morrow, windy, some snow showers high 34. Weather map is on Page B8.





The main bazaar in Bakwa, in Afghanistan's southwest. There are few customers for piping once used to irrigate opium poppy fields.

51 MEN CONVICTED OF RAPE AT TRIAL

Ex-Husband Sentenced in France to 20 Years

By CATHERINE PORTER and SÉGOLÈNE LE STRADIC

AVIGNON, France — In a packed courtroom on Thursday in Avignon, France, the head judge asked each of the dozens of men accused of raping Gisèle Pelicot — while she was near-comatose and at the invitation of her husband of 50 years — to stand briefly. Then he pronounced their convictions swiftly, one after the other: all

guilty.

When it was over, every one of the 51 accused men had been convicted, most of them for raping Ms. Pelicot in her own bedroom. Her ex-husband, Dominique Pelicot, 72, who had admitted to drugging her over nearly a decade to abuse her, was the only one to get the maximum sentence: 20 years.



Gisèle Pelicot talking to the news media after the verdict.

The rest were given sentences mostly ranging from six to nine

And with that, the trial that had both horrified and captivated France for almost four months ended with a victory for the woman at its center, Ms. Pelicot. She became a feminist icon for her bravery in allowing the case to be tried publicly, to more fully expose the horrors of rape in a country

After it was over, she stepped into a swarm of French and international reporters and hundreds of supporters eagerly awaiting her, who held up signs of appreciation and cheered when she emerged. There were so many of

Continued on Page A10

Poppy Boom in Afghan Desert Has Gone Bust

By AZAM AHMED

BAKWA DISTRICT, Afghanistan — An oasis stretched far into the desert, a vast sea of emerald stalks and scarlet poppy flowers that grew to the horizon.

The Taliban operated openly,

running a social experiment un-like anything in the country. Tens
— then hundreds — of thousands of people flocked here to escape the war and grow poppy, fleeing the American efforts to wipe out

the crop.

The Taliban opened a trauma hospital to treat their wounded and earned a fortune, not just from opium but also from methamphetamines and taxes goods moving in and out of Af-ghanistan, bringing them millions upon millions of dollars every

During the war, the remote district of Bakwa became a laborato-ry for a future Taliban state, pro-

Taliban Funded War by Taxing Drug Trade, Then Choked It

viding money for the war and a sanctuary for the men fighting it. All that has changed. The Taliban boom is rapidly going bust.

The same insurgents who embraced opium to help finance their war have put an end to it, ordering a ban that has all but cleared Afghanistan of poppy and illicit

What the United States and its allies failed to do in two decades of war, the Taliban has managed in two years of peace. In an area where poppy once dominated the landscape, barely a stalk remains.

Hundreds of labs set up to process heroin and methamphetpowered this part of southern Af-ghanistan has been all but emptied. And the nation, already reeling without international aid, has lost a sizable piece of its economy as a result.

On top of that, the Taliban gov ernment has stiffened its taxes, leaving residents bitter and angry.
Many have moved away, except those too poor or invested to leave, like Abdul Khaliq.

'This is all coming to an end," he said, waving his hand toward the emptying villages.

There was almost nothing in this district, Bakwa, when he arrived 25 years ago, just an empty desert plain. He built an empire out of sand, selling the pumps and solar panels that provided water for the opium boom, helping turn Bakwa into a frontier outpost for

smugglers, traders and farmers Now his story, like Bakwa's, has

3 French Hens, 2 Turtle Doves and 20,000 Crows

ROCHESTER, N.Y. — In Rochester, N.Y., there are telltale signs that the holiday season is under-

Santa's workshop opens at the outdoor ice rink downtown. There is the lighting of the pyramid of kegs at the local brewery. Produc-tions of "A Christmas Carol" and "The Nutcracker" begin.

Then there are the tens of thou-sands of crows that descend on December, and the fireworks and lasers that are deployed to drive them away.

City officials and wildlife ex-perts estimate upward of 20,000 crows roost downtown nightly.

"It's like you're in 'The Birds," said Rachel Kudiba, referring to Alfred Hitchcock's classic film about birds on a murderous rampage. Ms. Kudiba was one of four U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services specialists hired by the city to chase and haze the

massive groups of crows.

An outbreak of West Nile virus decimated the American crow population in the early 2000s.

But no one would know it by the sight of the cawing, swirling cloud of jet-black crows over the water-falls of the Genesee River. They come from miles around, wildlife experts say, seeking warmth in the city's concrete grid and ambient light after foraging in fields.

The phenomenon plays out in



A cawing cloud of jet-black birds descends on Rochester, N.Y., every year around the holidays. Getting rid of them is murder.

large roosts wintering in upstate and Poughkeepsie; in burn Danville, Ill., in the Midwest; and in Portland, Ore., and Sunnyvale, Calif., in the West

Many cities have employed scare tactics to ward them off. But few seem as consistent in their regimen as Rochester, where the annual Yuletide ritual of shooing

For two or three nights during comb the city. They have been conducting annual hazing raids in Rochester long enough to have an idea of where the birds gather, and they get help from residents who, in response to city media campaigns, call the city's 311 hotline.

When they locate a cluster, Continued on Page A20

Musk Wields Political Might At Fiscal Deal

Opposing a Bill Using Threats and Falsities

This article is by Michael D. Shear, Annie Karni, Ryan Mac and Maggie Haberman

WASHINGTON - When Presi dent-elect Donald J. Trump picked "the Great Elon Musk," the world's richest man, to slash gov-ernment spending and waste, he mused that the effort might be "the Manhattan Project of our

By Thursday, that prediction looked spot on. Wielding the social media platform he bought for \$44 billion in 2022, Mr. Musk detonated a rhetorical nuclear bomb in the middle of government shutdown negotiations on Capitol Hill.

In more than 150 separate posts on X, starting before dawn on Wednesday, Mr. Musk demanded that Republicans back away from a bipartisan spending deal that was meant to avoid a government shutdown over Christmas. He vowed political retribution against anyone voting for the sprawling bill backed by Speaker Mike Johnson, who called Mr Musk on Wednesday to ask that

he stop posting about the bill.

Mr. Musk also shared misinformation about the bill, including false claims that it contained new aid for Ukraine or \$3 billion in funds for a new stadium in Washington. By the end of Wednesday, Mr. Trump issued a statement of

his own, calling the bill "a betrayal of our country."

It was a remarkable moment for Mr. Musk, who has never been elected to public office but now appears to be the largest megaphone for the man about to retake the Oval Office. Larger, in fact, than Mr. Trump himself, whose own vaunted social media presence is dwarfed by that of Mr. Musk. The president-elect has 96.2 million followers on X, while Mr. Musk has 207.9 million. (Mr. Musk is also far richer than Mr. Trump. According to the Bloomberg Billion-aires Index, he is worth \$458 bil-

lion, while the president-elect is worth a mere \$6.61 billion.) This week also marked the first time Mr. Musk has been able to use his website as a digital whip, driving lawmakers to support his desired outcome.

His actions had prompted a backlash from some lawmakers who recoiled at his interference in the legislative process. Some even accused him of acting more like the president or vice president than a billionaire executive.

"Democrats and Republicans

spent months negotiating a bipar-tisan agreement to fund our gov-ernment," Senator Bernie Sanders, an independent from Ver-mont who has long criticized the power of wealthy business execu-

Continued on Page A16

HOUSE KILLS PLAN SOUGHT BY TRUMP ON SPENDING BILL

SHUTDOWN IS LOOMING

Speaker Back to Drawing Board, Facing Friday Night Deadline

By CATIE EDMONDSON

WASHINGTON — The government lurched toward a shutdown after the House on Thursday rejected a hastily produced plan or-dered up by President-elect Donald J. Trump to keep funding flow-ing. Dozens of Republicans defied his demand to pair the spending with a two-year suspension of the federal debt limit. The vote sent Speaker Mike

Johnson back to the drawing board ahead of a Friday night deadline with no clear path to keeping the government open. Right-wing lawmakers balked at increasing the government's borrowing limit, something many of them have long pledged not to do without spending cuts to keep the

debt from ballooning further. They were joined by Democrats who savaged the G.O.P. for bowing to Mr. Trump and reneging on a spending compromise Mr. John-son had reached with them only days earlier.

The vote was 174 to 235, with one member voting "present."



The blowup is terrible timing for Speaker Mike Johnson.

Thirty-eight Republicans joined

It was an epic meltdown that reflected the deep divisions among Republicans in Congress and a fraught dynamic between them and Mr. Trump that portends a difficult road ahead in January, when the G.O.P. will hold full control of Congress and he will be back in the White House. In particular, it suggested that the president-elect's ambitious fiscal plans, including a large tax cut, could face a rocky path on Capitol Hill even

with his own party in charge.

Even before the spending measure hit the House floor on Continued on Page A17

Court Disqualifies Georgia D.A. In Election Case Against Trump

By DANNY HAKIM and RICHARD FAUSSET Georgia's Court of Appeals on

Thursday disqualified the Atlanta prosecutor who brought an elec-tion interference case against President-elect Donald J. Trump and his allies, a surprise move that threw the entire case into dis

In a 2-1 decision, a three-judge panel reversed the decision of the trial judge, who in March allowed Fani T. Willis, the district attorney of Fulton County, Ga., to keep the case, despite revelations about a romantic relationship she had with the lawyer whom she hired to manage the prosecution.

All three of the appeals judges were appointed by Republicans.

Ms. Willis's office swiftly filed court papers indicating that it

would appeal the decision to the Georgia Supreme Court, which is also dominated by Republican-appointed judges.

If the lower court's decision stands, it could doom the case, which is the last active criminal prosecution involving charges against Mr. Trump. The Depart-ment of Justice recently moved to two crimin against the president-elect since it has a policy against prosecuting sitting presidents, and sentencing has been delayed in another.

In the Georgia case, Mr. Trump and 14 of his allies are charged with conspiring to overturn his 2020 election loss.

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INTERNATIONAL A4-13

Destruction in the Islands

After a cyclone flattened much of Mayotte, France's poorest territory, residents point to years of neglect. PAGE A8

Signs of Joy in Syrian Rubble

Returning exiles are shocked at the damage to Homs but ecstatic that the Assad regime is gone.

NATIONAL A15-21

Veto Threat on Judges Bill

A proposal had bipartisan support until Donald J. Trump won the election and the right to choose first. PA

A Jaw-Dropping Discovery

Two remarkably well-preserved mast-odon teeth were discovered recently in a yard near Scotchtown, N.Y. PAGE A20

OBITUARIES B11

Trailblazing Drag Star

Long before the term "drag queen" was widely used, Sir Lady Java's act was barred by law in Los Angeles but popular in the Black entertainment world.



BUSINESS B1-5

Amazon Drivers Strike

Some workers at seven facilities walked out, but the e-commerce giant said it PAGE B1 expected normal operations.

Warning on Gas Exports

The energy secretary said the continued pace of shipments was "neither sustainable nor advisable." PAG

Comeback of the Irish

Notre Dame's season could have unraveled after a home defeat to lowly Northern Illinois, but its path to the College Football Playoff shows just how much its third-year coach has grown. PAGE B6

An M.L.B. Epidemic

OPINION A22-23

Jessica Grose

Injury rates among pitchers have "skyrocketed" over the past several decades, Major League Baseball concluded in a report. But curbing the problem has few easy solutions PAGE B10

PAGE A23



WEEKEND ARTS C1-12

Let Her Entertain You

In the new, stripped-down Broadway revival of the musical "Gypsy," Audra McDonald steps into the role of Rose. Jesse Green has the review. PAGE



Inside The Times

The New York Times

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TODAY'S PAPER

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AUDIO

On "The Ezra Klein Show," a Times Opinion podcast, the legal scholars Kate Shaw and Gillian Metzger discussed how recent Supreme Court decisions have supercharged Donald J. Trump's power for his second term. Listen at nytimes.com/ezra-klein-show

VIDEO

Looking for a present for a loved one? Journana Khatib, an editor at the Book Review, says books always make great gifts. Learn about some titles she recommends, including "North Woods," at nytimes.com/video.

How well do you really know holiday movies? Test your knowledge by listening to audio clips and guessing the Christmas films (hint: two are actually TV specials). nytimes.com/style

Quote of the Day

"I wanted, by opening the doors of this trial on Sept. 2, that society would take up the debates that have been launched."

GISÈLE PELICOT, who waived anonymity to make public the trial of her former husband and the dozens of other men convicted of joining him in raping her for years while she was near-comatose. Page A1.

The Story Behind the Story

Cardinal Journalistic Sins, Playing Out Onstage

By SARAH BAHR

Sarah Bahr, who covers Culture, has never seen an editor conga line in a newsroom, but she enjoyed the one in the 2019 Broadway production of "Ink."

One can hardly blame people for believing

journalists have questionable ethics. The portrayal that is ubiquitous across pop culture isn't flattering: A striving workaholic who sleeps with a source ("Richard Jewell"). A narcissist willing to out people's lives on the line to get a story ("Die Hard"). A nosy witch who relies on gossip instead of fact (Rita Skeeter in "Harry Potter").

Four stage productions I saw this year in New York City have piled on to this lessthan-flattering depiction of my profession.

The reporters onstage were in desperate need of a course in journalistic ethics. They were manipulative ("Yellow Face"). They had an agenda ("McNeal"). They didn't identify themselves as journalists ("Safety Not Guaranteed," a musical based on the film of the same name), and they misrepresented their reporting experience ("Breaking the Story")

Any one of these characters would be fired, or, at least, one would hope, disci-plined for their behavior. For me, watching fictional journalists scheme their way to scoops is akin to what I imagine it must feel like for doctors to watch "Grey's Anatomy.

In addition to my role as an editor on The New York Times's Flexible Editing desk, I also write for the Culture section. (I see more than 250 films, plays and musicals each year.) And I cover journalism itself: I've written more than 100 articles for Inside The Times, which explains how reporters do their jobs.

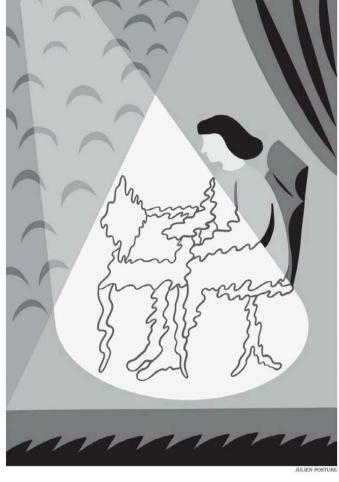
So, let me share how some stage scenarios would most likely unfold in a real news-

The reporter characters who approach their interview subjects with clear agendas in "McNeal" and "Yellow Face" - the former a New York Times Magazine writer aiming to deliver a hit piece on a star writer, the latter a Times reporter angling to weasel his way into a steaming-hot scoop
— would find themselves censured by their newsrooms, should their tactics come to

The Times does not, and would not, knowingly publish an article obtained by the unscrupulous undercover methods employed by the journalists in "Safety Not Guaranteed," who never disclose to the subject of their piece who they are, or that they are reporting a story.

Then there's a former war correspondent in the darkly comic drama "Breaking the Story," who misrepresents herself by saying she was inside a hotel that was bombed when she was only near it. Though she is haunted by her deception, she nevertheless accepts an award, perversely rationalizing that her injuries brought attention to the suffering of the people she was covering. But in real life, there are consequences

for bending the truth. Brian Williams, the former NBC Nightly News anchor, was suspended for six months and then demot ed amid the revelation that he had not been inside a helicopter shot down by enemy fire while covering the Iraq War in 2003, as he had repeatedly claimed, but was instead in a second helicopter.



These are cardinal journalistic sins, but the stage is also full of less egregious inac-

For one, there's the story-writing glory

You know the one: A journalist - after months of labor-intensive reporting - sits down to write a beautiful 3,000-word cover story in about 60 seconds, often to a superhero-esque score. The backspace key isn't used once as facts and quotes magically pour out into one seamless, orderly, beautiful narrative.

Here's a secret: Writing is still hard when you're a journalist - maybe even more so, with the added pressure that your article may be read by millions of readers. But a writer holed up in a room for hours on end, furiously chewing through pack after pack of gum while churning out page after page pausing to rearrange sections, fussing over adjectives — does not compelling stagecraft make.

Of course, plays are not meant to explain the journalistic process — they are for entertainment. And playwrights do get some things right: The long hours. (Is it even a journalism story if the protagonist doesn't cancel plans or miss a family dinner?) The punishing deadlines. The sources who call, text and email at all hours, meaning you're never really off the clock. The competition to get a scoop. And there are some thrilling parts of

journalism that theatermakers do justice to: The rush of chasing a story ("Almost Famous"). The exhilaration of nailing down a key fact or document after hours of searching ("Corruption"). The satisfaction of seeing the result of weeks of assiduous reporting in print ("The Connector").

That's the real, high-stakes drama. We certainly can't put words in people's mouths, but we can definitely publish the ones they do say.

And that can make all the difference. Without the dogged work of ethical journalists, the Watergate scandal may have never been exposed.

Sexual abuse in the Catholic church may have never been brought to light.

And the disgraced film producer Harvey Weinstein, who was at the center of sexual assault allegations that set off the global #MeToo movement, may never have been arrested.

The stories that play out onstage are entertaining, it's true. But I find the real ones to be greater than fiction

Today's Top Trending Headlines

Dominique Pelicot and 50 Others Guilty in Rape Trial That Shook France A court in Avignon, France, sentenced Dominique Pelicot to 20 years after he admitted to drugging and raping his wife, Gisèle Pelicot, for nearly a decade, inviting strangers to join him. The court also convicted 50 other defendants, most of them on rape charges. The case made Ms. Pelicot, who fought to have the trial open to the public, a feminist hero. Catherine Porter reported on the verdicts from Avignon.

Are Hot Showers Bad for Your Skin and Hair? Katie Mogg tapped experts and consulted research to answer this reader question in Ask Well. While there are benefits to warm baths (including just being very relaxed) most experts agree that scorching showers may strip away oils and moisture-retaining substances.

Trump Transition Live Updates: Republican Plan to Avoid Shutdown Fails in the House The House rejected a new Republican proposal to avert a shutdown, a day after President-elect Donald J. Trump torpedoed a bipartisan spending deal that House Speaker Mike Johnson had struck with Democrats. Times reporters covered the G.O.P.'s scramble on Thursday in a live blog.

Google Street View Captures a Man Loading a Bag Into a Trunk. Arrests Follow. "It was a routine image picked up by Google Street View: a man loading a white bag into the trunk of a car" in northern Spain, reported Annie Correal, But that image, the authorities in Spain said, helped them solve a missing-person case.

A Headline From History

ROCKEFELLER SWORN IN AS VICE PRESIDENT AFTER CONFIRMATION BY HOUSE, 287-128

December 20, 1974. President Richard M. Nixon's resignation in August had elevated Vice President Gerald R. Ford to the presidency, leaving a vacancy. Four months after Mr. Ford nominated him, Nelson A. Rockefeller, the former governor of New York, was sworn in as vice president in the Senate chamber, The Times reported. He was the second person to be named vice president through congressional vote, as required by the 25th Amendment. The first was Mr. Ford, who became vice president after Spiro Agnew resigned the office in 1973. Mr. Rockefeller was "only the second man to become Vice President without a public vote," The Times wrote. He did not seek a full term on Mr. Ford's ticket in 1976.

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Facts of Interest

U.S. exports of natural gas have tripled over the last five years, are expected to double by 2030, and could double again based only on new gas export terminals that have already been approved and planned.

Continuing Pace of Gas Exports Hurts Economy, Official Warns B1

For many Russians, the biggest concern in recent months has been the rising price of staple goods such as potatoes, which have nearly doubled in price over the last year.

In Annual Talk, Putin Sees a Glass Half Full A9

Amazon has hundreds of delivery hubs across the country, and 10 or more in some of the largest urban areas. At the hubs, Amazon generally hires contracting firms to take packages to customers. Thousands Who Deliver for Amazon Go on Strike B1

Since "The Lion King" was released in 1994, the film has spawned straight-tovideo follow-ups, animated TV shows, a Broadway hit, theme-park attractions and several projects from Beyoncé, including her role in "Mufasa: The Lion King." Circle of Life Returns For Yet Another Spin C5

California is a leader in electric vehicle adoption. The top five cities in the United States with the highest numbers of registered electric vehicles are all in California. California Gets Approval to Ban Gas-Powered New Car Sales by 2035 B4

A well-preserved jaw of a mastodon, a cousin to the woolly mammoth, was recently discovered in the backyard of a home in Orange County, N.Y., which has the highest concentration of mastodon remains in the country.

A Jaw-Dropping Backyard Find: Mastodon Teeth A20

Reader Corner

From the Comments Forum

The Times's Ellen Barry recently wrote an article about the U.S. school districts that monitor their students' school computer activity for signs of suicidal ideation. The article generated a discussion in the comments section. Read one edited comment below, along with Ms. Barry's reply.

My understanding is that the more a society talks about suicide to kids, the more likely it is for a kid to see that suicide is a potential coping mechanism. When I was in journalism school, ethics were very clear about limiting the how and the why whenever reporting on suicide, primarily when the victim was a teen, child or celebrity known to teens and children. This was considered a tactic of prevention. As much as I abhor censorship, journalistic ethics have historically separated child protection from other reporting in select circumstances like teen suicide. This seems to fly in the face of that guidance. If kids know they're being monitored because they might self-harm, it also gives kids the belief that adults assume this is common.

- MICHELLE KRUEGER, MINNEAPOLIS

Recent studies have consistently found no increase in suicidal behavior among patients who are asked about their suicidal thoughts. On the contrary, they show that screening and intervention save lives. That said, certain kinds of media reporting on the issue do seem to have a negative effect, and organizations like the American Feder ation for Suicide Prevention have issued safety guidelines for journalists. ELLEN BARRY

To read Ms. Barry's article, visit nytimes.com/by/ellen-barry

In Our Inbox

Excerpts From New York Times Newsletters



Greg Casar, a Democrat from Texas, will lead the Congressional Progressive Caucus.

The On Politics newsletter has been running a series of interviews with Democratic lawmakers trying to explain their party's losses in November. Next up is Representative Greg Casar of Texas, who, at 35, was elected last week as the youngest person to lead the Congressional Progressive Caucus. Below is an edited excerpt from his interview with Jess Bidgood, a Times politics reporter.

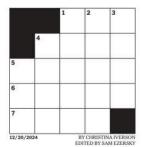
Do you think that the problem in November was a messaging problem, or problem?

I think the Democratic Party brand was already struggling so much with working-class voters that we could not survive the onslaught of Republican dark money and lies. Our brand wasn't strong enough to survive that onslaught, and that brand has problems for a mix of substantive reasons and message reasons.

If corporate elements of the Democratic Party, like Joe Manchin and his wing of the party, had listened to progressives and had passed the bills to lower housing costs, to contain child care costs within 7 percent of a person's income, I think that substantively would have helped a lot in this election.

To sign up for On Politics, visit nytimes.com/newsletters.

The Mini Crossword



ACROSS

- 1 What it doesn't hurt to do if
- you're confused, they say "Toodles!"
- 5 "A Christmas " (classic holiday
- 6 Really love
- 7 More than a few

DOWN

- 1 Burr in "Hamilton"
- 2 "A Christmas ___" (classic holiday movie)
- 3 Dark green leafy green 4 Magician's "I did it!"
- 5 Word after dash or web

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE

В	E	L	L	
A	R	1	A	S
В	U	В	В	Α
Α	P	R	0	N
S	T	A	R	

Here to Help

A Recipe for One-Pan Pork Tenderloin With Mushrooms

When pork tenderloin roasts with mushrooms in the same skillet, the results are deeply delicious. The pork's garlic, rosemary and fennel (if using) coating mingles with the crisping mushrooms, which grow rich and savory cooking in a knob of butter — exactly what the lean meat needs. Tearing a variety of mushrooms into ragged pieces creates a mix of textures with little effort. To double the recipe, sear the tenderloins and mushrooms in batches in a skillet, then transfer everything to a sheet pan to roast. $\ensuremath{\mathsf{ALI}}$ $\ensuremath{\mathsf{SLAGLE}}$

TIME: 30 MINUTES YIELD: 2 TO 3 SERVINGS

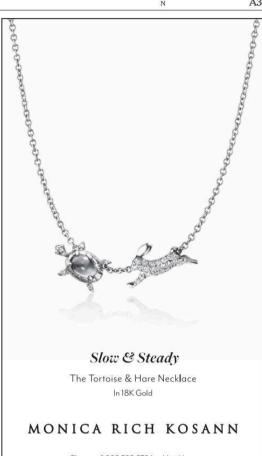
- 2 rosemary sprigs
- 4 garlic cloves, smashed and peeled 1/2 teaspoon fennel seeds (optional)
- Salt and black pepper 1 pork tenderloin (1 to 11/4 pounds).
- silver skin removed, meat halved crosswise and patted dry
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil 8 ounces mixed mushrooms, torn into
- 1-inch pieces 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, sliced
- 2 teaspoons red or white wine vinegar 1. Heat the oven to 425 degrees. Pluck 1 tablespoon leaves from the rosemary sprigs
- (reserve the rest). Using a mortar and pestle or knife and cutting board, combine the rosemary leaves, 3 garlic cloves, the fennel seeds (if using) and a pinch of salt and pepper. Pound or chop until a coarse paste forms. Season the pork with salt, then coat with the garlic-rosemary mixture. (You can season and refrigerate the pork up to 8 hours ahead.)
- 2. Heat the oil in a large, ovenproof skillet over medium-high. Add the pork and scatter the mushrooms around (skillet might be snug). Sear until browned underneath, 4 to 5 minutes.



Season the mushrooms with salt and pepper, and add the butter, remaining garlic clove and the reserved rosemary sprigs. Flip the pork, stir the mushrooms and spread them to fill the skillet. Roast, stirring the mushrooms halfway through, until a thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the pork registers between 140 and 145 degrees, 10 to 12 minutes.

3. Transfer the pork to a cutting board to rest at least 5 minutes. Stir the vinegar into the mushrooms and scrape up any browned bits stuck to the bottom of the skillet. Thinly slice the pork and serve with the mushrooms, spooning the pan drippings over top.

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



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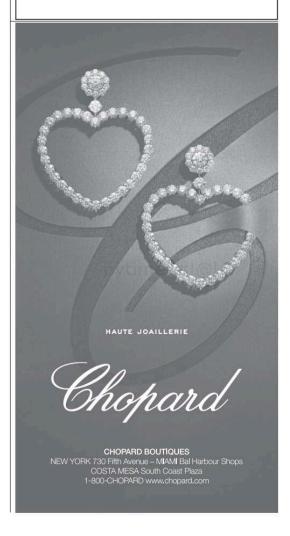
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MILANO



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FRIDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2024

International

The New York Times







Left, new building construction in Haiphong, Vietnam. Pham Van Thinh, center, a retired police chief, delights in seeing the bustle of young workers at the LG factory in his city, right.

Trump's Tariffs Helped Northern Vietnam Boom. But What Now?

By DAMIEN CAVE

HAIPHONG, Vietnam — Pham Van Thinh can see the back of an LG electron-ics factory from his patio, and in his eyes, nothing is more beautiful than that bright white behemoth.

Some nights, when workers stream out after 8 p.m., their lanyards flashing ID cards with new-hire faces, he walks ID cards with new-hire faces, he walks amid the crowd, soaking up the energy of a once-poor village near Vietnam's northern port of Haiphong that has suddenly joined the march of global trade. "It makes me happy," said Mr. Van Thinh, 73, a retired police chief who fought for the Communist north in the Vietnam War. "All these young people, they have better lives."

they have better lives."

Six years ago, this cluster of prosper-ity did not exist. Then President Donald J. Trump hit China with tariffs, igniting a global search for alternatives to Chinese

manufacturing.

Few nations, if any, have benefited more than Vietnam from the scramble more than Vietnam from the scramble that followed — especially north Vietnam, historically an economic laggard compared to the more cosmopolitan south. Around Haiphong, a few hours' drive from China, factories bloomed. The LG plant expanded exponentially; the industrial park nearby filled up with Chinese companies adding production abroad. Rural hamlets like Mr. Van Thinh's — once known for little more Thinh's — once known for little more than rice fields and dreams — grew almost overnight into boom towns of 30,000.

30,000.

Will another Trump term impede or accelerate that growth? No one knows.

Mr. Trump has vowed to punish countries that have large trade surpluses with the United States, and Vietnam now ranks third on that list, behind only China and Mexico. Officials in Hanoi say they worry about "discrimination" — that Vietnam will be singled out for tariffs while competitors avoid Mr. Trump's blacklist. blacklist.

South Korean companies (including LG and Samsung) are Vietnam's biggest foreign investors, and some have already paused expansion plans, waiting on Washington.

Still, some analysts exude confidence, saying Vietnam will continue to flourish if Mr. Trump slaps far higher tariffs on China than on other countries, as he has threatened.

No matter what happens next, Ameri-ca's once-and-future president can safely ca's once-and-nuture president can salely say he helped make north Vietnam great again. For the first time since France's 19th-century rule of Vietnam from Saigon, now Ho Chi Minh City, the north has become Vietnam's economic engine and gateway to the world. It leads the country in the value of exports going out, and foreign investment flowing in.

and foreign investment flowing in.
"The balance of power between these The balance of power between tiese two regions has shifted radically," said Vu Thanh Tu Anh, an economist at the Fulbright School of Public Policy and Management in Ho Chi Minh City. "It shows up in all the statistics."

The north's transformation, while driven in part by geography and local politics, also highlights how trade weaponization by great powers is rearranging the global economy. Industrialization is spreading to new places at a faster clip, with local fortunes defined not just by competitive advantages such as produc-tivity, but also by distant leaders fighting for supremacy, picking winners and

Put another way, the "wisdom of crowds" and markets is giving way to the whims of mercurial men — with reverberations that reach into distant nations

From China to Vietnam

In Asia, where national economies are more integrated with fewer trade barriers than almost anywhere else, what Mr. Trump started with tariffs, the pandemic

Faith in China was shaken as its government resisted investigations into Covid-19's origins and responded to the virus with strict lockdowns and factory shutdowns. That led many governments to get more involved in weaning supply chains from Chinese dominance.

Japan, for example, created a fund in 2020 to help companies diversify from China. South Korea expanded efforts to help businesses build ties to India and Southeast Asia through its "New South-ern Policy," while American and European officials have pressured companies (and their Asian suppliers) to "de-risk"



Hamlets near Haiphong have grown into boom towns, a phenomenon sparked after China was hit with tariffs, spurring a search for manufacturing alternatives.

Vietnam has been a huge winner. Of the roughly 120 Japanese companies us-ing government diversification subsi-dies, over 50 claimed them for Vietnam, more than any other country, according to Japanese officials.

LG, the South Korean multinational. recently sold its last two screen display factories in China after adding produc-

A Taiwanese electronics supplier has begun producing network devices for Elon Musk's Starlink system at a factory about 60 miles from Haiphong.

They are part of a larger trend. Be-tween 2017 and 2023, foreign investors committed \$248.3 billion to Vietnam for 19,701 projects, according to an analysis by Le Hong Hiep, coordinator of the Viet-nam studies program at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore. That's more than half of all foreign investment since Vietnam opened its economy in the late

Vietnam's growing trade surplus with the United States — reaching \$104 billion last year, up from \$38 billion in 2017 has led to accusations that China uses Vietnam as a warehouse, rerouting its products to avoid tariffs. Chinese im-

ports and investment have soared.

But in a country as wary of its neighbor as Vietnam, where 1,000 years of Chinese colonization lingers in national memory, the boom is by no means owned or operated by Beijing. From Vietnam's economic opening in the 1980s through 2023, mainland China was the sixth-larg-est foreign investor in the country. With Hong Kong included, it was only fourth,

after South Korea, Japan and Singapore.
A recent Harvard Business School
study showed that illegal tariff avoidance was more rare than the trade imbalance might suggest - representing be-

tween 1.8 and 16.1 percent of exports to the United States in 2021. Researchers found that most exporters were making new products with in-puts from many locations and local in-vestment, not just relabeling Chinese products as Vietnamese.

Haiphong's Leap Forward

"No winners" come from a U.S.-China trade war, the Chinese leader, Xi Jinping, declared last week in a meeting with global financiers. North Vietnam's expe-rience suggests otherwise.

In 1954, after separating from France to become an independent nation, it was one of the poorest and least-developed countries in Asia, relying almost entirely on subsistence farming.

Haiphong, the north's main port, was pounded by the U.S. military with some of the heaviest bombing raids of the war, and in the decade after unification in 1975, all of Vietnam became what one scholar called "a poverty-stricken society beset by a stagnant economy."

Today, double-digit growth rates in the north are the norm, and Haiphong is a modern metropolis of two million people connected to Hanoi by a new highway. Cranes swing like weather vanes above more than a dozen construction sites. New bridges cross a river twisting through the city, where piers at industrial parks help ships move to one of the busiest ports in the world.

Bruno Jaspaert, chairman of the European Chamber of Commerce in Vietnam and the chief executive of DEEP C, which was industrial parks executed.

runs industrial parks around Haiphong, said the waterway was just one regional advantage. Northern provinces have also had leaders better connected to Ha-noi, yielding more infrastructure invest-

ment, plus more open, affordable land. Compared to the south, where an in-dustrial base left over from the war made it easier for companies like Nike to get going in the 1990s, Mr. Jaspaert said the north "started later, they can plan better and they are also much faster."

Pointing out the window of his office to Haiphong's new city hall, surrounded by new apartment complexes, he empha-sized that none of that was there when he moved to Vietnam in 2018.

Northern Vietnam was already grow-ing then, in a country that lifted 40 million people out of poverty from 1993 to 2014. But American tariffs became an economic accelerant — lighter fluid poured on a steady flame. And in the

north, an epicenter of ancient Vietnamese civilization and Communist revolu-tion, government officials' quick action coincided with foreign investors' own sense of capitalist urgency.

Mr. Jaspaert said production decisions that once took 18 to 24 months now take six to nine. And while the south stagnates somewhat (Ho Chi Minh City's subway line remains incomplete after 20 years of construction), the north races

DEEP C's revenues and profits have quintupled since the Trump tariffs. Villages like Mr. Van Thinh's have

been transformed.

When the LG plant expanded in 2019, the narrow streets of nearby hamlets quickly turned into commercial strips with restaurants and bold-colored bar-bershops for workers who make a solid local wage of around \$400 to \$550 a

Every spare piece of land has been turned into worker housing. Mr. Van Thinh now manages 35 rooms with his family. Nearby, Pham Thi Cham, 55, drained a backyard pond where she raised fish to build eight rooms that she rents out for about \$60 a month.

Many of the workers come from central Vietnam. Instead of going south,

Tran Van Sv. 26, a quiet young man in a knockoff Givenchy T-shirt, arrived three years ago from a poor coastal province to work for LG. He said he lives frugally enough to send 60 percent of his pay back home.

It's a story repeated up and down the halls of boardinghouses with sneakers by the doors and motorbikes parked out-Mr. Van Thinh said all nine of his

grandchildren were studying at univer-sities or working at factories.

"I never could have imagined this," he

Now, with defiant exuberance, he can't imagine the progress stopping.

He emphasized that he trusted his

government to keep manufacturing healthy, adding pressure for leaders in

Plus, would Mr. Trump really crush a boom outside China that he helped cre-

"Everything is going so well," Mr. Van Thinh said, staring at the hazy lights of the LG factory. "These companies, they'll continue to expand."



From 2017 to 2023, foreign investors committed more money to Vietnam than they had since the late 1980s. Bruno Jaspaert, a C.E.O. in Vietnam, is chairman of the European Chamber of Commerce in Vietnam.





A Syrian girl carrying a meal on Monday through the neighborhood of Jura Ashayah, an area of Homs that was bombarded and besieged for years by former President Bashar al-Assad's forces.

Joy and Sorrow as Syrians Return to Rubble of an Ancient City

By CARLOTTA GALL
Photographs by DAVID GUTTENFELDER

HOMS. Syria — Members of the fam-

HOMS, Syria — Members of the family ducked under an empty doorway and stepped over the rubble from their home.

"It's shocking, really shocking," said Abdulrahman Alama, 37, as he stared at the damaged building. A refugee in Lebanon for 13 years since the start of Syria's civil war, he had returned to Homs and was visiting the family home with his sister and another relative just a week after the fall of President Bashar al-Assad. Any joy was tempered by the sight.

"I don't want to send a photo to my father because it is too shocking," he said.

Days after the lightning-fast rebel offensive that ousted Mr. al-Assad, Syrians are going back home by the thousands, among them refugees, the internally displaced and detainees emerging from prisons. And residents are shaking off the terror of living under dictatorship.

In Homs, people were reacting with both smiles and tears, thanking God and frequently cursing their former president.

Much of Syria was devastated by Mr. al-Assad's brutal fight to suppress a popular uprising and hold on to power. Homs, an ancient city in central Syria where protesters were the first to take up weapons in 2011 against his oppression, became a center of resistance.

Warplanes bombed the city. Neighborhoods were sealed off and the population starved and battered into surrender. Hundreds were killed as the Assad regime besieged parts of the city for three years. Even after the attacks stopped, intense repression remained in place.

Years after the bombardment, there are still scenes of indescribable dereliction. Whole districts are bomb sites, where ravaged buildings stretch for block after block. Walls are scarred with shrapnel, collapsed roofs tilt at dangerous angles, and mounds of rubble fill the videwalls.

"Complete destruction," said Mr. Alama, gesturing at his ruined neighborhood, Baba Amr, "and then God destroyed Assad."

Tragedy touched nearly every family in Homs during the Assad campaign.

The people of Homs turned out for peaceful protests in the spring of 2011, joining the call for justice that was rippling through the Arab world. They were cautious at first, aware of how the former president, Hafez al-Assad — Bashar al-Assad's father — had crushed a 1982 rebellion in the nearby city of Hama, killing thousands of civilians in one of the bloodiest episodes in recent Middle Eastern history.

But as the Assad regime used lethal force, clashes increasingly broke out, and within months a full-blown armed rebellion was underway. Baba Amr became an opposition-held area until February 2012, when Mr. al-Assad sent in security forces to crack down.

Rabia Asad, a truck driver, had moved out of Baba Amr but was helping families flee from the city, he said. People scrambled through the sewer system to escape the onslaught, but hundreds were killed and their houses burned at the end of the monthlong assault on the neighborhood, he said.

"Assad had us up to the neck," he said. Rebel fighters occupied the houses, and the Assad army shelled the neighborhood with heavy artillery, said Mahmoud al-Shater, 23, whose house, next











In Homs in recent days, clockwise from top: Abdulrahman Alana, who returned from exile in Lebanon, outside his destroyed home; fighters investigating an overturned tank left by Assad soldiers; men and women at a celebratory concert; a rebel fighter and his family outside a roadside restaurant; a boy riding his bike over a makeshift roadblock.

door to Mr. Alama's, was smashed. Mr. al-Shater was just 10 at the time his family took refuge outside the city.

Mr. al-Shater's father, Abdul Moler al-Shater, a construction worker, disappeared after the police stopped him and a driver at a checkpoint in the city in 2013. "If someone falls in the hands of the

"If someone falls in the hands of the government, they die or starve to death," his mother, Hannah, 51, said. She never learned what happened to her husband and asked that only her first name be published for fear of repercussions. "Mavbe Assad will come back." she said.

A year after her husband disappeared, a stray bullet killed her 8-year-old son, Mr. al-Shater's younger brother, striking him in the head as he stood in the courtyard of their house. Police officers came to investigate, but Hannah said she refused to talk to them because she was grieving and she never learned the results of their investigation. She lived off donations, raising her two remaining sons on her own, moving house several times as the fighting shifted.

Over three long years, the government besieged one district after another, sealing off neighborhoods and starving the population and fighters into surrender. The ferocity of the fighting increased, with warplanes attacking even the old city, with its black basalt walls and covered markets, and the ancient Christian quarter.

Survivors and fighters were eventually evacuated in buses arranged by the United Nations to rebel-held areas in northern Syria.

An entire generation of young men

fled the country to avoid arrest or enlistment into the Syrian Army.
Diaa al-Shaami, 23, was barely a teenager when his two elder brothers went abroad. Eventually, things quieted, and he began studies in trade and accounting and started a coffee shop to make ends

Interviewed between serving customers, he flashed a smile of happiness. There had been a constant fear of arbitrary arrest, for saying the wrong thing or just while walking in the street, he said. Plainclothes security police, known as Shabiha, would demand a free daily coffee from him and helped themselves to packs of cigarettes in his shop, he said, abusing him if he dared to ask for

Tamam Kara Hussain, 69, who lives alone in one room of his damaged home, the upper floor gaping open to the skies, was tending herbs and onions in boxes on his doorstep. He lost three brothers who were detained at a checkpoint and never seen again. His two sons were away fighting with the rebels, and the rest of the family had fled abroad, he

"We just wanted freedom, and he did all this," he said, cursing Mr. al-Assad. "But they will come back," he said of the people who had fled. "It's our land." Homs was already busy again. Refu-

Homs was already busy again. Refugees were arriving on buses from Lebanon every day, cramming into cars and minibuses to travel the last leg to their

Jihad al-Surur, 50, a local businessman, was directing a bulldozer to clear concrete blocks and rubble that the Assad army had placed in piles as rudimentary defenses as the rebels approached Homs this month.

Mr. al-Surur said he was donating his machines and workers to help open up the roads and collect garbage. "It's a mission," he said.

Mr. al-Assad's government had done little to repair the damaged city in 14 years. "He did not do anything for his

people," Mr. al-Surur said.

Syrians all over the city stopped a reporter to send a message to the outside world.

"We need everything, water, electricity, wood, connection," said Mufid al-Swabe, 40, a teacher of English literature, stopping his motorbike to ask that his message be passed on.

his message be passed on.

Amid the suffering, there were brave

"It's bitter and sweet," said Maria al-Amin, 45. She said she had found her brother's name among thousands listed as dead at the notorious Sednaya prison

in central Syria.

She said she was happy with Mr. al-Assad's ouster for her children's future.
Desperately poor, she lives in a half-ruined house with three children and a husband who sells scrap metal that he finds among the ruins. Ms. al-Amin was laying out stale rounds of flat bread on her porch to sell.

"The sadness is inside but not on the outside," she said.

Gaza Hospital Makes Plea For Israeli Attacks to Stop

JERUSALEM - The last functioning intensive care unit at a hospital in northern Gaza was severely damaged by Israeli shelling this week, according to medical staff at the facility who have been pleading for a respite from violence to bring in essential

Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya, the director of the Kamal Adwan Hospital, which includes the intensive care unit, in the city of Jabaliya, said on Thursday that it had been hit by an Israeli tank shell that caused a fire and inflicted serious damage. The unit was the only intensive care facility still providing services for both children and adults in northern Gaza, he said.

The Israeli military said it was "not aware of any strike or shoot-ing toward the I.C.U. in Kamal Adwan Hospital," and was looking into whether there had been fighting nearby, according to The Asso-ciated Press. Israel has in the past accused the armed Palestinian group Hamas of using the hospital as a base of operations, something that hospital staff and Gaza health officials have denied.

"We urgently need repairs re-lated to water and oxygen supplies, but we have not received anything so far," Dr. Abu Safiya said in a statement. "We appeal to the international community to open a humanitarian corridor and allow the entry of medical supplies, equipment and ambulances so that we can provide safe medi-

Kamal Adwan Hospital has kamai Adwar Frospital has been caught in the middle of an Is-raeli military offensive against Hamas in northern Gaza that has been raging all around the compound for more than two months.

"We have been addressing the world for over 75 days, and yet nothing is being done," Dr. Abu Safiya said in an earlier state-ment, issued on Wednesday. "Yes-terday was one of the darkest, most difficult and bloodiest days at Kamal Adwan Hospital," he added. "The tank shells hit the intensive care unit, igniting a fire that forced us to evacuate the pa-

Abu Bakr Bashir contributed re-



He said the isolation ward was completely burned in the fire.

Israel says the aim of its offensive is to destroy a regrouped Hamas presence in the area. The fighting, focused on Jabaliya and on two other areas of northern Gaza, has killed thousands of people and displaced more than 100,000 residents, according to the United Nations.

Throughout the offensive, Kamal Adwan, one of the last func-tioning hospitals in northern Gaza, has been inundated with casualties.

A World Health Organization crew visited the hospital this week and delivered fuel, food and medicine "amid hostilities and explo-sions," Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director general of the World Health Organization, said on Monday in a social media post.

"The conditions in the hospital are simply appalling," he said. "Hostilities around the hospital continue and recent attacks have further damaged the oxygen sup-ply," and parts of the building.

Israeli airstrikes this week hit eight buildings in the vicinity of the hospital compound and killed a number of people in those buildings, Dr. Abu Safiya said.

Israel has raided Kamal Adwan before and attacked areas in the vicinity of the hospital. In October, the military detained or expelled most of the hospital's staff during a raid that lasted for days.

Hashem Abu Wardeh, a nurse at Kamal Adwan, described working in near-impossible conditions to treat large numbers of wounded people with limited medical sup and amid continuous shelling and gunfire.

Speaking in a telephone interview on Monday, he said that few doctors and nurses remained at the hospital and that they were often caring for more than 100 pa-tients at a time. Displaced families are also taking shelter there.

But the worst part of the Israeli attacks was the constant damage to gas, water and electricity lines that supply the hospital, he said.

"The situation is very difficult and a lot of people are in pain, in-cluding children," Mr. Abu Wardeh

added. "We can't bear it. We just want mercy."

larger port of Hudaydah, in terri-tory controlled by the Houthis. Israel's military said the strikes

For more than a year, the Houthis have been attacking cargo vessels in the Red Sea in a



Responding to an airstrike on a power plant in the Yemeni capital, Sana, on Thursday. Israel said it had intercepted a Houthi missile.

Israel Hits Back at Houthis, Killing 9 in Yemen

astating military campaign in Gaza to crush Hamas, which at-tacked Israel on Oct. 7 last year,

and it also invaded Lebanon in Oc-

tober to prevent Hezbollah from

staging cross-border attacks. Af-

ter decimating much of the Leba-nese militant group's leadership,

Israel in late November agreed to

That was seen as a blow to the

regional influence of Iran, which cultivated a network of proxies in

a so-called axis of resistance against Israel and the United

States. The recent ouster of Presi-

dent Bashar al-Assad of Syria, a longtime ally of Tehran, further

Mr. Netanyahu alluded to those

significant regional shifts in a bull-

ish statement on Thursday about

the latest Israeli strikes - and ap-

eared to hint at further action.

the Assad regime in Syria, the Houthis are almost the last arm of

"After Hamas, Hezbollah and

akened the network

a cease-fire with Hezbollah.

Prime Minister Benjamin Ne-

The announcement of the strikes — which killed nine people, according to Al-Masirah, a Houthi-affiliated television channel — came hours after Israel's military said it had intercepted a missile launched from Yemen.

Israeli warplanes struck Houthi targets on the "western coast and in inland Yemen," the military said in a statement. Those included

Al-Masirah reported that seven people died in a strike on the port city of Salif, while two others were killed at an oil facility nearby in Ras Isa. Both cities are in western Yemen, not far from the much

were aimed at preventing the Houthis from exploiting sites "for military and terrorist purposes,

campaign that they say is in soli-darity with Palestinians under Is-raeli bombardment in Gaza.

both armed groups backed by Iran. Israel has conducted a dev-

Ismaeel Naar contributed report

are finding out, and will find out, the hard way that whoever harms

Israel will pay a very heavy price." Iran's Foreign Ministry on

Thursday condemned the Israeli strike on Yemen. The ministry's spokesman, Esmaeil Baghaei, de-

scribed it as a blatant violation of international law and said that the

It would be hard for Israel to strike a definitive blow against the

Houthis, in part because they control so much territory, said Baraa

Shiban, an expert on Yemen at the Royal United Services Institute, a think tank in London.

The militia group, which has withstood years of attacks by a

Saudi-led coalition, has an incen-

tive to continue to launch strikes

to bolster its legitimacy, Mr.

Shiban said. And its patron Iran

also has reason to maintain sup-

port for a proxy whose relative im-portance has grown, he added.

United States was complicit.

tanyahu said the Israeli military struck Houthi targets in Yemen early Thursday in response to the militia's attacks on Israel, and ap-peared to suggest that Israel might take further action in its campaign to weaken Iran-backed

"ports and energy infrastructure" in the capital, Sana, it added in a later statement.

including the smuggling of Iranian weapons to the region."

Israel has since October 2023 waged war against Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon —

"They have the ability to absorb these strikes even if Israel kept hitting them," Mr. Shiban said of the Houthis. "I find it hard to believe that they are going to pres-sure them to change their ap-

proach."

The Houthis over the past year have fired missiles at Israel itself, which is more than 1,300 miles northwest of Yemen. Most of those missiles have been intercepted, according to the Israeli authorities. A drope strike on Tel

thorities. A drone strike on Tel

Aviv in July killed one person and injured others. In retaliation, Israel bombed Hudaydah. On Thursday, Israel's military aid that the missile fired from Yemen overnight had been inter-cepted before crossing into the country's territory. It said in a later statement that debris from the interception had most likely damaged a school in central Israel. No one was injured in the attack, ac-

cording to Nadav Shoshani, a military spokesman.

Estimate of U.S. Troops in Syria Is Doubled

By HELENE COOPER

Treating a wounded person at Kamal Adwan Hospital in the

northern Gaza Strip after Israeli airstrikes earlier this month.

WASHINGTON - The Pentagon said on Thursday that 2,000 American troops were in Syria, more than twice the number offi-cials had cited for months.

Why the Defense Department delayed disclosing the number is unclear. Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder, the Pentagon press secretary, told re-porters that he became aware of the additional troops on Thursday morning. They are in Syria on a "temporary" basis, he said, to support what he called the "core official deployed forces" participating in the Pentagon's mission to keep Islamic State forces from reconsti-

General Ryder said the increase in the number of troops was unrelated to the fall of Presi-dent Bashar al-Assad to rebel forces in early December.

"Look, again, learned the num-

ber today, provided the number today," he told reporters. "Part of the explanation is the sensitivity from a diplomatic and operation security standpoint. But again, given the difference in what we've been briefing and what the actual number is, just felt that it was important to get you that informa-

Since the Assad government's collapse, Israel and Turkey have launched military operations in Syria. The United States, for its part, has conducted dozens of gets in Syria to stop the militant group's fighters from taking advantage of the shifting situation.

The Pentagon was asked re-peatedly in recent days and weeks how many American troops were in Syria, and maintained that the number was 900.

The issue of American boots on

the ground in Syria has something of a history. In 2019, President Donald J. Trump ordered all U.S. troops in Syria to return home, in an effort to end the American mission there. Pentagon officials balked, and Gen. Mark A. Milley, who was the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, talked Mr. Trump into allowing a limited number of troops to remain to safeguard oil fields, Mr. Trump said.

"We're keeping the oil," the president said at the time. "We left troops behind, only for the oil."

that, Pentagon leaders said little about the U.S. presence in Syria, but when asked, replied that 800 American troops were in the country.

More recently, they have put the number at 900.

The Pentagon has said that the troops in Syria are scattered among several bases, including al-Tanf, on the Syria-Iraq border, and in northeast Syria. U.S. and partner forces in a coalition that includes the Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces have been working to keep pressure on Islamic State militants and to ensure that fighters who are detained do not end up back on the battlefield.

The Pentagon says U.S. troops also have provided security for displaced women and children. Many of them are relatives of Is lamic State members who died fighting or were detained and who want to be repatriated — mostly

back to Iraq.

The Biden administration and the Iraqi government say people in displacement camps are nerable to indoctrination by the



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The Pentagon has said that the U.S. troops in Syria are scattered among several bases, including al-Tanf, on the Syria-Iraq border.





Surveying damage in a shantytown Thursday in Mayotte, where a rare cyclone hit last weekend.

Poor residents have already begun rebuilding themselves, some using debris left by the storm.

In Mayotte, Devastation and Deep Poverty Stoke Anger at France

Macron Promises Aid To an Island Territory Flattened by a Cyclone

This article is by John Eligon, Julie Bourdin and Aurelien Breeden.

MAMOUDZOU, France - The hill-France — The finite sides surrounding the harbor of the tiny French territory of Mayotte have been transformed into barren mounds of leaf-less, uprooted trees. Sailboats lie on their sides, consumed by the warm waters of the Indian Ocean.

Piles of twisted metal, bricks, insula-tion and other debris line the steep, narrow streets of Mamoudzou, the capital of this archipelago along the east coast of Africa. Amid all this destruction caused by Cyclone Chido, which struck last weekend, a few residents sat on the sidewalk in a downpour on Thursday, setting out buckets to capture water, which has become a valuable commodity with taps

dry since the storm.
"Tell Macron that God gave us water," said a shirtless man, raising his arms, re-ferring to the French president, Emman-uel Macron, who had just arrived to tour the devastation.

As residents pick through the wreck-age where dozens have been confirmed dead and thousands may be missing, the deeply impoverished territory of Mayotte is attracting rare global attention and generating renewed debate over its treatment as part of France.

More than a century and a half after France colonized Mayotte, which com-prises two larger islands and a series of smaller ones with about 320,000 people, it is the poorest place in France and faces some of the greatest social challenges.

The poverty rate in Mayotte is nearly 80 percent, five times higher than in mainland France, according to official statistics. The unemployment rate is nearly 40 percent, compared with about 7 percent for the rest of France. Some people work in fishing and agriculture, or in an informal economy of small shops and businesses; others are employed by

the state.

About 30 percent of residents do not have access to running water at home, a problem made worse by a drought last year. Some aid workers and analysts have said the government has failed to keep up with a rapidly growing population and provide necessary services. Others suggest that the government has largely overlooked the island, which sits some 5,000 miles away from mainland France and is a 12-hour flight from Paris. In the aftermath of the cyclone, Mr.

Macron has vowed to support the devas-tated population.

