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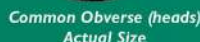


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A displaced family in southern Lebanon crosses a bridge destroyed by an Israeli air strike. (p.14)

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David Chase (p.10)

Editor's letter

Is the United States waging a holy war? The Trump administration has been overtly promoting the U.S. conflict with Iran as a battle of righteousness against the forces of wickedness, with Donald Trump as the savior and Pete Hegseth as his disciple of lethality.

On Easter, the day holiest to Christians, President Trump posted a message of death and destruction to Iranians, ending it with a sarcastic "Praise be to Allah!" At the White House Easter prayer event, his pastor, Paula White-Cain, compared the president to Jesus himself, saying he had been persecuted, unfairly accused, even shot, yet had risen again. "God is using you to defeat evil," White-Cain said, and "you will be victorious in all you put your hand to." Trump seemed to take that to heart and posted an AI image depicting himself as Jesus. This week, he took part in the MAGA-heavy "America Reads the Bible" event, choosing to read a passage from 2 Chronicles, so that he was effectively speaking in the voice of God.

A few weeks ago, Hegseth stood at a Pentagon podium and prayed in the name of Jesus that U.S. soldiers might use "overwhelming violence of action against those who deserve no mercy." He was explicit in what he was requesting: "Let every round find its mark against the enemies of righteousness and our great nation."

This constant invocation of a divine blessing on an aggressive war has me reaching back to an American classic, Mark Twain's short story "The War Prayer." A stranger comes to a church where the congregation is praying for their boys as they head off to battle. The man warns the flock not to involve God in what they are about to do. For what they are really asking of the Almighty, he said, is to "help us to tear their soldiers to bloody shreds with our shells; help us to cover their smiling fields with the pale forms of their patriot dead; help us to drown the thunder of the guns with the shrieks of their wounded, writhing in pain; help us to lay waste their humble homes with a hurricane of fire." Put that way, war doesn't sound very holy.

Susan Caskie
Executive editor

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Iran flexes its power over Strait of Hormuz

What happened

With peace talks between the U.S. and Iran at an impasse, the clash for control of the crucial Strait of Hormuz intensified this week as Iran seized at least two cargo ships in the trade corridor in retaliation for a U.S. naval blockade of its ports. The Navy has turned back some 30 ships trying to enter or exit Iranian ports since the blockade was imposed earlier this month, and in a bid to ramp up the economic pressure on Tehran, the U.S. this week boarded a tanker carrying Iranian oil in the Indian Ocean and seized an Iranian-flagged container ship that tried to run the blockade. The Iranian regime accused the U.S. of “piracy” and soon after seized two cargo ships—one flying a Panamanian flag, the other a Liberian flag—claiming the vessels had tried to navigate the contested strait without its approval. White House spokesperson Karoline Leavitt said Iran’s attacks on “international vessels” didn’t constitute a violation of the U.S.-Iran ceasefire.

A U.S. delegation led by Vice President JD Vance was set to travel to Pakistan for a second round of peace talks, but the trip was delayed after Iran refused to take part. A foreign ministry spokesman cited “contradictory messages” and “inconsistent behavior” from the Americans; other Iranian officials cited the blockade, which the regime called “an act of war.” Trump, who had warned that the “military is raring to go” for strikes on Iran if a deal wasn’t reached before the temporary ceasefire ended this week, extended the truce indefinitely, saying Iran’s leadership was “fractured” and needed time to “come up with a unified proposal.” Iranian officials accused Trump of trying to “buy time for a surprise strike.”

With traffic at a standstill in the strait, which carried some 20% of the world’s oil before the start of the war, U.S. Energy Secretary Chris Wright acknowledged that gas prices—now averaging about \$4 a gallon—might not drop below \$3 until next year. Trump said that’s “totally wrong” and that prices will plummet “as soon as this ends,” a claim experts called unrealistic. “Oil and gasoline rise very quickly, and they come down very slowly,” said economist Peter Earle. A new Quinnipiac poll found 65% of Americans blame Trump for the spike in gas prices, and more than half blame him “a lot.”

What the columnists said

As Trump’s approval numbers plunge to the mid-30s, associates say he “wants out of the increasingly unpopular war,” said **Barak Ravid** in *Axios*. His negotiators suspect a peace deal is within reach, but that “they may not have anyone in Tehran empowered to say yes.” Hard-line generals from the elite Revolutionary Guard now run the country, and they’re “openly at odds over strategy” with Iran’s civilian negotiators. The new supreme leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, could break the impasse. But he is rumored to have been badly wounded in the air strike that killed



Enforcing the blockade of Iran’s ports

his father, former Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, and is “barely communicating.”

There’s another major obstacle, said **Alayna Treene** and **Kevin Liptak** in *CNN.com*: The Iranians don’t trust Trump. The two sides seemed last week to be nearing an agreement. Then Trump went on a tear on social media and in interviews, falsely claiming Iran had agreed to “a host of provisions that hadn’t been finalized” and had accepted the most contentious U.S. demands, such as handing over its stockpile of enriched uranium. That tanked “the rising optimism for a deal,” and “it’s unclear where peace talks go from here.”

“Even Trump’s most basic claims about the Iran war can’t be trusted,” said **Daniel Dale**, also in *CNN.com*. He said this week that Vance was en route to Islamabad; in fact, the veep had never left the U.S. And he falsely claimed last week that Iran had agreed to never again close the Strait of Hormuz. Virtually nothing the president says can be taken at face value, a situation the world “has never had to contend with.” He’s confounded not just negotiators but ordinary Americans, said **Peter Hamby** in *Puck*. A new poll shows they “have no idea why this war is happening,” with answers ranging from keeping Iran from getting nukes (22%) to “taking oil” (20%) to “a show of power” (13%).

Control of the strait has become “the strategic fulcrum of the war,” said *National Review* in an editorial. Iran seems to think if it keeps the strait closed it will “exact so much economic pain” that Trump will end his blockade, or accept a deal that relents on his “red lines.” He needs to convince Tehran he’s “perfectly willing to start shooting again” and “take the strait back by force.”

Iran thinks it has the upper hand, said **Erika Solomon** in *The New York Times*. After a “high-stakes game of chicken,” it believes “Trump blinked first” when he extended the ceasefire with no

concessions. That validates its view that Iran’s readiness to absorb the economic pain wrought by the war exceeds Trump’s. The regime sees this as an “existential battle,” and no matter how much suffering the blockade inflicts, experts say “it’s not going to blink.”

Both sides have powerful incentives to end this, so “in a world of logic” a settlement would be “a safe bet,” said **Marc Champion** in *Bloomberg*. But we’re in a realm where logic doesn’t seem to apply, stuck with leaders who lack “the personal and political courage needed for compromise.” In Tehran, fanatical hard-liners call the shots. In Washington, we have a president who “seems to live in his own movie, reinventing reality to follow a script in which he plays the triumphant hero.” It’s “an inherently unstable situation” with no obvious way out, and “a return to war looks all too possible.”

What next?

Iran “maintains more military capabilities than the White House or Pentagon has publicly admitted,” said **Jennifer Jacobs** in *CBSNews.com*. So say multiple U.S. officials who’ve seen intelligence on the matter, which belies the administration’s claims that we’ve essentially wiped out Iran’s military capacity. Iran retains about half its ballistic missiles, and two-thirds of its air force is thought to be operational. While the conventional navy is largely destroyed, the Revolutionary Guard’s naval arm maintains 60% of its capacity, including fast-attack speedboats. If Trump is eventually able to strike a deal with Iran, said **Michael Birnbaum** in *The Washington Post*, it may “involve many of the same trade-offs” as the Obama-era nuclear deal that he tore up in 2018. A prospective agreement could include expiration dates on limits to Tehran’s nuclear program. And to secure Iran’s stockpiles of enriched uranium, the administration has floated unfreezing \$20 billion, in part proceeds from Iranian oil sales. That’s far more than the \$1.7 billion released under President Barack Obama’s agreement—a longtime target of GOP scorn.

...and How They Were Covered

Democrats score key redistricting win in Virginia

What happened

Democrats' efforts to reclaim the U.S. House of Representatives got a major assist this week, after voters in Virginia approved an aggressively gerrymandered electoral map that could gain the party four more seats in the chamber. By 51% to 49%, Virginians voted to allow the state legislature to redraw the state's representative districts in a way that likely gives Democrats 10 out of its 11 seats—up from six now—until at least after the 2030 census. President Trump immediately claimed without evidence the result was “rigged.” Since California voters had earlier approved a map that eliminated five Republican districts, Democrats have now pulled even with GOP redistricting gains in Texas, Missouri, Ohio, and North Carolina. Those states heeded Trump's repeated calls to redraw maps to help the GOP hold the House in the midterms, setting off the redistricting battle with Democrats. “Many expected Democrats to roll over,” said House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries. “We fought back. When they go low, we hit back hard.”



Purple state could soon tip heavily blue.

Virginia's redrawn map could still be scrapped by the state Supreme Court, which is still considering Republican claims that Democrats illegally organized the redistricting effort. Republicans could also gain as many as five more seats from Florida, which will hold a special session on redistricting next week. The U.S. Supreme Court, meanwhile, has delayed a ruling on a case that could overturn the 1965 Voting Rights Act's prohibition of racial gerrymandering, which could encourage legislatures in multiple Southern states to redraw their maps before the midterms.

What the columnists said

Carving up Virginia into “salamander-like” districts “wasn't an easy sell,” said **William Kristol** in *The Bulwark*. As Virginia Republicans emphasized in attack ads, Democrats such as Barack Obama and Gov. Abigail Spanberger once condemned gerrymandering. But now that Trump has forced the issue, Democrats—often “thought to be hapless competitors” in this dirtier political age—finally “stepped up and fought back.”

Now they can “spare us the false sanctimony about democratic norms,” said *The Washington Post* in an editorial. Some 46% of Virginians voted for Trump in 2024; this outrageously gerrymandered map would reduce their House representation to barely 9%. We can blame “Trump's original foolhardy and suicidal decision to goad Texas into mid-decade redistricting,” said **Jeffrey Blehar** in *National Review*. But it's still unjust to turn purple Virginia “into almost a one-party state.”

This was a “less resounding” win for Democrats than the party might suggest, said **Aaron Blake** in *CNN.com*. Spanberger won the Virginia governorship by 15 percentage points in November; this map squeezed by with 2. It also may have cost her politically. The centrist Spanberger, a potential presidential candidate, faced complaints of hypocrisy from the Right and criticism from the Left for not advocating for the referendum strongly enough. “The lesson of the current redistricting war” is that pragmatism doesn't pay; you need to “take whatever advantage you can, whenever you can.”

Lawmakers grill Kennedy over MAHA agenda

What happened

Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. refused this week to commit to following vaccine guidance from the next CDC director, as he appeared before Congress to justify his health policies over a series of grueling hearings. President Trump last week nominated Dr. Erica Schwartz, who served as deputy surgeon general in his first term, to lead a CDC reeling from Kennedy's staffing purge and vaccine schedule changes. Schwartz, a Navy veteran who is pro-vaccine, will need to clear a Senate confirmation hearing but is widely viewed as qualified. But when Rep. Raul Ruiz (D-Calif.) asked Kennedy whether he would “implement whatever vaccine guidance” Schwartz might issue “without interference,” the secretary said he was “not going to make that kind of commitment.”

During his seven days of answering senators' questions, Kennedy vigorously defended his Make America Healthy Again agenda. He insisted his criticism of vaccines had “nothing to do” with the measles outbreaks that killed three people last year; stuck by his support for raw milk, which has led to *E. coli* outbreaks in three states; and called a study that refuted his purported link between autism and Tylenol use in pregnancy “garbage.” Challenged on his decision to cancel \$500 million in mRNA vaccine research contracts, he said, “Covid is gone, and the mRNA vaccines have a limited efficacy against respiratory illnesses.” (In fact, Covid continues to spawn deadly variants.) He did, however, concede that mRNA vaccines hold promise in treating some cancers.

What the columnists said

President Trump may finally be “kicking out the crazy,” said **Noah Rothman** in *National Review*. The nomination of the refreshingly competent Schwartz echoes the changes at Homeland Security, where Markwayne Mullin is restoring a sense of normalcy after the chaotic tenure of his predecessor, Kristi Noem. While Kennedy, so far, remains at his post, it appears “the Trump administration is pivoting away from the fringes of American intellectual life to which it was once so attracted.”

Schwartz is “a good pick,” said **Lisa Jarvis** in *Bloomberg*. She certainly “has the management and public health chops” to lead the agency, but so did Susan Monarez, the CDC's last full-time director, and Kennedy persuaded Trump to fire her within weeks. And Schwartz will be coming into a demoralized agency purged of thousands of its scientists, its website brimming with diatribe rather than data. Will she “have the mettle to stand up to” Kennedy when he attempts to “suppress or warp science”?

It will be tough, said **Jonathan Cohn** in *The Bulwark*. With mid-term elections approaching, the White House knows Kennedy's anti-vaccine mania is a political loser. But it's “an open question” whether it is changing policy or just messaging. Kennedy's still in charge, after all, and it would take years to reverse the damage he's already done. “It doesn't matter who you put in at CDC,” said Debra Houry, the agency's former chief medical officer, “as long as the secretary continues to assert his influence.”

Controversy of the Week

Congress: A new era of accountability after Swalwell?

An “ethics earthquake” hit Congress last week, said Zachary Schermele in *USA Today*, and it’s only intensifying. The first tremor was the resignation of Rep. Eric Swalwell, the seven-term California Democrat and a leading candidate to be the state’s next governor, after he was accused of sexual assault and misconduct by multiple women. The married father of three says the accusations—including that he raped two women—are “false” and “lies.” Just hours after Swalwell quit, Rep. Tony Gonzales (R-Texas), who admitted an affair with a female aide who later died by suicide, also resigned. In both cases, a bipartisan coalition of female lawmakers had signaled they were moving toward expulsion votes, but this “#MeToo moment” seems part of a broader reckoning. Rep. Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick (D-Fla.) resigned this week after the House Ethics Committee found her guilty of spending millions of Covid relief dollars on her 2022 election. And pressure is mounting on Rep. Cory Mills (R-Fla.), who’s being investigated over allegations of domestic violence, revenge porn, and campaign finance violations; he denies any wrongdoing. Why is this happening now? asked Joan Vennoch in *The Boston Globe*. Maybe it’s a backlash to the #MeToo backlash. Maybe it’s our post-Epstein sensitivity to “power and perversion.” Whatever the reason, it’s good for the country that Congress is policing itself and “setting standards in a bipartisan way.”



Swalwell: A predatory ‘male feminist’?

became public, Democrats turned on Swalwell in case he threw the California governor’s race to a Republican. It’s nice that other resignations have followed, said Jon Allsop in *The New Yorker*. But the careful, scalp-for-scalp arithmetic carries “an unseemly whiff of partisan horse-trading.” Is this a real crackdown on ugly behavior? Or a choreographed effort to look like they’re “taking it seriously”?

The House’s “culture of turning a blind eye” will be hard to shake, said Michelle Cottle in *The New York Times*. Yes, the #MeToo

movement “scared some people straight for a while,” but it didn’t change “the essential power dynamic on the Hill,” where members drunk on flattery and self-regard routinely abuse the often young, often female staffers who work for them. For the ambitious Swalwell, that culture of sexual tolerance was as much of a draw as fame, power, and the other “trappings of office,” said Melanie Mason in *Politico*. A protégé of former speaker Nancy Pelosi, Swalwell “thought he was untouchable—until he wasn’t.”

Republicans are in no position to moralize, said Christian Schneider in *National Review*, having handed their party to “inveterate horn-dog” Donald Trump. But Swalwell does represent a uniquely Democratic species of predator: the “male feminist” who trumpets his support for women as a “prelude to making advances,” then uses his progressivism as a “cloak of invisibility” when accountability looms. Swalwell, at least, has paid a price, and with criminal probes underway in New York and California, it could get higher, said Ingrid Jacques in *USA Today*. But until both parties stop recruiting “creeps and criminals,” and voters start demanding better, the swamp of congressional ethics will remain “a bipartisan problem.”

Swalwell’s exit was about politics, not decency, said Allysia Finley in *The Wall Street Journal*. Democrats knew for years that Swalwell was a sex pest, but they still cheered his relentless attacks on President Trump and nodded along as he declared during Brett Kavanaugh’s Supreme Court confirmation hearings that sexual assault victims “deserve to be heard.” But when the allegations against him

Only in America

■ Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee has signed a resolution designating June, which is celebrated nationwide as LGBTQ Pride Month, “Nuclear Family Month.” The resolution defines a nuclear family as “one husband, one wife, and any biological, adopted, or fostered children,” and declares the arrangement “God’s perfect design for humanity.” For good measure, the text also condemns the “globalist ideologies of the World Health Organization” and other groups “that fight for population control.”

■ A Nebraska motorist is suing the family of a jogger he struck and killed, claiming the accident left him with PTSD. Gavin Maas was never charged in the 2025 death of Anthony Miller, 37, which police blamed on poor lighting, rain, and the victim’s dark clothing. Since the accident, Maas said he has been hospitalized numerous times for trauma, and is seeking \$50,000 from Miller’s estate for medical expenses and lost income.

Good week for:

Flattery, after Ukraine offered to rename part of its war-torn Donbas region “Donnyland” in honor of President Donald Trump, in the hope it would win his support for establishing the area as a demilitarized zone that Russia could never annex.

EV range, after Chinese electric carmaker Seres was granted a patent for an “in-vehicle toilet” that slides out from under the passenger seat upon voice command. The feature is designed to “satisfy users’ toilet needs on long journeys,” engineers wrote in the filing.

Pulp religion, after Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, delivering a sermon at the Pentagon, prayed for those beset by “the tyranny of evil men,” vowing to “strike down...with great vengeance and furious anger those who attempt to capture and destroy my brother,” seemingly unaware he was quoting a fake Bible verse from the movie *Pulp Fiction*.

Bad week for:

Conflict resolution, after President Trump told CNBC that “I would have won Vietnam very quickly,” if he’d had the chance. The draft-eligible Trump was unfortunately unable to serve in the 20-year war due to four educational deferments and a medical deferment for “bone spurs.”

Tactical approaches, after a drone recording video footage of an armed standoff in Jurupa Valley, Calif., caught a SWAT officer swiping through his “matches” on a dating app. “That is not representative of my department,” said Riverside County Sheriff Chad Bianco, who is running for governor. “It was a slap in the face to them.”

Science, after Dr. Mehmet Oz, head of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, revealed on Donald Trump Jr.’s podcast that “your dad argues that diet soda is good for him because it kills grass—if poured on grass—so, therefore, it must kill cancer cells inside the body.”

In other news

Justice Department demands Detroit-area election records

Michigan officials this week rebuffed a demand from the Justice Department to hand over all ballots from the 2024 election in Wayne County, the latest attempt by the DOJ to discredit votes that did not go President Trump’s way. While Trump won Michigan in 2024, he lost solidly Democratic Wayne County, home to Detroit. A letter signed by Harmee Dhillon, the assistant attorney general for civil rights, referenced three cases of alleged voter fraud in 2020 that were already prosecuted by the state, and a lawsuit alleging voter fraud that was later dismissed. The Trump administration has in recent months seized ballots in Georgia and voting records in Arizona from the 2020 election, which President Trump has baselessly insisted that he won. Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer called the latest request a “poorly disguised attempt to justify more doubt and misinformation about our elections.”

The U.S. at a Glance

Blue Mounds, Wis.

Beagle rescue: Police last week fired rubber bullets and pepper spray at about 1,000 activists who stormed a Wisconsin facility that breeds beagles for biomedical experiments. The attempted raid on Ridgman Farms in Blue Mounds, Wis., was organized by Wayne Hsiung, a prominent California animal rights activist who



Animal rights activists

said he wanted to rescue 2,000 dogs from torture. Ridgman has denied abuse allegations, but it agreed in October to give up its state breeding license to avoid prosecution after

a judge found it likely broke Wisconsin animal cruelty laws by performing surgeries without anesthesia, leaving wounds untreated, and other violations. The Dane County sheriff's office was anticipating the raid, which had been promoted on social media, but the scene quickly devolved as protesters rushed to breach the fences of the facility, officers threw tear-gas canisters into the crowd, and a pickup truck tried to plow through Ridgman Farms' front gate. "It was like a war zone," one protester said.

Shreveport, La.

Mass shooting: A Louisiana man killed eight children—including seven of his own—last week in the country's deadliest mass shooting in more than two years. Shreveport police said Shamar Elkins, 31, fatally shot the children, ages 3 to 11, "execution style," using a pistol that worked like "an assault-style weapon."



Horror scene

He also shot his wife, who was hospitalized with life-threatening injuries, and the mother of three of his children in a house nearby. Another woman and a 12-year girl escaped the horrific scene by jumping off a roof. Elkins later died by gunshot after leading police on a car chase. Elkins' wife had recently told him she was seeking a divorce, and relatives say Elkins, an Army veteran, had checked into the local Veterans Affairs hospital in January for a mental health evaluation. But he maintained a happy facade as a doting father, making the tragedy even harder to reconcile. "It will be written in the pages of history as one of the worst days" in Shreveport, said police chief Wayne Smith.

