

TALKING POINTS

SEEKING REVENGE AT THE FBI?

p.17

Kash Patel



MAIN STORIES

Tragedy over D.C.

p.5



OBITUARIES

The wild life of a '60s icon

p.35

Marianne Faithfull



THE WEEK

THE BEST OF THE U.S. AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

Musk's rampage

How the world's richest man is dismantling the federal government

Page 4



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Contents



A memorial for victims of the plane and helicopter crash outside Washington, D.C. (p.5)

THE WEEK

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NEWS

- 4 Main Stories**
- 6 Controversy of the Week**
- 7 U.S. at a Glance**
- 8 World at a Glance**
- 10 People**
- 11 Briefing**
- 12 Best U.S. Columns**
- 14 Best International Columns**
- 15 Best European Columns**
- 16 Talking Points**
- 18 Cartoons**
- 20 Technology**
- 21 Health & Science**

ARTS

- 22 Books**
- 23 Author of the Week**
- 24 Music & Film**
- 25 Film**
- 26 Television**

LEISURE

- 27 Food & Drink**
- 28 Travel**
- 30 Properties**

BUSINESS

- 32 News at a Glance**
- 33 Making Money**
- 34 Best Columns**

OTHER

- 35 Obituaries**
- 36 The Last Word**
- 38 Puzzle Page**



Kieran Culkin (p.10)

Editor's letter

“Do not obey in advance.” In his classic book *On Tyranny*, that is historian Timothy Snyder’s first rule for resisting a slide from democracy into authoritarian rule. Most of the power that autocrats accumulate, he warns, “is freely given” out of fear and resignation. We are now seeing that phenomenon come to life as Donald Trump and Elon Musk attempt to seek total, unfettered, and blatantly unconstitutional control of the federal government. “Real power,” Trump once said, “is fear.” His second coup attempt has deeply frightened much of Washington, the nation, and our allies. Even as their constitutional authority is stolen, congressional Republicans have turned into a herd of cowed lickspittles. Owners of major media organizations such as ABC, CBS, and Facebook are settling nuisance “bias” lawsuits by making multimillion-dollar blackmail payments to Trump, hoping these tributes will persuade him to leave their businesses intact. Facebook and X are actively collaborating with Trump’s agenda.

But Trump is far weaker than he seems. He won the popular vote by 1.5 percent; his approval rating even before this week’s surreal cascade of chaos was just 47 percent—a record low for a modern president in the honeymoon period. Barack Obama was at 68 percent at this stage, and George W. Bush and Joe Biden were at 57 percent. Republican control of the House is razor-thin, making significant legislation unlikely. And so Trump seeks to rule by personal edict, in a blizzard of executive orders, and by empowering tech terrorist Musk to launch a blitzkrieg on the federal government. “Trump is acting like a king,” Ezra Klein observed in *The New York Times*, “because he is too weak to govern like a president.” Trump seeks to overwhelm and terrorize, so that people give up—that is, obey in advance. If they do, his autocratic pretensions become reality. But if enough Americans stand up for the Constitution and the rule of law, Trump will again prove he’s manifestly unfit for the presidency, as he did in 2020, and his power will wane. Let’s hope most of the damage can be undone.

William Falk
Editor-at-large

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Musk launches offensive on government agencies

What happened

Elon Musk seized control of crucial federal agencies and functions with startling speed this week, commandeering the Treasury Department's payment system, dismantling the world's largest humanitarian aid agency, and sidelining officials who attempted to stand in his way. Democrats, watchdog groups, and civil service unions were stunned at the unprecedented power flex by the unelected billionaire and his team—an initiative called the Department of Government Efficiency—which challenged Congress' authority and potentially violated numerous laws. “Elon Musk is seizing the power that belongs to the American people,” said Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.). Almost the entire 10,000-person workforce of USAID, which delivered \$1.9 billion in food aid in 2023, was put on leave after DOGE shuttered the agency’s headquarters and seized its computer system. Musk called the agency “a viper’s nest of radical-left Marxists” and said it needed “to die.” President Trump said Musk, whom he tasked with downsizing government, was “doing a great job.”

At Treasury, Musk’s team gained access to payment systems that disburse trillions of dollars, including Medicare and Social Security benefits, payments to government contractors, and federal salaries. A top-ranked agency veteran was put on leave when he attempted to block them from the system, which holds sensitive data on millions of taxpayers. It’s “a data breach of exponential proportions,” said Mary Ellen Callahan, former chief privacy officer at Homeland Security. DOGE engineers—at least one of whom is as young as 19—have commandeered computer systems at the General Services Administration and Office of Personnel Management, and entered the offices of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the Veterans Administration, the Department of Commerce, and the Department of Education.

Congressional Democrats, who were denied access to both Treasury and USAID headquarters, assailed the Tesla and SpaceX CEO’s maneuvers as illegal and unconstitutional. “Before our very eyes, an unelected shadow government is conducting a hostile takeover of the federal government,” said Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer. But Republican lawmakers either expressed support or downplayed Musk’s actions. House Speaker Mike Johnson said Musk was performing a “very important service for the people” and should “continue digging.” Musk vowed he would. “We’re never going to get another chance like this,” he said. “It’s now or never.”

What the columnists said

“Musk is waging a largely unchecked war against the federal bureaucracy,” said Jonathan Swan in *The New York Times*. Even some Trump administration officials who support his aims express “a sense of helplessness about how to handle Musk’s level of unaccountability.” Some have hoped that Congress will assert itself and rein in the world’s richest man, who is serving as a special government employee, a status typically given to part-time, outside advisers. But the GOP response so far has



‘It’s now or never.’

been a collective “shrug,” said Kate Riga in *Talking Points Memo*. Even as Sen. Thom Tillis (R-N.C.) acknowledged Musk’s actions run “afoul of the Constitution,” he waved off concern. “Nobody should bellyache about that,” he said.

Many of the DOGE team’s actions “appear to violate federal law,” said Jeff Stein in *The Washington Post*. The group has no legal authority to wipe out a federal agency or to withhold congressionally approved funding. Its staffers have bombarded the federal workforce with offers to pay their salaries through September if they quit now—an offer it doesn’t have the legal authority to honor. And DOGE agents have trampled on security protocols by using private email addresses and hard drives, and by refusing to identify themselves. All these things are “so wildly illegal,” said Georgetown administrative law professor David A. Super, “that I think they’re assuming the system can’t react to all this illegality at once.”

Leading Musk’s strike force is “a coterie of engineers barely out of college,” said Vittoria Elliott in *Wired*. We’ve identified six men ages 19 to 24 “playing critical roles.” None has government experience, and at least one seems to be a volunteer. Contrary to the administration’s claim that DOGE has “read only” access to Treasury’s payment system, a 25-year-old engineer, Marko Elez, has direct access to systems “responsible for nearly all” government payments, said multiple sources. With the ability to write code on these systems, Elez “could do anything,” said one source.

Crippling USAID is a blunder that will have “catastrophic” consequences, said Michael A. Cohen in *MSNBC.com*. Musk’s decapitation of the 64-year-old agency has shuttered anti-malarial programs in Uganda, anti-starvation efforts in Sudan, and an AIDS relief project that has saved tens of millions of lives. For less than 1 percent of federal spending, such efforts boost our security by building goodwill and reducing global instability. “America First cannot morph into America Only,” said Luke Moon in *National Review*. The vacuum we leave behind will be eagerly filled by our enemies, China in particular.

What next?

Musk is now targeting the agency that manages thousands of federal worksites across the U.S., said Meg Kinnard and Joshua Goodman in the *Associated Press*. Regional managers for the General Services Administration last week received an order from GSA headquarters—where a Musk associate “has been embedded”—to begin terminating leases on “all of the roughly 7,500 federal offices nationwide.” That order seems to contradict Trump’s return-to-office mandate, but suggests the administration thinks there will soon be far fewer federal employees. Musk’s blitz has “set off a legal counteroffensive,” said Matthias Schwartz and Charlie Savage in *The New York Times*. FBI agents, labor unions, and other groups have filed a “raft of lawsuits” challenging his efforts to purge agencies and push workers from their jobs. “Together, they amount to the opening shots in an emerging battle over the constitutional order, checks and balances, and the Founders’ vision of the separation of powers.”

There’s only one word for all this: “a coup,” said Timothy Snyder in his *Substack* newsletter. If armed thugs stormed into these agencies, it’d set off a panic. But today’s reality is that “power is more digital than physical.” We have unelected actors illegally seizing power. If Musk decided to stop Treasury payments approved by Congress, it “would make democracy meaningless.” America needs to “snap out of it,” said David Rothkopf in *The Daily Beast*. “All of the warning lights are flashing.” Nobody should underestimate the gravity of Musk’s “lawlessness” or the damage being inflicted on our republic. If Musk isn’t stopped, the current “chaos, destruction, and lunacy” will be merely a warmup for “the worst form of malevolent dictatorship.” That’s not hysteria. America is in “a place we’ve never been,” and “something precious and fragile is at dire risk of being lost.”

...and How They Were Covered

Investigators search for cause of D.C. air disaster

What happened

Recovery workers this week retrieved the last of 67 bodies from the frigid Potomac River as investigators searched for the cause of America's deadliest plane crash in decades—an accident President Trump blamed on federal diversity programs. American Airlines Flight 5342 with 60 passengers and four crew was preparing to land at Washington, D.C.'s Reagan National Airport last week when it collided mid-air with a military helicopter carrying three soldiers; there were no survivors. The Black Hawk helicopter was on a routine recertification flight for experienced pilot Capt. Rebecca Lobach, 28, who was likely at the helm. It was flying 100 feet above its maximum allowed altitude over the river when it hit the plane, which had just been ordered to switch runways. Many victims were returning from the U.S. Figure Skating Championships in Wichita, including two Russian Olympic champions who were coaches and 11 elite skaters under 17. "She lit up the house," said Andy Beyer, the grieving father of 12-year-old Brielle.

Less than a day after the crash, Trump said the cause was diversity, equity, and inclusion programs initiated by Presidents Biden and Obama that made aviation safety standards "lower than ever before." He said the Federal Aviation Administration had been told to hire people with disabilities, which he claimed included "severe intellectual disability, psychiatric disability, and dwarfism." The disability policy, officials later said, in fact dated from Trump's first term. Former Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, whom Trump accused of having "a good line of bullshit," called Trump's remarks "despicable," adding that the Biden administration had "had zero commercial airline crash fatalities, out of millions of flights on our watch."

What the editorials said

Presidents are supposed to console at such times, said the New York *Daily News*. Instead, Trump chose to rail against diversity, his "all-encompassing bogeyman." Asked how he could be so sure that DEI was to blame when the facts were not yet in, Trump said, "Because I have common sense." Such a callous and unsubstantiated claim is "nonsense, and destructive nonsense at that."

It wasn't all bad

The frozen pond across from David Fisher's Indiana house had started melting in December when Fisher's son ran in to tell him that a teen boy and his dog had fallen through the ice. Fisher, a jump-rope expert who once performed for President Bill Clinton, grabbed his pair of 16-foot-long ropes. As the dog escaped on its own, Fisher slowly crept across the cracking ice, and once within distance tossed the boy one end of the rope, pulling him to safety. Fisher called it his "greatest achievement with a jump rope."



Clearing the plane wreckage from the Potomac

"It's hard to wrap our minds around" the grief and devastation of the families, said *The Dallas Morning News*. The young people on the plane had been "gliding closer to their Olympic dreams," and many of them were accompanied by their mothers. While U.S. commercial air travel has seen hundreds of near collisions, it's had no fatalities since 2009. This tragedy is "a terrible reminder that we have let our guard down."

What the columnists said

A full crash investigation is "a neurotically thorough process," said Matthew L. Wald in *The New Yorker*, and the

National Transportation Safety Board won't complete its report for weeks. But it's already "easy to see some of the lines of inquiry." Why was the control tower understaffed that night, with nobody dedicated to helicopter traffic? After the chopper crew "acknowledged seeing the other aircraft" and said it would maintain distance, why didn't it? Some contributing factors are obvious: The plane's anti-collision system couldn't operate at such a low altitude, and both craft were maneuvering in tight airspace because part of the sky over D.C. is closed to aircraft for security purposes

That's why an accident at Reagan was bound to happen, said Nicole Gelinas in *The New York Post*. "Operating at nearly twice its built capacity," the airport has the nation's most crowded airspace, with 890 commercial flights a day and dozens of helicopter flights. Transport officials have warned of the dangers for years. But "Washington elites" insist on flying into Reagan, rather than the other regional airport, Dulles, because it's much closer to Capitol Hill. Just last year, the FAA added 10 flights—including the fateful Wichita route.

One thing's sure: "There's no evidence" that diversity hiring at the FAA played any role in the crash, said Jonathan Chait in *The Atlantic*. Trump may be vowing a "return to merit" with his DEI rollback, but his purge of career civil servants in favor of those who pass a MAGA loyalty test is "all but guaranteed to make the problem worse." Those underqualified lackeys, remember, will be the ones tasked with "directing air traffic, testing food for safety, preventing terrorism." Do you feel safer yet?

Josiah Jackson stopped to play a piano in the terminal during a layover at Chicago's O'Hare airport in 2022. But he quickly realized the Kimball baby grand piano, next to a bar, was out of tune and gummed up from dried drinks. "It was absolutely the worst piano I have ever played," said Jackson, who had been playing piano since he was 4 and had just started a piano-tuning business. Planning a trip to Guatemala late last year, Jackson, 21, realized he could fix the instrument during an eight-hour layover at O'Hare. He spent seven hours cleaning every hammer and key, finishing with just 45 minutes left to catch his flight, and left a sign above the piano: "No drinks near piano, please!"



Jackson at work in O'Hare

When Todd Morris drove by a burning house in Jackson Township, Ohio, its second floor was already engulfed in flames. As a school-bus driver for the district, Morris knew the family that lived there had four children. He kicked in the door to search the house; fortunately Matt and Jordan Fisher were at work and, since school was off, the kids were at their grandparents'. But inside Morris found the family's two dogs and brought them to safety. Matt grew emotional when he found out about Morris' rescue. "I gave him a big hug," he said. "Our dogs mean everything to us."

Controversy of the Week

Tariffs: Does Trump know what he's doing?

And so ends, for now, “the dumbest trade war in history,” said *The Wall Street Journal* in an editorial. Just 48 hours after announcing a plan to slap 25 percent tariffs on imports from Mexico and Canada, “those notorious American adversaries,” President Trump this week declared the levies had been paused for 30 days. Why the change of heart? A cynic might point to the panicked sell-off of U.S. stocks in the hours before the tariffs were due to take effect. But Trump “claimed victory, as he always does,” and insisted his threats had persuaded Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum to deploy 10,000 troops to the U.S. border to combat drug trafficking, and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to appoint a “fentanyl czar” and strengthen border security. This was not a win for “the art of the deal,” said Fred Kaplan in *Slate*. The flow of fentanyl from Canada is minuscule—a mere 2 pounds of the drug was seized at the border in 2023—and the country’s \$1 billion border plan was first announced in December. Mexico, meanwhile, periodically agrees to send troops to the border, 10,000 of them as recently as 2021. Yes, Trump’s new 10 percent tariff on Chinese imports appears to be holding (see Business Columns, p.34). But his caving on the Mexico-Canada tariffs has left Trump and America “looking weaker.”

When you understand that different tariffs have different purposes, Trump’s behavior “is not nearly as strange as it seems,” said Oren Cass in his *Substack* newsletter. The new 10 percent levy on China is a conventional “decoupling tariff,” part of a long-term effort to boost American manufacturing. The threatened tariffs against Canada and Mexico, by contrast, are “negotiating tariffs.” These can be very effective at extracting quick policy concessions at no economic cost—as we saw last week when the threat of a 25 percent



Threatening allies for show

tariff persuaded Colombia to accept military flights carrying deported migrants. But they also serve Trump’s larger goal: putting our allies on notice that America is no longer the world’s “benevolent hegemon,” but “a country that’s pursuing its own interests first.”

How are economic threats against Canada and Mexico—our largest and second-largest trading partners, respectively—in America’s interest? asked William McGurn in *The Wall Street Journal*. The idea of bullying friendly nations may make emotional sense to the MAGA

crowd, filled with “grievances, real and imagined” against our traditional allies. But tariffs are not paid by the target countries and are instead passed along to U.S. consumers and businesses. From a president who campaigned on a promise to bring down prices, Trump’s obsession with tariffs is hard to fathom. Nor will alienating our allies restore American greatness, said David Frum in *The Atlantic*. To hold off China and remain the world’s dominant power, we will need “more and better friends than ever before.”

The only hope, said Jonathan V. Last in *The Bulwark*, is that our allies are starting to see through “Trump’s nonsense.” As long as “they help Trump save face and claim victory,” as Mexico and Canada did, it’s now apparent that his threats, more often than not, will not be implemented. And American voters seem happy with these phony show-downs. “It makes a certain kind of sense.” Addressing real problems—whether drug trafficking or unfair trade practices—is a complicated process that requires compromise from multiple stakeholders. But when the problems are “imaginary,” the president can just click his fingers and fix them. “Like magic. Which seems to be precisely what Americans want right now.”

Only in America

■ Oklahoma lawmakers are again considering proposals to soften the state’s penalty for cockfighting. Since a 2002 ballot initiative made the blood sport a felony, there have been periodic efforts to decriminalize it, with defenders insisting cockfighting is part of Oklahoma’s rural heritage. Taking a fresh approach, a new bill from GOP state Rep. Justin Humphrey would lower the penalty to a misdemeanor, and allow “cockfighting between a live fowl and a robot.”

■ A New York judge has resigned after claiming that all defendants are guilty in a bid to get out of serving on a jury. After reporting for jury duty, Petersburgh Town Justice Richard T. Snyder said he couldn’t be impartial because he knows that “everybody” who appears in his court is guilty or else “they would not be in front of me.” Snyder was excused from jury duty but was placed under investigation by the state Commission on Judicial Conduct for his comments.

Good week for:

Second acts, after former President Joe Biden, 82, signed with Creative Artists Agency—the top Hollywood talent-management firm, which counts Brad Pitt among its clients—to represent him in future endeavors. “We are profoundly honored,” said CAA co-chair Richard Lovett.

Mother issues, after Polish billionaire Roman Karkosik unveiled plans to build a towering statue of the Virgin Mary in his hometown of Kikola. At 131 feet tall, the statue will dwarf the 98-foot statue of Mary’s son, Christ the Redeemer, that looms above Rio de Janeiro.

Nicotine fiends, who may soon have representation at the highest levels of government. Sharp-eyed C-SPAN viewers noticed Robert F. Kennedy Jr., President Trump’s nominee for Health and Human Services secretary, discreetly slip what appeared to be a Zyn nicotine pouch into his mouth during his Senate confirmation hearing.

Bad week for:

Trade policy, after the Dallas Mavericks stunned the basketball world by trading superstar Luka Doncic, 25, to the Los Angeles Lakers for Anthony Davis, the injury-prone 31-year-old forward. Doncic says the mystifying trade came as a “big shock” to him personally, but that he’s excited to play in L.A. “The fans are amazing, and I got the ocean here.”

Free-speech absolutists, after a British woman was fined and sentenced to a year of “rehabilitation sessions” for harassing her boyfriend’s former partner with unsolicited videos of herself breaking wind. According to prosecutors, Rhiannon Evans, 25, filmed the video messages “by placing the camera on her bottom and passing the gas.”

Generosity, after Japanese police arrested a 71-year-old man who burgled 63 homes to fund his love of treating strangers to free meals in expensive sushi joints. “I wanted to look cool,” said Kazunori Inagaki.

In other news

Appeals court rules against ban on handgun sales to teenagers

A conservative appeals court ruled last week that 18- to 20-year-olds have the right to buy handguns, striking down a federal ban in place since 1968. The three-judge panel on the 5th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals in New Orleans said the ban violates the Second Amendment, because the Constitution “includes 18- to 20-year-old individuals among ‘the people’ whose right to keep and bear arms is protected.” It cited a 1792 law that required able-bodied white men ages 18 to 45 to join state militias. A 2022 Supreme Court decision stated that gun regulations can’t be justified by their potential to prevent shootings alone—only by whether they’re consistent with historical regulations. The 5th Circuit did not bar the enforcement of the 1968 ban, but rather sent the case with instructions to a lower court. The decision makes it more likely the Supreme Court will eventually weigh in on age limits for handgun sales.

The U.S. at a Glance

Lake Kaweah, Calif.

Water wars: The Trump administration opened two dams in California's Central Valley last week—the latest move in the president's battle with state Democrats over water policies in the wake of last month's historic Los Angeles wildfires.