At the airport and then at the hospital At the airport and then at the nospital on Thursday, Mr. Macron was greeted by scores of worried residents and exhausted doctors who told him about destroyed homes, power blackouts, low food and medicine stocks, empty gas stations—and worries of a terrible toll.

Mr. Macron, who wore a white shirt and a traditional local scarf, was also taken on a helicopter flyover of the devasta-tion. He repeatedly promised that relief was arriving and said that a field hospital would be operational on Friday.
For some people living in Mayotte, all

the attention and talk of camaraderie coming from mainland France — and Mr. Macron's visit — ring hollow after what they see as decades of discrimination and being cast aside like neglected stepchildren.

"It's not going to do anything for us," said Sarah Moilimo, 35, a teacher who is now accommodating about 25 people who lost their homes in her house in Mamoudzou, referring to Mr. Macron's visit. "What we need is for him to act and to do something," she added. "Over the last few months he's sent many ministers to visit Mayotte and nothing ever

Mr. Macron rejected suggestions that the French state had abandoned Mayotte and made sweeping promises of recov-ery during his visit. "We were able to rebuild our cathedral in five years," Mr. Ma-cron said, referring to the recent reopen-ing of Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris. "It would be a tragedy if we were unable to rebuild Mayotte."

Even though Mayotte is a part of France, its inhabitants do not enjoy all the same benefits as mainland residents, and they are subject to some different

In Mayotte, families are not entitled to

John Eligon and Julie Bourdin reported from Mamoudzou, and Aurelien Breeden



Many residents of Mayotte's shantytowns are believed to be undocumented migrants. President Emmanuel Macron of France visited the territory on Thursday.

'It's not going to do anything for us.'

SARAH MOILIMO, a teacher, on all the attention and talk of camaraderie from mainland France. certain grants for childbirth and education that are accessible almost everywhere else in France

Mayotte is one of only two French departments, the basic administrative units within regions, where state representatives can remove residents and desentantes can reinive residents and user stroy illegal housing without a court or-der. Although the law requires the gov-ernment to provide suitable alternative accommodation, that often does not hap-pen, according to aid groups.

The shantytowns that have been the focus of the local government's demolition efforts have taken the hardest hit from the storm, with many wiped away. Many residents of the shantytowns are believed to be undocumented migrants.

At a shantytown on a hill in the Pas-samaïnty neighborhood, not a single tree remained intact, the ones still standing all ravaged by the storm. The muddy slope was littered with a castaway car door, soaked mattresses and a dented

The banging of hammers echoed from the detritus, as displaced residents were already trying to move forward. One of them, a 38-year-old immigrant from Comoros named Abdouswali, stood on a long sheet of red corrugated iron that was once the roof of a nearby hotel, hammering out the kinks to build a new shack

after the cyclone destroyed his old one. The unemployed father of four, who asked to be identified only by his first name because he is undocumented, mi-grated from the neighboring nation of Comoros in 2014 to find work. The best he could do was the occasional construction job, he said. Without money to move into a more stable situation, he forged ahead on a new home, undeterred by the rubble all around him.

"We have no other choice," he shrugged. "There is no space to build." The disparities that Mayotte faces are

in some ways a legacy of the French colonial era.

Colonized in 1843, Mayotte became a French department — which establishes a local authority to administer social services and infrastructure — only in 2011. It's the youngest department in the country, and some civil society activists say government officials are still strug-gling to catch the island up on services and infrastructure amid rapid popula-

tion growth.

Ms. Moilimo, the teacher in Mamoudzou, said she moved to Mayotte about a year and a half ago after living in Mar-seille her entire life because she wanted to connect with her roots in Africa. She

figured Mayotte would be a good landing spot because she could still have the sal-

ary and quality of life she had in France.
"It's not like France at all," she said,
saying the disparities between Mayotte
and the mainland were startling.
Even though salaries are much lower

in Mayotte, prices are much higher, she said. The education system in Mayotte is so overwhelmed, she said, that many pupils perform far below their grade level. Some students have the opportunity to go to school for only half of the day be-

go to school for only half of the day be-cause of a shortage of teachers.

Thanks in part to pro-French female activists who used what is known as tickle torture as a way to scare off pro-independence politicians, Mayotte was the only territory in its island chain that voted to remain a part of France during a referendum in the mid-1970s. That led to its separation from what is today the inits separation from what is today the in-dependent nation of Comoros.

Today, many Mayotte residents continue to hold a strong allegiance to France, even when they feel the government has failed them, Ms. Molimo said.

"It's like the people of Mayotte have the syndrome of the colonized," she said.

"They're so, happy, to be considered."

"They're so happy to be considered French that they'll settle for anything you give them.'

Part of the reason that Mayotte may have lost so many lives is that cyclones are so rare there that residents often are not aware of the proper precautions to take, said Eric Sam-Vah, the deputy head of the Piroi Center, a disaster manage-

ment agency of the French Red Cross. Even though the French authorities have warned of a high death toll, residents have complained that government rescue and recovery efforts have been sluggish, and in some cases nonexistent. There was no sign of a government rescue effort during a walk Thursday through many stricken areas of the capi-

During his visit, Mr. Macron acknowledged that in many shantytowns there had not yet been searches to find the injured and dead, but said officials were ramping up efforts to find victims in these communities.

In many cases, Mayotte residents have had to turn to each other to survive.

After the roof of his two-story detached villa was torn off by the cyclone, Mickael Damour, 47, had to squeeze into a bathroom cupboard to stay safe. He emerged to roads so clogged with debris that he and his neighbors could not leave and were forced to shelter in a school, Mr. Damour, a dialysis nurse, said he put his professional skills to work, treating neighbors who could not get to the hospi-

"I bandaged wounds for two days, non-stop," he said. "We don't see a lot of aid from the French state."



Collecting rainwater in the streets of Mamoudzou, the capital. "Tell Macron that God gave us water," one resident said.

Amid Political Disarray, Europe Girds for Trump's Return

By MARK LANDLER and JIM TANKERSLEY

LONDON - When President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine met European leaders for dinner in Brussels on Wednesday, the shadow of President-elect Don-ald J. Trump hung over the gathering. But it is not just Mr. Trump's return to the White House that has scrambled Europe's response to the war in Ukraine.

It is also the political disarray

across the Continent — a wave of instability that is depriving Europe of robust leadership at the very moment that Mr. Trump is challenging its deeply felt support for Ukraine and its hardfought resistance of Russian aggression.

From Germany, where Chancellor Olaf Scholz's government just collapsed, to France, where President Emmanuel Macron has been gravely weakened by months of domestic political turmoil, Europe's big powers are on the back foot as they confront a resurgent Mr. Trump.

"We're not well equipped, that's for sure," said Wolfgang Ischinger, who was German ambassador to Washington dur-ing the Iraq War. "It is a horribly bad moment for my own country to be in the midst of an election campaign, with a rather polariz-

ing political debate."
Mr. Ischinger, who was chairman of the Munich Security Conference until 2022, said he was optimistic that Germany would emerge with a new gov-ernment, likely led by the conser-vative candidate, Friedrich Merz, that could engage constructively with the Trump administration. Mr. Macron, for all his domes-

tic travails, appears determined still to play an energetic role in

Mark Landler reported from London and Jim Tankersley from New

shaping Europe's response to the war. He recently floated the idea of sending a European peace-keeping force to Ukraine, though it found little immediate support

from other European officials. Still, he and other leaders are preoccupied by other issues. from economic troubles to the surge of far-right populist parties. That leaves them poorly placed to respond to what may well be politically unpalatable proposals by Mr. Trump about

how to end the war.

Just this week, reports surfaced that Mr. Trump's aides were discussing a plan to create a buffer zone between Ukrainian and Russian troops to be patrolled by 40,000 European sol-diers. Such a proposal would cause an outcry in Berlin and London, where the refusal to send troops has been an article of faith since early in the war.

"The 800-mile buffer zone between Ukraine and Russia is not going to happen," said not going to nappen," said Jeremy Shapiro, research direc-tor of the European Council on Foreign Relations, a think tank based in Berlin. "Europe couldn't do this without U.S. support. But it is a very good bit of political theater."

Political theater is one of Mr. Trump's specialties, and he is likely to throw out other ideas for ending the conflict. The chal-lenge, Mr. Shapiro said, is for European leaders not to be provoked or divided by Mr. Trump but to make sure that Europe has a seat in any diplomatic negotiation involving the United States, Ukraine and Russia. That is easier said than done,

given the political crosscurrents at home. Germany is caught up in a heated debate over the economy, with its export-led model at risk because of Mr. Trump's threatened tariffs. France has fallen into paralysis since Mr. Macron called an ill-advised parliamentary election last sum-



President Emmanuel Macron of France, left, with President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine in Brussels on Wednesday

mer. One prime minister, Michel Barnier, is gone, and his replace ment, François Bayrou, is al-

ready sparring with Mr. Macron. Even in Britain, where voters elected a Labour government with a thumping majority in July, the country is bogged down in



Chancellor Olaf Scholz is likely to be succeeded in Germany next year by a conservative.

economic problems, as well as an insurgent threat from an antiimmigrant party, Reform U.K., whose leader, Nigel Farage, has links to Mr. Trump.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer has expressed a desire to draw Britain closer to the rest of Eu-rope, but Brexit handicaps any British leader hoping to play the kind of statesman's role that his Labour predecessor, Tony Blair,

did in the late 1990s.

That leaves Italy and Poland as unlikely standard bearers for Europe. Italy's right-wing prime minister, Georgia Meloni, has gained influence as diplomats wager she will be able to build bridges to Mr. Trump. Poland's prime minister, Donald Tusk, a seasoned hand, will take a visible role when Poland assumes the presidency of the Council of the European Union next year.

The European Commission, the E.U.'s executive arm, wants to play an active role under its president, Ursula von der Leyen. But the lack of strong leaders in Europe's capitals will "certainly further strengthen Trump's dignissity contemptous attidismissive, contemptuous attitude toward the E.U. which we remember from Trump I," said Peter Ricketts, a former British national security adviser.

Gérard Araud, who was France's ambassador to Washington during Mr. Trump's first term, said, "The three main European countries have never been so weak. And Italy and Poland, which have nothing in common, won't take the driver's seat, whatever their preten-

Mr. Araud, who took part in Europe's fruitless lobbying campaign to persuade Mr. Trump not to pull out of the Iran nuclear deal in 2018, said European leaders were recycling the playbook they used during the first term in courting and flattering the president-elect to cut their own deals.

Mr. Macron put Mr. Trump in the front row at the recent re-opening of Notre-Dame Cathedral. Mr. Scholz said he'd like to meet with him before he leaves office, which some in Germany interpret as a bid for an invitation to his inauguration. Mr. Starmer's aides talk up a dinner that he and his foreign secretary, David Lammy, had with Mr. Trump in September.

Mr. Starmer and Mr. Trump spoke again on Wednesday, according to 10 Downing Street, which said in a readout that the prime minister "reiterated the need for allies to stand together with Ukraine in the face of Rus-

sian aggression."

Whether that happens depends heavily on Mr. Trump.
"Either he plays on these weaknesses and divisions;" Mr. Araud
said, "or he obliges European
countries to unite, which won't
be their natural and instinctive
reaction." reaction."

After almost three years of grinding war, however, the politics of Ukraine are shifting in Europe as well, in ways that could narrow the gap with Mr. Trump, While Mr. Merz and Mr. Trump. While Mr. Merz and Mr. Scholz both pledge to maintain military support for Ukraine if elected, they have promised an increasingly wary German public that they, too, will push to bring the conflict to a close.

"We are united by the unconditional will to do everything we can to end this war in Ukraine as quickly as possible," Mr. Merz said on Monday, in a parliamen-tary debate before the dissolution of the government.

Unlike in 2016, when Angela Merkel, then chancellor, got off to a chilly start with Mr. Trump on trade and military spending, Mr. Merz's right-leaning Christian Democratic Union has tried to reach out to people in Mr. Trump's orbit. The party even sent a representative, Jens Spahn, to the Republican Na-

tional Convention.

Germany's role in the Western alliance on Ukraine is so central that American diplomats say any Trump plan for ending the war has to include it. But the election, expected on Feb. 23, and coalition negotiations that will follow it, suggest Germany's direction may not be clear until April or

May.

"This is a dramatic point," said Amy Gutmann, who served as American ambassador to Ger-many from 2022 until earlier this

"It's coupled with Germany being a stronger than ever, and more important than ever, sup-porter of Ukraine," she said. "It's also more important than ever because of the economic problems that are afflicting Europe, and Germany is front and center in that."

Some analysts, however, argue that the focus on Europe's faltering leaders distracts from a deeper structural problem laid bare by Mr. Trump: its continuing strategic reliance on the United States. Merely by sug-gesting that the United States is ont committed to extending
President Biden's support for
Ukraine, they said, Mr. Trump
has thrown the European debate into disarray.

"All the Europeans who want

to stick to their position won't have the ability to do that if the Americans move to the other end of the field," Mr. Shapiro said. "My prediction is that they will reconstitute themselves around the new American position.

In Annual Talk, Putin Sees a Glass Half Full

BERLIN — President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia tried on Thursday to paper over or shift the blame for recent setbacks at home and in the Middle East, while making a fresh appeal to Donald J. Trump that he was ready to talk to the U.S. president-elect "any

At a four-hour, year-end news conference, Mr. Putin said it was a failure by Iran to resist a rebel of-fensive that help bring down one of Russia's closest allies, Bashar al-Assad, in Syria this month — without addressing Moscow's own decision not to help him.

Mr. Putin said that Russia's se-curity services committed the "gravest of blunders" in failing to stop the assassination of a Rus-

sian general in Moscow this week. And he said Russia's central bank could have taken more ac tion sooner to head off inflation, which has sent prices soaring. "Whoever would like to present

Russia as weakened," Mr. Putin said at one point, citing Mark Twain, "I want to remember a well-known person and writer who once said: 'Rumors of my death are greatly exaggerated.'" It was a familiar combination of

misdirection and self-confidence from Mr. Putin as he tried to portray Russia as firmly in control of its fate, at home and abroad. With the war in Ukraine ap-

proaching its fourth year, and with Russia taking heavy losses and its economy showing signs of strain, Mr. Putin made no secret of his desire for talks with Mr. Trump, who has promised swift negotiations to end the war.

"I'm ready for this, any time," Mr. Putin said, after being asked about potential negotiations with Mr. Trump. "And I'll be ready to meet, if he wants this." Later, he added: "If we ever

have a meeting with the newly elected president, Mr. Trump, I e will have something t talk about

Mr. Putin said he was seeking a broad peace deal to end the war rather than a temporary cease-fire. He said he would keep push-ing ahead on the battlefield, where he said Ukraine was suffering from "the attrition of military equipment, gear, ammunition and

most importantly, personnel."
"If we stop for one week, that will mean giving the enemy the chance to dig in at these positions, to give them the opportunity to rest," he said. "We don't need a cease-fire. We need peace.'

Mr. Putin displayed similar bluster in his comments on Syria, speaking in public for the first time about the stunning fall of Mr.

The Russian leader cast Syrian government troops as well as Ira-nian and pro-Iranian forces as responsible for Mr. al-Assad's fall, because they "retreated without a fight, blew up their positions and left." Russia flew 4,000 Iranian fighters to Tehran at Iran's re-quest as the rebels advanced, he

Anatoly Kurmanaev and Oleg Matsnev contributed reporting.

Russia itself did little to aid Mr. al-Assad, deciding not to commit resources to help combat the surprise rebel offensive that began last month.

And Mr. Putin insisted that Moscow remained a player in the Middle East despite what has been widely seen as a major blow to Russia's ambitions to position itself as a world power.

He claimed that most Middle Eastern countries and ruling fac-tions in Syria wanted Russia to keep its Syrian military bases.

"We'll need to think about it," Putin said, referring to whether Russia would maintain the bases. "We'll need to decide for ourselves how our relation-ships will look with those political forces that now control and will control the situation in the coun-

Professing readiness to meet with Trump 'any time.'

try in the future. Our interests need to coincide.'

Analysts say that, in fact, Rus-sia's standing as a world power has suffered as a result of Mr. al-Assad's fall, especially if it loses its Tartus naval base and Hmeimim air base in Syria. Both have been key to Russia's ability to project its influence across the Mediterranean and Africa.

Mr. Putin, responding to a question from NBC News, said that he had not yet met with Mr. al-Assad, who had fled Syria for Moscow, but that he was planning to. Mr. Putin said he would ask Mr. al-Assad about the whereabouts of Austin Tice, the American journalist abducted in Damascus, Syria, in 2012. Mr. Putin's marathon annual

news conference in Moscow has become a ritual for the Russian ruler, who first took power in 1999. In recent years, it has been com-bined with another Kremlin rite, the "direct line," in which Mr. Putin answers calls or letters from across the country, often from people complaining about their loThe broadcasts, often longer

than four hours, are meant to show Mr. Putin's close engagement with world affairs as well as with the worries of regular Russians. It is also, analysts say, meant to contrast him with Western leaders, whom Russia's state media often portrays as weak and out of touch.

Thursday's session, Mr. Putin also commented on the assassination of a Russian general, Igor Kirillov, in Moscow on Tues-day. He described it as the latest failure on the part of Russia's security services, recalling the car bomb that killed Daria Dugina, daughter of a prominent nationalist, in 2022.

"They missed these attacks," Mr. Putin said. "Their work needs to be improved so as not to allow these gravest of blunders for us."

But for many Russians, the biggest concern in recent months has been the rising price of staple goods like potatoes, which have nearly doubled in price over the last year.

The price of cucumbers, one of

the moderators told Mr. Putin, citing official statistics, rose 10 per-cent in just a one-week period this month. What members of the public most wanted to hear about from Mr. Putin, the moderator said, was "related to the rise in prices of bread, fish, milk, eggs and butter."

"Rising prices, it really is an unpleasant and bad thing," Mr. Putin said in an understated, melan-choly tone. "But I hope that, by generally maintaining macroeco-nomic indicators, we will manage this, too."

He directed a rare, veiled criticism at Russia's central bank which has been under fire for its record-high interest rates. Mr. Putin said that "some experts believe" the bank could have taken action "more effectively and earli-er" to address inflation. But he said the rising prices —

which experts see in large part as a consequence of Russia's overcharged war economy - were really an indicator of people's improved well-being.

"It's just that the supply of food

hasn't gone up as much as con-sumption," Mr. Putin said, without mentioning the war.



President Vladimir V. Putin preparing for his annual year-end ws conference and call-in show in Moscow on Thursday.



A destroyed Ukrainian tank remained near the front line in the Kharkiv region this month.

Zelensky Discusses Peacekeepers in Ukraine

By JENNY GROSS and CONSTANT MÉHEUT

BRUSSELS President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Thursday that he had discussed with European leaders the possibility of sending European peace-keeping forces to Ukraine as part of a cease-fire or peace deal, as the country's allies consider options to help Kyiv end the fighting with Russia on favorable terms.

But the Ukrainian leader added that deploying peacekeepers would not be enough to ensure the country's long-term security, and that only NATO membership could secure Ukraine against future Russian attacks.

"As long as Ukraine is not in NATO, this aspect can be considered," Mr. Zelensky said, after a meeting with European counter-parts in Brussels.

The notion of peacekeepers has been greeted with skepticism in several European capitals; Mr. Zelensky said no decision had been made on sending them, and emphasized such a move would require careful consideration.

"If we're talking about a contin-gent, we need to know specifically how many, what they will do, and how they will respond if there's aggression from Russia," he said. There's a lot to consider. We are discussing this topic. It's impor-tant that we raise these issues."

His remarks came at a meeting of European leaders at a one-day summit to discuss several issues including Europe's relationship with the United States and the need for stability in Syria. The question of how European countries could step up support for Ukraine in Russia's war dominated the discussions.

That war has increasingly been taking a precarious turn. Ukrainian forces have been losing

Jenny Gross reported from Brussels, and Constant Méheut from Kyiv, Ukraine.

ground and Russian troops, aided by fighters from North Korea, are advancing with better equipment and in bigger numbers. With Pres-ident-elect Donald J. Trump potentially poised to cut back U.S. assistance to Ukraine once he takes office in a month, European leaders have said they urgently need to deliver more air-defense systems and weapons to Ukraine

on Wednesday night, Mark Rutte, the head of NATO, was host to Mr. Zelensky and several other European leaders, including from Germany, Italy and Denmark, at Mr. Rutte's residence.

Earlier, Mr. Zelensky spoke with President Emmanuel Ma-cron of France. He said they discussed "the presence of forces in Ukraine that could contribute to stabilizing the path to peace."

gained traction in recent days af-ter Mr. Trump reportedly pushed for it in a meeting in Paris with the Ukrainian leader and Mr. Macron two weeks ago. Since then, Mr. Zelensky's repeated references to such a plan may be an attempt to appeal to Mr. Trump, who has called for a quick end to the war.

Mr. Macron had previously floated the idea of European troops in Ukraine in February, possibly to train Ukrainian sol-diers. Mr. Zelensky said earlier this month that Mr. Macron had revived the idea recently, suggest-ing that Western troops could be present on Ukrainian territory to guarantee a cease-fire while Ukraine is not a NATO member. Mr. Zelensky suggested on

Mr. Zelensky suggested on Thursday a path to conflict resolu-tion in which Ukraine would discuss sending peacekeepers with its European partners, while con-tinuing to press allies, especially the U.S., to be allowed to join NATO. "These security guarantees can be discussed separately with the U.S. and Europe," he said

A few European countries have not ruled out the option of deploy-ing forces in Ukraine. But overall,

many European capitals see it as a premature step while the war is

still raging.

It is also unclear if European troops could ensure a cease-fire on their own in Ukraine, given Mr. Trump's reluctance to directly in-

volve the U.S. Army.

Earlier, on Wednesday, Mr.
Rutte suggested that it was too early to discuss a plan for peace-keepers and that the West's focus should be on stepping up military support for Ukraine. The European Union's chief diplomat, Kaja Kallas, also said on Thursday that the focus right now should be on how Europe could help strengthen Ukraine. "Any push for negotia-tions too soon will actually be a bad deal for Ukraine," she said.

Still, some European leaders are acknowledging the pressure Scholz of Germany said on Thurs-day that the war in Ukraine had been going on for a "very, very long time now." "We have to get into a situation in which peace becomes possible," he said. "It must also be very clear that there must be no escalation of the war into a war between Russia and NATO.'

On Thursday, European leaders also discussed how to more urgently deliver air defense systems, ammunition and missiles, as well as more training and support for Ukrainian forces. Leaders also said that the first installment of the \$50 billion loan to Ukraine from the Group of 7 nations would be dispersed in January, with a to-tal of 18.1 billion euros (\$18.8 billion) to be dispersed in 2025.

When asked about Mr. Trump's push for a quick peace deal in Ukraine, Alexander de Croo, the prime minister of Belgium, said on Thursday that the priority was to push back the Russians. "First Ukraine has to win the war" he wrote on social media. "Once Ukraine has been able to push back the Russians then the EU will have to play its role to main-

51 Men Are Convicted of Raping Near-Comatose Woman in France



Gisèle Pelicot leaving the courthouse in Avignon, France, on Thursday after judges sentenced her former husband and 50 other men.

From Page A1

them that they stopped traffic on the road outside the courthouse.
"Justice for Gisèle, justice for all," one sign read. Another pro-claimed: "All the women on Earth support you. Thank you Gisèle."

As she has throughout the trial. Ms. Pelicot retained her trade-mark poise, giving a simple state-ment about her decision to allow the world to witness the painful details of her rapes rather than keep them private as is allowed by French law. Her goal was to force discussions of rape, including those facilitated through the use

"I wanted, by opening the doors of this trial on Sept. 2, that society would take up the debates that have been launched," she said on Thursday, "I never regretted my decision." decision.

She said she had drawn strength from the backing she had received from people around the world, adding that the support had allowed her to return to the courthouse "over long days of this trial" — even when videos of some of the rapes were shown in court at her insistence.

Though all the men were convicted, many feminist activists who have lined up daily to watch the proceedings in an overflow room were upset by the sen-tences. That was because in all tences. That was because in all cases, except for Mr. Pelicor's, the sentences were lower than the prosecutor had recommended. Six of the convicted men were freed, having already served most or all of their time in jail.

"It means you can rape a wom-an who was drugged in her own home and walk out free," said Pascale Plattard, a member of the feminist collective the Amazons of Avignon, who was perched on a fence in front of the courthouse. "I

am very angry."

Lorraine Questiaux, a lawyer whose Paris practice focuses on violence against women, called the sentences "relatively lenient,

given the gravity of the acts." Many of the lawyers of the ac-

cused said they were satisfied with the sentences, though it was unclear if some would appeal.

The trial has rattled the country because of its many sordid ele

A grandmother and retired manager at a big public company, Ms. Pelicot had built what she and her children thought was a happy life with her husband.

But that gauzy vision was torn apart one day in late 2020, when the police arrested him and told her of the abuse she had been suf-fering. Only then did she understand why she was losing hair and weight, and suffering repeated memory losses so severe that she thought she had Alzheimer's or a

Mr. Pelicot quickly admitted to crushing sleeping pills into her food and drink for years to rape her when she was near-comatose. Then, he invited dozens of men he met online to join him, charging them nothing but regularly filming the encounters. (Ms. Pelicot has since divorced him.)

The case drew so much attention in part because of the sheer numbers of men who had participated and because of their varied and ordinary profiles. The French news media called them "Mon-sieur Tout-le-monde" — "Mr. Ev-ery Man" — and experts said they destroyed the myth of the "mon-ster rapist," replacing it with the image of the man next door.

Aged 26 to 74, they appeared to be a cross-section of middle- and working-class men — tradesmen, firefighters, truck drivers, a journalist, a nurse.

About 15 of the defendants pleaded guilty. The rest admitted that they had had sex with Ms. Pelicot but argued that they had never intended to rape her. In-stead, most said that they had been lured by Mr. Pelicot to join the couple for a consensual three-some and had been told that Ms. Pelicot was pretending to sleep or had taken sleeping pills herself. Most painted Mr. Pelicot as a master manipulator; some argued that he had drugged them, as well,

a charge he denied.

Many offered stunning expla-nations to the court, qualifying their acts as "involuntary rape," "nonconsenting rape," "accidental rape" or "rape by body but not mind."

But the videos - which Ms. Pelicot insisted be played in court as evidence and as a wake-up call to the country — showed the men penetrating her nonresponsive

body. Earlier this week, the accused were given a last chance to offer final words in their defense. Few

Many of those who had been free on bail for the trial arrived at

'All the women on Earth support you. Thank you Gisèle.'

A demonstrator's sign expressing appreciation for Gisèle Pelicot, who has emerged from the trial as a hero.

the courtroom on Thursday morning carrying small bags with their belongings in preparation for what the day might hold. Shortly after the verdict, they were whisked away by police and taken directly to prison. Their wives, mothers and daughters who had watched the verdict in an overflow room wept.

As in other important moments during the trial, on Thursday Ms. Pelicot was flanked by her and Mr. Pelicot's three children. The trial, and the horrific crimes it documented, had shattered not just her

life and identity, but theirs, as well. The children had considered their father a loving pillar of the family who had hosted fabulous birthday parties and was there for them, whether it was attending sports events together or making sure his daughter got home from parties safely. The revelation of his crimes and double life destroyed their perceptions of their childhoods.

The couple's eldest son, David, told the court recently that he feared his own son, who remains in psychological treatment, had also been abused by Mr. Pelicot — a charge Mr. Pelicot denied. The couple's second son, Florian, said he had lost his marriage because of the tragedy.

And the couple's daughter, who goes by the pen name Caroline Darian, is convinced she was also drugged and sexually abused by her father since the police recovered deleted photos of her from his electronics that showed her in underwear she did not recognize, asleep with the lights on. She was briefly hospitalized in a

psychiatric ward soon after the police took her father into custody and checked herself back into a clinic during the trial, she said on Instagram, "to recover all my en-ergy, to be able to sleep again."

Her memoir about the horrific discovery has been translated into English and will be released soon: "I'll Never Call Him Dad Again."

Mr. Pelicot was convicted on Thursday of taking and publish-ing sexual photos of her, as well as of his two daughters-in-law. He had repeatedly denied abusing his daughter or grandchildren.

As she left the courtroom, Ms. Pelicot thanked her children, their partners and her grandchildren, including one grandson standing nearby, "because they are the future, and it's also for them that I aged this battle."

shared Then, she shared some thoughts for the crowds. "I think of the victims, unrecog-

nized, whose stories often remain hidden," she said. "I want you to know that we share the same

struggle." She added, "I have confidence in our ability to collectively seize a future in which everyone, women and men, can live in harmony, with respect and mutual under-

With that, she was escorted by a knot of police officers through the throngs of reporters and into the giant cheering mass of her sup

Decades to Conviction: The Pelicots' Timeline

By CATHERINE PORTER and SÉGOLÈNE LE STRADIC

PARIS - Dominique Pelicot, the ex-husband of Gisèle Pelicot, was convicted on Thursday of aggravated rape and other charges after admitting to drugging and raping Ms. Pelicot for almost a decade, and arranging for dozens of strangers he met online to abuse her unconscious body.

He received the maximum sentence of 20 years in prison. The 50 other men, most charged with ag-gravated rape, who were tried alongside him, were also con-

Despite Mr. Pelicot's guilty plea, under the French legal sys-tem a trial was held for society to understand the truth of what happened, experts said.

Here is a timeline of events in the case, based on court records and testimony.

1973 The Pelicots marry, two years after meeting. "We were so in love, we didn't want to be apart," Ms. Pelicot told the court at the trial.

1974

The first of their three children is born. They settle on the outskirts of Paris, where Ms. Pelicot, now 72, is the family's main breadwinner as a manager in a big public company, and Mr. Pelicot, also now 72, works at different jobs, including as a real estate agent.

2010

Mr. Pelicot is caught filming women under their skirts in a shopping mall near Paris, using a miniature camera concealed in a pen. He is arrested and fined 100 euros for "capturing indecent images." Ms. Pelicot learned of the arrest only in 2020 from an investigative judge, in the lead-up to the current trial. "If I had been informed, maybe I would have left him, or not," she told the court. "But I would have been more attentive."

July 2011

Mr. Pelicot starts drugging his wife, he said in court. Ms. Pelicot told the court that she recalled she had a blackout on a Saturday in 2011 when she slept in until 6 p.m. Later, as the drugging became more regular, she said, she suffered frequent unexplained blackouts that she feared were the symptoms of Alzheimer's or a brain tumor.

2013

The couple retire and move to a bungalow with a garden and a pool in Mazan, a small town near Avignon, in the south of France. Their children and grandchildren visit regularly.

2014

Adrien Longeron, then 24, is the first stranger that evidence shows Mr. Pelicot filmed penetrating Ms. Pelicot while she was asleep in her bed. The footage taken this year is among thousands of vid-eos and photos the police later found on Mr. Pelicot's electronics. Mr. Longeron is among the doz-ens who were charged with aggravated rape. He pleaded not

Sept. 12, 2020

Mr. Pelicot is arrested after a se-curity guard catches him filming up the skirts of women with his smartphone in a supermarket in Carpentras, a town near Mazan. The police seize the two phones, a camera and a video recorder he is carrying, as well as a laptop, a USB key and an SD card from his home. He is released while awaiting charges and tells Ms. Pelicot about the event.

Nov. 2, 2020

Ms. Pelicot meets with the police in Carpentras, believing she will hear about the supermarket event. Instead, the police tell her about the videos they have found on her husband's electronics and say that they believe her husband has been drugging her for years and inviting dozens of men into their home to rape her alongside

Nov. 3, 2020

The Pelicots' children help her move out of the house, which is now a crime scene. The police show Caroline Darian, the middle child and only daughter (who goes by a pen name) two photos recov-ered from her father's electronics that show her sleeping in a strange position, with the duvet pulled back and the lights on. She testifies that she is convinced her father drugged and sexually assaulted her. He denies the accusa-tions and says he did not take the photos.

Feb. 9, 2021

The police make the first arrests of other men charged in the case, using photos, as well as records from Skype conversations, phone calls and text messages, to track most of them down. Mr. Pelicot had directed the police to a hard drive in his garage where they had discovered thousands of images and videos he had taken and edited. Many were stored in a fold-er named "Abuse."

Sept. 2, 2024 The trial begins. Ms. Pelicot takes the stand and explains her deci-sion to allow a trial to be public and refuse the anonymity offered by law to victims of sexual assault. She says she wants society to change the way it deals with rape. "So when other women, if they wake up with no memory, they might remember the testimony of Ms. Pelicot," she tells the court calmly. "No woman should suffer from being drugged and victimized."

Thousands of women participate in protests across France to support Ms. Pelicot.

Mr. Pelicot and other defendants are convicted. Nine of the ac-cused, including Mr. Pelicot, re-ceived sentences above 10 years. The longest sentence apart from Mr. Pelicot was for a defendant who was given 15 years.

Supporters Of Survivor Thank Her For Courage

By SÉGOLÈNE LE STRADIC

AVIGNON, France - Supportthe courthouse in Avignon. France, on Thursday as the verdicts in her rape trial were read

They held signs and sang songs. They cheered when David Pelicot, her eldest child, exited the court-room after her former husband, Dominique Pelicot, and 50 other men were found guilty. Some in the crowd chanted: "We are strong, we are proud, and feminist and radical and angry."

Stefanie Ettmann, an Austrian living in Portugal, said she had traveled by plane, bus and train to reach Avignon Wednesday night. She got to the courthouse before 7 a.m. Thursday, joining a crowd that swelled to the hundreds.

"I'm here to support Gisèle — she's brought us so much healing. And her family. It's a collective healing she's bringing us," Ms. Ettmann said.

She said that Ms. Pelicot, by waiving her right to anonymity, had "brought us light," allowing the public to see the excruciating evidence against her husband and the men he recruited to assault

"We finally have a face speak-



Hundreds of supporters of Gisèle Pelicot assembled outside the Avignon courthouse on Thursday.

'Shame is changing sides,' a 20-year-old student said.

ing up, facing violence," she said. "And it's a beautiful face, dignified, full of love."

Stella Mezaber, 19, and Juliette Bernard, 20, both communica-tions students in Avignon, said they had regularly attended local demonstrations in support of Ms.

Pelicot since the trial began in

On Thursday, they held signs that read, "A rape is a rape," and "The problem isn't feminists; it's rapists."

"We've come here mainly to support, not in a spirit of voyeurism, but to show that what's going on is important," said Ms. Bernard, adding: "We want to show that we're there, and that shame is changing sides."

In front of Avignon's centuriesold ramparts, a white banner said

simply, "Merci Gisèle." Inside the courthouse, Raphaël Arnault, a local elected representative from the left-wing France Unbowed party, said that Ms. Pelicot had made rape a political issue again in France. The trial has set off a debate, in part, over whether France's criminal code should be amended to say explicitly that sex without consent is rape.

"My role as a politician is to do verything I can to prevent this kind of violence from happening again," he said.

51 Varieties of 'Every Man' Found Guilty in French Trial

By SÉGOLÈNE LE STRADIC and CATHERINE PORTER

All 51 defendants in the Gisèle Pelicot rape trial were found guilty on Thursday. Most of the accused received sentences of eight to 10 years, less than the 10- to 18year terms that the public prosecutor had recommended.

Ms. Pelicot's ex-husband,

minique Pelicot, who admitted to drugging and raping her over nearly a decade and bringing other men to their home to participate, received the maximum sen-tence of 20 years.

Fifteen of the 50 others were sentenced to eight years. In all, 41 of the men received prison sentences, including 18 who were already behind bars during the trial. Three were given deferred sentences because of their health, and six were released because of time already served. One is on the run and was tried and sentenced in ab-

The French news media labeled the defendants, who range in age from 27 to 74, "Monsieur Tout-le-monde," or Mr. Every Man, because of how varied and ordinary they appeared during the trial. Most were employed in jobs that reflect the middle- and workingclass rural France they come from: truck drivers, carpenters, a prison guard, a nurse, an I.T. ex-pert working for a bank, a local

Here are some of the others con-

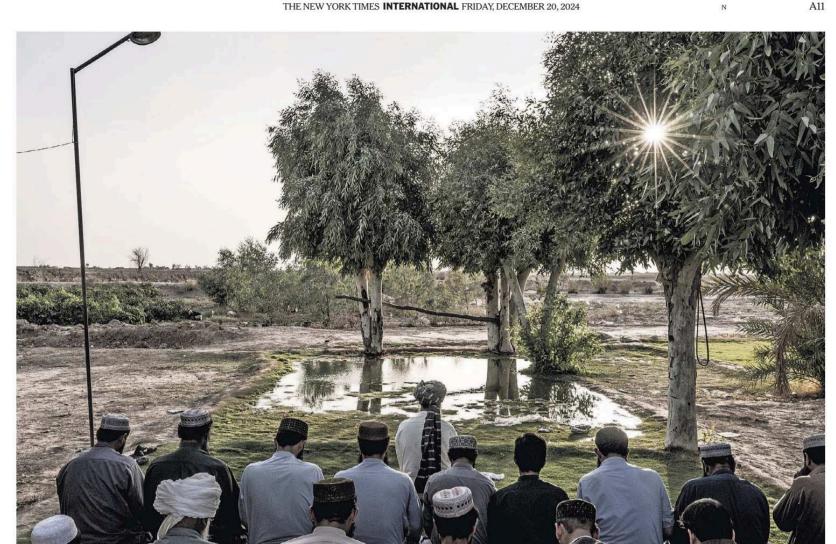


A lawyer for one of the accused, Paul Gontard. speaking to reporters after the verdict.

■ Jean-Pierre Maréchal: pleaded guilty not to violating Ms. Pelicot, but to following Domi-nique Pelicot's blueprint and drugging and raping his own wife — and inviting Mr. Pelicot along. He was sentenced to 12 years in prison. The prosecutor had rec-ommended 17. (Mr. Pelicot was also convicted of raping Mr. Maréchal's wife.) Mr. Maréchal's lawyer, Paul Gontard, said after the sentencing that he did not intend to file an appeal.

• Charly Arbo: A laborer at a cement company, he was among the youngest accused, and was sen-tenced to 13 years. Mr. Arbo was 22 when he first went to the Pelicots' home in 2016. While most of the men said they had gone there once, Mr. Arbo went six times.

 Joseph Cocco: Mr. Cocco, a retired manager of a beer company subsidiary was convicted on a lesser charge of aggravated sexu-al assault. He was among the few defendants who asked Ms. Pelicot for forgiveness. He was sentenced



Men praying on a patch of grass last year in Shagai, in the Bakwa District of southwest Afghanistan. The district was once a hub of production and trade for opium, heroin and methamphetamines.

POPPY BOOMED WITH TALIBAN, AND THEN THEY **TOOK IT AWAY**

From Page A1

come full circle: the foreigners gone, the Taliban back in power, the earth stripped of poppy and the land returning to dust.

"It's a matter of time," he said. The war in Afghanistan was many things: a mission to eliminate Al Qaeda and oust the group that gave safe harbor to Osama bin Laden; an ambitious drive to build a new Afghanistan, where Western ideals ran headlong into local tradi-tions; and a seemingly endless entangle-ment, where winning sometimes mattered less than not losing.

It was also a drug war.
The Americans and their allies tried

again and again to sever the Taliban's in-come and stop one of the world's worst scourges: opium and heroin production.

The United States spent nearly \$9 billion on heavy-handed eradication and interdiction, yet Afghanistan eclipsed its own record as the largest producer of illight programs in the wind.

own record as the largest producer of in-licit poppy in the world.

What did change was where that poppy was grown. Little by little, farmers flooded once empty deserts in south-western Afghanistan, barren pockets of sand with almost no populations to speak

of before.

Communities formed in starburst pat terns along ancient irrigation lines, then moved farther into the desert to farm as they pleased. The Taliban followed, find-ing sanctuary in the utter remoteness of districts like Bakwa and their unnavigable roads.

At its height, the Taliban oversaw a narcostate here, a farm-to-table drug op-eration with hundreds of field labs pro-cessing opium into heroin and wild ephedra into methamphetamines for Eu-

rope, Asia and elsewhere. By the end of the war, Bakwa had become an entrepôt of the drug trade, home to the largest

open-air drug market in the country. The Taliban showed flexibility, too, both morally and financially. Despite banning poppy on religious grounds be-fore the American invasion, the Taliban allowed farmers to grow as much of it as they wanted during the war.

And they taxed it loosely, often what-ever farmers could afford, adopting a hearts-and-minds strategy. They also taxed smugglers, who were happy to help fund a Taliban war machine that didn't interfere with business.

Bakwa soon became an incubator for governance. Taliban courts adjudicated all manner of disputes, while millions of dollars flowed monthly to help finance the Taliban mission beyond Bakwa and the southwest.

Western officials took aim at that money. They began with eradication, then tried persuading farmers to grow legal crops, and ended with fighter jets bombing makeshift labs made of mud.

"At least \$200 million of this opium in-dustry goes into the Taliban's bank ac-counts," Gen. John Nicholson, the U.S. commander in Afghanistan in 2017, a year of peak poppy production, said at the time. "And this fuels — really pays for

the insurgency." But the Taliban's customs checkpoints were just as essential in Bakwa, or even more so, taxing goods to the tune of \$10 million a month or more, according to Taliban officials.

"The money from agriculture, poppy included, funded the war" in these re-gions, said Haji Maulavi Asif, now the Taliban's governor for the Bakwa Dis-

BRYAN DENTON

trict. "But the money from the customs operation helped fund the entire move-

Now that poppy has been banned, the farmers the Taliban once relied on feel betrayed, while the Taliban is trying to govern without the money it brings.

"While economically, the decision to ban poppy costs a lot, politically it makes sense," Mr. Asif said. "We are silencing the countries of the world who say we are growing poppy and participating in the global drug trade."

OPIUM ENTREPRENEURS

When the war started in 2001, Abdul Khaliq barely noticed.

He had only recently bought land on a roadless expanse in Bakwa that cooked under the summer sun. But just beneath the surface there was water, so bountiful that reeds grew in some areas. Mr. Khaliq, a mechanic, opened a tiny work-

shop to fix water pumps.

There were no phones and few neighbors back then, so when the Americans invaded, he heard about it weeks later.
"We were desert people," he said. "We

didn't care about the war. That was the concern of city people."

That changed quickly. Before the American invasion, the Taliban had banned poppy production, sending opium prices skyrocketing. Now that they were gone Mr. Khalig switched they were gone, Mr. Khaliq switched from growing wheat to poppy. Others soon joined, and the desert



'WE WERE DESERT PEOPLE. WE DIDN'T CARE ABOUT THE WAR.'

ABDUL KHALIQ, who sold equipment and services to poppy farmers.

took on new hues. Bright flowers and verdant stems softened the landscape. The money was good — so good that the new Afghan government came knock-

ing.
One day, Bakwa's new police chief showed up to marvel at how productive Mr. Khaliq's poppy fields were. "I bet there's over half a ton of opium

here," Mr. Khaliq recalled the chief saying.
"I told him it wasn't that much, but he

charged me for that amount anyway," Mr. Khaliq said with a laugh. "And then he also asked for a bribe."

With the Americans in control of Bakwa, eradication programs gained momentum. The district governor soon arrived with great fanfare, bringing a tractor, cameras and an entourage of po-

He gathered the farmers and announced there would be no more poppy because the foreigners were serious about getting rid of Afghan opium.

Mr. Khaliq and others watched with quiet indignation as the tractor plowed through a neighbor's field. But after a short exhibition, the tractor stopped and a photographer was summoned.

"They took pictures of the small destroyed area," Mr. Khaliq recalled. "Then, they took bribes and left."

So went the early American-backed eradication campaigns in Bakwa, and the farmers adapted right away. They began pooling their money to compensate whoever's crops were destroyed for show.

As word spread, newcomers began ar-riving in droves. Unfamiliar faces turned up weekly at Mr. Khaliq's garage, drag-ging motors for him to fix. He stocked spare parts and water pipes, and began

"Our business grew with the population, but we never expected it to grow so much," he said.

Continued on Following Page



A son of Abdul Khaliq's repairing a water pump brought by a neighbor for maintenance Mr. Khaliq's business dwindled after the Taliban virtually eradicated the illicit drug trade.



The lone functioning gas pump at Mr. Khaliq's garage. Before the poppy boom that followed the U.S. invasion, Bakwa was sparsely populated. Now, most of the people who came have left.





Farmers drinking tea under a moonless sky in Bakwa. The region sat on an abundant aquifer that was drained by more than a decade of intensive agriculture.

WEALTH BUILT ON DRUG TRADE **ONLY VANISHES** AFTER THE WAR

'THE MONEY FROM AGRICULTURE, POPPY INCLUDED, FUNDED THE WAR.'

HAJI MAULAVI ASIF, Taliban governor for the Bakwa District.



From Preceding Page

THE TALIBAN PIVOT

Mr. Khaliq didn't care much for the Tal-iban at first. He found them harsh and overbearing, propagandizing about their faith while turning on the people around

"They were killing people and de-nouncing them as spies, even visitors who came to see family," said Haji Abdul Salam, one of Bakwa's largest landown-

as they notched military gains. By 2006, a resurgent Taliban was carrying out its

A steady stream of refugees arrived in Bakwa, and more Taliban followed, from fighters to mullahs, seeking shelter and

hide. The terrain was flat, making it easy to spot incoming raids. The ground was silty, which made planting roadside bombs simple. The roads meandered with such arbitrary vigor that only locals knew how to navigate them.

brought real justice and accountability." The Taliban eventually squeezed the Afghan government into a tiny corner of the district, forcing it to abandon any pretense of control over the area.

Hundreds of workers descended on Bakwa to collect poppy sap for opium each harvest, while an industry of buyers and smugglers coalesced around an open-air drug market known as the Abdul Wadood Bazaar. The bazaar drew thousands at times a

vast collection of frontiersmen trading in illicit goods. An entire logistics network developed to serve the trade.

The Taliban ran neither the market

MOBILE JUSTICE

Eradication wasn't working. In 2007, the peak of the effort — with officials report-ing 19,000 hectares of poppy destroyed — Afghanistan still broke a record for poppy cultivation.

Increasingly, the Americans and their allies began prosecuting a more conventional drug war in places like Bakwa, staging raids on smugglers and their net-works. Violent interdiction became the norm, infuriating residents.

The Taliban, by contrast, endorsed the drug trade, at least while it was serving



But they learned from their mistakes

first major offensive since being ousted, laying waste to nearby districts in Hel-mand Province.

opportunity.
"I moved to this area because it was

safe," said Haji Naim, Mr. Khaliq's cousin, a Taliban fighter.

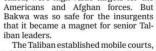
Bakwa turned out to be a great place to

"There is not a single straight road in Bakwa," said Mr. Khaliq. "If you spot a Taliban, you can't even chase him."

As they claimed more territory, the Taliban "learned to pivot," said Mr. Salam, who helps oversees the main trib-al council in Bakwa. "They began to prosecute their own officials, and

nor the drug trade but taxed all of it.

The money added up — and caught the eye of the Americans.



their interests. Though they had banned poppy before, they didn't seem to worry

much about the contradiction during the

war. To the contrary, they appointed Islamic scholars who delivered sermons

on the importance of supporting the ji-had and expelling foreigners.

"The secret to their success was reli-

gious propaganda," said Haji Abdullah

Khan, a lifelong Bakwa resident. "People

didn't like the Taliban, but they didn't

Taliban also assigned a district governor.

Such shadow governors, as they were called, were high-value targets for the

On more administrative matters, the

want Christians or Jews here.'

with judges riding around the district, meting out justice on the road. Prisoners would be locked in cars while the officiants went about their business, including the execution of thieves and murderers. Sometimes, the Taliban would ask lo-

cal residents to host the courts, including Mr. Khaliq. Too frightened to refuse, he said he held more than a few on his compound, just as he sold them gas and of-fered them tea whenever they came through. But he never warmed to the in-

Which made it all the more frustrating to him when U.S. forces, who operated out of bases in nearby areas, raided his home on multiple occasions.

"I iust did what I needed to do regard-

less of who was in power," he said.

A constant stream of visitors came to



Mr. Khaliq's expanding compound, which by about 2014 included new storage units, a new garage and a small kiosk selling snacks and sodas.

Lines of customers waited in his courtyard — sometimes for days — to pur-chase the most revolutionary piece of farming technology to emerge during the war: solar panels to run Bakwa's ubiquitous water pumps.

We must have sold tens of thousands of units," Mr. Khaliq said.

The desert was transformed once more, now with the black tiles of solar setups. Water reservoirs became the norm, an incredibly wasteful method of irrigation that uses open-air pools, which evaporate quickly in the desert heat.

Newcomers claimed even more pieces of desert. The growth was so rapid that international experts on poppy cultiva-tion, like David Mansfield, tracked it via satellite imagery, monitoring the stamps of green invading a sea of brown.

The Americans and their allies pushed the farmers and sharecroppers into the desert, where they were greeted by the Taliban and welcomed with open arms," said Mr. Mansfield, an analyst on Afghanistan.

By 2016, he said, more than 300,000 acres of land were being cultivated in Bakwa, a sixfold increase from 2003. The population more than quintupled to an estimated 320,000 people.

The Taliban grew with it. That same year, they finally claimed the district center in Bakwa, the last remaining symbol of the Afghan government.

The squat concrete building had been constructed with American money just





Solar panels laid out by a farmer preparing to leave Bakwa. The introduction of solar power for water pumps to grow poppies was a technological revolution.



"We have no choice but to stick it out," Haji Hawaladar, center, said of Bakwa's decline. Now, he said, "we could not even give this land away for free."



Some farmers converted from poppies to wheat, but Mr. Khaliq said he knew of people with caches of opium, whose price has skyrocketed.





cluding many women and children, he

said. Yet all anyone wanted to talk about

There had been so much water for

such a long time that no one considered that it might run out. Experts commis-sioned by U.S.A.I.D. in 2009 had found a

huge aquifer under Bakwa, one that seemed destined to last.

ter they had in the area," said Darren Richardson, who had commissioned the study. "That was a significant aquifer."

And yet, only a decade later, the water was growing scarce.

Despite the American airstrikes and

water worries, Bakwa remained a center of the drug trade. Poppy had a long shelf life once harvested. Its watering needs

coincided with the spring snowmelt from the neighboring mountains. The trade

But then the war ended. The Americans withdrew for good in

2021, and the Taliban took over. Months later, the supreme leader, Haibatullah Akhundzada, declared that poppy culti-

vation was "absolutely prohibited in the whole country."

The Taliban claimed to have arrested

could hold on, residents reasoned.

'I was surprised at the amount of wa-



A private reservoir, left, fed by water pumped with solar power. Such reservoirs are wasteful because they evaporate quickly in the desert heat. Far left, a farmer walking past a shop on the main road in Bakwa's district center.

four years earlier, in 2012. (Insurgents had burned down the previous one.) Once in control of the \$200,000 facility, the Taliban turned it into a hospital.

The hospital would treat 200 to 250 patients a day," said Abdul Wasi, a nurse there. "It was a trauma center for the Talthere. "It was a trauma center for the Tal-iban. Fighters from all over the region would come here

The local Afghan government, having abandoned the district altogether, moved to a few containers along the side

HEROIN AND METH

Bakwa became a Taliban financial capital, collecting taxes like a formal authority would.

Though the American-backed govern-ment controlled the official customs checkpoints in and out of Afghanistan, the Taliban set up their own.

They placed them on highways leading to and from Iran, Turkmenistan and Pakistan, charging hundreds of dollars per commercial vehicle. The Taliban

even issued receipts.

The money, estimated at around \$10 million a month, overshadowed the taxes from poppy farmers and smugglers, lo-cal Taliban officials say — and it was all administered from Bakwa.

The district changed yet again. Opium had been like an anchor tenant in a vast drug emporium. Next. labs began sprouting up to process heroin, a more lucrative venture. Those, in turn, gave way to labs producing methamphet-

amines.
The labs proliferated along the edges

of the open-air market. Some used cough medicine, draining amber bottles of pseudoephedrine and cooking it down. But ephedra, a shrub that blanketed the central highlands of Afghanistan, soon transformed the industry.

transformed the industry.

Hundreds of people, if not thousands,
worked in the burgeoning meth trade,
transporting, milling and producing the
drug from the wild ephedra crop.

Mr. Mansfield estimated that hundreds of tons of meth was produced in Bakwa alone, even as poppy continued breaking records. In 2017, Afghanistan cultivated more opium than in any year since the start of the war.

The United States, desperate for a forceful response, redoubled its efforts. Fighter jets and B-52 bombers were used in a two-year campaign to destroy labs across southwestern Afghanistan, in-cluding in Bakwa.

An estimated 200 labs were destroyed many of them mud huts and lean-tos leveled by munitions that cost many times what they had obliterated. Little changed. By 2020, hundreds of labs were still churning out heroin and meth.

GHOST TOWN

The collapse came as quickly as the boom. One year, it seemed to Mr. Khaliq. business was bountiful. The next, Bakwa was practically empty again.

He noticed the change before many of He nouced the change before many of his neighbors. Fewer customers came. Solar panel orders got smaller. Some were being canceled altogether. It was 2019, not long after U.S. airstrikes in Bakwa killed 30 people, in-

moved nearly every laboratory

Bakwa. The Abdul Wadood Bazaar hol-

numerous traffickers, seized nearly 2,000 tons of drugs and raided hundreds of heroin labs. Last year, the Taliban destroyed dozens of labs in Bakwa, setting Where the Americans had cherrypicked from the sky, killing or injuring in-nocents along the way, the Taliban reWith ruthless efficiency, the Taliban did what the United States had hoped for. They got rid of poppy farming, and in do-ing so severed one of their economic life-

The remnants of the boom haunt the landscape: abandoned well derricks, stark against the acid sky; old food wrappers and animal droppings desiccated in vacant courtyards.

