"All the News That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

THE WEATHER
Today, plenty of sunshine, dry, a light northwest wind, high 46. **Tonight,** clear, low 36. **Tomorrow,** sunny, dry, a north wind, high 43. Weather map appears on Page B12.

VOL. CLXXIII .... No. 60,008 © 2023 The New York Times Company WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2023 Prices in Canada may be higher $4.00

Many Voters See Criminality But Support Trump Anyway

Indictments No Obstacle Among G.O.P., Poll Shows

This article is by ***Shane Goldmacher****,* ***Ruth Igielnik*** *and* ***Camille Baker****.*

Donald J. Trump continues to march to the 2024 Republican presidential nomination with a commanding lead over his primary rivals, even as a strong majority of voters nationwide believe he has committed serious federal crimes, including a growing faction of Republicans, according to a new poll from The New York Times and Siena College.

The results show the remarkable degree to which Republican voters are willing to look past Mr. Trump's legal jeopardy — the former president has been indicted four times in 2023 and faces 91 felony counts — and line up behind his potential return to power.

Overall, 58 percent of voters nationwide believe Mr. Trump committed serious federal crimes, according to the survey, including 66 percent of independent voters.

Yet Mr. Trump continues to clobber his closest Republican competitors in the primary by more than 50 percentage points, pulling in the support of 64 percent of Republican primary voters nationwide. Nikki Haley, the former United Nations ambassador, is now in a distant second place, with 11 percent, followed by Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida, who has fallen to third, with 9 percent.

The poll was conducted before a court ruling on Tuesday injected more legal uncertainty into the 2024 presidential race. The Colorado Supreme Court ruled that Mr. Trump is disqualified from holding office again because he engaged in insurrection leading up to the Jan. 6 storming of the Capitol, a decision the former president plans to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Mr. Trump's primary lead has swelled since the summer, even though the share of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents who believe he engaged in criminality rose to 27 percent from 17 percent in July. Mr. Trump is leading not only because he dominates among the large share of Republicans who see him as innocent, but also because he is winning one in three Republican voters who think he engaged in serious criminality.

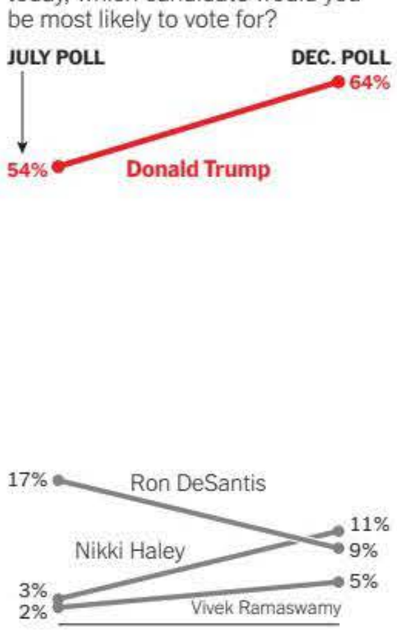
Support for Mr. Trump in the Times/Siena poll is so thorough that 62 percent of Republicans think that if the former president wins the primary he should remain the Republican Party's nominee — even if he is subsequently convicted of a federal crime.

"What they're doing to the man is a crime," James Howe, 81, a retired airline worker in Phoenix, said of Mr. Trump. "There's been nobody in the history of this coun-

Continued on Page A17

G.O.P. Primary Voters' Choices

If the election for the Republican nominee for president were held today, which candidate would you be most likely to vote for?



Source: New York Times/Siena College polls conducted nationwide July 23-27 (932 likely Republican primary voters) and Dec. 10-14 (380 likely Republican primary voters)

LAZARO GAMIO/THE NEW YORK TIMES

KRISTIN ELISABET GUNNARSDOTTIR/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

Local residents witnessing the volcanic eruption on Iceland's Reykjanes Peninsula on Tuesday.

RED SEA ATTACKS IMPERIL SHIPPING AND THE ECONOMY

IRAN-BACKED FIGHTERS

Vessels Avoid Suez Canal — U.S. Tries to Blunt Global Trade Risk

By PETER EAVIS

The wave of attacks against merchant ships in the Red Sea is forcing companies to send ships on longer routes and threatens to hurt an already wobbly global economy.

The Houthis, an armed group backed by Iran that controls much of northern Yemen, have been using drones and missiles to target ships since Hamas attacked Israel on Oct. 7. That has forced some shipping giants and oil companies to avoid the Suez Canal, a development that could hamper global trade and push up the cost of imported goods.

The Suez is a vital artery for container ships and fuel tankers. Goods and fuel from Asia and the Middle East have made their way to Europe and the United States through the passage since it opened in 1869. Britain and other world powers have fought wars and engaged in geopolitical intrigue over the canal, controlled by Egypt now, for more than a century.

About 50 vessels go through the Suez Canal a day, and recent data suggested that, as of Monday, at least 32 had been diverted, said Chris Rogers, head of supply chain research at S&P Global Market Intelligence. He noted that nearly 15 percent of European imports were transported by sea from Asia and the Persian Gulf, most of which go through the Suez.

Peter Sand, chief analyst at Xeneta, a shipping market analytics company, described the problems in the Red Sea and the canal as "a slow-burning disaster that really blew up on the weekend."

He added, "Everybody involved in global shipping, especially with supply chains connected by the Suez Canal, is trying to find out

Continued on Page A8

Colorado Court Deems Trump Unfit for Ballot

By MAGGIE ASTOR

Colorado's top court ruled on Tuesday that former President Donald J. Trump is disqualified from holding office again because he engaged in insurrection with his actions leading up to the Jan. 6 storming of the Capitol, an explosive ruling that is likely to put the basic contours of the 2024 election in the hands of the U.S. Supreme Court.

The Colorado Supreme Court was the first in the nation to find that Section 3 of the 14th Amendment — which disqualifies people who engage in insurrection against the Constitution after taking an oath to support it — applies to Mr. Trump, an argument that his opponents have been making around the country.

The ruling directs the Colorado secretary of state to exclude Mr. Trump's name from the state's Republican primary ballot. It does not address the general election.

"We do not reach these conclusions lightly," a four-justice majority wrote, with three justices dissenting. "We are mindful of the magnitude and weight of the questions now before us. We are likewise mindful of our solemn duty to apply the law, without fear or favor, and without being swayed by public reaction to the decisions that the law mandates we reach."

Mr. Trump's campaign said immediately that it would appeal the decision to the U.S. Supreme Court, a likelihood that the Colorado justices anticipated by putting their ruling on hold until January. And while Tuesday's rul-

Continued on Page A18

Gay Catholics Hear History: 'God Bless You'

This article is by ***Amy Harmon****,* ***Ruth Graham*** *and* ***Sarah Maslin Nir****.*

As a Jesuit priest for more than two decades, the Rev. James Martin has bestowed thousands of blessings — on rosary beads, on babies, on homes, boats, and meals, on statues of saints, on the sick, on brides and on grooms.

Never before, though, was he permitted to bless a same-sex couple — not until Monday, when the pope said he would allow such blessings, an announcement that reverberated through the church.

On Tuesday morning, Damian Steidl Jack, 44, and his husband, Jason Steidl Jack, 38, stood before Father Martin in a living room on Manhattan's West Side. The couple, running a bit late because of subway delays, dressed casually. Damian, a floral designer, complimented Father Martin on the pine smell of the Christmas tree.

In keeping with the Vatican's admonition that such a blessing should not be performed with "any clothing, gestures or words that are proper to a wedding," Father Martin wore no robes, and read from no text. There is no blessing for same-sex couples in the thick book of blessings published by the U.S. Conference of Bishops. Instead he selected a favorite of his own from the Old Testament.

"May the Lord bless and keep you," Father Martin began, touching the two men's shoulders. They bowed their heads slightly, and held hands.

Continued on Page A18

After Weeks of Buildup, a Must-See Nature Show

By EGILL BJARNASON and JENNY GROSS

HUSAVIK, Iceland — Pall Viggosson, a tour guide in Iceland, was driving a van carrying nine British tourists on Monday night in search of the northern lights. But instead of the greenish glow of the aurora borealis, he saw red — flames and smoke from a volcanic eruption that Iceland had been uneasily awaiting.

The area, the Reykjanes Peninsula, had been experiencing strong seismic activity since October, a harbinger of an imminent

It Took Some Time, but an Icelandic Volcano Finally Awakens

eruption. The earthquakes — there were as many as 1,400 in a single 24-hour period in November — prompted the evacuation of the town of Grindavik and the temporary closing of the Blue Lagoon, a top tourist attraction. With these shaky warnings, Icelanders were girding for the eruption that came Monday night.

"I realized quickly this was no ordinary light pollution," Mr. Viggosson said. He pulled over on the highway so the tourists could take photos.

Soon, the highway, which connects the capital to Keflavik International Airport, became busy, as other curious spectators drove from Reykjavik and nearby towns to catch a glimpse of the spectacle for themselves: reddish and orange skies, billowing smoke and lava fountains reaching over 300 feet into the air.

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JOHN MOORE/GETTY IMAGES

Texas Sued Over Migrant Law

Officials in El Paso County argued that the sweeping new law violated the Constitution. Page A16.

Duped, Trapped Then Tortured In Scam Camp

By ISABELLE QIAN

He had been promised a generous salary. A better work-life balance. A chance to live in the vibrant metropolis of Bangkok. His fluency in English would be put to good use as a translator for an e-commerce company, the recruiter had said.

More than anything else, Neo Lu, a 28-year-old Chinese office worker, believed the gig would be the new start he needed to save money for his dream of emigrating to the West. So in June of last year, he said his goodbyes, flew to Thailand and headed for his new job.

But when he arrived, his head was spinning from the scorching sun — and the feeling that something was very wrong. Instead of an office building in a city, Mr. Lu had been dumped at what looked like a labor camp haphazardly built on a patch of jungle and muddy fields.

Within the compound were spartan, low-rise concrete buildings with barred windows and doors. Two men in combat fatigues, carrying rifles, guarded the main entrance. High walls and fences topped with razor wire surrounded the compound, clearly

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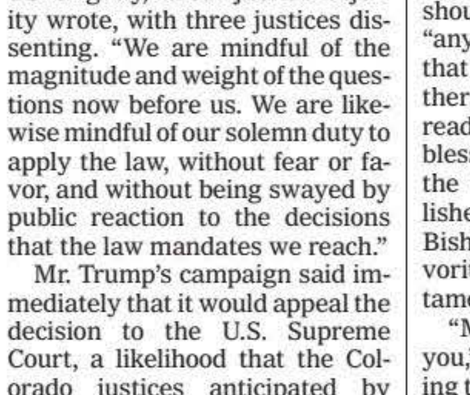
NATIONAL A14-20

New York Weighs Reparations
Gov. Kathy Hochul signed a bill that will create a task force to examine the lasting impact of slavery. PAGE A19

Tributes for a Trailblazer
President Biden was among those honoring Justice Sandra Day O'Connor at her funeral. PAGE A15



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How Russia Flouts Tech Bans
Using shipping workarounds and middlemen, Moscow has obtained the technology it needs to keep its economy and its war in Ukraine going. PAGE A10

Kidnapped in Myanmar
The ruling military, which is struggling with recruitment, denies abductions. But five men say it happened. PAGE A4

OBITUARIES A21

A Towering Sculptor
Richard Hunt, who was at Emmett Till's funeral, transformed public spaces with works that exuded freedom. He was 88.

BUSINESS B1-7

'Bond Vigilantes' Are Back
The financial world is debating if market appetite for U.S. debt is nearing a limit. Not everyone agrees that this is something to panic about. PAGE B1

Antigay Law Hurts Uganda
Passed in May, the Anti-Homosexuality Act is harming businesses that rely on foreign travelers and trade. PAGE B1

SPORTS B8-11

Unprecedented Recruitment
Twenty years ago, college football coaches did things they had never done before to sign Adrian Peterson. PAGE B8

FOOD D1-10

Future Told in Cookie Cutters
From Barbie to unicorns to presidential candidates, the shape-shifting baking tools mirror America's culture. PAGE D1

It's Really All About the Mess
The Feast of the Seven Fishes is meaningful for the time spent cooking together as much as the eating. PAGE D4

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In an Attic, Satirizing Nazis
Curt Bloch created 95 issues of a magazine, now drawing attention, in the crawl space of a Dutch home. PAGE C1

'Coppelia' Awakens With Joy
As with his "Swan Lake" and "Giselle," Alexei Ratmansky enlivens a staging of the Romantic ballet, at La Scala. PAGE C5

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Michelle Goldberg PAGE A22

Inside The Times

The New York Times

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The Newspaper and Beyond

TODAY'S PAPER

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Crossword C3
Obituaries A21
Opinion A22-23
Weather B12
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ROUNDUP

Two pop music critics for The Times, Jon Caramanica and Jon Pareles, shared their thoughts on 10 new holiday albums, ranging from jazzy (Gregory Porter's "Christmas Wish") to just plain fun (Wheatus's "Just a Dirtbag Christmas"). Find the full list at *nytimes.com/music.*

AUDIO

On the "Hard Fork" podcast, the hosts Kevin Roose and Casey Newton discussed a lawsuit involving Epic Games, the creator of Fortnite, which accused Google of violating antitrust laws by maintaining tight control of its Google Play app store. *nytimes.com/podcasts*

QUIZ

Banks have been increasingly closing down customer accounts without warning. In a new quiz featuring real case studies, readers are invited to see if they can get inside a banker's head and determine if an account's activity seems suspicious. *nytimes.com/your-money*

Quote of the Day

"If you want to make money, yawn. If you want to lose money, panic."

SAMUEL RINES, *the managing director at Corbu, a market research firm, dismissing concerns that the large-scale sale of bonds by traders as a kind of protest against high debt levels will become a dangerous financial strain. Page B1.*

The Story Behind the Story

TONY CENICOLA/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Niraj Chokshi, sitting in the foreground, traveled to Burlington, Vt., to learn about a company building battery-powered electric aircraft.

In the Air, on the Roads and Reporting en Route

The transportation beat called Niraj Chokshi's name, but it hasn't changed the way he travels. Much.

By TERENCE McGINLEY

Niraj Chokshi joined The New York Times in 2016 as a reporter on the Express desk, a group of journalists who cover breaking news and general topics. After three years of moving at a breakneck pace, reporting on the U.S.-Mexico border, hurricanes, archaeological discoveries and Red Delicious apples, he was eager to tackle one topic that he could explore in depth.

Then, in 2019, an opportunity to cover transportation for the Business desk emerged.

"I jumped at the chance," Mr. Chokshi said in an interview last week.

The beat has driven him to visit an electric-aircraft start-up in Vermont, report from a federal courthouse in Boston and tour the Boeing factory in Everett, Wash., which is generally regarded as the world's largest building by volume. While aviation commands much of his attention, Mr. Chokshi also reports on larger themes of transportation.

Ahead of some of the busiest travel days of the year, Mr. Chokshi explained what he had come to understand about the frustrations of flying and how he adjusted to a new beat. This conversation has been edited.

How do you prepare to cover a new topic?

When you start a beat, you throw everything at the wall. You're reading anything and everything, trying to soak it all in, and that can be really overwhelming. You don't have a filter yet. You don't have a sense of what to pay attention to and what you can ignore. You just try to accumulate knowledge. Then, to some degree, you learn to go with the flow.

Beats are not predictable: When I started, my editors and I were under the impression that airlines would be a smaller part of my focus. But within a few months, the pandemic began and the airline industry was in crisis. Very quickly, the airline industry was almost exclusively my focus.

In the past few months, you've reported from inside a federal courthouse in Boston, where the government was fighting a corporate merger. You were in Burlington, Vt., documenting the efforts of a company trying to advance battery-powered electric aircraft. Is transportation a beat with all of society in its purview?

I think so, and I think that's why I've enjoyed it so much. Not everybody flies, but a significant chunk of the public does. We all use roads. Lots of us travel by rail. And the airline industry itself is a reflection of broader business and economic trends.

I was in Boston this month for the closing arguments in the trial over JetBlue's acquisition of Spirit Airlines. The issue in court that day was unique to this industry, but it also spoke to a broader trend across the economy of consolidation. We all travel for the holidays; that's a universal experience. And every year I end up writing about holiday travel. I get to write about a lot of different things in a lot of different ways.

You often collaborate with reporters on other teams. How does that work?

It's probably not as structured as readers may expect. We recognize that there's a lot of expertise in this newsroom. I wrote an article about Boeing and China, and it was really easy to collaborate with Keith Bradsher, a colleague who covers China. All of the reporters look for opportunities to work together.

Frustration with airports and airlines has become a punchline. Has your reporting helped you understand why people's experiences with airlines often seem so bad?

I don't think a week goes by when I'm not contacted by a reader who has some awful experience to share. There are delays and cancellations. Sometimes it's out of the airline's hands, like in cases of weather or air-traffic-control issues, and sometimes it's something that they could have controlled, as was the case with the Southwest Airlines meltdown last Christmas. I think the frustration is justified. Travel can be miserable.

Not to excuse the industry, because it can do a lot more to improve the experience, but I do think it's helpful to keep in mind how complicated the aviation system is. You have thousands of flights crossing the country every day. They have to compete with weather and with one another. And, of course, on top of this, they have to do everything safely.

Has reporting on transportation changed the way you travel?

A lot of people in my life assume that I have gained some insider knowledge. But I don't think that my approach to travel has changed dramatically. There are small things I do differently: I try to find flights that depart earlier in the day, working under the assumption that problems will get worse throughout the day. I don't have a relationship with any airline; I look for the best mix of route and price. I have a lot of friends who ask me for tips, and I don't have any industry secrets. But I love to travel and do it as often as I can.

Today's Top Trending Headlines

After Weeks of Warnings, Iceland Volcano Erupts in Plumes Of Fire A volcano in Iceland's most populated region erupted on Monday, with its fissure not far from the Svartsengi Power Plant. The nearby town of Grindavík was evacuated. As of Monday evening, travel was not affected, Egill Bjarnason reported from Reykjavik.

Inside the Booming Business of Cutting Babies' Tongues Lactation consultants and dentists have aggressively promoted a procedure in which doctors snip a bundle of tissue connecting a baby's tongue to the bottom of their mouth. Times journalists reported that the procedure has grown in popularity among women who face pressure to nurse, even though there is little evidence it improves feeding.

Marvel Will Part Ways With Jonathan Majors After Guilty Verdict After more than five hours of deliberation, a jury on Monday found the actor Jonathan Majors guilty of assaulting and harassing his girlfriend. Not long after, Marvel Studios announced it had parted ways with the actor, who had been scheduled to reprise his Kang the Conqueror role in future Marvel features.

A Magical Tour of Christmas Markets Along the Rhine Elaine Glusac, The Times's Frugal Traveler columnist, rode trains and a "Christmas bus" to explore holiday markets at eight towns and cities in France and Switzerland. The cheerful markets feature warmed wine and abundant food. "From my treasured haul of about $250 in art prints, ceramics, ornaments and gifts, let it be known that Christmas markets are Whovilles on steroids," Ms. Glusac wrote.

A Headline From History

KASPAROV, IN COMEBACK, RETAINS CHESS TITLE

December 20, 1987. The defending champion Garry Kasparov retained his world chess title after beating Anatoly Karpov in Game 24 of the match the previous day in Seville, Spain, The Times reported. The win came three hours into play, when Mr. Karpov conceded, "realizing it was hopeless," according to The Times. Mr. Karpov had been in the lead entering the final game — having won 12 of the previous 23 games — before Mr. Kasparov forced him "into positions that eventually became indefensible." Mr. Kasparov had only needed to tie overall to retain his title. However, because the outcome of the match was a tie, the two players shared the $1.6 million prize. "Supporters of both feel they are the two best players in the world," wrote The Times. The rivals rematched most recently in 2009 in Valencia, Spain, to commemorate the 25th anniversary of their first World Chess Championship in 1984.

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Facts of Interest

Christmas trees grow slowly, about 12 to 14 inches a year, and can take 10 years to go from seed to harvest.

The Economics of Christmas Trees, From Seed to Sale A14

The Myanmar army is known for its past reliance on forced labor. For decades, it nabbed villagers to help transport ammunition through hilly jungles and used convicts to trip land mines, a practice called forced portering.

Kidnapped and Forced to Fight In Myanmar's Junta A4

Ann Clark, the United States' largest cookie-cutter manufacturer, said its top sellers are offbeat shapes. This year's breakout star is a gnome — traced to the success of cottagecore, a rustic-living ethos.

What's Ahead in 2024? The Cookie Cutters Tell All. D1

In Argentina, which has an annual inflation rate of more than 140 percent, a new, self-proclaimed "anarcho-capitalist" president, Javier Milei, last week devalued the currency by 50 percent.

Debt Is a Global Quandary. Old Remedies Are in Doubt. B1

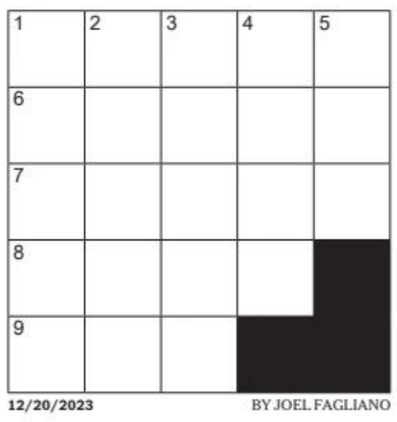
According to DJ Intelligence, one of the top software platforms D.J.s use, The Killers' "Mr. Brightside" is the third most-requested song, behind only Whitney Houston's "I Wanna Dance With Somebody" and Abba's "Dancing Queen."

A Straight, Heady Shot of Nostalgia C1

After being traded by the Tampa Bay Rays, Tyler Glasnow signed a $136.5 million contract extension with the Los Angeles Dodgers. It's the sixth $100 million contract the Dodgers have given to a pitcher.

His New Team Is Like His Old Team, But With 'More Money' B9

The Mini Crossword



12/20/2023 BY JOEL FAGLIANO

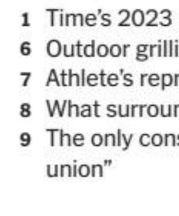
ACROSS

1 Time's 2023 Person of the Year
6 Outdoor grilling area
7 Athlete's representative
8 What surrounds Vatican City
9 The only consonants in "non-union"

DOWN

1 Royal memoir that was the best-selling nonfiction book of 2023
2 Station ___ (kind of car)
3 Things
4 "Be that way!"
5 Little kid

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE



KENTARO OKAWARA

Reader Corner

Responses and Replies

The Times reporter Alan Feuer has covered the courts for more than 20 years. Each week in the Trump on Trial newsletter, he answers readers' questions about the various legal cases facing former President Donald J. Trump. Read one edited exchange below.

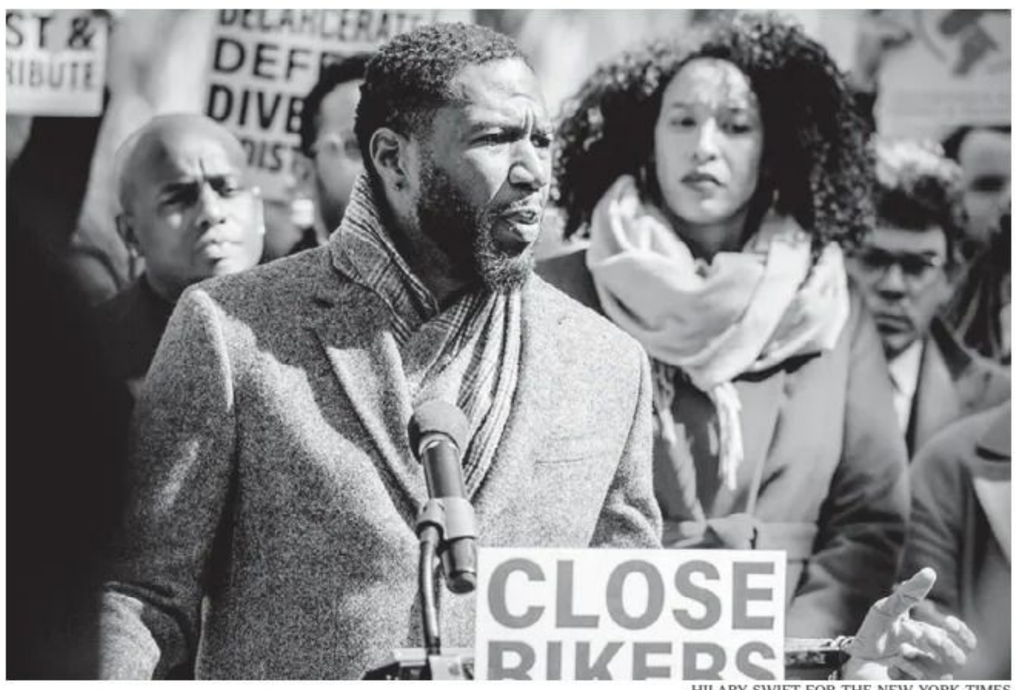
Is Trump getting special treatment compared to other citizens?
— HENK VAN DER VEER, THE NETHERLANDS

ALAN FEUER The judge in the federal case in Washington, Tanya Chutkan, has promised she intends to treat Trump no better or worse than any other defendant. That said, as a former president and his party's leading candidate for 2024, he is not a typical defendant and is using strategies unavailable to the average citizen. He is claiming that the concept of presidential immunity means he cannot be prosecuted for actions he took in office, an assertion that may be taken up by the Supreme Court.

And because he is a candidate, he is arguing that a gag order imposed on him in the Washington case curtailed his "core political speech," an argument that a federal appeals court took seriously.

In Our Inbox

Excerpts From New York Times Newsletters



HILARY SWIFT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Jumaane Williams, New York City's public advocate, has said that isolating detainees was cruel.

On Wednesday, the New York City Council is expected to vote on a bill that would largely ban solitary confinement in city jails, over the objections of Mayor Eric Adams. For the New York Today newsletter, James Barron talked with Emma G. Fitzsimmons, the City Hall bureau chief for The Times, who is following the story. Read an edited excerpt from their conversation below.

Does solitary confinement impede the rehabilitation of inmates?

A large body of research links solitary confinement to increased risks for self-harm and suicide, worsened mental illness and higher rates of death after release. There are also racial disparities in its use; Black and Latino people are more likely to be put in solitary confinement.

Several people have died after being held at the Rikers Island jail complex over the last decade in solitary confinement, including Kalief Browder, who was accused of stealing a backpack and detained there for three years.

What does the mayor say?

He opposes the City Council bill and is urging members to vote against it. He says that some violent detainees should be separated to protect jail workers and other detainees.

He has used his background as a former police officer to say that he understands the issue better than the Council. Shortly before becoming mayor, he said: "I wore a bulletproof vest for 22 years and protected the people of this city. And when you do that, you have the right to question me on safety and public safety matters."

To subscribe to New York Today, visit nytimes.com/newsletters.

Here to Help

How to Host Holiday Guests Without a Guest Room

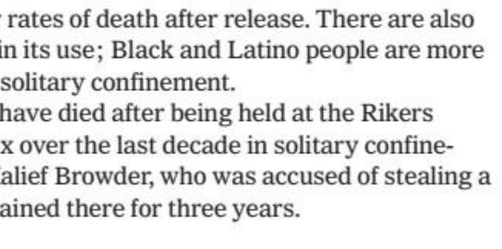
Not all guest rooms need to have four walls and a door. With the right attitude (and accessories), you can transform a communal space in your home into an oasis that your holiday visitors will appreciate. Here's what you need. **ELISSA SANCI**

Have a quality air mattress. Don't subject your guests to a saggy, unsupportive air mattress. Get a comfortable inflatable bed, such as the SoundAsleep Dream Series Air Mattress, which is also easy to inflate. It has the height and surface area of a real bed, and because it stays firmly inflated throughout the night, your visitors won't end up on the ground by morning.

If you're using a pullout sofa bed, add a support board. Pullout sofa beds aren't known for being the most comfortable guest option, but a support board can amp up any sofa's soft, saggy mattress.

Have extra blankets, sheets and pillows. Providing your company with cozy blankets and sheets is essential if you want to ensure that they have a comfortable place to sleep.

Buy a night light. Friends don't let friends stumble around in the dark trying to find the bathroom. The Amazon Echo Glow is a night light that's small enough to sit on an end table or on the floor beside an air mattress. You can program it through Alexa devices, so guests can verbally command it to turn on and off or tweak the brightness.

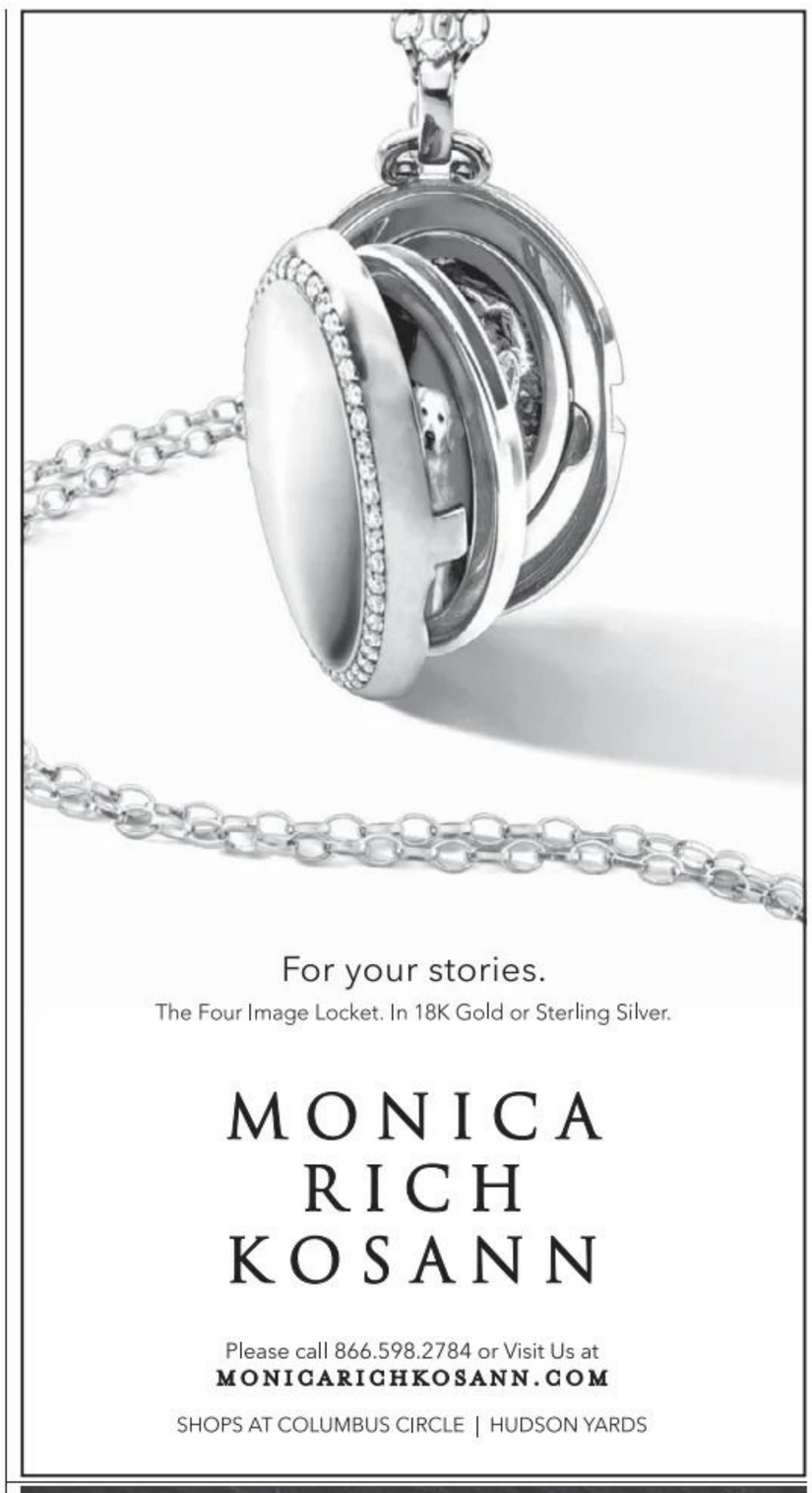


MICHAEL HESSION

Consider a multipurpose foldable ottoman. If your living space is tight, you might need to break down the sleeping arrangements every morning. The Seville Classics Foldable Storage Bench Ottoman can keep bedding, towels and pillows organized and tucked out of the way. This piece can also double as a makeshift luggage rack — it's designed to support up to 500 pounds.

Add a surge protector for easy outlet access. No one likes to search for an outlet in an unfamiliar room. Give your visitors access to open outlets with the 12-outlet surge protector from Tripp Lite. If visitors won't be able to reach the surge protector from where you've set up the air mattress or sofa bed, be sure to provide them with a wall charger and charging cable as well.

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



International

The New York Times

PALACE AL CANAL
x.com/byneontelegram

Kidnapped and Forced to Fight in Myanmar's Junta

Abductions of Men And Boys Are Rising

By SUI-LEE WEE

At least 16 young men disappeared last month.

In four cities across Myanmar, under cover of darkness, armed groups took them to police stations, according to family members and some of the men themselves. Some were released after paying ransoms. In other cases, failure to pay led to forced conscription into the military. Other men simply vanished.

Such disappearances began after Myanmar's military seized power in February 2021. But they appear to have accelerated in recent weeks, at a time when the military is facing the most serious challenge to its rule since the coup. In October, three ethnic rebel armies started the biggest offensive against the government in nearly three years.

The New York Times confirmed the abductions of 16 men in November, through interviews with men who had been released or with relatives of others. In some cases, it is unclear where they were taken and why. In a country that is functionally locked down by the military junta, information is hard to come by, and it is difficult to determine the exact number of disappearances.

But the accounts have sent a chill through communities. Family members are instructing men and boys to stay home. Parents are pulling their sons out of school.

"It's happening across Yangon, and people are jittery about it," said U Khin Zaw Win, the director of the Tampadipa Institute, a policy advocacy organization based in that city. His family has told his 14-year-old grandson not to go out in the evening, he said, for fear that "he might be grabbed by the scruff of his neck and just thrown into a truck."

People who lost their sons and husbands said reports to the police were often met with demands for money. Many did not dare to go to the authorities because they assumed the armed forces were behind the kidnappings.

Myanmar's military spokesman, Maj. Gen. Zaw Min Tun, dismissed that possibility, saying that "there's no reason for the military to engage in such activities anywhere in Myanmar."

But that has not quelled suspicions in a country where the army is known for its past reliance on forced labor. For decades, it nabbed villagers to help transport ammunition through hilly jungles and used convicts as human shields, and to trip land mines. That practice, documented by many human rights groups, was called forced portering, a term that still evokes dread in Myanmar and has been used in speculation about the recent disappearances.

The accounts come as the military is struggling with recruitment. At least 4,500 soldiers have defected from the army, according to People's Embrace, a group that supports defectors from Myanmar's security forces. While that accounts for a small percentage of the army's total personnel, estimated at 280,000 to 350,000 people, the number of deserters has doubled since the start of the year.

REUTERS

Soldiers in Yangon, Myanmar. Zarni Lynn, 15, below, vanished last month after going to buy water. Some young men were freed after ransoms were paid.

Defectors say the army has called up retirees, who are fighting in the trenches. Male relatives of soldiers are now required to fight, and wives have been marshaled to provide security for bases, in violation of military law. The Defense Services Academy, Myanmar's equivalent of West Point, admitted 83 students this year, far below the usual number of about 1,000, according to a lecturer from the academy, who declined to be named because the person was not authorized to speak to journalists.

Five men told The Times that they had been abducted by soldiers and forcibly conscripted into the army since the coup.

On Dec. 31 of last year, Myo Min Zaw was walking home from work in the city of Bago when soldiers shoved him into a military vehicle, he said. He was sent to an army recruitment unit in Mawlamyine, a city to the south. The next morning, soldiers shaved off most of his hair.

He told them he did not want to enlist.

"They said refusal meant imprisonment," recalled Mr. Myo Min Zaw, 18.

He said he was sent to the No. 9 Training School in Thaton for a 27-week program. About 80 percent of the roughly 100 people there were forced recruits like Mr. Myo Min Zaw, while the rest were soldiers' children. He was then assigned to a military base in Hpapun township to clean and cook. He escaped with a friend last month, taking their guns with them.

The number of reports of missing men appears to have increased since the start of Operation 1027, the offensive launched on Oct. 27 by three ethnic armies: the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army and the Arakan Army.

That rebel alliance has teamed up with other armed ethnic groups and the People's Defense Force — former protesters who took up arms after the coup — to seize hundreds of military outposts and strategic trade routes in three states and two regions. For more than a month, the army has struggled to retake any of its bases.

On Nov. 4, Zarni Lynn, 15, went to buy a bottle of water in Yangon around 12:30 p.m. and never returned.

His father, U Zarni Maung, said he had filed a police report but felt "utterly helpless."

"I fear they might take him to the military front line and harm him," he said.

Two weeks later, Win Min Soe was sitting on a bench and playing games on his phone outside his house in Yangon when three men in plainclothes with guns seized him. It was 9:30 p.m.

Mr. Win Min Soe, 20, started shouting for help.

"I followed, yelling: 'What are you doing? Why are you taking my son?'" said his father, Zaw Tun. The men warned him

to stay back if he did not want to be shot, forced Mr. Win Min Soe into a car and drove off.

Daw Hla Hla Moe, a neighbor, witnessed the abduction and corroborated Mr. Zaw Tun's account. "Taking a boy who is sitting in front of his own house is just terrifying," she said.

Mr. Zaw Tun said he went to the police station to ask about his son but has been at a loss since then. Mr. Win Min Soe, quiet and well-liked, was his only child.

Before the coup, Mr. Win Min Soe had been a second-year computer science student at a local university. After the military seized power, he joined the nationwide civil disobedience movement and stopped going to school in protest.

In recent weeks, soldiers have been stationed in high schools in Yangon, adding to the panic. In late November, Daw Sein Htay said she received a call from her 12-year-old son's teacher, who said that soldiers had based themselves in the school and that she "couldn't guarantee his safety."

Ms. Sein Htay rushed to pick up her son up that day. He has not been back at school since then, she said.

The abductions in Yangon appear to mirror those in other cities.

On Nov. 10, Ko Than Soe, a 34-year-old deliveryman, went to a mosque in the city of Mandalay for his morning prayers at 4:30 a.m. and never returned. When some of his friends came back that evening, they told his wife, Daw Moe Moe Lwin, that they had been seized by the police but managed to leave after they paid a ransom.

One of them said he was asked to pay about $860. The police told them that refusing meant being sent to the front line, said the man, who declined to be identified because the officers had instructed him not to talk about what had happened.

Ms. Moe Moe Lwin dashed to the police station to plead for her husband's release and was told to pay $500. She is unemployed and did not have the money. She returned again to ask where her husband was. She was finally given an answer: a military base.

Survivors Face Subzero Cold After Earthquake Kills Over 120 in Rural China

By VIVIAN WANG and JOY DONG

BEIJING — An earthquake killed at least 120 people in a mountainous area of northwestern China, officials and state media said on Tuesday, crumpling buildings while residents slept inside and sending people rushing into a frigid night.

Rescuers were searching for survivors in rural Jishishan County in Gansu Province, the epicenter of the quake, officials from Gansu said at a news conference on Tuesday. They said the quake, which struck at 11:59 p.m. on Monday, had killed 113 people in the province and injured more than 500 others.

Thirteen people in the city of Haidong in neighboring Qinghai Province were also killed, according to the state-run Xinhua News Agency.

The quake had a magnitude of 5.9, according to the United States Geological Survey, though it was measured at 6.2 by the China Earthquake Administration. Photos and videos shared by state media showed brick houses that had caved in, and bedrooms buried in rubble. Hours later, rescuers were still digging people out, according to CCTV, the state broadcaster.

The quake damaged 15,000 houses and knocked out water, electricity and transportation links in some parts of Gansu, which, like much of the country, is enduring a cold snap. The temperature in Jishishan during the quake was almost minus 20 Celsius (minus 4 Fahrenheit), according to state media.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PEDRO PARDO/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

Left, damage from the 5.9 magnitude quake that struck rural Gansu, one of China's poorest provinces, on Monday. Above, residents driven outdoors huddled against the cold.

In interviews with state media outlets, residents recounted being jolted awake and fleeing into the cold with barely enough time to grab extra layers of clothing. Photos showed people in a plaza wrapped in thick comforters.

On social media, people who said they were at the quake site reported that they had started bonfires in their yards or set fire to cardboard boxes to keep warm. They described the shock of finding out that neighbors or friends had died, and trying to assess the damage to their homes.

Several residents told Jimu News, a site affiliated with Hubei Province, that they expected to spend the night in their cars, driving away from the epicenter. In Gansu's provincial capital, Lanzhou, 100 miles away, a college student told The Paper, a Shanghai party-affiliated outlet, that the closets in her eighth-floor dorm room had shaken, and that students had felt aftershocks as they fled downstairs from the initial quake.

Some risked running back into the building later for more clothing because of the cold, she said.

On Tuesday morning, rescue workers had set up rows of tents in the main squares of villages affected by the quake, according to CCTV. They were rushing to deliver tens of thousands of cots, blankets, mattresses and coats.

Villagers livestreaming on social media on Tuesday reassured each other that they would rebuild together.

Gansu is one of China's poorest provinces, and Jishishan County is composed primarily of small townships and villages, home to about 260,000 people, a local official told party-affiliated media. The local government did not have enough clothes, quilts or shoes and would need to rely on the provincial government, said the official, Li Yong.

In 2020, provincial officials formally declared that Jishishan was no longer "poverty-stricken," as part of a nationwide campaign to supposedly eradicate rural poverty by the end of that year.

Since 1900, there have been three earthquakes of magnitude 6.0 or above, as measured by China, within a 120-mile radius of the Monday quake, state media said.

Parts of Gansu fall within an earthquake-prone belt that runs from Mongolia in the north to Myanmar in the south, Xu Xiwei, a professor at the China University of Geosciences, told state media. Many houses in the area may not be built sturdily enough to resist earthquakes, and the fact that the quake struck late at night likely made it harder for people to escape, adding to the casualties, Professor Xu said.

The State Council, China's cabinet, and the National Health Commission deployed teams to the site to oversee rescue operations, CCTV said. China's top leader, Xi Jinping, noted that the disaster had happened in a "high-altitude area with cold weather" and ordered workers to repair infrastructure as quickly as possible.

At 9:46 a.m. on Tuesday, China reported another quake, of magnitude 5.5, in the far western region of Xinjiang, about 1,800 miles west of Jishishan. Information about casualties was not immediately available.

Vivian Wang reported from Beijing, and Joy Dong from Hong Kong. Li You, Claire Fu and Siyi Zhao contributed research.

MARCO DI MARCO/ASSOCIATED PRESS

The eruption on Tuesday. It began Monday about two miles from the town of Grindavik, which was evacuated last month in anticipation of the blast. Officials said it was not yet a danger to people.

Miles of Shooting Lava: Eruption Lights Up Iceland's Skies

By EGILL BJARNASON and CASSANDRA VINOGRAD

MARCO DI MARCO/ASSOCIATED PRESS

THE NEW YORK TIMES

ANTON BRINK/EPA, VIA SHUTTERSTOCK

Left, scientists monitoring the eruption. Right, watching the lava flow. Authorities warned against getting too close, emphasizing that this was "no tourist volcano."

After weeks of anticipation, a volcanic eruption in Iceland's most populated area sent lava spewing into the night sky late Monday and pushed the authorities into action mode Tuesday. The eruption, which was larger than volcanologists had predicted, happened not far from an evacuated town and a power plant.

Iceland is no stranger to volcanic eruptions, and the authorities quickly moved to reassure the public that there was no immediate threat to life. "We are prepared and remain vigilant," President Gudni Johannesson wrote on the social platform X.

They also stressed that travel was not affected — a clear attempt to fend off concerns of a repeat of 2010, when an ash cloud from another eruption in Iceland snarled flights across Europe.

What happened?

The eruption began late Monday, with fountains of lava pouring from a fissure within a volcanic system on the Reykjanes Peninsula, the most populated region in Iceland and home to its capital, Reykjavik. Helicopter video shared by Iceland's Civil Defense showed steam rising from a glowing, snaking river of lava.

Volcanologists initially said that the eruption had occurred in one of the worst possible locations. The fissure, which is about 2.5 miles long, is not far from the Svartsengi power plant, a geothermal facility that supplies hot water to the whole peninsula. And it is just under two miles from Grindavik, a town of more than 3,500 that was evacuated last month after heightened seismic activity prompted concerns that an eruption was likely.

But after flying over the eruption site, volcanologists said that the immediate situation appeared less dire than initially feared.

Are people at risk?

Volcanologists noted that the direction of the lava's flow was unpredictable. Although the Icelandic Meteorological Office said on Tuesday afternoon that the eruption's intensity "continues to diminish," with the flow estimated to be about a quarter of what it was initially, it was not immediately clear how long it would go on.

"The fact that the activity is decreasing already is not an indication of how long the eruption will last, but rather that the eruption is reaching a state of equilibrium," the Meteorological Office said in a statement.

Yet because the affected area had previously been evacuated, the eruption "does not pose immediate threat to people," Iceland's tourist board said in a statement on Tuesday morning.

The area was closed to traffic, and the risk to nearby energy infrastructure was being assessed, Iceland's government added in a statement.

The authorities nevertheless warned against getting too close, with Hjordis Gudmundsdottir, a spokeswoman for the Department of Civil Protection, emphasizing that this was "no tourist volcano."

And the Meteorological Office said that some gas pollution could be detected in the capital later on Tuesday as a result of the eruption.

Is it affecting travel and tourism?

Iceland's authorities had raised the aviation alert to orange, because ash from a volcanic eruption could pose a risk to aircraft flying in the North Atlantic.

But as of Tuesday morning, all flights to and from the country were operating on schedule, according to a statement from Iceland's tourist board. It also noted that previous eruptions in the area had not affected air travel.

The European Union Aviation Safety Agency said it was "closely" monitoring the situation and stood "ready to take any action if required."

But Dave McGarvie, a volcanologist at Britain's Lancaster University, said that "lava dominated" fissure eruptions like this one tend to "produce little or no ash."

The eruption did catch some in Iceland by surprise, given that concerns of an imminent eruption had diminished in recent days. The nearby tourist meeca, the Blue Lagoon, which had closed in November because of earthquake activity associated with potential volcanic eruptions, had just reopened for guests on Sunday.

On Tuesday morning, the site issued a statement saying that it would again temporarily shut down.

Overall, Sigurdur Ingi Johannsson, the country's infrastructure minister, told RUV, the national broadcaster, "We seem to have been quite lucky," adding, "We hope that will continue."

Scientists will be taking measurements to try to see whether new subterranean magma is flowing toward the eruption site. That could determine whether this is likely to end in days or to last for weeks, according to Mr. McGarvie.

"An aspect of major concern is where the lava will go," he said by email. "Anywhere northward is helpful to the evacuated town of Grindavík."

For now, the lava appears to be flowing in the best possible direction, Iceland's prime minister, Katrin Jakobsdottir, told RUV. But "this can change with short notice," she added.

How often do volcanic eruptions occur in Iceland?

Volcanic eruptions are not uncommon in Iceland, which has fewer than 400,000 residents and about 130 volcanoes. In just the past two years, there have been four eruptions on the Reykjanes Peninsula, the scene of the latest eruption and home to about two-thirds of Iceland's population.

One of Iceland's most memorable eruptions involved the Eyjafjallajokull volcano in 2010. Although it was relatively small and caused no fatalities, the impact was widespread because a resulting ash cloud grounded much of Europe's air travel for more than a week.

Iceland straddles two tectonic plates, which are themselves divided by an undersea mountain chain that oozes molten hot rock.

Earthquakes occur when the magma pushes through the plates, and starting in late October, a rise in seismic activity was detected, with tens of thousands of earthquakes reported in the Reykjanes Peninsula. At one point there were as many as 1,400 in a single 24-hour period.

That raised concerns that a significant eruption would soon occur. But when Grindavik was ordered evacuated on Nov. 11, the authorities said that the country was "highly prepared."

"Iceland has one of the world's most effective volcanic preparedness measures," Iceland's Department of Civil Protection and Emergency Management said on its website.

After Weeks of Buildup, A Fiery, Must-See Show

From Page A1

"Against the mountains the flames were huge, and the fissure length grew larger and larger," Mr. Viggosson said.

One of the spectators was Bjorn Steinbekk, the head of a marketing and consulting company, left his Reykjavik home as soon as he heard about the eruption on Monday night. Using a drone, he captured footage of the lava shooting into the sky. Even for someone who has chased many eruptions in the last two years, "last night was a whole new chapter from anything we've seen before," Mr. Steinbekk said. "It was much more violent for two or three hours, with bigger strokes and a lot of lava coming out."

Iceland is prone to volcanic activity. It straddles two tectonic plates, which are divided by an undersea mountain chain that oozes molten hot rock, or magma. But the Reykjanes volcanic system in southwestern Iceland had been dormant for 800 years. In the last few years, however, magma began to gather under the surface.

José Alvarado, a pilot with the low-cost Icelandic airline Play, got a view of the eruption from the cockpit of his plane. He described what he saw as a big glow.

"The amount of light you got through the clouds was pretty amazing — it was completely red," said Mr. Alvarado, who was flying to Reykjavik from Lisbon. Once he heard from air traffic control that the eruption would not produce ash clouds and therefore posed no risk, he gave passengers an update and suggested they look out of the right side of the aircraft for a view.

By 2 a.m. on Tuesday, the eruption had started easing. By later on Tuesday, lava was spewing at a much lower intensity, Mr. Steinbekk said, speaking from near the eruption, as he prepared to launch his drone to get more footage.

Kjartan Adolfsson, an accountant living in Grindavik, a town of more than 3,500, evacuated with other residents last month after heightened seismic activity prompted concerns that an eruption was imminent. The eruption on Monday was "uncomfortably close to town," he said, although he was relieved that the lava was flowing away from Grindavik.

For weeks, Mr. Adolfsson, 59, said, he had been bracing for the worst. He said that the first time he had to evacuate because of an eruption was 50 years ago. His parents woke him up in the middle of the night at their home on the island of Heimaey, Iceland's largest island settlement. They packed quickly and sailed away from the town, only to find out later that their home had been destroyed by lava.

The local authorities have not yet indicated when Grindavik will be safe enough for residents to return. Almost everyone had evacuated at the time of the eruption.

Stefan Kristjansson, who owns several fishing boats, was unwinding in his outdoor hot tub in Grindavik on Monday night when he saw the horizon light up. He quickly got dressed, left some food out for his sheep and drove to Reykjavik. "I would like to be back before Christmas," he said.

VIKEN KANTARCI/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

The evacuated town of Grindavik, Iceland, as smoke and lava spew from the eruption on the Reykjanes Peninsula.

War in the Middle East

SUEZ CANAL AUTHORITY, VIA REUTERS

About 12 percent of world trade goes through the Suez Canal. The Houthis' attacks have already appeared to push up the price of oil.

Attacks in Red Sea Imperil the Global Economy

From Page A1

where their goods are, where they are heading."

Lloyd J. Austin III, the U.S. defense secretary, on Monday announced a new multinational force that would seek "to jointly address security challenges in the southern Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, with the goal of ensuring freedom of navigation for all countries and bolstering regional security and prosperity."

The joint effort, which will include the armed forces of the United States, Britain, Bahrain, Canada and France, was announced after a U.S. warship on Saturday brought down 14 drones launched from Houthi-controlled territory.

On Monday, BP, the oil company, said it was suspending shipments through the Suez Canal, citing the "deteriorating security situation for shipping."

The companies that transport products like toys and electronics from Asia in vast container ships have also said they will stop sending vessels into the area. A ship belonging to one of those companies, Maersk, was attacked last week.

Maersk said on Tuesday that all of its ships bound for the Red Sea would be rerouted around Africa via the Cape of Good Hope "to ensure the safety of our crew, vessels and customers' cargo onboard." Until it was safer to use the route, the detour around Africa would be "a faster and more predictable outcome for customers and their supply chains."

The instability near the Suez Canal comes at a time when a drought has forced the operators of the Panama Canal, another critical link in global supply chains, to slash the number of vessels that can use that waterway.

Some 12 percent of world trade goes through the Suez Canal, and 5 percent through the Panama Canal. When shipping companies avoid the canals, they often must spend millions of dollars more on fuel for ships to take longer routes.

Sailing from Asia to Europe via the Cape of Good Hope instead of the Suez Canal is a diversion that would lengthen the journey from Singapore to Rotterdam in the Netherlands by 3,300 miles, or nearly 40 percent.

Mr. Sand said taking the Cape of Good Hope route could add roughly $1 million, or around a third, to the cost of a round trip from Asia to Europe. He added that some shipping rates had risen 20 percent in recent days.

A portion of that additional cost could be passed on to consumers just as inflation is slowing in the United States and Europe.

The attacks have already appeared to push up the price of oil. Brent crude, the international oil benchmark, has risen about 8 percent over the past week.

ALBERTO PIZZOLI/A.F.P. — GETTY IMAGES

Lloyd J. Austin III, the U.S. defense secretary, announced a Red Sea security initiative.

The economic impact has increased the pressure on the United States and other countries to stop the attacks by the Houthis. Shipping executives said such force was necessary.

"If you closed down the Suez Canal, it would have some huge ripple effects," said Oystein Kalleklev, the chief executive of Avance Gas, which transports propane from the United States to Asia. "So, we will think that there will be sufficient naval ships in order to stabilize the situation."

Just over two years ago, the Suez Canal was the source of another supply chain scare. One of the largest container ships ever built got stuck for days in the canal, blocking other vessels from using the crossing. That episode occurred when supply chains were overwhelmed by the huge demand for home appliances, electronics and other goods during the pandemic.

By comparison, the current attacks in the Red Sea are happening during a period of relatively slack demand. As a result, Mr. Rogers of S&P said in an email, their effect will be limited "if the disruption lasts days rather than weeks or months."

The delays at the Panama Canal prompted some shipping companies that transport goods from Asia to the East Coast of the United States to send ships through the Suez Canal instead. But the problems in the Red Sea could now force them to go around the Cape of Good Hope, lengthening those trips even more.

Unlike the Suez Canal, the Panama Canal uses locks, which lift vessels up and down as they cross from one ocean to another. The lack of rain has reduced the amount of water available to fill the locks, and the Panama Canal authority has had to reduce the number of ships using the waterway. That number could fall further because the dry season is just beginning.

"The Panama Canal situation," Mr. Kalleklev said, won't be "over anytime soon."

U.S. Plans Task Force To Aid Red Sea Ships

An Effort to Counter Houthi Attacks

This article is by ***Eric Schmitt***, ***Neil MacFarquhar*** *and* ***Helene Cooper****.*

MANAMA, Bahrain — Drone and rocket attacks by rebels in Yemen targeting commercial ships in the Red Sea have left the Biden administration scrambling for a solution short of retaliatory strikes, which officials fear could drag the United States into a wider war.

On Tuesday, Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III said the attacks by the Iran-backed Houthis demanded "collective action" as he promoted a new U.S.-led maritime security initiative to protect vessels in the busy waterway.

"Many of the largest shipping companies in the world have elected to avoid the Red Sea entirely," Mr. Austin said during a visit to Bahrain, which hosts an American naval base.

But U.S. officials have struggled to lay out specifics of how the initiative will operate, and analysts said the plan was not likely to immediately stop the Houthi attacks, which have driven up freight and insurance rates and oil prices.

At any given time, about 1,000 commercial vessels are passing through the Red Sea, a senior U.S. military officer said, and about 400 of those are in the lower Red Sea, the area most vulnerable to Houthi missiles and drones.

Analysts said the initiative, called Prosperity Guardian, was mostly a symbolic move that allowed the White House to say more countries were supporting Red Sea security and to increase shipping companies' confidence.

The mission will include contributions from Britain, Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Seychelles and Spain.

The United States, Britain and France will continue to provide most of the warships to protect the waterway, but only in a defensive capacity. About half a dozen military ships from those countries, which had started operating in the Red Sea soon after Hamas's Oct. 7 attacks on Israel, will now fall under the formal initiative.

The expectation is that more countries will join and contribute ships or surveillance aircraft, though Mr. Austin and his aides did not give projected numbers.

The Houthi attacks have put Israel, which is heavily dependent on Red Sea shipping traffic, in a difficult position. Many Arab countries also need the trade that flows through the Red Sea.

But with the exception of Bahrain, which has agreed to let its navy participate in the task force, Arab countries have been noticeably silent. With U.S. support for Israel's war in the Gaza Strip fomenting anger among Arab populations, most countries in the region seem to want to avoid being associated with the United States in a military venture.

"It is a really uncomfortable and awkward moment for most of the Arab states," said Sanam Vakil, the director of the Middle East and North Africa program at Chatham House, an international affairs think tank in London. "They do not want to be seen as endorsing Israel's destruction of Gaza and its brutal tactics in any way."

In a statement announcing the initiative, Mr. Austin said that "countries that seek to uphold the foundational principle of freedom of navigation must come together to tackle the challenge posed by this nonstate actor."

The announcement comes after the U.S. and British navies said their destroyers had shot down 15 drones in the waterway over the weekend. And late Monday night, the U.S. Central Command reported two more attacks on commercial vessels in the Red Sea.

It was unclear what the countries involved in the task force would actually do, and one U.S. official acknowledged privately that the American and British navies would probably continue to handle the bulk of the enforcement. He spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk publicly.

A top Houthi negotiator, Mohammed Abdulsalam, said on Tuesday that the militia would not stop its "legitimate operations," calling the U.S.-led coalition "a militarization of the Red Sea without any justification."

The Houthis have defended their strikes as an effort to force Israel to allow food and medicine to enter Gaza and to halt its military assault on the area, which began after the Hamas attacks.

A senior Western intelligence official said that the new initiative was unlikely to deter the Houthis and that any retaliatory strike by the United States could result in an escalation, which the Houthis seek. The official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss operational matters, said that the Houthis' aim was to highlight Western support to Israel and that retaliation would play into that.

Current and former U.S. military officers with experience in the region said the announcement aimed at the least to give shipping companies greater confidence to resume routes through the Red Sea, easing rising fuel and insurance costs and addressing potential supply chain issues.

Eric Schmitt reported from Manama, Neil MacFarquhar from London and Helene Cooper from Washington. Vivian Nereim contributed reporting from Riyadh.

After the Oct. 7 Attacks, Israelis Are Becoming More Politically Conservative

By SHEERA FRENKEL

TEL AVIV — Maya Mizrachi grimaced at the group of eight Israelis calling for peace with Palestinians in front of Israel's military headquarters this month in Tel Aviv.

A year ago, Ms. Mizrachi, 25, had protested with them, carrying a sign that called for Israel to end its military occupation of the West Bank. Now, she had bumped into them by accident, on her way home from a nearby rally calling for the return of Israeli citizens held hostage in the Gaza Strip.

"I don't think there are more than eight people in all of Israel who would protest against the army right now," said Ms. Mizrachi, who is a student. "I can't even bring myself to do it."

She is one of a growing number of Israelis eschewing the politics of the left — ideas that include promoting peace talks with the Palestinians, ending Israel's occupation of the West Bank and supporting a two-state solution — since Oct. 7, when Hamas gunmen crossed into Israel in a surprise attack and killed roughly 1,200 people.

In the wellspring of sadness, anger and fear that has gripped Israel, a consensus has emerged that Israel needs to take a harder line with the Palestinians and embrace an even more militarized state. While public opinion of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is faltering, support for the policies upheld by his right-wing government is growing.

If the left has lost mainstream support, Israel's peace camp has been driven virtually underground. Activist groups say many members have abandoned the cause, and those who remain committed have struggled to find public places willing to accommodate antiwar protests.

According to polls conducted in the two months since Oct. 7, Israelis have moved decidedly to the right on a number of political issues, including support for settlers in the West Bank, endorsements for far-right politicians, and even the re-establishment of a military occupation of Gaza.

"The trauma of what happened on Oct. 7 shifted Israeli society. It made them question the most basic tenets of whether they were safe in their homes," said Tal Schneider, a political columnist for The Times of Israel. "They are calling now for more — more military, more protection, more hardline policies."

Left-wing parties in Israel have seen a steady decline over the past 20 years. In Israel's last election cycle, the center-left Labor Party won only four seats in the Knesset, Israel's Parliament, a significant decrease from the 19 seats it held in 2015, when it was last a member of the Israeli opposition. The Meretz Party, one of the few left-wing Israeli parties to have held a seat in the past decade, failed to get enough votes to qualify in the last election.

Last week, the head of the Labor Party, Merav Michaeli, announced that she was stepping down amid criticism that she was responsible for the party's poor poll numbers.

"Nobody in this country wants to talk about peace right now," Ms. Schneider said. "Being a leftist has become a dirty word," she said, adding that while socially progressive causes, like government-backed welfare, remain popular in Israel, they are increasingly divorced from Israel's left-wing movements. "Many Israelis want more government welfare programs, but a conservative political leadership."

Polls conducted in Israel since Oct. 7 show the extent of the political shift. A survey by Israel's Channel 12, one of the country's most popular broadcasters, found that roughly one third of Israelis described themselves as "moving to the right" in the month after the Oct. 7 attacks, while far fewer reported that their politics had shifted more to the left.

AMIT ELKAYAM FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Peace activists in Haifa, Israel, in October replacing posters supporting the war with signs calling for solidarity with Palestinians. "Being a leftist has become a dirty word," one politician said.

In another poll, Israel's Tel Aviv University found in November the share of Israelis in favor of a two-state solution was down from just a month earlier.

If the war has accelerated the left's decline, it has also hurt Mr. Netanyahu's popularity.

For months before the war, the prime minister held together an unruly coalition of far-right parties that controlled 64 seats in Israel's 120-seat Knesset. Recently, vigils for slain Israelis have turned into protests over Mr. Netanyahu's leadership and calls for him to resign.

"The country has lurched to the right, but they no longer want Netanyahu as the leader of the right," Ms. Schneider said. "It is a question of who can represent the new right-wing views held by so many Israelis today."

Longtime Israeli peace activists said Israel's lurch to the right is tangible. In the offices of Standing Together, an organization jointly founded by Israelis and Palestinians, the mood has been somber since Oct. 7.

Membership has dropped, said Alon-Lee Green, a founder of the organization. When the group has tried to hold solidarity rallies between Israelis and Palestinians in public places, they have found themselves turned away by local municipalities and the police.

"We are being banned from public places," Mr. Green said. "We are being told there isn't an audience for our message today," he added. "There has never been a more difficult time to call for peace."

The group has resorted to renting private venues, like restaurants and wedding halls, to hold their rallies, Mr. Green said.

He said he understood the urge, among many Israelis, to call for more security and a greater military presence since Oct. 7.

"I remember in the days after the attacks, I was constantly looking over my shoulder," Mr. Green said. "You can't underestimate what that type of thing does to your psyche, to be afraid in that deep way." But, he said, he feels more certain than ever that fighting for a peaceful future is the only viable path forward.

"I came out of my fear and realized this was the most important moment in my life to fight for peace, even if it feels more out of reach than ever before," he said.

But many other longtime Israeli peace activists said they could no longer support the movement.

The towns and agricultural communities that line Israel's border with Gaza were once bastions of the left. Many villages there were founded as kibbutzim, socialist agricultural communities. Over the years, many residents used their proximity to the Palestinians in Gaza to help deliver aid and run solidarity campaigns.

On Oct. 7, the closeness of those communities to the border made them vulnerable to the attack. Well-known peace activists, including Vivian Silver, a founder of Women Wage Peace, were among those killed. The attack made the survivors rethink policies they had previously championed.

Before Oct. 7, Larry Butler, 73, a resident if Nir Oz, considered himself a leftist. As a member of Peace Now, he participated in rallies calling for the evacuation of Israeli settlements in Gaza, which were disassembled in 2005.

Now, displaced in a hotel in Eilat, a resort town on the Red Sea, Mr. Butler has questioned his beliefs. "I guess I'm somewhere in the middle," he said, "but I'm definitely not left and I'm definitely not right."

In Tel Aviv, Ms. Mizrachi's turn against the left came soon after Oct. 7, when she discovered that a high school friend was among those killed at the Tribe of Nova music festival.

"The irony is that she was the biggest peace activist I knew," Ms. Mizrachi said. "She was the one who got me involved in the movement to begin with," she added. "I used to joke that she made me a leftie. Now I can't say that I am."

France Passes Immigration Bill After Macron Compromises With Right

Move Puts Leader In a Political Bind

YOAN VALAT/EPA, VIA SHUTTERSTOCK

DIMITAR DILKOFF/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

Marine Le Pen, left, the leader of the far-right National Rally, called the immigration overhaul a "great ideological victory." Right, protesting against the bill in Paris.

By AURELIEN BREEDEN and CATHERINE PORTER

PARIS — France's Parliament late Tuesday approved an immigration overhaul that was made tougher under right-wing pressure, securing a legislative win for President Emmanuel Macron but risking a political crisis for a leader elected twice on centrist vows to keep far-right populism at bay.

Hours after the bill was passed by the French Senate, it received 349 votes in favor and 186 against during a raucous late-night session in the National Assembly, the lower house, where Mr. Macron's centrist party and its allies do not hold an absolute majority.

In a rare sign of dissent, 37 of Mr. Macron's own party members voted against the bill or abstained, as did 22 lawmakers from other parties in his alliance. The far right, in an equally rare move, trumpeted its support for the government's proposals, with all 88 of its lawmakers voting in favor.

The bill creates one-year, temporary residency permits under some conditions for skilled workers in fields experiencing labor shortages and streamlines the asylum process, but it also tightens rules allowing foreigners to work, live or study in France.

It makes foreigners eligible for state subsidies like housing aid or family allowances only after they have lived in France for several months or even years; makes it harder for immigrants to legally bring over family members; and forces foreign students to pay new visa fees.

The vote occurred a week after the lower house shocked the government by unexpectedly rejecting a previous version of the bill, which the left deemed too harsh and the right and far right declared too lenient.

To break the deadlock, Mr. Macron's government coaxed conservative lawmakers with tougher measures that infuriated the left, angered some of Mr. Macron's allies and prompted the National Rally, France's most prominent far-right party, to gleefully proclaim it had won the battle of ideas.

Juliette Guéron-Gabrielle contributed reporting.

The compromises have put Mr. Macron in an extremely uncomfortable position: between a brewing internal revolt and what the French news media have called a "kiss of death" from the far right National Rally party and its leader, Marine Le Pen.

The vote rattled Mr. Macron's government and exposed fractures in his party, and it was not immediately clear how he intended to shore up his majority after a tumultuous day that ended with French news media speculating that several of his ministers intended to resign if the bill passed.

In an apparent attempt to resolve that tension, Gérald Darmanin, France's interior minister, announced before the result that "there will be no bill if there is no majority without the National Rally."

The move was interpreted as meaning that Mr. Macron would enact the new law only if it could have theoretically passed even without the far right's support, as was the case on Tuesday, and that he would have otherwise called for a new parliamentary debate.

"The majority stood united," Prime Minister Élisabeth Borne said on the social media platform X after the vote. "The National Rally's maneuver failed. Tonight, only the general interest has won."

The National Rally party has long argued that French citizens should have preferential or even exclusive access to government subsidies and aid, and that foreigners should have restricted or no access to such benefits.

Speaking on Tuesday after a joint committee of senators and representatives hashed out a compromise that paved the way for the evening's votes, Ms. Le Pen, the anti-immigration far-right leader, said that it was "a very small step — there is still a lot to do."

But Ms. Le Pen, who leads the National Rally lawmakers in the lower house, added: "On principle, I think it's a great ideological victory for our movement."

While Mr. Macron has pitched himself as a centrist defender of liberal democracy, critics say that his decision to support a bill that reflects many right-wing, anti-immigration beliefs has shattered that image.

"In 2022, after he was elected, he said, 'I won't forget all the people who voted for me because they wanted to oppose Marine Le Pen,'" said Vincent Martigny, a professor of political science at the University of Nice. "Now he's doing the opposite and paving the way for her."

Lawmakers for an alliance of leftist Socialist and Green parties in the lower house harangued the government ahead of the vote. One of the lawmakers, André Chassaigne, said that Mr. Macron had been elected on the promise to "protect us from the worst" of the far right.

> *Tightening rules that allow foreigners to work, live or study.*

"Today, you've gone from shield to steppingstone," Mr. Chassaigne said.

Mr. Macron's government rejected the criticism, arguing that a lack of forceful immigration reform had fueled the far right.

"What makes extremist forces rise?" Mr. Darmanin, the interior minister, said. "It's a lack of solutions."

The government said tougher immigration rules were necessary to keep the French safe, for instance by making it easier to deport foreigners who are convicted of crimes, and pointed to measures in the bill that the far right rejects, like a ban on putting minors in detention centers for illegal immigrants.

Unlike Mr. Macron's pension overhaul, which raised the legal retirement age to 64 from 62 and was unpopular from start to finish, recent polls show that roughly 60 to 80 percent of the French support stricter immigration rules similar to the ones in his bill.

When the immigration proposal was unveiled over a year ago, the government had pitched it as one of Mr. Macron's trademark "at the same time" bills — a centrist attempt to strike a balance between firmness and openness. But opposition parties broadly rejected it.

The government could have used a constitutional tool allowing it to push the immigration bill through the lower house without a vote, as it did for the pension overhaul. But that move was denounced as a strong-arm tactic, and the government wanted to pass the immigration bill in a more democratic way.

To do so, it secured support from the conservative Republicans party, which has 62 lawmakers in the lower house.

The Republicans, themselves increasingly aligned with the far right on immigration, pushed to make the bill stricter, for instance by making temporary residency permits for workers in fields with labor shortages a rare exception, not an automatic right.

"We have been fighting for this for months, I'd even say years," Éric Ciotti, the head of the Republicans, told reporters on Tuesday.

But labor unions, migrant advocacy groups and humanitarian aid associations say that measures like the creation of a fine for undocumented migrants will make integration of foreigners harder, and that restricting access to benefits is a betrayal of France's universalist social model.

The country's defender of rights, an independent ombudsman that monitors civil and human rights, alerted Parliament that the bill "seriously undermines the principle of equality and nondiscrimination, the bedrock of our Republic."

After a small protest near the National Assembly on Tuesday afternoon, Aboubacar Dembele, an undocumented worker who arrived in France in 2018, said that "the law negates everything — human rights, asylum laws, immigrant rights."

SANDRA WRAY

Wildlife officials say Neil the Seal, who sometimes rests in the middle of the road, could grow to 16 feet long and 7,500 pounds.

1,300-Pound Beach Bum Captivates Tasmania

By LIVIA ALBECK-RIPKA

He has shown up uninvited on doorsteps, slept on the road and prompted calls to the police. But the residents of a coastal region in southern Tasmania, Australia, have been unusually forgiving to their interloper — after all, he is a seal.

The more than 1,300-pound southern elephant seal, whom locals have affectionately named Neil (the Seal), appears to have gained public attention in Australia last year when he slithered into a beachside neighborhood near Hobart, the capital of the island state of Tasmania, where he rollicked with traffic cones and basked sluggishly in the sun.

Then, last month, Neil decided to take a nap in front of a woman's car, thwarting her plans to leave the house. "I think it's going to go down in the books as the best excuse in history not to go to work," the woman said at the time. Neil has since garnered global fame for his antics — enjoying a shower from a garden hose, growling belly up on a doorstep and appearing to charge toward a group of people on a lawn.

"I've never, ever seen anything like it," said Sonya Hay, who lives in a southern Tasmanian town where Neil was spotted this month. "He's basically the talk of the town."

Though it is not unusual for southern elephant seals to come ashore — the marine mammals spend several weeks each year on land to molt their fur — Neil is probably unique in his visits to communities near Hobart, said Clive R. McMahon, an ecologist at the Sydney Institute of Marine Science who has studied the behavior of elephant seals.

Unlike other seals born in nearby wild colonies, Neil, who is just a few years old, was born on a beach near the city, possibly because his mother was lost, Dr. McMahon said. But without other young seals to socialize and swim with, Neil most likely had a lonely youth. Elephant seals, Dr. McMahon added, "will habitually return to the places where they were born — so that's probably why Neil thinks this is his home."

There are always concerns, however, when wild animals, especially those as large as Neil, get too comfortable around humans. This year, the authorities in Connecticut, citing safety concerns for travelers, killed a moose that wandered into Bradley Airport. Last year, a 1,300-pound walrus named Freya suffered the same fate after climbing onto piers and boats off the coast of Oslo, Norway. And last year, the authorities already had to relocate Neil after he was harassed by dogs and people, the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania said in a statement in April.

The department warned that Neil would eventually grow to more than 16 feet long and weigh more than 7,500 pounds, becoming potentially dangerous if provoked. "It's critical he doesn't get used to being near humans," Sam Thalmann, a wildlife biologist with the department, said at the time. The department would not provide further information on Neil, nor respond to questions on whether intervention could be necessary again in the future.

> An intruder may be spending too much time with humans.

Dr. McMahon, the Sydney-based ecologist, said it was likely that in the coming years, Neil, whom scientists track using a GPS stuck to the fur on his head, would continue returning to the Hobart region, unless by some stroke of luck, or a very long swim, Neil encountered another group of elephant seals he could breed with. "The prospects," Dr. McMahon added, "don't look great for him."

For now, Neil appears to be spending his days lingering near a fish and chip shop in a rural community about 25 miles east of Hobart, where he alternates between a boat ramp and the middle of the road.

"He is very placid, very funny; he doesn't move," said Sandra Wray, the owner of the restaurant, recounting how her staff members, concerned for Neil's safety, notified the police, who helped shepherd the seal back into the water using a siren. His gray color, she added, "is almost the same color as the bitumen" which would make it challenging for a driver to spot the seal on the road.

Some residents said that while they had heard the odd complaint, Neil was generally beloved by the community and seemed to act out only when people came too close.

"I thought he was dead to be quite honest at first, because he was just laying there," said Stephen Godfrey, 34, who lives in another neighborhood where Neil has been seen, adding that he hoped Neil would continue to visit the seaside region where he had brought awe to many of the residents. "He's sort of part of the community now," he said.

A Dress Fit for a Princess Now Has a Price to Match

By LIVIA ALBECK-RIPKA

LOS ANGELES — She wore the ballerina-length evening dress to a 1985 dinner hosted by the mayor of Florence, Italy, and again to the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra the following year. On Sunday, that dress, which belonged to Diana, Princess of Wales, sold at auction for nearly $1.15 million — a record amount for one of her dresses.

The piece, created by Jacques Azagury, the Moroccan-British fashion designer, was "synonymous with the Princess of Wales's royal elegance and eternal grace," the Hollywood auction house, Julien's Auctions, said in a statement, noting that it had sold for more than 11 times what the auction house had predicted that it would bring.

The dress was sold along with a matching illustration that detailed its black velvet bodice embroidered with metallic stars, a two-tier royal blue organza skirt with a sash and bow (a nod to Diana's love of dance) and one of her signature looks: shoulder pads.

"The fact that this dress, all these years later, goes for this amount — I think people continue to be in awe of her and her fashion," Elizabeth Holmes, a fashion critic and expert in the royal family's style, said in an interview on Monday. "Diana has remained a fashion icon."

The sale of the dress came as "The Crown" — the opulent Netflix series about the British royal family that has renewed interest in the life of Princess Diana and her children — airs its final season. Several of the show's 60 episodes are devoted to the princess and the controversies in the years leading up to her death in a car crash in 1997.

The series also showcases her famous clothes. Diana, among the most photographed women in the world at the time, knew her fashion would be observed by millions, and evolved from a modest young woman into a glamorous international celebrity.

"She knew the power of a picture," Ms. Holmes, the fashion critic, said, describing how Diana used fashion to communicate with onlookers and draw attention to the charities she supported — even as her public speech was limited. When Diana wore the ballerina dress in the 1980s, the princess had truly begun to lean into her personal style, taking risks with shorter hemlines, lower necklines and bold silhouettes, Ms. Holmes said. "You can see that in this dress," she added. "You can place it in time."

The sale followed an auction in September at which Diana's iconic black sheep sweater was sold by Sotheby's for $1.14 million.

At Sunday's sale, a blouse the princess wore in her 1981 engagement portrait sold for $381,000, four times its original estimate, Julien's Auctions said.

Diana was the first to auction off her clothing — cleaning out her closet just months before she died to sell 79 dresses in New York and donate $3.25 million to charity.

TIM GRAHAM PHOTO LIBRARY/GETTY IMAGES

Princess Diana in 1986. Her dress, designed by Jacques Azagury, sold at auction for a record $1.15 million Sunday.

"It's interesting to see how her style, thank God, changed," Joan Rivers, the comedian, said at the time, as she observed the cocktail and evening dresses. A Los Angeles real estate broker, Donna Burgess, noted at the same event that she had come "to Never-Never Land to get a piece of the fairy tale" that, at the time, appeared to some to be Princess Diana's life.

