-minute speech, in the works for weeks, was meant to outline what Mr. Biden thinks worked in terms of the economy during his tenure and what will not work in the future, although he coughed throughout and was hoarse by the end.

“He’s not looking for a statue,” Jared Bernstein, the chair of the president’s Council of Economic Advisers, said over the weekend. “He’s looking for a better policy that uplifts the middle class and steers us away from trickle down.”

At this stage of Mr. Biden’s presidency, though, his public messaging is targeted and restrained. Once Washington’s most loquacious chatterbox, Mr. Biden these days barely engages with the reporters who follow him everywhere. He has held no news conferences and conducted no interviews with the traditional news media since the election, though he has done some podcasts. His only reply to shouted questions from journalists during his entire Africa trip added up to 14 words. In South America, it was just a single word.

As a result, Mr. Biden has not once publicly addressed his much-criticized decision to pardon his son since the written statement he released, nor has he discussed his consideration of blanket pardons for adversaries of Mr. Trump to protect them from his promised campaign of “retribution” once he takes office.

At times, Mr. Biden bristles at the constraints. Before the election, when he had been relegated to the sideline of the campaign, the president told an ally that he was bored and asked if there were any events for him to attend, a comment that seemed only partly facetious, according to a person informed about the conversation.

But his aides said there is plenty still left to do. In his memo, Mr. Zients pointed to the Gaza cease-fire talks, efforts to confirm more judges and plans to cancel more student debt for public service workers and other borrowers.

“During a time when most would expect us to slow down, you are accelerating,” Mr. Zients wrote, adding, “I know you and your teams are pushing forward on every issue, yard by yard.”



Frank Larkin, a former Navy SEAL, has pushed to raise awareness of blast exposure after his son Ryan Larkin died by suicide in 2017.

Congress Orders Action on Troops’ Brain Health

By DAVE PHILIPPS

Congress passed a sweeping new set of mandates on brain safety in the military Wednesday, requiring the Pentagon to set new safety limits for troops’ blast exposure, track and report exposures throughout their careers, modify existing weapons to reduce the danger and, for the first time, take brain safety into account when designing new weapons.

The new requirements are part of the \$895 billion military spending bill, known as the National Defense Authorization Act, which the Senate approved on Wednesday. It cleared the House last week.

The provisions on brain safety reflect a broad shift in how Congress and the military view the hazard of blast exposure, also called overpressure. Evidence mounted this year that service members are at risk of developing brain injuries from repeatedly firing their own weapons and from high-performance equipment like speedboats and fighter jets, but the military often has missed the problem.

“It’s been a hard fight to get to this point,” Senator Elizabeth Warren, the Massachusetts Democrat who introduced the measures, said in an interview. “Finally, there was widespread acknowledgment of a problem with blast overpressure and what it’s doing to the brains of our service members.”

The annual spending bill contains hundreds of provisions governing military pay, the purchase of new equipment and other expenditures, and it is often used to direct military leaders to address Congressional priorities. At times it has also become a battleground for social issues.

The provisions on blast exposures and brain health require the military to focus on an issue that it has largely ignored for decades.

In the past, weapons blasts that were not strong enough to leave someone immediately concussed generally were considered safe. The military gave little thought to how repeated exposure to such blasts from firing heavy weapons like howitzers, mortars and rocket launchers might gradually damage brain tissue.

Lawmakers said that emerging research, combined with sustained reporting about the issue in The New York Times, and a mass



Evidence has mounted that service members are at risk of developing brain injuries from repeatedly firing their own weapons.

shooting in Maine, committed by an Army Reserve soldier whose brain was found to have signs of blast-related injury, prompted both the Pentagon and Congress to reconsider the hazards.

“This is one of those things that went on for years and years, and I don’t think people connected the dots,” Senator Angus King of Maine said in an interview. “Now the dots are right in front of our eyes.”

One eye-opener, he said, was Sgt. First Class Robert Card II, who killed 18 people and then himself in Lewiston, Maine, in October 2023. He had been exposed to thousands of blasts during his service as a weapons and grenade instructor, and had shown signs of psychosis for months before turning violent. After his death, his brain was tested at Boston University and was found to have extensive damage of a distinctive type that researchers said was consistent with blast exposure.

“It was clear we needed more than thoughts and prayers,” Mr. King said. “We need to make a very deliberate effort to understand what happened and prevent it from happening again.”

Mr. King, an independent who caucuses with the Democrats, and Senator Jerry Moran, Republican of Kansas, introduced a separate bill to require the Department of Veterans Affairs to study and report on the connection between repeated blast exposure and mental illness, and to improve diagnosis and care.

The symptoms of brain injury from repeated blast exposure, which can include insomnia, anxi-

ety and depression, among other issues, have often been misdiagnosed in the military as post-traumatic stress disorder or as non-combat-related mental health problems. The underlying physical injuries were routinely missed.

To reach a diagnosis of service-connected traumatic brain injury, military doctors have required that the patient have experienced an identifiable injury event, like the explosion of a roadside bomb. With troops who were routinely exposed to blast waves, there often was no such event to point to, so brain injuries went undocumented.

The bill would require the military to standardize and improve the detection, treatment and reporting of those injuries.

The military has already taken a number of actions this year to begin to address the problem. In August, the Defense Department released comprehensive new requirements to reduce and track exposure, including baseline brain function screening for all new troops. Since that time, 36,000 troops have been assessed.

The Army has set new training rules for mortars and other heavy weapons, limiting how many rounds troops can fire each day. And it has begun to spread weapons training out over several weeks, instead of clustering it in a few blast-intensive days, in an attempt to give troops’ brains time to recover between exposures.

The Marine Corps fielded a few virtual training simulators that allow Marines to practice some skills without being exposed to blasts.

At the same time, the military is making changes to some existing weapons. In October, the Army showcased a new breaching explosive that aims more of the weapon’s door-busting blast away from the soldiers using them.

“For a long time, there has been not much progress, and we’re finally getting somewhere — but I think we still have a ways to go,” said Frank Larkin, a former Navy SEAL who has pushed for years to raise awareness of blast exposure and who helped draft the new provisions in the bill.

Mr. Larkin took up the issue after the death of his son Ryan Larkin, who struggled with symptoms of an undiagnosed brain injury after years of service in the Navy SEALs, including as an instructor for shoulder-fired recoilless rifles. Ryan Larkin died by suicide in 2017, and an autopsy revealed extensive damage in his brain.

“Ryan kept saying something was wrong, but no one would listen,” Mr. Larkin said. “My hope is that no one has to go through that again.”

The new Pentagon requirements are a step in the right direction, he said, but the military still faces serious obstacles in understanding and addressing the problem.

It remains unclear what the threshold is for blasts to damage brain tissue. Nor do researchers know yet whether the particular shape of the blast wave, exposure to several waves over a short period of time, or the genetics of the person exposed may make brain injury more likely.

No one has yet devised a reliable, objective way to detect cumulative blast-related injury in living brains; it can now be confirmed only postmortem. So while Congress is ordering the Pentagon to track the injuries, the military has no foolproof way to identify which troops are injured.

Established treatment procedures are limited largely to mitigating symptoms. There is as yet no approved therapy to directly heal damaged brain tissue.

“This brain health stuff is truly a national security issue,” Mr. Larkin said. “Our ability to think on our feet is what gives us an edge. We need to take this seriously, because it’s already impacting recruitment and retention. People need to see we will take care of our force and their families.”

Senate Clears Defense Bill Denying Transgender Care

By KAROUN DEMIRJIAN

WASHINGTON — The Senate on Wednesday gave final approval to a defense policy bill directing \$895 billion toward the Pentagon and other military activities, moving over the objections of some Democrats who opposed a provision added late in the negotiations that would deny coverage for transgender health procedures for minors.

The 85-to-14 vote, coming a week after a divided House passed the same measure, cleared the bill for President Biden’s signature.

Most Republicans and many Democrats supported the measure, which provides a 14.5 percent pay raise to junior enlisted service members and a 4.5 percent pay raise for all other service members. It also expands access to meal assistance, housing and child care programs that benefit those in uniform.

But several Democrats withheld their backing in protest of a provision preventing TRICARE, the military’s health care plan for service members, from covering “medical interventions for the treatment of gender dysphoria that could result in sterilization” for children under 18.

The language, which would affect the gender-transitioning children of service members, was recently added to the measure at the insistence of Speaker Mike Johnson, Republican of Louisiana, who refused to bring a defense bill to the House floor without it, according to aides familiar with the negotiations.

Twenty-one Democrats, led by Senator Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin, proposed an amendment to strip the provision from the bill, but the matter was never brought to a vote. Several of them took to the floor on Tuesday to lodge their objections.

“It’s flat-out wrong to put this provision in this bill and take away a service member’s freedom to make that decision for their families,” Ms. Baldwin said, estimating that the provision could negatively affect as many as 6,000 to 7,000 military families.

“It’s unfortunate that some of our colleagues decided to force this harmful provision in this National Defense Authorization Act, because otherwise, I would have been proud to support it,” she added, noting that this year was the first time since coming to the Senate that she was voting against the annual defense bill.

Ultimately 11 Democrats and three Republicans voted against the measure, while most others justified their support by highlighting provisions in the behemoth bill that they had championed.

“Everyone knows this N.D.A.A. is not perfect, but it still takes a strong stand against the Chinese Communist Party,” said Senator Chuck Schumer, Democrat of New York and the majority leader.

The bill authorizes a Taiwan Security Cooperation Initiative,

modeled after a similar program devised to bolster Ukraine’s military readiness; funds nuclear modernization; and expands sea power and infrastructure into the Indo-Pacific region.

Mr. Schumer also cited the bill’s efforts to expand technology innovation and the use of artificial intelligence in national defense as reasons to back it.

House Republicans had initially tried to impose more expansive restrictions on transgender health care, passing a bill in June that would have denied such care to anyone covered under the military’s health plan. Yet the survival of even the limited restriction was a departure from past years, when such politically loaded provisions have been excised from the bill in negotiations. It also reflected how Republicans had gained the upper hand after their sweeping wins during the November elections.

Mr. Johnson had two other final demands that rankled lawmakers, including some in the G.O.P., according to aides familiar with the negotiations. He insisted on dropping a provision that would have expanded access to in vitro fertilization, even though it had been included in both the House’s and the Senate’s initial versions of the bill. The procedure is currently available to service members only if their infertility issues were caused by illnesses or injuries sustained while on active duty; the change would have lifted that restriction.

Mr. Johnson also insisted that the overall price tag of the legislation not exceed congressionally imposed limits on military spending, a demand that upset Senate Republicans who wanted the bill to authorize an extra \$25 billion in spending.

“The absence of the Senate-backed increase to top-line investments will go down as a tremendous missed opportunity,” Senator Mitch McConnell, Republican of Kentucky and the minority leader, said of the legislation. “Artificial budget restraints mean that major bill provisions like a pay raise for enlisted service members will come at the expense of investments in the critical weapons systems and munitions that deter conflict and keep them safe.”

The measure authorizes \$33.5 billion for building new battle-force ships, \$17.5 billion for military construction projects and over \$143 billion for research, development and testing of weapons and other systems employed by the military.

It also includes a broad new set of mandates on brain safety in the military. Evidence has been mounting that troops’ own weapons and equipment can pose a serious risk to their brains in repeated use. Among other provisions, the bill requires the Pentagon to set new safety standards for blast exposure, track and report exposure over service members’ careers, and take brain safety into account when designing new weapons.



In addition to pay raises for service members, the measure authorizes \$33.5 billion for building new battle-force ships.

Pentagon Repatriates 2 Malaysian Prisoners Who Pleaded Guilty to War Crimes

By CAROL ROSENBERG

The Pentagon said on Wednesday that it had repatriated two Malaysian men from its prison at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, who admitted to committing war crimes for an affiliate of Al Qaeda that carried out a deadly bombing in Bali, Indonesia, in 2002.

The rare transfer, a day after the Pentagon released another prisoner to the custody of Kenya, reduced the detainee population to 27 men.

The freed prisoners, Mohammed Nazir Bin Lep, 47, and Mohammed Farik Bin Amin, 49, have been held by the United States since 2003. They were returned to the custody of the Malaysian government, and supervision of its de-radicalization program, through a diplomatic arrangement that was reached as part of their guilty pleas in January.

Before they left, the men gave sworn testimony that prosecutors hope will be useful in the eventual trial of Encep Nurjaman, the Indonesian prisoner known as Hambali. Mr. Hambali is accused of being the mastermind of the Bali bombing and other terrorist at-



Mohammed Nazir Bin Lep, left, and Mohammed Farik Bin Amin, in images provided by their lawyers. The men were held since 2003 in a C.I.A. prison in Thailand and then at Guantánamo Bay.



tacks in 2002 and 2003 as a leader of the Jemaah Islamiyah movement. The men admitted to being accessories to the terror attack, after the fact, by helping Mr. Hambali elude capture.

All three men were held for years after their capture in Thailand in the C.I.A.’s secret prison network that used torture in its in-

terrogations. They were transferred to the military prison in Cuba in 2006, but the military did not formally charge them at the war court until 2021.

Brian Bouffard, a lawyer who represented Mr. Bin Lep at Guantánamo, said his client “plans to live a quiet life with his family. He’s been punished many times

over for his long-ago involvement with the wrong people, and we hope one day that his torturers and their enablers might face accountability for the evil they have done in our name.”

At their sentencing hearing in January, Mr. Bin Lep’s co-defendant, Mr. Bin Amin, showed sketches to the military jury that he had made portraying his first months in C.I.A. custody — both the circumstances of his interrogation and his conditions at a “black site” prison in Afghanistan.

As part of their plea, the men admitted to training at Al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan in 2000 and agreeing to become suicide bombers. Instead, upon their return to Southeast Asia, they ran errands for Mr. Hambali and acted as couriers for funds that were traced to suspected accomplices in the bombings in the resort of Bali on Oct. 12, 2002, that killed 202 people, most of them Australian.

Under the plea agreement, the jury was instructed to sentence the men to 20 to 25 years for their crimes. The jurors returned a 23-year sentence. But the panel was unaware that, separately, through administrative credit from the

military judge and a side deal with a Pentagon official overseeing the court, the men would be returned home sooner in exchange for their cooperation with the government.

In Kuala Lumpur, the Malaysian national police said in a statement that the men had arrived “in good and healthy condition” and would undergo “a com-

mony would help convict Mr. Hambalis.

Besides Mr. Hambali, five other prisoners are in pretrial proceedings at Guantánamo Bay for the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and the bombing of the U.S.S. Cole on Oct. 12, 2000. Also, an Iraqi prisoner who pleaded guilty is serving a sentence that ends in 2032.

Another five prisoners are effectively held as “indefinite detainees” in the war on terrorism, three of whom have never been charged but have been found to be too dangerous to release through an intelligence review process. The other two are Ramzi bin al-Shibh, who was last year found to be mentally unfit to face trial in the Sept. 11 conspiracy case, and Ali Hamza al-Bahlul, who is serving a life sentence for conspiring to commit war crimes as a media adviser to Osama bin Laden.

That leaves 15 men, most of them Yemeni citizens, who were brought there by the George W. Bush administration and were subsequently found to be eligible for transfer to countries that will help absorb them into society while monitoring them for signs of radicalization.

A maneuver to convict the accused planner of the 2002 Bali attacks.

prehensive rehabilitation” process before “reintegration into society.” It added, “Everyone has the right to a second chance.”

Christine Funk, a lawyer for Mr. Bin Amin, said he “looks forward to the opportunity to continue living a life of purpose.”

Some relatives of those killed in the Bali bombings expressed disappointment that the men would get such short sentences but said they were hopeful that their testi-

Man Who Ran New York Security Outpost Says He Was Agent for China

By HURUBIE MEKO

A man pleaded guilty in federal court in Brooklyn on Wednesday to charges that he had worked as an unauthorized agent of the Chinese government, running a police outpost in Lower Manhattan as part of an effort to quash criticism of Beijing.

The man, Chen Jinping, was accused last year of helping to run the unauthorized Chinese police outpost and of hiding his activities from the federal government by not registering as a foreign agent. Mr. Chen was charged along another man, Lu Jianwang, also known as Harry Lu.

Federal prosecutors said that when the men learned of an investigation into the outpost, they destroyed text messages they had exchanged with their handler at China's Ministry of Public Security in October 2022, around the time that the F.B.I. searched the six-story building in Chinatown that housed the operation.

In court, Mr. Chen admitted through an interpreter that he had "agreed with others to act as an agent of a foreign government" and that he was not registered as a foreign agent, as legally required. Mr. Lu has pleaded not guilty and is awaiting trial. Both men are American citizens.

As Mr. Chen spoke to the court, his son and daughter sat in the front row of the gallery watching.

The pleading on Wednesday is the latest in the Justice Depart-

ment's initiative to stop efforts by the Chinese government to wield its influence secretly across the United States. The efforts have been driven especially in recent years by the U.S. attorney's office in Brooklyn, which has been headed by Breon Peace.

"A priority of my office has been to counteract the malign activities of foreign governments that violate our nation's sovereignty by targeting local diaspora communities," Mr. Peace said in a news release.

The authorities have said that the recent cases show a worldwide effort by the Chinese government to suppress criticism and intimidate dissidents. And at the time, the U.S. attorney's office in Brooklyn said the case represented the first time criminal charges had been brought in connection with such a police outpost.

In September, the office charged Linda Sun, who had worked in high levels of New York state government, becoming deputy chief of staff to Gov. Kathy Hochul, accepting years of payoffs in exchange for helping China and its Communist Party.

This year, Shujun Wang, 75, a Queens man who billed himself as a democracy activist and scholar, was convicted in Brooklyn federal court of acting as a spy for the Communist Party. And last year, prosecutors won a case in the same court against three men who had stalked a family in New Jersey on behalf of the Chinese gov-



HILARY SWIFT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The federal authorities last year searched what they said was an outpost of the Chinese police on East Broadway in Manhattan.

An effort by Beijing to stifle dissent among the Chinese diaspora.

ernment.

It is unclear what stance the incoming Trump administration will take in similar cases. Mr. Peace said Wednesday that he would leave his position on Jan. 10, making way for President-elect Donald J. Trump to name a new top prosecutor for the Eastern District of New York.

But on Wednesday, Mr. Peace notched another win when Mr. Chen pleaded guilty to conspiracy

to act as an illegal agent of a foreign government, a charge that carries a maximum of five years in prison.

Mr. Chen said that, acting on China's behest, he had tried to kill an news article published online. The article, according to the indictment, was published in 2022 on a Chinese-language website, FJSEN.com, and focused on the establishment of the police outpost in Manhattan. Mr. Chen was assigned to remove the article from FJSEN.com, prosecutors said, and after contacting the person operating the site, he succeeded.

When the authorities announced the prosecution of Mr. Lu

and Mr. Chen, they also disclosed two related cases, including one against 34 Chinese police officers accused of harassing Chinese nationals who lived in the New York area. The other was against eight Chinese officials accused of directing a Zoom employee based in China to remove dissidents from the platform.

Before Mr. Chen and Mr. Lu were charged, the authorities searched the outpost at the six-story building, located at 107 East Broadway, a move that intensified resistance against China's efforts to police its diaspora far beyond its borders.

Although Chinese officials have said that the outposts are not doing police work, Irish, Canadian and Dutch officials have called on Beijing to shut down similar operations in their jurisdictions.

According to court papers, the Manhattan operation was overseen by a branch of the Ministry of Public Security called the Fuzhou Municipal Public Security Bureau.

In 2018 I.R.S. filings, Mr. Lu was listed as the president of a nonprofit organization whose offices housed the police outpost. Prosecutors said that the group was formed in 2013 and that it described its charitable mission as offering a "social gathering place" for people from the city of Fuzhou. Mr. Lu was general adviser of the organization and Mr. Chen was its secretary general, according to the complaint filed last year.

None of the people working at the outpost registered with the attorney general as agents of the Chinese government, prosecutors said. However, an investigation found photos that showed a banner behind the leaders of the outpost that read: "Fuzhou Police Overseas Service Station, New York, U.S.A."

According to prosecutors, since the outpost opened in February 2022, a Chinese official at least once ordered people there to help find someone, a person identified in the indictment as Victim-3. That person told investigators of being harassed with phone calls and social media messages by people who the victim believed were acting on behalf of China. The person told the investigators that once, after delivering a "pro-democracy speech," his vehicle was broken into.

Investigators found communications between Chinese officials and staff members at the outpost, including Mr. Chen, according to the complaint.

However, when investigators interviewed Mr. Chen, he said that he did not know any Chinese government officials, according to the complaint. During a voluntary interview with F.B.I. agents, he went to the bathroom, where an agent followed him and warned him through a bathroom door against deleting text messages. But messages the agents knew he had exchanged with Mr. Lu and Chinese officials had disappeared.

In Trump's Orbit, a Clash of Ideas to Curb Obesity

From Page A1

Wegovy and Zepbound that allow people to ignore the siren call of high-calorie foods and large portion sizes.

Those with views like Mr. Kennedy's believe it is wrong to use pharmaceuticals to manage obesity and related issues that are tied to unhealthy lifestyle and to a ruinous food environment. The makers of obesity drugs, Mr. Kennedy told Greg Gutfeld on Fox News before the election, are "counting on selling it to Americans because we're so stupid and so addicted to drugs."

But there are many like Mr. Musk, who says he has used Wegovy, applauding the power of the new drugs to improve health and treat the seeming intractability of obesity.

Many health and nutrition researchers say they would love for obesity to be treated through lifestyle changes alone, but they are not optimistic. They point to a history of attempts to teach people to change their diet and exercise habits. Multiple studies left them with dashed hopes and tempered their enthusiasm.

That happened with diabetes.

In 1996, the National Institutes of Health initiated a study involving thousands of people at risk of developing Type 2 diabetes. Researchers led these subjects through an intensive program of diet, counseling and exercise. It worked so well that the study was ended one year early. The intervention slashed people's chances of developing diabetes by more than half.

The result was so consequential that Tommy Thompson, then the secretary of health and human services under President George W. Bush, joined the study's principal investigator, Dr. David Nathan, a Harvard diabetes researcher, to announce it in 2001, telling the nation that the study showed diabetes could be conquered.

"Just walk around the block, walk down the street 30 minutes each and every day and we can lick this particular disease," Mr. Thompson said at the time. He also said "Prevention works."

Until it doesn't. Diabetes incidence has actually increased since those results were announced 23 years ago.

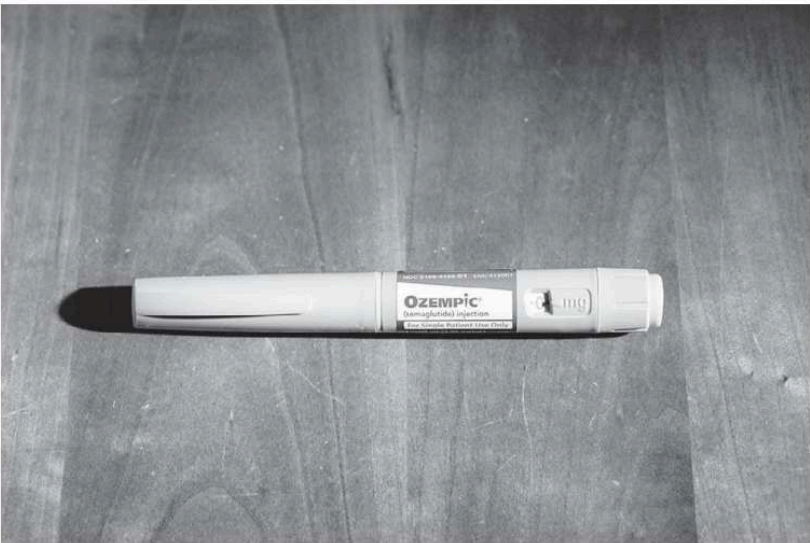
Permanent lifestyle changes, it turns out, are not easy.

"The problem, of course, is that people being people apparently find it difficult to maintain such changes over long periods," Dr. Nathan said in a recent interview.

Christopher Gardner, a nutrition researcher at Stanford, is a true believer in the power of a healthy diet. He has done study after study, funded by the National Institutes of Health, in which health professionals guided participants in their food choices or, in some cases, even delivered meals to them.

The studies succeeded — participants' health improved. But when the studies ended, Dr. Gardner said, and when participants no longer had that guidance or food delivery, many, if not most, went back to their old eating habits and all those benefits of a healthy diet vanished.

"Yes, diet should be the answer," said Dr. Gardner, who was paid five years ago by a purveyor of meat alternatives to study its products. But, he added, diet will be insufficient "unless some ma-



RYAN DAVID BROWN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

"There is not enough money in the system" to fund widespread use of obesity drugs, one doctor said.



HAIYUN JIANG FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Elon Musk, left, has commented in support of weight loss drugs while others like Robert F. Kennedy Jr., right, say lifestyle changes should be made instead of using drugs to manage obesity.

for changes are made to the whole food system in the United States."

There's also the problem of genetics, said Dr. Jeffrey Friedman, an obesity researcher at Rockefeller University in New York. Some people have a genetic tendency to become obese, and they will gain weight as long as food is cheap and plentiful. Tweaks like changing portion sizes or food advertising are not enough — if popcorn were sold in smaller bags, many would simply eat two bags of popcorn, he said.

That has led Dr. Friedman, like Dr. Gardner, and Dr. Nathan to conclude that the only practical way to improve people's health and allow them to lose weight is to rely on the new obesity drugs.

Dr. Charles Burant, a professor of internal medicine at the University of Michigan, is sympathetic to Mr. Kennedy's view that the problem is the food system.

He recalled an experience with one large food company that showed him how hard it could be to change what foods are marketed to Americans.

He had an idea for a palatable drink containing an amino acid that he thought might sate hunger.

So he went to the large food company and asked if it could make such a drink for him to test in a study. After a while, he received a reply: It was not in the company's business plan to develop products that reduced appetites. It was not interested in helping.

"It wasn't their business to sell less food," Dr. Burant said.

"If you can rein in corporations or try to use pressure to modulate what they do, I think that's great," he added. "But in the meantime,

until the population learns to eat good things, we need to do something to help people."

Others, like Dr. Kevin Volpp of the University of Pennsylvania, worry about promoting the widespread use of obesity drugs. He worries about the idea of tens of millions of Americans injecting

themselves weekly with drugs to curb their appetites.

"There is not enough money in the system to suddenly fund drugs for that many people," Dr. Volpp said.

He prefers to reserve the drugs for adults with the most serious diseases related to obesity.

Instead of handing out drugs to nearly all who qualify, Dr. Volpp said the country needed to consider other solutions, like marketing restrictions and taxes on sugary beverages.

He also would like health insurers to help subsidize the purchase of healthy food for those who can't afford it and have chronic medical problems, like diabetes, that are related to diet. Eleven states have secured permission to test the use of state Medicaid programs for pilot studies along those lines, he said.

"All this is like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle," Dr. Volpp said. "But we have to try everything that will help make our population healthier, given the rise in obesity to 40

percent from 12 percent in the last few decades."

It's not clear, though, how to put the jigsaw puzzle together, or whether to even try.

For Dr. Peter Lurie, the president of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, the situation is dire enough to try everything all at once.

His organization, he said, firmly believes that the food environment is an important factor driving high obesity rates, and he wants it to change.

He also describes himself as "something of a pharma skeptic."

But "when the pharmaceutical industry comes up with strong data that affects important outcomes," Dr. Lurie said, "it is irresponsible to turn your back on it."

That is also the view of Dr. Robert Califf, who has been serving as commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration under President Biden. Before he joined the F.D.A. in 2016, Dr. Califf, a cardiologist, ran a clinical trials center at Duke University that received funding from drug companies as well as from the federal government.

"While I am totally in favor of helping Americans have a better diet, these drugs are highly effective" for people with obesity, Dr. Califf said. "Not just for losing weight," but also for preventing heart disease deaths.

In the meantime, "we have to control the advertising," he said, and "we have to gradually change the agricultural system," and "we have to subsidize healthier foods."

"You can either be a cynical old vet and say this is impossible, or you could be optimistic," Dr. Califf said.

Florida Charges Man Accused Of Trying to Assassinate Trump

By PATRICIA MAZZEI

MIAMI — Florida officials filed charges on Wednesday against the man accused of trying to assassinate Donald J. Trump at his West Palm Beach golf course in September, defying federal prosecutors who had asked the state to suspend its investigation while their own moved forward.

The state charged Ryan W. Routh with attempted felony murder, citing injuries that a child sustained in a crash on Interstate 95 shortly after police officers shut down the highway in pursuit of Mr. Routh. He has pleaded not guilty to federal charges, including the attempted assassination of a presidential candidate.

Ashley Moody, the Florida attorney general, and Gov. Ron DeSantis, both Republicans, have repeatedly criticized the Biden Justice Department over its investigation of Mr. Routh, questioning federal prosecutors' credibility because, until recently, they were also prosecuting Mr. Trump.

Mr. DeSantis began the state's parallel investigation two days after the shooting, saying the federal agencies could not be trusted. In October, Ms. Moody sued the Justice Department, asking a federal judge to stop the department from blocking the state's investigation after federal authorities said theirs should proceed first.

Ms. Moody's complaint said that among other things, federal officials did not want Florida to interview witnesses while the federal investigation was going on.

On Wednesday, Ms. Moody reiterated that Florida officials are "within our right" to pursue state charges against Mr. Routh.

"There were many questions surrounding the agency prosecuting the president-elect and at the same time investigating his attempted murder," Ms. Moody said of the Justice Department at a news conference in Stuart, near

where Mr. Routh was stopped after fleeing the Trump International Golf Club on Sept. 15.

She and Mr. DeSantis acknowledged that once Mr. Trump takes office next month, their perspective on the federal investigation will change.

"The tide will turn on January 20th," Mr. DeSantis wrote on the social media platform X. The governor had been scheduled to announce the arrest warrant in person, but could not because of bad weather in Tallahassee.

Federal prosecutors say that Mr. Routh appeared to have surveyed Mr. Trump's golf course for about a month before Sept. 15. That day, he positioned himself outside a fence near the sixth hole. A Secret Service agent on a golf cart scouting the property one hole ahead of Mr. Trump saw the barrel of a semiautomatic rifle and fired.

Acting on witness testimony, officials identified the car in which the suspect fled and pulled over Mr. Routh heading north along Interstate 95 in neighboring Martin County.

According to the 18-page arrest warrant, five cars crashed about four miles south of where sheriff's deputies had detained Mr. Routh. A 6-year-old girl suffered "life-threatening" injuries in the crash, the warrant says.

Ms. Moody said those injuries and Mr. Routh's criminal conduct, "which we believe rises to the level of domestic terrorism," justified the attempted felony murder charge.

A defiant move against federal prosecutors as they pursue their case.

Corrections

NATIONAL

An article on Tuesday about Gov. Philip D. Murphy of New Jersey commuting the prison sentences of three women who had been abused and were convicted of killing men close to them misstated the circumstances of the crimes committed. They were all convicted of killing men close to them. The victims were not all boyfriends of the women.

ARTS

An article on Wednesday about the streaming service Max ending its partnership with "Sesame Street" misidentified the service currently carrying new episodes. The new episodes can be seen on Max, not on HBO, which previously partnered with the children's show.

OBITUARIES

An obituary on Tuesday about the coastal geologist Orrin H. Pilkey referred incorrectly to Washington State College, which he attended. It is now Washington State University, not the Univer-

sity of Washington.

An obituary on Tuesday about the journalist E.B. Furgurson III referred incorrectly to one point to his father, Ernest Furgurson Jr., who was also a journalist. He reported primarily on the Soviet Union when he was based in Moscow for The Baltimore Sun; he did not cover all of Europe.

An obituary on Monday about the artist Fidelia Bridges referred imprecisely to Bridges's election to the National Academy. Upon her election in 1873, she was the second of two living female artists at the time to receive the honor, not the second over all. Ann Hall was the first woman elected to the academy, in 1828.

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.

The Secret Payments That Allowed Opioids To Keep Flowing Freely

From Page A1

The P.B.M.s' power lies in their role as gatekeepers. They largely control the lists of drugs that insurance plans will cover, and drugmakers compete for position on those lists by offering rebates. The middlemen typically pass along most of these rebates to their clients, but they also keep a portion for themselves. The drug lists, known as formularies, frequently include restrictions meant to save money by steering patients to cheaper drugs. But for some drugs, such as opioids, restrictions can serve a medical purpose — minimizing the risk of overdose and addiction and limiting the number of pills that could be diverted to the illicit market.

Yet time and again, documents show, the P.B.M.s bargained away safeguards in exchange for rebates. Purdue's strategy to ensure broad access to its blockbuster painkiller OxyContin was explicit: "Offer rebates to remove payer restriction," according to an internal presentation. The company didn't want doctors to have to provide additional justification for prescribing a powerful narcotic, and it didn't want strict limits on the number of pills that could be dispensed.

The approach worked. Purdue repeatedly boasted in internal reports that prescribers and patients faced few or no restrictions on access to the drug.

What could have been a backstop against overprescribing instead became a sales tool, records show. After striking deals with P.B.M.s, drugmakers touted the favorable coverage — no second-guessing or paperwork requirements from insurers — as part of an effort to get doctors to write more prescriptions.

Even as the epidemic worsened, the P.B.M.s collected ever-growing sums. The largest of the middlemen bought competitors and used their increasing leverage not to insist on safeguards but to extract more rebates and fees. From 2003 to 2012, for example, the amount Purdue was paying P.B.M.s in rebates roughly doubled to about \$400 million a year, almost all of it for OxyContin.

The documents reviewed by The Times — including contracts, invoices, emails, memos and financial data — span more than two decades, beginning with the debut of OxyContin in 1996. Many came from a public repository of records unearthed during court cases and investigations. The Times also obtained more than 200 previously confi-

The Middlemen

This is the third article in a series about how pharmacy benefit managers prioritize their interests, often at the expense of patients, employers and taxpayers.

dential documents from plaintiffs in litigation against drugmakers, P.B.M.s and others.

In the public assignment of blame for the opioid epidemic, the P.B.M.s have largely escaped notice. Drugmakers, distributors, pharmacies and doctors have paid billions of dollars to resolve lawsuits and investigations. But more recently, the largest P.B.M.s have been in the legal cross hairs.

In statements, the P.B.M.s said they had long worked to prevent opioid abuse, while also ensuring that people in serious pain had access to the drugs. They said that for years they had offered their clients — employers, insurers and state and federal programs like Medicaid — the option to impose restrictions on opioids.

Justine Sessions, a spokeswoman for Express Scripts, said most clients had instituted some sort of safeguards for opioids. "Ultimately, our clients control their formularies and all aspects of their drug benefits," she said.

But this often presented the clients with a fraught choice: If they added restrictions, they could lose the rebates that helped make coverage affordable.

In addition, documents show that P.B.M.s sometimes collaborated with opioid manufacturers to persuade insurers not to restrict access to their drugs.

"Our work behind the scenes is paying off!" one Purdue executive emailed a colleague in 2003, recounting how she had worked with P.B.M.s that later became part of CVS Caremark and Express Scripts to persuade insurers to lift restrictions on OxyContin.

The opioid manufacturer Mallinckrodt similarly credited its collaboration with P.B.M.s with preventing two large insurance companies from imposing restrictions in 2015. "This is a best practice of how to reverse a negative decision," a Mallinckrodt executive emailed colleagues.

Spokeswomen for Purdue and

Mallinckrodt declined to comment.

Employees at Express Scripts and Optum Rx at times raised concerns that rebates were trumping safety considerations, internal emails show.

In 2017, for example, an Optum Rx executive proposed immediately restricting access to the painkiller Opana ER because it was going to be pulled from the market for safety reasons. It was important to prevent new patients from beginning to use the drug in the months before the withdrawal took effect, he wrote.

But another executive objected. "We currently get rebates," he wrote, "and that would put our rebates at risk."

Squelching the Pushback

The years following the 1996 rollout of OxyContin proved to be a critical period in the nascent opioid epidemic.

In response to rising costs and news coverage about addiction and abuse, some insurers began restricting access to the drug, requiring doctors to seek authorization before they could write some prescriptions or limiting the number of pills that could be prescribed to a patient each month.

For Purdue, this posed a serious threat. The restrictions, the company noted in an internal planning document, will "create barriers to OxyContin being able to achieve significant growth."

To knock down these barriers, Purdue needed to win over the middlemen, which held sway over insurers and other clients that counted on the rebates that the P.B.M.s shared with them.

Purdue forged what executives described internally as a "partnership" with Express Scripts and a "special arrangement" with Merck-Medco, one of the nation's largest P.B.M.s at the time. Together, the drugmaker and the middlemen disseminated purportedly independent guidance on pain management, including a mailing to doctors from Express Scripts that was meant to, in Purdue's words, "squelch the anti-OxyContin pushback."

In 1999, when Purdue struck a similar deal with AdvancePCS, the third of the big P.B.M.s at the time, a Purdue sales executive, James Lang, celebrated: "We want to make OxyContin a billion-dollar drug in two years. This will help."

"This is amazing," Purdue's president, Richard Sackler, replied.

Rebates formed the cornerstone of the relationships. In 2001, as OxyContin abuse made national headlines and regulators began trying to crack down, Purdue paid rebates of more than \$31 million to Merck-Medco and \$25 million to Express Scripts. By 2003, Purdue's total rebates to P.B.M.s reached almost \$200 million. (Merck-Medco later became part of Express Scripts, and AdvancePCS became part of CVS Caremark.)