Terminus Dam

Kaweah and Schafer Dam at Lake Success, unleashing about 2.2 billion gallons of water from the reservoirs and catching local water managers by surprise. None of the water was expected to reach Southern California, which is separated from the Central Valley by mountain ranges, but President Trump insisted that opening the dams earlier could have prevented the fires. "I only wish they listened to me six years ago—There would have been no fire!" he wrote on social media. Yet experts argued the water will be wasted, since it won't reach L.A. and farmers have little use for it until spring and summer.



West Baton Rouge Parish, La.

Abortion pill charges: A West Baton Rouge grand jury last week indicted a New York doctor who prescribed abortion pills to a Louisiana woman, marking the first instance of an abortion provider facing criminal charges for sending pills to a state that bans abortion. Margaret Carpenter prescribed pills to the woman via telemedicine, and New York has a shield law prohibiting state authorities from cooperating with legal action by other states against abortion providers. Seven other states have similar laws, and providers mail over 10,000 abortion pills every month to states that ban or restrict abortion. New York's Democratic governor, Kathy Hochul, pledged not to extradite Carpenter, saying that other states "want to target, harass, and intimidate" doctors. With the possibility of similar complaints looming, Hochul also signed legislation this week allowing doctors to request that their practices' names, rather than their own names, be printed on abortion-pill labels.

Ryan Watson/U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Getty, Facebook, Getty

Philadelphia

Medevac crash: Seven people died last week when a medical transportation plane crashed in a densely populated area of Philadelphia. A Learjet 55 air ambulance carrying six people hit the ground within one minute of leaving Northeast Philadelphia Airport, exploding into flames in the Castor Gardens neighborhood. Eleven-year-old Valentina Guzmán Murillo had just completed treatment at Shriners Children's Hospital and was being flown back home to Mexico with her mother. Four others were on the plane, and a seventh person was killed on the ground. Twenty-four people were injured, including a 10-year-old boy who was struck in the head by a piece of metal as he shielded his sister from debris. "A really loud boom, and we saw a fireball that covered the whole entire sky," said Andre Howard Jr., the boy's father. The crash destroyed four homes and set an apartment building on fire. Federal investigators are still seeking the cause of the crash.



Washington, D.C.

FBI purge: The Trump administration this week fired FBI staff and demanded personal information from thousands of bureau employees, in an unprecedented assault on the independence of the agency. After firing eight senior FBI officials, the Justice Department, in a memo titled "Terminations," demanded the bureau provide identifying details of as many as 5,000 staffers who worked on Jan. 6 cases. Two lawsuits from FBI agents seek to block the DOJ from collecting the lists of staffers and from releasing them publicly. In a heated meeting, FBI Acting Director Brian Driscoll refused a DOJ order to assist in the firings. The FBI's traditionally independent New York office has also pushed back fiercely, with N.Y. FBI head James Dennehy urging staff to "dig in" for "a battle of our own, as good people are being walked out of the FBI and others are being targeted."

New Jersey

Sentenced: Former Sen. Robert Menendez (D-N.J.) was sentenced in federal court last week to 11 years in prison for using his position to enrich himself—one of the longest sentences ever given to an elected official. Once one of Washington's most powerful Democrats, Menendez resigned last year after a jury found him guilty of charges including acting as an agent for Egypt, extortion, bribery, obstruction of justice, and conspiracy. In return for working to secure Egypt increased U.S. military aid, sharing sensitive information about U.S. Embassy workers in Cairo, and trying to block criminal prosecutions in New Jersey on behalf of his allies, Menendez received gifts including gold bars, cash, and a Mercedes-Benz convertible. "Working for the public good became working for your good," said Judge Sidney H. Stein. Menendez, 71, called himself a "chastened man" and asked for mercy but later called the case "a political witch hunt." He plans to appeal the conviction.



Menendez

Washington, D.C.

Cabinet picks: Pam Bondi, the onetime Florida attorney general, was sworn in this week as U.S. attorney general, while two of President Donald Trump's most controversial Cabinet nominees, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. for health secretary and Tulsi Gabbard for director of national intelligence, appeared headed toward confirmation. Bondi passed the Senate with one Democratic vote, Sen. John Fetterman of Pennsylvania. With the help of lobbying from Vice President JD Vance, Gabbard and Kennedy overcame doubt from Republicans like Louisiana Sen. Bill Cassidy, a doctor who had reservations about Kennedy's vaccine skepticism, and Sen. Todd Young, who expressed worries about Gabbard's support for NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden. Bondi received pledges from Kennedy that he wouldn't change vaccine recommendations or take down government web pages that debunk the link between vaccines and autism. After being sworn in, Bondi ordered the Justice Department to withhold funding from cities that do not cooperate with federal deportation efforts.



Bondi

**Brussels**

Former separatist in charge: Right-wing Flemish nationalist Bart De Wever was sworn in as Belgium's prime minister this week after nearly eight months of talks to form a coalition government, marking the first time a former separatist has led the country. Belgium is made up of the Dutch-speaking Flanders, the French-speaking Wallonia, and multilingual Brussels, and De Wever was once a proponent of Flemish independence, though he has since softened his stance. While his N-VA party is very right-wing, it is not as extremist as the ultranationalist Vlaams Belang party, which still seeks to break up Belgium. After swearing allegiance to the monarchy he once disdained, De Wever took office promising "the strictest migration policy ever."

Guantánamo Bay, Cuba

Preparing for migrants: The Pentagon this week sent 300 troops to the U.S. Navy base at Guantánamo Bay to start building a tent camp for up to 30,000 deportees to be detained under President Trump's crackdown on illegal immigration. As a first step, some 50 Army green tents were erected within a chain-link enclosure. Because the base has no supply lines to Cuba, all food and supplies for the migrants and staff will have to be brought from the U.S., and water desalination will need to be drastically scaled up. The detention camp has sheltered migrants in the past, housing a peak of some 25,000 people, mostly Cubans and Haitians, in 1995. After 9/11, the camp was repurposed to house hundreds of terrorism suspects, and still hosts 15 of those detainees.

*A tent city rises.**Bukele, Rubio***San Salvador**

Prison for hire: El Salvador President Nayib Bukele offered this week to take in any convicted criminals deported by the United States—including undocumented migrants and U.S. citizens—and house them in his country's notorious jails. "We have offered the United States of America the opportunity to outsource part of its prison system," Bukele wrote on X. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who visited El Salvador this week as part of a Latin American tour, said there was no immediate plan to deport U.S. citizens and conceded such an order would face legal challenges, but said the Trump administration was "incredibly grateful" for the offer. Bukele has driven down gang violence in his nation since 2022 by jailing tens of thousands of suspects with little due process. Most are warehoused in a brutal mega-prison, crammed dozens to a cell and denied outdoor access.

Panama City

Canal threats: In Panama this week, Secretary of State Marco Rubio demanded the country immediately reduce China's "influence and control" over the Panama Canal. President Trump has falsely claimed that Chinese soldiers operate the U.S.-built canal, and has said turning it over to Panama 25 years ago was a "very big mistake," threatening "something very powerful" if Panama doesn't cede control. Panamanian President José Raúl Mulino downplayed the dispute, saying he didn't think the U.S. was threatening military force, and insisting, "The canal belongs to Panama." But Mulino did offer a concession, announcing that his government would not renew a "Belt and Road" development deal that one of his predecessors had signed with China. Protesters reacted to Rubio's visit by burning American flags in the street.

Orebro, Sweden

Deadly school shooting: A gunman opened fire at an adult-education center in central Sweden this week, killing 10 people and then himself in the worst mass shooting in Swedish history. One student at Risbergska School, who gave his name as Ali, 19, told *Dagens Nyheter* that he and other students in his math class used benches and chairs to block the doors and hung jackets over the windows as the killer stalked the halls. "There was fear the whole time," he said. Swedish media identified the shooter as Rickard Andersson, 35, an unemployed loner with "extreme social phobia." Once relatively placid, Sweden has seen an increase in violent crime in the last decade and now has one of the highest rates of gun violence in the European Union.

**Caracas**

Uneven trade: President Nicolás Maduro agreed last week to take back Venezuelans who had sought asylum in the United States, clearing the way for the Trump administration to return hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers to the repressive socialist country. Under the deal, negotiated by Trump envoy Richard Grenell, Venezuela also released six Americans held in Venezuelan prisons. President Trump has terminated Temporary Protected Status for Venezuelans, which had allowed them to stay in the U.S. About 300,000 will lose TPS in April; another 250,000 in September. The U.S. had originally given Venezuelans TPS because it considered Maduro's regime illegitimate and repressive; many returnees will be jailed immediately upon their return. "Betrayed. We feel betrayed," said Venezuelan-American activist Adelys Ferro, whose community voted mostly for Trump. "More than betrayed. Beyond betrayed."

The World at a Glance

Moscow

Deadly bombing: Pro-Russia paramilitary leader Armen Sarkisyan was killed this week in a bomb attack at his gated Moscow apartment complex. A Ukrainian-born ethnic Armenian, he had been wanted in Ukraine since 2014 for fomenting violence against pro-EU protesters, and he later founded the Arbat battalion to fight for Russia in eastern Ukraine. His killing was the latest in a series of high-profile assassinations in Russia attributed to Ukrainian operatives. In December, Kyiv claimed responsibility for the killing of Igor Kirillov, a Russian general it accused of using chemical weapons in Ukraine, with a bomb planted on a scooter that exploded as he left a Moscow apartment. “Ukraine’s terrorist attacks are getting closer to the Russian elite,” said Sergei Markov, a pro-Kremlin political analyst. “This attack is a message from [Ukrainian President Volodymyr] Zelensky to the entire Russian elite: You will not hide from me anywhere.”



USAID work in South Sudan

Nairobi

Aid programs shut down: U.S.-funded aid programs—from medical clinics to soup kitchens—halted operations around the world this week after the Trump administration put the entire U.S. Agency for International Development on leave. Thousands of local employees were laid off, from Kenya to South Sudan to Afghanistan, and workers said that even if funding eventually resumes, the projects that deliver food, prevent malaria, and counter drug trafficking will have already collapsed. Engineer Evan Thomas, who works on a USAID-funded project installing pumps to bring clean water to over 1 million Kenyans, told CNN.com the loss of such programs could fuel global unrest. “When people don’t have water, when their livestock die, they become very stressed—and there are militias that are willing to take advantage of that stress and recruit for their own aims,” he said. “Undermining the access of people around the world to food and water and medicine is not going to make America more secure.”

Planet Labs, Getty (3)

Beijing

Prepping for war: China is building a staggeringly huge military complex just outside Beijing that U.S. intelligence officials believe is intended as a wartime command headquarters, the *Financial Times* reported last week. Set on



Satellite images

1,500 acres, the facility will be 10 times bigger than the Pentagon and equipped with a vast, hardened underground command center capable of protecting military leaders during a nuclear war. Former CIA China analyst Dennis Wilder said the project shows that Beijing is building “not only a world-class conventional force but also an advanced nuclear warfighting capability.” A CIA evaluation in 2023 said Chinese leader Xi Jinping had instructed the military to “be ready by 2027” to invade Taiwan.

Damascus

Away from Iran, toward Turkey: Syria’s new interim president, Ahmed al-Sharaa, drew a sharp line against Iran this week, saying Iranian militias that operated in Syria under the Bashar al-Assad regime were a “strategic threat” to the entire region. Al-Sharaa, who



Al-Sharaa, Erdogan

led the rebel coalition that ousted Assad in December, signaled his determination to shift his country away from Tehran by going to Saudi Arabia, a Sunni country that is Shiite Iran’s sworn enemy, on his first foreign trip since taking power. He then visited Turkey this week for talks with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. He thanked Erdogan for supporting Syrian refugees—3 million of whom had fled the Assad regime for Turkey since 2011—and said he sought cooperation, including against Kurdish fighters based in Syria.

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Hands off Gaza: Saudi Arabia and other U.S. allies this week flatly rejected President Trump’s proposal that the U.S. “take over” Gaza and expel many of the 2 million Palestinians living there in order to transform the enclave into “the Riviera of the Middle East.” Saudi Arabia said it would not accept “any infringement on the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people” to their own land and, ultimately, to a Palestinian state, calling that position “non-negotiable.” NATO member Turkey called Trump’s idea “absurd,” while Arab nations and the Palestinian Authority warned in a joint statement that forcing civilians out of Gaza would “threaten the region’s stability, risk expanding the conflict, and undermine prospects for peace.”



Gazans on the waterfront

Trump first floated the idea two weeks ago, saying 15 months of war between Israel and Hamas had turned Gaza into “a demolition site” and that the population should be resettled in Jordan and Egypt. This week, Trump expanded on that plan, saying the U.S. would take ownership of Gaza outright, dispose of debris and unexploded munitions, then redevelop the territory, creating “thousands of jobs” and attracting tourists. The proposal is similar to one Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner made last year when he said Israel should move out the Palestinians and develop “Gaza’s waterfront property.” Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in Washington this week as the first foreign leader to visit the second Trump administration, said Israel’s goal in the war against Hamas had been to ensure that Gaza wouldn’t host terrorists again. But, he said, Trump has now taken that idea “to a much higher level,” adding, “it is worthwhile really pursuing this avenue.”

Lauper's fierce independence

Cyndi Lauper has never been afraid to speak her mind, said Hadley Freeman in *The Sunday Times* (U.K.). At age 9, the singer was thrown out of her Queens elementary school over what she describes as “a political difference” with a teacher. “He told me my mother was going to hell because she was divorced,” recalls Lauper, 71. “I said, ‘My mother’s not going to hell, you don’t even know my mother!’” Next, she was sent to a convent school. “I lasted six months because I asked the nuns if they menstruated.” At 17, Lauper ran away from home to escape her abusive stepfather. She headed to Manhattan to live with her sister, Ellen, who was out as a lesbian. “This was the 1970s and it was a frightening time [to be gay], and Ellen had moved away because she was scared [of the family’s reaction].” Having Ellen as a sister made Lauper aware of the struggle for gay rights, she says, just as seeing her mother’s struggles made her a feminist. “I watched women like my mother be shut down: no education, no chance of anything but to be a dutiful wife and mother, cleaning, cooking, supporting everyone but yourself. My mother had a beautiful singing voice, it made you cry. Ah, woulda coulda shoulda, right?”

A prisoner and a firefighter

Some 900 prisoners were deployed to help fight last month’s devastating wildfires in Los Angeles, said Natalia Mesa in *High Country News*. Eddie Herrera Jr. was once in their shoes. For the last two years of his 18-year prison sentence, Herrera served as an incarcerated municipal firefighter outside Sacramento. “I took medical calls, responded to traffic collisions, residential structure fires, conducted rescues and CPR calls,” says Herrera, 47. Incarcerated firefighters in California are paid a maximum of \$10.24 a day to do dangerous, and sometimes deadly, work. But Herrera says that work utterly changed his life—a transformation that began during his first CPR call in 2019. The patient, a veteran police officer, didn’t make it. “But that experience was very impactful for me. I remember the brothers of the officer coming and shaking my hand and saying thank-you. They didn’t care in that moment that I was incarcerated. I felt a sense of pride. Because, being incarcerated, it’s this sense of feeling like you’re nothing.” But when he was in uniform, “I didn’t feel any of that. I felt like I was human again.” Today, Herrera is a professional firefighter. “Now I work alongside inmate firefighters in fire camps. They work so hard. Maybe it’s because they have much more to prove, much more to demonstrate.”

In the news

■ *Emilia Pérez* star **Karla Sofia Gascón** vowed this week to stay in the Oscars race for best actress, despite facing a firestorm of criticism over a string of bigoted social media posts. In the recently resurfaced posts from 2020 and 2021, Gascón—the first transgender performer to be nominated for an Academy Award—called George Floyd a “drug addict and a hustler”; described Islam as a “hotbed of infection for humanity”; said Hitler “simply had his opinion about the Jews”; and likened the “ugly, ugly” 2021 Academy Awards to “an Afro-Korean festival.” In a tearful CNN interview, Gascón, 52, offered her “sincere apologies” to anyone offended by the posts, but

insisted her comments had been misinterpreted and that she was being “crucified and stoned without a trial.”

■ **Kanye West’s** wife, **Bianca Censori**, caused a shock at the Grammys this week by posing on the red carpet in a transparent mesh outfit that left nothing to the imagination.

Standing before the paparazzi alongside her husband, Censori, 30, took off her fur coat to reveal the completely sheer mini dress. The couple then walked off the carpet, got in a car, and left the Grammys, despite West being nominated for best rap song. A lipreading expert later decoded the words West muttered to Censori on the red carpet. “Make a scene,” West said, appearing to demand she remove her coat. A friend of Censori told the *Daily Mail* that West has isolated his wife from loved ones and is trying to

**Growing up Culkin**

Kieran Culkin had a childhood of extremes, said Charlotte Edwards in *The Guardian*. At home in New York City, he had to share a bedroom with his six siblings, including his older brother, *Home Alone* star Macaulay. But the Culkin kids—all of whom were pushed into acting by their father, Broadway actor Kit Culkin—would then go to work on Hollywood movies and take helicopter rides to Michael Jackson’s Neverland ranch. Kit, whom Macaulay has described as a drunk and a bully, walked out on the family when Kieran was 12. His mother, Patricia Brentrup, was left to raise the children alone “on coupons,” says Kieran, 42. “She would get cheap liver at Key Food, two giant gallons of milk, all that.” Looking back, Kieran is in awe of how she managed. “If I wanted chocolate milk light, but my brother wanted more chocolate, and my sister wanted hardly any, she would make it those different ways.” Kieran is determined to do right by his own two children, ages 5 and 3. But he doesn’t think therapy would help make him a better father. “Us siblings, we’re already cooked. My godfather has this thing, he goes: ‘I will indulge anybody that wants to complain about their childhood. And you can blame your parents for everything until you’re 30, and then figure shit out.’ He’s oversimplifying it, but I like that.”

mold her into a more extreme version of his ex, Kim Kardashian. “This isn’t who [Censori] is,” said the friend. “But she has no one right now, and it is scary.”

■ *Stranger Things* actor **David Harbour** and British singer **Lily Allen** have separated after four years of marriage, after Allen allegedly caught her husband using a dating app to meet other women. Suspicious about Harbour’s behavior, Allen, 39, joined Raya late last year and began cross-referencing women on the app “with women David follows on Instagram to try to figure out who he was seeing,” a source told the *Daily Mail*. Allen was “devastated” by her discovery and checked into a \$10,000-a-week trauma center to deal with the shock of the breakup. “I’m really not in a good place,” she said on a podcast recently. “I just can’t concentrate on anything except the pain that I’m going through.”

Briefing

The battle over TikTok

Congress voted to ban the popular app. Why does President Trump want to save it?

Why is TikTok so controversial?

The highly successful short-form video app is owned by ByteDance, a Chinese company based in Beijing. That gives China's Communist government the ability to access the personal data of TikTok's 170 million U.S. users—about half the population. Researchers have documented that the TikTok algorithm promotes pro-China propaganda and suppresses posts about topics forbidden in China, such as the government's abuse of the Uighur minority and Taiwan independence. Calling TikTok a national security threat, the House voted 360-58 and the Senate 79-18 last year to require ByteDance to sell the app to an American company or have it removed from app stores. The Supreme Court unanimously upheld the law last month, ruling that Congress had "well-supported national security concerns" about TikTok's control by "a foreign adversary." TikTok refused to sell and indicated it would shut down. But President Trump issued an executive order delaying the ban for 75 days while trying to persuade ByteDance to sell 50 percent of the U.S. app to Microsoft, Oracle, or another U.S. owner. "I have a warm spot in my heart for TikTok," Trump said.

Why the warm spot?

It developed recently. In 2020, Trump issued an executive order to ban TikTok, saying the app gives "the Chinese Communist Party access to Americans' personal and proprietary information." That order was blocked by a federal court. Last year, ByteDance investor Jeff Yass—whose share of the company is worth more than \$20 billion—personally lobbied Trump to protect TikTok and became a major contributor, donating over \$96 million to Republican campaigns and PACs. During the campaign, Trump allies effectively used the site to win over young voters, and Trump amassed more than 15 million followers.

Now Trump says it would be wrong to deprive TikTok users of their favorite app. "We have to save it," he said.

Does China control TikTok?

TikTok's Singaporean CEO, Shou Zi Chew, insists the Chinese government does not control the app. But ByteDance is obligated by Chinese law to have an in-house Communist Party committee. The government also owns 1 percent of ByteDance's main Chinese entity. *BuzzFeed* obtained leaked audio from internal TikTok meetings in 2022, revealing that China-based employees repeatedly accessed U.S. users' data. "Everything is seen in China," said one employee. ByteDance's refusal to sell would suggest it values influence and data more than money.

