

Trump's Son Met With Russian Lawyer After Being Promised Damaging Information on Clinton

While President Trump has been dogged by revelations of undisclosed meetings between his associates and the Russians, the episode at Trump Tower is the first such confirmed private meeting involving his inner circle during the campaign — as well as the first one known to have included his eldest son. It came at an inflection point in the campaign, when Donald Trump Jr., who served as an adviser and a surrogate, was ascendant and Mr. Manafort was consolidating power.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

It is unclear whether the Russian lawyer, Natalia Veselnitskaya, actually produced the promised compromising information about Mrs. Clinton. But the people interviewed by The Times about the meeting said the expectation was that she would do so.

When he was first asked about the meeting on Saturday, Donald Trump Jr. said that it was primarily about adoptions and mentioned nothing about Mrs. Clinton.

Photo



President Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, also attended the meeting last year at Trump Tower. Credit Ruth Fremson/The New York Times

But on Sunday, presented with The Times's findings, he offered a new account. In a statement, he said he had met with the Russian lawyer at the request of an acquaintance from the 2013 Miss Universe pageant, which his father took to Moscow. "After pleasantries were exchanged," he said, "the woman stated that she had information that individuals connected to Russia were funding the Democratic National Committee and supporting Mrs. Clinton. Her statements were vague, ambiguous and made no sense. No details or supporting information was provided or even offered. It quickly became clear that she had no meaningful information."

He said she then turned the conversation to adoption of Russian children and the Magnitsky Act, an American law that blacklists suspected Russian human rights abusers. The 2012 law so enraged President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia that he halted American adoptions of Russian children.

"It became clear to me that this was the true agenda all along and that the claims of potentially helpful information were a pretext for the meeting," Mr. Trump said.

Two people briefed on the meeting said the intermediary was Rob Goldstone, a former British tabloid journalist and the president of a company called Oui 2 Entertainment who has worked with the Miss Universe pageant. He did not immediately respond to messages seeking comment.

Mark Corallo, a spokesman for the president's lawyer, said on Sunday that "the president was not aware of and did not attend the meeting."

Lawyers for Mr. Kushner referred to their statement a day earlier, confirming that he voluntarily disclosed the meeting but referring questions about it to Donald Trump Jr. Mr. Manafort declined to comment. In his statement, Donald Trump Jr. said he asked Mr. Manafort and Mr. Kushner to attend, but did not tell them what the meeting was about.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Political campaigns collect opposition research from many quarters but rarely from sources linked to foreign governments.

[American intelligence agencies have concluded](#) that Russian hackers and propagandists worked to tip the election toward Donald J. Trump, in part by stealing and then providing to WikiLeaks internal Democratic Party and Clinton campaign emails that were embarrassing to Mrs. Clinton. WikiLeaks began releasing the material on July 22.

Photo



Mr. Trump's former campaign chairman, Paul J. Manafort, at the Republican National Convention in July 2016 in Cleveland. Credit Sam Hodgson for The New York Times

A special prosecutor and congressional committees are now investigating the Trump campaign's possible collusion with the Russians. Mr. Trump has disputed that, but the investigation has cast a shadow over his administration.

Mr. Trump has also equivocated on whether the Russians were solely responsible for the hacking. On Sunday, two days after his first meeting as president with Mr. Putin, Mr. Trump [said in a Twitter post](#): "I strongly pressed President Putin twice about Russian meddling in our election. He vehemently denied it. I've already given my opinion....."

On Sunday morning on Fox News, the White House chief of staff, Reince Priebus, described the Trump Tower meeting as a "big nothing burger."

"Talking about issues of foreign policy, issues related to our place in the world, issues important to the American people is not unusual," he said.

But Representative Adam B. Schiff of California, the leading Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, one of the panels investigating Russian election interference, said he wanted to question "everyone that was at that meeting."

"There's no reason for this Russian government advocate to be meeting with Paul Manafort or with Mr. Kushner or the president's son if it wasn't about the campaign and Russia policy," Mr. Schiff said after the initial Times report.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Ms. Veselnitskaya, the Russian lawyer invited to the Trump Tower meeting, is best known for mounting a multipronged attack against the Magnitsky Act.

The adoption impasse is a frequently used talking point for opponents of the act. Ms. Veselnitskaya's campaign against the law has also included attempts to discredit the man after whom it was named, Sergei L. Magnitsky, a lawyer and auditor who died in 2009 in mysterious circumstances in a Russian prison after exposing one of the biggest corruption scandals during Mr. Putin's rule.

Ms. Veselnitskaya's clients include state-owned businesses and a senior government official's son, whose company was under investigation in the United States at the time of the meeting. Her activities and associations had previously drawn the attention of the F.B.I., according to a former senior law enforcement official.

Ms. Veselnitskaya said in a statement on Saturday that "nothing at all about the presidential campaign" was discussed at the Trump Tower meeting. She recalled that after about 10 minutes, either Mr. Kushner or Mr. Manafort left the room.

She said she had “never acted on behalf of the Russian government” and “never discussed any of these matters with any representative of the Russian government.”

The Trump Tower meeting was disclosed to government officials in recent weeks, when Mr. Kushner, who is also a senior White House aide, filed a revised version of a confidential form required to obtain a security clearance.

The Times [reported in April](#) that he had not disclosed any foreign contacts, including meetings with the Russian ambassador to the United States and the head of a Russian state bank. Failure to report such contacts can result in a loss of access to classified information and even, if information is knowingly falsified or concealed, in imprisonment.

Mr. Kushner’s advisers said at the time that the omissions were an error, and that he had immediately notified the F.B.I. that he would be revising the filing.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Mr. Manafort, the former campaign chairman, also recently disclosed the meeting, and Donald Trump Jr.’s role in organizing it, to congressional investigators who had questions about his foreign contacts, according to people familiar with the events. Neither Mr. Manafort nor Mr. Kushner was required to disclose the content of the meeting.

Since the president took office, Donald Trump Jr. and his brother Eric have assumed day-to-day control of their father’s real estate empire. Because he does not serve in the administration and does not have a security clearance, Donald Trump Jr. was not required to disclose his foreign contacts. Federal and congressional investigators have not publicly asked for any records that would require his disclosure of Russian contacts.

Got a confidential news tip?

The New York Times would like to hear from readers who want to share messages and materials with our journalists.

But in an interview with The Times in March, he denied participating in any campaign-related meetings with Russian nationals. “Did I meet with people that were Russian? I’m sure, I’m sure I did,” he said. “But none that were set up. None that I can think of at the moment. And certainly none that I was representing the campaign in any way.”

In addition to her campaign against the Magnitsky Act, Ms. Veselnitskaya

represents powerful players in Russia. Among her clients is Denis Katsyv, the Russian owner of Prevezon Holdings, an investment company based in Cyprus. He is the son of Petr Katsyv, the vice president of the state-owned Russian Railways and a former deputy governor of the Moscow region. In a civil forfeiture case in New York, the Justice Department alleged that Prevezon had helped launder money linked to the \$230 million corruption scheme exposed by Mr. Magnitsky by putting it in real estate and bank accounts. Prevezon recently settled the case for \$6 million without admitting wrongdoing.

Ms. Veselnitskaya and her client also hired a team of political and legal operatives in the United States. The team included Rinat Akhmetshin, an émigré to the United States who once served as a Soviet military officer and who has been called a Russian political gun for hire. Fusion GPS, a consulting firm that produced an intelligence dossier that contained unverified allegations about Mr. Trump, was also hired to do research for Prevezon.

The [F.B.I. began a counterintelligence investigation](#) last year into Russian contacts with any Trump associates. Agents focused on Mr. Manafort and a pair of advisers, [Carter Page](#) and Roger J. Stone Jr.

Among those now under investigation is Michael T. Flynn, [who was forced to resign](#) as Mr. Trump's national security adviser after it became known that he had falsely denied speaking to the Russian ambassador about sanctions imposed by the Obama administration over the election hacking.

Congress later learned that Mr. Flynn had been paid more than \$65,000 by companies linked to Russia, and that he had failed to disclose those payments when he renewed his security clearance and underwent an additional background check to join the White House staff.

In May, the [president fired the F.B.I. director](#), James B. Comey, who days later provided information about a meeting with Mr. Trump at the White House. According to Mr. Comey, the president asked him to end the bureau's investigation into Mr. Flynn; Mr. Trump has repeatedly denied making such a request. Robert S. Mueller III, a former F.B.I. director, was then appointed [as special counsel](#).

[Continue reading the main story](#)

The status of Mr. Mueller's investigation is not clear, but he has assembled a veteran team of prosecutors and agents to dig into any possible collusion.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

How the Miss Universe Pageant Led to Trump Team's Meeting With Russian Lawyer

The acquaintance was Rob Goldstone, a former British tabloid journalist and the president of a marketing company called [Oui 2 Entertainment](#), who has worked with the Miss Universe pageant, according to two people briefed on the meeting. Mr. Goldstone told The Washington Post that he had arranged the June 9, 2016, meeting with Donald Trump Jr. on behalf of a client and had attended it along with the lawyer, Natalia Veselnitskaya. On Monday, Mr. Goldstone identified the client as Emin Agalarov, a pop star in Russia.

Photo



Rob Goldstone, a former British tabloid journalist and the president of a marketing company called Oui 2 Entertainment who has worked with

the Miss Universe pageant, requested that Donald J. Trump Jr. meet with the lawyer connected to the Kremlin.

Mr. Goldstone, who did not respond to an email seeking comment, has worked with Mr. Agalarov, who along with his father, Aras, develops major real estate projects in Russia. Mr. Trump, an owner of the Miss Universe pageant at the time, selected the Agalarovs to host the worldwide competition in 2013 in Moscow, and has discussed [collaborating on a tower in Moscow](#) with them. He also appeared in one of [Emin's music videos](#), which featured pageant contestants.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

The beauty competition put Mr. Trump in contact with influential people in Russia, as he explained in a September 2015 interview on “The Hugh Hewitt Show.”