Washington, D.C.

Extremism: The Justice Department this week accused the Southern Poverty Law Center of financial crimes, targeting a storied civil rights nonprofit that has listed some prominent conservative organizations, like Turning Point USA, as hate groups. Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche claimed the 55-year-old SPLC, which tracks extremism, defrauded supporters when it used their donations to pay informants to infiltrate extremist organizations like the Ku Klux Klan and the Aryan Nations. A federal grand jury charged the SPLC with wire fraud, false statements to a federally insured bank, and conspiracy to commit money laundering, alleging the organization gave people affiliated with hate groups over \$3 million from 2014 to 2023. The SPLC was "manufacturing the extremism it purports to oppose," said Blanche. Interim SPLC leader Bryan Fair called the allegations false, saying the indictment "will not shake our resolve."



Annandale, Va.

Murder-suicide: A former Virginia lieutenant governor once considered a rising Democratic star killed his wife before shooting himself in a murder-suicide last week. Justin Fairfax, 47, was going through a contentious divorce from 49-year-old Cerina Fairfax when he fatally shot her in the basement of their Annandale, Va., home while their two teenage children were present. He then went into his bedroom and turned his handgun on himself. Sexual assault allegations ended Fairfax's political career in 2019, and he and his wife separated in 2024. A judge recently granted Cerina primary custody and ordered Fairfax to move out of the family's home by the end of April. Cerina testified about Fairfax's "heavy daily alcohol use," and acquaintances said he never got over the 2019 allegations, which he adamantly denied. Court records show that banks had been trying to recover tens of thousands of dollars he owed.

Washington, D.C.

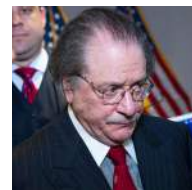
Resignation: Another Trump Cabinet member departed in scandal this week, as Labor Secretary Lori Chavez-DeRemer resigned her post amid a growing number of misconduct allegations. The Labor Department's inspector general was looking into whether she pursued a romantic relationship with a subordinate, a member of her security detail, while employees had lodged a formal office discrimination complaint, alleging Chavez-DeRemer created a "toxic workplace." Her husband, who was barred from entering the department's headquarters after being accused of sexual assault, frequently exchanged text messages with young female staff members, *The New York Times* reported, and Chavez-DeRemer instructed some of the women to "pay attention" to her husband and father. Her chief of staff and deputy chief of staff were placed on leave after being accused of concocting official trips so the secretary could vacation with friends. The former Oregon congresswoman has denied the allegations. She's the third female Cabinet member to exit this year.



Chavez-DeRemer

Miami

DiGenova returns: The Justice Department this week installed a familiar Trump loyalist, the president's former campaign lawyer, Joseph diGenova, to lead a sprawling inquiry into Trump's enemies, replacing a career prosecutor who had expressed doubts about the criminal investigation into former CIA director John Brennan. The 81-year-old diGenova will head up the "grand conspiracy" probe tasked with investigating whether former federal officials committed crimes in investigating Trump. DiGenova—who backed the president's efforts to overturn the 2020 election result—is expected to split time between Miami and Fort Pierce, Fla., where a grand jury can be overseen by federal judge Aileen Cannon, who has issued favorable rulings for Trump. So far, though, Trump's vengeance campaign is not off to a great start. Prosecutors abruptly rescinded a subpoena just days after it was issued to Trump critic Brennan by diGenova's predecessor, Maria Medetis Long, who was removed from the case last week.



diGenova

The World at a Glance



Dublin

Alleged kingpin: Irish and Emirati authorities this week arrested Daniel Kinahan, an Irish fugitive suspected of running one of the world's most notorious drug cartels. Kinahan, 48, was detained in Dubai and will be extradited to Ireland. Investigators say the Kinahan crime group, which controls much of Europe's cocaine market, has been operating from Dubai for nearly a decade since Kinahan fled a gang feud. The investigative news site Bellingcat tracked Kinahan, his brother, and his father, gang patriarch Christopher Kinahan Sr., there using Google restaurant reviews the elder Kinahan appeared to have posted under the name "Christopher Vincent." Daniel Kinahan, who has been active as a boxing promoter in Dubai, said in 2021, "there is no evidence or proof against me."

Kinahan

Vancouver

Loosening U.S. ties: Prime Minister Mark Carney said this week that Canada's trade interdependence with the United States was once a strength but, because of President Trump's tariffs and threats, is now a weakness. "We have to take care of ourselves," Carney said. "We can't rely on one foreign partner." Days earlier, Trump's commerce secretary, Howard Lutnick, had accused Canada of undermining talks to rework the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement. It was Trump, during his first presidency, who negotiated and signed it, having torn up NAFTA after labeling it unfair. But Lutnick said the USMCA was a "bad deal" and that Canada was dragging out preliminary negotiations to cause the U.S. economic pain. "They suck," he said.



Lutnick

Mexico City

Secret CIA mission: Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum this week demanded an explanation after two U.S. and two Mexican officials were killed in a car crash in Chihuahua, apparently while returning from a secret operation to destroy drug labs. Sheinbaum has said that Mexico will cooperate with the U.S. on intelligence sharing but won't allow U.S. boots on the ground. Any such collaboration between the U.S. and Mexican local law enforcement without federal permission, she said, would be a violation of Mexican law. To make matters worse, the two Americans were CIA officers, *The New York Times* reported this week. Chihuahua state officials said Mexican officers destroyed the lab on their own and only picked up the Americans—who were in the country to train the Mexicans in drone surveillance—afterward.



Meth lab in Chihuahua



Ross-Mahé back home

Paris

Widow's nightmare: The 86-year-old French widow of an American military veteran returned to France last week after 16 harrowing days in U.S. immigration detention. Marie-Thérèse Ross-Mahé reconnected a few years ago with Bill Ross, whom she'd dated in the 1960s when he was stationed in France, and she moved to Alabama to marry him. When Ross died in January, a battle erupted between her and his children over his \$190,000 estate, which includes the house where Ross-Mahé lived. Immigration agents—allegedly prodded by her stepson—arrested Ross-Mahé in her nightgown this month for visa violations. She arrived in Paris wearing orange shoes and stained prison garb from a Louisiana detention center. It was "an extremely difficult ordeal for her," said her son Herve Goix. "She was handcuffed like a dangerous criminal."

Brussels

Aid to Ukraine: With the pro-Russian Viktor Orban soon to lose power in Hungary, the European Union was able this week to approve a long-delayed \$106 billion loan to Ukraine. Orban had held up the money because he claimed Ukraine was slow-walking repairs to a pipeline that brings Russian oil through Ukraine to Hungary. But after Orban lost the Hungarian election last week to the pro-EU Peter Magyar, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky abruptly changed his tune and said the pipeline was ready to go. "Ukraine has completed repair work," Zelensky said this week. "The pipeline can resume operation." Orban then said he would lift his veto of the loan. Russian spokesman Dmitry Peskov called Zelensky's behavior "blackmail."



Radev

Sofia, Bulgaria

Pro-Kremlin leader: Former president Rumen Radev's party took an outright majority in this week's Bulgarian elections, making the Kremlin-friendly former fighter pilot the next prime minister. But it's not yet clear whether Radev will be another Viktor Orban, acting as spoiler for Russia within the EU, or the anti-corruption pragmatist he campaigned as. While he has already called for constructive dialogue with the Kremlin, he has not partnered with his country's pro-Russia party. "The usual Bulgarian posture," analyst Dimitar Bechev told *The Washington Post*, "is that there is a clear difference with Orban: We don't block the vote in Brussels and they don't ask questions about what happens in Bulgaria." Radev's Progressive Bulgaria movement won 45%, giving him 135 seats in the 240-seat legislature and ending two decades of political deadlock.

The World at a Glance

Kyiv

Mass shooting: A 58-year-old Moscow native killed six people and wounded several more in Kyiv last week, in the worst nonmilitary mass shooting Ukraine has seen in years. Dmytro Vasylychenkov killed four people on the street, then barricaded himself inside a convenience store, taking employees and customers hostage. Negotiators tried for 40 minutes to persuade him to surrender; then a SWAT team stormed in and killed him. Ukrainian authorities are treating the attack as an act of terrorism. They said Vasylychenkov had been living in Kyiv after moving from eastern Donetsk, a region mostly occupied by Russia. Neighbors in his apartment building said he seemed perfectly harmless. "You'd never guess he was some kind of criminal," said Hanna Kulyk, 75.



Terrorist attack

Debl, Lebanon

Smashing Jesus: Two Israeli soldiers were given 30-day jail sentences after one of them photographed the other smashing a statue of Jesus with a sledgehammer in a Christian village in southern Lebanon. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he was "stunned and saddened" by the act and apologized to "every Christian whose feelings were hurt." Locals said the statue was outside a private home in the village of Debl, one of the few towns in southern Lebanon where residents stayed through weeks of Israeli strikes against the Iran-backed Hezbollah militia. Israeli Christians were appalled. "I wanted to believe it wasn't real," said Farid Jubran of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem.



Desecration

Tokyo

Unleashing the military: Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi lifted a ban on arms exports this week in Japan's latest shift away from pacifist policies adopted after World War II. The sales will be restricted to 17 countries that agree to abide by the United Nations charter and use the weapons only for defense. Japan's arms industry has struggled to grow and stay profitable because the government was for so long its only customer. Allowing exports is expected to drive innovation and help the Japanese military catch up to better-equipped peers. Days earlier, Japan hosted a visit by more than 30 NATO envoys to strengthen ties with Western allies as security threats intensify across Asia. Takaichi's government also reached a \$6.5 billion deal to supply Australia with warships to modernize its aging fleet. "No country can now ensure its own peace and security alone," she said.



Takaichi

Doha, Qatar

Afghans barred from U.S.: President Trump is negotiating to ship 1,100 Afghan nationals, people who had risked their lives to help U.S. forces during the war against the Taliban, to Congo rather than allow them into the U.S., *The New York Times* reported this week. The group includes interpreters, special-ops fighters, and family members of American military personnel, as well as their relatives. Some 400 are children. The Biden administration promised them visas when the U.S. withdrew from Afghanistan in 2021, but Trump halted that resettlement program last year, leaving them stranded in Qatar. The Afghans now face the choice of returning to Afghanistan, where the Taliban are likely to kill them, or going to Congo, already overwhelmed with refugees after decades of conflict. "This is an easy solve," said Shawn VanDiver of aid group AfghanEvac. "Hey, welcome to America."

Malabo, Equatorial Guinea

Pope's truth to power: Pope Leo XIV ended his 11-day Africa trip this week by telling Catholics in Equatorial Guinea that humanity's future risked being "tragically compromised" by wars and crumbling international law. Leo visited four countries—Algeria, Cameroon, Angola, and Equatorial Guinea—inspiring the faithful and lecturing on the dangers of greed and the "lust for power." His forceful speeches were widely interpreted as targeting corrupt leaders in Africa as well as President Trump, who has clashed with him over immigration and the Iran war. In Algeria, the first Augustinian pope paid tribute to St. Augustine, who was born there in A.D. 354. In Cameroon, Leo called for breaking the "chains of corruption" as President Paul Biya, who has been in power for 43 years, listened passively. "Hearts must be set free," Leo said, "from an idolatrous thirst for profit."



Pope Leo XIV

KuGompo, South Africa

Opposition leader jailed: A South African court sentenced opposition firebrand Julius Malema to five years in prison last week for firing an assault rifle into the air in a packed stadium during a 2018 political rally. Malema, a fierce critic of Western imperialism and leader of the radical Economic Freedom Fighters party, was released pending appeal, but the verdict threatened to end his political career. Outside the court in KuGompo, he vowed to continue fighting the "white supremacist" enemy. "We are fighting the devil, and we must fight with everything," he said. Police braced for a possible repeat of unrest that followed the 2021 sentencing of former president Jacob Zuma, once a Malema mentor, to 15 months after he failed to report for a corruption inquiry.



Malema's career may be over.

Cox's blunt assessments



Brian Cox dispenses with politeness when discussing his peers, said Michael Odell in *The Times* (U.K.). Edward Norton? “A pain in the arse,” says the veteran Scottish actor, 79. Kevin Spacey? “A stupid, stupid man.” Johnny Depp? “So overblown, so overrated.” Quentin Tarantino? “Meretricious.” He has also criticized the Method acting of his *Succession* co-star Jeremy Strong—who

played his son Kendall Roy on the HBO hit—as “American shit” and “f---ing annoying.” Cox says he doesn’t want to discuss Strong again “because I’ve got into a lot of problems and [Strong has] begged me to stop talking about him. He’s a good actor, a wonderful actor. It’s just all the bollocks that goes with it. You watch children—they don’t say, ‘What’s my motivation?’ They just do it!” Being so blunt hasn’t yet damaged his career; he is now more in demand than ever. “My wife keeps saying, ‘Brian, be careful. Brian, be careful.’ I think, ‘F--- it, I don’t want to be careful anymore! I’ll be 80 this year. I’m gonna say what I want to say.’” He has other disagreements with his wife, the actress Nicole Ansari-Cox. “She is one of the most generous and caring people. The problem with Nicole, and we discuss this, is she’s got too many friends. At my age I’m trying to get rid of them. Well, most of mine are dying off.”

Sasse reckons with mortality

Ben Sasse knows he’s running out of time, said Ross Douthat in *The New York Times*. The former Republican senator from Nebraska was diagnosed with Stage 4 pancreatic cancer last December, and told he had three or four months to live. “I didn’t like the idea of my 14-year-old son not having a dad around at 16,” says Sasse, 54, who left Congress in 2023 to become president of the University of Florida. “I didn’t like the idea of my daughters, who are 22 and 24, not having their dad there to walk them down the aisle.” So far, he’s beating the odds, thanks to a clinical trial at Houston’s MD Anderson. “We’re delivering super poison to my tumors and trying to beat the hell out of them.” It’s working—his tumors are down about 76% from the end of last year. But “they’ve already seeded so many other kinds of cancer that it’s probably just not something you can ever catch up on.” Sasse says he is at peace with dying, a fact that he attributes to his Christian faith. Still, “death is something that we should hate. We should call it a wicked thief. And yet, it’s pretty good that you pass through the vale of tears one time and then there will be no more tears, there will be no more cancer.”



Chase's mother issues

The Sopranos was a deeply personal work for David Chase, said Stuart Heritage in *The Guardian*. Its premise—Tony Soprano, a mob boss, goes into therapy to deal with the trauma caused by his emotionally abusive mother—was inspired by the writer and producer’s relationship with his own paranoid and narcissistic mother. “I portrayed her as she was,” says Chase, 80. Unlike Tony’s mom, Norma Chase didn’t try to have her son killed. “But in 1967, at the height of the Vietnam War, my mother said, ‘I’d rather see you dead than avoid the draft.’” How did he take that? He laughs. “Not well. I had to create a whole TV series to get over it.” Chase also had a tricky relationship with James Gandolfini, who played Tony. Gandolfini once called him Satan; he would sometimes go missing for days at a time during filming, struggling with the darkness of his character. Chase recalls “three or four” occasions when Gandolfini asked to meet because he was so unhappy, and they “talked and talked and talked.” But he says Gandolfini “never refused to do anything” and that his disruptive behavior was trivial compared with that of the lead actors on *Northern Exposure*. When he joined that show as a writer in 1993, Chase found an assistant director measuring the distance from the two stars’ trailers to the set, “because neither one wanted to have a longer walk than the other. Now *that* wasn’t a happy set.”

In the news

■ **Caitlyn Jenner** asked President Trump for help after the gender on her passport was switched from female to male, a result of a Trump executive order requiring government-issued ID to reflect a person’s sex at birth. Jenner, who is Trump’s most famous transgender supporter, told conservative podcaster Tomi Lahren that all her documents, including her passport and birth certificate, had the sex marker changed from M to F when she transitioned. But when she renewed her passport recently, it came back with an M. “I can’t travel internationally anymore,” said Jenner, 76. “I can’t use my passport.” The former Olympic athlete said she wrote a letter to Trump earlier this year explaining how his January 2025 executive order is “affecting me and a lot of other people.”



She has yet to receive a reply. Trump is “kind of busy right now,” Jenner said. “I get that, and I’m not blaming him whatsoever. I love the guy.”

■ **Tiger Woods** is fighting a subpoena from Florida prosecutors for the golfer’s prescription drug records, according to court documents filed last week. Woods was charged with DUI last month after his Range Rover clipped a truck and rolled onto its side near his home in Jupiter Island, Fla. Responding officers said the golfer appeared lethargic and had two white pills—later identified as the opioid hydrocodone—in his pockets. Because Woods, 50, refused to take a urine test to determine what, if any, substances were in his system, prosecutors want access to his records at a Palm Beach pharmacy. The golfer’s attorney, Douglas Duncan, asked for a court hearing on the request; if a judge

gives the go-ahead, Duncan said a protective order should be issued to prevent the records from being “disclosed to any third parties.”

■ **Cher** last week filed for a conservatorship over her son Elijah Blue Allman, alleging that his drug addiction has left him “gravely disabled.” The pop star, 79, is asking Los Angeles Superior Court to let a private fiduciary take control of Allman’s trust—his sole source of income—since the 49-year-old “has no concept of money” and almost “immediately” spends any cash he gets on “drugs, expensive hotels, and limousine transportation.” Allman, Cher’s only child with the late rock singer Gregg Allman, is currently in custody at a New Hampshire psychiatric hospital after he was charged with trespass, assault, and burglary following two separate incidents in the state. Los Angeles Superior Court rejected a similar conservatorship request from Cher in 2024.

Briefing

A rising threat from ticks

Alpha-gal syndrome, which can trigger a potentially fatal meat allergy, is surging across the U.S. Why?

What causes alpha-gal syndrome?

It often begins with a bite from a lone star tick, which has a sugar molecule known as alpha-gal in its saliva. That molecule is found in the tissues of most mammals, but not humans, and normally causes no problems when people consume it in red meat. But when alpha-gal enters the bloodstream via a tick bite, the body produces antibodies to fight the intruder. In about 50% of people with those antibodies, a subsequent exposure to alpha-gal—such as by eating beef, lamb, pork, or venison—can spark an overactive immune response that causes hives, joint pain, vomiting, and severe abdominal cramps. “It was a terrifying experience,” said Roanoke, Va., resident Heather O’Bryan, who in 2019 found herself struggling to breathe after eating a pork sausage. “I didn’t know I had an allergy, but it almost killed me.” In extreme cases, alpha-gal syndrome (AGS) can cause anaphylactic shock and death. The U.S. confirmed its first alpha-gal death in November: a 47-year-old New Jersey airline pilot who collapsed in 2024, four hours after eating a burger at a barbecue. Thousands of people are now diagnosed with AGS each year, a remarkable number considering the syndrome was formally identified only in 2007. “Alpha-gal has gone from a medical curiosity to a major public health issue in just a decade,” said Vinay Jahagirdar, a gastroenterologist at Virginia Commonwealth University.



A lone star tick: Alpha-gal carrier

How many people have AGS?

More than 110,000 suspected cases were identified from 2010 to 2022, according to the Centers for Disease Control, which estimates that up to 450,000 people may be affected. Some doctors believe that’s an undercount. A study co-authored by Jahagirdar found a hundredfold increase in positive tests for alpha-gal antibodies between 2013 and 2024. Once clustered in the Southeast, the traditional habitat of the lone star tick, the disease is now common across the Northeast and Midwest and is surging along with other tick-borne conditions such as Lyme disease. Scientists say the warming climate has allowed lone star ticks to move north to areas where it was previously too cold for the species to thrive; the parasites have also been aided by the booming population of white-tailed deer, their primary host. Lone star ticks are especially aggressive and move three times as fast as the black-legged tick. “They will hunt you,” said Sharon Pitcairn Forsyth, a conservationist and founder of the Alpha-Gal Alliance. “They are like a cross between a lentil and a velociraptor.”

What are the signs of infection?

There aren’t any, so most people don’t know they have AGS until they suffer an allergic reaction. But getting a diagnosis can be a long journey, both because many doctors aren’t familiar with alpha-gal and because symptoms can take up to six hours to appear after an exposure. Andrew Keenan, 58, a telecoms repairman in Martha’s Vineyard, Mass., woke up with severe stomach cramps at 2 a.m. after

a skirt-steak dinner. He then broke out in hives, and his blood pressure fell so low that “I sat up in bed and almost fainted.” Keenan, who was treated at the hospital for anaphylactic shock, now gets cramps and itching that can last days when he accidentally consumes alpha-gal, but reactions vary widely. Some are allergic to pork but not beef or vice versa; some react to dairy, some don’t. “Reactions are consistently inconsistent,” said Patrick Roden-Reynolds, a biologist who studies tick-borne diseases.

Is there a treatment?