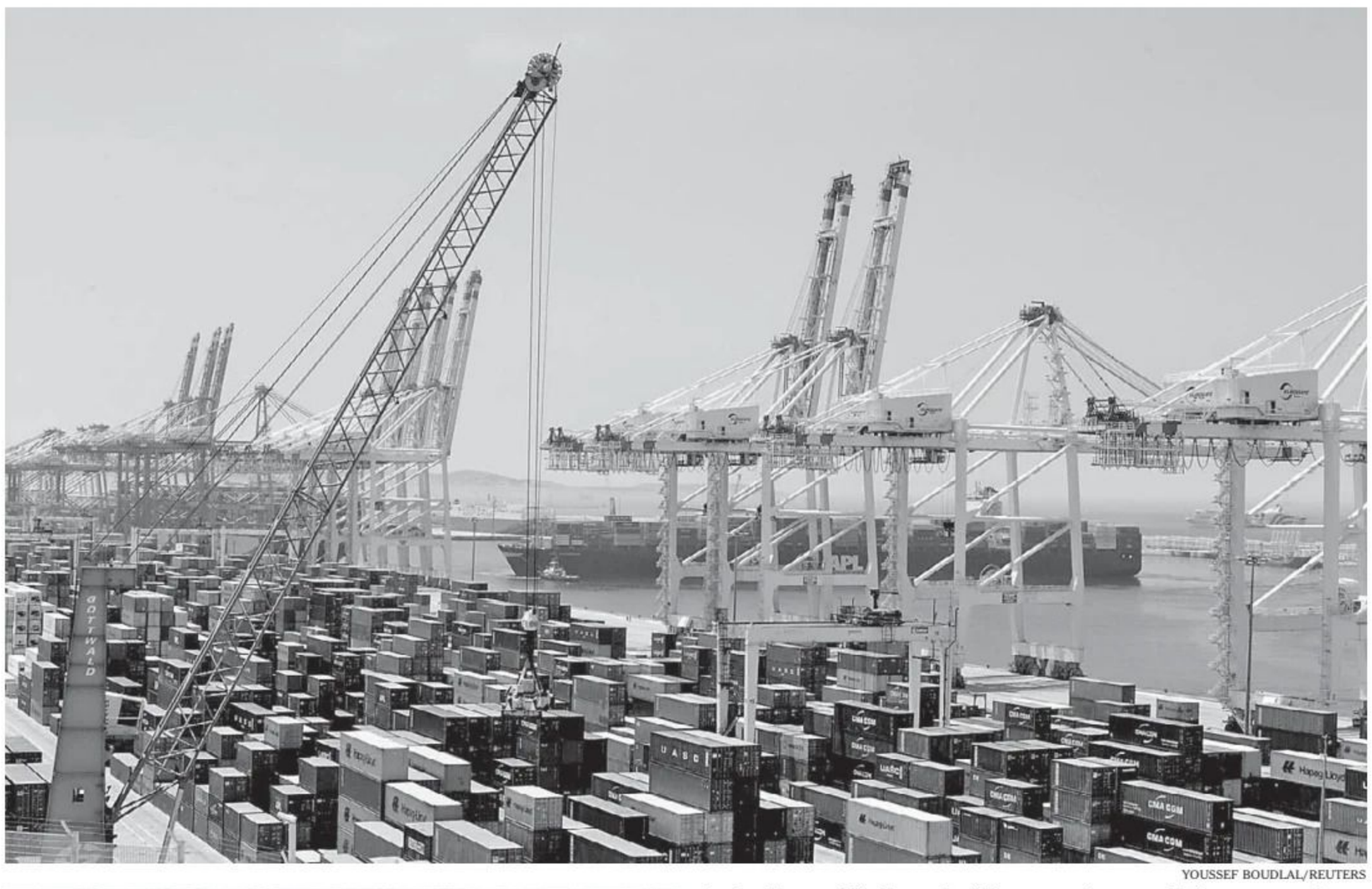
As is common, Julien's did not reveal the buyer of the Azagury ballerina dress. Ms. Holmes, the critic, said she hoped whoever it was would treat it with appropriate care.

"I'm dying to know what the people who buy these clothes do with them," she said. "Are you hanging it in your closet? What's going on?"

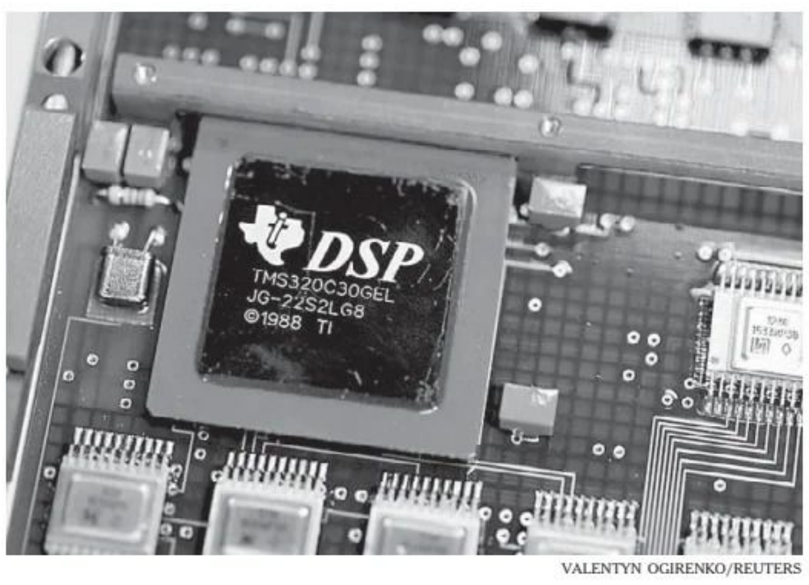
War in Ukraine

Using Middlemen, Russia Evades Sanctions on Imported Technology

This article is by ***Paul Mozur****,* ***Aaron Krolik*** *and* ***Adam Satariano****.*



YOUSSEF BOUDLAL/REUTERS



VALENTYN OGIRENKO/REUTERS

At the Tanger Med port in Morocco, above, tech from countries like Taiwan has been transferred to ships bound for Russia. U.S.-made chips, left, have been found in Russian military gear.

Shortly after Russia invaded Ukraine last year, engineers at Convex, a Russian telecommunications company, needed to find American equipment to transmit data to the country's feared intelligence service. But no gear was flowing in after Western nations imposed sweeping new trade limits on Russia.

Convex's employees soon found a solution.

While Cisco, a U.S. tech provider, had halted sales to Russia on March 3, 2022, Convex's engineers easily obtained the Cisco gear they needed through an obscure Russian e-commerce site called Nag, which had gotten around international trade restrictions by buying the American equipment through a web of suppliers in China.

Convex engineers then visited the offices of Russia's Federal Security Service, known as the F.S.B., in Yekaterinburg to install the gear that would help categorize and send data to the authorities. "Coordinate with the F.S.B. the placement of the Cisco Catalyst WS-C4948E switch," a Convex engineer wrote on March 23, 2022, according to a company communications log obtained by The New York Times.

In the 22 months since the war in Ukraine began, Russia has largely continued getting the technology it needs to keep its economy running. After export restrictions and corporate bans initially led to trade disruptions, Russian suppliers found loopholes and cultivated workarounds. Almost no piece of commercial hardware — basic telecommunications equipment, surveillance gear, microchips for advanced computing and weapons systems, and drones — has been too hard to get.

The Russian authorities and Russian companies have united to take advantage of cracks in the global response. They have tapped webs of intermediaries, including middlemen in China, and disguised their activity through shell companies, according to leaked Russian government emails, trade documents and records of online conversations between Russian engineers obtained by The Times.

They have also turned to countries that have staked out neutral positions in the conflict, such as Morocco and Turkey, and have used those countries' ports to receive goods from global tech manufacturers. Those goods are then placed on other ships headed toward Russia, a process known as transshipment. The prohibited tech products were then made available for purchase from well-known suppliers and on easy-to-use e-commerce sites like Nag.

Flexibility has been paramount. In weekly emails, Russian trade officials shared tips on which ports would transfer goods, who would trade in rubles and where Russian-flagged ships could be repaired, the documents show. If one supplier stopped selling, they found another. If a shipping route was cut off, new ones took up the slack.

The documents offer a rare glimpse of a race in which Russian traders have reliably stayed one step ahead of U.S.-led efforts to cut them off. Their success shows how difficult it is to stop the global movement of commercial technology, raising questions about the effectiveness of Western trade restrictions and whether tech giants should better control the destinations of their products — and if it is even possible to do so.

Cisco declined to comment. Convex did not respond to requests for comment.

Understaffed government investigating agencies in the United States and Europe cannot keep pace with the often shadowy flow of goods, said Elina Ribakova, an economist who has studied sanctions evasion at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, a U.S. think tank. Major tech companies, she added, must do more to cut off supplies to Russia.

"It's an endless Whac-a-Mole game," she said. "There should be alarm, particularly among the policymakers, that we have announced a lot of sanctions and may believe they are working, but in reality, they are not."

A Beautiful Friendship

As sanctions against Russia took effect last year, ProSoft, a Moscow-based electronics provider, experienced the fallout.

Officials at the company, which sells biometric surveillance equipment and tech for heavy industry and critical infrastructure, emailed the Russian government trade mission in Morocco for help, according to a message reviewed by The Times.

"Just a week ago, it was not difficult to ship them to us from American and European suppliers," a ProSoft executive wrote, referring to now-banned tech. Now "we run the risk of starting to reduce production (there are small reserves in the warehouse)."

A spreadsheet attached to the message listed hundreds of American, European and Japanese microchips and sensors that ProSoft needed.

At the time, Russia's economy was absorbing the initial effects of trade restrictions. The ruble tumbled, inflation and interest rates soared and Russian banks were cut off from large swaths of the global financial system.

But the pain did not last, as President Vladimir V. Putin remade Russia's economy. Russian officials and executives swiftly teamed up to find workarounds. Political loyalists profited as Western companies fled.

In Morocco, Russia's trade office, which looks after the country's economic interests overseas, also helped Russian companies regain their footing. After ProSoft reached out for help, trade officials jumped into action.

"We're in constant contact with the general director" of Morocco's state-run port of Tanger Med, one Russian official wrote in an April 2022 email. "In the event of ships entering under the Russian flag, there will be no problems with maintenance."

A spokeswoman for Tanger Med, which hugs the Strait of Gibraltar, said the port leased space to shipping companies and had "no information nor responsibility" about vessels moving through the complex. The port, which handles more than eight million containers annually connecting to 180 international ports, was "not aware" of shipped goods calling at Russian ports before or after being at Tanger Med, or maintenance of Russian ships being performed, she added.

By November 2022, Russian trade officials in Morocco were bragging that their "direct support" had turned the African country into an electronics transshipment hub. Goods from Taiwan, China and other manufacturing centers were offloaded at Tanger Med and then placed on other ships headed to Russia.

"Given the long-term nature of the cooperation with the Moroccan partner, the volume of supplies could amount to about $10 million per year," the trade officials wrote about their work for ProSoft.

ProSoft also maintained supplies of Western tech with the help of an obscure scrap metal company registered in Casablanca, Morocco. After the war began, the company, Invent Maroc, set up a new website and routed restricted technology through Morocco to Russia, including microchips from Texas Instruments, Intel and NXP, according to trade data.

Invent Maroc, run by a man named Alexander Trinz, had no prior history of international exports. Yet it sourced electronics from Costa Rica, Malaysia, Taiwan, China, Japan and Mexico, according to trade records.

In a call this month, Mr. Trinz said he had supplied technology to Russia in the past, but not since the war. "Before, we worked with Russia, but in this moment we can't," he said.

An analysis of ProSoft's offerings found nearly 300 products for sale that contain Intel chips, as well as components made by Nvidia and an A.I.-optimized computer chip designed by Google. Although it is unclear how the imports were ultimately used, American chips have been found on Russian missiles and drones, according to weapons experts.

Nvidia, Intel and Google declined to comment. Texas Instruments said it opposed "the illicit diversion of our products to Russia." ProSoft, NXP and Russia's trade representative to Morocco did not respond to requests for comment.

In October 2022, Russian trade officials said they had established 20 operators at the Tanger Med port to "promptly carry out" the logistics of getting cargo loaded onto "feeder" vessels ultimately bound for Russia, according to a weekly shipping report. Another report noted that ports in Turkey, a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, had accepted payment in rubles.

"The sanctions restrictions have been successfully overcome," one government report said of a Turkish trade route in March.

Click and Buy

On little-known Russian e-commerce sites like Nag, OCS Distribution, 3Logic Distribution and 4Telecom, complex technologies made by major American and European telecom manufacturers, such as Cisco, HP, Juniper, Ericsson and Nokia, are listed for sale.

Many of these sites freely sold Western technology for decades but overhauled their supply chains because of the war. Since then, the platforms have received hundreds of millions of dollars in technology from China, according to trade records.

Nag, which sells hardware to regional telecommunications companies and surveillance contractors, is one major platform. Through intermediaries, it has bought roughly $100 million in restricted American tech since the war began, according to trade data. In total, it imported $150 million in hardware from China this year, the data show. Communications gear, which has ostensibly been prohibited from reaching Russia, is readily available on its site, filtered by price, product type and quantity.

Nag employees have talked about logistical challenges that international sanctions have caused, according to internal communications. In May 2022, a Nag employee wrote to a Russian customer that "the old transit system has ended," delaying delivery of $20,000 of Juniper equipment. A month later, Nag followed up to say that the problem had been resolved and that the gear would arrive in the coming months.

Tech for building online surveillance and censorship was also available. Russian telecommunications operators are required by law to provide communications data about customers to the security services, meaning they must buy specialized equipment that sends the information to government agents. On Nag message boards, now accessible only from within Russia, engineers posted technical tips for making the systems work to F.S.B. specs.

Ericsson, Juniper, Nokia and IBM said any imports into Russia were done without their consent. OCS Distribution said that it "does not sell products in violation of international sanctions and restrictions" and that any such tech listed on its website for purchase was there because it was in the midst of an overhaul. HP, 3Logic Distribution and 4Telecom did not respond to requests for comment.

A network of Nag-operated companies and brands in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and the United Arab Emirates has also helped obscure shipments of sanctioned technology. In total, Nag brought in almost $10 million in Cisco equipment and about $1 million in Nokia and Intel products to Russia over the past year.

At the F.S.B. offices in Yekaterinburg, the Cisco gear that Convex engineers installed sat alongside routers made by Juniper, according to Convex's records. Less than a year later, Western tech was so abundantly available that Convex's engineers could shop around.

In a conversation on Convex's internal messaging system this year, engineers focused on a new supplier that they had "spotted." Operating under the name Saleserver.ru, the supplier had plenty of restricted technology from HP, IBM and others. More important, the price was right.

"Cheaper than Nag," one Convex employee wrote.

Zelensky Insists Ukraine Will Prevail Despite a Tough Year on the Battlefield

By ANDREW E. KRAMER

KYIV, Ukraine — President Volodymyr Zelensky pushed back against doubts about Ukraine's battlefield prospects and about the support of its allies, telling reporters on Tuesday that his country is not losing the war and is prepared to negotiate with Russia, but only on its own terms.

Ukraine's military fell far short of its goals in a counteroffensive over the summer, but Mr. Zelensky emphasized that it has strengthened its air defenses and scored naval successes in the Black Sea, while Russia has little but heavy casualties to show for its own war effort this year.

"Russia failed to achieve any results," Mr. Zelensky said at a news conference promoting the opening of talks with the European Union about eventual Ukrainian membership. The negotiations, announced last week, offer a rare glimmer of hope after months of diplomatic and military setbacks.

The shocks of the Russian invasion in February 2022, the initial setbacks and the subsequent victories of the first year of war produced a remarkable unity within Ukraine and among its backers. But the second year exacted enormous human and financial costs without much movement on the ground, leaving Ukraine in a state of uncertainty in battle, in relations with its allies and in internal politics.

Looming over the country's fight with Russia are delayed decisions on military and financial aid from the United States and the European Union. The United States has provided about half of Ukraine's weaponry and ammunition directly to its army and about a quarter of the foreign aid to the Ukrainian budget, while Europe has led in providing financial assistance.

But Republicans in Congress have held up President Biden's request for $64 billion more in support for Ukraine, along with aid to Israel and Taiwan, saying they will not approve it without overhauls in policies on immigration and border security.

And a European Union decision on a $54 billion, multiyear financial assistance package for Ukraine was delayed until January as Hungary blocked what needed to be a unanimous decision by the 27-member bloc.

Mr. Zelensky said he expected both Europe and United States to deliver. "I think we will not be betrayed by our partners," he said. "I am confident the United States will not let us down."

He offered his most extensive comments to date on the implications for Ukraine sustaining its war against Russia if Donald J. Trump — who has taken a benign view of the Kremlin and an adverse one of Kyiv — were to win the U.S. presidential election next year.

Without naming Mr. Trump, Mr. Zelensky said that if a future American president would pursue policies "that will be colder, or more inward oriented, if they will economize more, then these signals would have a very significant impact on the course of the war."

EVGENIY MALOLETKA/ASSOCIATED PRESS

President Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv on Tuesday. Recent talks on E.U. membership have provided some hope to Ukrainians.

He compared a potential pullback by the United States to a crucial part being removed from the machinery of global security.

"The mechanism starts breaking," he said.

On Monday, the Biden administration said it would announce just one additional package of military aid under spending already authorized by Congress before funding runs dry.

"When that one is done," the National Security Council spokesman, John Kirby, told reporters, "we will have no more replenishment authority available to us." Some military aid could still flow from a separate program overseen by the Pentagon, however.

A sense of drift in what has been a long and grueling conflict is evident at home, too.

Mr. Zelensky said military commanders recommended that Ukraine draft 450,000 to 500,000 men next year — an enormous figure for a country of about 40 million people — to sustain the war effort and allow soldiers who have fought continuously for 22 months to rotate away from the front. The military's general staff, he said, has not provided a definitive plan with precise numbers for a mobilization, which would have to overcome widespread draft dodging and growing hesitance to serve in lethal trench warfare.

The call-up, Mr. Zelensky said, will be "sensitive," conceding this and other grave challenges Ukraine faces.

At times during his news conference, he betrayed flashes of anger, lashing out at one reporter who questioned why he had not formed a national unity government with opposition parties.

Each side insists it is willing to negotiate a peace — but only on terms the other calls unacceptable. Russia demands recognition of Russian sovereignty over four Ukrainian provinces it now only partly controls, as well as over Crimea, which it seized in 2014.

Ukraine has been rallying international support for its own 10-point peace formula, and Mr. Zelensky reiterated on Tuesday that he is willing to negotiate on those terms. His government's efforts are seen partly as an effort to parry Russian diplomatic outreach among developing nations and partly as positioning for talks. When the proposal is finalized and endorsed by the several dozen countries in talks now, it will be conveyed to Russia, Mr. Zelensky said.

He said Russia did not seem inclined to negotiate now. "We don't see any request from Russia," he said. "Not in their rhetoric, not in their action. We just see brazen willingness to kill."

At home, tensions between Mr. Zelensky and the top military commander, Gen. Valery Zaluzhny, have spilled into public, stirring worries of a breach between Ukraine's political and military leadership. The general is seen as a potential rival to Mr. Zelensky, though he has denied any political ambitions.

After The Economist published an interview last month in which General Zaluzhny said that fighting would be deadlocked along the front without new weaponry, Mr. Zelensky quickly contradicted that assessment of a war bogged down. The two have not been seen together in public since.

Mr. Zelensky did little on Tuesday to smooth over the rivalry. He said General Zaluzhny served as an appointee like others in his government. "I am thankful for some and ashamed of others," he said, without clarifying his thoughts on the general.

The general has also publicly aired grievances; on Monday he criticized the president's dismissal last summer of the heads of military recruitment offices over corruption allegations.

Mr. Zelensky's once sky-high approval ratings have slipped. A poll released this month by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology showed 62 percent of Ukrainians trusted Mr. Zelensky, down from 84 percent last December.

Trust in General Zaluzhny is at 88 percent, the poll found.

Ukraine's leaders see some cause for hope in talks on joining the European Union, which would pull the country closer to economic and political integration with the West and out of Russia's orbit.

Ukraine, Mr. Zelensky said, will hold together in the fight against Russia. Unity, he said, "is our know-how, it helped preserve us since the beginning of the war."

Invoking the country's spirit, he said, might sound banal, but "one has to keep some banalities, just to have the ultimate banality of life."

After 2 Weeks, Still No Word on Missing Russian Dissident

By IVAN NECHEPURENKO

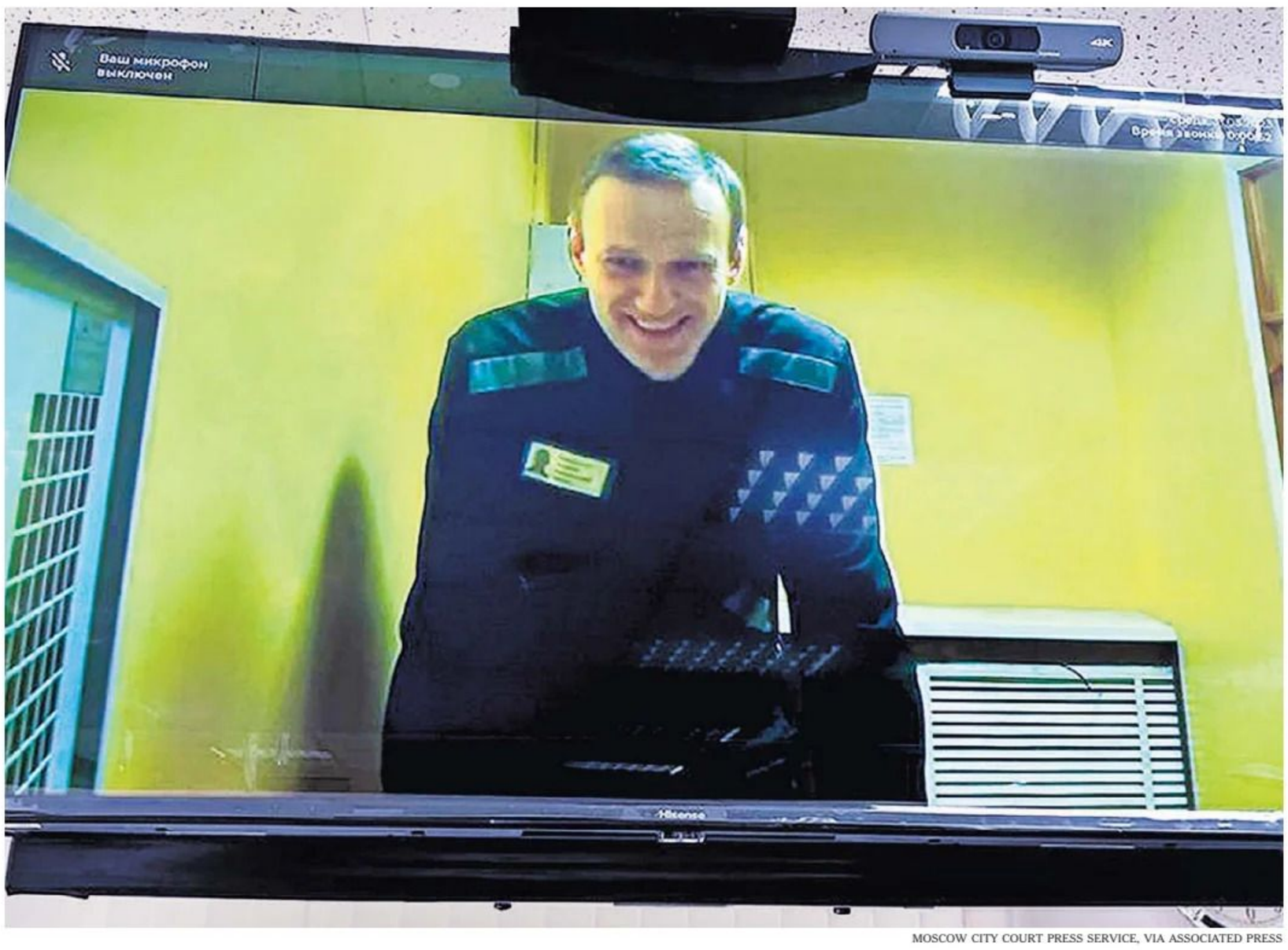
After two weeks without word from Aleksei A. Navalny, Russia's most prominent opposition figure, his lawyers and allies, fearing the worst, are running a frantic campaign to find him.

Their efforts have included requesting information from dozens of Russian prisons and taking to social media to raise awareness of Mr. Navalny's disappearance and to call on the Russian government to reveal his whereabouts.

Many Russians living abroad have gone to their country's diplomatic missions to protest. Some have held up posters saying "Where is Navalny?"

Dmitri S. Peskov, spokesman for President Vladimir V. Putin, told journalists on Friday that the Kremlin had "neither the possibility, nor rights or desire to trace the fate of convicts," referring to Mr. Navalny.

Here is what we know about Mr. Navalny and his disappearance.



MOSCOW CITY COURT PRESS SERVICE, VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

NATALIA KOLESNIKOVA/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

SERGEY PONOMAREV FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Clockwise from top, the Russian opposition leader Alexei A. Navalny on a video link for a court hearing in May; supporters of Mr. Navalny at a rally in Moscow in January 2021; the penal colony at Melekhovo, where Mr. Navalny was transferred in March 2022.

When did Mr. Navalny disappear?

The last time Mr. Navalny's lawyers heard from him was on Dec. 5. The next day, one of his lawyers waited for seven hours outside the penal colony where Mr. Navalny was being kept but was not allowed to see him, Kira Yarmysh, a spokeswoman for Mr. Navalny, said. Mr. Navalny then failed to appear by video link at a scheduled court hearing the next day, Dec. 7.

In the days after Mr. Navalny's disappearance, his allies grew more alarmed as letters sent to him went undelivered and the authorities declined to reveal his location to his lawyers. On Dec. 11, officials in the prison colony that had been holding Mr. Navalny — in Melekhovo, a town about 160 miles east of Moscow — told his lawyers that he was no longer listed among its inmates, Ms. Yarmysh said.

Mr. Navalny was scheduled to appear for various court hearings on Monday, she added. One of the courts at which he was supposed to appear suspended his case because it could not locate him, Vyacheslav Gimadi, a member of Mr. Navalny's legal team, posted on social media.

Where could he be?

As part of his last sentence, delivered by a Russian court in August after a conviction for supporting "extremism," Mr. Navalny was scheduled to be transferred to one of Russia's "special regime" colonies, known for their harsh treatment of inmates. There are at least 25 such prisons, scattered across Russia from the country's European part to the Arctic Circle and the Far East.

But he had not been moved by early December. Mr. Navalny suggested in a series of social media posts in November that the reason was because Russian investigators were unwilling to travel to remote special regime colonies as they pursued further cases against him.

If he has now been moved to one of those penal colonies, that might explain his current disappearance.

Detainees being transferred to remote prisons in Russia can spend long weeks being shuttled between trains in special prison rail cars and have little or no access to the outside world.

By law, relatives should receive notification within 10 days after an inmate's arrival at a new destination, usually by mail, and such a letter can take up to 20 days to arrive, said Yevgeny Smirnov, a Russian lawyer. According to Mr. Smirnov, the Russian prison system considers information about such transfers a state secret.

"A transfer between prisons is the most dangerous time for a convict," Mr. Smirnov said in a response to written questions. "During that period, they change a multitude of transit points and remain without any way to contact the outside world," he added. He also noted that, based on past experience, prisoners could be in transit and incommunicado for two to three months.

Last week, Baza, a Russian news outlet, reported that Mr. Navalny had been transferred to a detention center in Moscow to await trial on another criminal charge. But Ivan Zhdanov, the head of Mr. Navalny's anticorruption foundation, reported that the group had checked all Moscow detention centers without finding him.

On Saturday, Olga Romanova, a Russian prison rights activist, said on Facebook that Mr. Navalny was undergoing treatment in a prison hospital in the city of Vladimir, near Melekhovo. But that assertion has not been verified.

Why was Mr. Navalny imprisoned?

Mr. Navalny, 47, is the only Russian opposition figure of the last decade to mount a significant political challenge to Mr. Putin. He established a robust organization, drawing thousands of Russians to his rallies nationwide, and engaged many young people in politics.

He has been in custody in Russia since his detention in January 2021 in a Moscow airport, where he arrived after spending months in Germany recovering from poisoning by a nerve agent. Mr. Navalny and Western governments accused the Kremlin of poisoning him, which Russian officials denied.

Since then, the Russian authorities have brought forth a multitude of new charges against Mr. Navalny. According to Ms. Yarmysh, he is currently a defendant in 14 criminal cases and faces potential sentences of up to 35 years in prison.

What activities did he pursue in prison?

Since entering the Russian prison system, Mr. Navalny has filed a string of lawsuits against the authorities.

A lawyer by profession, he has filed suits demanding access to decent dental care, complaining about loudspeakers in his cell that repeatedly aired Mr. Putin's speeches and protesting against wiretapping in a room he uses to meet with lawyers.

Despite his imprisonment in increasingly harsh conditions, Mr. Navalny has remained a significant voice in Russian political life. With the help of his lawyers and political allies, he has published articles and manifestoes, and regularly posts on social media.

Since Mr. Navalny's disappearance, his allies have called on his followers to vote for any candidate other than Mr. Putin in the presidential election in March, aiming to amplify the visible dissent against Mr. Putin's policies, including the invasion of Ukraine.

Vandals Mar Grand Palace In Seoul With Graffiti

By JIN YU YOUNG

The Gyeongbokgung palace, a national treasure in the heart of South Korea's capital that draws millions of visitors each year, was vandalized with graffiti twice over the weekend.

Parts of the 14th-century palace were spray-painted in red and blue on Saturday and Sunday nights, according to the police. The police said at least two people acted on Saturday, and at least one person did on Sunday. They have yet to identify the suspects from Saturday. One person surrendered to the police on Monday morning. They have not determined a motive.

While graffiti is more common in alleyways and tunnels in South Korea, heritage sites are a rare target in the country and have special protections under the law, with violators facing stiff prison sentences and fines.

The palace is one of the five grand ones built during the Joseon Dynasty and boasts clay folklore statues, the king's throne hall and expansive roofs made from fired clay tiles in red, blue and green. It's nestled at the foot of a mountain, Bugaksan, among the modern office buildings of central Seoul. It was used by Gucci this year to host a fashion show. It does not host government offices.

The authorities were alerted to vandalism at the palace at about 2 a.m. on Saturday. The words "free movie" in Korean and several website addresses were written with blue and red spray paint.

Two areas were targeted: the entrance to Yeongchu Gate, the palace's western gate, and the side gate of the National Palace Museum. The total damage spread across 44 meters, or about 144 feet.

Government workers began cleaning off the graffiti the next day. Reports of a second spray-painting came in to police at about 10:30 p.m. on Sunday, this time in red and spanning three meters, or about 10 feet, of the western gate. The words included the name of an artist and album in English. The police declined to say what those were.

Gyeongbokgung, located in the heart of downtown and Seoul's old capital district, was built in 1395 as the main palace of the Joseon Dynasty, the last dynastic era of Korea before the Korean empire and the first Japanese annexation. A large part of the palace is being restored.

The police said they believe the suspects from each night were different and that the second incident might have been a copycat.

At least 20 government workers are removing the graffiti, which officials say will take about a week. The damaged areas are covered with a tarp and the surrounding areas are closed off by fences.

The palace is protected under the Cultural Heritage Protection Act, and anyone charged with vandalizing it could face up to five years in prison and a $39,000 fine.

Mystery Cases Emerge Amid Anthrax Outbreak

By APOORVA MANDAVILLI

KYOTERA COUNTY, Uganda — Five African countries are battling outbreaks of anthrax, with nearly 1,200 people affected so far and 20 deaths, according to the World Health Organization. But the official tally belies confusion about the exact nature and scale of the outbreaks, which may complicate the efforts needed to contain them.

Of the 1,166 presumed anthrax cases in Kenya, Malawi, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe, only 35 have been confirmed with lab tests. That is not unusual or unreasonable, experts said, especially in regions with limited resources.

But at least in Uganda, many of the presumed cases have resulted in negative tests for anthrax, raising the possibility that a second disease is circulating.

"It could simply be that the diagnostic testing is inadequate, or it could be that you have a moderate number of anthrax cases and simultaneously you have an outbreak of something else that could look similar," said Dr. Andrew Pavia, an infectious-disease expert at the University of Utah who has advised the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on anthrax treatment guidelines.

Anthrax does not typically spread between people, so the outbreaks so far are thought to be confined to people who consumed meat from infected animals. Uganda has now banned the sale of beef products.

"Even if somebody with cutaneous anthrax got off a flight in Washington, D.C., they're not going to infect anyone — as long as they don't have a duffel bag full of contaminated meat that they pass around," Dr. Pavia said.

Anthrax is caused by extraordinarily resilient bacteria called Bacillus anthracis that can survive in soil and water for decades or even centuries. Cattle become infected when they ingest spores in the soil while grazing, and they can fall ill and die just two or three days later.

Outbreaks in cattle are particularly likely after the type of heavy rains that eastern and southern African nations have recently experienced.

In humans, anthrax can cause skin ulcers with a black center and swelling, which can suffocate the patient if it extends to the chest.

Sporadic outbreaks of anthrax in wild animals, cattle and people are not uncommon in these countries. But having five outbreaks simultaneously "is probably a little odd, and that's probably what's generating some news attention," said Dr. William Bower, an anthrax expert at the C.D.C.

In Uganda, the first suspicious cattle death was in June in Kyotera District, and the first sudden human death was reported in July, according to an internal report obtained by The New York Times.

By the end of October, at least 24 animals had died. Some infected animals and people have since popped up in Kalungu District, about 45 miles north of Kyotera.

But it was only in mid-October, after reports of a mystery disease among people, that district officials began testing skin lesions from those affected. The first two samples turned up negative for anthrax and for several other diseases.

ESTHER MBABAZI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Paul Ssemigga has symptoms resembling anthrax, but as with many others in the current outbreak in eastern and southern Africa, it is unclear whether he has the disease or some other illness.

As of Dec. 6, Uganda's official tally stood at 48 presumed cases. But of the 11 for whom results were available, only three were positive for anthrax; the remaining eight tested negative, according to Kyotera officials.

Still, that may not mean the patients are free of anthrax, said Dr. Jean Paul Gonzalez, an expert in hemorrhagic fevers at Georgetown University who has trained 250 Ugandan scientists on emerging infections.

Uganda's lab facilities can reliably test for anthrax, but only if the samples are properly taken and processed, Dr. Gonzalez said.

Dr. Jean Kaseya, director general of Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said officials were relying on the patients' symptoms, as well as on known links to diseased cattle or contaminated meat, to determine whether they had anthrax.

"Because we have confirmed cases, because we have these deaths confirmed due to anthrax, there is no doubt for us that this is anthrax," Dr. Kaseya said.

The patients in Kyotera District had itchy lesions on the hands and arms, swelling and numbness of the affected limbs and headache. This was sometimes followed by swelling of the chest, difficulty in breathing and death.

"That sounds very much like anthrax," Dr. Bower said.

While there is a vaccine for anthrax, Dr. Kaseya noted, it is not available in Africa, where the disease is a far greater problem. "This is inequity, and it's not acceptable," he said.

He added that Africa C.D.C. was working closely with Uganda's ministry of health to help with the investigation. But officials in Kyotera face numerous hurdles in their attempts to identify and diagnose cases, according to the internal report.

"Suspected cases unwilling to show their skin lesions and allowing samples being taken," the report said. Some people with symptoms have given officials incorrect information or refused to provide information at all.

Officials also lack enough cars and fuel to travel to affected areas and evacuate critically ill patients.

Convinced that witchcraft is to blame for the disease, many patients eschew clinics for traditional healers. That has led to at least one death at a shrine in Kalungu.

Paul Ssemigga, 68, a farmer, believes he fell ill after eating contaminated meat. He sought help from a traditional healer and took herbs for more than a month before he sought care at Kalisizo General Hospital in Kyotera.

It is unclear whether Mr. Ssemigga has anthrax. Of the eight patients treated at the hospital, test results are available for only two; both were negative for anthrax.

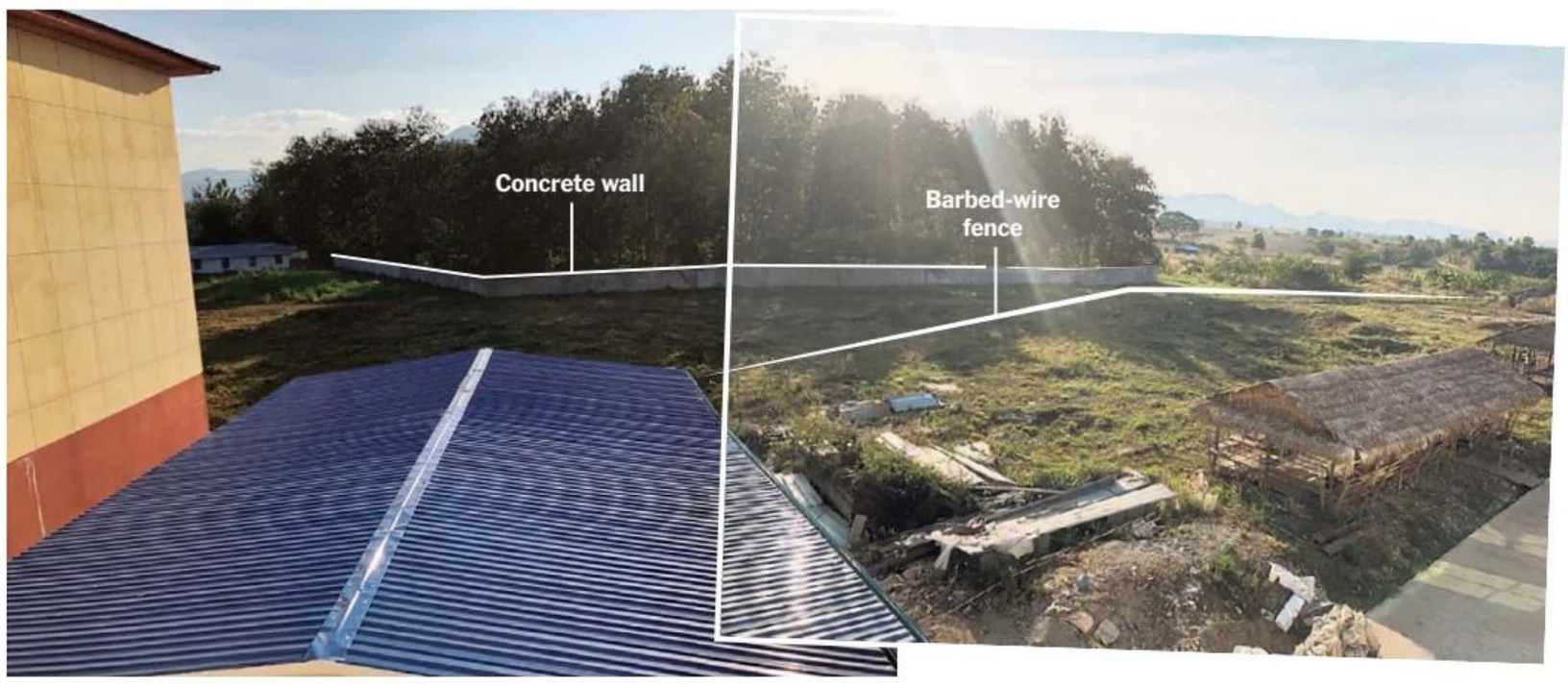
But so far, Mr. Ssemigga seems to be responding to antibiotics, and the swelling in his arms seems to be receding, said Dr. Emmanuel Ssekyeru, the hospital's medical officer.

It is possible that those who tested negative for anthrax have cellulitis, a generic term for any deep skin infection, Dr. Ssekyeru said. Or they may have any of a number of diseases with similar symptoms: Rift Valley fever, a viral illness also seen in domesticated animals, for example, or infections with certain bacteria or with arboviruses like West Nile virus — or even tick bites.

Investigators should continue to consider these other possibilities, Dr. Pavia said.

"One rule in outbreaks is that you don't close your mind off too early and you always consider that there's a second pathogen or a second route of transmission," he said.

Otherwise, officials may succumb to so-called confirmation bias, where "you have a few cases of one thing and so you try really hard to shoehorn others into that diagnosis, but you turn out to be wrong," he said.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY NEO LU

The view from Neo Lu's window in one of the buildings rented by the scam operation in Myanmar shows the barricades erected to prevent escape. Right, a view of a hallway, photographed in secret.

Duped, Trapped and Tortured: Inside an Online Scam

From Page A1

meant to keep not only outsiders at bay, but also those inside from leaving.

As Mr. Lu quickly realized, there was, in fact, no translation job. No e-commerce company, either. It had all been part of a ruse, starting with a posting on a Chinese job forum, perfected by human traffickers to get people like him to travel to Thailand.

The traffickers had led Mr. Lu across the Moei River, a muddy waterway on Thailand's porous border, and smuggled him, without his knowledge, into a remote corner of Myanmar. There, they handed him over to a Chinese gang that had paid for him.

He had essentially been abducted and sold into a criminal enterprise, far away from everything he knew.

That was how he became one of hundreds of thousands of people who have been trafficked into criminal gangs and trapped in what one research group has called a "criminal cancer" of exploitation, violence and fraud that has taken root in Southeast Asia's poorest nations.

Mr. Lu, who goes by the nickname Neo for the character in the "Matrix" movies, spoke to The New York Times on the condition that his full name not be used, for fear of retribution from the criminals. The Times verified the details of his travel, captivity and eventual rescue by interviewing his parents and two friends, as well as by reviewing text messages, copies of travel documents and letters issued by Chinese authorities.

His account of being trafficked aligns with those of many others who have been rescued from such camps. Taken together, his experience and the material he was able to smuggle out are a rare window into the inner workings and tactics of an underworld that is operating on a staggering scale.

From bases in Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, the gangs coerce their captives into carrying out complicated online scams that prey on the lonely and vulnerable around the world. Typically, such hoaxes involve using fake online identities to draw people into fictitious romantic relationships, then tricking them into handing over large sums of money in bogus cryptocurrency schemes.

The scam is known as "pig butchering," for the process involved in gaining the trust of its targets, which can take weeks — fattening up the pig, so to speak — before going in for the kill.

Many of the people who have been abducted and forced to work for the scam gangs are Chinese, because the groups initially focused on stealing from people in China. But the gangs' targets have expanded internationally. In the United States, the F.B.I. reported that in 2022, Americans lost more than $2 billion to "pig butchering" and other investment scams. Increasingly, people from India, the Philippines and more than a dozen other countries have also been trafficked to work for scam gangs, prompting Interpol to declare the trend a global security threat.

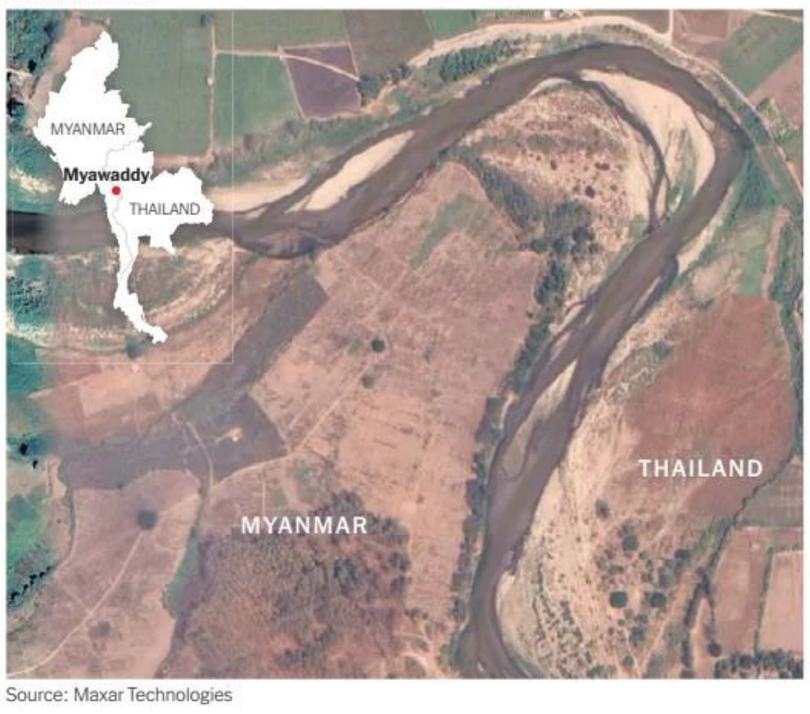
The criminal groups try to break their captives with a mix of violence and twisted logic. Those who disobey are beaten. Once they start working, the victims are often led to believe that they have become complicit in the crime and would face jail time if they returned to their countries. The gangs often take away the abductees' passports and let their visas expire, creating immigration complications.

The operation that held Mr. Lu paid workers a small cut of the profits to spend on the food, gambling, drugs and sex that served as the site's few distractions from working in sweatshop conditions. Some gangs rewarded workers with more money or the possibility of getting travel documents to leave.

"The scam groups need to give trafficking victims the illusion that they could work their way out of this system," Mr. Lu said. "Eventually the donkey goes from trying to avoid getting whipped to chasing after the carrot dangled in front of them."

Scam Compound

Dongmei Zone, a base for scam operations, was built between February 2020 and February 2022 in Myawaddy, along the Thailand-Myanmar border.



Source: Maxar Technologies

THE NEW YORK TIMES

Mr. Lu said he pleaded to be freed, but his captors refused. They put him to work as an accountant, and over months he tracked millions of dollars in illicit income and managed their day-to-day expenses.

While he was still inside the camp, he contacted The Times. He sent hundreds of pages of financial records and photos and videos of the site, hoping to expose the operation at some point.

Mr. Lu also sent a map screenshot that approximated his location in Myanmar. The Times analyzed satellite images of the area and geolocated the photographs Mr. Lu took on the ground to a known scam compound called Dongmei Zone.

Then, in January, he went silent.

Arriving in 'Little China'

Myawaddy, in southeastern Myanmar, where Dongmei Zone is, offers the perfect base for scam groups like the one that had abducted Mr. Lu.

There, the government is powerless. Thugs rule with virtual impunity, backed by the local ethnic armed groups that they pay for security. Such conditions have made the area a magnet for Chinese crime gangs, leading to a mushrooming of illicit casino enclaves and a surge in drug trafficking and money laundering.

U.S. authorities say that a key investor in the Dongmei Zone is Wan Kuok Koi, a convicted Chinese organized crime figure also known as "Broken Tooth." Mr. Wan could not be reached for comment.

More than a dozen similar illicit developments run by Chinese scam gangs sprang up in Myawaddy around the same time as Dongmei Zone, according to estimates by the United States Institute of Peace, a research group based in Washington.

Once people like Mr. Lu have been spirited into Myanmar, they are cut off from their families and friends, in a region mostly off-limits to foreigners and the media, and far from the reach of the police.

Mr. Lu called Myawaddy "Little China."

In some ways, Dongmei reminded him of a Chinese factory. Workers had access to a canteen, a convenience store that sold Chinese products, a Chinese restaurant, a small casino called the Golden Horse and a karaoke bar.

But it was clearly organized around illicit activity. Methamphetamine, MDMA (also known as Ecstasy) and ketamine were available for purchase in the arcade and karaoke bar, Mr. Lu said, and one of the compound's dormitory-like buildings also doubled as a brothel.

Security was tight, especially around the perimeter. Guards posted in watchtowers and at the gates prevented workers from escaping. The Moei River surrounded much of Dongmei.

The head of the organization was a gray-haired, middle-aged Chinese man with bulging eyes whom everyone called Xi Ge, in Chinese, which roughly translates as Brother Joy. No one in the camp used their real names.

Mr. Lu said Xi Ge rented the space from the Dongmei compound and ran an operation of about 70 people, most of whom were Chinese nationals who were also trapped in Myawaddy. Mr. Lu was later told that Xi Ge had paid human traffickers $30,000 for him.

Because its targets were mostly in China, the group set all the clocks ahead by an hour and a half, to conform with Beijing time. The days were long and grueling: Work started at 10:30 a.m. and ended at midnight, with three breaks of only a half-hour each. Workers had just one day off each month.

They sat in an open office under the close watch of supervisors. In one room, workers used hundreds of cellphones that lined the walls to build authentic-looking profiles on WeChat, a popular Chinese chat app. Such profiles were fed with data, including stolen WeChat accounts, cellphone numbers, photos and videos, that was often purchased wholesale online.

The workers spent their days using the WeChat accounts, swiping over social media feeds on each device to mimic normal use and get past the app's fraud detection system.

Mr. Lu slept in a room that was infested with earwigs and reeked of sewage gas. He shared it with seven other Chinese men.

Lying in bed, Mr. Lu would wonder how he had strayed so far from the life he once thought he would have.

He had studied engineering at a university in Britain for a year when he was 17, but his parents, who run a small business in eastern China, had to pull him out because of the cost. He had become depressed, then restless. In the years since then, he had worked for Chinese firms in Oman, Nigeria and Kenya, but he yearned to save enough money to pay his own way through college and eventually move to the West. In his mind, that single-minded ambition was what landed him in Myanmar.

Now, he was focused on how he would escape. He knew he needed to get help, but his phone had been confiscated by his supervisor when he arrived at the camp. During his first week, he used a work phone to reach out to a friend on Telegram, the messaging app.

The next day, managers confronted him, threatening to beat him or sell him to another compound in Myawaddy rumored to harvest the organs of trafficked workers.

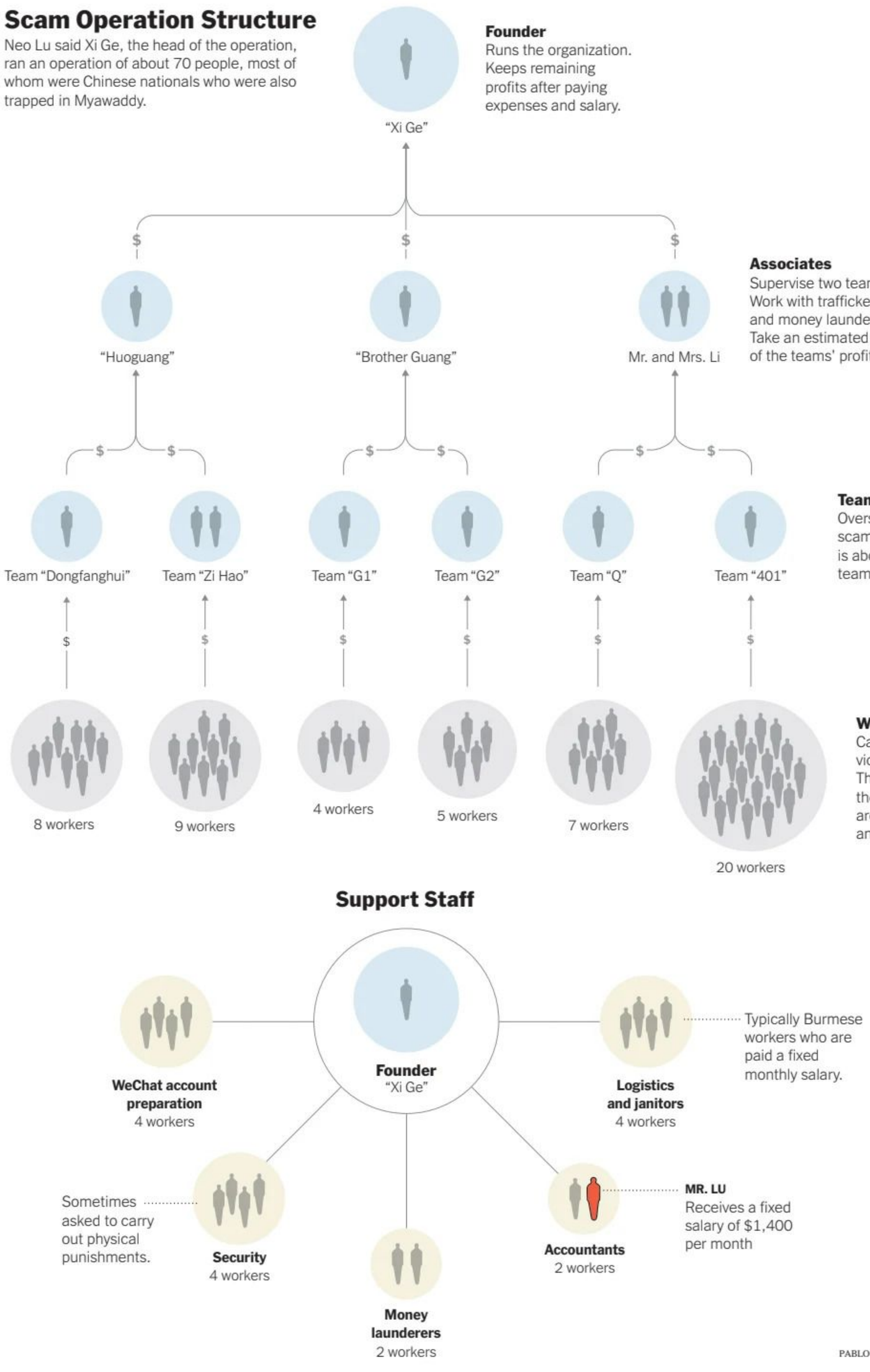
Mr. Lu broke down and begged to be released. "I can't do this. I'm not cut out for this. Please let me go," he recalled telling his captors.

It didn't work.

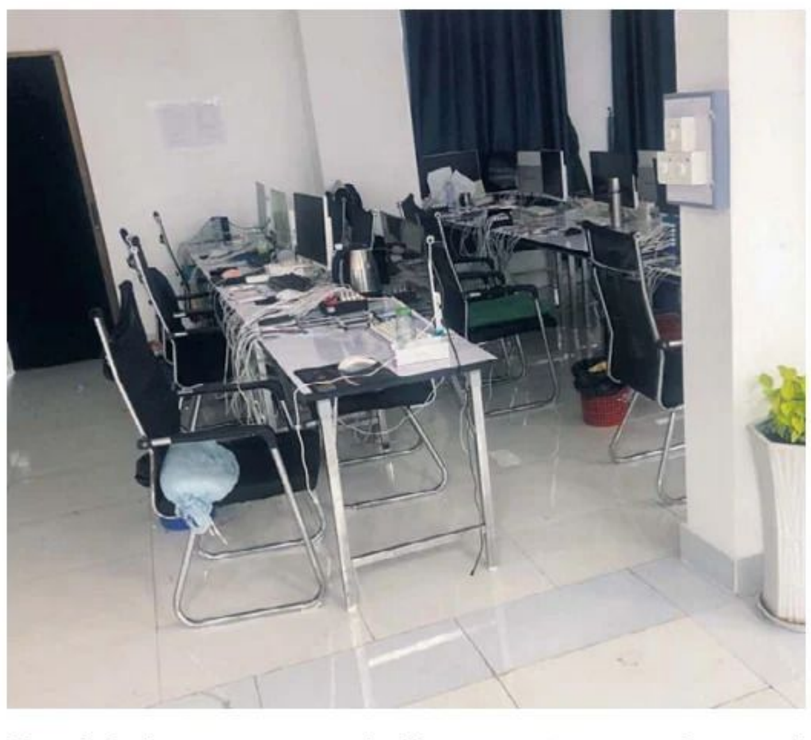
Xi Ge eventually presented Mr. Lu with three options: Pay a ransom of $30,000, work as a scammer like everyone else, or put his

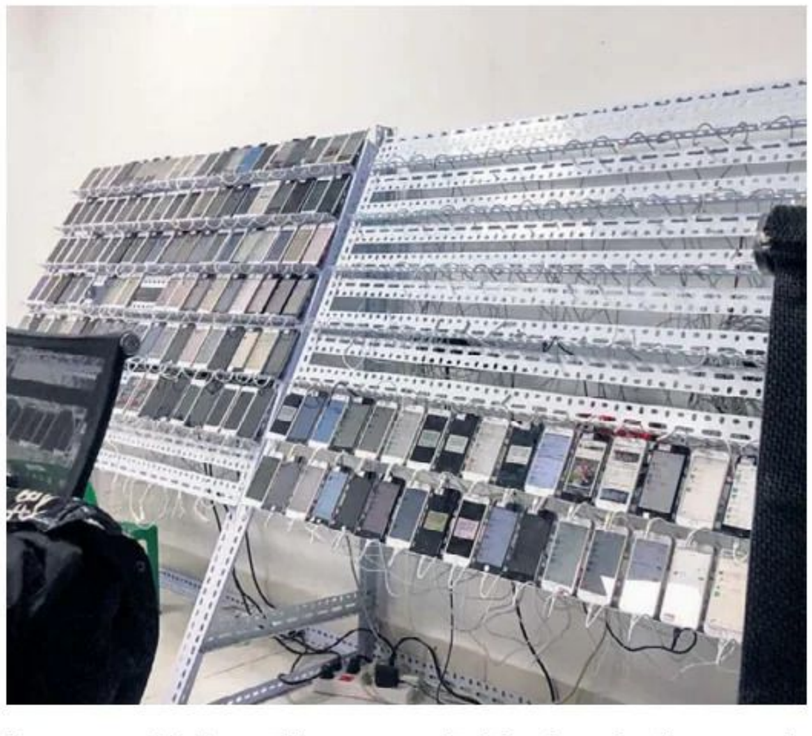
Scam Operation Structure

Neo Lu said Xi Ge, the head of the operation, ran an operation of about 70 people, most of whom were Chinese nationals who were also trapped in Myawaddy.



PABLO ROBLES/THE NEW YORK TIMES





PHOTOGRAPHS BY NEO LU

From left, the scam operation's office space; its account farm; and a dorm room. Mr. Lu said his room, which he shared with seven other men, was infested with earwigs and reeked of sewage gas.

skills to use and help with accounting. After six months, he said, the gang would consider releasing him.

Mr. Lu went with the accounting option.

Mr. Lu booked such expenses as electricity bills, office rent and commissions. But other payments that he tracked were unique to the criminal business. "Tea fees" referred to money paid to brokers to be connected with a human trafficker. "River crossing fees" covered the cost of smuggling workers over the border. "Soldier fees" were payments for armed guards to escort people in and out of the compound. "Caravan fees" were funds for laundering money.

How the Hoax Worked

Xi Ge's organization focused on trying to defraud Chinese-speaking women between the ages of 30 and 50, preferably married. One team was in charge of buying personal data in bulk and identifying potential victims. Another team sent out unsolicited friend requests and messages to those targets on WeChat.

Xi Ge's group targeted married women because they were likely to go to great lengths to avoid asking their families for help or reporting the fraud to the police, out of fear of being accused of infidelity, Mr. Lu said.

The operation raked in money at a rate that surprised Mr. Lu. In the five months between July and November, the group had taken more than $4.4 million from 214 victims, according to the records he kept.

The files Mr. Lu kept also included the contact numbers of some of the victims. The Times called more than a dozen women who had been defrauded by the group. One woman who spoke on condition of anonymity said she had lost more than $15,000 in November of last year. Another woman, who wanted to be identified only by her first name, Yi, said she had been duped out of $35,000 last August, including money she had borrowed and was still trying to pay off.

The internet giant Tencent, which owns WeChat, said in a statement that it prohibited criminal behavior on the platform and worked to fight scams. It also urged users to be vigilant.

Confined and Punished

After nearly six months, Mr. Lu had gained the trust of his captors, who allowed him to use his personal cellphone for a few minutes a day.

He contacted his family and friends and told them he had been kidnapped. He took photos of the compound and filmed short video clips inside the group's main office, taking pains to avoid being noticed. He drew an organizational chart and wrote a glossary of industry terminology. He uploaded everything onto an encrypted email account and deleted the files from his work devices.

He then sent the material, along with the financial records he had kept from July to November and a list of the scam victims' legal names, transaction records and phone numbers, to The Times.

On Jan. 3, Mr. Lu begged Xi Ge to keep his promise to release him. Instead, he was taken to a dorm room reserved for punishing disobedient workers.

Mr. Lu was handcuffed to a bunk bed, released only for meals and bathroom breaks. A guard watched him at all times. Mr. Lu's electronic devices were taken from him. He told his captors that he had reached out to the media and friends.

"I tried to get them to understand that I had gotten myself and them cornered," he recounted. "They could no longer trust me or resell me to another organization. I was a ticking bomb."

That was when the torture began.

A man he knew only as Ah Hong, who handled logistics at the compound, slapped and punched Mr. Lu. He beat him with a hollow PVC pipe. He shocked him with a stun gun baton. The pain was excruciating.

Ah Hong told him he would continue to be punished until he stopped asking to leave. In between beatings, senior leaders took turns trying to persuade Mr. Lu to give up. They promised to let him lead a new branch of the operation focused on English-speaking victims, a position that would be more lucrative.

Mr. Lu refused and said his family would pay a ransom.

One day, Ah Hong walked in, his face concealed with a gray scarf. He set up a camera in the room, as a group gathered to watch.

He hit "record," then took out the stun gun. He was making a ransom video.

On Jan. 14, more than 2,000 miles away from Mr. Lu, in the Chinese city of Taizhou, Mr. Lu's parents' phones lit up. The gang had sent two video clips.

Mr. Lu could be seen sitting cross-legged on the floor between two bunk beds, his hands cuffed behind his back. A man standing above Mr. Lu held a stun gun on him, the jolts of electricity setting off loud crackling and blue sparks. He went for Mr. Lu's right knee, then his left knee, abdomen and back.

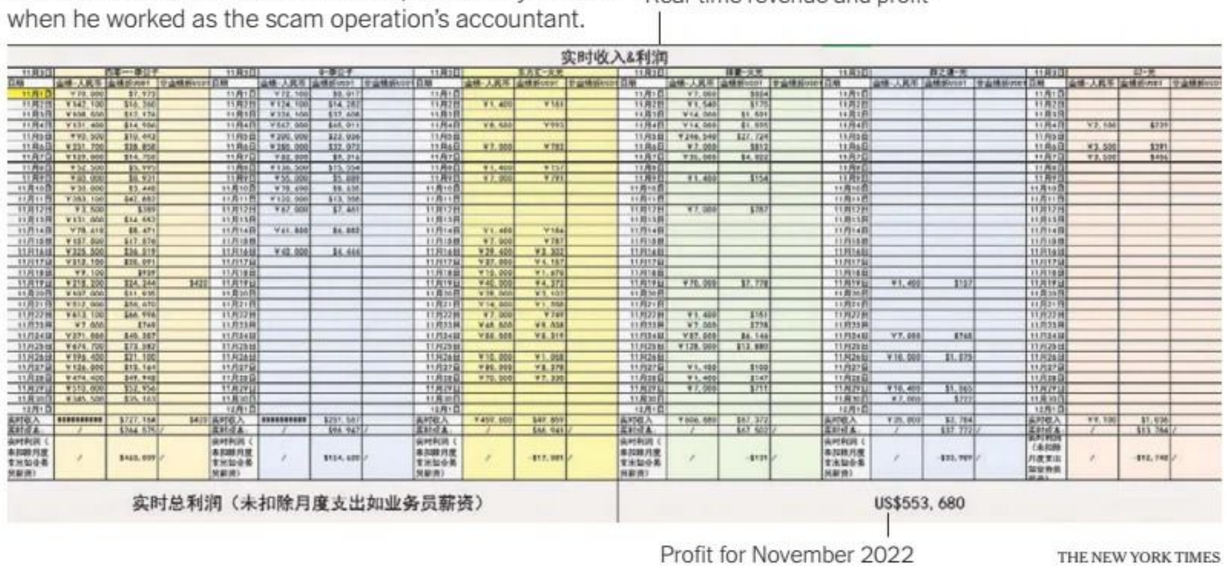
Mr. Lu writhed on the floor, howling in agony, in one of the clips.

For his parents, it was too much to bear.

"My husband wouldn't let me, but he watched it," said Mr. Lu's mother, Ms. Peng, who spoke on condition that her first name not be used. "My heart could not take it."

Tracking Illicit Income

A spreadsheet tracking operating expenses and revenue of the six teams for November 2022, created by Neo Lu when he worked as the scam operation's accountant.



THE NEW YORK TIMES

'The scam groups need to give trafficking victims the illusion that they could work their way out of this system.'

NEO LU, a 28-year-old survivor from a forced online labor camp.

The Rescue

The gang demanded 500,000 Chinese yuan, or about $70,000. For Mr. Lu's parents, who ran a small business selling banners and LED signs, this was no small sum.

Ms. Peng responded to Xi Ge, asking for more time and information. How should they pay the ransom? Whom would they send the money to? She added: "Let us see him one more time."

Mr. Lu's parents reported the kidnapping to the police and sought help from Chinese embassies and business associations. They also implored a higher power: Every morning at dawn, Ms. Peng and her husband went to the beach to pray for their son's safe return.

Then the police in their home province of Zhejiang introduced them to a man they said could help.

He went by the nickname "Dragon" and said he had successfully rescued more than 200 Chinese nationals from scam compounds in Southeast Asia. He also kept a blog about his experiences.

Dragon called the couple and explained to them in chilling detail what would likely happen next. Mr. Lu's captors, he said, would continue to send them gruesome images and videos. If they paid the ransom, though, the extortion would never end.

Instead, he said, they should stall and appear cooperative. He would find another way.

On Jan. 21, a week after the ransom videos had been sent, Dragon told Mr. Lu's parents that a powerful friend of his, a Chinese businessman with connections to the local armed militia, had made a trip to Dongmei earlier that day and confirmed Mr. Lu was there. Dragon said his friend could get Mr. Lu out in two days.

Ms. Peng connected The Times with Dragon, who corroborated the timeline and described the rescue in general terms. Dragon spoke on condition of anonymity and declined to provide specifics out of concern that going public would jeopardize future rescues.

Dragon said that the well-connected Chinese businessman went to Dongmei again on Jan. 23, this time flanked by a general and dozens of armed soldiers from the Border Guard Forces, a local armed group aligned with the junta that rules Myanmar. He asked for Mr. Lu.

Experts say that local militia groups often have relationships with the owners of such compounds, but are also obliged to keep the criminal groups that operate in the compounds in check. Dragon said that Xi Ge had crossed a line by drawing the attention of the Chinese authorities with the videos of Mr. Lu being tortured. That was how Dragon's associate, the businessman, was able to get the general to intervene in Mr. Lu's case, Dragon said.

The Times could not independently verify the details of the rescue.

Mr. Lu, who would be held in the room for 18 days in total, was unaware of the negotiations. One day, he was suddenly told to change and get into a golf cart.

Just like that, Mr. Lu was out.

He said the local militia questioned him and took his phone, laptop, IDs and cash. Within days, he was back in China; his flight landed in Shanghai on Feb. 2.

A still frame from a ransom video that was sent to Mr. Lu's parents in Taizhou, China.

His mother had packed a thick winter jacket for him, knowing that coming from Southeast Asia, he would not be dressed for the bracing cold. When she saw her son emerge from the arrivals area, a flood of relief washed over her.

Mr. Lu hugged his parents, who were both overcome with tears.

Though the family had avoided paying a ransom to the gang, Ms. Peng said that she had sent about $37,000 to Dragon, money he said would go to his associate and the general for their help.

The next day, Mr. Lu went to the Chinese police, handing over all the materials he had collected and offering detailed explanations of the scam operation as he knew it. In a statement seen by The Times, the police wrote that the authorities had helped rescue Mr. Lu from a scam camp in Myanmar, and that he "had no prior engagement in activities such as online gambling and online scamming."

In recent months, Chinese authorities have been working with Southeast Asian officials to arrest and deport to China thousands of people accused of working in scam groups, but experts believe many organizations have simply relocated their operations.

Mr. Lu remembers that one of his captors had told him to keep his mouth shut after getting out. But Mr. Lu has other plans. He has spoken to the Chinese media and consulted on a movie project, and he plans to write a memoir.

"These Chinese gangs are spreading a form of modern slavery," Mr. Lu said. "I want the whole world to know."

Anatomy of the Scam

One team in the organization bought personal data and identified potential victims. Another team sent messages to those targets on WeChat. From there, the workers followed a pre-written script, according to Mr. Lu.

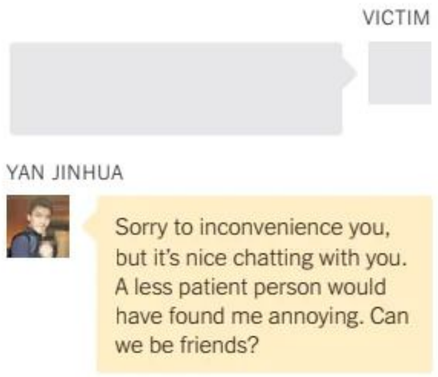
BEFORE THE SCAM

The group creates fake online personas such as this one, which they named "Yan Jinhua," purportedly a rich businessman and widower with young children. In reality, the persona was created using photos stolen from a Taiwanese influencer.

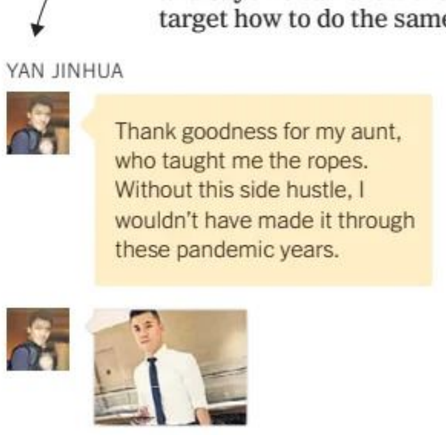
The scammers send out hundreds of friend requests, posing as a blind date or an acquaintance. About one in 10 such requests gets a response.

STARTING THE SCAM

The scammers work to strike up a relationship, often romantic, with the target, exchanging thousands of messages over about two weeks to build trust and intimacy.

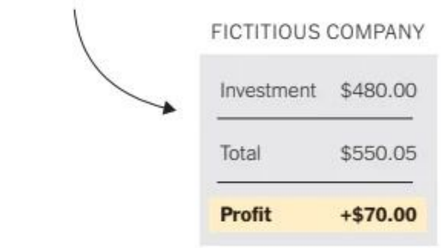


"Mr. Yan" then describes how he's made money from investing in cryptocurrencies and says he can show the target how to do the same.

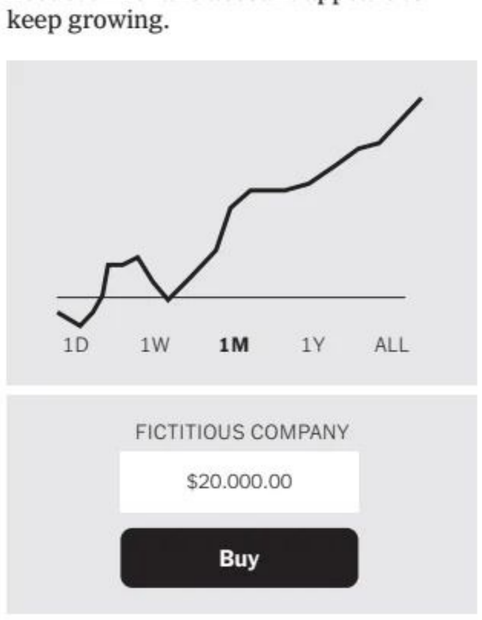


DURING THE SCAM

"Mr. Yan" asks the target to invest a small amount in a fake investment app and follow his trading tips. The scam group allows the target to withdraw the full amount the next day, along with a 10 percent return.



"Mr. Yan" pushes the target to invest more, and even to borrow money if needed. The fake account appears to keep growing.



FINAL STAGE OF THE SCAM

When the target decides to withdraw all or a large amount of the nonexistent funds, the app then shows error messages.

Eventually, the app stops working altogether. "Mr. Yan" disappears, along with the victim's money.

PABLO ROBLES/THE NEW YORK TIMES

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National

The New York Times

The Economics of Christmas Trees, From Seed to Sale

Wyckoff's Christmas Tree Farm in Belvidere, N.J., expects to sell 7,000 trees this year, an increase from last year. The owner said that the farm's supply costs, like fuel for equipment, have risen sharply.

BRYAN ANSELM FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

30%

The amount of a tree's cost tied to year-round care — from shearing and shaping it by hand, to the frenetic cutting season after Thanksgiving.

$105

The cost of a seven-foot tree. Wyckoff's now charges $15 per foot, up from $14 last year.

10 Years

How long it can take for a tree to grow before it is ready to be harvested.

$50,000

The cost of planting 10,000 young trees on 70 acres this year. Over half of those trees were lost to drought or flooding.

$69,000

The cost of five baler machines, where two workers slide each tree, base first, into the whirring cylinder.

By STEFANOS CHEN

Every day since the trees were planted has been a roll of the dice.

Unlike commodities like corn and soybeans, which Mr. Wyckoff grows on another 90 acres he owns, there is no good way to insure Christmas trees against the harm caused by extreme weather, or the effects of an overseas war or a pandemic that freezes supply chains, he added.

"Farmers are the biggest gamblers there are," Mr. Wyckoff, 57, said. His family has been growing Christmas trees in Belvidere, N.J., about a 90-minute drive from Midtown Manhattan, since his grandfather started the business in the 1950s.

Christmas trees grow slowly, about 12 to 14 inches a year, and can take 10 years to go from seed to harvest. Most trees he plants are 3 to 5 years old by the time he buys them from nurseries.

To keep up with costs, Mr. Wyckoff raised the price of his trees this year to $15 a foot, or $105 for a seven-foot tree, up from $14 a foot last year. A decade ago, similar trees sold for $10 a foot, he said. The trees he sells include the popular Fraser fir, the Norway Spruce and the Canaan and Douglas firs.

Despite the risks, the trees remain Mr. Wyckoff's most profitable crop. He expects to sell 7,000 this year, up from 5,000 last year.

"We're currently in a boom period," said Tim O'Connor, the executive director of the National Christmas Tree Association. Supply was tight before the pandemic, and then demand soared for trees customers could pick and cut themselves outdoors.

Nationally, there were 15,000 Christmas tree farms with sales of over $376 million in 2017, according to the latest available federal data. Bert Cregg, a horticulture professor at Michigan State University and industry expert, said farmers can make a 50 percent profit on each tree. Mr. Wyckoff said his profit was closer to 20 percent a tree.

Some costs have grown sharply for Wyckoff's Christmas Tree Farm. Nearly all of Mr. Wyckoff's equipment runs on diesel fuel; he paid $4.70 a gallon this year, up from $2.36 in 2018.

Climate change adds to the risk that he could lose huge swaths of trees. Of the 10,000 he planted this year, 5,500 were lost to drought and flooding. That cost him at least $27,500. In a typical year, he might lose 5 to 10 percent of his new trees.

The work is relentless. The farm has three full-time employees but a rotating cast of up to 40 seasonal workers during busy periods. Three large mowers ($20,000 each) cut down weeds every season, trees are pruned twice a year and pests and disease are monitored daily.

Mr. Wyckoff said he saved money by hiring high school students, getting help from local hunters and recruiting family members. His wife, Leslie, does accounting, his aunt Judy loves to mow and his 23-year-old son, Johnny, also works the farm.

The family's trees have won awards in national competitions and have adorned the White House, Mr. Wyckoff said. The family has met Michelle Obama and former Vice President Mike Pence and his wife.

Although Mr. Wyckoff and industry experts have some concerns about the risk of another downturn if demand drops, business is good for now.

Hector Ruiz, 75, recently drove from Stuyvesant Town in Manhattan in search of a Fraser fir. He left with a tree shy of 5 feet tall. Most of the bigger ones were sold out.

"But I'm coming back for those trees right there," he said, pointing to firs still in the ground and reserved for next year.

For Holidays, Secret Shrine Memorializes Beloved Pets

By AIMEE ORTIZ

Hidden in a corner of Central Park, there lives a tree that — if you walk by at just the right time of the year — will share with you its secret identity as the Pet Memorial Christmas Tree.

The tree glitters with hundreds of laminated photos, notes, ornaments and memorials to deceased pets.

There's Milo, commemorated as "A Good Boy," and the "Al Dente Brothers," who are "forever loved." There's Sherman, the Eastern box turtle; Geo the fish; and Miss Parker, the "fearless, independent, and amusing" Central Park squirrel.

Decorated every year by the "Keeper of the Tree" and volunteers, the tree is a public expression of love on display between Thanksgiving and Three Kings Day in January.

The keeper saves each memento, to be put up again the next holiday season.

Dozens of new keepsakes for the tree arrived on Saturday, as a group led by Central Park NYC chapter of Ever Walk, a walking initiative across the United States and abroad, hiked through the Ramble to the undisclosed location.

In the crowd, Kendra Oleckna; her husband, Robert Foote; and their 1-year-old Pomeranian, Stansha Rebotska, prepared to hang a memorial to their beloved Jazz, another Pomeranian who died a year ago.

Described as a spunky, handsome boy, Jazz was the couple's best friend and caretaker, who loved Mexican restaurants, she said.

Last month, Larry Closs, a writer and photographer, posted an article detailing the history of the tree, tracing it back to the 1980s, when the casting director Jason Reddock, who had been walking his dog in the Ramble, noticed a tree with dog toys on it.