Farmers blame the Taliban for their misery. For nearly 15 years, their poppy

— and the taxes the Taliban collected from it — supported the insurgents' war to establish a government. Now that the Taliban got what they

wanted, they have forgotten the people of Bakwa who made it all possible, residents grumble. Farmers too poor to leave now send their sons to work on harvests elsewhere, renting them out as la-

"We have no choice but to stick it out," said Haji Hawaladar, who had moved his entire family to Bakwa, trading his herd of goats for land. Now, he added, "we could not even give this land away for

The Taliban seemed to have no reservations about leaving. Today, the district is largely empty of administrators and fighters. Many have moved on to bigger

roles in other places. "This was like a test, or an exam," said Mr. Asif, the district governor. "Trusted people got important positions. The peo-

ple who did well in Bakwa were top of that list." In Mr. Khalig's compound on a recent evening, as a honeyed light washed over the desert, nieces and nephews played in

hundreds of solar panels that sit in tidy

ends. I will be done one day, too. But even if this ends, somewhere else will be be-

the courtyard while a son stood idly by the gas pumps, waiting for customers who never came.

A few years earlier, Mr. Khaliq's

grounds would have been teeming with life. Today, he is selling a tenth of what he once did.

"The only thing that might help would be growing poppy with the water that is left," said Mr. Khaliq. "But those who tried, the Taliban came and destroyed

A few farmers have turned their fields to wheat, and shocks of green punctuate vast brown fields. Mr. Khaliq's neighbors have moved away, leaving him alone with his crumbling fortune. Like others, Mr. Khaliq holds the Tal-iban responsible. They could have en-

forced water rights agreements, as exist all over Afghanistan. They could ease their ban on poppy to keep the farmers afloat.
"The Taliban did not solve the biggest

issues, water and the economy," he said. Like others, he knows some people are

still hoarding opium reserves to sell at a high price, given the ban. Prices have more than quintupled since 2021, and some people are still getting rich. But everything Mr. Khaliq owns has lost value: his land and equipment, and

rows, waiting for farmers who will never come back. The barren furrows of earth swirl like fingerprints over a monochromatic desert, a reminder of what was.

"This is life," he said. "Everything

National

The New York Times

Famed Pollster Departs With a 'Spectacular Miss,' Then a Lawsuit

Trump Out for Revenge After Final Iowa Survey **Showed Harris Leading**

By JONATHAN WEISMAN

The surveys of J. Ann Selzer once carried the hopes and fears of the men and women who sought to lead the nation, recording with uncanny accuracy the views of Iowa voters who exercised outsize influence in the choosing of American presidents.

Now just weeks into her retirement, Ms. Selzer represents something unex-pected: fears for how retribution could

shape a second Trump term.
Rather than for her successes, Ms. Selzer, the longtime director of a survey known simply as the Iowa Poll, is being pilloried for one last, spectacular miss — findings released on Nov. 2 that showed Vice President Kamala Harris ahead of Donald J. Trump in deep-red Iowa in the 2024 presidential election, raising the specter of an avalanche of unanticipated

support from America's women.

That poll is the subject of a lawsuit filed in Polk County, Iowa, this week by Mr. Trump's lawyers against Ms. Selzer, her polling firm and her employers, The Des Moines Register and its parent, Gan-nett, in what media lawyers see as a blatant effort to intimidate both the press and pollsters weeks before his inaugura-

It's unclear whether Ms. Selzer will be on her own in bearing the cost of her defense. A spokeswoman for Gannett, which has called the lawsuit meritless, declined to comment on whether the company or the paper would shoulder those costs. Ms. Selzer declined to comment, remarking, "Right now, I'm fo-cused on getting proper legal represen-

Ms. Selzer's esteem in Iowa has long been bipartisan, born out of success in forecasting the victories of Republicans and Democrats alike, said David Kochel,

a longtime Iowa Republican consultant. "She has been very well respected by people from both sides over many, many, many years," Mr. Kochel said. "The Iowa Poll has been the gold standard for such a long time."

She had other misses before 2024: Her final poll of Iowa in 2004 had John Kerry, the Democrat, leading then-President George W. Bush by five percentage points, days before Mr. Bush eked out a win in the state by 0.07 points. But that was a different, less polarized, time.

Ms. Selzer's victories far outnumber her losses, even when she was an outlier. In 2014, as other pollsters were predicting a triumph for the Democrat Bruce Braley in the race to succeed a retiring Democratic icon, Senator Tom Harkin, Ms. Selzer saw an easy victory for the

Republican, Joni Ernst. She was right.
This November, when she jolted the nation with a poll that had Ms. Harris leading Mr. Trump 47 percent to 44 percent, it set off a torrent of predictions that the vice president could be swept to a convincing victory by angry women other polls may not have captured.

Mr. Trump ended up winning the state

by more than 13 points.

"There was a lot of poll-herding going

on in 2024; pollsters don't like to be outli-ers," Mr. Kochel said. "She had less fear of that because she made some calls where she was the outlier, and she won the bet. It finally caught up with her."

Ms. Selzer, 68, was the consummate product of the Great Plains, born in Rochester, Minn., raised in Topeka, Kan., with a doctorate in communications the-ory from the University of Iowa. After graduation, she went to work for The Des Moines Register, where she oversaw virtually every poll conducted by the newspaper from 1987 to November 2024 and earned her reputation for understanding her state. She seemed to have a knack with Iowans, even with the caucusgoers who were famously hard to measure

In a farewell column last month, Ms. Selzer defended her reputation and integrity, even as she owned up to her final whiff.

"Polling is a science of estimation, and science has a way of periodically hum-bling the scientist," she wrote. "So, I'm humbled.

For Mr. Trump, her humility is not enough. His lawsuit cited the Iowa Consumer Fraud Act, claiming the poll defrauded voters to "create a false narrative of inevitability for Harris," an act of 'brazen election interference.

Devereux Chatillon, a media lawyer in Mount Kisco, N.Y., scoffed at the legal claim. To use a business fraud statute. Mr. Trump's lawyers would somehow have to show that the business in question — The Des Moines Register — fraudulently promoted a product, the vice president of the United States. And if the president-elect is suggesting that voters were somehow misled about that product, it clearly did not show up in the results of the election — not nationally and certainly not in Iowa, she said.

George Freeman, executive director of the Media Law Resource Center, was similarly baffled.

There's no fraud unless it was intentionally deceptive," he said. "Fraud is not just making a mistake."



The final poll J. Ann Selzer, above, conducted for The Des Moines Register showed Iowa voters preferring Kamala Harris over Donald J. Trump by 47 percent to 44 percent. Media lawyers see Mr. Trump's subsequent lawsuit, over what he called "brazen election interference," as an attempt to intimidate the press.



With its novel arguments, media lawyers and free-press advocates see the suit as a way to get around defamation laws that are exceptionally difficult to win for a man as famous as Mr. Trump. Invoking consumer fraud might not be a winning legal strategy, but it has one huge advantage. Under state consumer fraud statutes, state attorneys general typically can investigate and bring cases, as well as even intervene in existing cases. The Texas attorney general Ken Paxton, a close ally of Mr. Trump's, opened a fraud investigation in 2023 against the liberal group Media Matters that is still open

that is still open.

Iowa's conservative attorney general, Brenna Bird, has already shown a readiss to intervene on legal issues on behalf of Mr. Trump.

Win or lose, the legal action carries an unmistakable warning to any news out-

let that dares to cross the next president: "This complaint is the latest in President-elect Trump's history of using law-suits to punish reporting he dislikes," said Bruce D. Brown, the executive director of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press. Such legal fights are often protracted

and costly, and even if the suit seems un-likely to prevail, as experts suggest, it can drain one's finances to defeat it.

For Ms. Selzer, the tragedy of the mo-ment is the cloud under which she is retiring. Social media is replete with accusations from Trump supporters compar-ing Ms. Selzer to a cartoon "super villain" and spreading conspiracy theories that suggest Democratic operatives colluded with the pollster to yield her final poll re-

In an interview with Iowa journalists last month, she said she had been



DAVID ROBERT ELLIOTT FOR THE NEW YORK

warned by the West Des Moines police of threats to her safety.

"If the police department knocks on your door and says your name has bub-bled up, I take that seriously," she said. "And I'm taking all available precau-tions"

Mainly, she worries for her standing

"It's more than annoying," she said. "It is really a dig at my reputation."

An analysis of her work by The New York Times dating to 1996 shows how accurate she has been, both in her polling ahead of the pivotal lowa caucuses and the general elections. She foresaw Mr the general elections. She foresaw Mr. Trump's upset of Hillary Clinton in 2016. She caught Barack Obama's support in the 2008 Iowa caucuses and revealed former Senator Rick Santorum's late surge in 2012 that would put him on top of Mitt Romney for the win.

In six of the last eight Iowa polls, Ms.

Selzer was within the margin of error of the actual result.

But she has long had her detractors — in both parties. Over her last eight final Iowa presidential polls, she revealed a slight but consistent lean toward Demo-crats, a lean that Republicans have capitalized on to castigate her and her em-ployer, The Register, whose liberal edito-rial board has become increasingly out of

step with the conservative state.
"There needs to be accountability," Jeff Kaufmann, the Iowa Republican Party's chairman, wrote on social media on Tuesday, backing Mr. Trump's lawsuit. On Wednesday, he declared in a text, "I support President Trump 100 percent."

Democrats have had their share of problems with Ms. Selzer. A snafu on the final poll ahead of the Iowa caucuses in 2020 sent Pete Buttigieg's senior adviser, Lis Smith, into such a rage that the final Lis sinth, into such a rage that the into lowa Poll was shelved just days before voters went to the polls. By happen-stance, one of Ms. Selzer's pollsters called a Buttigieg organizer. When it came time to ask which Democrat she inended to vote for the list of candidate

did not include Mr. Buttigieg.

In her book "Any Given Tuesday," Ms. Smith may have inadvertently provided fodder for Mr. Trump's legal action, suggesting the results of the poll would help determine the outcome of the election. "This was the most impactful and im-

portant poll in presidential primary poli-tics. It would set the narrative for the caucuses, dominating the media coverage and dictating caucus choices," she wrote. "I was beside myself."

It is out of fear of crossing Mr. Trump that few Republican pollsters have publicly come to Ms. Selzer's defense. A halfdozen prominent Republican pollsters declined to comment for this article. "Know you got to do the story, but count me as a pass," one said in a typical response to an email inquiry.

In defending her integrity as a pollster, Ms. Selzer has not addressed the influence her polls might have had on election outcomes. But she has lamented the circumstances of her retirement, which she said was planned long before Election Day 2024.

'The unfortunate thing, of course, is that it comes after a spectacular miss, as I like to call it, rather than after one more spectacular hit," she said last month.
"Wouldn't that have been better?"



Barack Obama in Atlantic, Iowa, during his first presidential run in 2007. Ms. Selzer, who oversaw virtually every poll conducted by The Register from 1987 to November 2024, caught Mr. Obama's support in the state's caucuses in 2008.

Ruth Igielnik contributed reporting.

Amid Spending Talks Over a Debt Limit, Rumblings by Trump

President-elect Was Forced to Negotiate With Democrats During His First Term

President-elect Donald J. Trump injected debt limit politics into already-fraught congres-sional spending talks this week urging lawmakers to lift the debt limit or abolish it entirely before he takes office next month.

The re-emergence of the debt limit comes 18 months after Re-publicans and Democrats staved off a fiscal crisis and agreed to sus-pend a cap on how much the government can borrow until after the 2024 presidential election. That was supposed to clear the decks and sidestep a politically difficult vote during the heat of campaign season.

But now the problem is waiting for Mr. Trump. As he prepares to push an agenda of tax cuts and border security, Mr. Trump fears that a debt limit fight next year could interfere. His plans are expected to cost trillions of dollars. much of which will most likely need to come from borrowed funds. A drawn-out debt limit fight next year could force Mr. Trump and Republicans to bow to the de mands of Democrats and could consume the congressional calen-

dar.
"This is a nasty TRAP set in place by the Radical Left Democrats!" Mr. Trump wrote on social media on Wednesday night.
On Thursday, Mr. Trump suc-

cessfully pushed Republican Speaker Mike Johnson to include a two-year suspension of the debt limit in a spending deal that is needed to prevent a pending gov-ernment shutdown. But the House ernment shutdown. But the House rejected the proposal on Thursday night, with right-wing lawmakers opposed to a debt limit increase joined by Democrats to scuttle the legislation. It failed by a vote of 174 to 235, with one member voting

Republicans are always reluctant to lift the debt limit, particu-larly when a Democrat is in the White House, saying it enables runaway spending. G.O.P. law-makers regularly use it as a tool to extract concessions, such as spending cuts, from Democrats when they are in power.

But Republicans will soon control Congress, as well as the White House, putting the onus squarely on them to either deal with the debt limit or face the prospect of a default. The standoff over the debt limit last year roiled markets and led to a downgrade of the long-term credit rating of the United States. Mr. Trump would like to avoid a similar scenario on his

By trying to address the debt limit during the final weeks of the Biden administration, Republicans are hoping to prevent Demo-crats from weaponizing it against them once they are in power. And, as Mr. Trump has made clear, a de-cision to raise the cap would allow him to blame Mr. Biden for in-

easing the borrowing limit. "It's clear Trump wants to clear

the deck so he doesn't have to have a budget/debt limit show-down on his watch to clean up the mess from the Biden spending sprees," said Stephen Moore, a Heritage Foundation economist who has been an adviser to Mr. Trump.

Democrats demonstrated on Thursday that they did not want to go along with that plan, with the vast majority voting against the House measure to advance the

Democrats have long criticized Republicans for playing danger-ous games with the debt limit, and called for it to be abolished. But it to be to be about the to be to let go of it as a potential source of leverage. And while Mr. Trump has indicated that he is willing to spearhead a move to eliminate the debt limit, many Republicane might fear that follow publicans might fear that follow-ing his lead would be fiscally reck-

What is the debt limit?

The debt limit is a cap on the total amount of money that the United States is authorized to borrow to fund the government and meet its financial obligations.

Because the federal government runs budget deficits — meaning it spends more than it brings in through taxes and other brings in through taxes and other revenue — it must borrow huge sums of money to pay its bills. Those obligations include funding for social safety net programs, in-terest on the national debt and salaries for members of the armed

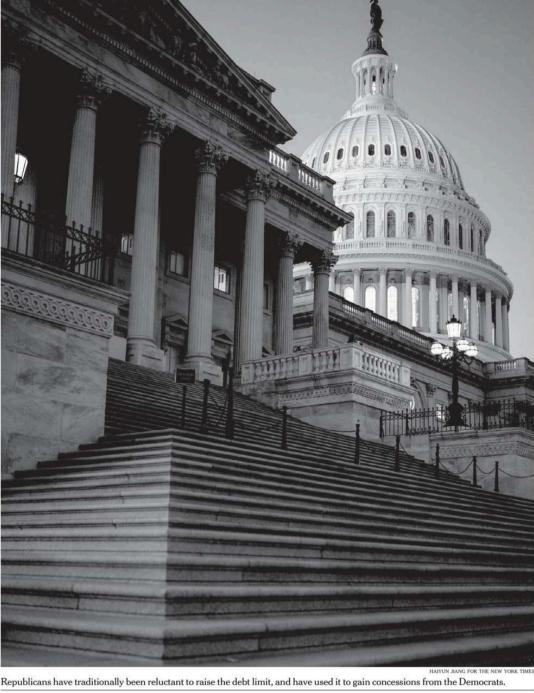
Approaching the debt ceiling of-ten elicits calls by lawmakers to cut back on government spending. But lifting the debt limit does not actually authorize any new spending — in fact, it simply al-lows the United States to spend money on programs that have al-ready been authorized by Con-

When will the debt limit be reached?

After a protracted fight, lawmakers agreed in June 2023 to suspend the \$31.4 trillion debt limit until Jan. 1, 2025.

On that day, the limit would have to be increased by the amount of debt that has been incurred since the suspension — about \$5 trillion. If it is not lifted or about \$5 trillon. If it is not lifted or suspended again, the Treasury secretary will then have to use "extraordinary measures" to ensure that the United States pays its bills, including interest payments to investors who have bought government debt. Those payments are essential to preventing the United States from defaulting on its debt.

faulting on its debt.
It is not yet clear how long the Treasury secretary will be able to use extraordinary measures, which temporarily curb certain government investments so that the bills can continue to be paid. However, it is expected that the



so-called X-date would come sometime in the middle of next

year.

"The summer could be a period that we zero in on as an X-date time frame," said Shai Akabas, the executive director of the Biparti-san Policy Center's Economic Policy Program, adding that natural disasters or new legislation passed early next year could bring that date forward.

How could the debt limit complicate Trump's agenda?

Republicans will soon control the White House, the Senate and the House, but with narrow major-ities. That means Republican law-makers will have to work with Democrats on most legislation to

find enough votes for passage.

That is what happened during Mr. Trump's first term, when Republicans controlled Congress but were reluctant to raise the debt limit. Mr. Trump was trying to force Democrats to fund his proposed border wall, threatening a government shutdown as a debt limit deadline approached.

Ultimately, he had to rely on Democrats, who drove a tough bargain over his demands, and he broke with his party to strike a deal with Democrats. Republicans were frustrated at the time over an agreement that included disas-ter relief money and a debt limit increase without including many

of their policy priorities.

The machinations over the debt limit distracted Republican efforts to pass the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, although lawmakers ultimately pushed it through at the end of

Republicans most likely want to avoid another paralyzing event this time around as they determine which of their many priori-ties they want to push through

first. They are still deciding whether to first focus on extending the 2017 tax cuts next year, which is estimated to cost \$4 trillion over 10 years, or to prioritize border security legislation.

They will need the votes of Democrats to deal with the debt limit, and a long standoff could hobble their ability to get other things done.

Abolish the debt limit?

One idea that Mr. Trump floated this week was to do away with the debt limit entirely.

According to the Constitution, Congress must authorize government borrowing. In the early 20th century, the debt limit was instituted so that the Treasury would not need to ask Congress for per-mission each time it had to issue

debt to pay bills. During World War I, Congress

passed the Second Liberty Bond Act of 1917 to give the Treasury more flexibility to issue debt and manage federal finances. The debt limit started to take its current shape in 1939, when Congress consolidated different limits that had been set on different types of bonds into a single borrowing cap

But the drama surrounding the debt limit has led to bipartisan calls for it to be ended. Treasury Secretary Janet L. Yellen in 2021 called the debt limit "destructive" and said it should be eliminated. Her predecessor, Steven T. Mnuchin, expressed similar senti-ments in 2017 when he described it as a "somewhat ridiculous con-cept" that does not limit spending.

Mr. Trump previously sug-gested that the borrowing cap was not necessary and said this week that the "Debt Ceiling guillotine" should be either extended or ter-minated before he takes office.

Musk Wields His Political Might to Try to Kill a Fiscal Deal as a Shutdown Looms

From Page Al

tives, wrote on X. "The richest man on Earth, President Flon man on Earth, President Elon Musk, doesn't like it. Will Republi-cans kiss the ring? Billionaires must not be allowed to run our government."

Representative Glenn Thomp son, Republican of Pennsylvania and chairman of the Agriculture Committee, told reporters that he "didn't see where Musk has a voting card.

control of the political debate for himself on Thursday morning, is-suing a threat of sorts to Mr. Johnson that he must not give in to Democrats as he tries to find a way to keep the government operating without incurring the wrath of Mr. Musk.

"If the speaker acts decisively, and tough, and gets rid of all of the traps being set by the Democrats, which will economically and, in other ways, destroy our country, he will easily remain speaker," Mr. Trump said in an interview with Fox News Digital.

On Thursday evening, Mr. Trump endorsed a new effort by Mr. Johnson to avoid a government shutdown with a spending plan that suspends the nation's debt limit for two years. In a post, the president-elect wrote that "all Republicans, and even the Democrats, should do what is best for our Country, and vote 'YES' for this Bill, TONIGHT!"

Michael D. Shear, Annie Karni and Maggie Haberman reported from Washington. Ryan Mac reported from Los Angeles

failed to pass in the House, with 38 Republicans voting against the measure.

Mr. Trump has tasked Mr. Musk to rein in an out-of-control bureau-cracy when he named him to lead the so-called Department of Gov-ernment Efficiency, or DOGE, with Vivek Ramaswamy, another

Mr. Trump dined with Mr. Musk and Jeff Bezos, the world's two richest men, at Mar-a-Lago on Wednesday night, as Mr. Musk's

Some lawmakers fume he is exerting too much influence.

posts were roiling Washington. Mr. Bezos, the Amazon and Blue Origin founder who also owns The Washington Post, recently gave \$1 million to the committee planning Mr. Trump's inauguration

Mr. Musk was not initially expected to be part of the dinner but joined as it was underway, according to two people who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss a private dinner. Many House Republicans have

een left deeply frustrated by Mr. Musk's involvement in spending negotiations and legitimately con-cerned about his threat to find primary challengers to take on any lawmakers who vote for a spend-ing bill he doesn't like. Lawmakers said that they were alarmed and that they have never seen a donor outwardly exact so much influence on policy after his preferred candidate won an election. They are also stuck taking their

cues from Mr. Musk's social media feeds, where he is promoting members who are in agreement with him. Despite his occasional presence on the Hill and in his role leading DOGE, Mr. Musk does not interact directly with many members of Congress. Mr. Rama-swamy has been the one talking directly with them.

On the House floor on Thursday, lawmakers were fuming that Mr. Musk is not a member of Congress and is exerting too much influence on their proceedings.

Mr. Thompson, who was deeply involved in negotiating direct pay-ments for farmers that are now effectively dead because of Mr. Musk, added, "I'm not sure he un-derstands the plight of the normal working people right now."

As their offices were flooded with calls, appropriators and lawmakers from rural areas were livid that Mr. Musk had spent the day posting on social media to effectively kill the bill. Members were glued to his feed as they walked to and from votes, and some privately expressed concerns about their own political futures if he went through with his threats.

Conservative Republicans, however, rallied behind Mr. Musk's barrage of posts. Repre-sentative Andy Barr, Republican of Kentucky, told Fox News that "this is exactly what the American people voted for when they voted for Donald Trump."

After Mr. Musk threatened on X to "vote out" any member who voted for the spending bill, Repre-



The billionaire Elon Musk made more than 150 posts about the bipartisan spending bill on X, the social media site he owns.

sentative Dan Bishop of North Carolina cheered. "In five years in Congress, I've been awaiting a fundamental change in the dynamic," he wrote online. "It has ar-

Some Republicans even went so far as to suggest that the party should replace Mr. Johnson with Mr. Musk as speaker, noting that speaker candidates don't have to be a sitting member of Congress.

"I'd be open to supporting @elonmusk for Speaker of the House," Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia wrote on social media. She added: "The establishment needs to be shattered just like it was yesterday. This could be the way."

That kind of lavish praise could come back to haunt Mr. Musk, though people close to Mr. Trump say there is no evidence of a rift between the president-elect and his richest supporter.

Still, the president-elect gets fa-mously irritable when the people in his orbit outshine him. Steve Bannon, once the chief strategist in the White House during his first term, abruptly departed after journalists focused attention on the power and influence he wielded.

One of Mr. Musk's first posts

about the spending bill came at 4:15 Wednesday morning in Washington.

"This bill should not pass," he wrote on his platform.

Between posts about his own video game antics and SpaceX's satellite internet service, Mr. Musk used his X account to call the bill "criminal," spread misinformation about its contents and issue a rallying cry to "stop the steal of your tax dollars!'

His posts followed a similar pattern of past activity on X, where he can become hyper-fixated on a single issue that bothers him. As the most popular user on X, Mr. Musk has used his feed as a bullhorn to drive conversation on the platform and beyond. By Wednesday

House representatives and senators, some of whom had already voiced their disapproval of the bill before Mr. Musk's outbursts, were falling in line.
"Any Member who claims to

support the @DOGE should not support this "CR of Inefficiency" that does not have offsets!!," Representative Ralph Norman, a Republican from South Carolina, wrote on X, using shorthand for a continuing resolution to keep fed-eral funding flowing. "Don't get weak in the knees before we even get started!"

On Wednesday, narrative eclipsed truth. "The terrible bill is dead," Mr. Musk posted just be-fore 4 p.m. in Washington, closing his post with the Latin phrase "Vox Populi, Vox Dei," which translates to "the voice of the peo-ple is the voice of God."

He has used the refrain before, most notably when restoring Mr. Trump's Twitter account in November 2022, shortly after buying the company. This time, the man who spent more than a quarter of a billion dollars this election cycle to support Mr. Trump's campaign used it to frame his own actions as the will of American citizens.

"No bills should be passed Congress until Jan. 20, when @real-DonaldTrump takes office," M Musk wrote on X. "None. Zero."

Spending Deal Debacle Threatens Johnson's Hold on His Job

By CARL HULSE

WASHINGTON - Speaker Mike Johnson spent months doing everything he could to hang on to his job come January, most notably a concerted charm offensive to keep President-elect Donald J. Trump placated and in his corner. It took just a few hours on Wednesday for it to all go bad

The Louisiana Republican this week got a taste of what life could be like in the second Trump era beginning next month as he was mercilessly undercut on his complex year-end legisla-tion by Mr. Trump and the president-elect's exceedingly influen-tial ally Elon Musk — that is, if Mr. Johnson is the speaker at all.

"We'll see," Mr. Trump told NBC News on Thursday when asked about his confidence in Mr.

The speaker's fate was thrust into question after House Republicans exploded in anger over the fully ornamented legislative Christmas tree he rolled out to fund the government into March, a 1,500-plus-page grab bag of year-end priorities and policy changes.

House Republicans, who have spent the weeks since the elec-tion talking about how they are going to remake the government in concert with Mr. Musk and cut all sorts of agencies and spending programs, were suddenly confronted with a bipartisan big-ticket measure that looked a lot like business as usual.

Mr. Trump demanded that Mr. Johnson jettison the deal he had cut with Democrats to keep the government open and, for good measure, raise the federal debt ceiling before Mr. Trump takes office. The speaker spent Thurs day contorting himself to try to fulfill those demands, and by late afternoon had hatched a plan to do so, but it failed to pass a House vote in the evening.

Even before the failed vote. Mr. Johnson's standing had sus-tained a major hit.

One House Republican, Thom-as Massie of Kentucky, said he would not support Mr. Johnson for speaker after he cut the initial spending deal. Several others also said the proposal put Mr. Johnson's job on the line.

"Everything has conse-quences," said Representative Ralph Norman, Republican of South Carolina. "No one puts forward this bill the way it was

Steve Bannon, the right-wing provocateur and former senior Trump adviser who helped to fuel the right-wing revolt that felled Mr. Johnson's predecessor, Kevin McCarthy, and who still has Mr. Trump's ear, was much more blunt about Mr. Johnson.

"He's got to go," he said on his reaming show "War Room." streaming show "War Room."
"President Trump supports him
until he doesn't support him."
Given the very narrow majority Republicans will hold when

the new Congress convenes on Jan. 3, Mr. Johnson can afford very few defections if he wants to hang on to the speaker's gavel, which he got only because of Mr.

McCarthy's ouster.
Mr. Johnson, who was the fallback choice for speaker by Republicans who couldn't co-alesce around anyone else to lead them, did not rise through the leadership ranks, where lawmakers traditionally hone their skills at things like quelling party divisions when a major issue, such as avoiding a shutdown, is in play. He spent much of Thursday cloistered in his office in the Capitol, listening to ideas from his colleagues on how to extricate himself and his party from the spending difficulties. Keeping his job has clearly

been a priority for months as Mr. Johnson has tried to shore up support. He has been a regular visitor to Mar-a-Lago to consult with Mr. Trump and to pledge his allegiance to his most important constituent, the incoming presi-

The two are not a natural fit. Mr. Johnson is a bookish, deeply religious man. He looked some-

what out of place tagging along with the Trump retinue to Ulti-mate Fighting Championship Fight Night at Madison Square Garden last month. But he has seen his stability tied to Mr.

The speaker also took steps to neutralize some of his harshest critics on Capitol Hill. He agreed to install Representative Mar-jorie Taylor Greene, the Georgia

Speaker risks G.O.P. rebellion as Trump and Musk lash out.

Republican who led a failed move to oust Mr. Johnson in May, as the chair of a new subcommittee to work with Mr. Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy on their effort to make huge cuts in government spending.

But the plum assignment might not have been enough to satisfy Ms. Greene, who on Thursday on social media opened the door to backing Mr. Musk for speaker, since the person holding that office does not need to be a member of the

Another piece of Mr. Johnson's

strategy to protect himself has exacerbated his current predica-ment. With the funding deadline of Dec. 20 arriving so close to the Jan. 3 start of the new Congress and the speaker election, Mr. Johnson pledged that he would not present Republicans with a huge year-end package of multi-ple spending bills known as an omnibus. Conservatives have griped for years that those bills don't get the scrutiny they deserve and lead to higher federal spending.
Instead, Mr. Johnson settled on

a plan to extend government funding into March, when Repub-licans will be in full control of Congress and the White House theoretically giving them the ability to determine spending levels without having to make concessions to Democrats. But because of an assortment of unfinished business, the measure took on a lot of baggage in the form of \$100 billion in disaster aid, \$10 billion in direct payments to farmers and, perhaps most toxically, a slight pay raise for lawmakers.

Mr. Johnson sought to defend the legislation as beneficial to Mr. Trump because it would get rid of some of nagging issues that the new administration

wouldn't have to waste time on. "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 the program "Fox and Friends." That's what we're going to run with gusto beginning Jan. 3 when we start the new Congress, when Republicans again are in con-

But his colleagues were outraged by the resulting legisla-tion, which they considered a giveaway. And while it might not have met the technical definition of an omnibus, which is a collection of spending bills, it was just as outrageous to some of them and put Mr. Johnson on shaky ground.

A central problem for Mr. Johnson is that while Republican members of the House control his fate, many of them refuse to support any spending bills, forc-ing the speaker to turn to Democrats for help in keeping the government funded. And when he bargains with Democrats, he gets legislation like the measure that imploded on Wednesday under Republican fire.

The situation will not get any easier — nor Mr. Trump and Mr. Musk more tolerant — when Mr. Trump officially returns to power in January, when Republicans will have an even smaller major-ity than they do now. Even if Mr. Johnson survives this episode in this Congress, he will still be at constant risk in the next one.

Asked by NBC News Thurs-

day whether he still had confi-

House Kills Budget Plan That Trump Demanded

From Page Al

Thursday evening, it appeared doomed to fail. It was made public roughly two hours before the vote was held, and Mr. Johnson used a special procedure to fast-track it to a vote that required the support of two-thirds of lawmakers to push it across the finish line. In the end, it did not come close to draw-ing even a simple majority.

Like the original bipartisan deal Mr. Johnson struck with Demo-crats, which Mr. Trump blew up on Wednesday in a hail of criticism the bill would have extended gov-ernment funding at current levels through mid-March, and provided \$100 billion in disaster aid and \$10 billion in direct payments to farm-ers. It also would have extended the expiring farm bill for a year.

The measure omitted an array of other policy changes that had been included in the initial deal.

But by far the biggest change was the addition of a two-year suspension of the debt ceiling a de-

pension of the debt ceiling, a demand that Mr. Trump abruptly issued on Wednesday — two days before the shutdown deadline — and then insisted that Republicans include in any measure to keep government spending flowers. keep government spending flow-

Mr. Trump threw his support behind the bill, calling it a "very good Deal for the American Peo-

"All Republicans, and even the Democrats, should do what is best

Maya C. Miller contributed report-

for our Country, and vote 'YES' for this Bill, TONIGHT!" Mr. Trump wrote on TruthSocial.

But the proposal was at odds with the position that many G.O.P. lawmakers have held for years—that they would never back an increase in the government's borrowing limit without spending cuts to slow the growth of the national debt. tional debt.

"You never have any ounce of self-respect," Representative Chip Roy, Republican of Texas, said in heated remarks to his G.O.P. col-leagues on the House floor. "To take this bill and congratulate yourself because it's shorter in pages, but increases the debt by \$5 trillion, is asinine."

He added that he was "absolutely sickened by a party that campaigns on fiscal responsibility" but was prepared to support legislation that would pave the way for so much more debt.

Mr. Johnson's original plan to avert a shutdown imploded on Wednesday amid a backlash by G.O.P. lawmakers that was fueled by Elon Musk, who spent much of the day trashing the measure on social media and threatening the political future of any Republican who supported it.

Mr. Trump later joined in with

his debt limit demand, saying he would rather raise it while Presi-dent Biden is still in office than be responsible for doing so next year after he takes office and Republi-cans are in full control of Con-

Democrats also refused to back a debt-limit increase they argued



would ease the path for Mr. Trump and Republicans to ram through extensive tax cuts for the wealthy at the expense of working people

Representative Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut, the top Democrat on the Appropriations Committee, tore into Republicans for rejecting the deal Mr. Johnson had negotiat-

ed with her party, arguing G.O.P. leaders had caved to Mr. Musk. "We must unequivocally reject the illegitimate oligarchy that seeks to usurp the authority of the United States Congress and of the American people," she said.

Only two Democrats, Repre-sentatives Kathy Castor of Florida and Marie Gluesenkamp Perez of Washington, voted "yes."

The debt limit is expected to be reached sometime in January —

though many think it could be stretched into the spring — 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 doing so.

"Increasing the debt ceiling is not great," Mr. Trump said in a statement, "but we'd rather do it on Biden's watch."

on Biden's watch."

The last time Mr. Trump forced a government shutdown, in 2018 in a dispute over funding for a wall at the nation's southern border, Congress had already passed bills funding three-quarters of the fed-eral government, including the Defense and Veterans Affairs Departments.

This time, Congress has not passed any individual spending

bills to fund the government into next year, meaning if lawmakers do not act before the Saturday morning deadline, the entire gov ernment will shut down. Unable to come to any real consensus on spending levels since negotiating two huge bills in March, Congress has been passing stopgap bill after stopgap bill ever since to keep the government from careening into a shutdown. The 2018 shutdown sidelined

roughly 800,000 of the federal government's 2.1 million employ-ees for 34 days.

In the case of a shutdown, large numbers of postal workers and Transportation Security Adminis-tration employees could be forced to work without pay. Benefits such as Medicare and Social Security

dence in the speaker, the presi-dent-elect said, "We'll see." continue uninterrupted because they are authorized by Congress

they are authorized by Congress in separate laws that do not need to be renewed every year.

The blowup could not have come at a worse time for Mr. Johnson who is beginned by the re-pleated. son, who is hoping to be re-elected as speaker on Jan. 3. Mr. Trump on Wednesday night issued a veiled threat to him over the imperiled

stopgap spending bill, telling Fox News Digital that the speaker would be "easily" re-elected to the role next year if he did what Mr. Trump wants. Asked in a telephone interview

Asked in a telephone interview on Thursday if he still had confi-dence in Mr. Johnson, Mr. Trump told NBC News, "We'll see." Hours later, the bill Mr. Trump

had demanded Mr. Johnson deliver failed resoundingly on the

The speaker's handling of the deal has also left a number of conservatives in the House openly mulling whether to support him in a vote on the floor early next year, when he can afford only a few G.O.P. defections to win the necessary majority to keep his gavel. At least one Republican, Representative Thomas Massie of Kentucky, who led the charge to oust Mr. Johnson earlier this year, has said

he will not back him for speaker. Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia said in a statement on X: "Johnson needs to stop the same failed pattern of making dirty swamp deals behind closed doors and keeping everyone in the dark. Republicans need to be working together to deliver the mandate. That requires big mandate. That requires changes in behavior."

President Threatens Veto of a Bill to Add More Judges

By MATTATHIAS SCHWARTZ

WASHINGTON -For decades, the wheels of the federal judiciary have been turning ever more slowly, as the number of fed-eral judges has failed to keep pace with rising caseloads.

The Judges Act of 2024 was supposed to ease the strain by adding 66 judges over the next 10 years. By spreading the new judgeships over three presidential terms, the bill's champions hoped to allay fears on both sides of the aisle that single president would be nded a bounty of additional

judgeships to fill.

There was just one hitch —
Election Day. The bill's sponsors knew that the measure's chances depended on it passing before the presidential race was decided Otherwise, the party of the losing candidate would be far less inclined to back the bill.

Democratic-controlled Senate passed it by a unanimous voice vote in August. But Election Day came and went without a vote in the Republican-controlled House. Now the bill's chances of becoming law look slim, with President Biden threatening to veto it as the current Congress

wraps up its term. The bill has drawn support from the American Bar Association and

the Federal Judges Association. For Mr. Biden and many other Democrats, the Republican decision to push off the vote until after Election Day — once it was clear that Donald Trump would nominate the first 22 judges — cost the bill its bipartisan sheen, and cost it their support. "You don't get to pick the horse after that horse has already won the race," is how Rep-resentative Hank Johnson, Demo-

crat of Georgia, put it. The 677 district court judges are the front line of the federal judiciary, handling most of the nearly 400,000 civil and criminal cases that pass through the system each year. Many of the most con-tentious and consequential legal questions, on transgender rights, gun control, immigration and abortion drugs, are first litigated in front of federal court judges, with a tiny fraction of those cases ever advancing to appellate courts.

For years, the courts have tried deal with their swelling caseload using a patchwork of visiting judges; semiretired judges; and magistrates, who have limited powers and do not have lifetime appointments.

The Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, a few blocks from the Capitol, helps oversee the system under the direction of the Judicial Conference, a policymaking body led by Chief Justice John Roberts.

This year, Justice Roberts named a new head of the adminis-trative office, Robert J. Conrad, a judge for the Western District of North Carolina. Judge Conrad's office has been closely involved in tracking the courts' workload and making the case for new judges In an interview on Thursday at the Thurgood Marshall Federal Judiciary Building, Judge Conrad said there was consensus on the need for more judges and that the need should drive the decision on the bill, not the prospect that Mr. Trump is now assured of filling the first 22 judgeships that would be created by the bill.

"Very rarely does it happen that the Senate, the House and the ju-diciary all agree on something being needed," Judge Conrad said. Data collected by his office shows how much the courts are slowing down.

Every other year, the adminis-trative office tallies the civil cases that have been pending for more than three years. There were 18,280 such cases in 2004. By 2024, the figure had more than quadru

"We need these additional positions in order to do our job going forward," he said.

Judge Conrad noted that the tally of slow-moving cases is sometimes known as the Biden List, named for the current president who, as chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, spon-sored a 1990 law that mandated ed 61 new judgeships.

Now, President Biden faces a choice: He can follow through on his administration's promise to veto the bill, letting the courts try to make do as their dockets swell. Or, he can sign the bill, putting even more judicial power into the hands of a successor who is intent on undermining his legacy.

on undermining ins legacy.
Giving Mr. Trump those extra
judgeships — 11 in 2025 and another 11 in 2027, plus three temporary judgeships in Oklahoma —
would be an especially bitter pill to swallow in light of signs that Mr. Trump intends to be more aggressive during his second term about nominating judges who are ideologically aligned with his

In a speech last month at the annual lawyers' convention of the conservative Federalist Society, Robert Luther III who worked in the White House Counsel's Office during Mr. Trump's first term, laid



Robert J. Conrad, head of the office that oversees the federal vstem, said the need for more judges should come first.

out what prospective nominees should expect to be asked: "What have you done to prove that you share President Trump's worldview and judicial philosophy? Mr. Luther said.

Gabe Roth, executive director of Fix the Court, a nonprofit that pushes for tighter judicial ethics rules and more transparency, said a veto would be risky for Demo-crats. It could embolden Republicans to take steps that would make it easier for them to confirm Mr. Trump's judicial picks.

"I get that the White House doesn't want to give Trump any more judgeships, but playing this game of chicken is dangerous when facing a side that time and again has opted to smash norms, particularly on judicial confirma-tions," he said.

Education Dept. Reopening Two Loan Repayment Plans

By ZACH MONTAGUE

WASHINGTON - The Education Department is reopening en-rollment in two student loan repayment plans it had sought to re-place, allowing borrowers to transfer out of the alternative program it had proposed, which has been frozen by litigation since

The decision revived the Pay As You Earn plan, also known as PAYE, and the Income-Contingent Repayment plan, also known as I.C.R. They were established in 2012 and 1996 and mostly closed to new enrollment last year to en-courage borrowers to sign up for the administration's Saving on a Valuable Education program, also known as SAVE.

Phasing out the two plans in fa-vor of an alternative with better terms for many borrowers had been a priority for the department, especially after successful legal challenges thwarted President Biden's more ambitious student debt forgiveness plans last

Emboldened by those rulings, a coalition of attorneys general from Republican states also brought lawsuits challenging the legality of SAVE this year, even after millions had enrolled in the plan, which offered many people vastly lower monthly payments.

Many people who signed up have been prevented from making payments since this summer surrounding litigation SAVE plays out.

That, in turn, blocked many public service workers from log-ging payments that would count

toward having their full balance forgiven after 10 years under the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program, including many who were agonizingly close before the litigation started.

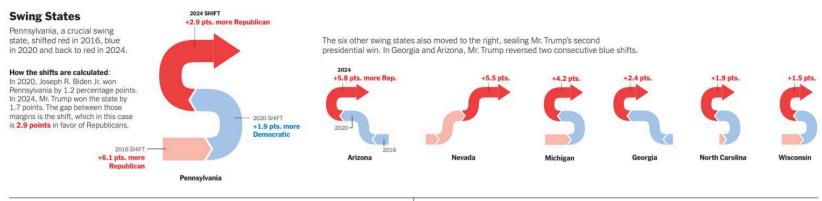
In the announcement, the department said the move was a stopgap designed to "give borrowers more breathing room on their student loans" while the depart-ment continued "vigorously de-fending the SAVE Plan in court."

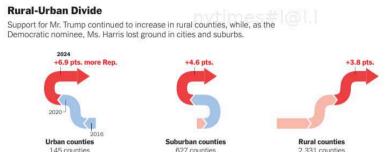
the litigation against SAVE to succeed after the Supreme Court declined to intervene in the case this year, and President-elect Donald J. Trump seems to favor having the department abandon the pro-gram along with most of Mr. Bi-den's student debt policies.

Both PAYE and I.C.R. are income-driven repayment plans, and the department advised that most borrowers would see lower payments under PAYE.
Under PAYE, the first \$22,590 of

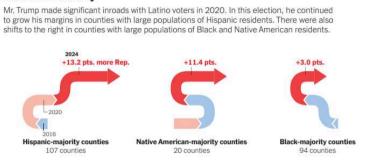
an individual's income is not counted toward a monthly pay-ment, and borrowers pay 10 percent of their income above that. Under I.C.R., most individuals owe nothing on up to \$15,060 in income, and 20 percent of their in-come beyond that amount. Both plans have higher income caps based on family size.

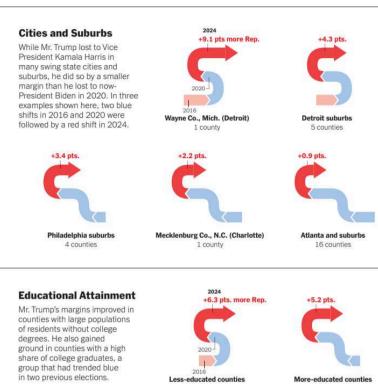
According to the department, oan servicers may continue to keep enrollees in forbearance for 60 days while processing applica-tions, after which interest will be-gin to accrue. But most crucially for public service workers, pay-ments made under the old plans will qualify toward forgiveness. Donald J. Trump's swift victory was driven by red shifts across the country, with gains among seemingly every possible grouping of Americans. By ZACH LEVITT, KEITH COLLINS, ROBERT GEBELOFF, MALIKA KHURANA and MARCO HERNANDEZ

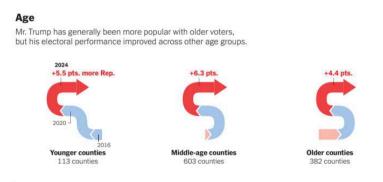


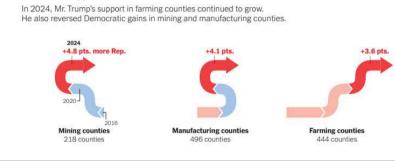








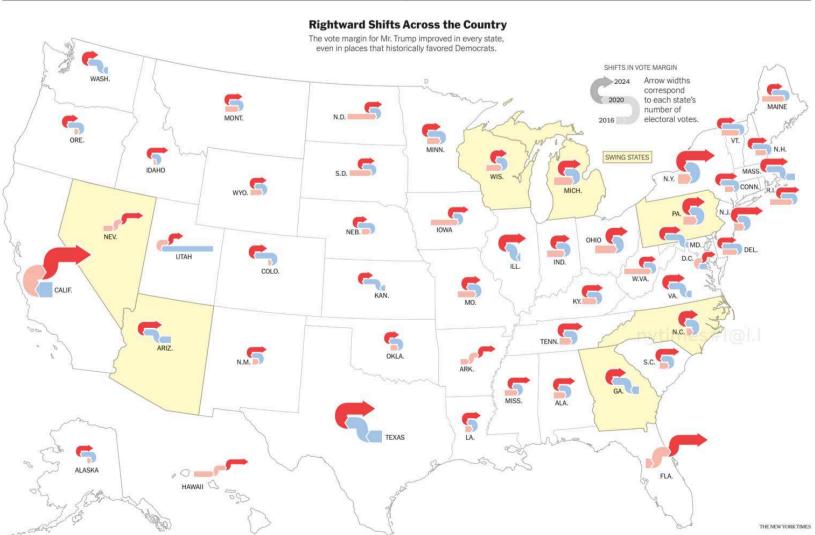




cated counties

2,718 counties

More-educated counties



Economic Types

Suspect in C.E.O.'s Killing Faces U.S. Charges and Possible Death Penalty

Federal prosecutors on Thursday unsealed a murder case against the suspect in the shoot-ing of UnitedHealthcare's chief executive, holding out the possibility of the death penalty even after a trial on separate state

The federal criminal complaint against the suspect, Luigi Man-gione, 26, includes one count of using a firearm to commit murder, which carries a maximum potential sentence of death, along with two stalking counts and a firearms offense

It came two days after the Man-hattan district attorney filed state murder and terrorism charges against Mr. Mangione in the killing of the executive, Brian Thompson. Mr. Thompson, 50, was gunned down on a Manhattan sidewalk this month.

The highest penalty Mr. Mangione could face if convicted in state court would be life in prison without parole.

Mr. Mangione was brought back to the city on Thursday after an extradition hearing in Pennsyl-vania that he did not contest, shackled and escorted by a phalanx of law enforcement officers Mayor Eric Adams and top police officials joined the dramatic tab-

The federal complaint, dated The federal compania, dated Wednesday, accuses Mr. Man-gione of traveling across state lines — from Atlanta to the Port Authority Bus Terminal in New

Reporting was contributed by Lola Fadulu, William K. Rashbaum, Chelsia Rose Marcius, Hurubie Meko, Jefferson Siegel and Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs.

York, where he arrived shortly after 10 p.m. on Nov. 24 — to stalk and ultimately kill Mr. Thompson, which would give the federal government jurisdiction to prosecute

Mr. Mangione was taken Thursday afternoon before a federal magistrate judge in Manhattan, who advised him of his rights. His lawyer, Karen Friedman Agnifilo, did not ask for bail.

Edward Y. Kim, the acting U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York, said in a statement that Mr. Mangione had traveled to the city to stalk and shoot Mr. Thompson "all in a grossly mis-guided attempt to broadcast Man-gione's views across the country. "But this won!" add sets it it we

"But this wasn't a debate, it was "But this wasn't a debate, it was murder," said Mr. Kim, who an-nounced the charges with James E. Dennehy, head of the F.B.I.'s New York office, and Jessica S. Tisch, the New York police com-

Mr. Kim said that the state pros-ecution by the Manhattan district attorney, Alvin L. Bragg, is ex-pected to proceed to trial before the federal case. Mr. Bragg's office said in a statement that it was coordinating with federal law enforcement agencies.

In court, Mr. Mangione sat qui-etly between Ms. Agnifilo and her husband and co-counsel, Marc Agnifilo. Mr. Mangione spoke only briefly at the 15-minute hearing, answering "yes" when the judge, Katharine H. Parker, asked if he understood his rights and the charges and if he had seen a conv charges, and if he had seen a copy of the complaint.

In court, Ms. Agnifilo made it clear to the judge that she was un-happy at what she called a "highly unusual situation." She noted that



After an extradition hearing, Luigi Mangione was flown from Pennsylvania to New York on Thursday, where he was guarded by a phalanx of law enforcement officers, and Mayor Eric Adams.

when the district attorney's office announced charges against Mr. Mangione this week there was absolutely no mention that Mr. Mangione was going to be charged federally." She said she had been prepared

to appear in state court at 2 p.m. on Thursday for Mr. Mangione's arraignment. "I find out today all of a sudden we are here," in federal court, with her client facing charges including one that carries

a potential death penalty.

She also called Mr. Mangione's situation confusing. She said the

state's argument that Mr. Mangione committed terrorism that would have an impact on many people and the federal charge of stalking a single person appeared to be in conflict. "I'd like to seek clarity from the government," she

A prosecutor, Dominic A. Gen-tile, responded that the government was prepared to address any legal argument in the proper for-um. Judge Parker asked that the two sides meet after the proceed-ing, to discuss the state and fed-

The federal and state prosecu tions would continue in parallel, though the trials would be staggered. The federal case could take much longer to reach trial, thanks to the complexities of death pen-alty litigation. The ultimate decision to seek the death penalty if Mr. Mangione is convicted would rest with the attorney general, presumably one appointed by President-elect Donald J. Trump.

The new federal charges came ust over two weeks after the killing of Mr. Thompson on Dec. 4.
Surveillance footage showed a

gunman approaching Mr. Thomp-son outside a Hilton hotel in Midtown Manhattan, lifting a hand-gun fitted with a suppressor and firing at him several times.

The authorities have said the suspect then fled uptown on an ebike and soon left New York.

The complaint includes images of what it says was the shooter traveling to and from the scene of the killing in the early morning. One image shows him at about 5:35 a.m., walking while wearing a gray backpack; in another, he is riding an e-bike down Central Park West to a location near the Hilton in Midtown.

Other images in the complaint show him after the killing, which occurred around 6:45 a.m. One shows the shooter, after he fled on foot to West 55th Street and mounted an e-bike, riding toward Central Park. Another shows him leaving the park near West 77th Street and Central Park West, riding north. In that image, he is no longer carrying the gray back-

Mr. Mangione was arrested on Dec. 9 in a McDonald's in Altoona,

Thursday's federal criminal complaint charging Mr. Mangione provides new details about a note-book found with him when he was arrested. The notebook expressed "hostility towards the health in-surance industry and wealthy executives in particular" across several handwritten pages, the com-plaint said.

Another notebook entry de-scribed an upcoming investor conference as "a true windfall" and went on to describe an intent to "wack" the chief executive of an insurance company.

A Prisoner's Self-Portraits of C.I.A. Torture Surface From a Sealed Court Record

Sketches From a Malaysian Suspect Held In a Dungeonlike Prison in Afghanistan

By CAROL ROSENBERG

GUANTÁNAMO BAY, Cuba — Alone in his cell with only dark thoughts of desperate times, the prisoner put pencil to paper and drew detailed portraits of how American agents tortured him 20 years ago

Some of it was self-administered therapy of sorts for the pris-oner, a Malaysian man named Mohammed Farik Bin Amin. The United States held him for years in solitary confinement, starting in 2003 in a dungeonlike prison run by the C.I.A. in Afghanistan

The Guantánamo prison does not offer specific treatment for people who have been tortured.

Some of it was homework assigned by his lawyer, Christine Funk, who negotiated the plea deal that sent him home on Wednesday. Ms. Funk had asked Mr. Bin Amin to draw what happened to him, rather than find a way to discuss it.

"This is what his nightmares are all about," Ms. Funk said.
"This is what he lives with."

Mr. Bin Amin's lawyers showed

his artwork to a military jury at his sentencing trial in January. He had pleaded guilty to war crimes and spoke of his remorse for helping a Southeast Asian extremist group called Jemaah Islamiyah, which carried out the 2002 bombings in Bali, Indonesia, that killed 202 people. Mr. Bin Amin admitted to being an accessory to the at-tack, after the fact, by helping the

main defendant elude capture. Ms. Funk has been defending violent criminals since 1994 and has devoted years of her career to the interplay between forensic science and the law. So the idea of offering a forensic look at Mr. Bin Amin's brutal treatment appealed to her as she was preparing for Mr. Bin Amin started his

sketches about five years ago, and his legal team worked to get them declassified. Then on Jan. 25, without objection from government prosecutors, Ms. Funk showed them on an enormous screen above the witness stand,

for both the public and his jury to

Other prisoners have drawn what they remember about being tortured in C.I.A. custody. But for the first time, a former C.I.A. pris-oner's version of what happened to him is now in the record of a trial at the post-9/11 war crimes court, which continues to grapple with the legacy of U.S. state-spon-sored torture.

And for the first time since they

were shown in court, they are be-ing published for the public to see them, here.



Darkened Dungeon

Mr. Bin Amin shows his right arm outstretched and chained to a bolt on his cell wall. He said he was held in darkness and found this "stress position," which left abrasions and blisters on his right hand and both feet, particularly painful to his back and

Sometimes he was left chained up so long he would urinate and defecate on himself, he said.

Hooded Solitary Confinement

Prisoners reported that they were held in solitary confine ment for long stretches. Mr. Bin Amin shows how he experienced it: naked and hooded on the floor of a cell with his wrists shackled behind his back and his ankles chained together with his legs extended. Hooding was routine, intensifying his isolation.



Stripped and Restrained

Guards in paramilitary attire cut off Mr. Bin Amin's clothing on the day he was captured in Thailand in 2003 and restrained his wrists behind his back with zip ties. At his sentencing hearing, Mr. Bin Amin said he was held naked "all the time" during the "couple of weeks" he was detained in Thailand.