Because the P.B.M.s often shared a portion of the rebates with the insurers and employers that hired them, these clients had a financial incentive not to impose restrictions. Purdue and the P.B.M.s sometimes reminded clients of this when they considered limiting access.

In a 2003 email, a Purdue executive, Bernadette Katsur, listed insurers that had abandoned planned restrictions on OxyContin — "proof of our success in working behind the scenes," she wrote.

By teaming up with AdvancePCS, she wrote in another email, "we have eliminated many attempts" to restrict access to the painkiller. Another Purdue manager relayed a Merck-Medco executive's account of the power of rebates: "The reason they have been able to keep various clients from placing" restrictions on OxyContin "has been the value of the rebates to them."

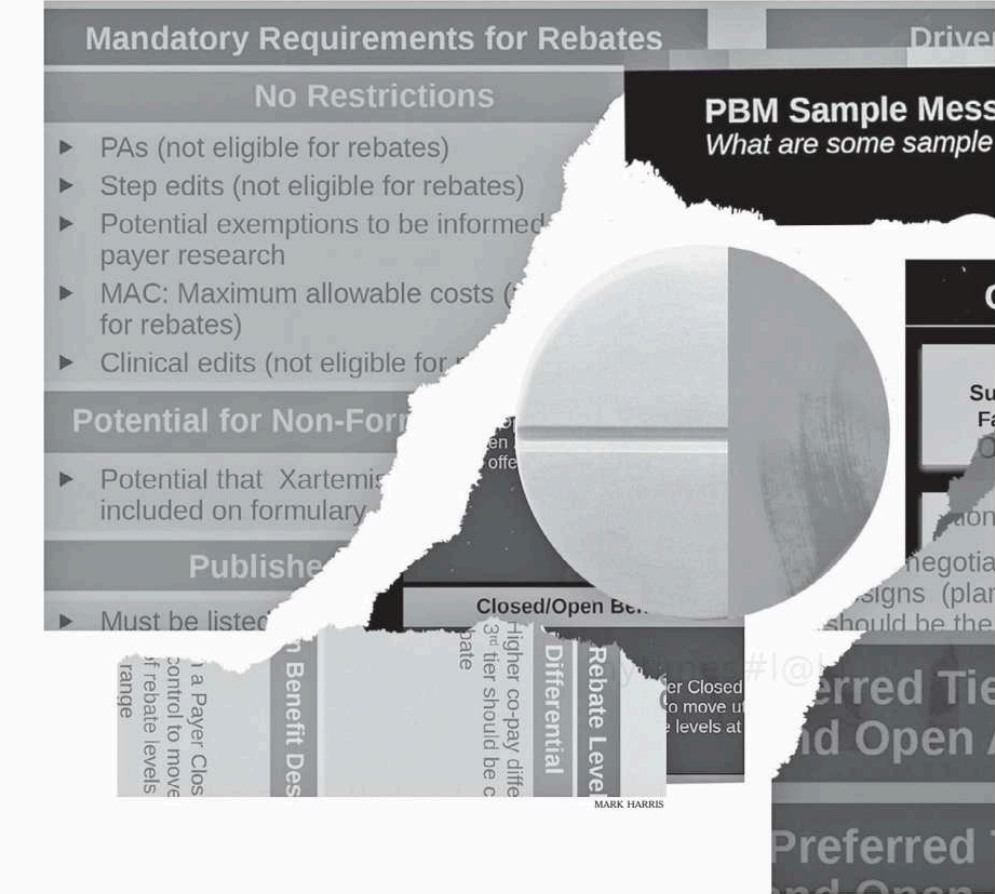
An important test came in 2003. At a meeting with Purdue, an executive for the insurer UnitedHealthcare raised concerns about abuse of OxyContin, noting that some patients were being prescribed as many as 1,000 pills a month. The insurance company planned to limit prescriptions to 60 pills; doctors would need to call to get authorization for higher amounts.

For help, Purdue turned to Merck-Medco, the P.B.M. that UnitedHealthcare had hired to handle prescription drug benefits for its customers. The effort culminated in a meeting at UnitedHealth Group's offices. A Merck-Medco official delivered a presentation on the "potential loss of rebates" to the insurer if it went forward with the limit, an executive for the P.B.M. reported to Purdue. "That information convinced the UHG team to change," he wrote.

The insurer imposed a limit of 124 pills, more than double what it had previously planned.

Removing Barriers

Other drug companies adopted similar tactics — a playbook that would prove effective even as the opioid epidemic

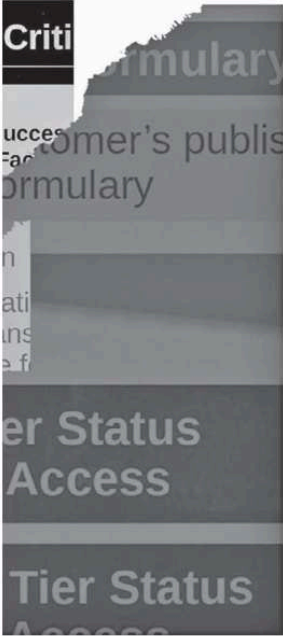


As we discussed during our call, there are several strategic initiatives where Express Scripts can support Purdue Pharma in your efforts to educate the market on the prescribing, administration and consumption of Oxycontin. Like yourselves, we believe

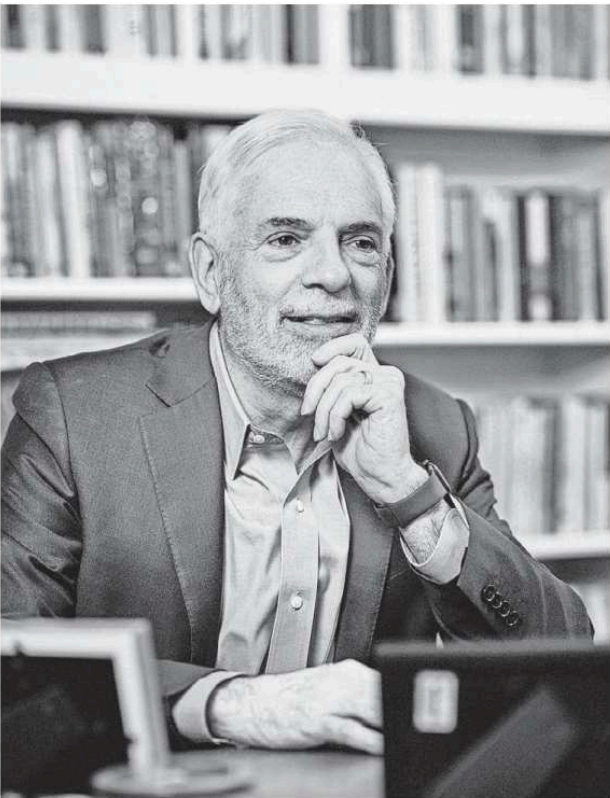
They put a sign (or two) and prescriber messaging on the front of the company, that "opioid programs" are a challenge as employers and plans look to control "excessive quantities"



JENS MORTENSEN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



For years, pharmacy benefit managers received rebates from opioid manufacturers in return for not restricting access to painkillers.



SIMON SIMARD FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



GEORGE FREY/REUTERS

spread.

A manager at the drugmaker Mallinckrodt succinctly explained the access game to colleagues in 2012, after a group of large insurers imposed restrictions on one of the company's painkillers. "We need to remove the barrier to growth, and that will require us to 'pay to play,'" the manager wrote.

Express Scripts, the P.B.M. for the insurance plans, helped arrange a "rebate enhancement," and the insurers loosened the restrictions.

Purdue and other leading drugmakers focused on avoiding two types of restrictions. The first was the requirement that doctors provide additional evidence to insurance companies or P.B.M.s that powerful painkillers were warranted.

In 2014, a large Blue Cross Blue Shield plan in New Jersey imposed such a requirement on Mallinckrodt's drug Xartemis XR because of "safety, policy and chronic use concerns," the drugmaker noted in an internal presentation. But after "assertive action" by Mallinckrodt and a P.B.M. called Prime Therapeutics, the Blue Cross Blue Shield plan "quickly reversed the decision."

A second priority for opioid manufacturers was to ease limits on the number of pills that could be dispensed. As some insurers tried to slow the flood of pills fueling the epidemic, manufacturers pushed for limits that were often well above the Food and Drug Administration-approved dosing guidelines.

Purdue argued that P.B.M.s should allow patients to get at least 320 milligrams of OxyContin per day. That was four times the level that some states recommended and more than double the limit that P.B.M.s, under federal pressure, would later impose. A 2015 study found that patients who received even half that amount were far more likely to die than those prescribed lower doses.

The 320-milligram threshold was nonetheless enshrined in numerous rebate contracts between Purdue and the P.B.M.s. CVS Caremark negotiated an option that allowed clients to set a lower limit, but if they did, the rebate that they received from Purdue would be cut roughly in half.

David Whitrap, a CVS Caremark spokesman, characterized that as a "significant concession," enabling clients to restrict the number of OxyContin pills while preserving some rebates from Pur-

due.

When opioid manufacturers struck a deal with a major P.B.M., they often urged their sales forces to capitalize.

After Mallinckrodt signed a contract with Express Scripts in 2014, for example, a sales manager relayed the good news to his team: "Make sure you let all your physicians know" that "they are free to write" prescriptions without insurance obstacles.

Wielding Leverage

Long before the big P.B.M.s rolled out their opioid safety programs in 2017 and 2018, there was ample evidence that they had the power to help curb the opioid epidemic.

In the early 2000s, at the behest of Georgia's Medicaid program, Express Scripts started requiring prior authorization for some prescriptions and placing limits on the number of pills that could be prescribed. A subsequent study by the P.B.M. found that the measures reduced the number of potentially inappropriate prescriptions.

"Any P.B.M. should be doing these things," an Express Scripts researcher said when he presented the results at an industry conference in 2003.

Some private insurers, including Blue Cross Blue Shield plans in Tennessee and Massachusetts, took action even though it meant losing rebates.

"This was a patient safety and public health imperative," said Andrew Dreyfus, the chief executive of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts when it restricted opioid access in 2012. While the insurer saw its rebates decline significantly, it credited the changes with reducing the overprescribing of opioids. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also found that opioid prescriptions decreased after the insurer's changes.

But despite the growing body of evidence, the largest P.B.M.s continued to use their leverage to wring larger rebates out of opioid manufacturers.

Optum Rx, for example, largely controlled access to patients with a Medicare drug plan run by the insurer UnitedHealthcare — a population that generated roughly \$200 million in annual sales for Purdue. (UnitedHealth Group owns both the insurer and Optum Rx.) To keep OxyContin on the list of approved drugs,

'This was a patient safety and public health imperative.'

ANDREW DREYFUS, who was chief executive for Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts when it restricted access to opioids like OxyContin, below, even though it meant a decline in rebates.

Purdue was already shelling out about 23 percent of every sale in the form of rebates, totaling nearly \$50 million in 2012, documents show.

But the P.B.M. wanted much more: about 60 percent. Purdue executives resented the demand, but they also feared the downside. If the middleman cut off access to OxyContin, sales could plunge, and other P.B.M.s and insurers might follow suit, the drugmaker worried.

"This is a 'no-win/tough' decision," a Purdue executive wrote to colleagues. Purdue agreed to the deal.

Mallinckrodt, too, agreed to pay ever-growing sums to keep its drugs available without restrictions. For some Medicare plans, the drugmaker by 2015 was paying Optum Rx about 70 percent of every sale.

'Stop With the Attitude'

The P.B.M.s' longstanding arrangements with opioid manufacturers began to crumble in 2016. That March, the C.D.C. issued guidelines cautioning against excessive opioid prescriptions, especially those for high doses and large numbers of pills.

The middlemen also faced growing pressure from Medicare regulators to reduce opioid overuse, and more states were enacting their own restrictions.

By then, most opioid prescriptions were for generic versions of painkillers, on which drugmakers usually didn't offer rebates. Even so, some P.B.M. executives fretted about potentially losing rebates on the remaining brand-name prescriptions.

In 2017, Express Scripts executives calculated how much money the company would lose by imposing restrictions and decided to charge clients for putting the safeguards into effect. The new fees should "make up for the rebate hit," one executive said in an email. (Ms. Sessions, the Express Scripts spokeswoman, said the company charged for the program "to ensure that we have the staffing and resources necessary.")

At Optum Rx, some executives pushed to delay new restrictions. They reminded colleagues that adding prior-authorization requirements and dose limits could violate the company's contract with Purdue. Under that deal, the P.B.M. received rebates only if it allowed a daily dose of OxyContin that was far above the amount that the C.D.C. said was associated with increased risk of overdose.

But the idea of postponing the restrictions frustrated some Optum Rx executives, including David Calabrese, a senior vice president. In emails in 2017, he stressed the severity of the opioid epidemic and "the immediacy of the need for intervention."

His concerns prompted a colleague to snap, "Stop with the attitude, and help us make sure we are compliant with our contracts."

"My attitude," Mr. Calabrese fired back, "is toward the gross overprescribing and overpromotion of these medications to our country's citizens, the countless deaths and my commitment to doing whatever is within my power to put an end to it."

The concerns about forfeiting rebates contributed to Optum Rx's decision to delay at least some restrictions until 2018, emails show.

In the meantime, the P.B.M. renegotiated its deal with Purdue to continue receiving rebates despite the addition of restrictions. According to an internal Purdue memo, the drugmaker agreed to keep paying because it feared that it would be booted from the middleman's drug lists altogether "if we do not keep them whole in terms of rebates."

Purdue made similar concessions to other P.B.M.s, documents show.

Within a couple of years of the publication of the C.D.C. guidelines, the benefit managers had added authorization requirements for potent, long-acting drugs like OxyContin and redirected some patients to alternatives that posed less risk for addiction and abuse. The P.B.M.s also limited the number of pills and doses that could be dispensed.

The middlemen publicly touted the results of their programs, citing decreases in potentially inappropriate prescriptions.

Amid the positive publicity, an Optum Rx manager, Brian Sabin, floated the idea of going even further: What about removing OxyContin entirely from the company's lists of covered drugs? "Purdue has looked awful in the news since basically 2008," Mr. Sabin wrote in a 2019 email to his colleague Venkat Vadlamudi. "They basically caused the opioid epidemic, and we're essentially rewarding their bad behavior. From a purely P.R. perspective, I think it would look good on us."

"Valid point," Mr. Vadlamudi replied. "We as a company looked into this, but the amount of utilization on OxyContin and the rebates we collect prevented us from doing it."

Report Finds Police Cards Have Created Gap in Justice

By TRACEY TULLY

The credit-card-size documents are known by many names: police courtesy cards, gold cards or family cards. They are distributed by law enforcement officers and their unions to a favored few and are flashed by drivers hoping for leniency when stopped for traffic violations.

The arrangement has long been part of a largely unspoken code.

But a report released Wednesday by a New Jersey government watchdog has for the first time pierced a well-guarded veil of secrecy around the cards and the surprising scope of their power.

The report grew out of an analysis of 50 hours of video footage from body-worn cameras during traffic stops made by New Jersey State Police troopers in December 2022. It found a "two-tiered system of justice" with differing treatment for those with law enforcement connections and for those without.

"A lot of what we saw was really brazen and obvious," said Kevin Walsh, New Jersey's acting comptroller, who conducted the study. "Drivers thought they would be treated with deference once they showed that they were part of the club."

In most cases, the cards worked.

More than a quarter of the 501 motorists who drove off without receiving tickets after being pulled over by a State Police trooper during a 10-day period either flashed a courtesy card or told the officer that they knew someone in law enforcement, the investigation found.

The phenomenon is not unique to New Jersey. The cards are common in many states, including New York, where a New York Police Department officer was awarded \$175,000 in a legal settlement this year after he said he was punished for refusing to give a break to a driver who showed him a courtesy card.

But videos of recorded exchanges released Wednesday by the comptroller's office show that in New Jersey the courtesy can extend even to drivers in high-speed pursuits and to drivers who admit to having had a couple of drinks.

"Do you realize we were behind you probably for, like, five miles?" an unidentified trooper asks a driver stopped for speeding in one recorded exchange.

"You're putting your life at risk," the trooper said. "I'm chasing you, putting my life at risk — driving 95 miles an hour, weaving through traffic — just to get to you."

"How much have you had to drink?" he adds.

"Not a lot at all," the driver responds, adding, "Maybe two glasses."

According to body-camera footage, the trooper then goes off to call the person who the driver claimed had given him the gold courtesy card that was proffered. The officer returns quickly.

"If you didn't have this, we'd be going a whole different way," he explains before adding, "Get out of here. Don't let me catch you on my highway again."

A spokesman for the State Police superintendent, Col. Patrick J. Callahan, could not be immediately reached for comment. Union leaders were also not immediately available for comment.

The release of the comptroller's report comes as the conduct of New Jersey State Police troopers is already under intense scrutiny.

The 10-day period evaluated by the comptroller's office was roughly six months before State Police troopers suddenly began stopping far fewer cars altogether.

Between July 2023 and March 2024, tickets for speeding, drunken driving, cellphone use and other violations plummeted by 61 percent statewide, data obtained by The New York Times shows.

Last week, the state attorney general, Matthew J. Platkin, appointed Preet Bharara, a former U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York, to lead a criminal investigation into the drastic decline in traffic stops by State Police troopers.

The slowdown in enforcement coincided with an almost immediate uptick in crashes on the state's two main highways, according to State Police traffic reports and data reported monthly to the New Jersey Turnpike Authority. New Jersey's traffic fatalities have since climbed by about 16 percent this year, compared with the same period in 2023.

The sharp downturn in summonses began a week after Mr. Platkin released a report that found glaring racial disparities in road safety enforcement. (That report was unrelated to the analysis released on Wednesday.)

In 2019, Gov. Philip D. Murphy signed a law that prohibits the distribution of badges to people who are not police officers. Mr. Walsh's office has suggested that the State Legislature consider adjusting the law to also preclude the distribution of police courtesy cards, as California has done.

"Some officers are put in a difficult spot because they are expected to go along with these unwritten rules," Mr. Walsh said.

How Biden Should Spend His Final Weeks in Office

THE days are dwindling to a precious few before President Biden relinquishes his tenancy at the White House to Donald Trump. Four years ago, in his Inaugural Address, Mr. Biden promised to “press forward with speed and urgency, for we have much to do in this winter of peril and possibility.” The peril remains, but so do the possibilities.

Last week he announced that he was commuting the sentences of nearly 1,500 people and pardoning 39 others convicted of nonviolent crimes. Eleven days earlier, in a decision widely criticized, Mr. Biden pardoned his son Hunter, who was awaiting sentencing on gun possession and income tax charges.

There is still much the president can do before he repairs to Delaware. He can spare federal death row prisoners from the fate some almost certainly will face when Mr. Trump returns. He can make the Equal Rights Amendment a reality after decades of efforts to enshrine it in the Constitution. He can safeguard magnificent landscapes that might otherwise be desecrated. He can protect undocumented immigrants facing deportation, alleviate crushing student debt facing millions of Americans and protect the reproductive rights of women. And more.

Yes, time is running out for Mr. Biden's presidency, but he can still repair, restore, heal and build, as he promised he would do on the January day four years ago when he took the oath of office. Here are a few suggestions.

Commute the sentences of the 40 federal inmates on death row

By Martin Luther King III
An American human rights activist and the eldest son of the civil rights leaders Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King.

By commuting all federal death sentences to life, Mr. Biden would move America, meaningfully, in the direction of racial reconciliation and equal justice. In 2021 he became the first president to openly oppose capital punishment. Since his inauguration, the federal government has not carried out a single execution.

If Mr. Biden does not exercise his constitutional authority to commute the sentences of everyone on federal death row, we will surely see another spate of deeply troubling executions as we did in the first Trump administration. A majority of those executed — 12 men and one woman — were people of color; at least one was convicted by an all-white jury and there was evidence of racial bias in a number of cases; several had presented evidence of intellectual disabilities or severe mental illnesses. The same problems were features in the cases of many of the 40 men on federal death row today, more than half of whom are people of color.

My father taught that the death penalty multiplies hate, violence and vengeance. Commuting federal death sentences would be a decisive shift toward love, peace and mercy.

Pardon people convicted of nonviolent marijuana offenses

By Rick Steves
A travel writer and the host of the public television show “Rick Steves’ Europe.” He is also a member of the board of NORML, which is working to legalize marijuana in the United States.

Mr. Biden has taken historic steps to address America's outdated and failed federal marijuana policies. In October 2022 he pardoned thousands of people convicted of marijuana possession under federal law, and last week, he granted clemency to around 1,500 people, including some nonviolent drug offenders. His administration has proposed a rule change that would reclassify marijuana — which currently shares the same classification as heroin — as a drug with a lower potential for abuse. But he can still do more.

Gallup polls have consistently shown that a significant majority of Americans support marijuana legalization. And on the campaign trail, Mr. Biden said that “no one should be in jail because of marijuana.” But his October 2022 pardons applied only to people convicted of marijuana possession, not those convicted of selling or distributing marijuana. In the final weeks of his term, he should pardon all Americans who have federal convictions for nonviolent marijuana-related crimes, and he should commute the sentences of every single person who is sitting in federal prison today for those offenses. It's the right thing to do.

Make the Equal Rights Amendment part of the Constitution

By Kirsten Gillibrand
A Democrat and a United States senator representing New York.

With Republicans set to take unified control of government, Americans are facing the further degradation of reproductive freedom.

Fortunately, Mr. Biden has the power to enshrine reproductive rights in the Constitution right now. He can direct the national archivist to certify and publish the Equal Rights Amendment. This would mean that the amendment has been officially ratified and that the archivist has declared it part of the Constitution.

The amendment is concise: “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex. The Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.”

The amendment would make discrimination on the basis of sex — like restrictions on reproductive care that single out women — unconstitutional, including, in my view,



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY RACHEL STERN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES; SOURCE PHOTOGRAPHS BY KENNY HOLSTON/THE NEW YORK TIMES, DOUG MILLS/THE NEW YORK TIMES AND MAANSI SRIVASTAVA/THE NEW YORK TIMES

abortion. We've seen the potential of this approach; courts in several states with E.R.A.s have cited those amendments in striking down state prohibitions on Medicaid-funded abortion care.

The E.R.A. has met the requirements for certification — it passed two-thirds of Congress in 1972 and was ratified by three-quarters of the states as of 2020. Only a flawed Trump Justice Department memo prevented its certification as a constitutional amendment. The memo claimed the E.R.A. is no longer valid because it failed to meet the seven-year deadline Congress initially set and then, when the ratification effort fell three states short, extended until 1982.

But the deadline was meaningless. The Constitution says nothing about a deadline for amending it.

No doubt this would be argued in the courts; right-wing legal challenges would follow the archivist's certification and publication. But there is strong legal backing for our position. Mr. Biden should act now to protect reproductive rights and make the E.R.A. the law of the land.

Release secret Justice Department legal guidance

By Michael Waldman
The president of the Brennan Center for Justice and the author of “The Supermajority.”

Mr. Trump has vowed to use the military for the “largest deportation” ever, promising a “bloody story.” Mr. Biden can make it harder for his successor to overwhelm the rule of law.

Here's one way: The executive branch is guided by legal analyses issued by the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel. Remarkably, these documents often remain secret for years or even decades. Mr. Trump's radical plans would bust norms and possibly break laws, and we need to learn just how aberrant they are.

The office issued guidance in 1994 on the use of the military to enforce immigration law. There's also a 1980 Justice Department manual on the use of military force to quell civil unrest. These and many other guidelines for domestic deployment of the military are still secret. The American Civil Liberties Union has filed a freedom of information request for them.

Mr. Biden shouldn't fight the request. In fact, he should release these documents right now.

Protect immigrants

By Andrea R. Flores
The vice president for immigration policy and campaigns at FWD.us, a bipartisan group pushing to reform immigration laws and policies.

Mr. Biden was slow to act on immigration challenges, delaying major actions until the election year to secure the border, to support cities hosting increases in asylum seekers and to protect undocumented spouses. Now he has a moral obligation to mitigate the catastrophic threats to immigrants posed by Mr. Trump. He can do this by taking bold protective measures using his executive power.

He can extend temporary protected sta-

tus to countries facing armed conflict, environmental disasters or other extraordinary conditions. Multiple countries have been granted that status since the bipartisan law was passed in 1990, and Mr. Biden expanded this protection to include Ukraine, Afghanistan, Ethiopia and others. Now he can do the same for other countries that meet the requirements for protection and allow eligible immigrants to apply for work permits. He should, for instance, extend and expand temporary protected status for Nicaragua and Venezuela, two countries whose people are still unable to return home because of government repression. Ending the status for each country will be difficult, as it will require Mr. Trump to prove that country conditions have meaningfully improved.

Mr. Biden's administration can also pause immigration court hearings and administratively close cases, removing families and children from the immediate threat of mass deportation. Last, his Department of Homeland Security can expedite the asylum claims of the parents and children torn apart under the Trump administration's family separation policy, who remain vulnerable to his promised mass deportations.

Commit funds appropriated by Congress for climate initiatives

By Jody Freeman
A professor at Harvard Law School, where she teaches courses on environmental and regulatory law.

Mr. Biden's top climate priority should be getting clean energy grants and loans approved under the Inflation Reduction Act out the door and into the hands of the states and the private sector. Most of the Inflation Reduction Act money has been allocated already, but not all, and Mr. Trump could claw back whatever isn't spent. That would limit the impact of Mr. Biden's most important climate accomplishment and lead to more greenhouse gas emissions.

Safeguard vulnerable federal lands

By John Leshy
A professor at the University of California College of the Law, San Francisco, and the author of “Our Common Ground: A History of America's Public Lands.”

Mr. Biden could designate more national monuments under the Antiquities Act, which would prohibit or sharply restrict certain activities in selected places. Several areas are being teed up by conservationists, including part of the 2.5-million-acre Owyhee Canyonlands in eastern Oregon. With its red rock canyons and upland sagebrush, it is one of the largest expanses of relatively pristine land left in the continental United States.

Help people struggling with student debt

By Ryann Liebenthal
The author of “Burdened: Student Debt and the Making of an American Crisis.”

To call the nation's student loan system a disaster is an understatement. A headline in The Times in July framed the situation succinctly: “Student Loan Borrowers Owe \$1.6 Trillion. Nearly Half Aren't Paying.” Unfortunately, Mr. Trump has signaled

11 writers on how the president can still protect immigrants, the environment and abortion access.

his enthusiasm for policies that would harm borrowers, potentially leaving them with higher bills, larger balances and longer repayment timelines.

So now is the time for Mr. Biden to take decisive action. He should issue an order canceling the student debt for struggling seniors — some 3.5 million Americans age 60 or older are still paying off student loans — and for borrowers in default and anyone swindled by for-profit schools. Will Mr. Trump undo these measures? Probably. But let Americans see that Mr. Biden tried to make the lives of these debtors better and his successor chose to make them worse.

What action might actually survive Mr. Trump's wrecking ball? Firing the Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority, known as MOHELA, one of the nation's biggest student loan servicers. MOHELA has a proven record of abominable performance. In October the Biden administration stopped assigning new borrower accounts to the company, which failed to process more than 460,000 applications for a repayment plan that could have saved borrowers money.

Strengthen access to abortion

By David S. Cohen, Greer Donley and Rachel Rebouché
The authors are law professors. Mr. Cohen is at Drexel University, Ms. Donley is at the University of Pittsburgh, and Ms. Rebouché is at Temple University.

Anti-abortion extremists in Mr. Trump's orbit have indicated they want to use the 151-year-old Comstock Act to prosecute anyone who mails items that can produce an abortion, including pills, instruments and supplies. This is an erroneous reading of the act, which has long been rejected by federal courts, but if followed, it could jeopardize access to abortion nationwide.

The Comstock Act has a five-year statute of limitations that could put abortion providers at risk for past conduct. To guard against this risk, and despite the fact that Mr. Trump has said he doesn't want to pursue such prosecutions, Mr. Biden should pardon everyone who might be considered to have violated the act's abortion provisions, without endorsing any interpretation of Comstock. A pardon of unnamed and uncharged individuals has precedent: President Jimmy Carter issued such a pardon for people who avoided the Vietnam War draft.

Mr. Biden must also finish some outstanding tasks that will protect reproductive rights. His administration has already allowed patients and health care providers to use telehealth when prescribing abortion pills rather than require an office visit, protected the medical records of patients who traveled for care to a state where abortion was legal and worked to ensure that medically necessary abortions would be provided in emergency rooms nationwide, even if states banned such care.

Now his administration must finalize proposed rules to expand access to birth control. And his administration should complete any outstanding investigations into hospitals for failing to provide emergency abortions and make the results public when possible.

COLUMNIST | NICHOLAS KRISTOF

The Case for Throwing Stones From a Glass House

NAIROBI, KENYA

WHEN SHE FINALLY HAD the chance to confront her rapist in open court, she didn't flinch. "What you did was bad," she told the pastor. "Don't do that to any other girl."

And he won't. At age 74, he was sentenced to 20 years in prison for assaulting her and others. But the devastation lingers for the petite and fragile Kenyan girl in braids who was repeatedly raped by the pastor when she was just 7 years old.

"I trusted him because he said he was a man of God," she told me. Now 13, she says she didn't understand what he was doing to her. But she knew it hurt, and she was terrified when he warned, "If you tell your parents, I'll kill you."

Violence against women is a serious problem in the United States, of course. But there has been some progress in America while in many countries a cloak of silence continues to enable such violence. This is one of the great moral struggles of our time, and we should exercise bipartisan American global leadership to address it.

President-elect Donald Trump has talked a good game about prioritizing the fight against human trafficking and child exploitation, and here's a chance to do so.

A new United Nations report estimates that 51,000 women and girls were killed last year around the world by their partners or family members — the equivalent of a good-size war. The highest number of these femicides, and the highest rate per capita, was in Africa, the U.N. found.

Here in Nairobi, a survey found that the first sexual experience of a majority of women in the sprawling warren of alleys that make up the Kibera slum was rape. UNICEF reported this year a global survey finding that one-third of girls in Oceania had been sexually assaulted by the age of 18, along with 22 percent of girls in Africa; a smaller but still significant number of boys had been sexually assaulted.

It is awkward for us to talk about problems linked to other cultures. Are we hypocritical? Aren't we a flawed messenger when our president-elect himself was found liable in court for sexual abuse? If I speak up, does that make me a white savior engaging in Western cultural imperialism?

My wife, Sheryl WuDunn, has a fitting answer when people accuse Americans of cultural imperialism. A Chinese American, Sheryl notes that her grandmother's feet were bound and says, thank God Westerners spoke out about foot binding, imposing their values and sparing future generations of Chinese girls such a fate.

We need the humility to acknowledge that we haven't come near to solving these issues in the United States. But at least we discuss them openly, shattering taboos — and throwing stones from a glass house is still preferable to silence as women and girls are murdered and assaulted in large numbers around the world.

At a shelter called Kara Olmurani in Nairobi, I interviewed the girl raped by the pastor. (The girls in this story asked that I not use their names, and I've obliged.) The shelter, a large, bustling house behind a high wall on the edge of town, is home to 18 girls who've been sexually abused and five young children who were the product of rape. A sign in the living room reads: I am a girl, smart, strong and beautiful. When I arrived, the girls were festive in masks and

colored braids for their holiday party, their playfulness a tribute to human resilience.

Kara Olmurani was founded by Terry Gobanga, a Kenyan minister who had been kidnapped in Nairobi on the morning of her wedding day in 2004. The attackers gang-raped and stabbed her, then dumped her on the road from a moving car. As Gobanga's friends gathered for her wedding, she was unconscious and fighting for her life in a hospital bed.

After recovering and marrying seven months later, Gobanga resolved to help others suffering from sexual violence and turned her house into a shelter. I wrote

been the successful and bipartisan effort to tackle human trafficking, bringing together liberal feminists and conservative evangelicals. Republicans and Democrats worked together over the past 25 years to reduce the number of girls sold into modern slavery in countries like Cambodia and the Philippines.

This was a humanitarian triumph — but Congress let the landmark anti-trafficking legislation lapse in 2021. It should promptly be revived.

Congress should also pass the long-stalled bipartisan International Violence Against Women Act, which would establish



A rape victim, right, at Kara Olmurani, a shelter in Nairobi, Kenya, speaks with Medina Bonareri Omboga, who oversees the shelter.

In the battle against sexual violence worldwide, the U.S. has a chance to lead.

about Kara two years ago, and Times readers then donated \$120,000, which allowed the organization to expand and start a branch in Malawi as well.

While speaking out is important, it can also create a resentful backlash that amplifies the problem (which has sometimes happened with denunciations of female genital mutilation). What works best is for Americans to support organizations pushing for change from within a culture and give them the microphones.

That's the context in which I admire Kenyan groups like Kara Olmurani and Shining Hope for Communities (which works to empower slum residents in Nairobi, especially girls). Both groups support victims but also work with the police to send perpetrators to prison.

Even at a time when Americans are deeply divided, we should still be able to work together to end impunity for brutality toward women and girls. One model has

a State Department office for women's issues and elevate issues of gender violence.

At Kara Olmurani, a slight girl in braids broke my heart. She was wearing a bracelet that read "joy," but as she told me her story she was soon weeping.

A man had attacked her in the fields when she was 12, and he raped her so brutally that she suffered an internal injury called a fistula, leaving her incontinent. She has required seven surgeries to repair the damage.

"Men should have self-control," she said earnestly. "They should be trained not to attack children."

She paused and gulped some air to steady herself. "And if he does something bad to a girl, he should be punished."

I hope Congress is listening. One of the epic moral battles of this century is against human trafficking and violence against women, so why would Americans of any political stripe want to stay passive on the sidelines?

I have the best readers! Thanks to all for donating more than \$4.2 million so far to the nonprofits in my annual holiday giving guide, in ways that we estimate will benefit about 89,000 people. You can donate or learn more at KristofImpact.org.

ment just a few months later. At that moment, Republicans were engaged in the same kind of hand-wringing and soul-searching that Democrats are presently engaged in.

Yet the Tea Party became the primary vehicle for obstructionism during Obama's eight years in office. It was not only anti-Obama and anti-government; it was also anti-Republican Party establishment.

As Democrats look for a way forward, it should not be a surprise if what emerges as Trump's opposition is similarly hostile to the Democratic Party as presently constituted.

A resistance to Trump rose during his first term, and one rose against President Biden. This is just the normal way of things in today's politics.

So as we watch Trump's cavalcade of dubious cabinet picks, and as we see various individuals and institutions engaged in what can only be called an anticipatory obeisance — what my colleague Michelle Goldberg described this week as "the great capitulation," bowing to Trump to avoid his potential wrath — it's true that resistance has yet to summon the full energy of liberals, even in disgust. After all, there is very little that average citizens can do about the way the administration takes shape.

Yes, California is trying to "Trump-proof" itself, and organizations like the A.C.L.U. are preparing to do battle with Trump's agenda. However, those efforts, too, are largely beyond the involvement of average citizens.

But when Trump takes office again, the response of the public to his policies will have sway, and if that response is disapproval, and if it becomes organized and focused, it could be a formidable obstacle to Trump fully realizing his aims.

Very likely, many of the people now engaged in restorative detachment will be the force behind such a movement. So, again: Don't feel guilty for resting. Energy conserved now will be crucial later.

LETTERS

Aghast at a Move to Revoke Polio Vaccine

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "Kennedy Aide Filed to Revoke Shot for Polio" (front page, Dec. 16):

A lawyer who is not a doctor but is advising Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has asked the F.D.A. to withdraw approval of the current polio vaccine until, the lawyer says, placebo-controlled trials can be completed.

The Salk polio vaccine, however, was definitely proven safe and effective in a randomized placebo-controlled trial. We know because, as public school children in Queens and New Rochelle, N.Y., we were subjects in that trial in the early 1950s.

One of us (Dr. Nancy Angoff) was randomized to receive the real vaccine, and one of us (Dr. Peter Aronson) was randomized to receive the placebo.

At that time, we recall, friends walked with crutches because of previous polio infections, and parents were terrified of polio outbreaks. What we do not recall is our parents, along with those of thousands of other young schoolchildren, approving our participation in the Salk vaccine trials.

The vaccine or placebo was given in our elementary schools by nurses in white uniforms as we lined up for shots on three occasions.

It is hard to imagine parents today approving such a thing. But they were fine with it then, out of fear that we could get polio and the hope that this vaccine could end their worry. And it did. Those of us who had gotten the placebo had to come back for the series of three shots.

After the vaccine was improved, it would have been completely unethical to subject anyone, let alone a vulnerable child, to a placebo in a new trial when there was a proven safe and effective way to stop this debilitating and sometimes deadly virus.

It would be completely unethical to withdraw approval of the current shot. Mr. Kennedy and his lawyers must know that there are real people, real children, who would pay the price for their poor, uninformed judgment.

We know. We were there

Health Insurance Woes

TO THE EDITOR:

In all the letters I've read regarding the sorry state of our health insurance system, not mentioned are the difficulties for providers willing to use the system.

I'm a clinical psychologist and available to work with insurance companies. Private fees are very high, and people should be able to access service through their insurance. However, the websites and logistics for reimbursement are often oppressive, and reimbursement is often delayed.