The next day, Mr. Reddock was walking his dog again, accompanied by the actress Nicki Gallas and her dog, when she noticed it, too. They began a tradition of returning to the tree and bringing ornaments and mementos of their own.

"Since the tree was an evergreen, and since Christmas was only weeks away, the pair decided it was a Christmas tree and thus the Pet Memorial Christmas Tree was born," Mr. Closs wrote.

"It's always extremely moving and extremely touching when somebody comes and they have — I call them remembrances, mementos," he said. "You watch them put it up on the tree, you know, and tears inevitably follow. And it's hard not to get choked up in those circumstances."

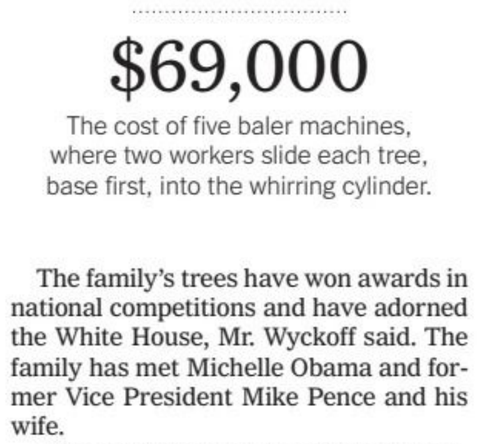
Marianne Larsen, the tree's current keeper, who took over the role from Mr. Reddock about five years ago after walking became too difficult for him, said the pandemic had been "the big instigator" leading to a recent deluge of photos.

"In 2020, we added 200 photos," she said. "In '21 it was another 200, and '22 is another 200. So now we're over 600, and I think after today we might be up to at least 750."

The tree's location was kept a secret for decades, and it remains largely unknown. It has to be found by chance, or someone has to know where to look.

Standing at the tree with her dog, Ulla, on Saturday, Ms. Larsen said part of the joy was in discovering the tree.

"You'll walk by and go, 'What's that?'" she said. "And if they take a moment to go in, they'll see that it's a memorial tree,



PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVE SANDERS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Jakes, who belongs to Kelli Lipson and her fiancé, Jorn Santegoeds, by the Pet Memorial Christmas Tree, where the couple had placed a photo of another of their dogs. Cats, dogs and even a squirrel and a turtle are commemorated.

A Christmas tree in Central Park is decorated with photos and notes.

because some people think it's just a celebratory Christmas tree, but it's not."

Ms. Larsen said that even people who had moved away from New York stopped by during the holidays to visit memorials they had left.

Kelli Lipson; her fiancé, Jorn Santegoeds; and their dog, Jakes, a 7-year-old Boston terrier mix, walked up to the tree with a photo in hand. Pictured was Nando, the couple's 5-year-old French bulldog, who died from a brain tumor in August.

Ms. Lipson said Nando had changed not just their lives but those of other dogs, as his short life had inspired them to begin fostering pets.

"I will never buy another dog again," she said. "He did a lot of good for the world, so we want to commemorate him."

O'Connor Is Remembered as a 'Gracious and Wise' Justice

By ABBIE VANSICKLE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY HAIYUN JIANG FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

President Biden paid tribute to Justice O'Connor. All nine Supreme Court members attended.

Mourners at the funeral service for Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, the first woman on the Supreme Court, at Washington National Cathedral.

WASHINGTON — Justice Sandra Day O'Connor was remembered on Tuesday for her trailblazing role on the Supreme Court, trading the sweeping skies of the Arizona desert as a cattle rancher's daughter for the marble halls of the court to become the first female justice and one of the most powerful women in the country.

"Gracious and wise, civil and principled, Sandra Day O'Connor, daughter of the American West, was a pioneer in her own right, breaking down the barriers in legal and political worlds and in the nation's consciousness," President Biden said in remarks during a funeral service at Washington National Cathedral.

"She knew no person is an island," he added. "In the fabric of our nation, we are all inextricably linked, and for the America to thrive, America must see themselves not as enemies but as partners in the great work of deciding our collective destiny."

As the justice's coffin, draped in white, entered the cathedral on Tuesday morning, bells tolled. Hundreds of people, including all nine current Supreme Court justices and retired Justice Anthony M. Kennedy, gathered for the service. The ceremony was filled with traditional music and admiring tributes to the determined woman who carved a path for the generations of female lawyers and judges to follow and who did so with grace, wit and, as one of her three sons told those gathered, "unearthly energy."

On the court, Justice O'Connor was known for her place at its ideological center and for her practical approach to legal decision-making. Her vote became the key to decisions on some of the most contentious issues that came before the court, including affirmative action, voting rights and abortion.

Although Justice O'Connor did not serve as chief justice, she held such power during a crucial period on the court that it was often referred to as the O'Connor court.

In his eulogy, Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. described Justice O'Connor as a pioneering force on the bench — and for generations of women.

"It has been said that the Supreme Court is like a family, a family composed entirely of in-laws," Chief Justice Roberts said, to laughter. He added that "she had to ignore slights and work to bring people together in social, professional and political life."

Justice O'Connor built collegiality among the justices, he said, all while forging a new path.

The justice "had to find her own style to cajole, persuade and unite colleagues when there was no example to follow," he said.

Her determination and skill left no doubt that women could perform at the highest levels of the law.

"Her leadership shaped the legal profession, making it obvious that judges are both women and men," Chief Justice Roberts said. "She was so successful that the barriers she broke down are almost unthinkable today but not so in her lifetime."

On the bench and in interactions with colleagues, he said, Justice O'Connor's approach was "simple and direct — get it done."

That approach has extended to her personal life, said Jay H. O'Connor, one of her sons.

Mr. O'Connor said his mother's direct, confident style was rooted in her childhood on the Lazy B, her family's cattle ranch. Her father instilled in her toughness; her mother, grace.

Life could be lonely out in the high desert, but books "transported" her, he said. Her education would take her to Stanford Law School, where she excelled academically and fell in love with a classmate, John Jay O'Connor III. The pair married shortly after graduation.

The couple took great joy in each other's company, he said. They took disco dance lessons together and were known to clear the dance floor at Washington parties.

His mother's tireless energy extended to their home, he said, where she raised her three sons to believe that their "turbocharged" family life was normal. She was fiercely committed to her children, driving one son to swim practices before dawn and typing up another's high school homework assignments.

Despite her demanding job, "she was still a mom in every sense of the word," Mr. O'Connor said. "My brothers and I all had a front-row seat, and we still wonder how she did it all."

Justice O'Connor, who died this month of complications from dementia at 93, even planned many of the details of her memorial service, he said.

In 1987, she wrote a letter to her family and sealed it, he said. It included her hopes for her funeral.

"The unmistakable theme of her selections was justice on earth," Mr. O'Connor said, adding,

> 'Our purpose in life is to help others along the way.'

"We are following her instructions here today to a tee."

She also included a message to her sons, "Our purpose in life is to help others along the way."

Her son paused, before adding, "What a beautiful, powerful and totally Sandra Day O'Connor sentiment."

The justice's biographer, Evan W. Thomas III, described the justice's faith as an important part of her life. Justice O'Connor was baptized in the Episcopal Church, regularly worshiped at the National Cathedral and had sat on its governing board.

But, he added, "Her temple, you might say, was the white marble building on First Street."

She joined the Supreme Court in 1981. President Ronald Reagan, fulfilling a campaign promise to appoint the first woman to the court, nominated Justice O'Connor, who at the time was a state appeals court judge in Arizona.

It may be hard to envision now, Mr. Thomas said, but when she started out, "the law, like much else in our society, had long been dominated by men." When she graduated from law school, she struggled to find work, he said, finally persuading a local district attorney to give her a job. When the lawyer told her he could not pay her, she worked for free. When he said there was not enough office space, she countered that she could share a secretary's office.

That same determination served her well at the court, he said.

When she joined the Supreme Court, he said, "she found the place to be cold and not just because she missed the Arizona sun."

When Justice Clarence Thomas started at the court, Mr. Thomas recalled, the new justice did not feel like going to lunch. But Justice O'Connor prodded him.

"She was the glue, the reason this place was civil," Mr. Thomas remembered Justice Thomas telling him.

The service was the second day of ceremonies in Washington, where the justice had served for 24 years before she retired in 2006.

On Monday, she lay in repose in the Great Hall of the Supreme Court, as her former law clerks took turns watching over her coffin.

Justice Sonia Sotomayor, the third female justice, spoke of Justice O'Connor's commitment to creating an atmosphere of collegiality at the court and added that she believed Justice O'Connor would be "smiling, knowing that four sisters serve" on the nine-member court.

The Rev. Jane E. Fahey, one of Justice O'Connor's first clerks in the 1980s, remembered her for "her cowgirl grit, energy and nonsense sense of duty."

During her retirement, the justice focused on two causes: judicial independence and civics education. She also traveled with her grandchildren and wrote two children's books that drew from her childhood on a ranch.

In October 2018, she announced that she had been diagnosed with the beginning stages of dementia and would withdraw from public life.

During the service, the justice's son announced that her family would take her remains back to the Arizona desert she so loved, back to the Lazy B, "where she learned how to see forever across the high open desert."

Families Had No Warning That Home Was Closing

By ERNESTO LONDOÑO and ISABELLA KWAI

There was no warning when a line of vans showed up outside the largest nursing home in St. Louis Friday afternoon, workers at the home said.

Older residents, some with dementia, were whisked away in wheelchairs while still wearing hospital gowns, employees of the Northview Village nursing home recalled. Amid the chaos as Northview Village emptied its halls, younger patients, some being treated for injuries or mental illness, walked out into the street on their own, according to Carolyn Hawthorne, a registered nurse who had worked at the nursing facility for nearly 11 years.

"It was one big travesty," she said of Northview Village's sudden closing, which left relatives of some of the home's 170 residents scrambling to figure out where their loved ones had been relocated. Ms. Hawthorne's own aunt, 73, was among residents suddenly moved to facilities around the region. "It was just heartbreaking."

The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, which regulates nursing homes, said that it had launched an investigation into the abrupt closure, though a representative for the agency said on Tuesday that it could not comment on the investigation.

A representative at Healthcare Accounting Services, which owns the nursing home, as well as several other care facilities in Missouri and Illinois, said on Tuesday that the company would have no comment.

The nursing home sector in the United States has grappled with overlapping challenges in recent years, including staffing shortages exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, sicker patients and rising medical and supply costs. As a result, several facilities have become insolvent.

Northview Village had been losing money for several years, according to Medicare cost reports. According to SNFdata Resources, which tracks the nursing home sector, Northview Village had been losing money since at least 2018. Data that Northview Village provided to Medicare late last year said its operating expenses for 2022 totaled more than $16.4 million, while its revenue was roughly $13.3 million.

It is exceedingly rare for nursing homes to suddenly shutter. Usually, state regulators have some warning and can work with owners to arrange a sale or at least find new homes for residents.

In the case of Northview Village, employees and relatives said, there was no warning. Workers said they found themselves suddenly unemployed, even as relatives searched to find new facilities where their family members had been taken.

Lisa Cox, a spokeswoman for the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, said that state officials had no warning that the facility was facing dire financial problems, and that, as of Tuesday afternoon, some families still had yet to learn the whereabouts of their relatives because of the "emergent nature of the relocation."

Outside the facility on Tuesday morning, Mayor Tishaura Jones of St. Louis joined a rally and led employees and their supporters in a chant of "Shame!"

"Shame on this owner for treating the people who live in this facility like pawns who can just be moved on a moment's notice," she said. "Shame on this owner for not paying the employees what they deserve."

The first inkling of the crisis came on Friday when workers said they had learned that they would not be paid, according to Marvetta Harrison, a certified medical technician who worked at the facility for 37 years.

Soon, the vans showed up.

Ashley Denmark, a St. Louis doctor whose uncle lived at Northview Village, learned about the evacuation on social media. She and other relatives spent the weekend in a state of panic trying to find their uncle, 76, an Army veteran who has schizophrenia.

"It was nerve-racking," Dr. Denmark said. "He's not someone who is able to advocate for himself or protect himself."

Marjorie Moore, executive director of VOYCE, a St. Louis group that advocates long-term care residents and their relatives, said the residents were believed to have been sent to at least 14 other facilities in the region. Many rely on Medicaid, which can complicate effort to find them new homes, she said.

"These people were certainly not in good health and need a lot of care," she said. "It's almost like their entire world has been ripped from them."

Alain Delaquérière contributed research.

Administration Warns Governors About Medicaid Losses Among Children

By NOAH WEILAND

The Biden administration on Monday warned the governors of nine states of unusually high Medicaid coverage losses among children, suggesting that officials were failing to protect young, low-income Americans while winnowing the program's rolls.

Xavier Becerra, the health and human services secretary, wrote letters to the leaders of the states that had the highest number or percentage of Medicaid coverage losses among children through September, after a federal policy that required states to keep people in the program lapsed.

The appeals to state leaders doubled as a call to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act. The letter recipients included Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida, Gov. Brian Kemp of Georgia and Gov. Greg Abbott of Texas. All three are Republicans who lead states that have not expanded Medicaid and where hundreds of thousands of children have lost coverage this year.

The nine states accounted for roughly 60 percent of the decline in enrollment in Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program, or CHIP, through September, federal health officials said.

The governors should "ensure that no eligible child loses their health insurance due to red tape," Mr. Becerra said in a press briefing Monday. He called on state officials to ease transfers of children from Medicaid to CHIP; reduce call center wait times; and adopt special rules that allow states to smooth their procedures for keeping children enrolled in Medicaid.

The letters, which the Biden administration published on Monday with new data on child Medicaid losses through September, signaled a newly aggressive posture during the so-called unwinding of the federal Medicaid requirement.

The process has been marked by technical problems and paperwork errors and delays that have caused thousands of poor children to lose health coverage.

> *States urged to make sure no eligible child is denied insurance.*

Federal officials had been reluctant to target governors or state Medicaid officials as they worked to resolve those bureaucratic problems.

Some advocacy groups and public health experts have said that the administration has not been aggressive enough in calling out, halting and resolving processes that had led to large numbers of children losing coverage in some states.

In a post on X, Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders of Arkansas, a Republican whom Mr. Becerra wrote to on Monday, accused the Biden administration of having undertaken a "politically motivated PR stunt, accusing us of restricting Medicaid access."

"That's false. During the unwinding process mandated by federal law, the Biden admin sent letters to certain states to pause their unwinding, but Arkansas was never one of them," she wrote. "Arkansas is in compliance with state and federal law, while Biden plays politics at Christmas."

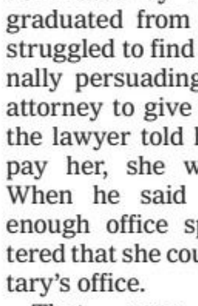
Child Medicaid enrollment has declined by more than three million this year, according to a separate analysis published on Monday by the Georgetown University Center for Children and Families.

Because of data lags and differences in how states report Medicaid losses, that figure is likely a significant undercount.

Overall, Medicaid enrollment has declined by almost eight million, according to the researchers. Nearly seven million children may be uninsured for at least some time as a result of the unwinding, according to the Georgetown researchers, amounting to almost one in 10 nationwide.

Through September, Florida, Texas and Georgia had the largest drops in child Medicaid enrollment nationwide, according to data shared by federal health officials Monday. Federal health officials noted on Monday that the 10 states that have not expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act had disenrolled more children than all those that have combined.

Stacey Pogue, a senior policy analyst at Every Texan, a research and advocacy group, said on Monday that thousands of children in Texas were still waiting for decisions from state Medicaid officials, who face a substantial backlog of applications.



Xavier Becerra, the health and human services secretary, made appeals to governors.

"We didn't have the staffing that was needed. We didn't have the technology needed," Ms. Pogue said.

According to KFF, a nonprofit health policy research group, more than 70 percent of people who have lost Medicaid this year did so for procedural reasons, such as when a family did not return paperwork to confirm their eligibility.

Children have more generous eligibility limits for Medicaid and CHIP, suggesting that many of those who lost coverage this year should have remained eligible for some form of coverage.

Researchers have pointed out that only a small percentage of children have been moving to CHIP, a sign that states have not done enough to facilitate those transfers.

Federal officials on Monday also presented figures showing what they said was a clear correlation between fewer Medicaid losses and the adoption of special waivers from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services; states have requested the waivers to ease the eligibility-checking process.

The Biden administration said on Monday that waivers, nearly 400 of which have been approved so far, would be extended through 2024.

Robin Rudowitz, the director of the Program on Medicaid and the Uninsured at KFF, said that the waivers had allowed states to use other government benefits programs to automatically verify Medicaid eligibility, and to give managed care organizations authority to help program recipients complete application forms.

Some states have sought even more ambitious versions. Kentucky and North Carolina recently extended Medicaid eligibility for children by 12 months.

El Paso County Sues Texas in Effort to Block New Migrant Arrest Law

By J. DAVID GOODMAN

BROWNSVILLE, Texas — El Paso County and two immigrant rights groups sued Texas officials on Tuesday to challenge a sweeping new law that allows state and local police to arrest migrants who cross from Mexico, setting up a legal showdown over federal immigration policies.

The federal lawsuit came a day after Gov. Greg Abbott signed the bill, which he called "so extreme"

Arguing that the federal government has exclusive power.

that he believed it would drive migrants away from Texas. Civil and immigrant rights groups and Democratic officials said the law violated the Constitution and invited racial profiling of Hispanic citizens in Texas.

In the suit, El Paso County and the two nonprofit groups argue that the state law should be struck down in its entirety because the federal government has exclusive authority over immigration matters.

The suit, filed in federal court in Austin, names as defendants the Texas Department of Public Safety, whose officers would be newly empowered to make arrests under the law, and the district attorney for El Paso, Bill Hicks, whose office would prosecute the offenses. The American Civil Liberties Union is representing the plaintiffs.

Mr. Abbott, a Republican, anticipated such a challenge. He has presented the law as a necessary reaction to what he has called the failure of President Biden to enforce existing federal law against crossing into the United States without authorization.

A spokesman for Mr. Abbott did not immediately reply to a request for comment on the lawsuit, nor did Mr. Hicks, who has said his office would not prioritize migrant arrests. A spokesman for the Department of Public Safety referred questions to Mr. Abbott's office.

Republicans have blamed President Biden for the surge of migrants who have entered the United States in record numbers the past three years, a trend that has become a political liability for him as he seeks re-election.

Over the last two years, Mr. Abbott, a third-term Republican, has steadily ratcheted up a strategy of state border enforcement, challenging the Biden administration to take Texas to court over it. The governor and the Republican-controlled state legislature have increasingly been at odds with the municipal governments of Texas cities, where Democrats are mostly in charge. Mr. Abbott has sparred publicly with mayors and urban district attorneys in Texas over a range of policies, including coronavirus restrictions, enforcement of abortion bans and police accountability.

JORDAN VONDERHAAR FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Gov. Greg Abbott of Texas has been ratcheting up state border enforcement, seeking a fight with the Biden administration.

The top officials in El Paso County, which includes the city of El Paso, are Democrats. Before the law was signed, the sheriff's office in El Paso, a county agency, said that it opposed the new law's approach and would not make arrests under the law.

Mr. Abbott has tried to put pressure on Democratic leaders in several of the nation's largest cities outside Texas by busing tens of thousands of migrants from the Texas border to destinations like New York, Washington, Los Angeles and Chicago.

The new state law, known as Senate Bill 4 and scheduled to take effect in March, makes it a misdemeanor to cross into Texas from Mexico without using an authorized port of entry. A person arrested under the law could be ordered by a court to return to Mexico or face prosecution if they did not agree to go. A second unauthorized crossing would be a felony.

A claim of asylum would not shield a migrant from arrest or prosecution for illegal entry under the new state law unless asylum had already been granted. But the process of reviewing an asylum claim often takes years.

"It's likely that it will create a dragnet that ensnares not only undocumented immigrants, but also Americans and legal permanent residents," said Representative Joaquin Castro, Democrat of San Antonio, who has asked the Justice Department to intervene to stop the law from taking effect.

According to the lawsuit, the Texas law is an attempt at "grasping control over immigration from the federal government and depriving people subject to that system of all of the federal rights and due process that Congress provided to them."

Mr. Abbott said on Monday that while he believed the law would withstand legal scrutiny, it presented an opportunity for the federal courts, and ultimately the Supreme Court, to reconsider a 2012 decision, Arizona v. United States, that narrowly ruled in favor of the federal government and against state efforts to enact their own immigration laws.

The two nonprofit groups that have joined with the county in filing the suit — Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center and American Gateways, both of which provide legal services to migrants — said the law would harm their ability to assist migrants, including those seeking asylum.

"Governor Abbott's efforts to circumvent the federal immigration system and deny people the right to due process is not only unconstitutional, but also dangerously prone to error," Anand Balakrishnan, senior staff attorney at the A.C.L.U.'s Immigrants' Rights Project, said in a statement.

KENNY HOLSTON/THE NEW YORK TIMES

It took five days and 15 voting rounds for Representative Kevin McCarthy, Republican of California, to be elected speaker in January.

CONGRESSIONAL MEMO

House Dysfunction: 724 Votes, Only 27 Laws Enacted

By ANNIE KARNI

WASHINGTON — Representative Kevin McCarthy, the former speaker, had a positive spin on the five days and record-breaking 15 voting rounds it took him to win the gavel in January. "Because it took this long," he said after the ordeal, "now we learned how to govern."

But as the first year of the 118th Congress draws to a close, the numbers tell a different story — one that doesn't involve much governing at all.

In 2023, the Republican-led House has passed only 27 bills that became law, despite holding a total of 724 votes.

That is more voting and less lawmaking than at any other time in the last decade, according to an analysis by the Bipartisan Policy Center, and a far less productive record than that of last year, when Democrats had unified control of Congress. The House held 549 votes in 2022, according to the House clerk, and passed 248 bills that were signed into law, according to records kept by the Library of Congress, including a bipartisan infrastructure law, the Inflation Reduction Act and the first bipartisan gun safety bill in decades.

The list of this year's accomplishments is less ambitious and more bare minimum, such as legislation to suspend the debt ceiling and set federal spending limits that helped pull the nation back from the brink of economic catastrophe. The tally also includes two temporary spending measures to avoid government shutdowns. The House cleared the must-pass annual military policy bill last week before leaving for the year, though it is not known when President Biden will sign it into law.

The numbers reflect the challenges that have plagued Republicans all year and are likely to continue, and maybe even get worse, in 2024: a tiny majority that requires near unanimity to get anything done; deep party divisions that make unanimity all but impossible; and a right wing whose priority is reining in government, not passing new laws to broaden its reach.

The raw number of laws passed is not always the best way to capture the productivity of a Congress, because some catchall bills incorporate dozens of smaller, sometimes highly significant, bills that hitch a ride. But this year was grossly unproductive even by the lower standards of what's possible in divided government and after taking into account the reality that not all bills are created equal. In 2013, for example, when Republicans controlled the House and Democrats controlled the Senate, as they do today, the House passed 72 bills that were signed into law.

Molly Reynolds, a senior fellow in governance studies at the Brookings Institution, said Congress's productivity issues this year reached a "low point." She attributed it to deepening political polarization and to the fractured House Republican conference with its too-slim-to-govern majority.

"Democrats as a party are much more interested in having government do things," Ms. Reynolds said. "A lot of what Republicans are motivated by is the pursuit of ideological purity. The ideological difference around the role of government makes it harder to imagine the sets of things on which the Republican House, especially with its divisions, would get together with a Democrat-led Senate and a Democrat president."

Despite the low number of bills signed into law, the House saw a frenzy of activity on the floor. That included numerous votes for numerous speaker candidates (19 across two historic speaker elections), multiple attempts to expel Representative George Santos of New York from Congress (three), failed and successful votes on censuring Democratic lawmakers (six) and dozens of votes on hard-right amendments to appropriations bills that ultimately did not pass, or proved to be nonstarters in the Senate because they were laden with conservative policy priorities.

The mismatch between the number of votes taken and the number of laws passed is something far-right House Republicans might consider a win. One of the demands the faction made of Mr. McCarthy in January as they were withholding their support to make him speaker was to open up the legislative process and allow more votes on the floor.

And some of the votes happened because House members defied the speaker and forced them against his wishes, like a resolution to impeach Mr. Biden over his border policies and a move to censure Representative Adam B. Schiff of California and fine him $16 million.

"It's a good reminder that not every vote is in pursuit of an actual legislative product," Ms. Reynolds said.

Some Republican lawmakers have expressed frustration at their inability to get things done. "If we don't change the foundational problems within our conference, it's just going to be the same stupid clown car with a different driver," Representative Dusty Johnson of South Dakota

Republican leaders tried to frame the year as productive.

vented to reporters in October after Mr. McCarthy's ouster.

But those foundational problems remain.

Rebellious right-wing Republicans, angry at Speaker Mike Johnson for relying on Democrats to pass legislation to avoid a government shutdown, voted to block two major spending bills from coming to the floor.

That marked the fourth time this year that House Republicans broke a longstanding code of party discipline by refusing to back procedural measures proposed by their own leaders that must be passed to bring legislation to the floor. That did not happen once under former Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who led the House for a total of eight years, or under the previous two Republican speakers, Paul D. Ryan or John A. Boehner.

When it came to the politics of retribution and revenge, however, the House had a historically productive year. It sometimes took multiple attempts, but Republicans were ultimately successful at formally censuring three Democrats in the House: Mr. Schiff and Representatives Rashida Tlaib of Minnesota and Jamaal Bowman of New York.

Before this year, only two members had been censured in almost four decades.

"I suspect that has something to do with the breakdown on the Republican side of party leadership," said Sarah Binder, a professor of political science at George Washington University. "There's no restraining of members from going to the floor."

It took the House three tries, but it also made history by voting to oust Mr. Santos; he was the first person to be expelled from the House without first being convicted of a federal crime or supporting the Confederacy.

Republican leaders tried to frame the year as productive, in its own way.

In his end-of-year recap, Representative Steve Scalise of Louisiana, the majority leader, said Republicans had succeeded in passing legislation to "confront rising crime, unleash American energy, lower costs for families, secure President Biden's wide-open border, combat executive overreach and burdensome agency rules, and refocus our military on its core mission of national security."

But many of those bills amounted to political messaging tools that would stand no chance of passage in a Democratic-controlled Senate.

Other than the must-pass bills, those that did make it into law addressed the smallest of small-bore issues, such as the 250th Anniversary of the United States Marine Corps Commemorative Coin Act. On Tuesday evening, Mr. Biden signed into law the Duck Stamp Modernization Act of 2023, which allows waterfowl hunters to use electronic federal duck stamps instead of physical ones to meet licensing requirements.

In his farewell speech to Congress, Mr. McCarthy highlighted as one of his hallmark achievements of the year the prevention of a new law. The measure blocked a rewrite of the criminal code for the District of Columbia that would have reduced mandatory minimum sentences for some violent offenses while increasing them for others.

"The president threatened to veto it," Mr. McCarthy said, "but we did it anyway, and we stopped him and it became law."

Failing to Reach a Deal, Congress Puts Off Aid For Ukraine Until 2024

By KAROUN DEMIRJIAN

WASHINGTON — Congress gave up Tuesday on a last-ditch bid to speed through emergency military aid to Ukraine before the end of the year, as negotiators failed to cement a deal in which Republicans have demanded tying the money to a crackdown on migration across the U.S. border with Mexico.

"It is our hope that their efforts will allow the Senate to take swift action on the national security supplemental early in the new year," Senator Chuck Schumer, Democrat of New York and the majority leader, and Senator Mitch McConnell, Republican of Kentucky and the minority leader, said in a rare joint statement.

They pledged to address Ukraine aid and border measures alongside military funding to Israel and the Indo-Pacific, promising that "the Senate will not let these national security challenges go unanswered."

The delay punts the fate of Ukraine aid — and the complicated task of drafting new immigration laws — into early next year, when lawmakers will also face the daunting task of striking a broader spending agreement to avert a partial government shutdown by mid-January.

"We are not going to have a lot of time when we get back to get our security package and full-year funding bills across the finish line," said Senator Patty Murray, Democrat of Washington and the chairwoman of the Appropriations Committee, admonishing Republicans to "get serious" about spending negotiations.

"January is not going to be an enjoyable month," Senator Susan Collins of Maine, the top Republican on the committee, told reporters.

Senators have struggled for weeks to strike a bargain pairing about $50 billion in fresh security aid for Ukraine with border enforcement measures stringent enough to satisfy Republicans but not so severe as to alienate Democrats. They intensified their efforts late last week, after Mr. Schumer delayed the Senate's holiday break to increase pressure for a deal before the new year.

Senior White House officials and Alejandro N. Mayorkas, the homeland security secretary, have been making near-daily visits to the Capitol to try to hammer out a compromise. But despite their efforts, which participants insist have resulted in progress, the group has yet to produce the text of a bill, or even the framework of an agreement. Negotiations continued Tuesday afternoon, but with only days left before Christmas, they had no chance of concluding before the holiday.

As the talks have dragged on, former President Donald J. Trump has reprised the nativist language that has defined his campaigns and his presidency, injecting fresh hostility into the debate over immigration policy. During a campaign rally in New Hampshire, he said that immigrants from South America, Africa and Asia were "poisoning the blood of our country," drawing comparisons to Nazi propaganda promoted by Hitler.

Mr. McConnell dismissed the remarks on Tuesday with a sharp retort.

"It strikes me that didn't bother him when he appointed Elaine Chao secretary of transportation," Mr. McConnell said, referring to his wife, a naturalized U.S. citizen who was born in Taiwan.

Mr. McConnell has been a vocal supporter of extending military assistance to Ukraine and dispatched his most senior aides to participate in the border talks. But Republican senators who are opposed to continued U.S. funding to Kyiv and have pressed for tougher immigration restrictions than those being discussed in the negotiations said Mr. Trump did not go far enough.

"I'm mad he wasn't even tougher than that," Senator Tommy Tuberville, Republican of Alabama, said Tuesday of Mr. Trump's comments. "When you see what's happening at the border? We're being overrun."

Any compromise would face difficult odds in the House, where a majority of Republicans have voted to discontinue military assistance to Ukraine, and almost all have backed legislation to revive harsh, Trump-era border enforcement policies that would never pass the Democratic-led Senate.

Senators Chuck Schumer, left, and Mitch McConnell promised swift action in the new year.

The House G.O.P. isn't likely to bend on its border demands.

House Republican leaders continue to clamor for the Senate to dispense with negotiations on the broader security package, which includes funds for Ukraine, Israel and the Indo-Pacific as well as civilians in Gaza, and take up a bill that would include only military assistance for Israel. But the money for Israel also faces some resistance.

On Tuesday, pro-Palestinian activists staged a protest in the Rotunda of the Capitol calling for a cease-fire and demanding lawmakers abandon plans to send more weapons to Israel that could be used against Gaza.

"Not another nickel, not another dime, no more money for Israel's crime," the protesters chanted, before police arrested about 60 of them for an unauthorized demonstration in the Capitol.

Several Democrats, mostly on the left, want to see conditions attached to any Israel aid, which would require weapons sent to help fight Hamas in Gaza to be used in keeping with international law. Many progressive Democrats and Hispanic lawmakers are also staunchly opposed to border policies under consideration.

Negotiators have agreed in principle that a deal would include measures making it more difficult for migrants to claim asylum, by raising the bar for claiming a credible fear of persecution if they are returned to their home country. They also have coalesced around the idea of expanding the administration's expedited removal authority, which allows officials to swiftly deport unlawful migrants before they can make asylum claims.

The parties are still trying to resolve differences surrounding when migrants should be detained, and which groups can be paroled into the country.

Kayla Guo contributed reporting.

Behind a DeSantis PAC, A Murky Link to Santos

This article is by ***Nicholas Nehamas****,* ***Rebecca Davis O'Brien*** *and* ***Grace Ashford****.*

A veteran political operative who played a mysterious role in the George Santos scandal now appears to be spearheading a newly formed super PAC that is supporting Ron DeSantis in Iowa.

The new super PAC, set up amid turmoil in the network of outside organizations supporting Mr. DeSantis's presidential campaign, lists Thomas Datwyler as its treasurer. Mr. Datwyler was also briefly listed as the treasurer for Mr. Santos's campaign after the Republican congressman first came under scrutiny for his widespread fabrications.

On Monday, the super PAC, Renewing Our Nation, spent more than $283,000 sending pro-DeSantis mailers across Iowa, according to a federal campaign finance filing. The contents of the mailers were not immediately clear. Neither was the source of the group's funding or the reason for its involvement in the presidential race. The group is not required to file detailed paperwork with the Federal Election Commission until Jan. 31.

Aside from the connection to Mr. Santos, Mr. Datwyler's résumé adds an additional layer of curiosity: He is listed as an executive at the compliance arm of the sprawling political firm owned by Jeff Roe, who until this past weekend was the chief strategist for Never Back Down, the main super PAC supporting Mr. DeSantis's campaign.

Mr. Roe, who resigned from Never Back Down on Saturday, did not immediately provide a comment on Monday.

In another oddity, the person listed as the manager of the sole vendor of Renewing Our Nation was, like Mr. Santos, unable to finish his term in Congress.

That person, former Representative Trey Radel of Florida, runs Cross Step Media, a company that sent out the pro-DeSantis mailers in Iowa, according to the filing.

Mr. Radel, a Republican, was elected to represent the state's 19th Congressional District in 2012, but served for just one year: He resigned under pressure in early 2014 after pleading guilty to a misdemeanor charge of cocaine possession. (He had bought 3.5 grams from an undercover police officer. His record was expunged after one year of probation.)

Renewing Our Nation has not yet reported other spending besides the mailers.

Maggie Haberman contributed reporting.

Mr. Datwyler and Mr. Radel did not respond to requests for comment. Neither did Never Back Down and Mr. DeSantis's campaign.

As Mr. DeSantis's campaign has faltered, the outside groups supporting him have become a frequent source of distractions. Never Back Down and the DeSantis campaign have sometimes worked at cross-purposes, with their disagreements aired through public memos, an awkward dance necessitated by a ban on coordination between campaigns and super PACs. (Never Back Down and the DeSantis campaign were accused of violating that ban by a nonprofit watchdog group on Monday.)

The tensions between the two sides have grown so extreme that last month, three DeSantis allies started their own super PAC, Fight Right, to air negative television ads in Iowa about Mr. DeSantis's closest rival, former Gov. Nikki Haley of South Carolina.

Mr. Datwyler played a brief but bizarre supporting role in the saga of Mr. Santos, the former congressman from New York. After Mr. Santos's original campaign treasurer resigned in January amid revelations about irregularities in Mr. Santos's filings, Mr. Datwyler was briefly listed on filings as his treasurer.

The arrangement made headlines when Mr. Datwyler's lawyer sent a letter to the F.E.C., accusing Mr. Santos of listing him in the role without his permission. Mr. Datwyler "would not be taking over as treasurer," the lawyer, Derek Ross, wrote, adding that there appeared to be "some disconnect."

Then followed a head-spinning sequence of events in which Mr. Santos listed a new, previously unknown treasurer, leading to speculation that this person might not be real, but another alter ego of the congressman's.

Mr. Santos has denied such claims, and has argued that Mr. Datwyler came up with a plan to supervise and oversee the Santos campaign filings using the name of an associate, rather than his own, to avoid blowback from being associated with the controversial congressman.

Reporting by The Daily Beast supported Mr. Santos's account, leading to a notable reversal: Mr. Datwyler's own lawyer, Mr. Ross, wrote to the F.E.C. to retract his earlier letter.

"Regrettably, recent public reporting has caused me to lose confidence in the accuracy and veracity of the information provided by Mr. Datwyler," Mr. Ross wrote.

Despite Hold, Prosecutors Try To Nudge Trump Case Along

By ALAN FEUER

There seemed to be little room for maneuver last week when the federal judge overseeing former President Donald J. Trump's indictment on charges of plotting to overturn the 2020 election put the case on hold as an appeals court considered Mr. Trump's claims that he was immune from prosecution.

The decision by the judge, Tanya S. Chutkan, effectively froze the matter, suspending all of its deadlines and imperiling the start date for the trial, which is scheduled to begin March 4 in Federal District Court in Washington.

But even the force of the judge's order has not quite managed to keep prosecutors in the office of the special counsel, Jack Smith, from seeking to nudge the case forward — or to stop Mr. Trump's lawyers from complaining about their efforts.

On Monday evening, prosecutors working for Mr. Smith notified Judge Chutkan that they had sent Mr. Trump's legal team a draft list of exhibits that they intend to use at the trial. They acknowledged, however, that the deadline to submit the list had been "held in abeyance."

The exhibit list had been given to the defense, the prosecutors wrote, "to help ensure that trial proceeds promptly if and when" the case was back in action.

Hours later, Mr. Trump's legal team responded to the submission with an outraged two-page filing to Judge Chutkan complaining about how prosecutors had "improperly and unlawfully attempted to advance this case" in violation of the pause.

The lawyers told Judge Chutkan that prosecutors had not merely sent them the offending exhibit list, but had also illicitly turned over thousands of pages of additional discovery materials.

Their filing contained a copy of an email that John F. Lauro, one of Mr. Trump's top lawyers, had written to two of Mr. Smith's lead deputies, Thomas P. Windom and Molly Gaston.

In the email, Mr. Lauro, in politely biting terms, accused the special counsel's office of simply ignoring Judge Chutkan's order in an effort "to rush this case to an early and unconstitutional trial."

He put his foot down, telling the prosecutors that the defense would not "accept or review the present production or any additional productions" of discovery materials "until and unless the court lifts the stay order."

It remains unclear what Judge Chutkan might do about the spat beyond reminding everyone that they are not supposed to be moving pieces on the chessboard while the game has been put on hold.

Whatever course she takes, the tug of war between the parties reflects how seriously both of them feel about the timing of the election interference case.

Jack Smith hopes to avoid a collision between the trial and the presidential election.

Mr. Smith's team has been pressing to hold the trial before the heart of the 2024 campaign season begins this summer, hoping to avoid a head-on collision between the legal proceeding and a presidential election in which Mr. Trump is a leading candidate.

Mr. Trump's lawyers are pulling every lever they can to delay the trial. If the proceeding can be put off until after the election and Mr. Trump were to win, he would have the power to order the charges against him to be dropped.

At the center of that struggle is Mr. Trump's argument that he is immune from the charges because they arose from actions he took while he was in office.

A few weeks ago, Judge Chutkan rejected those claims, and Mr. Trump challenged her decision in front of a federal appeals court in Washington. Mr. Smith then asked the Supreme Court to consider the issue. He also prevailed on the lower court to hear the question on a parallel track.

Both challenges will advance this week as Mr. Trump's lawyers file papers — due on Wednesday — to the Supreme Court in an effort to keep the justices from taking up the case.

LOREN ELLIOTT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

"I don't think it's as big a deal as they're making it," Clifford McRoberts of Bay Point, Calif., said of Donald J. Trump's documents case.

G.O.P. Voters Back Trump Despite Indictments

From Page A1

try that so many people have tried to convict him of a crime."

But there are stark warning signs for Mr. Trump about the impact of his legal jeopardy in a potential matchup with President Biden. More than one in five Republican voters thinks Mr. Trump has committed crimes, and 13 percent of Republicans believe that he should be found guilty in court of trying to overturn the 2020 election. For now, Mr. Biden is winning only one-third of Republicans who think that Mr. Trump should be found guilty, leaving Mr. Biden room to gain support.

Mr. Trump's political and legal fates appear increasingly intertwined, with his lawyers seeking to delay his coming trials. While Mr. Trump's indictments do not appear to be an impediment to his potential nomination, the 32 percent of Republicans who think a conviction will mean the party should nominate someone else could provide fertile electoral ground for Democrats.

Many voters readily admitted that they had not fully tuned into Mr. Trump's legal travails. The charges he faces are related to, among other things, his seeking to overturn the 2020 election, his alleged mishandling of classified documents and his hush-money payments to a porn star in 2016.

Roughly half of voters said they were paying only a little attention or none at all to the cases, with Democrats paying more attention than Republicans or independent voters. It remains unclear whether any of the trials will begin before the general election next fall, but Mr. Trump's legal team is preparing for the likelihood that one of the cases could start as early as March.

A majority of voters, 53 percent, said they saw Mr. Trump as somewhat or very unlikely to be convicted in the 2020 election case, compared with 35 percent who saw a conviction as very or somewhat likely.

In many ways, public opinion about the accusations against Mr. Trump appears to have been refracted, if not warped, through the same polarized lens that colors so much of how Americans consume political news these days.

"Him taking those classified documents home — you know, that's obviously illegal. It's against the law, but I don't think it's as big a deal as they're making it," said Clifford McRoberts, 72, who lives in Bay Point, Calif., and operates a small online store.

A conviction, he said, would not deter his Trump vote.

"No, no, not at all," Mr. McRoberts said. "I voted for Nixon, too."

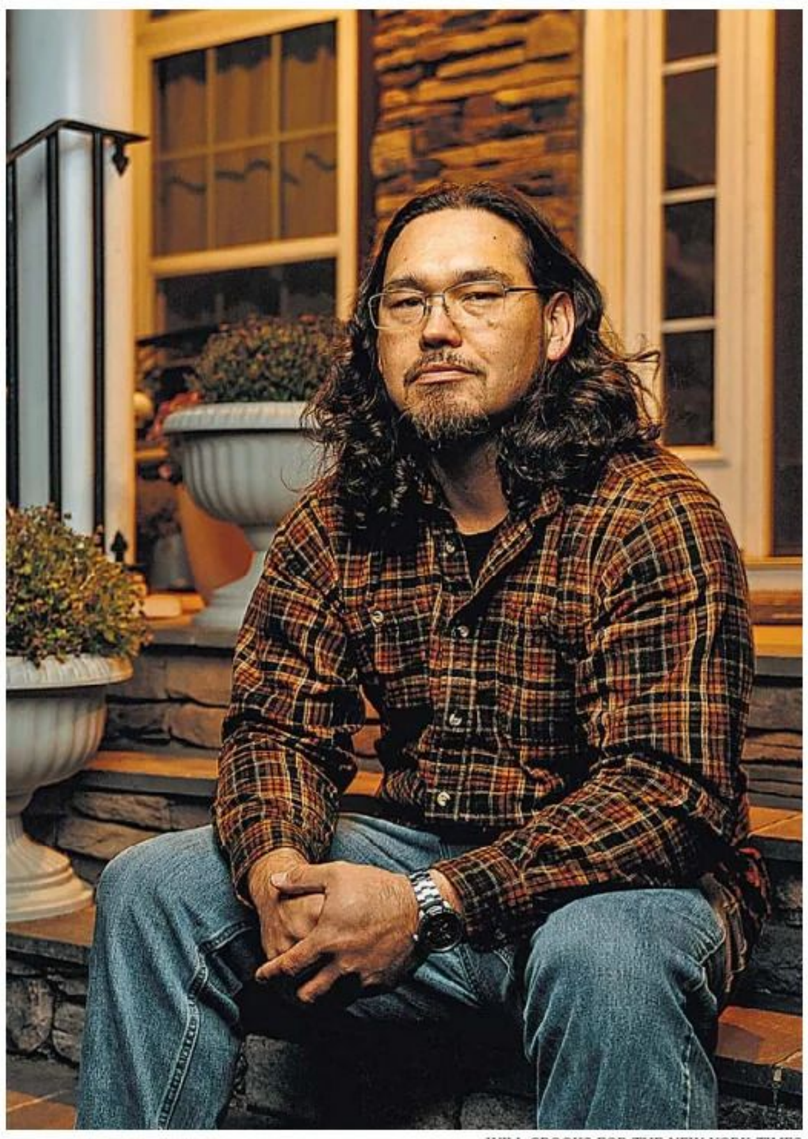
A full 83 percent of Republicans view Mr. Trump's prosecutions as politically motivated. And 84 percent of Democrats said he was charged because prosecutors believed he had broken the law.

Voters in the poll were also equally split — 47 percent to 47 percent — over whether Mr. Trump genuinely believed the election had been stolen or was knowingly making false claims. And, again, more than 80 percent of both Democrats and Republicans sided with their political tribes.

Perhaps as a result, the array of charges against Mr. Trump so far does not appear to be helping Mr. Biden politically.

Mr. Trump leads Mr. Biden 46 percent to 44 percent among registered voters. Among those deemed likeliest to vote, however, Mr. Biden actually edges Mr. Trump, 47 percent to 45 percent.

Maggie Haberman contributed reporting.

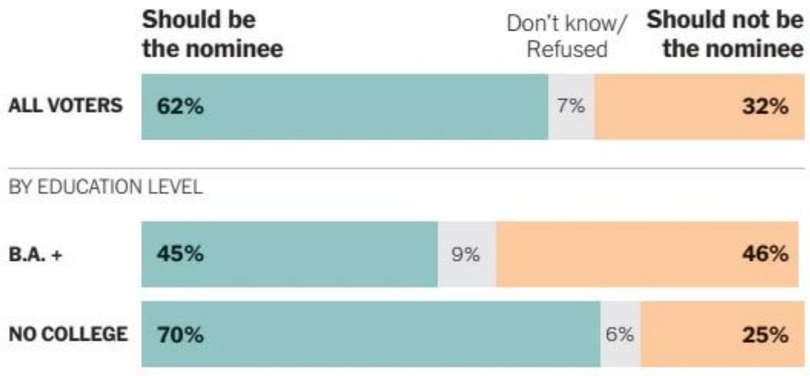


WILL CROOKS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Nykhael Kim, 39, of Easley, S.C., is supporting Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida in the Republican primary but still sees the prosecution of the former president as being "politically motivated."

If the Winner Is a Convict

Responses from Republican Primary voters to this question: Which comes closer to your view if Donald Trump is convicted of a crime and has won the most votes in the primary? Donald Trump ...



Source: New York Times/Siena College poll of 1,016 registered voters nationwide, Dec. 10-14.
Note: Values are rounded.

LAZARO GAMIO/THE NEW YORK TIMES

In a sign of Mr. Biden's weakness among registered voters, his level of support is actually lower than the share of voters — 47 percent — who believe that Mr. Trump should be found guilty of trying to overturn the 2020 election.

Reservations about Mr. Biden are undercutting concerns about Mr. Trump's criminality for some voters.

Allison Sullender, 39, a self-described independent voter who lives in San Bernardino, Calif., said she was undecided about her 2024 vote. She sees Mr. Trump as a "crooked businessman," but has deep concerns about Mr. Biden's age and the economy.

For now, she's leaning toward the Democrat. "But do I feel confident in him doing another four years?" she said. "No, I don't."

There is an enormous educational gulf when it comes to how voters view the criminal charges against Mr. Trump.

Among those with a college degree, 64 percent believe Mr. Trump has been charged because prosecutors believe he committed crimes. Those without a college education take the opposite view: 54 percent of them see the charges as politically motivated.

By a wide margin, college graduates think Mr. Trump should be found guilty of trying to overturn the 2020 election. Voters who did not graduate from college take the opposite position.

The education divide is apparent inside the Republican Party, too.

By an enormous margin — 70 percent to 25 percent — Republicans without college degrees think Mr. Trump should remain the nominee even if he is convicted. Yet among Republican college graduates, opinion is evenly split.

If, as expected, the 2020 election case goes to trial, 47 percent of voters said Mr. Trump should be found guilty, compared with 39 percent who said not guilty. But confidence in the fairness of a trial was not widespread: 43 percent said a trial would be fair and impartial compared with 49 percent who said it would not be.

"I don't believe that our justice system will give him a fair trial," said Nykhael Kim, 39, a sales manager in Easley, S.C., who is supporting Mr. DeSantis in the primary but still sees the prosecution of Mr. Trump as "politically motivated."

An educational gulf on how voters view the criminal charges.

Fifty percent of voters — including 18 percent of Republicans — said that if Mr. Trump were convicted, he should be sentenced to prison.

When it comes to the presidential primary, the poll shows precious few signs of political vulnerability for Mr. Trump less than a month before balloting begins. He is dominating Ms. Haley and Mr. DeSantis among Republican voters of every age and income level, in cities, rural areas and suburbs. Mr. Trump is winning 80 percent of G.O.P. primary voters who do not think he committed serious crimes — and 34 percent of those who think he did.

Mr. Trump's rivals have repeatedly argued that the election will unfold state by state, beginning in Iowa and New Hampshire. But the national picture remains bleak for them, with Ms. Haley and Mr. DeSantis each hovering near 10 percent support.

The poll makes plain the vastly different political coalitions Mr. Trump's rivals have assembled to get there.

Most of Mr. DeSantis's voters do not think Mr. Trump has committed serious federal crimes, while most of Ms. Haley's supporters think he has. Nearly all of Mr. DeSantis's supporters said they would support Mr. Trump over Mr. Biden, while Ms. Haley's supporters are more closely divided on that question.

Education is a key factor in understanding the dynamics of the Republican primary, too.

Ms. Haley is winning 28 percent of Republicans with college degrees yet only 3 percent of Republicans who did not graduate from college. Mr. Trump is winning both groups, but he pulled nearly twice as much support from Republicans who did not attend college (76 percent) as from those who did (39 percent).

Vivek Ramaswamy, the businessman, is at 5 percent in the poll, and Chris Christie, the former governor of New Jersey who has made the loudest case that Mr. Trump's conduct and legal cases make him "unfit" to return to the White House, had 3 percent support.

The New York Times/Siena College poll of 1,016 registered voters nationwide was conducted by telephone using live operators from Dec. 10 to 14, 2023. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points for registered voters.

Corrections

SCIENCE TIMES

An article on Tuesday about proposals to ease drug shortages misstated the name of a trade group that has suggested that the Food and Drug Administration provide more information on compounding pharmacies. It is the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists, not the Association for Health System Pharmacists.

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

Errors are corrected during the press run whenever possible, so some errors noted here may not have appeared in all editions.

Trump Ineligible for Ballot, Colorado Supreme Court Rules

From Page A1

ing applies only to one state, it could all but force the nation's highest court to decide the question for all 50.

"It's hard for me to see how they don't take this one, because this certainly seems to be one of those questions that requires some national resolution," said Anthony Michael Kreis, an assistant professor of law at Georgia State University who has closely followed the Colorado case and related lawsuits around the country.

If the justices take up the case, it will join a pile of other Trump-related matters they have agreed or are likely to decide, including whether he is immune from criminal prosecution for actions he took in office and the scope of an obstruction charge that is central to his federal Jan. 6 case.

The U.S. Supreme Court has a 6-to-3 conservative majority, with three justices appointed by Mr. Trump himself, and it is already under extraordinary political pressure and scrutiny both for its rulings and its justices' ethics.

"Once again, the Supreme Court is being thrust into the center of a U.S. presidential election," said Richard L. Hasen, an election law expert at the University of California, Los Angeles, who compared the stakes to Bush v. Gore. "But, unlike in 2000, the general political instability in the United States makes the situation now much more precarious."

In the Colorado court's lengthy ruling on Tuesday, the justices there reversed a Denver district judge's finding last month that Section 3 did not apply to the presidency. They affirmed the district judge's other key conclusions: that Mr. Trump's actions before and on Jan. 6, 2021, constituted engaging in insurrection, and that courts had the authority to enforce Section 3 against a person whom Congress had not specifically designated.

"A majority of the court holds that President Trump is disqualified from holding the office of president under Section 3 of the 14th Amendment to the United States Constitution," the justices wrote. "Because he is disqualified, it would be a wrongful act under the Election Code for the Colorado secretary of state to list him as a candidate on the presidential primary ballot."

Mr. Trump's campaign denounced the ruling, which is likely to inflame a Republican base that he has primed to see the array of civil and criminal cases against him as a witch hunt. Politically, his standing among Republican primary voters has only risen in the wake of the dozens of criminal charges against him.

"Unsurprisingly, the all-Democrat appointed Colorado Supreme Court has ruled against President Trump, supporting a Soros-funded, left-wing group's scheme to interfere in an election on behalf of Crooked Joe Biden by removing President Trump's name from the ballot and eliminating the rights of Colorado voters to vote for the candidate of their choice," a campaign spokesman, Steven Cheung, said.

"We have full confidence that the U.S. Supreme Court will quickly rule in our favor and finally put an end to these un-American lawsuits."

Similar lawsuits in Minnesota and New Hampshire were dismissed on procedural grounds. A judge in Michigan ruled last month that the issue was political and not for him to decide, and an appeals court affirmed the decision not to disqualify Mr. Trump there. The plaintiffs have appealed to the Michigan Supreme Court.

Tuesday's ruling "is not only historic and justified, but is necessary to protect the future of democracy in our country," Noah Bookbinder, the president of Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, said in a statement. His organization represented the voters seeking to disqualify Mr. Trump in Colorado.

Mr. Trump himself, who has routinely railed against unfavorable rulings, did not explicitly mention the Colorado Supreme Court decision in a speech Tuesday evening in Waterloo, Iowa — but his campaign was already fund-raising off it. An email to his supporters accused Democrats of trying to "nullify" Trump votes and asked for contributions to help defend his place on ballots.

Republican elected officials quickly circled the wagons around Mr. Trump, and a super PAC supporting him blasted out some of their comments to supporters.

JORDAN GALE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Donald J. Trump at a rally last week. Political opponents have sought to keep him off the ballot by citing the 14th Amendment.

The case hinged on several questions: Was it an insurrection when Trump supporters stormed the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, trying to stop the certification of the 2020 election? If so, did Mr. Trump engage in that insurrection through his messages to his supporters beforehand, his speech that morning and his Twitter posts during the attack? Do courts have the authority to enforce Section 3 of the 14th Amendment without congressional action? And does Section 3 apply to the presidency?

Judge Sarah B. Wallace, who made the district court ruling in Colorado, had said yes to all but the last question.

Because Section 3 enumerates several offices but not the presidency, and because the presidential oath is worded differently from the oaths of the enumerated offices, Judge Wallace concluded that the broad phrase "officers of the United States" was not intended to include the presidency. The Colorado Supreme Court disagreed.

"We do not place the same weight the district court did on the fact that the presidency is not specifically mentioned in Section 3," the majority wrote. "It seems most likely that the presidency is not specifically included because it is so evidently an 'office.'"

The three justices who dissented did so on procedural grounds, not on the merits of whether Mr. Trump engaged in insurrection or whether Section 3 applies to the presidency. In three separate dissenting opinions, each based on different legal arguments, they all concluded that the court had overstepped its authority.

"Even if we are convinced that a candidate committed horrible acts in the past — dare I say, engaged in insurrection — there must be procedural due process before we can declare that individual disqualified from holding public office," Justice Carlos Samour Jr. wrote in his dissent.

Several legal experts emphasized in interviews with The New York Times that the case involved novel legal and constitutional questions — ones for which there is no clear precedent.

"This is a provision of the Constitution that we just didn't expect to start using again," Jessica Levinson, a professor at Loyola Law School, said of Section 3, which was written after the Civil War to prevent members of the Confederacy from holding office.

Professor Hasen, of U.C.L.A., called the ruling "very carefully crafted and considered."

"That said, many of the issues that the Colorado Supreme Court resolved could well be decided differently by the U.S. Supreme Court if it ends up reviewing the case on the merits," he said. "Many of these are issues of first impression that courts have never had to address before."

Michael Gold and Adam Liptak contributed reporting.

Proud Boy Who Aided Prosecutors Is Sentenced

By ALAN FEUER and ZACH MONTAGUE

A former leader of the Proud Boys who helped the government investigate and prosecute others in the far-right group involved in the attack on the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, was sentenced on Tuesday to 40 months in prison for his own role in the assault.

His sentence slightly exceeded the nearly 38 months he has been credited for since his arrest after the riot, meaning he is likely to be released in a little over two months.

The former leader, Charles Donohoe, was the first member of the Proud Boys who cooperated with prosecutors to be sentenced for taking part in the Capitol attack.

After cooperating, he got little more than time served.

While Mr. Donohoe, who once ran a Proud Boys chapter in North Carolina, never testified in public against any of his compatriots, his sentence reflected the value that prosecutors placed on his assistance. His cooperation contributed, among other things, to four members of the organization — including its former chairman, Enrique Tarrio — being convicted of seditious conspiracy this spring.

At a two-hour hearing in Federal District Court in Washington, Mr. Donohoe, a 35-year-old former Marine, expressed regret about the part he played in the storming of the Capitol, saying he knew from the outset that his actions were illegal.

"I'd like to apologize to America as a whole," he said, adding that his struggles with addiction had clouded his judgment in the lead-up to the riot.

Prosecutors said little about his cooperation deal, focusing instead on his leadership role in the Proud Boys and his contributions to the group's planning before the riot.

Judge Timothy J. Kelly echoed those concerns, noting that Mr. Donohoe's involvement in the conspiracy organized by the Proud Boys was a departure from an otherwise civic-minded life, which included military service in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"That's the nature of conspiracies," Judge Kelly said. "They're not one-time mistakes — they're ongoing mistakes over time."

The Proud Boys were among President Donald J. Trump's most vocal supporters after his loss in the 2020 election, assuming center stage in a series of so-called Stop the Steal rallies in Washington after Mr. Trump's defeat.

The group also played a critical role in advancing the violence that erupted at the Capitol on Jan. 6, helping to lead the pro-Trump mob in breaching barricades and assaulting the police.

Mr. Donohoe was on the leadership team of the so-called Ministry of Self-Defense, a group of Proud Boys selected by Mr. Tarrio to be in the vanguard of the Capitol attack. Prosecutors say Mr. Donohoe joined the group's efforts to push forward toward the building — at one point hauling away a police riot shield that another Proud Boys member, Dominic Pezzola, had wrested from an officer.

Mr. Donohoe also sent messages from the front lines back to other leaders, including "a real-time video report" that some Proud Boys had "stormed the Capitol" just before 1 p.m., prosecutors said.

After the attack, Mr. Donohoe sent other messages celebrating the riot and declaring that the events of the day made him "feel like a complete warrior," prosecutors said.

Mr. Donohoe was charged in March 2022 along with other leaders of the Proud Boys, including Mr. Tarrio, with joining a conspiracy to obstruct the certification of the election that was taking place inside the Capitol on Jan. 6.

A month later, he pleaded guilty and agreed to cooperate with federal prosecutors — one of several members of the Proud Boys who ultimately turned on their allies.

Internal F.B.I. records show that federal agents made a concerted effort to recruit cooperators during their sprawling investigation of the far-right group. Two former Proud Boys — Matthew Greene and Jeremy Bertino — testified for the government at the sedition trial, telling the jury about the mindset of the organization's leaders in the run-up to Jan. 6 and about the group's obsession with physical violence.

Gay Catholics Hear Historic Words From a Priest: 'God Bless You'

From Page A1

"May the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you. May the Lord turn his countenance to you and give you joy and peace.

"And may almighty God bless you," he said, making the sign of the cross, "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen."

And then, with emotion evident on their faces, the three men hugged.

Father Martin is arguably the highest-profile advocate for L.G.B.T.Q. Catholics in America. He has met frequently with Pope Francis about making the Roman Catholic Church more inclusive, and in the fall he participated in a global gathering on the church's future at the pope's invitation.

On Tuesday morning, he was far from the halls of power. He was at home, making history. Father Martin had waited years for the privilege of saying such a prayer, however simple, out in the open.

"It was really nice," Father Martin said on Tuesday, "to be able to do that publicly."

The pope's decision was greeted as a landmark victory by advocates for gay Catholics, who describe it as a significant gesture of openness and pastoral care, and a reminder that an institution whose age is measured in millenniums can change.

The decision does not overturn the church's doctrine that marriage is between a man and a woman. It does not allow priests to perform same-sex marriages. It takes pains to differentiate between the sacrament of marriage — which must take place in a church — and a blessing, which is a more informal, even spontaneous, gesture. And, a priest's blessing of a same-sex couple should not take place in connection with a civil marriage ceremony, it says.

News of the pope's decision spread quickly among gay Catholics, many of whom began preparations for blessings of their own after the busy Christmas season.

On the morning of the pope's announcement, Michael McCabe's husband, Eric Sherman, ran into his home office in their apartment in Forest Hills, Queens, bursting with news: Their 46-year partnership could at last be blessed.

"You wait so long for the church to come around, you kind of give up hope," said Mr. McCabe, 73, who attends Mass every Sunday at the Church of St. Francis Xavier in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan.

The couple married in 2010 in Connecticut, before same-sex marriages became legal in New York, their home state. They had long been resigned to the church's stance, even if they had not fully made peace with it, Mr. McCabe said.

"I know that myself and my relationship with my husband are good things," said Mr. McCabe, who taught catechism to first graders at the church.

Although the pope's decision stops short of recognizing Mr. McCabe's marriage, he said he could only find the joy in the news. After rejoicing with his husband on Monday, he emailed his priest. They plan to receive a blessing early in the new year.

It wasn't immediately clear how different priests across the country would respond to the pope's invitation to bless gay couples. The announcement gives individual priests latitude and encouragement to offer the blessings, but does not require them to do so. Gay couples living in more liberal dioceses may be more likely to find a willing priest than those living in conservative dioceses.

In Chicago, Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, a close ally of Pope Francis, issued a statement saying that in his archdiocese, "we welcome this declaration, which will help many more in our community feel the closeness and compassion of God."

Many other bishops have remained mum so far. Conservative critics have said the pope's move essentially encourages priests to bless sin.

"I'm sure many old bishops are open to this, and many young priests will have to be convinced," said Massimo Faggioli, a professor of theology at Villanova University, noting that young Catholic priests in the United States are overwhelmingly conservative.

In New York City, where a handful of progressive Catholic churches have been on the forefront of welcoming L.G.B.T.Q. parishioners, but have stopped short of marrying them and sanctifying their unions, the news from the Vatican was just as exciting for some priests as it was for their parishioners.

"I say it is about darn time," said the Rev. Joseph Juracek, pastor of the Church of St. Francis of Assisi in Midtown, who believes the church is finally aligning with Jesus' teachings: "This is what he is all about: That God is for *all* people."

While many Catholics celebrated the pope's decision, others felt it was too little, too late. Some L.G.B.T.Q. people who left the church years ago, feeling unwelcome, said it was a half-measure that would not tempt them to return.

Thomas Molina-Duarte, 37, a social worker in Detroit, was an active member of his Catholic parish for many years. But when he and his husband married, they had to do so in an Episcopal church, and they eventually joined a "home church," where they gather with a small group to do close readings of texts from the Bible.

"I welcome the news, but it's not going to make me come back to the church." Mr. Molina-Duarte said of the pope's decision. "We've found a community of other people that we felt we could bring our full selves to."

In New York City, Damian and Jason Steidl Jack, who were married last year, had previously discussed the possibility of a blessing with Father Martin, a longtime friend of Jason's. When Father Martin texted on Monday afternoon and asked if they wanted a blessing, they leaped at the offer.

"God's grace is at work in our lives, whether the Vatican issues an announcement or not," said Jason, an assistant teaching professor of religious studies at St. Joseph's University in Brooklyn and an advocate for gay Catholics. "But we are eager for the support of our communities and of our pastors who look after us."

Walking back to the subway from Father Martin's Jesuit community residence, Jason and Damian said the blessing he had given them felt both ordinary and profound.

"It's one grace of many," Jason said. They were a part of history, and they were also on their way to meet Damian's mother at Walmart to shop for Christmas groceries.

"It's like you said," Jason told his husband, "It's like we're claiming our space."

Kirsten Noyes contributed research.

JAMES ESTRIN/THE NEW YORK TIMES

The Rev. James Martin gave a blessing to Jason Steidl Jack, left, and his husband, Damian Steidl Jack, in Manhattan on Tuesday.

SARAH BLESENER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Michael McCabe, left, and Eric Sherman of Queens, New York, are looking forward to being blessed by a priest in the new year.

Some same-sex partners rejoice; others see the change as too little, too late.

Clock Ticks for High-Profile Bills in New York

By GRACE ASHFORD

ALBANY, N.Y. — Will New York swear off buying paper from the Amazon rainforest to help stave off its deforestation? Should employers be able to bar workers from going to work for competitors?

A harried last-minute lobbying push to answer these and other questions is accelerating in Albany, where less than two weeks remain for Gov. Kathy Hochul to sign dozens of bills by year's end. Any legislation not acted upon before then will be automatically vetoed.

This year, state lawmakers passed nearly 900 bills, touching broadly on life in New York. And while Ms. Hochul has acted on most of those measures, roughly a hundred remain, including many of the most consequential and contentious.

One such measure — a proposal to address New York's history of racial injustice by creating a task force to study and report on the impact of slavery and racism in New York — was signed by Ms. Hochul on Tuesday. Others are less certain.

Here's where things stand on some high-profile pieces of legislation.

JEENAH MOON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Gov. Kathy Hochul of New York has until the end of the year to sign bills into law.

EMIL SALMAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

State Senator Brad Hoylman-Sigal, a Manhattan Democrat, sponsored a measure to increase the transparency of LLCs.

HANS PENNINK/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Assemblywoman Helene Weinstein wants to expand the scope of family members who are eligible for wrongful death benefits.

Noncompete Clauses

One of the most closely watched bills is a proposal to ban noncompete agreements, a hallmark of the powerful worlds of banking and finance that are central to New York City's economy.

New York's legislation is part of a growing national movement to restrict such provisions, which have ballooned in recent years to restrict not only Wall Street traders but also doctors, tattoo artists and even camp counselors.

The prospect of a ban has drawn opposition from powerful industries, including banking and media. A group associated with the Business Council of New York State has spent more than $1 million on ads warning that the legislation would be a "job killer" that would "cripple business's ability to fuel innovation and retain talent."

Ms. Hochul has embraced a potential middle ground that would protect lower-wage workers but exclude high earners, although it remains to be seen whether she can reach agreement with the bill's sponsors.

"We're working on language that accounts for the difference between the average worker and highly paid executives without fully restricting anyone," State Senator Sean Ryan, a Democrat and sponsor of the legislation, said of negotiations.

The bill was delivered to Ms. Hochul on Dec. 12, beginning a 10-day clock for her to sign or veto it.

Shedding Light on LLCs

The clock is also ticking for two transparency-related measures with the potential to change the way money is spent and disclosed in the state.

The first would require state agencies to post the details of emergency contracts within 30 days of when they are awarded, an effort meant to reduce the risk of waste and corruption. The second would require businesses to list their so-called beneficial owners, a nation-leading effort that would shine a light on the shadowy world of limited liability companies, or LLCs.

Such shell companies help shelter billions of dollars each year, some of it foreign, much of it difficult to trace. Vast sums are tied up in high-end real estate, leaving scores of luxury apartments empty even as the city faces a prolonged housing crisis.

Under the proposed legislation, ownership information would be provided to the state and made public in a searchable database.

"I hope the governor sees the benefit in transparency around the ownership of shell companies, both for the benefit of law enforcement but also tenants and employees," said State Senator Brad Hoylman-Sigal, a Manhattan Democrat who is the bill's Senate sponsor. "Most tenants don't know who their landlord is, and many employees have had their wages stolen by anonymous employers."

The Real Estate Board of New York said in a statement that it did not oppose disclosing ownership information to the state, but believed that by making such information public, the proposed database would create "privacy and identity theft risks for New Yorkers and risks weakening New York's economy."

Ms. Hochul has pledged repeatedly to champion transparency, although she has not yet offered a position on either proposal.

Blocking Spending to Save Trees

Environmental advocates are pushing another nation-leading measure that would reduce New York's contribution to climate change. The far-reaching measure would require the state to restrict buying from companies that do not attest that their products have not contributed to deforestation.

The legislation would regulate the supply chains of individual products to ensure they have not been manufactured on land that has recently been forest. Vast amounts of the world's carbon are stored in tropical forests that also serve as the sites of export for major commodities, including palm oil, cocoa and beef.

The European Union passed a similar ban that is scheduled to take effect in 2025.

New York's bill would apply to paper and wood, and also the food products sold by state contractors like Sysco, which has registered to lobby on the bill.

Ms. Hochul presented a scaled-back version of the legislations to proponents last week. But supporters have dismissed the compromise as "unacceptable."

Wrongful Death Statute

When the Legislature passed the Grieving Families Act last year, proponents celebrated, believing a victory 30 years in the making was at hand.

The bill would rewrite the state's 1847 wrongful death statute, broadening the category of beneficiaries and allowing courts to evaluate not only a decedent's earning potential but also the emotional pain caused by their death.

But Ms. Hochul vetoed the bill, saying that while she believed changes should be made, the existing language was overly broad.

This year, lawmakers tried again. They narrowed the bill slightly, limiting damages as well as the category of people who would be eligible for benefits.

"Basically what it does is expand the family members, the way family is thought of in 2023, who can recover damages," explained Assemblywoman Helene Weinstein, a Brooklyn Democrat and bill sponsor, noting grandparents and domestic partners.

The legislation remains unpopular with the insurance industry, which warns that its passage would send premiums, particularly for medical malpractice policies, skyrocketing.

It remains to be seen if the changes from last year's version are sufficient to win over the governor. If not, Ms. Weinstein said she intended to try again.

"Laws are like fine wine. Sometimes it's like a Beaujolais and you introduce it and it passes and sometimes it has to age just right," she said. "This is one of those that I think has started to reach the end of its aging time."

Jay Root and Luis Ferré-Sadurní contributed reporting.

Task Force Will Review Reparations for Slavery

By GRACE ASHFORD and LUIS FERRÉ-SADURNÍ

New York will undertake an ambitious effort to address the state's history of slavery and racism, establishing the United States' third statewide task force to examine whether reparations can be made to confront the legacy of racial injustice.

Gov. Kathy Hochul on Tuesday signed a bill that empowers a commission to study not only the history of slavery, which was outlawed in New York in 1827, but also its subsequent effects on housing discrimination, biased policing, income inequality and mass incarceration of African Americans.

New York joins California and Illinois at the forefront of reparations efforts, a complicated endeavor that will immerse stakeholders in a contentious political and budgetary conversation about the past and its dictates for the future.

It is far too early to tell what type of restitution, cash or otherwise, the commission in New York will recommend for descendants of enslaved people, or even if it will make such a recommendation. But in California, a multibillion-dollar price tag has already threatened to stymie the reparations project, highlighting the distance between the state's goals and its fiscal reality.

"I know the word 'reparations' brings up a lot of conflicting ideas for people," Ms. Hochul said on Tuesday before signing the bill. "A lot of people instinctively dig in when they hear it, without really thinking about what it means or why we need to talk about it."

"Today, I challenge all New Yorkers, to be the patriots and rebuke — and not excuse — our role in benefiting from the institution of slavery," she said.

A nine-member task force appointed by the governor and State Legislature will produce a report with nonbinding recommendations for ways to correct centuries of discrimination. State lawmakers could then pass legislation to enact any of the recommendations.

The California commission approved a report in May that recommended a sweeping statewide reparations program, as well as a formal apology to the state's millions of Black residents. The payments, which could reach more than $1.2 million per person, would cost billions of dollars at a time when the state faces fiscal challenges, including a $68 billion revenue shortfall.

It is now up to state lawmakers and Gov. Gavin Newsom of California to agree on any money to be paid or any policy changes recommended by the commission. So far, lawmakers have not passed any legislation, although the legislative Black Caucus has pledged to introduce a package of measures for consideration next year.

That commission went beyond slavery and sought to put a price tag on the effects of systemic racism as it applies to felony drug arrests, housing discrimination and eminent domain seizures, as well as differences in life expectancy. The reparations in California would apply only to residents descended from slaves or from free African Americans who lived in the United States before the 20th century.

In 2021, the Chicago suburb of Evanston became the first U.S. city to actually issue reparations in the form of housing grants of up to $25,000. As of August, the city announced it had distributed just over $1 million. The work of Illinois's reparations commission is continuing, with public meetings scheduled into the new year.

In San Francisco, a separate 15-member task force issued a series of 111 recommendations and one of the most ambitious, if elusive, restitution proposals: a one-time, $5 million payment to anyone eligible.

But the city's budgetary limitations and political division highlight the political challenge that reparations projects face: The proposed payments could amount to more than $100 billion, or about seven times the annual budget of San Francisco. The city's mayor, London Breed, who is Black, has not committed to cash reparations and her office has indicated that the federal government is better suited to handle reparations.

New York has similar budget issues. After two years of record-setting state budgets following an influx of federal pandemic-era aid, state officials in New York are now projecting a budget deficit of $4.3 billion for the 2024 fiscal year, and even larger deficits in the years ahead. Cuts could be on the horizon, renewing calls from left-wing lawmakers to hike taxes on the rich to bridge the budget gaps, a step that Ms. Hochul opposes.

A panel tasked with creating nonbinding recommendations.

An unusually expansive Ms. Hochul appeared to acknowledge the difficult negotiations ahead, admitting that she had concerns about the bill at the outset.

She further acknowledged the political risks of jumping into a conversation about historical wrongs, though she concluded that truly standing against racism would mean "more than giving people a simple apology 150 years later."

The Republican Senate minority leader, Robert Ortt, contended that New York had already paid its debt for slavery with the "blood and lives" of Americans during the Civil War.

The bill signing drew an assortment of the state's many Black political leaders, including the bill's sponsors in the State Senate and Assembly, as well as Assembly Speaker Carl E. Heastie and the Senate majority leader, Andrea Stewart-Cousins.

The Rev. Al Sharpton thanked Ms. Hochul for having the "audacity and courage" to back the proposal, calling the signing "the beginning of a process to repair damage done."

"You cannot heal unless you deal with the wounds," he said. "And this bill will put a commission together to be healing the wounds."

Now that the bill has been signed, Ms. Hochul and the leaders of the Senate and Assembly will each appoint three members to the task force.

The group will have one year from the date of its first meeting to produce a report of its findings and recommendations to the Legislature.

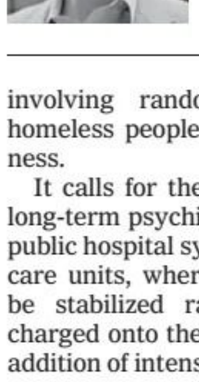
Shawn Hubler contributed reporting from California.

Proposal in Manhattan Would Expand Mental Health Services for the Homeless

By JAN RANSOM and AMY JULIA HARRIS

The Manhattan borough president on Tuesday announced a plan that he said would help expand access to psychiatric care and housing for severely mentally ill homeless people in New York City.

The proposal by the borough president, Mark Levine, was designed to address gaps in New York City's social safety net in the wake of several high-profile cases involving random attacks by homeless people with mental illness.



The plan by Mark Levine, Manhattan borough president, includes adding psychiatric beds.

It calls for the creation of 240 long-term psychiatric beds in the public hospital system's extended care units, where patients could be stabilized rather than discharged onto the streets, and the addition of intensive mobile treatment teams to care for those patients outside the hospital setting. Mr. Levine wants the city to double the number of those teams to 62, which would allow them to serve about 1,500 people. As of August, nearly 480 people were waiting to be assigned to such teams, records show.

"We have not invested in the kinds of interventions that put people back on the right path," said Mr. Levine, a former city councilman who took office as borough president last year. "I am optimistic if we have the will we can get this right."

Mr. Levine unveiled his plan after a New York Times investigation that identified breakdowns in the city's mental health care system — homeless shelters, hospitals, specialized treatment teams and other organizations. The lapses preceded nearly 100 acts of violence over the past decade, The Times found, sometimes by a matter of days or hours.

Mr. Levine said the killing of a financial consultant early last year by a homeless man with schizophrenia and a history of erratic behavior prompted him to take a hard look at the gaps in mental health care, and what he described as a "crisis playing out on the streets of New York City."

General hospitals have cut hundreds of psychiatric beds in recent years, leading to the discharge of patients who were not yet stable. Once released, some of the patients have spent months on waitlists for assignment to specialized treatment teams. Others have filled homeless shelters or landed on the streets and in the city's subway system. Some have gone on to unravel in preventable and violent ways.

JOSÉ A. ALVARADO JR. FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Mr. Levine made fact-finding visits to mental health facilities and housing on Randall's Island.

The Times found that the city had not placed mentally ill homeless people in dedicated mental health shelters where they could get psychiatric services. Hospitals frequently discharged patients before they were stable. Workers on specialized treatment teams were frequently overwhelmed, undertrained and underpaid, and they sometimes failed to help homeless people who were showing signs that they were deteriorating.

Many of the failures stemmed from poor communication among the various agencies responsible for treating mentally ill homeless people, The Times found.

So often, Mr. Levine said, we learn about the kinds of failures documented in the Times investigation only "after a horrible act." He added, "No one was connecting the dots."

To understand the ways in which the city's social safety net worked and the ways it did not, Mr. Levine said, he has toured the different parts of the system. He visited psychiatric facilities and mental health housing units on Randall's Island and tagged along with outpatient teams as they treated people in the streets.

What he found, he said, were a number of underfunded programs that worked for a small subset of people but were not able to meet the full need.

As borough president, Mr. Levine does not have the power to pass legislation or enforce laws, but he can introduce bills through the City Council in partnership with a Council member and push for the changes he has proposed.