Standing Sleep Deprivation

Detainees have said that C.I.A. interrogators shackled them with their arms raised above their head to deprive them of sleep and to break their will to resist questioning. But words have never been quite able to help people conjure an image of the technique. Here, Mr. Bin Amin shows himself nude, shaved from head to toe and shifting his weight from one leg to the other to try to relieve the pain.



Stress Position With Broomstick

In this self-portrait, Mr. Bin Amin's arms are shackled behind his back as he is forced to squat with a broomstick behind his knees, an unauthorized technique that so troubled other interrogators that they reported the abuse to C.I.A. headquarters. Mr. Bin Amin is also naked in this drawing but uses shadows to shield his genitals from view.

In 2004, the C.I.A.'s chief inter-rogator was relieved of his job in the agency's secret overseas prisons after using the broom-stick technique and teaching it to new interrogators, according to testimony at Guantánamo in 2020 from James E. Mitchell, a psychologist who helped the C.I.A. devise the so-called enhanced interrogation techniques. The chief interrogator, known in court as NX2, had been told the technique was forbidden and continued to use it anyway, Dr. Mitchell testified.



DRAWINGS BY MOHAMMED FARIK BIN AMIN

Mock Waterboarding

Here, his drawing shows four guards, some in masks called balaclavas, holding his limbs to the floor while a fifth C.I.A. employee straddles him and pours water on his body and face. The cell was cold, Mr. Bin Amin testified, and so was the water. He said the guards were questioning him and "punching my face" in the midst of the water

torture.

The C.I.A. has never acknowledged that it waterboarded Mr. Bin

The technique used on him is sometimes called "water dousing." Mr. Bin Amin said he was put on a plastic tarp on the floor, rath than on the medical-style gurney that C.I.A. interrogators used for than on the medical-style gurney that C.I.A. Interrogators used for the three prisoners whom the agency acknowledges it waterboarded. The distinction appears to be that the gurney could be tilted 90 de-grees to let a prisoner vomit or expel water before drowning. Ms. Funk: Did you think you might drown? Mr. Bin Amin: Yes.

Former C.I.A. prisoners said they were routinely photographed without clothes. In the drawing, a guard with his features obscured stands beside Mr. Bin Amin while another guard takes a photo of him, naked, upon his transfer from Thailand to a particularly brutal C.I.A. prison in Afghanistan. Guards had yet to shave off all of his hair. Mr. Bin ed, and that he tried to cover his genitals. The masked guard

slapped his hand away, he said. Ms. Funk: Did you feel humiliation? Mr. Bin Amin: Of course. Ms. Funk: Of course.

Senators Call for Inquiry in Georgia Over a Medicaid Program

WASHINGTON - A group of Democratic senators said on Wednesday that they had called for a federal watchdog investigation into a controversial Medicaid work requirement program in Georgia, accusing its administra-tors of churning through tens of millions of dollars in funding while enrolling a fraction of the low-income residents estimated to be eligible for it.

The program, called Georgia Pathways to Coverage, has been hailed by the state's Republican governor, Brian Kemp, as an innovative approach to administering Medicaid, which covers more than 70 million people in the United States. It is the only Medicaid

work requirement program currently operating.

Medicaid coverage is still avail-

able in Georgia without a work re-quirement, but the state has one of the strictest eligibility limits in the nation. Those who receive cover-age through Pathways would otherwise not be eligible for Medic-aid, but they must show that they are working, enrolled in college or doing community service for at least 80 hours each month to qual-

ify.

The program, which is set to expire next year, has been closely watched by Republicans and conservative policy experts as a pos-sible template for restructuring Medicaid in the next Trump administration. Republican lawmakers in recent months have dis-cussed legislation that would in-stitute Medicaid work require-

In a letter sent on Tuesday to Gene L. Dodaro, the head of the Government Accountability Of-fice, the Democratic lawmakers, including Georgia's two senators, Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff, pointed to the high costs of the program and the way the money had been spent: at least \$40 million as of June, with more than 80 percent going to administrative and consulting costs.

While hundreds of thousands of Georgians are left without the health coverage they need, taxpayer dollars are being routed into the pockets of eligibility syswrote the lawmakers, a group that also included Senator Ron Wyden of Oregon.

Georgia is one of 10 states that have not expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, which gave adults who make up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level access to coverage.

The next Trump administration may again encourage states to put work requirements for Medicaid in place, after the first Trump administration granted approvals to roughly a dozen states to do so. Some state work requirements were halted in court, and the Biden administration withdrew approvals for them. A federal judge allowed Georgia's to

Corrections INTERNATIONAL

Because of an editing error, an article on Thursday about Syria's first domestic flight since the fall of Bashar al-Assad's government referred incorrectly to the territory held by the rebel alliance that ousted Mr. al-Assad. The alliance holds much of Syria's northwest, not its northeast.

An obituary on Dec. 11 about the romance novelist Chiung Yao mis-stated the source of a line of dialogue she wrote. A character says You only lost one of your legs. What she lost was her love" in Chiung Yao's screenplay for a television adaptation of her novel Fantasies Behind the Pearly

Curtain" - not in the novel itself.

An obituary on Tuesday about the coastal geologist Orrin H. Pilkey misstated his birth date. It was Sept. 19, 1934 - not Sept. 14. The obituary also misstated the year a North Carolina law was passed that designated beaches and estuaries protected areas. It was 1974. not 1972.

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.



"It's like you're in 'The Birds,'" said Rachel Kudiba, a wildlife specialist hired by the city of Rochester, N.Y., to disperse its many crows.

3 French Hens, 2 Turtle Doves, 20,000 Crows

From Page A1

which they track by sound as much as by sight, they use a variety of techniques to rouse the crows. They shine spotlights, shoot off screaming fireworks, project laser beams onto nearby buildings and blast recordings of crows in distress If those tactics. crows in distress. If those tactics don't work, they clap.

The practices do not harm the crows, according to ornithologists and city officials. But that hasn't stopped the flow of sympathy for the cagey birds on social media, like the "Rochesterians for Crows" Facebook page and a "City of Rochester vs the Crows" post on

The crows typically decamp in boisterous groups of thousands, only to alight elsewhere in the city, commencing a game of cat-and-mouse that continues through midnight and picks up again a few hours before dawn the next day.

"It's a vicious cycle," Ms. Kudiba said after repelling a murder of crows outside St. Mary's Church and nearby Washington Square Park, a favorite roosting

Her partner in the operation, Daniel Hojnacki, a wildlife biolo-gist, pointed a laser overhead from the driver's seat of a pickup truck. Where do the birds go?

"Where we can't find them," he said, laughing.

Specialists say their goal isn't to shoo the birds out of town alto-gether. That's a fool's errand. No laser beam can undo the winter homing pattern that has drawn these whip-smart birds to Rochester for decades.

Rather, the aim is to break up their roost into less raucous — and less messy — masses. Crows root through trash and drop their own kinds of bombs in the form of ex-

Karen St. Aubin, the city's direc-





tor of operations, said the city has spent about \$9,000 a year on dispersing crows. It's worth it, she

"We used to have to power wash

benches, sidewalks, statues," Ms. St. Aubin said. "It's really about maintenance. Some of these larger roosts are in public places.

Daniel Hojnacki, a wildlife biologist, shooed some of the crows from downtown Roches ter with a laser, above. Ms. Kudiba repelled others with a flare. Their efforts do not harm the birds, ornithologists say.

Kevin McGowan, who studies crows at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, said it sounded to him as though Rochester's approach was

"You can get them out of a neighborhood or away from the town hall, but you're not going to get rid of them," Mr. McGowan

"It's an ongoing thing," he added. "But as I tell people, just hav-ing these large aggregations someplace you can see is totally cool."

New Jersey Wrong to Seize A City's Police, Court Rules

A New Jersey appellate court ruled Wednesday that the state's attorney general, Matthew J. Platkin, had overstepped his authority when he seized control of the police department in Paterson, the state's third-largest city.

son, the state's third-largest city. The city's mayor, André Sayegh, hailed the decision as a victory that rightfully restored his control of a fundamental function in the city he was elected to lead.

"I'm the mayor," Mr. Savegh said. "I'm on the front line. I have

to face the heat." He added: "What Matt Platkin did was unlawful and undemo-cratic. He disenfranchised Paterson voters.

The ruling on Wednesday grew out of a lawsuit filed by city lead-ers who had sought to reclaim control of the roughly 400-mem-ber department that since March 2023 had been run by the attorney

general's office.

Mr. Platkin said he would imme diately appeal the decision, which he said undermined decades of established legal precedent in New Jersey.

"Our office stepped in following a fundamental breakdown of com-munity trust," Mr. Platkin said in a statement. "Since then, murders, shootings, sexual assaults, robberies and other violent crime in Paterson have all plummeted, while officer morale and community trust have dramatically improved." proved."

The attorney general's office took the unusual, but not unheardof, step of seizing control of the department after a series of police shootings roiled the 156,000-resident industrial city in northern

New Jersey.

There were widespread protests, and civil rights activists, led by the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, had begun urging the Justice Department to step in

Three weeks before the take-over, Najee Seabrooks, 31, was shot and killed by Paterson police officers after calling 911 to report that he was experiencing a mental health crisis. Officers had tried for hours to persuade Mr. Seabrooks to come out of his bathroom before firing their weapons when he 'lunged toward the officers with a knife in his hand," according to a statement released at the time by Mr. Platkin's office Mr. Platkin's office.

A month before Mr. Seabrooks was killed, a Paterson police officer was charged with aggravated assault and official misconduct af-ter shooting a former city resi-dent, Khalif Cooper, in the back, leaving him paralyzed from the waist down. The charges were later dropped after prosecutors said they had found photographs that were never provided to a grand jury that showed Mr. Cooper with

a gun on the day he was shot. In March 2023, Mr. Platkin, New Jersey's chief law enforcement officer, said he had decided to take over day-to-day police op-erations in Paterson because of a "crisis of confidence in law en-forcement in this city."

It was not the first time the state

had intervened to try to fix a troubled force.
In 1998, the state seized control

of the Camden Police Department after concluding that it was under-

staffed and inefficient and had ignored recommendations to im-prove. Then, 14 years later, the department was disbanded alto-gether, largely in an effort to break the police officers' union, and rebuilt with an emphasis on less confrontational law enforcement.

Ryan Haygood, a lawyer who leads the Institute for Social Justice, called the court's ruling 'shameful."

He said Mr. Platkin's decision to take control of a deeply flawed de-partment was both surprising and courageous. It also obviated the need for a potentially lengthy re-view by the Justice Department that might never have led to federal intervention, Mr. Haygood

"Now, the court's decision could effectively return Paterson police to the very people responsible for the lethal and violent culture that the residents of Paterson wanted to be free from," Mr. Haygood said.



Attorney General Matthew Platkin said trust in the Paterson, N.J., police had broken down.

In its decision on Wednesday, a three-judge appeals panel ruled that Mr. Platkin and Isa M. Abbassi, a former chief with the New York Police Department who was put in charge of the Paterson po-lice after the takeover, had "ex-ceeded their statutory authority."

"We conclude defendants had no authority, either express or implied, to directly supersede the entire" department, the judges wrote.
Mr. Abbassi, who held leader-

ship positions in New York in the aftermath of the 2014 police killing of Eric Garner on Staten Island, recently moved to a new role in the attorney general's office and was replaced by Capt. Pat Murray, a 40-year veteran of the Paterson police force.

No changes will be implemented for at least three days, the

judges wrote, "to permit any party to seek emergent relief from the Supreme Court."

By midafternoon on Wednes-ay, that is precisely what hap-

A representative of the attorney general, Jeremy M. Feigenbaum, filed paperwork asking that the decision be blocked from taking hold until the New Jersey Su-preme Court had an opportunity to weigh the merits of the case.

"The court's ruling risks chaos in the chain of command for the Police Department imminently." Mr. Feigenbaum, New Jersey's solicitor general, wrote. "There will be profound uncertainty and changes as to who leads the de-partment while fragile police reforms remain underway will undermine the public safety for all residents." The Supreme Court has given

lawyers for the Paterson city offi-cials who filed the lawsuit until noon on Thursday to file a re-

'Critical' Regions of New Jersey

By TRACEY TULLY

The Federal Aviation Administration has issued a monthlong ban on drone flights over a large swath of New Jersey, the first broad prohibition of its kind since the authorities began investigating a spate of sightings last month

that set off fear and speculation.

The ban began late on Wednesday and will continue through Jan. 17, according to an F.A.A. alert.

The notification cited "special security reasons" for prohibiting flights in airspace near 22 New Jersey communities, including three of the state's largest cities, Camden, Elizabeth and Jersey

Only drone pilots authorized to operate for national defense, law enforcement or disaster-response purposes are permitted to send the unmanned crafts aloft. Operators of drones used for commercial purposes may apply for a waiver after providing a "valid statement of work," the F.A.A.

The F.A.A. said in a statement that it had temporarily restricted drone flights over "critical New Jersey infrastructure" at the request of what it described as "federal security partners."

The F.A.A. referred all additional questions to the U.S. De-partment of Homeland Security.

"We continue to assess there is no public safety threat relating to the reported drone sightings," Dana Gallagher, a Homeland Security spokeswoman, said in a statement. "In coordination with the F.A.A. and our critical infrastructure partners who requested temporary flight restrictions over their facilities, out of an abun-dance of caution, the F.A.A. has issued temporary flight restrictions over some critical infrastructure facilities in New Jersey." Pilots who fail to adhere to the

no-fly rules may face swift conse-quences, including having drones intercepted and being questioned or detained by federal officials, F.A.A. policies state. Many drones used for commer-

cial purposes are registered with the federal government and can be traced using software. It was unclear, however, how hobbyists flying drones in forbidden airspace might be discovered.

The F.B.I drone sightings in New Jersey a month ago. Soon after, the authorities banned drones from operating near the Bedminster golf course run by President-elect Donald J. Trump and the Pica-tinny Arsenal, a U.S. Army center. Widespread news coverage fol-

lowed. So, too, did thousands of additional reports of sightings over New Jersey, New York and several other states in the Northeast Federal officials have issued repeated assurances that there is no security threat, and have said that most sightings appear to be of either airplanes or helicopters. That has done little to assuage

the public and some elected offi-

Representative Josh Gottheimsaid he contacted the F.A.A. Thursday morning to express concern that, without more information, the decision to ban drones so broadly in New Jersey could lead to "more confusion and uncertainty."

"They must brief the public on the reasons for their action," said Mr. Gottheimer, a Democrat who represents a northern New Jersey

F.A.A. Bans Drone Flights Near A Jaw-Dropping Backyard Find: Mastodon Teeth

A married couple arrived in Cory Harris's office in late September, carrying a plain card-board box about the size of a dictionary. They were excited to open it, and to show Dr. Harris the amazing things inside.

Dr. Harris felt a sense of dread, and he prepared to deliver bad

"More often than not, it's a weird rock," said Dr. Harris, an ar-chaeologist and chair of the behavioral sciences department at SUNY's Orange County Community College. "You disappoint people, because they thought it was something really cool. And it's not.

The box was opened. What he saw inside — two yellowed teeth from a long-dead mastodon stirred in Dr. Harris a thrill he hadn't felt in years.

"I was crazy excited," said Dr. Harris, 50, who has worked in ar-chaeology for nearly 30 years. "It was the same old-school excite ment I felt when I got into this field in the first place."

The discovery of the remarkably well preserved mastodon jaw was announced Tuesday by the New York State Department of Education, which runs the New York State Museum, where scientists are studying the artifact. Fearful that their home near Scotchtown, N.Y., would be overrun by news crews or treasure hunters, the couple declined to be named or interviewed for this arti-

According to Dr. Harris, the mastodon jaw was discovered when the couple noticed something poking out of the grass in their backyard.

At first they thought it was an old baseball. It was not a baseball.



Mastodon teeth dug up from a backyard in New York's Orange County are among dozens found in the area since colonial times.

mous teeth buried in the soil, just inches below the surface. Realizing that this might be something of scientific importance, the homeowners reached out to Dr. Harris. The authenticity of the

Ice age discoveries in upstate New York are not unheard-of.

teeth was apparent immediately, he said, so he contacted Robert Feranec, director of research and collections at the state museum. In October the two scientists organized a small team to excavate a trench 14 inches deep.

There they found the jaw of an adult mastodon - a cousin to the

North America until it went extinct about 10,000 years ago. There were also fragments of a toe and a rib. If the homeowners agree, Dr. Harris and Dr. Feranec hope to return to the yard next summer, after the ground has thawed, to see if more of the mastodon is hidden there.

Because the house does not belong to Dr. Feranec, he has re-signed himself to waiting. But it hasn't been easy.

"It would take me a lot of energy not to dig in my own backyard if I know there's a mastodon right there," he said.

While it may be uncommon for homeowners to uncover ice age fossils poking out of their yard, the discovery of mastodon bones in Orange County is not exactly rare. In 1780, a preacher named Robert Annan found a collection of enormous bones on his farm in Wal-lkill, N.Y. The discovery was

deemed so important that Gen. George Washington, then the commander of the Continental Army, left his troops camped at Newburgh, N.Y., and rode 25 miles in a sleigh to see the bones him-

Washington's viewing party gathered just a few miles from the backyard where the latest fossils were found.

The highest concentration of mastodons in the country is in Orange County," said Dr. Feranec, who counted about 60 findings in the area since colonial times.

Orange County is a popular resting place for mastodons because it not only offered ideal places for the animals to live, but also the right conditions to preserve them after they died. According to Dan Fisher, a professor emeritus of paleontology at the University of Michigan, mast-odons arrived in what is now New York State about 14,500 years ago, feeding on pine and spruce nee-dles and twigs in a landscape of boreal forests — and cool, peaty bogs, which could prove deadly to animals that wandered in too deep and drowned.

A sample from the Scotchtown jawbone will be sent to a lab in California for radiocarbon dating, which will determine how long ago the animal died, Dr. Feranec said. He expects he already knows the answer: about 13,000 years ago, like most of the mastodon specimens found in Orange County over the last two and a half centuries. The old yellow teeth could yield other discoveries, Dr. Feranec said, like how far this individual mastodon roamed.

"You don't get many of these experiences in your life as a paleontologist," Dr. Feranec said. "You need to savor it."

Appeals Court Disqualifies Georgia Prosecutor in Trump Election Case

Judge Scott McAfee, the trial court judge, had rejected a de-fense claim that Ms. Willis's relationship with the lawyer she hired had given her a financial stake in the case. But he found that the relationship had raised "a significant appearance of impropriety" that needed to be addressed, and he effectively forced Ms. Willis to dismiss the lawyer, Nathan J.

The appeals panel's majority decision, written by Judge Tren-ton Brown, said that Judge Mc-Afee's decision "did not cure the already existing appearance of impropriety."

The ruling came as a surprise, in part because Judge McAfee has a conservative record and was originally appointed by Gov. Bri-an Kemp, a Republican. In a dis-sent, Judge Benjamin A. Land of the Court of Appeals, another Kemp appointee, wrote that he was "particularly troubled by the fact that the majority has taken what has long been a discre-tionary decision for the trial court to make and converted it to some-thing else entirely."

"If this Court was the trier of fact and had the discretion to choose a remedy based on our own observations, assessment of own observations, assessment of the credibility of the witnesses, and weighing of the evidence," Judge Land continued, "then per-haps we would be justified in reaching the result declared by the majority." He added: "But we are not trial judges, and we lack

A surprise ruling may doom charges against an ex-president.

that authority."

The Trump camp celebrated the win. In a statement, Steven Cheung, a spokesman for Mr. Trump, said: "In granting President Trump an overwhelming mandate, the American people have demanded an immediate end to the political weaponization of our justice system and a swift dis-missal of all the witch hunts against him."

Steve Sadow, Mr. Trump's lead lawyer in the Georgia case, said "as the court rightfully noted, only the remedy of disqualification will suffice to restore public confi-dence."

"This decision puts an end to a

politically motivated persecution of the next president of the United States," he added.

Ms. Willis's office did not com-ment beyond its appeal.

Ms. Willis, an elected Demo-crat, began her investigation of Mr. Trump and his allies nearly four years ago, but her case could be effectively dead if her office is not able to preserve its hold on the case. When a case is stripped from Georgia prosecutors, its fate is decided by a Republican-controlled state panel.

That panel already decided not to bring charges against Georgia's



Fani T. Willis, center, the Fulton County, Ga., district attorney, had a romantic relationship with Nathan J. Wade, right, the special prosecutor she had hired to manage the election case.

lieutenant governor, Burt Jones, who acted as a fake elector for Mr. Trump in 2020. Ms. Willis and her office were barred from bringing charges against Mr. Jones as part of the Trump election interference case, because she had headlined a fund-raiser for one of his political

Anthony Michael Kreis, a law professor at Georgia State Uni-

versity, called the ruling "exceptionally bad" in a series of posts on X and said that the appellate judges were encroaching on the trial court's job.

Chris Timmons, a former Geor-gia prosecutor who has followed the case closely, said that "it's a tough call to say whether the Court of Appeals got it right," add-ing that "their reasoning was that the people lost confidence in the

But he noted that Ms. Willis recently "won re-election in a landslide, suggesting that Fulton County at least has confidence in

The prosecution was upended in January after a lawyer for one of Mr. Trump's co-defendants re-vealed in a court filing that Ms. Willis had engaged in a romantic relationship with Mr. Wade. Defense attorneys accused Ms. Willis of "self-dealing" because she took a number of vacations with Mr. Wade after hiring him, while using public funds to pay him more than \$650,000 for his work on the case. work on the case.

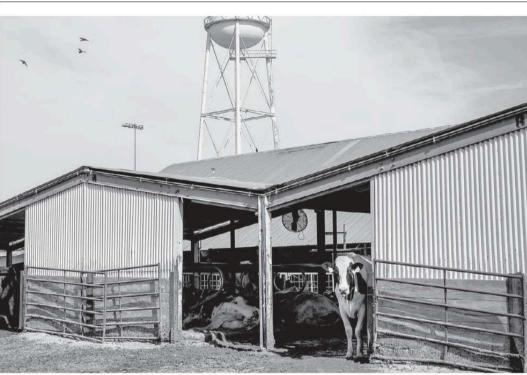
"Although reasonable minds could differ, I think that it's very reasonable for the Court of Appeals to feel that public confidence in the district attorney's office has been irreparably damaged in rela-tion to this case," said Clark D. Cunningham, an expert in legal ethics and a law professor at Geor-gia State University. gia State University.

While not all of the 15 defend-ants took part in the appeal, Mr. Cunningham said that he ex-pected all of the remaining defendants to now join it and that their chances of success were

good.
Mr. Trump's legal outlook has improved considerably since the November election. While Mr. Trump was convicted earlier this year of 34 felonies in a Manhattan case related to falsifying business records, the judge recently put off the sentencing, and prosecutors have signaled a willingness to freeze the case while Mr. Trump

olds office.

Besides Georgia, four other states are pursuing criminal cases related to efforts by Mr. Trump and his allies to cling to power after his 2020 election loss. But Georgia is the only state to have brought charges against Mr. Trump himself.



The avian influenza virus known as H5N1 primarily sickens birds, but in four months it has spread to cows in 645 herds in California.

Mutating Bird Flu Virus Is Called 'Covid for Cows'

This article is by Soumya Karlamangla, Orlando Mayorquín and Jesus Jiménez.

SAN FRANCISCO — A fast-growing outbreak of avian flu has upended California's dairy indus-try, the nation's largest producer of milk, infecting most of the state's herds and putting thou-sands of farmworkers at risk for

contracting the virus. In just about four months, cows in 645 dairies in California have tested positive for H5N1, even as many ranchers have taken strict precautions to stop the virus from spreading. Gov. Gavin Newsom was concerned enough Wednes-day that he declared a state of emergency over the outbreak in California.

The virus is spreading so quickly that dairy farmers are calling it "Covid for cows," and scientists are racing to figure out how to stop the contagion.

"We're trying to do everything we possibly can, and this has just been the worst crisis we've ever dealt with in the dairy industry in California," said Anja Raud-abaugh, the chief executive of Western United Dairies, a trade organization that represents most of the state's dairy farms. Avian flu primarily affects

birds, but it can also infect mam-mals, including humans. There have been 61 human cases reported in the United States so far this year, and most of the individu-als have had mild symptoms, including pink eye, fever and mus-

But officials reported Wednesday that the nation's first severe human case of infection had been identified in an individual in Louisiana who had been hospitalized with bird flu.

There has been no evidence that the virus can spread easily between humans, though disease experts warn that viruses can evolve as more infections occur. Consuming eggs and pasteur-

Emily Anthes contributed report-

ized milk won't make people sick. according to the Food and Drug Administration. (Raw milk from infected cows, however, has been deemed unsafe, and California re-cently recalled raw milk products after the virus was detected in

samples.) The most common way humans have contracted bird flu has appeared to be through close contact with infected cattle and poultry. The virus was first detected in cows early this year in Texas, but has since reached herds in 15 other states, including California.

Milk from infected cows has high levels of the virus, and experts believe that contaminated vehicles, equipment and workers play a role in spreading the virus from farm to farm. Those who milk cows can face high risks be-cause the virus is highly concentrated in infected milk, which can splash into workers' eyes, said Mi-chael Payne, a veterinary medicine expert at the University of California, Davis. Farmers took precautions by

cutting off contact with other dairy farms, regularly testing their milk for the virus, disinfecting new equipment and prevent-ing workers from other farms from visiting, said Dr. Payne, who studies biosecurity on farms. This fall, cattle ranchers in California also scrambled to isolate their herds because it has been be-lieved that avian flu spreads through close contact between

Yet those measures haven't always worked.

"Some of them have just done "Some of them have just done everything right, and they still got infected," Dr. Payne said. "It's enormously frustrating. You've got producers that upend their entire life. tire life and system of management — it's enough to make you want to throw up your hands."

Federal and state scientists are scrambling to identify other ways the virus may be spreading among cattle, such as whether wild birds, rodents or other ani-mals like skunks may be transmitting the virus between farms.

Last week, dairy cows in South-ern California tested positive for avian flu, hundreds of miles from infected herds in the Central Valley, the state's agricultural hub. Shipments of cows between the two regions have been shut down for weeks, Ms. Raudabaugh said.

That the virus had reached cows beyond the Central Valley, Governor Newsom said on Wednesday, was a sign that the outbreak had become a statewide crisis that requires more monitor-ing and resources. His emergency declaration waived certain labor restrictions to allow for more staffing and suspended requirements for equipment purchases

In October, a severe heat wave

The illness is quickly spreading from farm to farm in California.

in the Central Valley compounded

"Cows were just falling down dead. I'd never been so traumatized," Ms. Raudabaugh said. And cows that recover from the

virus only produce two-thirds as much milk when they return, Ms. Raudabaugh said. She said that milk production in November in California was 4 percent lower than at the same time last year.

"That's the long-term damning

impact," she said.

In California, 34 people have tested positive for bird flu, and almost all of them had been directly exposed to infected cattle, according to state officials.

The actual number of infected farmworkers is likely higher than what has been reported because many tend to avoid testing so they don't have to miss work, said Elizabeth Strater, a national vice president of the labor union United Farm Workers. Farmworkers who

are undocumented may also be reluctant to report that they're sick, she said, because they are worried about potentially having to pro-vide their personal information to a government agency.

"These are people who have a very thin social safety net," Ms. Strater said. "These are people that are living at or below the pov-erty line, and these are the people that we are counting on to keep the rest of us safe from things like avian flu."

California's poultry farms have also suffered from the virus, but they tend to be better protected. Unlike at dairy operations, where cows move between farms, bird flocks stay together on one farm, and large poultry operations are often indoors, where they are more protected from other ani-

Still, when the virus does reach extreme. The virus is fatal in chickens and spreads much faster among them than cows, so poultry farmers must euthanize an entire flock — potentially more than a million birds — if one gets in-fected. Since early November, 6.5 million egg-laying hens have died nationwide, including 2.5 million in California, according to the California Department of Food and Agriculture.

That has dented the state's egg supply, and many California grocery stores have been running low on cartons right before the holidays. At some stores, shelves are mostly bare, and customers have been restricted from purchasing more than one carton at a time.

Katya Rosales, 43, turned up at a Food 4 Less grocery store in Los Angeles with her two young daughters on Wednesday, only to find empty shelves.

Ms. Rosales said that she was worried about how she would find the ingredients for the cupcakes and flan she typically makes for her four children for Christmas.

"We need to figure out where we're going to get eggs," she said.

New York City Approves Pact For Elite School Test System

A New York City education panel voted late Wednesday night to approve a new contract for a contentious testing system for admission into the city's elite public high schools.

The board, the Panel for Educational Policy, made its decision in a 14-to-2 vote, with four abstentions, at its final meeting of the year — a vote that had been delayed as de-bate waged over the Specialized High School Admissions Test, or SHSAT, the sole admissions criteria for the city's eight special-ized high schools, which include Stuyvesant High School and Bronx High School of Science.

The new contract, a five-year, \$17 million agreement with Pear-son, the dominant education publisher in the United States, would make the test computer-based for the first time, according to the city's Department of Education

The move marks a major shift for a test that has been the source of fraught fixation for decades. While the specialized schools edu-cate only about 5 percent of New York City high schoolers, their admissions are scrutinized yearly, as they are regarded both as shining examples of the best of the city's education system and as symbols

of entrenched school segregation.
According to the D.O.E., approximately 30,000 eighth graders and 5,000 ninth graders take the test each year. Major ra-cial gaps have persisted in the admissions process, with 12 percent of spots last year offered to Black and Latino students — the highest number since 2013 and up from 10 percent the year before. Mayor Eric Adams once referred to the schools as "a Jim Crow school sys-

The flagship school, Stuyve sant, admitted only 10 Black stu-dents to its first-year class of 744 students last year.

But Asian American families have fiercely opposed any change to the entrance system for the eight schools. Over 2,000 of the more than 4,000 offers for admis-sion last year were made to Asian students, many of whom came

from low-income households. The meeting on Wednesday night at Sunset Park High School in Brooklyn lasted more than five hours, and debate was impas-sioned, with most speakers focusing on whether the test should remain the grounds for admission, rather than on whether it should be computerized. If the panel had voted down the contract, an entrance exam might not have been offered for the class of 2026.

Kemala Karmen, a parent of two public school graduates, sardonically suggested playing a drinking game and taking sips at each mention of the specialized schools being "crown jewels," or threats of the sky falling. She also bristled at the suggestion that students at specialized schools are the only ones who work hard.
"The amount of hysteria that has been whipped up by this contract is beyond," she said.

Chien Kwok, a parent of a stu-dent at a specialized high school and an alumnus of Brooklyn Technical High School, one of the eight,

Troy Closson contributed report-

pushed back on the idea that the admissions test was racist or inequitable, arguing that the most rigorous schools often serve students from low-income families.

"Focus your resources on helping students become high achievers," said Mr. Kwok, who is also a co-founder of PLACE, an advoca-cy group that is a fierce defender of test-based admission to the schools. "There's a crisis of low academic achievement across our

The policy panel, the governing body for the city's public schools, has 24 members, 13 of whom are appointed by the mayor.

The meeting agenda for Wednesday night acknowledged that the D.O.E. was aware of 19 investigations into Pearson for workplace discrimination but said that 16 of those cases had been closed or dismissed.

But the department did not address a string of issues involving Pearson's testing over the years Testing errors led the New York State Education Department to end its contract with Pearson in

"Thoughtful family engagement is of paramount importance, and as our students continue to live in a more digitized world, the transition to computer-based SHSAT testing aligns with the way most standardized testing is done, including the SAT," Chyann Tull, a spokeswoman for the city Department of Education, said in a statement.

The panel vote was originally scheduled to take place in October but was delayed twice as the board sought additional feedback from community members.

Before the meeting, Nyah Berg, the executive director of New York Appleseed, an advocacy group pushing for integrated schools, said that a single test should not determine someone's access to a New York City public school, especially not a test with a \$17 million price tag.

"We have to scrape and claw ev-ery year in the budget to find money for these important tools and resources for some of our most marginalized students, but for a test to replace the contract of the paper test," Ms. Berg said. But Senator Chuck Schumer of

New York released a strongly worded statement before the meeting, saying that voting down the contract would be "an attack on fairness, opportunity and proven pathways to success."

"Derailing the SHSAT would

lead to chaos and unfairly deny opportunity to countless dents," he said.



New York City has eight specialized high schools, including Stuyvesant High School.

The New York Times

Why I Quit My Job as a Health Insurance Executive

Wendell Potter

A former vice president for corporate communications at Cigna and the author of the newsletter "Health Care Un-Covered."

LEFT my job as a health insurance executive at Cigna after a crisis of conscience. It began in 2005, during a meeting convened by the chief executive to brief department heads on the company's

latest strategy: "consumerism."

Marketing consultants created the term to persuade employers and policymakers to shift hundreds and, in many cases, thou-sands of dollars in health care costs onto consumers before insurance coverage kicks in. At the time, most Americans had relatively modest cost-sharing obligations — a \$300 deductible, a \$10 co-payment. "Consumerism" proponents contended that if pa-tients had more skin in the game, they would be more prudent consumers of health care, and providers would lower their

Leading the presentation was a newly hired executive. Onstage, he was bombarded with questions about how plans with high deductibles could help the millions of Americans with chronic conditions and other serious illnesses. It was abundantly clear that insurance companies would pay far fewer claims but that many enrollees' health care costs would skyrocket. After about 30 minutes of nonstop questions, I realized I'd have to drink the Kool-Aid and embrace this approach.
And I did, for a while. As head of corporate

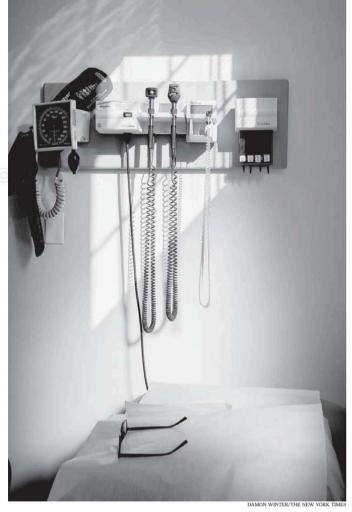
communications at Cigna from 1999 to 2008, I was responsible for developing a public relations and lobbying campaign to persuade reporters and politicians that consumerism would be the long-awaited solution to everrising insurance premiums.

But through my own research and com-mon sense, I knew plans requiring significant cost sharing would be great for the well-heeled and healthy — and insurers' shareholders — but potentially disastrous for others. And they have been. Of the estimated 100 million Americans with medical debt, a great majority have health insurers. Their plant are circult in the state of ance. Their plans are simply inadequate for

their medical needs, despite the continuing rise in premiums year after year.

I grew uneasy after the company meeting. But it took an impromptu visit to a free medical clinic, held near where I grew up in the mountains of Fast Tennessee to come face to face with the true consequences of our consumerism strategy.

At a county fairground in Wise, Va., I witnessed people standing in lines that stretched out of view, waiting to see physicians who were stationed in animal stalls. The event's organizers, from a nonprofit called Remote Area Medical, told me that of Shareholders, not patient outcomes, tend to drive decisions by insurers.



the thousands of people who came to this three-day clinic every year, some had health insurance but did not have enough money in the bank to cover their out-of-pocket obliga-

That shook me to my core. I was forced to come to terms with the fact that I was playing a leading role in a system that made desperate people wait months or longer to get care in animal stalls or go deep into medical

The tragic assassination of UnitedHealthcare's chief executive, Brian Thompson, has reinvigorated a conversation that my former colleagues have long worked to sup-press about an industry that puts profits above patients.

Over 20 years working in health insurance, I saw the unrelenting pressure investors put on insurers to spend less paying out claims. The average amount insurers spent on medical care dropped from 95 cents per

premium dollar in 1993, the year I joined Cigna, to approximately 85 cents per dollar in 2011, after the Affordable Care Act re-stricted how much insurers can profit from premiums. Since then, big insurers have bought physician practices, clinics and pharmacy middlemen, largely to increase their bottom lines.

Meanwhile, the barriers to medical care have gotten higher and higher. Families can be on the hook for up to \$18,900 before their coverage kicks in. Insurers require prior au-thorization more aggressively than when I was an industry spokesman, which forces patients and their doctors through a maze of approvals before getting a procedure, some-

times denying them necessary treatment. Sure, the insurance industry isn't to blame for all the problems with our health system, but it shoulders many of them. (In response to a request for comment, Cigna told The Times that Mr. Potter's views don't reflect the company's and that Cigna is constantly working to improve its support for patients.)

At Cigna, my P.R. team and I handled doz-At Cigna, my R. team and I nanded doz-ens of calls from reporters wanting to know why the company refused to pay for a pa-tient's care. We kept many of those stories out of the press, often by telling reporters that federal privacy laws prohibited us from even acknowledging the patient in question and adding that insurers do not pay for experi-mental or medically unnecessary care, implying that the treatment wasn't warranted.

One story that we couldn't keep out of the press and that contributed most to my decision to walk away from my career in 2008 in-volved Nataline Sarkisyan, a 17-year-old leukemia patient in California whose scheduled liver transplant was postponed at the last minute when Cigna told her surgeons it wouldn't pay. Cigna's medical director, 2,500 miles away from Ms. Sarkisyan, said she was too sick for the procedure. Her family stirred up so much media attention that Cigna releated but it was too late. She died a few lented, but it was too late. She died a few hours after Cigna's change of heart.

Ms. Sarkisyan's death affected me person-

ally and deeply. As a father, I couldn't imagine the depth of despair her parents were facing. I turned in my notice a few weeks later. I could not in good conscience continue being a spokesman for an industry that was making it increasingly difficult for Americans to get

often lifesaving care.

One of my last acts before resigning was helping to plan a meeting for investors and Wall Street financial analysts — similar to the one that UnitedHealthcare canceled after Mr. Thompson's horrific killing. These annual investor days, like the consumerism idea I helped spread, reveal an uncomfortable truth about our health insurance system: that shareholders, not patient outcomes, tend to drive decisions at for-profit health insurance

This Unreadable Russian Novel Is Xi Jinping's Spiritual Guide

and Sam Chetwin George

Mr. Garnaut is a co-founder of Garnaut Global, a geopolitical risk advisory firm. Mr. George is Garnaut Global's director of China research and a fellow at the publication China Heritage

N LATE October, while much of the world was focused on the buildup to the U.S. elections, President Xi Jinping of China was issuing a call for global resistance to the American-led world order.

Speaking in Kazan, Russia, at the summit

of BRICS nations, he told the leaders of Brazil, Russia, India, South Africa, Iran, Egypt and several other countries that the world had entered a pivotal new era "de-fined by turbulence and transformation."

"Should we allow the world to remain tur-

bulent or push it back on to the right path of peaceful development?" Mr. Xi asked. He invoked, as a spiritual guide for the task ahead, an 1863 Russian novel that glorified revolutionary struggle and inspired Vladimir Lenin.

Mr. Xi has frequently drawn on Russia's historical and literary tradition to convey his intent to undermine — and ultimately displace — Western ideas and institutions. But by urging a spirit of revolutionary sacrifice within BRICS, a group that is expanding to include new member-states, Mr. Xi is signaling an intent to rally the developing world for an intensified struggle against American power.

The obscure and radical novel that the Chinese leader cited as his inspiration offers a glimpse into Mr. Xi's mind-set as he prepares to test Donald Trump's commitment to the institutions and alliances that underpin the U.S.-led order.

The book, "What Is to Be Done? Tales of New People," was written by Nikolai Chernyshevsky in a prison cell in 1862 and 1863, after czarist authorities jailed him for "an evil intent to overthrow the existing order" because of his alleged connections to subversive organizations. The novel is little known in the West, perhaps because its meandering, confusing account of a love triangle in a utopian sewing cooperative is a tough read. The Russian poet Afanasy Fet said that Mr. Chernyshevsky's real crime was "premeditated affectation of the worst sort in terms of form" and that reading the book was an "almost unbearable" task. One of the authors of this essay can attest to that, having tried and failed to complete it several times while stationed as a journalist in Bei-

The book's appeal for Mr. Xi lies in its pro-tagonist, Rakhmetov. The scion of a princely

family, Rakhmetov rebels against his domineering father at age 16, strengthens his body through hard physical work and moves to St. Petersburg, where he is recruited into an underground group and reborn as an "extraordinary man" — the ultimate revolutionary. mate revolutionary.

Rakhmetov renounces good food, wine and women. He reads the classics of philoso-phy, literature and science. He eschews a mattress and even spends a night on a bed of nails to test himself, leaving his body covered in blood. He is "completely impervious to personal emotion, possessing no personal heart" and focused purely on doing whatever it takes to achieve his aims.

The book's radical utilitarian ideology roused Lenin, who borrowed the title "What

his mattress, taking cold showers and exercising outside in the rain and snow.

Mr. Xi invoked precisely this ethos of sac-rifice and fortitude at the BRICS summit, telling other leaders that Rakhmetov's "unwavering determination and ardent strug-gle encapsulate exactly the kind of spiritual power we need today. The bigger the storms of our times are, the more we must stand firm at the forefront with unbending deter-

mination and pioneering courage."

Perhaps tellingly, China has downplayed the radical nature of Mr. Xi's program for Western consumption, airbrushing his ref-erence to Rakhmetov out of official English transcripts of his remarks.

Mr. Xi has been steadily raising the pressure in his effort to undermine U.S. power. In

China's leader is digging into the language of revolution as he prepares to deal with Trump.



Is to Be Done?" for his own landmark 1902 essay, in which he broke with pacifist social democrats in favor of forming a vanguard of aggressive professional revolutionaries.

It also inspired many of Mao Zedong's radical Red Guards and the urban youths who answered Mao's call to live with Chinese peasants in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution. Among these so-called sent-down youths was Mr. Xi. He first read the book as a teenager while living in a cave in rural Shaanxi Province, according to his own account. He was "shocked" by Rakhme tov's ascetic ways but saw them as ideal for toughening one's will Mr Xi has said he emulated Rakhmetov's example by removing 2022 he declared a "no limits" partnership with Russia and aligned with President Vladimir Putin on his war in Ukraine. He has also been advocating something he calls the "Global Security Initiative," which serves as the rhetorical and philosophical framework for his plans. It espouses ideals such as "common security" and the protection of each country's "legitimate security concerns." But its real purpose seems to be to provide cover for those who would challenge U.S. strategic interests (it has been invoked by China to justify Mr. Putin's invasion of Ukraine) and, ultimately, protect the interests and political systems of China and its partners from U.S.-imposed constraints.

The Chinese leader wants more nations under this banner. In Kazan, he and Mr. Putin repeatedly stressed the importance of security as BRICS welcomed new members such as Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates — and applicants and observers such as Cuba, Venezuela and the Palestine Liberation Organization. Many of these have their own revolutionary or Leninist roots and need little encouragement to rally against America. As the president of Iran, Masoud Pezeshkian, said en route to the summit, "BRICS can be a way out of American totalitarianism."

Mr. Xi recognizes the importance of geo-political leverage and is weaving together a coalition of authoritarians. He has entrenched China's partnership with Russia, strengthened support for Iran during its proxy wars with Israel and refrained from proxy wars with Israel and retrained from criticizing China's sole official ally — North Korea — over its deployment of troops to support Russia's war in Ukraine. China has worked to repair previously frayed ties with countries such as India, Vietnam and Brazil, and is strengthening other relationships across the developing world. Mr. Xi appears to believe momentum is on

his side. Mr. Trump, on the other hand, comes into office with U.S. capabilities stretched by conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine. He has surrounded himself with a mix of isolationists and China hawks while sowing doubt about America's com-mitment to allies and partners such as Ukraine and Taiwan.

Mr. Xi previewed his stiffened posture at an Asia-Pacific summit in Lima, Peru, last month in comments that were clearly aimed at the incoming U.S. president. He listed a series of "red lines" that "cannot be chal-lenged," including staying out of Beijing's territorial disputes in the South China Sea and insisting that Washington "support" China's goal of unification with Taiwan wording that goes well beyond what the United States has committed to for decades.

Mr. Putin remains an essential partner to Mr. Xi. Russian state media reported this year that Mr. Putin planned to give the Chinese leader an old copy of Chernyshevsky's book for his birthday in June, and he staged the BRICS summit in the Tatarstan region, Rakhmetov's ancestral home. The two men met in October at the Kazan Kremlin, which sits at the end of what was once named

Chernyshevsky Road.
But there is no mistaking who is in charge here. It is Mr. Xi who is assuming the mantle of Rakhmetov — the "extraordinary man," the agent of history — and believes his iron will and visionary leadership will deliver the world from American turbulence.

Manhattan D.A. Makes a Simple Case Harder

Manhattan assistant district attorney.

HE fatal shooting of the health care executive Brian Thompson on a Mid-town Manhattan sidewalk was shock-ing, brazen and seemingly methodical, but it wasn't all that sophisticated.

It didn't take long for the authorities to

identify Luigi Mangione as the likely gun-man and arrest him. They had surveillance videos and various sightings. They are said to have forensic evidence linking him to the crime. A gun he had when he was arrested in Pennsylvania is said to be the same type of gun as the weapon used in the killing.

A notebook attributed to the suspect is said to have mentioned Mr. Thompson's company, UnitedHealthcare, and that he planned to shoot a chief executive. "These parasites had it coming," he wrote, condemning health care companies for callous

In other words, Manhattan prosecutors have what looks to be a pretty straightfor-ward case of second-degree murder, the charge that is almost always filed in New

York State in cases of intentional murder. But the Manhattan district attorney, Alvin Bragg, instead has charged the suspect with first-degree and second-degree murder in charges), which requires lifetime impris-onment in the event of a conviction. (The maximum sentence for second-degree murder without the terrorism charge would be 25 years to life.)

By complicating a simple case, Mr. Bragg has increased the risk of acquittal on the most serious charge and a hung jury on any charge. Since Mr. Mangione is already being celebrated by some as a folk hero because of his rage against the American health care system, the terrorism charge, which alleges that the suspect "intended to intimidate or

A terrorism charge in the killing of a C.E.O. sets the stage for political theater.

coerce a civilian population, influence the policies of a unit of government" and "affect the conduct of a unit of government," almost certainly will turn the case into political the-

By charging the suspect as a terrorist, prosecutors are taking on a higher burden to support a dubious theory. In trying to prove that he killed Mr. Thompson to "intimidate or coerce a civilian population," prosecutors will presumably argue that the civilian popand employees. But New York appellate courts have taken a very limited and fairly traditional view of what constitutes a civilian community under the terrorism law that was enacted within days of the Sept. 11 at-

The evidence appears to suggest that Mr. Mangione was bent on assassinating Mr. Thompson rather than intending "to sow terror," as Mr. Bragg alleged in his news conference unsealing the indictment. The suspect's notebook reportedly says that he planned a targeted assassination because he did not want to "risk innocents." So while this statement incriminates him as a murderer, it appears to undermine the terrorism

By taking on the burden of trying to prove an essentially political intent, prosecutors could amplify the criticisms of the American health care system that have made Mangione so alarmingly popular. The district attorney would provide him a soapbox upon which he will be allowed to rail against

insurers while trying to garner sympathy. Given the national debate over the role of insurance companies like Mr. Thompson's. prosecutors will have a hard time, in any case, weeding out jurors who have some sympathy for the defendant. By turning his supposed intent into a central element of the trial they invite juror nullification, in which jurors ignore their instructions to focus on the facts and instead let their points of view influence their verdict, leading to a hung jury, if not a full acquittal.

At a standard second-degree murder trial, the jury would be instructed that the prosecution need only prove that the defendant committed the crime. Motive does not need to be considered.

Perhaps the suspect's most feasible de-fense would be a psychiatric one, asserting that he is not criminally responsible "by rea-son of mental disease or defect." Unless there is persuasive evidence that has yet to be revealed, such a defense would be fairly easily undermined by evidence of the suspect's detailed planning, concealment and flight. But the terrorism charge could slightly enhance such a defense if a jury is subjected to a defendant's testimony about his grievances against the health care system and how they led a seemingly intelli-gent and grounded young man to assassi-nate an individual he didn't know simply because he was a top executive at the nation's

largest insurance company.

And if the threat of life without parole is simply being used as a cudgel to leverage a plea to second-degree murder, how would Mr. Bragg justify wiping away the terrorism charge? It brings to mind the Daniel Penny case, in which Mr. Bragg brought a man-slaughter charge, then dismissed it when jurors deadlocked, leading to an outright acquittal on even the lesser charge.

The bottom line is that by choosing to make an open-and-shut murder case into a complicated debate on the health care industry, the district attorney risks highlight-ing the most troubling aspects of the case and making a conviction more difficult.



LETTERS

Calls to the Media: Fight Trump's Lawsuits

Re "Trump Sues Des Moines Register, Escalating Threats Against the Media" (news article, Dec. 18):

Emboldened by his \$15 million conquest of ABC News, Donald Trump is now going after The Des Moines Register and a pollster, J. Ann Selzer, in another effort to intimidate the

Their "crime" was publishing a poll that showed Mr. Trump trailing in Iowa, which he eventually won.

Mr. Trump's attorneys know damn well that a newspaper is allowed to be wrong. It is not allowed to be malicious. But they want to put the fear of God into every publisher and

The media needs to combat this vindictive prosecution by Mr. Trump. The defendants need to seek a level of dam-ages double the sum that Mr. Trump seeks in his persecutive lawsuit. If he sues for \$15 million, he should be forced to pay \$30 million. The media needs to extract pain from those striving to make it surrender its mission as the public's watchdog.

JAY MARGOLIS DELRAY BEACH, FLA

TO THE EDITOR:

Hopefully The Des Moines Register will not fold as easily as ABC News and will vig-orously defend its First Amendment free press rights. ABC News, The Washington Post and The Los Angeles Times have all set a frighten

ing precedent by wilting to the threat of Donald Trump's This does not bode well for those who believe that the press has a duty to speak truth to a power that has little re-

gard for truth, and to the pow-TOM MILLER, OAKLAND, CALIF.

TO THE EDITOR:

I believe that the mainstream media is biased, and that President-elect Donald Trump has not received a fair shake. Having said that, I think that government interference with the media's freedom and journalists is a formula for disaster. In my view, better a biased media than one that is con-trolled by the government.

CHARLES R. CRONIN JR. HEMPSTEAD, N.Y.

TO THE EDITOR:

To those in the fourth estate facing threats and lawsuits as part of the incoming administration's efforts to shut you up, say, please: Fight, fight, fight

SHARON PYWELL WEST NEWTON, MASS.

Violence in School: It's More Than the Cellphones

TO THE EDITOR:

"Phones Fueling Violent Scenes at U.S. Schools" (front page, Dec. 15) paints a very clear picture of what the de-crease in prosocial behavior and the increase in violence look like in our schools.

However, after 20 years as a

school social worker and psychotherapist with specialization in adolescent mental health, I believe that much of the national discourse on adolescent mental health and behavior misses a key point. Children and adolescents

are influenced by and mirror the trends of the greater society. As mental health has declined across the life span, the same has happened with teenagers.

Can we really be surprised that in an age when violence is increasingly seen as accept-able as an answer to disputes and wrongdoing, we are seeing such an uptick in violence in our schools?

Attempted assassinations of

a presidential candidate, a violent insurrection, a man murdered on the street for being a C.E.O., the belief that those who disagree with us deserve to die, and fighting in schools — these are all part of the same pattern, and the responsibility of changing it lies with all of us.

BARBRA RESNICK ALTAMONTE SPRINGS, FLA.

TO THE EDITOR:

The urge and capacity for the "brutal beatings" ravaging schools, referred to in your article, are not rooted in technology. Anyone who knows children knows that rage is human. Guidance from families, schools and communities normally helps children and youth control that rage and learn that violence is socially unacceptable.

Phones may very well foster and amplify violence, as the article suggests, but the causes of violence and the inability to control it come from disturbed social relations. Lynchings, pogroms, gang violence and war all predate social media. Reducing violence is unfor-

tunately more difficult than restricting phone access. We must have ways to collectively examine why we feel about other people the way we do, consider how we treat others and ultimately recognize that violence is unacceptable.

JEFFREY HOFF FLORIANÓPOLIS, BRAZIL

Surveilling Speech Won't Increase Birthrates

Jessica Grose

A writer in Opinion and the author of a Times newsletter on the way we live now.

RESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN of Russia recently signed a bill into law that will fine anyone who is promoting "child-free propaganda." Meant both to shore up "traditional values" and to increase Russia's tanking birthrate, it stipu-lates that any individual found to be dissem-inating such "propaganda" may be subject

to fines of up to about \$4,000.

Considering the average monthly Russian salary as of 2023 was around \$800, that's a frightening potential penalty. Com-panies could be fined up to about \$50,000. This law joins other Russian legislation that attaches fines to expressions of support for the "international L.G.B.T. social move-ment," such as posting a rainbow flag online.

The new law gives no clear examples of what "child-free propaganda" could mean. Would a single, childless Russian movie character enjoying his life be against the rules? Would a woman writing on a mes-sage board about struggling with postpar-tum depression be verboten? Would a parent making a video about how difficult it is to make ends meet on the aforementioned

low monthly salary be penalized? It's not as if Mr. Putin has been some great free speech champion in his nearly quarter-century reign, but over the past several years he has ramped up restrictions, includserious ones on online speech. The Associated Press re-ferred to the Russian government's suppression and surveillance of its citizens as a kind of "cyber gulag" last

The new law on "child-free propaganda" is vague enough that some Russians are already worried about a broad interpretation. According to the independent publication Novaya Gazeta, an online community called Maternal Bliss wi "nearly 150,000 subscribers where mothers anonymously spoke about the challenges of motherhood removed all its posts to avoid

being charged under the new law."

This is an extreme example from an authoritarian leader. But the idea that it's easy to determine the emotional sentiment and political agenda behind a piece of writing is ever more common, and it's superpowered by technology.