What data does TikTok collect?

It collects users' ages, locations, contacts, phone numbers, internet addresses, and the content of their private messages sent



TikTok fans protesting outside the U.S. Capitol last year

through the app. Some argue this is no different from the practices of other social media companies. "The system of personal data security across social media and other apps is so broken, TikTok scarcely matters," said Ciaran Martin, former head of the U.K.'s cybersecurity agency. ByteDance insists that China is "unlikely" to demand access to its data.

What about censorship?

TikTok's secret sauce lies in the algorithm that determines what populates each user's feed, a never-ending video scroll called the "For You" page. That secret algorithm grants the company immense power over what people see. Two studies by Rutgers University found that the platform promotes positive views of China's government and culture and suppresses negative content about China. In one research test, TikTok blocked a user who posted a video condemning China's mass detention of Muslims. Studies also suggest TikTok impacts users' political views and increases polarization. About 45 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds get most of their news from TikTok, and U.S. intelligence warned last year that China has used it to "actively exploit perceived U.S. societal divisions" and to foment negative views of America.

How did the app get so popular?

Usage surged when the pandemic stranded many people in their homes, growing from about 40 million monthly users in early 2020 to over 100 million by August that year. They're mostly young: Only 10 percent of adults 65 and older reported using TikTok last year, compared with 62 percent of those under 30. Researchers at Baylor University also found TikTok's endless video scroll was addictive for nearly 1 in 4 users, with many of them losing track of time. In October, attorneys general in 13 states and Washington,

D.C., sued TikTok, arguing it violated consumer protection laws and exacerbated a teen mental health crisis by, among other things, using beauty filters that can lead viewers to develop body image issues. "They deployed a suite of manipulative features that exploited young people's psychological vulnerabilities," said California Attorney General Rob Bonta.

Where does TikTok stand now?

Trump's extension gives ByteDance until April 5 to sell TikTok, worth an estimated \$50 billion. It's been absent from app stores since January, but still works for users who already had the app downloaded. It's unclear that ByteDance will sell even half of TikTok, or that such a sale will be legal, since Congress has required a total sale to a U.S. firm. Meanwhile, TikTok influencers, whose livelihoods depend on the platform, remain in limbo. "I feel like I'm going through heartbreak," said Alix Earle, a lifestyle influencer with over 7 million followers.

The impact on teen mental health

Social media can help teens find community, but the negative effects are plentiful: loss of memory formation, conversational depth, analytical skills, and empathy, along with increased anxiety. An investigation by the attorneys general suing the company revealed TikTok was aware of the dangers it posed to young people but did nothing to minimize them. In the Baylor study, immersion in social media—whether TikTok or Instagram—was associated with increased mind wandering, depression, anxiety, addiction, and fear of missing out. Repeated exposure to unattainable body standards online can also trigger eating disorders. Former Surgeon General Vivek Murthy even called for a warning label on social media platforms. "The social media algorithms are built to promote whatever you seem interested in," said Linda Mayes of the Yale Child Study Center. "If a teen searches for any kind of mental health condition, such as depression or suicide, it's going to feed them information about those things."

Attention's central role in politics

Ezra Klein
The New York Times

"Attention, not money, is now the fuel of politics," said Ezra Klein. That's why President Trump, who railed against Facebook and Twitter in his first term, has aligned himself with the heads of those platforms—"the titans of attention"—in his second term. To win Trump over, Jeff Bezos, Mark Zuckerberg, and Elon Musk not only gave him millions for his inauguration and his campaign, they also transformed their media platforms to be friendlier to the new president and his supporters. In return, Trump—a showman who has always intuitively understood the power of attention—granted them "catbird seats" at the inauguration, and in Musk's case, "influence and centrality" in his administration. "We have not seen as clear a trade for power in the modern era"—and we aren't prepared for it. If Musk uses X to flood the country with disinformation and promote the Republican Party in the 2026 midterms and 2028 presidential election, "who will stop him?" Powerful people with enormous, concentrated wealth have largely defied efforts to control their political influence in the U.S., and "for attention, the problem is worse—and we have not even begun to attempt solutions."

Money didn't fix kids' learning loss

Stephanie Lundquist-Arora
National Review



"Our public education system is in dire straits"—and no amount of funding seems to help, said Stephanie Lundquist-Arora. Five years after school lockdowns began, American students haven't recovered from pandemic learning loss—in fact, many are faring "even more poorly" than before. The 2024 National Assessment of Educational Progress last week reported testing results for the nation's fourth- and eighth-graders, and they were grim. "The vast majority of children who took the NAEP math and reading assessments are performing below proficiency level," and reading scores actually declined to about 30 percent proficiency—even lower than in 2022. The Biden administration allocated \$189 billion to combat learning loss, but much of it was wasted on ancillary goodies like athletic fields, a nature center, and hotel stays, as well as on "equity development" and other ideological projects. It's clear that "simply throwing more money at public schools does not yield better results for students." More than two-thirds of fourth-graders lack reading proficiency, which portends more learning problems in the future. We will need more school choice—and more accountability for failing schools—for American children to "have a chance to succeed."

Will Trump abandon Taiwan?

Zack Cooper
The Dispatch

President Trump is toying with Taiwan, said Zack Cooper. Previously "one of the more supportive American presidents of Taiwan," he's "been far more critical this time around," raising questions about whether he'd support the island nation against a Chinese invasion. Trump has accused Taiwan of taking American semiconductor manufacturing business and has demanded that it quadruple its defense spending to 10 percent of GDP. Top adviser Elon Musk has "deep business ties" to China, and he has echoed Beijing's claim that Taiwan is "an integral part of China." Trump seems to be courting Chinese President Xi Jinping to make deals, even inviting him to the inauguration. Taiwan's government has indicated it will try to win Trump over by offering to make a big weapons purchase from the U.S. That "could be doubly beneficial," showing Taiwan takes China's "mounting military threat" seriously while appealing to Trump's transactional preference for allies to buy U.S. weapons. But no one knows how he'll respond if Taiwan fails to satisfy his unrealistic demands for massive new defense spending. "Too much unpredictability could incentivize Beijing to test Trump's commitment to Taiwan." With Trump in the White House, Taiwan's future "rests on a knife's edge."

Viewpoint

"Anyone concerned about democracy in America should also at long last recognize that Big Tech is the enemy and act accordingly. The social media companies have poisoned our politics with their addictive hate algorithms, done unforgivable harm to our kids' mental health, and fueled a war against our democratic institutions—in which Elon Musk, the Cronus of the tech titans, is an active belligerent. Most Americans across party lines disapprove of the social media giants already—especially parents of kids. Any Democrat who can't run a populist campaign against our Bond-villain tech overlords should have his politician's license revoked."

Tom Malinowski in The Bulwark

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

■ A Malaysian man is selling his services as a "villain for hire" who will harass women to enable his clients—their boyfriends or husbands—to appear manly by challenging him. Bearded, shaggy-haired Shazali Sulaiman, 28, said he's been told he looks like a gang member, and saw an opportunity to profit off his tough appearance. "Are you tired of your partner thinking you are weak?" he wrote on social media. "I can help you prove them wrong." He charges \$22 on weekdays, \$33 on weekends. "No one gets hurt," he said. "It is all just an act, like WWE."



■ A homeowner in China who refused to sell his house to make way for a road-construction project is now living in the middle of a nearly completed motorway. Huang Ping, who lives in Jinxi with his grandson, was offered about \$220,000 and two other properties—an offer later increased to three properties. He held out for a better deal; instead, the government decided to build around him. "I do regret it a bit," admitted Huang, who must leave and enter his home via a concrete tunnel. "It feels like I lost a big bet."

■ A 66 million-year-old deposit of fossilized vomit has been found on the Danish island of Zealand. Discovered by an amateur fossil hunter, the upchuck is thought to have come from a shark who'd eaten a meal of hard-to-digest sea lilies. It's "the most famous piece of puke in the world," said Jesper Milà, curator of the Geomuseum Faxe. Why has the find attracted attention from around the globe? "This is a funny story the world can relate to," he said, adding that "journalists like a story about vomit."



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MEXICO

Life in limbo at the U.S. border

Fabiola Mancilla Castillo
La Jornada

Tens of thousands of people are suddenly trapped in Mexico near the U.S. border, “begging for mercy to be allowed to cross,” said Fabiola Mancilla Castillo. These asylum seekers were not seeking to break U.S. law: They followed the rules, using the U.S. Customs and Border Protection app to schedule appointments for the hearings that will allow them to plead their cases. But that “American dream” was dashed within hours of President Trump’s inauguration. On his first day in office, he shut down the CBP One mobile app that the Biden administration had set up to discourage illegal border crossings. In an instant, the appointments that families had

waited 12 months or more to get simply vanished. Now these people are “crowding shelters” or living on the streets, “waiting for a miracle.” Their stories are heartbreaking but familiar. Gabriela, a Mexican woman from Guerrero, can’t stay here because her husband was murdered and corrupt authorities in her town let his killer walk free. Two of her children have already migrated to the U.S.—will she see them again? All these people want is “opportunity.” But American leaders have forgotten that it was immigrants who built their nation, people who arrived on “ships from Europe and invaded a land that was not theirs.”

LEBANON

Thrilled with our MAGA poster boy

Yara Sarkis
L'Orient-Le Jour

Lebanon has a new favorite son, said Yara Sarkis. Soon after he was elected last fall, Donald Trump announced he was appointing Lebanese-American Massad Boulos—his daughter Tiffany’s father-in-law—to the powerful position of adviser for Arab and Middle Eastern affairs. Since then, Boulos has become a major celebrity. Banners and billboards showing the smiling faces of both Trump and Boulos now festoon streets all over, including the main highway from Beirut to Tripoli. Residents of his home village Kfar Akka “threw rice in the streets” to wish Boulos “prosperity and happiness,” and proclaimed his wife, Sarah, to be Lebanon’s “first lady.” Party poopers have called all this hoopla

“visual pollution” and even “a peculiarly Lebanese form of submission.” It’s typical of us to fawn over members of the diaspora. Remember in 2019 when Carlos Ghosn, the auto executive of Lebanese extraction, fled corruption charges in Japan by escaping to Lebanon? Even though he was an international fugitive, many people wanted him to become head of state! And now, we need a hero even more. For the past five years, “the country has been sinking into a multifaceted crisis—economic, political, and security—to which was added the recent war between Hezbollah and Israel.” If people are hoping that Boulos can somehow steer U.S. policy to our benefit, well, let them hope.

Canada: Proudly resisting Trump’s bullying

“You’re damned right Canadians are booing ‘The Star-Spangled Banner’ at hockey and basketball games,” said Bruce Arthur in the *Toronto Star*. We’re also boycotting American booze and canceling trips to Florida. Canadians are furious that the United States—our oldest friend, closest ally, and biggest trade partner—is threatening economic warfare in the form of 25 percent tariffs. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau won a 30-day reprieve from the tariffs by promising to do more to combat drug smuggling at the border, including listing drug cartels as terrorists and creating a

“fentanyl czar.” But this is just a pause. “Living next to Donald Trump is a crisis” for the next four years, and we must negotiate a longer trade truce before “the madman and his fanatics” bring the hammer down. It’s encouraging that Trudeau, a Liberal who is stepping down soon, and the likely next leader, Conservative Pierre Poilievre, are on the same page, promising that we’ll answer U.S. tariffs with our own. “Canada fights together now.”

We’re all pleased Trudeau got Trump to step back, but “why did it take so long?” asked Brian Lilley in the *Toronto Sun*. The past few weeks saw “a lot of drama,” as we weathered sharp drops in stocks and the Canadian dollar. Yet all it took to calm the storm was agreeing “to do things that not only make the American president happy but are also good” for us. “We have been going through our own fentanyl crisis,” and cracking down earlier could have spared us misery. Don’t assume the trade war is over,



A liquor store in Vancouver

said Eric Nuttall in the *Financial Post*. If the U.S. can once again elect a bully like Trump, it can no longer be trusted as our main buyer. “Now is the time to unleash Canada’s enormous resource potential.” American refineries were “built to process Canadian heavy oil,” assuming they would always have access to it, and those refineries need us more than we need them. See how they like it when we build new pipelines to our west coast and begin “to sell more of our oil to an energy-thirsty Asia.”

Trump’s insulting threat to make us the 51st state has awakened Canadian patriotism, said John Ivison in the *National Post*. The nation is suddenly roiling with “feelings of duty, kinship, and loyalty to a collective mission” that had been dormant for years. And there are “no signs of cracks in the federation,” as premiers of even the more conservative provinces pledge to “clear shelves of American products” if necessary. It used to be that Canadian identity was defined “in terms of what we were not—that is, not American,” said Andrew Coyne in *The Globe and Mail*. Our points of difference were tinged with superiority: “We were better, finer, nicer people than the Americans, and not only that, but more modest.” But we have evolved to a more mature sense of self. Canada isn’t just America Lite; it is “a series of moral propositions: about the equality of its citizens, about their obligations to one another, about the purpose of their existence together.” That is “a nationalism worth fighting for”—and fight we will.

Best Columns: Europe

Germany: Postwar consensus to shun far right shatters

The fire wall that kept the far right out of power has been breached, said Tobias Peter in the *Stuttgarter Zeitung*. For the first time since the fall of the Nazis, a German party has relied on support from the extreme right to pass a motion in parliament. It happened last week, when the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) used votes from the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) to push through a nonbinding resolution to drastically tighten immigration policy. CDU leader Friedrich

Merz, strongly favored to win next month's elections, "has broken a taboo," and German politics will never be the same. Merz has made clear that he won't invite the AfD into government if and when he triumphs, but that's not the point. "Anyone who opens the door to cooperation, even a crack," must know that they're giving right-wing extremists a chance to smash through it. That's why Chancellor Olaf Scholz, a Social Democrat, called Merz's action "an unforgivable mistake." And it's why more than 150,000 people showed up in Berlin this week to demonstrate against the AfD.

The Left is "talking as if fascism were at the door," said Hansjörg Friedrich Müller in the *Aargauer Zeitung* (Switzerland). But Merz hasn't "suddenly gone mad" and started pushing crazy policies "à la Trump." He was merely proposing a return "to a responsible asylum policy, like the one Germany had before Angela Merkel opened the borders" a decade ago. In any event, the proposal that passed with AfD support wasn't legally binding, and a bill that would have been failed to pass two days later.



Protest in Berlin: 'Never again is now'

In fact, "a majority of the population wants a limit on migration," said Jasper von Altenbockum in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. But the Social Democrats refused to go along with measures they had already approved in Merz's draft, "such as suspending family reunification" and giving federal police more latitude. Apparently, Scholz and his allies care more about scoring political points than actually doing something about immigration.

"Rarely has the Bundestag known such drama," said *The Economist* (U.K.), with leftists claiming the country is now on a "steep path to the abyss." In reality, this vote hardly demolished the "anti-AfD 'fire wall.'" Merz didn't coordinate with AfD leaders; indeed, he packed his legislation "with poison pills painting the party as a Putin-loving threat to democracy." All he did was show voters he was serious about addressing the migration crisis. After all, earlier this month, "an Afghan who should have been deported" stabbed two people to death in Bavaria—and that was just the latest in a string of such crimes. Germans want action. Our schools, police forces, and housing authorities are "simply overwhelmed" with arrivals, said Hans-Joachim Vieweger in *Tagesschau*. We took in nearly 2 million people in 2023, including hundreds of thousands of refugees. Scholz promised a "rigorous deportation policy," but he simply hasn't delivered. His inaction has fueled the frustration behind the far right's rise. The fact that Merz tried to tackle this problem himself and "did not leave it to radical forces" is not a threat to democracy. It is "a service to democracy."

SWEDEN

At the mercy of radical Islamists

Adam Cwejman
Göteborgs-Posten

Swedes are free to criticize any religion they want, as long as it isn't Islam, said Adam Cwejman. We repealed the old blasphemy law in 1970, and since then, Swedes have been free to carp about or poke fun at faiths such as Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, and Hinduism. "If you insult Islam," though, you have violated an unwritten rule punishable by death. After Swedish cartoonist Lars Vilks in 2007 drew the Prophet Mohammed's head on a dog's body, he had to have round-the-clock protection, and police thwarted multiple attempts on his life. And now Salwan Momika has been killed, shot in his home near Stockholm. Momika was an Iraqi

Christian refugee who in 2023 tried to call attention to the mistreatment of Christians in Arab lands by burning a Quran at a Stockholm mosque—a provocative act that prompted protests around the world. While five suspects were detained, police have not confirmed a motive. "But it is not a wild guess that it had something to do" with the Quran burning; upon his death the internet erupted in celebratory posts by Muslims who believe that those who offend them should "pay the price with their lives." Clearly, Swedes don't enjoy free speech in our own land. There are limits to what we may say, limits that are enforced by terrorists.

FRANCE

Pathetic attempts at relevance

Pauline Théveniaud
Le Parisien

Does Emmanuel Macron really think the Mona Lisa can rescue him? asked Pauline Théveniaud. His presidency has been "sliding toward irrelevance" since last year, when he dissolved parliament in an effort to fend off the far right and wound up losing his majority. "Enfeebled by the debacle," he retreated for months to lick his wounds and returned to the national stage only last week to "pose as the savior" of the Louvre. Standing "under the most famous painting in the world," Macron seemed to be trying to take credit for the Louvre's new plan to ease crowding by giving Leonardo da Vinci's masterpiece *La Gioconda*, aka the Mona Lisa, its own room. He even called

the renovation a "new Renaissance" for the museum. But while Mona Lisa's smile is subtle, that plug for Macron's Renaissance party was anything but. In truth, it is the president himself who needs a political rebirth. Everywhere he inserts himself, he provokes howls of disapproval. Look at his self-promotion at the reopening of Notre Dame, rebuilt after the 2019 fire. He tried to put his personal stamp on the cathedral, pushing to replace six 19th-century stained-glass windows with modern new designs, an idea promptly nixed by art historians. While Macron may yet find private donations to spruce up the Louvre, his political capital is all spent.

Talking Points

Noted

■ President Trump spent 7 hours and 44 minutes talking on camera in his first week back in office, and spoke 81,235 words—more words than in *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *Richard III* combined, and nearly three times as many as President Joe Biden spoke in his first week. White House staff have discussed hiring more stenographers to keep up with Trump's verbiage. Associated Press

■ Among American women born in 1930, about 80 percent of those with and those without a college education were married by age 45. Among women born in 1980, 71 percent with a college education were married by 45, compared with 52 percent of those without. Axios

■ The Defense Department has ordered NBC, NPR, *Politico*, and *The New York Times* to vacate their dedicated offices in the Pentagon. They will be replaced by three right-leaning outlets—Breitbart, the *New York Post*, and One

American News Network—and one, *HuffPost*, that does not have a Pentagon correspondent and did not request a space. The shift is part of a rotation program to “broaden access,” said the department. NBCNews.com

■ As part of its crackdown on DEI across the federal government, the Trump administration is deleting any mention of the words “diversity,” “equity,” and “inclusion.” That has led the Internal Revenue Service to remove references in an employee handbook to the potential “inequity” of holding on to a taxpayer’s money and the “inclusion” of a taxpayer ID number on a form. The Wall Street Journal



Martin: Promising more of the same

Democrats have apparently “learned nothing” from their electoral thrashing, said Jonathan Chait in *The Atlantic*. When the Democratic National Committee met last week to choose a new leader, there was a tribal “land acknowledgment”; protesters interrupting speakers with shrieks of “Climate emergency!” and “Fossil fuel money!”; a lengthy explanation of how non-binary candidates are counted in gender-balanced elections; and a general affirmation that the DNC’s 2024 election strategy was sound—“except perhaps insufficiently committed to legalistic race and gender essentialism.” It was a perfect encapsulation of why so many ordinary Americans have soured on a party they regard as captive to leftist activists and obsessed with patronizing identity politics. Only 31 percent of voters now view Democrats favorably, but party apparatchiks are unwilling to reckon with what’s gone wrong. Neither outgoing DNC chair Jaime Harrison nor his newly elected replacement, Minnesota Democratic Party leader Ken Martin, “has questioned Joe Biden’s decision to run for a second term, nor any of the messaging or policy that contributed to his dismal approval ratings.”