Mr. Levine's plan calls for the state to create 400 new beds in the Transition to Home program at the Manhattan Psychiatric Center, a new inpatient treatment program for homeless people with severe mental illnesses. The program currently has 50 beds, Mr. Levine said.

He also urged city officials to ensure that supportive housing projects, including three being developed in Manhattan, are completed despite community opposition.

As another part of his plan, Mr. Levine urged the city to strengthen opioid treatment for people with serious mental illness and address staffing shortages in the behavioral health care industry by expanding student loan forgiveness programs, among other initiatives.

GO NAKAMURA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Asylum seekers searching for openings in the concertina wire along the Rio Grande in July. The wire has injured some migrants.

Court Limits U.S. Effort to Cut Texas Border Wire

By EDGAR SANDOVAL

SAN ANTONIO — A federal appeals court on Tuesday issued a temporary order limiting the Biden administration's authority to remove barbed wire erected by Texas along the U.S.-Mexico border as part of the state's effort to deter migrants from crossing into the United States.

Texas has been sparring with the federal government on several fronts over border control and had appealed a lower-court ruling in November allowing federal agents to cut the wire.

In its order on Tuesday, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit in New Orleans said that while the court was weighing the appeal by Texas, the federal government could not cut the concertina wire barrier that the state had placed along the Rio Grande.

"Defendants are enjoined during the pendency of this appeal from damaging, destroying or otherwise interfering with Texas' c-wire fence," the panel of judges wrote, referring to about 30 miles of concertina wire placed near the border city of Eagle Pass, Texas.

But the order does allow Border Patrol agents to cut the wire in the event of a medical emergency — an exception that addresses the federal government's concern that the barrier could make it difficult to render first aid to injured or ill migrants.

Alain Delaquérière contributed research.

BRIAN SNYDER/REUTERS

A U.S. Border Patrol agent cut the wire in September. Tuesday's court order does let agents cut the wire in a medical emergency.

Officials with U.S. Customs and Border Protection did not respond to a request for comment.

The case is part of a lawsuit filed by the Texas attorney general, Ken Paxton, who has argued that federal agents have illegally destroyed Texas property and curtailed the state's effort block migrants from crossing the border.

The order by the federal appeals court came a day after Gov. Greg Abbott signed legislation that gives Texas law enforcement officers the authority to arrest migrants who enter the state from Mexico without legal authorization.

The measure was passed in a special session of the Republican-dominated State Legislature last month despite the objections of Democrats, immigrant-rights groups and Hispanic organizations. Opponents said they feared that the measure would encourage racial profiling in border communities and asserted that it violated the U.S. Constitution by usurping federal authority over immigration enforcement.

El Paso County and two immigrant rights groups filed a lawsuit on Tuesday in an effort to halt the law, which is scheduled to take effect in March, and some sheriffs along the border have expressed concern that the measure could rapidly overwhelm local jails and courts.

The wrangling over the concertina wire is not the only legal battle between Texas and the Biden administration over the border. Earlier this month, the same federal appeals court ordered the state of Texas to remove a barrier of floating buoys in the Rio Grande installed at the direction of Governor Abbott to block migrants. The state is challenging that ruling.

A barbed barrier is just one part of a state's challenge to federal authority.

For more than two years, Mr. Abbott has been testing the legal limits of what a state can do to enforce immigration law.

Part of that strategy was expanding the use of concertina wire along the riverbank. Some migrants have been injured from the sharp wire, and drownings in the river's swift currents have become more common.

The state has argued that the sharp fencing has helped to deter crossings as well as drug smuggling along border towns like Eagle Pass, which has seen recent surges of migrants. According to Mr. Paxton's suit, border agents cut the wire at least 20 times during the first half of the year "to admit aliens illegally entering Texas through the fence hole created by CBP's destruction of state property."

Baltimore Sues A.T.F. Over Access to Gun Data

By GLENN THRUSH

WASHINGTON — The city of Baltimore is suing the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives for blocking access to data on guns used to commit crimes — information it said was essential for targeting gun violence and identifying sellers who flood the city with weapons.

In a lawsuit filed on Monday, the city's lawyers argued that the A.T.F. had adopted an overly narrow interpretation of legislation enacted in 2003 by congressional Republicans, at the urging of the National Rifle Association. The law blocked public access to gun trace data collected by the federal government on weapons recovered at the nation's crime scenes.

The so-called Tiahrt Amendment, named for its sponsor, former Representative Todd Tiahrt, Republican of Kansas, prevents the use of federal funding to release information on traces logged in the federal firearms tracing database — amounting to a blackout on public disclosure.

A spokeswoman for the A.T.F. did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The bureau's lawyers are skeptical that the legal challenges to the Tiahrt Amendment will succeed in appellate court, according to officials with knowledge of the situation.

Local police departments have access to trace information but are often reluctant to share it with local governments. The A.T.F. — despite President Biden's promise to improve access to firearms data — has flatly refused to publicly release information that could identify manufacturers, gun sellers and the federally licensed dealers most likely to sell to criminals or straw buyers.

"We actually need all the data," said Mayor Brandon M. Scott, who added that the information was particularly critical for identifying gun retailers outside the city, in adjacent Baltimore County and elsewhere, whose weapons often end up being used to commit crimes in Baltimore.

"By limiting our ability to deploy effective public safety strategies, the Tiahrt Amendment put forward by N.R.A.-backed politicians and Congress is jeopardizing the lives of residents not just here in Baltimore city, but across these United States of America," Mr. Scott told reporters on Tuesday in announcing the lawsuit.

In the filing, the city singled out three crimes where access to trace data was necessary: the killing of Izaiah Carter, 16, who was gunned down in March near his school in East Baltimore; the death of Maya Morton, 23, who was caught in the crossfire of a shooting while driving with her two young children in January; and a gunfight at Carver Vocational-Technical High School in October that seriously injured two teenagers.

In 2020, President Biden campaigned on a promise to repeal the Tiahrt Amendment. But those efforts have faltered, and a push to insert a repeal in the bipartisan gun bill passed in 2022 was unsuccessful.

Gun rights organizations and gun manufacturers have lobbied intensively to block legislative attempts to roll back the amendment, arguing that the effort is a political stunt to "name and shame" law-abiding federally licensed dealers whose guns inevitably wind up in the wrong hands.

But the trace data, in the rare instances it has been publicly released, has illuminated the pathways through which legally manufactured and lawfully sold firearms are obtained by criminals.

From 2014 to 2020, six small retailers in South and Northeast Philadelphia sold more than 11,000 weapons that were later recovered in criminal investigations or confiscated from owners who had obtained them illegally, according to an examination of Pennsylvania firearms tracing data by the gun control group Brady, the most comprehensive analysis of its kind in decades.

Trying to identify sellers who flood the city with weapons.

The report's conclusions confirmed what law enforcement officials have long known. A small percentage of gun stores — 1.2 percent of the state's licensed dealers, according to Brady — accounted for 57 percent of firearms that ended up in the hands of criminals through illegal resale or direct purchases by straw buyers who turned them over to people barred from owning guns.

A similar dynamic exists in cities like Baltimore and Chicago, which have no legal gun dealers in their jurisdictions. The purchasing activity migrates to adjacent areas, or to nearby states where firearms can be easily trafficked in the trunks of cars.

Gun violence in Baltimore has dropped somewhat in the past two years, and this year homicides are on pace to fall below 300 for the first time in nearly a decade.

But it still remains one of the most dangerous cities in the country, and many of the weapons used to commit crimes there are transported from other localities with looser gun laws — made easier by its central location on the I-95 corridor.

City officials estimate that 60 to 70 percent of the firearms used in crimes originated outside Maryland's borders from 2017 to 2021.

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Richard Hunt, Whose Soaring Sculptures Embody Freedom, Dies at 88

By MITCH SMITH

CHICAGO — Richard Hunt, a prolific sculptor whose towering metalwork became a mainstay of American public art, and whose 70-year career drew the attention of presidents from Lyndon B. Johnson to Barack Obama, died on Saturday at his home in Chicago. He was 88.

The death was confirmed by Mr. Hunt's studio and by his biographer, Jon Ott. The cause was not given.

Mr. Hunt, a son of Chicago's South Side, was 19 years old in 1955 when he attended the open-casket funeral of Emmett Till, the young Black Chicagoan who grew up near Mr. Hunt and who was tortured and killed by white men, his body mutilated, while visiting Mississippi, a murder that helped ignite the civil rights movement. That searing experience was a shaping influence on Mr. Hunt's career and nudged him to experiment with welding and with forging discarded materials into art.

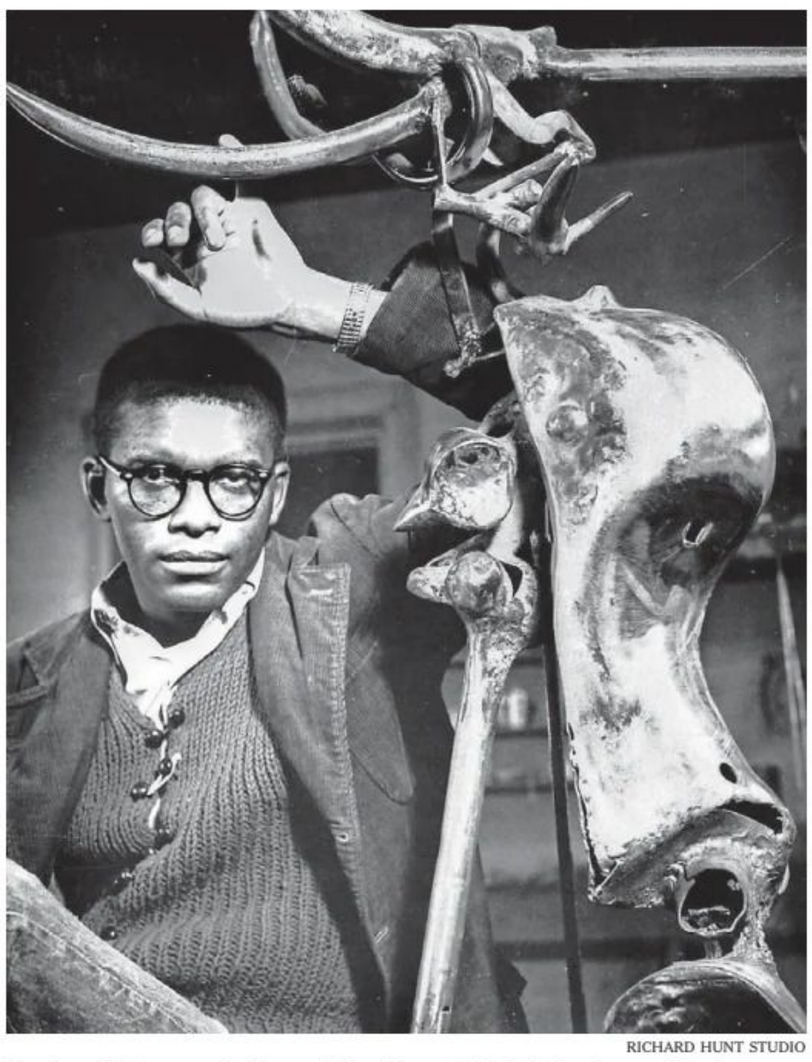
His work drew early acclaim. Two years after Emmett's funeral, while Mr. Hunt was still a student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Modern Art in New York purchased one of his sculptures, a steel work called "Arachne."

In 1964, Mr. Hunt became a visiting artist at Yale. In 1968, President Johnson appointed him to the National Council on the Arts. And in 1971, when he was 35, the Museum of Modern Art displayed more than 70 of Mr. Hunt's works in a retrospective exhibition.

In an appraisal of Mr. Hunt's art that year, the critic Hilton Kramer wrote in The New York Times that "there are really very few American sculptors of Mr. Hunt's generation who have produced a comparable body of work so early in their development."

But because he was based in Chicago, not New York, Mr. Kramer added, "his reputation here has remained that of an outsider."

Mr. Hunt's sculptures blended classical techniques honed at the Art Institute, where he began taking classes as a child, with self-taught soldering and welding. Using unusual methods for that time, he would scrounge in alleys for scrap metal or pick up parts left over from car crashes to use in his art.



RICHARD HUNT STUDIO

Richard Hunt with "Long Horn" in 1959. To find metal for his art, he would look in alleys or pick up parts left over from car crashes.

Transforming public spaces in a long career shaped by a memory of Emmett Till's funeral.

He was quoted as saying, "Sculpture is not a self-declaration but a voice of and for my people — over all, a rich fabric; under all, the dynamism of the African American people."

Mr. Hunt became known for his soaring pieces of public art, more than 160 of which have been displayed across the country, according to his studio. Those include "Swing Low," a 1,500-pound work of welded bronze that hangs from a ceiling at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, and "Flight Forms," an imposing work of welded stainless steel outside Chicago's Midway International Airport. Other works by him have been installed in locations as varied as a sculpture garden in Kansas, a museum in Kentucky and a playhouse in Michigan.

A recently completed work, which depicts a bird taking flight from a book, is set to be displayed at the Obama Presidential Center in Chicago once that facility opens. Mr. Obama, who visited Mr. Hunt in the days before his death, has called Mr. Hunt "one of the greatest artists Chicago ever produced." The city's mayor, Brandon Johnson, said in a statement that the sculptor made an "indelible impact on our city and our world."

JAHI CHIKWENDIU/THE WASHINGTON POST, VIA GETTY IMAGES

"Swing Low," at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, and "Flintlock Fantasy." "Sculpture is not a self-declaration," he said, "but a voice of and for my people."

Richard Howard Hunt was born on Sept. 12, 1935, in Chicago, the first of two children born to Cleophus Howard Hunt, a barber, and Etoria Inez Henderson Hunt, a librarian. He took an early interest in art, often visiting Chicago's museums, where he was captivated by works from Africa. As a young teenager, he began taking classes at the Junior School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Mr. Hunt is survived by his daughter, Cecilia, an artist, and his sister, Marian, a retired librarian.

Mr. Hunt would say that his attendance at the Till funeral nearly 70 years ago helped establish the course for his career. Like Emmett, he had been a Black teenager from Chicago who sometimes traveled to the South to visit relatives. He was quoted as saying that what happened to Emmett "could have happened to me."

RICHARD HUNT STUDIO

"That really set the tone for his entire artistic life, which was really focused around representing freedom, and freedom in every sense," Mr. Ott, the biographer, said.

Even as his work drew the attention of art collectors and political leaders, Mr. Hunt spent much of his adult life sleeping on a mattress on the floor of his Chicago studio, which had no television, few amenities and huge piles of scrap metal with which he and his colleagues would build.

The studio building, which he acquired in 1971, blends into a tree-lined residential streetscape in an affluent part of Chicago's North Side. But inside, the high-ceilinged space, which had been a substation for powering the city's elevated rail lines, is a living museum.

Alongside half-built sculptures and mementos from his career, Mr. Hunt had continued to work well into this year and to supervise his crew carrying out his vision for public art installations. One of his final pieces, Mr. Ott said, is a sculptural model for a monument to Emmett Till.

The plan, Mr. Ott said, is for Mr. Hunt's crew to complete a large-scale version of that piece, which will eventually be displayed outside Emmett's childhood home, just two blocks from where Mr. Hunt was born.

Michael Stone, 90, Psychiatrist Who Examined Evil

By SAM ROBERTS

Dr. Michael H. Stone, a psychiatrist and scholar who sought to define evil and to differentiate its manifestations from the typical behavior of people who are mentally ill, died on Dec. 6 at his home in Manhattan. He was 90.

The cause was complications of a stroke he had in January, his son David said.

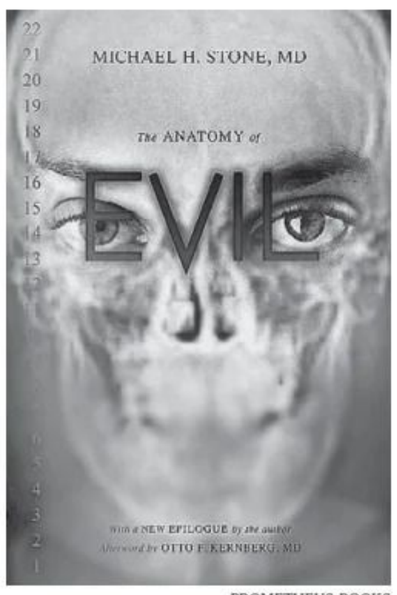
Dr. Stone was best known to the public as the author of the book "The Anatomy of Evil" (2009) and as the host from 2006 to 2008 of the television program "Most Evil," for which he interviewed people imprisoned for murder to determine what motivated them to engage in an evil criminal act.

He ranked the acts on a 22-category scale of his creation. Modeled on Dante's nine circles of hell, his taxonomic scale ranged from justifiable homicide to murders committed by people whose primary motivation was to torture their victims.

Only human beings are capable of evil, Dr. Stone wrote in "The Anatomy of Evil," although evil is not a characteristic that people are born with. He acknowledged that while acts of evil were difficult to define, the word "evil" was derived from "over" or "beyond," and could apply to "certain acts done by people who clearly intended to hurt or to kill others in an excruciatingly painful way."

For an act to be evil, he wrote, it must be "breathtakingly horrible" and premeditated, inflict "wildly excessive" suffering and "appear incomprehensible, bewildering, beyond the imagination of ordinary people in the community."

"Mike's major contribution to psychiatry was sharpening the distinction between mental illness and evil," Dr. Allen Frances, a former student of Dr. Stone's who is now chairman emeritus of the department of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Duke University School of Medicine in Durham, N.C., said in a phone interview.



PROMETHEUS BOOKS

Dr. Stone wrote "The Anatomy of Evil" (2009) and hosted the TV program "Most Evil."

"The problem," Dr. Frances said, "is that with every mass murderer, every crazy politician, every serial killer, the first tendency in the public mind and the media is that he's mentally ill." Dr. Stone, he said, helped to change that default position.

Analyzing the biographies of more than 600 violent criminals, Dr. Stone identified two predominant personality traits: narcissism, to the point of having little or no ability to care about their victims; and aggression, in terms of exerting power over another person to inflict humiliation, suffering and death.

In "The New Evil: Understanding the Emergence of Modern Violent Crime" (2019), a sequel to Dr. Stone's 2009 book, he and Dr. Gary Brucato warned that since the 1960s there had been an "undeniable intensification and diversification" of evil acts committed mostly by criminals who "are not 'sick' in the psychiatric and legal sense, as much as psychopathic and morally depraved."

Analyzing motivations and traits of hundreds of violent criminals.

The reasons, they wrote, included greater civilian access to military weaponry; the diminution of both individual and personal responsibility, as preached by fascist and communist governments earlier in the 20th century; sexual liberation, which unleashed other inhibitions; the ease of communication on cellphones and the internet; the rise of moral relativism; and a backlash against feminism.

In 2000, Dr. Stone figured in a sensational murder trial that tested the limits of doctor-patient confidentiality. He wanted to testify in the murder trial of Robert Bierenbaum, a plastic surgeon and former patient of his who was accused of killing his wife, Gail Katz-Bierenbaum, in 1985.

Dr. Stone had written a letter to his patient's wife two years before her death, advising her to live apart from her husband for her own safety. He had asked that she sign and return it, but she never did. He had also contacted Dr. Bierenbaum's parents, with his permission.

The judge ultimately excluded Dr. Stone's testimony from the trial on the basis of professional confidentiality. But the testimony of several other witnesses about the letter contributed to Dr. Bierenbaum's conviction.

Michael Howard Stone was born on Oct. 27, 1933, in Syracuse, N.Y., the grandson of Eastern European immigrants. His father, Moses Howard Stone, owned a wholesale paper business. His mother, Corinne (Gittleman) Stone, was a homemaker.

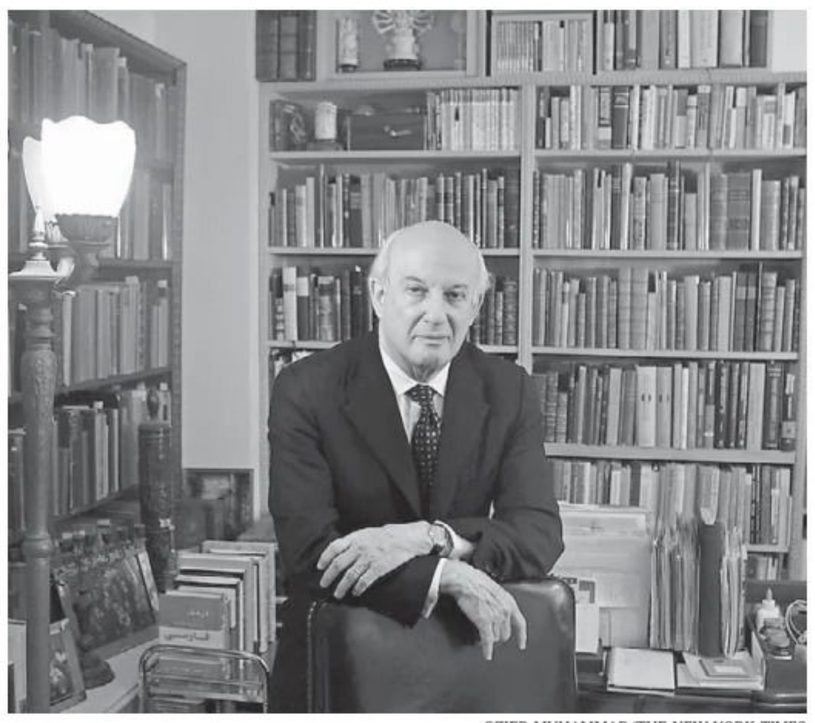
A prodigy who learned Latin and Greek as a child, he was only 10 years old when he began seventh grade. As the youngest and smallest student in the school, as well as the only Jewish one, he formed an alliance with a 17-year-old classmate who was a boxer, his son David said: Mike would do the classmate's homework, and the classmate would protect him from local antisemitic bullies.

He entered Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y., when he was 16, enrolling in a premedical curriculum but double-majoring in classics in case he was rejected by medical schools that had already met their quota of Jewish students. He enrolled in Cornell Medical School in Manhattan after graduating from Cornell in 1954 and received his medical degree in 1958.

He originally studied hematology and cancer chemotherapy at Sloan Kettering Institute in Manhattan, but his mother's chronic pain disorder prompted him to switch to neurology and then, eventually, to psychiatry. He did his residency at the New York State Psychiatric Institute at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital, where he met Dr. Clarice Kestenbaum, whom he married in 1965.

He is survived by two sons, David and John Stone, from that marriage, which ended in divorce in 1978; his wife, Beth Eichstaedt; his stepchildren, Wendy Turner and Thomas Penders; three grandchildren; and one great-grandson.

Dr. Stone spoke 16 languages and, like a vestige from another era, customarily wore three-piece suits. He was known for his impish sense of humor: His latest book, "The Funny Bone," published this year, is a collection of his cartoons, jokes and poems.



OZIER MUHAMMAD/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Dr. Michael H. Stone, who taught at Columbia, distinguished the violent actions of truly evil people from those of the mentally ill.

An amateur carpenter, he built the shelves that housed his library of 11,000 books. His collection included about 60 books on Hitler — further evidence, like his memories of childhood bullying, of his yearning to define evil.

As a psychiatrist, a psychoanalyst and for many years a professor of clinical psychiatry at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, Dr. Stone also conducted a long-term study of patients with borderline personality disorders, including those who had contemplated suicide. He concluded that, often as a result of therapy and other treatment, the condition of about two-thirds of them had improved appreciably some 25 years later.

In "The New Evil," Dr. Stone and Dr. Brucato offered a possible explanation for why "particularly heinous and spectacular crimes," especially those committed in America and by men, had been on the rise since the 1960s. They warned against "the rise of a sort of 'false compassion,' in which the most relentless, psychopathic persons are sometimes viewed as 'victims.'"

The two concluded by invoking a familiar metaphor: A frog dropped in a pot of boiling water will immediately try to escape; but, if placed in cold water that is gradually heated, the frog will remain complacent until it's too late.

"It is our ardent hope that, after a period of terrible growing pains, our culture will eventually learn that true power and control come only after a lifelong process of mastering and inhibiting the self," they wrote. "Perhaps, as a first step, we should admit that the water in our collective pot is growing disquietingly warmer, day by day."

Deaths

Cohen, Irwin
Daniel, D. Ronald
Greene, Rita
Stern, Guy

COHEN—Irwin B.,
age 90, died peacefully on December 18, 2023 after a brief illness while surrounded by his three daughters, their husbands and his grandchildren and listening to classical music and the New York Pops. Pre-deceased by his loving wife of nearly 60 years, Jill, he leaves behind in love daughters Cindy Zuckerbrod (Alan), Cathy Lasry (Marc) and Cheryl Effron (Blair), seventeen grandchildren and fourteen great - grandchildren. There was only one Irwin. He brought creative drive and sincerity to everything he did including his law practice; his real estate development which revitalized manufacturing in Long Island City with the Redstone, Falchi and Center Buildings and The Factory and made a new community with the creation of the iconic Chelsea Market out of 17 old buildings which had been a former cookie factory; his hours of nature photography in Central Park; and, most important, the relationships he had with people of all ages and interests. He was curious and passionately engaging until the last day of his life and leaves behind loving friendships beyond measure, including with Beverly Dolinsky. Irwin was an athlete from an early age, and was the NY State Heavyweight weight lifting champion in his early 20's and an early New York City Marathon runner who continued to exercise several hours a day until December. A proud graduate of Tilden High School, NYU and Brooklyn Law School, Irwin believed in New York's institutions and its people, including law enforcement and the DEA. He was a true patriot to his country and New York City in their hours of need after Sept 11th and has been a mentor to so many. As he said to his daughters, "Be kind and find ways to make life better for others." In lieu of flowers, please take a walk around New York, a City which made Irwin and which Irwin helped make even better. Funeral services Thursday, December 21, 2023 at 10:30am, Temple Emanu-El, One East 65th Street.

DANIEL—D. Ronald.
The Trustees and staff of Library of America are deeply saddened by the death of our friend, devoted Trustee, and former longtime Board Chair D. Ronald Daniel. For nearly two decades, Ron's energy, steady counsel, and generosity guided and sustained the organization, and he was deeply committed to our mission to keep great American writing alive in the culture. Our condolences to his wife, Lise, and his family. It was with great kindness that Ron requested that gifts in his memory may be made to Library of America, loa.org/donate.
Elizabeth W. Smith, Chair
Max Rudin, President

DANIEL—D. Ronald.
The students, faculty, and trustees of The Rockefeller University are deeply saddened by the death of our esteemed friend and Trustee Emeritus D. Ronald Daniel. Ron was a remarkable executive who brought uncommon talent and expertise to his roles on the Rockefeller board. During his long and storied career at McKinsey & Company, where he specialized in corporate strategy, development, and top management organization, Ron built a reputation as one of America's foremost management consultants. He joined McKinsey in 1957 and held a number of high-level positions at the firm, serving as a senior partner from 1968 to 1990 and as managing director from 1976 to 1988. Ron was introduced to The Rockefeller University by the late David Rockefeller and elected to our board in 1993. He became a Trustee Emeritus in 2005. During his many years of service at Rockefeller, which began with the administration of Nobel laureate Torsten Wiesel, Ron was a highly valued adviser to six successive university presidents. He was also a deeply engaged member of several board committees, including the Audit, Development, Finance & Operations, and Investment Committees. With his adored wife, Lise Scott, Ron was a frequent visitor to campus and a generous benefactor to major university initiatives, including the creation of the Collaborative Research Center and the construction of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation-David Rockefeller River Campus. Ron was a problem solver par excellence—his knowledge, experience, and wisdom were widely sought after by leaders in both the business and philanthropic sectors. We will remember Ron for his dedication to the university and his keen interest in the research under way in our laboratories. He will be greatly missed. We send our deepest sympathy to Lise; to Ron's three sons, David, Peter, and Stephen, and their families; and to the entire Daniel family.
William Ford, Chair
Russell Carson, Chair Emeritus
Richard Salomon, Life Trustee
Richard Lifton, President
Torsten Wiesel, President Emeritus
Marnie Imhoff, Senior Vice President

GREENE—Rita (nee Katz),
age 79, of New York, NY, died at home from Parkinson's disease on December 19, 2023. Beloved wife of David for 57 years, proud mother of Barrie (Ron) and Elizabeth (Justin), and adoring grandmother of Jeffrey, Mollie and Max. A lifelong New Yorker, Rita took in all the restaurants, shows, sports and shopping the city had to offer. She was equally at home in Lakeville, CT, enjoying tag sales, gardening and crossword puzzles on the deck. No holiday was complete without a dessert for everyone at the table: from rugelach and palmiers to layer cakes and fruit tarts. Her sharp wit, strong convictions and neighborly kindness brought much joy. The family is grateful to the aides and nurses who provided care for Rita at the end of her life. Services will be held at 12pm on Thursday, December 21st, at The Riverside 76th and Amsterdam. In lieu of flowers, please send contributions to the Carl Schurz Park Conservancy or the Scoville Memorial Library.

STERN—Guy.
The Leo Baeck Institute New York notes with sorrow the death of esteemed colleague Guy Stern whose life was the very embodiment of the German-Jewish culture LBI was created to study and preserve. Born in Germany in 1922, Guy was sent at the age of 15 to the US from where he tried desperately but without success to rescue his parents and siblings, all of whom perished in the Holocaust. Returning to Europe with the US Army, he was awarded the Bronze Star for his intelligence gathering from German POWs. Guy received a PhD from Columbia University and went on to a long and productive academic career while also serving as a highly valued member of the LBI board. We extend our sympathy to his widow Susanna Piontek.
David G. Marwell, President;
Markus Krah, Executive Director

In Memoriam

FRANCIS—Francesca Zolotov.
December 20.
Thinking of you on your birthday today and remembering and missing you for the last 12 years and for always.
With Love Always, Margaret

GORDON—Kenny.
KG, 25 years have passed and while we miss you more than words can describe, the wonderful memories we shared together can not fade. The love, laughter and joy you brought to our lives and all who knew you, still brighten our days.
All our love, Mom, Dad, Jonny, Catherine, Kenya, Chloe and Gemma

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Opinion

The New York Times

What Happened to Kate Cox Is Tragic, and Totally Expected

Greer Donley
A law professor at the University of Pittsburgh whose research includes the workability of medical exceptions to abortion regulations.

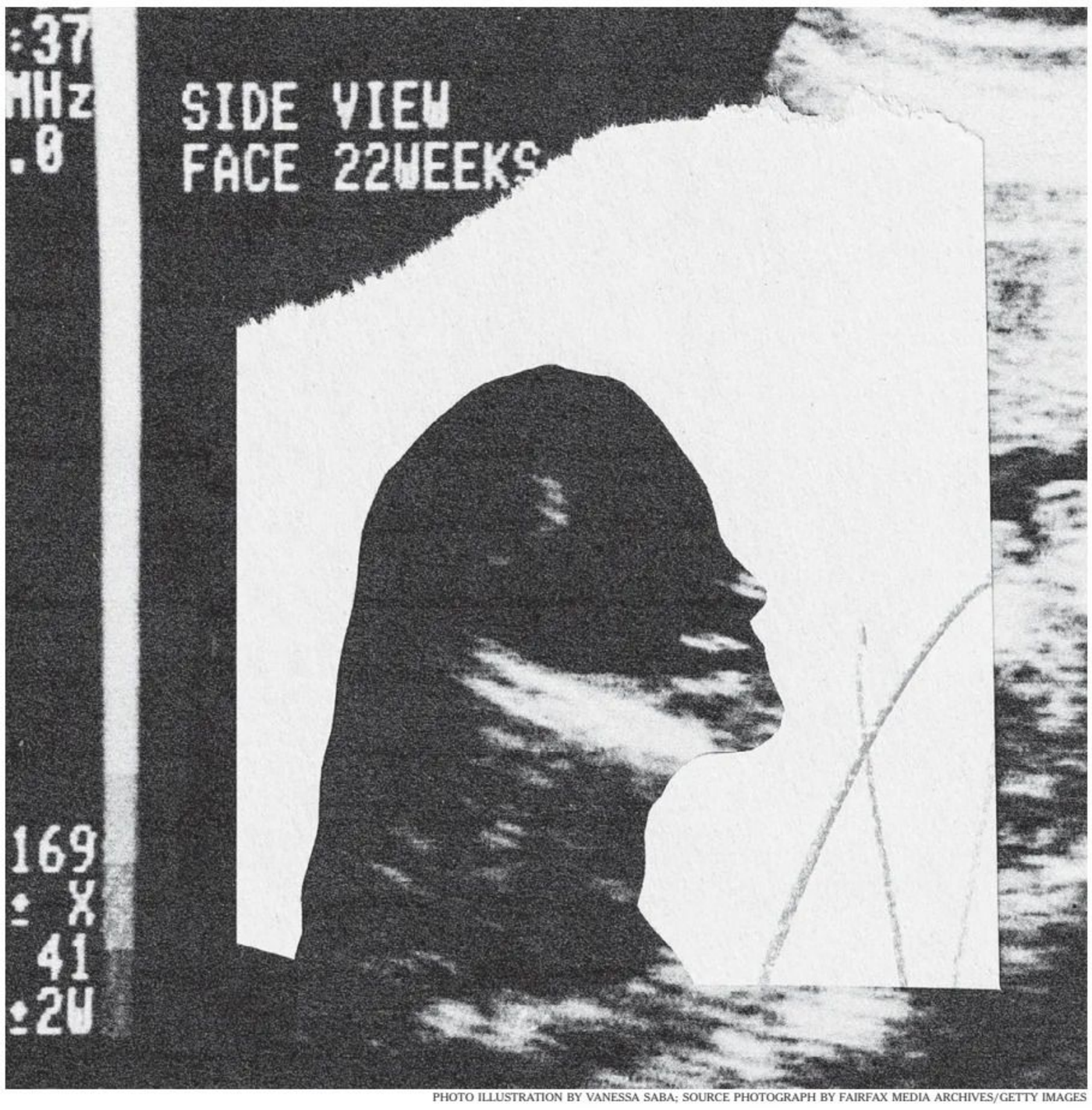


PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY VANESSA SABA; SOURCE PHOTOGRAPH BY FAIRFAX MEDIA ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

MANY people were shocked when the Texas Supreme Court intervened recently to stop Kate Cox from getting an abortion in the state — an abortion needed to protect her health and future fertility after her fetus was diagnosed with a severe anomaly in her second trimester. She ultimately traveled out of state to get the abortion she needed.

As someone who has been studying state abortion definitions and exceptions in the wake of Roe v. Wade's demise, I was not shocked. The Texas anti-abortion law that went into effect shortly after Roe was overturned was drafted to ban the care needed by Ms. Cox and other women with similar cases: It does not include an exception for fetal anomalies, unlike laws in a handful of other states. The law does have a narrow exception allowing abortions in some medical emergencies, but it is written in such a vague and confusing way that it is difficult for even experts on this topic, like me, to parse.

What is clear to me is that the Texas Supreme Court would have needed to make a broad and compassionate interpretation of the law for Ms. Cox to meet the high bar of that exception. Instead, the court interpreted the law narrowly — which is exactly what the state lawmakers who passed the legislation were hoping for. And the results have been tragic.

Since Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, the case that overturned Roe, numerous women around the country have shared Ms. Cox's experience. They, too, have been forced to travel for abortion care in the middle of a medical crisis, wait until their health deteriorated toward death or give birth to a child who died in their arms. Ms. Cox's story is unique only because she had the remarkable fortitude and bravery to sue her state while she was still pregnant, instead of after her medical emergency concluded, as many other plaintiffs have done.

The exception in Texas' abortion ban permits pregnant Texans to receive an abortion only if they are facing "a life-threatening physical condition," such as one that "poses a serious risk of substantial impairment of a major bodily function unless the abortion is performed or induced."

This language contains a great deal of ambiguity. What constitutes a "serious risk" or a "substantial impairment" or a "major bodily function"? Does an 80 percent chance of losing a uterus or fallopian tube qualify? What about a 30 percent chance of a cardiac event that could be fatal? These questions are critical but confounding for the health care providers who must look to the law, not medicine, to answer them.

The penalties for abortion providers who violate the state's law include a decades-long prison sentence, a $100,000 fine and the loss of a medical license. When one misinterpretation of the law could mean the loss of your vocation and freedom, it's no wonder that the legislation has had a chilling effect on doctors in the state providing any abortions at all.

The anti-abortion law in Texas is doing what it was intended to do.

Texas' choice not to include a fetal anomaly exception in its abortion ban was in keeping with what many in the anti-abortion movement believe: that the proper response to all fetal anomaly diagnoses is perinatal hospice.

In response to Ms. Cox's case, Texas Right to Life said: "Every child is uniquely precious and should continue to be protected in law no matter how long or short the baby's life may be. The compassionate approach to these heartbreaking diagnoses is perinatal palliative care, which honors, rather than ends, the child's life." The fetus's condition is therefore irrelevant under Texas law, unless the anomaly increases risks for the pregnant patient.

As for Ms. Cox's personal medical risks, they relate primarily to her two prior cesarean sections. Continuing her pregnancy would have put her in an impossible bind: Either she would have had a third cesarean (major abdominal surgery that could threaten her future fertility) or she would have attempted a vaginal birth, which, post-C-section, carries a low but significant risk of catastrophic uterine rupture. She also had an elevated risk of developing gestational hypertension and diabetes.

In my view, these risks are "serious" — to quote the Texas law — particularly to birth a dying child. But they are also not uncommon: If Texas allowed these risks to a woman's health to satisfy the exception in its abortion law, the exception would be available to anyone with an unwanted pregnancy that is also medically complicated.

And therein lies the problem: There is no nonarbitrary way to identify medically necessary abortions. Anti-abortion legislators and activists often try to place abortions into two categories: "therapeutic" abortions, meaning those that are medically indicated, and "elective" abortions, meaning those chosen to avoid having a child. The Dobbs decision itself engaged in this thinking, finding that Mississippi had a legitimate interest in regulating abortion "for nontherapeutic or elective reasons."

What this categorization misses is that pregnancy is inherently risky. This is especially true in the United States, which compared with other high-income countries has by far the highest (and worsening) maternal mortality. Every person who carries a pregnancy to term will endure months of significant, and occasionally debilitating, physical side effects and medical risks that include the possibility of death. Given that abortion is many times safer than childbirth, abortions help people avoid medical risks.

This issue extends beyond exceptions for medical emergencies. Take fetal anomaly exceptions, which are typically reserved for "lethal" anomalies in the states that have them. The boundaries of lethality have created deep confusion, in large part because only a tiny number of conditions are 100 percent fatal in infancy. Even a small percentage of babies born with Trisomy 18, the condition Ms. Cox's fetus was diagnosed with — which is often considered "incompatible with life" — can survive to 10 years old with aggressive treatment. As a result, some even outside the anti-abortion movement have questioned whether it deserves to be called "lethal."

But if Trisomy 18 doesn't count as "lethal," hardly any fetal diagnosis would. The prognosis of most severe fetal anomalies is complex, involving varying risks of stillbirth and infant mortality, coupled with significant risk of severe disability in survivors, a subset of whom will die in childhood. There is no categorical way to distinguish the diagnoses that are worthy of exemption in anti-abortion laws and those that are not.

The Dobbs decision greenlit a patchwork of abortion bans that are inherently standardless and functionally unworkable, forcing judges with no medical background into the business of making medical judgments. The boundaries between fatal and nonfatal, therapeutic and elective, and even abortion and miscarriage are blurry for medical professionals; they are virtually impossible to decipher for the lawyers and judges who have to navigate them.

This problem cannot be solved with clearer language; it is a problem intrinsic to the Dobbs ruling that allowed the complicated experience of pregnancy into the courtroom. The only way forward is to protect abortion, no matter the reason — to refuse to play the game of "good abortion" versus "bad abortion." What happened to Kate Cox, and so many patients like her, is a symptom of a broken law that cannot be fixed.

COLUMNIST | **MICHELLE GOLDBERG**

Don't Give In to Political Despair. Trump Is Too Great a Threat.

DAMON WINTER/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Before fighting authoritarianism, we have to fight fatalism.

SHORTLY AFTER DONALD TRUMP was elected in 2016, I spoke to a friend in Istanbul about my boundless horror, and while I can't remember the exact words she said in response, they amounted to "Welcome to my world."

I told her about all the protests breaking out, and she gently warned me not to get my hopes up. She'd also demonstrated against Turkey's authoritarian president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, she said, but eventually those protests had died out, and ours would, too.

Over the next four years, I was often relieved that her prediction hadn't come true. The Resistance, as the broad alliance of anti-Trump Americans came to be known, never flagged.

An obvious reason for its endurance is that Americans enjoy robust civil rights protections that the opponents of ruling regimes in many other countries do not. Despite my friend's generous empathy, there was in fact no real comparison between our situations; while Trump demonized journalists, Erdogan imprisoned them. In the absence of serious state repression, Trump's critics rarely had to hide their sentiments, making it easier to maintain hope that they, and not their freakish madman of a president, represented this country's future.

I fear that in a second Trump administration it will be much harder to keep the faith. The first Trump presidency seemed like a grotesque accident, a civic disaster that befell us because we were too blithely arrogant to see it coming. Trump redux, however, is something we're lurching toward with eyes wide open. If he wins again, it won't be a shock, and no one will be able to claim, as so many did before, that this is not who we are.

Right now, general election polls are blaring like sirens: A recent survey from Bloomberg News/Morning Consult has Trump leading in all seven swing states. He has made no secret of how he intends to govern: He wants to round up undocumented immigrants by the millions and imprison them in a network of new detention camps while they await deportation. He will, he's said, free many of the Jan. 6 insurrectionists — he calls them "hostages" — and use the Justice Department to prosecute his enemies. As The Washington Post reported, his associates have drafted plans to invoke the Insurrection Act as soon as he takes power so that he can deploy the military against protesters.

The ex-president's rhetoric is increasingly Hitlerian; he's repeatedly said that immigrants are "poisoning the blood" of our country, language that echoes "Mein Kampf." This month, he approvingly quoted Vladimir Putin about the "rottenness of the American political system, which cannot pretend to teach others about democracy," and he has said he wants to be a dictator on the first day of a second presidency.

He should be taken seriously, even if we've all grown too numb to maintain the appropriate level of alarm.

Faced with this onrushing nightmare, anti-Trump forces seem stunned and dejected. As progressives turn on Joe Biden over the war in Gaza, people too young to remember Ralph Nader's spoiler campaign in 2000, which helped give us the George W. Bush presidency and thus the Iraq war, are threatening to vote for third-party or independent candidates like Jill Stein and Cornel West.

Meanwhile, the flood of money that kept the Resistance flush through the Trump years has slowed to a trickle. In November, the liberal behemoth MoveOn became the latest progressive group to face layoffs, a sign, The New York Times reported, "of a slowdown in donations from small donors to left-leaning causes and candidates."

I was alarmed by something the painter Adam Pendleton said in a roundup of trendsetters' 2024 predictions published by T, The Times style magazine. "We'll turn toward abstraction," he said. "I predict that Donald Trump is going to win the election and, when people seek some sort of relief valve or means to move forward, I don't think they're going to do that by looking at a bunch of figurative paintings."

I have nothing against abstract art, but I was disturbed both by his resignation and by the idea that a new Trump term might be met not with relentless pushback but with aesthetic escapism.

Before we can fight authoritarianism, we have to fight fatalism. My great hope for 2024 is that anti-Trump Americans can transcend exhaustion, burnout and self-protective pessimism to mobilize once again for the latest most important election of our lifetimes.

It's perfectly understandable that many people galvanized by abhorrence of Trump would step back once his immediate threat to the Republic receded. The obsession with politics that took over the country during his administration was neither sustainable nor healthy. But if you don't want an even uglier and more despairing replay of those years, the time to act is now.

One place to start is with donations to grass-roots organizations working on voter turnout, which are desperately underfunded. (The Movement Voter Project has a clickable map with links to such groups all over the country.) You can also get involved with the campaigns to put referendums protecting abortion rights on the ballot in states like Arizona and Florida, efforts that could both undo cruel abortion bans and drive voter turnout.

It's going to be especially important next year to give people reasons to vote beyond the presidential election. I didn't want Biden to run again and wish there had been a competitive Democratic primary race, but it's too late for a serious challenge now.

Faced with an unenthusiastic electorate, Democrats will need down-ballot candidates who can motivate people to go to the polls. Few are doing more to bring exciting new candidates into the political process than Run for Something, which recruits and trains young progressives to run for office.

"As we look to our strategy for '24, we want to make sure especially that we're prioritizing resources for local candidates whose races can have an impact at the top of the ticket," said Amanda Litman, a Run for Something co-founder. Young voters, she said, "are not particularly psyched about Joe Biden right now. But thanks to years of education and each of these special elections, they deeply understand the need to show up locally."

Here's hoping she's right. Next year is going to be hard. It's up to all of us whether it's going to be disastrous.

Yazidis Are Owed Justice

Amal Clooney and Lee Wolosky
Ms. Clooney is a lawyer specializing in international law and human rights. Mr. Wolosky served under four U.S. presidents, most recently as special counsel to President Biden.

ISIS was one of the most brutal terrorist organizations in modern history. At its peak, it exercised control of territory the size of Britain, recruited tens of thousands of fighters and carried out or inspired attacks in over two dozen countries. It relied on a network of financiers to realize such global ambitions. But most of that network's members have yet to face justice, and most ISIS victims have yet to receive any compensation for their losses.

That is why we filed a federal lawsuit last week on behalf of more than 400 American members of the Yazidi community, a religious minority systematically persecuted by ISIS, to hold responsible an international conglomerate that paid millions of dollars to ISIS while the terrorists were committing a well-documented genocide.

Far too often, private entities have escaped responsibility for fueling conflicts, and victims have struggled to receive compensation for the violence that followed, even genocidal violence. This can change only if all those complicit in international crimes are brought to justice for their roles in the atrocities — including through cases, like this one, that are filed by their victims.

The world has learned about the plight of the Yazidis thanks to the brave advocacy of our lead plaintiff, the Nobel laureate Nadia Murad. She was 21 when ISIS invaded her hometown in August 2014, murdering thousands of men, raping girls and displacing her tight-knit community in northern Iraq. She was kidnapped, sold into sexual slavery and abused by 12 ISIS assailants over many weeks. Many of her family members, including her mother and six brothers, were murdered. Her young niece and nephew are still missing.

Sadly, Ms. Murad's experience is shared by many, including other plaintiffs in our case. Almost 10 years on, over 200,000 Yazidis are still internally displaced, many of them living in squalid camps. But they have had little hope of receiving meaningful compensation for the injuries they suffered at the hands of ISIS — until now.

Ms. Murad is part of a group of over 400 Yazidi Americans suing the French company Lafarge, one of the largest cement companies in the world. Last year Lafarge (now a subsidiary of the Swiss-based Holcim Group) pleaded guilty in the United States to conspiring to provide material support to ISIS.

Lafarge, and its Syrian subsidiary that operated a cement factory in Syria, admitted to an illegal conspiracy to pay ISIS and the Nusra Front, another U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization, nearly $6 million in exchange for various benefits, including getting ISIS to take out its competition by blocking or taxing the import of competing cement. And Lafarge didn't just provide money to the terrorist group; it also provided cement that ISIS reportedly used to construct underground tunnels in which it held and tortured Yazidi and Western hostages. All of this was a crime under U.S. law — as the company knew.

Lafarge's deal with the devil was made at precisely the time when ISIS's tactics were at their most brutal and public. Lafarge admitted to paying ISIS as early as August 2013, the same month the terrorists kidnapped an American aid worker, Kayla Mueller. As ISIS invaded Yazidi villages in Sinjar, Iraq, a year later, Lafarge ramped up its support by agreeing to give ISIS a share of the revenue from its Syrian plant.

On Aug. 5, 2014, just two days after the Sinjar invasion made news worldwide, Lafarge's point man shared a written draft of this revenue-sharing contract with a company executive. Later that week, as President Barack Obama announced targeted strikes on ISIS to avert a genocide of Yazidis, Lafarge confirmed its agreement to the terms of the deal. On Aug. 15, as Ms. Murad's village was attacked by ISIS convoys and her mother and brothers were executed, the company agreed to ISIS's request to sweeten the deal, giving ISIS 25 percent of the value of its raw materials, as well as 10 percent of its cement.

And as ISIS released videos of the beheadings of the American journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff and the U.N. Security Council warned that trade with ISIS would "support their future terrorist activities," Lafarge finalized the deal. It has since admitted that payments continued for months after the genocide began.

IVOR PRICKETT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Nadia Murad and her brother at a reburial ceremony for 103 Yazidi victims in Sinjar, Iraq, in 2021.

Corporations must be held accountable for their role in genocidal violence.

In 2022, when Lafarge pleaded guilty to conspiring to provide material support to a terrorist organization, it was the first time the U.S. government had prosecuted a corporation for that crime. The company admitted its illegal behavior and was subject to penalties of over $777 million.

But the victims of ISIS were never given the opportunity to be heard, and no portion of the financial penalty that the company paid to the Department of Justice has been used to compensate them. We are asking Attorney General Merrick Garland to exercise his discretion to remedy this injustice and see that those funds are used to compensate the people who suffered ISIS brutality. Victims should also have access to the Department of Justice's seizure of three terrorist organizations' cryptocurrency accounts — its largest ever.

When Lafarge was prosecuted in the United States, the F.B.I. assistant director in charge stated that this "should serve as an example to others." And though legal accountability often remains elusive, more and more private entities are being held to account.

In 2014 the French bank BNP Paribas was fined almost $9 billion for violating sanctions in place against Sudan, Iran and Cuba, and it is being investigated in relation to accusations of complicity in war crimes in Sudan. A court in Denmark convicted the fuel company Dan Bunkering of breaching international sanctions by selling $101 million worth of jet fuel to two Russian companies active in Syria. The Castel Group, a French beverage conglomerate, is under investigation for possible complicity in war crimes committed in the Central African Republic.

Corporations can no longer expect to wash their hands of responsibility for human rights abuses committed by subsidiaries abroad. But legal recourse remains difficult to achieve, and victims' right to redress must be made a priority.

This month, as we mark 75 years since the adoption of the Genocide Convention and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, wars and atrocities continue around the world. It is more important than ever to show that private actors who fuel the flames of violence can be held accountable — and that victims can obtain justice — no matter how long it may take.

COLUMNIST | **BRET STEPHENS**

Why I Can't Stop Writing About Oct. 7

THIS WILL BE my last column for the year, and it will be more personal than most. It's an effort to explain, to myself as much as to readers, why I can't stop writing about Oct. 7 and its aftermath.

A few weeks ago, my mother was watching footage of a Jewish student being taunted and mobbed by anti-Israel demonstrators at Harvard after he tried to film them. "I was born in hiding," she told me. "I don't want to die in hiding."

My mother was born in Milan in 1940, to a family that had fled the Bolsheviks in Moscow and then, a few years later, the Nazis in Berlin. She was baptized to avoid suspicion; one of her earliest memories is of being abruptly hidden under a nun's habit. It was only after the war, after she arrived in New York as a refugee, that she learned she was Jewish. America, to her, was the land in which you didn't have to hide.

That's no longer true. Well before Oct. 7, Jews were tucking their Stars of David under their collars or hiding their kipas under baseball caps to avoid being shunned or harassed. Synagogues and Jewish community centers were under constant armed guard. The ultra-Orthodox — who, courageously, do not hide their identity from anyone — were routinely assaulted in their communities by bullies who think it's fun to sucker-punch a Jew. But that reality was shamefully underreported by news organizations that otherwise see themselves as champions of the marginalized and oppressed.

Everything that was true before Oct. 7 became more so after it. Hate crimes against Jews, which had more than quintupled in the previous 10 years, also quintupled from Oct. 7 to Dec. 7 compared to the same period in 2022. Subtext became text: "Gas the Jews" was the chant heard from protesters at the Sydney Opera House, "From the river to the sea" from the quads of once-great American universities. The same students who had been carefully instructed in the nuances of microaggressions suddenly went very macro when it came to making Jews feel despised. The same progressives who erupted in righteous rage during #MeToo became somnambulant in the face of abundant evidence that Israeli women had been mutilated, gang-raped and murdered by Hamas. The same humanitarians who cried foul over migrant "kids in cages" at the southern U.S. border didn't seem particularly bothered that Israeli kids were being held in tunnels, or that posters with their names and faces were routinely torn down on New York street corners.

This is likely to get worse: A Harvard-Harris poll conducted this month finds that 44 percent of Americans ages 25 to 34, and a whopping 67 percent of those ages 18 to 24, agree with the proposition that "Jews as a class are oppressors." By contrast, only 9 percent of Americans over 65 feel that way. The same generation that received the most instruction in the virtues of tolerance is now the most antisemitic in recent memory.

Where does all this hatred come from? If your answer is Israel, then, to borrow a line I once heard from Leon Wieseltier, you aren't explaining antisemitism; you're replicating it. No self-respecting liberal would argue that Islamophobia is understandable because Muslims perpetrated the attacks of Sept. 11 and other atrocities. But somehow the types of excuses that are unthinkable when it comes to some minorities become "essential context" when it comes to Jews.

As it is, the single-minded loathing of Israel is another expression of antisemitism. Turkey flies F-16s in bombing runs against Kurds — while relying on U.S. security guarantees backed up by nuclear weapons — and progressives shrug. But after Israel experienced the equivalent of more than a dozen Sept. 11s on a single day, some progressives instantly cheered it as an act of justified "resistance."

This side of the left, perhaps larger in cultural influence than it is in number, has the moral credibility of David Duke. Much of the right, with its dog-whistling obsession with "replacement theory" and its conspiracy theories about nefarious "globalists," is no better. The fact that each side is in denial about its bigotry makes it that much more pernicious and pervasive. When progressives think the most despicable name in the world is Benjamin Netanyahu and the far right thinks it's George Soros, we have a problem.

There's a pattern. In the early 1920s, the most important scientist in Germany was Albert Einstein, the most important politician was Walther Rathenau and the most important philosopher was Edmund Husserl. All Jews. They wound up exiled, murdered or shunned. Today, the U.S. secretaries of state, Treasury and homeland security are Jewish, as is the majority leader in the Senate and the president's chief of staff.

America was once the land in which Jews didn't have to hide. No longer.

Too often in Jewish history, our zenith turns out to be our precipice. Too often in world history, that precipice is also the end of free society itself. Antisemitism is a problem for democracy because hatred for Jews, whatever name or cause it travels under, is never a hatred for Jews only. It's a hatred for distinctiveness: Jews as Jews in Christian lands; Israel as a Jewish state in Muslim lands. Authoritarians seek uniformity. Jews represent difference.

I don't think my mom will die in hiding. I wonder about my kids. America has been good to Jews since 1655, when the Dutch West India Company rebuked Peter Stuyvesant for refusing trade permits to some Jewish newcomers in what was then New Amsterdam. But if there's one lesson of Jewish history, it's that nothing good stays — and why we still say, at the end of every Passover Seder, "Next year in Jerusalem."

LETTERS

Defining Antisemitism and Anti-Zionism

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "Is Anti-Zionism Antisemitism, by Definition?" (front page, Dec. 12):

What is Zionism? To me, being a Zionist in 2023 means that I accept the right and the necessity of the survival of the Jewish people and the existence of a Jewish state that ensures their survival.

Anything that undermines or threatens Israel's survival also undermines or threatens the existence of the Jewish people and is, ipso facto, antisemitic.

PHILIP B. BERGER, TORONTO

TO THE EDITOR:

I am a Jew by culture and ancestry, albeit a secular one. I abhor contemporary violence by both Hamas and Israel. Historically, however, I have found that in recent years, Israel's aggressive behavior has been the more objectionable, and Israel seems more determined to demoralize and destroy the Gaza population than to surgically remove Hamas.

In the 1950s, when I was a young child and Israel a struggling young state, I paid small sums to buy leaves that I pasted on a picture of a tree until I had bought enough for a tree to be planted in Israel in honor of my grandmother. My father bought Israel bonds — hardly the best monetary investment — in my name and those of my siblings. In the late 1960s and early '70s, when I had my own children and when Israel had become an expansionist power, I asked him to stop.

Although a Jew, I am emphatically not a Zionist, and I resent and fear the conflation of the two.

MARK COHEN
PLATTSBURGH, N.Y.

The writer is distinguished emeritus professor of anthropology at the State University of New York.

TO THE EDITOR:

Jonathan Weisman describes radically different interpretations of Zionism as, alternately, a movement ensuring Jewish sovereignty and safety, or an oppressive colonialism. What is often lost in the debate is the historic diversity among many Zionisms (plural), which continue to struggle with one another for primacy today.

One version of Zionism is expansionist, deeply nationalistic and largely unconcerned about the human rights of non-Jews, while another version on the Zionist spectrum is profoundly humanist at its core and envisions an equitable coexistence between Jews and Palestinians.

Supporting a Zionism that promotes pluralism and shared society is the only vision for a better future for these two peoples whose fates are intertwined.

ANDREW VOGEL
NEWTON, MASS.

The writer is the senior rabbi at Temple Sinai in Brookline, Mass.

Curbing Drug Addiction

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "Rethinking Drug Policies in an Ailing Portland" (front page, Dec. 12):

As a law enforcement veteran, I believe that the police have an important role in supporting community safety. But policymakers can't keep relying on the police as a Band-Aid to every problem. We cannot arrest our way out of addiction. And increasing criminalization to solve public drug use, as some suggest in the article, won't work.

I worked and supervised police narcotics and gang units. Eventually, I saw that the laws I was charged with enforcing didn't make my neighbors safer. No matter how much we ramped up enforcement or how many people we arrested, it didn't stop the flow of drugs into our community or prevent people from dying.

For over 50 years, the United States has prioritized criminalization as a response to drug use, yet stronger drugs like fentanyl have emerged, and our country is facing a health crisis with record-setting overdose deaths.

To make any progress toward curbing addiction, we need to increase access to the addiction services and support people need: treatment, overdose prevention centers, outreach teams to connect people to care, and housing. More criminalization is a false promise of change.

DIANE M. GOLDSTEIN
LAS VEGAS

The writer, a retired police lieutenant, is the executive director of the Law Enforcement Action Partnership.

Asia's Disappearing Sea

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "A Giant Inland Sea Is Now a Desert, and a Warning for Humanity," by Jacob Dreyer (Opinion guest essay, nytimes.com, Nov. 28), about the shrinking Aral Sea in Uzbekistan:

Together, we — an archaeologist, a geographer and a historian — have extensive experience in the Aral Sea region. We take exception to Mr. Dreyer's description of this place as resembling "hell." Rather than stereotyping the region as a wasteland that people should flee from (Mr. Dreyer stresses his desire to leave the region as quickly as possible), we must recognize the meaning and value that the Aral Sea and its environs still hold for its residents today, and we should center those residents' desired futures.

We also need to consider the Aral Sea region a vital knowledge zone. As we confront shrinking bodies of water in many other regions around the globe, we can learn from the perseverance of Aral Sea residents. If we listen, what lessons can we learn from them as we prepare for future ecological disasters?

ELIZABETH BRITE
KATE SHIELDS
SARAH CAMERON

Dr. Brite is a clinical associate professor at Purdue University, Dr. Shields is an assistant professor at Rhodes College, and Dr. Cameron is an associate professor at the University of Maryland, College Park.

Saving Democracy

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "The Resolute Liz Cheney," by Katherine Miller (Opinion, Dec. 10):

While I appreciate former Representative Liz Cheney's relentless opposition to Donald Trump because of the danger he poses to the nation, keeping him out of the White House won't alone save democracy. We also desperately need to stop Ms. Cheney's fellow Republicans from undermining elections in their pursuit of permanent political power.

Republicans have used extreme means to draw House districts in their favor and refused to join Democrats to stop those gerrymanders even though they deprive voters of fair representation and promote polarization by increasing the number of safe seats.

Almost all Republicans voted against restoring provisions of the Voting Rights Act that would help assure protection against racial discrimination. They opposed measures to enact basic ballot access standards, instead allowing states to impose restrictive rules and locate polling places to make it harder for groups they don't favor to vote.

And they refused to support bills to stop the pernicious influence of big donors, opposing even basic disclosure rules to stop secret "dark" money from warping our political priorities.

Standing up to Mr. Trump does little good if we allow Republicans to destroy our democracy by other means. Voters need to elect people to protect free and fair elections before Republicans succeed in rigging them in their favor. Otherwise, we will have rule by a party instead of rule by the people, and our experiment in self-governance will be at an end.

DANIEL A. SIMON, NEW YORK

Off Broadway's Woes

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "Off Broadway, Vital to Theater Scene, Struggles" (front page, Dec. 8):

It saddens me to read about the struggles and closures of our city's intimate theaters. These are the institutions that nurture new work. Losing them darkens our future.

During this crisis, I hope artistic directors will remember that it doesn't have to cost a fortune to put on a play. Even a bare-bones staging gives us something Netflix never can: a story shared by strangers in person in real time.

ROB ACKERMAN, NEW YORK

The author is a playwright.

3 TECHNOLOGY
Google offered direct pay options to app developers and $700 million to settle an antitrust suit by prosecutors.

6 LITIGATION
A Washington State jury decided Monsanto should pay $857 million to victims sickened by its chemicals.

10 SPORTS
Examining what's behind the sudden decline of one of the top goal scorers in N.H.L. history, Alex Ovechkin.

TECH | ECONOMY | MEDIA | FINANCE

Business
The New York Times

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2023 B1
N

'Bond Vigilantes' Are Back.

JARED ORIEL

Not Everyone Is Worried.

By TALMON JOSEPH SMITH

Typically, the esoteric inner workings of finance and the very public stakes of government spending are viewed as separate spheres.

And bond trading is ordinarily a tidy arena driven by mechanical bets about where the economy and interest rates will be months or years from now.

But those separations and that sense of order changed this year as a gargantuan, chaotic battle was waged by traders in the nearly $27 trillion Treasury bond market — the place where the U.S. government goes to borrow.

In the summer and fall, many investors worried that federal deficits were rising so rapidly that the government would flood the market with Treasury debt that would be met with meager demand. They believed that deficits were a key source of inflation that would erode future returns on any U.S. bonds they bought.

So they insisted that if they were to keep buying Treasury bonds, they would need to be compensated with an expensive premium, in the form of a much higher interest rate paid to them.

In market parlance, they were acting as bond vigilantes. That vigilante mind-set fueled a "buyers' strike" in which many traders sold off Treasuries or held back from buying more.

The basic math of bonds is that, generally, when there are fewer buyers of bonds, the rate, or yield, on that debt rises and the value of the bonds falls. The yield on the 10-year Treasury note — the benchmark interest rate the government pays — went from just above 3 percent in March to 5 percent in October. (In a market this large, that amounted to trillions of dollars in losses for the large crop

CONTINUED ON PAGE B4

The financial world is debating whether the market appetite for U.S. debt is nearing a limit. The ramifications for funding government priorities are huge.

Anti-L.G.B.T.Q. Law Hurts Business in Uganda

By DAVID SEGAL

KAMPALA, UGANDA — Sitting on a sofa in his tiny office, Simon Azarwagye, the owner of a travel company called Azas Safaris, points to numbers on his laptop — visual aids for a story that still makes him miserable to tell.

"See that?" he says, gesturing to a graph marked "quote requests." It represents the 89 prospective customers he was communicating with earlier in the year. All of them had inquired about tours of Uganda's lush forests; the expeditions cost about $15,000 per couple for 13 days of hippo and gorilla spotting.

That was before the country's Parliament started debating one of the harshest anti-L.G.B.T.Q. laws in the world. It included a death penalty provision for "aggravated homosexuality" — defined as same-sex relations with someone who is disabled, H.I.V.-positive or elderly, among other categories — and criminalized defending gay men and lesbians in public.

News of the bill made international headlines. On the day it was

CONTINUED ON PAGE B6

STUART TIBAWESWA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Simon Azarwagye has seen a sharp drop in bookings at his travel company in Kampala, Uganda, in recent months.

Debt Is a Global Quandary. Old Remedies Are in Doubt.

By PATRICIA COHEN

LONDON — Martín Guzmán was a college freshman at La Universidad Nacional de La Plata, Argentina, in 2001 when a debt crisis prompted default, riots and a devastating depression. A dazed middle class suffered ruin, as the International Monetary Fund insisted that the government make misery-inducing budget cuts in exchange for a bailout.

Watching Argentina unravel inspired Mr. Guzmán to switch majors and study economics. Nearly two decades later, when the government was again bankrupt, it was Mr. Guzmán as finance minister who negotiated with I.M.F. officials to restructure a $44 billion debt, the result of an earlier ill-conceived bailout.

Today he is one of a number of prominent economists and world leaders who argue that the ambitious framework created at the end of World War II to safeguard economic growth and stability, with the I.M.F. and World Bank as its pillars, is failing in its mission.

The current system "contributes to a more inequitable and unstable global economy," said Mr. Guzmán, who resigned last year after a rift within the government.

The repayment that Mr. Guzmán negotiated was the 22nd arrangement between Argentina

Some argue an aging framework doesn't address present needs.

and the I.M.F. Even so, the country's economic tailspin has only increased with an annual inflation rate of more than 140 percent, growing lines at soup kitchens and a new, self-proclaimed "anarcho-capitalist" president, Javier Milei, who last week devalued the currency by 50 percent.

The I.M.F. and World Bank have aroused complaints from the left and right ever since they were

CONTINUED ON PAGE B5

The Digest

ECONOMY

Housing Starts Surged On Lower Interest Rates

U.S. single-family home building surged in November and could gain further momentum, with declining mortgage rates likely to draw potential buyers back into the housing market.

Single-family housing starts, which account for the bulk of home building, jumped 18 percent to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 1.143 million units last month, the Commerce Department's Census Bureau said on Tuesday.

Permits for future construction of single-family homes increased 0.7 percent to a pace of 976,000 units last month.

The rate on the popular 30-year fixed mortgage averaged 6.95 percent last week, the lowest level since August, from 7.03 percent in the prior week, according to data from mortgage finance agency Freddie Mac.

The rate has tumbled from a 23-year high of 7.79 percent in late October, tracking the decline in U.S. Treasury yields. *REUTERS*

AEROSPACE

Bezos' Rocket Company Has Successful Launch

Jeff Bezos' space company successfully launched a rocket carrying experiments on Tuesday, its first flight since engine trouble caused a crash last year.

The New Shepard rocket soared from West Texas, lifting a capsule full of tests, many of which were aboard the failed Blue Origin launch in September 2022. No one was aboard that flight or this latest one.

This time, the capsule made it to the fringes of space, exposing the experiments from NASA and others to minutes of weightlessness, before parachuting down to the desert. It reached an altitude of 66 miles during the 10-minute flight.

BLUE ORIGIN, VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

During last year's failed launch, the rocket veered off course shortly after liftoff, prompting the escape system to kick in and catapult the capsule off the top. The capsule landed safely, but the rocket came crashing down. *ASSOCIATED PRESS*

INTERNATIONAL

Bank of Japan Keeps Rate In Negative Zone, for Now

The Bank of Japan kept its long-standing easy credit policy unchanged on Tuesday, saying it will watch price and wage trends before raising its negative benchmark interest rate.

The policy decision was widely expected. But investors and analysts believe the central bank is tiptoeing toward a shift because of price increases that have left inflation above its 2 percent target.

The U.S. dollar gained against the Japanese yen and stock prices surged after Tuesday's decision.

The benchmark rate of negative 0.1 percent is meant to encourage banks to lend more and businesses and consumers to borrow more to spur the economy, the world's third-largest.

The central bank also has purchased trillions of dollars worth of government bonds and other assets as part of its strategy of injecting more cash to spur growth as the Japanese population shrinks and grows older. *ASSOCIATED PRESS*

S&P 500 INDEX
+0.6%
4,768.37

DOW JONES INDUSTRIALS
+0.7%
37,557.92

NASDAQ COMPOSITE INDEX
+0.7%
15,003.22

10-YEAR TREASURY YIELD
3.92%
–0.033 points

CRUDE OIL (U.S.)
$73.94
+$1.12

GOLD (N.Y.)
$2,052.10
+$11.60

Stocks & Bonds

Wall Street Ticks Up and S&P 500 Pulls Closer to Record High

By The Associated Press

Wall Street ticked higher on Tuesday and pulled within a good day of its record amid hopes that moves by Japan to keep interest rates easy for investors could be a preview for the rest of the world.

The S&P 500 rose 0.6 percent and is just 0.6 percent shy of its record set nearly two years ago. The Dow Jones industrial average gained 251 points, or 0.7 percent, and set its own record for a fifth straight day, while the Nasdaq composite climbed 0.7 percent.

Enphase Energy jumped 9.1 percent for the biggest gain in the S&P 500 after the maker of microinverters for the solar industry told employees it will cut 10 percent of its global work force and make other streamlining changes. Stocks of oil-and-gas companies also pushed the market higher after crude prices recovered some of their sharp drops from recent months.

Around the world, stocks were mixed in mostly quiet trading. Japan was an exception, and the Nikkei 225 jumped 1.4 percent after the Bank of Japan decided to keep its benchmark interest rate below zero and hold other policies steady in hopes of encouraging more borrowing and spending.

The S&P 500 has rallied more than 15 percent since late October on hopes that a similar, easier approach to interest rates may soon be arriving on Wall Street.

With inflation down from its peak two summers ago and the economy still growing, the rising expectation is for the Federal Reserve in 2024 to pivot away from its campaign to hike interest rates dramatically.

Jerome Powell, the chairman of the Federal Reserve, seemed to give a nod toward such hopes last week when he did not push forcefully against traders' expectations for cuts to rates next year. Wall Street loves lower rates because they give investment prices a boost and relax the pressure on the economy and financial system.

The hope is the Fed can pull off what was earlier seen as a nearly impossible tightrope walk, by first getting inflation under control through high interest rates and then cutting rates before they push the economy into a recession.

A report on Tuesday showed the housing industry appears to be in stronger shape than expected. Homebuilders broke ground on many more homes in November than usual, roughly 200,000 more at a seasonally adjusted annualized rate.

Of course, Wall Street's big recent moves also have critics saying the rally looks overdone and that stocks now appear expensive relative to the profit companies are making. More cautious investors also say the number of rate cuts traders have penciled in for 2024 looks unlikely unless the U.S. economy falls into a recession.

Some Fed officials have been sounding more cautious about the prospect for rate cuts since Powell's comments last week. On Friday, for example, the president of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York said it was "premature to be even thinking" about whether to cut rates in March.

Markets have nevertheless been ebullient, with the S&P 500 coming off its seventh straight winning week for its longest such streak in six years.

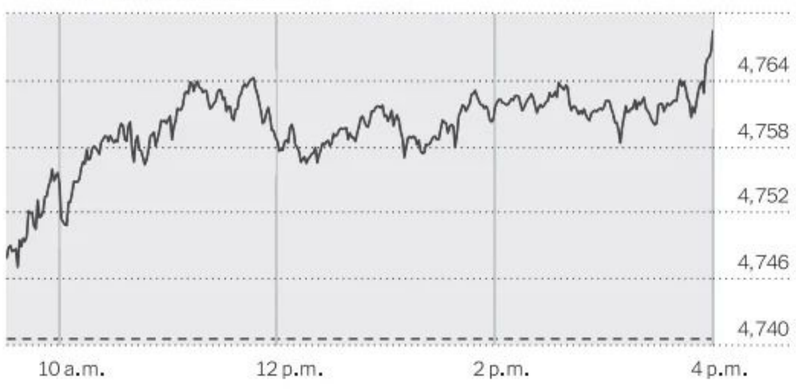
Showing how ravenous investors have become, clients at Bank of America poured $6.4 billion more into U.S. stocks last week than they withdrew. It's the fourth-largest such inflow since the bank began tracking the data in 2008, strategist Jill Carey Hall said in a BofA Global Research report.

To Lori Calvasina, head of U.S. equity strategy at RBC Capital Markets, the S&P 500 still looks reasonably valued given moderating inflation. But she also says the risk of a "short-term pause" for the market is rising given how much fervor has built up, with one survey of investor optimism well above its long-term average, among other potential signals of caution.

In the bond market, the yield on the 10-year Treasury slipped to 3.92 percent from 3.94 percent late Monday.

The S&P 500 Index

Position of the S&P 500 index at 1-minute intervals on Tuesday



Source: FactSet THE NEW YORK TIMES

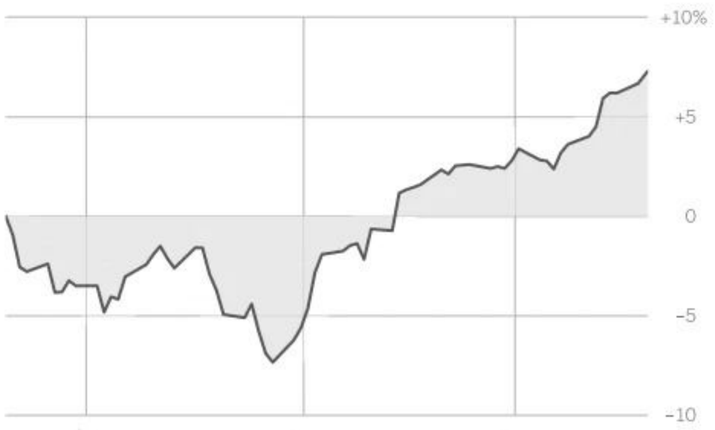
NEWSLETTER: DEALBOOK

DealBook helps you make sense of the day's most important business and policy headlines. Sign up for the newsletter at **nytimes.com/dealbook**

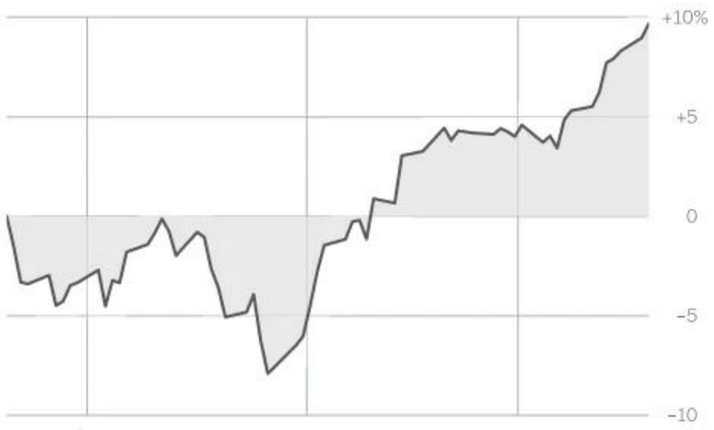
What Happened in Stock Markets Yesterday

POWERED BY FACTSET

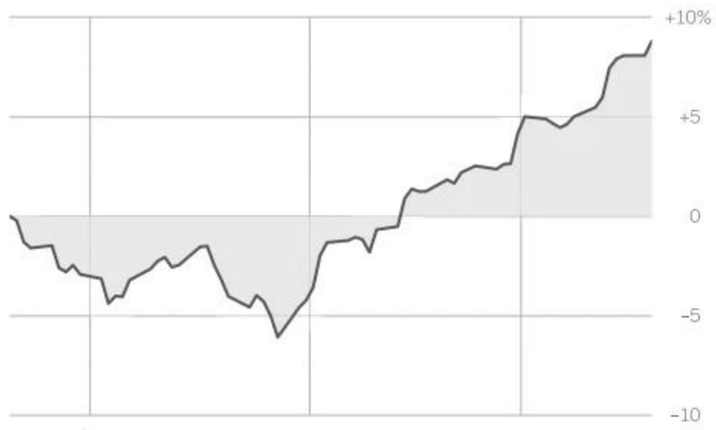
S&P 500 4,768.37 ↑ +0.6%
3 month performance: **+7.3%**



Nasdaq Composite Index 15,003.22 ↑ +0.7%
3 month performance: **+9.7%**



Dow Jones Industrials 37,557.92 ↑ +0.7%
3 month performance: **+8.8%**



Best performers

S&P 500 COMPANIES	CLOSE	CHANGE
1. Enphase Energy (ENPH)	$135.32	+9.1%
2. Illumina (ILMN)	$139.53	+8.1
3. Catalent (CTLT)	$44.64	+6.6
4. Estee Lauder 'A' (EL)	$149.02	+4.3
5. Moderna (MRNA)	$89.09	+4.3
6. Walgreens Boots Alliance (WBA)	$26.03	+4.2
7. Pfizer Inc (PFE)	$28.16	+4.1
8. First Solar (FSLR)	$172.66	+4.0
9. Caesars Entertainment (CZR)	$49.16	+4.0
10. FMC Corp (FMC)	$60.98	+3.5

Worst performers

S&P 500 COMPANIES	CLOSE	CHANGE
1. FactSet Research Systems (FDS)	$448.65	-2.1%
2. Molina Healthcare (MOH)	$359.25	-1.9
3. EPAM Systems (EPAM)	$295.40	-1.6
4. Ceridian HCM (CDAY)	$67.63	-1.5
5. Arthur J Gallagher & Co. (AJG)	$224.59	-1.3
6. LAMB WEST (LW)	$105.92	-1.2
7. Verisk Analytics (VRSK)	$234.46	-1.2
8. CBRE Group 'A' (CBRE)	$90.41	-1.2
9. HASBRO (HAS)	$51.38	-1.1
10. Equifax (EFX)	$246.44	-1.1

Most active

S&P 500 COMPANIES	CLOSE	CHANGE	VOLUME IN MIL.
1. Tesla (TSLA)	$257.22	+2.0%	106
2. Pfizer Inc (PFE)	$28.16	+4.1	69
3. Advanced Micro Devices (AMD)	$140.15	+0.9	64
4. Kenvue (KVUE)	$21.47	+2.2	50
5. NVIDIA (NVDA)	$496.04	-0.9	46
6. Bank of America (BAC)	$33.51	+0.2	44
7. Amazon.com (AMZN)	$153.79	-0.2	43
8. Apple (AAPL)	$196.94	+0.5	40
9. Ford Motor (F)	$12.02	+0.8	36
10. Intel (INTC)	$46.66	+2.1	35

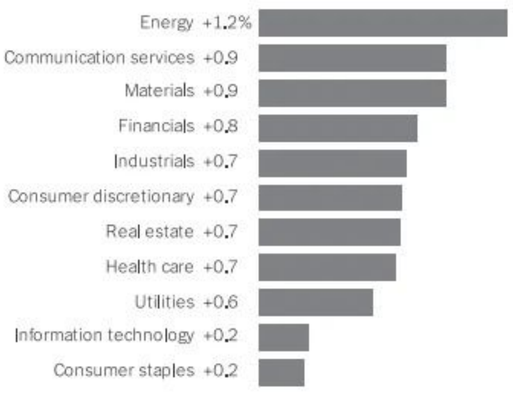
Specialty and short-term bonds

	TOTAL RETURN 1 YR	TOTAL RETURN 5 YRS	TOTAL ASSETS IN BIL.
1. Vanguard Short-Term Bond Index Fund Institutional Shares (VBITX)	+3.2%	+1.4%	57.3
2. Vanguard Short-Term Investment-Grade Fund Investor Shares (VFSTX)	+4.3	+1.8	54.8
3. Lord Abbett Short Duration Income Fund Class R4 (LDLKX)	+4.2	+1.6	43.1
4. Vanguard Short-Term Corporate Bond Index Fund Admiral Shares (VSCSX)	+4.4	+2.1	41.3
5. BlackRock Strategic Income Opportunities Portfolio Class K (BSIKX)	+4.4	+2.9	35.5
6. Vanguard Institutional Intermediate-Term Bond Fund Institutional Plus Shares (VIITX)	+2.6	+1.3	31.0
7. American Funds Intermediate Bond Fund of America Class R-6 (RBOGX)	+2.4	+1.6	23.4
8. Vanguard High-Yield Corporate Fund Investor Shares (VWEHX)	+7.5	+4.0	23.0
9. BlackRock High Yield Bond Portfolio Class K (BRHYX)	+9.1	+4.4	20.1
10. American Funds American High-Income Trust Class R-6 (RITGX)	+7.8	+4.7	18.3

Source: Morningstar

Sector performance

S&P 500 SECTORS



How stock markets fared yesterday in Asia ...