Perhaps I am being paranoid, but it makes

me nervous to think about the way *any* government could clamp down on speech like this. The ever-growing claims of artificial intelligence's ability to parse text, for instance, could be used to chill free speech and expression, and accelerate this trend

We already have examples of our govern-ment urging the media to downplay or remove information. Mark Zuckerberg, the Meta chief executive, has claimed that an F.B.I. warning during the 2020 election inspired Facebook to suppress a news story about leaked emails from Hunter Biden's lap top. In Florida, Gov. Ron DeSantis threatened "television stations with criminal prosecution for airing a political ad in favor of en-shrining abortion rights in the state's Consti-

It's easier for Putin to restrict freedom of expression than to fix material conditions.



ILLUSTRATION BY SAM WHITNEY/THE NEW YORK TIMES

tution," according to my newsroom colleague

Patricia Mazzei, until a judge made him stop. The increasing use of artificial intelligence allows governments to surveil a greater amount of text and video more efficiently. One version of this is a form of A.I. called sentiment analysis or opinion mining, which uses machine learning to determine whether a piece of text has a positive or negative leaning. Academics and tech commentators have already pointed out the obvious limitations of sentiment analysis: It can't detect humor, sarcasm or irony. Opinion mining also misses out on how complicated communication is and how much context is necessary to understand what another human being is saying or

I wanted to better understand the layers of meaning that any written or spoken utterance could have, so I called Deborah Tannen, a linguist and the author of several books, including "That's Not What I Meant! How Conversational Style Makes or Breaks Relationships." First, she explained that the words we

use are just one part of meaning making. Especially in spoken language, "intona-tion, facial expression, voice quality" and what Dr. Tannen calls "prior text" are all part of how we interpret speech. Prior text goes beyond the dictionary definition of a word we also understand words and figures of speech based on the way we've heard the same terms used in the past. If people have different cultural, demographic or geo-graphic backgrounds, they may have totally different interpretations of the same kind of

One example of prior text that Dr. Tannen writes about in "That's Not What I Meant!" involves what she calls "the art of ritual complaining." Some cultures, she explains, use complaint in a positive fashion, as a way to connect. I come from one of these cultures. A prime example: When I was extremely pregnant with my second daughter in the 90-de-

gree heat of late June, a fellow preschool mom asked me how I was feeling. I cheerfully told her, "Terrible!" She lat-er told me that's when she knew we'd be close friends, and she was right.

But it's easy to see how another mother, one with a totally different style of communication, would be alarmed or uncomfortable that I said I felt this way. And when one is writing on social media, without the context of a cheerful voice and smiling face, the disembodied ex-

pression of heartburn and discomfort when carrying a fully baked, ninepound baby could be ungenerously interpreted as being negative about the entire experience of motherhood. When Reuters asked Russian women

about whether they thought "child-free propaganda" was the reason for the declining birthrate in their country, they were "skeptical," and all cited the poor material conditions they were living in as the reason people were having fewer children, "People want children, but there's no money," a woman named Alina Rzhanova told Reuters. "That's why people are not having children. Not because someone somewhere wrote something." Perhaps if it wants to raise the birthrate,

the Russian government would be better off fixing its economy and the out-of-control in-flation rate than it would be surveilling speech. But that would be much more difficult

Cash and the Disabled

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "A Fight to Preserve the Value of Cash," by Paula Span ("The New Old Age" column, Dec. 10):

A factor to consider when fighting to preserve the value of cash is that every day hundreds, if not thousands, of baby boomers are aging into

disability.

If they experience vision loss, it will take time for them to learn about how to use their credit cards. If they lose dexterity, they may be unable to manipulate a mouse or a keyboard or to perform the some times delicate motions needed to insert and remove a credit card from a payment slot.

As a person who is blind, I am personally a bit anxious about using a card of any kind because I can't know who is looking over my shoulder. If there is a beep indicating an error, it is sometimes difficult to know what that error is.

Also keep in mind that vet-erans and athletes of any age can experience head trauma that limits the ability to use electronic payment methods.

MICHAEL LEVY, NEW YORK

The writer is a rabbi and the president of Yad HaChazakah — The Jewish Disability Empow-

Murder Is Wrong

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "Not Everything Understandable Is Justifiable," by Travis N. Rieder (Opinion guest essay, Dec. 14), about the killing of Brian Thompson, the C.E.O. of UnitedHealthcare:

How sad and absurd that we need reminding that murder is wrong. If you want fair health care, vote for those who will enact change. Taking another life is immoral in any context.

Just a horrible reflection of our society.

JOHN SCHLEIPMAN LAKE ST. LOUIS, MO.

A Mideast Bridge

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "Hindered in the Pursuit of Science," by Katrina Miller (Science Times, Dec. 10): As a Palestinian from East

Jerusalem and executive director of the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies, an academic and research institution in the Middle East that works with students from Palestine and Israel, I am keenly aware of the challenges of pursuing science in a post-Oct. 7 world.

We were only five weeks into our academic session when war broke out, and we saw something extraordinary hap-pen: Students remained com-mitted to both the work and each other.

We believe that this was due to the Arava Institute's unique learning model, which brings students from across the region and around the world together to address practical envi-ronmental challenges while engaging in meaningful dia logue. Today, with our Palestin-ian partners we are working together to develop solarpowered systems to generate drinking water and treat waste-water in both Gaza and the West Bank.

This shared pursuit of sci-ence has allowed us to cultivate a resource in short supply in our region: trust.

The environmental and geopolitical challenges in my region intensify daily, but sci-entific collaboration may be one tool to bridge divides in a region mired in conflict.

TAREQ ABU HAMED KIBBUTZ KETURA, ISRAEL

TECH | ECONOMY | MEDIA | FINANCE

4 ENVIRONMENT The E.P.A. will let California and 11 other states ban the sale of new gasoline-powered cars by 2035.



9 COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Odds are high that your favorite team didn't make the playoff. Join the bandwagon for one of these instead.

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Business

The New York Times

Thousands Who Deliver For Amazon Go on Strike

By NOAM SCHEIBER and SANTUL NERKAR

Workers who deliver packages from seven Amazon facilities across the country went on strike Thursday morning, according to the Teamsters union, which repre-

The Teamsters said thousands of workers had struck, but it was unclear how many people were participating in the action. Amazon said it expected the seven de-livery hubs to operate normally.

The drivers are employees of companies that Amazon uses to deliver packages to customers. Amazon has said it has no obligation to bargain with the drivers be-cause they are not its employees. But the union and the workers said Amazon ultimately con-trolled their working conditions and was therefore obligated to bargain with them.

The National Labor Relations Board has investigated some of the cases and issued at least one complaint finding the drivers to be Amazon employees and accusing the company of breaking the law by failing to bargain with them. CONTINUED ON PAGE B5

Trump's Pick Poised to Test '3-3-3' Plan

By ALAN RAPPEPORT and REBECCA F. ELLIOTT

When Prime Minister Shinzo Abe set out to rejuvenate Japan's economy more than a decade ago, he laid out a strategy known as the "Three Arrows," which aimed to banish deflation by easing mone-tary policy, increasing govern-ment spending and restructuring the economy so that it was poised for growth.

President-elect Donald J.

Trump could soon brandish three arrows of his own. Mr. Trump's Treasury secretary pick, Scott Bessent, has mapped out a three-pronged approach to jump-start-ing a U.S. economy that has been saddled with inflation and slug-gish output. The concept, which he billed during the campaign as his 3-3-3 plan, entails increasing growth to 3 percent, cutting the budget deficit to 3 percent of gross domestic product and raising U.S. energy production by three mil-lion barrels of oil per day, or the equivalent in other fuels.

A longtime hedge fund investor, CONTINUED ON PAGE B3

Inside End Of ABC Suit With Trump

By BROOKS BARNES

reached a settlement last week with President-elect Donald J. Trump in his defamation case against ABC News, it led to accu-sations that the company had caved to him. Media law experts predicted the move would em-bolden Mr. Trump to file other lawsuits that could test the limits of

the First Amendment.

Disney executives had anticipated the blowback. But they also determined that they had a flawed case — and that the company could risk damaging press protections for everyone by continuing to fight, as well as hurt the Disney

Concern among Disney lawyers had been rising for months. In July, a federal judge in Florida, Cecilia M. Altonaga, denied the me-dia giant's motion to dismiss the suit, which Mr. Trump had filed in the spring. But more worrisome for Disney, ABC's parent com-pany, was her commentary.

In a 21-page order, Judge Alton-CONTINUED ON PAGE B3

Pace of Gas Exports Is Called Unsustainable by Energy Official



Climate Defiance demonstrators last week in Washington. A Biden administration pause on issuing new L.N.G. permits slowed, but did not end, plans for new export terminals.



Export terminals are concentrated in communities along the Gulf Coast and elsewhere that already struggle from elevated levels of pollution generated by industrial facilities.

By LISA FRIEDMAN

If the United States were to con tinue exporting liquefied natural gas in the way that has made it the world's biggest gas supplier, it would drive up costs for American consumers and businesses, pol-lute struggling communities and increase global greenhouse gas emissions, according to a letter written by Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm that was obtained Monday by The Times.

The letter was written to ac-

company a study of the economic,

Jennifer Granholm said a new analysis showed that more sales overseas would reduce availability and raise costs at home.

national security and climate ef-fects of approving new natural gas export terminals that was released Tuesday by the Energy Department.

President Biden ordered the analysis in January, when he paused the process of issuing per-mits for more than a dozen new gas export facilities, including what would be the largest terminal ever built in the United States The pause was praised by environmentalists but triggered out-rage from the oil and gas industry.

In the letter, Ms. Granholm said

that the analysis showed that the continued pace of gas exports was "neither sustainable nor advisable."

However, the report does not provide grounds for the federal government to issue blanket deni-als of the final permits for future natural gas terminals. Under federal law, two agencies are responsible for approving L.N.G. projects. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission approves location and construction, while the Energy Department must de-CONTINUED ON PAGE B4

REAL ESTATE

Home Sales Zoom Higher As Inventory Grows

Sales of previously occupied homes rose in November to their fastest pace since March, with home shoppers encouraged by a wider selection of properties on the market, even as mortgage rates mostly ticked higher.

Existing home sales rose 4.8 percent last month from October, to an annual rate of 4.15 million. the National Association of Real-tors said Thursday.

Sales accelerated 6.1 percent compared with November last year, representing the biggest year-over-year gain since June 2021. Home prices increased on an annual basis for the 17th consecu-



tive month. The national median sales price rose 4.7 percent from a year earlier, to \$406,100.

Home sales are still running below last year's pace, when they sank to a nearly 30-year low. ASSOCIATED PRESS

ECONOMY

Spending Propelled G.D.P. To Rise 3.1% Last Quarter

The American economy grew at a healthy 3.1 percent annual clip from July through September, propelled by vigorous consumer spending and an uptick in exports, the government said in an up-

grade to its previous estimate. Third-quarter growth in gross domestic product — the economy's output of goods and services
— accelerated from the April-July rate of 3 percent and continued to look sturdy despite high interest

rates, the Commerce Department said on Thursday. G.D.P. growth has now topped 2 percent in eight of the last nine quarters. Consumer spending, which ac-

counts for about two-thirds of eco-nomic activity, expanded at a 3.7 percent pace, fastest since the first quarter of 2023. Exports climbed 9.6 percent.

Business investment grew a lackluster 0.8 percent, but investment in equipment expanded 10.8 percent. Spending and investment by the federal government jumped 8.9 percent, including a 13.9 percent surge in military spending. ASSOCIATED PRESS

TECHNOLOGY

U.S. to Aid Chip Plant For a Nvidia Supplier

The Commerce Department on Thursday finalized an award to SK Hynix of up to \$458 million in government grants to help fund an advanced chip packaging plant and research and development facility for artificial intelligence products in Indiana.

In April, the Nvidia supplier said it would invest \$3.87 billion to build the West Lafayette facility, which will include an assembly

line to mass produce next-genera-tion high bandwidth memory chips. The chips are used in graphic processing units that train A.I. systems.

The department also plans to make available \$500 million in government loans for the SK Hynix project. The project will create 1,000 jobs and fill a key gap in the U.S. semiconductor supply

chain, the department said.

Congress in August 2022 approved a \$39 billion subsidy program for U.S. semiconductor manufacturing and protection and the said of th ufacturing and related components, REUTERS



-0.1%

5.867.08



DOW JONES INDUSTRIALS +0.0%

42,342.24



NASDAQ COMPOSITE INDEX

-0.1% 19,372.77



10-YEAR TREASURY YIELD

4.57% +0.07 points



\$69,38





-\$45.20

Nasdaq Composite Index 19,372.77 \$\frac{1}{-0.1\%}\$

Stocks & Bonds

After Brutal Fall on Wednesday, Wall St. Stanches the Bleeding

An early rebound for stocks petered out by the end of the day, leaving indexes close to flat.

The S&P 500 edged down by 0.1 percent Thursday, coming off one of its worst days of the year — a 2.9 percent drop — after the Federal Reserve said it may deliver fewer cuts to interest rates in 2025 than earlier thought. The Dow Jones industrial average inched up by less than 0.1 percent after plunging 1,123 points on Wednes-day and the Nasdaq composite

slipped 0.1 percent. Wednesday's drop took some of the enthusiasm out of the market. which critics had already been warning was overly buoyant and would need everything to go correctly for it to justify its high prices. But indexes remained near their records, and the S&P 500 is still on track for one of its best years of the millennium, with a gain of 23 percent.

Micron Technology fell 16.2 per-cent despite reporting stronger profit than expected. The computer memory company's revenue fell short of Wall Street's fore-casts, and Sanjay Mehrotra, the C.E.O., said it expected demand from consumers to remain weaker in the near term. It gave a forecast for revenue in the current quarter that fell well short of what analysts were thinking.

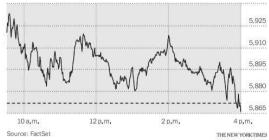
Lamb Weston, which makes French fries and other potato products, dropped 20.1 percent af-ter falling short of analysts' expec-tations for profit and revenue in the latest quarter. It also cut its financial targets for the fiscal year, saying demand for frozen potatoes was continuing to soften, particularly outside North America. The company replaced its chief executive. Such losses overshadowed a

14.7 percent jump for Darden Restaurants, the company behind Olive Garden and other chains. It delivered profit for the latest quarter that edged past analysts' expectations. Darden, the opera-tor of LongHorn Steakhouses, also gave a forecast for revenue

The S&P 500 Index

Position of the S&P 500 index at 1-minute intervals on Thursday

- Previous Close: 5,872.16



for this fiscal year that topped analysts'.

Accenture rose 7.1 percent after the professional services com-pany likewise topped expectations for profit in the latest quar-ter. The chief executive, Julie Sweet, said the company saw growth around the world, and it raised its forecast for revenue this fiscal year.

Amazon shares added 1.3 per-cent, even as workers at seven of its facilities went on strike Thursday in the middle of the online re-tail giant's busiest time of the year.

In the bond market, yields were nixed a day after moving higher on expectations that the Fed would deliver fewer cuts to rates in 2025. Reports on the economy came in mixed.

One showed the overall economy grew at a 3.1 percent annualized rate during the summer, faster than earlier thought. The economy has remained remarkably resilient even though the Fed held its main interest rate at a two decade high for a while before be ginning to cut rates in September.

A separate report showed fewer workers applied for unemployment benefits last week, an indication that the job market also re-mained solid. But a third report said manufacturing in the mid-At-

Dow Jones Industrials 42,342.24 0.0%

lantic region was unexpectedly contracting again despite economists' expectations for growth.

The yield on the 10-year Treas-

ury rose to 4.57 percent from 4.5 percent late Wednesday and from less than 4.20 percent earlier this month.

The rise in yields has put pres-sure on the housing market by keeping mortgage rates higher. Homebuilder Lennar fell 4.8 percent after it reported weaker prof-it and revenue for the latest quar-

ter than analysts expected. Stuart Miller, the C.E.O., said that "the housing market that appeared to be improving as the Fed cut short-term interest rates, proved to be far more challenging as mortgage rates rose" through the quarter. "Even while demand remained

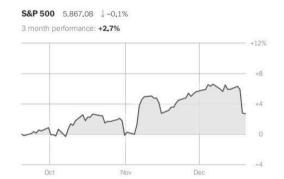
strong, and the chronic supply shortage continued to drive the market, our results were driven by affordability limitations from higher interest rates," he said.

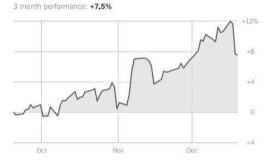
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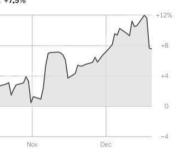
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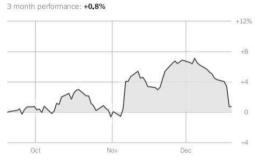
What Happened in Stock Markets Yesterday





Most active





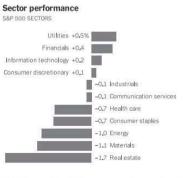
&P 500 COMPANIES	CLOSE	CHANGE
1. Darden Restaurants (DRI)	\$183.44	+14.7%
2. Accenture (ACN)	\$372.16	+7.1
3. GE Vernova (GEV)	\$332.80	+4.9
4. United Airlines Holdings (UAL)	\$95.56	+4.5
5. Palantir Technologies (PLTR)	\$74.21	+3.8
6. FactSet Research Systems (FDS)	\$489.73	+3.5
7. Carmax (KMX)	\$84.23	+3.5
8. VISTRA (VST)	\$137.20	+3.2
9. EPAM Systems (EPAM)	\$246.80	+3.2
LO. Moderna (MRNA)	\$39.56	+3.1

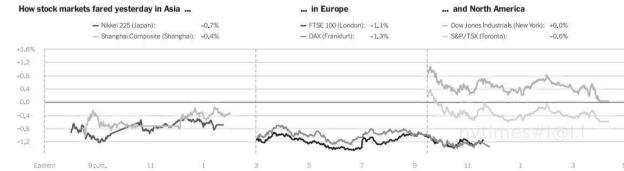
Best performers

5&P 500 COMPANIES	CLOSE	CHANGE
1. LAMB WEST (LW)	\$62.50	-20.1%
2. Micron Technology (MU)	\$87.09	-16.2
3. Vertex Pharmaceuticals (VRTX)	\$396.64	-11.4
4. Cintas (CTAS)	\$182.79	-10.6
5. AMEM HLDGPAR (AMTM)	\$18.93	-6.9
6. Western Digital (WDC)	\$59.62	-6.2
7. Lam Research (LRCX)	\$71.21	-5.3
8. Lennar (LEN)	\$138.40	-5.2
9. First Solar (FSLR)	\$175.88	-4.6
O. Seagate Technology Hldgs. (STX)	\$87.54	-4.4

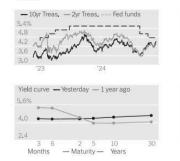
			OLUME
5&P 500 COMPANIES	CLOSE	CHANGE	IN MIL
1. NVIDIA (NVDA)	\$130.68	+1.4%	204
2. Tesla (TSLA)	\$436.17	-0.9	117
3. Palantir Technologies (PLTR)	\$74.21	+3.8	99
4. Micron Technology (MU)	\$87,09	-16.2	89
5. Ford Motor (F)	\$9.74	+0.5	81
6. Intel (INTC)	\$19,06	-1.2	65
7. Apple (AAPL)	\$249.79	+0.7	58
8. Pfizer Inc (PFE)	\$25.77	-0.5	50
9. Advanced Micro Devices (AMI	D)\$118.88	-2.1	43
IO. AT&T Inc. (T)	\$22,57	+0.4	43

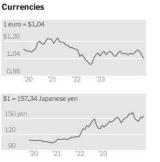
Convertible bonds and domestic hybrid securities		TOTAL RETURN	
	1 YR	5 YRS	IN BIL
Franklin Convertible Securities Fund Class R6 (FCSKX)	+26.3%	+12.4%	2.9
2. Fidelity Advisor Convertible Securities Fund - Class Z (FIQVX)	+25.3	+12.8	2.0
3. NYLI MacKay Convertible Class A (MCOAX)	+16.2	+10.2	1.6
4. Virtus Convertible Fund Class A (ANZAX)	+25.3	+11.8	1.4
 Columbia Convertible Securities Fund Institutional 2 Class (COCRX) 	+21.7	+10.4	1.2
6. Calamos Convertible Fund Class A (CCVIX)	+20.7	+9.8	0.9
7. Invesco Convertible Securities Fund R5 Shares (CNSIX)	+19.8	+10.0	0.8
8. Miller Convertible Bond Fund Class C (MCFCX)	+11.5	+4.4	0.6
9. Lord Abbett Convertible Fund Class R4 (LCFSX)	+23.7	+10.5	0.6
0. Putnam Convertible Securities Fund Class I (PCNIX)	+24.6	+10.5	0.5

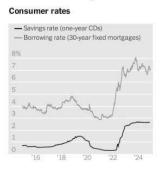


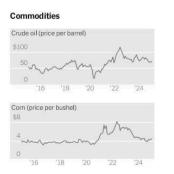


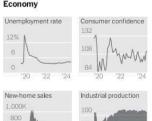
What Is Happening in Other Markets and the Economy











600



Regent Street in central London. "We aren't talking about an economy that's firing on all cylinders here," one economist said about Britain's prospects.

Britain's Economy Is 'Bumbling' Into the New Year

By ESHE NELSON

LONDON – It's a somber end to the year in Britain, dampened by a string of disappointing economic news. Inflation has jumped, the economy has stagnated and con-sumer confidence surveys are deeply downbeat.

The year started with an unex-pectedly strong rebound out of a recession, anticipation of interest rate cuts and the prospects for a new government that vowed to restore sustainable economic growth. Voters put the Labour Party in charge in July, ejecting the Conservative Party from power after 14 years.

But optimism has been difficult to muster lately. Labour's first budget included larger-than-expected spending and investment plans, offering some stimulus to the economy, but also raised taxes on businesses. And while interest rates are coming down, the pace has been slow.

On Thursday, the Bank of England held interest rates at 4.75 per cent. A day earlier, data showed that inflation accelerated to 2.6 percent in November, from 2.3 percent the previous month, moving further away from the bank's 2

percent target.

"We think a gradual approach to future interest rate cuts re-mains right, but with the heightened uncertainty in the economy we can't commit to when or by how much we will cut rates in the coming year," Andrew Bailey, the governor of the central bank, said in a statement.

Since the summer, the Bank of

England has cut interest rates by half a percentage point. Over the same period, the U.S. Federal Re-serve and the European Central Bank have lowered rates by a full

"Next year is going to continue to be pretty challenging for the U.K.," said Katharine Neiss, the chief European economist at PGIM Fixed Income, an asset manager. "We aren't talking about an economy that's firing on all cylinders here. Recent data showed the econ-

Recent data snowed the econ-omy contracting in October for the second month in a row, and weak growth in business activity in De-cember. The central bank forecast no growth in the fourth quarter. Still, it's not all bad. Though the

new government isn't particularly popular, it is stable, unlike those in France, Germany and Canada. And, so far, Britain doesn't seem in line for the stiffest tariffs that President-elect Donald J. Trump has said he will impose.

Labour's budget, announced in October, will boost economic growth in the short term as it bolsters spending on public services, according to the Office for Budget Responsibility, an independent watchdog. But the budget is also expected to increase inflation.

The Bank of England doesn't expect inflation to return sustainably to its target until 2027. Recent wage data showed strong infla-tionary pressures in the economy. Policymakers are also watching geopolitical tensions and trade policy, which could include sweep-ing tariffs imposed by the Trump

"These developments have generated additional uncertain-ties around the economic outlook," the central bank said on Thursday. Andrew Goodwin, an economist

at Oxford Economics, said he ex-pected inflation to be around 3 percent next year, while the econ-omy was likely to be "bumbling along" at about a 1.5 percent growth rate.

'We are still experiencing some

Optimism dampened by stubborn inflation and high interest rates.

pretty big headwinds," Mr. Good-win said. The short-term boost in public spending gives way in less than two years to tight budgets for government departments, he said, and it takes time for lower interest rates to propel higher eco-

nomic growth.

But he offered some leeway to the new government. "They've taken the view that the problems are so deep rooted that this isn't a quick fix," he said. "We do have to give them of little his of time to eat give them a little bit of time to sort these problems out."

In the next few months, a major source of uncertainty is how businesses will react when taxes rise. Starting in April, employer contri-butions to National Insurance, which funds state benefits including pensions, will increase by a little over one percentage point. The government also lowered the wage threshold that prompts contributions.

For the hospitality industry, the changes in the budget, which also included an increase in the na-tional minimum wage, amounted to a "tax bombshell," said Kate Nicholls, the chief executive of UKHospitality, an industry lobby group. She said businesses, which operate on tight profit margins, were already cutting hours, planning to raise prices and delaying investments.

"The budget was a real body blow," Ms. Nicholls said.

Rachel Reeves, the chancellor of the Exchequer, has said the tax increases were essential because the previous government had left a fiscal "black hole" of 22 billion pounds, or nearly \$28 billion. The revenue was also needed to strengthen public services, in-cluding the National Health Serv-ice and schools.

The Labour Party is betting that reforms to the planning system, so more houses can be built and the energy grid upgraded faster, will unlock private-sector invest-ment and promote long-term eco-

nomic growth.

Ms. Nicholls said some of the government's plans were wel-come, including those to improve broadband access and revitalize shopping areas. But those effects will take at least a year to materi-

alize, she added.

"There's no way of getting around the fact," Ms. Nicholls said, "that for the next 12 months, benefits the benefits the same around the hospitality has a huge amount of

Treasury Pick Is Preparing To Employ '3-3-3' Strategy

FROM FIRST BUSINESS PAGE Mr. Bessent has been a student of "Abenomics" since his days as the top money manager for the billionaire philanthropist George Soros. In that role, he met regu-larly with advisers to Mr. Abe and traveled from New York City to Tokyo on a monthly basis. He also famously bet against the yen.

"I became convinced that Abe and his circle of advisers would commit to directing all of the re-sources of the prime minister's of-fice to this multipronged and daunting task," Mr. Bessent wrote in a 2022 essay in The International Economy magazine. While Mr. Trump has made

broad economic promises on the campaign trail this year to super-charge the economy, slash the debt and unleash energy produc-tion, Mr. Bessent's benchmarks offer a more specific scorecard against which Mr. Trump's eco-nomic performance can be measured at the end of his term.

But reaching those marks will not be easy and will depend on a variety of factors, including how deeply Republicans decide to cut taxes, how high Mr. Trump ratchets up tariffs and how much oil global markets demand.

"I think having a clear set of goals is a good thing for policy-makers to have," said Jason Furman, an economics professor at the Harvard Kennedy School and a former chair of the Council of Economic Advisers under Presi-dent Barack Obama. "You just need them to be realistic. There's a distinction between what is possible and what you should count on.'

The Grail of Economic Growth

Economists warned during the presidential campaign that Mr. Trump's policies could add up to \$15 trillion to the national debt over a decade while stunting eco nomic growth and reigniting infla-tion with tariffs.

Mr. Trump has dismissed those forecasts, predicting that his poli-cies will bring a new "golden age" for America. In 2017, during his first term, Mr. Trump once suggested that economic growth could hit 6 percent as a result of his plans to cut taxes and roll back regulations. It ultimately topped out at 3 percent, which is where Mr. Bessent, who declined to be interviewed ahead of the confirma-tion process, would like to see it re-

The International Monetary Fund projects that U.S. output will slow to 2.2 percent in 2025 from 2.8 percent this year. There are, how ever, reasons to suggest that eco-nomic tailwinds could put the U.S. economy on a path toward faster growth under Mr. Trump.

However, he has threatened to reverse parts of Mr. Biden's agenda, including the Inflation Reduction Act, and has criticized federal subsidies for the chips in-dustry. If Mr. Trump succeeds in eliminating that spending, it could actually slow growth.

That 3 percent goal could also face headwinds if Mr. Trump proceeds with stiff tariffs on other countries. Such a move would un-doubtedly prompt trading part-ners to retaliate with tariffs on American products, weighing on U.S. exports.

Mr. Furman also noted that Mr. Trump's immigration policies, which include mass deportations of undocumented immigrants could weigh on the economy by shrinking the labor force.

"Immigration is by far the biggest lever that affects economic growth, and that will be moving in the wrong direction," he said.

Reversing a Deficit Disorder

Republicans are planning to extend tax cuts that could cost more than \$4 trillion over a decade and bilities of the Internal Revenue Service by cutting its budget. Both of those moves, if they happen, would make it more challenging to reduce deficits.

In the fiscal year 2024, the federal budget deficit was \$1.8 trillion, or 6.4 percent of gross domes-tic product. Mr. Bessent wants to get that down to 3 percent by 2028.

At an event this year hosted by the Manhattan Institute, a right leaning think tank, Mr. Bessent said that covering the cost of extending the expiring tax cuts that Republicans had passed in 2017 should be done through other budget cuts, such as provisions of the Inflation Reduction Act. He also suggested freezing nonde-fense "discretionary" spending and shifting some Medicaid spending to the states.

Mr. Trump is creating a Department of Government Efficiency, led by Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy, that will aim to reduce federal waste and find ways to cut spending. However, it remains unclear how their proposals will come into force.

The rising costs of Social Secu-



Scott Bessent was once the top money manager for the billionaire philanthropist George Soros.

A broad campaign promise will now face a real-world test.

rity and Medicare are the biggest drivers of the national debt, and Mr. Trump has said that he will not approve cuts to social safety net programs. At the Manhattan Insti-tute event, Mr. Bessent acknowledged that addressing those pro-grams will be crucial to the na-

tion's long-term fiscal health.

"These entitlements are massive — I think the next four years isn't the time to deal with them," Mr. Bessent said, explaining that confronting the cost of entitle-ments needs to be a gradual process. "The next step is for a future administration to have the confidence to deal with the entitlements."

'Drill, Baby, Drill'

Mr. Trump has made energy production a centerpiece of his economic agenda. He argues that by unshackling America's oil and gas industries, energy costs will fall and inflation will ease further.

Mr. Bessent has offered a more specific target, suggesting that the United States should strive to increase domestic oil production, which is expected to average around 13.2 million barrels per day this year, by an additional three million barrels per day. It is not clear if he is counting gas production in that calculation.

If he is, the United States could meet that target by the end of Mr. Trump's term, if it were to continue on its current growth trajec-tory. Increasing domestic production of oil alone by three million barrels a day would be much more difficult.

The oil and gas industry wants the Trump administration to expand federal leases for drilling, make it easier to build pipelines and to end a pause that the Biden administration put in place on new liquefied natural gas exports.

An expansion of production that sends energy prices tumbling sharply could weigh on profits for oil and gas companies, and they might resist such investments if there is insufficient global de-

Already, the International Energy Agency, a multilateral organi-zation based in Paris, is forecasting that global production will out-pace demand by more than one million barrels a day next year.

Concerns about a looming glut have weighed on the price of oil. which has been hovering around \$70 a barrel in the United States. Companies here generally need prices above \$60 a barrel to profitably drill new wells, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of Dal-

Many producers are also more cautious now about pursuing agessive growth than they during Mr. Trump's first administration because that strategy was incredibly expensive and investors grew tired of losing money in the shale patch.

"It's a real dilemma because some of the energy companies are not too excited about it, because if not too excited about it, because if you drill more, it's going to bring down the price," said Stephen Moore, a Heritage Foundation economist who has advised Mr. Trump. In natural gas, the ability to turbocharge domestic production will depend in large part on whether companies are able to build more pipelines to bring the fuel from the field to places where there is demand for it.

It remains to be seen how seriously Mr. Bessent's 3-3-3 targets will be taken in Washington and if they have a chance at success. In his 2022 essay, Mr. Bessent recalled his former boss, Mr. Soros, asking him in 2012 if he thought would "Abenomics"

"I'm not sure whether it will work," Mr. Bessent remembered saying at the time. "But it will be the market ride of a lifetime.'

Inside a Deal That Ended the Trump-ABC News Suit

FROM FIRST BUSINESS PAGE aga, the chief judge in the South-ern District of Florida, dismantled Disney's three-pronged argument for tossing the case. Mr. Trump sued after George Stephanopou-los, the star ABC News anchor, said on the air that Mr. Trump had been found "liable for rape" in a New York civil trial. In fact, Mr. Trump had been found liable for sexual abuse, although the judge in that case later noted that New York has a narrow legal definition of rape.

"A reasonable jury could interpret Stephanopoulos's statements as defamatory," Judge Altonaga wrote, and then added an emphaitalics. "Stephanopoulos stated ten times that a jury - or juries — had found plaintiff liable

Last Friday, Judge Altonaga dealt Disney another setback. She rejected requests to delay the case and ordered near-immediate depositions for Mr. Trump and Mr. Stephanopoulos. Moreover, Dis-ney was also told to turn over "all remaining documents" related to the case — including pertinent emails and text messages sent by and to Mr. Stephanopoulos — by

Sunday. Disney responded by opening settlement talks. By Friday night, the two sides had reached a deal. The company agreed to donate \$15 million to Mr. Trump's future presidential foundation and mupresidential foundation and mu-seum. Mr. Stephanopoulos and ABC News published a statement saying they "regret" remarks made about Mr. Trump during the March broadcast. The news network also agreed to pay Mr. Trump an additional \$1 million in

The concerns about the case among Disney executives, and the eventual decision to settle, in-

volved multiple considerations according to three people inside the company with knowledge of the discussions, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss a private matter. The settlement a private matter. The settlement was recommended by Horacio Gutierrez, Disney's general coun-sel, and approved by Robert A. Iger, Disney's chief executive. It was not elevated to a company

The company was concerned that a jury in Florida — a deep-red state that Mr. Trump carried by 13 points in the election last month would side with the presidentelect and potentially award him a would cost to settle.

Disney could have appealed, of course, and executives felt the law was on their side. But the appeals process also carried substantial risk, Disney lawyers concluded.

At a minimum, the \$205 billion ompany would be litigating against a vindictive sitting president and risking harm to its brand. Disney wants its family-friendly movies, television shows and theme park rides to appeal to people of all political persuasions. The company recently endured a brutal legal fight with Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida that made it a target of criticism — and boycotts — among Trump supporters and

right-wing pundits. Mr. Trump's animus could also make it harder for ABC News to make it harder for ABC News to do its job. During the campaign, Mr. Trump denounced ABC as "terrible" for its handling of his sole debate against Vice Presi-dent Kamala Harris and mused about stripping the network of its broadcasting license.

In the worst-cast scenario, Disney concluded, fighting the case could lead to the Supreme Court



Donald J. Trump sued after George Stephanopoulos said on the air that he had been found "liable for rape."

and become a vehicle for Mr. Trump and his allies to overturn the landmark First Amendment decision in New York Times v. Sullivan. That 1964 ruling, as well as a handful of subsequent cases, made it much harder for public figures like Mr. Trump to win libel lawsuits.

Disney's legal team, headed by Mr. Gutierrez, ultimately decided that settling, even with the inevitable negative headlines, was the best outcome - that \$16 million was a small price to pay for resolving a tricky case. (To compare, Disney recently agreed to pay \$43.3 million to settle a pay equity case and \$233 million to settle a class action case over back wages for Disneyland workers.)

A Disney spokesman declined to comment for this article, On Saturday, when the deal was made public in a court filing, ABC News and Disney declined to explain the decision, with ABC News saving

only that it was "pleased" the lawsuit had been resolved. A lawyer and a spokesman for Mr. Trump both declined to comment.

The blowback has been swift and severe. In the eyes of many, Disney — which has waged many bloody legal battles — seemed to have bowed to the president-elect. Inside ABC News, employees were outraged.

Paul Farhi, a former media writer for The Washington Post, wrote on social media that the settlement was "an awful precedent and a huge sellout." In a social me-dia post of his own, Marc E. Elias, a top lawyer for the Democratic Party, wrote: "Knee bent. Ring kissed. Another legacy news outlet chooses obedience.

Experts in media law expressed surprise, noting the high threshold required by the courts for a public figure like Mr. Trump to prove defamation. A plaintiff must show not only that a news outlet published false information, but that it did so knowing the information was false or with substantial doubts about its accuracy.

Mr. Trump's previous lawsuits against news outlets have almost always ended in defeat, including cases against The New York Times, CNN and The Washington

Experts wondered whether the settlement with Disney would en-courage Mr. Trump to intensify his assault on the media, at a time when many news organizations are struggling with declining public trust and deteriorating fi-

nances.
On Monday, Mr. Trump sued The Des Moines Register for pub-lishing a poll before the election that turned out to be wrong. A spokeswoman for the newspaper said it stood by its reporting and would defend itself in court.

California Gets Approval to Ban Gas-Powered New Car Sales by 2035

By CORAL DAVENPORT

The Biden administration on Wednesday granted California and 11 other states permission to ban the sale of new gasoline-pow-ered cars by 2035, one of the most ambitious climate policies in the United States and beyond.

The widely expected move by the Environmental Protection Agency is one of the last steps that the administration has taken to enact major climate policies be-fore the end of President Biden's

term next month.
President-elect Trump is expected to revoke that program soon after taking office, part of his pledge to scrap Biden-era climate policies. "California has imposed the most ridiculous car regulations anywhere in the world, with mandates to move to all electric cars," Mr. Trump has said. "I will terminate that."

The state, in turn, is expected to fight any revocation, setting up a consequential legal battle with the new administration.

Under the 1970 Clean Air Act, the Environmental Protection Agency has for decades granted a waiver to California, which has historically struggled with smog, to enact tougher pollution limits than those set by the federal gov-

ernment. Federal law also allows other states under certain circum-stances to adopt California's standards as their own.

The waiver can be used to rein in toxic, smog-causing pollutants like soot, nitrogen dioxide and ozone that lead to asthma and lung disease. But California officials have also used the waiver to curb greenhouse gases like car-bon dioxide, a chief cause of global warming. Gas-powered cars and other forms of transportation are the biggest source of carbon dioxide generated by the United

The new waiver would allow California and 11 other states to require that any new car sold by 2035 be a zero-emissions vehicle. It would not apply to the used car

Earlier this year, the Biden administration finalized national auto pollution rules designed to ensure that about 56 percent of new cars sold in the United States by 2032 are all-electric, while an additional 16 percent are hybrid. But that federal rule is not a ban; gas-powered vehicles could still be sold, just in fewer numbers.

Michael S. Regan, the adminis-trator of the Environmental Protection Agency, noted on Wednesday that California had routinely received waivers through the dec-ades to enact tough pollution con-

"California has longstanding authority to request waivers from E.P.A. to protect its residents from dangerous air pollution coming from mobile sources like cars and trucks," Mr. Regan said in a state-ment. "Today's actions follow through on E.P.A.'s commitment to partner with states to reduce emissions and act on the threat of climate change."

The E.P.A. issued two waivers on Wednesday. The first limits nitrogen oxide from heavy-duty vehicles that can mix in the atmosphere to form ground-level ozone and resulting smog. The second is designed to curb emissions from gas-powered vehicles that can also form smog, soot and heat the planet. It requires carmakers to increase sales of zero emissions cars over time until they represent all sales by 2035.

California is a leader in electric

vehicle adoption. The top five cit-ies in the United States with the highest numbers of registered electric vehicles have all been in California. In 2023, electric vehi-cles accounted for more than 30 percent of automobile registra-



A dealership in Richmond, Calif. The waiver would allow California and 11 other states to require that any new car sold by 2035 be zero emissio

tions in the San Francisco Bay Area, according to S&P Global Mobility, an auto market research firm. In Los Angeles, that share was close to 25 percent. This year, California surpassed two million zero-emissions vehicles sold.

While automakers have grudg ingly accepted the broader Biden administration rule, many are worried about the tougher California restrictions.

While nearly 10 percent of new cars sold in the United States are all-electric, the pace of growth in E.V. sales is slowing. And that greatly concerns the automakers faced with California's strict new

"Achieving the sales mandates under current market realities will take a miracle; there needs to be balance, and some states should exit the program," John

Bozzella, the president of the Alliance for Automotive Innovation, said in a statement. The alliance represents 42 car companies that produce nearly all the new vehi-cles sold in the United States.

"Automakers can produce elec-trified vehicles, but there's a huge gap between these E.V. sales man-

dates and a customer's (reasonable) expectation they can still choose what kind of vehicle to drive," Mr. Bozzella said.

The rules come as Mr. Trump prepares to take office after a comparing in which he attacked. campaign in which he attacked federal support for electric vehi-cles. His bid for the White House drew millions in donations from the oil and gas industry, which sees electric vehicles as a threat.

"Contrary to claims on the cam-paign trail that they would never tell Americans what kinds of cars we have to drive, the Biden-Harris E.P.A. just did exactly that by greenlighting California's ban on sales of all new gas and traditional hybrid vehicles," said Chet Thompson, the chief executive of the American Fuel and Petro-chemical Manufacturers, a lobbying organization. The group ran what it called a "seven-figure" campaign against Mr. Biden's tailpipe pollution rules.



An L.N.G. facility in Lusby, Md. Since 2016, U.S. energy companies have built eight large facilities that can export 14.3 billion cubic feet of gas each day.

Selling L.N.G. Overseas Is Said To Risk Higher Costs at Home

By BRAD PLUMER and REBECCA F. ELLIOTT

The Biden administration on Tuesday released a lengthy study that outlined the economic and environmental risks of shipping more liquefied natural gas over-seas, a move that could complicate President-elect Donald J. Trump's plans to approve addi-tional gas export terminals.

If the United States were to continue exporting liquefied natural gas in the way that has made it the world's biggest gas supplier, the study by the Energy Department found, it could drive up energy costs in America by further expos-ing the domestic market to inter-national pricing. It could also increase pollution in coastal com-munities where export terminals are built and create more global greenhouse gas emissions.

The study stops short of explicitly saying that it is not in America's interest to sell more gas around the world, noting that in-creased exports have also brought economic benefits and improved energy security for key U.S. allies such as Europe. The in-coming Trump administration is widely expected to sign off on new facilities that export liquefied nat-ural gas, or L.N.G.

Yet climate activists are very likely to cite the analysis in future lawsuits that challenge new export terminals in court.

"The final decision, of course, is now in the hands of the next administration," said Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm. "But we hope that they'll take these facts whether additional L.N.G. exports are truly in the best interest of the American people and economy."

Ms. Granholm wrote a letter to accompany the study in which she drew much stronger conclusions about the risks of continued L.N.G. exports than were raised by the analysis.

The American Gas Association, an industry trade group, criticized the study, saying it had "glaring issues" that the group would seek to correct during a 60-day public comment period. Environmental

groups praised the report.

The United States is relatively new to the business of selling gas abroad, but its export growth has been remarkable. Since 2016, U.S. energy companies have built eight large facilities in Texas, Louisiana, Maryland, Georgia and Mexico that can export 14.3 billion cubic feet of liquefied natural gas each day. Another five have been fully permitted and are under construction along the Gulf Coast. They would nearly double U.S. export capacity by 2028.

In January, after protests by climate activists, the Biden administration ordered a pause in approving any new export terminals saying it needed time to study the effects on the climate, economy and national security. That decision, which put several proposed projects on hold indefinitely, angered the oil and gas industry as well as lawmakers in fossil-fuel-producing states.

The new analysis, which runs to

several hundred pages, looks at five scenarios for future U.S. liquefied natural gas exports, assessing whether the fuel might displace coal or renewables like wind place coal or renewables like wind or solar over various periods of time. It also considers the effects of new terminals on the Gulf Coast, where shorelines are vulnerable to flooding and where communities face increasing levels of pollution.

It concludes that a large increase in exports could lead to a relatively modest increase in global greenhouse gas emissions, amounting to an additional 711 million metric tons of carbon-dioxide-equivalent between 2020 and 2050, at the high end. (Na-tions currently emit about 53 bil-

lion tons per year.)
The authors point out that these calculations are highly uncertain. If U.S. exports are displacing dirtier fossil fuels, such as coal or other types of gas, they can potentially reduce emissions. But if L.N.G. exports are displacing renewable or nuclear power, or leading to great-er overall energy use, emissions can go up.
The study also concludes that

residential gas and electricity bills in the United States could be about 3 percent higher, on aver-age, in 2050 if the country vastly expands its capacity to sell natu-ral gas overseas. The Gulf Coast and Southwest would bear the brunt of price increases

However, a separate analysis by S&P Global that examined effects through 2040 found the aver-age American family would spend just \$11 more per year on natural gas if a half-dozen pending export projects move forward, a differ-ence of less than 1 percent.

If those gas projects were scrapped, a combination of natu-ral gas, coal and oil from other countries would replace 85 per-cent of that supply, S&P Global Other sources of energy, such as renewables and nuclear power, would fill the rest.

The Energy Department study also found that new export termi-nals could have significant local effects on communities along the Gulf Coast. On the one hand, the construction of new terminals can employ thousands of workers. But some areas in Texas and Louisiana are already struggling with heavy pollution, and new export terminals threaten to exacerbate those problems.

Continued Pace of Gas Exports Called Unsustainable

FROM FIRST BUSINESS PAGE termine if exports are "in the pub-lic interest." To date, the Energy Department has never denied any company seeking such a permit.

The report could provide a legal argument for those seeking to sue to stop permits for export termials in the future, the senior administration officials said.

In her letter, Ms. Granholm wrote that future administrations must scrutinize each proposed project and consider the economic and environmental issues raised by the analyses. The report may compel companies seeking per-mits to more thoroughly demon-strate that they have mitigated the greenhouse pollution associ-ated with extracting and trans-porting the gas, and also force future administrations to show how they have reconciled decisions to approve new terminals with the report's findings.

Ms. Granholm noted that U.S

exports of natural gas had tripled over the last five years, are ex-pected to double by 2030 and could double again based only on new terminals that have already been approved and planned.

While she said that selling L.N.G. overseas generates "wealth for the owners of export facilities" and jobs across the sup-ply chain, Ms. Granholm wrote that "unfettered exports" would mean less gas available at home, causing domestic wholesale prices to increase about 30 percent. That, in turn, would increase costs for the average American household by more than \$100 a year by 2050 and quite likely also cause electricity prices to rise. For heavy industry, costs could go up by \$125 billion, she said, citing the report. That in turn could lead to higher prices on goods for con-

sumers, she wrote.

When it comes to climate change, Ms. Granholm said new export facilities should face rig-orous questions "especially in a world that needs to quickly reduce greenhouse gas emissions."

Under a scenario in which more than the current level of gas was exported, the report found that the direct emissions would be 1.5 gigatons per year by 2050. That's about a quarter of annual emissions generated by the United States, the world's second-biggest polluter. That figure does not take into account that additional gas might displace dirtier fuels like

The gas industry frequently claims that American exports of natural gas help the climate by displacing coal, which produces more carbon dioxide when burned. But Ms. Granholm noted that the study found increased L.N.G. exports would displace more wind, solar and other renewable energy than coal. The study modeled five scenarios and in ev-ery one, global greenhouse gases were projected to rise, even when researchers assumed aggressive use of technologies to capture and store carbon emissions.

The secretary noted that export terminals were concentrated in communities along the Gulf Coast and elsewhere that already struggle from elevated levels of pollution generated by refineries, petrochemical factories and other in-dustries. The burden on those communities would only grow if new terminals were constructed, she wrote.

Since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, American L.N.G. "has proven critical for our allies in Europe as they wean themselves off Russian gas," Ms. Granholm wrote. But she said the report found that European demand had



A protester being arrested last week during an action by the environmental group Climate Defiance in Washington.

flattened, peaked in Japan and was expected to flatten soon in South Korea. Most of the new de-mand will be in China, she wrote.

The White House did not re-pond to a request for comment.

Ending the pause on new export terminals has been a top aim of the oil and gas industry, which donated heavily to help return President-elect Donald J. Trump to the White House. Mr. Trump has promised to expand the drilling and burning of fossil fuels, the main driver of climate change. He has suggested he would approve some permits as soon as he takes office. On Dec. 10, he wrote on the social media site X, "Any on the social media site X, "Any person or company investing ONE BILLION DOLLARS, OR MORE, in the United States of America, will receive fully expe-dited approvals and permits, including, but in no way limited to, all Environmental approvals. GET READY TO ROCK!!!"

The pause in new permits be-ame a lightning rod during this year's presidential race.

It followed a campaign by cli-mate activists, who threatened to "punish" the Biden-Harris administration if it approved the largest of the terminals, known as Calcasieu Pass 2. But the pause gal-vanized the oil and gas industry against the administration, whipping up support and \$75 million in donations for Mr. Trump's campaign.

Over the summer, a judge or-dered the Biden administration to resume issuing permits, and it approved at least one export permit. But Republicans and the oil and gas industry have accused the administration of effectively continuing the pause, by deliberately continuing to stall new approvals. Climate activists and oil lobby-ists both say that the pause did

slow plans for new export terminals, though it does not appear to have caused the cancellation of any individual projects. Environmentalists have used

stalling tactics to block fossil-fuel infrastructure projects such as the Keystone XL pipeline, which would have brought carbonheavy oil from Canada's oil sands to the United States; the Dakota Access pipeline, an oil route from North Dakota to Illinois that triggered protests from Native Amer ican groups; as well as the Atlan-tic Coast Pipeline, which would

The new president will likely expand fossil fuel production.

have transported natural gas across the Appalachian Trail but was canceled after environmental lawsuits led to delays and an in-

crease in the cost of the project.

Last week in Washington, activists from the group Climate Defiance blocked the parking garage entrances to the Energy Department and crashed the holiday natty of the American Gas Association. party of the American Gas Association, a lobbying group, at a whiskey bar a few blocks from the Capitol.

Michael Greenberg, a spokes-man for the group, said he hoped that the pause in permits had slowed the momentum behind Calcasieu Pass 2 and other gas terminals enough that they might ventually be canceled.
But a spokeswoman for Venture



In a letter, Secretary of Energy Jennifer Granholm said new export facilities on climate change and emission

Global, the company seeking to build Calcasieu Pass 2, said that it was ready to move ahead.

"It is a highly commercialized project with major long-term con-tracts to customers in Germany, Japan and more," the spokeswom-an, Shaylyn Hynes, said in an email. "We are ready to break ground and are confident the incoming administration will follow the Natural Gas Act and restore what has historically been bipartisan regular order to the LNG ex-port authorization process."

Even if it secures a permit, Calcasieu Pass 2 faces other hurdles. After activists in the southern Louisiana community where the terminal would be built filed a law-suit complaining that they would be harmed by toxic fumes from the project, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission ordered further study of the local envinurther study of the local envi-ronmental impacts of the project, very likely delaying its ground-breaking until after July. A group of more than 170 scientists have called on the administration to block Calcasieu Pass 2.

Natural gas, which is primarily composed of methane, is cleaner than coal when it is burned. But methane is a more potent greenhouse gas in the short term compared with carbon dioxide and it can leak anywhere along the supply chain, from the production wellhead to processing plants to the stovetop. The process of liquefying gas to make it suitable for transport is incredibly energy intensive as well, creating yet more emissions.

Scientists have overwhelmingly said that nations must deeply and quickly cut the emissions from burning gas, oil and coal if humanity is to avoid climate catastrophe. Last year at the United Nations climate summit in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, the United States joined 196 other countries in promising to transition away from fossil fuels.

Fossil fuel companies are confident that Mr. Trump, who is dismissive of global climate agreements, will approve the terminals, even if doing so collides with his pledge to lower energy prices for Americans.

Asked about the proposed export terminals, Karoline Leavitt, a spokeswoman for the Trump tran-sition team, said in an email, "When he takes office, President Trump will make America energy dominant again, protect our energy jobs, and bring down the cost of living for working families."

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B5



Workers who deliver packages from seven Amazon sites went on strike, including three hubs in Southern California.

Amazon Delivery Drivers Walk Out

FROM FIRST BUSINESS PAGE
The Teamsters said in a statement that workers at other Ama-zon warehouses were prepared to join the strike. The largest group at Amazon represented by the un-ion works at a Staten Island warehouse known as JFK8, which employs more than 5,000 people. Employees at the warehouse voted to unionize in 2022, but the company has yet to bargain with them and is challenging the election out-

Workers involved in the strike say it could extend into early next week, perhaps into Christmas, but it's unclear how big an impact the walkout will have on Amazon's

holiday deliveries.

The company has hundreds of delivery hubs across the country, and 10 or more in some of the largest urban areas. It has said that if one delivery hub experiences de-lays or driver shortages, the company can seamlessly shift packages to another hub nearby.

Amazon has also filled in gaps in its regular delivery fleet by summoning individuals through an on-demand Uber-like program known as Amazon Flex, in which people use their own cars to deliver packages.

Former delivery hub managers say these methods have helped say these methods have helped the company reliably avoid dis-ruptions in the past, though the ability to navigate a strike is likely to diminish during the holiday season, when the network has less spare capacity.

At the delivery hubs, Amazon generally hires contracting firms to take packages to customers. The Teamsters have organized the drivers who work there by asking them to sign authorization cards. The union typically proceeds by trying to organize individual contracting firms rather than an entire complex at once. In most cases, the owners of the contracting firms have yet to recog-nize the union and there have not been elections.

"What you see here are almost entirely outsiders — not Amazon employees or partners — and the suggestion otherwise is just an-other lie from the Teamsters," Amazon said in a statement, referring to people picketing outside the de-livery hubs. "The truth is that they were unable to get enough support from our employees and part-ners and have brought in out-siders to come and harass and intimidate our team.'

The Teamsters had set a dead-line of Dec. 15 for Amazon to begin negotiating with the drivers and warehouse employees. It initiated the strike after Amazon failed to

do so.

"If your package is delayed during the holidays, you can blame Amazon's insatiable greed," Sean O'Brien, the Teamsters president, said in a statement. "We gave Amazon a clear deadling to come to azon a clear deadline to come to the table and do right by our members. They ignored it.'

Three of the seven hubs are in Southern California, and the other four are in Queens, Atlanta, San Francisco and Skokie, Ill., near Chicago.

Outside the Amazon warehouse DBK4 in the Maspeth section of Queens, more than 200 people were walking the picket line at

Workers said the strike could extend into the holidays.

around 10 a.m. on Thursday; about half appeared to have jobs connected to Amazon. They wore connected to Amazon. They wore blue vests and carried signs that included slogans like "Amazon is unfair" and "Obey the law." One protester led chants like "Shut it down!" over a meanhone. down!" over a megaphone.