That lack of soul-searching is no surprise, said Jim Geraghty in *National Review*. DNC members are largely state party officials who never have to face the public in a general election; they’re “insulated

from the consequences of election wipeouts.” Picking a new chair who promised to radically rethink the party would require these Democratic officials to admit they “screwed up royally.” Instead, they opted for Martin and his bland declaration that Democrats simply need “to dust ourselves off, and to get back in this fight.” The good news for Democrats is that party chairs

have almost zero power, said James Pindell in *The Boston Globe*. In our post-*Citizens United* era, in which wealthy donors call the shots, they have little influence over recruiting a presidential candidate, let alone getting them across the finish line. “They might as well try to put someone on Mars.”

The party still needs reform if it wants to win, said John Avlon in *The Bulwark*. Democrats should look at how President Bill Clinton revived an out-of-touch and out-of-power party in the 1990s by moving to the center and focusing on economic growth, responsibility, and community. That would mean listening to voters’ concerns on inflation and affordability; enforcing the rule of law at the border and on our cities’ streets; and bringing Americans together rather than driving them apart “with a censorious cancel culture.” There’s still a place for the Left, but a strong center “would help realign our politics” and potentially reunite our divided nation. “Bill Clinton understood this. Bill Clinton won.”

Impoundment: Trump’s spending power grab

President Trump is “laying the groundwork for a landmark confrontation” over who controls federal spending, said Tony Romm and Jeff Stein in *The Washington Post*. In his first hours in office, Trump moved to wrest away the power of the purse from Congress, with executive orders halting investments in green energy, foreign aid, and racial-equity programs—all of which had been approved by lawmakers. Then last week, he took the “extraordinary” step of freezing grants for thousands of federal programs, drawing lawsuits and a stay by a federal judge. The administration backed off the next day, but this retreat is only temporary. Trump and his pick to head the White House budget office, Russell Vought, are set on claiming the right to “impound,” or refuse to spend, money that Congress has appropriated. At stake is “a fundamental principle of the Constitution”: that Congress, not the president, has the “primary authority to tax, spend, and manage the nation’s complex finances.”

Impoundment has prompted sparring between the White House and Congress “since the early days of the republic,” said Steven T. Dennis in *Bloomberg*. That fight came to a head under President Richard Nixon, who impounded tens of billions of dollars for scores of federal programs. Firing back, Con-

gress passed the Impoundment Control Act of 1974, which says presidents can withhold funding only after requesting and receiving congressional approval. But Trump and Vought argue that law is an unconstitutional “usurpation of executive authority,” and that congressional appropriations “are a ceiling, not a floor, for spending.” That specious argument “is just wrong,” said Erwin Chemerinsky in the *Los Angeles Times*. The Constitution’s framers made sure that the branch of government most accountable to the people—the legislative—held the power of the purse. Any attempt by the president to subvert that “is patently illegal.”

This clash is inevitably headed for the Supreme Court, said Mark Joseph Stern in *Slate*. Will the conservative majority “follow the law” and bring Trump to heel? “There’s reason to be hopeful.” The claim for impoundment power is “extraordinarily dubious,” and rubber-stamping it would be a stretch even for a court with an “expansive view of executive power.” If the court doesn’t draw the line at “a radical attempt to restructure the government,” it’s hard to see what checks on Trump will remain. The coming showdown will test “whether this Supreme Court is willing to put any restraints on a president who seeks to rule as a dictator.”

Talking Points

Patel: A vindictive ‘crackpot’ running the FBI?

If Kash Patel's confirmation hearing last week proved anything, said former U.S. Attorney Barbara McQuade in *Time*, it's that he "cannot be trusted" to run the FBI. When pressed by Democrats in a confrontational confirmation hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Patel, a former federal prosecutor and a fierce loyalist of President Trump's, refused to say Trump lost the 2020 election. He also refused to say he would resign as FBI director if Trump directed him to engage in illegal conduct. Patel did state that under his leadership, there would be "no retributions" against Trump's adversaries. But Patel's "track record" is that of a MAGA fanatic who produced a song celebrating the Jan. 6 rioters, who wrote a book with an enemies list of more than 60 "Deep State" officials, and who vowed in 2023 to "find the conspirators not just in government, but in the media." Nonetheless, with none of the 53 Republican senators likely to vote against him, Patel seems headed for confirmation.

"That Patel is a Trump loyalist shouldn't matter much," said Andrew C. McCarthy in *National Review*. FBI directors are charged with executing the democratically elected president's law enforcement priorities. Patel is qualified for the job:



Patel: A wizard in 'King' Donald's court

He's worked as a public defender and as a staffer in the National Security Council during Trump's first term. "The bureau stands at a turning point," said Pat McMonigle in *City Journal*. After years of political prosecutions, "morale has cratered," with just 41 percent of Americans approving of the bureau. The FBI must pivot toward crime fighting, and remain apolitical. Patel "could be exactly the kind of outsider that the FBI needs."

Patel is a vindictive "crackpot" who's anything but apolitical, said David French in *The New York Times*. He has promoted a conspiracy theory that the FBI planned the Jan. 6 riots. He's claimed the media "helped Joe Biden rig presidential elections." To show his "extreme devotion" to Trump, he even published a children's book in which "King Donald" triumphs over evil plotters with the help of a wizard named "Kash." With a 10-year term at the FBI, "Patel will have an enormous amount of unchecked power" to investigate and prosecute election officials, Justice Department and FBI officials who investigated Trump, and anyone he deems an enemy of his king. "Every Republican senator who votes for Patel is abdicating his or her constitutional responsibility."

Trans kids: Trump seeks to halt all treatments

In New York state, trans teens and their parents are panicking, said Joseph Goldstein in *The New York Times*. After President Trump's executive order last week cut off federal funds for institutions that engage in the "chemical and surgical mutilation" of those under 19, hospitals and doctors that had been providing "gender-affirming care" for trans minors began canceling appointments and consulting with their lawyers. "I don't think we have a lot of options," said the frantic mom of a nonbinary 12-year-old who'd been receiving puberty blockers. Trump's order—which states the U.S. will seek to halt "the so-called 'transition' of a child from one sex to another" in every state—also led facilities in Virginia, Colorado, and Washington, D.C., to stop offering transition treatments to children. "Getting such care is already difficult enough," said Melissa Gira Grant in *The New Republic*, with 26 states restricting treatments that many trans children and teens consider "a crucial lifeline" for their mental well-being. Trump's interference in private medical decisions may be both illegal and unconstitutional, but the fact that hospitals are already surrendering is "a terrible sign of what may come."

Britain's voluminous Cass Review, "has exposed the shortcomings and dangers" of providing puberty blockers, cross-gender hormones, mastectomies, and other intrusive treatments for gender dysphoria, some of which can lead to permanent infertility. Evidence that these treatments improve troubled kids' lives is weak at best, the review found, and many outgrow their fixation on changing genders. Even socially liberal countries such as the U.K., Sweden, and Denmark now strictly limit experimental gender treatments on children, said Wesley J. Smith in *National Review*. Trump was right to "protect these disturbed minors."

Trump's "vicious assault on transgender existence" is not limited to children, said Mark Joseph Stern in *Slate*. Assuming "dictatorial powers," he declared that the U.S. government now only recognizes two unchangeable genders, leaving transgender and nonbinary people unable to get accurate passports and other documents. The president also banned trans people from serving in the military, saying their gender identities conflict with "a soldier's commitment to an honorable, truthful, and disciplined lifestyle." Trump has ignited "a five-alarm fire for all trans people. My heart breaks for them."

On the contrary, it's a return to sanity, said Nicole Russell in *USA Today*. Recent research, such as

Wit & Wisdom

"No matter what ideology you turn to, no matter how utopian it is, it does not solve the problem of hypocrites, frauds, and charlatans."

Writer Tony Tulathimutte, quoted in *The Guardian*

"The robber barons probably looked in the mirror and thought they were God, too."

Doris Kearns Goodwin, quoted in *The Financial Times*

"Just when you get sick of saying something is just when other folks are beginning to hear it."

Cecile Richards, quoted in *The New York Times*

"A good rule to remember for life is that when it comes to plastic surgery and sushi, never be attracted by a bargain."

Graham Norton, quoted in *The Knowledge*

"The separation of powers was adopted by the Convention of 1787 not to promote efficiency but to preclude the exercise of arbitrary power."

Justice Louis Brandeis, quoted in *The Atlantic*

"A's hire A's and B's hire C's. Find some A's and try to be around them."

Donald Rumsfeld, quoted in *American Thinker*

"The only way to prove that you're a good sport is to lose."

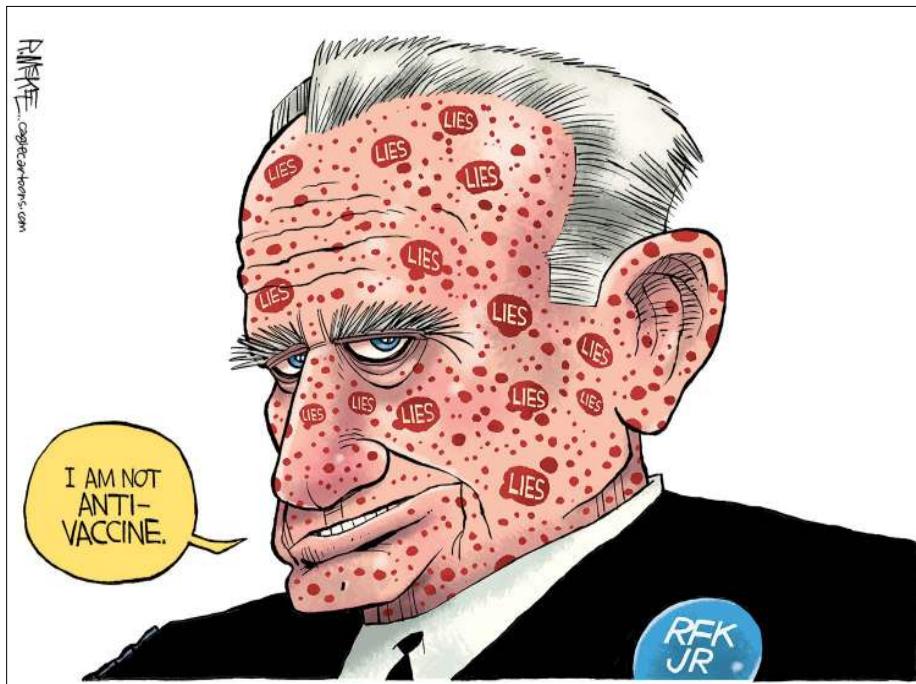
Ernie Banks, quoted in *Country Living*

Poll Watch

■ **70%** of Americans believe that corruption, inefficiency, and red tape are major problems for the federal government. But just **29%** approve of Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), and only **23%** support eliminating entire federal agencies. **52%** have an unfavorable view of Musk, while **36%** view him favorably.

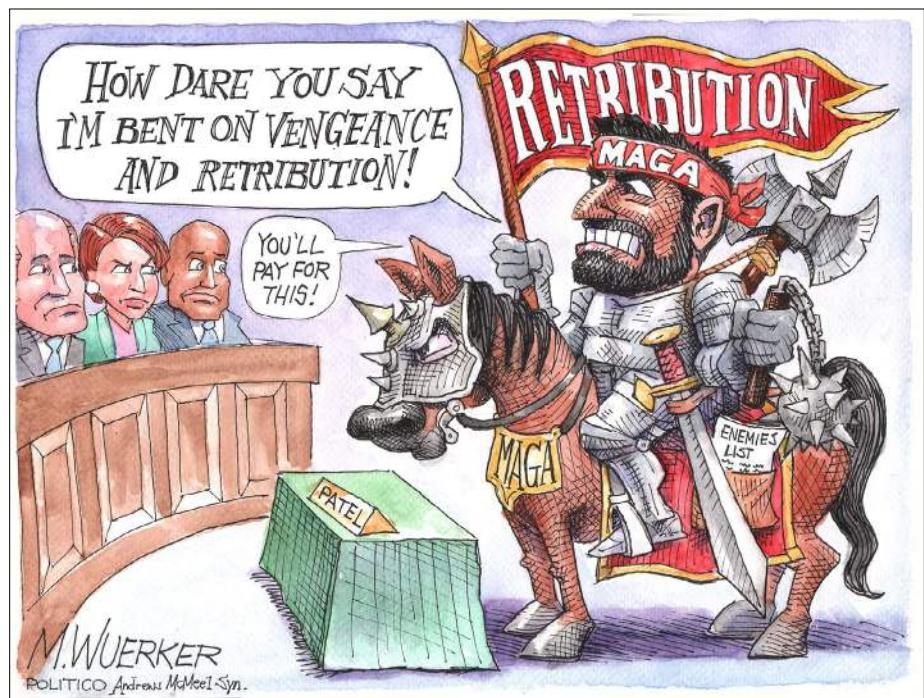
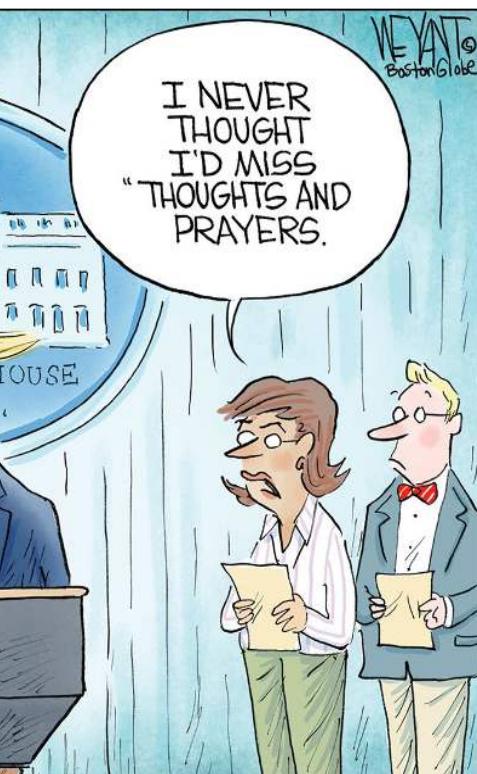
AP/NORC

Pick of the Week's Cartoons



Pick of the Week's Cartoons

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Send in the clones: A new Hollywood fight over AI

A battle over *The Brutalist*, a leading contender for Best Picture at the Oscars, shows how brutally Hollywood has turned against any whiff of AI in film-making, said Nate Jones in *New York* magazine. When director Peter Jackson used artificial intelligence to fix audio tracks in the 2021 Beatles documentary *Get Back*, the experiment was “greeted with enthusiasm from tech geeks” and not much notice from anyone else. Fast-forward to 2025, and suddenly *The Brutalist* is facing calls for disqualification after word got out that director Brady Corbet “had used AI behind the scenes.” Much as Jackson used AI “to clean up previously unusable audio” from a Beatles recording session, *The Brutalist*’s film editor used a voice-cloning tool, Respeecher, “to tweak Adrien Brody and Felicity Jones’ Hungarian dialogue.” An architectural consultant on the film also used Midjourney, an AI image generator, “to conjure a series of drawings” of brutalist-style buildings. These uses might seem minor, but they’ve touched a raw nerve over the possibility of AI displacing human artists and actors.

Using AI is an affront to everything that actors and writers went on strike about, said Candice Frederick in *HuffPost*. For months, they put themselves out of work to “protect human creativity and contribution.” Yet at the Sundance Film Festival, I attended multiple panels of industry speakers praising the time-saving and



Adrien Brody and Felicity Jones in ‘The Brutalist’

cost-cutting benefits of the technology with barely an acknowledgment “that AI could lead to more lost jobs.” Though *The Brutalist* and *Emilia Pérez* used AI very minimally, “where do you draw the line?” Is it OK “if all artists are credited and compensated and audiences might not know any better?”

It’s understandable that people in the film industry are on edge, said Sam Adams in *Slate*, given that “studio executives have openly fantasized about replacing living actors with computer-generated doubles.” But this broad backlash against *any* AI is nonsensical. *The Brutalist*’s dialogue correction isn’t taking anyone’s job.” And if we do have a problem with “using machine learning to alter an actor’s voice,” how is that different from the AI-powered tech used to de-age Robert De Niro and Al Pacino in 2019’s *The Irishman*? “The history of Hollywood can be told as a series of technological leaps,” said Devin Gordon in *The New York Times Magazine*. As with other innovations, like CGI, some directors will automatically condemn its use as “dishonest filmmaking.” Others will counter that “filmmaking is a grand illusion at its core, and we all consent to being tricked.” What I have found is that “the people who knew the least about AI’s potential in the filmmaking process feared it the most.” Whereas those “who actually worked with it harbored the most faith in the resilience of human creativity.”

Innovation of the week



A startup’s supersonic jet broke the sound barrier for the first time, said Kate Duffy in *Bloomberg*. Boom Technology is aiming to “resurrect high-speed passenger flights two decades after Concorde’s demise.” It achieved its first milestone last week when its XB-1 aircraft “surpassed Mach 1 (768 mph) while flying at an altitude of 34,000 feet across the Mojave Desert in California.” The XB-1 is a smaller prototype of Boom’s planned supersonic commercial jet, Overture, “which has drawn 130 orders from customers such as United and American Airlines,” and could eventually carry passengers from New York to London in a mere 3 hours 30 minutes. Boom has had to turn to the development of its own engine, however, since Rolls-Royce pulled out of a partnership in 2022.

Bytes: What's new in tech

■ Virtual reality finds a niche in space

Astronauts aboard the International Space Station get a picture of home through virtual reality, said Erin Carson in *ZDNet*. A Vive Focus 3 headset loaded with clips “of a sunset, beach, mountain path, and summer day” is among the tools being tested to combat the stress and mundanity of long trips in space. “I could almost feel the warmth of the sun,” said Danish astronaut Andreas Mogensen, who has taken to using the device while he exercises on the ISS’s stationary bike. “Getting VR to work in space requires extra considerations,” because of how the devices use accelerometers and gyroscopes to gauge a wearer’s movement. A Danish engineering firm, Nord-Space ApS, and tech company HTC figured out how to compensate for microgravity to prevent the astronauts from getting dizzy. Researchers are similarly testing VR experiences for Navy sailors on long voyages.

■ Self-driving cars push into more cities

Waymo is expanding its robotaxi fleet, said Andrew J. Hawkins in *The Verge*. The company, owned by Google’s parent, Alphabet, said last week it plans to add “10 new cities in 2025, starting with Las Vegas and San Diego.” It will be a slow rollout, with just a handful of vehicles deployed to each new location, “where they will be

manually driven around for a couple of months” to learn the roads, weather conditions, and regional driving habits. Last year, Waymo sent vehicles to regions with inclement weather, such as upstate New York and Michigan, “to stress-test its robot cars.” This year, Waymo said, the theme is ‘generalizability,’ or accelerating how quickly the cars can get up to speed in new locales.

■ An upside surprise on EV battery life

“EV batteries last way longer than expected,” said Laura Hautala in *IEEE Spectrum*. A report published in *Nature Energy* in December by a team of Stanford researchers found that real-world electric-vehicle batteries “could last 38 percent longer than previous lab-based estimates,” meaning that “drivers could get as much as 195,000 miles more out of their EVs than academic researchers believed.” The researchers said earlier studies might have underestimated EV battery life because the testing was done only in a lab. Instead, they gathered data from different sources, including autonomous EVs operating “in a mix of urban and highway settings,” and found real benefits to battery lifespan when the cars are used continuously, as in “real-world driving.” The results were “very surprising,” said Chris Rahn, a professor of mechanical engineering at Penn State University, who was not involved in the study.

Health & Science

Life's building blocks in outer space

NASA's first asteroid-sampling mission has delivered a bombshell: The 4.5 billion-year-old asteroid Bennu harbors many of the basic building blocks for life, including amino acids and the five main nucleobases that make up RNA and DNA. Samples from the asteroid—scraped off in space by a robotic probe and shot back to Earth in a sealed capsule to avoid being contaminated by terrestrial compounds—have now been analyzed in two new studies. They show that the Bennu samples contain not only organic molecules but also compounds that result from briny salt water. That doesn't mean Bennu itself ever harbored life: The researchers said

they found no evidence of any microscopic fossils. But it does suggest that chemistry friendly to life, including liquid water, is more common in space than astronomers thought, and that amino acids and nucleobases could have arrived on Earth through asteroid strikes. "The key mineralogical and chemical material needed for life's emergence on Earth was being delivered to our planet early in its history," geologist Michael Ackerson, who wasn't affiliated with the NASA project, tells *Smithsonian* magazine. "Effectively, Bennu's brines created a nursery for the development of complex organic molecules that were subsequently delivered to a nascent Earth." The next step for scientists



Removing samples from the capsule

is to try to get samples from the dwarf planet Ceres, located in the asteroid belt, and from Saturn's icy moon Enceladus, which have both shown evidence of saltwater residues.