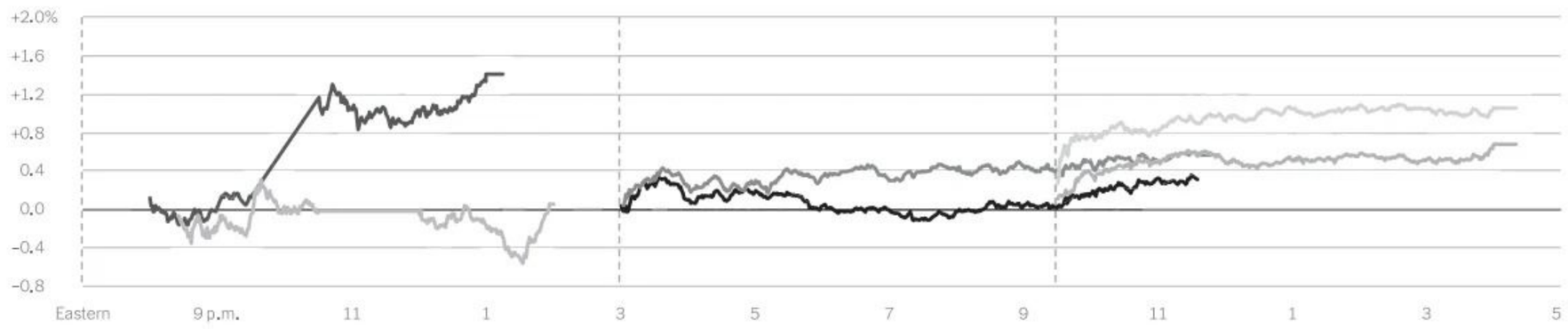
— Nikkei 225 (Japan): +1.4%
— Shanghai Composite (Shanghai): +0.1%

... in Europe

— FTSE 100 (London): +0.3%
— DAX (Frankfurt): +0.6%

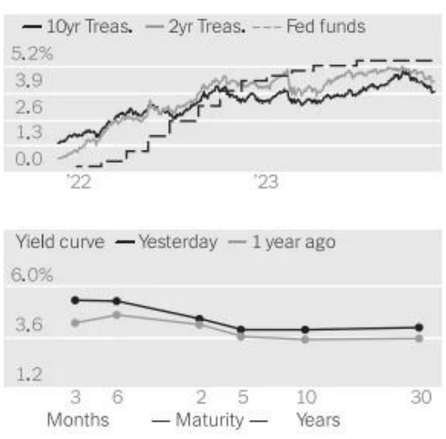
... and North America

— Dow Jones Industrials (New York): +0.7%
— S&P/TSX (Toronto): +1.1%



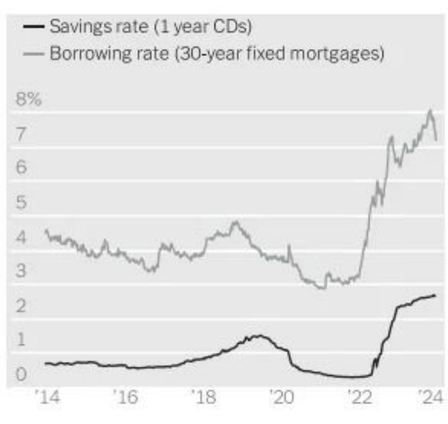
What Is Happening in Other Markets and the Economy

Bonds

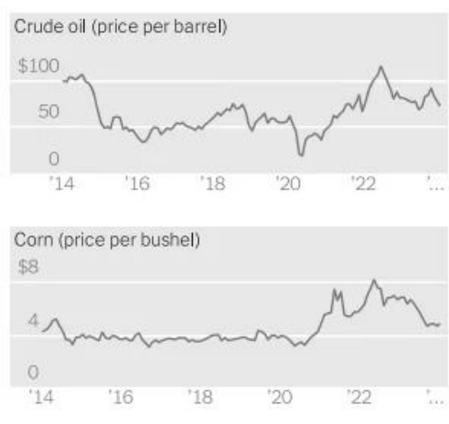


Currencies

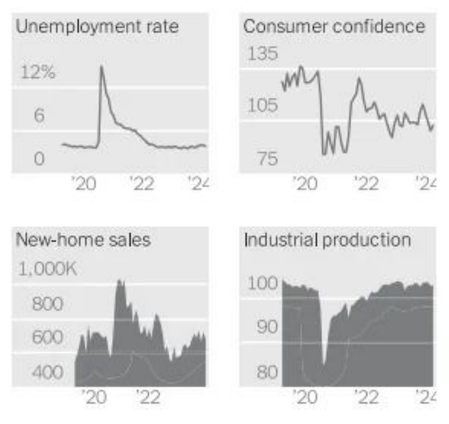
Consumer rates



Commodities



Economy



TECHNOLOGY

JIM WILSON/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Google's C.E.O., Sundar Pichai. The company lost in court to Epic Games.

LUCÍA VÁZQUEZ FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Google's new headquarters in New York City. Google said it would now allow apps to charge consumers directly rather than having to charge through Google.

Google Moves to Mollify Critics of Its Play Store

By NICO GRANT and DAVID McCABE

SAN FRANCISCO — Google said on Monday that it would allow developers on its Play app store to offer direct payment options to users and would pay $700 million to settle an antitrust suit brought by state attorneys general, in the company's latest move to navigate increased regulatory scrutiny of its power.

The suit, brought in July 2021, accused Google's app store of abusing its market power and forcing aggressive terms on software developers. The tech giant is facing several antitrust challenges in the United States, including a trial in which the federal government claims Google has abused its dominance in online search.

In its announcement on Monday, Google said it would now allow apps to charge consumers directly rather than having to charge through Google. The company will pay $630 million to create a settlement fund for consumers, as well as pay $70 million into a fund to be used by the states. To highlight the choice that users have in how they download apps, Google reaffirmed that phone makers, like Samsung, that use the Android mobile operating system can continue installing multiple app stores on their devices in addition to Google's Play Store.

The settlement was announced in September, though details were not released.

Google hopes that the settlement will act as a template for resolutions with other critics of its Play Store policies, including Epic Games — the maker of the popular game Fortnite — which won an antitrust lawsuit against Google last week, according to a person familiar with the matter.

"This settlement builds on Android's choice and flexibility, maintains strong security protections and retains Google's ability to compete with other OS makers and invest in the Android ecosystem for users and developers," Wilson White, Google vice president of government affairs, wrote in a blog post.

The settlement is Google's latest concession regarding its app store, which has come under increased regulatory scrutiny in recent years over claims of monopolistic behaviors. The Google Play Store has drawn complaints because it is one of two main marketplaces for mobile apps along with Apple's App Store. Google charges app makers a 15 percent fee for customer payments for app subscriptions and up to 30 percent for purchases made within popular apps that are downloaded from the store.

In 2021, the South Korean government passed a law forcing Google and Apple to allow app makers to charge customers directly. Since then, Google has offered alternative billing options in the country. It also preemptively introduced a pilot program that offered users a choice in how they were billed in the United States before the settlement took place.

The settlement will reduce those fees by four percentage points when app makers handle their own transactions, although consumers would not necessarily see a reduction in fees because app developers could pocket the discount. It will also allow developers to show different pricing options when users make a purchase.

Google settled the government claims with attorneys general from all 50 states, as well as Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico. If the suit had gone to court, the states would have made their case in a joint trial that would have been heard alongside lawsuits filed by Epic and the dating-app company Match Group, which had sued on similar grounds.

But Google and the attorneys general announced that they had reached an "agreement in principle" in September, two months before the start of the trial. The parties had to wait until a week after the Epic verdict to release the details of the September settlement.

In October, Google also settled with Match.

Epic went on to win its case last week, convincing a nine-person federal jury in San Francisco that Google's levies and aggressive terms on developers amounted to antitrust violations, which hurt the gaming company's business prospects. Judge James Donato of U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California will decide the remedies needed to address Google's conduct next year.

Google has said it will appeal the verdict in the Epic trial. Google's lawyers argued it was impossible for the company to act as a monopoly because its Android mobile operating system and Play Store compete against Apple's iOS software and its App Store, which is much more popular in the United States.

Apple largely prevailed in a similar lawsuit that was brought by Epic and decided by a judge, though the U.S. Supreme Court may decide to pick up the case next year.

Mr. White, of Google, wrote in the blog post that the company was "disappointed" by last week's verdict but said the case with Epic was "far from over."

Nico Grant reported from San Francisco, and David McCabe from Washington.

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF PUERTO RICO

In re: THE FINANCIAL OVERSIGHT AND MANAGEMENT BOARD FOR PUERTO RICO, as representative of THE COMMONWEALTH OF PUERTO RICO, *et al.*, Debtors.[1]	PROMESA Title III No. 17-BK-3283-LTS (Jointly Administered)
In re: THE FINANCIAL OVERSIGHT AND MANAGEMENT BOARD FOR PUERTO RICO, as representative of PUERTO RICO ELECTRIC POWER AUTHORITY, Debtor.	PROMESA Title III No. 17-BK-4780-LTS (Jointly Administered)

NOTICE OF (I) APPROVAL OF SUPPLEMENTAL DISCLOSURE STATEMENT, (II) ESTABLISHMENT OF RECORD DATES, (III) HEARING ON CONFIRMATION OF THE PLAN OF ADJUSTMENT AND PROCEDURES FOR OBJECTION TO CONFIRMATION OF THE PLAN OF ADJUSTMENT, (IV) PROCEDURES AND DEADLINE FOR VOTING ON THE PLAN OF ADJUSTMENT AND MAKING CERTAIN ELECTIONS THEREUNDER

If you are entitled to vote on or make an election with respect to distributions pursuant to the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan (as defined below), you will receive a separate Solicitation Package (as defined below) on a future date.

VOTING AND ELECTION DEADLINE: 5:00 p.m. (Eastern Standard Time) on January 26, 2024

OBJECTION DEADLINE: 5:00 p.m. (Atlantic Standard Time) on January 26, 2024

CONFIRMATION HEARING: March 4–15, 2024 at 9:30 a.m. (Atlantic Standard Time)

See below for additional deadlines.

If you have any questions regarding this notice, please contact Kroll Restructuring Administration LLC ("Kroll")[2] by telephone at (844) 822-9231 (toll free for U.S. and Puerto Rico) or (646) 486-7944 (for international callers), available 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. (Atlantic Standard Time) (Spanish available), or by email at puertoricoinfo@ra.kroll.com (with 'PREPA Solicitation' in the subject line).

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE OF THE FOLLOWING:

1. ***Approval of Disclosure Statement.*** By order, dated March 3, 2023 (the "Disclosure Statement Order"), the United States District Court for the District of Puerto Rico (the "Court") approved the adequacy of the information contained in the *Disclosure Statement for the Modified Second Amended Title III Plan of Adjustment of the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority*, dated March 1, 2023 [Case No. 17-4780, ECF No. 3297][3] (as the same may be updated, supplemented, amended and/or otherwise modified from time to time, including all exhibits and attachments thereto, the "Disclosure Statement").[4] By order, dated November 17, 2023 (the "Supplemental Disclosure Statement Order"), the United States District Court for the District of Puerto Rico (the "Court") approved the adequacy of the information contained in the *Supplemental Disclosure Statement for the Corrected Fifth Modified Third Amended Title III Plan of Adjustment of the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority*, dated November 16, 2023 [ECF No. 4171] (as the same may be updated, supplemented, amended and/or otherwise modified from time to time, including all exhibits and attachments thereto, the "Supplemental Disclosure Statement"), filed by the Financial Oversight and Management Board on behalf of the Debtor, and authorized the Debtor to solicit votes with respect to the acceptance or rejection of the *Corrected Fifth Modified Third Amended Title III Plan of Adjustment of the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority*, dated November 16, 2023 [ECF No. 4170] (as the same may be updated, supplemented, amended and/or otherwise modified from time to time, the "Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan"),[5] attached as **Exhibit A** to the Supplemental Disclosure Statement.

You may obtain a hard copy of the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan, Disclosure Statement, and Supplemental Disclosure Statement, including Spanish translations thereof, free of charge, by contacting the Balloting Agent, Kroll Restructuring Administration LLC (f/k/a Prime Clerk LLC):

Telephone (10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. (AST)) (Spanish available):
(844) 822-9231 (toll free for U.S. and Puerto Rico)
(646) 486-7944 (for international callers)

Email: puertoricoinfo@ra.kroll.com (with 'PREPA Solicitation' in the subject line)

Alternatively, electronic copies of the Disclosure Statement, Supplemental Disclosure Statement and Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan are available, free of charge, by visiting https://cases.ra.kroll.com/puertorico/.

2. Pursuant to the Supplemental Disclosure Statement Order, the Debtor will mail materials needed for voting on the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan (the "Solicitation Package") to Holders with Claims in the following Classes (collectively, the "Voting Classes"):

Class	
1	First Settlement Bondholder Claims
2	Uninsured Bondholder Secured Claims
3	Uninsured Bondholder Unsecured Claims
4	Assured Insured Bonds & Interest Rate Swap Secured Claims[6]
5	Assured Insured Bonds & Interest Rate Swap Unsecured Claims[7]
6	Syncora Insured Bonds Secured Claims[8]
7	Syncora Insured Bonds Unsecured Claims[9]
8	National Insured Bonds Secured Claims[10]
9	National Insured Bonds Unsecured Claims[11]
10	Pension Claim[12]
11	Fuel Line Loan Claims
12	General Unsecured Claims
13	Vitol Claims
16	Federal Claims

3. ***Confirmation Hearing.*** A hearing to consider confirmation of the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan (the "Confirmation Hearing") will be held before The Honorable Laura Taylor Swain, United States District Court Judge, at the United States District Court for the District of Puerto Rico, Clemente Ruiz Nazario United States Courthouse, 150 Carlos Chardón Avenue, San Juan P.R. 00918-1767 (or as otherwise provided pursuant to an order of the Court) on **March 4–15, 2024 at 9:30 a.m. (Atlantic Standard Time)**.

4. The Confirmation Hearing may be continued from time to time by the Court or the Oversight Board, without further notice or through adjournments announced in open court or as indicated in any notice of agenda of matters scheduled for hearing filed with the Court, and the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan may be modified, if necessary, prior to, during, or as a result of the Confirmation Hearing, in accordance with the modification provisions of the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan and Local Rule 3016-2, without further notice to interested parties.

5. ***Plan Confirmation Depository.*** Information relating to confirmation of the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan is available online in the Plan Confirmation Depository at titleiiiplandataroom.com.

6. ***Confirmation Objection Deadline.*** The Court has established **5:00 p.m. (Atlantic Standard Time) on January 26, 2024** as the deadline to file objections or responses to confirmation of the proposed Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan and the proposed confirmation order[13] (the "Confirmation Objection Deadline").

7. Pursuant to the *Notice and Order Concerning Termination of Objections and Other Responses to Prior Versions of the Plan of Adjustment of the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority* [ECF No. 3953] (the "Termination Order"), all responses and objections to the Second Amended Plan are terminated, parties in interest who wish to object to or otherwise respond to the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan must file objections or responses to the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan on or before the Confirmation Objection Deadline, and such pleadings must be self-contained (*i.e.*, shall not rely upon or incorporate by reference any prior filed response or objection), and be directed to the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan. Termination Order at 2.

8. Parties who do not file an objection to the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan or the proposed confirmation order prior to the Confirmation Objection Deadline will be prohibited from making an oral presentation before the Court at the Confirmation Hearing.

9. ***Objections and Responses to Confirmation.*** Objections and responses to confirmation of the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan must:

a. Be in writing, in English, and signed;

b. State the name, address, and nature of the Claim of the objecting or responding party;

c. State with particularity the basis and nature of any objection or response and include, where appropriate, proposed language to be inserted in the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan or the proposed confirmation order to resolve any such objection or response;

d. Be filed electronically with the Court on the dockets of (i) *In re Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority*, Case No. 17 BK 4780-LTS and (ii) *In re Commonwealth of Puerto Rico*, Case No. 17 BK 3283-LTS, through the Court's case filing system in searchable portable document format **on or before the Confirmation Objection Deadline (January 26, 2024 at 5:00 p.m. (Atlantic Standard Time))**.

i. If you are not an attorney who is a registered user of the Court's case filing system, you may instead mail your objection to the Court's Clerk's office at:

United States District Court, Clerk's Office
150 Ave. Carlos Chardon Ste. 150, San Juan, P.R. 00918-1767

so as to be received **on or before the Confirmation Objection Deadline (January 26, 2024 at 5:00 p.m. (Atlantic Standard Time))**, and

e. Be served upon the Office of the United States Trustee for the District of Puerto Rico, Edificio Ochoa, 500 Tanca Street, Suite 301, San Juan, PR 00901 (re: In re: Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority) so as to be received **on or before the Confirmation Objection Deadline (January 26, 2024 at 5:00 p.m. (Atlantic Standard Time))**.

10. ***Discovery Timetable and Deadlines.*** The Court has established the following discovery dates and deadlines, which are applicable to the Debtor and to other parties in interest who have timely filed a Discovery Notice and are eligible to participate in discovery:[14]

Summary of Discovery and Confirmation Deadlines

Five Business Days After Entry of Supplemental Disclosure Statement Order	Deadline for Confirmation Hearing Notice to be served.
Later of December 8, 2023 or the Date that is Twenty-One (21) Days Following Entry of the Supplemental Disclosure Statement Order, or as Soon as Reasonably Practicable Thereafter	Deadline for Debtor to complete mailing of solicitation materials.
November 17, 2023	Deadline for all parties to file opening expert disclosures ("Expert Disclosures").
December 1, 2023	Deadline for completion of fact discovery (the "Fact Discovery Deadline").
December 8, 2023	Deadline for all parties to file opening expert reports ("Opening Expert Reports").
December 15, 2023	Deadline for all parties to file rebuttal expert disclosures ("Rebuttal Expert Witness Disclosures").
December 18, 2023	Deadline for all parties to serve fact notices of deposition, topics and requested times for depositions ("Expert Notices of Deposition").
January 9, 2024	Deadline for all parties to file rebuttal expert reports ("Rebuttal Expert Reports").
January 12, 2024	Deadline for the Debtor to file initial proposed confirmation order (the "Proposed Confirmation Order").
January 19, 2024	Deadline for completion of expert discovery (the "Expert Discovery Deadline").
January 26, 2024 at 5:00 p.m. (Eastern Standard Time)	Voting Deadline & Election Deadline
January 26, 2024 at 5:00 p.m. (Atlantic Standard Time)	Deadline for parties in interest to file: • Objections to confirmation of the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan ("Plan Objections"); and • Objections to Proposed Confirmation Order.
	Deadline for all parties to file final witness lists.
January 30, 2024	Deadline for all parties to file Daubert motions and motions *in limine*.
February 9, 2024	Deadline for all parties to file objections to Daubert motions and motions *in limine*.
February 12, 2024	Deadline for Debtor to file: • Memorandum of law in support of confirmation of the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan; • Omnibus reply to Plan Objections and objections to the Proposed Confirmation Order; • Witness Declarations; • Vote Tabulation; and • Initial proposed findings of fact and conclusions of law ("Proposed Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law").
	Deadline for parties in interest to file statements or joinders in support of confirmation of the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan.
	Deadline for non-Debtor parties to file witness declarations.
February 16, 2024 at 4:00 p.m. (Atlantic Standard Time)	Deadline for all parties to file replies in support of Daubert motions and motions *in limine*.
February 16, 2024	Deadline for all parties to file exhibit lists and deposition designations.
February 23, 2024	Deadline for parties in interest to file objections to the: • Vote Tabulation; and/or • Proposed Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law.
	Deadline for all parties to file counter-designations, objections to deposition designations, or objections to exhibit lists.
February 27, 2024	Deadline for Debtor to reply to objections to the: • Vote Tabulation; and/or • Proposed Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law.
	Deadline for all parties to file objections to counter designations.
	Virtual hearing on motions *in limine* / pre-trial conference.
March 4–15, 2024	Confirmation Hearing

11. ***Voting Record Date.*** The voting record date is **November 14, 2023** (the "Voting Record Date"), which is the date for determining which Holders of Claims in Voting Classes (except the Bond Classes[15]) are entitled to vote on the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan. Therefore, only those creditors in a Class entitled to vote on the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan and holding Claims against the Debtor (except in the Bond Classes) as of the Voting Record Date are entitled to vote on the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan.

12. ***Voting Deadline.*** The deadline for voting on the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan is **January 26, 2024, at 5:00 p.m. (Eastern Standard Time)**, unless such time is extended (the "Voting Deadline"). ***You are not required to vote on the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan to receive distributions pursuant to the terms of the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan, if confirmed by the Court, and provided you hold an Allowed Claim. However, if you are a First Settlement Bondholder, Second Settlement Bondholder, or National receiving the treatment provided to Holders of Claims in Class 1, Class 2, Class 3, Class 8, or Class 9, you should review your First Bond Settlement Agreement, Second Bond Settlement Agreement, or National PSA, as applicable, prior to voting or abstaining from voting on the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan, and how it may affect your right to receive distributions.***

13. If you received a Solicitation Package, including a Ballot or Notice and intend to vote on the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan, you ***must***: (a) follow the instructions carefully; (b) complete ***all*** of the required information on the Ballot (as applicable); and (c) either (i) execute and return your completed Ballot according to and as set forth in detail in the voting instructions included in the Solicitation Package so that your Ballot is ***actually received*** by the Debtor's solicitation agent, Kroll Restructuring Administration LLC ("Kroll" or the "Balloting Agent")[16] on or before the Voting Deadline, or (ii) instruct your broker or nominee (each, a "Nominee") to electronically deliver your bonds via the Automated Tender Offer Program ("ATOP") at The Depository Trust Company ("DTC") in accordance with your desire to vote to accept or reject the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan on or before the Voting Deadline. ***Failure to follow such instructions may disqualify your vote.***

14. ***Election Deadline.*** The deadline for Beneficial Owners of PREPA Revenue Bonds insured by National that have the right to make an election of the form of distributions pursuant to the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan to make such election is on **January 26, 2024, at 5:00 p.m. (Eastern Standard Time)**, unless such time is extended (the "Election Deadline"). If you received an Election Notice with an option to make an election, you must: (a) follow the instructions carefully; and (b) deliver all of the required information according to and as set forth in detail in the election instructions so that it is received by your Nominee in sufficient time for your Nominee to actually effectuate your election through DTC's ATOP on or before the Election Deadline.

15. ***Parties in Interest Not Entitled to Vote.*** Creditors in Class 18 (Section 510(b) Subordinated Claims) are deemed to reject the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan and not entitled to vote.

16. Creditors in Class 14 (Ordinary Course Customer Claims), Class 15 (Eminent Domain/Inverse Condemnation Claims), and Class 17 (Convenience Claims) are deemed to accept the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan and not entitled to vote.

17. If a Claim is listed on the Debtor's list of creditors [ECF No. 262] as contingent, unliquidated, or disputed and a proof of claim was not (i) filed by the earlier of the applicable bar date for the filing of proofs of claim established by the Court or the Voting Record Date (as applicable); or (ii) deemed timely filed by an order of the Court prior to the Voting Deadline, such Claim shall not be entitled to vote to accept or reject the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan. Proofs of claim filed for $0.00 or Claims that have been expunged by order of the Court are also not entitled to vote.

18. If you have timely filed a proof of claim and disagree with the Debtor's classification of, or objection to, your Claim and believe you should be entitled to vote on the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan, you must serve the Debtor and the parties listed in paragraph 45 of the Supplemental Disclosure Statement Order and file with the Court (with a copy to Chambers) a motion (a "Rule 3018(a) Motion") for an order pursuant to Rule 3018 of the Federal Rules of Bankruptcy Procedure (the "Bankruptcy Rules") temporarily allowing your Claim in a different amount or in a different Class for purposes of voting to accept or reject the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan. All Rule 3018(a) Motions must be filed on or before the tenth (10th) day after the later of (i) service of this Confirmation Hearing Notice and (ii) service of notice of an objection, if any, as to such Claim. In accordance with Bankruptcy Rule 3018(a), as to any to any creditor filing a Rule 3018(a) Motion, such creditor's Ballot will not be counted except as may be otherwise ordered by the Court prior to the **Voting Deadline (January 26, 2024, at 5:00 p.m. (Eastern Standard Time), which corresponds to 6:00 p.m. prevailing Atlantic Time)**. Creditors may contact the Balloting Agent (i) via first class mail or via overnight courier, at Puerto Rico Ballot Processing, C/O Kroll Restructuring Administration LLC (f/k/a Prime Clerk LLC), 850 Third Avenue, Suite 412, Brooklyn, NY 11232, (ii) by telephone at (844) 822-9231 (toll free for U.S. and Puerto Rico) or (646) 486-7944 (for international callers), available 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. (Atlantic Standard Time) (Spanish available), or (iii) by email at puertoricoinfo@ra.kroll.com (with 'PREPA Solicitation' in the subject line), to receive an appropriate Ballot for any Claim for which a proof of claim has been timely filed and a Rule 3018(a) Motion has been granted. Rule 3018(a) Motions that are not timely filed and served in the manner set forth herein shall not be considered.

19. If you wish to have your Claim temporarily allowed for voting purposes pursuant to Bankruptcy Rule 3018(a), a form of Rule 3018(a) motion together with instructions for filing and serving the motion is available at https://cases.ra.kroll.com/puertorico/.

20. ***Parties Who Will Not Be Treated as Creditors.*** Any holder of a Claim that (i) is scheduled in the List of Creditors at $0.00 and is not the subject of a timely filed proof of Claim or a proof of claim deemed timely filed with the Court pursuant to either the Bankruptcy Code or any order of the Court, or otherwise deemed timely filed under applicable law, or (ii) is not scheduled and is not the subject of a timely filed proof of claim or a proof of claim deemed timely filed with the Court pursuant to either the Bankruptcy Code or any order of the Court, or otherwise deemed timely filed under applicable law, shall not be treated as a creditor with respect to such Claim for purposes of (a) receiving notices regarding the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan, and (b) voting on the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan.

21. ***Additional Information.*** Any party in interest wishing to obtain information about the solicitation procedures or copies of the Disclosure Statement, Supplemental Disclosure Statement, or the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan, including Spanish translations thereof, should contact the Balloting Agent, Kroll Restructuring Administration LLC, by telephone at (844) 822-9231 (toll free for U.S. and Puerto Rico) or (646) 486-7944 (for international callers), available 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. (Atlantic Standard Time) (Spanish available), or by email at puertoricoinfo@ra.kroll.com (with 'PREPA Solicitation' in the subject line), or may view such documents by accessing either https://cases.ra.kroll.com/puertorico/ or the Court's website, https://www.prd.uscourts.gov/. Please note that a Public Access to Court Electronic Records ("PACER") (http://www.pacer.psc.uscourts.gov) password and login are needed to access documents on the Court's website.

22. ***Bankruptcy Rules 2002(c)(3) and 3016(c)).*** **In accordance with Bankruptcy Rules 2002(c)(3) and 3016(c), set forth below are the release, exculpation, and injunction provisions contained in the Fifth Modified Third Amended Plan:**

Section 31(A) – Discharge and Release of Claims and Causes of Action:

1. Complete Satisfaction, Discharge, and Release. Except as expressly provided in the Plan or the Confirmation Order, all distributions and rights afforded under the Plan shall be, and shall be deemed to be, in exchange for, and in complete satisfaction, settlement, discharge, and release of, all Claims or Causes of Action against PREPA and Reorganized PREPA that arose, in whole or in part, prior to the Effective Date, relating to the Title III Case, the Debtor or Reorganized Debtor or any of their respective Assets, property, or interests of any nature whatsoever, including any interest accrued on such Claims from and after the Petition Date, and regardless of whether any property will have been distributed or retained pursuant to the Plan on account of such Claims or Causes of Action. Upon the Effective Date, the Debtor and Reorganized Debtor shall be discharged and released from any and all Claims, Causes of Action, and any other Debts that arose, in whole or in part, prior to the Effective Date (including prior to the Petition Date), and all Debts of the kind specified in Bankruptcy Code sections 502(g), 502(h), or 502(i), whether or not (a) a Proof of Claim based upon such Debt is filed or deemed filed under Bankruptcy Code section 501, (b) a Claim based upon such Debt is allowed under Bankruptcy Code section 502 (or is otherwise resolved), or (c) the Holder of a Claim based upon such Debt voted to accept the Plan; *provided*, for the avoidance of doubt, this Article XXXI.A.1 does not extend to or include any claims, rights, or defenses (whether ordinary or affirmative) of the Vitol Parties related to the Vitol-SCC AP preserved pursuant to the Vitol Settlement Agreement, and the Vitol Parties are not releasing and instead are expressly preserving, all of their claims, rights, or defenses related to the Vitol-SCC AP as provided in the Vitol Settlement Agreement.

2. Preclusion from Assertion of Claims Against the Debtor. All Entities are enjoined from asserting any and all Claims or other obligations, suits, judgments, damages, Debts, rights, remedies, Causes of Action, or liabilities, of any nature whatsoever, including any interest accrued on such Claims from and after the Petition Date, against the Debtor and Reorganized Debtor and each of their respective Assets, property and rights, relating to the Title III Case, regardless of whether any property will have been distributed or retained pursuant to the Plan on account of such Claims or other obligations, suits, judgments, damages, Debts, rights, remedies, Causes of Action, or liabilities. In accordance with the foregoing, except as expressly provided in the Plan or the Confirmation Order, the Confirmation Order shall constitute a judicial determination, as of the Effective Date, of the discharge and release of all such Claims, Causes of Action, or Debt of or against the Debtor and the Reorganized Debtor pursuant to Bankruptcy Code sections 524 and 944, applicable to the Title III Case pursuant to PROMESA section 301, and such discharge shall void and extinguish any judgment obtained against the Debtor or Reorganized Debtor and their respective Assets, and property at any time, to the extent such judgment is related to a discharged Claim, Debt, or liability. For the avoidance of doubt, this Article XXXI.A.2 does not extend to or include any claims, rights, or defenses (whether ordinary or affirmative) of the Vitol Parties related to the Vitol-SCC AP preserved pursuant to the Vitol Settlement Agreement, and the Vitol Parties are not releasing and instead are expressly preserving, all of their claims, rights, or defenses related to the Vitol-SCC AP as provided in the Vitol Settlement Agreement.

3. Injunction Related to Discharge of Claims. Except as otherwise expressly provided in this Article XXXI of the Plan, the Confirmation Order or such other applicable Final Order of the Title III Court, all Entities who have held, hold, or may hold Claims or any other Debt or liability discharged or released pursuant to Article XXXI hereof or who have held, hold, or may hold Claims or any other Debt or liability that is discharged or released pursuant to Article XXXI hereof are permanently enjoined, from and after the Effective Date, from (a) commencing or continuing, directly or indirectly, in any manner, any action or other proceeding (including, without limitation, any judicial, arbitral, administrative, or other proceeding) of any kind on any such Claim or other Debt or liability that is discharged or released pursuant to the Plan against any of the Released Parties or any of their respective Assets or property, (b) the enforcement, attachment, collection, or recovery by any manner or means of any judgment, award, decree, or order against any of the Released Parties or any of their respective assets or property on account of any Claim or other Debt or liability that is discharged or released pursuant to the Plan, (c) creating, perfecting, or enforcing any encumbrance of any kind against any of the Released Parties or any of their respective assets or property on account of any Claim or other Debt or liability that is discharged or released pursuant to the Plan, and (d) except to the extent provided, permitted, or preserved by Bankruptcy Code sections 553, 555, 556, 559, or 560 or pursuant to the common law right of recoupment, asserting any right of setoff, subrogation, or recoupment of any kind against any obligation due from any of the Released Parties or any of their respective assets or property, with respect to any such Claim or other Debt or liability that is discharged or released pursuant to the Plan. Such injunction shall extend to all successors and assigns of the Released Parties and their respective assets and property.

Section 31(B) – Releases by the Debtor and Reorganized Debtor: Except as otherwise expressly provided in the Plan or the Confirmation Order, on the Effective Date, and for good and valuable consideration, each of the Debtor and Reorganized Debtor, the Distribution Agent and each of the Debtor's and Reorganized Debtor's Related Persons shall be deemed to have and hereby does irrevocably and unconditionally, fully, finally, and forever waive, release, acquit, and discharge the Released Parties from any and all Claims or Causes of Action that the Debtor, Reorganized Debtor, and the Distribution Agent, or any of them, or anyone claiming through them, on their behalf or for their benefit, have or may have or claim to have, now or in the future, that are based upon, relate to, or arise out of or in connection with, in whole or in part, any act, omission, transaction, event, or other circumstance relating to the Title III Case, the Fuel Line Lender PSA, the National PSA, the Second Bond Settlement Agreement, or the Debtor taking place or existing on or prior to the Effective Date, and/or any Claim, act, fact, transaction, occurrence, statement, or omission in connection with or alleged or that could have been alleged, including, without limitation, any such Claim, demand, right, liability, or cause of action for indemnification, contribution, or any other basis in law or equity for damages, costs, or fees.

Section 31(C) – Releases by Holders of Claims: Notwithstanding anything contained in this Plan to the contrary, as of the Effective Date, for good and valuable consideration, each Holder of a Claim is deemed to have released and discharged the Debtor and the Reorganized Debtor from any and all Claims and Causes of Action, whether known or unknown, including any derivative claims, asserted on behalf of the Debtor, that such Entity would have been legally entitled to assert (whether individually or collectively), based on or relating to, or in any manner arising from, in whole or in part, the Debtor (including management, ownership, or operation thereof), the Debtor's in- or out-of-court restructuring efforts, intercompany transactions, the Title III Case, the formulation, preparation, dissemination, negotiation, or filing of the Disclosure Statement, the Plan, the Uninsured Bond Settlement Agreement, the Vitol Settlement Agreement, the Restructuring Transactions, the Fuel Line Lender PSA, the National PSA, or any contract, instrument, release, or other Definitive Documents, agreement, or document created or entered into in connection with the Disclosure Statement, or the Plan, the filing of the Title III Case, the pursuit of Confirmation, the pursuit of consummation, the administration and implementation of the Plan, including the issuance or distribution of securities pursuant to the Plan, or the distribution of property under the Plan or any other related agreement, or upon any other related act or omission, transaction, agreement, event, or other occurrence taking place on or before the Effective Date. Notwithstanding anything to the contrary in the foregoing, the releases set forth above do not release any post-Effective Date obligations of any party or Entity under the Plan, the Restructuring Transactions, or any document, instrument, or agreement (including those set forth in the Plan Supplement) executed to implement the Plan.

Section 31(D) – Exculpation. Except as otherwise specifically provided in the Plan, to the maximum extent permitted by law, no Exculpated Party shall have or incur, and each Exculpated Party is released and exculpated from any Cause of Action for any claim related to any act or omission in connection with, relating to, or arising out of, the Title III Case, the formulation, preparation, dissemination, negotiation, or filing of the Fuel Line Lender PSA, the National PSA, Disclosure Statement, the Plan, the First Bond Settlement Agreement, the Second Bond Settlement Agreement, the Vitol Settlement Agreement, or any Restructuring Transaction, contract, instrument, release or other Definitive Document, agreement, or document created or entered into in connection with the Disclosure Statement or the Plan, the filing of the Title III Case, the pursuit of Confirmation, the pursuit of consummation, the administration and implementation of the Plan, including the issuance of securities pursuant to the Plan, or the distribution of property under the Plan or any other related agreement, except for claims related to any act or omission determined in a Final Order to have constituted actual fraud or gross negligence, but in all respects such Entities shall be entitled to reasonably rely upon the advice of counsel with respect to their duties and responsibilities pursuant to the Plan. The Exculpated Parties have, and upon confirmation of the Plan shall be deemed to have, participated in good faith and in compliance with the applicable laws with regard to the solicitation of votes and distribution of consideration pursuant to the Plan and, therefore, are not, and on account of such distributions shall not be, liable at any time for the violation of any applicable law, rule, or regulation governing the solicitation of acceptances or rejections of the Plan or such distributions made pursuant to the Plan. For the avoidance of doubt, notwithstanding anything contained herein to the contrary, the Plan shall not, and shall not be construed to, release or exculpate, any payment obligation under the applicable National Insurance Policy, to any beneficial holder of National Insured Bonds, in accordance with its terms solely to the extent of any failure of such holder to receive the treatment provided to Holders of Claims in Class 9 (or any claims that National may have against a beneficial holder of National Insured Bonds with respect to National's applicable obligations under the National Insurance Policies).

Section 31(E) – Injunction. As of the Effective Date, all Entities that hold, have held, or may hold a Released Claim released pursuant to this Article XXXI of the Plan, are, and shall be, permanently, forever and completely stayed, restrained, prohibited, barred, and enjoined from taking any of the following actions, whether directly or indirectly, derivatively, or otherwise, on account of or based on the subject matter of such discharged Released Claims: (i) commencing, conducting, or continuing in any manner, directly or indirectly, any suit, action, or other proceeding (including, without limitation, any judicial, arbitral, administrative, or other proceeding) in any forum; (ii) enforcing, attaching (including, without limitation any prejudgment attachment), collecting, or in any way seeking to recover any judgment, award, decree, or other order; (iii) creating, perfecting, or in any way enforcing in any matter, directly or indirectly, any Lien; (iv) setting off, seeking reimbursement or contributions from, or subrogation against, or otherwise recouping in any manner, directly or indirectly, any amount against any liability or obligation owed to any Entity released under Article XXXI hereof; and (v) commencing or continuing in any manner, in any place of any judicial, arbitration, or administrative proceeding in any forum, that does not comply with or its inconsistent with the provisions of the Plan or the Confirmation Order.

Section 40(C) – Supplemental Injunction. Notwithstanding anything contained herein to the contrary, except to the limited extent provided in the Plan, all Entities, including Entities acting on their behalf, who currently hold or assert, have held or asserted, or may hold or assert, any Released Claims against any of the Released Parties based upon, attributable to, arising out of or relating to the Title III Case or any Claim against the Debtor, whenever and wherever arising or asserted, whether in the U.S. or anywhere else in the world, whether sounding in tort, contract, warranty, statute, or any other theory of law, equity or otherwise, shall be, and shall be deemed to be, permanently stayed, restrained and enjoined from taking any action against any of the Released Parties for the purpose of directly or indirectly collecting, recovering or receiving any payment or recovery with respect to any Released Claims arising prior to the Effective Date (including prior to the Petition Date), including, but not limited to:

1. Commencing or continuing in any manner any action or other proceeding of any kind with respect to any such Released Claim against any of the Released Parties or the assets or property of any Released Party;

2. Enforcing, attaching, collecting, or recovering, by any manner or means, any judgment, award, decree, or order against any of the Released Parties or the assets or property of any Released Party with respect to any such Released Claim;

3. Creating, perfecting, or enforcing any Lien of any kind against any of the Released Parties or the assets or property of any Released Party with respect to any such Released Claim;

4. Except as otherwise expressly provided in the Plan or the Confirmation Order, asserting, implementing or effectuating any setoff, right of subrogation, indemnity, contribution, or recoupment of any kind against any obligation due to any of the Released Parties or against the property of any Released Party with respect to any such Released Claim; and

5. Taking any act, in any manner, in any place whatsoever, that does not conform to, or comply with, the provisions of the Plan or the Confirmation Order, *provided, however*, that the Debtor's compliance with the formal requirements of Bankruptcy Rule 3016 shall not constitute an admission that the Plan provides for any injunction against conduct not otherwise enjoined under the Bankruptcy Code.

Dated: November 17, 2023, San Juan, Puerto Rico

Respectfully submitted, */s/ Martin J. Bienenstock*, Martin J. Bienenstock, Paul V. Possinger, Ehud Barak, Margaret A. Dale, Michael T. Mervis, Daniel S. Desatnik, (Admitted *Pro Hac Vice*), **PROSKAUER ROSE LLP**, Eleven Times Square, New York, NY 10036, Tel: (212) 969-3000, Fax: (212) 969-2900, Email: mbienenstock@proskauer.com, ppossinger@proskauer.com, ebarak@proskauer.com, ddesatnik@proskauer.com -and- */s/ Hermann D. Bauer*, Hermann D. Bauer, USDC No. 215205, **O'NEILL & BORGES LLC**, 250 Muñoz Rivera Ave., Suite 800, San Juan, PR 00918-1813, Tel: (787) 764-8181, Fax: (787) 753-8944, Email: hermann.bau

FINANCE | TECHNOLOGY

BRENDAN MCDERMID/REUTERS

SCOTT OLSON/ GETTY IMAGES

Interest paid to Treasury bondholders is the government's third-largest expenditure, after Medicare and Social Security. Many do not think the U.S. can default, because its debt payments are made in dollars that it can create on demand.

'Bond Vigilantes' May Be Back , but Not Everyone Is Worried

FROM FIRST BUSINESS PAGE

of investors who bet on lower bond yields earlier this year.)

Since then, momentum has shifted to a remarkable degree. Several analysts say some of the frenzy reflected mistimed and mispriced bets regarding recession and future Federal Reserve policy more than fiscal policy concerns. And as inflation retreats and the Fed eventually ratchets down interest rates, they expect bond yields to continue to ease.

But even if the sell-off frenzy has abated, the issues that ignited it have not gone away. And that has intensified debates over what the government can afford to do down the road.

Under current law, growing budget deficits increase the amount of debt the federal government must issue, and higher interest rates mean payments to bondholders will make up more of the federal budget. Interest paid to Treasury bondholders is now the government's third-largest expenditure, after Medicare and Social Security.

Powerful voices in finance and politics in New York, in Washington and throughout the world are warning that the interest payments will crowd out other federal spending — in the realm of national security, government agencies, foreign aid, increased support for child care, climate change adaptation and more.

"Do I think it really complicates fiscal policy in the coming five years, 10 years? Absolutely," said the chief investment officer for Franklin Templeton Fixed Income, Sonal Desai, a portfolio manager who has bet that government bond yields will rise because of growing debt payments.

"The math doesn't add up on either side," she added, "and the reality is neither the right or the left is willing to take sensible steps to try and bring that fiscal deficit down."

Fitch, one of the three major agencies that evaluate bond quality, downgraded the credit rating on U.S. debt in August, citing an "erosion of governance" that has "manifested in repeated debt limit standoffs and last-minute resolutions."

Yet others are more sanguine. They do not think the U.S. government is at risk of default, because its debt payments are made in dollars that the government can create on demand. And they are generally less certain that fiscal deficits played the leading role in feeding inflation compared with the shocks from the pandemic.

Joseph Quinlan, head of market strategy for Merrill and Bank of America Private Bank, said in an interview that the U.S. federal debt "remains manageable" and that "fears are overdone at this juncture."

Samuel Rines, an economist and the managing director at Corbu, a market research firm, was more blunt — laconically dismissing worries that a bond vigilante response to debt levels could become such a financial strain on consumers and companies that it sinks markets and, in turn, the economy.

"If you want to make money, yawn," he said. "If you want to lose money, panic."

The debate over public debt is as fierce as ever. And it echoes, in some ways, an earlier time — when the term "bond vigilantes" first emerged.

In 1983, a rising Yale-trained economist named Ed Yardeni published a letter titled "Bond Investors Are the Economy's Bond Vigilantes," coining the phrase. He declared, to great applause on Wall Street, that "if the fiscal and monetary authorities won't regulate the economy, the bond investors will" — by viciously selling off U.S. bonds, sending the government a message to stop spending at its heightened levels.

On the fiscal side, Washington reined in spending on major social programs. (A bipartisan deal had actually been reached shortly before Mr. Yardeni's letter.) On the monetary side, the Federal Reserve began a new series of interest rate increases to keep inflation at bay.

The Treasury bond sell-off continued into 1984, but by the mid-1980s, bond yields had come down substantially. Inflation, while mild compared with the 1970s, averaged about 4 percent in the following years, a level not tolerable by contemporary standards. Yet interest payments on government debt peaked in 1991 as a share of the U.S. economy and then declined for several years.

That sequence of events may be an imperfect guide to the Treasury bond market of the 2020s.

This time around, the Peterson Foundation, a group that pushes for tighter fiscal policy, has joined with policy analysts, former public officials and current congressional leaders to push for a bipartisan fiscal commission aimed at imposing lower federal deficits. Many assert that "tough questions" and "hard choices" are ahead — including a need to slash the future benefits of some federal programs.

But some economic experts say that even with a debt pile larger than in the past, federal borrowing rates are relatively tame, comparable with past periods.

According to a recent report by J.P. Morgan Asset Management, benchmark bond yields will fall toward 3.4 percent in the coming years, while inflation will average 2.3 percent. Other analyses from major banks and research shops have offered similar forecasts.

In that scenario, the "real" cost of federal borrowing, in inflation-adjusted terms — a measure many experts prefer — would probably be close to 1 percent, historically not a cause for concern.

Adam Tooze, a professor and economic historian at Columbia University, argues that current interest rates are "not a cause for action of any type at all."

At 2 percent when adjusted for inflation, those rates are "quite a normal level," he said on a recent podcast. "It is the level that was prevailing before 2008."

In the 1990s, when bond vigilantes helped prod Congress into running a balanced budget, real borrowing rates for the government were hovering higher than they are now, mostly around 3 percent.

In the broader context of the interest rate controversy, there is disagreement on whether to even characterize U.S. debt as primarily a burden.

Stephanie Kelton, an economics professor at Stony Brook University, is a leading voice of modern monetary theory, which holds that inflation and the availability of resources (whether materials or labor) are the key limits to government spending, rather than traditional budget constraints.

U.S. dollars issued through debt payments "exist in the form of interest-bearing dollars called Treasury securities," said Dr. Kelton, a former chief economist for the U.S. Senate Budget Committee. She argues, "If you're lucky enough to own some of them, congratulations, they're part of your financial savings and wealth."

That framework has found some sympathetic ears on Wall Street, especially among those who think paying more interest on bonds to savers does not necessarily impede other government spending. While the total foreign holdings of Treasuries are roughly $7 trillion, most federal debt is held by U.S.-based institutions and investors or the government itself, meaning that the fruits of higher interest payments are often going directly into the portfolios of Americans.

David Kotok, the chief investment officer at Cumberland Advisors since 1973, argued in an interview that with some structural changes to the economy — such as immigration reform to increase growth and the ranks of young people paying into the tax base — a debt load as high as $60 trillion or more in coming decades would "not only not be troubling but would encourage you to use more of the debt because you would say, 'Gee, we have the room right now to finance mitigation of climate change rather than incur the expenses of disaster.'"

Campbell Harvey, a finance professor at Duke University and a research associate with the National Bureau of Economic Research, said he thinks "there is a lot of misinformation" about current U.S. debt burdens but made clear he views them "as a big deal and a bad situation."

"The way I look at it, there are four ways out of this," Mr. Harvey said in an interview. The first two — to substantially raise taxes or slash core social programs — are not "politically feasible," he said. The third way is to inflate the U.S. currency until the debt obligations are worth less, which he called regressive because of its disproportionate impact on the poor. The most attractive way, he contends, is for the economy to grow near or above the 4 percent annual rate that the nation achieved for many years after World War II.

Others think that even without such rapid growth, the Federal Reserve's ability to coordinate demand for debt, and its attempts to orchestrate market stability, will play the more central role.

"The system will not allow a situation where the United States cannot fund itself," said Brent Johnson, a former banker at Credit Suisse who is now the chief executive of Santiago Capital, an investment firm.

That confidence, to an extent, stems from the reality that the Fed and the U.S. Treasury remain linchpins of global financial power and have the mind-bending ability, between them, to both issue government debt and buy it.

There are less extravagant tools, too. The Treasury can telegraph and rearrange the amount of debt that will be issued at Treasury bond auctions and determine the time scale of bond contracts based on investor appetite. The Fed can unilaterally change short-term borrowing rates, which in turn often influence long-term bond rates.

"I think the fiscal sustainability discourse is generally quite dull and blind to how much the Fed shapes the outcome," said Skanda Amarnath, a former analyst at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York and the executive director at Employ America, a group that tracks labor markets and Fed policy.

For now, according to the Treasury Borrowing Advisory Committee, a leading group of Wall Street traders, auctions of U.S. debt "continue to be consistently oversubscribed" — a sign of steady structural demand for the dollar, which remains the world's dominant currency.

Adam Parker, the chief executive of Trivariate Research and a former director of quantitative research at Morgan Stanley, argues that concerns regarding an oversupply of Treasuries in the market are conceptually understandable but that they have proved unfounded in one cycle after another. Some think this time is different.

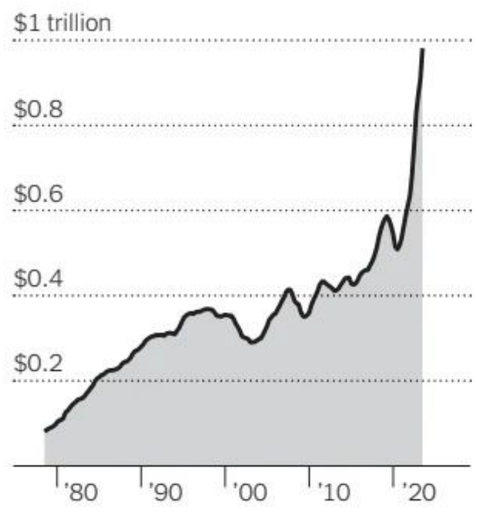
"Maybe I'm just dismissive of it because I've heard the argument seven times in a row," he said.

Federal Debt Nearly the Size of G.D.P.

Gross federal debt held by the public — the amount of interest-generating U.S. Treasury securities held by bondholders — neared peak levels relative to gross domestic product during the pandemic.

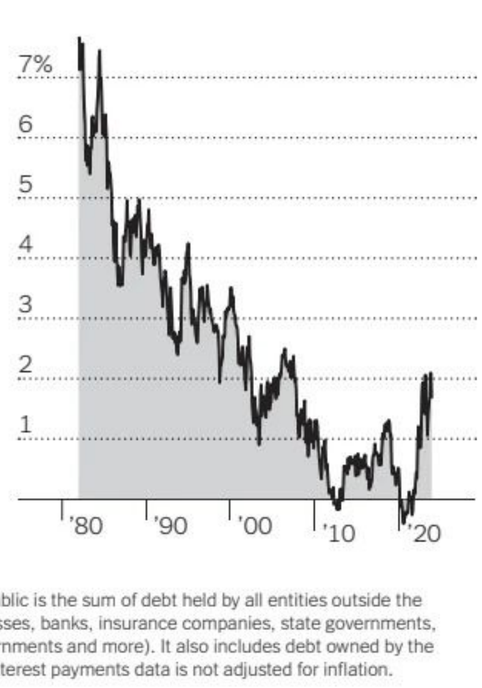
A Swift Rise in Treasury Interest Payments

Federal spending on interest payments to holders of Treasuries has taken off.



Real Government Cost of Debt Also Rose Recently

The inflation-adjusted rate for the 10-year Treasury note, a key market measure of "real" government borrowing costs, jumped well above its 2010s levels.



Notes: Gross federal debt held by the public is the sum of debt held by all entities outside the federal government (individuals, businesses, banks, insurance companies, state governments, pension and mutual funds, foreign governments and more). It also includes debt owned by the Federal Reserve. Federal spending on interest payments data is not adjusted for inflation.

IN THE UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF DELAWARE

In re: TIMBER PHARMACEUTICALS, INC., *et al.*,[1] Debtors. | Chapter 11 Case No. 23-11878 (JKS) (Jointly Administered)

NOTICE OF SALE HEARING

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE THAT on November 17, 2023, Timber Pharmaceuticals, Inc. and its debtor-affiliates (together, the "Debtors"), filed the *Debtors' Motion for Entry of Orders (I)(A) Authorizing and Establishing Bidding Procedures for the Sale of Substantially all of the Debtors' Assets; (B) Authorizing the Debtors to Enter into the Stalking Horse APA and Approving Related Stalking Horse Bid Protections; (C) Establishing Notice and Procedures Relating to the Assumption and Assignment of Executory Contracts and Unexpired Leases; (D) Scheduling an Auction and Approving the Form and Manner of Notice Thereof; (E) Scheduling a Sale Hearing and Approving the Manner and Notice Thereof; and (F) Granting Related Relief; and (II)(A) Approving the Sale of the Debtors' Assets Free and Clear of Liens, Claims, Interests, and Encumbrances, (B) Approving the Assumption and Assignment of Executory Contracts and Unexpired Leases, and (C) Granting Related Relief* ("Sale Motion") [Docket No. 3].

PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that, by the Sale Motion, the Debtors seek, among other things, to (A) sell substantially all of their assets ("Acquired Assets") and (B) assume and assign certain executory contracts and unexpired leases (the "Assumed Contracts") to the Successful Bidder free and clear of liens, claims, encumbrances and other interests pursuant to sections 363 and 365 of the Bankruptcy Code.

PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that, an asset purchase agreement (collectively with all exhibits and schedules, the "Stalking Horse APA"), dated as of November 17, 2023, has been entered into between the Debtors, as sellers, and Leo Spiny Merger Sub, Inc. and affiliates, as buyer (collectively, the "Stalking Horse Bidder") to sell the Acquired Assets.

PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that on December 15, 2023, the Bankruptcy Court entered an Order (the "Bidding Procedures Order") approving the Bidding Procedures (the "Bidding Procedures") as set forth in the Sale Motion, which set the key dates and times related to the sale of the Acquired Assets. A copy of the Bidding Procedures Order and the Bidding Procedures can be obtained by contacting counsel to the Debtors, Morris, Nichols, Arsht & Tunnel LLP, 1201 North Market Street, Wilmington, DE 19801, Attn: Eric D. Schwartz (eschwartz@morrisnichols.com)

PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that, pursuant to the terms of the Bidding Procedures, Bids for the Acquired Assets shall be accepted until **January 4, 2024 at 4:00 p.m. (ET)** (the "Bid Deadline"). A Bid received on or before the Bid Deadline that meets the requirements set forth in the Bidding Procedures shall be a "Qualified Bid."

PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that if more than one Qualified Bid is received by the Bid Deadline, the Debtors will hold an Auction on **January 8, 2024 at 9:00 a.m. (ET)** at the offices of Morris, Nichols, Arsht & Tunnel LLP, 1201 North Market Street, Wilmington, DE 19801 or virtually via telephone or video conference pursuant to information timely provided by the Debtors to the Auction Participants (as defined in the Bidding Procedures). Only the Debtors, the Stalking Horse Bidder, the DIP Lender, any Qualified Bidders who have submitted Qualified Bids, any creditor who has requested to attend the Auction in compliance with the Bidding Procedures, and their representatives and counsel may attend the Auction. If no Qualified Bids are received by the Debtors by the Bid Deadline, no Auction will be held, and the Debtors will seek approval of the Stalking Horse APA at the Sale Hearing (as defined below).

PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that the Debtors shall file and serve a Notice of the Successful Bid and Successful Bidder no later than one business day after the close of the Auction, if an Auction is held, or no later than one business day after the Bid Deadline, if no Auction is held. If you would like to be served with a Notice of the Successful Bid and Successful Bidder via e-mail, please provide notice of such request by emailing or calling counsel to the Debtors, Morris, Nichols, Arsht & Tunnel LLP, 1201 North Market Street, Wilmington, DE 19801, Attn: Eric D. Schwartz (eschwartz@morrisnichols.com).

PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that a hearing will be held to approve the sale of the Acquired Assets to the Successful Bidder (the "Sale Hearing") before the Honorable J. Kate Stickles at the United States Bankruptcy Court for the District of Delaware, 824 North Market Street, 5th Floor, Courtroom #6, on **January 19, 2024 at 10:00 a.m. (ET)**, or at such time thereafter as counsel may be heard or at such other time as the Bankruptcy Court may determine. The Sale Hearing may be adjourned from time to time without further notice to creditors or parties in interest other than by filing a notice on the Court's docket for these Chapter 11 Cases.

PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that objections to a Sale of the Assets, including any general objections to the Sale and objections to the Sale of any Assets free and clear of all liens, claims, interests, and encumbrances pursuant to section 363(f) of the Bankruptcy Code to the Stalking Horse Bidder, a Successful Bidder or a Backup Bidder, and excluding objections relating to the conduct of the Auction, the Auction results, the selection of any Successful Bid and/or Backup Bid, or the terms of any Sale to a Successful Bidder and/or Backup Bidder (each, an "Initial Sale Objection"), must: (i) be in writing; (ii) conform to the applicable provisions of the Bankruptcy Rules and the Local Rules for the United States Bankruptcy Court for the District of Delaware; (iii) state with particularity the legal and factual basis for the objection and the specific grounds therefor; and (iv) be filed with the Clerk of the United States Bankruptcy Court for the District of Delaware at 824 N. Market St, Wilmington, DE 19801 and served so as to be received no later than **January 4, 2024 at 4:00 p.m. (ET)** (the "Initial Sale Objection Deadline"), by (1) the Debtors, c/o Morris, Nichols, Arsht & Tunnel LLP, 1201 North Market Street, Wilmington, DE 19801, Attn: Eric D. Schwartz (eschwartz@morrisnichols.com); and (2) counsel for the DIP Lender, (a) Covington & Burling LLP, 620 8th Avenue, New York, NY 10018, Attn: Dianne Coffino (dcoffino@cov.com) and Martin Beeler (mbeeler@cov.com); and (b) Cole Schotz P.C., 500 Delaware Ave., Suite 1410, Wilmington, DE 19801, Attn: Patrick J. Reilley (preilley@coleschotz.com) (collectively, the "Objection Notice Parties").

PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE THAT objections relating solely to the conduct of the Auction, the Auction results, the selection of any Successful Bid or Backup Bid, or the terms of any Sale to a Successful Bidder or a Backup Bidder, which could not have been raised by the Initial Sale Objection Deadline (each, a "Successful Bid Objection"), must (a) be in writing, (b) comply with the Bankruptcy Code, Bankruptcy Rules, and Local Rules, (c) state with specificity the grounds for such objection, and (d) be filed with the Court and served on the Objection Notice Parties on or before **January 16, 2024, at 4:00 p.m. (ET)** (the "Successful Bid Objection Deadline").

CONSEQUENCES OF FAILING TO TIMELY FILE AND SERVE OBJECTION: ANY PARTY OR ENTITY WHO FAILS TO TIMELY FILE AND SERVE AN OBJECTION TO THE SALE ON OR BEFORE THE RESPECTIVE OBJECTION DEADLINE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE BIDDING PROCEDURES ORDER MAY BE FOREVER BARRED AND ESTOPPED FROM ASSERTING ANY OBJECTION TO THE SALE, INCLUDING WITH RESPECT TO THE TRANSFER OF THE PROPERTY FREE AND CLEAR OF LIENS CLAIMS, ENCUMBRANCES AND OTHER INTERESTS AFFECTED THEREUNDER.

PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that the Bidding Procedures Order contemplates a process to assume and assign Assumed Contracts after the Sale Hearing. To the extent that the Debtors intend to assume and assign an Assumed Contract, such counterparty will receive a separate notice consistent with the Bidding Procedures Order approved by the Bankruptcy Court.

PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that this Notice of Sale Hearing is subject to the full terms and conditions of the Sale Motion, Bidding Procedures Order, and Bidding Procedures, which shall control in the event of any conflict and the Debtors encourage parties in interest to review such documents in their entirety. A copy of the Sale Motion may be obtained from Morris, Nichols, Arsht & Tunnel LLP, 1201 North Market Street, Wilmington, DE 19801, Attn: Eric D. Schwartz (eschwartz@morrisnichols.com).

PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE THAT IF YOU DO NOT PROPERLY FILE AND SERVE AN OBJECTION OR OTHER RESPONSE TO THE SALE MOTION BY THE OBJECTION DEADLINE, THE COURT MAY GRANT THE RELIEF REQUESTED IN THE MOTION WITHOUT FURTHER NOTICE OR HEARING.

Dated: December 16, 2023, Wilmington, Delaware, Respectfully submitted, **MORRIS, NICHOLS, ARSHT & TUNNELL LLP**, */s/ Scott D. Jones* , Eric D. Schwartz (No. 3134), Andrew R. Remming (No. 5120), Tamara K. Mann (No. 5643), Scott D. Jones (No. 6672), 1201 Market Street, 16th Floor, Wilmington, Delaware 19801, Telephone: (302) 658-9200, Facsimile: (302) 658-3989, Email: eschwartz@morrisnichols.com, aremming@morrisnichols.com, tmann@morrisnichols.com, sjones@morrisnichols.com, *Proposed Counsel to the Debtors and Debtors in Possession*

[1] The Debtors in these Chapter 11 Cases, along with the last four digits of their U.S. federal tax identification number, are Timber Pharmaceuticals, Inc. (3182), Timber Pharmaceuticals LLC (3698), and BioPharmX Inc. (5554). The Debtors' headquarters is located at 3 Mountain View Road, Suite 100, Warren, New Jersey 07059.

PUBLIC NOTICE: To the Taliban a/ka/ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan: Plaintiffs Charlyn F. Selig et al. ("Plaintiffs") have filed suit against the Taliban in the United States District Court for the District of Columbia, Case No. 23-cv-0236, Charlyn F. Selig et al. v. Taliban a/k/a Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, for its role in perpetrating the terrorist attacks on the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul, Afghanistan on January 20 and January 21, 2018 (the "Intercontinental Hotel Attack") and on the Park Palace Hotel in Kabul, Afghanistan on May 13 and May 14, 2015 (the "Park Palace Hotel Attack"), together ("Hotel Attacks"). This is a notice that the complaint, summons, and notice of suite that have been filed. Public copies of these papers are available at: www.HNKlaw.com/seligvtaliban

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Figma's Chief Laments Failed Adobe Deal

By MICHAEL J. de la MERCED

Among the several deals that have fallen apart recently, Adobe's $20 billion takeover of Figma, an upstart design software maker, is among the most instructive.

The companies had promised it was a way to "usher in a new era of collaborative creativity," but regulators in three jurisdictions saw it as an unacceptable effort by a software giant to buy a promising future rival. To Dylan Field, Figma's chief executive, that contrast underscored a fundamental divide between how businesses and regulators think of competition.

"It's frustrating and sad that we're not able to complete this," Mr. Field said in his first interview since companies announced its demise on Monday.

The deal's end is another feather in antitrust enforcers' caps. Both the European Commission and Britain's Competition and Markets Authority were preparing to formally challenge the transaction. The Justice Department — which met with Adobe and Figma representatives last week — had been weighing whether to oppose it as well.

"It is important in digital markets, as well as in more traditional industries, to not only look at current overlaps but to also protect future competition," Margrethe Vestager, the head of the European Commission's competition policy, said after the deal's demise was announced.

Mr. Field argued repeatedly that the deal would have enabled his company to create more offerings, but said on Monday that "ultimately there is some gap between how regulators understand our business and how we understand our business."

By the weekend, it became clear the deal couldn't succeed. In recent weeks, "we both have seen how the path has been narrowing," Mr. Field said, and abandoning the transaction would provide more clarity and certainty to employees and customers.

In hindsight, Mr. Field said that the enforcement climate was different now than when the companies announced their plan in September 2022.

Regulators' opposition to the Adobe deal means that Figma probably won't be able to find another buyer, Mr. Field acknowledged, and the company would remain independent.

INTERNATIONAL

Debt Is a Global Quandary, and Old Remedies Are Being Questioned

FROM FIRST BUSINESS PAGE

created. But the latest critiques pose a more profound question: Does the economic framework devised eight decades ago fit the economy that exists today, when new geopolitical conflicts collide with established economic relationships and climate change poses an imminent threat?

This 21st-century clash of ideas about how to fix a system created for a 20th-century world is one of the most consequential facing the global economy.

The I.M.F. was set up in 1944 at a conference in Bretton Woods, N.H., to help rescue countries in financial distress, while the World Bank's focus was reducing poverty and investing in social development. The United States was the pre-eminent economic superpower, and scores of developing nations in Africa and Asia had not yet gained independence. The foundational ideology — later known as the "Washington Consensus" — held that prosperity depended on unhindered trade, deregulation and the primacy of private investment.

"Nearly 80 years later, the global financial architecture is outdated, dysfunctional and unjust," António Guterres, secretary general of the United Nations, said this summer at a summit in Paris. "Even the most fundamental goals on hunger and poverty have gone into reverse after decades of progress."

The world today is geopolitically fragmented. More than three-quarters of the current I.M.F. and World Bank countries were not at Bretton Woods. China's economy, in ruins at the end of World War II, is now the world's second largest, an engine of global growth and a crucial hub in the world's industrial machine and supply chain. India, then still a British colony, is one of the top five economies in the world.

The once vaunted "Washington Consensus" has fallen into disrepute, with a greater recognition of how inequality and bias against women hamper growth, as well as the need for collective action on the climate.

The mismatch between institution and mission has sharpened in recent years. Pounded by the Covid-19 pandemic, spiking food and energy prices related to the war in Ukraine, and higher interest rates, low- and middle-income countries are swimming in debt and facing slow growth. The size of the global economy as well as the scope of the problems has grown immensely, but funding of the I.M.F. and World Bank has not kept pace.

ANITA POUCHARD SERRA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A fruit and vegetables shop in Almagro in Buenos Aires. Argentina's economy is South America's second largest.

Resolving debt crises is also vastly more complicated now that China and legions of private creditors are involved, instead of just a handful of Western banks.

The World's Bank's own analyses outline the extent of the economic problems. "For the poorest countries, debt has become a nearly paralyzing burden," a report released last week concluded. Countries are forced to spend money on interest payments instead of investing in public health, education and the environment.

And that debt doesn't account for the trillions of dollars that developing countries will need to mitigate the ravages of climate change.

Then there are the tensions between the United States and China, and Russia and Europe and its allies. It is harder to resolve debt crises or finance major infrastructure without bumping up against security concerns — like when the World Bank awarded the Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei a contract that turned out to violate U.S. sanctions policy, or when China has resisted debt restructuring agreements.

"The global rules-based system was not built to resolve national security-based trade conflicts," Gita Gopinath, first deputy managing director of the I.M.F., said last week in a speech to the International Economic Association in Colombia. "We have countries strategically competing with amorphous rules and without an effective referee."

The World Bank and I.M.F. have made changes. The fund has moderated its approach to bailouts, replacing austerity with the idea of sustainable debt. The bank this year significantly increased the share of money going to climate-related projects. But critics maintain that the fixes so far are insufficient.

"The way in which they have evolved and adapted is much slower than the way the global economy evolved and adapted," Mr. Guzmán said.

'Time to Revisit Bretton Woods'

Argentina, South America's second-largest economy, may be the global economic system's most notorious repeat failure, but it was Barbados, a tiny island nation in the Caribbean, that can be credited with turbocharging momentum for change.

Mia Mottley, the prime minister, spoke out two years ago at the climate change summit in Glasgow and then followed up with the Bridgetown Initiative, a proposal to overhaul the way rich countries help poor countries adapt to climate change and avoid crippling debt.

"Yes, it is time for us to revisit Bretton Woods," she said in a speech at last year's climate summit in Egypt.

Ms. Mottley argues that there has been a "fundamental breakdown" in a longstanding covenant between poor countries and rich ones, many of which built their wealth by exploiting former colonies.

Mavis Owusu-Gyamfi, the executive vice president of the African Center for Economic Transformation, in Ghana, said that even recent agreements to deal with debt like the 2020 Common Framework were created without input from developing nations.

NATHALIA ANGARITA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The current system 'contributes to a more inequitable and unstable global economy.'

Martín Guzmán, former finance minister for Argentina.

"We are calling for a voice and seat at the table," Ms. Owusu-Gyamfi said, from her office in Accra, as she discussed a $3 billion I.M.F. bailout of Ghana.

Yet if the fund and bank are focused on economic issues, they are essentially political creations that reflect the power of the countries that established, finance and manage them.

And those countries are reluctant to cede that power. The United States, the only member with veto power, has the largest share of votes in part because of the size of its economy and financial contributions. It does not want to see its influence shrink and others' — particularly China's — grow.

The impasse over reapportioning votes has hampered efforts to increase funding levels, which countries across the board agree need to be increased.

'Big Hole' in How to Deal With Debt

Still, as Mr. Guzmán said, "even if there are no changes in governance, there could be changes in policies."

Emerging nations need enormous amounts of money to invest in public health, education, transport and climate resilience. But they are saddled with high borrowing costs because of the market's often exaggerated perception of the risk they pose as borrowers.

And because they are usually compelled to borrow in dollars or euros, their payments soar if central banks raise interest rates to combat inflation as they did in the 1980s and after the Covid pandemic.

The proliferation of private lenders and variety of loan agreements have made debt negotiations impossibly complex, yet no international legal arbiter exists.

Zambia defaulted on its external debt three years ago, and there is still no agreement because the I.M.F., China and bondholders are at odds.

There's a "big hole" in international governance when it comes to sovereign debt, said Paola Subacchi, an economist at the Global Policy Institute at Queen Mary University in London, because the rules don't apply to private loans, whether from a hedge fund or China's central bank.

Mr. Guzmán and other economists have called for an international legal arbiter to adjudicate disputes related to sovereign debt.

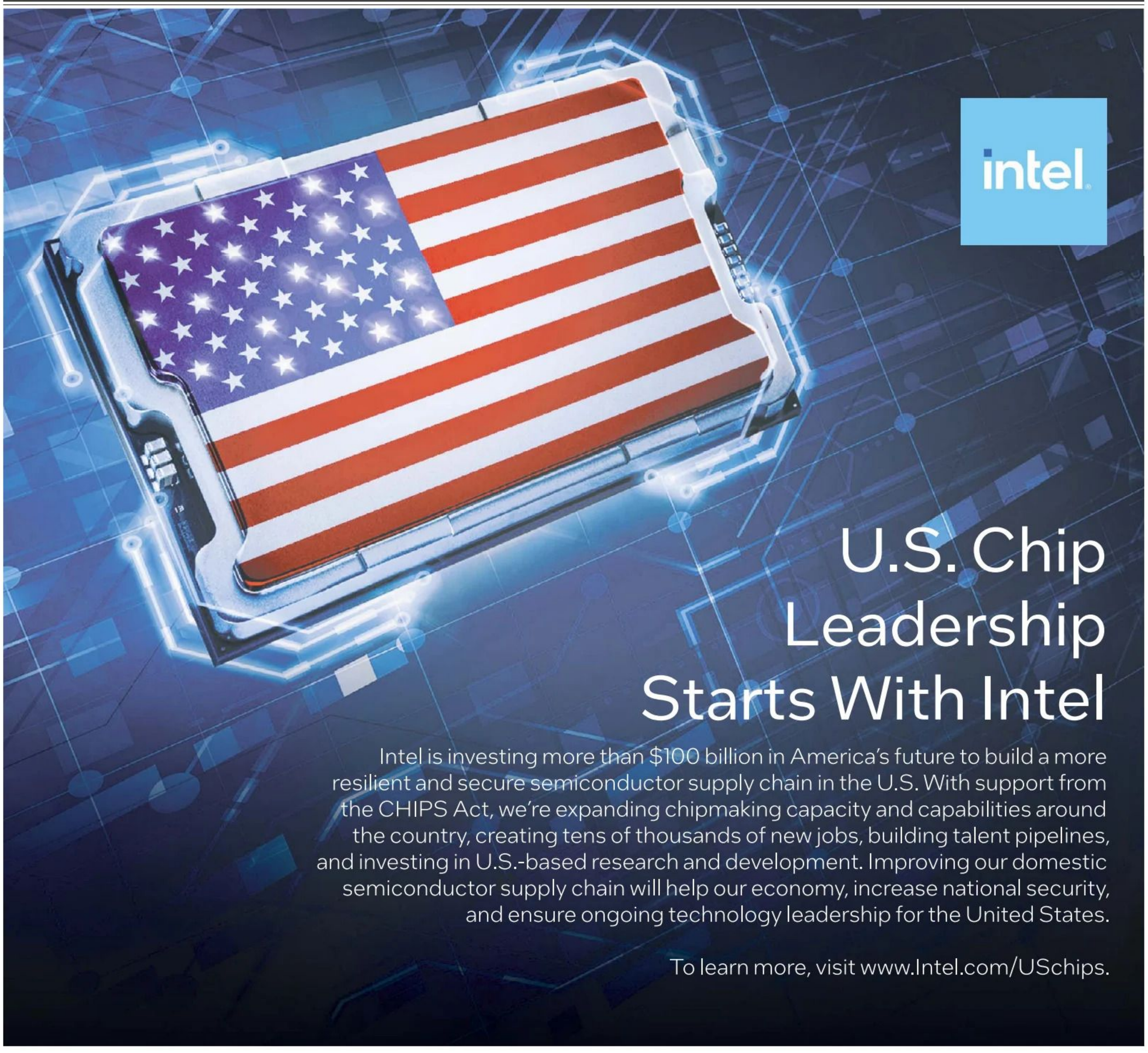
"Every country has adopted a bankruptcy law," said Joseph Stiglitz, a former chief economist at the World Bank, "but internationally we don't have one."

The United States, though, has repeatedly opposed the idea, saying it is unnecessary.

Rescues, too, have proved to be problematic. Last-resort loans from the I.M.F. can end up adding to a country's budgetary woes and undermining the economic recovery because interest rates are so high now, and borrowers must also pay hefty fees.

Those like Mr. Guzmán and Ms. Mottley pushing for change argue that indebted countries need significantly more grants and low-interest loans with long repayment timelines, along with a slate of other reforms.

"The challenges are different today," said Mr. Guzmán. "Policies need to be better aligned with the mission."



INTERNATIONAL | LITIGATION

Anti-L.G.B.T.Q. Law Hurts Business in Uganda

FROM FIRST BUSINESS PAGE

signed in late May, President Biden and leaders around Europe threatened sanctions that Uganda, which has an economy that lags in size behind those of Libya and Sudan, can ill afford. Within weeks, 60 of Mr. Azarwagye's 89 potential clients, most from either Europe or the United States, had canceled their plans or stopped returning messages.