I've had to hire a professional billing service to maintain my sanity, and I'm really smart enough to do it myself if it were user-friendly.

So I find this another manifestation of health insurance companies looking out for their own profits and frustrating patients and private providers.

HELENE TORKER, NEW YORK

What Works, and Doesn't, to Reduce Crime

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "What Republicans and Democrats Get Wrong About Crime" (Opinion guest essay, nytimes.com, Dec. 7):

While Jennifer Doleac rightly critiques "tough on crime" policies, the suggestion that increasing police funding and surveillance will deter crime misses the mark. Research shows that these strategies often harm Black and brown communities without addressing the systemic issues driving crime.

Heightened police presence disproportionately targets marginalized neighborhoods, deepening cycles of racial profiling and distrust. Similarly, surveillance tools like cameras and facial recognition amplify systemic inequities, often misidentifying people of color and exacerbating harm. These measures treat symptoms of crime, not its causes.

Instead, investments in community-based initiatives — such as education, youth employment programs, affordable housing and mental health care — have proven far more effective at creating lasting safety. Additionally, restorative justice programs address harm to the victim by fostering accountability and healing for

before and after the shots.

NANCY R. ANGOFF
PETER S. ARONSON
NEW HAVEN, CONN.

Dr. Angoff is emerita professor of internal medicine at the Yale School of Medicine. Dr. Aronson is professor of internal medicine and cellular and molecular physiology at the school.

TO THE EDITOR:

When I was 10 years old, our teacher, Ethel Salk, entered our class one morning in a public school on Chicago's South Side and said she had an announcement. I am paraphrasing her words: "I want to tell you children that my nephew has saved your lives. My nephew is Dr. Jonas Salk, and he has developed a vaccine for polio."

We all screamed or cried. We knew someone with polio and we were frightened of ending our lives in iron lungs that we'd seen in newspaper photos. Polio had spread throughout the state, through the summer camps and in our neighborhoods.

The thought that our government could be thinking about confirming a nonscientist who may believe in not requiring, or removing, many lifesaving vaccines is a travesty.

JOYCE HAMEL
HIGHLAND PARK, ILL.

TO THE EDITOR:

In 1987, when my daughter was just a few months old, I volunteered for her to participate in a vaccine trial for Haemophilus influenza type B (also known as H Flu or Hib).

Back then, I approached each holiday season with trepidation, knowing that over the next few months, at least one of my patients would present with meningitis, epiglottitis, pneumonia or sepsis from this bacteria. Most parents today don't even know that the DPT/Hib vaccine has all but eliminated that threat.

I lost patients to this disease just as pediatricians before me lost patients to polio, diphtheria, tetanus, measles, encephalitis and infections from varicella. If we are going to eliminate vaccines, we'd better start teaching pediatricians in training to beware of the onset of winter.

DIANA WASSERMAN
ACTON, MASS.

The writer is a retired pediatrician.

Unabomber's Victims

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "The Unabomber's Influence Is More Dangerous Than We Know," by Maxim Loskutoff (Opinion guest essay, Dec. 15):

The author asks, "So what do you say to a young person who has come to admire Mr. Kaczynski?"

How about telling them about each of his victims and their lifelong trauma (for those who survived) as a result of his selfish, evil act? How many people lost parents, children, siblings or friends?

To all the people talking about admiring murderers: Focus on the senseless consequences of their acts instead.

SETH BLUM, NEW YORK

COLUMNIST | CHARLES M. BLOW

Disconnected From Politics? Feel No Guilt.

THE SUNDAY AFTER Election Day, Jamal Bryant, the senior pastor at the predominantly Black New Birth Missionary Baptist Church, a megachurch in Stonecrest, just east of Atlanta, issued an altar call for the Black women in attendance. Once they had come forward, the Rev. Karri Turner, Bryant's fiancée at the time and now his wife, told them:

"My words and my heart to you this morning is not to charge you to run to another fight, not to charge you to take on another issue. But my charge to you in this moment is to pause and to take a time of Sabbath."

She added, "We're just taking a break."

Turner captured a sentiment that would be shared across the country. Since the election — in which, according to AP VoteCast, 89 percent of Black women voted for Kamala Harris — the idea of Black women disengaging from politics and taking time to rest has been the subject of quite a bit of news coverage and talk on social media.

But in the conversations I've had with liberals over the past several weeks, disengagement appears to be a more widespread phenomenon, one not confined to Black women.

Viewership of MSNBC and CNN has plunged, part of what The Washington Post describes as a "turn off the news" movement.

And when people have confessed to me that they have disengaged, oftentimes their voices drop as if the words are being ushered into the world shackled to shame.

That raises the question: Should anyone feel guilt for choosing not to constantly ruminate or pre-emptively panic? For choosing to take a breath and a beat before re-engaging in the fight — against the denigration of women and minorities, for individual liberty and bodily autonomy, against cruelty and for democracy itself — that is almost surely in the offing once Donald Trump returns to power?

Absolutely not.

First, taking time to lick wounds speeds their healing. Second, outrage is expensive. It consumes a tremendous amount of fuel, which at some point must be replenished. We do so by taking breaks to sit in solitude, to touch grass, to be truly present with loved ones and to clarify our purpose.

As Toni Morrison said in an interview long ago: "It's not possible to constantly hone on the crisis. You have to have the love, and you have to have the magic. That's also life."

When you reconnect to what you love, you remember why you fight. And sometimes resistance to the spectacle mushrooms in the shadow of the spectacle.

It would be a mistake for anyone to confuse a temporary disconnection for a permanent acquiescence, to believe that liberals will be satisfied to form a mournful

Black women aren't the only voters resting before re-entering the fight.

cortege marching helplessly toward Inauguration Day. People won't passively abide what they experience as oppression. They will chafe at it and buck under the weight of it.

The quiet you hear is the storing of energy for the political battles to come, which is itself part of the fight.

It may not be clear what issue or person or group will galvanize opposition to Trump's second term. But any assumption that an opposition won't rise or any revisionist history that casts resistance as something unique to Democrats would be a misreading of contemporary movements.

In 2008, after Barack Obama was elected but before his inauguration, when he — like Trump this year — was named Time magazine's person of the year, few would have predicted the rise of the Tea Party move-

WITHOUT LIMITS

BUT NEVER WITHOUT YOU

The Good Company SIREN 398 945 543



Thanks to your donations,
we're fighting Russian propaganda
by financing a satellite promising access
to reliable information. **Donate on rsf.org**

RSF REPORTERS
WITHOUT BORDERS
FIGHT FOR FACTS

3 BANKING
Bank of America alerted regulators to suspicious payments to Jeffrey Epstein only after he died.



4 COMPANIES
Pixar removed a transgender story line from its series 'Win or Lose,' which is set to start streaming in February.



7 SPORTS
Beau Pribula, a quarterback at Penn State, felt he had no choice but to leave the team before its biggest game.

Business

The New York Times



ILLUSTRATION BY NATE KITCH; PHOTOGRAPHS BY ERIC LEE/THE NEW YORK TIMES; SCOTT MCINTYRE/THE NEW YORK TIMES; GABBY JONES FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A Stable Economy, But for How Long?

By BEN CASSELMAN

After five years of uncertainty and turmoil, the U.S. economy is ending 2024 in arguably its most stable condition since the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

Inflation has cooled. Unemployment is low. The Federal Reserve is cutting interest rates. The recession that many forecasters once warned was inevitable hasn't materialized.

Yet the economic outlook for 2025 is as murky as ever, for one major reason: President-elect Donald J. Trump.

On the campaign trail and in the weeks since his election, Mr. Trump has proposed sweeping policy changes that could have

President-elect Donald J. Trump's proposals on immigration, tariffs, deregulation and taxes are adding to the uncertainty.

profound — and complicated — implications for the economy.

He has proposed imposing steep new tariffs and deporting potentially millions of undocumented immigrants, which could lead to higher prices, slower growth or both, according to most economic models. At the same

time, he has promised policies like tax cuts for individuals and businesses that could lead to faster economic growth but also bigger deficits.

And he has pledged to slash regulations, which could lift corporate profits and, possibly, overall productivity. But critics warn that

such changes could increase worker injuries, cause environmental damage and make the financial system more prone to crises over the long run.

No one knows exactly which policies Mr. Trump will pursue, or in what order, or how much of his agenda he will get through Congress and the courts. As a result, no one knows what to expect for the economy in 2025 or beyond.

"It is a very uncertain outlook, and most of that uncertainty comes from potential changes in policy," said Michael Gapen, chief U.S. economist for Morgan Stanley.

Many Americans, of course, would dispute that the economy was in good shape. Frustration with high prices, particularly for essentials like food and housing, is a big part of the reason that many people voted to return Mr. Trump to office. But consumer sentiment had begun to rebound even before the election, and has continued to

CONTINUED ON PAGE B3

Honda and Nissan Weigh Possible Merger

By RIVER AKIRA DAVIS and NEAL E. BOUDETTE

TOKYO — Honda Motor and Nissan Motor, Japan's second- and third-largest automakers, are discussing ways to deepen their ties, including the possibility of a merger that could fundamentally restructure Japan's car industry.

The merger talks between the two Japanese giants highlight the intense upheaval within the

world's auto industry, as carmakers grapple with expensive technological shifts, political instability and the rise of fast-growing Chinese rivals.

Though discussions are still at an early stage, the thinking at Nissan and Honda is that combining forces could provide the companies with the resources and scale necessary to navigate those immense pressures.

Last year, Honda sold 3.98 mil-

lion vehicles and Nissan 3.37 million. Their combination could make them the world's third-largest automaker group, behind their Japanese rival Toyota Group, which sold 11.23 million vehicles last year, and Volkswagen Group of Germany, which sold 9.23 million.

Honda and Nissan began collaborating this year on the development of electric vehicles. Over

CONTINUED ON PAGE B4

Fed Cuts Rates, but Sees Fewer in 2025

By JEANNA SMIALEK

Federal Reserve officials made their third and final rate cut of 2024 at their meeting on Wednesday. They also forecast two fewer rate reductions in 2025 than they had previously expected, as inflation lingers and the economy holds up.

The Fed has come a long way from just a few years ago: In 2022, inflation was more than twice its

current rate and many economists thought that the central bank's decisions might cause economic pain — and even a recession — as it rapidly lifted interest rates to slow demand and wrestle price increases back under control.

That didn't happen. The job market slowed without falling apart, and inflation cooled so substantially that the Fed was able to begin cutting interest rates in Sep-

tember. But the Fed is now entering a new phase in its journey toward an economic soft landing — a much more uncertain one.

Officials thought that it was clear that rates needed to come down notably from their 5.3 percent peak, and they have steadily lowered them to about 4.4 percent by making three back-to-back reductions. Policymakers do not want to cut rates so much that

CONTINUED ON PAGE B3

nytimes#l@l

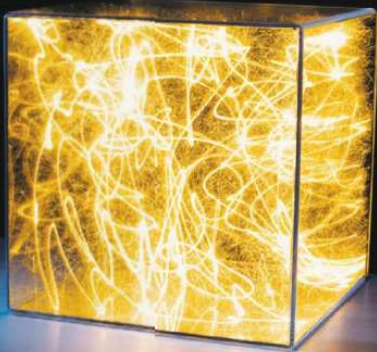


building
Volatility is a block

Create value through volatility. Discover how at crowe.com.



embrace volatility®
AUDIT / TAX / CONSULTING



The Digest

ECONOMY

Inflation in U.K. Climbs, Ending Hope for Rate Cut

Inflation in the U.K. rose to its highest level in eight months in November, official figures showed Wednesday, a development that has cemented market expectations that the Bank of England will opt against cutting borrowing costs this week.

The Office for National Statistics said consumer price inflation rose by 2.6 percent in the year to November, up from 2.3 percent

the previous month. It said stubbornly high inflation in the services sector, which accounts for about 80 percent of the U.K. economy, and a rise in fuel prices was largely behind the increase.

The increase, which took inflation further from the Bank of England's target of 2 percent, was in line with market expectations.

This is the biggest increase since March, leading economists to rule out any prospect that the Bank of England will cut its main interest rate from 4.75 percent after its policy meeting on Thursday. ASSOCIATED PRESS

RETAIL

General Mills Stock Falls After Forecast Is Trimmed

General Mills slashed its annual profit forecast on Wednesday as the Cheerios cereal maker ramps up promotions to attract cost-conscious consumers, sending shares down about 3 percent.

Strapped shoppers have increasingly chosen cheaper private label products over branded names, prompting major packaged food companies to increase promotions.

"As we moved through the quarter, it became clear that our product news and media support were not breaking through because we didn't have the right value," Jeff Harmening, the company's chief executive, said on a



post-earnings call.

The company also said its Pillsbury refrigerated dough sales were "disappointing" at the start of the key holiday season.

General Mills now expects annual adjusted profit to fall in the range of 1 percent to 3 percent. REUTERS

AUTOMOTIVE

Ford Motor Will Appoint New Quality Control Chief

Ford Motor is appointing a new head of quality, the company confirmed on Wednesday, as the automaker works to reverse its industry-topping record of recalls and reduce warranty costs.

The automaker will move control of its quality team from Jim Baumbick to a new leader who has not yet been announced, as Mr. Baumbick takes on the responsibility of E.V. programs.

Mr. Baumbick, who has led quality since late 2022, will oversee the vehicle programs team — which focuses on keeping the costs and timing of vehicles on track — in addition to his existing responsibilities.

The move, announced internally last week, is expected to take effect early next year.

A Ford spokesperson said the changes would allow its teams to "collaborate and work more efficiently to deliver exciting vehicles and software with the highest levels of quality for our customers." REUTERS



Stocks & Bonds

Market Slumps at Hint of Few Rate Cuts in Coming Year

By The Associated Press

U.S. stocks tumbled to one of their worst days of the year after the Federal Reserve hinted on Wednesday that it may deliver fewer shots of adrenaline for the U.S. economy in 2025 than earlier thought.

The S&P 500 fell 2.9 percent, just shy of its biggest loss for the year from the summer, to pull further from its high set a couple weeks ago. The Dow Jones industrial average lost 1,123 points, or 2.6 percent, and the Nasdaq composite dropped 3.6 percent.

The Fed said on Wednesday that it's cutting its main interest rate for a third time this year, continuing the sharp turnaround begun in September when it started lowering rates from a two-decade high to support the job market. That cut, though, was widely expected.

The bigger question centers on how much more the Fed will cut next year. A lot is riding on it, particularly after expectations for a series of cuts in 2025 helped the U.S. stock market set a high at least 57 times in 2024.

Fed officials released projections on Wednesday showing the median expectation among them is for two more cuts to the federal funds rate in 2025, or half a percentage point's worth. That's down from the four cuts expected just three months ago.

"We are in a new phase of the process," the Fed chair, Jerome H. Powell, said after the central bank quickly eased its main interest rate since September by a full percentage point to a range of 4.25 percent to 4.50 percent.

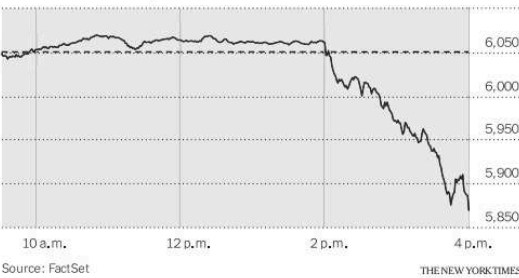
Asked why Fed officials are looking to slow their cuts, Mr. Powell pointed to how the job market looks to be performing well overall and how recent inflation readings have picked up. He also cited uncertainties that will require policymakers to react to upcoming, to-be-determined changes in the economy.

While lower rates can energize the economy by making it cheaper to borrow and raising prices for in-

The S&P 500 Index

Position of the S&P 500 index at 1-minute intervals on Wednesday

-- Previous Close: 6,050.61



vestments, they can also offer more fuel for inflation.

Mr. Powell said some Fed officials, but not all, are also already trying to incorporate uncertainties inherent in a new administration coming into the White House. Worries are rising on Wall Street that President-elect Donald J. Trump's preference for tariffs and other policies could further juice inflation, along with economic growth.

"When the path is uncertain, you go a little slower," Mr. Powell said. It's "not unlike driving on a foggy night or walking into a dark room full of furniture. You just slow down."

One official, the Cleveland Fed's president, Beth Hammack, thought the central bank should not have even cut rates this time around. She was the lone vote against Wednesday's rate cut.

The reduced expectations for 2025 rate cuts sent Treasury yields rising in the bond market, squeezing the stock market.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury rose to 4.50 percent from 4.40 percent late Tuesday, which is a notable move for the bond market. The two-year yield, which more closely tracks expectations for Fed action, climbed to 4.35 percent from 4.25 percent.

On Wall Street, stocks of companies that can feel the most pressure from higher interest rates fell to some of the worst losses.

Stocks of smaller companies did poorly, for example. Many need to borrow to fuel their growth, meaning they can feel more pain when having to pay higher interest rates for loans. The Russell 2000 index of small-cap stocks tumbled 4.4 percent.

Nvidia, the superstar responsible for a chunk of Wall Street's recent rally to records, fell 1.1 percent to extend its weekslong funk. It has dropped more than 13 percent from its record set last month and fallen in nine of the last 10 days as its big momentum slows.

On the winning end of Wall Street, Jabil jumped 7.3 percent to help lead the market after reporting stronger profit and revenue for the latest quarter than analysts expected. The electronics company also raised its forecast for revenue for its full fiscal year.

NEWSLETTER: DEALBOOK

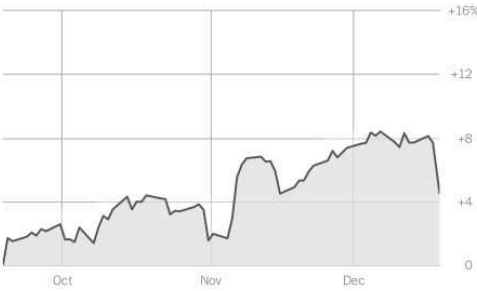
DealBook helps you make sense of the day's most important business and policy headlines. Sign up for the newsletter at nytimes.com/dealbook

What Happened in Stock Markets Yesterday

POWERED BY
FACTSET

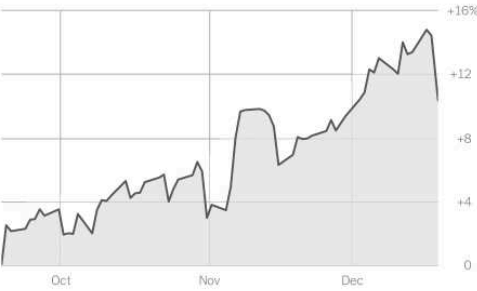
S&P 500 5,872.16 ↓ -2.9%

3 month performance: +4.5%



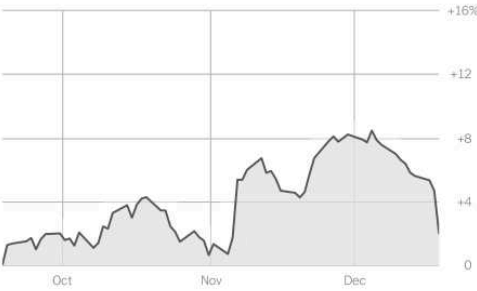
Nasdaq Composite Index 19,392.69 ↓ -3.6%

3 month performance: +10.4%



Dow Jones Industrials 42,326.87 ↓ -2.6%

3 month performance: +2.0%



Best performers

S&P 500 COMPANIES	CLOSE CHANGE
1. Jabil (JBL)	\$143.69 +7.3%
2. The Cigna Group (CI)	\$282.41 +6.3
3. UnitedHealth Group (UNH)	\$499.72 +2.9
4. Centene (CNC)	\$59.49 +2.9
5. CVS Health (CVS)	\$45.28 +2.8
6. Humana (HUM)	\$239.85 +2.5
7. Molina Healthcare (MOH)	\$296.59 +1.6
8. McKesson (MCK)	\$570.98 +1.5
9. LKQ Corp (LKQ)	\$36.99 +1.0
10. Cboe Global Markets (CBOE)	\$200.07 +1.0

Worst performers

S&P 500 COMPANIES	CLOSE CHANGE
1. Paycom Software (PAYC)	\$209.49 -10.1%
2. Tesla (TSLA)	\$440.13 -8.3
3. BXP (BXP)	\$74.23 -7.6
4. Texas Pacific Land (TPL)	\$1,114.46 -7.4
5. Crowdstrike Holdings A (CRWD)	\$349.18 -7.2
6. Albemarle Co. (ALB)	\$90.54 -7.2
7. Align Technology (ALGN)	\$212.69 -7.0
8. Broadcom (AVGO)	\$223.62 -6.9
9. Warner Bros. Discovery 'A' (WBD)	\$10.63 -6.3
10. Enphase Energy (ENPH)	\$68.80 -6.3

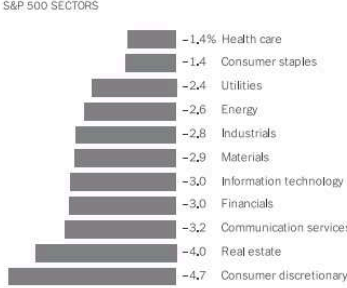
Most active

S&P 500 COMPANIES	CLOSE CHANGE	VOLUME IN MIL.
1. NVIDIA (NVDA)	\$128.91 -1.1%	261
2. Tesla (TSLA)	\$440.13 -8.3	142
3. Palantir Technologies (PLTR)	\$71.51 -3.9	107
4. Ford Motor (F)	\$9.69 -2.8	82
5. Intel (INTC)	\$19.30 -5.6	79
6. Micron Technology (MU)	\$103.90 -4.3	56
7. Apple (AAPL)	\$248.05 -2.1	56
8. Broadcom (AVGO)	\$223.62 -6.9	52
9. Advanced Micro Devices (AMD)	\$121.41 -2.9	48
10. Super Micro Computer (SMCI)	\$32.23 -4.6	47

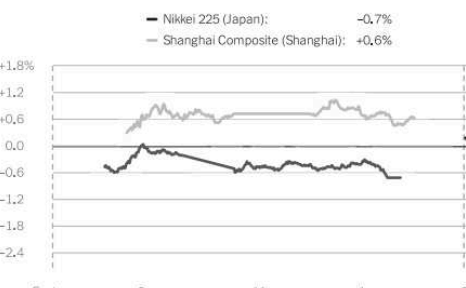
Midcap and small-cap stocks

	1 YR	5 YRS	IN BL.
1. Vanguard Mid-Cap Index Fund Institutional Plus Shares (VMCPX)	+32.5%	+12.0%	189.8
2. Vanguard Small-Cap Index Fund Institutional Plus Shares (VSCPX)	+36.0	+11.5	167.3
3. Vanguard Extended Market Index Fund Institutional Plus Shares (VEMPIX)	+38.9	+12.0	120.3
4. Vanguard Small Cap Value Index Fund Admiral Shares (VSIAX)	+33.7	+12.3	63.0
5. Fidelity Extended Market Index Fund (FSMAX)	+39.0	+12.0	44.5
6. Vanguard Small-Cap Growth Index Fund Admiral Shares (VSGAX)	+38.8	+9.6	40.7
7. Fidelity Mid Cap Index Fund (FSMDX)	+33.7	+12.0	39.6
8. Vanguard Mid-Cap Value Index Fund Admiral Shares (VMVAX)	+31.5	+11.1	32.8
9. T. Rowe Price Mid-Cap Growth Fund I Class (RPTIX)	+24.0	+9.5	32.5
10. PRINCPAL MIDCAP FUND Class R6 (PMAQX)	+36.6	+13.6	30.8

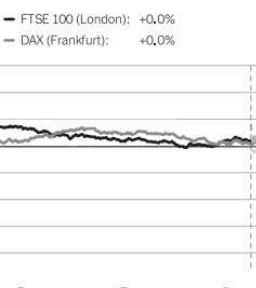
Sector performance



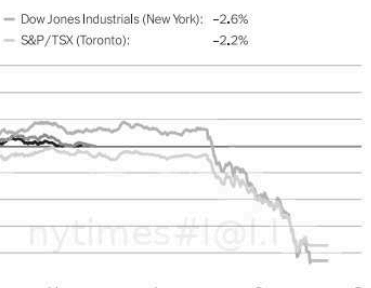
How stock markets fared yesterday in Asia --



... in Europe

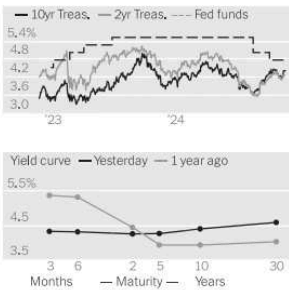


... and North America

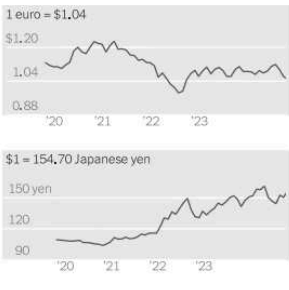


What Is Happening in Other Markets and the Economy

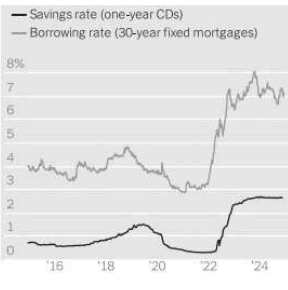
Bonds



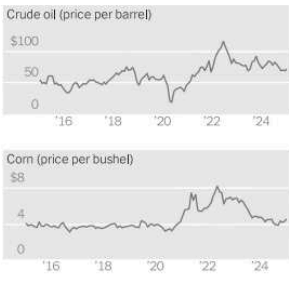
Currencies



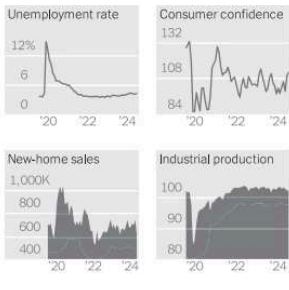
Consumer rates



Commodities



Economy



ECONOMY | BANKING

Economy Is Finally Stable, but for How Long?

FROM FIRST BUSINESS PAGE

improve, suggesting that the public, too, believed the economy was beginning to normalize.

Officially, Mr. Gopen and his colleagues are predicting that U.S. gross domestic product, adjusted for inflation, will grow a bit more than 2 percent next year, roughly in line with forecasts from other Wall Street analysts. That would be a modest slowdown from this year, when the economy grew more than 2.5 percent according to most estimates, and consistent with the recent cooling after a period of frenetic postpandemic growth.

But Mr. Gopen doesn't put much stock in his own forecast this year.

"There's a wide range of potential outcomes, and a base-line outlook isn't quite as useful as it is in normal times," he said.

Stocks have soared since the election, suggesting that many investors see a rosier picture, with fatter profits and faster growth. Many of them appear to be betting that Mr. Trump will focus on cutting taxes and regulations, while taking a moderate approach to trade and immigration policy. Investors particularly cheered his selection of Wall Street executives for key roles — particularly Scott Bessent, a hedge fund manager, as Treasury secretary — believing they will help dissuade Mr. Trump from imposing the most aggressive version of his proposed tariffs.

But that could be a risky gamble. On immigration policy, Mr. Trump has announced senior-level appointments — including

Thomas Homan, his "border czar," and Stephen Miller, his deputy chief of staff — that suggest he plans to take a hard-line stance. And despite the choice of Mr. Bessent, Mr. Trump has continued to talk about his plans for tariffs since the election. Last month, he announced on social media that he would put 25 percent tariffs on imports from Canada and Mexico unless they stopped drugs and migrants from entering the United States.

"Markets have a serenity about trade and immigration policy that I think is unwarranted," said Michael Strain, an economist at the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank. "Trade and immigration policy could be extremely disruptive to the economy."

Mr. Strain outlined a worst-case outlook for the economy, in which steep new tariffs discourage investment, mass deportations limit employers' ability to find workers and mounting deficits drive up borrowing costs. If that happens, Americans could face both rising prices and slowing growth — a form of the "stagflation" that the U.S. economy last experienced nearly a half century ago.

"In this scenario, the price of imported goods, the price of groceries, the price of restaurant meals, the price of homes all shoot up dramatically," Mr. Strain said.

Mr. Strain isn't predicting that all of those things will happen. But he argued that Wall Street was making a mistake by dismissing the possibility of this outcome — particularly because Mr. Trump

defied similar predictions in his first term and imposed steep tariffs on allies and adversaries. Economic research has found that those policies raised consumer prices and slowed growth, although the effects were modest.

The context is very different this time around. When Mr. Trump took office in 2017, the U.S. economy was emerging from the grudgingly slow recovery that followed the Great Recession. Inflation and interest rates were both

No one knows which of his stated policies Trump will pursue.

low, and had been for years.

This time, Mr. Trump is inheriting an economy that is solid but slowing. Inflation has eased but remains above the Fed's target of 2 percent, and memories of the rapid price increases of a few years ago are fresh in consumers' minds. Interest rates are still high by recent standards, and the Fed has lowered them more slowly than forecasters expected a year ago.

All of that means that both consumers and policymakers are likely to be less tolerant of higher prices than they were during Mr. Trump's first term. The Fed cut interest rates on Wednesday for the third straight meeting, but many economists believe the central bank will be reluctant to lower rates further until it becomes clear what effect Mr. Trump's policies are having. That could weigh

on growth and possibly lead to higher unemployment.

And while recession fears have faded this year, policymakers still face the central challenge: how to bring down inflation without large job losses. Inflation cooled rapidly in 2023 but has proved more stubborn this year. The unemployment rate, at 4.2 percent in November, is low but has edged up. It is taking longer for unemployed workers to find jobs — a sign that the job market could be weaker than it appears.

"If there's one thing you want to be concerned about with the economy right now it's around the labor market," said Aditya Bhawe, senior economist at Bank of America.

Yet forecasters have consistently underestimated the resilience of the U.S. economy in recent years. And there are good reasons for continued optimism. Households have comparatively little debt relative to their incomes, suggesting that consumers can keep spending. Productivity growth has been strong in recent years, and the spread of artificial intelligence could keep that momentum going. Most investors see the United States as a safe place to invest, especially compared with the rest of the world.

"This time last year, many expected the economy at some time this year to be in a recession or to have inflation have a very pronounced last-mile problem," said Blerina Uruci, chief U.S. economist at T. Rowe Price. "We don't worry as much about a recession now."

Fed Cuts Rates, but Sees Fewer Reductions in 2025

FROM FIRST BUSINESS PAGE

they reignite the economy, though — and they have now arrived at a point where it is uncertain how much further rates should fall.

"Our policy stance is now significantly less restrictive," Jerome H. Powell, the Fed chair, said during a news conference on Wednesday. "We can therefore be more cautious as we consider further adjustments to our policy rate."

"From here, it's a new phase," Mr. Powell later added.

The Fed's forecasts make clear that central bankers are poised to slow rate cuts notably starting next year as stubborn inflation lingers — and Mr. Powell made it clear that the Fed wants to see further progress toward cooler inflation to cut interest rates at all.

Markets shuddered at that assessment, with the dollar soaring and stocks plummeting. The S&P 500 index fell nearly 3 percent, its worst tumble since August. The Dow Jones industrial average fell for a 10th-straight day, its longest losing streak since October 1974.

Fed officials predicted that they would cut rates to 3.9 percent in 2025 in their fresh economic estimates — suggesting that they will make just two rate cuts next year. They had forecast four when they last released economic projections back in September.

They then expect to make two rate cuts in 2026, and one in 2027.

The exact timing of the Fed's future rate reductions is uncertain, and Mr. Powell made it clear that any moves would be based on incoming data. He suggested that the Fed might hold off on rate cuts if inflation were to get stuck at an unexpectedly higher level.

"For additional cuts, we're going to be looking for further progress on inflation," Mr. Powell said on Wednesday.

He also said that further softening in the labor market was "not something we need to see." But he stopped short of suggesting that the Fed would cut interest rates purely to prevent job conditions from cooling, as it has in recent months.

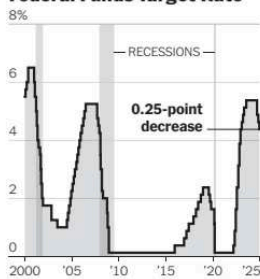
Fed policymakers are balancing two big risks. They do not want to keep rates so high for so long that they tank the economy. But they also want to make sure to fully stamp out rapid inflation — and right now, price increases are making officials wary.

On Wednesday, policymakers predicted that inflation would end 2025 at 2.5 percent, up from the previous 2.1 percent estimate and well above the central bank's 2 percent inflation target.

Those revisions come after a surprising period in the economy.

Earlier this year, the unemployment rate was climbing, hiring was slowing, and inflation had been falling steadily. But since September, the job market has shown signs of stabilizing, consumer spending has remained

Federal Funds Target Rate



solid and inflation has been more stubborn than many economists had expected.

Mr. Powell said that the recent lack of progress on inflation "might be the single biggest factor" driving the Fed's forecast for price increases in 2025 higher.

But Fed officials are also operating in an environment of uncertainty: President-elect Donald J. Trump has been promising to impose tariffs on American trading partners, and those could push prices up and feed into inflation if they become reality.

Some Fed policymakers did count fiscal policy into their economic projections, which could have driven some of the increase in their inflation forecasts. But exactly how much the policies would affect inflation is uncertain.

"I wouldn't say that we know whether the last episode is or is not a good model," Mr. Powell said on Wednesday, referring to the tariffs put in place during Mr. Trump's first term. He explained that officials are going to "take our time, not rush," and wait to see what the policies actually look like before reacting.

The economic combination facing the Fed in 2025 — an expectation for resilient growth and a hairier inflation outlook — explains the central bank's shift toward a wait-and-see approach.

"If the economy does evolve about as anticipated, we're at a point at which it would be appropriate to slow the pace of rate cuts," Mr. Powell said.

In fact, some officials thought that the Fed should hit pause on interest rates this month. Beth Hammack, the president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, voted against the rate cut, preferring to leave borrowing costs unchanged.

"The job's not done," Mr. Powell said Wednesday.

The Fed chair still had an overall optimistic message for the American public: "The U.S. economy is just performing very, very well — substantially better than our global peer group," Mr. Powell said. "The outlook is pretty bright for our economy. We have to stay on task, though."

Bank Flagged Payments to Epstein Only After He Died

By MATTHEW GOLDSTEIN

When Bank of America alerted financial regulators in 2020 to potentially suspicious payments from Leon Black, the billionaire investor, to Jeffrey Epstein, the disgraced financier, the bank was following a routine practice.

The bank filed two "suspicious activity reports," or SARs, which are meant to alert law enforcement to potential criminal activities like money laundering, terrorism financing or sex trafficking. One was filed in February 2020 and the other eight months later, according to a congressional memorandum reviewed by The New York Times.

SARs are expected to be filed within 60 days of a bank spotting a questionable transaction.

But the warnings in this case, according to the congressional memo, were not filed until several years after the payments, totaling \$170 million, had been made. By the time of the first filing, Mr. Epstein had already been dead for six months, after taking his own life in a Manhattan jail following his arrest on federal sex-trafficking charges.

The delayed filings have led congressional investigators to question whether Bank of America violated federal laws against money laundering. Also of concern to investigators is that the bank apparently processed the payments "without asking for information as to the nature of the transactions," the memo said. The bank told regulators in its initial filing that the wire transfers had "no apparent economic, business or lawful purpose," according to the memo.

The details in the congressional memo also illustrate a problem with the SARs system. Each year banks file millions of these confidential reports with regulators, but it is not uncommon for banks to file them long after the transactions have taken place. Banks may not act because they're unaware of a reason to dig deeper into a transaction, or they may want to cause trouble for a wealthy customer, money laundering experts say.

The memo, prepared by staff working for Senator Ron Wyden, the Oregon Democrat and chair of the Senate Finance Committee, recommended that Mr. Wyden ask the Treasury Department's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network to investigate Bank of America's conduct. The finance committee has been conducting its own investigation into the large payments from Mr. Black to Mr. Epstein for nearly two years.

A spokesman for Mr. Wyden said he was still considering the recommendations, but was likely to follow through on them.

The payments from Mr. Black to Mr. Epstein — made between 2012 and 2017 — have been a source of controversy since late 2020, when The New York Times reported that the business and personal ties between the two men were far greater than previously known. The dealings between the two men contributed to



JEENAH MOON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Senate staff members want Bank of America investigated for the way it reported payments to Jeffrey Epstein.

Mr. Black's decision in early 2021 to step down as chief executive of Apollo Management, the private equity firm of which he was a co-founder.

Mr. Black, a Bank of America customer with a net worth of \$13 billion, has insisted that the payments were for legitimate tax work and advice on art transactions. Dechert, a law firm hired by Apollo to review Mr. Black's dealings with Mr. Epstein, found that the work had saved Mr. Black nearly \$2 billion in federal taxes.

The law firm said there was no evidence Mr. Black knew of Mr. Epstein's predatory behavior. It found that he made \$158 million in payments, and a \$30 million loan to Mr. Epstein.

A spokesman for Mr. Black declined to comment.

The Senate Finance Committee has focused on the value of the advice Mr. Epstein gave Mr. Black, since Mr. Epstein had no particular training in tax or estate work. The committee's staff learned about the belated SARs filed during the course of its investigation, according to the memo. Senator

Wyden also sent a letter to Bank of America's chief executive, Brian Moynihan, asking about the due diligence the bank had conducted.