The picket line was set up near the exit where delivery vans leave, and picketers tried to stop vehicles from leaving several times. By 11 a.m., police officers had set up barricades on the sidewalk, and more than a dozen Amazon delivery vans were able to exit. An hour later, the crowd had thinned, but dozens of people continued to picket.

Antonio Lopez, a 27-year-old driver who has delivered Amazon packages for more than three years, said he wanted better pay and working conditions, and for the company to support his career

development.

"Anywhere is hard work, but people deserve to be paid for their hard work," said Mr. Lopez, who earns around \$23 per hour and is completing a certificate as a medi-

Drivers have complained that Amazon pushes them to deliver hundreds of packages a day with little margin for error, while monitoring their movements and driving habits. Some say they resort to urinating in bottles so that they don't fall behind schedule.

don't fall behind schedule.

Christian Santana, who has delivered goods for Amazon for more than two years, said the work conditions had taxed his physical health. "The workload never goes down," Mr. Santana said, adding that he has frequently had to urinate in a bottle while delivering packages.

while delivering packages.

Amazon has said that while it sets safety and quality standards, the contractors that directly em-ploy the drivers are responsible for enforcing them.

Looming over the conflict be-tween the Teamsters and the company is the upcoming change in the federal government. Under President Biden, the National Labor Relations Board aggressively enforced labor laws and brought many cases against employers, and it has tended to conclude that large companies like Amazon have an obligation to bargain with employees of contractor firms. But the labor board was far less sympathetic to unions' claims on these issues during the first ad-ministration of President-elect Donald J. Trump.

Mr. O'Brien, the Teamsters leader, spoke at the Republican convention this summer, and the union remained neutral in the presidential election — a break from recent campaign cycles. This appeared to give him some influence with Mr. Trump, who has tapped a more union-friendly candidate to run his Labor Department they may be provided to the control of t ment than most Republican presi-

dents have in recent memory.

But the labor board, not the department, has much more direct influence over workers' ability to organize into unions, and it is unclear how much input Mr. O'Brien or the Teamsters will have on ap-pointments to the board.

Amazon and SpaceX, which ras founded and is led by Elon Musk, a close adviser to Mr Trump, have both challenged the constitutionality of the labor board in federal court. The cases

American Integrity Insurance Appoints Jon Ritchie as President

A Visionary Step Toward Growth and Innovation in 2025



Jon Ritchie, American Integrity Insurance President

Tampa, FL - American **Integrity Insurance** Group, a leading Southeast property insurer, is proud to announce the promotion of Jon Ritchie to President. With a proven track record as COO since 2019, Ritchie has been instrumental in driving operational excellence, implementing cutting-edge technology, and strengthening a culture of innovation and collaboration across the organization. This leadership transition reflects the company's dedication to delivering unparalleled value to its policyholders and agents while positioning itself for long-term growth.

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leadership as COO,

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American Integrity spearheaded several technology advancements that differentiate it within the competitive property insurance landscape. From adopting proprietary risk modeling tools to leveraging AI-powered underwriting and claims processing systems, the company has redefined what it means to serve customers and agents efficiently and effectively. These innovations have not only enhanced policyholder experiences but also helped mitigate risks, making American Integrity a preferre partner for agents and a trusted ally for customers navigating increasingly complex insurance needs. "Jon has a deep understanding of our industry's challenges and the innovative spirit required to address them," said Bob Ritchie, CEO of American Integrity. "His ability to combine cutting-edge technology with a people-first approach positions us to lead the market in ways that align with our core

mission of service,

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sustainability. As CEO, I am deeply involved and committed to working closely with Jon to shape the future of our company and continue delivering on our promises to policyholders, agents, and employees alike."

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I am excited to lead a company that not only values operational excellence but also prioritizes culture and collaboration at every level.

-Jon Ritchie

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across Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina, and partnerships with over 1,000 independent agents, the company is poised to expand its reach and impact. Its forward-thinking approach to innovation, combined with a commitment to building trust and delivering value, sets the stage for an exciting future.

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For more information about American **Integrity Insurance** Group, visit www.aiiflorida.com.

By Toni Logan



American Integrity Insurance Home Office

Hyundai Supplier Ends Prison Contract

By TALMON JOSEPH SMITH

After facing public scrutiny for the use of prison labor, a supplier to the South Korean automaker Hyundai said it had dismissed dozens of incarcerated men it had employed through the Alabama Department of Corrections and with the state.

The supplier, Ju-Young, ended the contract weeks after The New York Times published an article about the company's involvement in the state's expansive prison la-bor system. Prison labor has faced increased legal challenges in state and federal courts after Alabama changed its Constitution in 2022 to more broadly ban "in-voluntary servitude," removing a previous exception for those con-victed of crimes.

"The contract with A.D.O.C. has been terminated," a Ju-Young offi-cial, Eunjung Lee, said in an email. 'We are not sure yet if we will be

resuming work with A.D.O.C."

Men being held at a correctional facility said local managers at Ju-Young plants had informed them in early November that the attention brought to the firm by the Times report was unwelcome, according to affidavits from several workers collected by a nonprofit labor group that is considering filing a legal challenge to the firings. They were told that executives would begin letting people go that month until all imprisoned work-ers could be replaced.

An Alabama Department of Corrections spokeswoman did not respond to requests for comment.

Officials at Jobs to Move America, the labor group that has been working with many of the prisoners, said 32 men were fired. Of those, at least 20 have been reassigned to other work-release

jobs, the group said. The supplier code of conduct at Hyundai dictates that suppliers should not manufacture "directly or indirectly, with the use of forced

Dozens of inmates in Alabama were fired as public scrutiny grew.

labor." A Hyundai spokesman declined to say whether the com-pany had determined that Ju-Young, which makes fenders for the automaker, was in violation of that code or whether the labor of Alabama prisoners constituted "forced labor."

"Hyundai is not involved in indi-vidual hiring decisions by independent suppliers," the spokes-man said. He added, "Hyundai requires all of its suppliers to follow the law and its supplier code of conduct, and we have a track record of taking action when we learn of alleged violations."

The prison labor program in labama — in which thousands of

prisoners are sent to work for private businesses and risk disci-plinary action if they refuse — has faced criticism from labor activists and some lawyers who say the system is a modern form of the "convict-leasing" forced labor programs of the Jim Crow era. After factoring in the 40 percent

cut that the Alabama prison system takes from workers' pay-checks, taxes and deductions for laundry and transportation fees, inmates often collect just a few dollars an hour.

The prisoners themselves often expressed mixed feelings about their jobs. In interviews this year with The Times, some men who worked at Ju-Young said they felt that they had no choice but to agree to take and stay on jobs that might be dangerous or hard. But most were also relieved to be working and earning a paycheck outside prison walls, often along-side free citizens.

Labor organizers, who would prefer the system be reformed rather than scrapped, largely do not view the firings as a victory.

"They depend on those jobs, to be safe from less safe parts of the system," said Haeden Wright, an organizer at Jobs to Move Amer-ica, referring to the state's medium- and high-security prisons. Separately, the U.S. Justice De-partment is suing the Alabama Department of Corrections, accusing it of unsafe, violent condi-tions in those facilities.

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FRIDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2024

Sports The New York Times

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFFS

How Notre Dame Bounced Back

A bad loss didn't define the season, showing Marcus Freeman's growth in his third year as coach.



Coach Marcus Freeman and the Fighting Irish entering the field for their Sept. 7 game against Northern Illinois, above. The Irish lost after the Huskies kicked a late fourth-quarter field goal, below.

By PETE SAMPSON

SOUTH BEND, Ind. - Marcus Freeman didn't like what he saw. Three days earlier, Notre Dame's head coach had watched

his program clear a path to the College Football Playoff by winning at Texas A&M. The Irish were doing everything Freeman wanted, winning on the lines of scrimmage, dominating on defense, leaning into the strengths of quarterback Riley Leonard

But that team didn't travel back from Kyle Field.

"Not the best Tuesday we ever had," Freeman said, as captured in the docuseries "Here Come The Irish." "But I don't want to lose my mind because I don't know ex-actly what the issues were. We'll see on film. But we've got to have

urgency to fix 'em."

Sometimes an observation can become an omen.

Four days later, Notre Dame had neither urgency nor fixes. And what the Irish put on film was arguably the worst loss of the college football season.

Favored by four touchdowns, Notre Dame crashed to earth in a 16-14 upset by Northern Illinois. Leonard threw two interceptions. Notre Dame's immovable object of a defense let a Mid-American Conference offense become an un-

Pete Sampson covers Notre Dame for The Athletic.

stoppable force in the fourth quarter. The game ended with Mitch Jeter's 62-yard field goal prayer going unanswered, blocked by the

Northern Illinois rushed the field. Notre Dame was booed off it. N.I.U. Coach Thomas Hammock publicly offered to help Freeman dignity that made it all feel worse.

A season in which hosting a Col-lege Football Playoff game had been baked into expectations seemed to have careened off the rails by Week 2. A first-time head coach in a make-or-break third season didn't look much different than the guy who lost to Marshall or Stanford or Louisville during

or stanford or Louisvine during his first two years. Shouldn't the program have been beyond this by Freeman's third year?

"Absolutely, absolutely," Free-man admitted. "I felt the prepara-tion was exactly where we needed."

Three months and 10 wins later, maybe Freeman was right. Just not how he meant it at that mo-

No. 7-seeded Notre Dame will host No. 10-seeded Indiana on Fri-day night in the first game of the new 12-team playoff, a return on investment into the program be-yond the new indoor practice facility that arrived just before Free-man or the 150,000-square-foot operations building going up

Continued on Page B9



'Misery wants company, but I don't during those tough times.'

MARCUS FREEMAN, on his reaction to the Northern Illinois loss.

Indiana (10) at Notre Dame (7)

8 p.m. Eastern, ABC and ESPN

Notre Dame vs. Indiana isn't what you think of as far as marquee matchups in football. but the Hoosiers have record-setting season to set up an in-state first-round meeting. Can arguably the best team in Indiana history go into South Bend and get a win? It will be a

Despite being in the same state and separated by a roughly three-hour drive, Indiana and Notre Dame haven't played since 1991. The past six meetings were all in South Bend, and Notre Dame won all of them by at least 18 points. Indiana's last win against the Irish came in 1950. which was also the last time the teams met in Bloomington.

If the weather is less than ideal, also known as a typical late December day in the Midwest, both of these defenses should be in a situation to thrive. For as much attention as Kurtis Rourke and the Indiana offense have received, the defense has been the better unit statistically. Indiana is second in the country in yards allowed per game (244.8). Notre Dame is not far behind in eighth (296.8).

DAN SANTAROMITA

Vikings Safety Leads The N.F.L. in Flips, Flops and Celebrating

By ALEC LEWIS

Usher liked his social media post. Lindsay Lohan and Marlon Wayans have praised his talents. He even received a message from the Jabbawockeez, the renowned

hip-hop dance group.

"Working with them," Camryn
Bynum said last week, "would be a dream."

This is what life is like for the best celebrator in the N.F.L.

Bynum, a fourth-year Minne-sota Vikings safety, is humble. But even he knows he holds the title. A few weeks ago, the league ranked the best post-play performances this season, and three of the top five featured him.

Bynum has moonwalked and breakdanced. In Week 5 in Lon-don, he successfully executed one of the most complicated hand-shakes in movie history, from Lohan's "The Parent Trap," In the Week 14 win over the Atlanta Fal-cons, he orchestrated an elaborate dance from the movie "White Chicks" with his fellow Viking Josh Metellus.

Teammates work with him to help his choreography come to life. His family laughs at all of this. Yes, it's funny that Bynum goes vi-ral as often as he does, but it's funnier to them how much he enjoys the process of coming up with the celebrations.

And it is a process.
"I spend hours," Bynum admitted.

Generating the idea is one thing, but then there's the practice. You do not gracefully flip another teammate wearing shoulder pads without rehearsal. You do not flop like a worm in the end zone without flopping like a worm on the living room floor. Commitment is required to be great, and Bynum is willing to do whatever it

There is a deeper meaning to all of this madness. Bynum is a competitor. Celebrating means that the Vikings turned the football over, and turning the football over means a greater chance of win-

Bynum is also a thinker Celebrating means a bigger platform, and more eyeballs mean more attention paid to the people who

made his journey possible.

Bynum attended Centennial

Alec Lewis covers the Vikings for

High School, a football power-house about 50 miles east of Los Angeles, Besides Vontage Burfict, the longtime Cincinnati Bengals linebacker, Bynum might be its most accomplished football alum-

As a sophomore at Centennial, As a sopiointe at Centennia, Bynum was the fifth-string cor-nerback on the junior varsity team. He wore gloves and high-top cleats with Batman logos on them. His baggy pants sagged. He was a puny, 5-foot-5 140-pounder. But Bynum loved football, so his parents sought trainers throughout Southern California to help him. They spent thousands of dol-lars and countless hours. But there wasn't much in the way of results to show for it.

One trainer suggested they sign Bynum up to play for a seven-on-seven team called Ground Zero, so they did. During one of the first games in Bynum's first tournament, the opposing team targeted him on essentially every play.

"I was getting, like, dogged," Bynum said. "I'm talking deep balls, sluggos, just getting beat clean."

After the game, Bynum's father, Curtis, approached the team's coach, Anthony Brown, and asked if he would be willing to work privately with his son.

"I'm thinking in the back of my head, 'Bro, you should've asked me this before your son got cooked," Brown said.

He agreed, but on one condition: Bynum must arrive at 5 a.m. the next morning for a workout. The son listened to his father strike the deal, but he was dreading it. It wasn't that Bynum didn't want to wake up early. It was more about his disdain for Brown's coaching style. Brown challenged and pressed and went as far as many coaches of yesteryear would

But Bynum was left with no choice. Before the sun rose, he buzzed around a gym, curling weights until his arms felt like Jell-O. Before dawn the next day. they met at a local park. Brown had Bynum doing endless footwork drills atop a hill. Falling back on his heels meant tumbling down to the road below.

Brown stressed rhythm and footwork. He mandated that Bynum press hard on his big toe. He made Bynum, a shy kid who Brown felt had been broken by his struggles, repeat a phrase during





Minnesota's Camryn Bynum, top, celebrating a game-ending turnover in October and, above, being flipped by a teammate after intercepting a pass this month. He spends hours practicing routines.

the workouts: I am Cam Bynum. For weeks and then months, Bynum's parents sat and watched in lawn chairs, wondering how any of these drills without a foot-ball would generate success on

the field.

The first time Brown brought his young daughter to a training session, she asked him afterward as they hopped into his truck, "Dad, why are you training him? He is sorry!" "Maya," Brown told her, "as

long as this kid keeps coming, I'm going to keep showing up. And if he keeps coming, he will no longer

Brown does not teach defensive back play the way other coaches do. Most ask their players to start in a square stance, then swivel like they're a center fielder trotting back for a baseball. Brown denises the swivel He thinks it feeds exactly into what the receiver wants to accomplish.

As his three boys were develop-ing into defensive backs (they all played varying levels of college football), he wondered: Why not stay square for as long as possible and force the receiver to declare before you do?

Brown explained this to Bynum at the hill between bright orange and electric green cones as he mimicked the moves he would be making in games. Bynum bought in. He backpedaled, weaved and twisted his hips. He repeated these same drills each day, quick bursts of rapid foot movements to build muscle memory. "It was so detailed," said

Bynum's mother, Jennifer. "Cam would wear a visor during training to keep his eyes down, to teach him to stop looking up for the ball," Curtis said, "which had been ingrained after so many years of other drills."

The more he spent time practicing around other kids, the more

A fourth-year player's post-play routines have viral appeal.

Bynum began to open up. The better he played with the seven-onseven team, the more he believed in what he could be. The cycle was intoxicating, and by the time his iunior season at Centennial rolled around, Bynum felt like a com-pletely different person.

He had already climbed Centen-nial's depth chart, but a suspen-sion to a classmate made him a starter. In one of Bynum's first games, he matched up with highly touted prospect Cordell Broadus, who is the son of the rapper Snoop Dogg. Bynum blanketed him. The next week, he picked off two passes against the perennial power Long Beach Poly.

"Once Cam got on the field," Brown said, "it was over. It just made him work harder. He was no longer sorry.'

The early morning sessions with Brown had morphed into two-a-days, and Bynum carried the fluorescent-colored cones around with him everywhere. Visits to camps earned him college of-fers. He attended the University of California-Berkeley, where he initially enrolled in pre-med classes before shifting to American Stud-

In the fall of 2020, he wrote a 32page thesis about his journey, de-tailing his parents' commitment, Brown's role and how developing rhythm in his feet was like musical flow. "The road has not been easy." he wrote in the introduction, "but I have enjoyed every second of it."

That road has continued for

Bynum in the N.F.L.

Bynum was a fourth-round draft pick and was converted from cornerback to safety his rookie season. He has not only adapted to the N.F.L. but thrived, starting 51 games over the past four seasons.

How was Bynum able to garner playing time as a rookie? Ask him and he will say it was his refined technique, which gave him more confidence. How was Bynum able to go from 81 tackles in 2022 to 137 in 2023, the most in the N.F.L.? Ask him, and his answer will be the same. (This season, he has started all 14 games for the 12-2 Vikings, posting 79 tackles, three interceptions and a fumble recov-

says his discipline is to thank for his success, and the best way to enjoy the reward from all of the hours and all of the pain is to let loose and bring others along for the ride. That's what these cel-ebrations are about. They are me-

mentos of joy and gratitude.

They are the "I am Cam Bynum" statements for the entire world to see and hear.

With a Selfie and a Birthday Wish, a Tennis Pro Becomes an Instant Icon

By MATTHEW FUTTERMAN and CHARLIE ECCLESHARE

On Dec. 7, João Lucas Reis da Silva, a 24-year-old professional tennis player, posted a couple selfie on Instagram.

It was his partner's birthday, so he posted a photo carousel of them posing by the water in Rio de Janeiro. "I love you so much," he wrote. The post made him a trailblazer — the first out, gay, active professional male tennis player but he was just wishing his part-

ner a happy birthday.
"I didn't think about it," Reis da Silva said from São Paulo, Brazil, in his first international interview since he inadvertently made himself a part of tennis history. "I just wanted to post a picture with

About an hour earlier, he had won a tournament for the first time in four years, defeating Danlift the Procopio Cup and earn a spot in qualifying at the Rio Open, an ATP 500 event he has played the past two years. Not a bad few days for the world No. 367.

"It's been a crazy week, but in the end it was perfect," he said.

After two long injury layoffs, he said, he is playing the best tennis of his life. He reached the semi-finals of a tournament in Chile before winning the title in São Paulo even as he felt the tennis world watching him in a way it never had before

'I didn't feel pressure," he said. "I was happy. I had my boyfriend here with me. He was supporting me. My whole team was here." The women's tennis tour has

had numerous out gay players, including the all-time greats Billie Jean King and Martina Navratilova, who won 98 Grand Slam tournament titles between them across singles and doubles. Men's tennis has not been this

Matthew Futterman is a senior tennis writer and Charlie Eccleshare covers tennis for The Ath-



way. Bill Tilden, the American star who dominated tennis in the 1920s, never publicly discussed his sexuality outside of his 1948 book, "My Story: A Champion's Memoirs." Brian Vahaly, who played in the 2000s and reached a career-high ranking of No. 57, and Bobby Blair, on tour in the 1980s, came out after they retired from professional tennis

Reis da Silva said last weekend that he told his family and friends he was gay five years ago.

"Before that, it was tough," he

said. "I couldn't say too much about myself to my coaches, to my friends. When I tried to love myself, that was something different. It changed my life, changed everything, the relationship with my

parents, with my coaches."

Over a year ago, Reis da Silva
fell in love with Gui Sampaio Ri-



cardo a Brazilian actor and model. Then Ricardo's birthday rolled around for 2024, and Reis da Silva

around for 2024, and Reis da Silva did what 24-year-olds do. He said: "I was like: 'Oh my god, it's my boyfriend's birthday. Like happy birthday. I love you' And then, boom! It was so normal for me that I didn't think about it.'

Messages of support began to roll in. Lulu Santos, the Brazilian singer and guitarist, sent him a message. Thiago Monteiro Brazil's current No. 1 tennis play Monteiro. er, added heart emojis to the post.



João Lucas Reis da Silva, a 24-year-old professional tennis player, above, on his way to winning the Procopio Cup in Brazil. At left, with his boyfriend, Gui Sampaio Ricardo, background.

gymnast Diego Hypólito, who won a silver medal at the Rio Olympics in 2016.

Just like that, this little-known

player from Recife, Brazil, on South America's northeastern Atlantic coast, had become a sports and cultural icon. He said he ex-pected to receive some negative reactions, but the responses have een "99.9 percent positive."
"I'm really happy that people

respect me, that people look at me, admire me, maybe," he said.

In an interview with The Tele-

graph, the British newspaper, in 2018, Vahaly said he had heard homonhobic comments from other mopnotic comments from other players in the locker room, de-scribing it as "part of the culture." He added that he hoped for a time when "we can say, 'Congratula-tions,' and then quickly move on. For people to be defined by their sexuality is what we need to get

Reis da Silva, who said he was aware of Vahaly's being honored by the U.S. Open (he will take over as U.S.T.A. chairman Jan. 1), re-members being 18 and hearing someone saying something offen-

sive in the gym.

"In the locker rooms and at

He got a like from the Brazilian gymnast Diego Hypólito, who things that kind of bothered me." he said. "But when I started to tell everyone that I'm gay and these people knew about it, they stopped saying these things. It's like when they have someone close to them that is gay, they respect them more."

He added: "Maybe that's a big

thing to stop it — if people see someone in the top that is gay, things can change. People might stop saying things they shouldn't that hurt people."

Alison Van Uytvanck of Belgium, the recently retired former world No. 37 who is married to Emilie Vermeiren, said she never received any negative comments in the locker room. In an interview this year, she said "it is kind of surprising" that the ATP Tour had yet to have an out, active male player.

"If only one player, like a top 100 player, would be open about it, it would be easier for others to open up," she said. Reis da Silva said seeing a role

model in the sport would have

made a huge difference to him.
"When I was 16, 15, I had problems accepting myself," he said. "Maybe if I had had someone playing saying: 'I'm gay, I'm here, I'm competing for the big tourna-ments,' it would have been easier for me to accept myself and to love myself. People have told me that. People told me that they admire me. That I inspire people. So it's a big deal for me and them.

"I don't have a problem with be-ing remembered as the great gay tennis player, but I don't want to talk about that every time, you know? I know there will be a lot of attention on me."

Born into a tennis-playing fam-ily, Reis da Silva said he began practicing his swing when he was 3. He followed in the footsteps of his brother, who is six years older and who competed at the junior level. As a boy, Reis da Silva was so obsessed with tennis that he would cry when his father told him it was time to go home.

He began to compete nationally at age 10, leaving home at 13 for São Paulo, where he lived and moved to Rio de Janeiro. He prefers to play from the baseline, rather than rush the net, and he rates his service return and his backhand as his biggest weapons. "I love to break serves," he said.

"I like to stay there in the point and be aggressive in my forehand and play big rallies."

He has competed throughout the United States, Europe and Australia in addition to South America, playing the Grand Slam events as a junior. After the win in São Paulo, he was hoping to take a short vacation with his boyfriend in Porto de Galinhas and spend Christmas with his boyfriend's family in Goiânia, Brazil.

After that, he will begin prepa-rations for some Challenger tournaments (one rung below the ATP Tour) that lead into the South American ATP Tour swing in February and the Rio Open. His big goal for 2025 is to play in the quali-fying tournament for the French Open and build the tennis life he

"It's an individual sport, so you can be whatever you want," he said. "Everybody will accept you."

SOCCER

Takeover of Everton by a Houston-Based Company Receives Regulatory Approval

By PATRICK BOYLAND

The Friedkin Group, a Houston-based company, has completed its takeover of Everton, ending the Premier League soccer club's long search for new ownership.

In September, the group agreed to purchase the 94 percent stake in Everton from the outgoing majority shareholder Farhad Moshiri, and it has now received the regulatory approval needed to complete the move. Formal confirmation that the deal could go ahead came on Wednesday from the Premier League's independent oversight panel.

Representatives from Friedkin Group will be at Sun-day's Premier League match against Chelsea at Goodison Park.

The deal will see Roundhouse Capital Holdings Limited, an entity within the Friedkin Group, offi-cially own the club, with Marc Watts installed as the executive

'Today marks a momentous and proud occasion for the Fried-

Patrick Boyland covers Everton for The Athletic.

kin Group as we become custodi-ans of this iconic football club," Watts said in a statement. "We are committed to leading Everton into an exciting new era both on and off the pitch. Providing immediate financial stability to the club has been a key priority, and we are delighted to have achieved this.'

The takeover ends Moshiri's as-sociation with the club that dates to 2016.

"I truly believe that the transac-tion with the Friedkin Group is the best outcome for the club and its future success," Moshiri said. "I now hand over to new owners confident in the outlook for the club and that our incredible fans will see the success on the pitch that they so thoroughly deserve."

Dan Friedkin, the chairman and chief executive of the Friedkin Group, is proposed to be chairman of the board, while Watts will be responsible in his role for the management of the club. Ana Dunkel, the group's chief financial officer, and Colin Chong, the club's interim chief executive, will also serve on the board.

"As stewards of Everton, we look forward to showing our com-mitment to the club through ac-



Farhad Moshiri, the outgoing majority shareholder, agreed to the takeover in September.

tions, not words," Friedkin said. "We believe there are exceptional people working in the club. The resilience and commitment shown to get through a challenging period in Everton's history has been inspiring to see and provides a great foundation for us to build

While no sums have been dis-closed, Moshiri will walk away having taken a significant loss. He will receive a small, undisclosed amount on completion of the takeover, and there will be a number of deferred payments as part of the

Moshiri will turn around £450 million (or \$571 million) of share-holder loans into equity in Ever-

As part of the takeover agree-ment, the Friedkin Group will significantly reduce the debt burden at the club. It has committed to paying off the £200 million owed to the American insurance firm A-CAP via a series of installments, and refinancing a further £150 million owed to another lender, Rights and Media Funding, the Friedkin Group's own loans to the club, which initially totaled £200 million but have since risen by the tens of millions in recent months, will now be treated as a mix of equity and long-term senior debt, secured against the new stadium. The group will now own 99.5 perof the club.

Everton was initially lent the money by 777 Partners last sea-son when that Miami-based group

was looking to complete its own takeover of the club. But that move fell through when 777 was unable to meet the necessary con-ditions to complete the deal, with its debt position subsequently assumed by one of its major cred-itors, A-CAP.

A-CAP and 777 have been the A-CAP and /// have been the subject of court proceedings in New York, with the British firm Leadenhall alleging that it was double pledged assets as collateral. The Friedkin Group reached an agreement with A-CAP over its debt, but the takeover needed as-sent from Leadenhall and the court. That case is ongoing in New York, with A-CAP previously de-scribing Leadenhall's claims as

Approval from the Premier League, the Football Association and the Financial Conduct Authority, the three other bodies that sign off on such transactions, was always viewed as a relative for-

In completing its takeover of Everton, the Friedkin Group has succeeded where many before had failed. Alongside 777, the American companies MSP Sports Capital and the KAM Group also

..Snow or rain showers

..Intermittently snowy

.....A morning snow shower

40°

tially entered exclusivity over a takeover of Everton over summer but then pulled out with various concerns, including over the A-CAP debt

The Friedkin Group now adds a Premier League club to its grow-ing sports portfolio, which also in-cludes the Italian side Roma and A.S. Cannes of the French fourth

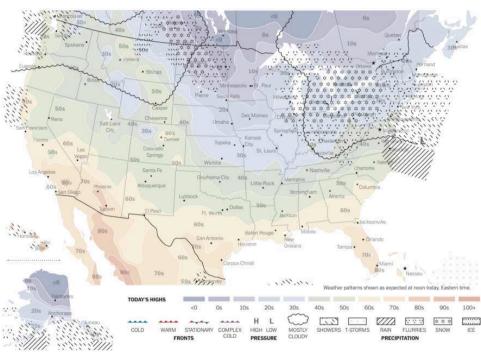
tier.
The move ends years of uncertainty at Everton, which has been operating with a patchwork inter-im board and under significant financial constraints during the long takeover process. With a costly new stadium project left to partially fund, debt soared, and the club scrambled to pay bills. Servicing the interest on shortterm loans became increasingly

problematic.

Moshiri, a former minority shareholder at Arsenal, arrived at Goodison Park in 2016 promising to return the nine-time champions of England to its former glory. He spent about £800 million in total, but resources for the club dried up notably after Russia's invasion of

Weather Report

Meteorology by AccuWeather



Highlight: Storm to Bring Snow to New England

A storm will rapidly strengthen southeast of New England tonight as it moves northeast. The storm will be close enough to the coast to bring steady snow from southeastern New England to downeast Maine. Over 3 inches of snow may fall just south of the Boston area in Massachusetts. Snow will taper to flurries on Saturday as northwest winds usher in much colder



National Forecast

As a clipper storm winds down over the Great Lakes and the interior Northeast today, snow showers and flurries could fall from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan into western Indiana. Parts of West Virginia could see steady snow, with intermittent snow likely as far north and east as New York. A developing coastal storm will produce accumulating snows and gusty winds for southeastern New England.

A weak storm will bring some snow from North Dakota to far western Minne-sota through the day. Sleet and freezing rain is possible over northeastern Mon-

Most of the rest of the West will be dry due to high pressure, but a storm to the northwest will bring showers to the North-

Metropolitan Almanac

Metropolitan Forecast

er snow at night.

TOMORROW ...

SUNDAY

year. High 27

TONIGHT

High 39. An approaching clipper system will bring a mostly cloudy sky and perhaps a bit of snow or rain, especially in the afternoon. This could transition to steadi-

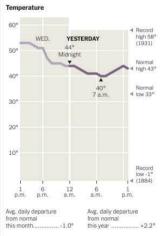
Low 31. With a storm system well off the East Coast, the sky will remain cloudy during the night, and there will be per odic snow. A small, slushy accumulation on non-paved surfaces may persist.

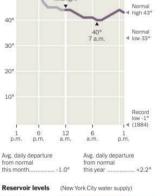
High 34. Gusty north to northwest winds moving in behind a departing clipper system will usher in much colder air during the day. A snow shower or two will occur in the morning.

The coldest air of the season so far will arrive in the region. Temperatures will be well below what is typical for this time of

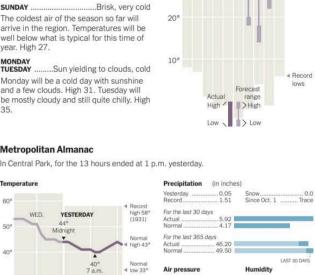
Monday will be a cold day with sunshine and a few clouds. High 31. Tuesday will

In Central Park, for the 13 hours ended at 1 p.m. yesterday









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Heating Degree Days

Recreational Forecast

Sun, Moon and Planets

70/ 47 PC 73/ 46 PC 38/ 17 S 48/ 32 PC 86/ 77 T 84/ 66 S 64/ 55 C 42/ 33 Sh 62/ 45 PC

Last Quarte	er New	First Quarter	Full
Dec. 22	Dec. 30 5:26 p.m.	Jan. 6	Jan. 13 5:26 p.m.
Sun RISE SET NEXT R	4:31 p.m.	Moon	s 11:08 a.m. R 10:11 p.m. s 11:28 a.m.
Jupiter S R	6:17 a.m. 3:28 p.m.	Mars	9:58 a.m. 7:05 p.m.
Saturn R S	11:25 a.m. 10:33 p.m.	Venus	R 10:13 a.m. S 8:08 p.m.
Danting			

Winds will be east to northeast at 12-25 knots. Waves will average 2 feet on Long Island Sound and 3-4 feet on the ocean. Visibility will be under 2 miles at times in rain, especially in the afternoon.

igh Tides	
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e Battery	11:51 a.m
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ridgeport	2:31 a.m 2:47 p.m.
ty Island	2:58 a.m 3:06 p.m.
	12:05 p.m
ontauk Point	12:15 a.m 12:37 p.m.
orthport	2:39 a.m 2:51 p.m.
ort Washington	2:52 a.m 2:53 p.m.
andy Hook	11:19 a.m
ninnecock Inlet	10:57 a.m 11:33 p.m.
amford	2:42 a.m 2:53 p.m.
rrytown	1:34 a.m 1:40 p.m.

.... 2:54 a.m.

Mountain and Ocean Temperatures



It will be a cloudy day across Maine and the mountains of New Hampshire. And cloudy in the afternoon over the Green Mountains, Adirondacks, Catskills and Poconos, where there will be some snow fall. Expect some snow to fall from central Pennsylvania to West Virginia.

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COMMENTARY

A Bandwagon Guide: Reasons to Root For And Against Each Team

By ANTONIO MORALES

We survived the wackiness of the Bowl Championship Series era and the computer formulas. We lived through the four-team College Football Playoff and all the worthy — and unworthy — debates that popped up from year to

On Friday, the 12-team playoff will arrive on our doorstep as college football ushers in a new championship format. Let's enjoy it for however long we have it

There are 134 Football Bowl Subdivision teams. With only 12 making the playoff, the odds are pretty high that your favorite program wasn't invited to the dance. And that means you need to find a team to root for over the next month.

Everyone's motivations are different. You might be rooting for your rival's downfall. There might be a player or coach you've gravitated toward over the past few weeks. You might want to get behind a Cinderella story or you might be a casual fan who just wants to find a rooting interest for the postseason.

son.
Here's your bandwagon guide to the first 12-team College Football Playoff, ranked from least-deserving candidates to most. But be warned: As appealing as the Cinderella stories might be, college football has always been a sport that has favored Goliath, not David.

12. Georgia

11-2, Southeastern Conference champion

Why you should get on board You are SEC Commissioner Greg Sankey.

Why you shouldn't The Bulldogs won the national championship in 2021 and

Bottom line Georgia has two relatively new trophies, so nobody will feel bad for the Bulldogs if they don't win it this season. And it would be somewhat boring if one of the more unpredictable seasons in recent memory ended with the most dominant program in the country hoisting the national championship trophy. The ascent to the start role of the backup quarterback Gunner Stockton does add some intrigue to Georgia's quest.

11. Clemson

10-3, Atlantic Coast Conference champion

Why you should get on board You work in the A.C.C. office and desperately need something good to happen for your conference.

Why you shouldn't Like Georgia, Clemson has two recent national championships (2016 and 2018).

Bottom line This year's Tigers aren't anywhere near as dominant as Dabo Swinney's past playoff teams. There's nothing wrong with that, but this team is essentially a bid thief that sneaked into the playoff late after beating Southern Methodist in the A.C.C. championship game. If you think Swinney's

Antonio Morales covers college football for The Athletic.

demise has been greatly exaggerated, the Tigers might be an interesting program to root for.

10. Ohio State

10-2, at large

Why you should get on board You're a Michigan fan who wants Ohio State to win a few playoff games — but not the national championship — so Ryan Day can stay in Columbus for a few more years

Why you shouldn't You're a Michigan fan who wants Ohio State's downward spiral to continue.

Bottom line Ohio State was billed as the best roster in the country before the season, but it has underwhelmed relative to the preseason hype. The Buckeyes' loss to Michigan in the regular-season finale was arguably the most shocking upset of the season. Expectations are so high at Ohio State that winning the national championship this season might elicit more relief than joy. That's not a fun bandwagon to hop on right now — or at any point.

9. Texas

11-2, at large

Why you should get on board It's cool to see a program with all the potential in the world realize it every once in a while.

Why you shouldn't College football traditionalists have had a hard time adjusting to all the change that's arrived in the sport this year with conference realignment. Do you want to root for the program that sparked much of the change by leaving the Big 12 for the

Bottom line It's kind of difficult to get behind such a massive brand like Texas when there are alternatives on the table

8. Notre Dame

11-1, at large

Why you should get on board You're a big fan of nostalgia and want to say you saw the sport's most historic program win it all. The Fighting Irish haven't won a national championship since

Why you shouldn't You're one of the folks who thinks Notre Dame is overrated every year, can't stand that it doesn't play in a conference title game and generally believes the Fighting Irish are not worthy of all the discussion they generate.

Bottom line Many people rag on Notre Dame, but the truth is that there are probably only six or seven schools that wouldn't trade places with the Irish, given their success over the past seven or eight seasons. But still, rooting for the Irish is kind of like rooting for the Vankees



7. Penn State

11-2, at large

Why you should get on board There aren't a lot of players more fun to watch than Nittany Lions tight end Tyler Warren. And defensive end Abdul Carter is the next great defensive player to come through the Penn State pipeline.

Why you shouldn't Penn State is a good program, but Coach James Franklin has lost nearly every game of consequence over the past few years, so it's difficult to put much faith into the Nittany Lions.

Bottom line The first-round game against Southern Methodist will essentially serve as a referendum on Franklin, who needs to win that game in the worst possible way. Not for his job status, but for the vibes.

6. Tennessee

10-2, at large

Why you should get on board A strong rushing attack and a stout defense have proven to be a successful playoff formula in the past. Tennessee checks those boxes.

Why you shouldn't When it has seemed like a good time to believe in Tennessee football over the past decade, things have gone south. The Volunteers' passing game may be a bit too inconsistent, and opposing defenses will force quarterback Nico Iamaleava to make big throws in big spots. Can he do that several weeks in a row?

Bottom line Tennessee isn't a bad bandwagon to hop on, but the Vols have had some shaky moments against some so-so teams. That makes it difficult to believe Tennessee can navigate four consecutive games against what will likely be elite defenses.

5. Oregon

13-0, Big Ten champion

Why you should get on board Oregon has been a top-10 program for a chunk of the past 25 years. A title would give the Ducks a strong case to be viewed with the sport's upper-echelon programs.

Why you shouldn't You're a fan of a West Coast program that desperately wants to hold onto the "0" national championship jokes despite the fact that Oregon has been better than every program on that side of the country for the past decade and a half.

Bottom line There's a new-money element to the Ducks that is difficult for traditionalists to look past. Oregon flexed its name, image and likeness muscles to build this roster, which rubs some opposing fans the wrong way. But with the way the sport is currently set up, Oregon seems primed to win a national championship at some point, so it might be wise to jump on now.

4. Southern Methodist

11-2, at large

Why you should get on board The Mustangs haven't been this relevant to the national championship conversation since the early 1980s. And after that, the program was hit with the death penalty. It took S.M.U. several decades to bounce back. The team is also in its first year as a Power 4 program after spending the past 11 seasons in the American.

Why you shouldn't S.M.U. hasn't been exposed to the talent level it is likely to see in the playoff, starting with Penn State. Clemson was the most talented, athletic team the Mustangs have faced this season, and it took them quite a while to adjust in their A.C.C. title game loss.

Boise State's Ashton Jeanty, the Heisman Trophy runner up, is must-watch TV.

Bottom line S.M.U. was a major surprise this season, but it's up against it this weekend having to travel to Happy Valley to play Penn State. That's a tough hurdle to overcome, which might make this a short-lived bandwagon ride.

3. Indiana

11-1, at large

Why you should get on board This program used to shoot for nine wins. Hoosiers Coach Curt Cignetti blew past those aspirations this year and led Indiana to 11 wins and the playoff, making the program one of the sport's true feel-good stories.

Why you shouldn't Indiana ran through its schedule pretty easily this season. It routinely beat opponents by double digits and was top 10 in the nation in scoring offense and scoring defense. But the Hoosiers struggled against teams with elite defensive talent. Notre Dame is strong on defense, which doesn't bode well for the Hoosiers.

Bottom line Cignetti did a tremendous job in his first season with the program. The schedule lined up perfectly as well. While the Hoosiers were a very fun story, it doesn't seem like their playoff run will last too long.

2. Arizona State

11-2, Big 12 champion

Why you should get on board Herm Edwards and Antonio Pierce left Arizona State in a bad spot and faced no real repercussions. Sun Devils Coach Kenny Dillingham took over a disastrous situation and has done wonders in Year 2. Running back Cam Skattebo, a Sacramento State transfer who is in his second year with the program, finished fifth in Heisman Trophy voting and is a perfect example of the great work Dillingham and his staff have done to identify the right talent to get things turned around in Tempe.

Why you shouldn't Arizona State has a first-round bye, which is beneficial, but there's a very high likelihood that the Sun Devils will face Texas, which gives up just 3.1 yards per rush (11th nationally).

Bottom line Arizona State is a really fun team, headlined by a great running back and a promising young head coach. It's a worthy bandwagon to jump on for the long term, but just know the playoff trip might be short-lived.

1. Boise State

12-1, Mountain West champion

Why you should get on board Running back Ashton Jeanty finished second in Heisman Trophy voting and is mustwatch TV. It would be cool to support one of the first B.C.S. busters and a program that was never allowed to compete for the national championship in the past.

Why you shouldn't Quarterback Maddux Madsen will be under the microscope and will need to make enough throws to get some of the attention off Jeanty. Can he do it?

Bottom line Boise State is the bandwagon to hop on. The Broncos did play Oregon, the No. 1 overall seed in the playoff, down to the wire in September. They can play with the best of them on any given day.

How Notre Dame Bounced Back From One of the Season's Worst Losses

From First Sports Page

across the street.

Notre Dame's path to the postseason strained the program, but that route also validated its head coach and the growth mind-set he has applied since he accepted the job at age 35, when Brian Kelly left for Louisiana State.

After inheriting a coaching staff in his first season and tweaking it in his second, Freeman has nearly perfected it in his third with one of the country's top coordinator pairs in Al Golden on defense and Mike Denbrock on offense. After gambling at quarterback in his first season (Tyler Buchner and Drew Pyne) and making an educated guess in his second (the Wake Forest transfer Sam Hartman), Freeman played to his convictions in his third (Leonard, a transfer from Duke).

Freeman likes to paraphrase his old college coach at Ohio State, Jim Tressel, by saying that progress is never a straight line. And they're right. It hasn't been.

Yet with Notre Dame both in the playoff and positioned to make a run — and Freeman now locked up with a new longterm deal — there is no longer a question of if progress has been made.

Notre Dame had been building to this before last season ended, when the former offensive coordinator Gerad Parker left for the head job at Troy and was replaced by Denbrock, who coached Jayden Daniels at L.S.U. Denbrock and Freeman had worked together as coordinators under Luke Fickell at Cincinnati for four seasons.

Finally, Freeman had an offensive coordinator who had solved problems over the headset in real time. He had coached a Heisman Trophy winner and made offenses work with redshirt freshmen. And he had worked with the majority of Notre Dame's offensive staff already; the quarterbacks coach Gino Guidugii and the receivers coach Mike Brown were also on staff at Cincinnati with Denbrock.

"I try to be intentional about who we hire, and there's also an understanding of you know somebody through consistency," Freeman said. "That's what I've learned over my time as a head coach. Probably the greatest thing I learned is the hiring process."

Notre Dame invested in two coordina-

The Balle invested in two cool materials with four-year contracts that are among the most lucrative in the sport. The 60-year-old Denbrock was a finalist last year for the Broyles Award, given to the nation's top assistant, and the 55-year-old Golden is a finalist this season. Not only did Freeman, now 38, find the coaches he wanted, but Notre Dame backed its head coach in getting the deals done.

Notre Dame is the only program in the country ranked in the top five of scoring offense and scoring defense. It's one of four schools ranked in the top 10 in yards per play on both sides. Freeman has said more than once that this year's roster is his best since taking the job. There's no doubt it's his best coaching staff, too. And that created connective tissue within the program when it could have come apart after Northern Illinois.

As much as that game shouldn't have happened, Golden and Denbrock had

been through worse and come out the other side. They had seen stuff hit the fan before. They also knew how to clean it off and get it running again.

Aaron Taylor, the former Notre Dame player who is now an analyst for CBS, said the moves to hire Denbrock and Golden were crucial.

"I think it's made all the difference in the world because of the thing Marcus lacked when he took the job: experience," Taylor said. "If you don't get the

Two of the country's top coordinators strengthen the Fighting Irish.

staff right, nothing is right. I don't think people appreciate how nuanced that is." The other thing to get right: the quar-

The Leonard experience at Notre Dame has been about what the Irish expected and probably something different, too. The Irish knew Leonard had the wheels to make Denbrock's offense go. They knew he would be able to command a locker room in ways previous quarterbacks did not. And that has all happened. It's just that Leonard's passing probably needed more time to get in sync with Denbrock's play calling than Notre Dame could afford early.

"It's the confidence," Freeman said. "I think going from where you were Week 1 to where you were Week 2, and in realizing, 'OK, this is the best it's going to be, and this is the worst it's going to be,' and understanding if I can put that stuff behind me and really focus on enjoying and maximizing this opportunity as a quarterback at Notre Dame, then I should. And that's what he's done.

"His confidence has grown. His under-

standing and knowledge of the offense, but also, the understanding and knowledge that coach Denbrock has in Riley and saying, 'OK, how do we do what your players do well, right?'" In the preseason Denbrock corrected

In the preseason, Denbrock corrected a reporter who asked about Leonard as a "running quarterback" by backing him as a "dual-threat." But it took four games for Leonard to throw his first touchdown pass, and he has yet to throw for 250 yards in a game. Still, he has accounted for 30 total touchdowns. And he has led the most prolific offense in modern school history, averaging 39.8 points per game.

Leonard and Denbrock meet weekly, a routine typical for a quarterback and an offensive coordinator. But when there's just one season between them, with Leonard a senior, the whole thing can feel a bit microwaved. Leonard and Denbrock will share coffee and bagels. Sometimes they talk football. Sometimes they don't. The time matters more than the subject.

"They had to figure out who Riley Leonard was," Taylor said. "There's choreography between Denbrock and Leonard that they figured out."

ard that they figured out."

He added: "They turned that corner, and they haven't looked back."

Notre Dame just needed a head coach to stitch all this together — the staff, the quarterback, the defense with N.F.L talent on all three levels. And Freeman had to do it with history against him, trying to lead a program that had spit out every first-time head coach for more than a century.

Two years ago after losing to Marshall, Freeman changed up the messaging that Notre Dame needed to attack every practice like it was a Saturday afternoon. The Irish steadied that ship, even after losing their starting quarterback. Last year, after an embarrassing home loss to Ohio State when the defense got caught with 10 men on the field for the final two plays, Freeman swallowed the responsibility.

This year's pivot was to never look away from the carnage of Sept. 7. Northern Illinois became a constant talking point. Team meetings, postgame, half-time, pregame — Notre Dame was never absolved. The sin remained. It might not have been how Freeman wanted it, but it was what Notre Dame needed. And so Freeman delivered.

Freeman delivered.

"Misery wants company, but I don't during those tough times," Freeman said. "You've got to take a hard look at yourself and figure out what it takes to get your program where it needs to be. That's what I was able to do as an individual, and the program itself did that, too."

Notre Dame has done nothing but win since Northern Illinois, with Freeman carving a straight path to the playoff. The Irish are now where they expected to be all along because of how they lost three months ago

Arm Injury Report Finds a Layered Problem With Few Easy Fixes

By ANDY McCULLOUGH

In the wake of a season that be-gan with major arm injuries to prominent pitchers such as Shane Bieber, Spencer Strider and Eury Pérez, Major League Baseball has issued a report to the front offices of all 30 clubs citing an increase in velocity, an added emphasis on generating movement and the proliferation of pitchers throwing at maximum effort as the primary culprits behind the sport's continuing injury crisis.

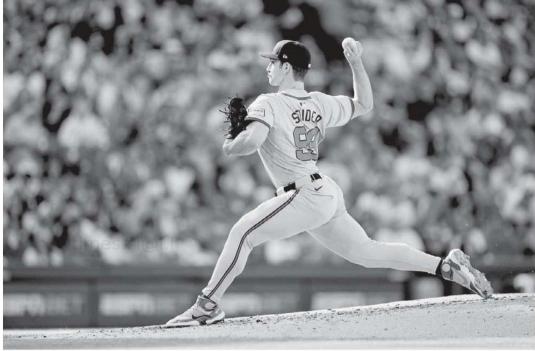
"Injury rates among pitchers have skyrocketed over the past several decades," according to the report, a 63-page document that summarized more than 200 interviews conducted during the past year with executives, coaches, trainers, surgeons, representa-tives from amateur baseball and former big league pitchers. The purpose of the study, M.L.B. officials said, was to spur conversation about a topic that tends to engulf the sport every April.

The number of operations to repair the ulnar collateral ligament in the elbow rose from 104 between the majors and the minors in 2010 to 281 in 2024. The World Series champion Los Angeles Dodgers were so troubled by pitching injuries in 2024 that the organization ordered an off-sea-son audit of its developmental

There are no easy solutions, the M.L.B. report explained. The document is light on prescriptions. The report includes the sugges tion that M.L.B. rules "could be adjusted or designed to encourage or require starting pitchers to preserve enough energy to allow them to pitch deeper into games," but does not offer specifics. In addition, there could be more restrictions on how often teams make

tions of now other teams make roster moves with pitchers. The study, which was run by John D'Angelo, M.L.B.'s vice pres-ident for amateur and medical baseball operations, does not include interviews with current ma-jor league players. The Major League Baseball Players Association has engaged with M.L.B. offi-cials about a joint study that would involve input from active according to officials from M.L.B. and the players' un-ion who requested anonymity to speak freely about the situation. The report called for "a detailed

Andy McCullough is a senior M.L.B. writer for The Athletic.



The Braves' Spencer Strider, above, and the Guardians' Shane Bieber, left, both had elbow operations early in the 2024 season.

the velocity of off-speed pitches.

The rising tide matches the growing realization that faster pitches, of all kinds, are harder to hit.

"That's why you see these guys throwing 87 m.p.h. sliders now,"

one major league executive told The Athletic this year for its series on the rise of strikeouts. "It might

have fringe-y spin and movement. But the fact that it's hard makes it

The M.L.B. report outlines a vicious cycle: Players at the major league level are incentivized to throw as hard as possible with as much movement as possible Players in the minors pursue the same practices to be promoted. Players in college and high school attempt to mimic them to be drafted. Children in youth baseball do the same in search of trav-el-ball opportunities and college scholarships.

The current generation of ama-

teur players "tries to emulate how view professionals training performing," the report

This cycle "poses a unique risk to young, amateur players," who often lack access to high-quality trainers and coaches, according to the report. The pursuit of velocity leads to more amateur arm injuries, which leads more players to enter the professional ranks having already undergone surgery

and thus are more susceptible to

future injury.
"I have a 14-year-old who played travel ball last summer into the fall," David Forst of the Athletics said at the general managers' meetings in November. "He had three pitchers on his team by August who were unavailable be-cause of arm injuries. I mean, those aren't Tommy John surgeries — bu problems." — but they're kids with arm

At the professional level, the re-port outlines, exacerbating the problem is the use of ball-tracking technology. That includes innova-tions like Edgertronic cameras, Rapsodo monitors and Trackman radar systems, which permit pitchers to chase the maximum velocity and the maximum amount of movement on individual pitches, potentially placing the arm in unnatural positions. The technology also allows teams to monitor bullpen sessions with a level of scrutiny that was once re281

U.C.L. operations in baseball in 2024, up from 104 in 2010.

served for actual games

Because teams might become alarmed when a pitcher's per-formance wavers, players are now motivated to operate at higher levels of effort in those once-relaxed settings.

The access to granular data also allows teams and players to re-shape pitches daily. In recent years, pitchers have embraced the splitter, which was once mothballed for fear of injury risk, and pioneered the sweeper, a horizon-tal-moving slider variant that some within the industry have condemned. All of these pitches, along with fastballs and curveballs and changeups, are thrown as hard as possible because they generate better results.

In turn, some trainers interviewed in the report indicated they found pitchers have overem-phasized strength training and de-emphasized cardiovascular conditioning, which may contrib-ute to the problem.

"Pitchers increasingly throw near maximum effort in accordance with modern baseball strategies that prioritize the pursuit of swings and misses over inducing weak contact from batters," the report states.

Rather than offer concrete solutions, the report emphasizes the importance of continuing dialogue and more research. The trouble comes in reshaping a system in which all of the actors from amateur players all the way up to the major leagues — are behaving rationally. Pitchers are re-warded for throwing harder, with heightened movement, at maxi-

neightened movement, at maximum effort, because it is effective. In other words, a healthy pitcher with a 5.00 earned run average still has a 5.00 E.R.A.

Near its conclusion, the report states: "Many experts agreed that creating a system where pitchers are encouraged or re-quired to moderate their activity and throw at submaximum effort to go deeper into games may be better for pitcher health."

That is health. The problem, as those involved in this process understand, is it will not necessarily help the team win games.

COMMENTARY

Tucker Deal Is a Move The Cubs Used to Make

By JON GREENBERG

Nine years ago, before the 2016 M.L.B. season, the Chicago Cubs executives Theo Epstein and Jed Hoyer liked to refer to their team as the reigning third-place finisher in the National League Central.

While finishing just behind the St. Louis Cardinals and Pittsburgh Pirates, the 2015 Cubs won 97 games, beat both teams in the playoffs and advanced to the National League Championship Series. It was clearly the start of something special, but they used the "third-place team" line to try to temper the championship expectations going into the 2016

Flash forward to now, and Hoyer has to take a different

Jon Greenberg is a senior columnist for The Athletic.

The Cubs are once again a defending third-place team technically, they tied for second in the division last season — but the context is much different. They won 83 games for the sec-ond consecutive year, despite paying top dollar for Manager Craig Counsell, a year after signing shortstop Dansby Swanson to a long-term deal. They have not made the playoffs in a full season since 2018. They do not "go for it" anymore.

examination of off-season train-

ing regimens and early-season

workloads," indicating that arm injuries tend to spike at the start of

At the center of the problem is

heightened velocity. The average four-seam fastball was clocked at

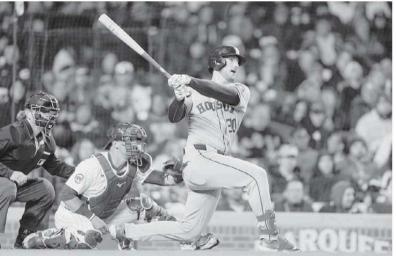
91.3 miles per hour in 2008. That

average rose to 94.2 m.p.h. in 2024, with corresponding increases in

And excitement for the coming Cubs season was basically non-existent . . . until last week.