“I called it my weekend in Moscow,” said Mr. Trump, who had announced his candidacy for president a few months earlier. He added: “I was with the top-level people, both oligarchs and generals, and top of the government people. I can’t go further than that, but I will tell you that I met the top people, and the relationship was extraordinary.”

The Agalarovs appear to have a good relationship with Mr. Putin. Shortly before the Miss Universe pageant, Mr. Putin [presented Aras Agalarov with the Order of Honor](#), one of Russia’s highest civilian awards.

Photo



Shortly before the Miss Universe pageant, President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia presented Aras Agalarov, a developer, with the Order of Honor, one of the country's highest civilian awards. Credit Sasha Mordovets/Getty Images

After Mr. Trump's victory in the presidential election last fall, Mr. Goldstone and Emin Agalarov celebrated the results in separate social media posts, with Emin posting a photo of himself, his father, and Mr. Trump on Instagram [with the message](#), "The sky is the limit! Congratulations Mr. President."

The Miss Universe pageant has been the subject of particular intrigue for months, given the federal investigation into the Kremlin's meddling in the presidential election and the question of whether the Trump campaign colluded with Russian officials, a claim that the president and his associates have denied.

Donald Trump Jr. said in a statement on Sunday that Ms. Veselnitskaya did not provide any information of value about Mrs. Clinton, his father's opponent in last year's election, during the June 2016 meeting, which took place at Trump Tower. He said the conversation soon turned to the adoption of Russian children and an American law called the Magnitsky Act, which blacklists suspected human rights abusers from Russia.

"Obviously I'm the first person on a campaign to ever take a meeting to hear info about an opponent... went nowhere but had to listen," [he said Monday](#) on Twitter.

For nearly three decades before he became president, Mr. Trump sought business deals in Russia, chasing that goal with little success before bringing the Miss Universe pageant there.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

In the late 1980s, Mr. Trump and his first wife, Ivana, considered potential sites for a project, but a deal never resulted, Mr. Trump said at the time, because of constraints on private ownership of properties. Nearly a decade later, Mr. Trump announced plans to invest \$250 million in two luxury buildings in Moscow, but neither was built.

Got a confidential news tip?

The New York Times would like to hear from readers who want to share messages and materials with our journalists.

It was in the mid-2000s, as the Trumps aggressively sought to license the family name for international real estate projects, that they began coming to Moscow regularly.

In 2006, Donald Jr. and his sister Ivanka stayed at the Hotel National Moscow near the Kremlin, coming and going to meet with potential business partners. Joining them on the trip was Felix Sater, a Russian immigrant and longtime associate of the Trumps. Mr. Sater, who continued to work with the Trump Organization even after it came to light that he had pleaded guilty to a role in a stock manipulation scheme involving Mafia figures and Russia criminals and has served as an American government informant, told The Times this year that the family's attitude was: "nice, big city, great. Let's do a deal here."

Mr. Sater worked on a plan for a Trump Tower in Moscow as recently as the fall of 2015, but he said that had come to a halt because of Mr. Trump's presidential campaign.

Donald Trump Jr., speaking at a Manhattan real estate conference in 2008, told the audience he had been to Russia a half-dozen times over 18 months. "I really prefer Moscow over all cities in the world," he said, according to [eTurboNews](#).

But he acknowledged that the Russian market was challenging, with "an issue of 'Will I ever see my money back out of that deal or can I actually trust the person I am doing the deal with?'"

Still, during the Miss Universe weekend, the Trumps continued to lay the groundwork for a deal in Moscow. During that visit, the Agalarovs and Herman Gref

— a former Russian economy minister who serves as chief executive of the state-controlled Sberbank PJSC — hosted a dinner for Mr. Trump on the night of the pageant, according to Bloomberg News.

Phil Ruffin, Mr. Trump's partner in the Trump International Hotel and Tower in Las Vegas, who flew to Moscow for the competition, said he and Mr. Trump had lunch at the Ritz-Carlton with the Agalarovs.

Mr. Trump went on Twitter to thank the father and son for their hospitality.

"I had a great weekend with you and your family. You have done a FANTASTIC job. TRUMP TOWER-MOSCOW is next. EMIN was WOW!"

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Donald Trump Jr.'s Two Different Explanations for Russian Meeting

Photo



Donald Trump Jr. at the Republican National Convention last year. He has offered different accounts of a June 2016 meeting with a Russian lawyer. Credit Josh Haner/The New York Times

In less than 24 hours, President Trump's eldest son, Donald Trump Jr., has given two different explanations for a meeting he held during the 2016 campaign with a Kremlin-connected Russian lawyer who promised to provide damaging information about .

Mr. Trump's meeting with that lawyer, Natalia Veselnitskaya, was [first reported by The New York Times on Saturday](#). In response, Mr. Trump said the meeting was brief and focused mostly on the issue of adoption.

This was Mr. Trump's statement to the news media on Saturday:

It was a short introductory meeting. I asked Jared and Paul to stop by. We primarily discussed a program about the adoption of Russian children that was active and popular with American families years ago and was since ended by the Russian government, but it was not a campaign issue at the time and there was no follow up.

I was asked to attend the meeting by an acquaintance, but was not told the name of the person I would be meeting with beforehand.

The statement made reference to Jared Kushner, President Trump's son-in-law, and Paul J. Manafort, the president's former campaign manager.

Mr. Trump's version of the meeting changed Sunday, when three advisers to the White House briefed on the meeting and two others with knowledge of it told The Times that Mr. Trump met [Ms. Veselnitskaya after she promised to provide damaging information on Mrs. Clinton](#).

Mr. Trump acknowledged on Sunday that Ms. Veselnitskaya offered him information on Mrs. Clinton but that her statements "made no sense" and the information was not "meaningful."

This is the statement Mr. Trump gave to the news media on Sunday:

I was asked to have a meeting by an acquaintance I knew from the 2013 Miss Universe pageant with an individual who I was told might have information helpful to the campaign. I was not told her name prior to the meeting. I asked Jared and Paul to attend, but told them nothing of the substance. We had a meeting in June 2016. After pleasantries were exchanged, the woman stated that she had information that individuals connected to Russia were funding the Democratic National Committee and supporting Ms. Clinton. Her statements were vague, ambiguous and made no sense. No details or supporting information was provided or even offered. It quickly became clear that she had no meaningful information. She then changed subjects and began

discussing the adoption of Russian children and mentioned the [Magnitsky Act](#). It became clear to me that this was the true agenda all along and that the claims of potentially helpful information were a pretext for the meeting. I interrupted and advised her that my father was not an elected official, but rather a private citizen, and that her comments and concerns were better addressed if and when he held public office. The meeting lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes. As it ended, my acquaintance apologized for taking up our time. That was the end of it and there was no further contact or follow-up of any kind. My father knew nothing of the meeting or these events.

Correction: July 9, 2017

An earlier version of this article misquoted a statement by Donald Trump Jr. about a meeting with a Russian lawyer. He said the meeting mostly focused on the topic of adoption, which “was not a campaign issue.” He did not say it was a campaign issue.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Spyware in Mexico Targeted Investigators Seeking Students

The main contact person for the group of investigators received text messages laced with [spyware known as Pegasus](#), a cyberweapon that the government of Mexico spent tens of millions of dollars to acquire, according to an independent analysis. The coordinator’s phone was used by nearly all members of the group, often serving as a nexus of communication among the investigators, their sources, the international commission that appointed them and the Mexican government.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Beyond that, the investigators say they received identical text messages on their own phones, too, luring them to click on links that secretly unlock a target’s smartphone and turn it into a powerful surveillance device. Calls, emails, text messages, calendars and contacts can all be monitored that way. Encrypted messages become worthless. Even the microphone and camera on a smartphone can be used against its owner.

The effort to spy on international officials adds to a [sweeping espionage offensive](#) in Mexico, where some of the country’s most prominent journalists, human rights lawyers and anticorruption activists have been the targets of the same surveillance

technology. But the new evidence shows that the spying campaign went beyond the nation's domestic critics.

It also swept up international officials who had been granted a status akin to diplomatic immunity as well as unprecedented access to investigate a case that has come to define the nation's broken rule of law — and the legacy of its president, .

Surveillance under Mexican law can be conducted only with the authorization of a federal judge, and only if the government can show cause to do so. But the kind of diplomatic immunity the investigators received meant that it was extremely unlikely that a federal judge would have been allowed to sign off on such a warrant, the investigators said.

Photo



The disappearance of the students has come to define Mexico's broken rule of law — and the legacy of its president, Enrique Peña Nieto.

Credit Carlos Jasso/Reuters

"You are not just hacking anyone's phone, you are hacking the phone of someone who has been granted immunity," said Francisco Cox, one of the investigators and a prominent Chilean lawyer. "They couldn't even search my bags in the airport."

"If this can happen to an independent body that has immunity and that is invited by the government, it is a bit scary to think of what could happen to a common citizen in Mexico," he said.

Since 2011, Mexico has purchased at least \$80 million worth of the spyware, which is sold exclusively to governments, and only on the condition that it be used against terrorists and criminals. But [an investigation](#) by The New York Times and forensic cyberanalysts in recent weeks determined that the software had been used against some of the country's most influential academics, lawyers, journalists and their family members, including a teenage boy.

The government has denied responsibility for the espionage, adding that there is no ironclad proof because the spyware does not leave behind the hacker's individual fingerprints. It has promised a thorough investigation, vowing to call on specialists from the United Nations and the F.B.I. for help. One of the surveillance targets, the forensic analysis showed, was a United States lawyer representing victims of sexual assault by the Mexican police.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

But the United States ambassador to Mexico, Roberta S. Jacobson, said the United States was not involved in the investigation. Opposition lawmakers and international officials are now calling for an independent inquiry into the spying scandal, declaring Mexico unfit to investigate itself.