"They ghosted me," he said, noting that he typically secures paying customers out of two-thirds of all inquiries. "A few who spoke to me explained, 'It's not safe to come to Uganda because of that law.'"

Since the passage of the Anti-Homosexuality Act of 2023, as the law is officially known, there have been arrests and hundreds of human rights violations involving L.G.B.T.Q. people, according to a report by Convening for Equality, a coalition of human rights groups. Gay and transgender people have been evicted by landlords, as required by the law. And fear is keeping gay and transgender patients from health clinics, which are obliged by the law to report them to the police.

More quietly, the law is exacting a grim economic toll.

The hospitality industry is hurting, hoteliers say. Textile makers say buyers in the United States and Europe have canceled orders, fearing that a "Made in Uganda" label on a garment is now bad for business. Construction companies in Uganda say Western financial backers are spooked.

"We had a face-to-face meeting with an American private equity firm, and one of the guys, who runs the firm, made clear he had a moral problem with the law," said Venugopal Rao, the chief executive of Dott Services, a construction company in Kampala, the capital of Uganda, that recently sought about $100 million in loans. "We could get money for our projects in Tanzania and in the Democratic Republic of Congo. But not Uganda."

Animosity toward gay people runs deep in this landlocked East African country of 49 million people. A poll conducted in 2022 by Afrobarometer, a nonpartisan research network, found that Ugandans were highly tolerant of people of different ethnicities and religious backgrounds, but highly intolerant of gay people. Close to 97 percent said they favored laws that criminalized homosexuality, and 94 percent of Ugandans said they would report a gay family member or friend to the police.

Business leaders and politicians trace Uganda's intolerance of L.G.B.T.Q. people to the markedly conservative strains of Catholicism and evangelicalism that dominate the country.

"This is a Christian country, and especially the African Christians have a different view about homosexuality," said Herbert Byaruhanga of the Association of Uganda Tour Operators.

He was explaining why his organization didn't lobby against the Anti-Homosexuality Act or issue a news release on the topic. There wasn't time to analyze the law before its passage, he said, but even if he had weeks to study each word, resistance would have been pointless because the law is immensely popular.

"We couldn't stand against the culture of Uganda," he said.

The country's longtime president, Yoweri Museveni, is the wild card in this entire matter. He has run Uganda with an autocratic grip for nearly four decades, and in testimony sent to the International Criminal Court, he has been accused of torturing and killing dissidents in the 2021 election.

He has publicly contended that gays undermine peace and stability and called them "disgusting" in a CNN interview.

'It's so bad that no court could uphold it.'

Andrew Mwenda, a journalist on why the Anti-Homosexuality Act's passing is ultimately good.

But several confidants, including Andrew Mwenda, a journalist who is also a spokesman for the president's son, say the president is primarily a pragmatist who worries about the state of the economy and hates the idea of Uganda's being seen as a pariah.

Mr. Mwenda and others have filed petitions against the Anti-Homosexuality Act, hoping that the courts will rule it unconstitutional or toss it out on a technicality. In 2014, a bill nicknamed "Kill the Gays" was nullified by the courts on the narrow ground that it passed without a quorum.

A spokesman for the president did not respond to messages.

Uganda's Constitutional Court held a hearing about the Anti-Homosexuality Act on Monday, and some observers believe a decision could come before the end of the year or early in January.

"This is the best law that Parliament could have passed," Mr. Mwenda said. "You know why? Because it's so bad that no court could uphold it."

Unfounded Rumors

More than half of Africa's 54 countries have anti-gay laws. Proponents of the laws regard them as a way to toss off a vestige of colonial rule and combat what they see as the decadent mores of the West. On the day of the Anti-Homosexuality Act vote, the Parliament speaker, Anita Annet Among, proclaimed, "The Western world will not come to rule Uganda."

Uganda has had an antisodomy law since 1950, passed during the era of British rule, that punishes homosexuality with life in prison. Britain liberalized its sodomy statutes in 1967, but in Uganda, starting in the early 2000s, right-wing Christians coalesced into a political force that regarded homosexuality as a baleful influence on culture.

The anti-L.G.B.T.Q. movement went quiet in Uganda after the demise of the "Kill the Gays" law, smarting from the loss and fumbling for a strategy to regain momentum. Three years ago, the issue began to once again inch into the national conversation.

Gay activists lay much of the blame on two groups: Family Life Network in Uganda and Family Watch International, an evangelical organization in Gilbert, Ariz.

Family Watch is led by Sharon Slater, who has pushed for conversion therapy for gay people and has been involved with what the group calls "family-centered" policy in Africa since 2002.

"Ugandans are very homophobic, but they won't act on it unless someone reawakens it," said Frank Mugisha, who leads Sexual Minorities Uganda, a gay rights group that was shut down in August of last year. "Family Life Network and Family Watch rejuvenated the movement."

Family Life Network did not respond to requests for comment. A spokeswoman for Family Watch, Lynn Allred, said in an email that the group's opponents "make up stuff and hope it's perpetuated by disreputable reporters." The group posted a lengthy "get the facts" page on its website, stating that it never lobbied for the Anti-Homosexuality Act and is, in fact, opposed to it.

Mr. Mugisha says the rejuvenation began at the National Prayer Breakfast held in Parliament in 2020, when a lawmaker suggested that an anti-gay law should be resurrected. Soon afterward, highly inflammatory stories about L.G.B.T.Q. people began to bubble up and multiply on social media. One unfounded rumor was hammered at over and over: Gay teachers were assaulting and "recruiting" students.

Homosexuality quickly became synonymous with pedophilia.

Uganda receives billions of dollars in annual aid and tax breaks from several sources, and some announced retaliatory action after the Anti-Homosexuality Act became law. The World Bank said it would not start any new projects in the country, stating in a press release that it wanted to "protect sexual and gender minorities from discrimination and exclusion in the projects we finance."

In late October, the U.S. State Department warned about the reputational risks of doing business in the country. More recently, it expanded a list of Ugandan officials who are restricted from visiting the United States.

The United States curtailed direct aid, and on Jan. 1 Uganda is scheduled to be removed from the African Growth and Opportunity Act, which provides tariff-free access to U.S. markets for sub-Saharan countries.

These measures are intended as punishment, but some Ugandan politicians think they have an upside.

This includes James Nsaba Buturo, a soft-spoken, 73-year-old former minister of ethics, who sat in his office in Parliament one recent afternoon with a Bible and a copy of the rules of procedure on his desk.

"The good books," he said.

He thinks that cutting back foreign aid might cure Uganda of its perennial corruption problem.

The logic goes like this: If there is less money coming into the country, those who steal from the public coffers will think twice because the consequences of that theft will be more dire.

"When the World Bank threatened us, I was very happy," he said. "What we steal from ourselves is worth three times more than what we get from other countries. This is a chance for us to get our house in order."

Blowback from the Anti-Homosexual Act is already squeezing the Ugandan economy, though the extent of the pain will become clearer in the coming months.

The country has been growing in recent years, said Corti Paul Lakuma, a senior research fellow at the Economic Policy Research Center in Uganda. There was double-digit growth in gross domestic product in the 2000s, and 6 percent growth from 2010 to 2019.

He believes the success stems from improvements in infrastructure and steps to privatize the banking industry. The country is also safer.

"In the '80s, you needed to be indoors by 7 p.m. Otherwise you might get killed," Mr. Lakuma said. "This is a 24-hour country now."

Long term, he is optimistic about Uganda, in part because he thinks that the Anti-Homosexuality Law will be struck down by the courts.

Others believe that the threat of sanctions and penalties has made it difficult for judges to overturn the law without seeming to have caved to foreign pressure.

Regardless, the country may already be serving as a warning to other African countries that are considering anti-gay laws. A lawmaker in Kenya has proposed a draconian one, but political observers say it's unlikely that Parliament will pass it or that it could get through the country's relatively independent judiciary.

And the broader trends in Africa are heading in the direction of tolerance. Six countries in Africa have legalized same-sex relationships in the last decade.

Uganda risks becoming an outlier.

This pains Mr. Azarwagye, the owner of the safari company. In early December, he moved his office out of the city, in part for cheaper rent.

"No one has been in touch," he said of the customers who stopped communicating with him this summer. "Most people who ghost you, they go on holidays to neighboring countries, like Kenya."

STUART TIBAWESWA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

"They ghosted me," Simon Azarwagye said of the customers who abandoned their travel plans to Uganda this year.

STUART TIBAWESWA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Medical centers that provide health care to L.G.B.T.Q. patients have seen fewer people since the anti-gay law passed.

ABUBAKER LUBOWA/REUTERS

ABUBAKER LUBOWA/REUTERS

Uganda's Parliament, above right, led by the speaker, Anita Annet Among, above left. "The Western world will not come to rule Uganda," she said on the day of the law's vote. Below, the skyline of Kampala, Uganda's capital. Blowback is already squeezing the country's economy, though the extent is unknown.

STUART TIBAWESWA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Monsanto Told to Pay $857 Million

By JESUS JIMÉNEZ

A jury in Washington State decided on Monday that Monsanto should pay $857 million to former students and parent volunteers who said they had been exposed at a school to dangerous chemicals made by the company and later became sick, according to court records.

The Superior Court jury in Seattle said Monsanto must pay $73 million in compensatory damages and $784 million in punitive damages to five students who had attended Sky Valley Education Center in Monroe, Wash., northeast of Seattle, and two parents who had volunteered there.

The former students and parents said that they had become sick from chemicals known as polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, that had leaked from light fixtures at the school, according to Henry Jones, a lawyer for the plaintiffs. The chemicals in the fixtures were made by Monsanto, which Bayer bought in 2018.

The verdict, which will be reviewed by a judge, would add to billions of dollars in similar amounts awarded by juries that have troubled Bayer in the years since its Monsanto acquisition.

Mr. Jones said in an email on Monday after the verdict, "No one who heard this evidence would ever change places with any of these people in exchange for all the money the jury awarded."

Monsanto said in a statement on Monday that it planned to appeal to overturn the verdict and challenge the "constitutionally excessive damages awarded."

"The objective evidence in this case, including blood, air and other tests, demonstrates that plaintiffs were not exposed to unsafe levels of P.C.B.s, and P.C.B.s could not have caused their alleged injuries," the company said.

The plaintiffs include former students and parent volunteers who were at the Sky Valley Education Center starting in 2005, according to court documents. They claim they suffered neurological, neurophysiological, endocrine and autoimmune issues after being exposed to chemicals at the school, according to court documents.

Light fixtures leaked dangerous chemicals made by the company.

The Monroe School District, which includes the Sky Valley Education Center, in Washington State did not immediately respond to requests for comment on Monday afternoon.

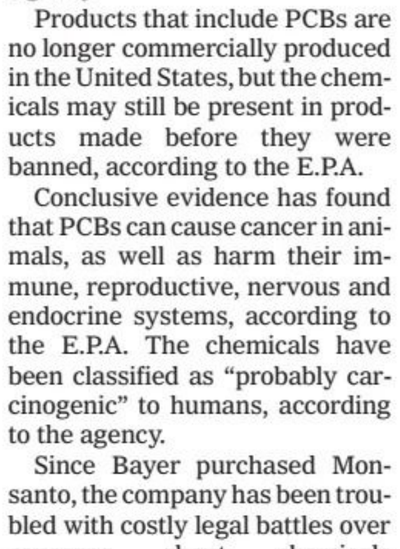
PCBs were once regularly found in commercial products and industrial equipment, such as lighting, until they were banned in the United States in 1979 amid concerns that they harmed people and the environment, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

Products that include PCBs are no longer commercially produced in the United States, but the chemicals may still be present in products made before they were banned, according to the E.P.A.

Conclusive evidence has found that PCBs can cause cancer in animals, as well as harm their immune, reproductive, nervous and endocrine systems, according to the E.P.A. The chemicals have been classified as "probably carcinogenic" to humans, according to the agency.

Since Bayer purchased Monsanto, the company has been troubled with costly legal battles over concerns about chemicals produced by Monsanto, such as Roundup, the weed killer.

Bayer agreed to pay $10 billion in 2020 to settle claims that Roundup caused cancer, one of the largest of such settlements. The company has said that it has set aside an additional $6 billion for ongoing lawsuits and others that could be filed later.



TED S. WARREN/ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Sky Valley Education Center in Monroe, Wash., where several people were sickened by chemicals.

ENERGY | AVIATION

REUTERS

The Suez Canal is a major route for energy shipping. Tankers coming from Iraq and Saudi Arabia travel through the Red Sea to reach Europe.

The Red Sea Crisis May Affect Oil Prices

By STANLEY REED

Energy companies like BP and shipping companies that transport crude oil have stopped sending some tankers through the Red Sea to avoid the threat of drone and missile attacks by the Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen. Rerouting the vessels would add delays and extra costs to journeys, putting upward pressure on oil prices.

Brent crude, the international oil benchmark, has risen about 8 percent since mid-December, to above $79 a barrel. But the move has only partly reversed a monthslong slide in the price of oil, which hovered above $90 a barrel in September and early October.

A vital route for energy is at risk.

The Suez Canal and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait at either end of the Red Sea are major routes for energy shipping. Tankers coming from Persian Gulf countries like Iraq and Saudi Arabia travel through the Red Sea to reach Europe. These vessels have become even more important recently, because the war in Ukraine and sanctions against Russia have made Europe more dependent on oil and refined products like diesel and gasoline from the Middle East and Asia. Russian oil flows southward to India and other Asian markets have also surged.

Goldman Sachs estimates that seven million barrels a day of oil and products, a sizable volume, flow through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. The Suez Canal is also a crucial route for liquefied natural gas shipments from the United States to Asia, an increasingly important route.

The main alternative to the Red Sea, a journey around Africa via the Cape of Good Hope, adds about two weeks to trips, increasing freight and insurance rates and raising the price of crude oil by up to $4 a barrel, Goldman estimates.

Why haven't oil prices risen more?

The situation in the Red Sea seems more likely to cause the rerouting and delay of oil supplies than the shutdown of wells. More oil, for instance, could travel to Europe from ports on the Red Sea in western Saudi Arabia, bypassing the need to cross the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.

In addition, analysts say the Houthis seem unlikely to intentionally attack ships connected to countries they view as politically friendly, including those from Russia and Qatar.

Until recently, oil prices were on a downward trajectory, as traders calculated that there was plenty of supply in the world. The United States is pumping oil at record levels, and Europe has loaded up its natural gas storage facilities for the winter. At the same time, analysts say, oil demand growth in the coming months may be weak because of economic problems in China and a warm early winter.

Traders have been burned betting that geopolitical events like Russia's invasion of Ukraine would disrupt oil flows; they may not want to risk money on such wagers at this point.

Efforts to reopen the route could reduce pressure on prices.

On Tuesday, the United States explained what officials said would be a stepped-up military presence in the Red Sea, with participation of other countries like Britain and Bahrain. Whether it will be enough to deter the Houthis remains to be seen. So far, the effort does not seem to be adding much to existing firepower, analysts say.

The big question is whether shipowners and energy companies will be convinced that Red Sea crossings are safe. "Vessel owners will be cautious until it is clear the situation is stabilized and risks reduced," said Richard Bronze, head of geopolitics at Energy Aspects, a research firm.

F.A.A. to Assess Fatigue Of Air Traffic Controllers

By EMILY STEEL and SYDNEY EMBER

The Federal Aviation Administration is planning to form a panel to look into the potential risks posed by exhaustion among air traffic controllers, many of whom have been working round-the-clock schedules that have pushed them to the physical and emotional brink.

The F.A.A. expects to announce more details about the three-member panel on Wednesday, said Jeannie Shiffer, a spokeswoman for the agency.

Michael Whitaker, the F.A.A. administrator, said at a news conference at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport on Tuesday that "as far as fatigue goes, we're taking this issue very seriously."

"We're looking at launching a group to examine fatigue among air traffic controllers in the very short term to identify if there are risks," he said, "and if there are, we will act accordingly to mitigate those risks."

The F.A.A. is creating the panel in the wake of a New York Times investigation this month that revealed how a nationwide shortage of air traffic controllers had resulted in an exhausted and demoralized work force that was increasingly prone to making dangerous mistakes.

The Times reported that virtually all of the nation's air traffic control sites were understaffed, forcing many controllers to work 10-hour days, six days a week.

Mr. Whitaker said on Tuesday that the F.A.A. was trying to address the staffing shortage. "We know we need more air traffic controllers," he said. "We're working hard to hire from a variety of sources and keep them moving through the training pipeline."

Investigations published by The Times this year showed how the nation's vaunted aviation safety system, while still remarkably safe, was under mounting stress. Potentially dangerous close calls have been happening, on average, multiple times a week this year. Some air traffic controllers say they fear that a deadly crash is inevitable.

Errors by air traffic controllers have been one major factor. In the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, there were 503 air traffic control lapses that the F.A.A. preliminarily categorized as "significant," 65 percent more than in the prior year, according to internal agency reports reviewed by The Times. During that period, air traffic increased about 4 percent.

In November, a group of outside experts appointed by the F.A.A. called for "urgent action" to address safety risks in the nation's aviation system, highlighting issues like air traffic control staffing and outdated technology.

In response to the Times articles, lawmakers and industry representatives have called on the F.A.A. to address the shortage in air traffic controllers.

"The air traffic controller staffing shortage is a real safety crisis," Senator Tammy Duckworth, Democrat of Illinois, said in a statement following publication of the Times investigation on air traffic controllers.

Senator Ted Cruz, Republican of Texas, said in a statement, "Widely respected aviation experts are warning us that failure to solve these human capital issues could prove catastrophic."

On Tuesday, Senator Jeanne Shaheen, Democrat of New Hampshire, sent a letter to Mr. Whitaker, urging the agency "to thoroughly review measures in place to address controller fatigue, burnout and general physical and mental well-being."

She said The Times's descriptions of exhausted controllers "reflect a dire level of occupational stress that imperils the health of every controller employed by the F.A.A. and jeopardizes the safety of America's traveling public. These accounts must be treated seriously and met with a focused effort to address unsustainable controller workload and increase mental health resources and support."

At the news conference on Tuesday, which came as the holiday travel crush gets underway, Mr. Whitaker said safety was paramount at the agency.

"We will make sure that safety is always above efficiency," he said.

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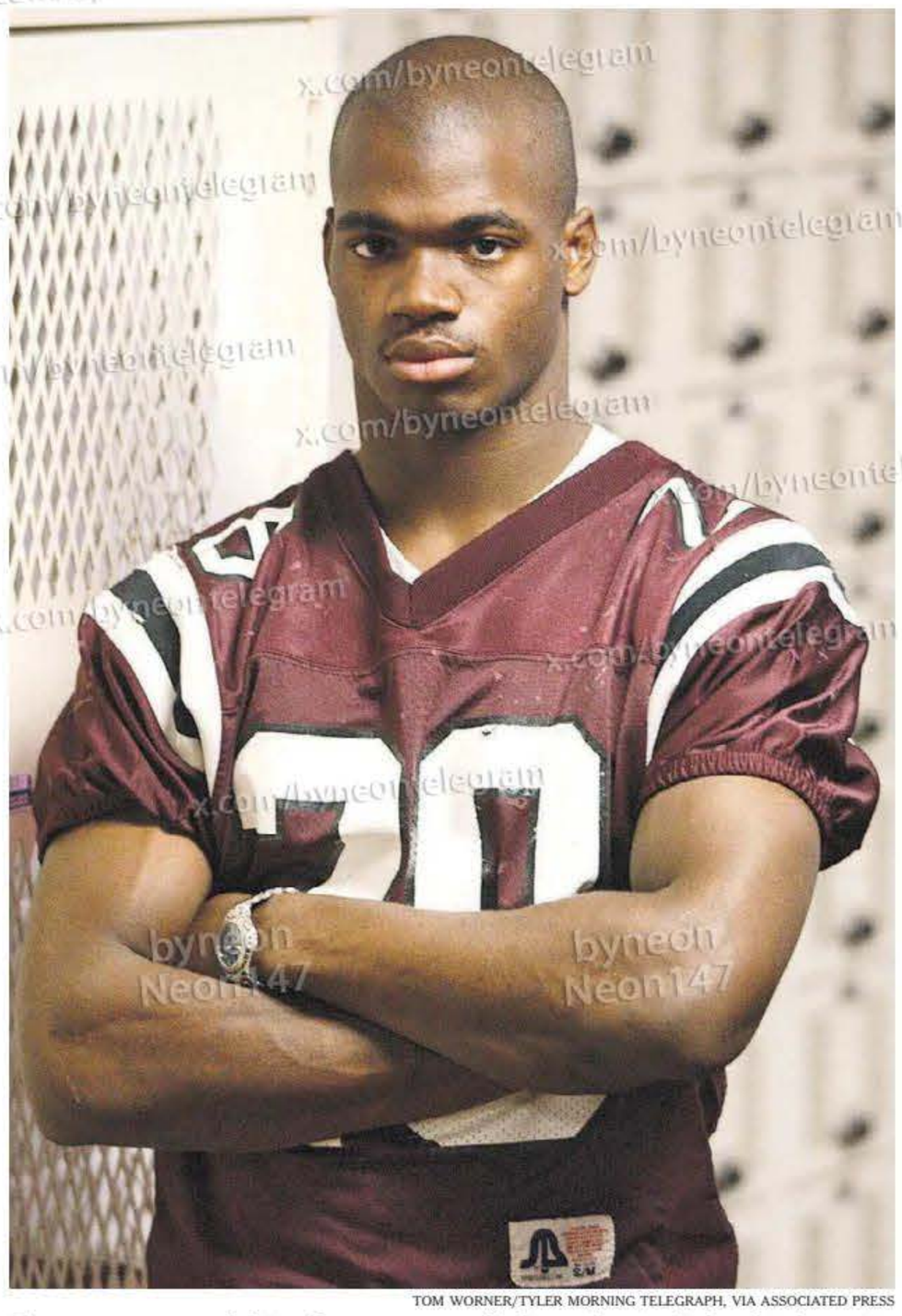


TOM WORNER/TYLER MORNING TELEGRAPH, VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

Twenty years ago, Adrian Peterson was called a can't-miss high school recruit.

To land Peterson, coaches took unprecedented measures, and visited his father in prison.

By CHAD GRAFF
The Athletic

The private plane was mostly quiet. There was a nervous energy for the three University of Oklahoma football coaches onboard. They had never done what they were about to do.

It was Dec. 1, 2002, the first day coaches were allowed to visit high school juniors for recruitment. A day earlier, those coaches had been on the sideline as Oklahoma lost to Oklahoma State, effectively dashing their hopes of appearing in the Bowl Championship Series national title game. But on this one-hour flight, they had other concerns.

As the plane neared Texarkana, Texas, they talked about how none of them had ever been to a prison on a recruiting visit. "All I could relate it to was what I saw on TV and in the movies," said Cale Gundy, who was Oklahoma's running backs coach. "We just didn't know what it would be like."

Still, Adrian Peterson was worth it. So the coaches headed to the federal prison where Adrian's father, Nelson, was incarcerated.

That flight started one of the wildest recruitments ever, a whirlwind two years during which the top college football programs in the nation battled for Peterson's commitment. It included a brief period when it was thought Peterson might skip college altogether and go straight to the N.F.L.

Peterson eventually made it there, and played 15 seasons. He was the N.F.L.'s most valuable player in 2012 after coming back from an anterior cruciate ligament tear. In 2014, he pleaded no contest to a misdemeanor charge of recklessly assaulting his son; he had used a switch to discipline the 4-year-old. He was put on probation, fined $4,000 and required to do 80 hours of community service. The N.F.L. suspended him, but he returned in 2015 and won his third rushing title.

But before that, he was a coveted high school standout who arrived just as recruiting rankings were rising in popularity. Now, those rankings are a part of the fabric of college football, evidenced by the excitement over the early signing period, which begins Wednesday.

Peterson was one of the first can't-miss, No. 1 prospects in the modern recruiting era, drawing coaches to tiny Palestine in East Texas and to a federal prison.

Gundy said, "We knew it was going to be a battle all the way for him."

'I've Never Seen Anything Like Him'

Jeff Harrell arrived at Palestine High School as the defensive coordinator of the football team and head track coach when Adrian Peterson was a sophomore. Peterson wasn't on the varsity football team that year because he was academically ineligible. So Harrell did not work with Peterson until the track season that spring. Peterson's mother, Bonita, had been a track star; his father had been a college basketball player.

After the school's first track workout, Harrell decided to have Peterson run on the team's 4x100-meter relay team in addition to the 100- and 200-meter individual events. Harrell taught relay runners to stand 15 steps behind their starting mark to allow time to gather the baton from the previous runner while getting up to top speed. But when Peterson started running, the sprinters behind him with the baton couldn't catch him. So

Continued on Page B10

JERRY LAIZURE/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Oklahoma's Career Rushing Yards Leaders

PLAYER	YARDS
1 **Samaje Perine**	4,122
2 **Billy Sims**	4,118
3 **Joe Washington**	4,071
4 **Adrian Peterson**	4,045
5 **Steve Owens**	4,041

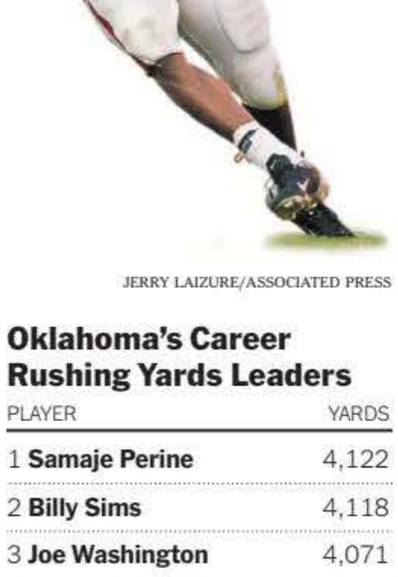
Source: Oklahoma 2023 Football Media Guide
THE NEW YORK TIMES

HANNAH FOSLIEN/GETTY IMAGES

N.F.L.'s Career Rushing Yards Leaders

PLAYER	YARDS
1 **Emmitt Smith**	18,355
2 **Walter Payton**	16,726
3 **Frank Gore**	16,000
4 **Barry Sanders**	15,269
5 **Adrian Peterson**	14,918

Source: Pro Football Reference
THE NEW YORK TIMES



TY RUSSELL/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Above, Peterson's father after his release from prison. Right, with his mother and brother as he signed with Oklahoma.

DAVID BRANCH/TYLER MORNING TELEGRAPH, VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHARLIE RIEDEL/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Peterson taking a handoff during his freshman season from the reigning Heisman winner, Jason White.

BASKETBALL

COMMENTARY

Top Draft Prize Could Turn Out To Be Fool's Gold

By JOHN HOLLINGER
The Athletic

So does anyone here want to be the No. 1 pick?

As N.B.A. scouts made the journey through Atlanta and Auburn, Ala., last weekend to see potential lottery picks from the University of Kentucky and the University of Southern California, the chatter among league observers was how soft the top of the 2024 N.B.A. draft looked. If anything, the early-season play has left evaluators even more disappointed in the current crop of one-and-dones. As a result, there is little to no consensus regarding the top of the board.

On Sunday, scouts put eyes on one potential top pick, Southern California's Isaiah Collier, as the Trojans played a rare game east of the Mississippi River, against a strong Auburn squad. Southern California got smoked, and Collier was . . . OK. In 18 foul-plagued minutes, he scored 13 points and showed an ability to get downhill easily, especially going to his left. He showed off his strong frame; defenders were bouncing off him in traffic.

> The race for No. 1 is wide open, but will anyone truly win?

On the other hand, a bully-ball guard as the top pick stands as a pretty light endorsement for the rest of the draft class. And Collier isn't exactly wart-free. Turnovers continue to be his nemesis: He had four miscues Sunday and was averaging an eye-popping 8.3 per 100 possessions. Collier's figure would be the highest turnover rate of any legitimate prospect at any position, based on recent drafts. The only player who was close to that and turned into a decent N.B.A. player would be Cade Cunningham, who turned it over 7.0 times per 100 in his lone season at Oklahoma State, and even he has been a disappointment as the draft's top pick in 2021.

Collier's shooting also looms as a question mark. He corkscrews to his left as he gets into his jumper, which can make it difficult for him to square up on the move. Additionally, his stroke isn't consistent, with the arc varying from attempt to attempt. Collier was shooting 68.2 percent from the line and 33.3 percent from 3 through 10 games.

It would be easy to knock Collier down to the middle of the first round. But what player are you putting ahead of him? Scouts struggled to answer that question a day earlier watching Kentucky's heralded recruiting class against North Carolina in Atlanta. (The day also featured a numbing undercard in which U.C.L.A. and Ohio State combined to shoot 2 of 24 from 3 before the game mercifully ended without overtime.)

Kentucky had three of the top six players in this recruiting class, but none have screamed "high lottery pick." The best of the bunch might be Aaron Bradshaw. A skinny 7-footer, Bradshaw, playing in some of his first action since returning from an off-season foot injury, scored 12 points in 21 minutes as Kentucky beat North Carolina. He showcased a good outside stroke, ran the floor well and seemed mobile defensively. On the other hand, he also got pushed around in the paint and didn't show much offensive facility beyond catch-and-shoots and dunks. After missing some of the big November matchups, when scouts usually get their first impressions, he'll be evaluated heavily through the Southeastern Conference season.

Kentucky had two other highly touted freshmen: the 6-foot-7 small forward Justin Edwards and the 6-3 guard D.J. Wagner. Wagner had one of his best games Saturday, including an impressive left-handed scoop finish to complete an and-1, and finished with 14 points, 6 rebounds and 5 assists. On the other hand, he projects as a volume scorer at the next level and hasn't shot the ball well from the perimeter. If he can't play point guard, he'll be severely undersized on the wing.

Edwards has the size and athleticism of an N.B.A. small forward, but hasn't accomplished much on the court. Offensively, his shooting is a work in progress, and he defaults to two-dribble, 2-point pull-ups. His low rates of assists and steals make it easy to question his feel.

Thus, the question among draftniks is whether Kentucky's two best prospects are undersize guards coming off the bench, even if they don't fit the prototype for players typically selected highly in the draft.

Rob Dillingham is tiny (generously listed at 6-2, with a small frame) and possibly flammable on defense, but is also shooting 46.5 percent from 3 and averaging 33.3 points, 10.4 assists and 3.5 steals per 100 possessions. He scored 17 on Saturday, but needed 16 shots to get there.

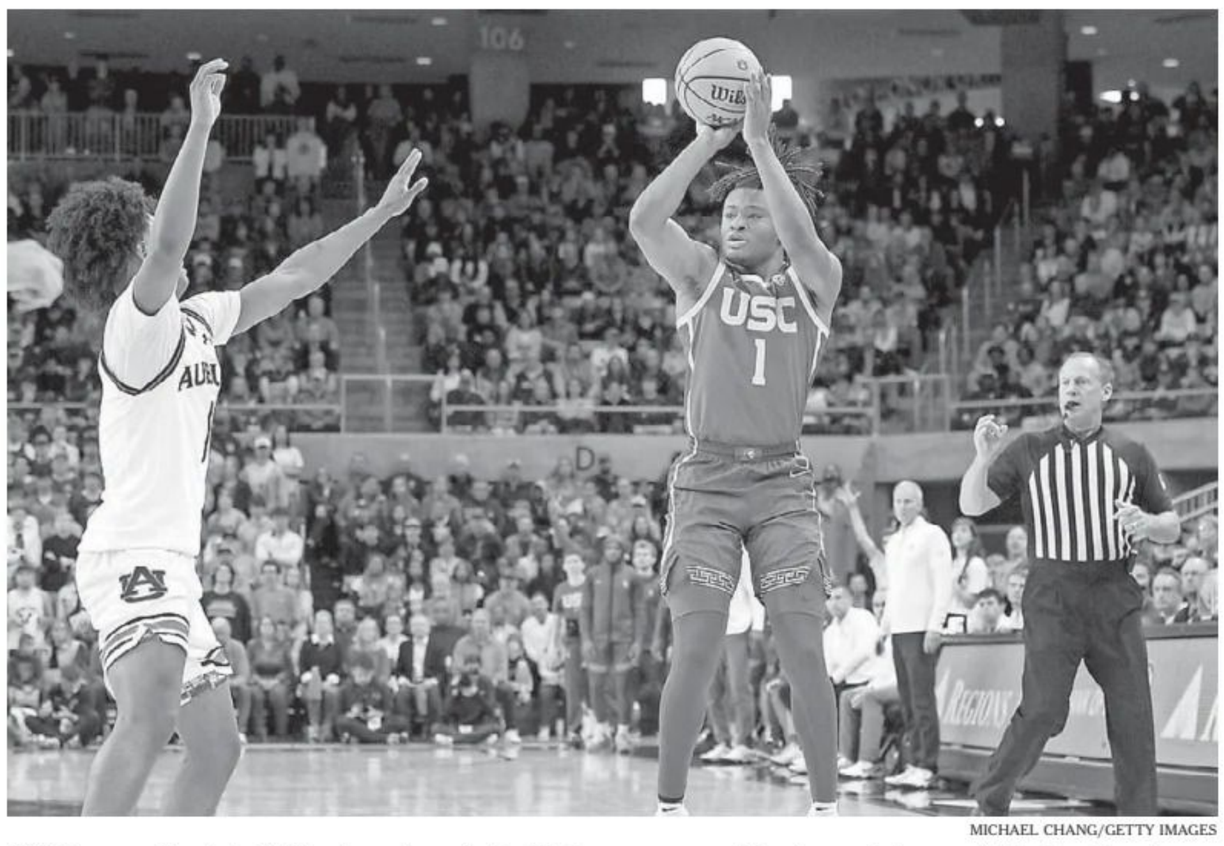
Next to him, Reed Sheppard is 6-3 and not really a point guard, but has insane shooting statistics thus far (57.1 percent from 3 and 93.3 percent from the line) and a hair-trigger release. Additionally, his defensive playmaking wizardry has been eye-opening. Through 10 games, he has 29 steals and nine blocks; he's averaging 7.7 "stocks" (steals plus blocks) per 100 possessions.

The focus was on Kentucky and Southern California over the weekend because those schools have the best college prospects, but the scouting caravan will stay in the South until Friday to watch the N.B.A. G League Winter Showcase in Orlando, Fla.

Two G League Ignite wings — Ron Holland and Matas Buzelis — were on top of many draft boards this summer, but they have been up and down. If those two fail to impress, the race for No. 1 is truly wide open. Could it be the international mystery man Nikola Topic? The French center Alex Sarr, currently playing in Australia? Or is another name going to come in from left field? (Keep an eye on UConn's Stephon Castle.)

The horrific starts by a few N.B.A. teams (take a bow, Detroit Pistons) mean there is no surefire lottery prize at the end of the rainbow. As the college season heads into conference play, this still looks like one of the weakest draft classes in years.

John Hollinger is a senior N.B.A. writer for The Athletic.



MICHAEL CHANG/GETTY IMAGES

U.S.C. guard Isaiah Collier has struggled with turnovers and the inconsistency of his shooting form.

BRYNN ANDERSON/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Aaron Bradshaw, a Kentucky 7-footer, has shown skill but has been pushed around in the paint.

W.N.B.A. Is Adding Tournament For 2024

By BEN PICKMAN and SABREENA MERCHANT
The Athletic

The W.N.B.A. will play 40 games during the 2024 regular season for just the second time, in a season that will feature a revamped Commissioner's Cup and a break for the Paris Olympics.

The league's schedule, released on Monday, will kick off on May 14, five days earlier than the 2023 season started.

The Commissioner's Cup will become an in-season tournament, and all games will count toward each team's regular-season win-loss record. The tournament's championship will be played on June 25, 2024, with a prize pool of $500,000.

"The newly designed, concentrated structure for this in-season tournament adds an increased sense of urgency and excitement as we place a particular spotlight on Eastern and Western Conference Commissioner's Cup play in a two-week window near the tip-off of our regular season," W.N.B.A. Commissioner Cathy Engelbert said in a statement.

For the fourth iteration of the Commissioner's Cup, each team will play five games, instead of 10, with one game against every other team in the conference. That will lead to an unbalanced schedule in which some teams will play three home and two road games in the group stage, and others will play two home and three road games.

Every W.N.B.A. game from June 1 through June 13 will be a Cup game, leading to the final on June 25 between the winners of each conference group.

The condensed schedule of the Commissioner's Cup might evoke the N.B.A.'s scheduling of its in-season tournament, with a shorter group stage and specific nights featuring only cup games. But the changes were probably motivated by the need for the W.N.B.A. to accommodate the Olympics in its schedule.

Nevertheless, the new setup should serve to highlight the Cup games, which sometimes blend in with the rest of the regular season, and increase variance in the outcomes, so the league's top two seeds are not guaranteed to meet in the final.

The last night of regular-season W.N.B.A. action before the Olympic break will be July 17, with the All-Star Game scheduled for July 20. The regular season will resume on Aug. 15.

Despite the hiatus, each team will play 40 games for the second consecutive year. To make the dates work, the regular season will start and end earlier than it did last year. It will conclude, with all 12 teams in action, on Sept. 19; last year's season ended Sept. 10.

Opening night will feature the Washington Mystics against the New York Liberty, the Connecticut Sun versus the Indiana Fever, the Seattle Storm against the Minnesota Lynx, and the reigning champion Las Vegas Aces versus the Phoenix Mercury.

The Aces will face the team they beat in the finals, the Liberty, for the first of three scheduled matchups on June 15 in Las Vegas. The two teams will also meet on Aug. 17 in Las Vegas and Sept. 8 in New York.

Another highlight of the schedule is a game for the Sun in Boston at TD Garden, home of the N.B.A.'s Celtics. The Sun will face the Los Angeles Sparks on Aug. 20.

The schedule frequently features teams playing two games in three days, often with a travel day in between. The first of 22 total back-to-backs on the schedule will be May 19 and 20, when the Storm play in Washington on a Sunday afternoon, and then travel to play the Liberty the next night. Three teams — the Mercury, the Liberty and the Sun — play three back-to-backs during the year, and the Atlanta Dream do not play any.

Ben Pickman and Sabreena Merchant cover women's basketball for The Athletic.

SARAH STIER/GETTY IMAGES

A'ja Wilson with the M.V.P. trophy after the Las Vegas Aces won the championship.

BASEBALL

His New Team Is Like His Old Team, but With More Money

By FABIAN ARDAYA
The Athletic

Pitcher Tyler Glasnow knew this much: He was going to be traded this off-season. Such is the life cycle of a Tampa Bay Rays player set to make $25 million next season. The list of clubs involved in talks to acquire the right-hander was extensive: the Cubs, the Reds, the Angels. But to land with the Los Angeles Dodgers?

"It worked out best-possible scenario," Glasnow, a native of Santa Clarita, Calif., said on Monday as the ink dried not only on the trade — which sent Glasnow and outfielder Manuel Margot to Los Angeles in exchange for pitcher Ryan Pepiot and outfielder Jonny DeLuca — but also on a five-year, $136.5 million contract extension, which features $110 million guaranteed in new money.

The Dodgers and Rays had been engaged on Glasnow, 30, for much of the winter, narrowing their focus in recent weeks. He is 6 feet 8 inches and has as tantalizing an arsenal as anyone in baseball. As those discussions intensified, the Dodgers' priorities became clear.

If they were going to give up Pepiot, 26, a right-hander penciled into their rotation with five years of club control left, they were going to need to ensure Glasnow was around long-term. Likewise, if they were going to give up DeLuca, 25, with his six years of cost control remaining, they were going to want the Rays to kick in some of the money on Margot's remaining deal as well. (The Rays will send $2 million to cover Margot's $10 million salary next season, and an additional $2 million to cover a buyout if the Dodgers decline Margot's $12 million club option for 2025.)

Fabian Ardaya covers the Dodgers for The Athletic.

JOHN RAOUX/ASSOCIATED PRESS

After being traded by the Rays, Tyler Glasnow signed a $136.5 million extension with Los Angeles.

The talks came together quickly. Los Angeles, Glasnow said, was "somewhere I've wanted to be my entire life." He grew up an hour from Dodger Stadium (or three, he joked, depending on traffic), arriving late and leaving early but staying long enough to admire the swing of Shawn Green or the arm of a young Clayton Kershaw.

He had set a number with his agent, Joel Wolfe of Wasserman, but added, "It's never really been about making as much as I possibly can." While his parents have moved to Arizona, Southern California remains his home. Teammates and friends throughout the game vouched for the Dodgers and their front office.

"It's such a similar feel to the Rays," Glasnow said of a front office that has plenty of ties to his former home. "I guess the only difference is that the Dodgers have a lot more money."

> The Dodgers bet big on Glasnow's upside despite his arm issues.

A video from Shohei Ohtani, two-way star turned recruiter, didn't hurt. Ohtani "thinks very highly" of Glasnow, General Manager Brandon Gomes said, making the quick request a no-brainer.

"It definitely added a lot of points for me to go to the Dodgers," Glasnow said. "I think his recruitment worked."

So too did a market-rate extension, one that tacked on $110 million over the next four years to the $25 million he was owed next season (for luxury tax purposes, $10 million of that was converted to a signing bonus). That, plus a dual option that allows the Dodgers to exercise a $30 million club option or Glasnow to pick up a $21.5 million player option for 2028, is a weighty bet on upside, particularly for a pitcher who has never topped 120 innings in a season and is a couple of years removed from Tommy John surgery.

It is just the sixth $100 million contract the Dodgers have given to a pitcher, but the second one this winter. Ohtani's was the other. Both have troubling histories with their elbows, an added risk factor.

But Glasnow and Gomes argued that the right-hander's health issues came from his recurring trouble with that surgically repaired ligament. The problems started with an ulnar collateral ligament sprain in 2019, an issue that recurred in 2021 and eventually required surgery. Keith Meister, an orthopedic surgeon based in Texas, performed a "hybrid procedure," Glasnow said, which included a synthetic collagen band aimed at reinforcing the new ligament.

"So in my brain, I have double the strength," Glasnow said. An innings restriction in 2023, along with some tweaks, from mechanical adjustments to where he stands on the rubber, helped.

His workload for 2024, a year after he made a career-most 21 starts, will be fluid, Gomes said. After all, he was acquired for what he could provide in October as well as to help the Dodgers get through the regular season. The club is finding creative ways to manage Walker Buehler's workload after his second Tommy John surgery and has floated the possibility of a delayed start to his season. There remains a chance that Dustin May will be a part of the mix in the latter half of the season after undergoing surgery in July to repair his flexor tendon and revise his Tommy John procedure. If Kershaw opts to return to Los Angeles, he wouldn't be back until at least midseason after undergoing shoulder surgery.

Timing out the health of those arms is an imperfect science, and that's partly why the Dodgers remain in the market for starting pitching even after acquiring Glasnow. As the club was completing its deal for Glasnow, the Dodgers met with the Japanese right-hander Yoshinobu Yamamoto at Dodger Stadium. Yamamoto, who is also represented by Wolfe, has met twice with the Mets and the Yankees, though the Dodgers remain among the front-runners for his services. Should they land him, he would inevitably be their third $100 million arm of the winter.

HOCKEY

Unraveling the Swift, Unexpected Decline of One of the Greatest to Play

By SHAYNA GOLDMAN
The Athletic

Fifteen goals. Alex Ovechkin is on pace to finish the 2023-24 season with only 15 goals.

Ovechkin, who sits second on the list of all-time scorers in the N.H.L., has never finished a season with a measly 15 goals. He's never fallen below the 20-goal marker, not even in condensed seasons. And now, for the first time in his career, he's gone 13 straight games without a goal. The five goals he has at this point aren't even that impressive — only three were scored with a goaltender in the net.

Even if the 38-year-old Ovechkin is far removed from his prime, this is a stark, unexpected decline for one of the greatest goal scorers of all time. So, what's behind the drop-off? Is this harsh reality the new normal? Is there a chance he can turn it around in the second half of the season?

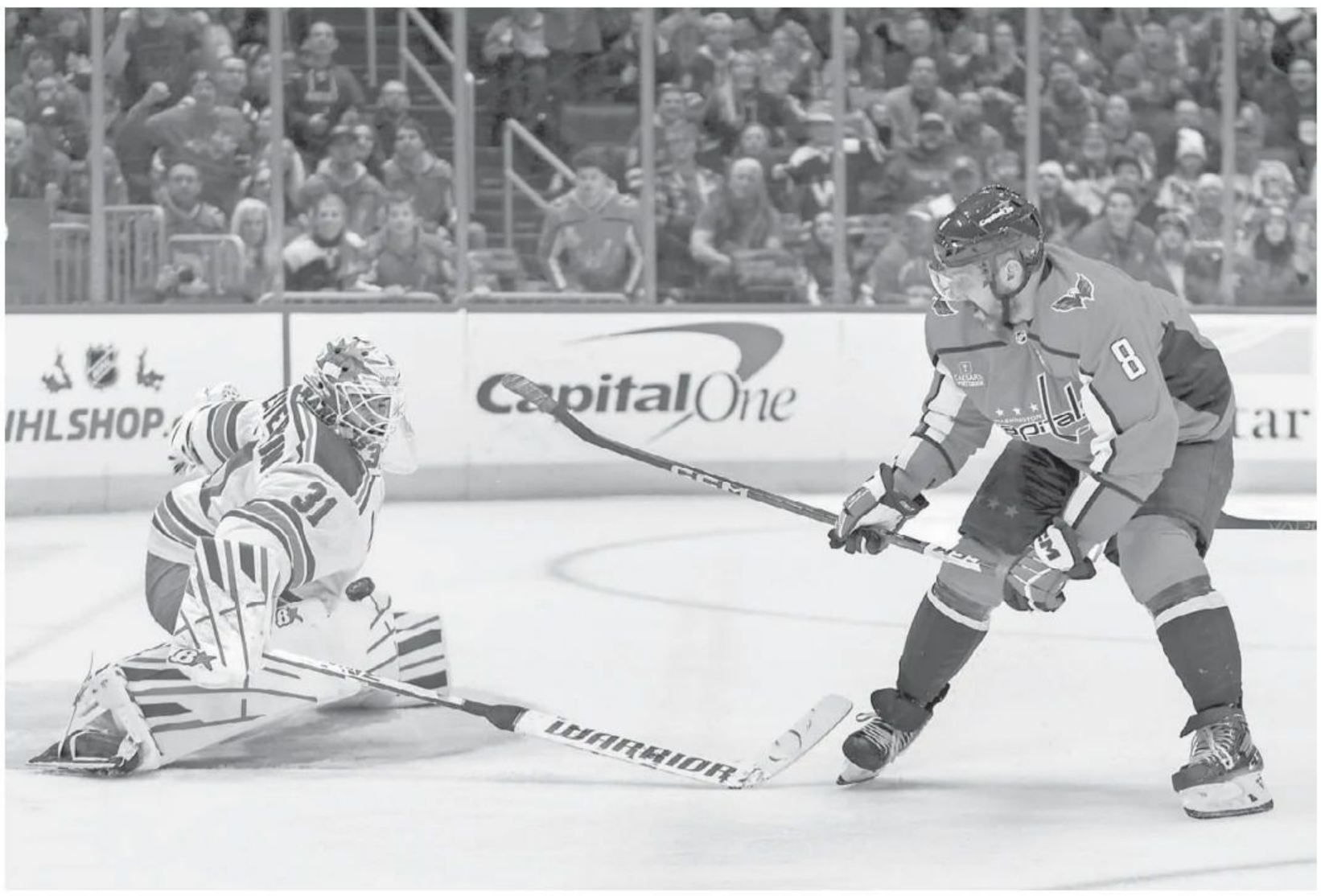
Aging curves tell us that players tend to peak in their early-to-mid-20s and start to decline in their 30s, with a sharp downtick in their late 30s.

There can be outliers and randomness in aging curves, and that usually centers on elite talent. Their peak tends to be so high that their eventual trend down can still be above-average. That, paired with the fact that power-play scoring tends to age better than even-strength production, should, in theory, work in Ovechkin's favor. So should the fact that volume shooters tend to age better than snipers. It just hasn't been the case this season.

The power-play aspect is particularly glaring since that's where Ovechkin tends to do a lot of his damage. About 37 percent of his goals per season, on average, have come on the power play. At his best, power-play scoring has made up 50 percent of his goal totals. This year, with just one tally on the power play, it accounts for a career-low 20 percent of his scoring. That's a dip of more than 10 percent from each of the past two seasons.

Ovechkin has converted on only 2.6 percent of his shots on the power play, through Saturday's game, when he's generally closer to about 15 percent. That should regress closer to average and lead to more goals — especially since his shot rate isn't much lower than last year's, when he managed 14 power-play goals. In fact, the quality of his shots is better than last year's by his expected goals rate. Based on the quality of his shots, before even accounting for his shooting talent, he would be expected to be closer to five goals on the power play.

Shayna Goldman covers the N.H.L. for The Athletic.



STEPHANIE SCARBROUGH/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Washington's Alex Ovechkin couldn't get the puck past Rangers goaltender Igor Shesterkin on Dec. 9. At 38, Ovechkin has converted on 2.6 percent of his shots on the power play through Saturday's game. He's generally closer to about 15 percent.

JAMES GUILLORY/USA TODAY SPORTS

About 30 percent of Ovechkin's unblocked attempts have missed the net, which is relatively low compared with years past. But one difference is just how much opponents are blocking his shots. Before, penalty killers couldn't afford to overcommit to Ovechkin even though he was the team's biggest threat on the power play.

This season, the Capitals' power-play formation has been predictable, with fewer options than in the past. A lack of fluid movement and too much stagnant standing in formation hurts Washington. So does the obvious strategy of trying to feed Ovechkin for his patented one-timer.

Slap shots aren't used as much in today's game because it's pretty easy for players to read the setup, and in Ovechkin's case, that can mean waiting while his stick is in the air ready to rip. But with the right pass to precede it, it can be one of the toughest shots to stop. That pre-shot movement is essential to the danger of a shot. It's difficult for a goaltender to react to one that's set up by a lateral cross-seam pass.

What makes Ovechkin's attempts less dangerous now is where that set-up pass often comes from. Whether he's deployed with the first or second unit, he's typically teed up from the point, by either John Carlson or Rasmus Sandin.

Compare that to last year. Of Ovechkin's 15 power-play goals last season, 11 were one-timers. While six were set up from centralized passes from the point, another five were perched by a lateral pass. As dangerous as his one-timer is, those shots aren't as lethal as they could be because of the set-up pass.

But Ovechkin's scoring woes extend beyond the power play. He has just one five-on-five goal this season. Here, a lowly shooting percentage bites him again at 1.85 percent, when his career average is around 11. And there are other concerning trends, including career lows (since 2007-8) in shot volume and expected goal generation. A higher percentage of his shots have missed the net compared to last year, and more have been blocked by opponents, too.

In addition to personal declines that should be anticipated at this point in his career, the team around him is influencing his start. It's not unrealistic to think that at age 38, even someone of Ovechkin's caliber would need more support to play to his potential. Surrounding him with high-caliber passers may be the key to sustaining his success.

But according to Corey Sznadjer's tracking, Ovechkin's primary centers have been moving the puck less. Dylan Strome and even Evgeny Kuznetsov have seen downticks in their passing to set up their teammates' shots and scoring chances, and there isn't a playmaking winger on this roster who can skate across Ovechkin to make up for that. That may explain why his shot and scoring chance numbers are down relative to last year in his isolated minutes with both Strome and Kuznetsov.

Ovechkin has scored only three times against a goaltender.

What does this mean for Ovechkin's chase of Wayne Gretzky for the all-time goal-scoring record?

Some areas in Ovechkin's game should regress closer to average. He shouldn't shoot at 5 percent all year, and he could get closer to his career average of 12.8 if he can keep firing the puck at a high rate. As it stands, he's the 10th most frequent shooter in the league in all situations. And he has the fourth biggest differential between his actual goal total and expectations, behind only Matthew Tkachuk, Josh Anderson and John Tavares. It all bodes well for a more productive stretch ahead.

But even if Ovechkin's pace picks up, he's lost so much ground through the first third of the season. And there's no guarantee that pace will reach the rate he needs to stay on track for the scoring record. The roster support just isn't there to make up for the individual declines, and stamina could be a problem down the stretch. He's been less physical this season, which may preserve him from that wear and tear, and his average ice time is down to a career-low 18:22 in all situations. But an 82-game slate is a grind.

Aging is inevitable, and no player, not even the greats like Ovechkin, is immune to that. The race for goal number 894 to tie the record isn't lost just yet — but a start this slow to this season makes the next 67 goals seem all the more daunting.

FOOTBALL

Extraordinary Measures For a Can't-Miss Player

From First Sports Page

Harrell had Peterson move to 10 steps behind the starting mark. Then five.

"That didn't work," Harrell said.

So Peterson was told to stand at the starting mark until he received the baton. Harrell feared a collision. But each time, Peterson grabbed the baton and sprinted away so fast that, somehow, it worked.

"I remember going home every day and telling my wife, 'I've got this kid and I've never seen anything like him in my life,'" Harrell said.

Peterson ran a 10.6-second 100-meter dash that year. He set a personal best of 10.26 seconds two years later, a time so fast that if it weren't for football, Harrell said, Peterson could have been an Olympian.

Peterson ran for 5,011 yards in his two varsity seasons. He averaged 11.7 yards per carry as a senior. He had 32 touchdowns. And he rarely played after halftime because his team was so dominant.

"I didn't let him play any more than we needed and didn't let him return any kicks or play defense," Harrell said.

When Peterson's high school career finally came to an end during a playoff loss his senior year, Harrell was filled with relief more than disappointment. "I just thought: Thank God I got through this and he didn't get hurt," Harrell said.

A Prison Visit Pays Off

At the Federal Correctional Institution Texarkana, guards guided the coaches to a picnic table in a courtyard. Nelson Peterson came out and was joined by Bonita, Adrian and one of Adrian's younger brothers. They talked about academics at Oklahoma (Nelson at one point had been committed to play basketball there) and the football program. Aside from the location, it was a normal recruiting visit.

"We sat out at that picnic table in the facility for a couple of hours," Coach Bob Stoops said. "They were fantastic to be with and visit with."

Adrian Peterson told a few schools how important it was to ensure his father was involved in the recruiting process. Nelson Peterson had been convicted on federal charges of laundering money acquired from the distribution of crack cocaine.

"We had gone through all kinds of red tape for a couple months leading up to being allowed to get in and visit with them," Stoops said. "So after that, other people tried."

But because of all the logistics, it was difficult for other recruiters to get in. Southern California tried unsuccessfully to meet with Nelson. And while Adrian Peterson liked Coach Pete Carroll and his assistant Ed Orgeron, he wanted his father to be able to watch his college games, which would have been tough if he chose Southern California. So Orgeron got resourceful.

"I tried to get the guy transferred" to a prison in Los Angeles, Orgeron said on "The Dan Patrick Show" last year. "Yeah, I tried. Couldn't get it done, but I competed."

In the spring of 2003, Peterson visited Oklahoma for the first time. The Sooners were two years removed from a national championship and were coming off a win in the Rose Bowl. They had no reason to change their shotgun offense that had resulted in so much success. But before the spring practice that Peterson attended, Gundy, the running backs coach, went over to the offensive coordinator, Chuck Long, and told him: There's this recruit, and he needs to see us running out of the I-formation. That's his specialty.

"Well, we didn't have any I-formation stuff," Long said.

But he quickly installed a few new plays they could run in front of Peterson.

On Jan. 3, 2004, the Sooners were in their team hotel in New Orleans. It was the night before their B.C.S. national championship game against Louisiana State. They were wrapping up a team meeting when quarterback Jason White saw the coaching staff celebrating. Peterson had just committed to Oklahoma on national TV.

"I'll never forget seeing Coach Gundy so excited, jumping up and down," White said. He added, "I was like, 'Wow, this guy must be really, really good for Coach Gundy to act like that right before the national title game.'"

'He Was the Very Best'

On Oct. 29, 2003, Peterson watched LeBron James make his highly anticipated N.B.A. debut, dropping 25 points as an 18-year-old. Two nights later, Peterson, who is three months younger than James, ran for 305 yards and six touchdowns on 17 carries in a home win over Athens High School. He had touchdown runs of 46, 50 and 61 yards. Two days after that, Peterson was on the sideline for a Dallas Cowboys game, a guest of safety Roy Williams.

That September, Maurice Clarett sued the N.F.L. over its rule that players aren't eligible for the draft until they have been out of high school for three years. The suit, combined with James's status as an 18-year-old in the N.B.A., opened the door for an obvious discussion: If Clarett wins his case, if there's no age limit to enter the N.F.L., could Peterson make the jump straight to the league?

"Absolutely he could have," Stoops said.

Instead, Peterson arrived at Oklahoma in 2004. The first day of fall camp was used for physical testing and conditioning before putting pads on and practicing on the second day. Coaches put Peterson in a group with White, the quarterback coming off a Heisman Trophy-winning season.

The testing started with down-and-backs, 100 yards to the opposite end zone, then back. On the first run, Peterson finished in front by 20 yards. The second, it was 30 yards.

The upperclassmen figured he would slow down when pads came on the next day. Instead, Peterson took his first carry for a touchdown, the start of a dominating practice. "We knew right then we had a superstar," Long said.

Oklahoma initially taught their running backs to stand 7½ yards behind the ball. But Peterson reached the line too quickly. He was running into his linemen before they had a chance to reach their blocks. So coaches told Peterson to stand 9 yards behind the ball.

Peterson's 2004 season is considered one of the greatest ever by a true freshman. He ran for 1,925 yards in 13 games. He averaged more than a touchdown per game (15 total) and 5.7 yards per carry. He notched more than 100 rushing yards in each of his first nine collegiate games. He finished second in Heisman voting while presumably splitting votes with White, who finished third. (Southern California's Matt Leinart won.)

"That's why his daddy named him A.D. — All Day," Gundy said. "Everything that he did, he was the very best."

Peterson was a star again in 2005, rushing for 1,104 yards and 14 touchdowns. A year later, as a Heisman front-runner, he opened the season as one of the nation's top rushers, gaining 100 yards or more in each of the first five games. Before the sixth game, Nelson Peterson was released from an Oklahoma City halfway house. Peterson called it "a real big deal" to get to play in front of his father for the first time since he was 12.

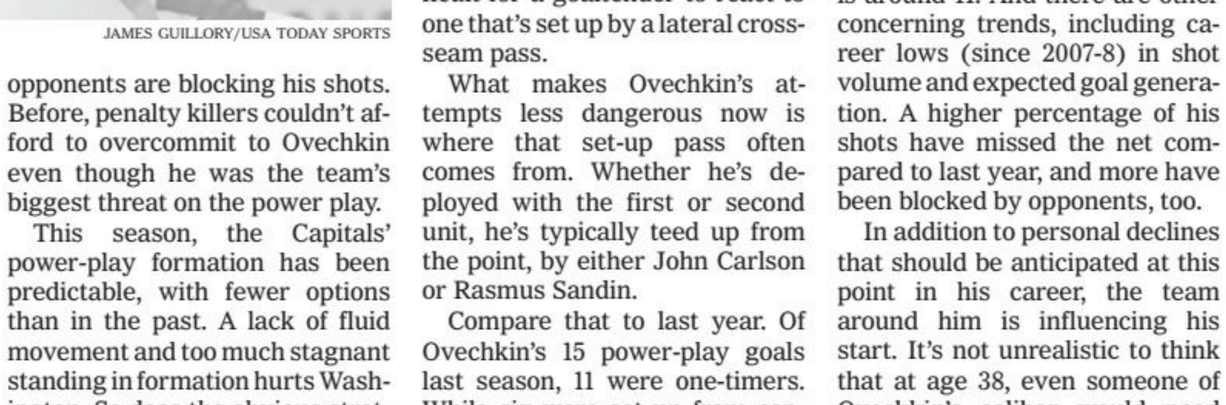
Against Iowa State, with his father in the stands, Peterson totaled 228 yards of offense and two touchdowns. But on his last carry, a 53-yard touchdown run, he broke his collarbone diving into the end zone, ending his regular season and leaving him just short of Oklahoma's career rushing record, held at the time by Billy Sims.

Peterson was the seventh pick in the 2007 N.F.L. draft. He led the league in rushing three times, and his 14,918 career rushing yards are the fifth most in league history. He hasn't officially retired, but he hasn't played in a game since the 2021 season ended.

Earlier this year, he sent a long video to Harrell. He thanked him for all their work together. The two connected and chatted about those crazy days in high school with opponents asking for autographs and college coaches lining up outside the school. They also recalled all the games Peterson exited early, discussing how large the legend of Adrian Peterson might have been had Harrell let him play more.

Harrell said, "I told him, you could've set records that would be there forever."

Chad Graff covers the N.F.L. for The Athletic.



ASSOCIATED PRESS/THE OKLAHOMAN, VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

POOL PHOTO BY JULIE JACOBSON

In 2004, Adrian Peterson had one of greatest seasons ever by a true freshman but finished second to Matt Leinart, below far left, for the Heisman.

PRO FOOTBALL | N.F.L. WEEK 15

Future Grows Tenuous For Saleh as Jets Flail

By ZACK ROSENBLATT
The Athletic

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. — Garrett Wilson leaned against a locker, clenched his fist and unclenched it, over and over. He grabbed his left hand and went finger by finger, squeezing each one, veins popping. Wilson's frustration has been simmering for weeks. Now it's boiling.

It took Wilson three quarters to receive his first target on Sunday against the Miami Dolphins.

"I'm aware," Wilson said, cutting off a question before it was finished.

Across the locker room, New York Jets players bemoaned the team's poor effort in a 30-0 loss. Wide receiver Allen Lazard took it even further.

"I think they just played a better game," Lazard said. "They outschemed us, out-efforted us."

Effort. Scheme.

Last week, the Jets snapped a five-game losing streak by beating up the Houston Texans in a surprising 30-6 win, with all of the points coming in an explosive second half for an offense that had otherwise struggled all year. Quarterback Zach Wilson had his best game. There was a feeling that the performance might have saved some jobs, secured them for 2024, when Aaron Rodgers will come back to save the day.

The best plans are laid to waste by blowouts.

The Jets are 5-9. Sunday's loss — along with other results around the league — eliminated them from playoff contention for the 13th year in a row, the longest playoff drought in the N.F.L., N.B.A., M.L.B. and N.H.L. If

ADAM HUNGER/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Garrett Wilson had a hard time hiding his frustration.

Coach Robert Saleh felt safe after last week, he should be worried now. It's one thing to lose games, but another to lose the locker room, and Saleh is getting dangerously close to the latter. It might already be happening.

"You put together the best plan possible — sometimes it's good, sometimes it's not," Saleh said on Sunday. "But overall, just from coaching to execution, all of it on the offensive side just wasn't good enough today."

The Jets started their 11th new offensive line in 14 games against the Dolphins, and it was a disaster from the get-go. Wilson was strip-sacked on the first possession, and was bruised and battered all day. He was sacked four times in total and hit seven times, and he retreated to the locker room before halftime.

Wilson initially left the game due to "dehydration," according to the CBS broadcast. After halftime, Wilson was declared out with a head injury but, according to ESPN, was not being evaluated for a concussion yet. Later in the game, Wilson was ruled out with a concussion. Late in the fourth quarter, The Athletic saw Wilson entering the X-ray room. Saleh said after the game that Wilson was in concussion protocol.

But the Jets are not the only team in the N.F.L. devastated by injuries to the offensive line, or who have had their starting quarterback go down with a season-ending injury. The Bengals are 3-1 with Jake Browning since he was tapped to fill in for Joe Burrow. The Browns are 2-1 with Joe Flacco, and 9-5 overall despite losing both of their starting tackles and their top backup tackle.

Zack Rosenblatt covers the Jets for The Athletic.

The best coaches make the most of what they have, and put their players in position to succeed even when they are outmanned. The Jets aren't doing that — and that's with one of the N.F.L.'s best defenses, an elite wide receiver (Garrett Wilson) and an explosive running back (Breece Hall).

This team has mostly wasted a stellar season from that defense, though even the defense struggled against Miami. Dolphins wide receiver Jaylen Waddle burned Jets cornerback D.J. Reed on a 60-yard touchdown and finished with 142 yards. Running back Raheem Mostert scored two touchdowns, and the Dolphins scored 30 points even without Tyreek Hill playing.

And then there's Wilson, one of the N.F.L.'s most talented wide receivers, wasting away. He watched from the sideline as Dolphins Coach Mike McDaniel schemed Waddle open, something the offensive coordinator Nathaniel Hackett has failed to do for the Jets all season.

"I think they have a lot of pieces in their favor that make it easier to scheme," Wilson said. "Tyreek goes down, they put Waddle in there and he goes for 150. And that's, that's the ball I grew up loving. But that's not how it's going to be. I gotta figure out how to be better, run better routes, be better in the meeting rooms, figure out how I can be involved early and often. And how we can win games."

Wilson is having a harder time hiding his frustration, especially on Sunday, when he was targeted just four times, and cameras caught him on the sideline getting animated with his irritation.

"I mean, it seems like we're being unintentional, to be honest," Wilson said. "That's my mind-set. It's simple. I feel like that doesn't have to be the case. But it was. I guess I gotta fix it. I gotta figure out how I can get involved in the first quarter. Maybe it's starting practice fast. I don't know. I gotta show something, I gotta do something. They've got a good plan for us. They did a good job getting after us and stuff made it hard. That's the way it was, and I gotta be able to adjust. I don't know. I gotta figure it out."

It's not Wilson's job to figure it out. That's on Saleh, and Hackett.

Now there are three games left in this season, and players are starting to say the quiet part out loud. The truth: The Jets were not prepared for Sunday's game.

Against the Texans last week, the Jets offense was productive. Otherwise, this has been one of the worst offenses in franchise history by most metrics, and the worst third-down offense in recorded N.F.L. history.

The 103 yards gained on offense by the Jets on Sunday tied for the fourth fewest in franchise history, and three of the five lowest yardage totals have come under Saleh's watch.

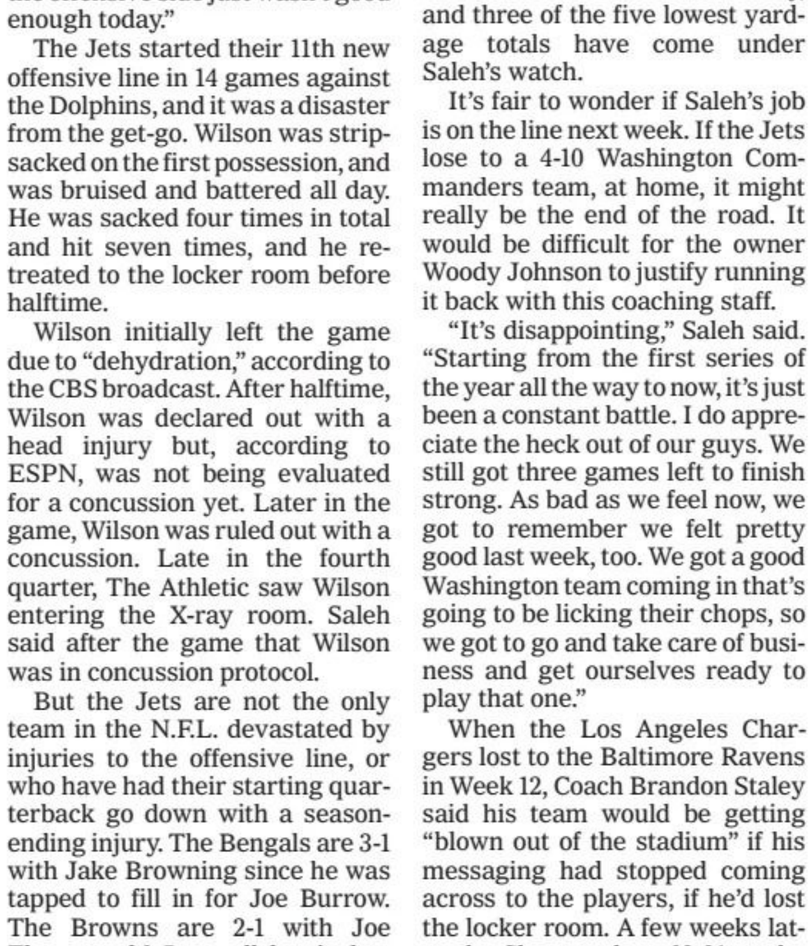
It's fair to wonder if Saleh's job is on the line next week. If the Jets lose to a 4-10 Washington Commanders team, at home, it might really be the end of the road. It would be difficult for the owner Woody Johnson to justify running it back with this coaching staff.

"It's disappointing," Saleh said. "Starting from the first series of the year all the way to now, it's just been a constant battle. I do appreciate the heck out of our guys. We still got three games left to finish strong. As bad as we feel now, we got to remember we felt pretty good last week, too. We got a good Washington team coming in that's going to be licking their chops, so we got to go and take care of business and get ourselves ready to play that one."

When the Los Angeles Chargers lost to the Baltimore Ravens in Week 12, Coach Brandon Staley said his team would be getting "blown out of the stadium" if his messaging had stopped coming across to the players, if he'd lost the locker room. A few weeks later, the Chargers lost, 63-21, to the Las Vegas Raiders, and Staley was fired the next day.

So, has Saleh lost the locker room?

Check back next week.



DOUG MURRAY/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Robert Saleh during Sunday's 30-0 loss to Miami. With the New York Jets now 5-9, the coach may be losing the locker room.

TYLER KAUFMAN/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Tommy DeVito of the New York Giants was sacked seven times by the New Orleans Saints during a crushing 24-6 loss on Sunday.

DeVito Fairy Tale Hits a Reality Bump: The Saints

By CHARLOTTE CARROLL
The Athletic

As Tommy DeVito mania swept through the N.F.L. over the last few weeks, his signature finger-pinch gesture was everywhere. The Superdome in New Orleans on Sunday was no exception. But it was a little different this time. It wasn't the Giants and their fans gleefully throwing up their hands in celebration.

It was the New Orleans Saints.

They took the quarterback's gesture into their own hands on a day they dominated the Giants, 24-6, crushing New York's playoff hopes and DeVito mania in the process.

The Saints sacked DeVito seven times and had plenty of fun in the process, particularly defensive linemen Bryan Bresee, with two sacks, and Tanoh Kpassagnon, with a career-high three.

Even before the game started, the Saints were trolling DeVito. Darren Rizzi, the Saints' special teams coordinator and a New Jersey native, sported a Bergen Catholic High School shirt in a nod to his alma mater. His school's rival is DeVito's Don Bosco.

"You see it in all sports — when someone does something and something else happens, they're gonna retaliate," DeVito said after Sunday's game. "But it's all fun and games. It's part of the game."

Though the media circus that's followed the rookie quarterback will likely start to fade now that the Giants' three-game win streak has been snapped, the fairy tale isn't completely over.

For one thing, DeVito will continue to be the Giants' quarterback; Coach Brian Daboll said Sunday night that DeVito will remain the starter next week. And though he may have come back to earth after a bit of overexposure, DeVito has still proved that he is no pumpkin.

He is 3-2 as a starter and looks miles ahead of where he was when he took his first professional snaps, against the Jets in Week 8. Remember that game, when the Giants hardly trusted him to throw?

DeVito has come a long way since then, earning more trust each week. He's been given more freedom, airing the ball out more often and having designed runs called for him. On Sunday, DeVito's first play was a deep shot to wide receiver Darius Slayton. He finished the game 20-of-34 for 177 yards, and though he had no touchdowns, he contributed 36 rushing yards.

Despite the constant pressure he was under, DeVito didn't put the ball in peril. He didn't fumble, and he has four straight starts without throwing an interception.

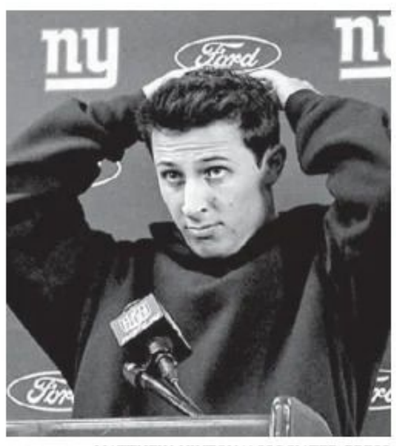
DeVito has proved his poise and ability to come up big in clutch situations. Last week's game-winning drive in prime time was a testament to that.

DeVito took some especially hard hits from the Saints, having to leave the field after a shot as he slid on a scramble late in the first half. He was evaluated for a concussion but played the entire second half after being cleared.

On Sunday, things just weren't clicking for the quarterback and the Giants' offense. New York couldn't get running back Saquon Barkley going on the ground, and DeVito reverted to his bad habit of taking too many sacks, though the Giants' offensive line deserves some of the blame there.

Part of DeVito's problems Sunday stemmed from simply facing a higher caliber of opponent. The Saints have a better defense than any of the Giants' last three opponents (the Green Bay Packers, New England Patriots and Washington Commanders). As a result, DeVito and the Giants went 2-of-16 on third downs against the Saints.

Charlotte Carroll covers the Giants for The Athletic.



MATTHEW HINTON/ASSOCIATED PRESS

DeVito said the team's "swagger" was missing on Sunday, "and I put that on me."

"We just lacked execution on offense," DeVito said. "We weren't good on third downs. We have to be better. I don't think we played with enough swagger. And I put that on me because I take that personally, as far as playing with energy, playing with juice."

So where does all this leave DeVito in the Giants' quarterback conversation? That's a tough question to answer as Daniel Jones recovers from an anterior cruciate ligament tear. But General Manager Joe Schoen said recently that when he is healthy, Jones is the starter. Can DeVito serve as the backup next season after Tyrod Taylor exits in free agency?

The evidence says he can. But what about being more than that?

Last week, a reporter started to ask Daboll to compare DeVito to a quarterback Daboll used to coach in New England. A guy named Tom Brady, who took the N.F.L. by storm after he was drafted with the 199th pick.

Daboll didn't let the reporter finish the question before he stressed how early into DeVito's career it is. Daboll knows that sort of comparison isn't realistic. It also isn't fair to DeVito.

But since DeVito went undrafted, there have been questions about why he was passed up and why he stood out enough during the evaluation process for the Giants to scoop him up.

A rookie still shows he belongs in the quarterback debate.

"I think Tommy, on tape looking back, he was very comfortable in the pocket," the offensive coordinator Mike Kafka said last week. "He had a very nice, compact throwing motion. He can get out in space and run around a little bit. He's athletic. So, the things you saw in college, you try to take some of the things, how they fit into the offense. And as a young player, you're just constantly learning and learning and growing. For him, it was the mental side of it, so building our routine with him and how we can build and help him be a professional quarterback."

That process should include the final three games of the season and beyond thanks to his résumé thus far.