Flu spreads easily in densely packed flocks.

The bird flu has mutated again

A rare strain of avian flu, H5N9, has been detected for the first time in sick birds in the United States, sparking concerns about the virus' ability to evolve. The variant was identified in ducks at a commercial farm in California where the more common H5N1 strain was also present. After some 120,000 birds were culled, genetic analysis confirmed that H5N9 emerged through "reassortment," a process involving the mixing of different flu strains within an infected host. The announcement of a new strain comes three weeks after the first bird flu-related human death in the country, in Louisiana, and a week after President Trump announced he was pulling the U.S. out of the World Health Organization, which coordinates the global response to pandemics. Officials say H5N9 is not a major threat to humans—only birds, for now. But its emergence while H5N1 is spreading widely not only in U.S. birds but also mammals, sickening hundreds of dairy herds, has heightened fears that avian flu will mutate into something more dangerous. "It does suggest there's enough virus around that reassortment might become more frequent," Angela Rasmussen, a virologist at the University of Saskatchewan in Canada, tells *The Washington Post*. "With enough H5 in these animals and enough seasonal flu in humans, you get them together, and you have a recipe for a potential pandemic virus."

Is ADHD a killer?

Adults with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder may not live as long as their neurotypical peers, reports *Discovermagazine.com*. Researchers from University College London analyzed the health records of just over 30,000 adults in the U.K. who had been diagnosed with ADHD, mostly by early adulthood, comparing them with a control group of around 300,000 non-diagnosed people. They found that men with the condition had a lifespan reduced by between 4.5 and 9 years, while for women it was between 6.5 and 11 years. The authors say the lower life span is unlikely to be due to the condition itself—which is rooted in brain chemistry—but rather may stem from self-medicating behaviors such as smoking and drinking, or from depression, which can often accompany the condition. "People with ADHD have many strengths and can thrive with the right support and treatment," says senior author Josh Stott. "However, they often lack support and are more likely to experience stressful life events and social exclusion, negatively impacting their health and self-esteem."

Why men are getting bigger

People in general have grown taller and heavier over the past century, as countries get richer and offer better health care and nutrition. Men, though, have grown at more than twice the rate of women. Researchers compared data from dozens of countries to see how height and weight changed with living conditions as measured by the human development index (HDI)—a score based on life expectancy, education, and income that ranges from 0 to 1. The researchers found that for every 0.2-point rise in HDI, men got an average of 1.6 inches taller and 14 pounds heavier, compared with just 0.66 inches taller and 6 pounds heavier for women. Why the disparity? Are the men getting all the best food? Lead author Lewis Halsey, from the University of Roehampton in London, says the difference could be the result of sexual selection, because tall men might get more chances to pass on tall-boy genes. "Women tend to prefer taller men," he tells *CNN.com*. "In contrast, women's height isn't so important. So, to put it simply, men don't tend to say, 'Oh, I only like tall women.'"

A coral takes a walk

Corals are generally seen as immobile animals, with most of the 6,000 known species living in colonies on fixed reefs. But not mushroom corals. A new study has found that these inch-long organisms have the drive and ability to creep along the ocean



Journeying to deeper waters

floor—very, very slowly. The researchers set up time-lapse cameras in an aquarium, with a sliver of white light at one end to mimic shallow coastal habitats, and a small blue beam at the other end to represent deeper waters. The mushroom corals showed a strong preference for the blue light, inching toward it in each of the three trials. They propelled themselves forward by slowly inflating the tissues on the outside of their body and then quickly releasing them, much like jellyfish. It's slow progress: They only cover about 8 inches over 24 hours. But lead author Brett Lewis, from Queensland University of Technology in Australia, says that's impressive given their size. "This is such a large movement for them," he tells *The New York Times*. "That's a sprint for them."

Review of Reviews: Books

Book of the week

Source Code: My Beginnings

by Bill Gates
(Knopf, \$30)

"Bill Gates is the John McEnroe of the tech world," said Steven Poole in *The Guardian*. "Once a snotty brat whom everyone loved to hate," the co-founder of Microsoft and former richest man in the world has since grown up enough that he's become "a beloved elder statesman." In his first memoir, you won't hear about the aggressive business tactics that made Gates controversial or the global-minded philanthropic efforts he has devoted a third of his life to. It covers only his first 23 years, from his birth in 1955 into a happy family through the creation of Microsoft and the startup's agreement to supply a version of its Basic programming language to Apple Computer. Young Bill was on his way. "This volume, still, is more than just a geek's inventory of early achievements. There is a wry mood of self-deprecation throughout."

"As he paints it, Gates' Seattle childhood hit all the notes of a '50s sitcom," said



Gates in 1973: Bound for Harvard and untold riches

Steven Levy in *Wired*. "But the family dynamic was fraught, often because of Gates' personality quirks"—namely, his youthful arrogance and mulishness. His supportive parents did get him into a top private school, though, which gained him unlikely access at age 13 to a computer as well as to coding—the machine's magical language. "This is Spider-Man getting bitten by the spider, the Incredible Hulk getting exposed to radiation," said Tom Whipple in *The Times* (U.K.). If you've encountered Gates'

life story before, you know that his friend, future Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen, was right there with young Bill as he caught the coding bug. Soon, Gates and his pioneering pals will be writing code to automate the school's class schedule, then selling a payroll program to local businesses. But because this planned first volume in a trilogy closes when the company itself is very young, *Source Code* feels like a book best left to "the real Gates aficionados."

"Inevitably, much of *Source Code* reads like self-justification," said Richard Waters in the *Financial Times*. Gates bullied Allen into accepting a smaller ownership share? Well, he was doing more of the work. He abused his access to Harvard's computer lab? Hey—he was just following the anything-goes hippie ethic of the 1970s. Still, Gates does make his early story his own, sharing his embarrassment about some of his behavior even as he mentions that if he were coming of age today, he probably would be diagnosed on the autistic spectrum. And because this book delivers an account of his rise that's "replete with cliff-hanger moments and revealing new details," it at least bodes well for Volume 2.

Novel of the week

Homeseking

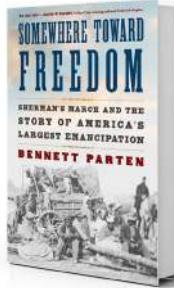
by Karissa Chen

(Putnam, \$30)

"It is rare that a 500-page book delivers on its weight," said Qian Julie Wang in *The Washington Post*. But Karissa Chen's debut novel, a love story that spans seven decades, proves unforgettable. Its protagonists, Suchi and Haiwen, are teenage sweethearts in 1947 Shanghai when their paths part. Sixty years later, the two reunite by chance in Los Angeles, and Chen ties those two moments together by tracing Suchi's life chronologically while relating Haiwen's in reverse. As the Chinese Civil War, the Cultural Revolution, and mass migrations shape the journeys of Chen's separated soulmates, "it is impossible not to marvel at the many strands she has woven into this beating heart of a novel." Yes, *Homeseking* "gets a little chronologically confusing at times with all the jumping around," said Alexis Burling in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. But as Chen "mines the complicated reasons behind her characters' impossible, life-altering choices," she never lets her tale become overly sentimental or less than "a genuine pleasure to read." Even with its prodigious length, "not a sentence of this book feels wasted."

Somewhere Toward Freedom: Sherman's March and the Story of America's Largest Emancipation

by Bennett Parten (Simon & Schuster, \$30)



When Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman led his Union Army through Georgia in late 1864, "the march did not always look like a Jubilee," said Allen C. Guelzo in *Washington Monthly*. But as the troops advanced the roughly 285 miles from Atlanta to Savannah, some 20,000 refugees fleeing slavery fell in behind, turning the military maneuver into a mobile liberation event. Their story has, in large part, "not been told until now." So we're lucky that historian Bennett Parten has "the storyteller's eye for vivid detail." He sees the event and aftermath as symbolic of both the initial hopes and eventual failures of the war to end American slavery, and no other writer has brought greater depth to relating the tale.

"Sherman was a surprising instrument of emancipation," said Fergus M. Bordewich in *The Wall Street Journal*. The Ohio-born Union commander was a racist who

opposed abolition, and some of his subordinates treated the Army's train of refugees cruelly. At Ebenezer Creek, 20 miles from Savannah, one of his generals ordered pontoon bridges pulled away immediately after the soldiers' crossing, leaving hundreds of refugees to die by drowning or in the ensuing assault by Confederate cavalry. Several thousand refugees, traveling by foot, horseback, mule, or wagon, did reach the march's conclusion, and all along the way, "Parten's descriptions are vivid, drawing on official accounts as well as the letters of soldiers and the memories of former slaves."

The "greatest strength" of Parten's book lies in the way he handles the aftermath, said Scott Spillman in *The New Yorker*. Eager to march his army into South Carolina free of trailing refugees, he issued Special Field Order No. 15, a directive that set aside a broad, 200-mile-long stretch of coastline to be parceled out in 40-acre plots for resettlement by freedpeople. Regrettably, the policy was eventually rescinded, and Parten revisits that story to illuminate the broader dynamics of the Reconstruction era. Still, he's wrong to suggest that the betrayal dashed all the hopes Sherman's march had engendered. "All the failures of Reconstruction, real as they were, cannot justify such grave doubts about the achievements of abolition."

The Book List

Best books...chosen by Pagan Kennedy

Pagan Kennedy's new book, *The Secret History of the Rape Kit*, recounts how a forgotten woman provided countless others a chance to hold their assailants accountable. Below, Kennedy recommends six books that offer hope and companionship in dark times.



Color Me Flo by Flo Kennedy (1976). Kennedy (no relation) masterminded some of the most outrageous political acts of the 1970s—like a “pee-in” held in Harvard Yard to protest the school’s lack of women’s bathrooms. In this delightfully shaggy book, Kennedy recounts scenes from her adventures as a civil rights lawyer, prankster, and feminist gadfly. It was Kennedy who taught us: “Don’t agonize, organize.”

Tunnel 29 by Helena Merriman (2021). In 1961, a wall went up around East Berlin in the middle of the night, preventing almost everyone from fleeing. That step into fascism inspired a group of students to engineer an escape route, digging a tunnel that snaked from a basement in East Berlin to freedom. Merriman has reconstructed a lost history that unfolds like a heist movie.

Giovanni’s Room by James Baldwin (1956). Baldwin tends to be remembered as an essayist and author of *The Fire Next Time*. But if you’re exploring his work, consider starting with this novel, a page-turner about queer people trying to live their truth in the 1950s.

Empire of Pain by Patrick Radden Keefe (2021). I was sucked into this book because I couldn’t look away from its characters’ villainy. In a blitz of brilliant reporting, Keefe reveals how the most dastardly members of the Sackler family built a Big Pharma empire and pushed opiates into doctors’ offices and eventually the streets.

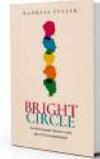
The Handmaid’s Tale by Margaret Atwood (1985). Years ago, Atwood asked herself a question: “If you wanted to seize power in the United States and set up a dictatorship, how would you go about it?” The 2017 TV adaptation of this novel was excellent, but you should really hold the story in your hand and *read* it. After all, it portrays a dystopia in which women have lost the right to even touch a book.

The Power Broker by Robert Caro (1974). As an insomniac, I spend hours lying in the dark, aching to fall into an unconsciousness. And that’s how a 66-hour audiobook became my best friend. *The Power Broker* spins the epic true tale of Robert Moses, who twisted New York City into the shape of his own greed and ego.

Also of interest...in group dynamics

Bright Circle

by Randall Fuller (Oxford, \$28)



The birth of Transcendentalism “looks rather different” in this new group portrait, said Francesca Wade in *The New York Times*. Randall Fuller focuses on five women, including Margaret Fuller and Sophia Peabody, who regularly gathered at a Boston bookshop in the 1840s to discuss ideas that became associated with the men in their midst. With lively studies like this now multiplying, “these strident, provocative women can no longer justly be left out of any narrative of this movement.”

The Woman Who Knew Everyone

by Meryl Gordon (Grand Central, \$34)



Though it’s been decades since Perle Mesta was D.C.’s supreme soiree hostess, said Julia M. Klein in *The Washington Post*, readers of this new biography are “likely to find Mesta as endearing as her many party guests did.” Mesta craved attention, and won so much of it that a 1950 Broadway musical was written about her. She did promote a few just causes and landed an ambassadorship. Of course, “it helped that she came from money and that she was willing to spend it on entertaining.”

Pretend We’re Dead

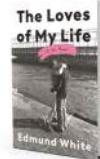
by Tanya Pearson (Da Capo, \$31)



In the history of rock, 1993 through 1995 could be called “the Years of the Woman,” said Clara Bingham in *Washington Monthly*. In this oral history of the era, author Tanya Pearson revisits the days when Courtney Love, Liz Phair, and other audacious female rockers dominated radio and magazine covers. Though their kind vanished when radio consolidated and 9/11 triggered a culture shift, “thanks to Pearson’s essential book, their glory days will no longer be forgotten.”

The Loves of My Life

by Edmund White (Bloomsbury, \$28)



Edmund White, now 85, has a new sex memoir out, and he “writes beautifully about desire at its most fevered and abject,” said Dan Kois in *Slate*. The great novelist and essayist “lived through momentous times, times of triumph and tragedy in gay America,” and as he revisits countless hookups and romances with other men, he masterfully juxtaposes “the eye-poppingly explicit and the gently lyrical.” The book “did often shock me,” but it makes a case that sex shouldn’t be so rare in serious literature.

Author of the week

Scott Turow

Scott Turow will never forget a conversation he once had with a woman whose son had been charged with murder, said **Sarah Lyall** in *The New York Times*. Turow, who at 75 still performs occasional pro bono legal work, had previously defended the woman’s son in a less serious case. But this time the evidence was overwhelming and the suspect’s mother



was “just torn apart,” he says. “I’ve always been struck by how terrible it is for a parent. They think, ‘Is my love for this child so huge that I can’t recognize that he or she is a monster?’” In Turow’s latest novel, *Presumed Guilty*, a young murder suspect who benefits from parental blind devotion is represented by none other than Rusty Sabich, the protagonist of *Presumed Innocent*, Turow’s classic 1987 legal thriller. Sabich has reappeared in one novel since, but Turow felt he owed the character closure. “I feel a certain personal loyalty to him,” he says, “because he’s the man who changed my life.”

Turow’s literary breakthrough occurred at a time when Americans had a far higher regard for the law, said **Sophia Nguyen** in *The Washington Post*. “The law was in its heyday in terms of its hold on the popular imagination,” he says. “You had *L.A. Law* on television, Steven Brill had started Court TV.” Because Americans had become more interconnected than ever before, he says, “the law was increasingly the place where profound cultural issues were being decided.” Today, though faith in the legal system has faded, Turow hopes his novels help readers recognize that it’s still the best system we have for achieving justice. “It’s a human institution, and that means that it’s undermined constantly by the people who practice it,” he says. “But the goals are really worthy.”

The 2025 Grammys: Beyoncé finally takes the top prize

“Finally. Finally. If you really care about this stuff—and maybe you shouldn’t—it feels like waking up from a bad dream that lasted 15 years,” said Chris Richard in *The Washington Post*. At last weekend’s Grammys, Beyoncé won her long-overdue first Album of the Year award, ending a string of baffling snubs, while Kendrick Lamar scored a similar breakthrough by taking home the two top prizes for an individual song. If the world was fair, “Beyoncé and Lamar should have been celebrating nights like this years ago,” not forced to find consolation in the wins they’d already scored in genre categories. But in at last fully honoring both artists, the Recording Academy “signaled a massive and necessary shift toward honoring real-world resonance in real time,” and that can only be good for the Grammys’ future.

“I Love L.A.” was another theme of the night—from the first performance on, said Evan Nicole Brown in *Time*. Citing the wildfires that devastated the region last month, host Trevor Noah called for donations to a relief fund that took in \$24 million across a week of Grammys events, adding to the more than \$100 million that the music industry raised for the cause just days earlier with its star-studded Fire Aid concert and telecast.

But the year in music was marked by its “surge of breakthrough artists,” and all were granted ample time to shine, said Stephen Thompson in *NPR.org*. Sabrina Carpenter, Teddy Swims, Shaboozey, and Benson Boone each sang their massive hits, while



Taylor Swift plays presenter on Beyoncé's big night.

Best New Artist winner Chappell Roan “provided one of the night’s most spectacular highlights” with a commanding performance of “Pink Pony Club.” No rising star, though, was more likely to emerge from the night with a flood of new fans than DoeChii, who “rightfully” won Best Rap Album, delivered a killer performance, and threw in a moving acceptance speech.

So, what has changed in Grammy world? asked Mikael Wood in the *Los Angeles Times*. It’s hard to explain Lamar winning Song of the Year and Record of the Year with the “giddy venom” of “Not Like Us,” his knockout diss track about Drake, without considering that the academy’s voting membership has gotten younger and less white since 2019: Two-thirds of voters are new since then, and Black representation is up 90 percent. In Beyoncé’s case, though, it wasn’t just a matter of the academy changing: “The singer in many ways adapted to the academy,” assembling an album that explored the Black roots of country music by way of nods to history and heavy use of acoustic instrumentation. “Cowboy Carter is not Beyoncé’s finest album, but it is an album, as Beyoncé suggested in her acceptance speech, that opens doors.”

And the winners were...

Album of the year: *Cowboy Carter*, Beyoncé

Record of the year: “Not Like Us,” Kendrick Lamar

Song of the year: “Not Like Us,” Kendrick Lamar

Best new artist: Chappell Roan

Sundance today: Does the festival still matter?

Though plenty of entries in this year’s Sundance Film Festival had buzz, “no movie generated half the conversation that Sundance did about itself,” said Owen Gleiberman in *Variety*. The organizers’ decision to move the festival out of Park City, Utah, by 2027, has raised an existential debate. Can Sundance, which in the 1990s “altered the very landscape of cinema,” stay relevant? The 2025 edition drew crowds, but not the crowds of 20 years ago. And in the streaming age, why bother flying somewhere for a festival? Because the festival briefly makes many of the films available online, “you can actually experience Sundance without attending.” Which feels appropriate, since most viewers will never see these films in theaters. Besides, “most fit all too snugly into the small screen.”

The organizers claim that Sundance has grown too big for Park City, said Nicole Sperling in *The New York Times*. When 20,000 moviegoers arrive in the small ski



This year’s festival crush

village, “hotel prices skyrocket, the streets become clogged with black SUVs, and what should be a five-minute ride down Main Street can turn into a 30-minute crawl.” But it’d still be a blow if the festival left Utah entirely, bypassing Salt Lake City for one of the two other finalists for Sundance’s new home, said Brian Higgins in *The Salt Lake Tribune*. If Sundance moves to Boulder, Colo., at least all the attendant industry big-

wigs and Insta influencers can still wear matching furs. But Sundance migrating to Ohio’s third-largest city just feels wrong. “Imagining Cincinnati with Sundance is about as weird as imagining Park City with the Cincinnati Bengals.”

Perhaps the talk of leaving explains “the bittersweet, muted enthusiasm” that greeted this year’s screenings, said Bilge Ebiri and Fran Hoepfner in *NYMAG.com*. Also, though, “this was a bad Sundance year,” as high-profile titles including *Opus*, *The Thing With Feathers*, and *Bubble & Squeak* “whiffed badly.” Still, there were standouts, including the provocatively stressful *If I Had Legs I’d Kick You*, starring Rose Byrne as a therapist caring for her sick daughter, and *Rebuilding*, in which Josh O’Connor plays a “wonderfully scruffy” cowboy who loses his family farm to wildfire. The latter played to a packed but totally silent theater. “That’s when you know a film is really working its magic.”

Review of Reviews: Film

I'm Still Here

Directed by Walter Salles
(PG-13)



A Brazilian family is tested by a regime's brutality.

With his dark-horse contender for the Best Picture Oscar, Brazilian director Walter Salles “has artfully chronicled in miniature the history of an entire country,” said Manuel Betancourt in *The A.V. Club*. Fernanda Torres is herself contending for Oscar gold for her performance as Eunice Paiva, a mother of five who must hold her family together when, in 1971, her beloved husband, Rubens, is taken away, never to be returned, by agents of Brazil’s military dictatorship. In real life, Eunice subsequently fought for decades for information about Rubens’ fate, yet *I'm Still Here* refuses to let the regime dominate its drama. Instead, “the film witnesses what a patriarch’s disappearance does to a household,” and lets the effects play



Torres: A devastated mother carries on.