"A late filing, in and of itself, isn't an indication you were lax or bad," said Elise Bean, a former chief counsel to the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, who has specialized in money-laundering investigations. Ms. Bean said the issue for regulators

'Suspicious activity reports' are a warning about potential criminal activities.

is whether a bank was "deliberately late" in filing a report.

Ms. Bean said sometimes it can take a news event to prompt a bank to go back and review its records and retroactively flag a transaction as suspicious.

A Bank of America spokesman declined to comment.

Bank of America filed the first SARs a few weeks after the U.S.

Virgin Islands filed a civil racketeering lawsuit against Mr. Epstein's estate in January 2020, over his nearly two decades-long sex-trafficking operation in the U.S. territory. The second report was filed in October 2020, after The Times and other media began to report on the deep ties between Mr. Epstein and Mr. Black.

SARs are confidential reports and filings are rarely made public.

It is unclear what will happen to the investigation once Republicans take control of the Senate. Scott Bessent, President-elect Donald J. Trump's pick to run the Treasury Department, will likely be able to appoint a new director of the financial crimes division. Last week the Republican-controlled House Judiciary Committee released a report arguing that the SARs process has been "weaponized" to spy on Americans and weaken their "financial privacy."

Bank of America is not the only big bank to have been questioned about suspicious transactions involving Mr. Epstein.

In litigation involving hundreds of Mr. Epstein's sexual abuse victims, it was disclosed that JPMorgan Chase had filed several SARs after the bank kicked him out as a client in 2013, including one that was filed after Mr. Epstein's death in 2019.

Deutsche Bank, which subsequently became Mr. Epstein's primary banker, paid a \$150 million fine to New York bank regulators, in part because of its due diligence failures in monitoring Mr. Epstein's financial affairs. Last year, JPMorgan agreed to pay \$290 million to Mr. Epstein's victims to settle allegations they had facilitated his trafficking of teenage girls and young women.

JPMorgan and Mr. Black separately reached financial settlements with the Virgin Islands to settle investigations into Mr. Epstein's activities there.



LUCY NICHOLSON/REUTERS

Leon Black in 2018. Mr. Black, a Bank of America customer with a net worth of \$13 billion, made payments totaling \$170 million to Mr. Epstein.

IN THE UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF DELAWARE

In re: FRANCHISE GROUP INC., et al., Chapter 11 Case No. 24-12480 (JTD) (Jointly Administered)

NOTICE OF PROPOSED SALE OF ASSETS, BIDDING PROCEDURES, AUCTION, AND SALE HEARING

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that, on November 3, 2024 (the "Petition Date"), Franchise Group, Inc. and its affiliated debtors and debtors in possession in the above-captioned cases (collectively, the "Debtors") each filed a voluntary petition for relief under Chapter 11 of the U.S.C. (the "Bankruptcy Code") in the United States Bankruptcy Court for the District of Delaware (the "Bankruptcy Court"). The Debtors seek to sell all of their "Saleable Assets" (as defined in the "Assets"), free and clear of all claims, interests, and encumbrances, except as may be provided in any applicable Sale Order.

PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that, by order dated December 16, 2023 (the "Revised Bidding Procedures Order"), the Bankruptcy Court approved the "Revised Bidding Procedures" that govern the Sale. All interested parties should carefully read the Revised Bidding Procedures Order and the Bidding Procedures. Copies of the Revised Bidding Procedures Order, the Bidding Procedures, which are attached to the Revised Bidding Procedures Order as Exhibit 1, and all related pleadings filed in these Chapter 11 Cases are available for download at <https://cases.uscourts.gov/cases/24-12480>, or upon request to the Debtors' claims and noticing agent, KRC Restructuring Administration LLC, via email at krc@krcra.com or by phone at (844) 245-4564 (U.S. Canada) or +1 (646) 937-7731 (International), or via email at KRCinfo@krcra.com.

PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that a separate notice will be provided to non-Debtor counterparties to the Debtors' executory contracts and unexpired leases that may be sold and assigned in connection with the Sale. Any interested bidder should contact Christopher Grubb (grubb@duccpartners.com) and Kishan Patel (kpatel@duccpartners.com) of Duca Partners LLC, the Debtors' investment manager, at the deadline for Submission of Qualified Bids of February 3, 2025 at 5:00 p.m. (ET).

• Objectors to the Sale or the relief requested in connection with the Sale ("Objectors") must: (i) be in writing; (ii) comply with the Bankruptcy Rules and the "Bidding Procedures" that govern the Sale; (iii) be filed with the Clerk of the Court, 824 N. Market Street, 3rd Floor, Wilmington, DE 19801 on or before 4:00 p.m. (ET) on January 2, 2025 (the "Sale Objecting Deadline"); and (iv) be served upon the Debtors' claims and noticing agent, KRC Restructuring Administration LLC, via email at krc@krcra.com or by phone at (844) 245-4564 (U.S. Canada) or +1 (646) 937-7731 (International), or via email at KRCinfo@krcra.com; (v) be served upon the Debtors, Young Conway Stargatt and Taylor, LLP, 1000 North King Street, Wilmington, DE 19801; (vi) be served upon the Trustee for the District of Delaware, J. Caleb Boggs Federal Building, 844 King Street, Room 2207, Wilmington, DE 19801; (vii) be served upon the DIP Lenders and Ad Hoc Group of First Lien Secured Lenders, (A) Paul Hastings LLP, 200 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10022; (B) JPMorgan Chase Bank, N.A., 270 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10022; (C) Citicorp Bank, N.A., 60 Pine Street, New York, NY 10270; (D) Wells Fargo Bank, N.A., 260 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10017; (E) Bank of America, N.A., 100 North Wall Street, New York, NY 10038; (F) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (G) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (H) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (I) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (J) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (K) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (L) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (M) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (N) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (O) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (P) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (Q) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (R) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (S) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (T) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (U) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (V) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (W) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (X) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (Y) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (Z) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (AA) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (AB) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (AC) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (AD) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (AE) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (AF) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (AG) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (AH) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (AI) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (AJ) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (AK) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (AL) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (AM) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (AN) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (AO) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (AP) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (AQ) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (AR) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (AS) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (AT) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (AU) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (AV) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (AW) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (AX) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (AY) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (AZ) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (BA) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (BB) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (BC) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (BD) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (BE) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (BF) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (BG) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (BH) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (BI) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (BJ) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (BK) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (BL) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (BM) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (BN) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (BO) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (BP) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (BQ) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (BR) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (BS) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (BT) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (BU) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (BV) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (BW) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (BX) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (BY) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (BZ) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (CA) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (CB) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (CC) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (CD) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (CE) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (CF) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (CG) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (CH) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (CI) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (CJ) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (CK) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (CL) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (CM) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (CN) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (CO) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (CP) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (CQ) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (CR) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (CS) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (CT) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (CU) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (CV) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (CW) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (CX) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (CY) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (CZ) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (DA) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (DB) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (DC) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (DD) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (DE) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (DF) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (DG) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (DH) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (DI) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (DJ) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (DK) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (DL) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (DM) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (DN) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (DO) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (DP) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (DQ) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (DR) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (DS) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (DT) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (DU) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (DV) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (DW) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (DX) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (DY) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (DZ) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (EA) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (EB) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (EC) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (ED) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (EE) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (EF) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (EG) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (EH) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (EI) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (EJ) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (EK) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (EL) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (EM) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (EN) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (EO) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (EP) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (EQ) Sun Life of Canada, 100 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1C4, Canada; (ER) Sun Life of

Courtship Between Honda and Nissan Includes Talk of Possible Merger

FROM FIRST BUSINESS PAGE
Several months, their discussions have expanded to include the potential creation of a new company under which both automakers would operate, according to two people familiar with the matter who were not authorized to speak publicly.

Nissan and Honda are expected to sign a memorandum of understanding within the next week to formally begin discussions of partnership-broadening steps, including the details of a potential merger, the people familiar with the matter said. No final decisions have been made, they said.

The companies said in statements that they were in talks. "As announced in March of this year, Honda and Nissan are exploring various possibilities for future collaboration, leveraging each other's strengths," they said. "We will inform our stakeholders of any updates at an appropriate time."

The possibility of merging forces would have been largely unthinkable for two Japanese titans of automaking just a decade ago. The talks underscore the level of churn in the industry as manufacturers move away from the internal combustion engine, which has powered the vehicles they have produced for most of the past century.

Honda and Nissan each need to invest billions of dollars in electric vehicles, said Jessica Caldwell, executive director of insights at Edmunds, a market research firm.

"Moving forward in E.V.s is expensive, and some of the smaller players have to figure out how to pay for it," she said. "And it's harder than ever now because sales of E.V.s are growing more slowly than people had expected just a few years ago."

Nissan shares soared more than 20 percent during trading in Tokyo on Wednesday as investors reacted to the news about a potential merger. Honda's shares fell slightly.

Honda, founded in 1948, has long pursued a go-it-alone ap-



Makoto Uchida, left, Nissan's president, and Toshihiro Mibe, the top executive at Honda, at a Tokyo news conference in August. Talks are at an early stage.

proach, developing components like engines on its own and spurning globe-spanning alliances. But more recently, the amount of investment required for a shift toward battery-powered vehicles has led it to seek partnerships with companies including Sony in Japan and General Motors in the United States.

Established in 1933, Nissan in particular has struggled in recent years to keep up with the swiftly growing appetite for hybrid gas-electric vehicles in the United States and fully electric cars in China. Last month, Nissan un-

veiled deep cuts to its global operations and said it needed to take steps to speed up its development of new offerings in its core markets.

Nissan's global sales declined across its core markets — North America, China and Japan — in the first half of its fiscal year. From April to September, its operating profit fell 90 percent, to \$214 million.

Japanese automakers, like their peers in the United States and Europe, are also facing intense competition from new, highly cost-competitive and technologically

advanced rivals in China. After enjoying years of state support, Chinese makers of electric vehicles like BYD are pushing deeper into Europe and Southeast Asia, where Japanese manufacturers have long dominated.

Last year, China overtook Japan for the first time to become the world's largest car exporter. China's exports benefited from strong demand for electric vehicles and its shipments to Russia, a market that Japanese and Western automakers withdrew from in response to the war in Ukraine.

Like the Western automakers

G.M., Ford Motor and Volkswagen, Nissan and Honda have struggled to compete in China as local rivals offer low-cost models tailored to the domestic market, which is the world's largest. Nissan has forecast that its sales in China will fall 13 percent this fiscal year. Honda projected an even larger slump.

As the industry adapts to the new market dynamics, automakers worldwide are forging more alliances. In September, G.M. said it would work with Hyundai of South Korea on internal combustion, electric and hydrogen-pow-

ered vehicles. Last month, Volkswagen said it would form a joint venture with the electric vehicle maker Rivian, a California start-up.

People at Honda and Nissan say a partnership could benefit both companies in a number of ways. Honda has a strong portfolio of fuel-efficient hybrid vehicles, and Nissan could help it build out its global supply chain for batteries. Nissan was an early pioneer in electric vehicles and has several popular models, including the Sakura minivan it offers in Japan.

Nissan also holds a large stake in Mitsubishi Motors, a smaller Japanese automaker. If a Nissan-Honda group is established, Mitsubishi will consider joining it, according to the Japanese newspaper Nikkei, which earlier reported the merger discussions.

Automotive mergers often fail to deliver the efficiencies and profits that executives hope for. DaimlerChrysler split after nine years of a mostly unhappy marriage. Stellantis was formed in the 2021 merger of Fiat Chrysler and the French PSA Group, and the chief executive who helped engineer the pairing, Carlos Tavares, resigned under pressure this month.

Nissan and the French automaker Renault have been strategic partners for more than two decades, and both saw some benefits early on, but neither achieved the kind of growth and profitability levels that executives and analysts had expected.

Last year, Nissan and Renault agreed to take steps to unwind their alliance. Around the same time, Honda and G.M. decided to scrap a plan to develop a line of lower-priced electric vehicles, less than two years after the companies announced the joint effort.

River Akira Davis reported from Tokyo, and Neal E. Boudette from Michigan.

Disney Cuts Trans Plotline From a Series

By NICOLE SPERLING

LOS ANGELES — Pixar, a division of Walt Disney Studios, removed a transgender story line from its animated series "Win or Lose," which is set to start streaming in February, Disney said on Tuesday.

The series follows a middle school coed softball team in the week leading up to the championship game, and each episode is told from the perspective of a different character. The character will remain in the show, Disney said, but a few lines of dialogue focused on her gender, a plot point that appeared near the end of the eight-episode series, have been edited out.

"When it comes to animated content for a younger audience," Disney said in a statement, "we recognize that many parents would prefer to discuss certain subjects with their children on their own terms and timeline."

The decision to remove the story arc was made over the summer, Disney said.

The change was reported earlier by The Hollywood Reporter.

Disney has frequently drawn the ire of conservative groups over its inclusion of L.G.B.T.Q. characters and story lines in family movies. In 2022, the company released "Lightyear," which featured a same-sex kiss, and "Strange World," centered on a

An animated show, 'Win or Lose,' follows a school softball team.

gay teenage boy. That same year, the company's chief executive at the time, Bob Chapek, faced criticism when he refused to condemn anti-L.G.B.T.Q. legislation in Florida. When he finally explained his silence, a union representing his employees called the decision a "momentous misstep."

When Robert A. Iger, Mr. Chapek's predecessor, returned to Disney as chief executive in late 2022, he said some of the company's shows and movies had become too political and ordered a review of projects in the works. Last year, the company decided not to release an episode from the animated Disney Channel show "Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur" that focused on a recurring transgender character's interest in sports.

"Win or Lose" was created by Michael Yates, Carrie Hobson and David Lally. Will Forte voices the coach.

Rear Car Seatbelt Alarms To Be Requirement by 2027

By AMANDA HOLPUCH

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration will require new vehicles to sound a warning if back-seat passengers don't use their seatbelts — a rule that will take effect in September 2027, the agency said this week.

That means more of the noisy, persistent ding familiar to drivers who start the ignition before clicking their seatbelt, and to front-seat passengers who forget to buckle up.

This new requirement, announced on Monday, is part of an update to the existing rule for seatbelt-reminder systems. Vehicles will also be required to have enhanced warnings for driver and front passenger seats, starting on Sept. 1, 2026.

Seatbelt use in back seats has consistently been lower than that in front seats, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Ad-

ministration. In 2022, front seatbelt use was about 91.6 percent, while rear seatbelt use was about 81.7 percent, the agency said.

A rear-seatbelt warning is already a familiar feature to many drivers. About 47 percent of vehicles with a model year of 2022 have voluntarily provided a rear-seatbelt warning system, according to the agency.

Under the updated rule, vehicles will need to provide a visual alert when they start if a rear seat is occupied and its seatbelt is not in use. An audio and visual alert will also be required if a seatbelt is unbuckled while the vehicle is moving.

Most vehicles already sound a warning if the front passenger seat is occupied and a seatbelt is not used, but the rule change will make that alert a requirement. It will also extend the duration of audio and visual seatbelt warnings



JENNY KANE/ASSOCIATED PRESS

for the driver's seat.

The seatbelt-reminder noise for drivers was first required in the United States in 1972, when car safety features, such as airbags, were the subject of heated debate. At the time, auto industry leaders said that regulators were moving too fast. Much of the public was also resistant to those changes, with only an estimated 20 percent of drivers using seatbelts, accord-

ing to the Department of Transportation.

Concerns about the "policing" of auto design were elevated further when regulators required an ignition lock that would prevent cars released in 1974 from starting if the driver was not wearing a seatbelt. This requirement was unpopular — particularly among middle-aged men, car dealers told The New York Times — and was

A.I. Start-Up's Funding Haul Shows Investors Remain Enthusiastic

Databricks to collect \$10 billion in venture capital deal.

By ERIN GRIFFITH

SAN FRANCISCO — In October, OpenAI, the start-up behind ChatGPT, raised one of the largest rounds of venture capital, bringing in \$6.5 billion.

On Tuesday, another artificial intelligence start-up, Databricks, announced an even bigger haul: It is set to collect \$10 billion in a new funding round, which would value the company at \$62 billion.

The record fundings show that two years into an A.I. boom, investor enthusiasm for the technology has not waned. In recent months, some A.I. start-ups have struggled to find their footing and been sold or folded into larger companies. Even the fastest-growing companies are burning enormous sums of cash. OpenAI recently told investors that it expected to lose \$5 billion this year on \$3.7 billion in sales.

Investors remain bullish. Databricks, which was founded in 2013 and provides software tools for storing and analyzing large amounts of online data, said it expected in January to have more than \$3 billion of "revenue run rate," or monthly revenue extrapolated for a full year. It has morphed into an A.I. company in recent years, helping businesses build and operate the kind of software that drives chatbots and similar A.I. services.

The San Francisco-based company also said it expected to have a "positive free cash flow" for the three months ending Jan. 31, a sign that its income was mostly outpacing its spending. The company sells its products to more than 10,000 customers, including Shell and Comcast. More than 500 customers are on a pace to pay Databricks over \$1 million a year for its offerings, the company said.

At a valuation of \$62 billion, Databricks would surpass the market capitalization of its main competitor, Snowflake, which is publicly traded.

In a statement, Databricks said it had so far secured \$8.6 billion of the \$10 billion that it was raising. Ali Ghodsi, the chief executive and a founder of Databricks, said the rest of the round was "substantially oversubscribed."

"These are still the early days of A.I.," he said.

Databricks said it planned to use the money for new products, acquisitions and international expansion. It also plans to let its employees cash out some of their shares.

Allowing start-up employees to sell shares before a traditional "liquidity event," such as an initial public offering or acquisition, is a growing trend among older tech start-ups. The time between a start-up's raising funding and go-



DATABRICKS, VIA REUTERS

Ali Ghodsi, the chief executive and a founder of Databricks, at a 2019 event.

ing public or selling has gotten longer over the past decade.

Plentiful venture capital in the private markets means compa-

nies are under less pressure to tap the public markets for funding.

That trend has been especially acute in recent years as I.P.O.s

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration wants the same noisy, persistent dings that warn front-seat passengers to buckle up to include passengers in the rear.

repealed by Gerald Ford in October 1974.

The changes announced on Monday could prevent more than 500 injuries and 50 deaths each year, once fully implemented, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said in a news release.

About 50 percent of the 25,420 passenger vehicle occupants who died in car crashes in 2022 were not wearing seatbelts, according to the agency.

The rule applies to passenger cars, trucks and buses, but not school buses and multipurpose passenger vehicles that can safely carry up to 10,000 pounds.

Adam Raviv, the chief counsel of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, said in a statement: "While seatbelt use has improved for decades, there's still more we can do to make sure everyone buckles up."

\$62B

Valuation of Databricks after its latest funding round.

have dried up and antitrust scrutiny of big tech companies has squashed acquisitions.

Some expect that I.P.O.s and deal-making will flourish next year under President-elect Donald J. Trump. But the hottest private tech companies, including Databricks, the payments firm Stripe and the rocket company SpaceX, have so much interest from private investors that they may choose to stay private and continue letting their employees and early investors cash out via private stock sales.

Thrive Capital, the New York investment firm founded by Joshua Kushner, led the funding. Thrive also led OpenAI's round of funding in October. The firm, known for its early bets on Instagram, Stripe and Spotify, has been aggressively investing in the A.I. boom. In August, it raised \$5 billion in new funds.

Databricks' existing investors, which include Andreessen Horowitz, DST Global, GIC, Insight Partners and WCM Investment Management, also helped lead the round.

(The New York Times has sued OpenAI, claiming copyright infringement of news content related to A.I. systems. OpenAI has denied the claims.)

PRO BASKETBALL

A Fiery Coach Preaches ‘No Friends on the Floor’



KYLE TERADA/IMAGN IMAGES



AARON GASH/ASSOCIATED PRESS



ERIC CHRISTIAN SMITH/ASSOCIATED PRESS

With Jabari Smith Jr., top left, rejecting shots at the rim and the hard-nosed Dillon Brooks, below left, rallying his teammates, Coach Ime Udoka’s all-gas, no-brakes Rockets have postseason dreams.

Houston’s Udoka Builds Contender With Hard-Nosed Defensive Play

Forward Tari Eason leading the Rockets off the floor after they ended a 15-game losing streak to Golden State last week. Eason and swingman Amen Thompson are the Terror Twins off the bench.

By SAM AMICK
The Athletic

Houston Rockets Coach Ime Udoka saved the best highlights for last. After nearly 45 minutes of analysis, with players soaking in his messages at the team’s practice facility ahead of training camp, the montage of mayhem began.

First, it was a video clip from Dec. 2, 2023, in which Udoka told LeBron James and the rest of the Los Angeles Lakers to stop whining, leading to the coach’s ejection. Then came a clip of a dust-up in Milwaukee on Dec. 17, 2023, when Dillon Brooks and Udoka were ejected in the final minute for aggressively disputing a late call. The string of 15 separate altercations from the Rockets’ previous season kept running from there, entertaining them all.

“It’s his personality,” Rockets guard Fred VanVleet said of the presentation and Udoka’s role in it. “He’s a confrontational guy, a fighter, so it was funny to watch them all in order and see the build-up. But it’s about building that identity as a group and as a team. We’re built on toughness.”

Udoka had gone into great detail in the

presentation about the defensive improvements that had been made, how the Rockets went from among the N.B.A.’s worst teams in every relevant category before his arrival in 2023 to “top six,” Udoka said, in his first season with the team.

The message, in essence, was that they needed to get even better on that end if they were going to become a perennial playoff contender. But to get there, it would require a commitment to the motto that Udoka constantly preaches — “No friends on the floor” — and that was on full display in those fiery moments.

“We started to look at the frequency and the dates, and there was something every week from January on,” Udoka said recently in an interview. “The broadcasters would say: ‘Here goes another dust-up with Houston. It’s becoming an every game thing now.’ So that mentality had changed. And I told the guys, You have to earn the respect of the league and not take a back seat to anybody.”

Meet the all-gas, no-brakes Rockets, who are as feisty and unapologetic a team as the N.B.A. has seen in quite some time.

After losing to the Oklahoma City Thunder in the N.B.A. Cup semifinals on Saturday in Las Vegas, the Rockets are 17-9, which is one of the top four records in the Western Conference, and they are winning with their defense.

Defense was Udoka’s primary strength during his playing days, when he went undrafted out of Portland State before spending parts of seven seasons in the N.B.A. and playing overseas.

His beliefs were buoyed during his first coaching job alongside the Spurs’ Gregg Popovich from 2012 to 2019, then put into action when he led the Boston Celtics to the N.B.A. finals in 2022. (The Celtics’ defense went from 13th in defensive rating the year before his hiring to No. 1.) And for all the success the Rockets enjoyed under Mike D’Antoni as coach and James Harden at guard, they were never known as defense-first, intimidating types.

Two summers ago, the Rockets considered bringing Harden back. It was the most obvious way to return to relevance. But even beyond Udoka’s vision for the defense, Rockets officials were concerned the development of their two most important young players — the big man Alperen Sengun and guard Jalen Green — would be stymied if they added veteran standouts who were not truly compatible with their young core.

Enter the veteran guards VanVleet and Brooks, who joined the team in the summer of 2023 and shined in their new roles as Houston improved to 41 wins from 22.

Udoka had a soft spot for VanVleet, in part because of the similarities in their stories. Both were undrafted before making it in the N.B.A., with VanVleet going on to become an All-Star and champion (with the 2018-19 Toronto Raptors).

Brooks’s playing style and prickly personality, made famous during his Memphis Grizzlies tenure, were also perfect for what Udoka had in mind.

The ripple effect has been real.

After finishing no higher than 27th in defensive rating during three seasons under Stephen Silas, when the rebuild was in full effect and they won just 59 times in 222 tries, Udoka’s Rockets, who were 10th in defense last season, are now second. Considering the origin story of Udoka’s hiring, how the team owner Tilman Fertitta and General Manager Rafael Stone decided to prioritize a defensive mind-set above all else, they could not ask for much more than this.

“When we were bringing Ime in, it wasn’t ‘best coach available,’” said

Continued on Page B8

Sam Amick is a senior N.B.A. writer for The Athletic.



TROY TAORMINA/IMAGN IMAGES

PRO FOOTBALL

ANALYSIS

Bills’ Smart Approach to Lions Among Week 15’s Key Coaching Calls

By TED NGUYEN
The Athletic

Week 15 featured several quality N.F.L. matchups, including the Buffalo Bills’ 48-42 win against the Detroit Lions. The Tampa Bay Buccaneers undressed the Los Angeles Chargers’ normally tricky defense, and the Houston Texans confused Miami Dolphins quarterback Tua Tagovailoa into his worst game of the season. These were some of the week’s best and worst coaching decisions:

The Bills exploited the Lions’ injury-depleted defense.

The Lions entered the game with both of their starting cornerbacks healthy, but they were down two top linebackers (Alex Anzalone and Malcolm Rodriguez). The Bills targeted running backs and tight ends downfield early and often, knowing the Lions would stick to playing man coverage.

Ty Johnson, a backup running back, was the Bills’ top receiver; he had five catches on five targets for 114 yards. Buffalo’s running backs and tight ends combined for 18 targets for 14 catches and 251 yards.

The Lions’ linebackers had trouble covering them on rhythm plays and had no shot when quarterback Josh Allen broke the pocket.

Allen looked like the N.F.L.’s most valuable player on Sunday, but the Bills’ offensive coordinator, Joe Brady, made life easy for him with a brilliant game plan and play calls that were threaded off one another.

On the Bills’ second play of the game, Allen motioned receiver Khalil Shakur behind him to fake a handoff. Johnson was lined up to Allen’s left and ran a wheel route. After the snap, Allen turned his back to the defense, making it harder to see where the ball was. Linebacker Kwon Alexander had Johnson in man coverage, but he was frozen by the play fake.

He was a tick late to get to Johnson, who got by him. Alexander had decent coverage, but he was one-on-one, and Allen delivered a perfect pass.

Johnson had several plays designed for him, but even on plays that weren’t, he did a great job of finding space when Allen broke the pocket.

Brady has been hesitant to use Allen on designed runs, but he unleashed him on Sunday. On second-and-4 in the first quarter, Allen had the option to hand the ball to the running back on a sweep or keep it and follow his tackle on a trap play, depending on what the defensive end did. In this instance, the end played outside, so Allen kept the ball and scored.

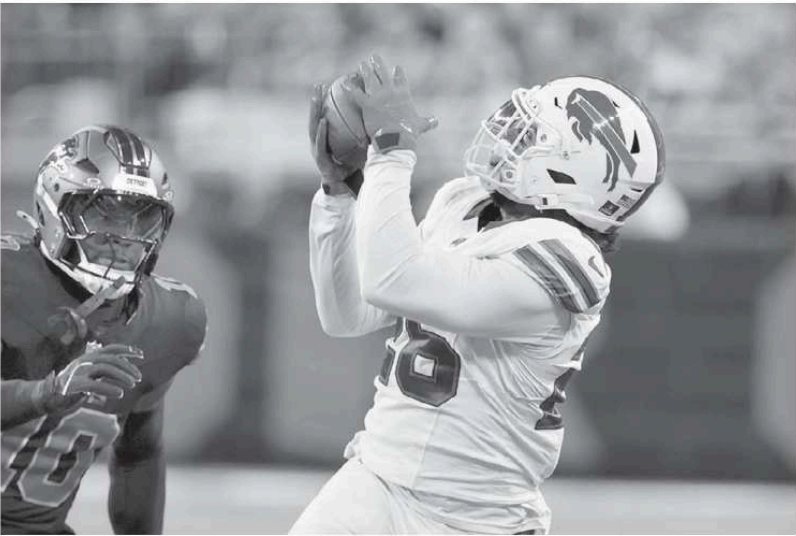
Brady called the same play later, but the end played inside, so Allen handed off the ball for a touchdown.

Brady leaned on the biggest weaknesses of the Lions’ depleted defense. The Bills moved the ball with ease on nearly every drive. Buffalo has scored over 40 points two weeks in a row and

Ted Nguyen covers the N.F.L. for The Athletic.



CARLOS OSORIO/ASSOCIATED PRESS



DUANE BURLISON/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Lions Coach Dan Campbell, above left, made a reckless decision to attempt an inside kick with 12 minutes left in Sunday’s game against the Bills. Running back Ty Johnson, above right, and the Bills offense took advantage of Detroit’s injury-depleted defense, scoring 48 points. Below left, quarterback Baker Mayfield and the Buccaneers always seemed to be a step ahead of the Chargers. Below right, the Texans defense forced Dolphins quarterback Tua Tagovailoa to throw three interceptions.



JAYNE KAMIN-ONCEA/IMAGN IMAGES



ASHLEY LANDIS/ASSOCIATED PRESS

has not come close to turning over the ball. The Lions’ defensive coordinator, Aaron Glenn, has to find a way to adjust. His defense cannot continue to line up in man without any disguising and expect to hold up against playoff offenses.

The Lions also made late-game management errors.

We love Lions Coach Dan Campbell for his commitment to aggressiveness, but attempting an inside kick with 12 minutes left, right after your team held the Bills to a field goal and scored a touchdown to cut the lead to 10, was reckless.

Campbell understandably did not trust his defense to stop Allen, but the inside kick is such a low-percentage play that you should not try one until you absolutely have to, especially since you cannot surprise the other team with an inside kick anymore. Last season, 5.2 percent of inside kicks were successful, and that was when teams still benefited from the element of surprise.

Campbell also made a critical clock-management error. The Lions tackled running back Ray

Davis with 2 minutes 41 seconds remaining. The Lions had all three of their timeouts, but did not use one there, letting 39 seconds run off the clock. The clock ticked down to 2:03 after the Bills kicked a field goal. If the Bills kicked a returnable ball on the kickoff, the Lions might have lost the advantage of the two-minute warning. Completing the comeback would have been difficult, but Campbell’s mistakes cost the Lions a better chance to do so.

The Buccaneers solved the Chargers’ defense.

The Chargers had the seventh-best defensive third-down conversion rate (35 percent) in the N.F.L. entering Week 15. The defensive coordinator Jesse Minter’s pressure packages were giving teams fits and confusing even some of the N.F.L.’s most savvy quarterbacks. Tampa Bay’s offense, coached by the coordinator Liam Coen, looked well prepared for whatever Minter threw at it. The Buccaneers converted 9 of 15 (60 percent) of their third-down attempts, the highest rate the Chargers have given up this season, in a 40-17 victory.

On third-and-3 in the fourth

quarter, Buccaneers quarterback Baker Mayfield appeared to sniff out the blitz early and changed the play. Running back Rachaad White knew safety Derwin James Jr. would be blitzing from the edge and pointed at him. Mayfield moved receiver Mike Evans into the slot knowing he would have space to that side because of the blitz.

White picked up the blitz, giving Evans time to fake going outside before breaking inside. Safety Tony Jefferson initially had Evans in coverage. When Evans went outside, cornerback Tarheeb Still had to switch on him, but because Still was lined up outside, Evans easily won inside and Mayfield hit him with a bullet.

Later in the drive, with the ball in the red zone, the Buccaneers lined up in a similar formation. The Chargers once again had a slot pressure called, but the Buccaneers had the perfect play called.

James again blitzed from the edge. This time, White faked as though he was going to block him before leaking out for a screen. The offensive line did a good job of oozing out to its blocks downfield, and White was not touched until he got near the goal line.

Scoring 40 points on the road

against a good defense is no easy feat. Coen has been as impressive as any offensive coordinator this season.

The Texans confused the Dolphins’ Tagovailoa.

The Texans have had trouble covering crossing routes all season. Going against a Dolphins offense that feasts on crossing routes, this weakness shaped up to be a problem. Coach DeMeco Ryans masked this defensive weakness with an excellent game plan, confusing quarterback Tua Tagovailoa and making him appear unsure of what he was looking at in the Texans’ 20-12 win.

Playing Cover 2 is the most effective way to counter the Dolphins’ passing game, but you cannot telegraph what you are going to do or Tagovailoa will know exactly which windows to attack and destroy you. The Texans did a good job mixing Cover 2 and man coverage and disguising their coverages.

On third-and-7 in the second quarter, the Texans showed Cover 1 (man-to-man with one deep safety and a robber underneath). Initially, corner Kamari Lassiter lined up over receiver Tyreek Hill outside, and both

safeties lined up in the middle of the field.

When Hill motioned inside, Lassiter followed him inside, as he would in man coverage. If it were zone, usually, Lassiter would stay outside and the nickel would bump over to Hill.

After the snap, both safeties bailed toward the numbers and the defense dropped into a Cover 2 zone. Lassiter stayed inside and played the “hook” zone inside. This is a unique disguise; you hardly ever see an outside corner playing this type of zone.

Tagovailoa thought the Texans were in man and wanted to hit receiver Jaylen Waddle on a corner route. He waited for Waddle but could not hit him with a corner playing underneath him and a safety over the top of him. Tagovailoa held on to the ball too long, and the Dolphins were called for a holding penalty.

Tagovailoa had one of his worst games and held on to the ball for his second-longest average time to throw of the season (2.72 seconds). The Texans sacked him seven times and intercepted him three times. The loss will most likely knock the Dolphins out of playoff contention. Though the Texans’ offense has struggled with consistency, their defense continues to come up big.

To Secure a Long-Awaited Playoff Berth, Broncos Know They Need to Run Better

By NICK KOSMIDER
The Athletic

There is a common thread in the rookie quarterback Bo Nix’s lesser performances this season that goes beyond the interceptions he has thrown in those games.

In the Broncos’ 31-13 victory against the Indianapolis Colts on Sunday, Nix led his team in rushing for the fourth time this season. Denver is now 1-3 in those games, and Nix’s average output as a ball carrier in those contests is only 36 yards.

Broncos Coach Sean Payton has said often this season that a young quarterback’s best friends are a stout defense and a consistent run game. The first part of the equation hit in a major way against the Colts as the Broncos forced five turnovers and held Indianapolis scoreless in the second half.

The running game was a different story. The Broncos had 24 designed rush attempts and gained 54 yards, according to TruMedia, a meager 2.2 yards per carry. Nix forced too many throws on Sunday. His footwork was rushed and jittery at times. He conceded af-

Nick Kosmider covers the Broncos for The Athletic.

terward that he was battling doubts about how he was processing it all.

“I’m not going to lie; it’s tough,” Nix said. “You start getting a little bit in your head, and you start questioning: ‘Am I actually seeing it? What was that?’ So it’s tough, but I feel like everybody goes through it. The ones that can get out of it and finish the game and win and not let it dictate the outcome of the game, that’s usually when you find some maturity and you find some growth.”

The Broncos expressed confidence after Sunday’s game that Nix would bounce back from his rough outing. They pointed to the two touchdown passes he threw in the second half to help the Broncos pull away. But it has become clear that Nix’s growth can only be so impactful in Denver’s offense if he is not complemented by a more effective rushing attack.

“We have to run the ball better,” right tackle Mike McGlinchey said after Sunday’s win.

The Broncos can clinch their first playoff berth since 2015 if they beat the Chargers in Los Angeles on Thursday. But the previous matchup between these teams showed how difficult it will be for the Broncos to reach that long-awaited milestone if they cannot be more dangerous run-

ning the ball. The Broncos gained a season-low 49 yards on designed rushes during a 23-16 loss to the Chargers in Week 6. Nix had a team-high 61 rushing yards in the loss, but much of that came on scrambles in the second half as the Broncos attempted to erase a 23-3 deficit.

The Broncos ran into similar issues against the Colts on Sunday. Jaleel McLaughlin averaged more than 6 yards per carry during Denver’s previous two wins, but he gained only 21 yards on seven carries before leaving the game with a quad injury. Javonte Williams gained 15 yards on six carries, and is averaging only 2.8 yards per carry since Week 8. The rookie Audric Estimé had 6 yards on his first carry on Sunday — it did not come until the third quarter — but gained only 7 yards on his next four chances.

“I would say there’s some looks that we have to be better at, relative to when we’re running a certain play into some tough looks where now you don’t really have the leverage,” Payton said. “We have to do a better job as coaches, starting with me, and having solutions when the looks aren’t what you’re practicing. Overall, I think it’s an area that — here we are with three weeks left in the season — we have to find more consistency there.”



LINDSEY WASSON/ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Chargers are coming off one of their worst defensive performances of the season in Sunday’s 40-17 loss to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, who ran for 223 yards and averaged 5.7 yards per carry. The Chargers entered the game ranked eighth in the N.F.L. in expected points added per opponent rush attempt, but they gave up more than 200 rushing yards to an opponent for the second time in the past four games.

The Broncos should have opportunities to find holes in the Los Angeles defense, but they may also be short-handed. The Broncos did not practice Monday, but the team released an injury report with estimated statuses. McLaughlin was listed as a “did not practice” with the quad injury,

putting his availability for Thursday’s game in question. If Williams, a fourth-year running back, gets lead work, he will have to shake off what has been a miserable stretch for him. He has gained only 14 yards on 18 carries in Denver’s last three games.

The Broncos’ secondary depth has been encouraging. The Colts had a 10-7 lead on Sunday as they lined up for a third-and-15 play at Denver’s 32-yard line late in the second quarter.

The Colts were in field goal range, but they wanted more. Quarterback Anthony Richardson saw his top deep target, Alec Pierce, get a half-step on the rookie cornerback Kris Abrams-Draine on the left side and let it rip. The pass was zooming toward the end zone, directly on target.