No. The only way to manage the disease is to avoid alpha-gal—which is trickier than just ordering halibut instead of lamb chops at a restaurant. Food can easily be cross-contaminated, and aerosolized fat molecules from sizzling meat can cause a reaction, as can many items with mammal-derived ingredients: dairy products; foods with gelatin; medications made with glycerin; personal-care products that contain collagen or lanolin; even sugar, which is processed with animal-bone char. “I’m nervous about everything I eat,” said Jamie Ridgway, a Virginia Beach resident who landed in the ER after eating a marshmallow. Some sufferers now avoid restaurants and dinner invites. “You don’t want to be the social pariah asking people, ‘Is this vegan? What about that?’” said Massachusetts teacher Kate Sudarsky, 26.

How do people cope with AGS?

Support groups are growing in hard-hit areas. O’Bryan of Roanoke reports an “almost constant” stream of new members to the online groups she’s joined. In high-incidence states like Virginia—where up to 1 in 50 residents of some counties has AGS—a growing number of restaurants offer alpha-gal-free dishes. Some eateries “have gone completely alpha-gal free,” said Pitcairn Forsyth, who notes “a lot of chefs have” AGS. Many sufferers carry EpiPens to treat severe reactions; they include Missourian Annie Kittrell Poehlein, who at home now has “separate pots and pans and cutting boards. I have my own barbecue grill; we have two ovens.”

What are health authorities doing?

A growing number of states track cases; 12 now mandate reporting of positive tests, including Kentucky, Virginia, and Massachusetts. Health officials are trying to raise awareness of the condition and to educate people on how to avoid tick bites. Meanwhile, researchers are attempting to solve a number of mysteries, including the reason reactions vary so widely, why the allergy sometimes fades over time, and whether people who carry alpha-gal antibodies but show no visible allergic response might suffer unseen health effects, including digestive problems or coronary disease. Treatment breakthroughs may be on the way, but in the meantime, experts expect AGS to keep spreading. “It seems like an oddity now,” said Brandon Hollingsworth, a University of South Carolina epidemiologist, “but we could end up with millions of people with an allergy to meat.”

An island hot spot

Martha’s Vineyard is known for its beautiful beaches and high-flying summer visitors. But the island off Cape Cod now has another distinction: its unusually high number of AGS cases. There were 742 positive tests in 2025 among the island’s 23,000 year-round residents, up from 140 in 2023 and two in 2020. “Cases are skyrocketing,” said local biologist Patrick Roden-Reynolds. He says the lone star tick “has gone from nonexistent to everywhere” due to warming weather and a rising deer population. The impact is evident across the island, where many restaurants highlight alpha-gal-free items. Vegan ice creams and cheeses are “selling like crazy,” said market owner Rosemary Willett. Alpha-gal is a constant topic of conversation, say islanders. Soon after testing positive, Chilmark resident Cassie Courtney went to the grocery store, “and 4 out of 5 people standing in line had it,” she said. “We were all looking at each other’s carts, asking, ‘What are you eating?’”

Best Columns: The U.S.

Is Putin planning to attack NATO?

David Ignatius
The Washington Post

Russian President Vladimir Putin is a wounded bear, said David Ignatius. In Ukraine, his army is “at a standstill” despite staggering troop losses, and the Russian economy “is a mess.” He’s powerless to help his ally Iran, and his buddy Viktor Orban was just deposed in Hungary. In his “embattled” state, Putin is actually “more dangerous”—and he might be considering an attack on Europe. Putin is eager to “challenge NATO,” which has taken Ukraine’s side in the war, and may see a narrowing “window of opportunity” to do so. With President Trump backing away from NATO and Ukraine, European nations are pouring billions into building up their defenses. Meanwhile, Putin’s pal Trump has suggested the U.S. might ignore its obligations to come to a NATO member’s defense. To crack the alliance, Putin could invade a Baltic nation and dare NATO and the U.S. to engage in warfare with nuclear-armed Russia. Russia’s defense ministry last week threatened to strike European countries supplying drones to Ukraine, which include Germany, Britain, Sweden, and Italy. That sounds like a bluff, but as Putin’s Ukraine invasion showed, he’s “a risk taker.” His next move might shock us.

Why migrants are treated like animals

Adrian Carrasquillo
The Bulwark

“The abuses are piling up” at “Alligator Alcatraz,” said Adrian Carrasquillo, and the mistreatment of migrants is intentional. When Florida and the Trump administration opened the Everglades detention center last year, “its harsh location and cavalier nickname” generated both sarcastic laughter and outrage. Most Americans quickly moved on, but “Alligator Alcatraz” remains “a key site for Trump’s mass deportation regime.” Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-Fla.) gained entry and saw 1,500 detainees living in cramped, reeking cages, some configured so that people must use the toilet in front of everyone. When a federal judge last month ruled detainees were entitled to make outgoing legal calls, guards cut off phones and started beating up migrants who complained—causing a broken wrist, shoulder and arm injuries, and a black eye. As punishment, detainees are locked in “the box” in direct sunlight, exposed to swarms of mosquitoes and extreme heat for hours without water. The camp, said Wasserman Schultz, is a “monument to cruelty.” The Trump administration wants conditions in its detention camps to be so unbearable that other immigrants self-deport out of fear of winding up like animals in cages. Yes, the cruelty is the point.

Thomas’ holy war on progressives

Heather Digby Parton
Salon

Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas “is sounding the alarm: Progressives are an existential threat,” said Heather Digby Parton. At a speech last week at the University of Texas at Austin, Thomas made it clear he’s no umpire making “dispassionate decisions about the Constitution and the rule of law.” Instead, he spoke as a theocrat who believes that Americans should be governed by “natural law,” with rights given by God—as defined by conservatives like him. His speech was a diatribe against the Progressive movement, tracing it back to its origins at the turn of the 20th century, when it arose in response to the monopolies and capitalistic excesses of the Gilded Age. Thomas, however, portrayed the movement as sinister and anti-American. In Thomas’ telling, progressivism enabled the growth of government, crushed individual rights, and caused nearly all the ills of the 20th century. In a “jaw-dropping” statement, Thomas declared “it is not possible” for America and progressivism “to co-exist forever.” He made it clear that he believes that “the country is at war” and that his side is aligned with God. That extremist belief is the foundation of every one of his Supreme Court opinions.

Viewpoint

“You can see the terror in Pete Hegseth’s eyes at his press conferences about potentially being scapegoated for a less-than-total victory over Iran. He’s allegedly paranoid about being replaced by Army Secretary Dan Driscoll and probably has reason to be. My sense is that he’d do anything to retain the president’s favor, as being a buffoon with an impressive title whom no one takes seriously is preferable to being a buffoon to whom no one any longer pays any attention. Shaky job security is a terrific incentive for an employee to work harder. Working harder in the Trump administration means being even more of a servile henchman and bootlicker than you were before.”

Nick Catoggio in *The Dispatch*

It must be true... I read it in the tabloids

■ A man who was found clinically dead after he fell asleep in subzero weather on a bench in Siberia was “defrosted” by doctors and brought back to life. An ambulance crew found the man with no pulse and couldn’t resuscitate him. But at the hospital doctors slowly warmed him, gradually lifting his body temperature from 75 degrees to 93. After 25 minutes of cardiopulmonary resuscitation, they saw a faint pulse. The man was kept in an induced coma for a day, woke up, and was sent home five days later.



■ People in Western Massachusetts lined up to sniff—and gag at—the notorious stench of a “corpse flower” that bloomed at Mount Holyoke College. The rare tropical plant periodically attracts flies and other pollinating insects by releasing a scent similar to rotting flesh. Visitors likened the smell to a full garbage can, rotten eggs, and, yes, a corpse. It’s like “a stinky diaper baking in the sun,” said visitor Michael Breton. Tom Clark, director of the college’s botanic garden, said that as you get close to the bloom, the stench is “just overwhelming—literally unbearable.”

■ A 91-year-old woman in suburban Cleveland who prompted a police visit when she failed to answer repeated check-in calls was found absorbed in a video game. After the calls from a city wellness program went unanswered, police entered the woman’s home through a garage and found her in her bedroom, trying to top her high score on the video game. “Everyone got a good laugh out of it,” said a police captain.

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SINGAPORE

The other strait to worry about

Sim Tze Wei
Lianhe Zaobao

“Every war reshapes how countries think” about future conflicts, said Sim Tze Wei. And the “blockade and counter-blockade” by the U.S. and Iran in the Strait of Hormuz is surely giving China dangerous ideas. Beijing can see how effective these dueling “toll booths at sea” have been. Iran disrupted 20% of the global oil supply, triggering a worldwide energy crisis. The U.S. then cut off Tehran’s access to ports, throttling its economy. What if China were to follow that playbook and block the Taiwan Strait, in an effort to forcibly reabsorb Taiwan? “The global fallout” would be even worse, crippling all kinds of trade and supply chains and

causing “systemic shocks” everywhere. About 20% of all global maritime trade passes through the 110-mile-wide waterway that separates the autonomous island from the mainland, but if China were to start firing “missiles and bullets,” those ships would not cross. Taiwan itself, meanwhile, produces 90% of the highly advanced semiconductor chips that power AI, electronics, and military systems. That means the losses from a blockade could reach \$2 trillion, and if war actually broke out, that could rise to \$10 trillion—or 10% of global GDP. Such a scenario would plunge the world “into a depression to rival that of the 1930s.”

TURKEY

Massacres: The worst U.S. export

Salih Tuna
Sabah

The American plague of school shootings has “finally arrived on our soil” all in a rush, said Salih Tuna, with two in one week. The first was at a high school in Sanliurfa, where a former student, 18, opened fire and wounded 16 people before killing himself. We were still in shock from that horror when another one, the very next day, made our “blood run cold.” A 14-year-old armed with five guns killed nine people and wounded 13 at his Kahramanmaraş middle school; he died after being slashed with a knife by a parent who had rushed to the scene. Predictably, lawmakers are now demanding more security: “Let’s install X-ray machines, let’s station police at the door.” One opposition

leader has even proposed a force of 65,000 officers to patrol every campus. Yet this horror “cannot be explained solely by security lapses or ‘insanity.’” Of course we must address “the terrifying ease” of children’s access to firearms, but upping security will be futile unless we dissect our “culture of violence,” what Turkish human rights activist Rakesh Dink has called the “darkness that turns a baby into a murderer.” Teenagers who have “lost their sense of belonging” can wind up reaching for the “false heroism” they see in films, TV shows, and video games. If we can’t find a way to cure the “spiritual emptiness of these children, their nihilistic anger,” we will see more of these tragedies.

Lebanon: Will it ever know real peace?

During a shaky ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah this week, some of the Lebanese families who fled their homes managed to return—only to find a wasteland, said Ghassan Hajjar in *An-Nahar*. I was among them, “sorrow mixing with anger” as I navigated the ruins of Mashghara. “Here lies the playground of childhood, the sweet memories.” I sweep “photos scattered on the ground” into the trash, grateful my mother isn’t alive to “see the destruction of the family home.” My neighbors stare at their own damaged properties, churning through emotions.

Aida is angry, her life savings gone. Jessica, a photographer, “cleans her camera lens with tears.” Amira isn’t here: She can’t travel because she was injured while fleeing. These stories are everywhere. More than a million of us had to leave our villages, ordered to evacuate as Israel occupied a fifth of the country. Nearly 2,300 were killed, and 60,000 houses were damaged, many of them far outside the occupation zone. Eventually, some of us will “repair the stones,” but “who can restore what is in our souls?”

The trauma is compounded by our helplessness, said Adel Akl in *L’Orient-Le Jour*. Lebanon is “drowning in a vast conflict” among great powers. They battle, but we bleed. Iran and Israel were bombing each other when Iran’s Lebanese proxy, Hezbollah, chose to strike Israel, bringing the “death and ruin” onto “our soil.” America plays a “major role” by backing Israel, while Russia and China lend support to Iran “behind the scenes.” As for us, Lebanon is riddled with corruption, and



Neighbors embrace in the wreckage of Nabatieh.

this conflagration is rekindling “old militia mentalities” that have divided us. Israel is leveling Muslim border towns, but mostly sparing Christian ones, in its hunt for Hezbollah. It would be naive to expect the “rushed negotiations” to end the nightmare, said Lluís Bassets in *El País* (Spain). Israel and Lebanon have technically been at war since 1948 and still have no diplomatic relations. The Israeli scorched-earth policy is reopening wounds left from Israel’s 1978 and 1982 invasions, as well as from the subsequent 18-year occupation of

southern Lebanon that fueled Hezbollah’s rise. The two sides fought again in 2006 and have exchanged fire repeatedly since the Gaza war broke out in 2023. While the Lebanese government is now working for peace, both Israel and Hezbollah are practiced in the “ancient and savage sport” of breaking truces.

That’s why Lebanon “lives in fear of the resumption of war,” said Ilham Said Freiha in *Al Anwar*. And many of us are blaming Hezbollah for our misery. Yes, Israel ignores ceasefires at will—just after the one with Iran was announced two weeks ago, it unleashed a rain of fire on Beirut that took over 350 lives. But it was Hezbollah that started this latest round, and the militia is still making threats, even against the Lebanese government. “What must we, and who must we, wait for to liberate our land?” Hezbollah was formed to deter Israel. But its weapons “have proved ineffective in protecting either the people or land,” so why does it cling to them so fervently? “We have had enough of wars; it is time for peace.”

Best Columns: Europe

United Kingdom: The ‘summer of sex’ we all need

“What’s not to like about a ‘summer of sex?’” asked Rowan Pelling in *The Daily Telegraph*. Samantha Niblett, a Labour member of Parliament, has joined with Cindy Gallop, founder of the sex-positive movement Make Love Not Porn, for hearings in Parliament promoting sex education over the steamy months ahead. High time, I say. It’s not that we don’t talk about sex—some of our biggest TV shows of recent years, including *Fleabag* and *Sex Education*, are pure smut. But they’re also proof that we tend to “gloss over” our very British embarrassment at the mechanics of the act with humor, snickering rather than communicating. This campaign is intended to help young people understand issues around consent and violence, as well as how childbirth, menstruation, and menopause affect women’s pleasure. And Gen Z youth desperately need such instruction. Their early and frequent exposure to hardcore, sometimes violent porn has shaped their “perception of sex in pernicious, long-lasting, intimacy-busting ways.” Many get their information from the toxic manosphere. When some 60% of Gen Z men can’t locate the clitoris, “swapping sexual ignorance for erotic pleasure is a national necessity.”

“You’d think that politicians, historically a randy bunch, would be up for this,” said Rebecca Reid in *The i Paper*. They should be horrified that each new generation is having less sex than the previous. Yet many say Niblett is wasting Parliament’s time on something so frivolous as rumpy pump. “This is a moment of profound national seriousness and what are they doing?” asked Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch. “They are promoting sex



Gallop and Niblett: Bawdy talk

toys in Parliament. It gives a whole new meaning to fiddling while Rome burns.” Try “diddling while Rome burns,” said Madeline Grant in *The Spectator*. The world is teetering “on the brink of geopolitical collapse,” yet Niblett wants a national conversation about what goes on in the bedroom? This is a new low for a political class that thinks “literally no area of life should be free from government intervention.” Sure, it’s amusing that Niblett has an apt surname and that she’s chosen to call her program “Yes Sex Please, We’re British.” But this “dignity-phobic” MP says she plans to bring sex toys to the floor of Parliament to discuss erotic pleasure and “the benefits of masturbation.” Listening to politicians “flogging dildos” is an excruciating prospect. “Never has the case for earplugs been more compelling.”

Spare us the “sanctimonious faux horror,” said Rachel Cunliffe in *The New Statesman*. Nobody’s saying we shouldn’t pay attention to the Iran war or the housing crisis. But our long history of political sex scandals should prove that we need to learn how to navigate it. Niblett says her project is “about taking control of our Britishness and not feeling ashamed.” The real question is “why it has taken so long for the government to take sex seriously,” said Olivia Petter in *The Independent*. As a Millennial whose sex ed “amounted to being shown how to put a condom on a banana,” I am surrounded by peers who either can’t take no for an answer or can’t advocate for their own pleasure. If we must get the “blunt, horny instruction” we need from Parliament, bring it on. “Yes, yes, yes, minister.”

ITALY

Choosing Europe, not Trump

Francesco Bei
La Repubblica

Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni made a valiant effort to be an “Italian bridge” between the EU and Donald Trump, said Francesco Bei, but that connection has finally “collapsed into the waters of the Atlantic.” The far-right Meloni charmed Trump when she met him in Paris in 2024—he called her “a real live wire”—and she even visited him at Mar-a-Lago before his inauguration. That’s why whenever Brussels needed to get through to Trump, EU officials would beg her: “Giorgia, you talk to him.” Yet even Meloni couldn’t support Trump’s punitive tariffs or his attempt to snatch Greenland, nor could she allow the U.S. to use

Italian bases for the Iran war. Now the break is here: Trump’s “crude, unbridled attack” on Pope Leo XIV was too much for the leader of a country with such close ties to the Vatican. Meloni called Trump’s remarks “unacceptable,” and he is now furious with her. But maybe this is for the best. While Meloni was busy making excuses for Trump, her more serious counterparts in France, Germany, and the U.K. were preparing Europe “to stand on its own two feet.” If she wants to restore her relevance, she should forget about being a MAGA whisperer and come out “in favor of a united Europe.” That’s the path Italy should have been on all along.

ROMANIA

Could we be Putin’s next vassal?

Silviu Sergiu
Cotidianul

Hungary’s Viktor Orban did Vladimir Putin’s bidding in Europe for years, blocking Russia sanctions and Ukraine aid. Now that Orban has been voted out, Moscow is “keen to fill the void” with another Kremlin stooge, said Silviu Sergiu. Slovakia? It has a pro-Russia leader in Robert Fico, but his country is “too small” and “economically dependent on Brussels.” Bulgaria? It just elected a pro-Kremlin prime minister, but it’s not very influential. That leaves Romania as Putin’s best option. Right now, we have a reform-driven prime minister, Liberal leader Ilie Bolojan, who has managed to unite our four pro-Europe parties. But the disgruntled Social Democrats are trying to oust him, and they might

succeed. “What more precious gift could Russia receive than a new government in Bucharest?” We’re already primed to fall to a Russophile populist party. Our rising inequality fuels the perception that European integration hasn’t been so great for the working poor. And our tendency to lap up “unfiltered online content” makes us easy marks for Russian disinformation. Just look at what happened in the 2024 presidential election, when Russian interference was so blatant that the entire vote had to be annulled and rerun. It’s not that Romanians are inherently pro-Russian—far from it. But we have proved ourselves to be “the most vulnerable in the region” to Putin’s manipulation.

Noted

■ President Trump has invoked his White House ballroom project in public remarks and social media posts on about a third of days this year. That's about equal to the number of days he has mentioned health insurance and "affordability," and more days than he has mentioned TrumpRx, a federal website intended to help Americans shop for cheaper prescription drugs. *The Washington Post*

■ Military personnel are sharing photos of the small meals they're being served on warships in the Middle



East, telling relatives food supplies are running low as the war with Iran hits the two-month mark. One Marine

on the USS *Tripoli* shared a photo of a recent lunch: a scoop of meat and a single tortilla. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth denied reports of shortages, saying, "Our sailors deserve—and receive—the best." *USA Today*

■ More than three dozen doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals are running for Congress as Democrats in the midterms; many were spurred by their anger over the Trump administration's cuts to health programs and its embrace of anti-vaccine theories. There are currently 16 physicians serving in the House and four in the Senate. *The New York Times*

■ In the 229 state and federal elections held since President Trump's inauguration, Democratic candidates have outperformed Kamala Harris' 2024 vote margins in 193 of them, by an average of 5 percentage points. Margins have shifted toward Democrats in 85% of special elections over the past 15 months. *Politico*

FBI: Is Patel a national security threat?

"Kash Patel has never been qualified to lead the FBI," said Danielle Han in *Jezebel*, and *The Atlantic* just showed us "the gazillionth reason why." In a damning report published last week, the magazine alleged that the bureau's director suffers paranoid "freak-outs" about being fired, is often absent from work, and is "regularly too drunk to do his job."



Accused of excessive drinking

Justice Department and White House sources told *The Atlantic* that Patel's security detail has repeatedly struggled to wake the seemingly hungover FBI boss, forcing meetings and briefings to be rescheduled for later in the day. Last year, his detail even reportedly considered using SWAT-style "breaching equipment" because Patel had been unreachable behind locked doors. Some FBI and administration officials wonder if alcohol explains Patel's repeated missteps—such as his sharing of inaccurate information about a suspect following the September murder of Charlie Kirk—and fear that he's become a national security risk. Patel vehemently denies all the accusations and this week filed a \$250 million defamation lawsuit against *The Atlantic*, calling its report "hit-piece lies."

"Patel's goal, of course, isn't actually to win in court," said William Kristol in *The Bulwark*. To do that, he'd have to prove not only that the claims in *The Atlantic* were false but also that the outlet

knew they were so when it published them, "or at least didn't care if they were true or not." His real aim is to punish a publication that dared embarrass him with a costly nuisance suit "and to demonstrate to an audience of one, President Trump, that he's fighting the lying lib media." For now, Patel "still has support from the White House," said Mike Pesca in

his *Substack* newsletter. Trump appreciates his willingness to target perceived enemies—Patel vowed this week that arrests related to the 2020 election are "coming soon"—and to purge anyone who is "anything less than loyal to the president," including scores of FBI agents over the past year.