Love Me

Directed by Andrew Zuchero and Sam Zuchero
(R)



In a post-human world, two machines crave connection.



This high-concept film about a romance that spans billions of years “begins quite promisingly,” said Bilge Ebiri in *NYMag.com*. In a future in which humanity has been erased from Earth, a lonely AI-powered sea buoy makes contact with a satellite programmed to search for life-forms, and “there’s beauty in the inanimate objects’ inarticulate longing.” But as the two machines, voiced by Kristen Stewart and Steven Yeun, advance their relationship by adopting avatars drawn from the internet content left behind by humans, the characters’ search for life’s meaning “can start to get wearying.” The avatars, also played by Stewart and Yeun, are based on long-dead influencers who playacted being a couple. And when the



Stewart and Yeun: Model lovers

Dog Man

Directed by Peter Hastings
(PG)



An unlikely hero battles feline treachery.

If there’s no youngster in your life who’s already a fan of Dav Pilkey, “this probably isn’t the movie for you,” said Elizabeth Weitzman in *The Wrap*. In his *Captain Underpants* and *Dog Man* book series, Pilkey’s humor “zig-zags between groaningly broad, hilariously stupid, and surprisingly sentimental.” Yet his work is “witty enough

for any adults who happen to be paying attention,” and this hit new adaptation “does full, chaotic justice to its source material.” The speechless title character, for those who don’t know, is a dog-human hybrid who was created on an operating table when a cop and his dog were wounded in an explosion. His greatest foe remains the criminally evil Petey the Cat. “But something is missing,” said Mark Kennedy



Half dog, half cop, all mensch

out on Torres’ face. “Acting of this subtle caliber is rarely celebrated, but Torres’ unassuming turn has proved undeniable,” said Carlos Aguilar in the *Los Angeles Times*. Because Torres makes Eunice seem such an unbreakable force of grace under pressure, “when sorrow does slip through her eyes in a lost stare or a weighted silence, Torres’ expression is beauti-

fully gutting.” At one point, more than a third into the story, Eunice and a teenage daughter are also taken into custody, said Zachary Barnes in *The Wall Street Journal*. Afterward, “once the thrillish elements have subsided,” the movie struggles to maintain its momentum. Even so, “much of it has a potent force,” mostly thanks to a lead performance that’s “tough, tender, and remarkable in its reserve.”

robots repeatedly imitate the act for decades and even centuries, said Richard Roeper in the *Chicago Sun-Times*, “it’s as if we’re stuck in a hellish version of *Groundhog Day*.” Sure, “there’s something deeply ironic and sad about two AI entities who try to replicate human emotions by imitating two insanely shallow people who were sharing an artificial version

of their lives on Instagram,” but it’s also tedious. Still, “the sheer audacity of the movie is enough to make it worth watching,” said Alissa Wilkinson in *The New York Times*. “A tale like this one requires a lot of inventive filmmaking,” and though the film “spins its wheels midway for a while,” it’s “wonderfully ambitious,” and raises interesting questions about our future intertwining of human life with AI.

in the Associated Press. “The Hollywoodization has overstuffed the narrative,” combining a dizzying number of plotlines that include explosions galore as well as a sentimental thread about what makes a good father. Lost in that mix is “the guerrilla feel of the books.” Once the wicked Petey clones himself, creating an adorable kitten named Li’l Petey, the movie

becomes “an emotionally naked tale about the fears of parenting,” said Katie Walsh in *The Seattle Times*. Bitterly disappointed, Petey abandons his non-evil offspring only for Dog Man to come to the rescue of first the kitten, then Li’l Petey’s dad. Often, *Dog Man* is “so visually dense” that the action passes in a blur. “But the emotional beats are solid, especially when it comes to the themes of found family.”

Streaming tips

Golden Age rom-coms

The Philadelphia Story

Put Cary Grant, Katharine Hepburn, and Jimmy Stewart in a romantic comedy, and it's hard to go wrong. Hepburn plays a socialite torn between two men when she entertains her debonaire ex and a handsome reporter on the eve of her second wedding.

\$4 on demand

Roman Holiday

What is it about handsome reporters? Gregory Peck plays a scribe who lands the scoop and romantic score of a lifetime when he stumbles upon Audrey Hepburn's AWOL princess asleep on a park bench. The pair's escapades in Rome define romantic dreams.

\$4 on demand

His Girl Friday

Cary Grant and Rosalind Russell may have set the record for banter (240 words per minute, by one count), but it's their winning chemistry that makes this 1940 screwball comedy a classic. Grant plays (you guessed it) a newspaperman who tries to steal time with his reporter ex-wife by assigning her a big story.

\$4 on demand

City Lights

Who needs words to win a woman's heart? Not Charlie Chaplin's Tramp, who in this 1931 silent masterpiece goes to absurd lengths to keep the object of his affection, a blind flower girl, from getting evicted.

\$3 on demand

Sabrina

Call it *Cinderella* with a few twists. Audrey Hepburn stars as a chauffeur's daughter who wins over a playboy scion portrayed by William Holden. But it's the rake's levelheaded brother, played by Humphrey Bogart, who may be the real catch.

\$4 on demand

The Apartment

Perhaps Billy Wilder's most underrated romantic comedy, this 1960 film stars Jack Lemmon as an insurance clerk who lets his bosses use his pad for extramarital dalliances. Shirley MacLaine plays the elevator girl both he and his boss adore.

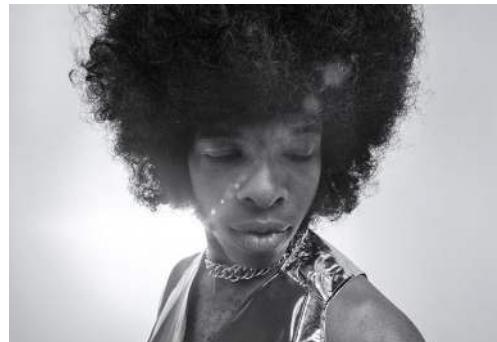
\$4 on demand

The Week's guide to what's worth watching

Bridget Jones: Mad About the Boy

Renée Zellweger has returned again as Bridget Jones, and Bridget's dating life is as complicated as ever. In this fourth movie in the 24-year-old rom-com franchise, the anxious Londoner is now a successful TV writer and widowed middle-aged mother of two young children. Told she has mourned the death of Mark, her husband, long enough, she finds her heart torn again between two men, a young park employee played by Leo Woodall, and her son's science teacher, played by Chiwetel Ejiofor.

Thursday, Feb. 13, Peacock



Sly Stone: Funk and soul's brightest comet

Sly Lives! (aka The Burden of Black Genius)

"Everybody is a star," Sly Stone once sang—but few have shined as bright and hot as he did. The legendary funkster shot to fame in the late 1960s with an uplifting message and his racially mixed band, the Family Stone. Then came mounting pressure, creeping insecurity, drug addiction, and run-ins with the law. Questlove directs this sonically charged dive into Sly's rise and retreat into reclusion.

Thursday, Feb. 13, Hulu

The Gorge

Horror director Scott Derrickson (*The Black Phone*) brings the jump scares in his new thriller starring Anya Taylor-Joy and Miles Teller as elite snipers assigned for a year as the lone occupants of a pair of guard towers that loom above opposite sides of a gorge they are told is the gate to hell. Forbidden to communicate even with each other, they predictably break the rules—and unleash untold fury.

Friday, Feb. 14, Apple TV+

Yellowjackets

What happened in the wilderness didn't stay in the wilderness. As Season 3 begins for this gender-switched hit *Lord of the Flies* drama, new tensions emerge among the surviving members of a girls' high school soccer team after the plane crash that stranded them prompted a descent into cannibalism. In the present, three adult survivors discover that someone wants them dead.

Friday, Feb. 14, Paramount + with Showtime



Another entitled cohort primed for a fall

SNL50: The Homecoming Concert

Saturday Night Live kicks off a weekend-long celebration of its 50th anniversary with a star-studded three-hour live concert event.

Friday, Feb. 14, at 8 p.m., Peacock

SNL50: The Anniversary Special

The centerpiece of the *SNL* celebration will be this three-hour primetime special. Details are under wraps, but expect a parade of cast members past and present.

Sunday, Feb. 16, at 8 p.m., NBC and Peacock

Other highlights**Cobra Kai**

The final five episodes of the *Karate Kid* spinoff series brings to a close the yearslong rivalry between Cobra Kai and Miyagi-Do.

Thursday, Feb. 13, Netflix

American Murder: Gabby Petito

Friends and family members recall Gabby Petito, who was murdered in 2021 by the fiancé with whom she shared a "van life" Instagram feed.

Monday, Feb. 17, Netflix

Best Interests

Michael Sheen and Sharon Horgan co-star in a British drama series as parents battling experts to keep their brain-damaged daughter alive.

Monday, Feb. 17, Acorn TV

Show of the week

The White Lotus

Another exotic vacation with a side of murder awaits. Mike White's award-winning, privilege-skewering satire heads to Thailand for Season 3, set at the Ko Samui outpost of the fictional White Lotus resort chain. Motives for murder abound among the guests. Michelle Monaghan, Carrie Coon, and Leslie Bibb play old friends whose girls' getaway turns testy. Walton Goggins portrays the timeworn older man in a May-December relationship, and Parker Posey and Jason Isaacs are a couple whose adult children are running amok as the family's fortunes take a dive.

Sunday, Feb. 16, HBO and Max

Winter salads: Giving the cozy season its due

The jewel-toned, hot-and-cold salad shown here makes “a terrific starter” for a winter meal, says Vanessa Seder in *Warm Your Bones: Cozy Recipes for Chilly Days and Winter Nights* (Union Square & Co.). It boasts “a lovely balance of sweet, tangy, crunchy, salty, hot, and cool,” and guests will feel virtuous to be eating so healthfully.

The second salad is less colorful. It’s more “a celebration of winter’s stark whiteness,” and it, too, “pays homage to some fabulous in-season, cold-weather produce.”

Recipes of the week

Roasted winter vegetables in a warm walnut vinaigrette

- ½ (3-lb) butternut squash, peeled, seeded, and sliced crosswise into ½-inch-thick wedges
- 2 medium yellow or red beets, peeled, halved, and cut into ½-inch-thick wedges
- 2 medium turnips, peeled, halved, and cut into ½-inch-thick wedges
- 10 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 5 oz baby spinach
- 1 cup raw walnut halves
- 3 garlic cloves, coarsely chopped
- 3 tbsp honey
- ¼ cup sherry vinegar

Position racks in upper and lower thirds of oven and preheat to 425. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper.

Place squash on one prepared baking sheet and beets and turnips on the other.



A new way to get your greens

Drizzle with 2 tbsp olive oil per baking sheet and season each sheet with 1 tsp salt and 1 tsp pepper. Toss vegetables gently to coat, then spread them out evenly. Roast for 20 minutes, remove from oven, gently toss again, and roast for about 20 minutes more, until vegetables are browned in parts and tender.

Arrange spinach on a large serving platter and top with the roasted vegetables (no need to let them cool).

In a medium skillet, warm remaining 6 tbsp olive oil over medium heat. Add walnuts and cook, stirring continuously, until they have just begun to toast, 1 to 2 minutes. Stir in garlic and cook just until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add honey and cook until boiling, about 2 minutes. Stir in vinegar and cook until heated through and

boiling, 1 to 2 minutes. Remove from heat and season with salt and pepper.

Spoon hot dressing over salad and serve immediately. Serves 4 to 6.

Winter white salad

For the dressing:

- 1 tbsp honey
- 3 tbsp champagne vinegar
- 1 tsp whole black peppercorns, coarsely cracked using the side of a chef’s knife
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- Sea salt

For the salad:

- 1 large Bosc pear
- 2 cups romanesco cauliflower florets
- 2 cups white cauliflower florets
- ½ cup thinly sliced rounds daikon radish
- 6 Hakurei turnips, sliced, or 2 small turnips, peeled and cut into thin wedges
- 2 medium sunchoke, thinly sliced
- 3 oz Parmigiano Reggiano cheese, shaved using a vegetable peeler

In a large bowl, whisk together honey, vinegar, and peppercorns until combined.

Slowly drizzle in olive oil and whisk until emulsified. Season with salt.

Use a sharp knife to thinly slice pear, making sure to discard any seeds, and gently toss it in dressing to avoid any browning.

Add remaining ingredients and gently toss to combine. Serves 4.

Dining out: Boston's best clam chowders

In Boston, a bowl of classic New England clam chowder is the cure for a cold winter day, said Adam H. Callaghan in *Food & Wine*. Forget tomato-laden Manhattan chowder or the clear stuff served in Rhode Island. In Massachusetts, the only chowders worth arguing over are thickened with milk or cream and loaded with clams and potatoes.

Saltie Girl “Some New Englanders say clam chowder should be so thick you can stand a spoon up in it,” and this posh Back Bay seafood bar backs that notion. Kathy Sidell reduces heavy cream and clam stock “until it’s practically a solid,” adds chopped clams, shallot, and potato, then finishes the dish with a floating fried clam and crispy lardon.

279 Dartmouth St.

Dive Bar If you visit downtown’s High Street Place Food Hall, order the chowder at Tiffani Faison’s raw bar. House-smoked bacon adds depth to the broth, and whether it’s winter or summer, she recommends pairing it with a bright Sancerre or white Burgundy from her neighboring wine bar. 100 High St.



The bar at Summer Shack

Summer Shack “Even the oyster crackers are homemade” at this popular Back Bay spot founded in 2000 by the late Jasper White, Boston’s “Godfather of Seafood.” Summer Shack’s New England clam chowder includes salt pork and a touch of thyme, and its creaminess “brings out the sweetness of the clams.” 50 Dalton St.

The Banks Seafood and Steak A two-decade veter-

eran of the chowder game, Robert Sisca has been perfecting an example “just outside of archetypal,” using herb oil and Berkshire pork belly. He also serves fried clams and waffles topped with a gravy consisting of chowder broth, maple syrup, lemon juice, chives, and bacon. 406 Stuart St.

Wine: California bargains

As has always been true, good wine is a true pleasure, and “it’s even more satisfying the less you spend,” said Eric Asimov in *The New York Times*. Although prices have been climbing, I still consider \$15 to \$20 the sweet spot for value wines, and these three reds show that some in that affordable range even hail from California.

2022 Broadside Merlot (\$18).

Though it once made sense to avoid California merlot, this Paso Robles offering, with “its plummy, minty flavor and pleasantly bitter aftertaste,” proves that there are now some good ones out there.

2021 Skull Wines Red (\$18).

A blend of six grapes, this breezy organic red wine might remind you of Beaujolais. “It’s lively, fresh, and delicious, and it goes down easily.”

2022 Sidekick Cabernet Sauvignon (\$20).

“Juicy, lightly fruity, and herbal,” this cab from Lodi has a welcome touch of acidity and “just enough tannic edge.”



This week's dream: Thai luxury at the real 'White Lotus'

Picture the opening scene: A ruffled travel writer is greeted by crisply uniformed staff who "whisk away his luggage and offer an elaborate cocktail," said Christopher Muther in *The Boston Globe*. Am I starring in an episode of HBO's *The White Lotus*? Almost. This is the treatment you get at the Four Seasons Resort Koh Samui, on an island off the east coast of Thailand, where the HBO dramedy's latest season, which debuts Feb. 16, was shot. Four Seasons properties have been the stand-ins for the fictional White Lotus throughout the show's run, with Season 1 set at Four Seasons Resort Maui and Season 2 at Four Seasons San Domenico Palace in Sicily. Alas, I'm not one of the "high-end gays" that Jennifer Coolidge's character talked about in previous episodes. "I'm just an ordinary gay with a limited work expense account. Sigh."



A view to the Gulf of Thailand from one of the resort's shared perches

My cocktail vanquished, a golf cart arrived to ferry me to my 1,100-square-foot villa with views of the Gulf of Thailand. A dish of Thai Sweet Golden Cake awaited me next to an inviting plunge pool. It was all so private, I soon realized I needn't bother with a swimsuit. In a decadent tableau straight out of *White Lotus*, "I ate cake while naked in a pool." However briefly,

I had become a high-end gay—"minus the homicidal tendencies."

Dinner at the resort's Koh Thai Kitchen was just as sumptuous. The duck rolls and chicken-cashew stir fry, presented while a full moon shone over the ocean and palm fronds stirred in the breeze, proved to be "one of the most romantic meals I've ever eaten...by myself." And even though "I was the odd schlug who didn't belong, everyone was exceedingly kind." On my second day, a gracious late checkout allowed time for a "heavenly" layout beside the beachfront infinity pool, a paddleboarding session, and a visit to the teakwood-furnished library. For my last activity, I requested another piece of Thai Sweet Golden Cake and took it back to my plunge pool. It was just another indulgent day at "the White Lotus." *Villas for two at the resort (fourseasons.com/kohsamui) start at \$2,100*

Hotel of the week



A banda for two

andBeyond Mnemba Island Mnemba, Tanzania

The 11 thatched banda-style villas at andBeyond's Mnemba Island resort are "the ultimate in laid-back, barefoot luxury," said Lisa Grainger in *Condé Nast Traveler*. "Surrounded by powder-soft, blindingly white beaches and shaded by casuarina trees, the shell-shaped rooms blend into the environment: all creams, woods, rattans and sisal, with pale accents of coral." Located on a tiny dollop of sand off Unguja, the biggest island in the Zanzibar archipelago, this recently renovated escape is ringed by a protected coral reef that keeps other boaters at least 400 meters off shore. That makes it "a rare private space on this increasingly touristy Zanzibar coastline." *andbeyond.com; bandas from \$2,150 per person*

Getting the flavor of...

Truckee's burgeoning winter scene

When the moon rises over the 19th-century storefronts of Truckee, Calif., it's possible to imagine "the rough-and-tumble cowboy outpost it was," said Anna Dimond in *The Wall Street Journal*. Lying about 12 miles north of Lake Tahoe, Truckee was first a gold-rush stopover, then a booming logging town, and by the 1990s a bit run-down, appreciated mostly by "bohemian ski bums." Today's Truckee is "no longer just for chapped-lip die-hards" from the nearby Palisades Tahoe and Sugar Bowl resorts. It buzzes with restaurants, bookshops, and boutiques serving a growing population of year-rounders and digital nomads. There's a raw bar at Buoy & Trap, freshly made pasta at Great Gold, and hearty steaks and weekend brunch at Cottonwood, a converted 1928 ski lodge. While "the hardcore set grumble about losing their best-kept ski secret," Truckee is undeniably improved. "In a town where 'getting coffee' once meant filling a travel mug at the bagel shop before skiing, four new specialty shops have opened within walking distance of each other."

The fount of Mississippi blues

The Blue Front Cafe is the oldest surviving juke joint in Mississippi. And that's where I met Jimmy "Duck" Holmes, 77, last of the Bentonia, Miss., bluesmen, said Emma John in *Afar*. Holmes inherited the spot in 1970, and it's now one of 200 official sites along the Mississippi Blues Trail. "Even when I'm gone,

this place will be here," Holmes told me, sitting amid guitars, old photos, and tubs of pig's feet. As a fiddle player based in London, I'd long listened to certain forms of American folk music, and I hoped my weeklong trip along the Blues Trail, from Jackson to Meridian, would boost my appreciation for the blues. My stops included Indianola, home of the great B.B. King, as well as Dockery Farms, a plantation that nurtured musical talent and where musician Charley Patton cultivated influential acolytes such as Howlin' Wolf and Son House. At times, I could "hear riffs emanating from unseen speakers." The journey helped me realize that blues tones and style are "woven through the music I love, from bluegrass to Motown."

See more on a 'stopover vacation'

Many of the world's top airlines are now offering the opportunity to extend a trip by adding a stopover package, said Larry Olmsted in *Forbes*. If you're flying somewhere on Cathay Pacific with a stop in Hong Kong, for example, you can schedule the second leg of your flight as long as three months after the first. Similar, though shorter, benefits are available in some cities through TAP Air Portugal, Icelandair, and Iberia. For those changing planes in Istanbul, Turkish Airlines offers free, same-day, guided trips into town for shopping or sightseeing; Qatar Airways provides tours of Doha at a discount. And Emirates offers Dubai packages at prices "almost too good to believe." One three-day offer includes a dinner cruise, a tour, sea kayaking, and a visit to the observation deck of the 2,700-foot Burj Khalifa for just \$105.



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How to Win at Love

A classic tennis bracelet serves up over 10 carats of sparkle for a guaranteed win

It was the jewelry piece that made the world stop and take notice. In the middle of a long volley during the big American tennis tournament, the chic blonde athlete had to stop play because her delicate diamond bracelet had broken and she had to find it. The tennis star recovered her beloved bracelet, but the world would never be the same.