"This case just on its face — and presuming the veracity of the allegations — is serious enough to warrant the creation of an international commission," said James L. Cavallaro, a commissioner on the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, which appointed the group of experts. "The commission shares the concerns of others: How can the government be trusted to investigate its own alleged violation of citizen rights given its track record in this matter?"

Another commissioner, Esmeralda Arosemena de Troitiño, backed the idea of an independent inquiry. "This investigation should find both the material and intellectual authors of the alleged spying," she said.

Top officials from the nation's main opposition party have come forward to say that they, too, have been targeted, raising the pressure on the government. The head of the National Action Party, Ricardo Anaya, says his party is pushing for a congressional committee to conduct its own inquiry and will also formally demand an international investigation into the spying.

"The grand tragedy of Mexico is impunity. Horrible things occur, and nothing happens," he said. "This time, we will not let that happen."

The [disappearance of the students](#) in September 2014 ignited an enormous outcry in Mexico. Hundreds of thousands poured into the streets to protest a case that, to many, represented all that afflicts Mexico, a nation where about 30,000 people have

disappeared and more than 100,000 have been killed in the decade-long churn of the drug war.

Photo



Activists and journalists outside the attorney general's office in Mexico City after a report that their smartphones had been infected with sophisticated technology sold to the government to spy on criminals and terrorists. Credit Carlos Jasso/Reuters

The anger also focused on Mr. Peña Nieto, whose determination to change the narrative of his country from one of desperate violence to economic promise was suddenly, and permanently, upended. The outrage has been matched only by the disbelief that, almost three years later, nearly all of the 43 students are still missing. The remains of one have been discovered. Fragments of another may also have been identified. The rest of the students, whether dead or alive, have not been found.

Many Mexicans believed that their best chance of finding out what really happened to the students lay with the international investigators, who were appointed by the [Inter-American Commission on Human Rights](#), a regional body based in Washington that monitors countries and can refer cases to court. But the investigators said the government essentially obstructed their inquiry and then cast them out by refusing to extend their mandate — evidence, they said, that the government simply did not want the case solved.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Still, it is hard to prove who ordered the spying. Even the manufacturer of the spyware, an Israeli cyberarms manufacturer called the NSO Group, says it cannot determine who, precisely, is behind specific hacking attempts using its technology.

But the company says that it sells its surveillance tools only to governments, and that stringent safeguards prevent them from being used by anyone outside of the government agencies that purchase the technology.

Moreover, once a person's phone is targeted, researchers can verify that the spyware has been deployed by examining the text message to determine whether it points to a server running NSO's technology. They have confirmed at least 19 cases in Mexico involving human rights lawyers, anticorruption activists, journalists and, now, international officials.

"Citizen Lab and our partners are finding people targeted with NSO spyware almost wherever we look in Mexico," said John Scott-Railton, a senior researcher at [Citizen Lab](#) at the Munk School of Global Affairs at the University of Toronto, which has worked with the digital rights group R3D in Mexico to identify the spyware on the phones of [targeted activists and officials](#).

"I have never seen anything that matches the scale and scope of this case," he said of the surveillance campaign in Mexico.

Hacking attempts disguised as text messages appeared on the cellphone of the executive secretary for the investigators, the point person for all contacts with the group, on March 1 and 4, 2016, the forensic analysis found. Around the same time, lawyers for Centro Prodh, a human rights group looking into the mass disappearance of the students, were also being targeted by the software.

"The Mexican government implored the commission to create this expert group, and then when their investigation did not ratify the official version, things changed," said Mr. Cavallaro, who was the president of the Inter-American Commission at the time of the hacking attempts. "If it's true that the government spied or tried to spy on our experts, that would be an outrage of historic proportions."

The investigators sent a private letter to the Inter-American Commission late last month, detailing their suspicions after The Times published [an article](#) about the hacking campaign. They said some of their phones had also been subject to suspicious messages.

Photo



Three officials with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights — Enrique Gil Botero, foreground; Paulo Abrão, rear; and James L. Cavallaro, right — attending a meeting with parents of the students in 2016. Credit Jose Luis De La Cruz/European Pressphoto Agency

One message, sent to one of the investigators in March, was from someone posing as a close friend whose father had died. A link was attached with the details of the funeral. When the link was opened, the website of a well-known funeral home in Mexico popped up. A similar message, with the same link, was also sent last year to an academic trying [to impose a sugar tax](#) in Mexico. In that case, the message was confirmed as Pegasus.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

During the hacking attempts on the investigators, the group was in the throes of a crisis. The investigators had just complained publicly of being harassed, and they were less than two months from publishing their final report, which rejected the government's version of what happened to the students.

The mystery began on Sept. 26, 2014, when about 100 students from a teachers' college in the town of Ayotzinapa struck out to commandeer some buses. As they had in years past, the students planned to take the buses to Mexico City to attend a commemorative march and then return them, a tradition both the bus companies and the authorities typically tolerated.

But that night soon turned into an ominous chapter in Mexico's modern history. The police fired mercilessly on the students and the buses transporting them, leaving six dead and scores wounded. The police emptied two buses of students, detained them and whisked them away in patrol cars.

The government maintains that local police officers, along with the drug gang they worked for, kidnapped the students, killed them and incinerated their bodies in a nearby dump.

The government version, however, never offered a clear motive for the attack on the students, and Mexicans pushed for an international inquiry. Eventually, the government agreed, and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights appointed a five-member team of prominent prosecutors and rights activists from across the Spanish-speaking world.

When the investigators arrived in Mexico, after months of local protests over the disappearances, it was an exceptional moment: a reclusive government opening itself up to external scrutiny.

But within a few months, the relationship between the government and the investigators began to sour. In its first report, the investigators contradicted a central tenet of the government's version, saying it could find no evidence of a fire big enough to burn 43 bodies, nor any remnants or bone fragments that matched those of the missing.

The acrimony came quickly. Pro-government newspapers began attacking the group, and the Mexican government opened a criminal investigation against the executive secretary of the Inter-American Commission, based on unsubstantiated claims about the misuse of funds.

"We always worked in good faith, and we went with open eyes and an open mind, only going where the facts led us," said Mr. Cox, one of the investigators. "Our purpose was to contribute to the rule of law in Mexico."

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Congress Is Facing a Time Crunch to Repeal Obamacare

Inaction on health reform complicates some of the policy choices in tax reform, too. The current Senate health bill includes substantial tax cuts and several hundred billion dollars in projected savings. If that bill is not going to become law, it could

alter the choices about which taxes get cut or raised as part of the tax-only bill.

Photo



One of many reasons that the Senate would like to pass the health care bill promptly: Members of Congress and their staffs count on summer recess. Credit John Antczak/Associated Press

Congress likes its summer vacation

If health reform isn't wrapped up by the end of the month, it bumps up against Congress's scheduled summer recess, a time when legislators like to go home to their districts, take a break from lawmaking, spend time with their families, and raise money. Many congressional staff members also go on vacation during the recess. Leaders could, of course, tell lawmakers and their staffs that they need to stick around and keep working until they pass a bill, but the scheduled recess tends to act as a deadline.

September is going to be really busy

Obamacare repeal is a big political priority for Republican leaders and the White House. But several other bills need to pass to keep vital parts of the government working. Those are likely to take priority in the weeks after the summer recess. Congress will need to [raise the debt ceiling](#), pass a reauthorization of the Children's Health Insurance Program, and pass new bills to fund government functions, to name a few. In April, the last time Congress had an important must-pass spending bill, the health reform measure was pushed aside.

Fiscal New Year's Eve is coming, maybe

The health reform bill is attached to a budget for the 2017 fiscal year. The 2017 fiscal year ends on Sept. 30. At that point, the health bill could conceivably turn into a pumpkin, but experts in Senate budget procedure have differing opinions. A final determination would need to be made by the [Senate parliamentarian](#).

[Continue reading the main story](#)

If the fiscal New Year comes, and the parliamentarian rules the expired budget is irrelevant, Republicans will need to start from scratch on health care by passing a new budget for 2018 with instructions to reform the health system, and by passing a health care bill through the House again. Neither of those steps would be assured of success, and both would complicate efforts to pass a tax reform bill, which leaders hoped to tie to the 2018 budget process.

Time may not help lawmakers reach consensus

Mr. McConnell had hoped that speed would be his friend in passing the health bill through his chamber. His staff drafted much of the bill in secret, and he hoped to bring it up for a vote a week after first making its details public.

That strategy didn't work, we now know. But since that missed deadline, more Republican senators have publicly stated their opposition to the bill. During last week's July 4 recess, several crucial senators heard criticisms of the bill and voiced strong critiques, according to [reporting from my colleagues](#) who attended their town hall meetings. The divisions in the caucus don't necessarily doom the measure: House Speaker Paul Ryan pulled his health bill from the floor, then passed an amended bill a few weeks later. But so far, it looks as if consensus is weakening even as the time pressures build.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Lawmakers Question Trump's Stake in Subsidized Housing Complex

Photo



Representative Elijah E. Cummings of Maryland is the House Oversight Committee's top Democrat. Credit Doug Mills/The New York Times

WASHINGTON — Two congressional Democrats are demanding more information about President Trump's potential conflicts of interest stemming from his part ownership of the nation's largest federally subsidized housing complex, which they say could benefit financially from decisions made by the .