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MARSHAL/ SHERIFF SALES 3650

MARSHAL EXECUTION SALE
PUBLIC AUCTION
RE: Parking Violations Vs Various Judgment Debtors I Will SellAt Public Auction For City Marshal Jeffrey Rose
By Arthur Vigar Auctioneer
On Friday, December 22, 2023 10:00AM
At Ken Ben Ind. 1908 Shore Parkway, Brooklyn, New York, 11214
All R/T/I in & to the Following Vehicles:

01 MERCED	WDBJF65J21B319041
05 GMC	1GKET16S856178873
10 NISSAN	1N4AL2AP7AC162197
12 NISSAN	1N4BL2AP5CN405694
10 HYUNDAI	KMHDU4AD2AU829818
10 NISSAN	1N4AL2AP6AN409469
15 V W	3VW217AU1FM007221
08 INFINITI	JNKBV61E18M200346
01 BMW	WBAAV334X1FU81103
99 NISSAN	JN8AR07Y6XW355255
12 ACURA	2HNYD2H47CH507708
03 HONDA	1HGCM56603A025085
03 LEXUS	JTJBT20X230006627
01 FORD	1FMYU70E81UA00507
06 TOYOTA	5TDZA23CX6S556294
11 AUDI	WAUFFAFL6BA095125
08 BMW	5UXFE83518LZ36610
06 CADILLAC	1GYEK63N86R114594
04 HONDA	1HGCM56364A088988
11 NISSAN	1N4CL2AP6BC184993
06 NISSAN	JN8AZ08W26W514011
03 HONDA	5FNRL18923B046118
03 NISSAN	JN8DR09Y13W809934
07 FORD	1FTSE34L87DB45483

Following Vehicles Sold With Liens

13 CHEVR	2GNFLEEK5D6343867
12 NISSAN	JN8AF5MV0CT112777
08 LEXUS	JTHBJ46G282160171
08 FORD	1FMEU73E38UA45881
05 HYUNDAI	KM8SC73D05U013446
03 TOYOTA	4T1BE32K23U753743
09 HONDA	5FNRL38489B054779
12 TOYOTA	5TFHY5F16CX258740

Following Vehicles Sold As Salvage

03 TOYOTA	4T1BF28B73U302855
07 ACURA	JH4CL96937C007269
14 CHEVR	1G11C5SL3E4167686
08 FORD	1FTNE24W88DA99012

CASH ONLY Inspect ½Hr. Prior to Sale
City Marshal Jeffrey Rose
Badge#67 Phone(718)645-2100

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Tanysha Wright vs Cavan Properties Inc. , Supreme Court, Bronx County, Index #24993/2017E. City Marshal Martin Bienstock #75, sells on Wed. Dec 20th 2023 at 11:00 am. Selling the right, title and interest of Cavan Properties Inc., now known as Cavan Properties (WY), Inc., successor by merger with Cavan Properties Inc., as member, shareholder, investor, or otherwise in and to the entities of Broad River Investors LLC c\o Cavan Properties Inc, and Shenandoah Investors LLC c\o Cavan Properties Inc. Sale will take place at 11:00 am at the Law Office of Bernard D'Orazio & Assoc. P.C. 238 W. 139th St., New York NY 10030.
City Marshal Martin Bienstock #75
Telephone: (718) 279-3660

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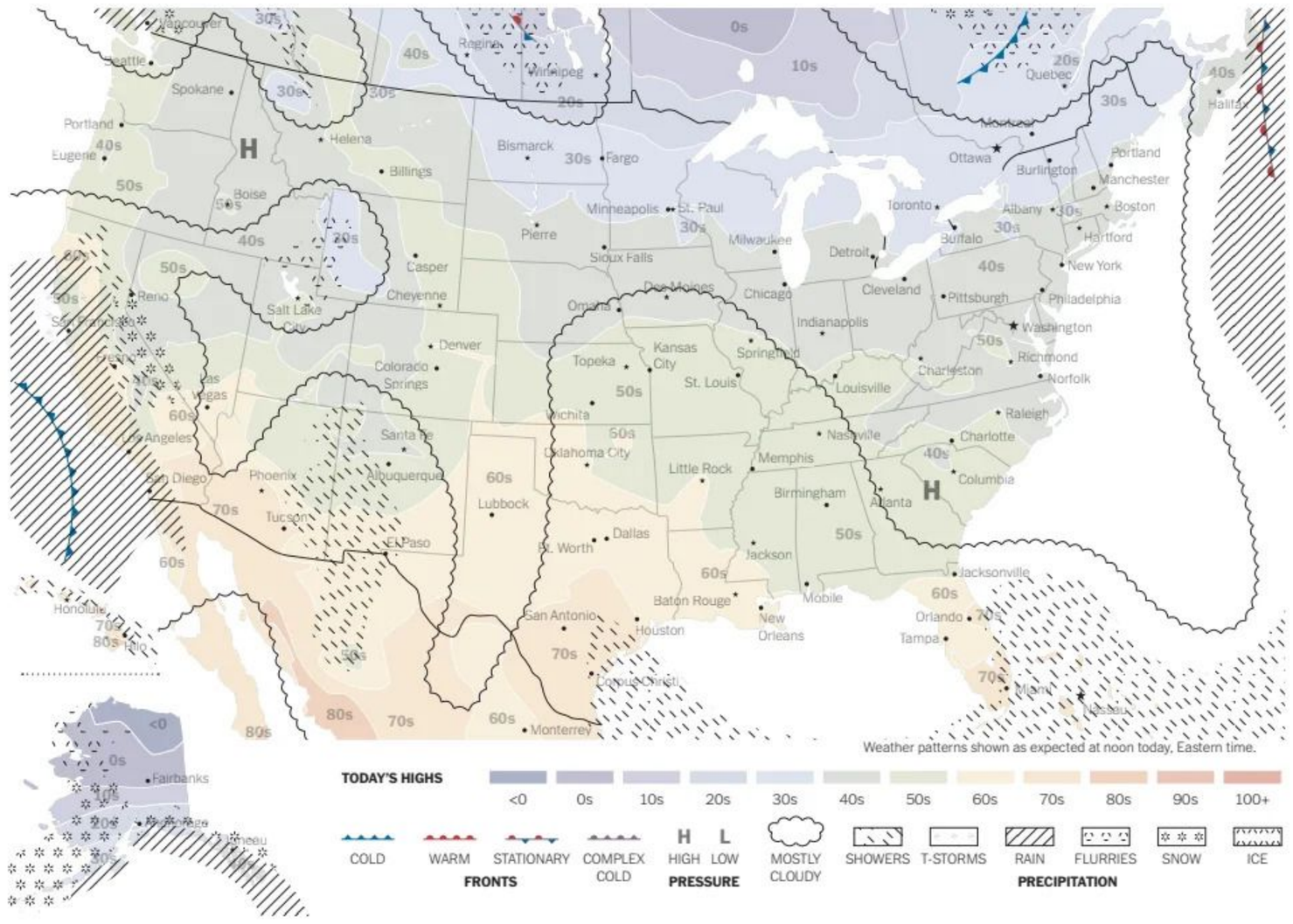


Metropolitan Forecast

TODAY .....Plenty of sunshine

High 46. High pressure will promote dry weather. Winds will be light at 4 to 8 miles per hour. Temperatures will be around average.

TONIGHT .....Clear

Low 36. Dry conditions will continue at night. Winds will be 6 to 12 m.p.h. Low temperatures will be a couple of degrees above average.

TOMORROW .....Plenty of sunshine

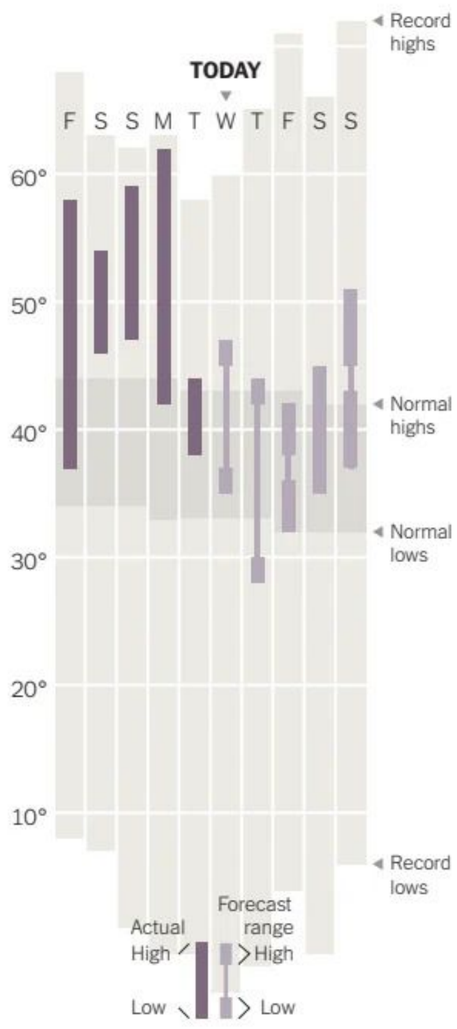
High 43. It will be dry as high pressure remains overhead. Winds will be 6 to 12 m.p.h. Temperatures will be around average.

FRIDAY .....Sunny to partly cloudy

High pressure will promote a mostly sunny sky. Winds will be 4 to 8 m.p.h. Temperatures will be slightly below average. High 40.

SATURDAY
SUNDAY .....Mostly sunny Sunday

Saturday will have a variably cloudy sky and a slight breeze. High 42. Sunday will be dry with a breeze. High 48.



Highlight: Friday Travel Weather

Wet roads and reduced visibility will lead to some travel disruptions across the Southwest on Friday. Areas of fog and showers will form from Texas to the Midwest. Much of the East and Rockies will be dry with generally good travel conditions.

National Forecast

After Tuesday's cool-down, temperatures across the Northeast and Great Lakes will be as much as 10 degrees higher today. An area of high pressure over the region will provide a return to dry weather.

Showers and thunderstorms will continue in California as a storm slowly moves southeast. There will be times of steadier rain along the coast, potentially leading to travel disruptions for some.

Another weak storm traveling across New Mexico and Arizona could bring a few showers. A warm breeze from the south will keep temperatures above average across the southern Plains.

Dry conditions will continue in the rest of the nation as high pressure remains in control.

Metropolitan Almanac

In Central Park, for the 13 hours ended at 1 p.m. yesterday.

Temperature

Avg. daily departure from normal this month ..... +5.2°

Avg. daily departure from normal this year ..... +2.0°

Reservoir levels (New York City water supply)

Yesterday 95%
Est. normal 83%

Precipitation (in inches)

Yesterday 0.00
Record 1.51
Snow 0.0
Since Oct. 1 ..... Trace

For the last 30 days
Actual 7.98
Normal 4.17

For the last 365 days
Actual 60.02
Normal 49.52

LAST 30 DAYS

Air pressure
High ..... 29.98 noon
Low ..... 29.66 1 a.m.

Humidity
High ..... 67% 8 a.m.
Low ..... 41% noon

Heating Degree Days

An index of fuel consumption that tracks how far the day's mean temperature fell below 65

Yesterday 24
So far this month 360
So far this season (since July 1) 1119
Normal to date for the season 1250

Trends

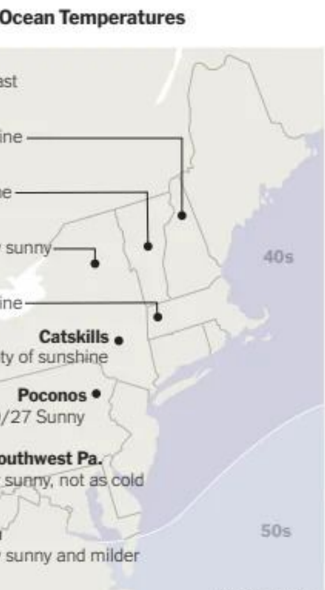


Chart shows how recent temperature and precipitation trends compare with those of the last 30 years.

Cities

High/low temperatures for the 16 hours ended at 4 p.m. yesterday, Eastern time, and precipitation (in inches) for the 16 hours ended at 4 p.m. yesterday. Expected conditions for today and tomorrow.

C ..... Clouds
F ..... Fog
H ..... Haze
I ..... Ice
PC ..... Partly cloudy
R ..... Rain
Sh ..... Showers
S ..... Sun
Sn ..... Snow
SS ..... Snow showers
T ..... Thunderstorms
Tr ..... Trace
W ..... Windy
– ..... Not available

N.Y.C. region	Yesterday	Today	Tomorrow
New York City	44/ 38 0	46/ 36 S	43/ 29 S
Bridgeport	46/ 39 0	45/ 32 S	43/ 21 S
Caldwell	42/ 38 0	48/ 32 S	44/ 22 S
Danbury	42/ 33 0	44/ 29 S	39/ 18 S
Islip	45/ 37 0	45/ 32 S	44/ 21 S
Newark	45/ 37 0	50/ 35 S	45/ 25 S
Trenton	41/ 34 0.02	45/ 30 S	44/ 22 S
White Plains	41/ 36 0	45/ 32 S	40/ 21 S

United States	Yesterday	Today	Tomorrow
Albany	40/ 25 0.02	41/ 30 S	34/ 19 S
Albuquerque	53/ 36 0	51/ 37 Sh	55/ 35 PC
Anchorage	24/ 21 0.09	28/ 16 C	22/ 7 C
Atlanta	47/ 30 0	53/ 34 PC	60/ 38 PC
Atlantic City	44/ 29 0.01	47/ 33 S	46/ 29 S
Austin	69/ 50 0	71/ 56 C	68/ 59 C
Baltimore	43/ 25 0	49/ 31 S	49/ 27 PC
Baton Rouge	60/ 38 0	66/ 43 PC	67/ 50 PC
Birmingham	49/ 30 0	55/ 32 PC	59/ 36 PC
Boise	46/ 37 0.01	48/ 34 PC	47/ 35 PC
Boston	47/ 29 0	41/ 31 S	37/ 23 S
Buffalo	32/ 28 0.04	39/ 30 PC	35/ 22 PC
Burlington	40/ 27 Tr	38/ 21 S	25/ 17 PC
Casper	52/ 37 0	53/ 36 C	51/ 33 S
Charlotte	48/ 24 0	52/ 27 S	59/ 33 PC
Chattanooga	44/ 25 0	53/ 29 PC	57/ 32 PC
Chicago	35/ 28 0	44/ 35 C	42/ 37 C
Cincinnati	37/ 24 0	49/ 29 PC	50/ 33 PC
Cleveland	34/ 26 0.02	43/ 32 PC	43/ 34 PC
Colorado Springs	65/ 36 0	61/ 35 PC	59/ 30 S
Columbus	33/ 24 0	46/ 29 PC	45/ 33 PC
Concord, N.H.	45/ 22 0	43/ 25 S	36/ 15 S
Dallas-Ft. Worth	62/ 46 0	67/ 53 C	62/ 55 C
Denver	65/ 36 0	59/ 35 PC	62/ 32 S
Des Moines	44/ 29 0	47/ 39 PC	48/ 42 Sh
Detroit	36/ 27 0	42/ 28 PC	42/ 32 C
El Paso	65/ 41 0	65/ 46 Sh	68/ 42 PC
Fargo	34/ 24 0	37/ 27 S	39/ 26 C
Hartford	46/ 26 0	45/ 31 S	42/ 20 S
Honolulu	79/ 69 0.09	77/ 70 R	79/ 70 Sh
Houston	65/ 49 0	70/ 56 C	72/ 59 C
Indianapolis	37/ 26 0	47/ 32 PC	47/ 39 PC
Jackson	55/ 33 0	58/ 33 PC	64/ 47 PC
Jacksonville	52/ 35 0	57/ 40 PC	64/ 45 S
Kansas City	51/ 38 0	55/ 47 PC	57/ 50 C
Key West	70/ 63 0	73/ 65 C	72/ 65 Sh
Las Vegas	64/ 47 0	66/ 47 PC	65/ 48 C
Lexington	39/ 24 0	54/ 31 PC	54/ 32 PC
Little Rock	52/ 32 0	60/ 34 PC	60/ 44 C
Los Angeles	65/ 57 0.03	64/ 57 R	64/ 56 R
Louisville	41/ 27 0	53/ 33 PC	54/ 35 PC
Memphis	50/ 35 0	57/ 36 PC	59/ 42 PC
Miami	73/ 60 0	72/ 65 PC	74/ 63 Sh
Milwaukee	38/ 31 0	41/ 36 C	41/ 39 C
Mpls.-St. Paul	39/ 25 0	40/ 28 PC	39/ 35 C
Nashville	43/ 24 0	55/ 30 PC	57/ 32 PC
New Orleans	56/ 45 0	61/ 50 PC	64/ 54 PC
Norfolk	48/ 33 0	46/ 33 S	52/ 36 PC
Oklahoma City	56/ 44 0	59/ 50 C	60/ 49 R
Omaha	50/ 28 0	48/ 38 PC	53/ 40 Sh
Orlando	63/ 49 0	70/ 56 PC	74/ 55 PC
Philadelphia	42/ 28 0	48/ 32 S	46/ 27 S
Phoenix	76/ 56 Tr	74/ 52 Sh	76/ 57 C
Pittsburgh	34/ 23 0.01	43/ 29 PC	43/ 31 PC
Portland, Me.	48/ 25 0	40/ 26 S	33/ 18 S
Portland, Ore.	53/ 41 0.29	53/ 39 F	51/ 43 PC
Providence	48/ 27 0	44/ 29 S	39/ 22 S
Raleigh	47/ 25 0	50/ 27 S	57/ 31 PC
Reno	54/ 35 0.15	50/ 37 C	54/ 31 PC
Richmond	48/ 25 0	50/ 26 S	53/ 29 S
Rochester	31/ 26 0.02	41/ 32 S	35/ 20 PC
Sacramento	63/ 54 0.88	61/ 50 R	63/ 42 C
Salt Lake City	49/ 38 0.02	51/ 35 C	50/ 34 C
San Antonio	69/ 52 0	73/ 59 C	70/ 60 C
San Diego	69/ 59 0.03	67/ 57 R	70/ 56 R
San Francisco	63/ 56 0.05	60/ 50 R	63/ 48 C
San Jose	66/ 55 0.05	61/ 47 R	66/ 47 C
San Juan	84/ 72 0	83/ 73 PC	83/ 74 PC
Seattle	52/ 40 0.25	49/ 40 F	49/ 43 PC
Sioux Falls	47/ 24 0	47/ 29 PC	48/ 36 C
Spokane	41/ 35 0.08	43/ 33 F	40/ 34 C
St. Louis	44/ 33 0	56/ 42 PC	55/ 46 C
St. Thomas	84/ 74 0	83/ 74 PC	84/ 74 PC
Syracuse	32/ 26 0.06	40/ 26 S	34/ 17 PC
Tampa	63/ 46 0	69/ 54 PC	71/ 54 PC
Toledo	38/ 27 0	46/ 30 PC	44/ 33 C
Tucson	77/ 54 0	73/ 46 C	76/ 51 C
Tulsa	56/ 42 0	61/ 49 W	61/ 51 R
Virginia Beach	46/ 35 0	46/ 37 S	52/ 37 PC
Washington	45/ 29 0	49/ 32 S	51/ 30 PC
Wichita	51/ 41 0	59/ 47 PC	59/ 45 R
Wilmington, Del.	42/ 26 0	47/ 29 S	47/ 24 PC

Africa	Yesterday	Today	Tomorrow
Algiers	59/ 49 0.47	63/ 49 PC	62/ 43 PC
Cairo	71/ 54 0	70/ 58 PC	69/ 55 PC
Cape Town	80/ 64 0	75/ 59 S	80/ 60 W
Dakar	81/ 70 0	83/ 65 W	82/ 66 PC
Johannesburg	85/ 56 0.08	84/ 65 PC	87/ 63 T
Nairobi	83/ 63 0	80/ 61 PC	79/ 61 S
Tunis	61/ 50 0.05	63/ 54 PC	60/ 56 R

Asia/Pacific	Yesterday	Today	Tomorrow
Baghdad	64/ 44 0	65/ 42 PC	66/ 52 C
Bangkok	93/ 77 0	94/ 73 C	88/ 69 PC
Beijing	25/ 6 0	20/ 2 S	23/ 3 S
Damascus	57/ 31 0	58/ 37 S	59/ 43 C
Hong Kong	70/ 61 0	60/ 49 PC	60/ 47 PC
Jakarta	97/ 77 0	94/ 74 PC	94/ 75 PC
Jerusalem	61/ 47 0	61/ 48 PC	63/ 48 PC
Karachi	76/ 61 0	82/ 52 PC	82/ 61 PC
Manila	88/ 76 0.03	89/ 77 PC	89/ 79 Sh
Mumbai	90/ 77 0	89/ 73 PC	90/ 75 PC
New Delhi	71/ 50 0	70/ 47 PC	72/ 47 PC
Riyadh	70/ 50 0	76/ 49 S	77/ 52 C
Seoul	32/ 16 0.12	23/ 6 PC	18/ 4 S
Shanghai	43/ 35 0.04	39/ 19 S	32/ 16 S
Singapore	85/ 79 0.17	87/ 77 Sh	87/ 77 Sh
Sydney	91/ 71 0.08	69/ 64 R	71/ 63 W
Taipei City	66/ 59 0.18	61/ 51 C	55/ 45 C
Tehran	52/ 38 0	53/ 42 S	54/ 39 S
Tokyo	50/ 41 0.01	56/ 42 PC	52/ 37 S

Europe	Yesterday	Today	Tomorrow
Amsterdam	50/ 45 1.39	50/ 47 R	54/ 44 R
Athens	64/ 47 0	63/ 54 S	60/ 50 PC
Berlin	46/ 39 0.54	44/ 39 Sh	49/ 37 R
Brussels	46/ 40 0.94	47/ 45 R	53/ 46 R
Budapest	52/ 27 Tr	43/ 34 PC	42/ 40 C
Copenhagen	48/ 41 1.04	42/ 37 R	45/ 38 C
Dublin	48/ 42 0.14	52/ 50 C	53/ 47 W
Edinburgh	46/ 38 0	51/ 48 C	50/ 39 R
Frankfurt	40/ 30 0.18	45/ 42 C	51/ 43 R
Geneva	54/ 32 0	44/ 35 PC	45/ 43 R
Helsinki	40/ 34 0.32	32/ 19 PC	29/ 27 C
Istanbul	58/ 39 0	55/ 50 PC	54/ 46 R
Kyiv	42/ 38 0.03	46/ 35 PC	39/ 32 C
Lisbon	56/ 37 0	60/ 47 S	60/ 45 S
London	55/ 46 0.19	53/ 49 C	57/ 49 W
Madrid	52/ 28 0	52/ 34 PC	53/ 30 S
Moscow	37/ 34 0.11	38/ 33 W	34/ 27 C
Nice	67/ 48 0	58/ 46 C	58/ 46 PC
Oslo	37/ 25 0.02	29/ 18 PC	31/ 27 Sn
Paris	46/ 36 0.04	49/ 47 PC	54/ 50 C
Prague	46/ 37 0	43/ 38 PC	45/ 38 Sh
Rome	62/ 36 0	58/ 43 PC	58/ 45 S
St. Petersburg	39/ 35 0.16	35/ 29 Sn	33/ 30 SS
Stockholm	46/ 34 0.14	31/ 19 Sn	34/ 30 Sn
Vienna	51/ 27 0	46/ 40 R	48/ 42 Sh
Warsaw	46/ 40 0.14	43/ 37 R	43/ 37 Sh

North America	Yesterday	Today	Tomorrow
Acapulco	87/ 73 0	87/ 71 PC	88/ 71 S
Bermuda	72/ 69 0.03	68/ 60 W	66/ 60 C
Edmonton	30/ 25 0.02	34/ 23 PC	38/ 23 C
Guadalajara	67/ 43 0	77/ 49 C	79/ 50 PC
Havana	75/ 64 0	78/ 59 PC	78/ 61 C
Kingston	82/ 77 0.02	87/ 75 PC	87/ 75 PC
Martinique	86/ 77 0	87/ 71 PC	86/ 75 S
Mexico City	59/ 44 0	72/ 43 S	73/ 43 PC
Monterrey	65/ 49 0	67/ 52 PC	68/ 55 C
Montreal	41/ 29 0.05	36/ 19 S	28/ 15 S
Nassau	75/ 65 0	73/ 67 W	74/ 66 PC
Panama City	88/ 73 0.01	88/ 73 Sh	90/ 73 Sh
Quebec City	39/ 34 0.05	28/ 15 S	24/ 7 S
Santo Domingo	81/ 72 0.45	86/ 69 R	85/ 68 Sh
Toronto	29/ 24 0.01	40/ 27 C	31/ 24 S
Vancouver	50/ 45 0.10	50/ 44 C	49/ 44 C
Winnipeg	23/ 12 0	24/ 22 C	32/ 21 S

South America	Yesterday	Today	Tomorrow
Buenos Aires	68/ 55 0	73/ 66 R	81/ 69 PC
Caracas	91/ 76 0	91/ 75 Sh	91/ 76 PC
Lima	76/ 68 0	76/ 68 C	76/ 68 C
Quito	63/ 46 1.33	65/ 45 Sh	66/ 48 Sh
Recife	82/ 75 0.32	88/ 79 T	85/ 80 T
Rio de Janeiro	79/ 72 0	80/ 73 Sh	83/ 74 PC
Santiago	75/ 54 0	87/ 52 S	89/ 54 S

Recreational Forecast

Sun, Moon and Planets

Full	Last Quarter	New	First Quarter
Dec. 26 7:32 p.m.	Jan. 3	Jan. 11 6:56 a.m.	Jan. 17

Sun	RISE	7:16 a.m.	Moon	S	12:17 a.m.
	SET	4:31 p.m.		R	12:30 p.m.
	NEXT R	7:17 a.m.		S	1:29 a.m.
Jupiter	S	3:04 a.m.	Mars	R	6:36 a.m.
	R	1:32 p.m.		S	3:48 p.m.
Saturn	R	10:59 a.m.	Venus	R	4:00 a.m.
	S	9:39 p.m.		S	2:17 p.m.

Boating

From Montauk Point to Sandy Hook, N.J., out to 20 nautical miles, including Long Island Sound and New York Harbor.

Winds will be out of the northwest at 10-15 knots. Waves will be around a foot on New York Harbor and Long Island Sounds. Waves on the open ocean will be 4-7 feet. Visibility will be unrestricted.

High Tides

Atlantic City	1:22 a.m.	1:37 p.m.
Barnegat Inlet	1:32 a.m.	1:49 p.m.
The Battery	2:08 a.m.	2:23 p.m.
Beach Haven	2:55 a.m.	3:12 p.m.
Bridgeport	5:05 a.m.	5:31 p.m.
City Island	5:23 a.m.	5:54 p.m.
Fire Island Lt.	2:23 a.m.	2:40 p.m.
Montauk Point	2:59 a.m.	3:10 p.m.
Northport	5:09 a.m.	5:41 p.m.
Port Washington	5:18 a.m.	5:54 p.m.
Sandy Hook	1:37 a.m.	1:54 p.m.
Shinnecock Inlet	1:21 a.m.	1:41 p.m.
Stamford	5:08 a.m.	5:39 p.m.
Tarrytown	3:57 a.m.	4:12 p.m.
Willets Point	5:20 a.m.	5:54 p.m.

Mountain and Ocean Temperatures

High pressure will promote dry conditions across the region with a mostly sunny sky. It will be breezy across portions of the Green and White Mountains. Temperatures will be higher, with daytime highs a couple of degrees above average.

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2 TELEVISION

Portraying Princess Margaret with her glamour dimmed.

4 FILM

Jonathan Majors's conviction leads to a career fallout.

5 DANCE REVIEW

Genuine emotion overrides stylization in a rejuvenated 'Coppelia.'

A German Jew in the Netherlands created a satirical magazine.

Hiding In an Attic, Taking On The Nazis

By NINA SIEGAL

AMSTERDAM — For more than two years, home for Curt Bloch was a tiny crawl space below the rafters of a modest brick home in Enschede, a Dutch city near the German border. The attic had a single small window. He shared it with two other adults.

During that time, Bloch, a German Jew, survived in the Nazi-occupied Netherlands by relying on a network of people who gave him food and kept his secrets.

In that respect, he was like at least 10,000 Jews who hid in the Netherlands and managed to live by pretending not to exist. At least 104,000 others — many of whom also sought refuge but were found — ended up being sent to their deaths.

But Bloch's experience was different because, in addition to sustenance and care, his helpers brought him pens, glue, newspapers and other printed materials that he used to produce a startling publication: his own weekly, satirical poetry magazine.

From August 1943 until he was liberated in April 1945, Bloch produced 95 issues of Het Onderwater Cabaret, or The Underwater Cabaret.

Each issue included original art, poetry and songs that often took aim at the Nazis and their Dutch collaborators. Bloch, writing in both German and Dutch, mocked Nazi propaganda, responded to war news and offered personal perspectives on wartime deprivations.

CONTINUED ON PAGE C6

IMAGES VIA CHARITIES AID FOUNDATION AMERICA

A few covers of Curt Bloch's handwritten wartime magazine, Het Onderwater Cabaret, or The Underwater Cabaret, including the last issue, top left, "above water" in 1945.

Commercial or Classical? Don't Choose.

Anthony Parnther is as comfortable with music from 'Black Panther' as he is with Prokofiev.

PHILIP CHEUNG FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Anthony Parnther at home in Los Angeles. He makes his New York Philharmonic conducting debut this week.

By STEVE SMITH

Anthony Parnther has a job that routinely takes him to fantastic places. Parnther, 42, makes his New York Philharmonic conducting debut this week. His destination? Wakanda: With a wave of his hand, he'll evoke lush jungles and shimmering citadels as the film "Black Panther" screens overhead.

Back home in Los Angeles in January, Parnther will pass through idealistic college classrooms and anxious laboratories, headed to a date with destiny in Los Alamos, when he conducts the sweeping score to "Oppenheimer."

But in a recent video interview, Parnther was finding his way to someplace quite different: Whoville.

"I'll be very honest with you," he said in a video interview. "I'm sitting here trying to rapidly memorize the words to 'You're a Mean One, Mr. Grinch.'"

He was cramming for a Christmas concert with the San Bernardino Symphony Orchestra, where he has served as music director since 2019.

"I could tell you that I'm sitting here studying the Prokofiev Second Piano Concerto, which we're doing on this concert," he said. "But I'm actually more worried about the Grinch, because I'm the soloist."

Posts at San Bernardino and the South-

CONTINUED ON PAGE C5

A Straight, Heady Shot Of Nostalgia

The Killers' 'Mr. Brightside,' snubbed, is now an anthem.

By JESSICA M. GOLDSTEIN

The Killers released "Mr. Brightside" 20 years ago and hardly anybody cared.

The dominant hits of the day were hip-shakers and party bangers whose titles doubled as bodily imperatives: "Shake Ya Tailfeather," "Get Low," "Stand Up" — odes to the delirious, thrilling movements that keep the party going. "Mr. Brightside" is . . . not that.

It's an intense, dramatic song about the shattering experience of getting cheated on by someone you love. The lead single off the Las Vegas band's debut studio album, "Hot Fuss," consists of exactly one verse, prechorus and chorus, which simply repeat; the singer Brandon Flowers's voice is the sardonic wail of a jilted lover who is physically ill at the thought of his girlfriend being with someone else ("Now they're going to bed, and my stomach is sick"), and pretends that he is totally OK ("Comin' out of my cage, and I've been doing just fine") when he is obviously an absolute wreck ("I just can't look, it's killing meeeee").

CONTINUED ON PAGE C4

Heartbreak Never Dulled A Naughty Royal's Sparkle

But in the final season of 'The Crown,' Lesley Manville portrays Princess Margaret's decline after the princess suffered three strokes.

By SIMRAN HANS

LONDON — On the day Queen Elizabeth II died, Lesley Manville was in the hospital.

The actor was filming an episode of the final season of "The Crown" in which her character, Princess Margaret, is visited at her sickbed by her older sister, Elizabeth, played by Imelda Staunton. When the two actors were briefed that the real queen "may well pass today," Manville recalled in a recent interview, they told the crew they'd like to carry on filming the emotional scene.

They wrapped at 4 p.m., Manville said, "which we later found out was around the time she died."

In the sixth and final season of "The Crown," it is Manville's character that is approaching the end. Margaret was one of the Windsor family's more rebellious members, and as a young woman, she fell in love with the divorced Royal Air Force officer Peter Townsend, though she was not allowed to marry him. In the show, this heartbreak casts a shadow over the rest of her life.

Still, that pain never dulled Margaret's sparkle. Manville, 67, who speaks with the command of a seasoned stage actor, described Margaret as glamorous and alluring, "a woman who was never off the front pages of the newspaper in the '50s and '60s — the Diana of that generation."

On "The Crown," Vanessa Kirby initially played Margaret (Seasons 1 and 2), followed by Helena Bonham Carter (Seasons 3 and 4), and by the time Manville took up the role for Season 5, the princess was in her 60s. Through the decades, the show presents Margaret's dazzling lifestyle in stark contrast with Elizabeth's years of quiet duty.

But much of Margaret's earlier glamour was stripped away after she suffered three strokes between 1998 and 2001. Manville was drawn to the knottiness of portraying Margaret "in this difficult and lonely time of her life," she said. When the character's illness also takes away her looks, her identity is shaken, too. "She doesn't know how to function," Manville said.

"Ritz," the eighth episode of the new season, depicts the strokes and Margaret's decline. The princess defies her doctor's orders and continues drinking and partying on Mustique, the Caribbean island where she has a second stroke. Ahead of filming, Manville met with several people who had had strokes, she said, to accurately show the physical and psychological aftereffects. The challenge was to balance the realism of a drooping mouth and slurred speech with "speaking coherently enough," she added.

During this period of ill health, Margaret's calendar was no longer full — "She didn't like that," Manville said — and her royal engagements were less frequent. "When you had all of that, and then you just see it ebbing away, that's fascinating to play," Manville said.

Meriel Sheibani-Clare, a writer for Episode 8, said that in this episode, the show's creators wanted to reframe Margaret by celebrating her support for her sister. Manville played her as "brittle and spiky," Sheibani-Clare said, while still conveying vulnerability so "she sometimes feels like a little girl."

Manville said "the uniqueness of the series" was that it allowed her "to do my Margaret," quite separate from Kirby and Bonham Carter's performances. But running through all three performances, Manville noted, has been a thread of naughtiness. In one comedic vignette from Episode 8, Manville's Margaret, barred from smoking by her doctor, ransacks the palace in search of a cigarette and takes a hungry, exalted puff. If she had played Margaret without a sense of humor, Manville said, "that would not be picking up the baton very successfully."

Manville, who has been a fixture of British stage and screen since the mid-1970s, said she had never wanted to be "a personality actress who just plays themselves all the time." When she accepted the role of Margaret in 2020, she was about to portray a 1950s cleaning lady in the feature "Mrs. Harris Goes to Paris." The contrast between playing that role and a "real blue-blood aristocrat" was "too tempting for words," Manville said.

Staunton, another British actor with a long résumé, said she and Manville were "old friends" and had bonded during "a hilarious time flying around on harnesses" while making Disney's 2014 live-action film "Maleficent."

In "The Crown," the actors channel their offscreen relationship through gentle sisterly banter. But in Episode 8, an intimate scene in which Elizabeth reads to the ailing Margaret in bed at home is a rare opportunity to see the queen's stiff upper lip quiver. Elizabeth softens and grows wistful, while Margaret's wit crackles in the face of her own mortality.

In her last episodes of "The Crown," Manville said she wanted to amplify "the pain of life without a partner" and Margaret's loneliness, which she said was present even when Kirby played her as a young woman.

But the show's creators didn't want to define Margaret by her love life. "There had been so much out there by the tabloids and biographers about poor, sad, tragic Margaret," Sheibani-Clare said.

"But right to the end," she added, she spoke to her sister on the phone every day."

SOPHIE STAFFORD FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

PHOTOGRAPHS VIA NETFLIX

Right, Lesley Manville, who plays Princess Margaret in the final season of "The Crown," said "the uniqueness of the series" was that it allowed her "to do my Margaret." Below, in earlier parts of the series, two other actresses portrayed the princess: Vanessa Kirby, left; and Helena Bonham Carter, center. Manville, below right, took up the role in Season 5.

Delays of Biblical Proportions Stalled a Sequel

Scorched sets, quarantined puppets and a green ogre thwarted the 'Chicken Run' follow-up for 23 years.

By SHIVANI GONZALEZ

When "Chicken Run" was released in theaters in June 2000, audiences and critics alike were charmed by the Claymation chickens Ginger and Rocky and the story of their escape from a sinister farm.

The movie, which was the first feature from Aardman Animations (home of Wallace and Gromit and Shaun the Sheep), grossed more than $220 million and became the highest-grossing stop-motion animated film — a record it still holds.

Now the sequel "Chicken Run: Dawn of the Nugget" is finally on Netflix. The director Sam Fell; Aardman's creative director, Peter Lord; and the production designer Darren Dubicki explained what caused 23 years of delays.

AARDMAN/NETFLIX

The "Chicken Run" flock in the sequel includes the voices of Imelda Staunton and Thandiwe Newton.

Sheer Exhaustion at First

Despite the instant success of the first film, Aardman, its partner on the production, DreamWorks, and the creators were in no rush to make a second one.

Sequels weren't as much of an expectation then as they are today, and the arduous process of Claymation had left the team relatively exhausted and ready for a break.

"It's like you've just run a marathon and someone says, 'Hey, how about running another marathon?' You think, 'Well, not just now,'" Lord said. "So right back in 2000s, we were perhaps not ready. But after that, we had no objection to making a sequel at all."

DreamWorks had agreed to make five films total with Aardman, but any potential new productions fell off the priority list. The Hollywood studio instead focused on other stop-motion animated projects already in the pipeline and quickly zeroed in on a sequel to "Shrek" after the original became a box office smash in 2001.

"So for a few years, the studio was sort of distracted, the relationship with DreamWorks finished and 'Shrek' arrived," Fell said, adding that Jeffrey Katzenberg, chief executive of DreamWorks Animation at the time, "was probably more interested in 'Shrek,' too, by then."

Next, a Devastating Fire

Even before sequel plans were in place, there was a setback: In Bristol, England, the warehouse filled with all the "Chicken Run" puppets, molds and sets caught fire. When it was time to start working on a second film, "we had to really start from scratch," Fell said.

He explained that they "didn't have any reference apart from the making-of book — there were no puppets or anything to refer to."

Lord added: "We were briefly discouraged by the scale of the problem, and then we thought, 'Well, no, it's just like any other movie. Just get on with it.'"

The do-over allowed for greater creativity: While the first film took place primarily in a single location — a Yorkshire chicken farm — the second one has dozens of intricate and colorful sets.

"It was pretty apparent when we started reading the script, the scope and scale of the script meant that the world was much vaster than the first film," Dubicki said.

For Lord, seeing the characters come back to life after being lost in the fire was a moving experience.

Then Came the Flood

After designs were rendered and all the puppets recreated, production of the sequel was on track — until the warehouse where the production team was storing all the characters and sets, as well as filming the movie, flooded.

"The roof buckled in the heat of the hot summer and then it just started raining like mad for three days," Fell explained. "The whole studio started leaking, like, not just a little bit, like a lot."

The team ended up engineering a system of funnels from the ceiling and bringing the water away from the sets. Fell likened it to Willy Wonka's factory.

On Top of That? The Pandemic.

Preproduction began in early 2020, but like everything else, it came to a halt as the pandemic shut down regular life.

When the crew started working again, the necessary Covid-19 precautions significantly slowed the process.

"Stop-motion animation is a very collaborative business; it's about people being together in the same place, discussing, making group decisions, looking through the camera, choosing the building, designing, planning camera moves," Lord noted. "In Covid, you couldn't do that. You had to bring everyone on the set one at a time."

Dubicki added, "You had to be really mindful of bringing people together at various points that were integral to making it move forward."

It turns out that not only did staff members have to quarantine if someone tested positive or felt sick — the clay characters did as well.

Crew members "hold and touch and move the puppet with their hands, so by the time they finished their shot, the chicken was then considered to be potentially contaminated and someone had to come in with gloves and a mask and take the chicken to the quarantine area," Fell explained.

"There were shelves in a tent with a U.V. light where Babs would be put on the shelf for 10 days before anybody could touch her again," he added, referring to Ginger's knitting compadre.

"Weather, wind, pestilence, plagues — we survived it all," Fell said with a laugh, and joked, "Next one's coming out in 2050."

Fever Dreams and Flipped-Out Nightmares

The year's best genre movies, all available to stream, involve aliens, demons, forest fires and an unstoppable Finnish hero.

Science Fiction

Environmental disaster and artificial intelligence run amok have emerged as the major science-fiction concerns of our time. Compared to those, gray, almond-eyed aliens in flying saucers, hellbent on destroying humanity, feel like a throwback to simpler times. But "No One Will Save You," Brian Duffield's genre exercise, is deceptive.

Kaitlyn Dever plays Brynn, a demure semi-recluse who turns out to be surprisingly adept at fighting back the murderous visitors. The movie uses the suspenseful logistics of physical survival to grab viewers; Duffield has a terrific command of economical action filmmaking. But that is not the reason I've been mulling over this nearly dialogue-free movie since it premiered on Hulu in September: The story is actually about psychological survival.

An outcast in her small town, Brynn is haunted by a traumatic event in her past, and when she fights for her life, her battle plays like an extreme version of a coping mechanism. I've read several theories about the ending, but the entire movie is coded, with the aliens' retro appearance being a major clue. Under its straightforward exterior, "No One Will Save You" is a melancholic look at what Brynn does not just to live, but to live with herself.

ELISABETH VINCENTELLI

Stream "No One Will Save You" on Hulu.

CINEDIGM

Horror

My two favorite horror movies this year took apples-and-oranges paths to clock me in the face and rip out my heart.

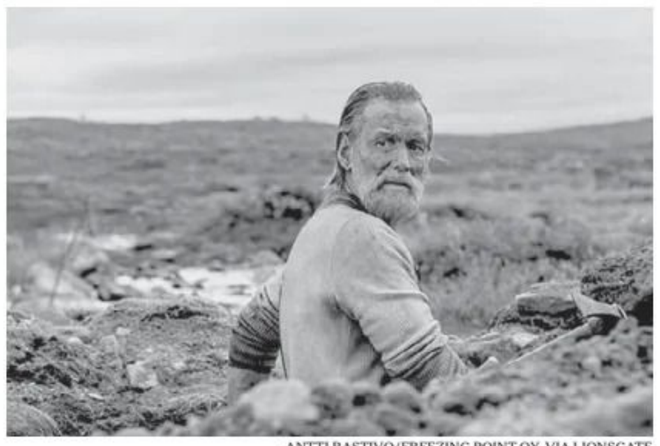
"The Outwaters" starts as a lighthearted found-footage account of four friends on a trip to the desert. But almost an hour into the film, a silhouetted figure appears in the dark distance, and that's when the writer-director Robbie Banfitch shifts into gut-punching high gear with a frenzied maelstrom of screams, grunts, creatures and guts. The result is an experimental fever dream, a sustained and visually stunning sensory assault — I could smell fear — that's singularly thrilling. Turn up the volume for a true razor's edge experience.

Paul Owens's low-fi "LandLocked" delivers equally brutal blows but with softer gloves. It's about a young man (Mason Owens, the director's brother) who finds a VHS-era camera in his family's old home that lets him glimpse his past wherever he points the lens. (Owens used his real-life family's tapes as footage.) Even in empty rooms, demons long thought to be buried instead lurk, and in the film's most terrifying passage, one monstrously emerges. It's an assured, understated and deeply creepy slow-burn study of memory, loss and, most meaningfully, fatherhood.

ERIK PIEPENBURG

Stream both "The Outwaters" and "LandLocked" on Tubi.

SAM LOTHRIDGE/20TH CENTURY STUDIOS



ANTTI RASTIVO/FREEZING POINT OY, VIA LIONSGATE

SIDESHOW/JANUS

Action

At first glance, Aatami Korpi (Jorma Tommila), the silent, bruising figure in the Finnish World War II exploitation film "Sisu," wouldn't strike you as an activist. After all, he is a stoic prospector who, at the outset of the writer-director Jalmari Helander's film, discovers a mother lode of gold. But the action genre is often where bold political statements are made through simple symbolic figures. So when the vicious SS tank commander Bruno Helldorf (Aksel Hennie) learns of Korpi's riches, what arises is a Finnish anti-imperialist story with elements of female empowerment.

Helander interweaves these themes through common action tropes. There is the cadre of Finnish female prisoners of war held by the Nazis who will eventually become the kind of army familiar to the exploitation genre, ultimately winning their bodily freedom. The retired Korpi is also an unstoppable killing machine so feared by the Russian army, it nicknamed him the Immortal. Helldorf throws everything at Korpi: tank shells, bullets and a minefield. Korpi remains unbowed. His repeated return from near-death scenarios is a wonderful gag that marries comical violence with thematic heft, turning "Sisu" into this year's sharpest resistance film.

ROBERT DANIELS

Rent or buy "Sisu" on major platforms.

International

For me, this year in international cinema is defined by two images: one of red fumes filling the skies above a German forest in "Afire," and the other of blindingly blue waves towering over a Tahitian beach in "Pacifiction."

"Afire" is a horror-inflected summer comedy about vulnerable masculinity and bemusing desire from Christian Petzold, known for his postmodern period melodramas ("Transit," "Phoenix"). "Pacifiction" is a woozy thriller about modern-day colonialism from Albert Serra, the Catalan filmmaker with an acclaimed oeuvre of formally stringent, often historically perverse films ("Liberté," "The Death of Louis XIV"). Both movies move away from their directors' usual obsessions with the past. They are animated, instead, by a trembling anxiety about the apocalyptic stakes of the present.

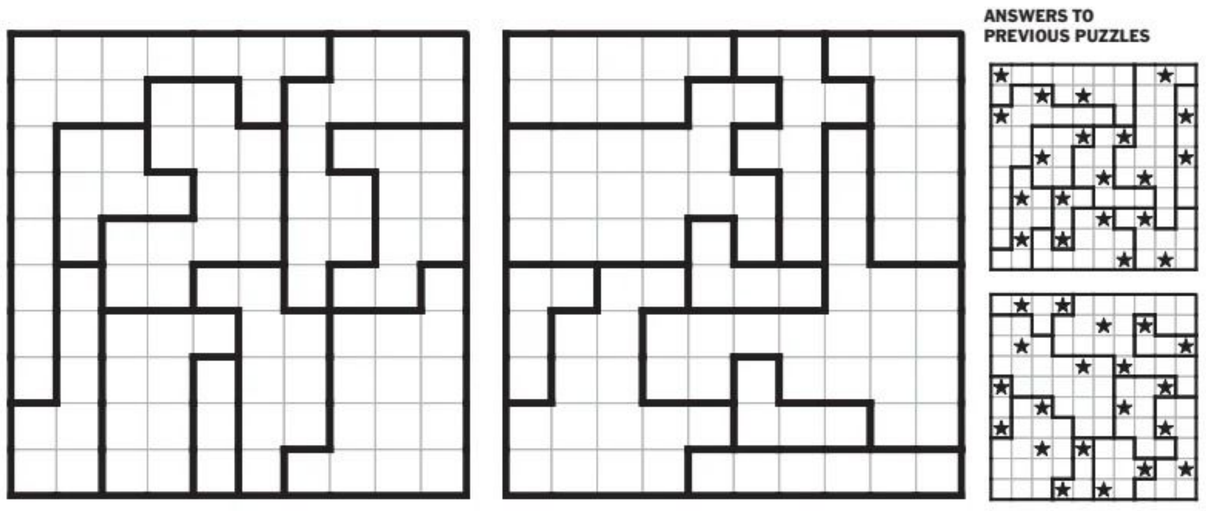
In "Afire," forest fires spurred by climate change spell doom for a group of four young lovers. In "Pacifiction," a nuclear threat lurks in the ocean, the dark waters barely concealing the machinations of imperialist powers. If the elements rise dramatically to the heavens in both, it's less to inspire awe than caution — a warning that the forces we have knowingly, venally wreaked upon the world and on one another may just consume us all.

DEVIKA GIRISH

Stream "Afire" on the Criterion Channel and "Pacifiction" on Mubi.

Clockwise from top: a scene from the horror movie "The Outwaters"; Jorma Tommila in the action thriller "Sisu"; Paula Beer in the horror-inflected comedy-drama "Afire"; and Kaitlyn Dever in the sci-fi film "No One Will Save You."

Two Not Touch



ANSWERS TO PREVIOUS PUZZLES

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

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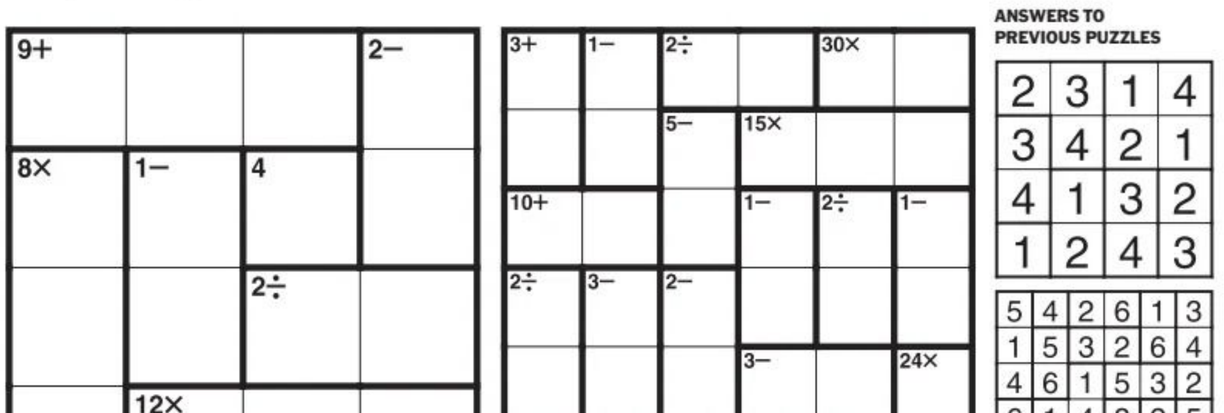
Brain Tickler

Add one letter of the alphabet 13 times — along with proper spacing and pronunciation — to complete a six-word sentence: **J E R A L E D O I T Y L U Y M U I N S**

PUZZLE BY WILL SHORTZ

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER People keep dialing my phone, sniffling and coughing. I'm getting sick of these cold calls.

KenKen



ANSWERS TO PREVIOUS PUZZLES

2	3	1	4
3	4	2	1
4	1	3	2
1	2	4	3

5	4	2	6	1	3
1	5	3	2	6	4
4	6	1	5	3	2
6	1	4	3	2	5
2	3	6	4	5	1
3	2	5	1	4	6

Fill the grid with digits so as not to repeat a digit in any row or column, and so that the digits within each heavily outlined box will produce the target number shown, by using addition, subtraction, multiplication or division, as indicated in the box. A 4x4 grid will use the digits 1-4. A 6x6 grid will use 1-6.

For more games: www.nytimes.com/games

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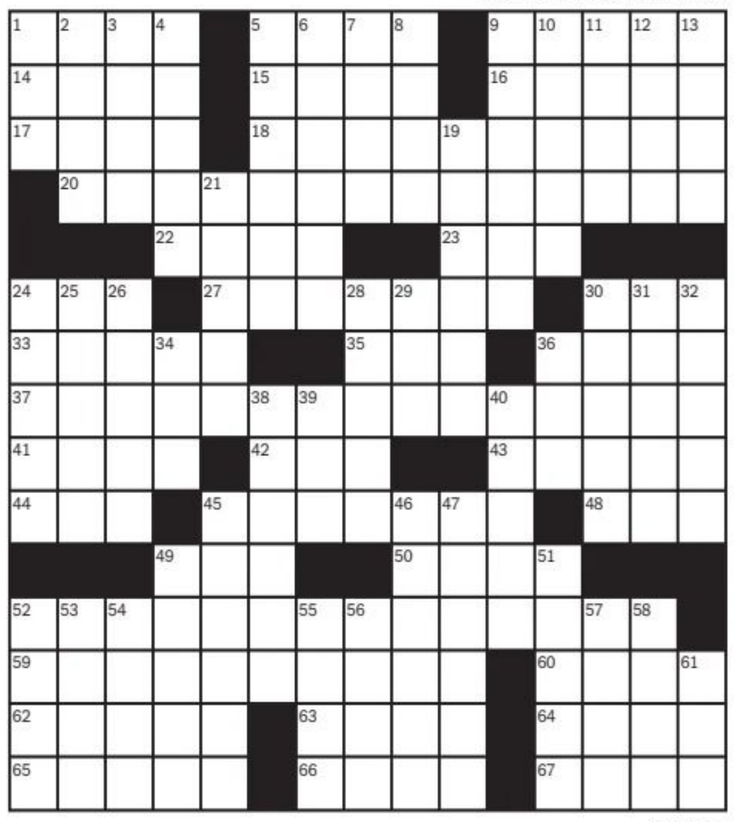
Crossword | Edited by Will Shortz

PUZZLE BY BRAD WIEGMANN



12/20/23

ACROSS

1 Quartet that reunited in 2022 to "perform" as holograms
5 Hell's Half ___ (Wyoming landmark)
9 Chromosomes come in them
14 Croc, for one
15 Big name in bubbly
16 Condition linked with grinding teeth
17 District on the western coast of Hawaii
18 Craisin brand
20 Female scholars
22 Lead-in to zone
23 Smallish batteries
24 Author Patchett
27 Components of Mars's Viking and Pathfinder
30 Intrinsic makeup
33 Fabric whose name is French for "cloth"
35 Hirsute cousin of old TV
36 Gooey addition to a charcuterie board
37 Where turn signals are found
41 Delicacies for which Aveiro, Portugal, is known
42 "Surely you don't mean *me*!?"
43 Speechless expression
44 Showstoppers?
45 Bach composition
48 Scratch, say
49 It might be cocked or bent
50 N.B.A.'s Westbrook, to fans
52 Grammy winners for "Jump (for My Love)" (1984)
59 "Apologies for bothering you ..."
60 Massage deeply
62 Mosquito, by nature
63 Chip in
64 Ski lift
65 Dutch settlers of South Africa
66 & 67 One of two pen names punnily hinted at by 20-, 37- and 52-Across (can you find the other one?)

DOWN

1 "Oh, no!"
2 Explode
3 Pro ___
4 Best effort
5 Egyptian sun god
6 Result of some spinning
7 Danger for a mariner
8 Abbreviated abbreviation
9 They might be served carbonara or puttanesca
10 Datebook data: Abbr.
11 About, on a memo
12 Vanguard's opposite
13 "Survey ___ ..." ("Family Feud" catchphrase)
19 Almost adjoining
21 Swiss mathematician who introduced functional notation
24 Totally confused
25 Prominent
26 Physicist Bohr
28 You can count on it
29 Abbreviated abbreviation
30 Amateur pediatrician, informally
31 Strong, silent type?
32 Norse pantheon
34 Paul for whom a guitar is named
36 Backside
38 Turkish inn
39 Prefix with apology or denial
40 "He is richest who is content with the ___": Socrates
45 Supplies, as a soiree
46 Stiff bristle, botanically
47 Elephant or warthog, e.g.
49 Put in
51 Company with Counting Sheep commercials
52 Last name in soft drinks
53 Reds state
54 "Not hungry yet, but thanks anyway"
55 Word with "Revolutionary" or "Tobacco," in book titles
56 In one's right mind
57 ___ Stark, Lord Eddard's eldest on "Game of Thrones"
58 Unit of meat or marble
61 Fish hatchlings

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE

A	T	A	R	I	■	B	R	E	D	■	O	S	H	A
C	A	P	O	S	■	A	I	D	E	■	N	E	A	R
C	L	O	T	H	E	S	P	U	N	■	A	R	I	D
R	O	L	E	■	X	I	I	■	■	S	P	I	K	E
A	N	O	■	P	E	C	T	O	R	A	L	F	U	N
■	■	G	R	I	D	S	■	P	I	T	A	■	■	■
A	L	I	A	S	■	■	O	A	T	■	T	O	T	E
M	O	Z	Z	A	R	E	L	L	A	S	T	U	C	K
C	L	E	O	■	O	D	D	■	■	L	E	T	M	E
■	■	■	R	E	A	D	■	L	I	A	R	S	■	■
G	R	O	C	E	R	Y	L	U	S	T	■	T	I	P
N	I	A	L	L	■	■	A	D	E	■	M	A	N	O
A	L	K	A	■	I	F	I	W	E	R	E	Y	O	U
T	E	E	M	■	D	E	L	I	■	A	T	E	I	T
S	S	N	S	■	S	W	A	G	■	M	A	D	L	Y

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‘Mr. Brightside’ Is a Straight, Heady Shot of Nostalgia

CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1

Yet in the intervening decades, “Mr. Brightside” — which eventually reached the Billboard Hot 100 more than a year after its release, peaking at No. 10 in June 2005 — has become something *more* than a hit. It has grown into an all-purpose, inescapable rallying cry: a karaoke staple, a football tradition, a party playlist must-have, a meme. It’s a straight shot of nostalgia that, having survived that awkward interval when a song feels dated and falls out of favor, now belongs to a pantheon of modern classics that are both of their time and transcend it.

ROB VERHORST/REDFERNS, VIA GETTY IMAGES

FRANK MULLEN/WIREIMAGE, VIA GETTY IMAGES

Top, the Killers, from left: Dave Keuning, Brandon Flowers, Ronnie Vannucci and Mark Stoermer. Above, Keuning, left, and Flowers. Though it was first released in 2003, “Mr. Brightside” didn’t reach the Billboard Hot 100 until June 2005, and it has gained steam during the last 20 years.

IF BOOMERS GAVE the masses “Don’t Stop Believin’,” millennials can claim “Mr. Brightside” as the generation’s official entry into that canon: a song that gets everybody at the bar shout-singing along.

The track is the centerpiece of the Killers’ oeuvre and the star of their new greatest hits album, “Rebel Diamonds,” which is full of hits with lyrics that are basically tattooed onto the hippocampuses of even the most casual fans — “All These Things That I’ve Done” (“I’ve got soul but I’m not a soldier”), the synthy-sad “Smile Like You Mean It” and gender-bendy “Somebody Told Me” (“you had a boyfriend who looked like a girlfriend that I had . . . ”). But none of those singles comes close to matching the ongoing ubiquity of “Mr. Brightside.”

“We’ve never not played that song live, because it’s stood the test of time and I’m proud of it,” Flowers told Spin in 2015. “I never get bored of singing it.” (A representative for Flowers said he was unable to speak for this article because he was in the studio.)

“You drop this on a Friday night at midnight and the whole club just goes bananas,” said William Reed, a D.J. and founder of Club Decades, a dance party at Boardner’s in Los Angeles. “Literally everybody in there is dancing and singing and dancing on top of the platforms and shouting with their eyes closed and screaming. It’s beautiful.”

Tony Twillie, entertainment director of the New Orleans Bourbon Street karaoke hot spot the Cat’s Meow, called it “one of our most popular songs.” He can cite its code for the D.J. — R203 — off the top of his head. “Everyone knows that code.”

Unlike “Don’t Stop Believin’,” “Mr. Brightside” is almost comically easy to sing — or at least, it is a song that can withstand being sung very badly. Josh Fontenot, a bartender and former karaoke host at Louie’s Pub in Chicago, always pitches “Mr. Brightside” when rookies need a recommendation. “You can put the song on and *not* sing it and people will be excited that the song is on,” he said. “The room will sing it for you.”

If you have been to Nashville recently and felt like you heard this song everywhere, you’re probably right: Jer Gregg, who oversees entertainment for TC Restaurant Group venues that cater to country music purists and bachelorette parties alike, estimates that “Mr. Brightside” is getting played “somewhere around 300 times a week” at the company’s various locations.

Why does the track slip so seamlessly into so many different settings? Genre-wise, it’s fluid: The Killers are a rock band, but their energy is a little bit glam, a little bit dance pop, a little bit emo. “Mr. Brightside” covers a cornucopia of emotional bases, too. You can sing it when you’re ecstatic, on a celebratory night out; you can sing it when you’re miserable, on a “forget about that ex” night out. There’s even a football angle.

At a 2017 University of Michigan game against its rival Michigan State University, in the middle of a downpour, the song came over the loudspeakers at the end of the third quarter and everybody in the sold-out stands (capacity: 109,901) kept singing a cappella after the D.J. cut the music. Belting “Mr. Brightside” has been a third-quarter ritual ever since. You can even buy “Mr. Brightside” Michigan-themed merch.

“It’s a weird song to have be a college football anthem,” acknowledged Alejandro Zúñiga, a Michigan alumnus who covers the Wolverines for 24/7 Sports. “The subject of the song is not related to sports, and it’s not a fight song,” he added. “But it just had so much momentum that it became what it is.”

‘It’s original. It’s got teeth. It’s got all that poignant sarcasm to it.’

JONATHAN CAIN, A MEMBER OF JOURNEY, ON ‘MR. BRIGHTSIDE’

“Mr. Brightside” is what the chart analyst and “Hit Parade” podcast host Chris Molanphy calls “a second-chance hit”: a song that fizzled and nearly flopped until something in the culture jolted it back to life. (Like Lizzo’s “Truth Hurts” from 2017, which didn’t really catch on until 2019, when it was released as a radio single after getting a bump from TikTok and Netflix.) “Sometimes certain songs need to marinate before they find their moment,” Molanphy said in an interview.

IF ARTISTS HOPING for a smash in 2020 are praying their song blows up on TikTok, in the early 2000s, the ultimate signal-boost for an indie band was getting on the soundtrack for the soapy teen drama “The O.C.” The Killers did one better: They appeared on a second-season episode of the show, performing a three-song set at the Bait Shop which included, of course, “Mr. Brightside.” Two months later, “Mr. Brightside” debuted on the Billboard charts.

The following year, when Nancy Meyers needed a specific song for her house-swap rom-com “The Holiday,” she felt like “Mr. Brightside” had been written with her movie in mind. In the scene, Cameron Diaz’s Amanda, drunk and alone — having fled to England after catching her boyfriend in bed with someone else — pops “Hot Fuss” into a CD player. With a glass of red wine in one hand and her other fist pumping the air, she drunkenly shouts along to the chorus.

“I knew I liked the song,” Meyers said in an interview. “The lyrics worked for the scene. What’s that line about? ‘Choking on your alibis.’ I don’t know if they wrote it from a woman’s point of view, but it fit what I needed.”

Noting that the track has aged well, she added: “It’s strangely upbeat, for an angry song. Cheating on people, that’s not going out of style.”

Chances are you’ve heard “Mr. Brightside” at a wedding — maybe you played it at *your* wedding. According to DJ Intelligence, one of the top software platforms D.J.s use to let their clients build event playlists, “Mr. Brightside” is the third most-requested song, behind only Whitney Houston’s “I Wanna Dance With Somebody” and Abba’s “Dancing Queen.”

Evan Reitmeyer, owner of MyDeejay in Ellicott City, Md., said “Mr. Brightside” is on more than half the playlists of his coming weddings — and its numbers have only been growing: “I would say in the last five to seven years especially, it’s just become a perennial hit that’s getting requested at every wedding.”

Despite its not-very-matrimonial theme, “Nobody seems to care about the lyrics,” he said. “They just care about how it feels. And I don’t mind; it kills on the dance floor so I’m going to keep playing it.”

For brides and grooms in their 30s, “Mr. Brightside” would have been a bop of their formative years — a time when late nights were spent chugging Four Loko, sweating through skintight American Apparel disco pants and making out with the wrong person (or knowing that, actually, *you* were the wrong person).

“I think it’s one of those songs, like ‘Don’t Stop Believin’,’ that people belatedly realize: ‘It’s an anthem. Why don’t we play this at every party we’ll ever have?’ ” Molanphy said. “And now you can’t escape it.”

But does Journey, a band that also got a boost when its song featured prominently on TV, think that “Mr. Brightside” is the new “Don’t Stop Believin’ ”?

“Sure, it is!” said Jonathan Cain, the band’s keyboardist and rhythm guitarist. He remembered liking it right away. “It was quirky and catchy. It bounced. When I heard it, it was kind of like the first time you heard Talking Heads. Very similar to David Byrne. And what an opening line! That immediately captures everybody’s imagination. It’s original. It’s got teeth. It’s got all that poignant sarcasm to it.”

The two songs have different emotional trajectories — “Don’t Stop Believin’ ” begins in loneliness and ends in a call for faith, while “Mr. Brightside” tracks the narrator’s spiral from coupledom into exile — both, Cain said, are about “the idea that stuff is going to come at you in life and you’re going to have to be able to walk through it, no matter what.”

For Kyle Tekiela, whose band Starry Eyes does some Killers cover gigs, “Mr. Brightside” is always the closer. “When it finally happens, everyone goes out of control and screams it,” he said. “It’s like a religious experience. ‘Mr. Brightside’ comes on and it’s like: OK, all our energy is spent, and now it’s time to go. Call the Uber.”

KYLE BUCHANAN | REPORTER’S NOTEBOOK

The Fast Rise and Staggering Fall of Jonathan Majors

The actor was headed to the A-list. But a criminal conviction has jeopardized that.

IT’S HARD TO MINT a new movie star these days, which is why people in Hollywood were so high on Jonathan Majors. Cerebral and charismatic with the muscular build of an action hero, the 34-year-old actor had risen quickly from acclaimed indies to big blockbusters. This was supposed to be the year that would turn him into an A-lister, aided by the massive releases of “Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania” and “Creed III,” as well as an Oscar contender, the prestige drama “Magazine Dreams.”

Instead, Mr. Majors has flamed out in spectacular fashion. Charged in March with attacking his girlfriend at the time, Grace Jabbari, Mr. Majors was convicted on Monday of reckless assault and harassment; sentencing is scheduled for Feb. 6. (He was acquitted on two additional counts that involved acting with intent.)

Just after the verdict was read, Marvel Studios announced it would no longer continue with the actor, who had been cast as the supervillain Kang and was set to recur as that character in a number of the studio’s properties, including the next two mega-budget “Avengers” movies. It’s further confirmation that this Hollywood up-and-comer has now become a persona non grata. Searchlight Pictures had already removed “Magazine Dreams,” in which Mr. Majors played a steroid-addled bodybuilder, from its year-end release calendar, though many who saw the intense drama during its Sundance Film Festival premiere in January had predicted that it could earn Mr. Majors his first Oscar nomination.

Few actors had been set up for superstardom as securely as Mr. Majors, and it’s hard to recall an ascent and fall as swift. Shortly after graduating from the Yale school of drama, Mr. Majors landed a breakout role in the acclaimed “The Last Black Man in San Francisco” (2019) as a sensitive playwright struggling to make art in his increasingly gentrified city. Called a “mournful heartbreaker” by the critic Manohla Dargis in her review of the film for The New York Times, Mr. Majors quickly leaped to the top of casting directors’ wish lists: Here was a brand-new character actor, capable of eccentric and compelling choices, with plenty of leading-man upside.

Higher-profile projects arrived the next year, as Mr. Majors starred in the HBO supernatural drama “Lovecraft Country,” which earned him an Emmy nomination, and appeared in the ensemble of Spike Lee’s “Da 5 Bloods.” In October 2020, Marvel Studios brought the actor on board to play Kang, a multiversal threat whose many variants would torment the leads of “Ant-Man” and the Disney+ series “Loki” before battling every other superhero in a big-screen two-parter, “Avengers: The Kang Dynasty” (set for 2026) and “Avengers: Secret Wars” (2027).

With that powerful co-sign, Mr. Majors’s future seemed assured: He would spend several years starring in Hollywood’s biggest comic-book blockbusters while continuing to establish his bona fides as a dramatic actor in films like the western “The Harder They Fall” (2021) and the war drama “Devotion” (2022). Though he had not yet become a household name, Mr. Majors now had so much momentum that his presence could get a movie made, and he became attached to high-profile projects like “48 Hours in Vegas,” a Lionsgate comedy about bad-boy basketball player Dennis Rodman, and Amazon’s “Da Understudy,” which was set to reunite Mr. Majors with his “Da 5 Bloods” director, Mr. Lee.

Fellow actors were eager to welcome him to the A-list. In March, when I spoke to Michael B. Jordan, the director-star of “Creed III,” he said that Mr. Majors’s ascent was “only a matter of time.” Mr. Majors arrived to that interview late, toting a portable speaker playing Kanye West’s “Real Friends,” and predicted that “Creed III” would be the first of many collaborations with Mr. Jordan. “De Niro and Pacino,” he said, setting his sights high.

Those dreams are now dashed: Though Mr. Majors may still find work in independent films, as some stars with checkered pasts have managed, the major studios that were once so eager to sign him are now certain to look elsewhere.

SETH WENIG/ASSOCIATED PRESS

The actor Jonathan Majors leaving the courtroom in New York on Monday after his conviction.

THEATER DIRECTORY
Your daily guide to theater

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ROSLYN SULCAS | DANCE REVIEW

Infused With A New Vigor

Ratmansky's original ballet choreography makes details and nuances of a story pop.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRESCIA E AMISANO/TEATRO ALLA SCALA

Above, Ludovica di Pasquale's Coppelia reads a book as Nicoletta Manni's Swanhilda, foreground center, mimics Coppelia's doll moves in Alexei Ratmansky's "Coppelia" for La Scala Ballet. Below, Timofej Andrijashenko and Manni.

MILAN — "Coppelia" is the last, exuberant gasp of 19th-century ballet Romanticism, that moment when the idea of the ballerina as a weightless, ethereal being, poised on the tips of her toes, became central to classical dance.

But the heroine of "Coppelia" isn't anything like the unattainable sylph of "La Sylphide" or the vaporous Wili of "Giselle." She isn't a victim, she doesn't die. Instead she is a cheerful, sensible village girl who teaches her fiancé the inadequacy of fantasy and the virtues of the real.

In Alexei Ratmansky's new "Coppelia," for the La Scala Ballet here, the heroine, Swanhilda (Nicoletta Manni), is the driving force of the story, much more clearly than in other productions. She doesn't pout at her fiancé Franz's infatuation with the beautiful Coppelia, the enigmatic figure who turns out to be a mechanical doll, created by the eccentric, sinister Dr. Coppelius. She wittily takes charge, determined to confront her mysterious rival and cleverly manipulating the situation after discovering the truth.

Ratmansky, who became artist in residence at New York City Ballet in August, is one of the world's foremost ballet choreographers. He's also a serious dance historian, who has staged deeply researched revisions of several 19th-century ballets based on period sources and notation.

He hasn't done this with "Coppelia." Instead he has created original choreography while sticking faithfully both to the Léo Delibes score and the original libretto. ("Coppelia" was first choreographed by Arthur Saint-Léon for the Paris Opera Ballet in 1870, but the ballet we know today is largely based on the 1884 version by Marius Petipa.) The effect is similar to seeing his "Swan Lake" or "Giselle" revisions, in which a wealth of detail and nuance suddenly seem alive — as if a carapace of formulaic presentation and interpretation has been cracked open.

In interviews, Ratmansky, who was born in Ukraine and has been fiercely outspoken in his opposition to the Russian invasion, said that when first thinking about the piece, he was struck by the setting of the ballet in Galicia, a region partly in Ukraine. That idea isn't belabored but is subtly suggested by Jérôme Kaplan's dark wood sets and lovely embroidered costumes for the villagers.

What's most notable, given this association, is the production's joyfulness and energy. It's genuinely funny; the audience frequently laughed out loud, including at an early moment when Franz (Timofej Andrijashenko) attempts a clumsy cover-up after Swanhilda sees him blowing a kiss to Coppelia.

And when Swanhilda and her friends discover, in Act II, that Coppelia is a lifeless doll, they shake with laughter. This is one of many moments in Ratmansky's telling in which emotions and reactions ring true and feel like a departure from the stylized actions of many classics.

Swanhilda is immediately established at the start of the ballet as a life-giving force — she enthusiastically flings open her curtains and waters her plants — but Franz is clearly a slightly dim, if adorable, klutz. Ratmansky gives him more dancing than is usual in traditional versions, and Andrijashenko, a polished technician with a beautiful expansive jump, does a fine and funny job of conveying both irrepressible exuberance and a poor-me-I-am-just-a-man sulkiness.

Ratmansky's narrative proceeds with more clarity and logic than most "Coppelias" with Swanhilda, Franz and their friends integrated into the village dances and dramatic action. (The actor and writer Guillaume Gallienne is credited as dramaturg. Bravo.) Manni's Swanhilda is under no illusions about her handsome swain, whom she clearly loves, and she makes it enjoyably obvious that he is in her very bad books. Supported in arabesque at the end of a pas de deux, she pushes him away and balances alone, before running off, leaving Franz stomping with frustration.

The villagers's ensemble dances, notably a mazurka and a czardas, are earthy and convincing as folk dance, the women throwing themselves sideways into the mens's arms, hands tucked behind heads, the group performing vigorous stamping jumps without undue prettiness.

Dr. Coppelius (Christian Fagetti) is not the doddering fool of many versions, but bad-tempered and obsessively focused on his mechanical creations. In Act II, Kaplan makes the interior of his house an atmospheric mad-scientist lair. Huge drawings of skeletons are suspended from high ceilings; disjointed, near-naked dolls line the sides. When the women set them in motion, the dolls move with jerky, convincing limitation. And a special word here for Ludovica di Pasquale as Coppelia, for whom Ratmansky has invented a brilliant, staccato mime sequence that goes far beyond the usual perfunctory puppetlike gestures.

In this act and elsewhere, Ratmansky uses mime and gesture, but more often integrates it into the dance, so that the steps themselves seem to tell the story. Sometimes, as when Coppelius laughs with glee as Coppelia (Manni brilliant as the disguised Swanhilda) seems to come to life, the movement seems a pure embodiment of the music.

The musicality of the choreography is perhaps the most thrilling aspect of this "Coppelia." Throughout, Ratmansky's use of dynamic contrast between groundedness and floating jumps, his shifts of rhythmic emphasis, and changes in impetus and momentum, make conventional ballet vocabulary look spontaneous and fresh.

The La Scala dancers look terrific throughout, not least in Act III, usually depicted as the wedding of Swanhilda and Franz, with what can often feel like a stodgy set of divertissements. Ratmansky sticks to the traditional idea of allegorical dances here but makes them about the young couple's future. A woman in orange (Linda Giubelli), surrounded by six children, perhaps shows the joys of maternal love; a man in a Greek tunic (Navrin Turnbull) might represent sensuality and romance; a brigand figure (Rinaldo Venuti) causes fighting to break out among the villagers: discord!

Finally there is peace and resolution in a beautiful pas de deux for the lovers, showing us Franz's swashbuckling charm and Swanhilda's generous warmth. Unusually for a climactic moment, it ends modestly, Swanhilda balancing in a low arabesque on Franz's knee, her arms opening out gently. That modesty seems emblematic of Ratmansky's enterprise in this "Coppelia." He hasn't reinvented or reinterpreted the ballet, but he has infused it with new life.

CRITIC'S PICK

Coppelia
Through Jan. 13 at La Scala in Milan; teatroallascala.org. It is also streaming on medici.tv.

Commercial or Classical?

CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1

east Symphony Orchestra — a Los Angeles ensemble that is one of the nation's oldest primarily Black orchestras — allow Parnther to explore and expand the repertoire. An enthusiastic communicator, he talks his audiences through his programs regularly, so singing isn't that big of a stretch.

But his "Black Panther" and "Oppenheimer" engagements shed light on a less visible aspect of his growing career, which has included appearances with major ensembles, including the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. Even if you don't know Parnther by name, you've likely heard his conducting — on film soundtracks like "Avatar: The Way of Water" and "Turning Red"; television series like "Fargo" and "Only Murders in the Building"; or video games, including "League of Legends" and "Guild Wars." If you've streamed "Encanto at the Hollywood Bowl," a concert performance of the animated Disney film featuring the original voice cast, you've seen him in action.

Ludwig Goransson, who composed the scores for "Black Panther" and "Oppenheimer," views Parnther as an invaluable collaborator. In a video interview from Los Angeles, he said: "If something doesn't sound right, I'll hit him up on the podium and we'll talk about things — how to adjust a couple of notes or change a voicing — and he can immediately relate that information to the musicians."

One reason he works so effectively with studio musicians, Goransson says, is because he emerged from their ranks. For Parnther, working with Goransson on the "Star Wars" TV spinoffs "The Mandalorian" and "The Book of Boba Fett" was especially meaningful. As an eighth grader in Norfolk, Va., he learned his middle-school band would play music from "Star Wars" on a coveted trip to the theme park Kings Dominion. Thumbing through a musical reference book, he flipped past "A" and the accordion — it brought up unfortunate associations with "The Lawrence Welk Show" — before landing on "B" and the bassoon. He took up the instrument as his way to tag along.

Parnther, the son of Jamaican and Samoan academics, was exposed to gospel in the Baptist church, but it was soundtracks by John Williams that sparked his interest in music. The timing wasn't ideal: In high school, when he decided to pursue music professionally, his family living was in public housing after losing their home in a fire; his mother was fighting cancer.

She bought her son the best bassoon she could afford, a Schreiber S91 Prestige: not state of the art, but a durable instrument.

"She had to literally make the choice between paying the electric bill and making the payments on my instrument," Parnther said. "She decided to make the payments on my instrument, so there was a fire lit in me: I wanted to repay my mother for the sacrifices that she made."

Parnther went on to earn music degrees from Northwestern and Yale. He then took a position at East Tennessee State University in Johnson City, Tenn., gaining confidence as a conductor while earning a music education degree.

His tenacity and ambition paid off. The kid who had been inspired by "Star Wars" to pick up the bassoon would go on to play his hardy Schreiber for Williams in the soundtracks for the last three feature films in the series. He also played bassoon on sessions with high-profile pop artists, including Beyoncé, Rihanna and Snoop Dogg. (When his instrument was stolen from his car in 2020, its theft and recovery made headlines.)

His work as a versatile, open-minded conductor brought him attention beyond the studios. In addition to his San Bernardino and Southeast Symphony posts, in 2020 Parnther was named conductor of the Gateways Music Festival Orchestra, an elite annual aggregation of classical musicians of African descent, whose Chicago debut he will lead in April.

Conducting also brought unanticipated collaborations — with the singer John Legend, the hip-hop producer Metro Boomin and the metal band Avenged Sevenfold, among others. Parnther hasn't lured those artists into his concert-music realm yet, but it's not out of the question.

"The conductor of the future, in order for the orchestra to remain relevant, will have to find a way to center the orchestra and not the genre," he said. "Sometimes that means you mix genres on the same concert, if there's a story line or a relevant through line."

And the skills he's picked up in the fast-paced world of commercial entertainment have proved transferable. Engaged last year to record "The Central Park Five," Anthony Davis's Pulitzer Prize-winning opera, with the Long Beach Opera in just two days, Parnther took the company into a Glendale film studio. He used a metronomic click track and other tools of the trade to maximize efficiency.

"The click track lends a certain precision," Davis said in a video interview, "but there are times when I want a little more flexibility to let the music breathe" — crucial in sections involving improvisation. "It was a great experience, having the tightness of the music, yet also allowing space for the creative expression of individual musicians."

PHILIP CHEUNG FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

"The conductor of the future, in order for the orchestra to remain relevant, will have to find a way to center the orchestra and not the genre," said Anthony Parnther.