Denver can clinch its first playoff berth since 2015 with a win on Thursday. The run game may prove more challenging if Jaleel McLaughlin (38) is out.

But Abrams-Draine stayed calm, closed the gap and deflected the pass just as it reached Pierce. The breakup saved a touchdown and illustrated some of the traits the Broncos have been impressed with from Abrams-Draine as he spent most of this season working behind the scenes.

“He showed some moxie, stayed with his guys, didn’t panic when the ball was in the air,” Payton said of Abrams-Draine, a fifth-round pick out of the University of Missouri who made his debut in a Week 13 win against the Cleveland Browns. “There’s something about him.”

Payton felt similarly about cornerback Damarri Mathis, whose 20 defensive snaps against the Texans were his most in a game since playing all 71 snaps in a Week 8 loss to the Kansas City Chiefs in 2023.

Mathis got the outside work in base packages in place of the injured starter Riley Moss while Abrams-Draine (58 snaps) played in that spot during subpackage looks. The two players were on the field together late in the game when cornerback Pat Surtain II registered his fourth interception of the season, tying a career high.

“In both cases,” Payton said, “I was really encouraged.”

VOLLEYBALL



DAN RAINVILLE/IMAGN IMAGES

Maggie Mendelson and the Nittany Lions will face Nebraska in one semifinal.

Top 4 Seeds Will Compete At Final Four In Louisville

By MITCH SHERMAN
The Athletic

The N.C.A.A. women's volleyball Final Four will be contested by four No. 1 seeds in battles of Big Ten and Atlantic Coast Conference foes: Penn State vs. Nebraska and Pittsburgh vs. Louisville.

The national semifinals will be played Thursday in Louisville, Ky., at 6:30 and 9 p.m. Eastern, with coverage on ESPN. The championship match will be Sunday at 3 p.m. on ABC.

Penn State (33-2) beat Creighton in five sets on Sunday night to earn a rematch in the national semifinals with Nebraska. Penn State beat Nebraska last month to share the regular-season Big Ten title with the Cornhuskers. This is the Nittany Lions' 14th trip to the

No. 1-ranked Pitt seeks its first national title in the sport.

Final Four, in search of an eighth national championship.

Nebraska (34-2) also won on Sunday, in three sets against Wisconsin. The Final Four berth for the Huskers, who lost in the championship against Texas last year, is their 18th since 1986. Nebraska, led by the senior libero Lexi Rodriguez, is seeking its sixth national championship and first since 2017.

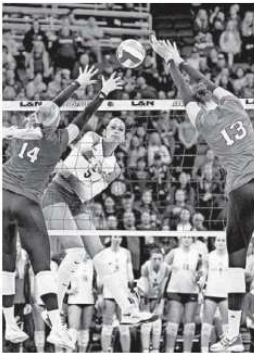
Pitt (33-1), the top seed in the 64-team tournament, swept Kentucky on Saturday to earn a fourth consecutive Final Four appearance. The Panthers lost in the semifinals against Nebraska last year.

Louisville (29-5) beat Stanford in four sets on Saturday to earn a third trip to the national semifinals and the opportunity to stay at home throughout the postseason. Texas beat the Cardinals in the championship match in 2022.

The semifinal between the A.C.C. rivals Pitt and Louisville will be their third meeting this season; Pitt won in five sets at home in October and won at Louisville in four sets last month.

The Panthers are led by the A.C.C. player of the year Olivia Babcock, a sophomore opposite hitter. The senior outside hitter Anna DeBeer leads the Louisville attack.

Mitch Sherman covers Nebraska sports for The Athletic.



JEFF FAUGHEENDER/COURIER JOURNAL

Olivia Babcock (5) of Pitt will square off against Louisville for the third time this year.

The New York Times



Open the app.
Open the world.

The New York Times app.
Download now.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

At Southern Methodist, a Belief in Football Is Paying Off

By CHRIS VANNINI
The Athletic

Southern Methodist University football has always stayed on the mind of Paul B. Loyd Jr.

He made his millions in oil and drilling, like so many Texans in the second half of the 20th century, as an executive and investor. But he was not just an oil guy. He was a proud former Southern Methodist football player, a captain in the 1960s who played in a Cotton Bowl. He watched the program's return to national prominence in the 1980s behind a backfield of Eric Dickerson and Craig James. But then came the N.C.A.A.'s so-called death penalty, which barred the university from fielding a team in 1987, and the ensuing decades of purgatory.

Southern Methodist was another investment for Loyd, but a more personal one. He has donated millions to the private school in Dallas over the years, partly in hopes that the football program would eventually turn around. The all-sports center connected to Gerald J. Ford Stadium is named after him. He also spent 25 years on the university's board of trustees.

"I lived in places like Iran, Saudi Arabia, West Africa, and the connection back to your school and athletics means a lot," he said. "You realize what that school did for me. I get emotional about it."

Nearly 40 years after Southern Methodist football was temporarily shut down and 30 years since the dissolution of the Southwest Conference left it scrambling for a home, the team is back on the sport's biggest stage. S.M.U. (11-2) will travel to Penn State (11-2) for a first-round College Football Playoff game on Saturday after going 8-0 in its first season as a member of the Atlantic Coast Conference.

Much of that success comes from the players and coaches who made it happen on the field. But another factor was the supporters who funded it, paving the way for Southern Methodist to shake up college football the way it did four decades ago.

"As a businessman, if you look at the rate of return on what we invested, that return is substantial," Loyd said.

Loyd was a part of a small group of Southern Methodist megadonors who first put hundreds of millions into the program to upgrade facilities and then allowed Southern Methodist to forgo nine years of media rights payments from the A.C.C. (a total of more than \$200 million) as a condition of its invitation to join the conference.

What's \$200 million between friends? The \$50 million indoor practice facility is named for Bill Armstrong and his wife as a result

Chris Vannini is a senior college football writer for The Athletic.



GEORGE WALKER/ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA GETTY IMAGES

A new class of deep-pocketed boosters has helped the Southern Methodist football program get back on the sport's biggest stage.

of their donation. The Garry Weber end zone complex that opened this year began with a \$50 million donation from Weber's foundation, and the Armstrongs put another \$15 million toward the building. Within a week of accepting the A.C.C. invitation last year, S.M.U. donors put together \$100 million to offset lost TV money.

It was a bet on the belief that if the university could just get a power conference invitation, everything would come together.

It happened quicker than anyone imagined, and this season has been everything the donors dreamed about. Southern Methodist's deep-pocketed boosters got the program in trouble all those years ago, but a new class took the school back to the top. This time, it was good business.

"It's no longer, 'If you make this investment, here's what could happen,'" said David Miller, Southern Methodist's chairman, who spearheaded the fund-raising and A.C.C. efforts. "What we hoped could happen is happening right now."

"It's real. You can reach out and touch it, feel it."

The dividends do not stop at football success. The men's basketball team is 9-2 under a first-year coach, Andy Enfield, who was hired away from Southern California; it has a top-10 recruiting class coming in next year. The volleyball team recently reached the second round of the N.C.A.A. tournament.

Applications for enrollment are up more than 40 percent, according to Miller. Southern Methodist's brand is bigger than it has been in decades. Miller says he has talked to deans who are getting more job applicants since Southern Methodist joined the A.C.C., enticed by the chance to work alongside universities such as Duke, California and Stanford.

"So often you provide support, and you may see it somewhere down the line," said R. Gerald Turner, the school's outgoing president, who arrived in 1995. "But it's just amazing that the turnaround has been so fast."

The first big investment came 16 years ago, when the Mustangs lured Coach June Jones away from Hawaii fresh off a run to a Bowl Championship Series matchup. But school officials were still leery of the program's troublesome past. Jones won, as did his successors, Chad Morris, Sonny Dykes and Rhett Lashlee, the current head coach. With each step forward, administrators grew more comfortable with being proud of football again. Southern Methodist's American Athletic Conference championship last year was the football program's first title since 1984.

"It's like a limb or appendage is back after being gone for so long," said Thaddeus Matula, an alumnus who directed the 2010 documentary "Pony Excess," about the program's rise and fall. "Southern Methodist being a great program was part of my childhood. For it to be back is amazing."

After a Southwest Conference exodus had forced it to join the Western Athletic Conference in 1996, Southern Methodist did

whatever it could to make sure it was not left behind in conference realignment again. Turner, Miller and Athletic Director Rick Hart led a three-pronged attack while reaching out to other conferences, with Turner taking the presidents, Hart taking the athletic directors and Miller taking the board chairs. A consultant, Oliver Luck, made the connections.

The Big 12 passed. The Pac-12 fell apart. Southern Methodist's acceptance by the A.C.C. came late in the realignment shuffle, and only because North Carolina State flipped its vote to give the Mustangs the requisite 12 of 15 votes; Florida State, Clemson and North Carolina had voted no. Florida State, in its lawsuit to get out of the A.C.C.'s Grant of Rights, even chided the conference for diminishing its football media profile by adding the Mustangs.

Just four months into the league, Southern Methodist has more than carried its weight, running the table in A.C.C. play and reaching the conference championship game (losing to Clemson), with a 42-16 win over Florida State along the way.

If California and Stanford were the headliners of the A.C.C.'s additions last year, Southern Methodist was the third wheel. The Mustangs knew they had to prove themselves as the only program moving up from the Group of 5.

"I've felt since I've been here that if we could position ourselves into a league like the A.C.C., this can be a top-10 athletic program in the country," Hart said. "We'll never have the number of alumni,

but we have the potential to become a national brand again."

The "Pony Excess" documentary brought Southern Methodist's story to a new generation, at a time when the public mood around paying players was changing. Fourteen years later, athletes are allowed to profit off their name, image and likeness rights, and Southern Methodist's Boulevard Collective was the best-funded N.I.L. operation in the Group of 5 before the move to the A.C.C.

Heading into college sports' revenue-sharing era, which will be formally ushered in next year when the House v. N.C.A.A. settlement is completed, Southern Methodist will be paying players again. It has the money. It always did.

"You have to be able to play that game hard, and we fully intend to," Miller said.

Matula is in the early stages of making a sequel documentary and a scripted version of the original. Money in college sports is the story of the moment. The way Matula and Southern Methodist's big donors see it, how much would you pay to make your favorite team win big again? Can anyone really put a price on that?

"College football, you can become more cynical over the years about it being more about the money," Matula said. "But with Southern Methodist, there is sort of a beautiful purity just under the surface. Winning is more important than the money. Raising the A.C.C. funds so quickly, it was, purely, a business decision."

COMMENTARY

Blame N.C.A.A.'s Broken System For Quarterback's Untimely Exit

By AUDREY SNYDER
The Athletic

STATE COLLEGE, Pa. — Beau Pribula was on the practice field on Sunday afternoon when Penn State held its first on-field workout ahead of Saturday's College Football Playoff game in Beaver Stadium.

Pribula, a quarterback, had spent the previous three years on campus fulfilling a childhood dream. As he was growing up in York, Pa., there was really only one place he had ever envisioned himself playing college football. He kept tabs on his beloved Nittany Lions as a kid and even dressed as a Penn State football player for Halloween. This was his dream school.

Pribula watched from afar as a mobile quarterback named Trace McSorley helped uplift James Franklin's program. He wanted to be like him. Even when the Nittany Lions added another quarterback to the 2022 recruiting class, the five-star prospect Drew Allar, Pribula — the in-state kid who spoke so often throughout his recruitment about wanting to help bring a national championship to this place, the place he grew up idolizing — was still all in.

Until Sunday night, Penn State and Pribula thought they could somehow defeat an N.C.A.A. calendar that wasn't designed with players like him in mind. There's no flexibility in this model for quarterbacks who know they need to find another team before next semester begins but who are also instrumental to their current team's postseason

Audrey Snyder covers Penn State for The Athletic.

success.

Pribula isn't just any backup quarterback on a playoff team. He is a leader who had a role in every game this season and who accounted for nine touchdowns. He came on in relief at Wisconsin to help Penn State win a tough game on the road. The Nittany Lions regularly used a two-quarterback package with Pribula and would run plays specifically designed for him. His

Missing the playoff in order to enter the transfer portal.

speed and change of direction gave defenses much to think about.

Penn State planned to have Pribula on the field this weekend for the team's most important game of the season — until it became clear to Franklin on Sunday that his quarterback was "distracted" by all that was asked of him.

"We've got problems in college football," Franklin said this week. "And I can give you my word — Beau Pribula did not want to leave our program, and he did not want to leave our program until the end of the season."

Franklin continued: "When you play the position of quarterback and there's only one spot and those spots are filling up, he felt like he was put in a no-win situation, and I agree with him."

Allar announced on Monday that he plans to transfer for his

senior season in 2025, information that surely was shared between teammates and friends before either went public with a decision about next season.

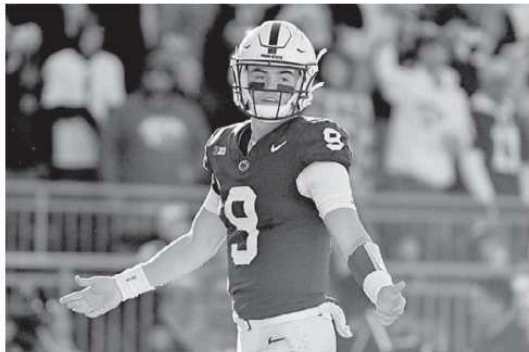
"Unfortunately, that's the landscape of college football right now," Allar said. "He's part of the reason why we're here. It sucks that he's not able to go out there with us on Saturday."

What was Pribula supposed to do? A broken system led him and Penn State to this no-win situation. College football's timeline forced his hand, with the general transfer portal window closing on Dec. 28.

Yes, the portal stays open longer for teams in the playoff, but Penn State could still be playing games deep into January. The national championship is Jan. 20. How many schools will still be looking for a starting quarterback at any point in January? Many quarterbacks whose teams are in lower-tier bowl games or whose teams didn't qualify for a bowl have already signed with their next schools.

There's also the slippery slope of allowing Pribula to stick around knowing that he has planned to transfer. Franklin has long stood firm on his policy that once a player enters the transfer portal, his locker is cleaned out and he is no longer on the team. But unless Pribula's name was in the portal, he couldn't legally have contact with other teams. Also, how is he supposed to go on visits when Penn State is preparing for the most important game of the season? Oh, and Penn State also has final exams this week.

Sure, he could wait until the next transfer window opens in



BARRY REEGER/ASSOCIATED PRESS

This season, Penn State's offense included a two-quarterback package that ran plays specifically designed for Beau Pribula.

April, but good luck finding a team and winning a starting job if you're not on campus for spring ball.

And yes, Penn State's opponent on Saturday, Southern Methodist, has a backup quarterback (Preston Stone) who has entered the portal but is still with the team. But every situation is different. What works for S.M.U. might not work for Penn State.

"Why have we created a system where this guy couldn't finish this season with his team?" Franklin said as he called for someone, anyone to step up and take on the role of college football commissioner.

"Obviously I have a responsibility for Penn State and our football program, but I also feel like I also have a responsibility to Beau Pribula," he said. "I hate it. I do. I hate it for him. I hate it for Penn State, but I also don't think it's the right thing for college football."

Franklin even sounded willing to bend his own portal rule to keep Pribula around longer and said he asked some of the team's leaders whether they thought there was a way for this to work. Ultimately, Franklin said Pribula

felt there was no way to uphold his level of preparation, finish out this semester, talk to other schools and make visits all while the playoff begins.

"It's the first time stuff like this has happened, so there's really not a right answer for any of these things," tight end Tyler Warren said. "That's what's best for him at this moment, but we love him. That's our guy. That's my roommate, and he's one of my better friends. It's different right now, but he's a great teammate and we got a lot of respect for him."

And so, Penn State carries on with one fewer quarterback in the meeting room and with a game plan in which the offensive coordinator Andy Kotelnicki and Franklin said they will "use different pieces of the puzzle" to get other players involved to help make up for Pribula's absence. Whether it's players who have seen the field this season or others who have impressed in the developmental squad scrimmages, Franklin said they will need to find a solution.

In reality, this messy N.C.A.A. calendar has left them with no other choice.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Ivy League Agrees to Let Football Teams Start Competing in the Postseason

By BILLY WITZ

Among the tens of thousands of college athletes who compete for an N.C.A.A. championship, there is one subset who never get the chance: Ivy League football players.

Since the conference began play in 1956, as a bulwark against athletics encroaching on academics, Ivy League football seasons have come to an end on the Saturday before Thanksgiving.

No bowl games. No playoffs.

But that will change next year after the Ivy League's presidents announced on Wednesday that they would allow the league's teams in the Football Championship Subdivision's 24-team playoff, which features schools formerly categorized by the N.C.A.A. as Division I-AA.

The inability to participate in the playoffs has been a persistent source of disappointment among Ivy League coaches and players, so the announcement on Wednesday was welcome news to the eight programs.

"That's the joy of competition," said Bob Surace, who played at Princeton and is the longest-

A policy reconsidered after a compelling student-led appeal.

tenured football coach in the league after completing his 15th season. "There's a score and somebody is going to win and somebody is going to lose, and you find out on that day who is the better team."

When previous appeals to change the policy were not granted, there was rarely any reason given — other than that Ivy League presidents needed compelling evidence to break from the status quo. And as more evidence linked football to brain injuries, the case for playing more games was harder to make.

The Ivy League has been at the forefront of efforts to mitigate dangerous play. In 2016, the league followed the lead of a former Dartmouth coach, Buddy Teevens, and banned tackling during practice, a protocol that has been adopted by many other

colleges and the N.F.L. It also moved kickoff up to the 40-yard line, resulting in more touchbacks and fewer high-speed collisions that result in severe injuries.

But the conference reconsidered its stance on allowing post-season participation after hearing from student-athletes.

Mason Shipp, a receiver at Yale, crafted the proposal along with Leah Carey, a softball player at Brown, and Chloe Maister, a lacrosse player at Cornell, and presented it to the presidents this year. They worked with Robin Harris, the Ivy League's executive director, and enlisted fellow members of the Ivy League Student-Athlete Advisory Committee — which aims to improve the overall well-being of student-athletes at the schools — to get the attention of administrators on each campus.

"The reason it was unique was it came from us," Shipp said in an interview on Wednesday. "They value our voice. This was our words, our writing, and the beauty of it was, yes, a football player was involved, but so was a Brown softball player and a Cornell lacrosse player."

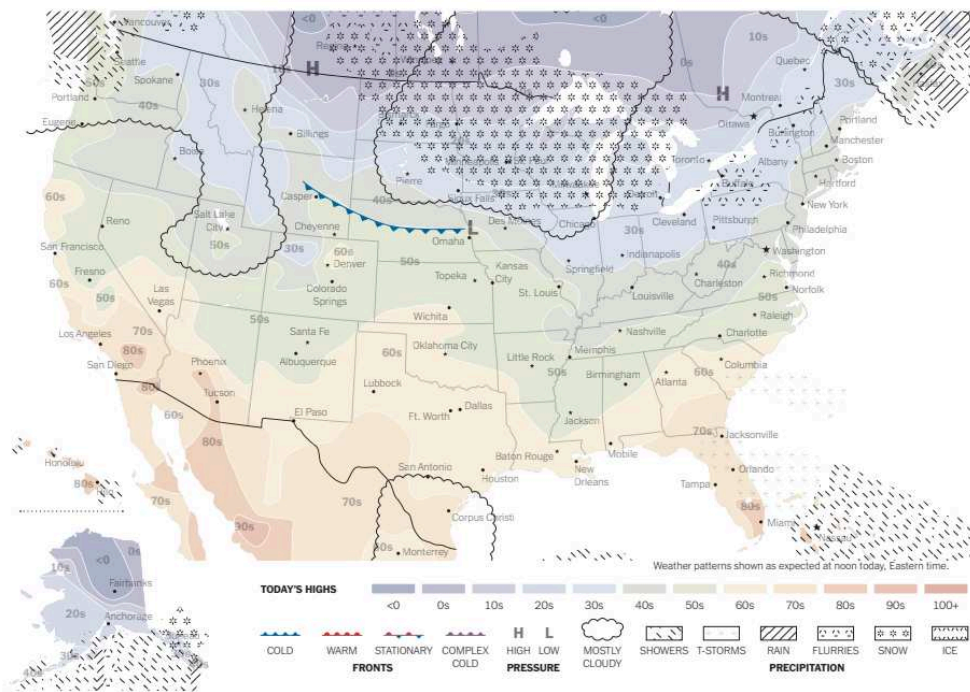


ADAM GLANZMAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Dartmouth playing Brown in 2021. Starting next season, Ivy League teams will vie for the playoffs.

Weather Report

Meteorology by AccuWeather



Highlight: The Weekend Outlook



Very cold air will settle in across the Northeastern quarter of the nation this weekend with snow showers downwind of the Great Lakes. Another in a series of storms will bring rain and mountain snow to the Northwest. It will be mostly dry across the South.

National Forecast

A clipper storm will move from the Upper Midwest today to the interior Northeast late tonight. Snow in Wisconsin and Minnesota will be heavy in some areas and can lead to rapidly deteriorating visibility and dangerous travel conditions.

Strong winds will blow across the northern Plains and northern Rockies. Wind gusts of 30 to 50 miles per hour can lead to power outages and blow around loose objects. Where snow recently fell, extensive blowing and drifting will occur.

Meanwhile, some rain will reach Washington and Oregon late in the day.

Much of the rest of the nation will be dry, except for the Atlantic coast of Florida, which will see some thundershowers. Cool to colder air will expand over the Plains. Patchy morning fog in California's Central Valley will yield to sunshine.

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
N/A.....Not available

N.Y.C. region

	Yesterday	Today	Tomorrow
New York City	53/42 0	44/34 PC	39/31 SS
Bridgeport	50/31 0	46/31 PC	39/30 SS
Calderwell	52/30 0	45/29 PC	38/30 SS
Danbury	52/27 0	45/28 PC	37/27 SS
Islip	53/32 0	46/31 PC	42/29 C
Newark	54/39 0	46/34 PC	40/31 SS
Trenton	53/30 0	44/29 PC	39/28 C
White Plains	51/32 0	44/30 PC	36/28 SS

United States

	Yesterday	Today	Tomorrow
Albany	46/33 0.12	39/24 PC	37/25 SS
Albuquerque	53/28 0	54/30 C	57/30 S
Anchorage	21/17 0	25/22 PC	29/26 C
Atlanta	75/45 0.02	62/40 S	59/32 S
Atlantic City	53/40 0.02	47/37 PC	46/34 Sh
Austin	71/38 0.04	67/41 S	65/34 S
Baltimore	39/29 0.33	37/32 C	37/23 SS
Baton Rouge	78/50 0.01	66/43 S	65/36 S
Birmingham	74/40 0.08	59/36 S	53/30 S
Boise	49/29 0	41/29 PC	43/29 PC
Boston	50/38 0	45/34 S	37/28 SS
Buffalo	42/28 0.22	32/27 S	32/17 SS
Burlington	45/32 0.07	35/20 C	25/19 C
Casper	48/30 3r	49/27 S	52/32 PC
Charlotte	70/48 0.02	55/42 S	54/34 S
Chattanooga	69/40 0.32	54/34 S	49/33 S
Chicago	34/26 3r	36/30 PC	32/17 SS
Cincinnati	43/30 0.32	39/32 PC	36/23 C
Cleveland	37/31 0.14	35/31 PC	37/25 SS
Colorado Springs	45/34 0	46/31 PC	58/34 S
Columbus	52/30 0	45/29 PC	37/23 SS
Concord, N.H.	49/33 0.02	41/22 PC	29/21 C
Dallas-Ft. Worth	56/37 0	62/41 S	56/33 S
Denver	56/33 0	62/27 PC	57/34 S
Des Moines	28/23 0	46/18 W	25/19 PC
Detroit	38/27 0	34/30 C	34/26 SS
El Paso	62/35 0	66/37 S	67/36 S
Fargo	14/10 0	23/11 Sn	3/2 Sn
Hartford	52/35 0.01	45/28 PC	34/27 SS
Honolulu	84/69 0	84/68 PC	82/67 PC
Houston	75/38 0.07	68/46 S	69/38 S
Indianapolis	41/28 0	38/30 PC	34/23 SS
Jackson	75/44 0.10	59/38 S	57/29 S
Jacksonville	78/60 0.03	75/55 C	70/40 S
Kansas City	44/31 0	45/19 W	33/21 S
Key West	82/70 0.11	77/69 C	72/64 Sn
Las Vegas	68/46 0	68/45 S	67/45 C
Lexington	56/33 1.22	43/34 S	38/25 C

Little Rock 60/36 0.06 56/40 S 48/28 S

Los Angeles 82/54 0 79/51 S 71/48 PC

Louisville 46/33 0.37 44/35 S 38/27 C

Memphis 58/36 0.83 52/38 S 45/28 S

Miami 82/69 0.15 83/68 PC 80/56 S

Milwaukee 35/25 0 34/31 Sn 33/17 SS

Mpls.-St. Paul 25/19 3r 24/11 Sn 18/12 PC

Nashville 64/35 0.60 50/35 S 41/31 PC

New Orleans 76/56 0 64/47 S 64/39 S

Norfolk 72/44 0.04 49/42 PC 49/37 S

Oklahoma City 40/31 0.17 37/29 C 27/16 PC

Omaha 35/27 0 54/12 W 27/16 PC

Orlando 81/64 0.04 77/61 C 76/47 PC

Philadelphia 58/38 0.03 45/31 PC 42/30 C

Phoenix 82/52 0 81/52 PC 79/50 S

Pittsburgh 40/31 0.17 37/29 C 27/16 PC

New Delhi 76/46 0 72/50 PC 72/49 PC

Riyadh 69/44 0 69/50 C 69/50 C

Seoul 32/18 0 40/23 S 39/29 C

Shanghai 47/36 0.01 45/35 C 50/35 PC

Singapore 84/79 0.34 84/75 R 87/76 T

Sydney 75/64 0.18 75/62 PC 77/63 S

Taipei City 52/34 0.14 51/34 R 42/30 C

Tehran 51/28 0 54/36 S 47/37 PC

Tokyo 54/39 0 49/38 S 53/45 PC

Europe Yesterday Today Tomorrow

Amsterdam 55/45 0.26 53/40 R 47/43 C

Athens 64/39 0 61/49 C 64/54 S

Berlin 54/39 0 55/39 R 44/36 PC

Brussels 55/43 0.06 54/37 R 44/42 PC

Budapest 48/30 0 48/32 S 45/32 R

Copenhagen 48/43 0.69 49/39 Sh 43/39 S

Dublin 57/45 0.18 45/37 S 49/43 R

Edinburgh 57/43 0.04 43/36 PC 50/43 Sh

Frankfurt 54/39 0.02 54/37 R 44/36 PC

Geneva 52/34 0.14 51/34 R 42/30 C

Helsinki 34/10 0.05 40/35 R 37/26 C

Istanbul 55/46 0 56/47 C 59/49 S

Kyiv 38/32 0 43/34 PC 41/32 C

Lisbon 63/48 0 63/48 S 63/48 S

London 58/49 0.14 47/38 PC 49/42 Sh

Madrid 54/32 3r 58/32 Sh 51/28 S

Moscow 18/9 0.40 22/18 Sn 37/33 C

Nice 66/46 0 59/45 PC 57/41 S

Oso 41/25 0.70 40/32 S 38/27 PC

Oslo 55/45 0.08 55/37 R 45/43 PC

Prague 48/33 0.06 51/37 C 41/32 PC

Rome 57/34 0 59/53 PC 57/42 W

St. Petersburg 12/2 0 36/32 Sn 41/28 R

Stockholm 44/21 0.11 41/30 PC 33/26 PC

Vienna 49/37 0.02 46/40 C 44/33 Sh

Warsaw 48/40 0.03 51/40 C 43/35 PC

North America Yesterday Today Tomorrow

Acapulco 88/72 0 90/70 PC 89/71 PC

Bermuda 73/69 0.03 75/68 Sh 74/69 Sh

Edmonton 1/0 0.13 5/1 C 20/8 S

Guadalajara 68/45 0 77/48 T 77/49 T

Havana 84/65 0 82/68 Sn 79/64 PC

Kingston 90/76 0 89/76 PC 89/76 PC

Martinique 83/75 0.15 87/76 Sh 86/76 R

Mexico City 63/46 0 68/46 C 67/46 C

Montreal 74/59 0 67/53 PC 62/52 Sh

Montreal 37/36 0.03 31/14 PC 21/14 Sn

Nassau 81/72 0.20 81/70 T 81/70 PC

Panama City 91/75 0 90/75 R 87/75 R

Quebec City 36/34 0.12 30/9 PC 18/12 C

Santo Domingo 87/72 0.02 87/71 Sh 85/71 T

Toronto 37/36 0.04 30/25 C 28/12 Sn

Vancouver 52/45 0.33 48/44 R 52/44 Sh

Winnipeg 9/13 0.03 7/12 Sn -1/7 C

South America Yesterday Today Tomorrow

Buenos Aires 82/70 0 84/72 PC 87/62 PC

Caracas 89/75 0.42 91/76 R 92/77 R

Lima 74/66 0 75/66 C 75/66 PC

Quito 66/51 0.42 65/51 R 66/51 R

Recife 86/81 0 86/80 PC 86/79 Sh

Rio de Janeiro 79/72 0.02 81/72 S 88/77 PC

Santiago 84/54 0 94/55 S 89/56 S

Metropolitan Forecast

TODAYBreezy and cooler

High 44. With a storm moving out to sea, drier air will move into the region with a breeze coming from the west. The sky will be partly sunny, and the air a bit chillier.

TONIGHTPartly cloudy

Low 34. A weak area of high pressure moving across the region during the night will maintain dry conditions and bring gentle winds. Temperatures will be chilly, but not terribly cold.

TOMORROWCloudy, snow showers

High 39. An approaching clipper system will bring a mostly cloudy sky and spotty snow or rain showers. As colder air arrives at night, there could be a few hours of steady snow with a small, slushy accumulation.

SATURDAYA morning snow shower

Gusty north to northwest winds will move in behind the departing clipper system during the day, ushering in a much colder air mass. Snow showers may linger in the morning. High 34.

SUNDAYSunny and cold

Sunday will be brisk and very cold despite plenty of sunshine. High 27. Monday will be mostly sunny and almost as cold. High 29.

Metropolitan Almanac

In Central Park, for the 13 hours ended at 1 p.m. yesterday.



Temperature (in inches)
Yesterday0.00
Record2.21
SnowTrace
Since Oct. 1Trace

For the last 30 days
Actual5.55
Normal4.15

For the last 365 days
Actual45.83
Normal49.50

Air pressure High30.30 8 a.m.
Low30.21 noon

Humidity High58% 1 a.m.
Low44% noon

Heating Degree Days
An index of fuel consumption that tracks how far the day's mean temperature fell below 65

Yesterday17
So far this month456
So far this season (since July 1)1020
Normal to date for the season1223

Trends Last 10 days
30 days
90 days
365 days

Temperature Average Below Above
Precipitation Average Below Above

Reservoir levels (New York City water supply)
Yesterday68%
Est. normal82%

Recreational Forecast
Sun, Moon and Planets

Last Quarter Dec. 22
New 5:26 p.m.
First Quarter Jan. 6
Full Jan. 13 5:26 p.m.

Sun RISE 7:16 a.m.
SET 4:31 p.m.
NEXT R 7:16 a.m.

Jupiter R 6:22 a.m.
Mars R 3:32 p.m.
Saturn R 11:29 a.m.

Venus R 10:14 a.m.
Moon S 10:44 a.m.
R 9:07 p.m.
S 11:08 a.m.

Saturn R 11:29 a.m.
Venus R 10:14 a.m.
Moon S 10:44 a.m.
R 9:07 p.m.

Boating
From Montauk Point to Sandy Hook, N.J., out to 20 nautical miles, including Long Island Sound and New York Harbor.

Winds will be northwest at 12-25 knots. Waves will average 1-2 feet on Long Island Sound and 2-4 feet on the ocean. Visibility will be under 2 miles in early rain, then it will be unrestricted.

Jim Leach, 82, Iowa Republican Who Extolled Moderation, Is Dead

By CLAY RISEN

Jim Leach, a soft-spoken, cerebral Iowa Republican who spent three decades in Congress tirelessly lofting the banner for the moderate political center — so much so that he endorsed Barack Obama in 2008 and switched parties in 2022 — died on Dec. 11 in Iowa City. He was 82.

His daughter, Jenny Dix, said his death, in a hospital, was from a heart attack and a hemorrhagic stroke.

Mr. Leach was probably the only U.S. representative who could speak learnedly, in the same interview, about college wrestling, banking regulations and the influence of Thomas Hart Benton on the paintings of Jackson Pollock — and then, if necessary, repeat his words in Russian.

He belonged to what conservatives once pejoratively called the “Gypsy Moth Republicans,” a loose group of moderate and liberal party members, mostly from Northern states, who sat out the Reagan revolution, particularly its embrace of tax and spending cuts.

In 1984, he helped form the Republican Mainstream Committee, which pushed for arms control, women’s rights, civil rights and environmental protections at the party’s national convention that summer in Dallas. He also supported abortion rights, earned high marks from the Sierra Club and was a campaign-finance ascetic — he took money only from inside Iowa, and no more than \$500 per donor.

“I basically have always been a progressive in international affairs, a moderate on social issues and somewhat restrained on spending,” Mr. Leach said in a 2009 interview with the National Endowment for the Humanities, which he ran from 2009 to 2013.

He was one of the few Republican critics of the Reagan White House during the Iran-contra scandal. Yet he was evenhanded in his attacks: As a member of the House Banking and Financial Services Committee, he led the

charge in 1994 against Bill and Hillary Clinton over their involvement in the failed Madison Guaranty Savings and Loan Association, part of the Whitewater scandal.

Considered one of Capitol Hill’s most well-informed regulators, Mr. Leach repeatedly proved prescient about government banking rules. In the late 1990s, he warned of the systemic risk posed by the emerging derivatives trading sector, a corner of the industry that helped drive the 2008 financial crisis.

His crystal ball was not always clear: In 1999, he joined two fellow

During his 30 years in Congress, he resisted his party’s rightward tilt.

Republicans, Senator Phil Gramm of Texas and Representative Thomas J. Biley Jr. of Virginia, in their successful legislation to repeal the Glass-Steagall Act, a Depression-era law that prevented commercial banks from selling securities. Many economists blame that change for the 2008 crisis.

Mr. Leach moved further from his party in the 2000s. He was one of only six Republicans to vote against authorizing the use of force against Iraq in 2002, and the next year he was one of just three Republicans to vote against President George W. Bush’s package of tax cuts.

Mr. Leach insisted on running positive campaigns. During his bid for re-election in 2006, he threatened to break with the Republican Party after it distributed fliers in his district attacking his Democratic opponent’s support for gay marriage.

He knew his opponent, David Loebsack, well. A political science professor at Cornell College in Mount Vernon, Iowa, Mr. Loebsack had invited him to lecture to his class and called him “a good

man” on the campaign trail. Still, he beat Mr. Leach in what was widely considered a dismal year for Republicans nationwide.

Still nominally a Republican, Mr. Leach not only endorsed Mr. Obama in 2008 but also spoke at the Democratic National Convention that summer in Denver. Mr. Obama subsequently named him chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

James Albert Smith Leach was born on Oct. 15, 1942, in Davenport, Iowa, to James Leach, who owned several small businesses, and Lois (Hill) Leach, a community activist.

He was a state wrestling champion in high school and studied politics at Princeton, from which he graduated in 1964. He received a master’s degree in Soviet studies from Johns Hopkins University in 1966 and later studied at the London School of Economics.

Mr. Leach joined the Foreign Service in 1968 and worked on Soviet relations and disarmament issues.

He resigned in 1973 after President Richard M. Nixon ordered his attorney general, Elliot Richardson, to fire Archibald Cox, the special counsel investigating the Watergate break-in. Mr. Richardson refused, and resigned; William Ruckelshaus, the deputy attorney general, refused in turn and resigned as well in what became known as the Saturday Night Massacre.

“All Foreign Service officers of any rank are presidential appointees,” Mr. Leach told the National Endowment for the Humanities. “I concluded that I couldn’t serve the president from that time on.”

He returned home to work for one of his father’s businesses.

Recruited by the local Republican Party, he first ran for Congress in 1974. He lost narrowly, despite the country’s post-Watergate backlash against Republicans. He ran again in 1976 and won.

Mr. Leach married Elizabeth Foxley, known as Deba, in 1975. Along with their daughter, she



SHEPARD SHERBELL/CORBIS, VIA GETTY IMAGES

Representative Jim Leach of Iowa at the 1992 Republican National Convention in Houston. Left, Mr. Leach with President George W. Bush at a rally in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in 2002. Although he supported Mr. Bush, Mr. Leach was one of six Republicans to vote against authorizing the use of force against Iraq that year.



TIM SLOAN/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

survives him, as do their son, Gallagher, and two grandchildren.

Unlike many colleagues who follow their congressional careers with cushy lobbying jobs, Mr. Leach went into academia. In addition to running the National Endowment for the Humanities, he taught at Princeton, Harvard and the University of Iowa, where he was also the interim head of the

school’s art museum in 2018.

He remained active in politics, too. He endorsed Joseph R. Biden in 2020, the same year he joined more than 150 other Republicans in a letter saying that Donald J. Trump was unfit to serve as president.

He announced he was switching to the Democratic Party in 2022.