Mr. Trump stands to make millions from his 4 percent stake in Starrett City, a sprawling affordable housing complex in Brooklyn, according to a 10-page letter written by Representative Elijah E. Cummings of Maryland, the House Oversight Committee's top Democrat, and Representative Hakeem Jeffries of New York, whose district includes the complex. The lawmakers sent the letter on Friday to the president's eldest son, Donald Trump Jr., and Allen H. Weisselberg, the Trump Organization's chief financial officer, who oversees a trust that holds the president's business assets. The letter was also sent to , the secretary of the housing department, and Representative Trey Gowdy, Republican of South Carolina and the chairman of the oversight committee.

"Many real estate companies receive government subsidies to support affordable housing, but unique conflicts exist with regard to Starrett City because the president is on both sides of the negotiations," the letter said. "He oversees the government entity providing taxpayer funds and he pockets some of that money himself."

Mr. Cummings and Mr. Jeffries said Mr. Trump's financial disclosures show that the president's stake in Starrett City is valued at \$5 million to \$25 million, while the complex as a whole is probably valued at more than \$625 million. The letter, citing a [Washington Post report](#), said Starrett City's owners have received more than \$490 million in rent subsidies since May 2013.

Document

This is a letter from two Democratic congressmen requesting information about President Trump's potential conflicts of interest stemming from his partial ownership in Starrett City, the nation's largest federally subsidized housing complex.

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 7, 2017

Mr. Donald Trump, Jr.
Mr. Allen Weisselberg
Trustees
Donald J. Trump Revocable Trust
725 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10022

The Honorable Ben Carson
Secretary
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20410

Dear Messrs. Trump, Weisselberg, and Carson:

We write to request information regarding conflicts of interest created by President Trump's continued ownership stake in the nation's largest government-subsidized residential property, New York's Starrett City, and what, if any, steps you are taking to manage those conflicts.

The President has rejected the advice of ethics experts from across the political spectrum by refusing to divest his ownership in his personal businesses, and leaving in place numerous conflicts of interest. The President's decision to maintain a 4% ownership stake in Starrett City means that his administration oversees Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) programs that pay the President millions of dollars annually. For example, in 2009 alone, HUD committed \$78 million in federal funds to the owners of Starrett City, to supplement the rent payments of the property's residents. According to the *Washington Post*, Starrett City's owners have received "more than \$490 million in rent subsidies since May 2013."¹

Many real estate companies receive government subsidies to support affordable housing but unique conflicts exist with regard to Starrett City because the President is on both sides of the negotiation—he oversees the government entity providing taxpayer funds *and* he pockets some of that money himself.

[OPEN Document](#)

The congressmen also pointed out that about a decade ago, the owners of Starrett City had reached an agreement to sell the complex for \$1.3 billion and that Mr. Trump had praised the deal, which would have made him about \$52 million. However, that deal and others to sell the complex were blocked by the housing department because federal officials were concerned that the buyers might not be able to maintain the apartments as affordable.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

U.S. Agency Moves to Allow Class-Action Lawsuits Against Financial Firms

Under the Congressional Review Act — a 1996 law that had been rarely used before the current Congress employed it to reverse 14 rules from the Obama administration — lawmakers have 60 legislative days to overturn the rule blocking mandatory arbitrations. The rule could take effect next year.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

The Chamber of Commerce and other pro-business groups have belittled the rule as nothing more than a gift to class-action lawyers, who tend to be Democratic donors.

But as much as Republicans deplore the consumer protection agency, they may find it difficult to kill a rule that could have wide populist appeal. Across the country, judges, prosecutors and regulators have decried arbitration clauses for allowing corporations to circumvent the courts and for taking away the only tools citizens have to fight illegal or deceitful business practices.

The rule is one of the signature efforts of the , which was created in 2010 as part of the Dodd-Frank regulatory overhaul to safeguard the rights of millions of Americans in the aftermath of the mortgage crisis.

At a time when Dodd-Frank has come under attack, the arbitration initiative from the consumer finance agency — which operates independently from the Trump administration — is a provocative stand against the prevailing political tide in Washington.

Indeed, the rule is largely unchanged from when it was issued in draft form in May 2016 and the agency began soliciting comments from industry.

It is that kind of independence that has drawn particular ire from Republicans.

Last month, the Treasury Department issued a report recommending that the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau be neutered, accusing it of regulatory overreach and calling for the president to be able to remove its director, Richard Cordray.

Supporters of the agency say arbitration is exactly the kind of issue that requires independence from corporate interests.

The rule will unwind a series of brazen legal maneuvers undertaken by major American companies to block customers from going to court to fight potentially

harmful business practices.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

“These clauses allow companies to avoid accountability by blocking group lawsuits and forcing people to go it alone or give up,” Mr. Cordray said in a statement.

Over decades, financial institutions, led by credit card companies, figured out a way to use the fine print of their contracts to force consumers into private arbitration, a secretive process where borrowers have to go up on their own against powerful companies with deep pockets.

Prevented from banding together in a class and pooling their resources, most people simply abandon their claims entirely, never making it to arbitration at all.

The new rules could change all that when it comes to consumer finance. While the protections would not apply to existing accounts, consumer could pay off old loans and get new accounts that would fall under the new rules.

The new rules do not explicitly outlaw arbitration, but industry lawyers say that they will effectively kill the practice.

“If this rule goes into effect, what we are going to see is a huge avalanche of litigation and a loss to consumers of the benefits of arbitration,” said Alan S. Kaplinsky, a lawyer with the firm Ballard Spahr in Philadelphia, who is widely considered the father of arbitration clauses.

To Mr. Kaplinsky, who opposes the rule, arbitration offers a faster and more efficient way to resolve legal disputes.

In the debate about arbitration, those assertions were almost entirely anecdotal. There is no federal database that tracks arbitrations and the process is entirely secretive.

To get beyond the anecdotal, The New York Times assembled its own database of arbitrations [in a series of articles in 2015](#) that showed few people ever go to arbitration.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

In financial disputes, the numbers are particularly startling. In its investigation, The Times found that between 2010 and 2014, only 505 consumers — a fraction of the tens of millions of Americans whose financial contracts have arbitration clauses — went to arbitration over disputes of \$2,500 or less.

That reluctance is why one federal judge remarked in an opinion that “only a lunatic or a fanatic sues for \$30.”

By banning class actions, companies essentially squashed challenges to practices that ranged from predatory lending and wage theft to sexual discrimination and medical malpractice.

Among the class actions derailed over the years by arbitration was a case brought by Citigroup customers who had accused the bank of tricking them into insurance that they were never eligible to use. In another, a group of merchants challenged American Express over high processing fees.

The rule from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau would apply only to the financial companies regulated by the agency and would not touch arbitration clauses buried in the fine print of nursing homes or employment contracts.

Clauses embedded in those contracts have pushed disputes about elder abuse, sexual harassment and even wrongful death out of view.

Recognizing that problem, the federal agency that controls more than \$1 trillion in and funding proposed a rule last September that would have barred any nursing home that gets federal funding from requiring residents resolve disputes in arbitration. But the protection was fleeting. Soon after the Mr. Trump took office, the administration moved to scrap the rule.

In some ways, the fate of the nursing home rule adds urgency to the efforts by the consumer bureau. The agency’s rule represents the first significant blow to arbitration since a pair of Supreme Court decisions in 2011 and 2013 enshrined its use.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Those decisions, which initially drew scant attention outside the cloistered legal world, upended decades of jurisprudence that had been put in place to protect workers and consumers.

To stop the spread of class-action lawsuits, a coalition of credit card companies used an arcane federal law dating to 1925 that formalized arbitration as a way for companies of equal bargaining power to resolve corporate disputes. Starting in the early 2000s, the credit card companies began to use arbitration for disputes with their customers.

Today, it is virtually impossible to apply for a credit card, rent a car, get cable or internet service, or shop online without agreeing to private arbitration.

As arbitration crept into tens of millions of contracts, prosecutors, judges and lawmakers starting sounding alarms. In the Dodd-Frank law, the agency was specifically mandated to examine arbitration.

The analysis culminated in a 728-page report, released in March 2015, that showed how few consumers went to arbitration once they were prevented from joining a class action. For those who did go through with arbitration, the agency found, the results were dismal. During the period studied by the agency, only 78 arbitration claims resulted in judgments in favor of consumers, who got \$400,000 in total relief.

The financial industry balked at the findings, arguing that on a person by person basis, consumers wind up with more money in arbitration than in class actions.

But law professors and judges, including some appointed by conservative presidents, say that the total amount of money obtained in class actions is beside the point. Class actions, they argue, are intended to help big groups of people get back small amounts of money — say a \$35 overdraft fee. More important, they argue, class actions can push companies to get rid of questionable business practices.

Big banks, for example, had to pay more than \$1 billion to settle class-action lawsuits, which started in 2009, that accused them of monkeying with checking account policies to maximize the number of overdraft fees they could charge customers.

In the aftermath of the litigation, seven of the banks involved have adopted arbitration clauses to their contracts.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Liu Xiaobo, George Pell, Dalian Wanda: Your Tuesday Briefing

As our India correspondents note, there is little doubt that the focus is on China, which has been involved in an aggressive standoff with Indian border forces in the Himalayas.

Photo



Credit Sam Hodgson for The New York Times

• **In the latest developments** on Russia's contacts with the Trump campaign last year, five White House advisers told our reporters that President Trump's eldest son [was promised damaging information about Hillary Clinton](#) before meeting with a Kremlin-connected lawyer during the 2016 campaign.

That is the first public indication that at least some in the campaign were willing to accept Russian help. Readers have added [more than 3,300 comments](#) to the story. Donald Trump Jr. gave [two different explanations for the meeting](#).

We examine how the 2013 Miss Universe pageant in Moscow [offered the Trump family links to Russia — and to the Kremlin](#).

Photo



Credit Gregorio Borgia/Associated Press

- **Cardinal George Pell**, one of the highest-ranking figures in the Roman Catholic Church and a close adviser to Pope Francis, [is back in Australia to face charges of sexual assault](#). His first hearing is in Melbourne on July 26.