That's when Hoyer, the Cubs' president of baseball operations, executed a trade for one of the best hitters in baseball, acquiring Kyle Tucker for two replaceable veterans — third baseman Isaac Paredes and pitcher Hayden Wesneski - and a prospect, Cam

It was the kind of move befitting a major-market baseball



If Kyle Tucker has a big year, the Cubs will be forced to spend like a big-market team to keep him.

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executive with his eve on Octothis year's first-round pick, ber; one that gets fans excited about baseball while football is still being played; one that has you thinking of green ivy and full owner Tom Ricketts to spend stadiums on Friday afternoons It was the kind of move the Cubs used to make when Epstein and Hoyer were trying to win World Series, not just N.L. Cen-But it's not that simple. Tucker is signed for only one

more year. The Cubs are not a Kyle Tucker away from being a great team in 2025, unless he really does produce the way Juan Soto does. The best thing you can say about the trade is that it showed the fans the Cubs were taking next season seri-"I think you wouldn't make

this kind of deal if you felt like you didn't have a lot of good players around a player like Tucker," Hoyer told a group of reporters in a video call on Tues-day. "I think that going back to '21 and '22, it wouldn't have made sense to do this deal. I think that it made a lot of sense for us to do it with where we are right now, given the construction of the

tral titles.

Hoyer had to gamble that what the Cubs are getting is worth what they are giving up, namely, Smith. I'm one of the people who have been hectoring the Cubs money and for Hoyer to make bold moves to get the team back to relevancy, and yet I find my self acting like a prospect hugger when it comes to Smith, who showed real promise in limited at-bats in the Cubs' system this year. They have struggled to draft and develop potent hitters over the last decade. Smith might not be far away.

But trading prospects is what big-market executives do. You just hope they do not trade the ones who turn into stars, as when the former White Sox general manager Rick Hahn dealt a former big leaguer's teenage son (Fernando Tatís Jr.) for James Shields. Acquiring Tucker for Smith Paredes and Wesneski, Hoyer admitted, "comes at a real price, but it's a price we're willing to pay."

"I do think there's always that push-pull of the things you're doing for now and things you're doing for the future," he said. 'Ultimately, you know, our goal is to try to be a better team than last year. And that's been our focus."

Hover may not be done adding, especially after doing a little

subtracting Tuesday, when he traded Cody Bellinger to the New York Yankees in a salary

After the Yankees lost out on Soto, this move was expected -the teams had been haggling over Bellinger's contract, which has a \$25 million player option for 2025 — and it frees money for Hoyer to chase a veteran starting pitcher on the trade market. It was only a year ago that the Cubs were patting themselves on the back for bringing back Bellinger on a multiyear deal after he signed on the cheap once the Dodgers nontendered him in

If Hover can reallocate Bellinger's salary to sign or trade for a frontline pitcher to join Shota Imanaga, Justin Steele and the rest, the Cubs will look a lot more interesting and we can stop talking about them trading guys to save money.

We know that Ricketts, no matter how much we yell at him, is not going to spend like the Mets owner Steve Cohen or the Dodgers. If Ricketts's more modest goal is to bankroll an N.L. Central winner, well, he has a right to be disappointed. The Cubs have not even done that since 2017. Hover's deal is coming up after the season, so he

Chicago is hoping the slugger can turn into a long-term answer.

needs a playoff appearance too. His future could align with Tucker's production

Tucker, who turns 28 in Janu-ary, had a .993 on-base plus slugging percentage and a 4.7 WAR, using Baseball Reference's calculation, in 78 games last season. If he hits in Chicago the way he has in Houston (112 homers over the last four years), the star-starved Cubs fans will love him and the pressure will be on Ricketts to spend like a bigmarket owner to keep him. In that case, what Hoyer is doing makes even more sense. The Cubs are stagnant. Tucker could give them a spark.

"It's very difficult to acquire players of this caliber," Hoyer said. "They're not available often." He added, "I don't know what the future holds, but obvi-ously Chicago sells itself really

Sure, Chicago is great, especially in the summer, but Hoyer cannot lock up Tucker with promises of long walks along Lake Michigan, street fests and West Loop cuisine. He is going to want actual money. Tucker is an Excel Sports client, not a Scott Boras guy, so could realistic extension talks happen before he hits the open market next win-

"When you acquire a player like that, you want to have that player for a long time," Hoyer said. "Certainly, there will be contact with his agent. We'll have discussions.

Tucker, who has not played a game for the Cubs vet, said he vould listen.

"I'm always open to talks and see where that leads," Tucker said. "You never know what the

future's going to hold."

Once upon a time in Chicago, the future was bright for a thirdplace team. We visualized a World Series, and it actually happened. Nearly a decade later, we're a little more realistic, a

little more jaded.

Maybe the Cubs are for real. Maybe Tucker is just what they need to be relevant again.

Jerome Kohn, Who Devoted Career To Arendt's Legacy, Is Dead at 93

By SAM ROBERTS

Jerome Kohn, who devoted his career to decoding, defending and disseminating the work of Han-nah Arendt, the provocative philosopher who diagnosed the roots of 20th-century totalitarianism and who controvertibly wrote that the convicted Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann embodied "the banality of evil," died on Nov. 8 in Bay Shore, N.Y., on Long Island. He was 93.

His death, in a hospital, was confirmed by his sister, Mary

Kohn Lazarus.

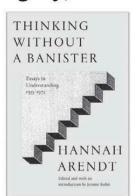
As the founder of the Hannah Arendt Center at the New School for Social Research in Manhattan and as the literary executor and trustee since 2001 of the Hannah Arendt Bluecher Literary Trust, Mr. Kohn was the gatekeeper for a political theorist who was difficult

to pigeonhole ideologically. He edited five of Ms. Arendt's books and made her vast oeuvre available to researchers. He was also a rich source of personal reminiscences about a friendship that lasted from 1967, when he first audited her courses at the New School, until her death in 1975.

"Jerome Kohn's main concern was to keep Hannah Arendt's thoughts and words in circula-tion," said Prof. Thomas Wild, the research director of the Hannah Arendt Center for Politics and Hu-manities at Bard College, in Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y., which Mr. Kohn was instrumental in founding and where he was on the board of directors.

"He would, of course, argue against claims or accusations about things that Arendt never wrote or did," Professor Wild said, in an email. "But he would never want to control how people (in good faith) interpreted Arendt's

The life and work of Ms. Arendt, a Jewish refugee from Nazi Ger-



"Thinking Without a Banister" (2018) was one of Ms. Arendt's works that Mr. Kohn edited.

many, were, Mr. Kohn wrote, largely defined by two events: the rise of totalitarianism, in the form of Nazism and Stalinism, and Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem in

"What really makes it possible for a totalitarian or any other kind of dictatorship to rule is that the people are not informed," Ms. Arendt said in a 1973 interview. "If everyone always lies to you, the consequence is not that you be-lieve the lies, but that no one believes anything at all anymore." That, she said, robs people of their ability to act and of their "capacity to think and to judge," and allows governments to rescind the sacred right of citizenship.

Her book "Eichmann in Jerusa-Her Dook "Elchmann in Jerusa-lem" (1963), which was serialized in The New Yorker, provoked an outcry over her suggestion that European Jews could have de-fended themselves more ag-gressively and her verdict that while Eichmann deserved to be hanged, his crimes against buhanged, his crimes against humanity exemplified what she called "the banality of evil" — a claim that some readers inferred as absolution.

In his introduction to "Thinking Without a Banister," a collection of Ms. Arendt's essays published in 2018, Mr. Kohn wrote that she judged Eichmann as a man who could not separate fact from fic-tion and who "could not see the world from anyone else's point of view, noticeably not of those Jews he admired and worked with." This, he argued, "is banal, and (this is the hardest part) the banality of the extreme evil for which as a human being, not a monster, he was responsible.

Much that was said about Ms. Arendt "was indeed preposterous," Mr. Kohn wrote in his introduction to "Responsibility and Judgment" (2003). "For example, that she attempted to exonerate Eichmann when she had done ex-actly the opposite; or that she was morally insensitive in asking why Jews had not fought back, a question raised by the prosecutor but never by Arendt, who understood that the processes of dehumanization precluded rebellion."

Rochelle Gurstein, a historian and essayist, observed in an inter-view that, for a literary trustee, Mr. Kohn was unusually magnani-mous — and that he brought a special dimension to his role

"My own intellectual life was already profoundly shaped by Arendt's ideas when I first met Jerry," she said. "And over the course of the many years of our conversations, it was an unexpected gift to learn so much about her sensibility and humor things I could not have gleaned from her writing.'

Jerome Hartman Kohn Jr. was born on June 28, 1931, in Hartford, Conn., to Jerome and Alice (Bussy) Kohn. His father was a philanthropist who owned a to-



A scholar and editor who also was a philosopher's friend.

bacco company

The poet Wallace Stevens was a neighbor, and one of several intellectual figures — including W.H. Auden, Mary McCarthy and James Baldwin with whom Mr.

Kohn would be associated.

After graduating from the Loomis School in Windsor, Conn., Mr. Kohn earned a bachelor's de-gree in literature from Harvard. He went on to study philosophy at Columbia but gravitated to the New School, where he became Ms. Arendt's teaching assistant and

acolyte. "Kohn's life changed when he read two essays by Hannah Arendt in The New Yorker: one on Bertolt Brecht and 'Truth and Politics,'" published in 1966 and 1967, said Prof. Roger Berkowitz, the academic director of the Hannah Arendt Center at Bard, when Mr. Kohn was awarded an hon-orary degree there in 2022.

Mr. Kohn delivered a eulogy at Ms. Arendt's funeral and became the keeper of her flame. Among the other anthologies of her works he edited were "Essays in Understanding" (1994), "The Promise of Politics" (2005) and, with Ron H. Feldman, "The Jewish Writings" (2007). (2007).

"These essays, with his editing and curation, along with his excel-

Jerome Kohn in an undated photo. His "main concern," a colleague said, "was to keep Hannah Arendt's thoughts and words in circulation."

introductions, brought lent Arendt to a wider audience, broadened our understanding of the scope of her political and cul-tural interests, and very much amplified her impact and reputa-

tion," Professor Berkowitz said.

Mr. Kohn himself, Professor Berkowitz said, argued that "the original American democratic reality of citizens freely exercising power has been eclipsed by an 'encroaching social totalism' and the

dominance of bureaucratic rule." Mr. Kohn collaborated with Ms. McCarthy in editing a posthumous edition of Ms. Arendt's "The Life of the Mind" (1978). He facilitated the formation of an Arendt Center at the University of Oldenburg in Germany and directed the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies program at the New School from 1980 to 1985. In the 1980s, he taught art and philosophy at the Cooper Union with the art critic Dore Ashton.

In addition to his sister, he is survived by his partner, Gerard They Hoolahan. lived Cutchogue, N.Y.

So keen was Mr. Kohn on spreading Ms. Arendt's message that public debate and individual action were vital to sustaining a democracy that he licensed Gucci to reproduce, on T-shirts, her etymological analysis of a word and a phrase that were elemental to a productive political life.

The word was "persona," which, she wrote, "originally referred to the actor's mask that covered his individual 'personal' face and individual 'personal 'perso cated to the spectator the role and the part of the actor in the play."

The phrase was "the human condition," which she analogized to birth, concluding that "speech corresponds to the fact of distinctness and is the actualization of the human condition of plurality that is, of living as a distinct and unique being among equals.

Java said in

interviews that she

stage name from a comment a man

made to her on the sidewalk: "You

look like java, baby — deep, dark and

came up with her

Sir Lady Java, Trailblazing Drag Star Who Challenged a Law in Los Angeles

At first, it was lonely being Sir

Lady Java. She was a drag singer, an actress, an erotic dancer and a stage-patter comedian in mid-1960s Los Angeles before there was much of an open gay, lesbian or transgender community there.

So she flirted with nightclub audiences and sought to beguile them — and it worked. She became a figure in the

Black entertainment world, get-ting fond coverage from the Black press, appearing in a Blaxploita-tion movie and performing for or alongside entertainers like Richard Pryor, James Brown and Sammy Davis Jr. At the same time, she could draw a heterogenous audience, including L. Ron Hubbard, the founder of Scientol-

ogy.

Lacking much ready-made language to define her, she invented her own identity as much as she invented her act. The world around her was not exactly welcoming, yet she wound up finding validation in unexpected places: a heartfelt compliment from a Hol-lywood star she idolized; a legal fight with the Los Angeles police that she lost before winning; and a public profile that seemed to collapse before she came to be con sidered, in recent years, a signifi cant historical figure, worthy even

of a biopic. Java died on Nov. 16 in Los Angeles, according to the online news outlet Them. Her death was announced on social media by Hailie Sahar, a transgender actress and singer who was planning to play Java in a movie about her life, as Deadline reported in

Sources disagree about Java's age, but Ms. Sahar said she was 82. The cause was a stroke, The Los Angeles Times reported.

Java got her start performing at Los Angeles-area clubs like Joe's Nairobi Lounge and the Mermaid Room. Ads said her act included a "torrid, sexy dance" inside a cage; a solo fashion show: comedic impressions; stories about discrimination and becoming one's true self; and a striptease, featuring a white lacy gown and a curvaceous figure.



Ads and descriptions of Java in the media often referred to her as a "female impersonator," a phrase some fans questioned.

She was considered "America's loveliest female impersonator," Sepia, a Black photojournalistic magazine, reported at the time. Java herself used that phrase, but some fans questioned it. "No female impersonator can fool me and I know Sir Lady Java is no

She performed for or alongside Richard Pryor, James Brown and Sammy Davis Jr.

man," one reader wrote to Jet, another Black publication, in 1967. 'Come on Jet, you know that's a woman."

Java would later say that she did indeed live as a woman. As a public figure in mid-20th century America, she was playful about her gender. One ad for a perform-ance, part of an archival collection dedicated to her at Harvard University, switched between using male and female pronouns and assured the prospective audience that Java "has never shaved."

Her appeal became her undoing

in 1967, when the Los Angeles po lice appeared during one of her sets at a club owned by the comedian Redd Foxx. The officers were there to enforce an ordi-nance of the local municipal code, known as Rule No. 9, which banned entertainment in which "any performer impersonates by means of costume or dress a per-son of the opposite sex." The police threatened to arrest Mr. Foxx and revoke his club's license.

Java lost work but gained publicity. She returned to Mr. Foxx's club in a sleeveless white dress and pumps along with a big sign that read, "Java vs. Right to Work." The moment was captured in a photo published in Jet showing a crowd holding picket signs and a theatrically shrugging Mr.

The American Civil Liberties Union took on her case, challenging Rule No. 9 in California's Supreme Court. She lost on the grounds that only club owners had the relevant legal standing, then found that no club owner would adopt her cause, according to the A.C.L.U. But her right to perform in Los Angeles clubs was restored in 1969, when the ordi-nance was overturned in a sepa-

In 1976, Java's appearance in the Blaxploitation movie "The Human Tornado" testified to her rep-utation as a club draw. She plays a nightclub performer who brings in so much money that a rival club owner kidnaps her.

In a 2016 interview, Java said there was nothing she was more proud of than her relationship with the actress, singer and civil rights activist Lena Horne. In 1978, Java performed at a birthday party hosted by Ms. Horne. "The highlight of the evening," Jet reported, came when Ms. Horne, 'the world's most beautiful woman," met Java.

"I've been wanting to meet Lady Java for so long," Ms. Horne was quoted as saying in Jet. "I think she's the most beautiful fem-inine thing I've ever seen in my

Java usually gave her place of birth as New Orleans, but Them reported that she was born in Evangeline Parish, a more rural area in south-central Louisiana.



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY HARVARD LIBRARY THE HOUGHTON LIBRARY OF HARVARD UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES

Ms. Sahar wrote online that Java

was born on Aug. 20, 1942. Her family moved to Riverside, Calif., during her youth. Her mother helped make costumes for her act and supported her as she

after her performing career ended, Java fell out of the public eye for decades. In recent years she began appearing on historical lists of prominent Black transgender people.

In a 2016 interview with the artist and activist Pasqual Bettio, she said that the name Java came from a "nice looking Black fellow"

who had called out to her on the sidewalk, "You look like java, baby — deep, dark and delicious." She described her heritage as "mixedrace French and Indian and Black and Spanish and German."

Autobiographical ads about Java refer to her receiving transition surgery. "I dress as a female and live as a female," she told Mr. Bettio. She added that she went out with both men and women, and that, no matter what, "I al-

ways conducted myself as a lady." In 2022, Java was a marshal for the Los Angeles pride parade.

Susan Stryker, a writer and aca-

demic focused on transgender issues who was interviewed by Time magazine in 2021, described Java's challenge of Rule No. 9 as "an unsung yet really important episode in not just trans liberation, but the broader L.G.B.T. civil rights movement."

In recent years Java lived in the Mid-City section of Los Angeles. Information about survivors was not immediately available

"When I first started there were no gay people around," she told Mr. Bettio. "They were hiding." Now, she continued, "It's nice to see so many. I can't believe it."

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Fliezer Judoh

Kirwin, Barbara Sassower, Susar

KIRWIN—Barbara Davis,
died peacefully at home in
Rhode Island, December 18,
Rhode Island, December 18,
mother and grandmother,
predeceased by her husband
of more than 64 years, Paul,
and her son, Glenn (Joan)
who was killed in the September 11th attacks. Survived by
children Jon (Dennis), daughchildren Jon (Dennis), daughber 19,
handrew (Romy), Daniel
(Gary) and Jennifer. Proud
'Ba'' to Miles, Troy, Brooke,
Grace, Benjamin and Emma.
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Singalongs of the 'Messiah' have roots in 1820s festivals.



5 FILM REVIEW When death comes calling, a friend is there to help out.



10 DESIGN NOTEBOOK What 'home' means: from a living room to human DNA.



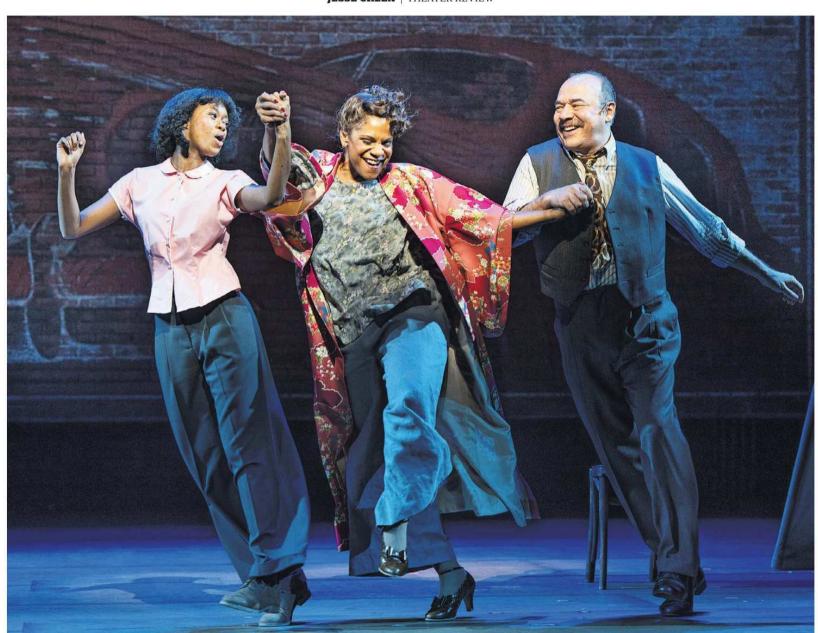
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2024 C1

NEWS | CRITICISM

Weekend Arts

The New York Times

JESSE GREEN | THEATER REVIEW



From left: Joy Woods as Louise, Audra McDonald as Rose and Danny Burstein as Herbie in George C. Wolfe's revival of the musical "Gypsy," at the Majestic Theater.

Hold Your Hats and Hallelujah

Audra McDonald offers a passionate Rose in a smart yet tawdry Broadway revival.

IT'S ONLY FITTING that we pore over "Gypsy" as if it were holy writ. It was, after all, written by three of the holies: Jule Styne (music), Stephen Sondheim (lyrics) and Arthur Laurents (book).

One of the greatest American musicals, it is also, along with "West Side Story" and "Guys and Dolls," one of the most frequently revived. The story of Rose, "a pioneer woman without a frontier," pushing one daughter into vaudeville and the other into burlesque, thus invites a Talmud's worth of exegesis.

Gypsy
CRITICS Majestic Theater

For theater lovers, so did the prospect of George C. Wolfe directing Audra McDonald in the latest incarnation of the 1959 show. Praisers and carpers could not even wait for the opening on Thursday, at the Majestic Theater, to start the inquisition.

I understand their eagerness. The revival, certainly the most original of the five that have made it to Broadway, offers traditionalists much to worry on. Granted, a lot of what they have been mulling is minutia: The show has restored a 10-bar lead-in to the ballad "Small World"! Most of McDonald's keys have been raised, sometimes in mid-song! The famous strobe effect that magically ages the young cast members into adults has been ditched! And of course, unavoidably, there is race.

Though it would be absurd (and a shame) not to get a Rose from McDonald, our leading musical tragedienne, it's true that Rose Hovick, the woman the character is mod-CONTINUED ON PAGE C3

MANOHLA DARGIS | FILM REVIEW

Art and Commerce In Postwar America

A period drama with the ambitions of a historical reckoning.

"THE BRUTALIST" is a bursting-at-theseams saga of bold men and their equally outsize visions. Set across several decades in the aftermath of World War II, it is a grave, serious, visually sumptuous movie that puts many ideas into play, starting with the tension between art and commerce. It largely focuses on one man in one place, but its concerns are more expansive and touch on everything from utopia to barbarism, desire, death, form, content, immigration, as-similation and the promise and perils of modernity. Many movies offer up a slice of reality; true to the architectural aesthetic that its title invokes, this one offers a slab.

The movie is built on a series of vivid contradictions, including those embodied by its protagonist, Laszlo Toth (a haunting Adrien Brody). A Jewish-Hungarian architect and survivor of the Holocaust, he arrives on



Ellis Island as a refugee and, in short order, travels to Philadelphia, where he finds complicated shelter amid the ghosts of America's colonial past. There, Laszlo experiences the feverish exuberance of postwar America but also multiple, crushing de-feats. He's lonely and forlorn, becomes homeless and an addict. He's also ambitious and finds towering success. Laszlo repeatedly suffers and rebounds; mostly, he endures.

Directed by Brady Corbet, "The Brutalist" is a period drama with the ambitions of a historical reckoning. For Laszlo, who ar-rives destitute in the States, history is a CONTINUED ON PAGE C6



Adrien Brody in "The Brutalist," in which he plays a Jewish-Hungarian architect and designer after World War II.

There's a Lot to Look Back On

Celebrate 40 years of Laraaji's 'Vision Songs' and 125 years of the Brooklyn Children's Museum.



MARCELLO AND CHIARA MASTROIANNI, A FAMILY

Through Jan. 5 at the Museum of Modern Art, Manhattan

Marcello Mastroianni would have turned 100 this year, and to mark that milestone, the Museum of Modern Art and the famed Italian film studio Cinecittà have collaborated on the retrospective Marcello and Chiara Mastroianni, a Family Affair, a dual tribute to the actor and to his daughter with Catherine Deneuve.

Familial relations are at the heart of the 1961 comedy "Divorce, Italian Style" (on Friday), directed by Pietro Germi, in which Marcello plays a baron smitten with his teenage cousin (Stefania San-drelli) who conspires to induce his wife, drelli) who conspires to induce his wife, Rosalia (Daniela Rocca), to have an affair; if he kills her while she's in the act of cuckolding him, the law will go easy on him. Breaking the fourth wall, the film tips its hat to Marcello's role in Federico Fellini's "La Dolce Vita": In one sequence, the Fellini film opens at the local cinema, scandalizing the church leadership but drawing a crowd. "La Dolce Vita" itself will screen at MoMA in a dig-Vita" itself will screen at MoMA in a digital reissue on Monday and Dec. 27.

For Chiara and her mother, check out Arnaud Desplechin's "A Christmas Tale"

(on Tuesday), a delight from 2008 that casts Deneuve as the matriarch of a sprawling French family and Chiara as her daughter-in-law.

BEN KENIGSBERG



POP & ROCK LARAAJI

Dec. 20 at First Unitarian Congregational Society in Brooklyn

The oft-repeated origin story of the ambient musician Laraaji goes like this: One day in 1978, while busking in Washington Square Park, he captured the attention of the electronic pioneer Brian Eno. The musicians' chance encounter reputed in their calloboration or the resulted in their collaboration on the glimmering New Age masterpiece "Ambient 3: Day of Radiance," the third entry in Eno's celebrated ambient series.

Beyond that album and the lore that

Beyond that album and the fore that envelops it, Laraaji boasts a deep catalog of expansive, radiant music that dovetails with his studies of meditation and mysticism. Among his most melodic works is "Vision Songs, Vol. 1" from 1984 — a charming, loosely constructed collection and a rare example of the artist performing used mysicials.

performing vocal music.
Originally issued on a limited run of cassettes, "Vision Songs" flew largely under the radar until its 2018 rerelease. On Friday, starting at 8 p.m., the album will get its due at a 40th-anniversary celebration put on by the experimental con-cert series Ambient Church. Tickets are \$40 at ambient.church.

OLIVIA HORN



Laraaji marks the 40th anniversary of "Vision Songs, Vol. 1" at First Unitarian Congregational Society of Brooklyn.



Marcello Mastroianni and Daniela Rocca in "Divorce, Italian Style." It will be screened at the Museum of Modern Art.

RICHARD NIXON SINGS WITH TIM PLATT

Dec. 21 at Union Hall, Brooklyn

Richard M. Nixon, the disgraced former president, has been dead for three dec-ades. And yet there is still something de-mentedly delightful about seeing the comedian and musician Tim Platt imper-sonate the politician as a time-traveling, culture-clashing caricature who con-

cedes his 1960 presidential election loss to John F. Kennedy by belting out Fleet-wood Mac's "Silver Springs." Platt has written and performed origi-nal music for the likes of "Sesame Street" and "The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon." He released his debut comedy al-Fallon." He released his debut comedy al-Fallon." He released his debut comedy album, "Teeth Like Beak," in September. By comparison, "Richard Nixon Sings With Tim Platt" is more cartoonishly helter-skelter, reimagining songs from a disparate catalog that includes Radiohead, Stephen Sondheim and Matchbox 20. At Saturday's show, which starts at 5 p.m., Platt will be aided and abetted by Shalewa Sharne and Dan Chamberlain Shalewa Sharpe and Dan Chamberlain. Tickets are \$12 on Eventbrite.

SEAN L. McCARTHY



CLASSICAL

POOR HYMNAL Dec. 21 at Alice Tully Hall, Manhattan

In 2008, the composer David Lang won a Pulitzer Prize for a work about winter-time destitution, "The Little Match Girl Passion," its form inspired by J.S. Bach's rassion, its firm inspired by 3.3. Bactistowering "St. Matthew Passion." Lang returns to this theme in "Poor Hymnal," which makes its New York premiere on Saturday at 7:30 p.m. at Alice Tully Hall, performed by the Philadelphia-based

choral ensemble the Crossing.

Admirers of Charles Ives may hear some of that composer's sparse textures, hymnic melodies and clustered chords in Lang's work, but "Poor Hymnal" throbs with a rhythm all his own. In a season marked by both increased consumption with a rhythm all his own. In a season marked by both increased consumption and more apparent wealth inequality, "Poor Hymnal" draws its lyrics from the Bible, Tolstoy and even Senator Eliza-beth Warren of Massachusetts to remind us of how much we owe one another, es-

pecially those living in poverty.

Saturday's performance is sold out, but tickets, which are choose-what-youpay with a suggestion of \$35, may be-come available before showtime. Check lincolncenter.org or call the box office at 212-721-6500.

GABRIELLE FERRARI



A visitor meets a friendly snake, part of the Living Collection at the Brooklyn Children's Museum.

BROOKLYN CHILDREN'S MUSEUM'S 125TH-BIRTHDAY WEEKEND

Dec. 21-22 at the Brooklyn Children's

Until almost the 20th century, Americans viewed museums as strictly for adults. That perspective began to shift, however, when the Brooklyn Children's Museum opened in 1899, featuring its own cultural and natural history collections.

Young visitors can enjoy those offerings, which now include live turtles, liz-ards, insects and snakes, on Saturday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., during the museum's 125th-birthday festivities. (An R.S.V.P. at brooklynkids.org is sug-

Aspiring artists can head to the build-ing's ColorLab to design and write post-cards focused on themes like "celebra-tion" and "favorite memories." Children can also meet the professional creators of the "We Celebrate" installation of artworks and playhouses surrounding the museum's synthetic-ice ArtRink, a space to skate on the soles of special bootees (they're provided) rather than on blades. The instructor Kadeem Alston-Roman

will demonstrate fancier footwork at a disco party, teaching vintage dances such as the twist and the cha-cha slide. Feel like relaxing instead? The audito-

rium will have screenings of birthday-oriented cartoons.

And don't miss exhibitions like the re-cently opened "In the Works," a two-story mock construction site that wel-comes children inside of its scaffolding

instead of warning them away.

Museum admission is free all weekend; ArtRink tickets start at \$4.

MARGARET LYONS | WATCHING

Maybe Not a Detail for Her Dating Profile

In 'Laid,' a woman's previous sexual partners begin dying off. Why is this happening?

"LAID," ON PEACOCK, follows a party planner named Ruby (Stephanie Hsu) whose previ-ous sexual partners start dying. At first it seems like unlucky coincidence, but the pat tern quickly emerges, and suddenly the number of deaths in Ruby's wake is becoming distressing. Her bestie and roommate, A.J. (Zosia Mamet), makes a crazy wall, la-beled "Ruby's Sex Timeline," and a morbid, prickly "High Fidelity" is afoot.

Is there a serial killer in their midst? A su-

pernatural force at play? Or, as one character suggests, is this just what it means to be in your 30s?

The show is based on an Australian series and was adapted for American television by Nahnatchka Khan and Sally Bradford Mc-

Sign up for the Watching newsletter.

Kenna. "Laid" bubbles over with pop-culture asides, Billy Crystal's oeuvre and A.J.'s obsession with Amanda Knox. Cameos include Kate Berlant, John Early, Chloe Fineman and Simu Liu.

"Laid" is its smartest, funniest and most biting when Ruby is chasing down all her previous partners, many of whom are not happy to see or hear from her. "You're the worst person I've ever met," says one. "And I host trivia." Ruby and A.J. have a snappy shorthand and nicknames for the suitors of vestervear, and the show gets some fun mileage from enumerating exactly what acts Ruby did and did not do with various part-

Where "Laid" eventually falters, toward the end of its eight-episode season, is in the contrast between its breezy-bitchy shenanigans and the fact that 18 people in Ruby's or-

bit have died within a few weeks. Its dark sense of humor and arch whimsy are no match for the deflating, uninspired earnest-ness of lines like "If you really want to move forward, you have to deal with the pain of your past" and "actually try and clear up some of that trauma." Similarly, Ruby's love interest, Isaac (Tommy Martinez), feels ancillary and undeveloped, the blankest of all

The show does better when it's more detached, more blasé, more acerbic, raunchier. "Laid" reminds me of dozens of other shows — all of which I love, like "Lovesick," "Jane the Virgin," "Search Party," "Hindsight" and "Dead to Me." It is biting in ways that feel special and gossipy, and unlike with lesser kooky mystery shows, its characters' smarts and forthrightness are what move the story forward. Wit and charm: They might get you laid, and they definitely get you "Laid."



Martinez (Isaac) and Zosia Mamet (A.J.) in the darkly comic mystery "Laid," on Peacock.

IESSE GREEN | THEATER REVIEW

Hold Your Hats and Hallelujah: Rose Returns

continued from PAGE C1 eled on, was white. And on Broadway at least, she has always been played by white women: Ethel Merman, Angela Lansbury, Tyne Daly, Bernadette Peters, Patti

So surely it meant something that Wolfe also cast Black actors as Rose's daughters:

also cast Black actors as Rose's daughters: June (who grew up to be the actress June Havoc) and Louise (who grew up to be the stripper Gypsy Rose Lee). Having spent his career putting the Black American experi-ence in the spotlight, staging shows like "Caroline, or Change," "Shuffle Along" and "The Colored Museum," Wolfe seemed in-tent on opening the door to a new room in tent on opening the door to a new room in the musical's capacious mansion.

Many poured into that room prematurely,

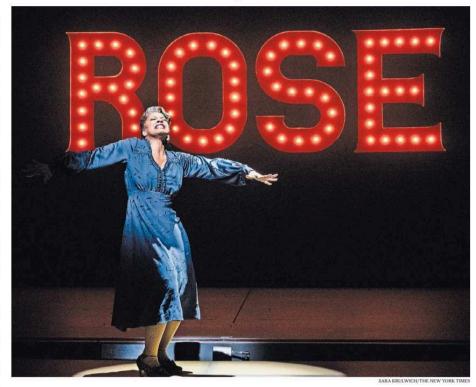
wondering how Wolfe expected audiences to believe that a sane Black Rose could ever have dreamed of stardom for her children in the racist enclave of show business in the

This production, in effect, is his answer. A hundred years later, he shows us, the dream has come true: McDonald is the star such a Rose hoped for. Doing a psychological strip-tease, showing more of the character's rage than her predecessors, she is stupendously affecting. So, if a bit intermittently, is the

I say that with residual confusions, which Wolfe, in pre-opening interviews, waved away by noting that the authors called their work "A Musical Fable." Characters in most fables do not have legs, let alone race. So even though it is based on Lee's gritty memoirs, "Gypsy" is not a literal work but an uncommonly interior and admonitory one. No matter who plays the leads, Laurents has placed them in the context of American emotional poverty, as well as the literal kind. The story, already heavily fictionalized for the stage, does not depend on (and is already halfway unmoored from) facts.
To emphasize this, Wolfe's production is

suggestive, even surreal. On sets by Santo Loquasto that detail as little as possible, he moves the characters through encounters that have the dark intensity and fragmen-tary quality of memories. (The inky lighting is by Jules Fisher and Peggy Eisenhauer.) Just about the only thing you are asked to see in the early scene set in Rose's father's home in Seattle are a Bible and a gold plaque, one symbolizing everything she hopes to escape, the other providing the

The next scene finds Rose, a combination of the Pied Piper, Orpheus and the witch from "Hansel and Gretel," driving to Los Angeles, picking up strays and orphans to serve as backup for Baby June's newsboy act. She certainly bewitches Herbie, a the-atrical candy salesman, into leaving his



Audra McDonald makes a meal of Rose's ambition and a dessert of her guile in the revival of "Gypsy."

route to become the act's agent - and implicitly her lover. To argue whether that interracial romance (Danny Burstein, who plays Herbie, is white) would have hap-pened in real life is to miss the bigger point, especially given Burstein's big menschy performance. In "Gypsy" it definitely hap-pens, and takes only one song. It's in that context, I think — the context

of the profound artificiality of musical the-ater — that Wolfe asks us to see his production. Race is real but not the point and not even solid-state. (When the newsboys age up, they go from Black to white.) To those who need a musical to be a manifesto, he seems to say dismissively, along with Herbie, "Everybody in show business listens to

Instead, he wants us to listen to the show itself, which in scene after scene, and espe-cially in song after song, proves so deeply complex in its joys (the strippers!) and ter-rors ("Rose's Turn," the 11 o'clock break-down) that it blurs the boundaries of form.

I found that approach rewarding and a relief, and it seems the cast did too. McDonald, as will be no surprise if you've seen her in full dramatic mode, makes a meal of Rose's ambition and, with a slight Southern drawl, a dessert of her guile. (On the Momma scale, on which one end is Appealingly Crafty like Merman and the other is Terrify-

ingly Crazy like Lansbury, she's, well, both.) Her scenes with Burstein are rich and funny and regretful; those with June (Jordan Tyson) and Louise (Joy Woods) are withering. (Tyson is especially fierce, and Woods nails the depressive affect of a girl erpetually unnoticed by her mother.) Nor McDonald vain about her voice; she lets Rose be ragged in service to the role. An unpretty part cannot be prettily sung.

"Gypsy" is odd that way: Brilliant as the

sore is, there are no merely nice songs. June's act is deliberately awful; Louise's first-act ballad, "Little Lamb," though wistful, is bleak. (It's her birthday and she doesn't know how old she is.) Rose's "charm"



GypsyAt the Majestic Theater in Manhattan; gypsybway.com. Running time: 2 hours 55 minutes.

songs are beady seductions.

And because every number is loaded with callbacks and foreshadowings, both musically and lyrically, the rangy story is tied into a very tight thematic bundle. (Follow the evolution of Baby June's inane ditty "May We Entertain You" into the grown-up Gypsy's louche signature.)

It says everything about the authors' savvy that the show's most uplifting musical moment is "You Gotta Get a Gimmick," in which a hilarious trio of strippers (Lesli Margherita, Lili Thomas, Mylinda Hull) teach the underage Louise the fine points of their art. It may be the crassest (and lit-

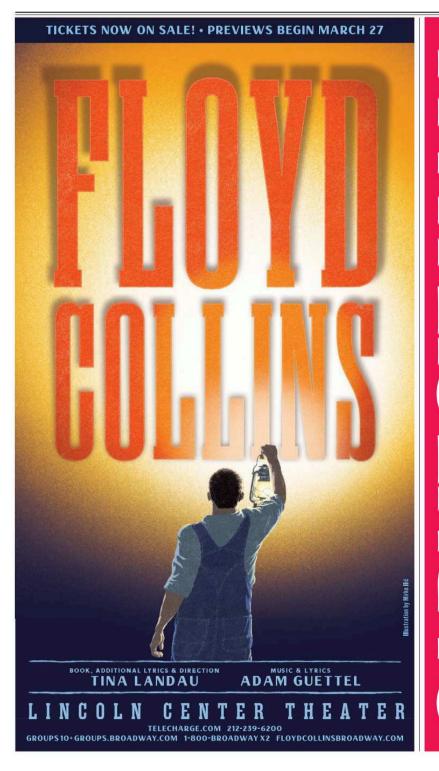
The production offers a rich new layer, sufficient in itself, and more so as part of history.

erally brassiest) showstopper ever written. "If you wanna bump it/Bump it with a trumpet" - indeed

Wolfe's revival does justice to these conlow. You hear it immediately in the famous overture, played with élan and abandon by an orchestra featuring the original complement of 26 players. (The confident music distributions) rection is by Andy Einhorn; the unusually lively sound design by Scott Lehrer.) Toni-Leslie James's costumes are period dowdy when they're not agelessly vulgar. And though I found Camille A. Brown's choreography a bit underpowered in the big showhis numbers — it's hard to beat the Jerome Robbins originals — her work is often lovely and haunting elsewhere. That not all this revival's choices will

please everyone is probably a good thing. On occasion, I found myself recalling mo-ments that moved or thrilled me more in earlier productions, just as I did when I saw those productions in the first place. "Gypsy," like other great works of midcentury American drama — it opened the same season as Lorraine Hansberry's "A Raisin in the Sun" - rewards a layering of lifetime impressions. Wolfe offers a rich new layer, sufficient in itself, and more so as part of his-

Most important, he has given us a way of seeing a star who had to be seen in this role. As "Gypsy" suggests, and McDonald keeps proving, a pioneer woman needs a frontier.





Conductor

Dec 24 Ricardo Morales, Clarinet

All-Mozart program in this annual 7 PM concert

Dec 28

Jennifer Koh, Violin Brahms's Symphony No. 1. Barber's Violin Concerto, and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich's Prologue and Variations

These concerts are made possible, in part, by an endowment fund for young artists established by Stella and Robert Jones.

Yannick Nézet-Séguin,

Artistic Director Joshua Hopkins,

Baritone G. Mahler's Symphony No. 9 and Jake

Heggie's Songs for Murdered Sisters (NY Premiere, created in collaboration with Margaret Atwood and Joshua Hopkins) Mein Traum (My Dream): Schubert, R. Schumann, C. Weber

Raphaël Pichon,

Christian Gerhaher.

Ying Fang, Soprano Ensemble Altera Christopher Lowrey,

New York debut of conductor Raphaël Pichon

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The audience doubles as the choir during the National Chorale's "Messiah" concert on Tuesday in Manhattan.



Lift Every Voice: A D.I.Y. 'Messiah' Co-Stars You

A sing-in at David Geffen Hall was among the performances of the Handel oratorio on the city's holiday calendar.

THE ORCHESTRA WAS DONE tuning. The soloists had taken their seats at the front of the stage and the conductor had ascended the podium. But there was one more item of business before Tuesday's performance of Handel's "Messiah" by the National Chorale at David Geffen Hall could begin. "You know what we need to do," the conductor Everett McCorvey said, gesturing for audience members to rise from their seats. "We have to warm up." Then he led the whole auditorium in a sequence of lip trills and scales.

Each December, people flock to churches and concert halls to hear Handel's scripture-based oratorio, with its glittering succession of choruses, recitatives and arias. But for some, the most cherished "Messiah" is one they get to sing in themselves. Tuesday's concert was the 57th year that the National Chorale has hosted its "Messiah" sing-in, with the audience as the choir.

sing-in, with the audience as the choir.

The tradition of "Messiah" singalongs featuring thousands of unrehearsed amateur singers goes back to British Handel festivals in the 1820s. "Messiah" is hardly an obvious choice for amateurs, with its blizzards of 16th notes, intricate counterpoint and excursions into the thin-air reaches of the sopranos' range. Unlike Bach's "Christmas Oratorio," which includes simple chorales sung in every Lutheran congregation, Handel's work was written for a professional setting.

And yet the oratorio came to life in a vi-

And yet the oratorio came to life in a vibrant performance on Tuesday, carried by the general enthusiasm and aided by a substantial core of what sounded like experienced choristers in the hall. Nearly all had brought their own vocal score. Many could



Nearly everyone brought a score to the sing-in. The tradition of "Messiah" singalongs featuring thousands of unrehearsed amateur singers goes back to British Handel festivals in the 1820s.

be seen sitting in groups of friends, but in my vicinity I also observed a mother and daughter, leaning into each other as they tentatively sight-read their way through, and a married couple who trumpeted their different parts — tenor and alto — with piercing confidence.

To honor some of the community groups represented, 17 conductors took turns leading the small but determined band of instrumentalists. Shift changes on the podium were greeted with loud cheers, and every choral selection rewarded with raucous applause. A gladiatorial spirit also seized the quartet of professionals (the soprano Janinah Burnett, the countertenor Benjamin Perry, the tenor Taiwan Norris and the baritone Christopher Burchett) who belted out their solos with warmly received touches of showmanship.

If tempos were sluggish in some of the choral numbers and dynamic shadings fell victim to the collective excitement, I was too busy to pay much attention, caught in the unaccustomed effort of singing myself. A violinist with no vocal training, I had optimistically cast myself as a soprano, counting on that to be the easiest part to pick out

amid the sea of voices. But I soon found myself squeaking out in the high notes, after which I selectively dropped out at critical moments, content to steal glances at a young man sitting by himself who sang every note of the bass part with enviable as-

surance and polish.

Punctuated by laughter and whoops, this "Messiah" unfolded in an atmosphere somewhere between a singing competition and SantaCon. It also drew one of the most diverse crowds I have seen at Geffen Hall and one of the most joyous and colorful, with many participants sporting light-up garlands and 50 shades of red sweaters.

Even the best professional "Messiah" performances are more about community than the notes. That's what makes Trinity Wall Street's rendition so consistently moving. I heard a performance last week amid a crush of rain-soaked bodies in Trinity Church. Yes, the choir is wonderful, and the period-instrument orchestra stocked with musicians who play baroque music with native-tongue fluency.

But what's most memorable is the conversational intimacy that comes from members of the choir stepping out to sing their solos. Among the standouts this year were

the lustrous bass Steven Hrycelak and the soprano Margaret Carpenter Haigh, whose heartfelt invocation of peace in "Rejoice Greatly" had listeners dabbing at tears.

"Messiah" performances at Trinity tend to be choreographed with a light hand and a keen instinct for drama. This year, the "heavenly host" Handel conjures in the Nativity scene included the church's youth chorus, which joined in from a balcony above the main entrance, leaving audience members to crane their heads in wonder. The children later returned to their perch to add their bright voices, and a supernatural sparkle, to the resplendent "Hallelujah."

sparkle, to the resplendent "Hallelujah."
The English conductor Jane Glover, working from memory, led a supple and breezy performance that stood out for her intelligent phrasing of the choral numbers, during which she patiently allowed textures to build and swell before letting them crest on a carefully chosen word in the text.

I would have liked more big-picture dramaturgy in the New York Philharmonic's "Messiah," which I saw at a Friday matinee. Instead, the Dutch early-music specialist Ton Koopman conducted from the harpsichord with unremitting exactness. Here and there, his forensic approach illuminated new details, as in the charmingly naturalistic bleating he brought out in the chorus "Behold the Lamb of God." But in some of the solo arias his tempos

But in some of the solo arias his tempos were so slow that both the bass-baritone Klaus Mertens and the tenor Kieran White had to take breaths at inopportune moments inside a phrase. The countertenor Maarten Engeltjes was more persuasive, revealing a buttery tone and flexible articulation. And the soprano Maya Kherani was lithe and radiant in fast coloratura arias like "Rejoice!" and quietly magnetic in affecting numbers like "If God Be for Us."

The chorus of Musica Sacra — more than

The chorus of Musica Sacra — more than twice the size of the Trinity group, but merely a fraction of the singalong megachoir — was a marvel of lightness and warmth. In its reading, the interlocking runs in "He Shall Purify" shimmered airy and precise. I'm not sure Handel would have found much purity in the version I participated in, when those runs came out labored and (speaking for myself) short of breath. But I suspect he would have recognized it as a labor of love and a testament to the astonishing communal pull his oratorio still exerts 282 years after its creation.





 $The \ professionals \ more \ than \ held \ their \ own. \ The \ best \ "Messiah" \ performances \ are \ more \ about \ community \ than \ the \ notes.$

Movies

ALISSA WILKINSON | FILM REVIEW

So, What Makes Life Worth Leaving?

Pedro Almodóvar's moving drama stars Tilda Swinton and Julianne Moore as friends facing mortality together.



AT THE END of James Joyce's 1914 story "The Dead," the main character is watching the snow fall on Dublin, late in the dark after a Twelfth Night dinner party. He's just learned something profoundly affecting about his wife's past, something he didn't know until now, and it's made him ruminative. Some day, every person he knows even him — will be nothing more than mem-ory. This thought is mortal, but not morbid. He finds it moving. "His soul swooned slowly," Joyce writes, "as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last

faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead."

Pedro Almodóvar borrows a version of that ending for his first English-language feature, "The Room Next Door," which he wrote and directed. Two characters lounge on chairs on a deck, watching as seemingly unseasonable snowflakes fall on them. They've been touched by mortality, and the process has proved strangely life-affirming. One repeats the last line from "The Dead."

This is not it turns out the ending of Signary.

This is not, it turns out, the ending of Sig-

rid Nunez's 2020 novel "What Are You Going Through," from which "The Room Next Tilda Swinton, left, as Martha and Julianne Moore as Ingrid in "The Room Next Door." Conversation is blunt Door" is adapted. Almodóvar's film is more of an improvisation on the novel, borrowing some characters and plot points while telling a story all its own. (Joyce is indeed here, and the characters quoted in the novel, but the quotation is from "Ulysses.") Both are about a pair of old friends who reunite while one is undergoing treatment for terminal cancer. Eventually, the sick friend asks the other to accompany her upstate, where she plans to take a eu-thanasia pill. In the novel, which meanders and winds around many a bend, the narraand whos around many a bend, the harra-tor is often asked, or asking, what she is go-ing through. It's a riff on the philosopher Si-mone Weil: "The love of our neighbor in all its fullness simply means being able to say

to him, 'What are you going through?'"
"The Room Next Door" takes a more straightforward path through its version, but though it goes unspoken, that question always lurks. Returned to New York after years living abroad, Ingrid (Julianne Moore) learns at a signing for her new book

that her old friend Martha (Tilda Swinton), a war correspondent, is in the hospital for cancer treatment. She visits her, and they begin to grow close. The two women both dated the same man — Damian (John Tur-turro), who once was full of joie de vivre but now makes a living delivering lectures about how the world is on the brink of environmental catastrophe. Their friendship, however, stems from a shared youth work-ing in journalism and spending their nights partying in New York.

Now, in middle age, things look a little different. Though everything looks different when death has come over the horizon. After some time, Martha asks Ingrid to come the some time, wanta asks night to come to the home she's rented in the woods, to be in "the room next door" when she decides it's time to go. Ingrid is frightened, and reluctant, but realizes it's what she must do. They close up Martha's apartment, pack

suitcases and head upstate to face the end. "The Room Next Door" is remarkably straightforward for an Almodóvar film, without the signature theatrics or sexual

pyrotechnics that tend to pop up in that Spanish auteur's work, Every conversation is blunt, each character plain-spoken and uninterested in subtext. It takes a second to get used to — movies are full of people say-ing the opposite of what they mean — but it also feels refreshing, and true to these women in particular. They are past the point in

life where it's expedient to dissemble, or to pretend to be something they're not. Instead, they discuss everything: Martha's estranged daughter, or Ingrid's next book, or the things they have seen and learned by life. This is right vartered file. learned in life. This is a richly textured film, set in beautiful buildings and gardens. In-

The Room Next Door Rated PG-13 for frank discussion of euthanasia pills, a bit about sex and, of course, dying. Running time: 1 hour 47 minutes. In theaters.

grid and Martha wear gorgeously hued clothes (and lipstick) and surround them-selves with books and carefully selected things. They are sophisticated, educated people who have made lives for themselves according to their tastes and preferences.

Often movies ask what makes life worth living; this one asks what makes life worth leaving. It is a controversial subject, both in the movie and in the real world, and the film doesn't treat it lightly. So the hovering specter of death is every-

where, but Martha doesn't mind. For her it gives the prospect of rest, of departing the world on her own terms. Ingrid is not there because she wants Martha to die, but be-cause she wants to show her love — to uncause she wants to show her love — to un-derstand what she is going through, to go through it herself. It's balanced out with Damian's doomerism, which Ingrid can't quite quibble with but also finds appalling. He used to be full of joy, but his version of recognizing mortality has led him down quite a different path from Martha's.

Swinton and Moore are alone in conver-sation for much of the movie, two remarkably well-paired actors. Their easy youthful camaraderie returns almost immediately, and they address each other with love but also a simple self-respect. It is the sort of friendship you hope for in adulthood: hon-est, equal and willing to support the other even when their choice is different from the one you'd make.
Almodóvar's films often explore doubles:

mothers and daughters, pairs of lovers, twisted friends. "The Room Next Door" does the same, in several different regis-ters, and I think that's the point of the title. We cannot really know what another per-son is going through. Even if we follow Weil's exhortation and ask, we're incapable of fully inhabiting another person. We can't live inside of them. The real act of friendship, of love, is to check on one another in the morning and make sure we're still there. What we owe our neighbor is to set up camp, in whatever way we can, in the room

MANOHLA DARGIS | FILM REVIEW

Circle of Life Returns For Yet Another Spin

Barry Jenkins directed this computer-generated prequel to a remake.

THE FUR looks more silkily luxurious in "Mufasa: The Lion King," the African land-scapes bolder and brighter, but much re-mains the same in its horizonless empire.

Mufasa: The Lion King Rated PG. Running time: 2 hours. In theaters.

five years ago, in the photorealistic re make of the first "Lion King," Mufasa - the big cool cat then voiced with imperial gravi-tas by James Earl Jones — was ruling his animated kingdom with the kind of benevolent authoritarianism that suggests Holly-wood isn't the progressive hotbed it's reputed to be. By the end, villainy was van-quished, order restored and hereditary monarchy reconfirmed. The circle of life, as the song goes, remained reassuringly un-

That circle has proved to be more of an inexorably expanding spiral for Disney over the years. The first movie, a seamless blend of old and new tech, opened in 1994 to acclaim and chart-topping box office, scooping up a bounty of awards and strengthening the studio's emerging status as an industry behemoth. In the decades since, the film spawned straight-to-video follow-ups, several animated TV shows, a Broadway hit, theme-park attractions and several projects from Beyoncé — she voiced Mufasa's queen consort, Nala, in the 2019 remake — among them "Black Is King," a feature-length film version of her compan-

Beyoncé and her daughter Blue Ivv Carter, as a cub named Kiara, are featured in "Mufasa," a more technologically advanced photorealistic addition to this Dis-ney juggernaut. An origin story that evolves largely in segmented flashbacks,

the movie tracks its title character on an adventure crammed with dangers, none human, and features the usual cavalcade of novel and returning voices. (Some are more welcome than others; Seth Rogen and Billy Eichner again voice the hyperventilated Pumbaa and Timon.) Among the franchise's shepherds here are the director Barry Jenkins ("Moonlight"), the writer Jeff Nathanson and the songwriter Lin-Manuel Miranda, who's contributed seven

The overall results are generally pretty, mildly diverting, at times dull and often familiar, despite a few unusually sharp, brief departures from Disney's pacifying for mula. Once again, the story opens with sweep and quickly narrows to focus on a male cub on an odyssey of self-discovery that includes peril, romance, too much wan comedy and a firm affirmation of his royal birthright that comes with an anxious side order of populism. This time Mufasa is the young hero (voiced as a cub by Braelyn Rankins and as an adult by Aaron Pierre). He enters the nuzzling embrace of his mother, Afia (Anika Noni Rose) and father, Masego (Keith David), but is soon swept away into a new realm and the fold of an adopted family.