Parnther has used his platforms and rising profile to champion Black composers like Davis and Adolphus Hailstork, while nurturing artists who straddle worlds as he does, including Kris Bowers, Chanda Dancy and Tamar-kali. But his Hollywood affiliations have their own perks.

"I'm not a famous conductor," Parnther said, "but I have been picked out in so many public spaces as the conductor from 'Encanto at the Hollywood Bowl.'" He's seen a video of his symphonic concert with Metro Boomin rack up over six million views on YouTube. "And a comment that I ran across is like, Oh my God, this is awesome — but wait a minute, is that the same conductor from 'Encanto at the Hollywood Bowl'?"

IMAGES VIA CHARITIES AID FOUNDATION AMERICA

Curt Bloch, in an undated photo below, was dedicated to publishing his satirical magazine each week and numbered the issues. Some covers depicted the brutish character of Nazism, above.

Hiding in an Attic, and Taking On the Nazis

CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1

In one poem, he sardonically suggested how recent events had reordered what it meant to be a beast in the animal kingdom:

Hyenas and jackals
Look on with jealousy
For they now seem as choirboys
Compared to humanity.

Bloch shared his handwritten magazine with the people he lived with, the family who sheltered him and, possibly, outside helpers and other Jews in hiding. After the war, which Bloch survived, he collected his magazines and brought them home and ultimately to New York, where he emigrated. There they sat on some bookshelves, the unknown creations of a man who was trained not as a poet, or an artist, but as a lawyer.

Bloch's daughter, Simone Bloch, now 64, remembers seeing the magazines in the family home growing up. She didn't fully grasp their significance, or particularly care to. A rebellious teenager by her own account, Simone said she never connected particularly well with her father, who died suddenly from a liver ailment when she was 15.

"A couple of times he read from them at dinner parties," she said in an interview, "but I didn't understand German then."

Many years later, though, Simone's daughter, Lucy, took an interest in the magazines, not just as family mementos but as markers of history. She received a research grant to travel to Germany, where she learned more about her grandfather's history. Simone then spent years searching for a way to expand public awareness of the magazines, one of the few previously undiscovered literary efforts that document the Holocaust in Europe.

This led to the production of a book, "The Underwater Cabaret: The Satirical Resistance of Curt Bloch," by Gerard Groeneveld, which was published in the Netherlands this year. Soon there will also be a museum exhibition, "'My Verses Are Like Dynamite.' Curt Bloch's Het Onderwater Cabaret," which is scheduled to open in February at the Jewish Museum Berlin.

"Any time that an almost completely unknown work of this caliber comes to the fore, it's very significant," said Aubrey Pomerance, a curator of the Berlin museum exhibition. "The overwhelming majority of writings that were created in hiding were destroyed. If they weren't, they've come to the public attention before now. So, it's tremendously exciting."

Research by Pomerance and Groeneveld for the exhibition and the book has helped to illuminate many aspects of Bloch's life, which had not previously drawn much attention. Born in Dortmund, an industrial city in western Germany, Bloch was 22 and working at his first job as a legal secretary when Hitler became the chancellor of Germany in 1933. Antisemitic violence in Bloch's hometown escalated even before official anti-Jewish measures were instituted.

After a colleague threatened his life that same year, Bloch fled to Amsterdam, where he took a job with a Persian rug importer and dealer. He hoped to find refuge there before escaping further west, but his plans were dashed when the Germans invaded in 1940, the borders closed, and the nightmare expanded to Jews there as well.

Bloch's firm transferred him to The Hague, but when non-Dutch Jews were forced out of the western Dutch provinces by the occupier's decree, he was sent to work in a subsidiary in Enschede.

There, he got a job with the local Jewish Council, an organization installed by the German overseers to carry out Nazi antisemitic edicts. Jews who worked for the council were assured that they were safe from deportation.

JEWISH MUSEUM BERLIN

'Any time that an almost completely unknown work of this caliber comes to the fore, it's very significant.'

AUBREY POMERANCE
A CURATOR AT THE JEWISH MUSEUM BERLIN

Technically, Bloch was an adviser for "immigrant affairs," although no opportunities for immigration existed — only transport to a concentration camp. The the Jewish Council in Enschede understood the dangers and warned its members to go into hiding.

It was aided by an influential Dutch Reformed Church pastor, Leendert Overduin, who secretly ran a resistance organization that helped some 1,000 Jews find places to hide. Known as Group Overduin, it consisted of about 50 people, including Overduin's two sisters. Overduin was arrested three times and was imprisoned for this work; he has been recognized since as Righteous Among Nations by Yad Vashem, the Holocaust remembrance center in Jerusalem.

Group Overduin found Bloch a hiding place in the home of Bertus Menneken, an undertaker, and his wife, Aleida Menneken, a housekeeper. Their two-story brick house on Plataanstraat 15 was in a middle-class district of western Enschede.

There, Bloch shared the crawl space with a 44-year-old German-Jewish refugee, Bruno Löwenberg, and Löwenberg's 22-year-old girlfriend, Karola Wolf, whom they called Ola. During their time in hiding, Bloch fell in love with Ola and wrote many verses just for her.

"He had a lot of courage, but he also had a reckless streak," Groeneveld said.

Each edition of Bloch's magazine consisted of just a single copy. But it may have been read by as many as 20 to 30 people, Groeneveld estimated.

"There was huge organization behind him, which included couriers, who brought food, but who could also bring the magazine out, to share with other people in the group who could be trusted," Groeneveld said. "The magazines are very small, you can easily put one in your pocket or hide it in a book. He got them all back. They must have also returned them in some way."

Bloch named his magazine in response to a German-language radio program that played on Dutch airwaves during the occupation, the Sunday Afternoon Cabaret. But this, Groeneveld explained, was the Underwater Cabaret, which took its title from a Dutch term for going into hiding: "onderduiken." Its literal translation is "to dive under," but a common translation is "to slip out of public view." A person in hiding was an "onderduiker," who had gone "under water," or was submerged.

Groeneveld said that Bloch's covers, which were stylized photomontages, drew inspiration from antifascist satirical magazines of the prewar era, like the French Marianne, known for its anti-Nazi illustrations, and the German workers' magazine Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung.

"His main target was Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi propaganda minister," Pomerance said. "He often refers to articles that talk about a 'final victory for the Nazis,' and he mocks that notion, calling them murderers and liars. He was always sure that Germany would not win the war."

In his poem, "The Way to Truth," for example, he advised an imagined German reader how to approach Goebbels's falsehoods:

If he writes straight, read it crooked.
If he writes crooked, read it straight.
Yes, just turn his writings around.
In all his useful words, harm is found.

Bloch's writing wasn't necessarily intended to live only on the page. During his time in hiding, he may have recited his poetry or performed the songs, Pomerance said.

"Quite a number of his poems were identified as being songs," he said. "But unfortunately he didn't provide any melodies that they should be sung to," except for one, titled "Resistance Song."

The cover of the final issue, dated April 1945, after his liberation, is a photomontage of two people climbing out of a hatch. The title of that issue declares they are finally "above water."

One poem in the edition, the only one he wrote in English, reads:

At Berlin with our Russian friends,
The German Nightingale,
Herr Hitler, doesn't sing today
He's feeling, after some delay
A tie around his neck.

Though Bloch survived, his mother and his sisters and most of the rest of his family in Germany died in the war. After the liberation of the Netherlands, he met Ruth Kan, who had survived a number of concentration camps, including Auschwitz. They married in 1946, had a son, Stephen, and moved to New York in 1948, where they later opened a business that sold European antiques and had Simone in 1959.

Beyond the new book and museum exhibition, Simone is developing a website that will feature her father's art and poetry in three languages: German, Dutch and English.

That process has had a profound impact on her, she said.

"It provides not just insight but access to my father in a way that I wish I'd had when I was young," she said.

Italy Names New Directors For Several Major Museums

A nationalist government turns to Italians to lead the Uffizi and other top institutions.

By ELISABETTA POVOLEDO and ALEX MARSHALL

ROME — The Culture Ministry of Italy announced new leaders at some of that country's top museums, including the Uffizi in Florence — one of the world's most visited art institutions and home to hundreds of masterpieces, including paintings by Botticelli, Caravaggio and Michelangelo.

The nationalist government said in a news release on Friday that the Uffizi's new director would be Simone Verde, an art historian who currently leads the Pilotta complex of museums in Parma, in northern Italy.

Verde, 48, studied theoretical philosophy in Rome before securing a diploma in art history from the École du Louvre in Paris. He has also worked at the Louvre Abu Dhabi, as the museum's head of scientific research and publications.

Verde, who will begin a four-year term in January, will replace Eike Schmidt, who led the Uffizi for the past eight years. The Culture Ministry announced that Schmidt would be taking over another Italian institution: the Capodimonte Museum, in Naples, whose collection includes paintings by Caravaggio, Titian and Gentileschi.

Yet Schmidt, who recently suggested he might leave the museum world for politics, is keeping his options open. Since the appointment, he told Italian reporters that he would decide in January whether to run for mayor of Florence, adding that he could not do that job while also leading a museum.

SUSAN WRIGHT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The Uffizi in Florence, Italy, is one of the world's most visited art institutions. Simone Verde is the museum's new director.

"How can you think of spending half the week in Naples and half in Florence?" he said, according to Corriere del Mezzogiorno, a local edition of the Milan daily Corriere della Sera. "It would be absurd."

A Uffizi spokesman said that Schmidt and Verde were unavailable for comment.

The Culture Ministry's announcement, which included new leadership for eight other museums, could signal a change in outlook for the Italian art world.

Eight years ago, a previous Italian government passed a reform that paved the way for foreigners to lead some of the country's major museums, including Schmidt, who was born in Germany, at the Uffizi; Sylvain Bellenger, a French art historian, at the Capodimonte Museum; and James Bradburne, a Canadian-born British cultural manager, at the Brera art museum in Milan.

All the appointees announced on Friday are Italian. (Schmidt recently received Italian citizenship.)

Vittorio Sgarbi, the deputy culture minister, joked on Saturday that Stella Falzone, who will lead the National Archaeological Museum in Taranto, was the only "foreigner" among the new directors because she had previously worked at the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna. The news agency ANSA reported that Sgarbi described the hiring decisions of the previous minister, who had opted for more international candidates, as foreigner-loving "intoxication."

Elisabetta Povoledo reported from Rome, and Alex Marshall from London.

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A chocolate tart worth a double take. BY GENEVIEVE KO

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Food
The New York Times

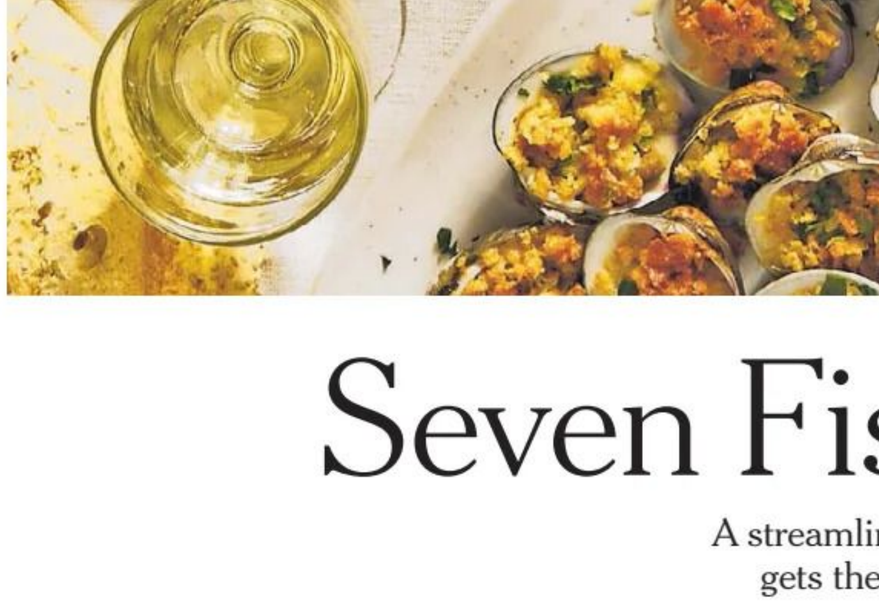
RYAN LIEBE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES. FOOD STYLIST: BARRETT WASHBURNE. PROP STYLIST: PAIGE HICKS.

Seven Fishes, Minimal Stress

A streamlined version of the Italian American Christmas Eve meal gets the job done with plenty of time left for comfort and joy.

BY DAN PELOSI | PAGES 4-5

What's Ahead in 2024? The Cookie Cutters Tell All.



RACHEL VANNI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The shape-shifting baking tools can reveal a lot about what's on people's minds, as one American company has learned . . . to its profit.

A cookie cutter "is almost like an extension of our personalities," said Arlene Chua of Staten Island.

By PRIYA KRISHNA

RUTLAND, VT. — Ben Clark may be uniquely qualified to predict the outcome of the next presidential election. He's not a pollster or political strategist. He makes cookie cutters.

The metal baking tools are an uncanny cultural bellwether, said Mr. Clark, who runs Ann Clark, the largest cookie-cutter manufacturer in the United States. Just after the 2016 election, he noticed that percentage sales of his Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump cutters roughly aligned with the vote.

Last spring, guitar and musical-note shapes began selling at a rapid clip, just as Taylor Swift was starting her Eras tour. In July, cookie cutters shaped like lipsticks and convertible cars picked up steam, thanks to Barbie mania.

On a recent morning at the factory in Rutland. Vt., Mr. Clark was puzzling over next year's election — specifically, how to create a cookie cutter of President Biden, whose silhouette isn't all that recognizable. Suddenly, it hit him.

"The glasses!" said Mr. Clark, referring to Mr. Biden's signature aviator shades. "That's what it has to be."

You may not know the name Ann Clark, but whether you're buying a cookie cutter from Williams-Sonoma or from Amazon, it's most likely hers. The company, founded in 1989 by Ann and John Clark — Mr. Clark's parents — says it accounts for about 65 percent of all cookie-cutter sales in the country, about $12 million a year.

Its strategy is twofold: Throw a wide variety of cookie cutters (about five million a

CONTINUED ON PAGE D9

Hallacas for the Holidays

For Venezuelans, the form of tamale, filled with a rich meaty stew, is a comforting taste of home.

By CHRISTINA MORALES

In 2015, the first year Héctor Arguinzones celebrated Christmas in the United States, he longed to share his mother's hallacas with his wife, Niurka Meléndez, and their son, Samuel.

Hallacas, similar to tamales, are a signature dish of the holiday in Venezuela, where he and his family had emigrated from, but the only ones he could find in America were made with ketchup. So he spent the next couple of years learning how to replicate his mother's recipe, taking cooking classes and having her decipher her vague measurements over long-distance calls until he finally nailed the filling.

For Venezuelans at home and living in the United States, hallacas are a Christmas staple. Families spend several days making and assembling them, stuffing the guiso — the stewlike filling made from chicken, pork and beef and stained deep red from annatto — into corn masa. The hallacas look like presents when they're wrapped in banana leaves and tied with cotton twine.

In 2017, Mr. Arguinzones and some friends cooked holiday dishes like ensalada de gallina and pan de jamón for 200 Venezuelan immigrants in Harlem. Mr. Arguinzones made his mother's hallacas.

Every year since then, over several weeks in December, he has continued to make them for 300 Venezuelan migrants in need. On Dec. 22, the group gives them away, along with donated toys that Mrs. Meléndez has collected for each family.

"We do this to preserve our traditions," Mr. Arguinzones said in Spanish. "When you're eating that chicken salad, that hallaca, that pan de jamón, it's going to feel like it was prepared like it is in your house."

This is just one project that Mr. Arguinzones and Mrs. Meléndez plan under their organization, Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid. They started the group in 2016 to help Venezuelan migrants, more than 110,000 of whom have arrived in New York City since last year. In September, about 400,000 Venezuelan migrants who entered the United States from March 2021 to July of this year were granted work permits.

Isbelis Diaz's experience with hallacas was similar to that of Mr. Arguinzones. Ms. Diaz, who is from Maracaibo, recalls helping her mother and grandmother prepare vegetables for the guiso. Her son, Ivo Diaz, pitched in to tie the hallacas.

She moved to New York in 2001, and soon began to make and sell hallacas, using her great-grandmother's recipe from the 1930s. She built a following by bringing them to events and businesses. She made hundreds during the holiday season.

Since 2019, Ms. Diaz has served her hallacas year-round at Casa Ora, the fine-dining Venezuelan restaurant she runs in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, with her son and daughter-in-law Rachel Diaz Pirard. (The restaurant is named after her first granddaughter, Ora Diaz.) Two other cooks help her make the hallacas. On a recent Friday, they made 300. "It's a lot of work, but it's never missing from the Venezuelan table," Ms. Diaz said in Spanish.

Since 2010, Alejandro Hernández Padilla has been making his mother's recipe for hallacas with his family in Pembroke Pines, Fla. He has used her handwritten grocery list to guide him.

In early December, he gathered with his father, wife, three children, sister, niece and other relatives. They chopped the vegetables throughout the week. On a Friday night, he made the guiso with chicken, pork, capers, onions, scallions and other ingredients. On Saturday, he set up stations where the team turned out 45 hallacas.

By 10 p.m., the family was eating.

"It takes me back to my childhood," said Mr. Hernández Padilla, who grew up in Caracas. "This year, the kids are a little bit bigger so they helped a little more. Maybe one day they'll remember when they used to make hallacas in the little house in Pembroke Pines."

KERRI BREWER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES. FOOD STYLIST: BARRETT WASHBURNE.

HALLACAS

ADAPTED FROM ISBELIS DIAZ AND IVO DIAZ, CASA ORA RESTAURANT, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK
TIME: 5½ HOURS
YIELD: ABOUT 25 HALLACAS

For the annatto oil:

- ½ cup/75 grams annatto seeds
- 2 cups olive or canola oil

For the guiso:

- 2 pounds boneless, skinless pork shoulder, diced into ¼-inch pieces
- 6 ounces bacon (about 6 slices), cut into thin strips
- ½ cup/71 grams brined capers
- 1 medium head of garlic, minced (about 4 tablespoons)
- 1 ½ pounds Russet potatoes, peeled
- 1 pound carrots, peeled
- 1 large white onion, diced into ¼-inch pieces
- 1 leek (white and light green part only), halved and thinly sliced
- 3 scallions, trimmed and thinly sliced
- 1 large red bell pepper, diced into ¼-inch pieces
- 1 large green bell pepper, diced into ¼-inch pieces
- 6 ounces ají dulce peppers (about 20), halved, seeded and thinly sliced
- 2 Maggi chicken bouillon cubes, dissolved in ½ cup of warm water
- 1 (15-ounce) can chickpeas, rinsed
- 2 cups/340 grams brown raisins
- ⅔ cup/125 grams jarred sliced Manzanilla olives and pimentos
- 2 tablespoons/30 grams homemade sazón or store-bought (preferably La Flor)
- 1½ tablespoons yellow mustard
- 1½ tablespoons soy sauce
- 1½ tablespoons black pepper

For the assembly:

- 4 (1-pound) packages banana leaves, thawed, washed and dried
- 1 large roll (800 feet) cotton twine

For the masa:

- 2 teaspoons kosher salt (such as Diamond Crystal)
- 1 (2.43-ounce) box Maggi chicken bouillon cubes (6 cubes)
- ½ cup warm water
- 1 (2 pound 3.27-ounce) bag pre-cooked white Harina Pan cornmeal
- 6¾ cups room temperature water, plus more if needed for hydrating masa

1. Prepare the annatto oil: In a medium saucepan, add the annatto seeds and oil. Turn on the heat to medium-low and let the seeds simmer slowly until the oil turns deep red and becomes fragrant (it will look and smell similar to red wine), about 20 minutes. Lower the heat slightly if the oil pops too frequently. Strain, then set aside.

2. Prepare the guiso: In a large pot, heat ⅓ cup of the annatto oil over medium-high. Add the pork, bacon, capers and garlic, and stir to combine. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the pork and bacon crisp and some of the liquid evaporates, about 25 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the pork mixture to a medium bowl. (Don't discard the rendered fat.)

3. While that fries, add about 10 cups of hot water to a medium saucepan or pot and bring to a boil over high. Roughly chop the potatoes and carrots, then add to a food processor and pulse into small, ¼-inch pieces. Once the water is boiling, add the carrots and potatoes and cook until tender, about 10 minutes. Drain into a colander.

4. Once the meat and root vegetables are done cooking, prepare the rest of the guiso. Add about ½ cup of annatto oil to the large pot and heat over medium-low. Add the onion, leek, scallions, bell peppers, ají dulce and the ½ cup dissolved chicken bouillon liquid, and cook uncovered, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables have softened, about 10 minutes.

5. Stir in the reserved pork mixture along with the boiled potatoes and carrots, the chickpeas, raisins, olives, sazón, mustard, soy sauce and black pepper. Simmer over medium-low heat until the flavors meld, about 10 minutes. Set aside to cool before making the hallacas. (The filling can be made and refrigerated a day or two in advance.)

6. Prepare the banana leaves for the hallacas: Separate the smaller leaves and any ripped pieces from the larger ones. Unfold the larger leaves carefully and lay them flat on a counter. Measure and cut the leaves vertically to be about 1 foot in length. If some of your leaves are ripped, you can layer better ones underneath and use them or cut and discard the damaged pieces if they're closer to the edge.

7. Prepare the masa: Add the salt and bouillon cubes to ½ cup of warm water in a large measuring cup; crumble and stir until dissolved, to ensure that the salt in the masa is evenly distributed.

8. In a large mixing bowl, pot or stand mixer, add the cornmeal, 6¾ cups room temperature water, the seasoned water and ¼ cup annatto oil. Mix until the masa is soft and pliable like kids' clay and turns light yellow. Cover the bowl with a damp kitchen towel to prevent the masa from drying out and cracking.

9. Prepare the hallacas: Have your banana leaves, annatto oil, masa, guiso and a cup of room temperature water nearby. Take a leaf and place it in front of you with the stripes of leaf going in a diagonal direction. Using a silicone pastry brush (or even your fingers), coat the portion of the leaf that faces you with the reserved annatto oil.

10. Measure out ½ cup of masa and roll it into a ball. If the masa is drying out or cracking in your hands, lightly dab it with some of the water and roll until it hydrates more. Press that ball into the center of the leaf and use your three middle fingers to flatten the masa and spread it outwardly in roughly a 10-inch circle to the edges of leaves until you are just able to see the dark green color of the leaf through the masa. Leave at least 1 inch between the edge of the leaf and your masa. Press and seal any cracks you see along the edge of the masa.

11. Measure out a loosely packed ½ cup of your guiso and place it in the center of the flattened masa. Using a kitchen knife, push the guiso into a long, 3-inch-wide strip, leaving about 1 inch between the end of your guiso and the edge of the masa on the leaf.

12. Assemble your hallacas: Carefully grab the left corner of the leaf and fold it over to the right. The masa should fall gently on top, covering at least the left half of the guiso. Repeat with the right-hand side, overlapping the masa slightly in the center. With your fingers, press the ends to seal the guiso inside. If you spot any holes or gaps in the masa at the seams, you can pull a pinch more masa and mold to close them up.

13. Wrap the hallacas: Starting with the left corner, carefully fold the leaf over the hallaca and tuck the end underneath to create a tight hold. If the leaf does not entirely go over the hallaca, carefully lift the leaf from the bottom, pushing hallaca toward you. Gently thrust the top of the hallaca into your hand and reposition it to the center of the leaf so that the corner can fold underneath.

14. Once the left corner of the leaf has been tucked, take the now-sealed portion and fold it over to the right until you reach the end of the banana leaf.

15. Fold the open ends of the hallaca back to seal, then place the scruffy side down onto another leaf. Repeat the same folding.

16. Place the unkempt side down horizontally on the counter. While still attached to the roll, unfurl about one foot of cotton twine and place it underneath. Unravel a couple of inches more from the roll, but don't cut the twine yet. Take the ends and cross them over the top and twist tightly. Flip the twine so that the ends are now in a vertical direction. Flip it over so that the bottom is now facing you and repeat until tight for extra support, up to three times. Tie it and trim the twine. Set the hallacas aside for cooking (they'll keep, refrigerated, for up to 5 days) or freeze them for up to 4 months.

17. To cook them, place as many as you can in a large pot. Fill that pot with water until all the hallacas are covered. Bring the water up to a boil over high heat and cook them until firm to the touch, 10 to 12 minutes if making a few, or up to 30 minutes if cooking a large batch.

18. To serve, cut the twine with a scissor and unwrap the plantain leaf. (They can stay in the hot water with the lid on for up to 45 minutes, if you'd like to serve them later.) If you have extra guiso, it can be heated up and spooned on top when serving. If cooking a frozen hallaca, let it sit on the counter to defrost while you boil water. Once the water is boiling, cook the hallaca for slightly longer, about 20 minutes. If you're reheating a hallaca you have already unwrapped, submerge it in a bowl of water and microwave it for about 4 minutes.

Front Burner

FLORENCE FABRICANT

TO INDULGE

Cookie-Brownie-Cake Is Ready to Be Served

➤ A few blocks from where the Cronut was born, a new pastry mash-up by a French chef is coming. Gregory Doyen (right) developed a cakelike confection inspired by brownies and cookies that's round, about three inches in diameter, fairly dense and with a central opening where a ganache or fruit filling goes. Mr. Doyen is calling it MOD, for multilayered original dessert. It's offered as a single serving ($7.50 each) and in fours ($29), and can be shared and personalized. In a show of extreme confidence, it's the only product sold in the bright white shop of the same name he owns with Edward Geyman, his business partner. A native of the Burgundy region in France who studied pastry making and has been a pastry consultant in many countries around the globe, Mr. Doyen, 38, arrived in the United States a year ago and began working on this project. "I didn't just want to reproduce French pastry," he said. The flavor and filling combinations are endless. For now he has eight colorful examples, including peanut butter and jelly, matcha with white chocolate, walnut with dark chocolate, red velvet with dark chocolate and raspberry, and pecan caramel with milk chocolate chips and sea salt. He has a featured flavor of the month, which for now is s'mores with a marshmallow topping that he torches before serving. He said he's working on a mini size: *MOD, 199 Prince Street (MacDougal Street), 212-964-0973, moddessert.com.*

TO VIEW

Looking at Food And the Islamic World

➤ The Los Angeles County Museum of Art has just opened a unique culinary exhibition, "Dining With the Sultan: The Fine Art of Feasting." It examines food, its preparation and service, and the artifacts involved in the Islamic world. Covering late antiquity and early Islamic courts through the Ottoman era, the exhibition covers the Middle East, Egypt and Central Asia, and some Chinese, Spanish and Italian porcelains, with 250 pieces on display. Ceramic and metal ware, manuscripts, boxes for scents and spices, and even apparel are included, as it explores subjects like etiquette, finding potable water, coffee, outdoor feasting, eating for health, and music and entertainment. For those with an interest in the subject but no plans for a stop in Los Angeles (or in Detroit, where it will next be shown), there is an elaborate companion catalog, $85, available from thelacmastore.org: *"Dining With the Sultan: The Fine Art of Feasting," Los Angeles County Museum of Art, until Aug. 4, lacma.org.*

TO SERVE

Portuguese Tinned Fish And Bright Sauces

➤ Most of the tinned seafood, or conservas, coming out of Spain, Portugal and elsewhere, amounts simply to fish in a can. But recently, these convenient pantry additions for hors d'oeuvre, easy lunch or part of dinner (Feast of the Seven Fishes, anyone?) have become more elaborate. A new Portuguese line, ABC+ from a small independent cannery and imported by Caputo's, a tinned fish specialist in Salt Lake City that ships nationally, is a prime example. Among its 18 or so varieties you'll find horse mackerel in ravigote sauce, trout fillets in caper sauce, mackerel fillets aglio e olio, small sardines in spicy brava sauce, calamari in curry, john dory in mint sauce, and wild shrimp in spicy olive oil and garlic. Most are 4.2 ounces serving one or two and are priced at $17.99 and $19.99, with a few more expensive varieties. In addition to Caputo's, they're sold in New York at Formaggio Essex: *ABC+ conservas, caputos.com.*

TO CELEBRATE

Bûches de Noël, Japanese Style

➤ The French bakers at Pistache, a Brooklyn-based caterer that sells online, have been inspired by Japan for their new bûches de Noël. They're delicate roulades of light, Japanese-style sponge cake filled with mousseline pastry cream, glazed and decorated with macarons. The flavors are chocolate, lemon, coffee and pistachio, and they serve eight to 10. To receive a cake by New Year's Eve, place orders by 8 p.m. on Dec. 26; pickup is in Brooklyn on Dec. 29, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., and Dec. 30, 9 a.m. to noon, at the Pfizer Building, 630 Flushing Avenue (Tompkins Avenue), Williamsburg. Delivery is available in Manhattan and Brooklyn, with a fee, on Dec. 30 after 10 a.m. Order online or phone 917-597-8387 (ask for Yvan): *Pistasche bûche de Noël, $70, pistachenyc.com.*

TO TOAST

What's Your Sign? Take a Glass.

▲ We're nearing the end of Sagittarius and about to welcome Capricorn. In the run-up to the New Year a set of glasses bearing signs of the Zodiac seems appropriate. These, newly designed by Charlap Hyman & Herrero, for Sprezz, a Brooklyn-based tableware company, include all 12. They'd be delightful as birthday gifts. The handblown glasses are labeled lowball but at 14.8 ounces, they're generous enough for a tall Scotch and soda: *Astrological Glasses, $25 each, sprezznyc.com.*

TO SHOP

An Ever-Expanding Italian Market

➤ The gelateria Pamina opened in August and was a hint of what was to come. There were adjacent storefronts poised to be combined for a market, cafe and restaurant, all of which would be called Travelers Poets and Friends. The market and cafe have opened; there is an area up front for fresh pasta, shelves with produce, dairy and Italian groceries opposite, a coffee and wine bar serving cicchetti (small plates, Venetian-style) with a counter and some tables and a busy kitchen turning out rustic breads, pastries and pizza. In late January a full service restaurant is to open as well. And all of it is meatless (though there's fish). It's the work of Emanuele Nigro's One More Hospitality — with the partners Riccardo Orofino, Mickey Bosco and Waél Deek — which also owns Alice and Osteria57: *Travelers Poets and Friends, 461 Avenue of the Americas (11th Street), 212-420-0057.*

JEENAH MOON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES (DOYEN); VIA MUSEUM OF ISLAMIC ART, DOHA, QATAR (JUG); 100 MISTERIOS (TINS); KARSTEN MORAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES (BÛCHES DE NOËL); JOEL GOLDBERG FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES (PASTA)

MELISSA CLARK | A GOOD APPETITE

Allowing the Host to Savor the Morning After

This puffy, cheesy casserole is not just festive, it's smart.

IT'S NOT A big deal making eggs and toast to feed one or two. It's when you try it for a crowd that things start to get tricky. The eggs or the toast always wind up cold, which is bad enough on a weekday, and even worse on a holiday morning.

But turn those ingredients into a breakfast casserole and something magical ensues.

Instead of remaining separate, the bread soaks up the egg, becoming custardy in the center, and puffed and golden on top after baking. You can stir in all kinds of other ingredients to fancy it up — any combination of bacon, sausage, cheeses, herbs or vegetables will heighten its appeal.

Best of all, not only can all of this be done in advance, it should be.

Assembling the casserole the day before allows the bread to soften and absorb the egg mixture as it sits. Then, the next day, all you need to do is pop it in the oven, leaving the cook plenty of time for other morning pursuits — going for a run or taking a shower (or both), caffeinating, even opening presents while the casserole slowly bakes until burnished.

Although many breakfast casseroles lean on bacon and sausage for character and heft, this one is meatless and bright. It's filled with leeks and spinach sautéed until wilted, the pan deglazed with winy vermouth for extra zip. Then, the vegetables are mixed into a simple egg and milk custard that's gently suffused with nutmeg, lemon zest and a pinch of cayenne.

I also threw in some cheese, choosing Gruyère for its rich nuttiness, along with some Parmesan for pungency and depth. But you can substitute Cheddar, Gouda, Manchego, blue cheese, even soft goat cheese, which would make the center of the casserole even creamier and tangier.

And should someone at your table miss the bacon, you can lay some slices on a sheet pan and cook them in the same oven alongside the casserole. This way, the casserole stays vegetarian while the bacon stays crisp, rather than softening into the puddinglike center of the casserole.

Add a beverage or two (coffee, tea, mimosas), and you'll be all set to serve a savory, festive and highly convenient meal no matter how early in the morning your guests are set to arrive.

SPINACH AND GRUYÈRE BREAKFAST CASSEROLE

TIME: 1 HOUR 50 MINUTES, PLUS AT LEAST 8 HOURS CHILLING AND 10 MINUTES RESTING
YIELD: 8 TO 10 SERVINGS

- 8 ounces baguette or other crusty bread, cut into 1 ½-inch cubes
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt (such as Diamond Crystal), more as needed
- 2 leeks, trimmed, halved and thinly sliced into half-moons
- 10 ounces fresh spinach
- ¼ teaspoon grated nutmeg
- Large pinch of ground cayenne
- 1 teaspoon finely grated lemon zest
- 2 tablespoons dry vermouth or white wine
- 8 large eggs
- 2 cups half-and-half (or use a mix of milk and heavy cream)
- ½ teaspoon freshly cracked black pepper
- 4 ounces Gruyère, grated (2 cups)
- ¾ cup grated Parmesan

1. Heat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly butter a 9-by-13-inch baking dish or a large gratin dish.

2. Spread baguette cubes on a baking sheet. Bake until crisp, about 8 to 10 minutes. Transfer cubes to a large bowl and toss with 4 tablespoons melted butter and a pinch of salt.

3. Meanwhile, in a large sauté pan, melt the remaining 2 tablespoons butter over medium-high heat. Add leeks and a pinch of salt, and sauté until tender and lightly golden, about 5 minutes.

4. Stir in about half of the spinach leaves, a pinch of salt, nutmeg, cayenne and lemon zest, and stir until wilted, about 2 to 4 minutes. Stir in remaining spinach and another pinch of salt. Sauté until most of the liquid has evaporated, about 5 minutes longer. Stir in the vermouth and let cook for 2 to 4 minutes, or until the pan looks dry. Taste and add more salt if needed. Let spinach cool.

5. In a medium bowl, whisk together eggs, half-and-half, pepper and 1 teaspoon salt. Add mixture to the baguette, tossing well. Add spinach, 1¾ cups Gruyère and ½ cup Parmesan, and toss everything until mixed (your hands work well for this).

6. Pour mixture into prepared baking dish, cover, and refrigerate for 8 hours or overnight.

7. When ready to bake, heat oven to 350 degrees. Uncover and top casserole with remaining ¼ cup grated Gruyère and ¼ cup grated Parmesan. Bake for 50 to 60 minutes, or until the center is set and no longer liquidy (it might puff, and that's fine). Let sit for 10 to 20 minutes before serving.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KERRI BREWER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES. FOOD STYLIST: BARRETT WASHBURNE.

Ease the Drama of a Holiday Tradition

A modern version of the Feast of the Seven Fishes is built around a streamlined menu.

By DAN PELOSI

A marinara-stained kitchen timer ticks as Donna Berzatto choreographs a complex dance of dishes around limited oven space. "I need you to remember to put the Rockefellers in, and take out the artichokes, which leaves an open oven," she commands her son Carmy. "I need you to put the branzino on the top and let it broil and get that nice little crispy bit."

The alarm buzzes again and again and again, a metaphor for the ticking time bomb of family drama brewing during preparations for the Christmas Eve tradition of the Feast of the Seven Fishes. The scenes of the high-intensity cooking feat, from the latest season of the popular FX television series "The Bear," delivered an emotionally heightened portrayal of a tradition dear to many Italian American families. The 67 anxiety-inducing minutes probably didn't inspire anyone to tackle the celebratory meal.

This is unfortunate because the food is amazing, and the kitchen drama is part of what makes it all worth it. As an Italian American who grew up with the feast, I recognized the truth behind the dramatization in "The Bear": The meal is often more about the cooking than it is about the eating. As any family who has attempted to prepare it knows, the essence of the Feast of the Seven Fishes is the preparation's mess, which is inherent to the celebration.

Some believe you have to suffer for the food to taste good (hi, Donna!), while others embrace the chaos and imbue it with laughter and cheer. "For my dad, being in the kitchen is the holiday," said Francesco Sedita, a co-author of the children's picture book "Our Italian Christmas Eve."

In Italy, the traditional Christmas Eve dinner is known as La Vigilia, or the eve. Rooted in Roman Catholicism, which calls for abstaining from meat on the eve of any holiday, La Vigilia tends to be a bounty of seafood. The Feast of the Seven Fishes is uniquely American. Italian immigrants created their own traditions and identities, and most likely used the number seven because of its biblical significance.

The feast is typically made up of at least seven dishes, each containing its own type of fish, separated into various courses. There are no strict rules, and no specific fish are required. Every family takes deep pride in their own unique way of orchestrating the feast.

For modern feasts, what remains important is keeping the tradition alive out of respect for the aunts, uncles and grandparents who have prepared the meal for years. The complex menu has evolved, though, to keep the heart of the feast beating.

"Seven fishes for a dinner, realistically, could possibly be a heavy lift for people," said the Italian American chef Christian Petroni.

One way to bring the feast to the table without making it a stressful or dramatic undertaking is to prepare seven fishes, but not seven dishes. This menu does that by including an easy, crowd-pleasing crisp and zesty cold seafood salad that contains three types of seafood. Buttery stuffed clams can be baked then kept warm until it's time to serve, and anchovy-stuffed dough balls can be formed and fried ahead of time.

For the finale, a saucy and celebratory pasta catches the remaining fish — but it could be the only dish you serve if that's all you have time to do. If that's the case, pop open tins of briny anchovies, sardines or mussels for an effortless way to make it to seven fishes.

Each year, as my family works away in the kitchen, we brag about having spent the week before maniacally sourcing seafood from several different fish markets in town, as if there is a badge of honor to be earned for each stop. We laugh as the older generations playfully frighten the children with the more exotic sea creatures. My aunt frantically asks who can bring an extra pot for the pasta, as if she doesn't have the same urgent revelation every year. There are somehow never enough pots.

As Mr. Sedita said, it's not only about the food but also "the dedication to time spent together; we are in it for the long haul — the laughing, the crying, the yelling." Ultimately, what we are really feasting on is emotions, which, hopefully, bring on more smiles and less agita than anything on the table.

Pillowy, Briny Ecstasy

Each bite of these zeppole (top, near right) begins with a perfectly crisp exterior that gives way to a yeasty, pillowy interior. Once you hit the fish at the center, you are in briny ecstasy. These are as delicious at room temperature as they are hot, so you can fry them ahead of time.

Classic Flexibility

This version of seafood salad (near right) uses shrimp, scallops and calamari but works well with any seafood you can get your hands on. Prepare it a day ahead of time to give the seafood even more time to soak up the lemony, garlicky dressing.

Crunchy and Buttery

In this take on clams oreganata (far right), butter crackers are used in place of plain bread crumbs to add their fatty saltiness to the crunchy topping, which coats juicy whole clams. A buttery wine sauce is spooned over the clams just before eating.

A Party Dish

Simple yet celebratory, this seafood pasta (top, far right) is a party dish that your guests will want to tuck into. White wine-steamed mussels and tomato-poached cod top a mound of bucatini coated in a buttery, brothy sauce.

ZEPPOLE CON LE ALICI (FRIED ANCHOVY BALLS)

TIME: 2 HOURS 25 MINUTES
YIELD: MAKES 32 BALLS (8 SERVINGS)

- 2 (¼-ounce) packets active dry yeast
- 1 tablespoon plus 2 teaspoons granulated sugar
- ⅓ cup warm water
- 1¼ cups hot water
- 4 tablespoons/56 grams unsalted butter, softened
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt (such as Diamond Crystal) or ½ teaspoon table salt
- 3½ cups/440 grams all-purpose flour, plus more as needed
- Vegetable oil, for deep-frying (4 to 5 cups) and greasing bowl
- 32 oil-packed anchovy fillets (from two 3.35-ounce jars), drained and separated
- Chopped parsley and lemon wedges, for serving

1. In a small bowl, dissolve yeast and 2 teaspoons sugar in the warm water. Set aside until foamy and fragrant, about 5 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, pour the hot water into a large mixing bowl. Add butter, 1 tablespoon sugar and 1 teaspoon salt and stir until butter melts. Let cool for 5 minutes. Add yeast mixture and flour and stir to combine into a shaggy dough.

3. Knead dough on a generously floured surface for 5 minutes, until a smooth ball is formed. Place dough in a lightly oiled bowl, cover tightly and let rise for 1 hour.

4. Clip a deep-fry thermometer to the side of a large Dutch oven and set it over medium heat. Add oil to a depth of 2 to 3 inches and heat to 400 degrees. If you don't have a thermometer, you can drop a small piece of dough into the oil. If it sizzles immediately, it's ready.

5. While the oil heats, scoop the dough into 32 balls (about 1 very generous tablespoon each). Hold a ball in your palm and use your thumb to make an indentation in the center of the dough. Place one whole anchovy inside, pinch the dough shut, then roll into a smooth ball, completely submerging the anchovy in dough. Continue doing this with the rest of the balls and anchovies, placing them on a tray as you go.

6. Working in batches so as to not overcrowd the pot, carefully lower the dough balls into the hot oil and fry until dark golden brown, 3 to 4 minutes, turning as needed to evenly brown. Place fried balls on a paper towel-lined tray to drain and cool slightly. Continue frying the dough balls, allowing the oil to return to 400 degrees in between batches.

7. Serve hot, warm or at room temperature, topped with parsley and served with lemon wedges.

INSALATA DI FRUTTI DI MARE (ITALIAN SEAFOOD SALAD)

TIME: 2½ HOURS
YIELD: 8 SERVINGS

- Ice
- 5 lemons
- 1 pound shrimp, peeled, deveined and tails removed
- 1 pound sea scallops, halved horizontally
- 1 pound calamari, tubes cut into ½-inch rings, tentacles left whole
- ¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 garlic cloves, finely grated
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- Salt and black pepper
- 1 cup thinly sliced fennel (from 1 small bulb)
- 1 cup thinly sliced celery (from 1 to 3 stalks)
- 1 cup torn or sliced pitted Castelvetrano olives
- ½ cup drained jarred sliced hot cherry peppers
- 1 cup chopped fresh parsley, plus more for garnish

1. Place a steamer basket or metal colander inside a large pot. Add water, making sure it does not rise above the bottom of the steamer. Cover the pot and bring the water to a simmer. Meanwhile, fill a large bowl with water, ice and the juice of one lemon.

2. Place the shrimp in the steamer, cover and steam for 2 to 3 minutes, until opaque and cooked through, then transfer to the ice bath. When cool, lift out and place on a towel-lined tray to dry. Repeat with the scallops and then the calamari. Transfer to the refrigerator to cool for at least 15 minutes.

3. In a large bowl, whisk together the olive oil, ½ cup lemon juice (from 2 to 3 lemons), garlic, vinegar and 1 teaspoon each salt and pepper. Add the fennel, celery, olives, cherry peppers, parsley, the zest of 1 lemon and all of the seafood. Gently mix everything together, ensuring the scallops do not break apart. Submerge as much seafood as possible in the dressing in the bowl by gently pressing it down. Cover tightly and refrigerate for at least 1 hour or up to 1 day.

4. Before serving, give the salad a mix and season to taste with salt and pepper. Use a slotted spoon to transfer the salad into a serving dish. Spoon some (or all) of the dressing over the salad and garnish with extra chopped parsley and lemon zest.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RYAN LIEBE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES. FOOD STYLIST: BARRETT WASHBURNE. PROP STYLIST: PAIGE HICKS.

MUSSELS AND COD BUCATINI WITH SPICY TOMATO SAUCE

TIME: ABOUT 1 HOUR
YIELD: 8 TO 12 SERVINGS

- Salt
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 shallots, minced
- 10 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- Black pepper
- Crushed red pepper
- 1½ cups dry white wine
- 2 pounds mussels, cleaned (see Tip)
- 1 (28-ounce) can tomato purée
- 1 tablespoon Calabrian chile paste, plus more to taste
- 3 pounds cod fillet, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 2 pounds bucatini or other long pasta
- 4 tablespoons salted butter
- 1 cup chopped parsley, plus more for garnish
- 1 lemon

1. Bring a large pot of salted water to boil over high heat.

2. In a separate large pot over medium heat, add the olive oil, shallots and garlic plus a few pinches of salt, black pepper and red pepper. Cook, stirring a few times, until translucent, about 3 minutes.

3. Add white wine, then cover and bring to a simmer. Add mussels and cover again. Cook for 5 to 7 minutes, until mussels have all opened. Place opened mussels into a bowl and cover with foil to keep warm. If there are a few left unopened, cover the pot for a minute at a time until they all open. (Discard any that don't open.)

4. Stir the tomato purée, chile paste and a few pinches of salt into the mussel broth, maintaining medium heat. Add the cod, gently stir to coat, cover and cook for 7 minutes, until the cod is opaque but still firm.

5. Meanwhile, drop the bucatini into the boiling water and cook until al dente according to the package's directions. Reserve 1 cup of pasta water, then drain the pasta.

6. Add the bucatini, butter and parsley to the tomato sauce and stir. Add reserved pasta water, ¼ cup at a time, as needed until the sauce is glossy and clinging to the pasta. Squeeze the juice of the lemon over pasta and stir. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

7. Transfer pasta to a serving bowl (or keep in the pot) and add the mussels and any accumulated liquid. Garnish with more chopped parsley. Serve immediately.

Tip: Soak mussels in cold water and scrub any dirt or debris off of their shells. Discard any mussels with open, cracked or chipped shells.

CLAMS OREGANATA (BAKED STUFFED CLAMS)

TIME: 1 HOUR
YIELD: 24 CLAMS (6 TO 8 SERVINGS)

- 24 littleneck clams (about 2 pounds), scrubbed and rinsed
- 8 tablespoons salted butter
- 1 shallot, minced
- Salt
- ¾ cup crushed butter crackers, such as Ritz
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- ¼ cup grated Parmesan
- ¾ cup clam broth
- ¾ cup dry white wine
- Extra-virgin olive oil, for drizzling
- Chopped fresh parsley, for serving
- Lemon wedges, for serving

1. Heat the oven to 425 degrees.

2. Fill a pot with water to a depth of ¼ inch, bring to a boil, add clams and cover. Steam until they just open, removing them one by one to a bowl as they do, 4 to 7 minutes. Pull off and discard (or compost) the top shells. Strain the broth and save for later. Place the halved clams on a half sheet pan.

3. Melt 4 tablespoons butter in a medium skillet over medium heat. Add the shallot, sprinkle with salt and cook, stirring occasionally, until translucent, about 3 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in the crackers, oregano and Parmesan to combine.

4. Scoop a heaping teaspoon of the cracker mixture over each clam. Sprinkle any extra onto the sheet pan, then pour the wine and reserved clam broth into the pan, under the shells. Cut the remaining 4 tablespoons of butter into small cubes and scatter on the pan. Drizzle olive oil over the top of the clams.

5. Bake for 12 to 15 minutes, or until the topping is golden brown.

6. Remove the clams from the oven, and arrange on a serving tray. Pour the liquid from the pan into a serving tray for guests to spoon over clams before eating. Sprinkle with parsley and serve with lemon wedges on the side.

GENEVIEVE KO

Simplified Chocolate Tart Is a Show-Off

Bake in a cake pan to avoid some of the fussiness of pastry.

ARMANDO RAFAEL FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES. FOOD STYLIST: MONICA PIERINI.

IT'S BEEN A hard year, and finding small joys feels particularly important right now, around the holidays. When I considered which treat could deliver that happiness in this season (aside from cookies, of course), I remembered the first pastry I learned as a restaurant cook. In the basement corner of a little French bistro, we turned out chocolate tarts, the elegant little black dress of desserts.

Fashioned in the style of the renowned chef Joël Robuchon's recipe, the filling was as creamy as pudding and as silky and softly set as crème brûlée. With a buttery, crisp crust, the tart made the diners feel special and the cooks feel empowered by their baking prowess.

This big chocolate tart does the same and requires no professional training to guarantee stunning results.

In a significant departure from most tarts, it's made in a rectangular cake pan. The speed bump edges of a fluted tart pan, and even the smooth lines of a tart ring, necessitate stressful dough rolling, fussy parbaking and risky crust unmolding. And even the biggest tart pan doesn't make enough wedges to feed a crowd.

In this take, the crumbs of a cocoa dough are simply pressed across the bottom of the pan. The filling, usually a blend of cream, milk, chocolate and eggs, swaps fresh milk for sweetened condensed milk to ensure that the custard doesn't break, since it covers the football field expanse of a cake pan.

I first learned this canned milk trick while working on a cookbook with the pastry chef Pichet Ong. The sugar in condensed milk has been inverted, meaning the bonds between glucose and fructose molecules have been broken. And, as Mr. Ong explained, that altered state ensures "a velvety smooth texture because the sugar has been stabilized and won't crystallize once it sets." Here, it also has the added benefit of being carried by dairy.

"It's extra milky and helps offset the bitterness of the cocoa," Mr. Ong said. "It gives it a sweetness that's not cloying and a deeper sweetness than granulated."

Along with cream and a generous pinch of salt, the canned milk accentuates the chocolate and makes this tart delicious on its own. But it can also be a blank canvas: The tops of the individual portions can receive the crunch of nuts or flaky salt, the chew of candied orange peel or ginger, or the pop of tangy freeze-dried berries.

The portions can also be sliced in any shape or size you want. When cutting the tart, I was inspired by the artist Piet Mondrian's later abstract works, which showcase the beauty of squares and rectangles, and by their connection to his early figurative landscape paintings.

At their core, both styles of painting are fundamentally compositions. I'm not, by any stretch, comparing dessert to fine art, but the practice of changing forms around a foundational concept applies here. Even though this dessert isn't built in a tart pan, it remains crust and filling, and the pleasure we all need and deserve now.

BIG CHOCOLATE TART

TIME: 5 MINUTES
YIELD:

For the Crust:

- 1¼ cups/163 grams all-purpose flour
- ½ cup/100 grams sugar
- ¼ cup/28 grams unsweetened cocoa powder
- ½ teaspoon coarse kosher or sea salt
- 10 tablespoons/140 grams cold unsalted butter, cut into small cubes
- 1 large egg yolk

For the Filling:

- 1½ cups/357 grams heavy cream
- ¾ teaspoon coarse kosher or sea salt
- 12 ounces/336 grams semisweet chocolate, chopped
- 3 large eggs, at room temperature
- ½ cup/166 grams sweetened condensed milk
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- Flaky sea salt, thinly sliced candied orange peel, thinly sliced candied ginger, chopped pistachios and/or freeze-dried raspberries, for garnish (optional)

1. Make the crust: Heat oven to 350 degrees. Grease a 9-by-13-inch metal cake pan, line the bottom and sides with foil or parchment paper, and grease again.

2. In a food processor, pulse the flour, sugar, cocoa and salt until evenly combined. Add the butter and pulse until the mixture resembles sand. Add the egg yolk and pulse until the crumbs look like very coarse sand, scraping the bowl as needed. Dump the crumbly dough into the pan, spread in an even layer and press firmly across the bottom.

3. Bake until visibly dry, about 20 minutes. When you press the top gently, it shouldn't indent. Cool completely in the pan on a rack.

4. Make the filling: Reduce oven temperature to 325 degrees.

5. Heat the cream and salt in a large saucepan over medium, stirring occasionally, just until the cream bubbles at the edges. Turn off the heat and add the chocolate. Stir gently until smooth.

6. Add the eggs and stir until evenly blended, then stir in the condensed milk and vanilla until smooth. Pour into the cooled crust.

7. Bake until just set, 20 to 25 minutes. The very center should have the barest wiggle when you shake the pan.

8. Cool completely in the pan. When ready to serve, use the sides of the foil or parchment to slide the whole slab onto a large cutting board. Cut into squares or bars, wiping the knife between cuts for clean edges. Top with flaky salt, candied orange or ginger or both, pistachios and/or raspberries.

Tip: The tart tastes best right after cooling, but it can be refrigerated for up to 5 days, cut or uncut, in an airtight container. Before serving, microwave for 5 or 10 seconds to restore shine to the top and softness to the center.

WHERE TO EAT | BECKY HUGHES

Free of Alcohol, but Still Plenty of Fun to Go Around

These spots have memorable mocktails (some also have food) for a festive mood.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY SCOTT SEMLER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

WE'RE IN THE THROES of holiday party season, and things have been pretty festive around here. But the holiday party burnout is real. Cutting back on drinking is one way I've been managing my social exhaustion — which isn't to say I'm not going out.

Maybe you're in the same boat, or maybe you're looking to gather with a group of people that includes both drinkers and teetotalers. And maybe you're just sick of ordering a ginger ale. So, this week, I'm suggesting a few merry and bright bars with notable (and not phoned-in) nonalcoholic cocktail programs — as well as regular-old cocktails and plenty of snacks. After all, everyone deserves a night out to toast the holiday season and the new year.

Fancy Cocktail Bars

Tigre is a new bar in the Lower East Side from the Maison Premiere team where, through a dim hall of mirrors, you'll find a 70s-style lounge with tiger-print banquettes and gold details on nearly everything. The menu lists three nonalcoholic wines from the brand NON, an exciting alternative to a bitters and soda. For those imbibing, every server there will recommend the Cigarette Martini, and they'd be right — it's a leathery martini made with vodka and a smoked juniper spirit from Empirical. They'll also make you a martini by ratio of gin (or vodka) to vermouth, from four to one, to one to nothing.

There's a similarly festive (read: fancy!) scene in NoHo at **the Nines**, a plush piano bar with a serious cocktail program, including three bubbly, low-A.B.V. options and three nonalcoholic cocktails. The Famous Redhead, made with pomegranate, ginger and lime, is only $12, which is pretty reasonable for a place serving a $95 baked potato, and a small price to pay for live music and some of the best people-watching in the city.

Becky Hughes is writing the Where to Eat newsletter, filling in for Nikita Richardson. Sign up to get restaurant recommendations in your inbox weekly: nytimes.com/where-to-eat

Drinks and Dinner

You could sit down for a proper dinner at **Superbueno**, in the East Village, where a Chamoy y Soda made with pickled plums, guajillo and soda tastes just as special as any one of their cocktails. If you're drinking alcohol, the Vodka y Soda is one of my favorite drinks in the city — it's much less boring than it sounds, with guava and pasilla. The birria grilled cheese is an ideal drunchies specimen but delicious in any state of mind, and the pastor yaki tacos are prime party fare.

Layla, in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, seems as if it should be a summer bar, with the backyard picnic tables, but a wintry dinner at the low-lit bar is downright cozy. It has house cocktails, including a spiked hot chocolate, but it also carries brands like St. Agrestis's phony Negroni, Ghia aperitivo used in a mule, and Seedlip for a nonalcoholic margarita. To eat: oysters with punchy mignonette, fennel salad with pecorino and a crunchy chicken Milanese.

Above left, the birria grilled cheese at Superbueno. Above, at Tigre, where the drink menu includes three types of nonalcoholic wine. Left, the Not the Melon You Know at 929.

And finally, at **929**, in Long Island City, Queens, slide into a leather booth while Canto-pop vinyl spins. A popular cocktail, the winter melon-flavored Not the Melon You Know can be made without the booze. Dine on braised beef shank, popcorn chicken and radish cakes over drinks, or order Taiwanese takeout from **Gulp** downstairs to pick up on your way out.

Tigre, 105 Rivington Street (Ludlow Street), Lower East Side; **the Nines,** 9 Great Jones Street (Lafayette Street), NoHo; **Superbueno,** 13 First Avenue (East First Street), East Village; **Layla,** 325 Bedford Ave between South Third Street), Williamsburg, Brooklyn; **929,** 42-45 27th Street (42nd Road), Long Island City, Queens

The Power of the Korean Church Lunch

Especially on Christmas, the lively after-service meals have held a lasting significance.

By ERIC KIM

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JANICE CHUNG FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Above and left, lunch being served this month at Dongsan Korean Reformed Church in Yonkers, N.Y. Top right, the chef Daniel Harthausen, who is based in Virginia. The dish wanja jeon recalls his childhood in Cheyenne, Wyo., where his family attended a small church that became a community hub for Koreans. Bottom, members shared lunch last week at the Yonkers church.

KATE THOMPSON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

At the Dongsan Korean Reformed Church in Yonkers, N.Y., the cafeteria is twice the size of its worship space. The spacious, high-ceilinged room is filled with more than 40 round dining tables encircled by white folding chairs. After the 11 a.m. service every week, lunch is served and the tables fill up like ones in a high school cafeteria.

On a recent Sunday, hungry, boisterous parishioners formed long lines for their servings of miyeok guk, a savory seaweed soup, which burbled away in three giant pots on the stove. Everything is made from scratch, and with good vibes only.

"You have to cook with joy or the food won't come out right," Soon Geum Jang, 73, said. If there's anything difficult about feeding 400 to 500 parishioners every week, the kitchen's head chef, Young Hee Kim, 65, said, it's producing that sheer volume of food. But cooking together, with friends, "it's not hard." Every Saturday morning, Ms. Kim and her team meet early at the church to prepare food for the next day's lunch.

According to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, 59 percent of Korean Americans identify as Christian. But that number used to be even higher. For decades, church lunches have been pivotal spaces for Korean immigrants as they established themselves in the United States, and these meals continue to flourish as hubs of community bonding for many who are the first generation to arrive here. More than just a meal, they are an opportunity for conversation, gossip and fellowship.

But the Korean Americans born here are now finding third spaces beyond work and home — that aren't church — to be with other Korean Americans. In a rapidly evolving world where Korean pop music, food, film, culture and community can be found virtually anywhere, the after-service lunch is becoming a less central experience for younger Korean people.

There is one exception: On Christmas, when children come home and get dragged to church by their parents, the generational divide seems to collapse, if only for a day.

"On a typical Sunday, services were basically segmented by age, and people were quick to leave right after," Rachel Kim, 30, said. Her father is the senior pastor at Open Door Presbyterian Church in Herndon, Va. "Christmas lunch, however, compelled people to linger and mingle." It was, she said, one of the few times she heard English and Korean spoken in the same room.

Korean American churches pull out the big stops for Christmas, cooking more elaborate meals of banquet dishes like fried mandu and jeon, the various pan-fried fritters, patties and pancakes that line the buffet trays at Korean parties; japchae, janchi guksu and other party noodles; barbecued favorites like galbi, bulgogi and the spicy pork variant, dwaeji bulgogi; fancy braises like galbi jjim and dak bokkeumtang, otherwise known as dakdori tang; and all manner of soups and stews, but predominately miyeok guk, which is, in Korean cultures, traditionally eaten on one's birthday.

Food that's "imbued with that magic of Christ being born" made everything feel more special, the novelist R.O. Kwon recalled of her early days attending the St. Raphael Korean Catholic Center in Norwalk, Calif. But now as an adult, having left the church when she was 17, she mourns not just the loss of her faith but also the loss of that community, a theme she explores in her novel "The Incendiaries."

"I really wish there was some other way to gather with the community," Ms. Kwon said, somewhere Korean Americans could go every week. Somewhere that isn't church.

For Koreans born and raised in America, church can often be a reminder of a life left behind, and with that comes wistfulness and, sometimes, pain. But Christmas lunch can conjure something else: a flood of good memories, and a reminder of the beautiful aspects of that kind of fellowship.

Where Ms. Kwon thinks back fondly to the smell of wooden chopsticks snapping, Rachel Kim recalls the squeaky-white Styrofoam plates, brimming with rice, kimchi and bulgogi. On a recent visit home for Thanksgiving, the best thing Ms. Kim ate was a flavorful lettuce banchan at church.

In college at the University of Virginia, Ms. Kim met another pastor's kid (or "P.K."), Eunice Ko, also 30. At the time, being the child of the Korean Central Presbyterian Church's pastor meant that Ms. Ko never had to worry about a sense of belonging in her community within Centreville, Va. Without shyness, she could walk into the cafeteria and say hello to any one of the 4,000 parishioners.

Ms. Ko, now in her second year at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, no longer attends church, and that sense of home and automatic acceptance is something she never takes for granted. It's "what I look for in a community now," she said.

But younger generations are finding less need for a feeling of community.

It often takes growing up to realize how much work goes into cultivating a network of like-minded people. For the Virginia-based chef Daniel Harthausen, 28, who runs the pop-up restaurant Young Mother and last year won the Max competition show "The Big Brunch," it also takes growing up to realize how much work goes into the foods that raised you, even something as seemingly simple as a meat patty.

One of his favorite church lunch dishes, wanja jeon, recalls his childhood in Cheyenne, Wyo., where his family attended a small church that became a community hub for Koreans in an area that didn't have many Asians. The church's basement had a full kitchen and dining hall, and the meal after Christmas service meant a potluck of "large, shareable stuff."

"It was really the only time I grew up where I was around other Korean kids," Mr. Harthausen said, "and the only time I really felt connected to my culture."

WANJA JEON (PAN-FRIED MEAT AND TOFU PATTIES)

ADAPTED FROM DANIEL HARTHAUSEN
TIME: 2 HOURS 5 MINUTES
YIELD: ABOUT 30 PATTIES

For the Patties:

- ¼ cup whole milk
- 1 large egg
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon fish sauce
- ¼ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ cup panko bread crumbs
- ½ cup finely chopped scallions (green parts only)
- ⅓ cup finely diced yellow onion
- ⅓ cup finely diced carrot
- 3 dried shiitake mushrooms, soaked in warm water until soft, drained and finely diced (optional)
- 2 garlic cloves, grated
- 1 (1-inch) piece ginger, grated
- 1 tablespoon toasted sesame oil, plus more for greasing hands
- 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt (such as Diamond Crystal)
- 1 tablespoon gochugaru (see Tip)
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- ½ teaspoon white pepper (optional)
- 1 pound ground pork
- ½ pound ground beef (preferably 10-percent fat)
- ½ block firm tofu, drained and crumbled into pebble-size pieces (about 7 ounces)

For Frying:

- 4 large eggs plus 2 egg yolks
- 1 teaspoon granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt (such as Diamond Crystal)
- ½ teaspoon instant dashi powder, such as Hondashi (optional)
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- Neutral oil, for pan-frying

1. Make the patties: To a small bowl, add the milk, egg, soy sauce, fish sauce and baking soda and whisk to combine. Stir in the panko and set aside for at least 10 minutes while you prep the other ingredients.

2. To a large bowl, add the scallion, yellow onion, carrot, mushrooms (if using), garlic, ginger and sesame oil and mix to combine. Add the sugar, salt, gochugaru, black pepper, white pepper, pork and beef. Mix again to combine.

3. Add the panko mixture to the meat. With clean hands, knead the mixture until thoroughly combined and the meat starts to look shreddy, about 3 minutes. (To knead, hold the bowl with one hand and use the other to fold and press the meat onto itself in long, counterclockwise strokes.) Then, knead again to fold the crumbled tofu into the meat mixture until evenly dispersed, making sure not to break up the tofu too much. Cover and rest the mixture in the refrigerator for at least an hour but preferably overnight.

4. Heat oven to 375 degrees.

5. Form the patties: Using a cookie scoop or your hands (greased with a little sesame oil), form 1½-inch balls, then slightly flatten them to make ¼-inch-tall patties. As you finish each patty, place it on a large sheet pan. You should get about 30.

6. Fry the patties: In a bowl, whisk together the eggs, egg yolks, sugar, salt and dashi powder, if using. To a separate bowl, add the flour. One by one, coat each meat patty in the flour, shaking off excess, then place it back on the sheet pan.

7. Heat a large, heavy-bottomed skillet over medium, then add enough oil to thinly cover the bottom. Working in batches, dip each flour-coated patty into the egg mixture, letting excess egg drip off, then place in the hot pan in a single layer. Sear the patties until lightly browned, then flip and sear the other side, 2 to 3 minutes total. Drain patties on a large sheet pan fitted with a wire rack or paper towels.

8. If using paper towels, discard them. Bake the patties until no longer pink in the centers (with an internal temperature of 170 degrees), about 8 minutes. Serve immediately, warm or at room temperature.

Tips: For a simple dipping sauce, stir together 2 tablespoons soy sauce, 1 tablespoon white vinegar, 1 tablespoon water, 1 tablespoon granulated sugar, 1 minced garlic clove, 1 sliced red chile and ½ tablespoon sesame seeds.

Gochugaru, a flavorful Korean red-pepper powder, ranges from a fine dust to tiny coarse flakes. Try to buy the coarse variety, both for deeper, sweeter flavor and for color, a gleaming crimson. You can find gochugaru at Korean and other Asian supermarkets and at many grocery stores, as well as online.

ABOVE AND BELOW, ARMANDO RAFAEL FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES. FOOD STYLIST: MONICA PIERINI.

Top, wanja jeon, or pan-fried meat and tofu patties. Above, dwaeji bulgogi, or spicy pork bulgogi.

DWAEJI BULGOGI (SPICY PORK BULGOGI)

ADAPTED FROM JEAN KIM
TIME: 35 MINUTES
YIELD: 6 TO 8 SERVINGS

- ½ Asian pear, peeled and cored
- 1 small yellow onion, peeled
- 10 garlic cloves, peeled
- 1 (2-inch) piece ginger, peeled
- ¼ cup gochugaru (see Tip)
- ¼ cup toasted sesame oil
- ¼ cup gochujang
- ¼ cup maesil cheong (green plum syrup; see Tip)
- ¼ cup soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 2 tablespoons Sriracha
- 3 pounds thinly sliced pork butt or shoulder (see Tip)
- Neutral oil, such as canola, for cooking
- Salt
- Perilla leaves or any mix of red leaf, romaine and butter lettuces, for serving

1. In a food processor or blender, purée the pear, onion, garlic, ginger, gochugaru, sesame oil, gochujang, maesil cheong, soy sauce, sugar and Sriracha until smooth. Add to a large bowl, along with the sliced pork, and mix well to coat. Cover and refrigerate overnight or up to 24 hours. (After that, the meat will tenderize too much.)

2. Heat a large skillet or griddle over medium-high, and add enough oil to generously coat the bottom. Working in batches, lay the pork in a single layer and cook, stirring once or twice, until firm but juicy and no longer opaque, about 5 minutes. Season to taste with salt.

3. Serve immediately with perilla leaves or lettuce leaves to wrap the pork for the juiciest, most aromatic bundles.

Tips: Gochugaru, a flavorful Korean red-pepper powder, ranges from a fine dust to tiny coarse flakes. Try to buy the coarse variety, both for deeper, sweeter flavor and for color, a gleaming crimson. You can find gochugaru at Korean and other Asian supermarkets and at many grocery stores, as well as online.

You can find maesil cheong, or green plum syrup (also labeled an extract), online or in Korean supermarkets. Add a splash to a mug of hot water and drink it as tea, or mix it into salad dressings, marinades and stews as an aromatic sweetener with a touch of fruity tartness. It's worth seeking out, but if you can't find it, use a splash of apple juice or an extra pinch of sugar instead.

You can find perfectly sliced pork, for shabu shabu and bulgogi dishes such as this, in the meat section of Korean or other Asian grocery stores. Otherwise, freeze a block of pork until firm enough to cut clean, ⅛-inch-thick slices with a very sharp knife.

What's Ahead? The Cookie Cutters Tell All.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE D1

year, in 750 shapes) into the market to see what sells. And respond quickly to new fads and trends — a winning play in an industry dominated by companies that aren't as nimble because they import their products from China.

Ann Clark sells classic cutters like the gingerbread man and the heart, but its top sellers tend to be more offbeat shapes: a Mason jar (the big hit in 2015), a llama (huge in 2019). This year's breakout star is a gnome; the company traces its popularity to the success of cottagecore, an ethos that embraces rustic living.

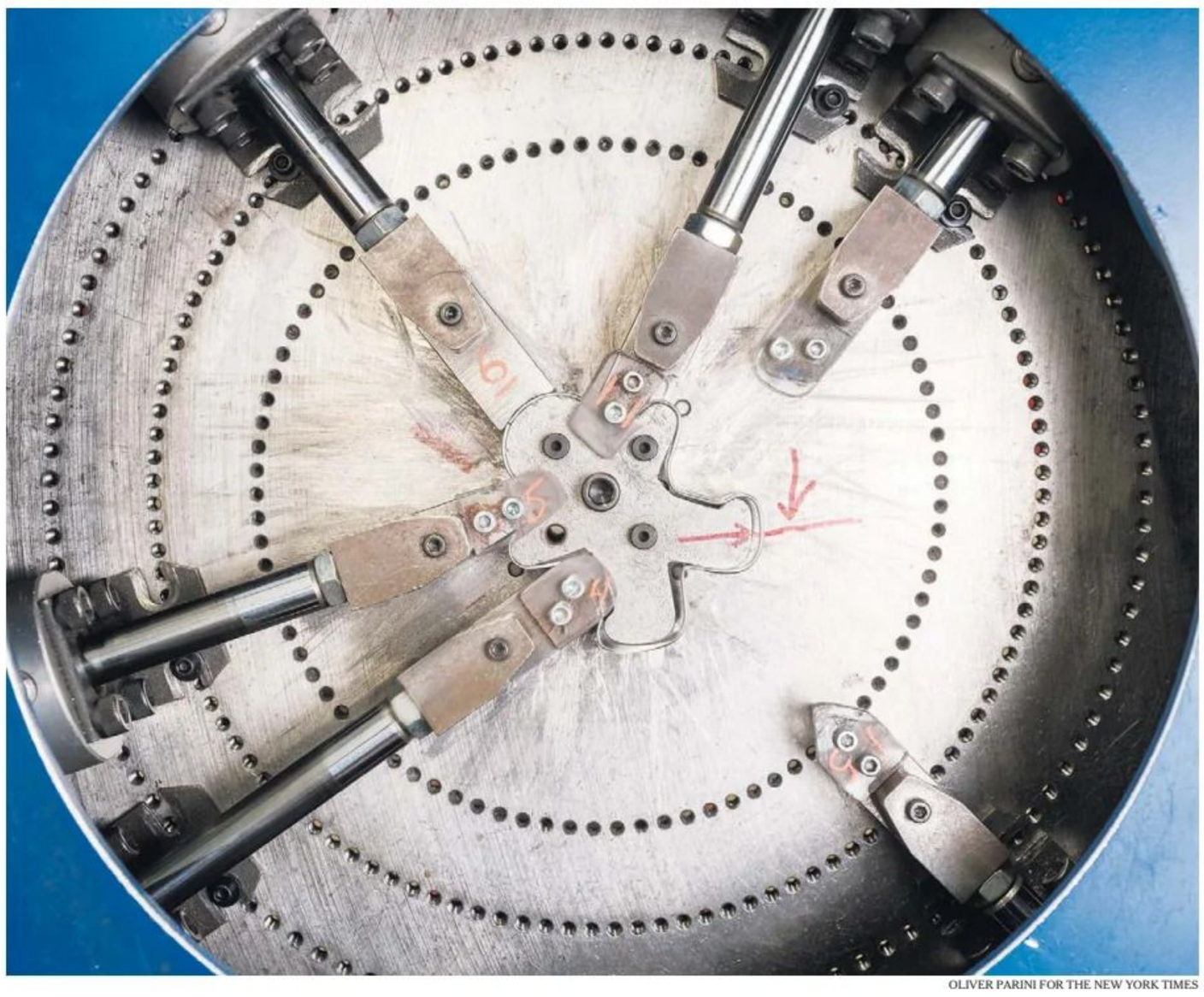
With nostalgia on the rise, the company predicts that next year, there will be more interest in 1960s and '70s psychedelia, with shapes like mushrooms and peace signs. Given the postpandemic surge in travel, globes and stacks of suitcases may catch on.

While cookie cutters are closely linked to Christmas — and Ann Clark makes 40 percent of its sales this time of year — a large part of the company's success has come from recognizing that cookie decorating is a year-round activity, and catering to the legions of devoted customers who clamor for new and unusual shapes.

"Cookie-cutter collectors are part of a cult," said Arlene Chua, a banker and cookie decorator on Staten Island who owns about 5,000 cookie cutters. She recently converted a coat closet into cookie-cutter storage, with bins categorized by themes like Christmas, fashion and baby shower.

Cookie cutters connect her to memories. Her high-heeled-shoe cutter reminds her of shopping in Manhattan; she associates her church-shaped one with her mother, a Roman Catholic.

A cookie cutter "is almost like an extension of our personalities," Ms. Chua said. Many collectors have shapes that have been passed down through generations.



OLIVER PARINI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

GIVEN ALL THAT, you might expect the Clark family and its enterprise to be a cradle of holiday cheer. But on a Monday in December, the factory — a gray building in an industrial park — looked more like a welding plant than Santa's workshop. Inside was a sprawl of power tools, metal sheets, cardboard boxes and conveyor belts.

A few festive flourishes stood out: a wreath at the entrance, gingerbread men painted on cubbies and doors like little surprises. Ms. Clark, 83, with her white bob and cheery eyes, could pass for Mrs. Claus.

Her start in the business came not through baking, but art. Ms. Clark was painting ornaments and other objects to sell at craft shows in 1989 when she drew a pig and rendered the image in various items, like a coaster, a cutting board and a cookie cutter. The cutters outsold everything, and her husband persuaded her to go all in on them. (He died in 2000.)

Their son Ben, now 59, joined the company in 1998 simply because he wanted to move back home from Maryland.

The cookie cutter, he said, "is a widget to me."

Like any good gadget, it must meet some rigorous specifications. "It has to be very sturdy," Ms. Clark said. The bottom must be sharp enough to cut through cold dough, but not so sharp that it will injure the baker. The shape should be instantly recognizable (though some require close inspection). That reindeer can't have skinny legs, which can easily break off when baked.

The cutters themselves are also made with exacting precision. Strips of shiny, tin-plated steel are trimmed to the precise length of each cookie cutter and welded into circles. Those circles are placed on top of weighty metal dies, and with the press of a button, a set of arms nudges the metal at specific positions to form the shape.

The machines can make 600 to 1,000 cutters an hour, and allow the company to develop new shapes quickly without relying on an outside supplier, as most of its competitors do.

DESPITE ALL THE AUTOMATION, the cookie cutter remains one of the few timeless and inexpensive tools in an increasingly mechanized baking world, said Kay Johnson, a curator at the National Cookie Cutter Historical Museum in Joplin, Mo.

Cookie cutters are also mirrors of American culture through the ages, she said. For example, one way historians know that homesteaders in the 19th century played cards is that they had cookie cutters in the shapes of the four suits. In the 20th century, many of the most popular nursery rhymes were the ones — like "Humpty Dumpty" and "Hickory Dickory Dock" — whose characters had been turned into cookie cutters.

Mr. Clark keeps abreast of current fads by looking at online search data. While anyone can submit an idea for a shape, search interest in particular cookie-cutter shapes usually determines which ones are produced. A Barbie-inspired doll head received an immediate green light, while a proposal to make a Covid-era surgical mask was rejected. And some ideas don't work out: Two years ago, the company paused production on a cookie cutter shaped like a pistol because employees objected.

In the company's warehouse, cookie cutters are arranged from the most popular (graduation cap, unicorn head, bunny) to the least popular (scissors, snail, the state of California). "My predictions on these, I've given up," Mr. Clark said.

Random shapes will suddenly take off, and he'll try to find an explanation. Why do sales of hexagons jump in the spring? Because people are making hamantaschen for the Jewish holiday Purim. And the boom in moons around the same time? Ramadan.

The future of the business is harder to figure out. The rise of 3-D printing could threaten the Clarks' juggernaut; some companies are using the technology to print plastic cookie cutters on demand in highly customized shapes.

It's also uncertain how long Americans will stay interested in cookie cutters. Sales were flat from November 2022 to October 2023, according to the market research company Circana.

Cutting out cookies takes time and patience, Mr. Clark said, but "we are all about instant gratification now."

Still, there's a bigger potential audience out there. Ann Clark began expanding internationally in 2018, and its cutters are now available throughout Europe and in countries like Japan and Brazil.

Mr. Clark considered researching country-specific traditions and developing corresponding shapes. Instead, he just released all 750 shapes abroad and saw what sold well.

The spike in teddy-bear cutters in Britain taught him about the importance of the stuffed animals, which many Britons keep past childhood. The popularity of geese cookie cutters in Germany introduced him to St. Martin's Day, a holiday whose centerpiece is a roast goose.

The experience cemented a valuable lesson, Mr. Clark said. What better way to learn about the world than through its cookie cutters?

LEFT AND ABOVE, RACHEL VANNI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Top, making gingerbread man cookie cutters at the Ann Clark factory in Rutland, Vt. Above, Arlene Chua of Staten Island and some of her 5,000 cookie cutters.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY OLIVER PARINI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Ann Clark, top right, with her son Ben Clark. Above left, the factory floor. Evelyn Henderson, a graphic designer, must make shapes compatible with the machines.