Cardinal Pell has denied the claims, about which information is limited. They appear to have occurred long ago and include multiple accusers.

In what officials said was a coincidence, an Australian commission investigating Catholic institutions' handling of sexual abuse allegations released a new trove of documents within hours of the cardinal's return.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

- **In our latest edition** of [The Breakdown](#), news and notes from Australia, more on Cardinal Pell, and the frank criticism of President Trump by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's political editor, Chris Uhlmann. Check back at 3 p.m. Sydney [for a new edition](#).

Business

Photo



Credit Wu Hong/European Pressphoto Agency

- **Dalian Wanda** announced a [plan to sell 76 hotels and a large portion of 13 tourism projects](#), signaling a strategic retreat for a conglomerate that epitomized China's high-flying dealmakers. Cash from the deal — \$9.3 billion — will be used to repay loans.
- **Air India's** decision to [serve only vegetarian meals](#) in coach on all domestic flights was met with outrage from critics who saw another government attempt to police what Indians eat.
- **AT&T's \$85.4 billion bid** for Time Warner is [mired in uncertainty](#), as critics in the White House fear political interference and business leaders watch for a regulatory precedent.
- **U.S. stocks** [are up slightly](#). Here's a snapshot of [global markets](#).

In the News

Photo



Credit Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

- **Drone footage** reveals the terrifying extent of recent flood damage in Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's main islands. [[The Asahi Shimbun](#)]
- **Gunmen** opened fire on a busload of Hindu pilgrims in the tense, divided region of Kashmir, killing at least seven people. Most were women. [[The New York Times](#)]
- **A woman in Nepal** who was, in keeping with local tradition, sequestered in a crude hut during her period was killed by a snakebite. [[The New York Times](#)]
- **A Pakistani investigation** into Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his family set off by the so-called Panama Papers has found a "significant disparity" between their declared wealth and their known sources of income. [[Associated Press](#)]

[Continue reading the main story](#)

- **The White House apologized** for a statement that erroneously referred to President Xi Jinping as the leader of the Republic of China, the formal name for Taiwan. [[The New York Times](#)]
- **The Australian Federal Police** are conducting an inquiry into allegations that Australian soldiers covered up the killing of an Afghan child during an operation in 2012. [[ABC](#)]

- **A new Vatican directive** established that the unleavened bread used in Roman Catholics masses must contain some gluten, even if only a trace amount. [[The New York Times](#)]
- **Bertha**, a 65-year-old hippopotamus believed to be the world's oldest, died at a zoo in the Philippines. [[South China Morning Post](#)]

Smarter Living

Tips, both new and old, for a more fulfilling life.

Photo



Credit Andrew Scrivani for The New York Times

- **Seriously:** You can rewire your brain [to crave better habits](#).
- **Making** a [backup of your backup](#) data can provide peace of mind, and [walking your dog more](#) can be beneficial to you and your pup.
- **If you're in the mood for grilling**, try [spicy lamb sausage with onions and zucchini](#). And if you're feeling ambitious, aim for [sea scallops drizzled with brown butter](#).

Noteworthy

Photo



Credit Elwood Smith

- **Hehe. LOL. Bahaha!** Textual representations of laughter go back at least to Chaucer, but texting and email have [dramatically changed the way we communicate our giggles, guffaws and snorts](#).

[Continue reading the main story](#)

- **Beethoven's Ninth Symphony** was featured in a concert for world leaders at the Group of 20 summit, but the [work's meaning is far from clear](#) — and its intended message may have been garbled.
- **In today's 360 video**, visit [Masdar City, in the United Arab Emirates](#), where plans to become the first city with a net-zero carbon footprint have stalled.

Back Story

Photo



Credit NASA

“It was like a Roman candle,” [one eyewitness said](#). “A shower of gold-colored sparks followed by a blue flame with flecks of green and red at its sides.”

In 1979, people across the deserts of southwestern Australia emerged from their homes to “sonic booms” and the smell of “burned earth” as fiery debris from the 77-ton Skylab, the U.S.’s first space station, rained down. It was July 11 in the U.S., and the early hours of July 12 for the witnesses.

Skylab was launched in 1973 to collect data, two years after the Soviets sent up the first space station, Salyut 1.

By 1979, Skylab’s orbit had decayed, and the world obsessed over its coming plunge. People threw parties, bought “crash helmets” and bet on where it would

land.

Although no deaths or injuries were reported after the crash, [President Jimmy Carter still apologized to Australia](#).

Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser responded: “While receiving Skylab is an honour we would have happily forgone, it is the end of a magnificent technological achievement by the United States, and the events of the past few days should not obscure this. If we find the pieces I shall happily trade them for additions to the beef quota.”

Tacey Rychter contributed reporting.

We have briefings timed for the [Australian](#), [Asian](#), [European](#) and [American](#) mornings. You can sign up for these and other Times newsletters [here](#).

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Your Morning Briefing is published weekday mornings and updated online.

What would you like to see here? Contact us at asiabriefing@nytimes.com.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

[**A Bipartisan Congress That Works? Veterans Committees Show How It's Done**](#)

The tally thus far is impressive, if not exactly the stuff of headline news: The secretary of Veterans Affairs was confirmed unanimously, the only cabinet secretary with that level of congressional approval. Congress quickly passed a temporary funding extension for the [Veterans Choice Program](#), which pays for private-sector health care for veterans facing long wait times at government facilities. Then it passed a new law that makes it easier for the department to hire and fire. The next bit of legislation on the brink of becoming law expedites disability benefits appeals.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

This is happening as Congress finds itself stalled by [a growing list of priorities](#) that lawmakers had hoped to send to Mr. Trump before the August recess. In the case of the health care overhaul, the Senate leadership has even [decided to sidestep the](#)

[committee process](#) that typically sets the pace of legislation moving through the Capitol.

Lawmakers with coveted spots on the veterans committees are quick to acknowledge that caring for those who served the country in uniform has long been largely a bipartisan pursuit. But ideological differences do exist between the parties on how to care for veterans' health needs, particularly when it comes to the Choice program, which was hastily written after [a 2014 scandal over the manipulation of patient wait times](#) and has proved to be a flawed, if popular, fix.

Photo



Secretary David Shulkin of the Department of Veterans Affairs has retained the confidence of Republicans and Democrats. Credit Al Drago for The New York Times

Whether the latest bout of amity can persist will largely depend on whether lawmakers are able to agree on a way to permanently fix the program, and streamline a half dozen others that send veterans out for private care, before it loses its authorization in January.

But as lawmakers talk about how they will do it, it almost sounds like an idealized version of how Washington works.

“We don’t want to have a fight for fights’ sake. We want to find solutions,” said Johnny Isakson, the courtly Republican chairman of the Senate Committee on

Veterans' Affairs. "So when we have opposition to an issue from a member, we try to bring them into the fold and sometimes maybe address the concern they have."

Mr. Isakson, 72, a former real estate executive, is among an increasingly rare breed of deal makers in the upper chamber. Those watching the 15-person committee say he has gone a long way to set the tone for its work. He has found a willing partner in Jon Tester of Montana, the committee's top Democrat, who along with being a political moderate is up for re-election next year in a rural state that voted overwhelmingly for Mr. Trump.

"With Johnny at the helm, we've been able to get a lot of stuff done," Mr. Tester said. "Do Johnny and I agree on everything? No, we don't, but we believe we can communicate and move forward."

The 24-member House committee, which is more ideologically diverse, has its own incentives to compromise. Representative Phil Roe of Tennessee, its chairman, was by most accounts chastened by harsh blowback to a draft bill floated in April that would have made service members pay to be eligible for G.I. Bill benefits. The committee's top-ranking Democrat, Tim Walz of Minnesota, represents a right-leaning rural district and is in the early stages of running for governor. The two men have been working side by side on the committee for nearly a decade.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

That both sides remain cautiously confident in the Department of Veterans Affairs secretary, David Shulkin, who also served in the Obama administration, has helped as well.

Mr. Tester and Mr. Walz have shown that they are willing to maneuver their caucuses toward compromise if the Republican position is within range. To pass the accountability legislation, a long-held priority for both parties that had the support of influential veterans' groups, the Democrats had to overcome initial opposition to weakening the protections afforded to department employees accused of wrongdoing. The changes were opposed by the largest federal workers' union. The final legislation, which Mr. Trump [signed into law](#) late last month, makes it easier for the department to fire problematic employees, incentivizes whistle-blowing and gives the secretary greater hiring authorities to fill vacant medical center director jobs.

Legislation that overhauls the department's appeals procedure was an easier lift. About half a million veterans have pending claims contesting a Veterans Benefits Administration decision. The process, as currently configured, can take years to sort out. The legislation tries to significantly expedite that process by creating distinct queues for veterans based on the evidence they wish to submit with their

claims.

The department had championed a similar proposal during the Obama administration, and it won support from the veterans groups. But then lawmakers ran out of time to move it through Congress. The legislation won quick passage in the House this term and, with Congress returning from recess, is expected to win passage in the upper chamber as well. Lawmakers hope it will become law before the August recess.

The good feeling may soon be put to the test, however. “What they are getting done now is low-hanging fruit,” said Paul Rieckhoff, the chief executive of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. “You could argue it is a great political strategy: Get points on the board, get wins. But I don’t think that’s going to last.”

Mr. Rieckhoff was referring to negotiations, which are expected to intensify this fall, over a reimagining of the multibillion-dollar Choice program and a half dozen other programs that allow veterans to seek health care in their communities at government expense. In the aftermath of the 2014 scandal, lawmakers created a program that gave veterans facing long wait times and travel distances the option of going to private doctors. But lawmakers from both parties agree that its unnecessarily cumbersome scheduling and payment process, [among other problems](#), need fixing.