Some of those involved in the making of the original "Lion King" were fond of citing "Hamlet" as one of its influences, an amusing, self-aggrandizing association. Here, at least, Mufasa seems more like a leonine variation on Charlton Heston's Moses in 1956 film "The Ten Commandments" in that he's an outsider destined for greatness who's raised by royals and finds a tricky surrogate brother in the new family's princeling, Taka (voiced by Theo Somolu and Kelvin Harrison Jr.). Mufasa endures hardship and also wages battle against rival lions, led by Kiros (Mads Mikkelsen) — su-perpredators with white fur that, like previous waves of colonizers in Africa seek to dominate everything they don't kill out-



The introduction of a pride of white marauders - and nod to colonialization - is a welcome jolt of daring into this saga. That's especially true because, like most big-studio movies out for world domination, this one's bid at verisimilitude — evident in its scrupulous mimicry, in the ridges of feathers, in the brightly popping flowers and bil-lowing clouds — is in service to a movie that's been optimized to appeal to everyone. It's no surprise, given the advances in digital animation (A.I. was used for the 2019 movie), that the fur and fangs here look more persuasively realistic than they have in the past. Even so, the creatures are still the same talking, singing, ingratiating people in animal drag that they've long been in

That's true even if Jenkins's touch is evident in the casting. Most of the adult voices have warm, emotional expressivity, with John Kani's red-faced adult mandrill, Rafiki, elevating every scene he's in. The children sound similarly natural, with none of the customary treacly mewling that can be as unbearable as claws dragged across stone. Still, any hope that Jenkins would assert (voiced by Braelyn Rankins), center, with his mother (Anika Noni Rose), left, and his father

more authorship here than Disney does fades by the time the adult Mufasa is singing an insipid love duet with his crush, Sarabi (Tiffany Boone). Romance as well as families and their problems remain the studio's storybook givens as do the animals' discreet dietary habits. Never fear, no (literal) throats were ripped out in the making

In the end, every ferociously bared fang and extended claw in "Mufasa" remains safely blunted. That's to be expected in a children's movie, of course, but what is finally most striking about this series is that as the technology has evolved, the gulf between its natural world and our own has grown exponentially wider. The portrayal of the animal figures is now so vividly realistic that at times you can you can almost feel the velvet of Mufasa's cub fur in your fingertips, much as you would with a house cat. There's something pleasant in that even if — bum-mer alert! — it is starting to seem like Dismer aler!! — it is starting to seem like Dis-ney, with its galloping herds, cavorting troops and colorfully feathered flocks, is busily modeling the natural world before it

Wrestling With Art and Commerce in Postwar America

wasteland. Given the Nazi destruction of European Jewry (the formation of Israel becomes a winding story thread), it's hard to know where else he would go; in America, he at least has family. Once in Philadel-phia, he reunites with his cousin, Attila (Alessandro Nivola), who lives with his pretty Catholic wife, Audrey (Emma Laird), and runs a furniture business that carries his new name, Miller & Sons. "The folks here," Attila explains, "like a family busi-ness." They apparently don't like Jews, be-cause Attila also says he's now Catholic. Soon after Laszlo arrives — Attila puts

him up in a small room off the showroom, like the hired help — he begins designing new furniture for Miller & Sons to replace its heavy, Colonial Revival-style pieces. His first piece, a cantilever chair with a frame made of tubular metal, looks like something that the Hungarian-born designer and ar-chitect Marcel Breuer would have de-signed. Breuer apparently said that he was inspired by a bicycle to make his first such chair, an association that Audrey echoes when she says Laszlo's chair looks like a tri-cycle. She's skeptical of Laszlo and his cre-

ations, maybe even suspicious. Corbet, who wrote the script with Mona Fastvold, doesn't explain Audrey's attitude outright. He folds a great deal into "The Brutalist," slipping ideas and meaning into reminiscences and privately whispered confessions, but he also lets his larger themes surface in actions and in hard, cold gazes. If Audrey never openly says why she doesn't like Laszlo, she doesn't have to. He's family, so she's polite. But he's a stranger, a foreigner and a reminder of her husband's heritage. When she looks at Laszlo, it's as if





she were examining a strange, somewhat distasteful creature. Soon after they first meet, she says that she knows a doctor who can fix his nose, which seems broken; she all but asks him to fix his identity.

It's a quick, pointed scene in a movie that grabs onto you immediately and builds steadily with measured, insistent force. Corbet can be subtle, though that's not his usual preference (his earlier movies in-clude "Vox Lux"), but he's going for monu-mentality here. He likes big, bold moments and grand, metaphorically resonant images that he often pushes to the near-breaking point. One of the first images in "The BrutalTop, Adrien Brody in "The Brutalist." Above, Guy Pearce as Harrison Lee Van Buren Sr., a wealthy patron with whom Brody's character forms a complicated relationship

The Brutalist

35 minutes. In theaters.

ist" is an upside-down shot of the Statue of Liberty, a disorienting, topsy-turvy angle that conveys Laszlo's literal point of view as that conveys Lazzlo's literal point of view as he emerges from the darkened depths of the ship that has carried him to America. The statue is already heavily freighted with complex, contradictory meaning that Lazz-lo embodies and is a harbinger of his de-stabilized story. It's also an emblem of Cor-bett's embitings. bet's ambitions

These extend to the movie's presentation.
"The Brutalist" runs three hours and 20 minutes, not including a 15-minute break that counts down on onscreen. (The movie never drags, but the intermission is welcome; more long movies should have them!) Releases like these were known as roadshows, and they signaled a movie's im-portance or at least its scale and scope; in the 1950s, when much of "The Brutalist" takes place, roadshows also indicated to au-diences that these films could only be seen in theaters. Much as Corbet does through out, with beauty and soaring camerawork, the presentation of "The Brutalist" states his intent: I imagine that he's announcing that "The Brutalist" isn't made for distraction. It isn't on Netflix.

Just as Laszlo's tenure at the furniture store proves brief, his dealings with Audrey turn out to be an easy run-up to the far more complicated relationship he forms with a wealthy patron, the amusingly named Harrison Lee Van Buren Sr. (a tremendous Guy Pearce). Corbet spends time on Laszlo's other attachments, especially when his wife, Erzsebet (a strong Felicity Jones), and niece, Zsofia (Raffey Cassidy), are at last allowed to enter the United States. Laszlo also makes his only real friend early when he meets another outsider, Gordon (Isaach de Bankolé), at a soup kitchen. Yet even after Erzsebet and Zsofia move in with Laszlo, these relationships — and finally the movie itself — are overshadowed by

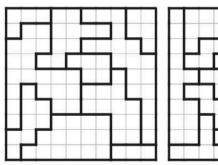
Harrison bursts into the story in a lathering rage, shouting and storming, and immediately jolts "The Brutalist" into a more heightened, excited register. He's an indus-trialist — he made his fortune during the war — with a sprawling estate, a gloomy mansion and two spoiled, vaguely debauched adult children, Harry (Joe Alwyn) and Maggie (Stacy Martin). They've hired Laszlo to redo their father's study as a surprise. Harrison rejects the results, but when Look magazine publishes a glowing story on the study ("A Milloraire Ampl His Mod."). on the study ("A Millionaire Amid His Mod-erns"), he hires Laszlo to build a huge cen-ter where the surrounding community can gather, reflect and learn. "Something boundless," as Harrison grandly describes 'something new.'

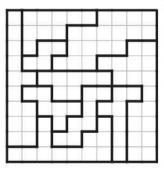
Having been lauded by Look as "forward-thinking," Harrison sets out to play the role of the modern man with a vengeance. Aud-

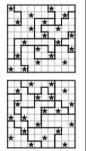
rey may not like Laszlo's slight, open and simplified furniture, which, like his accent, hunger and deep melancholy, sets him apart from her settled middle-class life with Attila. But Laszlo is an avatar of an ideal that she can't begin to understand, a conceit that the story underlines when, early on, he tells Attila that his store's furniture isn't "very beautiful." Laszlo isn't simply criticizing the pieces or making a casual judgment but instead expressing an aesthetic sensibility, a philosophy, a worldview. Harrison doesn't understand, much less share, that worldview, but being a successful capitalist, he knows Laszlo's value to him as a means to an end. He pays Laszlo, buying his time, buying him.

Throughout "The Brutalist," Corbet ges-tures, openly and obliquely, toward ideas and history, and the movie's intellectual scaffolding. Laszlo studied at the Bauhaus, the German art school where form followed function, and which drew artists and archi-tects like Breuer, Kandinsky and Mies van der Rohe. In 1933, the Nazis pressured the school to close. The rest is history, although, as Laszlo's story makes clear from the moment he lands in the United States — in a journey that takes him from the old world to the new, from fascism to capitalism, from the horrors of the Holocaust to the smiling, totalizing embrace of the American century and all it entails — it is a history that feels very present. Is it any surprise that this movie belongs to its villain?

Two Not Touch







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

Brain Tickler

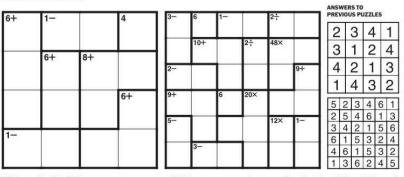
Anagram each word or name to get something to wear.

BORE GROANS OBELUS TACO THIRST WALSH

PUZZLE BY WILL SHORTZ

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER The last surviving Civil War veteran lived long enough to see the Korean War conclude

KenKen



Fill the grid with digits so as not to repeat a digit in any row or column, and so that the digits within each heavily outlined box will produce the target number shown, by using addition, subtraction, multiplication or division, as indicated in the box. A 4x4 grid will use the digits 1-4. A 6x6 grid will use 1-6.

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Crossword | Edited by Joel Fagliano

ACROSS

- Abbr. in a scholarly paper
- 5 Places with scrubs and masks
- 9 Acquire, informally
- Common motifs in high art?
- 17 Major success stories in the entrepreneurial world
- depicted clothed in green 19 Triumph
- 20 Barn greeting
- 21 #1 overall, say
- 26 One of three in "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead'
- 29 2023 film in which Michael Jordan is on shown from behind
- 30 Check mark alternatives
- 32 Symbol of America's first transcontinental railroad
- 38 Veins, e.g. 40 Harsh
- 41 Mens
- sentences?

- 42 Pablo Neruda wrote one to a large tuna in the market
- 43 Where to watch
- 44 Young and inexperienced, so to speak
- 49 Egg ___ yung 52 Subject of 199 silkscreen paintings by Warhol
- 53 Softballs 18 Goddess often 56 "Sorry, those secrets are
 - *beyond* classified" 62 Refuse to sign
 - one's work, say

 63 Like the ruins in Tulum 64 It comes straight from the horse's
 - mouth 65 Willing partner

DOWN

- 1 Rhea's relative 2 Sharpness
- 3 Performance that might elicit a "Brava!" 4 Allowed
- 5 Lead-in to pass 6 Certain film shot, or film reaction
- 7 Had carte blanche

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE

O R D E R S
B A D R A P S
B O N I T A Y L O R S D N A Y S A U T E P A N T// E R M I N A L

D I S M A Y S N O

- 8 French composer 26 Place to take who influenced Ravel and Debussy 27 I.O.U.
- 9 Spanish 101
- 10 Garfield, for one
- 11 Largest cell in the human body 12 Certain seizure
- 13 Aptly named Standard Oil
- 15 John, in Portuguese

- 16 Sighting from the crow's nest
- 22 Micronesian
- 23 Move like a crab
- 24 M I B team that once drafted Tom Brady
- 25 Many a founding father, religiously

- 28 Lin-Manuel Miranda, vocally 31 Came down after
- getting lifted up? 33 Pool contents 34 Lymph node, e.g.
- 35 Hairstyle change 36 Masters of disguise
- 37 French 101 verb 39 Fig. that's often redacted
- 45 The sun emerging from the clouds at exactly the right time, say
- 46 Member of the Golden Horde 47 2024 M.L.B. All-__ De La
- Dickinson 57 Org. with towers 58 Chablis, e.g. 59 Splash of orange in a Japanese

49 Like some

halls

51 "Jeepers!"

invite

mattresses

so Ancient music

54 Letters on an

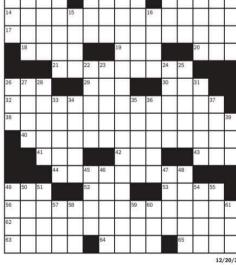
55 "'Hope' is the thing with feathers / That perches in the __": Emily

handshakes and

- pond
- 60 Stay there! 61 Milk

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PUZZLE BY HENRY JOSEPHSON

12/20/24 48 Dish whose name is Turkish for "stuffed"

In a Video Game World, Life Moves Fast

A brooding troublemaker with the voice of Keanu Reeves joins a superhero franchise.

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG has always been a star. When introduced in the early 1990s, the fuzzy blue speedball was the mascot and lead character for Sega's home video game console, a potent rival to Nintendo's plumber Mario, who originated in arcade games. Mario got a still-risible start in movies back in 1993, in "Super Mario Bros.," a live-action picture starring Bob Hoskins and John Leguizamo that has since developed a cult following. He bounced back in 2023 with an animated adventure replete with eye-popping graphics but lacking a certain "it's-a me" charm. In contrast, the hedgehog's transition to

the cinema screen has been smooth speed-of-light sailing, at least in terms of his com-mercial appeal. The first picture knocked

Marvel off the top of the highest-grossing superhero movies, because Sonic is, sure, a superhero. The second one broke some of the records reset by the first. And so we have the inevitable third, again a mix of liveaction and animation, again featuring Jim Carrey in the role of Ivo Robotnik, Sonic's human nemesis, again featuring James Marsden and Tika Sumpter as friendly

Sonic the Hedgehog 3

Rated PG. Running time: 1 hour 49 minutes. In theaters.

Montanans, Their job is to keep Sonic (voiced with try-hard amiability by Ben Schwartz) and his pals Knuckles (red and surly, but in a cute way, voiced by Idris Elba) and Tails (yellow and just plain cute, voiced by Colleen O'Shaughnessey) comfortable when they're not off on save-theplanet adventures.
"Sonic the Hedgehog 3," directed by Jeff

Fowler, begins not with Sonic but with Shadow, who's kind of like the older brother Sonic never knew he had. Shadow is bigger, has more color, wears the hedgehog life rings (a feature of the video game — just go with it) around his ankles and wrists, and has a poor attitude that gets worse when he re-members his more cheerful past, centered on a lively young girl named Maria. Shadow is voiced by Keanu Reeves with suitable

emo brooding.
Unleashed on the world after 50 years in "stasis," Shadow wreaks plenty of havoc in Tokyo. The agents of the Guardian Units of Nations, led in part by Director Rockwell (a frozen-faced Krysten Ritter), can't counter him. Sonic and his pals can't fathom him. The narrative is powered by doppel-

gängers (bet you never thought you'd read that in a review of a Sonic the Hedgehog movie). While Sonic puzzles out Shadow, Carrey's Robotnik discovers a never-even-intuited (as opposed to long-lost) grandfa-ther. Get ready for the sight of two Jim Car-

FILM REVIEWS



nic (voiced by Ben Schwartz) takes a rare break from light speed in "Sonic the Hedgehog 3."

reys engaging in sanctioned buffoonery It's hard to settle on what's more bombas-c: Carrey's admittedly virtuoso double act, or the teeming computer graphics gadgetry of death and destruction spilling out of every corner of the screen. However you choose to categorize this movie, you

have to admit it's a lot — up to and including a post-credits tease for the next picture in the franchise.

The Count Of Monte Cristo

Not rated. In French, with subtitles. Running time: 2 hours 58 minutes.

Adapting "The Count of \odot Monte Cristo," Alexandre Dumas's voluminous adventure yarn, is not for the fainthearted. But the French filmmakers Matthieu Delaporte and

Alexandre de la Patellière prove lacking in neither heart nor style: Refusing to pander to restless derrières, they've given this big, bounding, beautifully cinematic swashbuckler almost three hours to breathe. Yet their pacing is so frisky - and Celia Lafitedupont's editing so elegant - your derrière is unlikely to complain.

Originally published as a multipart magazine series, the story, set in the early 1800s, is a humdinger of thwarted romance and false imprisonment, buried treasure and a buried-alive baby. Shepherding a gung-ho cast through a plot brimming with betrayal and corruption, the directors weave a gloriously old-fashioned tapestry from the tribulations of Edmond Dantès (Pierre Niney), a young sailor who has been wrongly incarcerated for treason, Many years and one daring escape later, he will return to Paris reinvented as the now fabulously wealthy Count (see "buried treasure" above), desiring only to reunite with his ladylove (Anaïs Demoustier) and exact revenge on the three blaggards who framed

Making only minor concessions to modernity (like transforming one important female character from a slave to a protégée), the screenplay drills down on the



From left, Bastien Bouillon, Anaïs Demoustier and Pierre Niney in the latest adaptation of "The Count of Monte Cristo," set in the early 19th century.

notion that honor and justice are, at best, uneasily defined. Each comeuppance is neatly packaged as a moral reckoning. The avaricious crewmate (Patrick Mille) who stole Dantès's career; the nefarious prosecutor (Laurent Lafitte) who ignored exculpatory evidence; the best friend (Bastien Bouillon) who coveted Dantès's fiancée. All will be stripped of the thing they most value - money, love, reputation-- their punish-

ments ingeniously executed.

Yet the movie's dark heart lies in its understanding that hatred is a blade as destructive to its bearer as to his enemies. And Niney, with his slender frame and fine-drawn features, makes an especially defenseless and brokenhearted hero, one whose suffering only increases with each act of vengeance. His Count learned early how to concoct elaborate schemes; he learned too late that their success would leave only emptiness behind. JEANNETTE CATSOULIS

The Six Triple Eight

Rated PG-13 for language including racial slurs, as well as thematic material and war violence. Running time: 2 hours 7 minutes. On Netflix

In Tyler Perry's World War II drama, "The Six Triple Eight," Oprah Winfrey appears as the humanitarian Mary McLeod Bethune. Susan Sarandon (wearing outsized choppers) arrives as Bethune's friend Eleanor Roose velt, the first lady of the United States. Together Roosevelt and Bethune persuade President Franklin D. Roosevelt (Sam Waterston) to press a piqued general into using Black female soldiers to address the mountains of unde livered mail — to soldiers and from them — sitting in airplane hangars in Scotland.

There's prestige aplenty in Perry's drama about the only Black, all-female Women's Army Corps unit serving in Europe: the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion. But it is Kerry Wash-

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8:30

ISABELLE HUPPERT IN HONG SANG-SOO'S TRAVELER'S NEEDS 2:0

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AUSSA WALKINSON, THE NEW YORK TIMES

SOUNDTRACK TO A COUP D'ETAT

CONCLAVE 7:0

CONCLAVE 12

CHARADE (1963)

ATED FEATURE - 2024 NY FILM CRITICS' AW

OH CANADA

ington as Maj. Charity Adams,

and Ebony Obsidian as Pvt. Lena Derriecott King, who command Rated PG-13. A world-shattering our attention.

Major Adams leads 850 women on a six-month mission to move 17 million moldering, rat-gnawed, bloodstained parcels and letters. The movie — Perry's best yet at balancing his entertainer gifts with his artistic aspirations veers some from Kevin M. Hymel's article that inspired it: compressing events, creating composite characters and making an interracial friendship into a love story between Lena and Abram (Gregg Sulkin), which leads her to volunteer.

The drama lands many of the

eats of the Greatest Generation genre and its subgenre: Black service members battling on two fronts. But familiarity doesn't halt it being illuminating and affecting. What initially strikes Major Adams as a menial assignment at best, and a setup for failure at its bigoted worst, becomes a nearsacred operation. And when it does, the film finds a reach-foryour-Kleenex grace. LISA KENNEDY

Homestead

cataclysm. Running time: 1 hour 50 minutes. In theaters.

It's not often that a feature film ends with a teaser for a series that is already available to stream, but "Homestead," released by Angel Studios, the distributor of "Sound of Freedom" and various Christian-themed projects, is less a self-contained movie than a pilot for a show that already exists. The quality of the acting can only improve.

Not counting a cryptic opening aboard a "Waterworld"-like ship these seafaring characters will presumably resurface in an episode — "Homestead" begins with a nuclear attack off Southern California. The East Coast is in chaos, too: We'll later learn that the power grid is down, probably because of a cyberattack.

But the principals have been preparing for an apocalypse. Jeff Eriksson (Bailey Chase), with a military background, has arranged to run security for a ty-

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coon named Ian Ross (Neal Mc-Donough), who built Homestead, a largely self-sufficient compound in the Rocky Mountains intended for just this eventuality.

Ian and Jeff's family members trickle into the compound, designed to hold dozens. (The timeline is murky, but "Homestead" spans about a month.) They will survive as long as they can continue growing sufficient food.

But starving refugees are at the gate, and they may die trying to get in. "You'd better square yourself with that reality," Jeff, who prefers to err on the side of lethal force, warns Ian, who holds what is portrayed as a misplaced belief that the Federal Emergency Management Agency may still bail everyone out.

Ian's wife, Jenna (Dawn Olivieri), suggests that prayer is the answer. "Lucky for us, my God is bigger than the math," she says, although her solution addresses the math elegantly — for those fortunate enough to be at Homestead, a luxury viewers are meant to assume they would share. BEN KENIGSBERG



ritten and Directed by PEDRO ALMODÓVAR sed on the novel "What Are You Going Through" by Sigrid Nunez

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THE SEED OF THE SACRED FIG

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SWEST 67 STEW COUMBUS 6-CRITICES PICK!
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ENDS IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE 10:45am, 1:30pm, 4:15, 7:00," 9:45pm THE GIRL WITH THE NEEDLE 1:10, 7:20PM OH, CANADA 12:45, 5:05, 8:00, 10:05es EMUS

** CHRISTMAS EVE IN MILLER'S POINT*

EMLIA PEREZ ** PORCELAIN WAR* ** WILL & HARPER

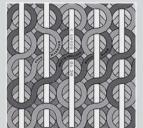
SABBATH QUEEN ** MEMOIR OF A SNAIL*

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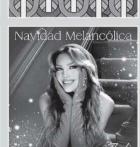
C8













The Holiday Canon Welcomes New Entries

Seasonal albums let musicians adopt — or reinvent — a classic format and show fans a different side of themselves. Here is a sampling of this year's releases, from singers exploring the standards and artists rethinking the meaning of the holidays.

CLAY AIKEN

'Christmas Bells Are Ringing'

This is Clay Aiken's second holiday album; the first arrived two decades ago, the year the first arrived two decades ago, the year after he gawkily crooned his way to second place on the second season of "American Idol." In the intervening time, he's been on Broadway, he's run (unsuccessfully) for political office and he's been on "The Masked Singer." But he never lost his voice — all these years later, Aiken still sings with a lovely flutter, and with real punch, too. His first holiday collection, "Merry Christmas With Love," was overflowing with earned pomp — a singer who excelled at targeted bombast given free melodramatic rein. His new one, a covers collection, is a touch more new one, a covers collection, is a touch more polished, though he does convey true mis-chief on "Magic Moments" and, on "Do You Hear What I Hear," accesses the kind of pyrotechnic fifth gear that's the stuff of "Idol" finales, musical theater blockbusters and Christmas morning celebrations. JON CARAMANICA

THE CARPENTERS

'Christmas Once More'

The Carpenters' 1978 holiday release "Christmas Portrait" is not only one of the most enduringly enjoyable Yuletide pop al-bums of its era, it's also one of the most am-bitious works that Richard Carpenter ever bitious works that Richard Carpenter ever arranged: a grandly orchestrated, elegantly realized suite that weaves together an extended medley of Christmas favorites as though they were a single song. That fluidity is preserved on the new collection, "Christmas Once More," even though it's a compilation that features remixed and remastered material culled from both "Christmas Portrait" and its slightly inferior though still lovely 1984 sequel, "An Old-Fashioned Christmas." These 16 tracks represent most of the highlights from each release, including a festive take on "(There's resent most of the highlights from each release, including a festive take on "(There's No Place Like) Home for the Holidays" and a rerecording of the Carpenters' own 1970 holiday hit "Merry Christmas, Darling," featuring accompaniment from the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. Streamlining the best material from the two previous LPs eliminates some of the compositional pomp that occasionally distracted from the warm, down-to-earth intimacy of Karen Carpenter's voice, and the finely executed new mix gives it an added gleam. LINDSAY ZOLADZ

JACOB COLLIER

LINDSAY ZOLADZ

'Three Christmas Songs (An Abbey Road Live-to-Vinyl Cut)'

This year the multitalented polymath Jacob Collier recorded a continuous, 14-minute set of three Christmas classics live at Abbey Road Studios in London. He uses his piano, guitar and voice all in a similarly searching manner, leaping along scales and octaves with a daredevil's flair. That approach works best here on piano, particularly during a spellbinding deconstruction of "I'll Be Home for Christmas" enlivened by its twin-kling cascade of high notes. Collier's voice is more of an acquired taste than his piano playing, and despite his impressive range his showy runs can overly complicate the emotions meant to be translated through these songs. Regardless, though, this re-cording captures a skillfully executed performance and ends with one of its most enchanting moments, as Collier conducts a choir — its members just happened to be sitting in the audience — in a beautifully un-derstated "Silent Night."

DEAN & BRITTA & SONIC BOOM

'A Peace of Us'

"A Peace of Us" brings indie-rock introspection to seasonal sentiments. Dean Wareham, from Galaxie 500 and Luna, and his longtime duo partner and wife, Britta Phillips, collaborated with Sonic Boom, from Spacemen 3, on mostly lesser-known Christmas songs, from John Barry and Hal David, David Berman, Randy Newman, Merle Haggard, Boudleaux Bryant and Willie Nelson, whose "Pretty Paper" is remade as whispery, pulsing electro-pop. The songs play up the mundane aspects of the holiday, and the tone is hushed and hazily retro, with subdued vocals and reverbed guitars alongside the sleigh bells. Even the Lennon-Ono standard, "Happy Xmas (War Is Over)," drifts away instead of building up. JON PARELES JON PARELES

BEN FOLDS

'Sleigher'

Christmas would seem to present a prime topic for Ben Folds, whose piano virtuosity, keen eye and skeptical but ultimately kindly spirit can turn domestic moments kindly spirit can turn domestic moments into show tunes waiting for a show. "Sleigher" has one standout: "Christmas Time Rhyme," a song about the annual family reunion where "We arrive half alive from the last weird trip around the sun." It's a jazzy waltz that juggles childhood memories and grown-up insights. The rest of the album — including songs from the Mills Brothers and Mel Tormé — struggles to match it. match it.

JON PARELES

CHAPEL HART 'Hartfelt Family Christmas'

This family country harmony trio, which had a memorable run on "America's Got Talent" in 2022, is both pristine and playful on its first holiday album. There's a cheeky and suave "Blue Christmas," and "Mary Did You Know?" is soothing like a lullaby. The album features an array of guests, as well: Gretchen Wilson, sounding more raw than she has in some time, on the tile track; a robust Darius Rucker on "That Time of Year"; and Rissi Palmer on a "White Christ-mas" that turns hard to honky-tonk halfway

JON CARAMANICA

LINDSAY ZOLADZ

JENNIFER HUDSON 'The Gift of Love'

On her first holiday album, "The Gift of Love," the singer, actress and talk show host Jennifer Hudson vamps her way through a collection of gospel, pop, R&B and funk with requisite razzle-dazzle. Hudson's showstop-ping voice is at its finest on a stunning performance of "O Holy Night" and a towering rendition of "Go Tell It on the Mountain," but she also knows when to lighten things up with a few fun originals, like the upbeat "Santa for Someone," on which she winks with a well-placed comedic pause, "I gotta get this paper . . . so I can wrap these gifts." Save for a few spoken-word groaners from Common, who makes a cameo on the ro-mantic ballad "Almost Christmas" ("Let's remain here, through the sun and the rain, dear"), the album's only true misstep is its opening number, yet another ponderous cover of Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" that misunderstands the wry, deadpan poetry of the source material and transforms it into an overly reverential holiday carol. At this point, "Hallelujah" covers should come with a gift receipt.

'A Jaguar II Christmas: The Orchestral Arrangements'

Take away all the vocals - with their raunchy lyrics — and bring in string arrangements, real or simulated, that fill out the chords. Toss in some public-domain melodic quotes from Christmas carols and old heads like Tchaikovsky. And suddenly, Vic-toria Monét's "Jaguar II" becomes cozy, Grated background music for that decorous, multigenerational holiday gathering. This is very savvy, low-effort content generation. JON PARELES

MEGAN MORONEY

'Blue Christmas . . . Duh'

Here's a lovely three-song set from the ex-cellent country miserablist Megan Mo-roney, who has released beautifully morose albums each of the last two years. Unsur-prisingly, she sees the holiday season through the lens of loss. On "Christmas Morning," she sings about the farce of hold-ing it together for the holidays — the family is visiting, the conversation is clipped, the is visiting, the conversation is clipped, the temperature is dipping. "Take down the tree, unplug the lights / It's colder in this bed than it is outside," she sighs at the chorus. The other original here, "All I Want for Christmas Is a Cowboy," is more playful and upbeat, but no less destitute, with a plea to Santa: "When you're flying over Austin or Abilene, wrap a bow around a boy in some Wrangler jeans."

JON CARMANICA JON CARAMANICA

THALIA

'Navidad Melancólica'

"Navidad Melancólica'

The Mexican pop hitmaker Thalia, who has ranged through Latin pop styles, titled her holiday mini-album "Navidad Melancólica" ("Melancholy Christmas"). But she doesn't stay unhappy long. Thalia sounds like she'll easily get through the loneliness she sings about in the bachata "Nueva Navidad" and the 1950s-flavored ballad "Velitas" ("Little Candles"). Its other new songs touch on reverence (the power ballad "Nació la Luz," belted with Marcos Witt) and partying ("Barrio Bravo en Navidad" and the New Year's Eve song "Tengo Lo Que Quiero"), while she closes the album with new takes on warhorses: "Al Mundo Paz," a country-rockabilly reworking of "Joy to the World," and an electro-merengue revamp of "Feliz Navidad."

JON PARELES JON PARELES

MATT WILSON'S CHRISTMAS TREE-O

'Tree Jazz — The Shape of Christmas to Come'

Fifteen years ago this fall, the drummer Matt Wilson first convened his Christmas Tree-O, a seasonally themed combo featur-ing the bassist Paul Sikivie and the multireedist Jeff Lederer. On its second album, the band amplifies the mixed signals that made its self-titled 2010 debut an offbeat delight in the small but distinguished niche of Inght in the small out distinguished niche of Christmas jazz. As with many Wilson projects, there's a strong element of fun here, telegraphed by the hammy cover art and title punning on a pair of Ornette Cole-man classics. But there is also real musical heft, especially when Lederer, on tenor, lets fly with a gutsy solo over Sikivie and Wilson's deep, roomy swing on "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day," or when the band zips through "Up on the Rooftop" in a brisk mode that nods to Coleman's late-50s quartet. A peppy Puerto Rican Christmas song ("Si Me Dan Pasteles") featuring the so-called Treedom Singers, a klezmer-esque Sephardic Jewish Hanukkah number ("Eight Little Candles") and a convincing mash-up of "Under Pressure" and "Do You Hear What I Hear?" round out another eclectic offering from a trio with a refreshingly eccentric take on holiday cheer. HANK SHTEAMER

Documenta Chooses New Leader

Naomi Beckwith, an American curator, will oversee the event that is held twice a decade.

By ADAM SELLA

BERLIN - Documenta, the German contemporary art exhibition held twice a decade announced on Wednesday that Naomi Beckwith, the deputy director and chief curator at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Mu-seum in New York, would oversee the next edition in 2027.

With an established curator from a glob-ally renowned museum at the helm, Documenta hopes to move on from controversies that have plagued it in recent years, includ-ing a highly polarizing show in 2022 and the resignation of the search committee asked to choose the curator of the 2027 show be-cause of disputes related to the Israel-

Beckwith embraced the challenges at a Beckwith embraced the challenges at a news conference in Kassel, the city in cen-tral Germany where Documenta takes place, saying she would make navigating crises a central theme of her exhibition. In a world of conflict, Beckwith said, "I think this is a marvelous time to turn to art-

ists and their capacity for imagination, so that we can all think about ways to navigate

this oncoming future."

She will face an uphill battle, leading an institution that is no stranger to crisis through a German cultural landscape that is struggling to maintain international relevance amid growing concerns about a clam-pdown on free speech in the arts. While she recognized that artists have

while she recognized that artists have opinions and sometimes want to agitate with their art, she also emphasized the importance of balancing artists' politics with the German context, where ethical and legal parameters set limits on acceptable

In the last edition of Documenta, in 2022, these limits were tested by the discovery of antisemitic caricatures in a huge agitprop mural that was displayed in the center of Kassel. The artwork, which was quickly taken down, caused months of debate and con-

troversy.

The caricatures had gone unnoticed by the edition's artistic directors, an Inde



omi Beckwith is the deputy director and chief curator at the Guggenheim in New York

sian art collective called ruangrupa, whose "decentralized" concept for the exhibition outsourced many curatorial responsibilities to other arts collectives.

ities to other arts collectives.

Beckwith said she would be more handson. "I don't sort of invite an artist and then they show up with an artwork the day of the exhibition," she said. "Every exhibition is a deep collaborative practice for me with artists," she added, "so there are no surprises."

Her appointment comes after a selection process mired in controversy. In November 2023, the team that was assembled to choose an artistic director resigned and

choose an artistic director resigned and four former members criticized Germany's political climate around the war in Israel and Gaza in an open letter. Polarized de-bates in the arts scene, they said, made it impossible to stage an exhibition in which "an open exchange of ideas and the devel-opment of complex and nuanced artistic approaches" was possible.

At the news conference on Wednesday,

Kassel's mayor, Sven Schoeller, described the selection committee's resignation as "one of Documenta's severest crises." He praised the new selection committee, which was made up of curators and museum di-rectors from across the world and first convened in July, for selecting a new artistic di-

rector on short notice.

Documenta was first staged in 1955 as a direct response to the "Degenerate Art" show, the Nazis' denunciatory modern art exhibition held 18 years earlier. It has become one of the world's most prestigious art shows, rivaled only by the Venice Biennale, and is viewed as a compass for contempo-

rary art's direction.

The 100-day show takes place every five years, and its 16th edition is scheduled to take place in 2027 between June 12 and Sept. 19. It is already running behind schedule after the selection committee's resignation delayed the appointment of the artistic

"I begged for an extra year," Beckwith said. The shortened time frame could mean that publication deadlines and the number of venues involved may need to be adjusted, she said, though she added that she was confident she would manage. "It is not unusual at all," she said, "to make a grand exhi-bition — even at the scale of Documenta — in two and a half years."

Fine Art

TRAVIS DIEHL | ART REVIEW

Timely Debates Short on Fresh Viewpoints

A show about a 21st-century issue draws largely from works made in the 20th century.

ANY SHOW ABOUT "THE BODY" has the backhanded blessing of wide appeal. Everybody has one — so what? The thesis of "Vital Signs: Artists and the Body," a survey of more than 65 modern and contemporary artists on view at the Museum of Modern Art, is more specific than its title suggests: It proposes that 20th-century artists used abstraction to explore the human body's changeability, and press the limits of iden-

tity.

Lanka Tattersall, a curator in the museum's drawings and prints department,
frames the show as filling the gaps in art
history, in particular the story of modern art
as told by MoMA around midcentury,
marked by the abstract self-expression of
manly men, like Jackson Pollock and Mark
Rothko. "Vital Signs," instead, features a
cross-racial and international selection of
women and gender-nonconforming artists,
searly all from the museum's collection.

nearly all from the museum's collection.

There are fresh acquisitions such as twee There are fresh acquisitions such as twee body-horror ceramics (a woman merged with a book titled "Historia del Hombre," or a cob studded with toothy lumps) by Tecla Tofano, a Venezuelan artist who died in 1997. Lynda Benglis is here, with a classic condiment-hued latex "pour," an almost obligatory nod to 1960s feminist critiques of



Vital Signs: Artists and the Body Through Feb. 22 at the Museum of Modern Art in Manhattan; 212-708-9400.



ab-ex excess. And there are happy surprises, like Mako Idemitsu's video "Inner Man," in which a mustachioed nude frolics over footage of a woman in a pale kimono.

It's an understated show, shadowed with critical thinking. After all, many of the thorniest issues of the 21st century — immigration, trans rights, mass incarceration — are inextricably connected to the concept of the body: where a body comes from, how a person may change their body, which bodies are confined.

That is why it's frustrating that the show mostly sticks to the 20th century, without reckoning with the complications intro-duced to its subject by the internet, social media and big data. "Vital Signs" wants to address timely debates around identity but

feels stuck in art history.

It's a formal show, concerned with fundamentals like color and line. Many works feature wiggly, organic shapes, sometimes given eyes or nipples, that insinuate human anatomy. Some of these artists approach corporality the way they might compose a canvas. In an untitled 1957 painting by the Tevan artist Forrest Ress.—perhaps the Texan artist Forrest Bess — perhaps the most severe example — a hashmarked finger of black and yellow probes a hot grisaille field. Bess based his pictures on vi-



sions related to his ideas about androgyny, a desire he consummated through a series of

Embodiment can feel constricting. As these artists unfurl their bodies into various intangible designs, the connection to "the body" becomes tenuous — and sometimes thrilling. Why do Lee Lozano's furious drawings of tools, like a 1963 rendering of a misassembled pipe wrench, evoke the hu-man form? Maybe because we're seeking

The show's thesis is sharper in some of The show's thesis is sharper in some of the more conceptual pieces. José Leonilson's "34 com scars (34 with Scars)," 1991, a white textile roughly sutured with black thread as if by a battlefield surgeon, stems from the Brazilian artist's H.I.V. diagnosis. And the Canadian artist Jackie Winsor's "Burnt Piece," 1977-78, a scorched, striated cube made of cement and wood, invokes bodies without likeness.

If the implications of virtual identities and alternate selves can't be fully investi-gated through 20th-century work, the precursors are there: in Lynn Hershman Leeson's "Roberta's Construction Chart #2," 1976, a plan for facial alterations relat-ed to a persona she inhabited in the 1970s; and in the systematic approach to corporality taken by Adrian Piper, Charles Gaines and Mary Kelly. Gaines's eerie manual pixelization of photographic portraits, broken down into a grid and then superimposed on those of other people to make a kind of generalized average face, was a sardnic evereralized average face, was a sardonic exercise in 1978. But similar techniques now underpin facial recognition software.

Only one piece in the exhibition was made after 2000: "Misdirected Kiss," a photo-collage mural from 2016 by Martine Syms, an artist who argues that online life



Clockwise from top: an installation view of "Vital Signs: Artists and the Body" at the Museum of Modern Art, featuring an untitled 1992 piece by Lorna Simpson; Martine Syms's "Misdirected Kiss" (2016); Lynda Benglis's "Blatt" (1969), an example of her classic condiment-hued latex pour"; an untitled 1957 painting by the Texan artist Forrest Bess.

and images of "the body" shape abstractions like youth and Blackness. At 36, she is the youngest artist in the show by 20 years. The wallpaper's orthogonal clatter of screenshots of text and digital portraits of Black women, including a double selfie of Tyra Banks and the artist, runs along the wall after you exit the show, above couches where museum visitors check their phones. Syms's work — acquired by the museum

this year — proves the curators' awareness of the issues that make a show like "Vital Signs" vital: the impacts of the internet, the tension between virtual and physical reali-ties, the alienating avatars built and pro-cessed, often without our consent, from the data we shed. At its best, the show highlights how inadequate art that emphasizes the expression of discrete individuals can now feel against our networked identity crisis





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There's No Place Like It: Exploring Where We Live



An exhibition, centered on the theme of 'home,' mixes beauty, politics and platitudes.

WHEN THE COOPER HEWITT introduced its triennial design series, in 2000, the goal was straightforward: to offer a snapshot of the field that reflected, typically with an optimistic gloss, the preoccupations and triumphs of American designers. Early editions were filled with consumer products in a range of streamlined, candy-colored styles; recent shows have added healthy portions of save-the-planet ingenuity. Toothbrushes and sneakers on 1. Biodegradable tires on 3.

styles; recent shows have added healthy portions of save-the-planet ingenuity. Toothbrushes and sneakers on 1. Biodegradable tires on 3.

"Making Home — Smithsonian Design Triennial," the seventh iteration, aims for something appreciably different. It explores, as the introductory text puts it, "the ways in which design is embedded in contemporary life." The curators have commissioned 25 artists, architects and design teams to create site-specific work around the rather elastic theme of "home."

the rather elastic theme of "home."

The uneven results, which leave visitors pinballing from sharp-witted displays to platitudinous ones, from subtle expressions of domesticity to hand-holding infographics, suggest at least one practical challenge presented by the curators' organizing conceit. If you want to illustrate how a particular object or design sensibility is "embedded in contemporary life," you can't show it in anything resembling isolation. You have to lug a chunk of contemporary life into the museum along with it.

And so "Making Home" offers, in one

And so "Making Home" offers, in one gallery after another, dense cross-sections of American life, some slipped elegantly and others rather roughly wedged inside the 1902 Carnegie mansion, at the corner of 91st Street and Fifth Avenue, that has been the Cooper Hewitt's home since 1976.

Perhaps the most enthusiastic application of this slice-of-life approach, installed on the ground floor, is "Living Room: Orlean, Virginia." To reflect the relationship between the career of the American bassbaritone Davóne Tines and his grandparents' home in rural Virginia, where the singer's musical talents were nourished, the artist Hugh Hayden has faithfully recreated its living room, including upright piano, sofa and chairs, lamps, end tables and framed family photographs, and set the whole scene on a plinth with giant rocking-chair

For the triennial's opening-night party, Tines, one of the blazing talents of contemporary opera, mounted that wobbly stage with his aunt and grandparents. With his grandfather at the piano, the group ran through a series of spirituals, a performance developed in collaboration with Zack Winokur, artistic director and co-founder of the American Modern Opera Company. The living room rocked and swayed as Tines, and then the others, stood to deliver a raucous finale



Top, "Living Room: Orlean, Virginia" by Hugh Hayden, Davone Tines and Zack Winokur, on the ground floor of the museum; above, performers in the installation on the show's opening night.

When I went back to see the show again the next morning, though, I found the installation, now quiet and still, disappointingly inert: an earnest serving of Americana that would be more comfortably at home at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History than in an institution, and an exhibition, dedicated to contemporary design. The rocking-chair base, meant as a symbol of the precarity of Black life, seemed an empty gimmick without its activating performers.

Elsewhere in "Making Home" are exhibits on birthing centers and senior housing; on the design of spaces to ease re-entry from prison into civilian life; on efforts to rehabilitate Indigenous architectural practices in three U.S. states; and on the structure of intentional L.G.B.T.Q. communities in three more.

There are rooms lined with tobacco leaves, vials of blood (or a liquid close to it) and adobe blocks. (The vials decorate a display by Heather Dewey-Hagborg, an "artist and biohacker," on the rise of biobanks — facilities that store blood samples, which Dewey-Hagborg explores as "the hidden homes of our DNA.")

The show's curators — Alexandra Cunningham Cameron and Christina L. De León of the Cooper Hewitt, alongside Michelle Joan Wilkinson, curator of architecture and design at the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C. — deserve credit for figuring out how to keep the curtains open in some of the ground-floor galleries. How remarkable to see actual sunlight streaming across the Cooper Hewitt's elaborately patterned parquet floors! Free-standing wooden plinths, a useful alternative to wall text, are largely confined to the edge of each

gallery or to the museum's common spaces.

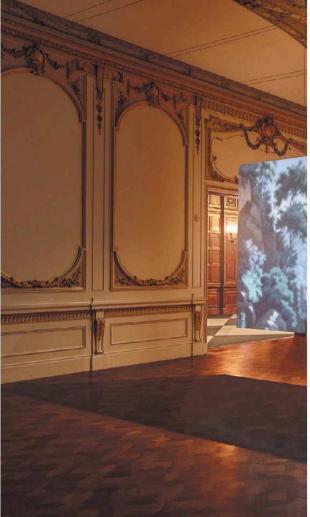
Many of the installations, meanwhile, come with their own totalizing design strategies preloaded. An extensive analysis of

how the Smithsonian has acquired and displayed objects from Puerto Rico, by Sofia Gallisá Muriente and Natalia Lassalle-Morillo, in collaboration with the theater designer Carlos J. Soto, even features handwritten labels. I wonder how the exhibition's graphic designer, Ben Ganz, felt about that!

To a degree, this creates a collection of

To a degree, this creates a collection of displays that don't even bother to try to cohere: a parade of Gesamkunstwerks, each marching to its own Trómmler. Many are earthy, others ironic or didactic. Still, for all this tonal confusion, the thematic focus on embeddedness does open up the structure of this triennial in compelling ways. In particular, it dispenses with the overworked definition of a design curator as somebody whose primary job is to celebrate the field's avant-garde, the advancing front of innovation that quickly turns yesterday's breakthroughs into so many remaindered items.

The best examples of this approach are richly layered, suggesting that subjects like the legacy of Manifest Destiny expansion are stitched so deeply into the fabric of American culture that they are impossible to yank out whole and display on their own. One standout is a double-sided installation by the artist Amie Siegel, called "Vues/Views," with wallpaper samples on one side of a hanging screen and a film projected onto the other. It explores the relationship between the French wallpaper company Zuber and domestic architecture in the United States; Siegel's film (in which Tines, the bass-baritone from "Living Room," reappears) uses Zuber's picturesque pan-



Making Home — Smithsonian Design Triennial

Through Aug. 10 at the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum in Manhattan; 212-849-8400, cooperhewitt.org.

oramic scenes, often installed in genteel if decaying interiors in the American South, as the basis for a larger critique of American wealth, power and racial prerogative. I was encouraged to see a clever critique

I was encouraged to see a clever critique of oligarchical reach, and of the Carnegie family in particular, in "Game Room," a display by the designer Liam Lee and the artist Tommy Mishima featuring a tongue-incheek board game, a Monopoly for Millionaire's Row instead of Atlantic City, installed in Andrew Carnegie's former home office. Even braver — though the installation itself is somewhat underdeveloped — is the decision by the curators (and the Cooper Hewitt's director, Maria Nicanor) to feature an exhibit by the journalist Mona Chalabi and New York design office SITU Research on "domicide," or the destruction of residential architecture around the world. On one wall it cites a statistic measuring the massive scale of destruction to homes in Gaza in the continuing war.

Yet I wandered this triennial in vain looking for entries related to many of the most pressing design-related challenges of the day, including several — the construction of affordable housing in American cities, especially, as well as the electrification of residential buildings and the conversion of the empty office towers into apartments — that could have fit without much strain under the wide umbrella provided by the theme of "home."

Often, instead, the exhibition is content to treat design and designers as something of a support mechanism, a means of advancing what the curators frequently frame as more pressing subjects, including health care and racial equity. Another way to put this is to say that "Making Home," for all its engagement with political themes, is reluctant to portray designers as figures who themselves have meaningful political agency beyond a principled sort of opting out.

And so the work on view tends to fall into one of two categories: things that are vulnerable (that need protection or resuscitation or generate nostalgia) or things, like Zuber wallpaper, that are emblematic of an inequitable power structure.

I'm sure some of this can be chalked up to the fact that the Cooper Hewitt, as an arm of the Smithsonian, has to be careful not to be too aggressive or overt in its political advocacy. Fair enough, although given that con-











C11



From above, "Vues/Views" by Amie Siegel, starring Davóne Tines; "Game Room" by Liam Lee and Tommy Mishima; and an installation by East Jordan Middle/High School.

straint, the curators' emphasis on embeddedness, on design's entanglements with the larger culture, was a recipe for precisely this dilemma — for an exhibition that strides confidently in the direction of real politics only to pull up short on its doorstep

and decide not to ring the bell.

This reluctance is clearest in a multimedia installation in the museum's basement gallery. It celebrates efforts at East Jordan Middle/High School, in a small Michigan town about 250 miles northwest of Detroit, to more fully embrace its growing group of Spanish-speaking immigrants. The initiative has included "culinary and linguistic exchanges" as well as events such Noche Latina (Latino Night).

The story is one "of a changing community coming together, highlighting themes of home, belonging and the power of youth collaboration."

The installation's focus on shifting demographics in small-town Michigan, or places like it, is perfectly unobjectionable — as far as it goes. I mean, good for the students of East Jordan Middle/High School! The point is that debates over immigration are not just deeply politicized already, but also directly implicate architects and other design professionals in ways that this installation, at least, seems to want to wish away.

Three weeks after the opening party for "Making Home," the land commissioner for Texas, Dawn Buckingham, offered up 1,400 acres near the Mexico border to the incom-

ing Trump administration as a location to build camps facilitating mass deportation. "I have 13 million acres," Buckingham told ABC News. "If any of them can be of help to this process, we're happy to have that discussion."

The camps will be designed by whichever architecture and engineering firms want to help Donald J. Trump carry out his most ambitious campaign promise (if he keeps it). The camps will function as domestic spaces, however provisional or punitive.

And I doubt their designers, or the authorities responsible for rounding up immi-grants and their families and delivering them to the completed camps, will care much about the value of linguistic and cultural exchanges or the good vibes produced by Latino Night.





"Unruly Subjects" by Natalia Lassalle-Morillo, Sofía Gallisá Muriente and Carlos J. Soto, left; "Patterns of Life" by Mona Chalabi and SITU Research.

Galleries

BY WILL HEINRICH

Raven Chacon

Through July 3. American Academy of Arts and Letters, Audubon Terrace, Broadway between 155th and 156th Streets, Manhattan; 212-368-5900, artsandletters.org.

A day or two after the election, I rode up to Audubon Terrace on 155th Street to sit in an empty room listening to birdsong. The room, a bright and stately Beaux-Arts gallery with an enormous frosted-glass skylight, is one of several that the century-old American Academy of Arts and Letters has just started opening to the public year-round, under the direction of Jenny Jaskey, the academy's new chief curator. The birdsong, a nine-channel medley of Audubon Society field record-ings and calls that the artist Raven Chacon had devised for extinct species once native to the area, was an artwork called "Aviary."

Across the patio and downstairs are two other shows. One is a dazzling array of brilliantly colored musical scores by Wadada Leo Smith, who taught Chacon at Cal Arts. The other, organized by Rhea Anastas and Nora Schultz, is a look at the incisive conceptual work of Christine Kozlov. "Aviary" itself has hosted performances by other artists, and there's even a new publication series.

If you know that Audubon Terrace was built on land that once belonged to John James Audubon, who bought it with the proceeds of his hugely popular book "The Birds of America"; that he based his extraordinary paintings mostly on dead specimens; and that he was also a slavehold-er, you can take "Aviary" as a cutting, even chilling, piece of satire.

At the same time, though, the gallery itself is magnificent, and Chacon's installation offers an exceptionally elegant way of calling attention to not only the beauty of the American Academy's campus, but - what may be more critical at the moment - its broader potential as a wellspring of community.

feats of wall-mounted assemblage that make up the rest of the show.

The pieces, spanning decades of his practice, incorporate paintcan lids, artificial plants, historical and art historical references. scraps of carpet, a lawn ornament and many other objects sticking every which way, so that their perspective and organization reel and rock like the deck of a boat. A single molten color scheme balances the chaos and gives each piece a powerful formal unity the unity of a feverish, singular mind.

Park Seo-Bo

Through Jan. 11. White Cube. 1002 Madison Avenue, Manhattan; 212-750-4232, whitecube.com.

In the late 1970s, while living in Paris and cleaning his brushes with old copies of Le Monde, the Korean painter Park Seo-Bo (1931-2023) found himself beguiled by his unexpected power to blot out or reshape the news. Later he dedicated himself to a decades-long series of up-anddown scribbles that he called Écritures, because they resembled writing. (They also resembled conceptual art, or an idiosyncratic meditation practice.)

In 2022, knowing that he was dying, Park returned to newspaper, with the intention of leaving behind as many marks as possi-ble. (This time the papers, ranging from the 1930s to the 1980s. were sourced specially.) Thirty of the resulting pieces — along with a few loosely related monochromes from the 1990s make up this surprisingly riotous show at White Cube. It's the paradox of minimalism: Narrow ing your vocabulary as severely as Park did amplifies the force of any change you do allow. And the difference between Park's tight and angry ups and downs, between his confident loops and his simple hooks, all of them scratched into white paint with a pencil or the wrong end of a paint-

brush, feels enormous, My favorite is an issue of Le Petit Provençal from a Sunday in



An installation view of Raven Chacon's "Aviary" (2024), a sound piece.



Thornton Dial's "Alone in the Jungle: One Man Sees the Tiger Cat" (1988).

Thornton Dial

542 West 22nd Street, Manhattan; 212-790-3900, hauserwirth.com.

In 1988, Thornton Dial made a long, lanky animal out of rope. He looped it back and forth, as if coiling a rug; painted it blue; and glued it to an eight-foot board. Across these blue lines of rope, Dial (1928-2016) also painted white stripes: It was a tiger. (He titled the piece "Monkeys and People Love the Tiger Cat.") Surrounding the tiger, he painted monkeys in black and white, simple outline figures that look like shadows or opposites of one another. One sits, another lies on his back, and a third crouches on all fours under the tiger's belly, as if the animal's negative space had come into a life of its own.

There are only two tiger pieces in "Thornton Dial: The Visible and the Invisible." But the same back and forth, inside out, everything-at-once energy that Dial channeled into his tigers also courses through the seven large

1939, its title, printed in red, unmarked, but its news all obscured scribbles that evoke soap on the window of a store being renovated. The understated dissonance between the news of the day in World War II-era France and Park's intensely abstract and personal project feels all too timely.



Park Seo-Bo's "Écriture No. 221115" (2022), pencil and oil on Le Petit Provençal newspaper, on canvas.