It's possible *The Atlantic* exposé will doom Patel, said Jeet Heer in *The Nation*. Trump, a teetotaler who watched his older brother drink himself to death, cannot abide substance abuse in his underlings. But whatever happens with Patel, the damage he's wreaked "will outlive his tenure." He has gutted FBI teams focused on terrorism, political corruption, and organized crime, and turned the bureau into "a dangerously right-wing" agency with the power to hurt the president's political foes. "The real problem is not Patel's alleged inebriation but the deep corruption of the most important law enforcement agency in the country."

Vance: The veep's losing streak

The past week wasn't just "bad" for Vice President JD Vance, said Hayes Brown in *MS.now*. It was "a trash fire." First, President Trump sent him to Pakistan to head the initial round of negotiations with Iran, making Vance the "scapegoat for failing to end a war" he reportedly opposed. The vice president flew home empty-handed, only to discover that autocratic Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, for whom Vance had stumped hard in Budapest, had suffered a landslide election defeat. Then came Trump's clash with Pope Leo XIV over the Iran war, which left the Catholic veep "trapped between the Holy See and his loyalty to the embodiment of MAGA's will on Earth." He picked Trump, saying the pontiff should "be careful" in discussing matters of theology. The capper was a dimly attended appearance at a Turning Point USA event in Athens, Ga., where Vance was heckled over Gaza. It can only be a matter of time before Trump, who's notoriously averse to "losers," realizes his No. 2 "is deeply lacking in wins."

This is not how things were meant to go, said Dana Milbank in *The New York Times*. As Trump's MAGA heir apparent, Vance was supposed to be on "a cruise to the 2028 presidential nomination." It "now looks more like a run

through the Strait of Hormuz." In a straw poll at last month's Conservative Political Action Conference on who should get the GOP nod, Vance dropped to 53% from 61% last year, while Secretary of State Marco Rubio rocketed from 3% to 35%. Vance should take a page from Rubio, said Kimberley A. Strassel in *The Wall Street Journal*. Unlike our "showman" veep, who wants to be "everywhere, all the time," the secretary of state keeps his head down and lets his work speak for itself. The more Vance hops "up and down for attention, the more Rubio looks presidential."

Vance is "in a trap of his own making," said Zack Beauchamp in *Vox*. An opportunist who sold out "purported core principles" to ally with Trump, he wanted to use the vice presidency to advance two foreign policy goals: turning the U.S. into "a patron" of Europe's far right and steering the GOP away from "military adventurism." He's failing spectacularly in both areas. Trump's militaristic rampage—his attacks on Venezuela and Iran, and threats to Greenland—has alienated "Europeans en masse." Like others before him, Vance made the mistake of thinking he could redirect the president's impulses and turn Trumpism "into a vehicle for his own ideology." Instead, it's run right over him.

Talking Points

AI: The backlash turns violent

"If chatbots were as all-knowing as we've been led to believe, they should have seen the backlash to artificial intelligence coming," said **Martin Baccardax** in *Barron's*. Now it's here. Daniel Moreno-Gama, 20, was carrying an anti-AI manifesto when he allegedly threw a Molotov cocktail at OpenAI CEO Sam Altman's \$27 million San Francisco mansion earlier this month. Two days later, a man and a woman in their 20s were arrested for allegedly firing a gun outside Altman's house. Someone fired 13 bullets into Indianapolis councilman Ron Gibson's home the previous week, leaving a note reading, "No Data Centers." Gibson had supported a new AI data center. AI is barging "into public life with a pace and aggression unlike any of its technological predecessors." Its creators warn that AI will eliminate half of white-collar jobs in five years, concentrate even more money and power at the top, and consume vast amounts of water and electricity. Just 26% of Americans see AI as a positive force. Is it any surprise the backlash has "turned violent"?



A protest against data centers in Michigan

On social media, many people justified the attacks against Altman, said **Clare Duffy** in *CNN.com*. If the "commoditization of what it means to be human is allowed to continue," wrote one Reddit

user, violence "will be much more common." Some activists deemed Moreno-Gama a hero, comparing his alleged attack to Luigi Mangione allegedly murdering UnitedHealthcare's CEO. Before he was charged with attempted murder, Moreno-Gama himself posted about "Luigi-ing tech CEOs."

The "Stop AI" movement is being driven by young people who've already experienced technology taking over their lives, said **Eva Roytburg** in *Fortune*. But the backlash is spreading across America's heartland as communities reject massive data centers, citing concerns about water usage and utility bills. Americans have stopped or delayed \$64 billion worth of data centers in two years. Maine is set to become the first state to ban them. In Festus, Mo., voters just ousted local politicians who approved a data center. These developments "signal an escalation in the blowback," said **Brian Merchant** in his *Substack* newsletter. AI executives have been warning that they're building a tool so powerful it will automate millions of jobs and "might literally end humanity," but seem shocked we're finally listening. "Ordinary people are saying: Wake up. We have good reason to hate AI." The backlash will likely only "get worse from here."

Hungary: A blueprint for defeating Trump?

"Hungary is obviously a very different country from the United States," said *The New York Times* in an editorial. But given how closely President Trump modeled his "corrupt, authoritarian approach to politics" on that of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, the resounding victory of opponent Peter Magyar last week could offer "a model for defeating Trumpism." Orban had so successfully stocked the media, judiciary, and parliament with his Fidesz party loyalists during his 16 years in power that Magyar "faced long odds." But Magyar "crushed Orban" by tapping public anger about his corruption, Hungary's "stagnant living standards," and its poor health care. His new Tiszta party won more than 70% of seats in parliament. Could Democrats pull off a similar feat?

"Crucially, Magyar's brand of anti-Orbanism was not stridently progressive," said **Idrees Kahloon** in *The Atlantic*. A conservative former Fidesz member, Magyar vowed "zero tolerance" for illegal immigration and refused to denounce a law banning gay pride events. This, plus tireless campaigning in Hungary's rural heartland, allowed him to assemble a broad coalition. The equivalent here would be a MAGA defector winning the Democratic nomination. But Democrats are still busy

courting various identity groups and reflexively opposing anything Trump supports, which "boxes them into backing unpopular policy positions" such as opposing border enforcement and allowing trans women to compete in women's sports. Magyar's chief lesson for Democrats is that it's "the corruption, stupid," said **Joe Conason** in *The National Memo*. He made the Orban regime's "sleazy deals" and outright theft central to his campaign. Given the "remarkably similar offenses" committed by the Trump family, Democrats should adopt the same message about "the decadent MAGA movement and its greedy overlord."

Unfortunately for Democrats, said **Alexander Burns** in *Politico*, they have "no equivalent" to Magyar. He cobbled together a movement that is neither left nor right and has "no ideological coherence." Democrats, meanwhile, have become homogeneously liberal, with a staid internal culture that elevates conventional thinkers. If Democrats do win in 2026 and 2028, said **Julia Ioffe** in *Puck*, they will face a problem similar to Magyar's—he has to reform a government "that has been absolutely stacked with Orban apparatchiks." To "rebuild all that Trump has destroyed," Democrats will need many years in power.

Wit & Wisdom

"A man dies when he refuses to stand up for that which is right."

Martin Luther King Jr., quoted in *The Kansas City Star*

"Only part of us loves pleasure and the longer day of happiness, wants to live to our 90s and die in peace in a house that we built. The other half of us is nearly mad."

Writer Rebecca West, quoted in *The New Republic*

"If you cannot solve a problem, enlarge it."

Dwight Eisenhower, quoted in *The Washington Post*

"Get down off your cross, honey, someone needs the wood."

Dolly Parton, quoted in *The Spectator*

"Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence."

Carl Sagan, quoted in *Universe Today*

"No country can act wisely simultaneously in every part of the globe at every moment of time."

Henry Kissinger, quoted in *CFR.org*

"If you want peace, work for justice."

Pope Paul VI, quoted in *Alternet*

Poll Watch

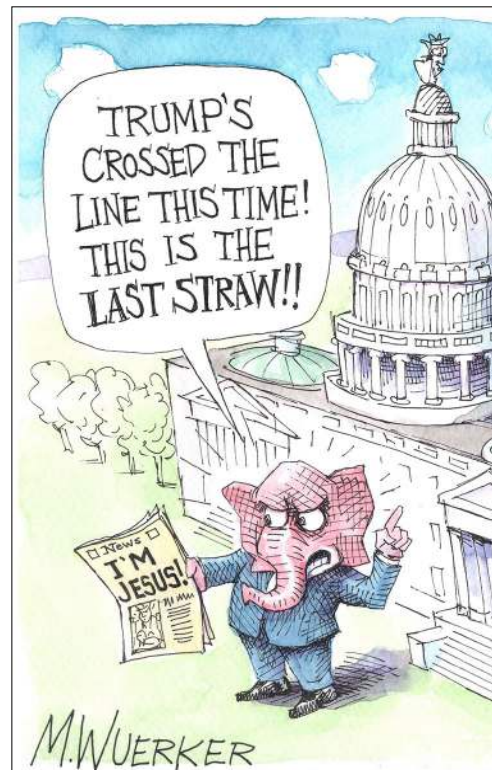
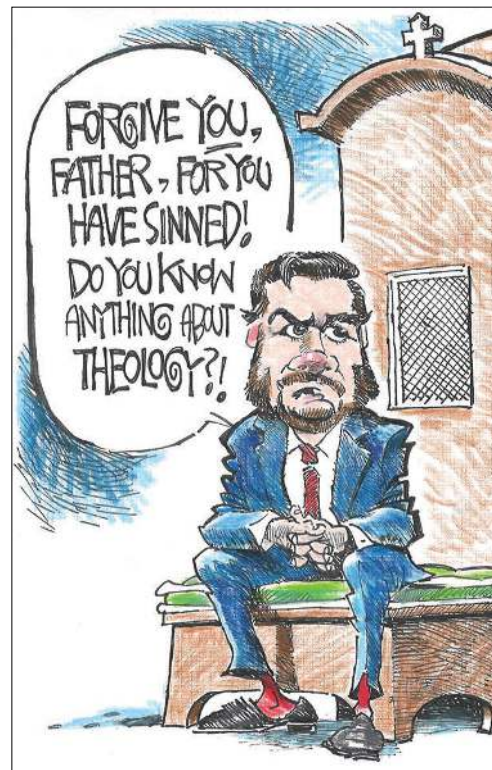
■ **37%** of Americans approve of President Trump's job performance, with **63%** disapproving—including **50%** who strongly disapprove. **68%** said they disapprove of how Trump is handling inflation and the cost of living. **67%** disapprove of his handling of the war in Iran.

NBC News/Survey Monkey

■ Only **38%** of Americans think the American dream still exists for everyone who works hard and plays by the rules. Just **17%** think their children will be better off than they are.

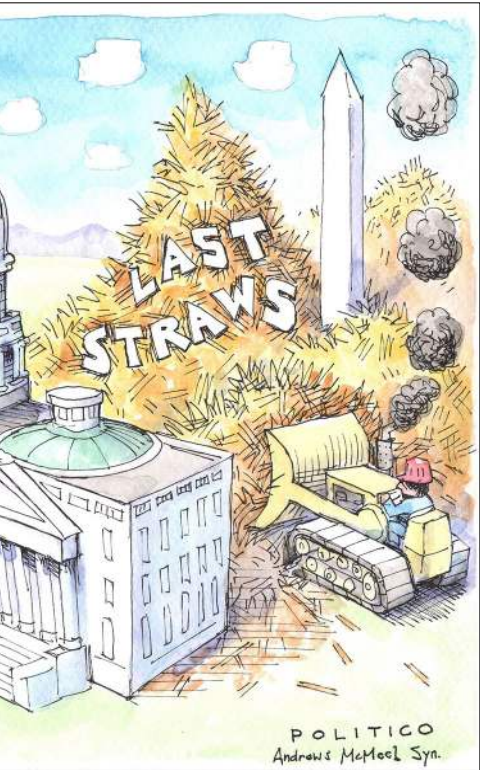
The Times (U.K.)/YouGov

Pick of the Week's Cartoons



Pick of the Week's Cartoons

For more political cartoons, visit:
theweek.com/cartoons



NewBird: Even shoe companies are pivoting to AI

"It's been an eventful month for Allbirds," said **Brian Barrett** in *Wired*. On March 30, the cozy footwear brand—once valued at more than \$4 billion—sold off "whatever was left of its intellectual property" for a paltry \$39 million following a dramatic fall from grace. But rather than give up, Allbirds said last week it's "pivoting to AI," using a \$50 million cash infusion from an unnamed institutional investor to buy expensive artificial-intelligence processing chips for its transformation into a "GPU-as-a-service" provider. "As befits a reinvention of this magnitude, Allbirds will also get a new name: NewBird AI." The bizarre ploy seems to have achieved one of its objectives: Allbirds' stock popped 580% after the announcement, jumping from \$2.49 to nearly \$22, before falling back slightly. The investors' enthusiasm "perfectly encapsulates this extended moment of AI frenzy."



From wool sneakers to leasing GPUs

Allbirds' "AI-pivot Hail Mary" deserves a spot in the "Last-Minute Reinvention Hall of Fame," said **Joe Ciolli** in *Business Insider*. Its timing could not have been better. The "fact that Allbirds doesn't have a current functioning business" and yet investors say it's worth close to \$150 million "puts it officially in meme-stock territory." That's incentive enough for "more struggling companies to try similar moves." It recalls when some companies attempted the same kind of gambit at the height of the earlier crypto bubble, said **Sarah Perez** in

TechCrunch. Famously, the Long Island Iced Tea company—which sold nonalcoholic beverages—announced in 2017 it was changing its name to "Long Blockchain" and began investing in companies with blockchain technology. Its stock jumped "some 275% after the rebranding," but the success was short-lived. "The Nasdaq stock exchange delisted the stock the following year," and the Securities and Exchange Commission later brought insider-trading charges.

"These sorts of bizarre pivots work occasionally," said **Robert Cyran** in *Reuters*. Samsung "once exported dried fish" before becoming a smartphone maker, "and Nokia made the unlikely switch from rubber-boot manufacturing to wireless telecom." The oil giant Shell got its name "because of its origins as a collectibles shop" before it commissioned its first oil tanker. But "the bigger the gambit, the lower the chance for success." Allbirds has a menial amount of cash with which to enter "the crowded and heavily capitalized world of data centers." Whether or not Allbirds can make it, maybe its instincts are right, said **Will Gottsegen** in *The Atlantic*. Practically every company today has "incorporated AI into their existing products," from Mattel's toys to Pepsi's sales operations. "Private lenders abound, and VCs are doubling down" on this transformative technology. It shouldn't surprise us that a shoe brand has pivoted to AI. It only emphasizes "how much of our economy is being drawn into its orbit."

Innovation of the week



"Imagine the Cybertruck, but done well, and about a tenth of the size," said **David Pierce** in *The Verge*. That's what you get with the new \$3,495 Olto from New York-based startup Infinite Machine. "I don't know exactly what to call the Olto"—it has "some moped DNA, some e-bike, even some scooter." It has pedals, but you don't really need them. It weighs 175 pounds, much of which comes from its "monstrous 1,200Wh battery," which offers 40 miles of range. Trust me, "you're not going to want to pedal it with a dead battery." But when charged, the bike can zip around at nearly 40 mph. I was passing cars on a city street. It's "the most fun new kind of vehicle I've tried in a long time."

Bytes: What's new in tech

■ AI's climate impact was hidden

Tech firms successfully lobbied the European Union to make the environmental toll of their data centers classified, said **Ajit Niranjani** in *The Guardian*. European countries "aim to triple their data-center capacity in the next five to seven years" to position Europe "as a global leader in artificial intelligence." But that hunger for AI power "is being met, in part, by burning more fossil gas." In a move to increase transparency, the European Commission in 2023 required tech companies "to report data on key performance indicators," including green metrics. But in 2024, Big Tech firms such as Microsoft, Google, Amazon, and Meta "lobbied the EU to hide" such information "as confidential, citing commercial interests." The data "cannot even be accessed through freedom of information requests," hindering researchers gathering data on the energy footprint of the AI build-out.

■ A new tech hub in the Philippines

The U.S. signed a deal last week with the Philippines to develop a "high-tech industrial hub" to counter China, said **Heather Somerville** and **Georgia Wells** in *The Wall Street Journal*. The hub will be established on a piece of the island of Luzon that's been given to the U.S. by Manila. "The U.S. will occupy the site rent-free and administer it as

a special economic zone," where it will have diplomatic immunity and operate under U.S. common law—"the first arrangement of its kind anywhere in the world." It's not clear yet which American companies will participate in the project or what they will build. However, the unique arrangement deepens the U.S.'s ties to a Southeast Asian ally that has valuable sources of raw materials used for electronics but has historically struggled to process those materials.

■ How ChatGPT can keep you on task

"On the productivity front, ChatGPT has been a game changer for me," said **Elton Jones** in *Tom's Guide*. I decided to try a new feature called ChatGPT Tasks to see if it could "improve my daily workflow." Already it stands out as one of the model's most helpful features. For instance, I gave it several things to do automatically for me every weekday, including send me "a briefing with top AI news" at 9 a.m., a "focused two-hour deep work plan" at 9:30 a.m., and a guided "mental health reset" at 10 p.m. "It's helped me start my mornings with purpose, stay focused," and wind down at night. I'm impressed by how well Tasks listens to prompts to follow a daily directive, "without me having to do anything else." Maybe next I'll have it send fun suggestions of local things I can do over the weekend.

Health & Science

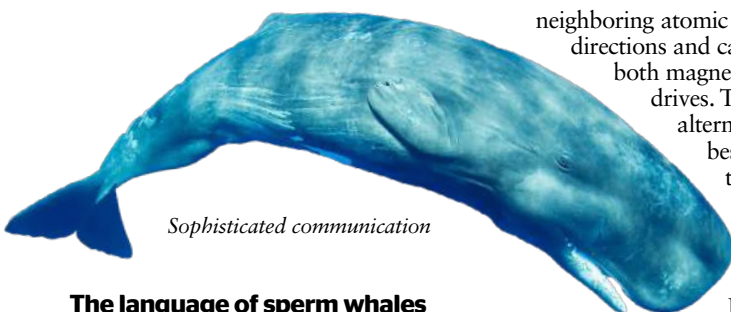
Spring cleaning for the brain

Put down your phone for two weeks and you could reverse a decade's worth of cognitive decline. That's the finding of one of the largest studies of its kind, involving more than 450 people, reports *The Washington Post*. For 14 days, the participants used an app called Freedom to block internet access on their phones (calls and texts were still allowed). Their daily time online plummeted, from more than 5 hours to just over 2.5, and by the end of the period participants showed marked improvement in sustained attention, mental health, and well-being. The gain in attention was equivalent to about 10 years

of age-related decline, and the effect on depression symptoms was comparable to that of cognitive behavioral therapy. Encouragingly, even those who cheated by borrowing a phone still benefited, and many reported that the positive effects lingered well after the experiment ended. The findings echo those of a separate Harvard study, which found that just a week of reduced smartphone use produced drops in anxiety, depression, and insomnia. Phone use



is far more damaging than computer use, the researchers say, because it tends to be "compulsive and mindless"—people scroll while walking, eating, and talking, making those activities less satisfying and relationships less fulfilling. "You don't have to restrict yourself forever," says co-author Kostadin Kushlev from Georgetown University. "Even a partial digital detox, even for a few days, seems to work."



Sophisticated communication

The language of sperm whales

The sounds sperm whales make are even more related to human language than we realized, a new study shows. The whales communicate through clicks called codas, and previous research from Project CETI had focused on understanding the timing and patterns of those codas. Now CETI researchers have found that the clicks also come in different frequencies, similar to human vowel sounds. Sperm whale vowels can rise and fall in pitch and can even come in diphthongs, two pitches in one syllable, as heard in spoken Mandarin. They've identified two: a longer one they call a-coda and a shorter i-coda. These vary in length and pitch, and they can even change based on the coda that comes before or after, the feature of human language known as coarticulation. In English, for example, *a* sounds more nasal in front of *n*, as in *man*. They're not sure, though, whether the tones change the meaning. "We're showing that these differences are structurally there, and they're probably controlled," linguist Gasper Begus tells *National Geographic*. "We don't know their language fully yet, but we're writing down all the rules."

A new class of supermagnets

Physicists have identified a bizarre type of magnet that could soon turbocharge quantum and regular computing capabilities. The magnets most of us know are ferromagnets, which can point north in a compass or stick notes on a fridge. In the 1930s, physicists discovered antiferromagnets, in which

neighboring atomic spins point in opposite directions and cancel each other out;

both magnet types are used in hard drives. This new third variety, altermagnets, combines the best qualities of the first two, reports *Scientific American*. Like anti-ferromagnets, altermagnets generate no net magnetic field.