Exactly how to do so is where the fights might occur. Democrats support community care in theory, but they are fearful that Republicans in the majority and the White House could try to use a significant expansion of the program to force further privatization of the department’s services. Republicans largely deny that that is their agenda. Mr. Shulkin plans to present lawmakers with the department’s own plan, which could either heighten animosities or dampen them.

“If they simply reauthorize Choice resources at the current level, that achieves bipartisan consensus easily,” Mr. Carter said. “If they revamp Choice to make it more aggressive, the fiscal implications of that will make many Republicans balk and the privatization implications will make Democrats balk.”

The committees remain in the early stages of negotiations. For now, though, Democratic and Republican leaders alike are content to take stock of a rare moment of agreement.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

“I think it’s been probably the most productive time of any committee I’ve ever been on,” Mr. Walz said. “It’s a unique time.”

[Continue reading the main story](#)

California Today: Rainy Winter, Fiery Summer

Public officials said California had been primed for a nasty fire season.

A rainy winter that helped ease drought conditions also accelerated the growth of new vegetation — which is now bone dry and essentially waiting to ignite.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

“When it’s warm out and dry, it just is a recipe for disaster,” said Lynnette Round, a spokeswoman for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

There were no reports of deaths from the latest round of fires. Ms. Round said a handful of firefighters suffered injuries, but nothing serious.

Here are some images from the blazes now raging across the state.

Photo



The Alamo fire sent smoke into the sky near Santa Maria in Santa Barbara County on Friday. Credit San Luis Obispo Fire Department, via Reuters

Photo



The Whittier wildfire lit up the sky in an area near Cachuma Lake on Saturday. Credit Reuters

Photo



A fire vehicle approached the Whittier fire on Highway 154 in Santa Barbara County on Saturday. Credit Mike Eliason/Santa Barbara

County Fire Department, via Associated Press

Photo



The Wall fire in Butte County left scorched residential properties in its wake. Credit Josh Edelson/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Photo



Sharon Reitan and Josh Cornelison, who lost their home in the Wall fire, rested at an evacuation shelter in Oroville on Sunday. Credit Noah Berger/Associated Press

California Online

(Please note: We regularly highlight articles on news sites that have limited access for nonsubscribers.)

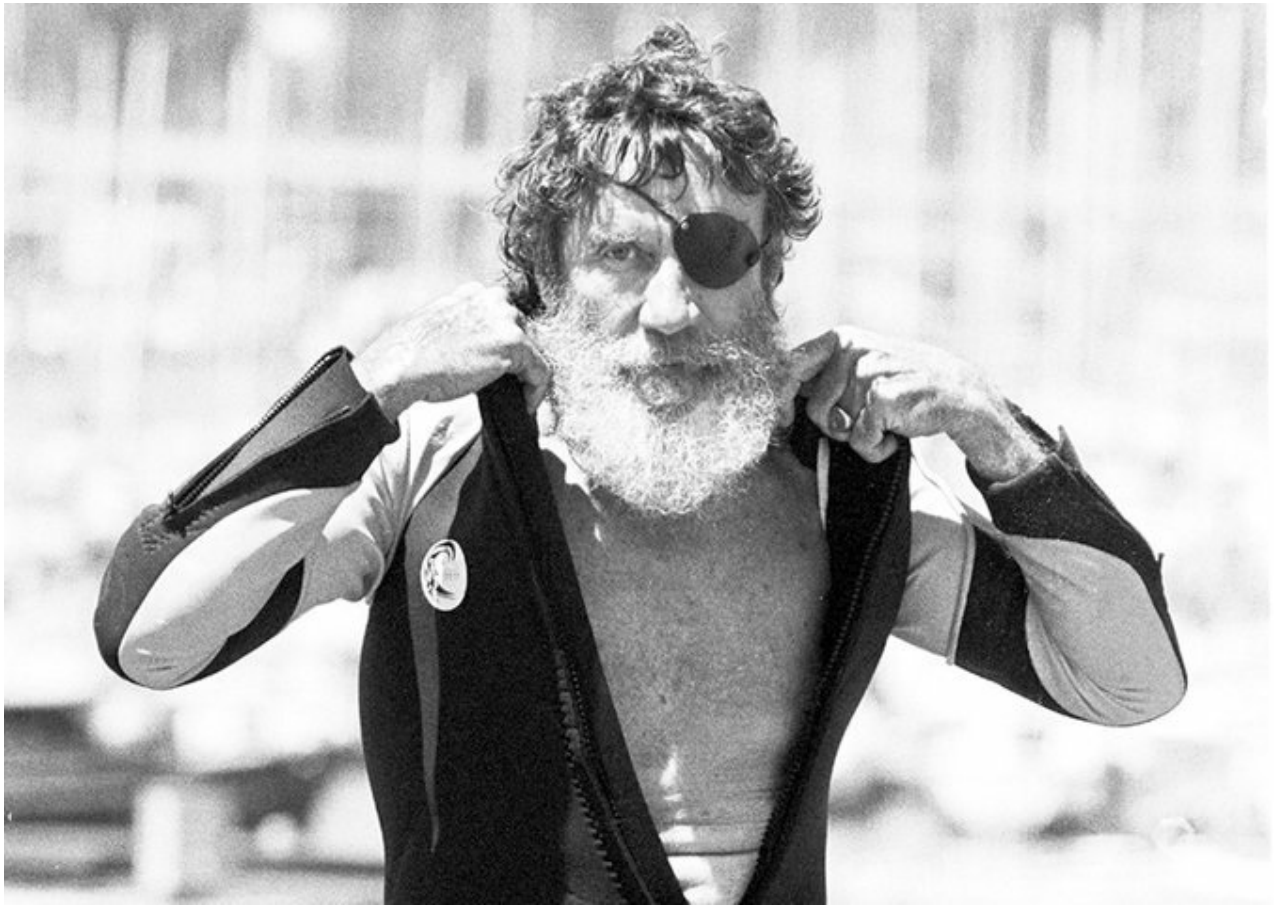
Photo



Representative Maxine Waters, a Democrat from Los Angeles, was elected to the House in 1990 and has easily held her seat since then. Credit Lexey Swall for The New York Times

- In President Trump, **“Auntie Maxine” Waters** has found a perfect target and won an army of new admirers. [[The New York Times](#)]
- The government offered a \$110,000 reward for information in a string of **fires at construction sites** in Oakland and Emeryville. [[East Bay Times](#)]
- “I’ve shed a few tears reflecting on what I’ve been through.” Once **homeless**, a Sacramento man is now a rookie police officer. [[Sacramento Bee](#)]

Photo



Jack O'Neill before windsurfing off Santa Cruz in 1982. He revolutionized the surfing industry through the sale of wetsuits. Credit Dan Coyro/The Santa Cruz Sentinel, via Associated Press

- Thousands of people paddled into the Pacific and formed a circle in memory of **Jack O'Neill**, inventor of the modern-day wet suit. [[Santa Cruz Sentinel](#)]
- The **yellow road signs** that warned California drivers to watch out for running immigrants have almost entirely disappeared. Here's why. [[Los Angeles Times](#)]

[Continue reading the main story](#)

- In **Silicon Valley** of all places, we're still building corporate campuses like it's the 1950s. [[Opinion | The New York Times](#)]
- An advance sellout. A Magic Johnson fist bump. **Lonzo Ball** as a Laker brought a new vibe to the N.B.A. summer league. [[The New York Times](#)]

Photo



“The bigger the job you have in Hollywood,” Amy Pascal said, “the less you are actually connected to the creative process.” Credit Andrew White for The New York Times

- After the humiliating cyberattack that led to her ouster at Sony Pictures, **Amy Pascal** became one of Hollywood’s role models for dealing with adversity. [[The New York Times](#)]
- CBS is facing criticism for letting Daniel Dae Kim and Grace Park leave “**Hawaii Five-0**.” Our television critic weighed in. [[The New York Times](#)]
- At a tiny museum in Berkeley, you can smell the **natural history of perfume**. [[The New York Times](#)]
- This **Sonoma County restaurant** is modeled on the idea that hosts treat guests like friends, not customers. [[The New York Times](#)]

Photo



From left, Este, Alana and Danielle Haim of the band Haim in Los Angeles. Credit Elizabeth Weinberg for The New York Times

- The Los Angeles trio **Haim** is an anomaly in the music business today: a rock band very much devoted to being a rock band. [[The New York Times](#)]
- Five examples of what you could rent for \$1,750 in **San Francisco** right now. [[Curbed San Francisco](#)]

Coming Up This Week

- The [Badwater ultramarathon](#) — a 135-mile foot race in Death Valley — kicks off Monday.
- This year's [Emmy Award nominees](#) are to be announced Thursday morning.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

- On Friday, the [California State Fair](#) opens in Sacramento with rides, music and livestock.
- San Diego will host three days of [Pride festivities](#), including a parade, starting Friday.

And Finally ...

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Michigan's New Motor City: Ann Arbor as a Driverless-Car Hub

One of the strongest draws to Ann Arbor is MCity, a 32-acre testing ground that opened in 2015. It features simulated city streets, intersections and storefronts where carmakers and others can test self-driving vehicles in a confined but realistic setting. Dozens of companies, including General Motors, Toyota, Honda, BMW and Intel, are conducting research there in collaboration with the university.

Last winter they were joined by Navya, a French start-up that has developed a small, autonomous shuttle bus. Two will go into service at the university in September in one of the first trials of a driverless transit vehicle open to the public. By the end of the year, Navya plans to begin building its buses near Ann Arbor.

Henri Coron, Navya's vice president for sales, said the decision to locate the assembly plant in Michigan was based on "the strength of support" from the university.

The university's president, Mark Schlissel, said his institution was trying to ensure that Michigan remains a vibrant center of automotive innovation, even as Silicon Valley and other locations take prominent roles in developing self-driving cars.