David Bonderman, 82, Pioneer in the Private Equity World

By MICHAEL J. de la MERCED

David Bonderman, a founder of the giant investment firm TPG, who helped transform private equity into a multitrillion-dollar industry that reshaped corporate America, died on Dec. 11. He was 82.

His death was announced by his family, TPG and the Seattle Kraken, the National Hockey League franchise he co-founded. The cause and place of death were not disclosed.

Mr. Bonderman, a lawyer, took various legal paths over his career — law professor, civil rights lawyer, corporate lawyer — before becoming a financier. That led him to create what is now TPG, a \$239 billion behemoth that buys companies, invests in start-ups, makes loans and more.

TPG is one of the biggest players in what Wall Street calls alternative investments, among the fastest-growing businesses in finance, and has minted many Midas-level fortunes. Mr. Bonderman had an estimated net worth of about \$6.7 billion, according to Forbes.

Though he stepped down from day-to-day management at TPG about a decade ago, he retained the title nonexecutive chairman.

“David Bonderman was one of the most creative and innovative deal makers since 1990,” Stephen A. Schwarzman, a founder of



ELAINE THOMPSON/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Mr. Bonderman in 2018. He also was involved in historic preservation, playing a key role in the survival of Grand Central Terminal in Manhattan.

Blackstone and a longtime rival, said in a statement. Henry R. Kravis of KKR, another competitor, said Mr. Bonderman was “a real pioneer in the alternative investment space.”

TPG’s core business, private equity — in which investors borrow money to acquire companies, restructure their operations and then resell them — became so successful that many of its tactics are now common across corporate America.

But when Mr. Bonderman set

An unconventional figure who was one of the industry’s most creative deal makers.

up TPG (originally known as the Texas Pacific Group) in 1993 with James Coulter and William S. Price III, private equity was largely about small partnerships pursuing small deals. The three were part of a generation of financiers — including Mr. Schwarzman; Mr. Kravis and George R. Roberts of KKR; and David M. Rubenstein of Carlyle — who turned the business into much more.

Yet Mr. Bonderman eschewed the traditional trappings of a Wall Street mogul. Known as Bondo to friends and colleagues, he often preferred khakis and loud socks to suits. He favored Diet Coke over fine wine. And guests at his firm’s annual meetings weren’t staid establishment figures like politicians; they were often celebrities like Jimmy Buffett and Elton John.

“He brought rock ‘n’ roll into an industry that seemed to be playing only classical music,” Mr. Coulter said in an interview.

The unconventional figure that Mr. Bonderman cut fit his unorthodox professional path.

David Bonderman was born on Nov. 27, 1942, in Los Angeles to Marguerite and Aaron Bonderman. He graduated from the University of Washington in 1963 and from Harvard Law School in 1966.

International matters were a particular interest: His undergraduate major was Russian studies, and at Harvard he won a fellowship that took him to the Middle East, where he became fluent in Arabic.

Mr. Bonderman taught law at Tulane University in New Orleans before joining the Justice Department under President Lyndon B. Johnson, focusing on civil rights. After Richard M. Nixon became president, Mr. Bonderman left government and briefly studied Islamic law in Tunis and Cairo before joining Arnold & Porter, a prestigious Washington law firm.

It was there that he established himself as a skilled negotiator by, among other things, persuading the Supreme Court to overturn the insider-trading conviction of his client Raymond Dirks, a securities analyst turned whistleblower.

When Mr. Bonderman was in his 40s, he drew the attention of Robert M. Bass, a Texas oil baron, who pitched him on helping him invest his fortune. Mr. Bonderman protested that he had no qualifications, having never even taken an accounting course; Mr. Bass responded that he had no idea what he was doing either.

At Mr. Bass’s family office, Mr. Bonderman led profitable transactions, including the takeover of American Savings and Loan Association during the banking crisis of the late 1980s. By 1992, he and Mr. Coulter had struck out on their own, buying the embattled Continental Airlines out of bankruptcy and turning it around.

The next year, the two men and



STEPHEN B. MORTON/ASSOCIATED PRESS

David Bonderman, center, in 2018, the year the Seattle Kraken, the N.H.L. franchise that he co-founded, gained board approval.

Mr. Price founded the Texas Pacific Group, headquartered in Fort Worth and San Francisco. Their goal was to create an investment firm that did not follow the Wall Street mold.

“We never wanted to be the biggest private equity firm,” Mr. Coulter said, “but we wanted to be among the most interesting.”

Mr. Bonderman became a jet-setting deal maker, crisscrossing the globe to establish TPG in Asia and elsewhere. (By some colleagues’ estimates, he annually racked up more than 1,000 hours in the air for years.) TPG became known for investing in prominent companies, including Burger King, Creative Artists Agency, Petco and, twice, J. Crew.

Mr. Bonderman’s reputation as a corporate turnaround artist grew: The Obama administration named him a director of General Motors in 2009 after it rescued that troubled automaker.

Not all of TPG’s bets worked. Several deals it struck shortly before the 2008 global financial crisis, including the takeovers of the Texas utility TXU and the casino giant Caesars, eventually went

bad.

But Mr. Bonderman helped lead TPG into other kinds of investing, including the lucrative business of backing fast-growing start-ups. The firm became an investor in companies like Uber, Airbnb and Spotify, and was known for extracting highly favorable terms in exchange for its money. (Mr. Bonderman resigned from the board of Uber in 2017 after making a sexist remark about women at a meeting.)

Finance was not the only field in which he made a mark. He became involved in historic preservation, playing a key role in the survival of Grand Central Terminal in Manhattan. He donated to wilderness conservation efforts, including through the Wilderness Society and the World Wildlife Fund.

He also led a group of investors who helped create the Kraken, which brought professional hockey back to Seattle for the first time since the 1970s.

Mr. Bonderman is survived by his wife, Laurie Michaels; five children; and three grandchildren.

Deaths	Deaths	Deaths
Goer Baron, Felice Malman, Lottie Weintraub, Freddi	admired for her long service as a practitioner of immigration law in New York, where she positively affected so many lives. Born in Brooklyn in 1953, Freddi grew up in Oceanside, N.Y., and received her bachelor’s degree from the University of Massachusetts and her J.D. from New York Law School. Freddi spent most of her professional career with the law firm of Fragomen Del Rey Bernsen and Loewy, where she served as corporate immigration counsel to clients in a wide range of industries, and frequently represented individuals and organizations on a pro bono basis, her commitment to public service earning her honors from New York’s City Bar Justice Center and The Legal Aid Society. Freddi also served as an Adjunct Professor at Rutgers University Law School, as well as a Guest Lecturer in Immigration Law at New York Law School and at the City University of New York Graduate Center. She was a frequent speaker at national and international conferences and was quoted in national magazines and newspapers on a variety of topics related to U.S. immigration and nationality law. While earning accolades for her legal and humanitarian work, it was Freddi’s joy for which she will be most missed, a vibrant life she brought to everyone she encountered and that she carried into every aspect of her life. Freddi was a steadfast mentor, an inspiring leader and a trusted friend. Her wisdom, generosity and joy taught everyone	who were fortunate to come into contact with her. Her success is rooted in loving what you do and sharing that love with others. Freddi was a beloved sister to Jeff (Pennv Howell), devoted aunt to Harry, a close and indispensable cousin to Merri Siegel (Greg) and Jessica Beyer and their families and a loving stepmother to Emma and Eric Martin. Donations in Freddi’s memory may be made to the Safe Passage Project (www.safepassageproject.org), which provides free legal services to vulnerable immigrant and refugee children seeking protection from persecution and violence. A celebration of Freddi’s life is planned for early February in New York City.
GAER BARAN—Felice.  The Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights of A.J.C. mourns the loss of a renowned human rights champion whose vast knowledge, strategic brilliance, and fierce commitment catalyzed greater protection and justice for countless people. Over an incredible career, including 20 years as an expert member of the United Nations Committee against Torture, 12 years on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, and 31 years as JBI Director, Felice’s conviction that the universal human rights framework is essential to secure protection and freedom for all made an indelible imprint on the world, and her legacy inspires us to action. JBI Administrative Council, Jerry Biederman, Chair; Christen Broecker, Director. Obituary at https://tinyurl.com/Felicegoer	MALMAN—Lottie. born June 8, 1919, died in her sleep on December 13, 2024 at 105. Lottie was the beloved mother of Arthur (Laurie) Malman, the grandmother of Heidi (Craig) Albert, Jessica (Drew) Phillips and Dana (Joshua) Warren and the great-grandmother of Jared, Talia, Reid and Heath Albert, Emily and Olivia Phillips and Madeline, Liliana and Isabella Warren. A talented pianist, Lottie instilled in her family the love of music and dance and the colors lavender and pink. A graveside service was held at the Sharay Pordes Cemetery in East Hampton.	PARDO—Andrew “Andy.” Feb. 29, 1940–Dec. 19, 2023 Miss you every day. My one and only love! Ruth.
WEINTRAUB—Freddi.  We are saddened to announce the passing of Freddi Weintraub in White Plains, NY on November 30, 2024 after a long illness, six days shy of her 71st birthday. Freddi was beloved by her friends, colleagues and family, and		In Memoriam PARDO—Andrew “Andy.” Feb. 29, 1940–Dec. 19, 2023 Miss you every day. My one and only love! Ruth. 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 TO NYTIMES@CLASSIFIEDSPUS.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 12:45 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: Celebrate a Life

Memorialize and celebrate a loved one in the pages of The New York Times.

For more information, visit advertising.nytimes.com or call 1-800-458-5522.

Life-changing roles for the Glindas and Elphabas across two decades of ‘Wicked.’



On pointe, the male Trocks balance comedy and talent.

The Library of Congress adds 25 varied titles to its registry.

Arts

The New York Times



Buy, Donate, Repeat

At 91, Leonard A. Lauder's appetite for collecting and giving is as voracious as ever.

By CAROL VOGEL

In the 1980s, when major collectors were scooping up paintings by Monet and Matisse, Leonard A. Lauder, the philanthropist and cosmetics heir, was forging his own path with Cubism, collecting Picasso and Braque, its pioneers.

Decades before, rather than amassing hotel postcards to send to friends and family, Lauder began collecting them wherever he went.

And when trustees at places like the Museum of Modern Art were writing checks to build new and bigger buildings, Lauder was intent on increasing the endowment of the Whitney Museum of American Art, where he is its chairman emeritus.

“Here’s the weird thing about me,” he said over lunch in his Manhattan apartment, before a wall of photographs by Irving Penn. “I rarely give money to an institution for their ideas. I create my own.”

Then he added, “Just as most collectors give a big gift and then it’s over, I never stop.”

It’s been 11 years since Lauder promised the Metropolitan Museum of Art 78 Cubist paintings, drawings and sculptures worth more than \$1 billion, a gift that instantly transformed the Met’s Cubist holdings to one that scholars say exceeds such world-class institutions as the Museum of Modern Art in New York; the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia; and the Pompidou Center in Paris.

Yet at 91 his thirst for collecting is as voracious as ever. Since the gift was first announced, Lauder, the emeritus chairman of the Estée Lauder Companies — whose fortune was estimated by Forbes this year at \$15.1 billion — has quietly added 12 major Cubist works to the Met’s holdings, by art-

Leonard A. Lauder at his Upper East Side apartment with photographs by Irving Penn.

KYLE BUCHANAN | THE PROJECTIONIST

Some Early Inklings Of Best Picture Nods

Which films will be nominated next month for the top Oscar? Predictions include ‘Anora,’ ‘Conclave’ and ‘Emilia Pérez.’

OSCAR SEASON kicked into high gear this month, transforming a race that once appeared to be wide-open into something with a little more shape.

What can be gleaned about this year’s crop of best picture contenders now that we’ve gotten nominations from the Golden Globes and Independent Spirit Awards, wins from the Gotham Awards, and a variety of critics’ groups picking their favorites? Below, I’ll project the films that I believe have the best shot at making the Oscars’ top category.

First, a disclaimer: Few of the groups that have weighed in so far include actual Oscar voters, and many of the early honors are decided by small juries that are dwarfed by the academy’s huge voter roll, which includes nearly 10,000 members. Still, these awards bodies and tastemaker groups shape perception and help winnow the field. As busy Oscar voters begin their quests to catch up on all the contenders, the movies that have already been doing well are likeliest to receive the most sampling.

I’ll begin with what I’ve been calling the A-B-C-D-E tier, the five strongest best picture bets that just so happen to begin with the first five letters of the alphabet.

CONTINUED ON PAGE C2

LAURA COLLINS-HUGHES | THEATER REVIEW

A Hard-Knock Life Is Still So Sweet

That plucky orphan returns to the stage, with a little help from a well-known name.

THE DIFFICULTY with star casting, for a potential theatergoer, is that you never know if it’s merely a gimmick — a famous face who’s been hired to goose a play’s box office, but might not deliver much onstage. And when the celebrity is swooping into an existing production, taking over a role for just a stretch, there is also the question of chemistry.

Annie
Theater at Madison Square Garden

istry. Will the well-known actor blend with the show?

Glad tidings, then, from the holiday run of “Annie” at the Theater at Madison Square Garden, where Whoopi Goldberg is giving a rib-ticklingly funny, extremely smart performance as the tipsy, terrorizing Miss Hannigan, bane of all the orphans in her care. If Goldberg the TV talk-show presence has eclipsed in your mind Goldberg the savvy comic actor, her Miss Hannigan will jog your memory.

There is, for example, the weary, what-

CONTINUED ON PAGE C3



SARA KRULWICH/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Hazel Vogel, left, as Annie and Whoopi Goldberg as Miss Hannigan in a revival of the musical “Annie,” which runs through Jan. 5 at the Theater at Madison Square Garden.

KYLE BUCHANAN | THE PROJECTIONIST

Early Hints Of Rivals For Oscars’ Top Prize

CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1

‘Anora’
This comedy about a sex worker’s impulsive marriage to a wealthy Russian scion is off to a strong start: After winning the Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival in May, “Anora” opened in October to the year’s best per-screen average. Over the past few weeks, the film has won the best picture award from the Los Angeles Film Critics Association and netted great nomination hauls from the Golden Globes and the Indie Spirits. (The fact that both groups recognized the lesser-known supporting actor Yura Borisov is a sign of just how well the film is playing.) Still, here’s the most important thing: Whenever I talk to voters and industry insiders about their favorite films of the year, “Anora” gets by far the most shout-outs. It’s the passion pick and our current pack leader.

‘The Brutalist’
If serious-minded voters fail to spark to “Anora,” they’ve got a weighty alternative in “The Brutalist.” This drama about a mid-century Hungarian architect (Adrien Brody) who emigrates to America has Very Important Ideas on its mind, including anti-semitism in the years following World War II, the compromises necessary when an artist creates works at a grand scale and the rapacious nature of American capitalism. Directed by Brady Corbet, “The Brutalist” won first-place honors from the New York Film Critics Circle and the runner-up prize from its Los Angeles counterpart, in addition to picking up seven Golden Globe nominations. This three-and-a-half-hour drama (including an intermission!) won’t be an easy box-office sell as it begins to roll into theaters this week, but Oscar voters will be impressed by Corbet’s ambition and the film’s staggering scale.

‘Conclave’
This juicy potboiler about the plot to elect a new pope features almost as much back-channeling, bitter rivalries and surprise twists as an actual Oscar season. Fitting, then, that it should be one of the safest best picture contenders. Everybody seems to like “Conclave,” which is handsomely filmed by the director Edward Berger, whose recent remake of “All Quiet on the Western Front” won four Oscars. But do they love it enough that “Conclave” can go the distance and actually win best picture? It’ll take a few more rounds of secret votes before we know the answer to that one.

‘Dune: Part Two’
The first “Dune” won six Oscars, and since the sequel received even better reviews and box-office returns, a best picture berth appears all but certain. Still, there may be limits on just how far the spice can flow: The filmmaker Denis Villeneuve was denied a best director nod for the first film, and his fresh snub from the Golden Globes last week suggests that history could repeat itself. A better best picture campaign could have been mounted if the movie and press tour had not telegraphed that a third installment was in the works; if “Part Two” in-



WARNER BROS.



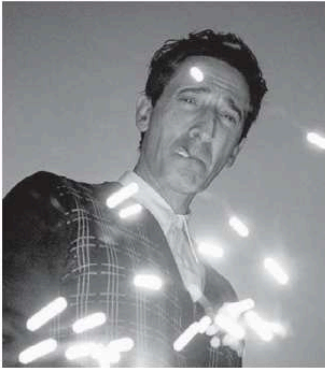
A24



SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES, VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS



NEON



LOL CRAWLEY/A24

stead appeared to end the series, voters would have been more inclined to bestow rewards now instead of waiting to see how the whole thing turns out.

‘Emilia Pérez’
Does Jacques Audiard’s unconventional Netflix musical have a shot at winning best picture? After taking major prizes at the European Film Awards, including best picture, director, actress and screenplay, “Emilia Pérez” picked up 10 Golden Globe nominations, the second-biggest haul any film has ever received there. Social-media users may have blanched at the film’s indelicate portrayal of transgender issues — co-star Selena Gomez’s Spanish has taken some online drubbing, too — but those kinds of controversies rarely penetrate the academy conclave. There is no best picture contender as bold as “Emilia Pérez,” and that alone could propel the film to victory.

Clockwise from top: Zendaya, left, and Timothée Chalamet in “Dune: Part Two”; Kieran Culkin, left, and Jesse Eisenberg in “A Real Pain”; Adrien Brody in “The Brutalist”; Mark Eydelshteyn, center left, and Mikey Madison in “Anora”; and Colman Domingo, left, and Clarence Maclin in “Sing Sing.”

In addition to the A-B-C-D-E tier, three more movies appear to be good bets for a best picture nomination.

‘Wicked’
ABC and the academy must be breathing a sigh of relief that “Wicked” has turned out so well: After the last Oscar telecast got a ratings bump thanks to the populist blockbusters “Oppenheimer” and “Barbie,” this year’s crop of initial contenders looked positively puny in comparison. But “Wicked” has come on strong at the box office, far surpassing even “Dune: Part Two” with a domestic haul that could reach \$500 million, and the film has proved just as popular with early voting groups, scoring key Golden Globe nominations, best film and director trophies from the National Board of Review and 11 nominations from the Critics Choice Awards. Forget green and pink: “Wicked” has its eye on gold.

‘Star Trek II’ and ‘Dirty Dancing’ Join Film Registry

‘No Country for Old Men’ was also among the 25 selected by the Library of Congress.

By DERRICK BRYSON TAYLOR

Attention all Trekkies: The Library of Congress is doing its part to ensure that “Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan” will live long and prosper.

That 1982 film, which chronicles an epic battle between James T. Kirk and a vengeful tyrant and is often considered the best of the six original-cast “Star Trek” theatrical movies, is among the 25 films selected for preservation this year in the Library of Congress’s National Film Registry, the library announced on Tuesday.

Also being added are “Invaders From Mars” (1953), an indie film about a boy who discovers that space aliens are taking over the minds of Earthlings, and the horror film “The Texas Chain Saw Massacre” (1974), which was initially condemned by many for its violence. “Beverly Hills Cop” (1984), the action-comedy starring Eddie Murphy, was also selected.

The films, from 1895 to 2010, were chosen for their cultural, historic or aesthetic importance, said Carla Hayden, the Librarian of Congress.

They represent an array of genres and filmmakers and include Hollywood landmarks, and were selected in consultation with experts. The number of titles in the registry is now 900.

“Films reflect our nation’s history and culture and must be preserved in our national library for generations to come,” Hayden said in a statement. “We’re honored by the responsibility to add 25 diverse new films to the National Film Registry each year as we work to preserve our cultural heritage.”

The library also allows the public to make nominations on its website, and this year more than 6,700 films were nominated for consideration. Several titles that received strong public support have now been added to the list, including “Dirty Dancing” (1987),

the Patrick Swayze and Jennifer Grey-led film that, between the dance moves, explores topics like abortion, classism and antisemitism; “No Country for Old Men” (2007), the Coen brothers’ neo-western that won the Academy Award for Best Picture in 2008; and “The Social Network” (2010), about the creation of Facebook.

Andy Warhol also made the list, with “The Chelsea Girls” (1966), a film he directed with Paul Morrissey.

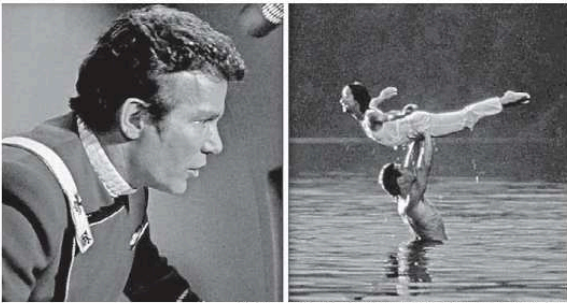
Five works by Black directors, who have historically been overlooked in film archives, were selected for this year’s list, including “Ganja & Hess” (1973), directed by Bill Gunn; Sidney Poitier’s “Uptown Saturday Night” (1974); a group of six student films (1975-76) by Zora Lathan; Jessie Maple’s “Will” (1981), considered the first independent feature-length film directed by a Black woman; and “Compensation” (1999), directed by Zeinabu irene Davis.

The selection committee also chose films by Hispanic artists. “American Me” (1992) was directed by Edward James Olmos, the American-born Latino actor who has been outspoken about representation in Hollywood. “Mi Familia” (1995), directed by Gregory Nava, is the third of Nava’s films to appear in the registry.

The comedy “Up in Smoke” (1978) features Cheech Marin, and so does “Spy Kids” (2001), which also stars Antonio Banderas. “Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan” stars Ricardo Montalbán, one of Hollywood’s first Latino leading men, as Khan.

Hayden said that the selection process was a collective effort in the film community and included contributions from the National Film Preservation Board, led by Jacqueline Stewart.

“What’s remarkable to me is that every year when the board talks about films and their significance, we find new titles to consider,” Stewart said in a statement. “I’m thrilled that we recognize student films and independent films, animation, documentary and experimental works, as well as feature-length narrative drama, comedy, horror and science fiction on the registry this year.”



PARAMOUNT PICTURES; GREAT AMERICAN FILMS LIMITED PARTNERSHIP

From left: William Shatner in “Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan”; and Patrick Swayze and Jennifer Grey in the pop-culture touchstone “Dirty Dancing.”

These are the latest additions to the National Film Registry:

1. “Annabelle Serpentine Dance” (1895)
2. “KoKo’s Earth Control” (1928)
3. “Angels With Dirty Faces” (1938)
4. “Pride of the Yankees” (1942)
5. “Invaders From Mars” (1953)
6. “The Miracle Worker” (1962)
7. “The Chelsea Girls” (1966)
8. “Ganja & Hess” (1973)
9. “The Texas Chain Saw Massacre” (1974)
10. “Uptown Saturday Night” (1974)
11. Zora Lathan student films (1975-76)
12. “Up in Smoke” (1978)
13. “Will” (1981)
14. “Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan” (1982)
15. “Beverly Hills Cop” (1984)
16. “Dirty Dancing” (1987)
17. “Common Threads: Stories From the Quilt” (1989)
18. “Powwow Highway” (1989)
19. “My Own Private Idaho” (1991)
20. “American Me” (1992)
21. “Mi Familia” (1995)
22. “Compensation” (1999)
23. “Spy Kids” (2001)
24. “No Country for Old Men” (2007)
25. “The Social Network” (2010)

JEOPARDY!

CLUE OF THE DAY

SUPER BOWL HISTORY

IT'S THE ONLY TEAM TO PLAY IN THE SUPER BOWL BEFORE NEIL ARMSTRONG'S MOON WALK THAT HAS NOT BEEN BACK TO THE BIG GAME SINCE

FOR THE CORRECT RESPONSE, WATCH JEOPARDY! TONIGHT OR LOOK IN THIS SPACE TOMORROW IN THE TIMES.

Yesterday's Response: WHAT ARE THE FALKLAND ISLANDS?

Watch JEOPARDY!

7 p.m. on Channel 7

The New York Times Games

Download the New York Times Games app.

JEFFREY ARLO BROWN | CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

An Exiled Conductor's Once and Future Orchestras

John Eliot Gardiner assembles a new group after being banished from his ensembles.

HAMBURG, GERMANY — Marten Root, a flutist specializing in historical instruments, has played under the conductor John Eliot Gardiner for more than 35 years and considers him a profoundly intelligent and honest musician.

Root, 68, also has had severe enough verbal disagreements with Gardiner, 81, that he twice temporarily quit working with him. The reasons were “incidents which happen if you're a flute player in an orchestra,” Root said in a video interview. “You're the top of the score. You're always in the line of fire.”

Both times, he returned. Playing under Gardiner, an eminent performer of Baroque music who has recorded every single Bach cantata, was “no easy job to do,” Root said, “but basically, I decided to go back to the orchestra twice, because it's musically more than worth it.”

In August last year, Gardiner struck the singer William Thomas after a performance of the opera “Les Troyens” in France. Gardiner apologized and announced that he was temporarily withdrawing from all conducting.

Now, Gardiner has returned — but not with his old organization, Monteverdi Choir & Orchestras, which didn't want him back. Instead, Gardiner has just completed a tour with a new ensemble he founded, the Constellation Choir & Orchestra.

The two groups almost collided recently, playing nearly identical concerts at the Elbphilharmonie here in Hamburg on Dec. 7 and on Saturday. Heard so closely together, the performances offered an unusual glimpse of what is ahead for Gardiner's once and future ensembles. Although the concerts looked similar on paper, they sounded strikingly different.

Gardiner's collaborators remain some of his fiercest defenders. “Let's face it, nice guys don't win ball games,” Root said. The mezzo-soprano Alice Coote told The Times of London that Gardiner had struggled through the five-hour performance of “Les Troyens” in sweltering heat and had been “angered” when he didn't receive a standing ovation.

Away from the podium, he underwent cognitive behavioral therapy and took anger management classes. “My whole life, I tried to understand and get a grip on anger — and I was completely shocked by what I did,” he told the Süddeutsche Zeitung newspaper recently. (Gardiner did not respond to an interview request.)

In July, Gardiner returned to performance, leading the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France in a concert of pieces by Von Weber, Tchaikovsky and Beethoven. A short time later, the Monteverdi Choir & Orchestras, an umbrella organization that includes the English Baroque Soloists, the Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique and the Monteverdi Choir — all groups founded by Gardiner — decided not to invite him back.

“The M.C.O takes seriously its obligations to protect victims of abuse and assault, and preventing any recurrence remains a priority for the organization,” the



Above, Constellation Choir, John Eliot Gardiner's new ensemble. Gardiner, right, was banned from his old groups after striking a singer. Below, Christophe Rousset leads the English Baroque Soloists and the Monteverdi Choir, founded by Gardiner.

Monteverdi Choir & Orchestras said in a statement.

Musicians like Root were frustrated by the decision, seeing Gardiner as a singular artist who has taken sincere, specific steps to improve his behavior after a mistake. Classical music commentators, though, identified a familiar dynamic in which eminent conductors are held to a more forgiving standard of behavior than leaders in other fields. Gardiner's quick return to performance, the journalist Andrew Mellor wrote in the trade publication Classical Music, “is a damning indictment of our industry's unwillingness to change.”

When Gardiner founded the Constellation Choir & Orchestra in September, many performers from his old groups were happy to follow him. The oboist Michael Niesenmann, 64, has played under Gardiner for 32 years, including in the new ensemble, and said in a phone interview, “Plainly and simply, we want to continue to try to bring light into the world with the music.”

The German soprano Marie Luise Werneburg, 40, who recently made her debut under Gardiner, said that the first rehearsals after his break were friendly yet exacting. Gardiner commented on some drawings Werneburg's children had made in her score. “That created a totally kind and relaxed atmosphere,” she said in a phone interview.

Given the speed with which Gardiner launched Constellation, and the ensuing split from the Monteverdi organization, some awkwardness was inevitable. When



PHOTOGRAPHS BY DANIEL DITTUS

Gardiner hit Thomas, the visit to the Elbphilharmonie this month by the English Baroque Soloists and the Monteverdi Choir was already scheduled. Promoters were faced with a choice to book the famous conductor with his new ensemble, or the organization he built over decades, led by Christophe Rousset, the harpsichordist and respected guest conductor for his tour. Only the Elbphilharmonie decided to invite both.

Arrangements for the dueling tours recalled a family trying to salvage a non-refundable vacation booked before a messy divorce. In an interview, Christoph Lieben-Seutter, the general and artistic director of the Elbphilharmonie, said that he scheduled the back-to-back performances because he didn't want to deny performers work.

“I think it was a generous solution,” he said, “for both the musicians and the audience.”

The Dec. 7 concert was the Constellation Orchestra & Choir's debut. Because of a delayed flight, the performance started 40 minutes late, and in the first piece, Bach's cantata “Schwingt freudig euch empor,” the group sounded like it was still adjusting to the hall's acoustic, with a thin ensemble sound and muddy attacks.

They quickly found their footing, however. Their performances of Charpentier's “Messe de Minuit pour Noël” and Bach's “Unser Mund sei voll Lachens” showed excellent balance and moments of dynamic daring. The Bach aria “Auch mit gedämpften, schwachen Stimmen,” which Werneburg sung accompanied by the solo violinist Kati Debretzeni, was stunningly soft and tender.

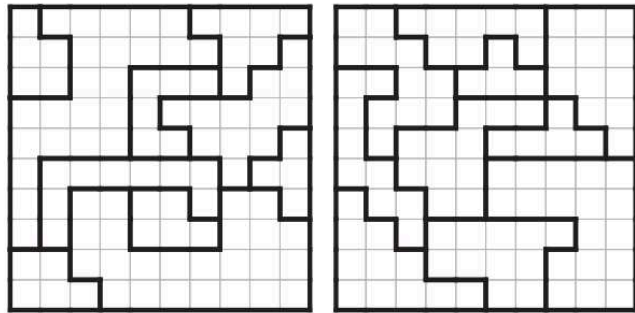
Gardiner's interpretations emphasized continuity of line, and he made sure that individual accents or ornaments didn't overwhelm larger musical phrases. But his approach neglected the gestural, almost linguistic aspects of the Baroque repertoire that give the music such topographic variety.

In the Saturday performance, by Gardiner's old ensembles and Rousset, the same music was enlivened by a broader palette of articulations, including pungent, non-vibrato long notes, fleet-footed short notes and assertive accents. The strings created a beautifully earthy sound, though their enthusiasm made it hard to hear soft instruments like the theorbo. Passages of ornamentation sounded spontaneous and tasteful; the group's excellent articulation extended to the singers' clear renditions of the words.

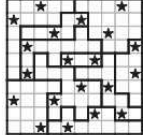
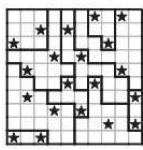
The concerts offered strong and overlapping pleasures. Rousset's was more sharply etched, but the Constellation Orchestra & Choir offered a thrill beyond the music: the chance for the audience to witness Gardiner's redemption arc. Of the two conductors, he received the more rapturous reception.

In a brief speech in German before his encore, he noted that his time away from music had been hard. “We must pass through great sadness to reach the kingdom of God,” he said, nodding to a Bach cantata, and added that the concert felt like the beginning of a new chapter. The musicians beamed. This time, the audience gave him a standing ovation.

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.

Copyright © 2024 www.krazydad.com

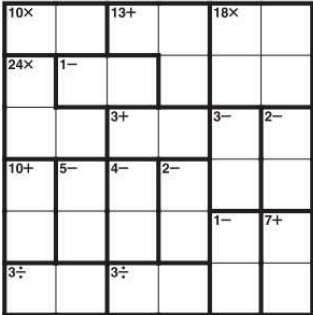
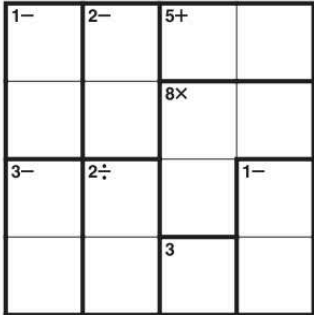
Cryptogram

FYK OUWF WNGQHGHED BHQHO MUG QKFKGUE OHQKC
OAED KEANDY FA WKK FYK ZAGKUE MUG BAEBONCK.

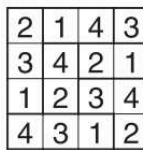
PUZZLE BY BEN BASS

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER 1. Brittle 2. Connote 3. Foresee

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.

For more games: www.nytimes.com/games

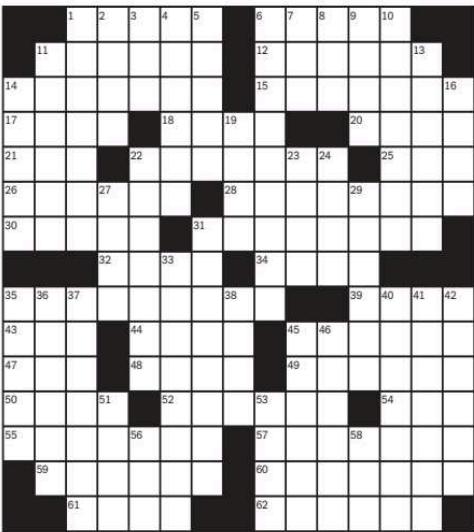
KenKen® is a registered trademark of Nextoy, LLC. Copyright © 2024 www.KENKEN.com. All rights reserved.

Crossword Edited by Joel Fagliano

PUZZLE BY BRANDON KOPPY

- ACROSS**
- 1 Some mustangs
 - 6 Comedian Ken of “The Masked Singer”
 - 11 Laser-focused mindset
 - 12 They might be standing
 - 14 Vegas nickname
 - 15 Unfair judgments
 - 17 Stopping point for a cruise ... or Crusoe
 - 18 Commoner
 - 20 “Say no more”
 - 21 Nowhere to be found, informally
 - 22 Parenthetical on four #1 albums since 2021
 - 25 Cellular data?
 - 26 Disparate
 - 28 Its home is on the range
 - 30 Nasty look
 - 31 Speed limit, of a sort
 - 32 “That makes sense now”
 - 34 Illicit info
 - 35 Sticky treats, in more ways than one?
 - 39 Fictional queen of Arendelle
 - 43 Greek consonant
- DOWN**
- 44 “That makes sense now”
 - 45 With 45-Down, displays during an online presentation ... or a hint to three pairs of answers in this puzzle
 - 47 Alternatives to ands or buts
 - 48 Spelling Bee rank between Solid and Great
 - 49 Had over
 - 50 Hand (out)
 - 52 Shake deeply
 - 54 ____-Way, brand of plows and salt spreaders
 - 55 Attention-grabbing appearance, maybe
 - 57 “Still good to meet up?”
 - 59 Beam of light
 - 60 Baby bear?
 - 61 Chums
 - 62 Mount Vernon or Monticello

- ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE**
- POSY RBI CABLE
UHAUL ORC ISLES
FANTA GREENPEAS
FRAZZLE EVE UFO
YEN EARL IAM
TOSS ALLSORTS
SONEPEE TRAIT
CONSIDERTHEODDS
ALIEN ETSY SOY
FOOTNOTE PEEN
SOB STEM TBA
IFS VIM ARCHERS
SITUATION EASES
ADAPT MLK ESTEE
WORSE IDS PSST



12/19/24

- 3 What selfish athletes spell “team” with, presumably
- 4 Take-home amount
- 5 With craft
- 6 Websites with employment opportunities
- 7 Theodore Roosevelt ushered in a “Progressive” one
- 8 Quirky
- 9 Burning man?
- 10 Charlie brought his to the chocolate factory
- 11 See 11-Across
- 13 Kind of cord
- 14 Nantz's longtime N.F.L. commenting partner
- 16 Devoted fan, informally
- 19 Coding catchall
- 22 See 22-Across
- 23 13th-century poet who wrote the “Masnavi”
- 24 Kerfuffle
- 27 Neckwear sometimes made with kukui nuts
- 29 Gets involved in
- 31 See 31-Across
- 33 Hedgehog lookalikes
- 35 Get one's hair just right
- 36 Futile batting statlines, in baseball lingo
- 37 Hangs out for a while
- 38 Barely makes, with “out”
- 40 “Dinner is served!”
- 41 Cross-reference for additional information
- 42 Free throw after a basket
- 45 See 45-Across
- 46 Most evasive
- 51 Sicilian landmark
- 53 Sorcerer
- 56 Something connected to a QR code
- 58 Org. for Coco Gauff

Online subscriptions: Today's puzzle and more than 9,000 past puzzles, nytimes.com/crosswords (\$39.95 a year).

Read about and comment on each puzzle: nytimes.com/wordplay.

How ‘Wicked’ Changed Its Women

By MICHAEL PAULSON and ALEXIS SOLOSKI

The graduates of Shiz University are making their alma mater proud. In the 21 years since “Wicked” opened in New York, 43 women have starred full time as Elphaba or Glinda — frenemies who meet as Shiz undergrads — and many more have taken on the vocally taxing

roles in productions across the United States and around the world. Shiz has taught them well. After leaving the show, many have gone on to glittering careers, on Broadway and beyond. Three former Elphabas were nominated for Tony Awards this year, while four former Glindas have appeared in principal roles. As a smash-hit Hollywood adaptation introduces millions more to this revisionist history of Oz, we checked in with alumnae of the stage show to ask what they learned there. These are edited excerpts from our conversations.