But a subtle geometric twist—atoms carrying opposing spins are rotated 90 degrees relative to one another—breaks a key symmetry and allows them to generate spin-polarized electrical currents, just like ferromagnets. Their existence was first confirmed experimentally in 2024 with cryogenic cooling, and now scientists are identifying substances that can generate them at room temperature. The implications for data storage are significant. Altermagnets spin 1,000 times faster than ferromagnets, so devices using them will be faster. And since they lack a magnetic field, they can pack much more densely into devices. "It's like your fantasy magnet," says physicist Peter Wadley, who was involved in the 2024 experiment. "It's almost too good to be true."

Misdiagnosing vegetative state

As many as 1 in 4 patients diagnosed as being in a vegetative state may actually be conscious, trapped inside unresponsive bodies but aware and listening, reports *The New York Times*. A landmark study examined 241 patients across multiple countries, all of whom appeared unresponsive during standard bedside exams. But when given advanced brain scans and asked to perform mental tasks—such as imagining playing tennis—a quarter showed brain activity indicating they understood and could follow commands. Scientists call this "cognitive motor dissociation," a disconnect between a semiconscious mind and an immobile body. By some estimates, 50,000 Americans have been classified as in a chronic vegetative state, with up to 400,000 more minimally conscious. If the study's ratio holds, tens of thousands of those people, many living in continuous-care facilities, may be aware enough to be in pain. Yet testing for that type of consciousness is available only in a few clinics and is the standard of care nowhere. Bedside exams are highly unreliable: Studies of those suggest up to 40% of vegetative-state diagnoses may be wrong. "It's not OK," says neurologist Nicholas Schiff, "to know this and to do nothing."

Civil war in a chimp tribe

Chimpanzees are known to wage brutal campaigns against outsiders, but scientists have now documented something rarer and more unsettling: a split of a once united community into warring groups. Researchers in Uganda's Kibale National Park drew on three decades of behavioral data to trace the fracture of the large Ngogo band. These chimps exhibited fluid social dynamics when the study began in 1995; they lived in clusters that intermingled peacefully. But around 2015, the deaths of several seniors,



Sudden enmity

combined with a disease outbreak, triggered a split into two factions. Primatologist Aaron Sandel tells NPR he can pinpoint it to one day. The Western cluster chimps heard the Central cluster nearby and "started touching each other in reassurance, like they were really nervous," he says, "as if they were hearing outsider chimps." In the seven years that followed, the Western group launched 24 attacks on the Central one, killing at least seven adult males and 17 infants. Sandel says he sees lessons for humans: "If you act like a stranger, you become a stranger."

Review of Reviews: Books

Book of the week

Mutiny: The Rise and Revolt of the College-Educated Working Class

by Noam Scheiber

(Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$32)

"A college-educated working class sounds like an oxymoron," said George Packer in *The Atlantic*. But *New York Times* labor reporter Noam Scheiber has great hopes for the cohort on which he's affixed that label: college graduates in their 20s and early 30s who have had to settle for low-paying wage work after earning their degrees. In his new book, Scheiber profiles about a dozen or so young Americans who turned to labor activism following dispiriting experiences with employers including Starbucks, Amazon, Apple, Hollywood studios, and the universities that impoverished them in the first place. While he occasionally questions his subjects' career decisions, "he's plainly on their side," viewing their perception of unfairness as real and their activism as the best way to fight economic inequality. Unfortunately, "he isn't sufficiently aware of the insularity of their project," of how unlikely it is that these young progressives will ever be joined by



Starbucks employees at a 2022 labor rally

noncollege wage workers in an effective broader movement.

"There's much truth in Scheiber's reporting," said Eric Levitz in *Vox*. College graduates have become more progressive in their economic views since the 1990s and more likely to identify with rank-and-file workers. But his claim that today's college grads have been pushed leftward mainly by their collapsing economic fortunes is "a bit misleading." Yes, tuition and housing costs have soared. But the share of college grads who hold low-wage jobs is smaller than it was three decades ago, and the relative

return on a degree in lifetime earnings, despite the impact of the Great Recession and the pandemic, is significantly greater. The stories Scheiber shares are well told, and the precarity of his subjects' lives "vividly evoked," said Ruy Teixeira in *The Wall Street Journal*. But among their generation, they're "an idiosyncratic subset," not the norm.

You could also say Scheiber's heroes were naive to expect better from their employers, said Kenneth S. Baer in *Washington Monthly*. Often, though, they were misled. Apple used the label "geniuses"

for retail-store staffers like Chaya Barrett, but the sweet talk didn't pay her bills and she soon turned to union organizing. While *Mutiny* celebrates such activism, Scheiber is "too keen an observer of American political life" to fail to mention that the college-educated working class may be too progressive to mesh easily with the rest of the working class, whose members strongly favored President Trump in 2024. But while Scheiber focuses on workplace issues, *Mutiny* is "ultimately an education book," a warning to our colleges and universities that "higher education, as an industry, has become too expensive, too mercenary, and too irrelevant for far too many."

Novel of the week

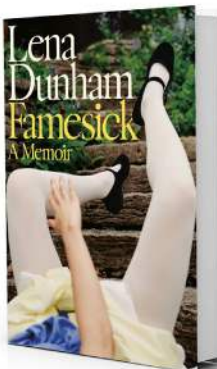
Go Gentle

by Maria Semple (Putnam, \$30)

"Maria Semple is a chaos agent," said Jeff Giles in *The New York Times*. In *Where'd You Go, Bernadette* and her other satires, wild plotting has always been part of the appeal, and in Semple's first novel in a decade, the protagonist, Adora Hazzard, is a divorced New York City-based TV writer turned philosophy tutor who falls into a middle-age affair that entangles her in an international art heist. *Go Gentle* can be "frustratingly uneven" because the action is "so giddily over the top" and its action breaks for a traumatic backstory that "threatens to overshadow the screwball hijinks." Thanks to Semple's warm vision and "sparkling" writing, however, "you ultimately get on board with her can't-stop-won't-stop mischief." Sure, "the whole doesn't really cohere," said Rebecca Wait in *The Guardian*. But this novel "fizzes with funny lines," and Semple is passionate about weaving in offbeat insights from Adora's favorite ancient school of philosophy. "Stoicism is not traditionally—I know this won't hurt Marcus Aurelius' feelings—very sexy, but Semple makes it feel fresh and exciting." So forget the disjointedness. "I felt both cleverer and sillier after finishing this book, which is a lovely way to be left."

Famesick: A Memoir

by Lena Dunham (Random House, \$32)



"This may be the first Lena Dunham work built on deep hindsight," said Madeline Leung Coleman in *NYMag.com*. The star and creator of *Girls* shot to fame in her early 20s by appearing to present her own life raw, with all its embarrassments.

She did so in her debut film, in her hit HBO series, on Twitter, and in her best-selling 2014 memoir. Now, though, as she nears 40, Dunham is ready to look back on those heady years and connect the dots between her impulse to share, her lightning-rod status, and the onset of chronic illnesses that still plague her. "It's a Hollywood story written in blood and vomit and pus," but because she's a savvy writer, "she knows to foreground the relatable."

"If you've hated Dunham this whole time and regret her success, well, good news," said Scaachi Koul in *Slate*. "Famesick will tell you just how awful all that success

made her feel." As her star rose, critics blamed her for everything wrong in the world, including the failures of feminism, Millennials, and white people, and Dunham was listening. Worse, as she stretched herself thin during *Girls*' six-season run, her body was rebelling, generating racking pain, triggering a Klonopin addiction, and eventually requiring acceptance of living with an incurable connective tissue disorder. Not surprisingly, "it's a shocking and funny read," packed with tidbits about fellow celebrities, and a reminder of "what made her so interesting in the first place."

Dunham's first memoir was "pert and packaged," adorned with lists, asterisks, and "cute little pen-and-ink illustrations," said Alexandra Jacobs in *The New York Times*. *Famesick*, to its credit, "dispenses with such pleasantries." It also names names. Hitmaker Jack Antonoff is painted as an inadequate boyfriend. Adam Driver, Dunham's onscreen boyfriend, throws a chair during the shooting of a difficult scene. Jenni Konner, Dunham's co-showrunner, comes across as "a callous taskmistress," one who ignored Dunham's calls for medical help. "What a relief," then, that Dunham, who's been sober for eight years and is now married to a man she mentions only in the acknowledgments, is "not a true casualty of all the cruelty visited upon her."

The Book List

Best books...chosen by Jimin Han

Jimin Han is the author of the novels *A Small Revolution* and *The Apology*. Her latest, *Dreamt I Found You*, recasts Korea's most classic love story, setting it in a contemporary Korean American community in a New England beach town.



Little Women by Louisa May Alcott (1868). I discovered *Little Women* in a library as a child and immediately identified with Jo March, who wanted to be a writer. My immigrant family struggled to make ends meet, like the Marches. Like Jo, I played pretend in the evenings, but using chess pieces as characters. The kernel of hope to become a writer began then.

The Woman Warrior by Maxine Hong Kingston (1976). This was the first book I read written by an Asian American writer. I was startled by the familiarity of family dynamics, beliefs, and heartaches, even though Hong Kingston is Chinese, not Korean like me. How could anyone resist that first line: "You must not tell anyone..."

Clay Walls by Ronyoung Kim (1986). I've always read a wide variety of authors, but this novel by a writer of Korean heritage was deeply affirming. It came into my life exactly when I needed it. The struggles of Faye's immigrant family in 1920–45 California gave me context for my own parents' childhood and the complex web of relationships and dreams we carry with us.

Beloved by Toni Morrison (1987). This was the first novel I read in one go. I stayed up all night and immersed myself in the lyricism and imagery of Sethe's haunting story. Morrison creates atmosphere ingeniously: "Winter in Ohio was especially rough if you had an appetite for color. Sky provided the only drama."

Words of Farewell by Sok-kyong Kang, Chi-won Kim, and Chong-hui O (1989). I came across this collection of stories by Korean women when I was trying to understand the political turmoil of 1980s South Korea. One story, "A Room in the Woods," captures the ways we try to love one another, even if we fail, a theme that's always preoccupied me.

Kitchen by Banana Yoshimoto (1988). I picked up this novella when I was working full time and had put aside my hope of writing a novel. I was pulled in by the narrator's opening line, "The place I like best in the world is the kitchen." I wanted to write her about what I liked best and was reminded that writing is a conversation.

Also of interest...in American tales

The Banker Who Made America

by Richard Vague (Polity, \$35)



It's telling that Thomas Willing's name isn't even in this book's title, said Adam Gopnik in *The New Yorker*. During the Revolutionary War, Willing and a fellow Philadelphia merchant used their personal borrowing power to finance George Washington's army, an incredible legacy. At the same time, "it seems likely they were making a coolheaded hedge on the outcome of the war," not risking all for an ideal. All the more reason to keep celebrating history's idealists, not its money men.

End of Days

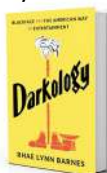
by Chris Jennings (Little, Brown, \$30)



Of the handful of signature 1990s televised crises, "the siege at Ruby Ridge is arguably the haziest in public memory," said Meghan O'Gieblyn in *The New York Times*. In this "riveting" look back at the 11-day standoff between the FBI and an Idaho family of Christian survivalists, Chris Jennings "attempts the sense-making that has eluded accounts of the event." Throughout, he writes vividly. Occasionally, he "soars into a panoramic lyricism reminiscent of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*."

Darkology

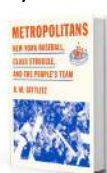
by Rhae Lynn Barnes (Liveright, \$40)



Rhae Lynn Barnes' new book is "a painfully necessary autopsy of the nation's soul," said Walton Muyumba in *The Boston Globe*. Destroying the myth that blackface minstrelsy barely survived into the 20th century, the Princeton historian shows that schools, Elks clubs, churches, and military bases routinely staged amateur skits by white performers in blackface until well past World War II. Mocking Black people, it appears, was gallingly mainstream entertainment.

Metropolitans

by A.M. Gittlitz (Astra, \$30)



Journalist A.M. Gittlitz wants his New York Mets to be seen as heroes of the working class, and his quest proves "less quixotic" than you'd expect, said Timothy Farrington in *The Wall Street Journal*. He "writes with the lunatic panache of a 2000s sports blog," which helps him sell the idea that the team's underdog history and flickers of player activism established the Mets as baseball's would-be revolutionaries. His enthusiasm, meanwhile, "brings out the idiosyncratic joys of the Mets roster."

Author of the week

Nelio Biedermann

Germany has found its new Thomas Mann, and the kid is only 22, said **Thomas Rogers** in *The New York Times*. Swiss writer Nelio Biedermann, who's still a university student, published a throwback first novel in German last fall that has turned him into a literary sensation, drawing comparisons with both Mann and Marcel Proust. *Lazar*, which arrived



in the U.S. in translation this week, chronicles the fortunes of an aristocratic Hungarian family, the von

Lazars, across the tumultuous first half of the 20th century. Biedermann based it on members of his own family, including those who fled Hungary in 1956. But he didn't feel the book's tone was right until he began adding touches of magic realism. The published novel, he says, is "actually my fifth attempt at telling this story. I started when I was 16."

Biedermann's process was almost as old-fashioned as the story he chose to tell, said **Lexi Covalsen** in *Cold Magazine*. He wrote in longhand, putting aside his computer. "It feels more like creating something, rather than just typing," he says. He also read widely to gain fluency in the classical style he aspired to. And when he realized he needed an even deeper feel for the story's time period, he traveled to Budapest to spend time with a great uncle. "Often, what I really needed to know were the small details that help create atmosphere. I could ask him about everything, like what people ate, how they spoke." Biedermann didn't grow up with the wealth that earlier generations of his family knew. He now has a level of renown that makes little sense in the life he thought he was building. "It is a bit weird," he says, "to see my professors in the audience at readings, knowing that they still need to grade my papers."

Review of Reviews: Art & Stage

Museum of the week

David Geffen Galleries

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Leave it to L.A. to erect a new signature building that “challenges nearly every convention of what a museum should be,” said **Sam Lubell** in the *Los Angeles Times*. Twenty years in the making, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art’s new \$724 million centerpiece is a megastructure three football fields long whose sinuous single exhibition floor hovers 30 feet off the ground and on one end hurdles palm-tree-lined Wilshire Boulevard. “This is no machine or temple for art. It has the scale of a landform and the shape of a living being. And like all living beings, it is far from perfect.” But the new home of LACMA’s permanent collection reinvents the largest museum in the western U.S. and, in an era when even Southern California seems to have lost its nerve, “stands as a reminder that risk and ambition are still possible.”

It’s certainly “the most significant American museum built this century,” and “not merely because of its architecture,” said **Michael J. Lewis** in *The Wall Street Journal*. Michael



An exhibition space that invites meandering

Govan, LACMA’s director since 2006, aimed to redefine the museum-going experience when he picked Swiss architect Peter Zumthor to pursue the mission. Govan wanted to eliminate the chronological display of an international art collection that spans centuries, inviting visitors to wander among the works unguided, as if in a forest. Unfortunately, the largely formless building Zumthor has created shows “a willful disregard for the way that people experience space” and is “maddeningly difficult to navigate.” The natural light let in by the floor-to-ceiling windows that wrap the half-mile-long gallery space is welcome, but the interior is crammed with 29 boxy concrete galleries that are all “oppressively gloomy.”

It’s a confounding place. “Its error is to confuse formlessness with freedom.”

The concrete-and-glass exterior, despite its sweeping curves and amoeba-like form, looks “surprisingly conventional” from ground level, said **Paul Goldberger** in *Air Mail*. “You want it to dance a little more.” Stepping inside, however, I was pleasantly surprised. When LACMA provided a preview last summer, before the art was installed, some visitors worried that the endless windows and concrete interior walls would defeat effective display, but rough concrete turns out to be an “exceptionally elegant” backdrop for paintings and sculpture, adding more drama than painted plaster could, while Zumthor’s meandering form “makes you want to meander within it.” The experience of chancing upon remarkable works of art and design as you wander can be “thoroughly engaging,” said **Sarah Amelar** in *Architectural Record*. You might be taken in by a 17th-century Dutch master, a court robe from Qing-dynasty China, or a Raymond Loewy-designed 1963 Studebaker Avanti. “I didn’t expect to be enthralled, but I found the art-viewing experience so captivating that I eventually had to be torn away—and can’t wait to go back.”

The Fear of 13

James Earl Jones Theatre, New York City ★★★★★

“It’s not that *The Fear of 13* is bad,” said **Adam Feldman** in *Time Out*. It’s “a respectable telling of a worthy story,” featuring two screen stars, Adrien Brody and Tessa Thompson, in their Broadway debuts. Brody portrays Nick Yarris, a Pennsylvania man convicted of murder who was exonerated by DNA evidence in 2003 after spending 22 years on death row. Thompson plays a volunteer visitor who fell in love with Yarris and eventually married him. But in adding secondary characters to a story that Yarris engagingly related in a 2015 documentary, the play proves “bigger but not better.” You can, if you wish, pay hundreds of dollars to see the stage version. “Or for free, anytime,” you can stream the film and see Yarris tell the story more effectively.

The play was “rapturously” received when it debuted in London in late 2024, said **Helen Shaw** in *The New York Times*. Here, in a far bigger venue, Brody’s “electric” energy can’t hide the flaws in Lindsey Ferrentino’s script. Though Thompson handles her role with confidence, she’s given little to play, and Ferrentino pushes aside the more interesting story of Yarris’ personal growth to focus on the romance. She also makes the



Brody and Thompson: A love story on hold

audience doubt Yarris’ trustworthiness for no good reason and inexplicably deletes the detail from Yarris’ life story that explains why *The Fear of 13* is the show’s title.

Surprisingly, the play “spends little time raging against the machine,” said **Jackson McHenry** in *NYMag.com*. Through the tales Brody’s Yarris spins about his past, we hear of prosecutors who’d rather shut a murder case than determine the truth, but that’s “not a notion Ferrentino lingers on.” Meanwhile, though Brody gives Yarris “an indomitable spark,” he proves “so enamored with that bravado” that, like the play itself, he’s simply “repeating a good story” while failing to provide deeper insight.

Fallen Angels

Todd Haimes Theatre, New York City

★★★★★

“Broadway has not seen a more delectable diversion this season,” said **Charles Isherwood** in *The Wall Street Journal*. In this “bubbly” revival of a 1925 Noël Coward farce, the “glittering duo” of Rose Byrne and Kelli O’Hara



O’Hara and Byrne

play Jane and Julia, dissatisfied society wives who come drunkenly undone upon learning an old flame of theirs is back in town. As the pair battle each other and the furniture, the two co-stars “show themselves to be divinely physical comedians,” said **Rober Hoffer** in *The Wrap*. Still, this ruthlessly pared-down version, which guts three acts down to 90 minutes, takes a half hour to “light any real comic fire,” and it loses steam again once its central twosome sober up for the finale. In the end, “it isn’t Noël Coward, but it’s a lot of fun.”

Review of Reviews: Film & Music

Michael

Directed by Antoine Fuqua
(PG-13)



Michael Jackson's life story,
willfully truncated

"Michael is like if you made a cheery biopic of Bill Cosby that ended with his successful run on *The Cosby Show*," said Nick Schager in *The Daily Beast*. "A deliberate act of whitewashing," the long-awaited new Michael Jackson biopic presents the crowd-pleasing half of a "sordid" true tale, cutting short its account just before it would have become necessary to revisit the multiple allegations of child sexual abuse that surfaced in 1993 and have continued to shadow the pop star's legacy since his 2009 death. "The fact that *Michael* concludes with a title card announcing 'His Story Continues' doesn't suffice as an explanation." If you focus only on what this "lavishly conventional" biopic leaves out, however, "you may miss the compelling urgency of what it gets in," said Owen Gleiberman in *Variety*. The movie opens in 1966, when Michael was roughly 8 and his tyrannical



Jaafar Jackson steps into his uncle's shoes.

father Joe, played by Colman Domingo, is beating and berating his five young sons to push them to stardom. We then leap to 1978 to witness a young adult Michael, played by real-life nephew Jaafar Jackson, engineering his escape into a solo career, with Quincy Jones guiding him. The younger Jackson isn't as photogenic as his indelible uncle, "but does

he ever nail the look, the voice, the electrostatic moves—and, more than that, the mixture of delicacy and steel that made Michael who he was." The picture's downfall is its lack of real interest in Michael as a human being, said Robert Daniels in *RogerEbert.com*. Produced by its subject's estate and four of his siblings, "it has nothing original to say about him," merely resketching his life to age 30 as most of us know it, failing even to provide insight into his emotional pain. Barely a movie, *Michael* is "a filmed playlist in search of a story."

Mother Mary

Directed by David Lowery
(R)



A pop star and her jilted
collaborator reconnect.