"We want to provide the research underpinning for the state to succeed in competing in this future of mobility," he said. "For the economic future of the state, it is critical that the leadership of automotive technology remains in southeastern Michigan."

[Continue reading the main story](#)

This Season's First Half Was a Home Run Derby

It is possible, of course, that this power boom is caused by chemicals. But that would mean a widespread wave of cheating is taking place despite increasingly stringent drug testing. Many pitchers believe the ball is harder than usual, with lower seams, though Major League Baseball insists that all testing shows the balls to meet normal specifications.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

More plausible, perhaps, is that the homers are an outgrowth of baseball's statistical revolution and the logical concepts it has popularized. Hitters understand that driving the ball in the air, instead of on the ground, offers far more potential for production and financial reward. Technology shows them precisely how to angle their bats to turn fly balls into homers, and many have the skills to apply what they know.

"We're allowing analytics people to come in, and for years baseball people didn't like analytics people; they were a bunch of nerds," said Craig Wallenbrock, a longtime hitting trainer and a former scout who consults for the Los Angeles Dodgers. "That may or may not be true, but that has nothing to do with what they're measuring. They're looking at launch angle, exit velocity, working with actual facts about what happens. It hasn't changed the way we hit a baseball, but it's changed our understanding of what's going on."

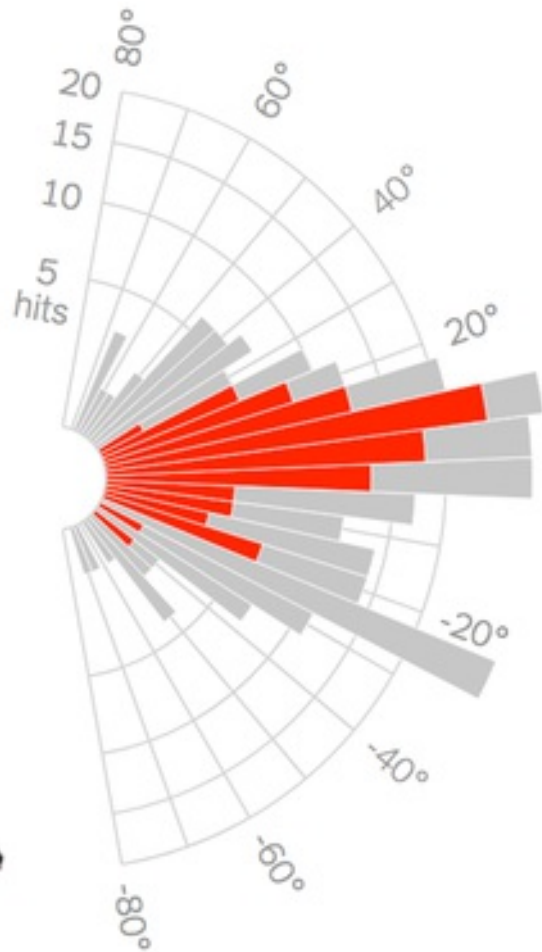
[Interactive Graphic](#)

[Not every batter benefits from a higher launch angle.](#)

D.J. LeMahieu

Batted Balls

Hits



[OPEN Interactive Graphic](#)

The pace of the adjustments has been sudden, with the home run spike beginning in the summer of 2015, the year that began the so-called Statcast Era, when baseball began measuring — and publicly emphasizing — the DNA within every ball in flight: the rate of spin for each pitch, the angle of the hitter's bat upon contact, the speed at which every batted ball travels.

For the best hitters in the world, more data means a more precise road map from bat to bleachers. And while the proportion of ground balls has essentially held steady — 44.3 percent to 45.3 percent for each year of this decade, according to [FanGraphs](#) — hitters seem to know how to drive fly balls with more backspin to make them into homers. The percentage of fly balls that become homers has risen in each of the last four years, from 9.5 percent in 2014 to 13.7 percent this season.

The rapid evolution does not surprise Billy Eppler, the Los Angeles Angels' general manager.

"It doesn't, because of something that, actually, Alex Rodriguez told me some years

back: ‘If you can articulate what you value, and what you’re looking for, players of this caliber of athleticism can turn themselves into it,’” said Eppler, a former Yankees assistant. “It’s kind of standing the test of time, where guys know that runs are valuable, and the ones that have the capability to do it — meaning the strength — are lifting the ball a little bit more and putting more balls in the seats. But the trade-off that comes with that is contact.”

That’s because the emphasis on home runs creates more holes in hitters’ swings and pitchers are well equipped to exploit them. The most extreme case, perhaps, is San Diego’s Ryan Schimpf, who had 14 homers, and just 12 other hits, to go with 70 strikeouts before his demotion last month.

Photo



Carlos Correa of the Houston Astros with Dave Hudgens, the team’s hitting coach, in Oakland, Calif., in April. Hudgens wants hitters to swing only if they believe they can hit the pitch for a homer. Credit Michael Zagaris/Oakland Athletics, via Getty Images

Strikeout rates have risen every year for a decade; this year, the average total of strikeouts per game is 16.489, up from last year’s record of 16.055. The average fastball velocity has risen each year since 2008, according to FanGraphs, and is now up to 93.6 miles per hour, as starters go fewer and fewer innings and teams turn to more and more hard-throwing relievers to fill the rest of the game. All of them are being encouraged to be more aggressive, which also becomes a factor in

the home run surge.

“What has happened is, because of the increase in velocities, you’re seeing more pitchers pitching up — more pitching coaches and organizations encouraging pitches thrown up at the top of the zone — where that was never the case before,” said Colorado Rockies Manager Bud Black, who pitched in the majors from 1981 to 1995. “My generation was down, down, down and away, and if there was a guy who would chase a high fastball, you would throw it up. But you never made it part of your game.”

[Continue reading the main story](#)

That can lead to more strikeouts, but also more mistakes that get hammered. Jon Lester, the veteran left-hander for the Chicago Cubs, added that umpires also seemed to be calling fewer strikes on low pitches this year.

“You’ve got to bring that ball up just a little bit, giving them a better opportunity to hit the ball,” Lester said.

Photo



Mike Bryant in 2014. Bryant, a former minor leaguer for the Boston Red Sox, instructed his son Kris in hitting. Credit John Locher/Associated Press

One hitter who takes advantage is Lester’s teammate, third baseman Kris Bryant,

the National League rookie of the year in 2015 and the most valuable player last year. Bryant's father, Mike, was a minor leaguer for the Boston Red Sox and [learned hitting](#) from Ted Williams. Mike Bryant now instructs young hitters in Las Vegas, and helped mold Kris into a prodigious — and unapologetic — fly-ball machine.

“Keep it really simple: Hit it hard, hit it in the air,” Mike Bryant said. “We want them to swing aggressively, we want them to make a big move forward into the ball, transfer their weight forward. Swing up, don't chop down. Barrel below the hands at contact, not above. ‘Don't hit the top of the ball, don't throw your hands, don't stay back’ — all the phrases that you've heard for years and years are totally the wrong things to teach.”

He said strikeouts were up because the pitchers were better, not because hitters had changed. Actually, he said, hitters have not changed as much as they have learned how to use launch angles to their advantage. Greats of the past like Williams and Mel Ott, Bryant said, may have done so intuitively.

Ott, the third player to reach 500 homers — after Babe Ruth and Jimmie Foxx — would practice lofting fly balls down the short right-field line at the Polo Grounds, to hook home runs inside the foul pole. Playing for the New York Giants from 1926 to 1947, he led the National League 10 times in at-bats per homer, succeeding with an unorthodox style.

Photo



Ryan Schimpf of the San Diego Padres hitting a two-run home run against the Washington Nationals on May 28. This season, Schimpf had 14 homers and 12 other hits, but also 70 strikeouts. Credit Matt Hazlett/Getty Images

“You go back to Mel Ott, look at the way he held the bat,” Mike Bryant said. “Why did he point the bat straight back at the catcher? Do you think he just did that to be different? No, he did that with purpose. He pointed the bat straight back at the catcher because he wanted to start with his hands low and finish high, or at his shoulders, because he thought, ‘How am I gonna hit this pitch?’ He wanted the swing plane to be up because they had a high mound and they were pitching downhill. These guys were thinkers. Everybody’s been telling you for generations not to think too much. You have to think.”

Today, the thinking hitter wants to know the reason for an outcome, and he knows data will provide an answer. Batters this season have a .252 batting average on fly balls and a .241 mark on ground balls, many of which are gobbled up by over-shifted infielders. The gap in slugging percentages is much more striking: .751 on fly balls, .261 on grounders, according to FanGraphs. Understandably, hitters are less likely than ever to accept the wisdom that prevailed not long ago.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

“Go back a decade and almost every hitting coach was telling you to hit the ball hard on the ground, hard on top,” said San Diego Padres Manager Andy Green, a utility player in the majors from 2004 to 2009. “That’s just not the vernacular of the game today.”

A record 111 major leaguers bashed at least 20 home runs last season, making power almost a job requirement for a spot in the lineup. Accordingly, more and more players — Josh Donaldson, J. D. Martinez, Daniel Murphy, Justin Turner — have tailored their swings to change their style of hitting, often through an intense off-season overhaul with a private coach.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Germany’s Siemens Says Russian Partner Violated Crimea Sanctions

“Russia-E.U. relations are already not in a good place, not least because there seems to be no pathway for E.U. sanctions easing at this point,” said Mujtaba Rahman, managing director for Europe at Eurasia Group, a political consultancy.

“In this light, this is going to be seen as something of a provocative act by Russia and will further deteriorate relations between Berlin and Moscow.”

[Continue reading the main story](#)

The dispute will also do nothing to encourage foreign investment or repair Russia’s reputation as a place where contracts are often ignored, property is subject to arbitrary seizure and there is little legal recourse.