SARA KRULWICH/THE NEW YORK TIMES

GLINDA

Kristin Chenoweth

Chenoweth, who won a Tony Award in 1999 for “You’re a Good Man, Charlie Brown,” originated Glinda on Broadway in 2003. She is now one of Broadway’s most-loved stars and is planning to return next season in a musical adaptation of “The Queen of Versailles.”

How did you first become involved with “Wicked”?

I was called by [the composer] Stephen Schwartz himself, and he said, “Look, I’ve got this part I want you to do.” I didn’t know if I could work out the dates, but I went over to his apartment and listened to “Popular.” I thought it was really cute and I could have some fun with it, so I was involved in a workshop in L.A., and that’s how it started. I remember the producer Marc Platt going, “Kristin, every once in a while a part comes along — maybe once in a lifetime — that is like a hand to a glove, and this is your part.” Glinda was very much the side character, but they started seeing how Idina and I were working together, and it evolved into a much bigger role. That first night we opened in San Francisco, for our out-of-

town tryout, I told Idina, “It’s not going to matter what the critics say. There’s something very special here.” I just knew it.

How did it change your life?

Movies came to me. More TV came. Ultimately an Emmy Award came. I credit “Wicked” for all of that. People saw me in a different light, and it changed my world in the best possible way.

Why do you think this role has become such a training ground for women in musical theater?

It’s a very hard role. Both roles are extremely difficult, and you’ve got to have the skill set to do it. Glinda starts out one way, singing high soprano, and by the end she’s singing extremely low. You’ve got to have that layered funny, but it’s got to be masking the real insecurity of her. You can’t just show up and be cute.

ELPHABA

Idina Menzel

Menzel, Tony-nominated in 1996 for playing Maureen in “Rent,” won a 2004 Tony Award for originating Elphaba, then went on to enormous success as the voice of Elsa in Disney’s “Frozen” films. She starts previews next month for “Redwood.”

How did you begin with “Wicked”?

I had heard about it through the grapevine as being a really cool new project, and I wanted to be seen for it. I thought of Elphaba as very Goth and like Ally Sheedy in “The Breakfast Club,” so I went in, in a cool black dress with black Doc Martens and green eye shadow and green lipstick. I sang well, so they asked me to learn “Defying Gravity.” I started to get invested in it and was feeling that I was really right for it — it spoke to me. I was really desperate to get the role. I had a great audition, and was doing great, and I did “Defying Gravity,” and at the end I cracked. I looked at the accompanist and said, “I’m going to do that again,” like, “Don’t even think about moving on to the next part.” I got really angry, and I did it again, and I hit it. Joe Mantello [the musical’s director] always says that’s when he really thought I could be wicked.

What’s the craziest thing that happened to you in the show?

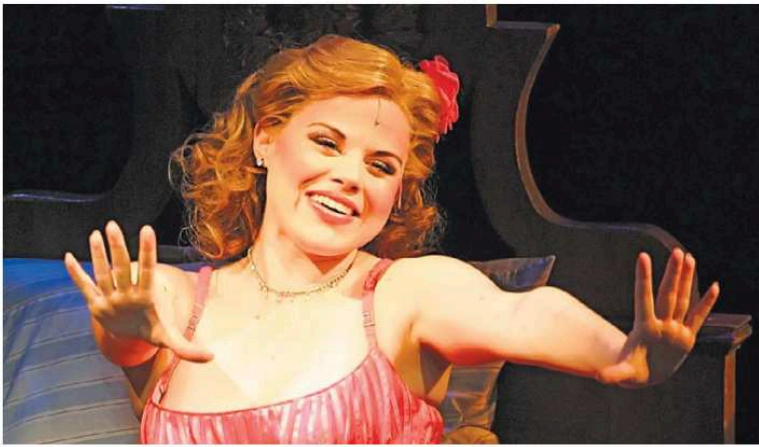
I fell and almost died? I fell through a trap door. They cued one cue early, so I walked into an empty hole and slammed my ribs. They stopped the show, literally said, “Is there a doctor in the house?,” laid me down on the floor and closed the curtain. I broke a rib — just one. The next day was scheduled to be my last performance, and they said, “If you can get there, we would love to say goodbye.” Shoshana Bean [who had taken over] did the most generous thing she could do, and stepped off two minutes before the end of the show and allowed me to come out in my red track suit, on so much Vicodin, and take a bow.

How did it change your life?

Between “Rent” and “Wicked,” there was a long chasm where I didn’t really work that much and I lost a lot of confidence. I got “Wicked,” which I was so excited about, but I felt super-insecure in the rehearsal room. Kristin’s process is remarkable to watch, she can cold read, and she’s fearless and superfast, and I just wasn’t. I felt like at any minute they would replace me. But by having to walk in Elphaba’s shoes, and face bullying and adversity onstage every day, and to have to truly find my voice and also reconcile power and sensitivity and empathy all at the same time, it changed my life. I feel like it saved me.



JOAN MARCUS



SARA KRULWICH/THE NEW YORK TIMES

ELPHABA

Stephanie J. Block

Block played Elphaba through two years of workshops and readings, then was replaced by Menzel for the pre-Broadway production in San Francisco. She understudied the role there, returned to originate Elphaba in the first national tour, and played the role on Broadway from 2007 to 2008. She went on to become a Broadway star in her own right, notching three Tony nominations and winning in 2019 for “The Cher Show.”

How do you think about your initial disappointment with “Wicked”?

Did I cry? Of course. Did I want it desperately? Of course. My heart was completely broken. But did it go exactly the way it needed to go for my life? Yeah. I met my husband on tour. I was able to buy an apartment and start a life. It was an incredible hurdle, and it completely changed my life. What I love about Elphie — she and I align — is that we have always been authentic to ourselves, and in the end we lived happily ever after.

How did “Wicked” prepare you for other shows?

Sharing a space with another strong female lead is something that every leading actress should experience. It’s fortifying and humbling, and it helps you grow. The magnitude of the role is a bit of a litmus test — it’s almost too much of a test for body, mind and spirit, but when you can do it, you walk out feeling invincible. And there’s also this really beautiful sisterhood that goes along with it, this quiet understanding between all the witches. We recognize ourselves in each other: You took it on, and you’re still standing.

Is “Wicked” still a part of your life?

Let’s be honest: It’s everywhere. I got to introduce my daughter to the piece — it was touring in Northern California and I brought her. We still have all sorts of fan art. I have lots of sweet little Elphaba figurines everywhere. And I did steal my second-act hat.

GLINDA

Megan Hilty

Hilty appeared in the role on Broadway from 2005 to 2006, the first national tour in 2006, and the Los Angeles production from 2007 to 2009. She was nominated for a Tony in 2016 for her performance in “Noises Off,” starred in the NBC Broadway drama “Smash,” and is now winning raves in the new Broadway musical “Death Becomes Her.”

What did “Wicked” teach you about yourself?

Over those years, I worked with 17 different Elphabas. The best thing that happened during “Wicked” was forging those beautiful friendships. We are [told in] narrative after narrative that there is no room for more than one woman, especially in the entertainment business. I’m eternally grateful for that very special show to ingrain in me the power of female friendship.

How did “Wicked” prepare you for your subsequent career?

It taught me how to be a leading lady. I had no idea what I was doing. I was fresh out of college and I learned quickly by example from the women around me.

What’s the craziest thing that happened to you during your run?

When I was in Los Angeles, the part where her frock turns into a ball gown, I was doing this plié, so my legs were spread wide and I was squatting down, and at the same time, I blew my hair out of my face. My microphone was right there, so you can imagine the enormous sound. It made Eden Espinosa laugh so hard. I did what I thought Glinda would do. I blamed it on her. I said, “Excuse you.”



JOAN MARCUS

GLINDA

Kate Reinders

She played Glinda in *Chicago* and on Broadway from 2005 to 2007 and then went on to star in the Broadway musical “*Something Rotten!*” and the Disney+ mockumentary “*High School Musical: The Musical: The Series*.”

What did “Wicked” teach you about yourself?

Glinda was the first time I really got to explore lots of different parts of myself. She’s funny, she’s smart, she’s silly, she’s serious. She explores the pressure to be who she thinks people want her to be. Ultimately friendship and love win over. It really is a wonderful lesson.

How did the show prepare you for your subsequent career?

I remember being in the bubble in *Chicago* and

having a moment where I thought: “It’s never going to get better than this. This is the best role in the best company. Am I peaking?” It prepared me for the reality of things to come and go. I knew it wouldn’t last forever and I just tried to really enjoy it while it was there. Once you play Glinda or Elphaba, it gets tricky. They are the best female roles available.

What’s the craziest thing that happened to you during your run?

Everybody gets stuck in the bubble. There’s always slipping and sliding and falling down a little bit. The best is when you get stuck in the bubble and just your feet are showing.

GLINDA

Annaleigh Ashford

She performed in the national tour from 2005 to 2006, on Broadway from 2007 to 2008, and in *Chicago* from 2008 to 2009. She won a Tony in 2015 for a revival of “*You Can’t Take It With You*” and has starred in revivals of “*Sweeney Todd*” and “*Sunday in the Park With George*,” as well as several TV series.

What did “Wicked” teach you about yourself?

Glinda puts her dreams ahead of her friendship, and in the end she’s the one alone. As a young person in this business, that was instrumental in the way that I viewed my future. It’s so important to make sure you have balance and perspective because it’s such a selfish, self-involved career.

How did “Wicked” prepare you for your subsequent career?

It’s a monster of a show. I found it to be extremely humbling. I still have “Wicked” nightmares. It’s been like 20 years. Once every couple of months I have a dream where I’m supposed to be playing Glinda at some point and I get onstage and I don’t know what’s happening.

What’s the craziest thing that happened to you during your run?

In New York, I fell on my butt and did a backward somersault. I fell so epically that I realized the audience was concerned about me and I had to tell the audience I was OK. I felt so very bold. And I got a great laugh.

Is “Wicked” present in your life now?

So many people have been through Shiz University, as we say. It’s a rite of passage. And it’s almost like you’re in this sisterhood. It’s a love story between these two women. There’s something really special about that.



JOAN MARCUS

ELPHABA

Jennifer DiNoia

She played Elphaba in more than 2,200 performances, and on four continents: in four American productions, as well as in Sydney, Seoul and London. She joined the show in *Chicago* as a swing in 2006 and became an understudy and a standby before landing *Elphaba*; she last played the part in 2022.

What did the role teach you?

I was a dancer and had never taken a voice lesson until I booked “Wicked.” I was kind of winging it from the beginning, and every time I’m in the show there’s new people I get to learn from. Also, I’m quite meek and awkward, while Elphaba knows who she is and doesn’t have a filter. Elphaba taught me how to find my voice, not just onstage, but in real life.

What’s the craziest thing that happened to you in the show?

When we were in *Chicago*, there was a huge blizzard one evening, and all of the power went out in the theater. The audience screamed. The generators came on and filled up the house lights, but we couldn’t finish the show. That theater is well known for being haunted, and all of the dressing rooms are downstairs with no windows. I was like, “I can’t stay here, after hours, by myself, in the dark, cleaning this makeup off.” So I hailed a cab, fully green, and went home with my full Elphaba makeup on, which I’d never done before or since. That was pretty fun.

Have you left theater?

I’ve done other theater, and a lot of readings and workshops, but my career has really only been “Wicked” for the last 17 years. Now I have an 8-year-old, and the Broadway schedule is hard to balance with real life. Being a single parent half the time, I’ve tried to lean into being present in a different way, and that’s another huge role. I played Elphaba until I was 12 weeks pregnant, and then I came back when my daughter was 8 months old. While I didn’t miss a large chunk of her life, I’ve missed parts of it, so now that she’s very aware, I’m making choices a little differently. Not that I’m done with theater — it just has to be the right project to make the sacrifices.



MATT CROCKETT



BRINKOFF-MOGENBURG

ELPHABA

Willemijn Verkaik

A Dutch actress, she has played Elphaba in more languages than anyone else: German, Dutch and English — with a British accent in the *West End* and an American accent on Broadway. She performed the role more than 2,000 times between 2007 and 2017. She is now starring in “*& Juliet*” in Germany.

Did you learn anything from Elphaba about your own power?

Yes. That I could do a lot more than I thought. I feel that with these songs I can really pour everything out of my heart — enthusiasm, courage, power, vulnerability. It’s a very demanding role, and to be able to do that every night makes you very strong. I’ve been through a lot during the years of playing the role — health issues — and even though I felt sometimes alone or weak or unhealthy, I thought, “If Elphaba can do it, I can do it, too.”

What’s the craziest thing that happened to you onstage?

I was singing “No Good Deed,” and my foot got stuck in my dress. I couldn’t get up, and I had to crawl offstage. The song is so dark and so serious, and then I was ridiculous. My colleagues laugh about it still.

How did the role change your career?

A lot. When I was in Germany, there was an open rehearsal, and someone filmed “No Good Deed.” That went viral, and it put me on the map. All of a sudden I had this international career ahead of me. I’ve been invited for all kinds of concerts and events just because of Elphaba.

ELPHABA

Lindsay Mendez

She starred in “Wicked” from 2013 to 2014, and went on to win a Tony Award for a “*Carousel*” revival in 2018. She was nominated again this year for “*Merrily We Roll Along*.”

What did “Wicked” teach you about yourself?

“Wicked” was the first show I ever led on Broadway. I had a lot of fear and insecurity going in. But I happened to step into it with Katie Rose Clarke, who played Glinda. She was so kind and easy and confident and a real team player. She taught me so much about the kind of energy to bring. My favorite parts of the show were when I was onstage with her.

How did it prepare you for your subsequent career?

The way I had to prepare my body, the way I had to take care of myself, my voice, I really had to dedicate my entire life to doing that show every night. “Wicked” taught me the discipline to do something that big every night and deliver. I just finished “*Merrily We Roll Along*.” It was such a breeze compared to “Wicked.”

What’s the craziest thing that happened to you during your run?

Derek Klena, he was my Fiyero. At the end he opens a trap door, and Elphaba comes out of it. My first weekend doing the show, he opened the trap door and it slipped out of his hands and it just fell back down and hit me in the head. It’s really heavy! I was like, “I’m bleeding.” But I kept going, because as actors, we just do that.



JOAN MARCUS

GLINDA

Brittney Johnson

The first Black actress to play Glinda on Broadway, from 2022 to 2023, Johnson is now appearing in the revival of “*Gypsy*.”

What did “Wicked” teach you about yourself?

Glinda changes so much from the beginning of the show to the end. She starts off as a self-centered person who really can’t see past her own self. Then she turns into a person who has empathy. As an actor and as a human being, it reminds you that there is room for growth in your life. You shouldn’t be the same person from year to year. Hopefully we change daily. That’s the only way to have a complete human experience.

How did “Wicked” prepare you for your subsequent career?

“Wicked” was Show No. 5 for me. I had a lot of Broadway experiences before. But it is truly unlike any other show. Once you play one of these witches, you can pretty much do anything stamina-wise. That blue bubble dress weighs 15 pounds!

Is “Wicked” still present in your life?

Someone stopped me the other day to tell me how much my performance meant to him. When somebody tells you that you touched them and changed them, it’s a very humbling experience.



JOAN MARCUS

It's Buy, Donate, Repeat for Leonard Lauder

CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1

ists including Picasso, Léger, Gris and Braque. Beyond these 20th-century masters, he is also helping the museum shore up its representation of postwar and contemporary artists, with seminal paintings by Alex Katz, Roy Lichtenstein and Larry Rivers.

On a wintry day, he pointed to a painting by Rivers, the proto-Pop artist, on an adjacent wall. (The artist died in 2002.) “Rivers was not appreciated in his time,” said Lauder, who first fell in love with his work at a show at the Jewish Museum in 1965. “I just bought another Rivers — ‘The Last Civil War Veteran’ — for the Met because I realized they didn’t have a major work by him.”

The Met’s photography collection has also benefited from Lauder’s largess, with a growing number of Irving Penn images he is constantly buying, mostly from dealers. Perhaps less known among his holdings is a group of graphically bold and colorful literary posters created in the 19th century by top illustrators to publicize magazines, newspapers and books. In 1984, Lauder donated them to the Met — it was the first entire collection he gave the museum — and since then the number of posters has more than doubled, to some 400 works.

“What museums are known for is not their architecture or their shows but ultimately their collections,” Lauder said.

Building great collections takes time, patience and determination. Together with Emily Braun, an art history professor at Hunter College who has been Lauder’s curator for 37 years, he knows where all the great Cubist works are, keeps a keen eye on auctions and art galleries and thinks nothing of spending years trying to get a coveted painting or drawing. “It keeps me alive,” he said. “I don’t want to stop.”

Sometimes he and Braun succeed in their hunt; sometimes they don’t. Collecting, Lauder explains, “requires study, travel, perseverance, mistakes, refinement and, of course, buying.”

(This passion runs in the family. His younger brother, Ronald S. Lauder, a dynamic collector, is a trustee of the Museum of Modern Art and a founder of the Neue Galerie on the Upper East Side.)

“One work that got away was Léger’s ‘Composition (The Typographer),’” Leonard Lauder recalled in an email. “I first saw it in the mid-1980s in the home of Hester Diamond, who was the widow of the art dealer Harold Diamond.” That 1918-19 painting “was magnificent, but so was the price, so I didn’t buy it. In 1969 Hester sold it to Jacques Koerfer,” the German-born former



TIMOTHY A. CLARY/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES



DON HOGAN CHARLES/THE NEW YORK TIMES

chairman of BMW and collector of modern art.

“I thought that the moment had passed forever,” Lauder mused. “Of course, I heard my mother’s voice in my head, ‘You only regret what you do not buy,’ but it was too late.”

Eight years after Koerfer died in 1990, Christie’s auctioned several paintings from his estate. Because of the large size of the Léger (it measures more than 8 feet by 6 feet), Lauder said, “my sense was that I’d be able to purchase it because collectors of early Modernism are drawn to more modestly scaled works.” He was successful. “However, it was so large,” he recalls, “we had to remove the windows in our living room and have the crate hoisted by crane from the street. Fortunately the weather cooperated.” It is now part of his promised gift to the Met.

‘You Have to Make One Big Purchase’

Years before, Lauder applied the same tenacity to transform the Whitney Museum from a provincial New York institution to a world-class museum known for its extraordinary holdings of American art. Lauder became a trustee in 1977, and eventually its most important benefactor. In 2008, rather than contributing toward the construction of its new home in Manhattan’s meat packing district, he gave the Whitney \$131 million toward its endowment, the biggest donation in the institution’s history.

In 1977, he recalled, he persuaded 15 people to donate \$5,000 each to buy “Die Fahne Hoch!” (“Hold the Flag High”), an early Black Painting by the young Frank Stella. The owners, Eugene and Barbara Schwartz, prominent collectors, had agreed to give it to the Whitney as a joint gift, if the museum could raise the other half, \$75,000. In his 2020 memoir, “The Company I Keep: My Life in Beauty,” Lauder explained that when he finally was able to get the 15 donors together to buy it, the wall label read “like the Manhattan phone book — a very long list of names. It didn’t make us look like we were a heavy hitter in the art world.”

“That’s when I took Tom Armstrong to lunch,” he said, referring to the Whitney’s longtime director, who died in 2011. “And I told him you’re never going to get anywhere doing that. You have to make one big purchase that’s going to make headlines.” Eventually Lauder spearheaded a group of trustees to pay for the museum’s 1980 purchase of Jasper Johns’s “Three Flags” for \$1 million, which at the time was the highest price paid for the work of a living artist. In doing so Lauder created the model for the headline-grabbing donation that would transform the museum world, and the art market.

A triple image of the American flag from



JASPER JOHNS/LICENCED BY VAGA, NEW YORK, NY; COLEY BROWN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

1958, that work is now considered a landmark of 20th-century art, one that Lauder calls the Whitney’s “Mona Lisa.” “That was the road to the future,” he mused. Since then he has helped the museum acquire nearly 50 works by Johns: paintings, drawings, sculptures and prints, because, as he explained, “I want the Whitney be the place to see Johns’s work.”

When the Whitney and the Philadelphia Museum of Art were organizing a double Jasper Johns retrospective in 2021, Lauder wrested away from Philadelphia Johns’s “Painted Bronze,” two meticulously crafted cans of Ballantine ale placed side by side on a plinth, which had been on loan there for decades. Lauder got Johns, who owned it, to agree to sell it to him as a splashy acquisition for the Whitney.

Lauder also purchased several other Johns works in anticipation of the show, including an untitled painting from 2018 and “False Start 1,” a print from 1962.

“I love that Leonard is not only committed to spectacular masterpieces, but also to prints and drawings that show an artist’s technical explorations and deep thinking,” Scott Rothkopf, director of the Whitney, said, pointing out that Lauder recently contributed the lead gift toward an endowment in honor of Adam Weinberg, the Whitney’s longtime director, who retired on Oct. 31.

In the past decade, Lauder has also bought the museum dozens of works of art, including sculptures by Frank Stella and Robert Rauschenberg; paintings by Rauschenberg and Wayne Thiebaud; and photographs, prints and drawings by artists like Lucas Samaras and Brice Marden. His most recent purchase for the Whitney is a larger-than-life steel sculpture depicting a

Top: Fernand Léger’s “Composition (The Typographer)” (1918-19), at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2014. Second row: Leonard A. Lauder in 1973, with Robert Dash’s “Open Meadow” (1968); Jasper Johns’s “Painted Bronze” (1960). Above: Johns’s “Three Flags” (1958). Below: Charles Ray’s seated steel sculpture “Jeff” (2021), at the Whitney Museum of American Art.



JASPER JOHNS/LICENCED BY VAGA, AT ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK, WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, NEW YORK

seated man with a haggard, forlorn stare, by the artist Charles Ray. Titled “Jeff,” it had been in the museum’s 2022 Biennial and is considered one of the most important examples of Ray’s work.

Lauder enjoys the fact that these gifts, as well as scores of others, have remained under the radar until now. “I sell lipsticks,” he said with an impish grin. (And often, when he sees a woman applying lipstick, including this reporter, he will ask if it’s from one of Estée Lauder’s brands.)

These days he refuses to talk money, saying he is “interested in giving museums what they need.” Max Hollein, director of the Metropolitan Museum, called Lauder “a partner, a visionary and an advocate who has expanded and transformed the horizons of the Met,” in large part because “he understands the power of an image and how it can move us all.”

Still on the Hunt

Images don’t always mean million-dollar artworks. Indeed, Lauder is nearly as passionate about postcards.

“When I was 7, my mother took me to Miami Beach, where she was selling her creams,” he said, describing Estée Lauder, a pioneer of the cosmetics industry, who died in 2004 at 97. “I’d go to Collins Avenue and get the hotel postcards, and I loved them because they were fantasy: The blue skies were really blue; the beach sand was white, and everyone looked so happy. Also, I could get them for free.”

That was the beginning of a lifetime of collecting postcards. “I’m interested in popular culture, and that’s where postcards come in,” he explained. “I love that they’re the predecessor for so many things: email,

Instagram, social media.”

In 2002, realizing that the Museum of Fine Arts Boston had the largest and most important collection of Japanese woodblock prints outside Japan, Lauder gave the institution a collection of some 20,000 Japanese postcards.

“The postcard was in many ways the successor to the woodblock print,” explained Benjamin Weiss, the senior curator of visual culture at the M.F.A. “Around 1900, as traditional woodblock prints became unfashionable in Japan, much of the artistic invention that had kept prints at the center of attention over the previous century and a half — and which had captured the imagination of viewers and collectors in Europe and the United States — migrated to the postcard.”

In 2010, Lauder ended up giving Boston more than 100,000 postcards from the 1870s through just after World War II. “The collection is still growing,” Weiss said, especially what is known as Real Photo Postcards, which are cards printed from photographic negatives and capture daily life in early-20th-century America.

Postcards and photographs share a similar visual aesthetic. Little wonder then that Lauder came to his love of photography. In the 1970s, he had already commissioned Irving Penn to photograph ads for Clinique that highlighted either a single product or several meticulously arranged on a shelf. “It’s so important to present products in an engaging way to the people we are trying to reach,” he said. The images instantly helped define the Lauder brand. (The composition of Penn’s images has been copied so many times over the years that some on Instagram have called them “shelfies.”)

While Lauder credits Carol Phillips, Clinique’s founder and former chair, with the idea of asking Penn to create the ads, “That would never have happened were Leonard not so brilliantly attuned to the language of cosmetics and product advertising,” said Jeff Rosenheim, the Met’s curator in charge of the department of photographs.

“My love of photography blossomed when I married Judy, a great photographer and a great collector of photography,” Lauder said, referring to Judy Glickman, whom he married in 2015.

Braun says that “Leonard is really a historian,” which distinguishes him as a collector. “He’s also a tremendous reader and scholar.” In 2013, he and Met trustees established the Leonard A. Lauder Research Center for Modern Art at the Met, where scholars run small shows that focus on the work of a particular artist. Its inaugural exhibition — “Birds of a Feather,” in 2018 — explored the artist Joseph Cornell’s fascination with Juan Gris’s collage “The Man at the Café,” depicting a mysterious male figure reading a French newspaper, with a black fedora casting an eerie shadow.

In 2021, Lauder gave that collage to the Met. It is the largest example of Gris’s *papiers collés*, or pasted papers, from 1913 and 1914 that are not only rare (he produced 40 over an eight-month period) but considered the highest point of his creativity. The Met now has seven examples of pasted papers, more than any other collection.

But Lauder is still on the prowl for more works by Gris from this period. As recently as 2022, he added “Violin and Engraving” from 1913 to the Met’s collection, which features an old master print collaged onto the canvas. “Collecting is a journey,” he said, “one that is best navigated by patience and a good eye.”



TIMOTHY A. CLARY/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

Richard Foreman, New York theater's elder statesman of the avant-garde, brings his first new work to the stage in a decade.



SARA KRULWICH/THE NEW YORK TIMES

A Metaphysical Puzzler Resurfaces

By BEN BRANTLEY

On Dec. 13 — a Friday, wouldn't you know — I heard Richard Foreman talking to me as if in a dream. As had always been his wont, he was ruminating with a kind of appalled resignation about the unreliability of our own thoughts and perceptions.

He wasn't there in person. He has been ill. But his recorded voice occasionally filled the air like that of some tutelary demon. I was at La MaMa Experimental Theater Club in the East Village, where the troupe Object Collection was putting on a work called "Suppose Beautiful Madeline Harvey," in which a woman at a boulevard cafe wanders if she even exists.

This was the first new play written by Foreman, 87, in a decade, though it was not staged or designed by him. Both these facts are big deals. But before I explain why, a little background.

Man With the Microphone

For many years, around just this time in the early winter, Foreman would allow us to lose our own minds by walking straight into his.

Others might celebrate the holidays at Radio City Music Hall or with a "Messiah" concert. But the annual seasonal spectacle to which I most looked forward, for more than dozen years starting in the early 1990s, took place in a theater at St. Mark's Church, where one man was spilling the contents of his brain onto a stage no larger than a hotel room. These operated under the rubric of the company Foreman had founded in 1988, the Ontological-Hysteric Theater.

Here, Foreman presided — as director, playwright, light and sound designer, and disembodied voice — over short, sharp shocks of plays with alarming names: "My Head Was a Sledgehammer," "I Got the Shakes," "Panic! (How to Be Happy!)," "Permanent Brain Damage." That last title offers a fair description of the condition into which, in Foreman's view, all human beings are born.

This innate disability was Foreman's equivalent of original sin — an impairment that made knowledge and reality itself forever shifting, forever unreliable. His nonlinear, plot-free plays centered on hapless figures who roamed amid conspicuously homemade, string-segmented sets cluttered with everyday objects that seemed to have wills of their own. Small wonder that his beleaguered characters were as prone to pratfalls as slapstick comics.

They spoke in a language in which every



SARA KRULWICH/THE NEW YORK TIMES

assertion contained its own contradiction. "This happens! This really happens," one of them might say. "But if mere actors speak this, then it no longer happens." Or: "Truth revealed takes the unfortunate shape of everything that isn't true."

For anyone who wasn't there, it's hard to explain just how exhilarating these existentially challenged creatures could be. I, for one, found it cathartic to reconsider philosophical questions, in the largest sense, that I had mainly put aside after stoned, all-night gabfests in college but that continued to hum in some backroom of my brain.

Just as important for those of us who are never happier than when experiencing a perfectly realized play was the pure, razzmatazz theatricality and artistic discipline on the stage. Within each work's short span (exactly 65 minutes), the actors executed their spills, collisions and self-sabotaging dialogue with the drill-team precision of Rockettes.

And always present, to the side in the front row, was Foreman himself, looking amiably lugubrious as he operated the tech board and intoned ominously amplified directives and annotations: "Here's tomorrow's baked goods, stale already." Or simply, "Wake up!"

Foreman's characters might have no control over their daily lives, but the man with

Top, Maggie Hoffman, center, in "Suppose Beautiful Madeline Harvey." Above left, D.J. Mendel, left, and Robert Cucuzza in the 2003 production of "Panic! (How to Be Happy!)." Above right, Jim Fletcher in a recent production of Richard Foreman's "Symphony of Rats."



SPENCER OSTRANDER

the microphone controlled their onstage existences with a completeness that few, if any, other playwrights have ever known. He was the ultimate auteur, dotting every "i" and pulling every string, and the idea of a Foreman play in which Foreman wasn't at the helm seemed an impossibility.

Adapting an Auteur's Sensibility

But a decade after he renounced playmaking (he has said he was tired of repeating himself), other Foreman-loving theater artists are starting to put on Foreman plays. First came a revival of his "Symphony of Rats" (1988) by the Wooster Group, which I caught last year and which is returning to the Performing Garage in SoHo (not far from where Foreman still resides) next month.

Since that show's directors were the Woosterites Elizabeth LeCompte and Kate Valk, creative coevals of Foreman, this "Symphony" (about an American president in a melting wonderland) felt of a piece with the Foreman sensibility. True, it deployed the sophisticated technology that is more Wooster than Foreman. But, as Jason Zinoman wrote in his review in The New York Times, the show felt "like a delightful love letter from one giant of experimental theater to another," and it provided an affectionately skewed sense of déjà vu.

"Suppose Beautiful Madeline Harvey," which runs through Sunday at La MaMa, is a different animal. For one thing, it is made up of entirely new material. The show's creators, the director Kara Feely and the composer Travis Just, are working not from a script but one of the many texts Foreman has been composing in recent years.

Foreman has said that his texts "are generated rather than written," as if he were taking dictation from an unknown source. This one describes a chance, fleeting encounter between the title character, Madeline Harvey, and a man called "handsome Roger Vincent" at a boulevard cafe that may or may not be in Paris. That was also, sort of, the setting for Mr. Foreman's last new work, "Old-Fashioned Prostitutes (A True Romance)," from 2013.

Somehow aliens and spontaneous combustion are involved. Of course it is really about the chimerical nature of time, memory and our all-too-fallible senses.

The setting for this thwarted pursuit of knowledge bears little resemblance to Foreman's magical playrooms of yore. Despite the presence of monitor screens, the set brings to mind a host of more conventional dramas set in bars and cafes. Music — by Just, who had worked with Foreman on several productions — is omnipresent as it never was in previous Foreman shows, underscoring speech with sounds astral and suspenseful.

In the early performance I saw, the actors spoke their repeated, classically Foreman lines (one recurring phrase: "honey dripping from a silver spoon into a cup of frozen tea") without that sense of certainty — or perhaps inevitability is the word — that characterized the Ontological-Hysteric versions. And the matching exact, hypnotic synchronicity of physical movement was only fitfully achieved.

But it's worth remembering that Foreman said, in a 1982 interview, that he hadn't liked the few productions he'd seen of his plays staged by others because "they weren't different enough." And he has always suggested that the most active force in his universe is the law of mutability.

"Suppose Beautiful Madeline Harvey" hearteningly shows that there are indeed younger artists longing to reinterpret the singular wonder of Foreman's metaphysical play puzzles. Perhaps, after all, the sensibility of the man who wrote that "befuddlement can clarify" will endure longer than those enchanted, 65 minutes of stage time that exist only in our (most unreliable) memories.

nytimes#l@l.l

The New York Times

The Morning

Make sense of the news, every day, with David Leonhardt and Times journalists.

A newsletter. Sign up to get it seven days a week. nytimes.com/themorning

GIA KOURLAS | DANCE REVIEW



From left, Matias Dominguez, Andrea Fabbri and Sergio Najera in Durante Verzola's "Symphony," which had its world premiere at the Joyce on Tuesday.

RACHEL PAPO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

It's Vintage Vampires, And Comic Balanchine

The all-male Trocks, full of humor and frayed Russian glamour, zero in on a toothy Act II of 'Giselle' and a take on 'Symphony in C.'

ARLENE CROCE, the great American dance critic who wrote for The New Yorker from 1973 to 1996, died on Monday morning, the day before Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo lifted the curtain on its December season at the Joyce Theater.

Many of Croce's reviews — witty, biting and full of trenchant observations, both harsh and beautiful — were works of art themselves, including one from 1974 about the debut of Les Ballets Trockadero in a loft on 14th Street. The stage was the size of a handkerchief. The corps de ballet was a lonely five dancers.

New York, Croce wrote, "the dance capital of the world," has long needed a company of madmen to break us all up."

Fifty years later, the madmen are still at it. Even as the all-male company has grown in size and in repertoire, it still holds onto its dilapidated essence: Russian glamour as it frays around the edges. Could it sometimes use a spritz more? In the case of its newest dance, "Symphony," a strong world premiere, it's likely.

Laughter still ripples during performances by the Trocks, as they are known, but so does admiring applause. Alongside jokes is pointe work (the province of women in traditional companies) that seems to improve each season. The Trocks, though, can be more entertaining in male roles than female ones. The foppish prince, the hapless noblemen — humor is poured into them, while in the more demanding ballerina parts, some of the dancers place too much focus on making their technique bright and light. Equalizing the space between comedy and serious dancing is a delicate balance, but that's what makes the Trocks sing.

On Tuesday, the first of two programs, the company presented a tight double feature: its vampiric version of Act II of "Giselle," with décor by Edward Gorey; and "Symphony," a take on George Balanchine's "Symphony in C." In "Symphony," the rising young choreographer Durante Verzola presents his first Trockadero ballet, a brisk, rigorous and musical romp through selections by Charles Gounod.

"Symphony in C" is set to music by George Bizet, who was a student of Gounod's; in Verzola's ballet, you hear echoes of Bizet's score, just as in the choreography, you see fragments of Balanchine's. As the dance breezes by in ways both knowing and innocent, it's clever and clean.

There could be more of a nudge toward comedy — technical challenges seem to overshadow the parody of it all — but when the humor arrives, it has an unforced sheen. The most joy is found in the first movement, led by Andrea Fabbri, whose broad chest and linebacker physique is at odds with his tutu. (The dancers each have a male and female persona, and here Fabbri is in ballerina mode as Tatiana Youbetyabootskaya.) But he owns it. When he gets caught in the middle of ballerina crossings, his fear and increasing irritation are overcome, showbiz style, with a gleaming, generous smile.

"Symphony" follows the structure of "Symphony in C," including its romantic pas de deux in the second movement. Jake Speakman (Colette Adae) and Raphael Spyker (Medulli Lobotomov) play it straight, largely — unless Spyker's shell-shocked expression was part of the comedy? That wasn't completely clear.

Kevin Garcia (Elvira Khababgallina) — leggy and refined in the third movement — and the ever buoyant Takaomi Yoshino (Varvara Laptopova) in the fourth brought impressive displays of technique and musicality. But it was a delight, and even with a much smaller cast than "Symphony in C," in which the rows of dancers seem to stretch on for days, Verzola, through structure,

produced a ballet of clarity, verve and effervescence.

In "Giselle," which led the program, the Wilis — women who died before their wedding days — are vampires led by Myrtha (Laptopova), their grim, glowering queen. Giselle (Shohei Iwahama's Anya Marx) is now a Willi, while Albert (Raydel Caceres's Mikhail Mudkin), the man who deceived her, visits her grave and eventually ends up joining her in her coffin. It's kind of a happy ending.

In between, mayhem ensues as the Wilis, after forcing Hans, a gamekeeper who loved Giselle, to dance to his death, now try the same with Albert. Albert is blond and perfectly idiotic with red lips that are more gleaming than Dorothy's ruby slippers. At one point he grabs the cross that stands over Giselle's grave and waves it at the Wilis, who cower, somehow both annoyed and distressed.

It's the Wilis who steal this ballet. Grimacing as they stand in their rows or clawing the air with angry paws, they waver between irritation at their male invaders and devotion toward Myrtha, who shoos them off like mosquitoes. They rush ridiculously across the stage with pointed index fingers, they hop in arabesque, they land hard. They are ghouls in pointe shoes. The program was topped — like a swirl of whipped cream — with a curtain call in which the Trocks kicked it up to "New York, New York." It was, to all, a good night.

Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo
Through Jan. 5 at the Joyce Theater in Manhattan; joyce.org.

LAURA COLLINS-HUGHES | THEATER REVIEW

A Hard-Knock Life Can Still Seem Sweet

CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1

can-I-tell-you wave of her hand as she utters the oblivious line "Why any kid would want to be an orphan, I'll never know." And there is the gross-out one-upmanship of her snatching a dead mouse from a moppet who's trying to scare her with it, popping the rodent's head into her mouth and pretending to chomp down.