"The more movies you've seen, the less patience you might have with movies that try to impress you with how wiggly they are," said Stephanie Zacharek in *Time*. When the new film featuring Anne Hathaway as an icy fictional pop icon isn't teasing us with glimpses of ghosts or blood-lettings, it's "just a slog," despite a premise and a pairing of two stars that suggest it could have been more. At times, *Mother Mary* is "a phantasmagoric fever dream of a gothic pop opera," said Katie Walsh in the *Chicago Tribune*. At others, it's "a single-setting two-hander that pits two of our most mesmerizing actresses against each other." Hathaway, playing the titular singer on the eve of a highly anticipated



Hathaway's arena act

comeback, journeys to the atelier of a former close collaborator portrayed by Michaela Coel. Hathaway's fraying idol wants a dress of nearly magical power as she returns to the stage, and Coel's Sam agrees to make it, airing grievances as she does about how Mary treated her. The movie "certainly casts a spell," but the story itself "devolves into

mush." To enjoy the film, "a certain leap of faith is required," said David Fear in *Rolling Stone*. When, at last, it "rushes headfirst into delirium," viewers ready to roll with it may find that it "taps into the same transcendent state that great pop music does," getting into your head and under your skin "in ways that defy description."

Yaya Bey

Fidelity ★★★★★



"Whether the subject is her people, herself, or a loved one," Yaya Bey is "one of the most thoughtful, incisive, and witty lyricists of her generation," said Andy Kellman in *AllMusic*. On a record that "caps a three-album/three-year streak for the ages," the Queens-born singer, songwriter, and producer is once again synthesizing soul, funk, hip-hop, reggae, and electronic dance music "with buoyant facility." While she lamented her late father on 2024's *Ten Fold*, the mourning she does on *Fidelity* is more expansive, addressing losses suffered by the Black community, from gentrification to the abbreviated lives of great artists. Despite the focus on weighty subjects, the artist, at 35, "still finds ways to inject some humor," said Grant Sharpley in *Paste*. On "Simp Daddy Line Dance," she chides a deadbeat lover while playfully interpolating dance commands from DJ Casper's "Cha-Cha Slide." She's at her best on "Blue," with her rhythm section entwined "like slow dancers in a tight embrace" before Bey's "mesmerizing" voice "emerges like a light in thick fog," singing about a new day. "Life is far too short, she tells us, to not lay it all out there."

Nine Inch Nails & Boys Noize

Nine Inch Noize ★★★★★



"Ever wondered what Trent Reznor would be like with a couple of glow sticks and a string vest?" asked Rich Hobson in *Louder*. "That's effectively the question *Nine Inch Noize* answers," memorializing the recent rave-tent collaborations between the industrial-rock legend and German-Iraqi DJ Alex Ridha, aka Boys Noize. The pair's remixes feature "some brilliant reinterpretations of classic Nine Inch Nails cuts," including of "Heresy," which here becomes "a cross between *Purple Rain*-era Prince and Godflesh." All that's missing is "the full sensory experience" of the act's live show, so don't miss the videos from Coachella posted online. While *Nine Inch Noize* is "essentially an EDM album," said Kory Grow in *Rolling Stone*, it's also "a full-circle moment" for Reznor. From NIN's earliest days, he put out multiple mixes of the band's singles "in hopes of filling smoky dance floors at Midwestern goth nights." Aside from "Closer," Reznor and Ridha avoided obvious NIN hits. "Instead, they chose songs that could benefit from head-imploding electronic bass drums and a little TB-303 squelch." The most unexpected track: a cover of Soft Cell's "Memorabilia" that ends with a big house beat.

Streaming tips**New documentaries****Mr. Nobody Against Putin**

This year's Oscar winner for best documentary takes viewers inside a school in small-town Russia where students are blitzed with propaganda about the war in Ukraine, and one teacher, Pavel Talankin, refuses to go along. *\$6 on demand*

#SKYKING

This edge-of-your-seat documentary revisits the event that made Richard "Beebo" Russell an internet folk hero. In 2019 the young airport ground-service agent stole an empty passenger jet and, despite having no piloting experience, flew it solo for 70 minutes, chatting nonstop with ground control before fatally crashing into an island on Puget Sound. *Hulu*

Modern Whore

Former escort and stripper Andrea Werhun aims to erase the stigma associated with such work by sharing anecdotes about her experiences and participating in lighthearted reenactments, re-creating the spirit of her 2017 memoir. *Available to rent May 1*

Beam Me Up, Sulu

In the 1980s, *Star Trek* fan Stan Woo persuaded George Takei to reprise his series character, Sulu, for a low-budget short. Footage from that project and interviews with Takei and others produce an endearing look at *Star Trek's* impact on small-screen minority representation. *\$6 on demand*

4x20: Quick Hits

Spark up, if you're so inclined, for this collection of four short documentaries celebrating aspects of cannabis culture, including the making of *Harold & Kumar Go to White Castle* and the long, defiant run of *High Times* magazine. *Hulu*

The AI Documentary

Navalny director Daniel Roher has made the primer on artificial intelligence we all need. Talking with scientists and tech CEOs, he quickly finds the horror. But he also finds hope. Maybe, just maybe, AI can make the world a better place. *\$20 on demand*

The Week's guide to what's worth watching**My Killer Father: The Green Hollow Murders**

Siblings often have conflicting memories about their shared pasts. Lucy Studey McKiddy and one of her sisters are still arguing over whether their father was a serial killer. Lucy claims that, as a child in rural Iowa, she witnessed her father, Donald Dean Studey, dispose of bodies in a well. She believes he killed dozens of people, including two wives whose deaths were ruled suicides. This three-part documentary digs for the truth. *Tuesday, April 28, Paramount+*

Widow's Bay

Matthew Rhys stars as the mayor of an island town in coastal New England in this new series that deftly mixes horror and comedy. Eager to win the respect of his constituents and breathe life into the community, Mayor Tom Loftis goes all out to turn the island into a tourist destination. His efforts are beginning to pay off when he discovers there may be truth to suspicious locals' claims that the town is cursed. *Wednesday, April 29, Apple TV*

Man on Fire

Don't cross John Creasy. This new series adaptation of a 1980 best seller that's already produced two Hollywood films moves the thriller action to Rio de Janeiro, where Creasy, a troubled special forces veteran played here by Yahya Abdul-Mateen II, finds fresh purpose when he takes it upon himself to protect a friend's teenage daughter. Because the girl has witnessed a deadly skyscraper bombing, powerful criminal forces want her dead, but Creasy won't allow it. *Thursday, April 30, Netflix*

Conbody vs. Everybody

Ex-convicts hoping to rebound generally don't get much help. Former drug dealer Coss Marte wanted to change that. This five-part docuseries from *Winter's Bone* director Debra Granik follows Marte as he launches a fitness business that employs ex-felons as its trainers, all of them fighting self-doubt and society's negative perceptions. *Friday, May 1, Criterion*



Rhys in 'Widow's Bay': A doomed optimist

Swapped

Imagine *Freaky Friday* but with fur and feathers. So it goes in this animated feature, in which a tiny mammal and a predatory bird fall into a magical pod during a tussle and emerge having somehow switched bodies. Suddenly, the two sworn enemies must work together to find a way out of their predicament. Michael B. Jordan, fresh off his Oscar win, joins Juno Temple in leading the voice cast. *Friday, May 1, Netflix*

Other highlights**The House of the Spirits**

A lavish eight-part Spanish-language adaptation brings to life Isabel Allende's celebrated 1982 magical-realist novel about the triumphs and struggles of one family across a century of fictionalized South American history. *Wednesday, April 29, Prime*

Should I Marry a Murderer?

Marry him or turn him in? In this documentary, a woman in Scotland faces that dilemma when her fiancé reveals that he once killed someone in a hit-and-run. *Wednesday, April 29, Netflix*

Shared Planet

This breathtakingly shot nature series traverses the globe to capture myriad ways in which humans and animals coexist and thrive in shared environments. *Wednesday, April 29, at 10 p.m., PBS; check local listings*



McKenna's Piggy with a bully played by Lox Pratt

Show of the week**Lord of the Flies**

As stranded-on-an-island stories go, it's hard to top William Golding's chilling 1954 novel about English schoolboys forced to fend for themselves after a plane crash. This four-part series, the first television adaptation, comes, fittingly, from *Adolescence* co-creator Jack Thorne. Thorne's version focuses on one key character per episode as the boys first attempt to build a cooperative society before descending into darkness. Gorgeous and garish, the show is enhanced by a terrific young cast, led by David McKenna as Piggy, and a dark, eccentric score by *White Lotus* composer Cristobal Tapia de Veer. *Monday, May 4, Netflix*

Critics' choice: The joy of tiny restaurants

Gemini Washington, D.C.

"At this sliver of a counter-service restaurant, you sometimes have to fight for your supper," said Elazar Sontag in *The Washington Post*. There are no indoor seats. The standing-only high tops are first come, first served. Also, closing time is 8:30, which is mid-dinner at most places in Dupont Circle. "Despite this all, I find myself running back to Gemini." My first rule for a meal here is "always order the vegetables." Chef Johnny Monis displays his wizardry with them in such simple dishes as Japanese sweet potatoes cooked to "a nutty custard" and topped with feta and koji butter. Then come his show-stopping pastas, such as ferretti coated in a corn carbonara or orecchiette in a pork ragù that's "humming with gentle heat." For your wine, "you're in the good hands of Eric Moorer," whose spot-on selections are priced at retail plus a \$15 corkage. Somehow, the space is also home to Happy Ice Cream, which "may well be the best ice cream shop in America." Every scoop is "smooth and dense and surprising," and "there is no boring flavor." For good reason, "I've yet to see someone have a bad time at Gemini." 1509 17th St. NW

Off Alley Seattle

"Off Alley is exactly the kind of restaurant that reminds me what I love about restaurants," said Tejal Rao in *The New York*



Stand-up dining only at D.C.'s Gemini

Times. This gem's "particular set of kinks and oddities and imperfections" starts with its 6-foot-wide dining room and 12-seat counter—some of those seats "so close to the kitchen that when I wondered aloud what cut of meat was in a dish, a cook at the stove looked up and answered." Such queries are probably common, as chef Evan Leichtling "devotes himself to an offal-forward nose-to-tail ethos, transforming miscellanea into simple-looking but sumptuous dishes." Highlights from my visits included seared rabbit kidneys in a buttery pan sauce and blood sausage served over a creamy quince paste. Leichtling's dishes "aren't workshoped to perfection," so the newcomers sometimes miss slightly. But

"even with its desserts," this bare-bones operation "goes big," delivering with foie gras ice cream that's more than mere gimmick. It's "a puff of velvet, both sweet and deeply savory." ½ 4903 Rainier Ave. S.

Small Hours Minneapolis

Small Hours isn't actually small, but its staff sure is, said Dara Moskowitz Grumdahl in *Mpls.St.Paul* magazine. Here's the math: "40-some seats, three people," those three being co-owners Sam Cassidy and Sarina Garibovic plus a third person helping to plate and serve. The math works because every night unfolds "like a simple dinner party served by the smartest good cook you know, the kind who somehow whips up something for 10 people effortlessly." Garibovic, a sommelier, pours "her most favorite favorites." Cassidy, who built the cherrywood cabinetry, makes the cocktails and keeps good music flowing by way of a handy turntable. Meals generally start with excellent bread, superb anchovies, a house paté, and a simple green salad. Your two entrée choices might be an herb-marinated roast chicken and a salsa-verde-painted whole branzino, and either will taste "like good, chic home cooking—hearty, uncomplicated, and fresh." The desserts follow suit, and it all comes off like a dream, making Small Hours not just a stop-in spot but "a place to burrow in for an evening." 2201 NE 2nd St.

Recipe of the week

In this refreshing pasta salad, mayonnaise is replaced by a light, airy, lemony topping of whipped Greek yogurt, said Andee Gosnell in *Food & Wine*. "Any short, curved pasta will work well," and don't skip the preserved lemon. It's "the key flavor booster here, adding a salty, tangy, slightly briny bite that makes the whole salad feel brighter and more layered."

Creamy ditalini pasta salad with whipped yogurt

8 oz ditalini pasta • 2 small Persian cucumbers, thinly sliced crosswise (about 1 cup) • 1½ cups small cherry tomatoes, halved • 1 cup sliced scallions (about 1 small bunch) • ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling • ¼ cup finely chopped fresh parsley • grated zest and 3 tbsp juice from 1 lemon • 1½ tbsp finely chopped preserved lemon • 1 tbsp chopped fresh dill, plus more for garnish • kosher salt • ½ tsp black pepper, plus more for garnish • ¾ cup plain whole-milk Greek-style yogurt • ½ cup heavy cream

■ Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil over high. Add pasta, and cook according to package directions.

■ Drain pasta, and rinse under cold water. Transfer pasta to a large bowl. Add cucumbers, tomatoes, scallions, olive oil, parsley, lemon juice, preserved lemon, dill, 1¼ tsp salt, and black pepper; toss until well combined.



■ Place yogurt and cream in a large bowl. Whisk until mixture is fluffy and firm peaks form, about 3 minutes. Fold in 1 tsp lemon zest and ½ tsp salt. Season to taste with additional salt.

■ Stir whipped yogurt into pasta salad. Garnish with additional dill, black pepper, and remaining lemon zest. Drizzle with olive oil. Serves 4.

Wine: Bargain sparklers

"Nothing lifts your mood like a bottle of bubbles," said the editors of *Wine Enthusiast*. Seeking to encourage more people to add that sparkle to everyday life, we've just published our first-ever top-40 list for sparkling wines. While none of our choices tops \$75, these three are among the best that fall below \$25.

Côté Mas NV Crémant de Limoux Rosé Brut (\$12). This pink sparkler's "mouth-filling" mousse combines sharp citrus notes and "pleasurably soft" mouthfeel.

Domaine Fernand Engel NV Brut 'Tradition' (\$20). This "beautifully crafted" Alsatian crémant offers "lovely complexity, with tropical passion fruit and ripe mango notes all wrapped in a crisp, lingering finish."

2020 Bouvet-Ladubay Tresor Blanc Brut (\$18). In this Loire Valley chenin blanc-chardonnay blend, aromas of yellow apple, honeysuckle, and toasted bread lead to a palate that's lemony but "with whispers of caramel-dipped white blossom."



The Spectre Black Badge: What the critics say

Forbes

Yes, the new Spectre Black Badge is the most powerful Rolls-Royce ever, but “there’s more to it than numbers alone.” The automaker’s Black Badge editions are tailored for buyers who do more of their own driving, so the power boost is accompanied by tighter steering and an enhanced suspension that keeps the car’s nose down when the accelerator’s punched. It’s still an EV, but with 650 hp instead of 575, a difference that “gives the big Roller a greater sense of urgency at just about any speed.”

The Wall Street Journal

Unlike most large super-luxury cars, this majestic coupe is “utterly gorgeous.” An “endless” hood gives way to a “daringly raked” wind-

screen and graceful rear fly line. The darkened chrome used for the grille and hood figurine give the Black Badge edition a look that’s “younger, fresher, more nocturnal,” yet “nicely understated.” If you resent people who can afford a Spectre, there’s schadenfreude to be had in its modest 251-mile range and its enormous rear-hinged doors, which are “nothing but a pain.” The interior, however, is spectacular—“as it ought to be.”

Motor Trend

Throw this car into curves and it conveys “a sort of unapproachable capability.” It’s built to cultivate confidence of a different kind. While many of us have grown used to the “smooth power” of electric vehicles, “the Spectre is in



Nocturnal elegance, from \$465,000

another realm.” Driving it is “an otherworldly experience,” its cabin “so quiet occupants can practically hear themselves breathing at highway speeds.”

The best of...kitchen thermometers



ThermoWorks Thermapen One

The Thermapen One is still the very best instant-read thermometer around, delivering consistent results in two seconds or less. Though there are solid cheaper options, “its accuracy, speed, efficiency, and longevity make it worth the price.”

\$115, thermoworks.com
Source: Food & Wine

Combustion Predictive Thermometer

This technologically advanced option is distinguished by its ability to predict when your food will reach your target temperature. It does so by crunching the data it collects from the eight sensors in its wireless probe.

\$230, combustion.inc
Source: Bon Appétit



Comark Pocket Dial Thermometer

Some chefs prefer a simple, old-fashioned meat thermometer. This durable, inexpensive 5-inch option gives fairly quick readings and is comparable in accuracy to the best instant-reads.

\$7, katom.com
Source: NYMag.com

ThermoWorks IRK-2 Industrial IR

Point-and-shoot infrared thermometers are ideal for measuring surface temperatures, such as of a baking stone or flat-top grill. This one’s particularly accurate, and its laser guide indicates exactly the spot it’s measuring.

\$99, thermoworks.com
Source: America’s Test Kitchen



Oxo Good Grips Candy and Deep Fry Thermometer

A few smart tweaks make this a good choice for high-temperature stovetop cooking. Its large handle can be lifted by hand or by tongs, and its graphics help you monitor when sugars are about to caramelize.

\$25, oxo.com
Source: The Spruce Eats

Tip of the week...

How to do ‘No Mow May’

■ **Don’t mow your lawn in May.** Yes, it’s that easy. Since 2020, many homeowners have let their yards go natural in early spring, creating habitat for bees, butterflies, and other pollinators.

■ **Adjust your timing.** No Mow May started in the U.K., where the climate is a rough match for our Northeast and Midwest. But flora in the Midwest is ahead of normal this year, so optimal no-mow season—when clover and other flowers are in blossom—will end there before May does.

■ **Have something to offer.** “If your backyard looks like a tapestry,” with patches of differently colored mini blossoms, it’ll be a pollinator magnet. But an uninterrupted, golf-course-like blanket of grass won’t attract butterflies and bees, and dandelions alone won’t make much difference.

■ **Consider ticks.** Tall grass attracts ticks, so if that’s a worry, discourage them by pretreating the lawn with cedar granules or a garlic oil treatment, both of which are safe for pollinators.

Source: Architectural Digest

And for those who have everything...

You wouldn’t exactly want to follow in George Mallory’s foot-steps. The British mountaineer famously died in 1924 during an attempt on Mount Everest. But the romance of Mallory’s effort helps explain why the **Crockett & Jones Everest Boot** was created. Crockett & Jones, established in 1879, “rose to the challenge” when two mountaineers recently asked the company to re-create Mallory’s footwear using as a model the single boot found on Everest in 1999. Twins Hugo and Ross Turner put those boots to the test on a climb in Nepal before the manufacturer unveiled a consumer-friendly version made from the same waterproof leather and insulated with so-called yurt felt, the same warming layer Mallory chose.

\$990, us.crockettandjones.com
Source: The Times (U.K.)



Best apps...