From that moment on, the tennis bracelet has been on the lips and on the wrists of women in the know. Once called eternity bracelets, these bands of diamonds were known from then on as tennis bracelets, and remain *the* hot ticket item with jewelers.

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Best Properties on the Market

This week: Homes in Miami



◀ **South Miami** This 1950 boho nature retreat, 10 miles from downtown, is tucked into a wooded property crossed by the Snapper Creek Canal. The three-bedroom villa features terrazzo floors, exposed-wood walls and ceilings, a skylight, a wood-burning fireplace, and a kitchen-dining-living room facing an organically shaped pool and landscaped entertaining patio. The 0.74-acre lot has paths through native flora to ponds, an art studio, and a picnic area with boating access. \$2,799,000. Val Byrne, Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices EWM Realty, (305) 323-6231



▶ **Spring Garden** Seven Oaks, a 1920 Arts & Crafts home, once belonged to a local hero: concert pianist and teacher Ruth Greenfield, who founded one of the South's first integrated conservatories. The five-bedroom house has hardwood floors, a living room with central fireplace, an office with built-ins, and a kitchen-dining area with French doors to a roomy deck. The tropically landscaped double lot includes a big backyard and mature trees; parks, downtown, and Miami Beach are all nearby. \$2,750,000. Jackson Keddell, Douglas Elliman, (305) 209-8066



BBC Media



◀ **South Miami** Ten minutes' drive from the University of Miami and Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, this six-bedroom house is also walking distance to multiple local parks. The 2022 open-plan smart home comes with solar panels, EV chargers, an elevator, impact-resistant floor-to-ceiling sliders, a wood-slatted feature wall, a chef's kitchen, a den with a wet bar, a gym, and a sauna. Outside, enclosed by privacy foliage, are a lawn, patio, outdoor living space, and pool. \$6,950,000. Nathan Zeder, Coldwell Banker Realty, (786) 252-4023

Best Properties on the Market



◀ **Coconut Grove** The Grove at Grand Bay is walking distance to parks, shops, and dining. This condo in the North Tower with four bedrooms plus staff quarters features floor-to-ceiling windows, black-walnut paneling, steel art frames, wood and terrazzo floors, cement columns, and an open main space with a gourmet kitchen, wine refrigerator, and Biscayne Bay views through sliding doors to a wraparound balcony. Building amenities including parking, pools, a playroom, and a concierge. \$7,985,000. Giorgio Vecchi and Dario Stoka, Douglas Elliman, (305) 798-9300

► **Buena Vista East Historic District** This organic-modern four-bedroom is a short drive from museums, Morningside Park, and the water. The 1960 open-plan house has vaulted, beamed ceilings, polished concrete floors, bifold glass doors from the living room and primary bedroom to the wraparound deck, a soaker tub in the primary bath, and a chef's kitchen with an eat-in quartz peninsula. Outside are a landscaped front and an expansive pea-gravel backyard surrounded by mature trees. \$1,695,000. Issam Shalhoub, ONE Sotheby's International Realty, (305) 930-5805



Steal of the week



◀ **Edgewater** The 2006 New Wave condominiums overlook Biscayne Bay and Miami Beach. This one-bedroom unit has high ceilings, tile floors, an open kitchen with granite counters, and a dining area flowing into a living room, both with floor-to-ceiling glass doors to a covered balcony. Building amenities include a

waterside pool, gym, lounge, meditation garden, doorman, and parking; the sports courts of Margaret Pace Park are walking distance. \$575,000, Eddy Martinez and Roland Ortiz, Worldwide Group at ONE Sotheby's International Realty, (786) 253-3949

The bottom line

■ Outstanding federal student debt stood at roughly \$1.64 trillion toward the end of 2024. That's above where it stood at the start of 2021 (\$1.59 trillion), despite President Biden's forgiveness of student debt for 5.3 million borrowers during his term. *CNBC.com*

■ The number of job openings in the U.S. decreased to 7.6 million from a revised 8.2 million reading in November, according to the Bureau of Labor. The number of vacancies per unemployed worker stayed at 1.1. At its peak in 2022, the ratio was 2 to 1. *Bloomberg*

■ Music streamer Spotify posted its first full year of profitability after 18 years in business, earning \$1.18 billion. The company said that it paid a record \$10 billion in royalties to the music industry in 2024. *The Wall Street Journal*



■ State Farm, California's largest home insurer, asked state officials for an emergency rate hike averaging 22 percent after last month's deadly wildfires. The company has already received at least 8,700 claims and paid more than \$1 billion to customers. *Los Angeles Times*

■ Waffle House is adding a 50-cent surcharge to egg orders as a nationwide egg shortage pushes the average price per dozen eggs to \$4.15, more than double their cost in the summer of 2023. *Associated Press*

■ Amazon said it set new delivery speed records in 2024, with more than 9 billion items arriving the same or next day globally. Its same-day delivery service now reaches 140 metro areas in the U.S. *Qz.com*

National savings: Trump seeks U.S. wealth fund

President Trump wants the United States to be in the investment business, said Jenny Leonard and Katherine Burton in *Bloomberg*. Trump signed an executive order this week directing officials to create a national wealth fund. Trump floated the idea of a sovereign wealth fund—in essence an investment fund owned by the government—during the

campaign, proposing that “money from tariffs” could be used to “invest in manufacturing hubs, defense, and medical research.” Other national wealth funds generally exist in countries with excess money, either from “large foreign exchange reserves, like China, or revenue from the sale of oil.” How the U.S. would invest is unclear, though



Investor-in-chief?

Trump floated the suggestion that “the fund could facilitate the sale of TikTok.”

Let's hope this doesn't go anywhere, said Dominic Pino in *National Review*. A sovereign wealth fund makes sense for oil-rich states like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates that pull in massive revenues and “don't have a ton to spend it on.” Among Western countries,

“Norway is the canonical example of a successful sovereign wealth fund.” But it, too, has money to spend, averaging a budget surplus of 10 percent of GDP since the 1990s. The U.S. is running an enormous deficit, “would have to borrow even more money to start a wealth fund,” and is a “poor steward of the money it already controls.”

Economy: Strong growth for 2024 beats predictions

The U.S. economy “defied expectations” again, growing by a 2.3 percent annual rate in the fourth quarter, said Ben Casselman in *The New York Times*. Growth slowed from 3.1 percent in the third quarter, “but nonetheless represented an encouraging end” to the year, the Commerce Department reported this week, led by “robust consumer spending.” For the year as a whole, measured from the end of 2023 to the end of 2024, gross domestic product increased 2.5 percent, which was slower than the 3.2 percent in 2023 but still well ahead of forecasters’ projections.

Headed south: Meta may change incorporation to Texas

Meta is in talks to relocate its incorporation from Delaware to Texas, said Emily Glazer in *The Wall Street Journal*. Meta would follow Elon Musk's Tesla, which reincorporated in Texas “after a Delaware court ordered him to give up a compensation package valued at \$55.8 billion.” Most Fortune 500 companies incorporate in Delaware because it has “specialized courts that handle business matters.” Texas is trying to “woo corporate registrations” with its own, possibly friendlier business court system. While its registration could move, Meta said that it has no plans to move its headquarters operations from California.

Tech earnings: Alphabet falls on high data-center costs

Alphabet shares tumbled 8 percent this week after the company reported slower cloud growth, said Stephen Morris in the *Financial Times*. The parent company of Google “reported double-digit increases in fourth-quarter revenues and profits, driven by its core advertising business.” But investors were disappointed by the results from its cloud unit. Google blamed “more demand than we had available capacity.” CEO Sundar Pichai said that the company plans to spend \$75 billion on data centers this year, much more than Wall Street anticipated.

New recruit: Top VC firm hires Daniel Penny

Daniel Penny, the Marine veteran who was acquitted of homicide after fatally choking a homeless man on a New York City subway, has been hired by venture capital firm Andreessen Horowitz, said Hurubie Meko and Mike Isaac in *The New York Times*. A partner at the firm wrote in a memo this week that Penny, a former architecture student, will learn “the business of investing.” Co-founder Marc Andreessen “strongly supported President Trump” in the last election, and Penny has been “praised as a hero by some conservatives” for protecting fellow passengers, while liberals condemned his actions as vigilantism.

Help wanted, larceny experience required

Retailers are hiring shoplifters to combat shoplifting, said Clara Hernanz Lizarraga in *Bloomberg*. Martin Gill, a former criminology professor, is the founder of a U.K.-based consultancy Perpetuity Research “that helps retailers improve their security strategy.” Gill has three ex-cons on staff who conduct “penetration tests”—essentially going undercover to test how stores respond to retail theft. And business is booming: In the United States, a recent survey revealed “that nearly two-thirds of retailers had increased their budgets to train employees on theft.” Gill characterizes his mystery shoplifters as “career criminals who have been heavily involved in theft and fraud.” They are hired to help companies understand their vulnerabilities. In one case, “a Perpetuity shoplifter was tasked with entering a supermarket to pilfer alcohol” and made out with five bottles that never got security tags. Floor staff are typically not notified when a test is occurring, but there is always an agreed-upon plan in case a hired shoplifter is caught red-handed.

Making Money

Retirement: Great Wealth Transfer? Not so fast

A new study casts doubt on how great the “Great Wealth Transfer” will actually be, said Adam Hardy in *Money*. The Baby Boomer generation—those born between 1946 and 1964—has enjoyed an impressive run and now holds “roughly 50 percent of all household wealth in the United States,” or about \$85 trillion. “For years, economists and analysts have been projecting” that a large proportion of that “will soon flow to younger generations,” carrying enormous economic implications. Not so fast. “A growing body of research suggests that older Americans might end up depleting their wealth before it gets passed on.” The latest, a survey of high-net worth individuals from Charles Schwab released in January, found a disproportionate share (45 percent) of Boomers saying, “I want to enjoy my money for myself while I am still alive.”

Is that so wrong? asked Isabel Woodford in the *Financial Times*. “Since as early as I can remember, I’ve known” that my parents “don’t believe in leaving a large inheritance.” It’s not that they don’t love us. This may sound “counter to the primitive desire to protect one’s offspring,” but it could also reflect justified concern. “Lots of money isn’t always the best thing” for your children. It could even be “economically infantilizing,” given the cultural backlash against “nepo babies.” Receiving anything from



Anxious elders are not rushing to give money to heirs.

a deceased family member “remains the exception in the U.S., not the rule,” said Daniel Neligh in *Bloomberg*.

“Just 1 in 5 American households have received a substantial gift, trust, or inheritance in recent decades,” and that might not change considerably in the coming decades. Most of this “great wealth” poised to be transferred is within families already in the top 2 percent.

For those who are well-off, though, the reluctance to give away their money is driven mainly by anxiety, said

Anne Tergesen in *The Wall Street Journal*. Many Boomers are doing better than they think, and are living “below their means” because they are concerned about rising health-care costs and outliving their retirement savings. In one study, “married 65-year-olds withdrew an average of 2.1 percent of their savings annually,” well below the 4 percent spending rate that many advisers recommend. They’re leaving upwards of \$1.16 million unspent over a 30-year retirement, while still “setting aside 40 percent of their initial wealth for emergencies or bequests.” For Boomers, deciding how to transfer wealth appropriately means answering a lot of “what ifs,” said Preston Fore in *Fortune*. What if your health-care costs are extreme? What if you live to 100? Conversations about wealth transfer should not be “about only keeping or only giving—it’s about doing both, responsibly.”

What the experts say

■ Loan rates stay high despite Fed cuts
The Federal Reserve’s rate cuts last year still haven’t done much to lower most borrowing costs, said Sarah Hansen in *Morningstar*. Unfortunately, monetary policy isn’t quite like waving a magic wand. Credit card rates “are closely tied to the federal funds rate,” however, it can take months for changes to get fully priced in. The average rate on a credit card has barely budged in recent months, dropping “to 21.47 percent in November after peaking at 21.76 percent in August.” Mortgage rates have gone *up* since September, since they are “linked to yields on longer-term Treasury bonds,” which reflect concerns about lingering inflation. Other loans, like auto and personal loans, are even “less sensitive to the Fed’s moves,” and rates for those have “ticked up” because delinquencies are on the rise.

■ The payoff from a Roth conversion
Sometimes writing a big check is the best thing you can do for your financial health, said Peter Coy in *The New York Times*. When you convert from a traditional Individual Retirement Account (IRA) to a Roth IRA, the money gets taxed as income up front. On the flip side, inside the Roth it “grows tax-free,” and the withdrawals don’t count toward taxable

income, either, helping to “lower Medicare premiums and limit required minimum distributions from your ordinary 401(k) or IRA.” A 65-year-old retiree who does a \$1.1 million Roth conversion could spend “about \$2,600 more per year through age 70 and about \$11,600 more per year after that.” However, the initial tax bill on the conversion “is nearly \$300,000,” a big psychological hurdle.

■ A ‘no spend’ trend for 2025

People “tired of consuming” are pledging to have a “no-buy 2025,” said Ann-Marie Alcántara in *The Wall Street Journal*. On Instagram and TikTok, influencers are encouraging followers “to purchase as little new stuff as possible”—or at least wait until they absolutely need it. The “no-spend challenge” has been life-changing for some. Elysia Berman has been documenting her way out of nearly \$48,000 in credit card debt by compiling a “no-buy” list that “includes clothes, beauty products, perfume, jewelry, home décor, and books.” Others are taking a slower approach. Marissa Huertas-Crespo takes screenshots of items that catch her eye online, putting those photos in a folder on her computer—and then “deleting anything she hasn’t thought about” at the end of each month.

Charity of the week

In 1989, the prolific inventor Dean Kamen—who developed the two-wheeled Segway and the first insulin pump for



diabetics—founded a nonprofit organization that would bring engineering and inventing opportunities to kids of all ages: FIRST (firstinspires.org). Through FIRST, children and teens ages 4 to 18 get to participate in robotics competitions all around the world. Each year, more than 80,000 students work in small groups, guided by a mentor, to develop a robot with parts provided by FIRST. Their robots then face off at regional FIRST competitions in nearly 100 countries. A lucky few progress to an annual championship. FIRST also hosts LEGO leagues, in which nearly half a million kids develop coding, engineering, and design skills by building LEGO models to solve annual challenges based on real-world problems.

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.

Shopping: The end of China's cheap ride

The closing of a once obscure trade loophole could give American consumers the first taste “of what the trade war actually means for them,” said John Herrman in *New York* magazine. Both the Biden and Trump administrations recognized Chinese retailers had “a major advantage over American firms.” A 95-year-old trade exemption known as “de minimis” allowed packages valued at under \$800 to ship to the U.S. tariff-free. Chinese retailers like Temu and Shein took advantage of that by shipping supercheap clothes and household items directly from Chinese factories. President Trump this week closed the loophole, long criticized by both parties, as part of new trade levies against China (see Controversy, p.6). The move caused chaos in customs as the U.S. Postal Service briefly stopped accepting packages from China. Even if the logjam clears, “impossibly low prices are central to Temu’s appeal,” and subjecting \$4 dresses and \$12 handbags to a 35 percent import tax will feel an awful lot like inflation for budget-conscious consumers.

It’s hard to overstate how great an impact this will have, said Ana Swanson in *The New York Times*. Use of the de minimis provision has “exploded in popularity,” with Chinese exports of low-value packages soaring from \$5.3 billion in 2018 to \$66 billion in 2023. That has “angered traditional retailers,” who could not avoid tariffs. “Leveling the playing field is terrific for U.S. business,” said Jim Marcum, chief executive of David’s Bridal, which paid an average duty of 23.5 percent on its made-in-China dresses last year. One million packages were coming in per day from Temu and Shein, said Melissa Chen in *The Free Press*.



New customs rules could cripple Temu’s business.

In addition to getting away with not paying tariffs, they are “exempt from government rules covering product safety, forced-labor dictates, and so on,” that apply to competitors like Gap and H&M. “Even the most strident free-trade evangelists” have to agree that “the de minimis loophole has handed China’s e-commerce companies an unfair trade advantage.”

Those companies have used that advantage to turn young Americans into shopaholics, said Bethany Mandel in the *New York Post*. Temu gamified con-

sumerism, “with a spinning roulette wheel touting cash rewards, countdown timers, piggy banks of website credit, and flashing pop-up messages.” It’s part of China’s “multifront war on Americans’ minds, turning us into monkeys at a casino, constantly seeking a dopamine hit on TikTok” and crowding our homes with needless stuff. Meanwhile, the shopping apps are filled with cheap knockoffs, hurting American entrepreneurs.

U.S. retailers shouldn’t celebrate yet, said Andrea Felsted in *Bloomberg*, because the trade war with China still threatens their bottom line. Many retailers rely less on production in China than they did a few years ago, and Trump’s 10 percentage point hike in levies on Chinese imports is “much more manageable than the 60 percent” he previously floated. Still, U.S. retailers “must start preparing now for any potential escalation in the trade war.” If conflict with China—or Canada, Mexico, and Europe—heats up, then pinched consumers will inevitably have to cut down on “nice-to-have goods.”

The big pot payoff that never came

Jonathan Caulkins and Keith Humphreys
The Atlantic

Legal weed’s economic promises have gone up in smoke, said Jonathan Caulkins and Keith Humphreys. The legalization of commercial marijuana was supposed to bring a slew of benefits to states, from “reduced addiction to opioids” to “surging tax revenue” and “a socially responsible industry that prioritized people over profits.” So far, that’s all been “overstated or simply wrong.” Today, more people smoke weed on a daily or near-daily basis than drink alcohol. The industry is controlled by massive growers like Copperstate Farms, an Arizona business with a 2,000,000-square-foot greenhouse. “Commercial production has driven

down prices, and so the cannabis tax windfall touted by many supporters has also been overwhelming.” In California, weed taxes accounted for just 0.2 percent of the state’s total tax collections. Falling prices have also thinned margins, making businesses pursue new customers with intoxicating edibles, sometimes with misleading labels—or no labels at all. Americans are catching on. In November, voters in Florida, North Dakota, and South Dakota rejected ballot measures to legalize recreational marijuana use. It’s a healthy pause to re-examine how the “for-profit, freewheeling, corporate cannabis industry has created downsides and excesses.”

Israeli tech is our best ally on AI

Scott Cohen
The Wall Street Journal

President Biden kicked Israel’s technology sector in the teeth on his way out the Oval Office door, said Scott Cohen. A week before Biden left office, the Commerce Department “announced export controls on advanced computer chips” to a wide range of foreign countries, mostly in the Middle East and Asia, that do business with China. “The rule classified Israel as a Tier 2 country subject to advanced-chip export caps, instead of including it in the Tier 1 list of countries with no restrictions.” This essentially cuts off Israel from the high-stakes battle for artificial intelligence technology. It’s quite a change from 2022, when Biden entered into an AI

partnership with Israel. Israel “has proved itself a global leader in AI”; major U.S. tech companies, including Nvidia, Google, Microsoft, Intel, and Salesforce, have “all acquired Israeli AI startups in the past few years.” After Oct. 7, Israel put its AI skills into security applications, such as groundbreaking drone-detection systems. That is exactly what the U.S. Defense Department has said it needs. “The Trump administration should respond by immediately adding Israel to the Tier 1 list,” eliminating any restrictions on its access to AI chips. If we’re in a technology battle for “dominance” with China, cutting off Israel is the last thing we need.

Obituaries

The swinging '60s singer who beat addiction

Marianne Faithfull
1946-2025

Marianne Faithfull transformed hard living into hard-won redemption. The Londoner found fame at 17, after Rolling Stones manager Andrew Loog Oldham met her at a party and chose her to record the Mick Jagger-Keith Richards song "As Tears Go By." As Jagger's eventual girlfriend—and a muse who inspired songs such as "Wild Horses"—she became an icon of Swinging '60s London. She co-wrote the Stones' druggy "Sister Morphine" and acted in films, including the eroticized 1968 drama *The Girl on a Motorcycle*. But her partying years gave way to a breakdown, a suicide attempt, heroin addiction, and homelessness. She re-emerged with the acclaimed 1979 album *Broken English*, which paved the way for a third act, as a husky-voiced chanteuse singing of loss and resilience. "I don't know how else to be but raw and honest," she said in 2014. "Even if I try to, I can't stop myself from saying what I think."