Not to be underestimated, there is also the affection the audience has for Goldberg. On Friday night, as Miss Hannigan settled into her comfy green armchair, legs played and liquor bottle at the ready, I heard a

Annie
Through Jan. 5 at the Theater at Madison Square Garden in Manhattan; msg.com. Running time: 2 hours 30 minutes.

woman across the aisle say in an exhale of fondness: "Oh, Whoopi." Well, exactly. Even as one of the great child-loathing villains of musical comedy, Goldberg has our sympathy.

She has quite a good show around her, too. Directed by Jenn Thompson, who played the orphan Pepper in the original 1977 Broadway production, this touring version of Thomas Meehan, Martin Charnin and Charles Strouse's classic steers well clear of cloying. It's a thoughtful interpretation, making emotional sense of a comic-strip tale, with a remarkably fine Annie in Hazel Vogel.

The story is set in Depression-era New York, in December 1933, when the divide between the haves and have-nots is stark. Annie, a tough and tender 11-year-old longing for the parents who surrendered her when she was an infant, is plucked from her orphanage to spend Christmastime at the opulent home of Oliver Warbucks (Christopher Swan), a Fifth Avenue billionaire. (Set



From left, Isabella De Souza Moore, Whoopi Goldberg and Rhett Guter in "Annie."

design is by the reliably clever Wilson Chin.)

Growing besotted with this child who has tamed his growliness, Warbucks wants to adopt Annie, but she is still waiting for her mother and father to return. He promptly offers a large reward to find them. Along the way, Annie sings "Tomorrow" to Franklin Delano Roosevelt (Mark Woodard). Warbucks is nothing if not well connected.

In this wisely understated production,

the relationships feel unusually natural. Of course Annie falls instantly for Sandy, a dog she meets on the street, played by the disarmingly darling canine actor Kevin. (The dog trainer is Charlotte Woertler.) Of course Warbucks and his right-hand woman, Grace Farrell (Julia Nicole Hunter), decide their kindhearted Annie is a keeper. (Her wardrobe, by Alejo Vietti, definitely is.)

And of course Miss Hannigan hates the brat, whose runaway tendencies have

caused so much trouble. But when Miss Hannigan's brother, Rooster (Rhett Guter), and his girlfriend, Lily (Isabella De Souza Moore), plot to impersonate Annie's parents and collect the reward, Miss Hannigan is startled by the suggestion that Rooster intends to kill the girl.

That doesn't stop her from aiding their nefariousness; she's greedy for her cut of the cash. Still, as she joins in on the song and dance of "Easy Street," Rooster and Lily are exultant, while she is morally queasy. This, too, Goldberg communicates with subtlety.

Vogel displays a similar restraint in Annie's more traumatized moments — nothing maudlin, simply a child's subdued shock, which adds depth to the proceedings. So does the warm affection between her and Warbucks. When they briefly waltz together at his mansion, the interlude has a gentle poignancy. (Choreography is by Patricia Wilcox.)

In a strong cast, Olive Ross-Kline is an adorable scene-stealer as Molly, the littlest orphan, while Savannah Fisher and Lawrence E. Street have standout moments in the ensemble.

One caveat: The volume of the child actors' microphones is in dire need of dialing down. Under-mike the orphans and they risk being drowned out by the orchestra when they sing, but over-mike them and we reel — not from their voices, but from the blare of them. (Sound design is by Ken Travis, music direction by Andrew David Sotomayor.)

That miscalculation makes the opening scene, in the orphanage dorm, worryingly off-putting: a bunch of kids arguing much too loudly. Repeatedly throughout the show, the sound level works against Vogel's lovely, clear singing voice, which needs less boosting.

But the rest of this "Annie" is very carefully judged — with a sweetness level that never overpowers.

2 SPECTACLE ON ICE
They skate into fashion's
forefront. BY MISTY WHITE SIDELL

3 PEOPLE PLACES THINGS
A Philippine island offers
a Bali vibe. BY KURT SOLLER



4 BUMPER MESSAGES
Tesla owners tell you where
they stand. BY EVE PEYSER

3 'I'M A MARQUISE DIAMOND'
Selena Gomez has a new
best friend. BY ANNA GRACE LEE

FASHION | BEAUTY | NIGHTLIFE

ThursdayStyles

The New York Times

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2024 D1
N



Younger crowds,
old-fashioned
activities.

THE
GAMES
ARE ON
BY CALLIE
HOLTERMANN
PAGE 5

A meeting of a Rummikub club this month in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Hungry for in-person interaction, Gen Z and millennial players are joining chess, mahjong and backgammon groups.

GRAHAM DICKIE/THE NEW YORK TIMES

nytimes#l@l



GABRIELLA DEMCZUK FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Ffern, in London, sells its perfumes only by subscription, and the wait list is long.

For Every Season, a Fleeting Scent

The perfume maker Ffern puts out four fragrances a year, and when they're gone, they're gone.

By MARISA MELTZER

"We have this conviction that fine fragrance is like fine wine," said Owen Mears, the founder of Ffern, a line of perfumes based in London. "Everybody knows it's just grapes, but you can't simply recreate it, because there is craft involved." He was drinking tea

at the Nine Orchard hotel next to his sister, Emily Cameron, Ffern's creative director. "Our starting point was doing things really differently," Ms. Cameron said. Undeniably, their perfumes are made and sold in a manner far different from that of a fragrance you might pick out at a department store or at Sephora. Ffern, which Mr. Mears started in 2016, is a subscription service. A space on the ledger, as it's called, costs \$129 per season and signifies that you want a bottle from the next batch. Then you'll get a new scent four

times a year, as the seasons change. Each edition is handmade in small batches in the English countryside from ingredients that are 95 percent natural and aged in barrels. Each scent is produced only for that season, never to be made again, encouraging subscribers to make sure they collect each precious release. That may explain the wait list. The number of spots on the ledger are limited, and once it's full, you have to wait for a space to open up. According to the company, the wait

CONTINUED ON PAGE D4

STEPHANIE GOTTLIEB
NEW YORK

Every Day
is an Occasion
to Sparkle



Book an appointment to visit
our 5th Avenue showroom for all
your holiday gifting needs

www.stephaniegottlieb.com
info@stephaniegottlieb.com

OSCAR HEYMAN
Since 1912



26.44ct Ceylon Sapphire & Diamond
'Entourage' Ring

WWW.OSCARHEYMAN.COM

She Glides Down the Runway



DANIEL DERAJINSKI/CON SPORT, VIA GETTY IMAGES

Outfits worn by the figure skater Madison Chock are as dazzling as her performances.

By MISTY WHITE SIDELL

The Chrysler Building. Salvador Dalí. Billie Eilish. Aliens. All have inspired costumes worn by the figure skater Madison Chock, who is known not only for intricate twizzles and lifts but also for competing in ensembles that have raised the bar for fashion in her sport. Almost all of her costumes over the past two decades have been designed by Ms. Chock herself.

She and her skating partner and husband, Evan Bates, won their second consecutive gold medal for ice dancing at the Grand Prix Final competition Dec. 7 in Grenoble, France. For their jazzy free dance routine, Ms. Chock wore a shimmering geometric costume that she said had taken inspiration from the Chrysler Building and other Art Deco architecture.

“Figure skating has so much room for fashion,” said Ms. Chock, who often looks to runway shows by high fashion labels like Schiaparelli and Mugler as inspiration for her ensembles. “I am very passionate about design, and I’m in a sport that’s unique because we have an ability to combine creativity with athleticism.”

Ice dancing is typically performed in pairs, and unlike figure skating, it does not involve jumping. Instead, duos like Ms. Chock and Mr. Bates — who are five-time U.S. national champions and Olympic gold medalists — incorporate technical footwork patterns and aerial lifts into programs choreographed like ballroom dances.

In recent years, as ice dancing has become more theatrical, so too have athletes’ costumes. But few have rivaled those Ms. Chock, 32, has designed for herself and Mr. Bates, 35, whose ensembles are meant to complement his wife’s. The costumes she and Mr. Bates wore at the Grand Prix Final were created for a program set to music by Thelonious Monk and Dave Brubeck. The skaters, who live in Montreal, debuted the looks at the Skate America competition in October. Covering Ms. Chock’s iridescent dress, which was the greenish color of oxidized copper and had a flapper-style skirt, were more than 10,000 rhinestones.



GABRIELA BHASKAR/THE NEW YORK TIMES



MATTHEW STOCKMAN/GETTY IMAGES

Clockwise from top: Madison Chock and Evan Bates this month; Ms. Chock in the 2022 Olympics in gloves accented with press-on nails; in an alien-inspired costume during those Games.

Johnny Weir, the former professional skater who is now a commentator on the sport for NBC, said in an interview that Ms. Chock and Mr. Bates might be the most fashionable skaters currently competing.

During the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing, Mr. Weir, who is known for his own bold style, described Ms. Chock’s performances with Mr. Bates as a version of haute couture. Her Olympic costumes included a slime green dress for a short program set to “Bad Guy” by Ms. Eilish, as well as a silvery dress and coordinating makeup for an extraterrestrial-themed free dance to songs by Daft Punk.

Ms. Chock’s ensembles begin as sketches. To fabricate them, she often works with Mathieu Caron, a costumer for skaters and ballroom dancers. “She has very good taste,” Mr. Caron said. “Year after year, she pushes the boundaries. It’s the whole package, even hair and makeup — every detail is planned.”

Ms. Chock and Mr. Bates have not been the only models for her costumes: Last

year, she started a namesake company offering her design services to other skaters.

This season Ms. Chock worked with Olivia Smart, an ice dancer for Spain, to develop a hooded, sand-colored dress for a program inspired by “Dune” that Ms. Smart performed with her teammate, Tim Dieck. The costume’s hood, Ms. Chock said, “adds mystery and intrigue.” Mr. Caron created a coordinating ensemble for Mr. Dieck.

Ms. Chock and Mr. Bates wrap up their current skating season in March, after which they will begin focusing on the 2026 Winter Olympics in Milan and Cortina d’Ampezzo, Italy. They plan to start selecting music in the spring or early summer, and then she will get to work on coming up with accompanying costumes.

“I’m very excited the Olympics will be in Milan, which is a great city for fashion,” said Ms. Chock, who in preparation has been paying particular attention to runway shows from Prada and other labels in Italy. “Going into the Olympics, I’m very inspired by Italian designers.”

The New York Times

Cooking

Make busy mornings less of a scramble.

Eggs
Oats
Smoothie
Kejriwal
Avocado
Parmesan
Overnight
Toast
Fruit
Eggs



Explore recipe collections like
Breakfast in 10 Minutes or Less.
nytcooking.com

People Places Things

HIGHLIGHTS FROM TMAGAZINE.COM



Overlooking the lush Philippine island of Siargao from the Coconut Tree View Deck, a meditative stop on the side of the road. People say the area looks the way Bali did in the 1970s.

FLOCKING TO Siargao

Spend a few days in Siargao, the fig-shaped Philippine island in the country's southeast, and locals will tell you that the coconut-tree-covered enclave is what Bali was in the 1970s.

What the island, one of more than 7,000 that make up the Philippines, shares with these busier destinations is a bohemian history, warm hospitality, beautiful jungle and ocean surroundings and an under-the-radar sense of cool that, as some locals rightfully worry, will quickly diminish if the construction seemingly happening everywhere isn't carefully managed.

Much of the island's energy is centered on the aptly named Tourism Road, in General Luna, on Siargao's southeastern edge. But if you want to really explore, hire a motorboat captain to take you to one of the tinier, barely inhabited islands in the Philippine Sea: You might have a pristine beach entirely to yourself.

Or have a tuk-tuk driver bring you to the island's north, where the real estate developer Alelee Andanan, who lives between Manila and Siargao, recently started an international artists' residency and a by-appointment gallery.

"Anyone who gets attached to Siargao enjoys a sense of novelty," said Linying, the Singaporean recording artist. "That's my theory as to why it attracts so many creative people, that 'best-kept secret' thing, and the north feels like the encapsulation of that."

For the complete article, visit [tmagazine.com](#). KURT SOLLER



Sleep

"Nay Palad Hideaway put the island on the luxury map; before it opened in 2010, Siargao was a surfing destination, but the hotel elevated everything, from the service to the food," said Queenmelo Esguerra, a documentarian, broadcast journalist and gender-equality activist.

"Kalinaw is also beautiful," she added. Inés Castañeda, who is a co-chef at Roots Siargao, said: "Even though we live in Siargao, we sometimes go to Izuatarri, up north, run by a Spanish-Filipino couple. It's a Brutalist concrete building on top of a cliff, and you're surrounded by palm trees."

She added, "Your room has one bed, one table and an amazing view — you don't need anything else."



Left, a bedroom and patio at Nay Palad Hideaway. Right, a villa at the Kalinaw resort.

Eat and Drink

Ms. Castañeda said, "I've lived in Peru, so you can imagine I have a craving for ceviche. Cev offers that and kinilaw, which is similar but uses local vinegars (like coconut) and sometimes coconut milk and the [Filipino citrus fruit] biasong. It's casual and has a very good atmosphere, too."

"The heart of Filipino food is pork sisig, and the place to get that is Kanin Baboy. It's the cooked head of the pig, thinly sliced and garnished with kalamansi, and it's exactly what you want to eat with a beer: crunchy, spicy, presented on a sizzling platter."



Left, Cev, a popular restaurant. Right, part of a seven-course tasting menu at Roots.

Linying said: "I always try the tasting menu at Roots. It's seasonal — they use the restaurant as a vehicle to explore the biodiversity of the island. They have an amazing cassava cracker starter and a nice chile cacao dessert."

"At Coco Frio, a couple from Manila nails drinks made using every part of the coconut. Get the Coconut Coffee Freeze, basically a coconut slushy, where the flesh and milk are blended with a shot of espresso."



At Côte Femme, you can buy dresses, beach cover-ups and scrunchies all made nearby.

Shop

"Traditionally the islanders are not craftsmen; they're fishermen," Ms. Esguerra said.

"But the shop worth visiting is Côte Femme, run by a Spanish woman who

married a local surfer," she said. "She started doing beach clothes using fabrics from Spain, but it's all made in Siargao, and she also sells hand-woven hats."

Linying said, "The surf shop Fat Lips does custom board-shaping, and it's a great place to be a part of chill, unterritorial surf culture."

Take Home

"Have your picture taken by the photographer Camille [Robiou du Pont]," Ms. Esguerra said. "She takes the best island portraits that are distinctly Siargao."



The beach on Daku Island, which is off the coast of Siargao in the Philippines.

Explore

"I'm still a student of surfing, but I like Cloud Nine," said Bobby Dekeyser, the founder of the furniture company Dedon and the owner of the resort Nay Palad Hideaway. "The beach scene there is a little like Ibiza, with its mix of cultures. I hang out, walk around, go to a bar with friends and sing karaoke. Sometimes people invite us from the street into their homes. I don't like planning, and it's quite easy."

Ms. Esguerra said, "The Magpupungko Rock Pools [where you can swim and jump off cliffs] are a fantastic place if it's low tide and there aren't too many people there, but the crowd can ruin the experience, so I wouldn't go [in the middle of the day]."

It's Not Just Any Engagement Ring for Selena Gomez

The actress and singer is wearing a marquise diamond, the 'hot stone of the moment.'

By ANNA GRACE LEE

Some brides-to-be openly discuss their dream engagement rings, creating mood boards, getting fittings and going shopping ahead of the proposal. In Selena Gomez's case, some say she may have dropped the ultimate ring hint as a lyrical Easter egg in her 2015 song "Good for You."

"I'm on my marquise diamonds, I'm a marquise diamond," Ms. Gomez sings in the steamy pop song. "Could even make that Tiffany jealous."

When the actress and singer announced her engagement to Benny Blanco last week, she posted photos of herself wearing a marquise diamond engagement ring.

She and Mr. Blanco, a record producer and songwriter, have been publicly in a relationship for about a year. In a video clip posted to her Instagram stories, Ms. Gomez showed off the ring on a video call, prompting screams of joy from the caller on her phone.

"I said yes to this!" Ms. Gomez exclaims in the clip. "It's so pretty."

On Instagram, she posted a slide show of photos from the proposal, showing her beaming at her ring as she sat on a picnic blanket with Taco Bell takeout. She wrote "forever begins now" in the caption. In comments on the post, a flood of fellow celebrities congratulated the couple, with Taylor Swift offering to be the flower girl at the wedding and Mr. Blanco writing, "hey wait ... that's my wife."

Ms. Gomez and Mr. Blanco have been open about their relationship, speaking warmly of each other in interviews and



Above left, Selena Gomez and her new fiancé, the record producer and songwriter Benny Blanco. Above right, Ms. Gomez described the proposal, and displayed the ring, on Instagram.

posting photos on social media. Ms. Gomez has previously worn another piece of jewelry celebrating their love: a sparkling Jacquie Aiche ring emblazoned with a "B" initial, for Mr. Blanco.

The marquise style of diamond is said to date back to 18th-century France, when King Louis XV ordered a jewel cut to resemble his lover's lips. Its shape, resembling an oval, evokes romantic folklore.

It's a style that befits "the artistic, the wanderlust-y person who beats to the tune of their own drum and wants to do something different and wants to stand out, but also regards the history of the classics," said Jade Trau, a fine jewelry designer whose namesake brand features marquise cut pieces.

She described Ms. Gomez's ring as "a

very contemporary, modern-looking marquise cut" with a "yellow-gold setting" and a "chunkier pavé band" with "little diamonds" on the band.

Ms. Trau, who comes from a family of New York diamond manufacturers and has been working with diamonds since the late '90s, said that she has been wearing her grandmother's marquise ring for years. When she first began wearing it, the style wasn't as popular, she said. But lately, she has noticed that the look has become more of a trend.

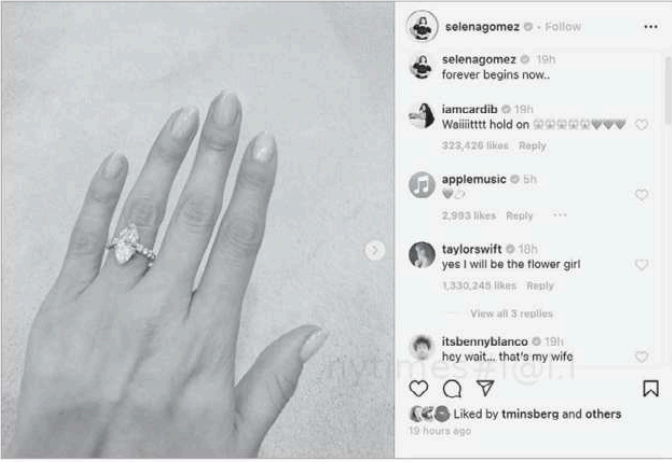
"Now it's like the hot stone of the moment," Ms. Trau said. "On one hand, it has this really contemporary feel to it and on the other hand, it looks like a leaf — it has this very organic, natural feel to it."

Reported estimates of the potential cost

of Ms. Gomez's engagement ring have ranged from about \$200,000 to \$1 million. Based on the apparent size of the marquise diamond and the diamonds on the band, Ms. Trau estimates the total weight to be a little over four carats, which she said would cost \$150,000 to \$200,000.

While the speculated price tag has become a point of interest, the larger story lies in the meaning and details of the ring. Whether or not Mr. Blanco selected it based on Ms. Gomez's song, this ring stands apart as distinctly personal and intentional.

"This is not a cookie-cutter ring," said Cathy Waterman, the California-based jeweler known for creating pieces for celebrities, including Swift. "This is a ring that somebody thought about," she said, adding, "The ring reflects how he feels about her."





PHOTOGRAPHS BY GABRIELLA DEMCZUK FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

For Every Season, a Fleeting Fragrance

CONTINUED FROM PAGE D1

list has half a million people on it, and 20,000 people add their names each week.

Jacqueline Peker, a carpet consultant in London, had to wait a few months before she became a member in 2021. “I might have found it on Instagram, or maybe it was one of those word-of-mouth things,” she said. “It’s not just about the perfume but the ritual and the way it takes you through the year. I was literally just sitting in bed thinking it must be time for the next one.”

The perfumes, created by François Robert and Elodie Durande, the company’s “noses,” are released at the equinox and the solstice. Autumn 24 was quince with notes of jasmine and myrrh; Winter 25, which will come out Saturday, is a rose scent with bergamot and eucalyptus.

Ffern won’t disclose how many bottles it makes for each season, but the run of the first scent, called Winter 19, was just 300 bottles.

Mr. Mears, 29, and Ms. Cameron, 35, take pains to explain each scent for subscribers who haven’t smelled them. Each release comes with a piece of art (the autumn 2024 scent, for example, was accompanied by photographs of a still life with quinces by

Jamie Beck), and each has an evocative back story.

“We have imagined a figure skating through a moonlit landscape of wild ice and frozen forests,” reads the description of the Winter 25 scent on their website. And indeed, Mr. Mears and Ms. Cameron had just returned from filming a couple dancing on ice in the Rocky Mountains.

Ffern, which has 35 employees, also has a podcast and maintains an in-house film crew to create short films about each perfume.

“It’s not superfluous to the product,” Mr. Mears said. “If you’re a company that makes shampoo, your product lives or dies by efficacy, and the storytelling is superfluous. The efficacy of a fragrance is the joy a wearer has. We have to immerse them in the world so they can fall in love and feel part of it.”

Most Ffern customers are buying the perfumes based on descriptions and reviews on TikTok, Instagram or the review site Fragrantica. That is where the fans come in. They post unboxing videos on social media, send in poems they have written about their favorite scents, and paint pictures inspired by them.

Above, Owen Mears, the founder of Ffern, and his sister, Emily Cameron, its creative director. Top right, their shop in London. Above right, Ffern’s Autumn 24 fragrance.

Each one is handmade in small batches in the English countryside.

The siblings had what Ms. Cameron described as a “folkloric, pagan childhood” in a rural village in Somerset, next door to one of the first biodynamic herb farms in Europe. Many of their early memories involve playing in fields of echinacea and lemon grass and in apple orchards. They also had a great-aunt who was a botanist.

In 2022, they opened a shop in Soho in London, giving nonsubscribers a chance to experience the fragrances firsthand, and they are thinking of adding a shop in New York. The United States is home to their largest number of members. (The company currently ships only to Britain, the United States, Canada and Germany.)

“We never do market research,” Ms. Cameron said. “So we didn’t realize rhubarb and quince don’t have the same connotations in the U.S. But we quite like the divisiveness.” Rhubarb, she said, is often associated with strawberry-rhubarb combinations, so the scent is not familiar on its own, and quince is generally more common in Britain.

Each Ffern perfume comes with a small sample so subscribers can try the scent. They can return the unopened full-size bottle if, say, the Spring 25 violet leaf scent, is

not for them.

Paul Thomas, a creative director in Cardiff, Wales, hasn’t skipped a scent since he joined the ledger in 2021. “Winter 23 reminds me of when I got married,” he said. “It’s a unisex scent we both share. I love that connection, and we go through a full bottle each season.”

The next Ffern project will be starting a farm in Somerset. Mr. Mears and Ms. Cameron have been visiting potential locations on weekends with a very specific vision in mind: to show how their fragrances are made and aged in barrels, to host events, even to create a place to stay overnight. They imagine a landscape evocative of cozy children’s books like “The Secret Garden” or “The Wind in the Willows.” A walled garden is on the wish list.

The farm is the first Ffern venture for which they have taken outside funding. It is intended to be the culmination of their vision, a way to live the full Ffern lifestyle, if even for an afternoon. Mostly, though, they want to educate.

“From Day 1, that has been our aspiration,” Mr. Mears said. “To show what happens with fragrance from this field versus another field.”

Tesla Owners Don’t Drive Away Quietly

Using bumper stickers to express their thoughts, pro and con, about Elon Musk.

By EVE PEYSER

It was the last week of October, with the election fast approaching, and business was booming for Matthew Hiller. His Etsy shop was receiving hundreds of orders per day. He was preparing to leave for vacation in France, and was hoping that while he was away Elon Musk wouldn’t do anything “particularly crazy.”

It may seem strange, but every time Mr. Musk, the Tesla chief executive, causes a stir, Mr. Hiller has to fulfill orders for his online shops. The most popular of the items that he sells? Bumper stickers that say, in all-caps, “I Bought This Before We Knew Elon Was Crazy.”

For his vacation, Mr. Hiller asked a friend to cover for him. “I don’t know how she’s going to manage this,” he said. With Mr. Musk frequenting rallies in support of Donald J. Trump and posting on X relentlessly at the time, Mr. Hiller was dubious that business would slow. He had no idea that things were about to get far more hectic with Mr. Trump’s winning the presidential election and Mr. Musk’s status as his close ally.

Mr. Musk spent more than \$250 million on the 2024 election, according to federal filings, and then immediately stepped in as a key part of Mr. Trump’s transition team. Few business executives are as closely associated with their products as Mr. Musk, so his rise in the world of far-right politics led to plenty of celebration among Trump-supporting Tesla owners but plenty of consternation among those who disagreed with the move or who had simply grown tired of Mr. Musk.

The solution, for many Tesla owners on both ends of that spectrum, has been to slap a bumper sticker on their car to let people know how they feel about Mr. Musk.

Mr. Hiller, who lives in Honolulu and works at the Waikiki Aquarium, became a player in the situation by being ahead of the curve thanks to his side business: an Etsy shop called Mad Puffer Stickers.

At first, Mr. Hiller just sold stickers with fish illustrations (e.g. an image of a clownfish with the caption “Don’t talk to me. I’m a fishtrovert”) on Etsy and Amazon. He had



Some of the items made by Matthew Hiller and sold on his Etsy shop called Mad Puffer Stickers.

been considering buying a Tesla, but in early 2023, several months after Mr. Musk completed his takeover of Twitter, Mr. Hiller said he found himself alienated by what he characterized as misinformation on the site.

“So I’m like: ‘There’s no way I’m buying a Tesla. I don’t want to give this guy a penny,’” he said. “Then I started thinking, there’s got to be so many people who are just embarrassed, who have a Tesla already, and they’re like: ‘Oh my god, now I’m repping this guy. I don’t want to endorse anything this guy stands for.’”

That is when he added the new bumper sticker — “I Bought This Before We Knew Elon Was Crazy” — to his offerings, aiming to draw in left-leaning Tesla owners. Initially, he sold five to 10 of the stickers a day. But as Mr. Musk became increasingly outspoken in his support of Mr. Trump, more orders started to flow in, with Mr. Hiller reporting he has sold around 18,000 of the stickers across 30 countries.

“It’s become a pretty good side business,” Mr. Hiller said.

The situation turned into an opportunity for supporters of Mr. Musk as well, with

multiple pro-Musk bumper stickers surfacing, including one that seemed to be a direct response to Mr. Hiller’s that reads, “I bought this after I knew Elon was awesome.”

Among the customers for that sticker was Sean Ziese, who runs a machine shop in eastern Oklahoma.

“I’ve always been against E.V.s.; the oil patch is what puts food on my family’s table,” Mr. Ziese said. “During the Republican National Convention, Trump said that Elon is going to start supporting conservatives. I told my wife, ‘If Elon is going to start supporting conservatives and free speech, I’m going to start supporting Elon, even though I hate E.V.s.’”

So he bought a Tesla Cybertruck and added the “awesome” sticker. It has become his favorite car.

It is a situation fairly particular to Tesla that the company’s products are viewed, by some, as a direct endorsement of the company’s chief executive. Buying an Amazon Kindle does not necessarily signify that you’re a Jeff Bezos fan. And less than a decade ago, being a Tesla owner didn’t necessarily imply an endorsement of Mr. Musk’s

The C.E.O.’s emergence into the spotlight of national politics has stirred emotions on four wheels.

public persona as much as it signaled an interest in electric cars, a fair amount of disposable income and a concern about climate change.

It is not possible to know the overall effect of Mr. Musk’s political messaging on how Teslas are perceived by their owners. But his sharp pivot to the right was cited as a potential factor for a slump in sales earlier this year, and a vocal group of Tesla owners, like Mr. Hiller’s customers, has become self-conscious about the cars. For them, the anti-Musk bumper stickers allow them to create a distance from the company’s chief executive without selling their vehicle.

Brian Esola, a paralegal and real estate agent who lives on City Island in the Bronx, identifies as an “independent with left-leaning ideologies.” He purchased a Tesla in April but began to feel uneasy about the implied association with Mr. Musk.

“I appreciate what he does occasionally in his business endeavors, but from a personal perspective, and from his words and attributes and actions, I just could not support him,” Mr. Esola said. So he purchased a sticker from Mr. Hiller’s Etsy shop that said, “Anti Elon Tesla Club.”

Morgan Ames, a professor of data science at the University of California, Berkeley, purchased her first Tesla in 2013. Four years later, after she had her second child, she bought another one to accommodate her growing family.

“Even in 2017, we were definitely uncomfortable with some of the more outrageous stuff Elon Musk was saying in the news,” Ms. Ames said. She nevertheless doubled down on her Tesla ownership because she couldn’t find other electric cars that matched Tesla’s capabilities.

After Mr. Musk’s association with Mr. Trump became impossible to ignore, Ms. Ames printed a bumper sticker for her Tesla that said, “Shut up, Elon Musk.” She briefly sold them on the online marketplace Zazzle but said her shop was removed after complaints. Nowadays, any time people compliment her sticker, she gives them one.

For Mr. Ziese, however, Mr. Musk’s actions have only made him more sure that he made the right decision.

“It’s really a neat experience,” he said of driving his Cybertruck with its “awesome” bumper sticker. “It never would have happened if Elon never would have bought X and, you know, got free speech going again.”

The Offline Joy of the Board Game Club

Gen Z-ers and millennials put down their phones and pick up their pawns and mahjong tiles.

By CALLIE HOLTERMANN

When Michelle Kong started a chess club last year, hoping to meet other players in their 20s, attendance was so meager that she needed only one chessboard. She posted about the club on social media until a tattooed cross section of young people in Los Angeles began showing up to exchange pawns and phone numbers.

Before long, boxes of triple-weighted bishops and rooks were piling up in the back seat of Ms. Kong's sedan. Last December she upgraded the club's home base from a cozy jazz bar to a warehouse that was barely large enough to accommodate the 500 people who attended the Thursday night meetings of the group, LA Chess Club, this summer.

"It kind of blew up," said Ms. Kong, 27, who is in urgent need of a place to store 200 chessboards.

Staring down an epidemic of loneliness, people in their 20s and 30s are gathering to play chess, backgammon and mahjong in hopes that old-fashioned game clubs might help ease the isolation and digital overload that weigh heavily on their generation.

Many have already been experimenting with more physical alternatives to doomscrolling like pickleball and running clubs. But organizers like Ms. Kong say that the kind of board games stored in their grandparents' attics are hot among Gen Z-ers and millennials hungry for less athletic modes of socialization.

"A running club sounds like absolute torture to me," said Victoria Newton, 35, who has been hosting Knightcap Chess Club events in Austin, Texas, since July. "I have found that it's easier to connect with someone when I'm not trying to catch my breath or covered in sweat."

Board game sales in the United States surged more than 30 percent from 2019 to 2020, fueled by the Covid-19 pandemic, said Juli Lennett, a toy industry adviser for Circana, a market research firm.

Stuck at home and starved for social interaction, many Americans were able to "rediscover the love of gameplay," she said.

The habit appears to have made it out of lockdown: The number of board game events organized using the invitation service Partiful quadrupled in the past year, the company said. The number of groups related to board games on Meetup increased roughly 10 percent per year from 2021 to 2023.

Espresso martinis in hand, this wave of players seems eager to dispel the nerdy, stuffy or ultracompetitive reputations of game clubs past.

Eduardo Rojer, 30, attracts players to his free Rummikub meet-ups in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, through an Instagram page where he posts memes about the tile game involving Charli XCX and Paris Hilton. The monthly club has drawn around 80 people to each meeting since Mr. Rojer started it in July, after having learned the game from a friend and her mother during the early months of the pandemic.

"From what I hear, it's something you used to play with your grandma," Mr. Rojer said. "I wanted to make this game kind of hot and relevant."

Back to Basics

Young people are only several thousand years late to the board game boom.

Tabletop games are about as old as civilization itself, said Zachary Horton, an associate professor at the University of Pittsburgh who studies games. But they may be especially attractive to a generation that is fully saturated by digital media, he said, and living in an acrimonious political era in which it can feel as if different groups are playing by their own rules.

Formal clubs devoted to board games gained steam in the United States in the 19th century, when wealthy men could meet for competitive play at the Mechanics' Institute Chess Club in San Francisco and the Manhattan Chess Club in New York.

As different game styles became more popular, gatherings also shifted, Professor Horton said. Role-playing games of the 1970s gave rise to Dungeons & Dragons groups, and board game cafes and bars proliferated in the early 2000s, catering to players of elaborate strategy games like Catan.

But with more games to choose from than ever before, many young players are drawn to the classics. Among Gen Z, Professor Horton said, "it couldn't be a clearer or stronger movement toward analog play."

Remington Davenport thinks that a sense of nostalgia is part of the draw of NYC Backgammon Club, the group she started last year for young people to play a 5,000-year-old game many attendees learned from parents and grandparents. Ms. Davenport, 35, said she had felt out of place at the existing backgammon events that she had been able to find in New York City.

"I was really disappointed with the lack of women at these events, and the lack of people in their 20s and 30s," she said.

More than 3,500 people in all have come to the frequent meet-ups that NYC Backgammon Club holds at restaurants in Brooklyn and Manhattan, Ms. Davenport said. (Admission is about \$10 per event.) In April, she left her job in sales to focus on backgammon full time.

Other board game groups aim to help young people connect to the history of those who played before them. Green Tile Social Club in New York and Mahjong Mistress in Los Angeles are aiming to help the next generation learn to play mahjong, a tile game that is believed to have originated in China in the 19th century but has long been played throughout Asia.

Mahjong Mistress — made up of Angie Lin, 33; Abby Wu, 27; Susan Kounlavongsa, 38; and Zoé Blue, 30 — holds meet-ups every couple of months that cost \$15 to \$25 and often draw hundreds of people. The hosts organize Lunar New Year parties and



Left, an elbow-to-elbow gathering of Pawn Chess Club, where attendees packed into a Canal Street apartment. Below, from left: Eduardo Rojer, founder of a Rummikub club in Brooklyn; matching club tattoos; and Kasey Oldford, left, and Julia Arce during a match.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GRAHAM DICKIE/THE NEW YORK TIMES



mahjong matchmaking nights where enthusiasts can flirt while discussing the specifics of richi versus Taiwanese mahjong.

"People are looking for wholesome activities," Ms. Lin said, pointing to data that Gen Z is consuming less alcohol than older generations. Well, mostly wholesome: "Our first singles night, we had two people making out at the end of it."

'People Are Dancing Here'

On a drizzly Tuesday evening this month, a line of people huddled under umbrellas on Canal Street in Manhattan, waiting to climb five flights of stairs to the apartment where a chess club was underway.

Paradoxically, several of the city's liveliest game groups are dedicated to perhaps the fustiest game of all: chess. Its popularity has spiked among adolescents in recent years, fueled by a combination of the pandemic, the 2020 Netflix mini-series "The Queen's Gambit" and a campaign to target young people by Chess.com, an app and website for online chess. (The game's status was reinforced when the author Sally Rooney, 33, released the chess-forward novel "Intermezzo" in September.)

There seems to be a chess club for practically every scene in New York City, where players have long frequented the Marshall Club in Greenwich Village or the open-air tables in Washington Square Park.

Now, they might try Queens Gambit, which describes itself on social media as the "queerest anti-imperialist chess club on



earth," or Club Chess, which has hosted chess nights at Le Bain and New York Fashion Week parties with Maison Margiela.

A.L. Bahta, 30, an artist and musician, and Corrine Ciani, 28, a writer and event producer, had nightlife in mind when they started Club Chess last year. "There's a lot of traditional chess clubs in New York, and that's sort of not the angle we've ever went in," Ms. Ciani said. "We've had people play chess in front of D.J. booths — like, on the floor — and we've had to be like, 'Sorry, people are dancing here.'"

This particular line was for Pawn Chess Club, a beginner-friendly group that cycles through wine bars and restaurants in Lower Manhattan. Its founders, Isabel Münter, 32, and Simone Robert, 29, co-workers at a design studio, hustled around the candlelit apartment, where guests crowded around two long tables of chessboards and sipped sake from boxes with straws.

"People are just so eager to meet other people," Ms. Münter said. "There's something very nice about a chessboard, where you can sit in total silence with a stranger across from you because you're focusing, or it can be a totally chatty game."

The group's events have been held every two or three weeks since the spring of 2023 and regularly draw more than 100 guests. Some were there to play chess, others to watch. A few were on dates. Several wanted a night out that would not leave them exhausted or hung over.

Linsen Chai, 29, an exhibition designer at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, said he



had loathed chess when his father had encouraged him to learn the game as a child. But he was surprised by how much he enjoyed playing in the relaxed environment of the chess club.

"I'm trying to make it part of my life again, which is very full circle," he said. "When I told my dad I was going to a chess club, he outright laughed."

He returned to the room where a throng of people were watching Anya Biggs, a chess tutor and member of several of the city's chess clubs, advance her knight. When it looked as if the game might be reaching its conclusion, a man turned to the strangers standing on either side of him.

"Anyone want to play?" he asked.

'People are just so eager to meet other people,' a club founder says.

N°5