For meal planning

■ **Prepear** is an excellent meal-planning app because it “runs like a true kitchen manager.” It enables you to save recipes from the web, schedule them, and create grocery lists that delivery services can shop for you. (Basic level free; premium level \$10 monthly)

■ **Plan to Eat** stands out for its stellar grocery lists. They allow you to choose different stores for different items, such as a butcher for meats and a warehouse store for bulk goods. (14-day free trial; \$55 annually)

■ **Paprika** is ideal for weight loss because it encourages you to plan out your meals on a calendar, helping you avoid last-minute takeout meals or unhealthy snacks. (Free or a \$5 one-time upgrade fee)

■ **Mealime** is a great option for managing dietary restrictions. It can blacklist as many as 100 ingredients; facilitate paleo, vegan, and vegetarian diets; and provide “extensive” filtering for potential allergens. (Free, or \$3 monthly)

Source: Fortune

Best Properties on the Market

This week: Homes with bars



1 ◀ Tampa This 1994 six-bedroom Mediterranean home on Tampa Bay includes a cocktail lounge with a stone bar, bottle shelving on a mirrored wall, a fireplace, and water views. The open-plan interior features a curved iron staircase and arched doorways, a gourmet kitchen, and a gas fireplace. A saltwater pool and spa, a covered patio, an outdoor kitchen, and a shared dock complete the property. Downtown Tampa is a 15-minute drive. \$5,600,000. Jennifer Zales, Coldwell Banker Realty, (813) 758-3443

2 ▶ Farmington, Conn. Built by a renowned abolitionist in 1832, this historically designated Georgian-inspired estate has a fully outfitted Irish pub with wainscoting, coffered ceilings, and a wrap-around wood bar. The eight-bedroom main house includes a library, a sitting room with inlaid floors, a billiards room, a wine cellar, a music room, and an updated chef's kitchen. The nearly 5-acre property includes a guest cottage, pool, tennis court, and greenhouse. \$3,450,000. Scott Holmes, William Pitt Sotheby's International Realty, (860) 485-5875



Kevin Gaillard



3 ◀ Darby, Mont. Hart Bench Ranch, in the Bitterroot Mountains, features a Western-style saloon in a workshop with wood walls, saddle barstools, and a sitting area with a woodstove. The main residence, a 2001 four-bedroom log home, has a double-height great room with a loft, an antler chandelier, a stone fireplace, and a windowed gable. The 155-acre lot offers mountain views, a greenhouse, a guesthouse, a garage, and a barn with five horse stalls. \$7,450,000. Deke Tidwell, Hall and Hall, (406) 544-7191

Best Properties on the Market

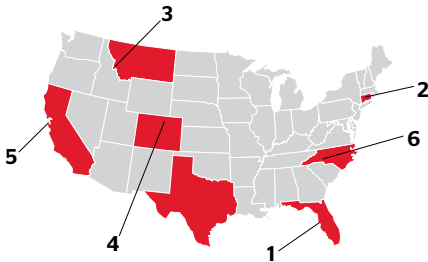


Boxwood Photos



4 ◀ Berthoud, Colo. This 2022 contemporary four-bedroom has a lower-level rec-room wet bar with cristallo quartzite counters, a beverage fridge, and an adjacent wine room. In the living room are clerestory windows, accordion doors, and a 21-foot floor-to-ceiling fireplace finished in hot rolled steel. An upper deck and a patio with a built-in grill offer mountain views. Access to a pool and gym are included. \$2,750,000. David Johnson, LIV Sotheby's International Realty, (970) 213-0648

5 ▶ San Francisco Designed by Robert Arrigoni and built in 1970, this curved modern home above Edgehill Way has a C-shaped four-seat bar with a brass footrest, wood walls, and cement posts in a sitting room. The eight-bedroom's main space has 20-foot ceilings, a catwalk, herringbone wood floors, and cement beams and details contrasting with warm wood. There's also an elevator, and ocean and city views. Edgehill Mountain Park is a short walk, and Golden Gate Park is a 10-minute drive. \$7,950,000. Neal Ward, Compass, (415) 269-9933



Steal of the week



Cameron Glenn/Skyvisions USA



6 ◀ Sherrills Ford, N.C. This updated 1990 ranch near Lake Norman has a step-up barroom just off the vaulted living room, with an eight-door cabinet and beverage fridge. The three-bedroom includes new wood-look floors, a painted brick fireplace, and a skylighted sitting room with walls of glass. On the 1.5-acre property are a two-bay garage, a fenced saltwater pool, a hot tub, three decks, flat yards, and a shed. Charlotte is less than an hour away. \$560,000. Victoria McHutchon, Compass, (206) 565-4106

The News at a Glance

The bottom line

▪ The war in Iran has triggered a surge in airfares, with the lowest-priced economy tickets costing 24% more on average than they did a year ago. A flight from London to Melbourne in June now costs 76% more than last year, while the price of a flight from Hong Kong to London has gone up by 72%.
BBC.com

▪ The share of workers who said they were satisfied with how much they are paid fell 3.3 percentage points to 52.3% in March, the lowest share since the New York Federal Reserve began tracking the data in 2014.
Axios



▪ SpaceX bought 1,279 Tesla Cybertrucks in the fourth quarter, while Elon Musk's other ventures acquired 60 more. Together, those purchases accounted for 18.9% of all Cybertrucks sold in the U.S. during the period. Without the sales to Musk-run companies, Cybertruck registrations would have fallen 51%.
Bloomberg

▪ Boeing reported a 14% rise in quarterly revenue this week after delivering more planes than its rival Airbus for the first time since 2023. Boeing delivered 143 commercial aircraft in the first quarter—14 more than the same period a year ago, and 29 more than Airbus, which has struggled with supply bottlenecks.
Financial Times

▪ Red Lobster said it's bringing its endless shrimp promotion back—after the money-losing deal was blamed for pushing the seafood chain into bankruptcy in 2024. The deal will now start at \$24.99, up from \$20 previously. The company hopes the return of the popular promotion will help revive sales, which fell 6% last year.
The Wall Street Journal

Warsh: Senators grill Fed chair nominee

Kevin Warsh, President Trump's nominee to lead the Federal Reserve, faced questions this week from senators who seemed skeptical about his independence, said Nick Timiraos in *The Wall Street Journal*. Warsh, a former Fed governor, "spent much of his confirmation hearing insisting" that the "central bank will maintain

its autonomy" from a president who demands lower interest rates. He also outlined "a sweeping agenda" that would "break from the Fed's recent approach" by holding fewer news conferences and slashing the bank's bloated balance sheet. Sen. Thom Tillis (R-N.C.) vowed again to block Warsh unless the Justice Department ends its criminal investigation of Fed Chair Jerome Powell,



Will he stand up to Trump?

on unsubstantiated grounds; second, whether the criminal charges against Powell are bogus "pretexts for disagreements over the Fed's interest rate policy." Warsh refused to answer either question, saying that he "lacks the legal expertise to weigh in." It's never been a question "whether Warsh has the brains for the job. It's whether he has the spine for it." Clearly, he doesn't.

though he said he would consider rescinding his objection if Congress launched a review.

Warsh had an opportunity to prove himself, said Catherine Rampell in *The Bulwark*, and he failed. He was asked two pointed questions: First, whether he would defend Fed governor Lisa Cook, as Powell has done, after Trump fired her

Spirit Airlines: Seeking a government bailout

Spirit Airlines is scrambling to stave off a financial crash, said Alison Sider and Brian Schwartz in *The Wall Street Journal*. The budget airline has filed for bankruptcy twice since its planned merger with JetBlue was blocked by regulators in 2024, and rising jet fuel costs since the start of the Iran war have taken an added toll. President Trump said this week he'd like to "see a buyer emerge for Spirit." When *The Week* went to press, the administration was discussing lending the carrier as much as \$500 million in exchange for "a significant stake."

Anthropic: NSA granted access to risky Mythos

The National Security Agency has been using Claude Mythos Preview, Anthropic's "most powerful model yet," despite the Pentagon's ongoing feud with the startup, said Maria Curi and Sam Sabin in *Axios*. Anthropic chief executive Dario Amodei met White House chief of staff Susie Wiles and Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent last week "to discuss the use of Mythos within the government" as select businesses test a model that Anthropic said was "too dangerous for a wider release." The NSA's use of Mythos seems to clash with the Pentagon's unprecedented declaration last month that Anthropic was a "supply chain risk," barring the U.S. startup from business with federal entities.

SpaceX: Musk makes deal with AI coding startup

SpaceX has struck a deal that could result in it buying "one of the fastest-growing AI startups," said Lloyd Lee in *Business Insider*. Elon Musk's rocket and satellite company, which recently merged with his artificial intelligence company xAI, announced this week it had an agreement to purchase AI coding firm Cursor for \$60 billion later this year or pay \$10 billion to "work together." The partnership gives Musk "a major foothold in the AI coding race" just as SpaceX is raising interest for what could be the largest public offering in history.

Tariffs: The refund rush begins

Businesses officially began filing claims for tariff refunds this week following the opening of a new government portal, said Tony Romm and Ana Swanson in *The New York Times*. The Trump administration collected more than \$166 billion in tariffs that were struck down by the Supreme Court in February. "More than 3,000 businesses, including FedEx and Costco, had already sued" to secure their refunds before the new site's launch. The Trump administration has suggested it could be months before firms see any money, and has declined to say if it will "return to court in a bid to halt some or all of the refunds."

The caffeine addicts who set coffee prices

The most exclusive job on Wall Street involves sniffing coffee beans for a living, said Krystal Hur in *The Wall Street Journal*. "Armed with spoons," this group of roughly three-dozen "middle-aged caffeine addicts" gathers in a small room on the eighth floor of the New York Stock Exchange testing coffee products. Their ratings help set U.S. futures-market prices for arabica "and, in turn, the global coffee industry." Most of the testers work in the coffee business, some are traders, and others are retirees. And the group is growing desperate for a pick-me-up. Recruiting is challenging, as most young people heading to work on Wall Street want "glitzy jobs where coffee serves as fuel, not product." Candidates also must pass a grueling three-part test that's administered roughly once every five years. "Only about 5% to 8% of test takers will typically pass each time the test is administered." By comparison, "the pass rate for California's notoriously difficult bar exam in February 2025 was 64%."

Making Money

Refunds: A happy Tax Day for more Americans

April 15 is typically a day Americans want to forget. Not this year, said **Julie Z. Weil** in *The Washington Post*. Thanks to the “big, beautiful bill” passed by congressional Republicans last year, taxpayers were able to claim an average of \$3,462 in tax refunds as of Tax Day, up nearly 11% from 2025. Over \$241 billion has been refunded to Americans so far, compared with \$211 billion at this time last year. That’s a result of language in the GOP law that increased the standard deduction, added a \$6,000 rebate for qualifying seniors, boosted the child tax deduction, and set new rules for deducting tips, overtime, and car loan payments. The bill also overrode planned tax increases for a vast majority of filers. People have taken notice. Alia Shawa, a waitress at a New York City restaurant, said that she and her husband, a chef, got “a whopping \$26,000 refund” after deducting the taxes on her tips and his car loan, compared with owing \$12,000 to the IRS last year. “I finally get something back,” Shawa said.

People are using their refunds “to shore up their finances rather than splurge,” said **Julia Fanzeres** and **Josyana Joshua** in *Bloomberg*. Early filers increased debt payments by about 20%, according to the Bank of America Institute, using the funds to pay off bills, car loans, credit card balances, and student loans. Lower-income households put even more of their refunds—nearly



The average refund was up almost 11% from last year.

30%—toward repaying debts. At a time of stubborn inflation and rising gas prices because of the war with Iran, Americans are “focused on getting their own fiscal homes in order.” That’s why the refund boost isn’t likely to improve voters’ sour mood, said **Daniel Bunn** in *Barron’s*. The average refund is only about \$350 more than last year, which is well below what President Trump originally claimed it would be. And “an extra few hundred dollars landing in Americans’ wallets from once-a-year tax refunds won’t ease” the economic strain caused by many of Trump’s other policies, including his tariffs and cuts to Obamacare. “The reality is that on Tax Day 2026, the cost of day-to-day life was higher and more financially tenuous than it was a year prior.”

Besides bigger refunds, there’s another thing that’s different this tax season, said **Richard Rubin** in *The Wall Street Journal*: a lack of enforcement. The IRS has shed more than 25,000 workers since last year, “leaving fewer federal employees to audit returns, collect unpaid tax debts, and deter Americans from skirting the law.” At the top, there’s no acting IRS commissioner, and senior officials are “doing double duty.” Audits of people with at least \$10 million are set to drop 39% this year. The Trump administration “has defunded the police,” said one tax lawyer. “There’s no more succinct way to describe what’s happened.”

What the experts say

■ Investors decry Trump’s crypto firm

The Trump family’s World Liberty crypto venture is facing an investor backlash, said **Jill R. Shah** in the *Financial Times*. The price of its WLFI token has plummeted 16% over the past month after the company borrowed \$75 million against roughly \$440 million worth of the token. One of the company’s most influential backers, billionaire Justin Sun, took to social media to criticize “the WLFI team”—which includes President Trump’s sons, Eric and Don Jr.—for “treating the crypto community as a personal ATM.” Sun alleged that the company had unilateral power over user accounts, and that his account has been frozen since September, during which time the value of his holdings has fallen by \$80 million. The criticism by Sun is notable; U.S. securities regulators dropped fraud charges against Sun after he bought \$75 million worth of WLFI tokens in late 2024.

■ Still waiting for the housing thaw

Blame the war in Iran for another dismal spring housing market, said **Samantha Delouya** in *CNN.com*. “Before the United States and Israel began joint attacks on Iran, the average 30-year mortgage rate fell to 5.98%, dipping below 6% for the first time in three years and offering a hopeful sign” for the frozen housing

market. The rate is now back up to 6.30%, a result of the war pushing up yields on 10-year Treasuries, which are used by lenders to set home-loan rates. But mortgages are only part of the story. Sellers like **Eric Haugen**, who was ready to list his home in Colorado this spring, don’t “want to take any chances right now” and risk not having buyers. “I don’t think people feel safe or ready to make a big purchase,” Haugen said.

■ A World Cup price explosion

This summer’s World Cup is looking like an “epic, all-American ransack,” said **Jason Gay** in *The Wall Street Journal*. Already, some resale prices for ordinary tickets to the final at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, N.J., are over \$9,000. Officials now say that a round-trip train ticket from New York to the stadium will cost \$150. Many soccer fans will have little choice but to cough up the dough because FIFA, soccer’s world governing body, eliminated parking at the stadium for World Cup matches. FIFA is also asking for \$6,050 for entry to a “pitchside lounge” at Team USA’s June 12 opener. Another two-game package, which includes a ticket to the final, is on offer for \$39,500. I think “I’ll take my family to the Galápagos instead.”

Charity of the week

random acts OF FLOWERS.

After a near-fatal accident, **Larsen Jay** said one of the things that helped him most during his recovery was getting flowers delivered. So in 2008, he founded **Random Acts of Flowers** (randomactsofflowers.org), a nonprofit based in Knoxville, Tenn., that brings bouquets of recycled flowers to people in hospitals and health-care facilities around the country. Volunteers collect donated flowers from individuals as well as from such businesses as grocery stores, funeral homes, and event venues. They trim, water, and arrange the flowers, creating bouquets that get delivered to those who need a pick-me-up in hospitals, nursing homes, and more, all within 48 hours. The final touch is a delivery card in each arrangement that details the name of the donor, sponsor, or person who created the bouquet. The nonprofit also organizes group activities for volunteers, including composting, as well as drives to collect donated vases.

Each charity we feature has earned a four-star overall rating from *Charity Navigator*, which rates not-for-profit organizations on the strength of their finances, their governance practices, and the transparency of their operations. Four stars is the group’s highest rating.

Cook: What his departure means for Apple

Tim Cook's reign as "the greatest non-founder CEO of all time" is coming to an end, said **Ben Thompson** in *Stratechery*. The Apple boss announced this week that he will step down in September and hand off the world's third-largest company by market value to John Ternus, Apple's senior vice president of hardware engineering. It concludes an incredible run by Cook, who inherited the job from Apple founder Steve Jobs in 2011. Unlike his visionary and artistic predecessor, "Cook was, without question, an operational genius" who took Jobs' signature creation—the iPhone—and brought it to an "unimaginable scale." Apple's profits grew by 354%, driven largely by Cook's success in growing the App Store, which helped Apple become the first public company worth \$1 trillion. His announcement comes on a high note too, "after Apple's best-ever quarter" financially, with revenue up 16% from a year prior and the company now worth \$4 trillion.



In 15 years, Cook grew Apple's profits by 354%.

The elevation of Ternus feels like "a safe choice," said **Reed Albergotti** in *Semafor*. Apple isn't about to "roll the dice on someone who might squander its lucrative business." So it chose a company lifer "hailing from the Jobs era" and not some "AI guru" wanting a "radical new direction." It says that Apple views itself "as a hardware company" and it's "going with the hardware guy," said **Dave Lee** in *Bloomberg*. Under Cook, the company maintained its "competence and composure" while rivals chased the next big thing, be it the metaverse, drones, self-driving cars, or artificial intelligence. His legacy is assured with "a decades-long head start on what it takes to manufacture

billions of units at an unparalleled high quality." It has further entrenched a fantastic hardware ecosystem, including the beloved AirPods and Apple Watch, through which it can incorporate a future of "ambient computing" where "screens play less of a role."

That's an enormous risk, said **Peter Kafka** in *Business Insider*. Apple may end up wishing "it had a leader who wanted to take big, ambitious swings" and did not "opt out of the AI wave." The company's approach is just to let "everyone else clobber each other to produce the best AI products," and it

will "sit back and collect (some kind of) rent when those competitors need to reach billions of iPhone users." But that's presuming that the iPhone is still relevant in 10 years. More and more people in Silicon Valley think AI will "eventually be so powerful that it's going to create a new piece of tech" that replaces the smartphone, leaving Apple without its core.

To retain its standing among Big Tech's big shots, Apple will need to "think a little more different," said **Dan Gallagher** in *The Wall Street Journal*. Apple's stock has "trailed nearly every other megacap tech name" since the launch of ChatGPT in 2022, with rivals like Nvidia and Alphabet now holding significantly more value. "It may not be spending hundreds of billions of dollars to build up supercharged AI networks," but it needs to prove it has some foothold in the technology. "Successfully launching a greatly improved Siri voice assistant would be a start." But what exactly "Apple will be in the age of AI remains to be seen."

Trade school isn't for everybody

River Page
The Free Press

At risk of being replaced by artificial intelligence, white-collar workers are being told to go to trade school, said River Page. Kind Snacks founder and *Shark Tank* star Daniel Lubetzky has suggested young people "learn how to be a carpenter," and Nvidia's chief executive Jensen Huang has said that "the skilled craft segment of every economy is going to see a boom." For the anxious professional class looking for a more stable career, the trades, or at least an idealized version of them, offer "something of a comfort blanket," thanks to the belief that the jobs of people who work with their hands "will remain safe." But most "CEOs, billionaire

TV stars, and college-educated parents doling out advice usually have little to no experience of the trades." They talk as if it's a path to financial stability. The average electrician or plumber nationwide makes only about \$67,000 a year. Other roles pay even less. And many currently deskbound workers, despite being "confident in their ability to learn new things," aren't prepared for the "harsh reality" of a hands-on career. "This stuff is hard, dangerous, and backbreaking," and "not everyone is going to be cut out for it." Telling white-collar folks to "learn a trade" comes off the same way as telling laid-off coal miners to "learn to code": condescending.

Live Nation got what it deserved

Helaine Olen
MS.nw

The Live Nation verdict looks terrible for the Trump administration, said Helaine Olen. A federal jury in New York last week found that the concert giant, which owns Ticketmaster, "maintained an illegal monopoly over entertainment venue ticket sales," harming customers and concert promoters alike. But according to the Trump administration, there's nothing to see here. Trump's Department of Justice tried to end the case early, stunning the presiding judge by agreeing to a surprise settlement that slapped Live Nation on the wrist with a \$280 million fine. Attorneys general for 33 states and the District of Columbia refused to join the settlement, and

continued to pursue a jury verdict. It's a good thing they did. Because the jury sided with the glaring evidence that Live Nation "repeatedly, blatantly violated" the anticompetitive agreement it signed when it acquired Ticketmaster, heaped endless fees on customers, threatened venues that didn't use Ticketmaster, and laughed as they were "robbing them blind, baby"—the actual words of a text message sent by an executive. It's unclear whether this decision will result in Live Nation's breakup, a remedy New York Attorney General Letitia James said states are seeking. Still, the millions of Americans "tired of being beaten up by big business" should be grateful.

Obituaries

The puppeteer who created surreal TV shows

Sid Krofft

1929–2026

Sid Krofft made children's television a weirder place. Along with his brother

Marty Krofft—who died in 2023—he conjured worlds populated by fantastical creatures that seemed born from an acid trip, though the two always denied taking drugs. Their first original show, *H.R. Pufnstuf* (1969), featured a galumphing dragon who protects a boy from the wicked Witchiepoo. *Lidsville* (1971) was a world of talking hats, and *Sigmund and the Sea Monsters* (1973) starred an underwater creature shunned by his family because he wouldn't scare people. Krofft provided most of the wacky ideas and engineered the full-body, mascot-style costumes, while his brother persuaded the network executives to go along. "When you're nuts," Krofft said in 2006, "you've got to go nuts all the way."

"The brothers liked to say that they came from a long line of puppeteers," said *The Hollywood Reporter*. In fact, "that story was fabricated," but Krofft did start puppet work young. Born Cydas Yolas to Greek and Hungarian immigrants in Montreal, he was doing puppetry for the Ringling Bros. circus by age 15, and by his 20s was opening for Judy Garland. Then his brother joined him, and in 1961 they launched *Les Poupées de Paris*, a "burlesque puppet show"



featuring "mostly topless women" that toured America and played at several world's fairs. NBC recruited them to design costumes for one show and in 1969 greenlit *H.R. Pufnstuf*, which lasted only 17 episodes but found new life in reruns. For *Land of the Lost*, which ran from 1974 to 1976, the Kroffts placed live-action humans alongside stop-motion-animated dinosaurs to depict an alternate, time-warped universe, and employed a linguist to help create a language for the apelike Pakuni characters.

Yet they did not limit themselves to Saturday-morning fare, said *The New York Times*, scoring a prime-time hit with ABC's *Donny & Marie*, a variety show starring the squeaky-clean Osmond siblings. They also had a few flops, notably 1980's *Pink Lady*, which featured schlocky stand-up comedian Jeff Altman and two Japanese pop stars who spoke almost no English. In his 90s, Krofft "resurfaced in the public eye" with his own Instagram Live show, said the *Los Angeles Times*. *Sundays With Sid* featured interviews with performers including Joel Grey, David Copperfield, and Krofft's good friend Paul Reubens, aka Pee Wee Herman. Krofft never lost his delight in the work. "I'm just having a good time," he said in 2000. "I can't believe that I get paid for this nonsense that I come up with. It's amazing."

The racer who got wheelchairs into marathons

Bob Hall

1951–2026

Considered the "father of wheelchair racing," Bob Hall was the first wheelchair champ of

a major marathon, a pioneer who pushed the running world to become more inclusive. Having won the first formal national wheelchair marathon, in 1974, he attempted to enter the Boston Marathon the following year. Although race officials were skeptical that Hall could compete alongside runners, they struck a deal: Hall would earn an official finisher's certificate if he could complete the course in under three hours. He pushed himself intensely—at one point finding himself side by side with eventual race champion Bill Rodgers—and beat the challenge by two minutes. Hall said he'd entered the race to accomplish a personal goal but realized while on the course that he had become a trailblazer, opening the field to a new kind of competitor. "I said to myself: Other people have got to do this, too," Hall said last year. "This is not my race, this is all of ours."