Born Marianne Evelyn Gabriel Faithfull, her heritage was "one of intrigue, decadence, and fallen empires," said the Associated Press. Her father was a former British spy, her mother a baroness descended from Austro-Hungarian aristocrats. As a child she spent time in both a convent



school and a "sex-obsessed commune," and by her teen years she was emulating Joan Baez and singing in folk clubs. Discovered by Oldham, who hadn't heard her sing a note, she nailed "As Tears Go By" in two takes, and the song quickly soared to Britain's top 10. That made her "a breakout star," said *Rolling Stone*, and when she took up romantically with Jagger

two years later, her "It girl status" was cemented. She made headlines when, during a drug raid on Richards' country house, she was arrested wearing only a fur rug. But then she began to spiral, suffering a miscarriage and a pill-fueled breakdown; soon she'd "disappeared from the spotlight in a haze of heroin addiction."

Substance abuse had roughened and deepened her once wispy voice by the time she returned with *Broken English*, said *The New York Times*. A raw record of "unforeseen character and depth," the platinum-seller turned Faithfull into "a symbol of survival and transformation." In the following decades, she continued to tour and record despite mounting health problems, and wrote a pair of candid memoirs of her turbulent life. "Never apologize, never explain—didn't we always say that?" she wrote in 1994's *Faithfull*. "Well, I haven't and I don't."

The MLB commissioner who presided over trouble after trouble

Fay Vincent's stint as Major League Baseball commissioner was a tumultuous three years. Just a month after he took the reins in 1989, a massive earthquake hit San Francisco and damaged Candlestick Park—in the middle of a World Series the Giants were in. Vincent was praised for

Fay Vincent
1938-2025

managing to resume the series a week later, but it was just the start of his stressful tenure. He presided over the 1990 owner lockout that delayed Opening Day and the emergence of the steroid-use scandal, and at one point, he actually suspended Yankees owner George Steinbrenner for paying a gambler. "I was not a successful commissioner," Vincent said in 2014. "Nobody likes to fail."

Born in Connecticut, Francis Vincent grew into a lumbering, 6-foot-3, 240-pound teen recruited to play college football. But a fall out of a window his freshman year ended that dream and gave him a limp for life. He later graduated from Yale Law and served as chairman of Columbia Pictures and vice-chairman of Coca-Cola before joining MLB as deputy commissioner. In that role, said *The Washington Post*, he "negotiated a controversial lifetime ban of player-manager Pete Rose" for gambling on games. Soon after, he was promoted to commissioner, a job for which he was ill-suited. His congenial, "consensus-building personality" seemed "out of step with the turmoil."

Vincent loved "schmoozing with umpires and groundskeepers as well as players," said *The New York Times*, but wasn't as cozy with the owners, who forced his resignation in 1992. Later, he devoted himself to baseball history, writing a memoir about his love of the game and his struggles as commissioner. "Baseball, alone in sport, considers errors to be part of the game," he said.

The skating icon who became a sportscaster

Dick Button
1929-2025

Figure skater Dick Button made other athletes earn his praise. A two-time Olympic champion and five-time world champion, he expanded the sport not just by being the first to land a triple jump but also through his acerbic commentary. For four decades, Button was the primary TV commentator for nearly every major skating championship, teaching Americans how to tell a salchow jump (forward) from a lutz (backward) and turning figure skating into a marquee Olympic event. He showered skaters with compliments when deserved, but skewered those who fell short, pointing out technical violations not obvious to casual fans. When Christopher Bowman won the U.S. national championship in 1992, for example, Button deemed his routine "ordinary, boring, slow, conservative, and sedate," and he refused to apologize for his opinions. "I don't think anybody wants to sit there and listen to somebody say, 'Ooh, ooh, ooh, wasn't that beautiful? Wasn't that just too lovely for words?'" he said in 2010. "The heck with that."

Richard Totten Button got his first pair of skates at 11, just in time to become a pioneer in the "new wave of explosive athleticism in



the sport," said *The Wall Street Journal*. Seven years later, at the St. Moritz Olympics in 1948, the 18-year-old landed the world's first double axel jump and became the first American to win Olympic gold in the sport. The following year, he won the Sullivan Award, the nation's award for outstanding collegiate or Olympic athlete. He repeated his Olympic win in 1952, landing the first triple jump—the triple loop—and developing a new type of spin, the now-common flying camel. By then, he was enrolled at Harvard University, where he completed both undergraduate and law degrees.

Button never practiced law, but instead found success producing made-for-TV skating shows. His "tart wit and passion" animated his commentary, said *The Hollywood Reporter*, and he won an Emmy in 1981. On the side, he continued skating recreationally until 2000, when he suffered a brain injury from a fall on the ice at age 71. Still, he relearned to walk and continued Olympics commentary for another decade. By then, he was considered "the sport's unofficial spokesman," said *The New York Times*. "I'm fine," he said upon his return to the booth. "I'm here, and I'm wreaking havoc as usual."

The making of a saint

The Vatican will soon declare its first Millennial saint, said Linda Kinstler in **The Guardian**.

How did the Catholic Church decide an Italian teenager was worthy of canonization?

AS A CHILD growing up in Milan, Carlo Acutis collected stories of miracles. He wrote about the time when, in 1411, wine turned to blood in a castle chapel in Ludbreg, Croatia; of how, in 1630, a pastor in Canosio, Italy, saved his town from a flood by blessing the raging waters; of how, in 1906, a priest on the island of Tumaco, Colombia, held up a reliquary on the beach to stop an approaching tsunami. Acutis, 11 years old and a devout Catholic, began typing up these stories and posting them on his website, which he styled as a “virtual museum” of miraculous events. A section on the site invited visitors

to “discover how many friends you have in heaven,” and to read stories of young saints.

Acutis hoped to one day join their ranks. He was convinced that he would die before he reached adulthood and told his mother, Antonia, that he would perish of “a broken vein in his brain.” He wanted to be buried in the town of Assisi, where his family had a summer home. In the meantime, he devoted his life to the church, which was a surprise to his largely secular parents. As a teenager, he taught catechism classes to young children and offered them a step-by-step guide to becoming a saint. “Always remember that you, too, can become a saint!” he would say. Every day, they were to go to mass, recite the Holy Rosary, read the Scripture, and confess their sins.

Describing what would-be saints needed to do in life, Acutis omitted mention of the significant tasks they would need to undertake in death. To be recognized as a saint, an individual must go through what is essentially a prolonged posthumous trial. The Vatican office responsible for this process is known as the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, and it has been in operation since 1588. The dicastery investigates whether the candidate was spiritually exemplary in life, and whether they have proven useful to the faithful in death. Crucially, and most controversially, every candidate must also have two scientifically inexplicable miracles posthumously attributed to them before they can be canonized. (God alone can perform miracles, according to the Catholic faith; saints merely intercede on behalf of believers.)



The beatification of Acutis at the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi

Acutis wrote extensively about his theological devotion, as if in anticipation of his own postmortem trial. He filmed a video of himself in which he proclaimed that he was “destined to die.” Then, on Oct. 1, 2006, when he was 15, he fell ill with a fever and sore throat. A pediatrician was consulted and an antibiotic prescribed, but his symptoms worsened. On Oct. 6, he found blood in his urine; the next day he did not have the strength to get out of bed. His parents took him to the hospital, where he was diagnosed with leukemia. He told his mother he would not make it out of the hospital alive. Over the next few days, his condition continued to decline, and a priest was summoned to his bedside. On Oct. 11, he suffered a cerebral hemorrhage and fell into a coma. Hours later, doctors declared him brain-dead. The next day, at 6:45 a.m., his heart stopped beating. His body was transported back to his home in Milan, where loved ones gathered. He was buried in a family plot in Piedmont while a tomb in Assisi was readied.

Not long after, Acutis’ belongings were handed over to a historical committee from the local archdiocese that began looking into whether he could have in fact been a saint. They started collecting testimonies from neighbors, friends, teachers, and priests. They pored over his internet history and extensive writings, looking for any signs of sin. In 2012, the Archdiocese of Milan opened an official process for his beatification and canonization, called a “Cause.” The following year, the Vatican gave its first sign of approval of Acutis’

candidacy, issuing an order called a *nihil obstat*, or “nothing hinders,” which grants permission for the investigation of a saintly life to proceed.

THE DICASTERY FOR the Causes of Saints is located on the third floor of an imposing building on St. Peter’s Square, immediately outside the Vatican’s circular colonnade. Its daily operations are kept out of the public eye. Father Angelo Romano, the newly appointed general relator of the dicastery, would not allow me to take photographs inside or to record our conversation, and just as a prosecutor or judge can-

not discuss the details of ongoing litigation, he could not speak to me about any saintly investigations in progress. “We are a very peculiar court,” he said. “There is no point when a Cause will be dismissed, and there is no statute of limitations.” Romano estimates that the office is now working on no fewer than 1,600 Causes, some of which date back to the 15th century.

Canonization has long been a way for the Catholic Church to shape its image. In Acutis, the Holy See found an avenue to connect with a younger generation. From the moment his Cause was officially opened, Acutis was referred to as potentially “the first Millennial saint.” He has been nicknamed “God’s influencer” and “the patron saint of the internet.” Few Causes have proceeded as quickly as his.

Today, the rules governing sainthood retain a basic structure established four centuries ago. Supporters of a would-be saint must publicize the candidate’s story and virtues. In Rome, a postulator, who acts as the equivalent of a campaign manager, must submit their credentials to the dicastery for approval. After the Vatican issues the *nihil obstat* order, testimonies about the candidate’s life must be submitted and then compiled into a *positio*. These volumes, which read a bit like legal briefs, often run to more than 1,500 pages.

Next, the *positio* is presented to the plenum of the dicastery, a body of bishops and cardinals that serves as the office’s “highest court” and interrogates the written account for any signs of the unholy, which can stall a Cause for decades. The Cause

The Last Word

of Henriette DeLille, the founder of a New Orleans religious order, has been called into question because of a rumor that she gave birth to two sons out of wedlock. If the plenum is convinced, then the case is brought before the pope, who determines whether the candidate can be called “venerable” and become the object of direct prayers from the faithful. After that, two miracles still need to be investigated, and found to be scientifically inexplicable. Proof of a first miracle means that an individual can be beatified, meaning that the Church recognizes their place in heaven; only a second can make them a saint, venerated by the universal Catholic Church.

AFTER THE POPE declared Carlo Acutis “venerable” in 2018, the search for miracles could begin. For the faithful, the question is not whether an aspiring saint will work miracles, but when. Rumored signs of Acutis’ sainthood soon emerged. A group of Brazilian priests who visited his grave claimed that the rose petals they found there never wilted. When his body was exhumed in 2019, a rumor emerged that he had been found incorrupt. “He was still our big boy, 1.82 meters tall, only his skin was a little darker, with all his black, curly hair,” his mother told an Italian newspaper. The Archbishop of Assisi issued a statement dispelling the rumors, saying that Acutis’ body “was found in the normal state of transformation proper to a cadaveric condition.” In any case, the church no longer considers incorrupt remains to be an indication of sainthood.

In April 2019, Acutis was moved to a glass-paneled tomb inside the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore, one of the major sanctuaries in Assisi, and a livestream of the shrine was set up. His body became church property and his remains were prepared for display.

A silicone mask of his face was made to cover up signs of decay, while his heart was preserved in a golden reliquary and deposited at the nearby Cathedral of San Rufino. Pieces of his funeral shroud, cuttings of his hair—of which there were several hundred—and fragments of his organs were prepared as relics for veneration. Acutis was attired in his favorite clothing: navy blue Nikes, blue jeans, and a North Sails zip-up sweater. He was the first prospective saint to be buried in branded clothing.

Since 1950, every miracle approved by the dicastery’s medical board—a secretive body of doctors who meet regularly to evaluate stories of divine healings—has been

a physical act of healing. The advance of scientific knowledge means that fewer cures are truly inexplicable. Those alleged miracles that do make it to the dicastery’s medical board must be accompanied by documentation: CT scans, X-rays, blood-work reports. The medical board will only recognize a miracle if, after thorough investigation, no existing scientific explanation can be found for a cure.

In 2019, the dicastery received a package from Brazil containing materials that claimed to document a miracle attributed to Acutis. The healing was said to have occurred on the seventh anniversary of his death, in 2013, when a 3-year-old boy named Matheus kissed a relic of Acutis’ clothing that had been transferred to a chapel in Campo Grande, in the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso do Sul.

Matheus had been suffering from a diseased pancreas: He vomited continually and could only subsist on a liquid diet; no one expected him to live very long. At the chapel, he prayed to Acutis to be cured. Hours later, he ate a full meal of rice, beans, and steak and kept all of it down. His doctors could not explain the sudden turn, nor understand why scans showed that his pancreas appeared to have healed itself.



Pope Francis greets devotees of Acutis.

Matheus’ recovery became Acutis’ first verified miracle, clearing the way for his beatification. In October 2020, 3,000 people attended the mass in Assisi where he was officially declared “blessed,” moving one step closer to sainthood.

IN MAY 2024, the medical board of the dicastery announced that it had verified a second miracle attributed to Acutis. The healing had occurred two years earlier, after a woman named Liliana, from Costa Rica, visited Acutis’ tomb in Assisi. Liliana’s daughter, Valeria, had fallen off her bike while she was studying at a university in Florence, and had been hospitalized with

severe head trauma. According to the Vatican, Valeria “required craniotomy surgery and the removal of the right occipital bone to reduce pressure on her brain.” At Acutis’ tomb, Liliana asked him to heal her daughter. That same day, Valeria’s doctors reported that she had begun breathing on her own again; a few days later, all signs of the hemorrhage had gone. Upon reviewing the incident, the medical board of the dicastery could find no scientific explanation for what had occurred. Pope Francis declared it a miracle and said that he would convene a meeting called a consistory of cardinals to formally approve Acutis’ canonization.

After the news broke, a rush of visitors descended upon Acutis’ tomb in Assisi. In a single month, 32,000 people visited the ancient chapel where he lies entombed. On July 1, the Catholic cardinals in Rome gathered with Pope Francis in the Vatican’s Apostolic Palace. After the prefect of the dicastery, Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, presented the report on Acutis’ Cause—known as a *peroratio*, or a final plea—a vote was taken and the canonization was approved.

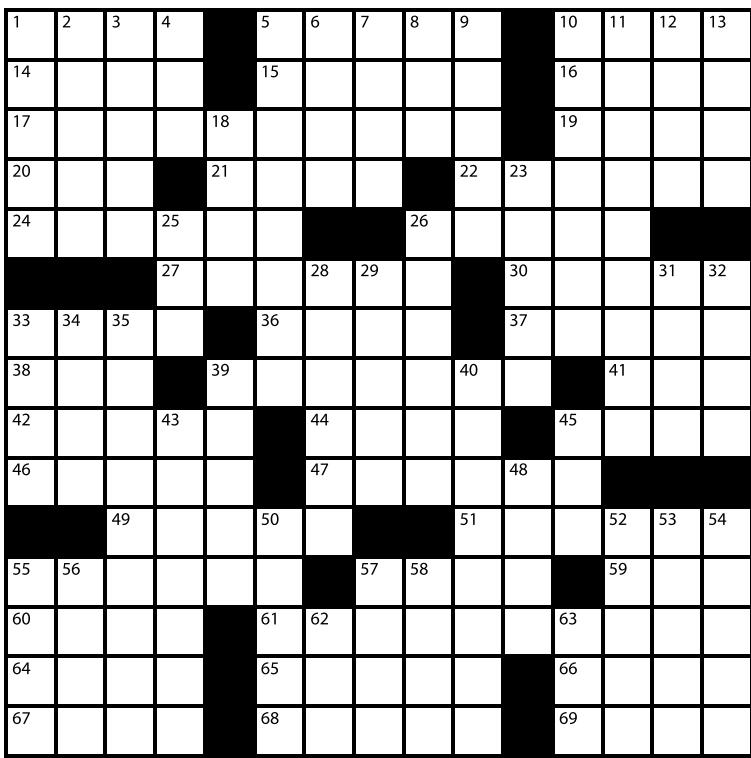
This year, at 10:30 a.m. on April 27, the pope will confirm Acutis’ sainthood by uttering one Latin word: “*discernimus*,” or “we recognize it.” His name will be inscribed upon the List of Saints, a print volume published by the dicastery and reissued every year. Carlo’s feast day will become part of the liturgical calendar, and his memory venerated by Catholics the world over.

This autumn, a fragment of Acutis’ pericardium, the sac that encircles the heart, toured North America. On the day the relic visited his church, Father Peter Turrone, a neuroscientist turned priest from the Archdiocese of Toronto, told me that he stood blessing people from 1:30 p.m. to 9:45 p.m. One couple brought their young daughter, who had severe epilepsy and was in a wheelchair. She had already begun praying to Acutis and said her symptoms had diminished. At the church, Turrone touched the relic to her face and held it there as her parents cried before him, praying to Acutis for full healing. Now that he is set to become a saint, there will be no further medical investigations into Acutis’ divine works. All that is certain is that a prayer was uttered, a relic touched, some slight relief from pain felt. Every miracle is an “invitation to believe,” Turrone said. “It’s not the pope and it’s not the bishop who makes the Cause—it’s the people.”

Adapted from a story that first appeared in The Guardian. Used with permission.

The Puzzle Page

Crossword No. 779: Gulf Wars



ACROSS

- 1 Weep, but much louder
5 Small orchard
10 Sacred bird, in ancient Egypt
14 Lotion component, frequently
15 Force to fit
16 Lion's locks
17 This service said it will be changing "Gulf of Mexico" to "Gulf of America" on its platform in response to President Trump's recent directive
19 Discreet hiss
20 Grand finale
21 1515 or 2020, say
22 Grabs, as power
24 School unit
26 Lovely, in Livorno
27 Prompt
30 Without changing myself for anyone
33 Like some hair
36 Alternative to Gouda
37 In and of itself
38 The ___ of Sail (historical period)
39 Shriveled grapes
41 "I finally figured it out!"
42 Drink slowly
44 "Easier said than ___"
45 Eliminated from the tourney, one way
46 Some noblewomen
47 Cold symptom
49 State with a panhandle
51 Holiday that's an episode title of *The Office*
55 Country in Africa's Great Lakes region

57 Ireland, poetically

59 Worth keeping a skeptical eye on

60 Sort of

61 In response to 17-Across, Canadian wags online have demanded the Gulf of Maine be renamed for this province

64 ___ gin fizz (drink)

65 Eighth Greek letter

66 Capital where Baryshnikov was born

67 Keep watch over, as a goal

68 Like many sitcom characters

69 Big Apple Mayor Adams

DOWN

- 1 Beat 6-0 in a set of tennis, casually
2 Flying solo
3 Shady area?
4 Part of a relay race
5 Rich source of antioxidants
6 Supreme being of Hinduism
7 Suave Sharif
8 No ordinary Joe
9 Follow
10 Sudden urge
11 The Persian Gulf has many local names; Turkey names it after this port, which is upriver from the gulf and the second-largest city in Turkey's neighbor to the south
12 Police dept. rank
15 ___ 16
17 18
20 21
24 25
27 28
29 30
33 34 35 36
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69

The Week Contest

This week's question: Houston's mayor says that "drug-addicted rats" are scarfing piles of seized marijuana and magic mushrooms stored at the city's police headquarters. If a TV network were to make a reality show about Houston PD's battle with these drug-chomping rodents, what would it be titled?

Last week's contest: Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, and three other überwealthy individuals are poised to become trillionaires in the next decade, according to a new study from Oxfam. What would you title a memoir by one of them about why he deserves to be the world's first trillionaire?

THE WINNER: "Greed Is Good, and My Greed Is Best"

James Pearson, Anaheim, Calif.

SECOND PLACE: "Trill Seeker"

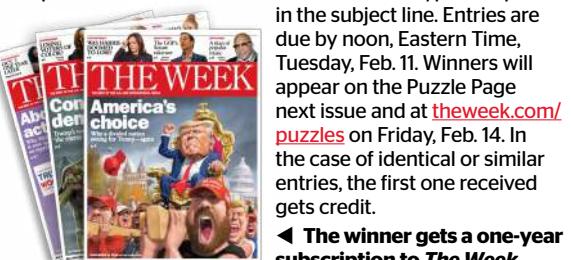
Jeff Jerome, Northampton, Mass.

THIRD PLACE: "The Secret of My Excess"

Ken Kellam III, Dallas

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 "Rat police" in the subject line. Entries are due by noon, Eastern Time, Tuesday, Feb. 11. Winners will appear on the Puzzle Page next issue and at theweek.com/puzzles on Friday, Feb. 14. 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:
hard*

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| 9 | | | | | | | | 4 |
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| 6 | | | | | | | | 1 |
| | 1 | 2 | 6 | 8 | 5 | | | |
| 3 | | | | | | | | 9 |

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

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