Born in Massachusetts, Hall contracted polio as a baby and had corrective surgeries "that permanently fused his right ankle," said *The New York Times*, leaving him able to walk only very slowly using braces and crutches. Yet he was determined



to become an athlete, playing Little League at age 12, wheelchair basketball in his teens, and even wrestling for a year at Boston State College. Then his "competitive drive led him to track and field," where he quickly won the wheelchair mile and the wheelchair marathon and set his sights on the Boston Marathon. His "exploits received national attention," said *The Washington Post*, particularly when, in 1980, he joined runner Dave McGillivray to trek 1,520 miles from Florida to Boston to raise money for cancer research. The two paused at the White House to meet with President Jimmy Carter.

Not content with the "fight for equality" in Boston, said the Framingham, Mass., *MetroWest Daily News*, Hall pushed other cities' marathons to open wheelchair divisions, notably suing the New York City Marathon. He also founded Hall's Wheels, making racing chairs whose custom designs influenced the ultralight three-wheel chairs used by today's racers. Last year, on the 50th anniversary of his race, 50 wheelchair athletes competed in the Boston Marathon, and Hall served as grand marshal. "It warms me up quite a bit and puts a smile on my face," he said. "It's kind of like closing the circle of my life."

The Cold War journalist who saved NPR

If Kevin Klose's reporting during the Cold War showed the importance of a free press, his prolific fundraising as head of NPR helped protect that freedom. Klose had no experience raising money when he became NPR head in 1998, yet he managed to double

Kevin Klose

1940–2026

the public broadcaster's budget and endowment during his

decade-long tenure. A good chunk of that came through an eye-popping \$230 million gift he landed from Joan B. Kroc, widow of McDonald's magnate Ray Kroc. The windfall allowed NPR to add a legion of reporters and more foreign bureaus and, crucially, to stay on the air after President Trump cut off its federal funding last year. That was Klose's goal: to keep NPR free of political interference. "Gathering news and getting it out to other people," he said in 2003, "is absolutely essential for our democracy."

His "career in journalism seemed almost preordained," said *The Washington Post*. His father was an ad exec, his mother a magazine writer, and the two produced radio shows "at their farmhouse" in Red Hook, N.Y. So after graduating from Harvard and completing a stint in the Navy, Klose joined the *Post* in 1967. He rose to Moscow bureau chief, interviewing dissidents like Andrei Sakharov and writing of life under communism. After the Cold War, he jumped to Radio Free Europe, "which had long broadcast news into communist and authoritarian societies," and he had it begin training those countries' journalists in how to hold their governments accountable.

Later, at NPR, Klose found his talent for fundraising, "spending months cultivating a given individual," said *The New York Times*. He wanted the free press to survive, at home and abroad. "People turn to us in times of crisis," he would say. "Let's be sure to be there."

A teenager's treasure hunt

Michael Haskell, 17, set out to make some money by selling the contents of abandoned storage units, said **Alex Vadukul** in **The New York Times**. He ended up learning about life.

ON AN ICY afternoon, a 17-year-old named Michael Haskell parked his battered Hyundai outside a cavernous storage facility on Staten Island, N.Y. Then he fetched a hand truck and wheeled it through a maze of hundreds of identical units, its squeaking wheels echoing through the labyrinth. “Any of these could be a gold mine,” he said.

He stopped at No. 3361 and unlocked the padlock. A musty odor emerged. He looked inside. The unit was crammed with birdcages, cedar chests, old paperbacks, barstools, and art deco lamps.

“I think I’ll make good money off this locker, which isn’t bad, since I bought it for \$140,” Michael said. “Copper is at \$6 a pound right now, so I can sell the lamps to the scrapyards. It’s all about squeezing every dollar out of the locker.”

While some teenagers hang out after school, playing *Fortnite* or shooting hoops, Michael has taken up a more enterprising hobby. He buys abandoned storage lockers at bargain prices from public lien auctions with the aim of selling their contents for profit. It began two years ago, when he watched a rerun of *Storage Wars*. He has been on an urban treasure hunt ever since.

His adventures have brought him to CubeSmart, Extra Space Storage, and Manhattan Mini Storage facilities in and around New York City. He sells his scavenged goods through his eBay store, “Mike’s Unique Treasures,” to earn over \$7,000 a month, a figure backed by the financial records he showed me.

He runs his operation out of the suburban New Jersey home where he lives with his mother. The garage is lined with meticulously indexed old magazines, vinyl records, World War II artifacts, rare stamps, VHS tapes, and vintage fishing rods.

After finishing his homework, Michael spends his nights at a worktable, packaging inventory to ship to his customers around the country. “My friends tell me they’re amazed I’m making money at this,” he said. “None have asked to come along with me yet, though. I’m not sure why.”

At the Staten Island facility, Michael took photographs of enticing objects and fed them into an AI image search, Google Lens, to get an idea of their value. Then he used a mechanical saw to break down tattered furniture with no selling potential. “I’m always on the search for the next Crispo,” he said. “That was my first big score.”



Haskell at work at a storage facility in Queens

He was referring to the haul that turned his hobby into a quest: a storage unit he bought in Brooklyn for \$450 that had belonged to Andrew Crispo, a shadowy 1980s art dealer. Michael sold a Man Ray painting and some Walt Kuhn drawings he found inside for nearly \$50,000. “My family took my hobby seriously after that,” he said.

It was so simple at the start. When Michael got into the game of flipping used goods, he just wanted to make some money. But the business of dealing in people’s abandoned possessions, it turns out, can be fraught. Two years into his pursuit, he knows all too well that every locker tells a story, many of them bleak.

“I’m always trying to figure out the lives behind the units,” Michael said as he drove toward another storage facility. “This guy was really into antiques. Maybe he was a flipper, like me. But who knows why he abandoned his unit. If you lose a locker, usually you’re not financially stable, and your life isn’t in a great place. Sometimes it can be a sad story.”

Michael woke at 7 a.m. the next day and rode the school bus to Bergen County Academies, where he is a senior. He took a math quiz and started writing an essay for English class about the poetry of Lucille

Clifton. He tried not to worry too much about what he would hear back from colleges he had applied to—Wesleyan, Emory, Hamilton. But he had one thing on his mind above all else: the next hunt, the next locker, the next treasure.

ON A RECENT afternoon at home in Bergen County, Michael was scouring auction listings on Lockerfox.com to plot his next targets. Not long ago, the room he sat in was filled with Legos. Now it’s his office, decorated with his finds—a Hermes 3000 typewriter, framed oil paintings, ancient Chinese vases. “They’re Qing, not Ming,” Michael said. “Ming vases are the ones you want.” Beside the books and schoolwork on his desk were the tax documents his mother was helping him prepare. This year, he will file income taxes for the second time.

He took a long look at the intel generated by a computer program he had developed with ChatGPT. It listed storage units that had been abandoned by people whose names had appeared at some point in the news. One was connected to a politician in Piscataway, N.J. Another locker had belonged to a minor celebrity: Brooklyn rapper Bobby Shmurda, whose ascent in hip-hop over a decade ago was cut short by headline-making gang conspiracy charges.

After nearly seven years in prison, Shmurda was released in 2021. Michael paid \$90 for his unit. “From what I’ve read, it sounds like he was a one-hit wonder and mostly became famous for going to prison,” Michael said. “Who knows, maybe there’s something valuable connected to his music career in there.”

Michael’s mother, Anna Haskell, was in her study, reading *The Wall Street Journal*. “It all started in middle school,” Haskell, an investor, said. “Michael would go to book fairs, where he discovered he could buy books by the bag and resell them. Then he started researching Legos that were going out of production, and he started buying those up, reselling them as they got more valuable. Then he saw *Storage Wars*. I don’t know what he could be one day, but what he’s doing is almost like distressed investing, buying distressed assets. Maybe he’ll go into the investment path.”

Haskell considered what her son might be gaining from his locker dives, aside from money. “I think he’s learning about human paths, about human nature,” she

The Last Word

said. “People’s lives are in these lockers. Belongings can tell you a lot about a person. When you meet someone, you might think you know them, but you just don’t know.”

AS MICHAEL MONITORED outgoing deliveries in the garage, he told me about a unit in Hackensack, N.J., that had belonged to a socialite. It was heaped with trash bags containing Prada dresses, Hermès scarves, and jewelry. There were also empty vodka bottles, divorce papers, and distressing financial documents. “Her life had clearly fallen apart,” he said. “You think money solves all your problems. It doesn’t.”

And there was the locker in Manhattan that had belonged to a relative of the first Black mayor of Richmond, Calif. Michael showed me a yellowed local newspaper front page from 1964 that depicted him smiling as he took office.

“His name was George Carroll,” Michael said. “I read he was one of the first Black mayors of a large American city. Looking at this picture, you can imagine the adversity he faced. He led an inspiring life, which wasn’t the case with Crispo. Crispo wasn’t just connected to a murder, he was involved with so many other horrible things as well.”

A striver from Philadelphia who reinvented himself in Manhattan, Crispo made his name with his sharp eye for undiscovered painters and his championing of American modernism. After opening his namesake gallery on East 57th Street, he handled works by major figures like Edward Hopper and Georgia O’Keeffe. He became an art-world star and tabloid fixture known for the sadomasochistic sex parties that took place in his gallery after hours.

One evening in 1985, Crispo and a gallery assistant, Bernard LeGeros, picked up a Norwegian art student named Eigil Dag Vesti and brought him to an estate owned by LeGeros’ parents in Rockland County, New York. After a drug-fueled night, Vesti was shot dead while naked and handcuffed. Three weeks later, hikers discovered his corpse in a smokehouse, a zipped leather hood over the head.

As Michael learned in his online sleuthing, the case became known as the Death Mask Murder. LeGeros was arrested and charged with the killing. Crispo denied involvement and was never charged, though the murder weapon, a .22-caliber rifle, was found hidden in his gallery.

Crispo later served prison time for tax evasion and for threatening to kidnap a

lawyer’s 4-year-old child. He died destitute in 2024 in a Brooklyn nursing facility, causing his storage unit to go delinquent. “He had a horrible ending,” Michael said. “I’m not sure what the lesson is. His life seems like a lesson in how not to live your life.”

The auction house Bonhams handled the artworks that Michael found in the Crispo locker. With his mother’s help, he invested the proceeds from the nearly \$50,000 sale into the S&P 500. There may be more windfall yet. Still unsold from the collection is a Yoruban ceremonial staff, which will soon go to auction. Bonhams has set the bidding at \$4,500.

But around the time that Crispo’s grim life story left Michael feeling shaky about humanity, he came upon something quite different in a storage unit he had unlocked in Union City, N.J. Its contents seemed routine at first—toolboxes, hammer holsters, saws, drills, some Spanish-language comic books. But deep within the clutter, in a tattered box, Michael found a Purple Heart.

After clearing the locker, he went on eBay and found a lively market for Purple Hearts. One could easily fetch \$300. But he didn’t list it. “I felt I should return it,” Michael said. “I didn’t have much to go on because I didn’t have an owner’s name for this unit. But there was a faded address on one package.”



Some of Haskell’s finds on display at his family’s home

The address brought him to a home with a rusted white fence in an immigrant enclave of Union City. A pair of dust-caked Timberland boots sat by the entrance. No one answered Michael’s knocks at the door. No one answered his calls after he pulled a phone number through public records. Then he sent a letter. He is still waiting to hear back.

He keeps the Purple Heart in a drawer. “Selling it would be disrespectful to a life, to someone who fought for something, even if I don’t know who they are,” Michael said. “I’ll never sell it.”

ON AN OVERCAST Monday afternoon, Michael endured another math quiz before leaving school to investigate the Bobby Shmurda unit. Walking through the cold toward his car, he ran into Scott Demeter, his junior-year history teacher.

“What Michael is doing is what education should look like,” Demeter said. “So many teens just want to get picked up as an influencer now, but he’s doing something that involves entrepreneurial spirit and risk-taking. He’s generating real income, too. I just joked with a colleague that we should quit our jobs and do what Michael’s doing.”

After the drive, Michael arrived at a storage facility in Edgewater, N.J., and made his way inside. He found Shmurda’s unit at the end of a long, dark hall. Its blue metal door rattled as he heaved it open. To his dismay, there was nothing of note inside. A set of weights. A plasma TV. A pair of loudspeakers. “Maybe the speakers are worth something,” he said. “Otherwise, this is junk. His name isn’t written on anything, so no one will even believe me that this is Shmurda’s stuff.”

Ever in hope of a jackpot, Michael made his way to a Storage Post facility in Long Island City. This unit had not been flagged by his ChatGPT-assisted search bot, but he figured it was worth a shot. He unlocked the door—and scowled. It was filled with gym clothes, cookbooks, a VCR, and a plant pot. But as he rummaged through the boxes, he grew interested in the life behind all this seemingly worthless stuff. The dusty Ampex tapes, recording masters, and sheets of paper scribbled with lyrics suggested a working musician. Old photos depicted a handsome singer in his 1970s prime, hanging out in the studio with his band.

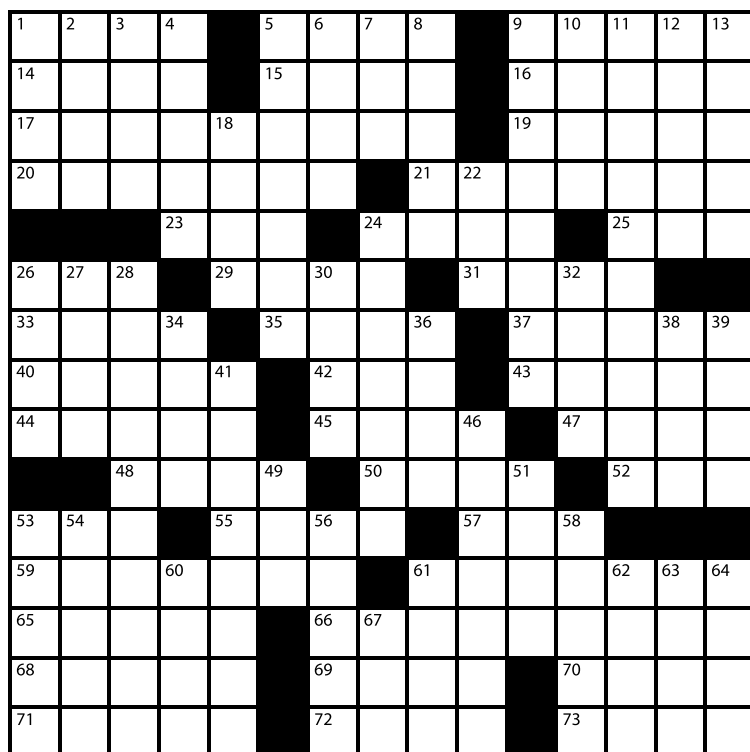
Buried deep in the unit, Michael found a few records by a soul musician named André Anthony Waters. On the cover of his 1988 album, *Heat Up the Night*, he wore a leather jacket with a popped collar as he stared coolly into the camera. Michael searched his name on his phone but didn’t turn up much, not even a Wikipedia page.

“You can see his hopes and dreams in this locker,” he said. “It looks like he never really made the big time, though it’s clear his music was everything to him. I doubt I’ll make much off this unit, but this was a good life story.”

He started heaving the boxes into the hall. “But you can’t get too attached,” he said. “It’s still got to sell.”

This article originally appeared in The New York Times. Used with permission.

Crossword No. 838: Small-Screen Scene Setters by Matt Gaffney



ACROSS

- 1 Song played at dusk
5 Unwavering look
9 Flyer with a bow and arrow
14 Prefix with "distant"
15 Beasts of burden
16 Lena who played Glinda in *The Wiz*
17 CBS has announced that its fall lineup will include this new legal drama set in Silicon Valley
19 Overact, in a way
20 Doesn't waste time
21 Time in the airport lounge, maybe
23 Night before
24 Gushing review
25 Rage
26 He may throw a batter out
29 ___ palm (ornamental plant)
31 Take out ___ (support your local paper)
33 Time to call out the National Guard
35 *Friends* friend
37 Opposite of "viejo"
40 Bitter-tasting
42 Bird known for sitting upright
43 One of the Isley Brothers
44 "I'll take care of that for you"
45 Amazing achievement
47 Open ___ of worms (invite trouble)
48 Get some air, in a way
50 France's culinary capital
52 "Strange Magic" band
53 Today rival, briefly

- 55 Father of Steph Curry
57 Propel, as a boat
59 Out of control, as a train
61 Shape with eight angles
65 "What happened next was..."
66 This ABC drama (2012-18) starred Hayden Panettiere trying to make it in the music industry
68 Top-quality
69 River with Blue and White sections
70 Brewski
71 Amass, and then some
72 Arrow-shooting deity
73 Thomas Hardy title character

DOWN

- 1 Laptop fixer
2 Blue hue
3 Brand-new beagles, say
4 *Nueve menos dos*
5 Approached
6 Imaginary line of a sort
7 At peace with oneself, loosely
8 Holmes played by Millie Bobby Brown
9 This TV Western was named for its main character, who shared his name with a state capital
10 Man, in Milan
11 This five-season NBC drama is named for the New England city to which a Beverly Hills plastic surgeon returns
12 Latin for "between"
13 John of farm equipment fame

- 18 Guns, as a motor
22 DuVernay with 2 million Insta followers
24 This WB/UPN series features extraterrestrials posing as high school students in the Southwest city it's named for
26 ___ Mountains (they divide Europe and Asia)
27 Cats chase them
28 This comedy hit's name adds two letters to the name of its city, implying that it's a world of its own
30 Silly mistake
32 Celebrity's glow
34 Use a stopwatch for
36 Do very well, in stand-up comedian lingo
38 Container for tablets
39 Prefix meaning "wine"
41 This widely praised Western ran from 2004-06 and chronicled the settling of the Dakotas
46 Flashlights, to Brits
49 Princess's problem
51 Kid's consequence, maybe
53 ___ paper (crossword-writer's need, pre-PCs)
54 H.H. whose pen name was Saki
56 Thigpen or Cheney
58 Belt's place
60 Relaxing video genre
61 1952 Olympics locale
62 Elmer's stuff
63 Car until '04
64 Suffix like -hood
67 Play on the radio

The Week Contest

This week's question: Ohio police entered the home of a 91-year-old woman who'd failed to answer multiple check-in calls, only to find her engrossed in a video game and trying to beat her previous high score. If this nonagenarian were to write a book about the joy of late-in-life gaming, what should it be titled?

Last week's contest: A Burmese python can devour a whole antelope and then go on an 18-month fast thanks to a special molecule in its blood, a new study has found. If researchers were to create a snake-derived drug that gives humans the same feast-and-fast ability, what name should they give the medicine?

THE WINNER: BoaZempic
Daniel Burstein, Jacksonville, Fla.

SECOND PLACE: SSSatiated
Yvon Jensen, Georgetown, Texas

THIRD PLACE: Wegulpy
Nathan Gonik, Southfield, Mich.

For runners-up and complete contest rules, please go to theweek.com/contest.

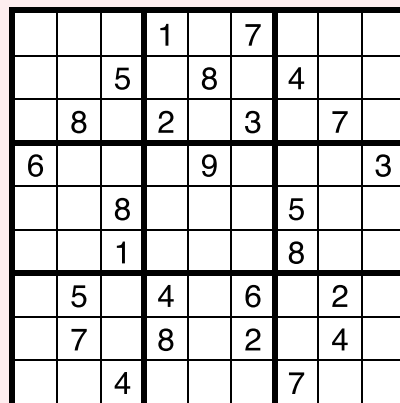
How to enter: Submissions should be emailed to contest@theweek.com. Please include your name, address, and daytime telephone number for verification; this week, type "Senior gaming" in the subject line. Entries are due by noon, Eastern Time, Tuesday, April 28. Winners will appear on the Puzzle Page next issue and at theweek.com/contest on Friday, May 1. In the case of identical or similar entries, the first one received gets credit.
◀ **The winner gets a one-year subscription to *The Week*.**



Sudoku

Fill in all the boxes so that each row, column, and outlined square includes all the numbers from 1 through 9.

Difficulty: medium

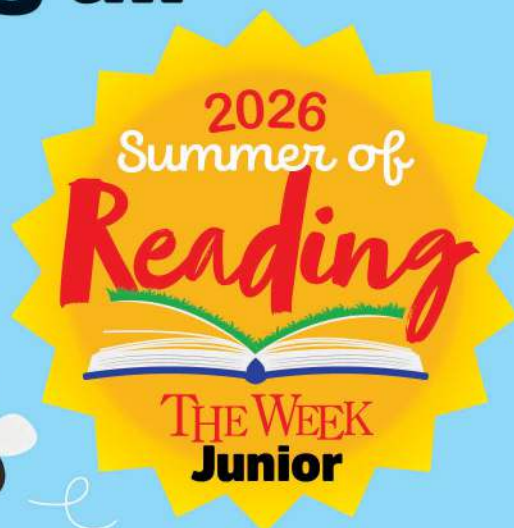


Find the solutions to all *The Week*'s puzzles online at theweek.com/solutions

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