Siemens has been one of Russia’s most reliable foreign investors. It has done business in Russia since the rule of the czars and usually avoids saying anything to offend the government.

But abandoning any pretense of diplomacy, Siemens said it would begin criminal and civil proceedings in Russia against those responsible for what it called the fraudulent export of the turbines. The unusually sharp statement on Monday followed news reports about the violations, from what the company called “reliable sources.”

Siemens also said it had been lied to by its Russian customer. Technopromexport had repeatedly reassured Siemens that the turbines would not be sent to Crimea, Siemens said.

The Kremlin’s spokesman, Dmitry S. Peskov, said Monday that the turbines had been made in Russia from Russian parts and were not subject to sanctions restrictions. According to Siemens, the turbines were made in Russia with a Russian partner but by contract subject to the sanctions.

“This development constitutes a clear breach of Siemens’s delivery contracts, which clearly forbid our customer from making deliveries to Crimea,” Siemens said.

While hurt by sanctions, Russia has been in a prolonged economic slump mostly because of low oil prices. Crimea is different. The peninsula, isolated and contested, is under a stricter regime, and electricity in particular has been politicized.

In 2015, Ukrainian nationalists [blew up electrical pylons](#), and rolling blackouts ensued, embarrassing the Russian government by illustrating its dependence on Ukraine to keep everything, including trolley buses and hospitals, running.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Russia quickly unspooled an undersea cable, but it met only part of the region’s demands. Ukraine then tried to write its claims to sovereignty into a new electrical supply contract, again rubbing in Russia’s inability to power up Crimea.

The attempt to smuggle in sanctioned generators is the most aggressive Russian move to solve the electrical shortage.

Rumbling, inefficient diesel generators keep lights on. But they have already cost Kremlin-linked companies a fortune in fuel, adding to the overall cost of integrating the region under sanctions.

For multinational companies like Siemens, the thicket of restrictions in Russia can be difficult to navigate. Russian local partners have a strong incentive to win favor by skirting the rules while the parent companies have an equally strong incentive to avoid punishing fines.

And in Russia's murky legal system, compliance is never certain.

The Siemens smuggling case is among the first of Ukraine-related sanctions busting to come to light. But earlier examples abound of rule bending in Russia by local subsidiaries, which caused headaches for parent corporations.

In 2010, for example, the German carmaker Daimler settled American charges over [bribes and kickbacks](#) in several countries, including Russia, by paying a \$185 million fine. The Russian subsidiary was one of two that pleaded guilty in United States District Court in Washington and in a related investigation by the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Siemens said it built the turbines in Russia with a Russian partner and sold them to Technopromexport for a power generation project in Taman, a city on a peninsula in southern Russia that is separated from Crimea by a narrow section of the Black Sea.

Technopromexport had agreed in writing not to ship the turbines to Crimea, or to export the power they generated to annexed territory, Siemens said.

The European Union has barred its companies from exporting infrastructure equipment to Crimea since Russia annexed the peninsula from Ukraine in 2014 in a move that angered the international community.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

The German government is almost certain to become embroiled in the dispute because of Siemens's size and importance to the economy. The economics ministry in Berlin declined to comment except to say that German companies were responsible for adhering to sanctions imposed on Russia.

Siemens's history in Russia dates to the 1850s, when it built a telegraph network there. But recently, sales in Russia have declined because of the country's economic

problems. Siemens's revenue in Russia last year was 1.2 billion euros (about \$1.4 billion), half its figure for 2013.

The company is highly sensitive to accusations of wrongdoing. In 2008, it paid more than \$1.6 billion in penalties to the governments of the United States and Germany after admitting it routinely bribed foreign officials to win contracts.

Siemens said it would review all its business activities in Russia to make sure there were no other violations of sanctions.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Anthony Roth Costanzo Exists to Transform Opera

"The countertenor voice was the ultimate experimental tool for composers in the 18th century," said the flutist and new-music maven Claire Chase, a frequent collaborator with Mr. Costanzo. "And I think what Anthony is doing is making that tool, with its range and its versatility, viable for composers in the 21st century."

Anthony Roth Costanzo - "Ombra mai fu" from Xerxes (Handel) Video
by WQXR

Baroque music, long the primary source of employment for countertenors — men who sing in the vocal register typically associated with mezzo-sopranos or altos — remains a major part of Mr. Costanzo's career. New York audiences accustomed to seeing him in Metropolitan Opera productions of Handel's "Rodelinda" and the Baroque pastiche "The Enchanted Island" will get a more intimate Handel in ["Aci, Galatea e Polifemo."](#)

Written for a wedding in 1708, this serenata — a form somewhere between a sonata and an opera — is about two servants who fall prey to their master, the malevolent Polifemo. The National Sawdust production, directed by Christopher Alden, features a device that enables projections to respond to visual and musical cues in real time.

"Handel presents directors with a lot of challenges because da capo arias can be seen as repetitious — no plot, all emotion," Mr. Costanzo said. "So it becomes that much more important to find different colors along the way."

National Sawdust, where Mr. Costanzo presented the similarly old-meets-new ["Orphic Moments"](#) last year, is also a more ideal space than the massive Met to experience what the director Peter Sellars describes as one of this singer's best

qualities. “He has this super pianissimo that just stops traffic,” Mr. Sellars said.

Photo



Mr. Costanzo will have the title role in Philip Glass’s “Akhnaten,” having its Metropolitan Opera premiere in 2019. Credit Michelle V. Agins/The New York Times

Mr. Costanzo’s other major venture this summer — recording his first album for Decca Gold — offers yet another collapsing of eras. “I didn’t want to do the usual countertenor debut of, like, Scarlatti arias,” he said.

So the set list for the album, for release in fall 2018, will be split evenly between Handel and Philip Glass, whose “Akhnaten” will have its Metropolitan Opera premiere in 2019, with Mr. Costanzo in the title role.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

The Met’s production of “Akhnaten,” staged by Phelim McDermott and previously seen with Mr. Costanzo at the English National Opera in London and the Los Angeles Opera, has involved far more drastic depilatory measures than the post-“Farnace” shedding of his Aleppo beard. “Full-l-l-l body wax,” said Mr. Costanzo, describing the three-hour procedure to become a pharaoh who bares all.”

With the exception of one miserable year of high school in his hometown, Durham, N.C., Mr. Costanzo has been in New York since he was 11. Along the way came

backup singing gigs, Broadway tours and even a Merchant Ivory film.

Perhaps because he started his career as a countertenor and never had to recalibrate a “standard” male voice upward, Mr. Costanzo brings a ringing force to his tone. (He joked that critics for The New York Times have referred to his voice as “penetrating” on four occasions, [exaggerating](#) the [actual number](#) by one.) Peter Gelb, the Metropolitan Opera’s general manager, described Mr. Costanzo’s sound as “focused and beautiful and large enough to fill the Met house easily, which is often not the case with countertenors.”

Mr. Costanzo, who frequently performs with the multihyphenate performance artist Justin Vivian Bond, agrees that he is fortunate to have come of age in an era when the binary conception of gender has loosened. Still, no amount of open-mindedness can fully prepare the listener for the moment when, as Ms. Chase put it, “you see this tiny, fierce body and then you hear this voluminous, voluptuous, massive sound.”

Anthony Roth Costanzo & Justin Vivian Bond – Summertime (Gershwin)
Video by WQXR

Mr. Costanzo said: “I don’t think the gender fluidity of today has taken away the shock. The thrill of it and novelty of it will never go away, nor should it.”

The increased presence of Baroque operas on the international scene in the past few decades has benefited Mr. Costanzo and his peers; countertenors are now actively sought by major opera companies worldwide. But as someone who cajoled Princeton University into letting him expand his undergraduate thesis into a [multimedia extravaganza](#) with a six-figure budget, he has never been content merely to take on the projects offered to him.

“Magic seems to follow Anthony,” said [the star](#) mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato, another frequent collaborator, “but that’s only because he is working nonstop to create it.”

There’s a coming Nico Muhly concert in the Works and Process series at the Guggenheim Museum. And the new American Modern Opera Company he is working on with Mr. Aucoin, a noted conductor as well as a rising composer. And the monthly Opera Party salons for the radio station WQXR. And, just to make sure the pre-1750 material doesn’t become rusty, he’s doing Handel’s “Giulio Cesare” at Houston Grand Opera in October and Pergolesi’s “Stabat Mater” at Lincoln Center’s White Light Festival in November.

Mr. Sellars, who has directed Mr. Costanzo in works that included Purcell and Ligeti, said this entrepreneurial mania is a throwback to a period we think of now

as decorous and staid.

“In the great age of countertenors, the idea of opera was being reset every two weeks, and they were at the absolute center of these innovations,” Mr. Sellars said. “Anthony is in some ways a reincarnation of this. He exists to transform the art form.”

Correction: July 10, 2017

An earlier version of this article referred to the American Music Opera Company. The correct name of the company is the American Modern Opera Company.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

80% of New Jersey Residents Disapprove of Christie's Performance, Poll Finds

Mr. Christie also saw his support among fellow Republicans plummet, with just 30 percent offering their approval.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

The Monmouth University poll, which was conducted from July 6 to 9, was based on a telephone survey of 800 New Jersey residents. It has a margin of sampling error of three and a half percentage points.

The governor has already achieved a milestone in the state — [a poll from Quinnipiac University](#) last month recorded him as officially the most unpopular New Jersey governor since polling began, with 81 percent of the state expressing disapproval of his work.

“In reality, Christie may have found the floor for his ratings, but it’s a level where most of his constituents now feel his time” in office has hurt the state, Patrick Murray, the director of the Monmouth University Polling Institute, said in a statement.

Amid such intense unhappiness with the governor, Mr. Christie has opted to audition for a job in which disagreement and argument can lead to success: drive-time sports talk radio.

Rather than seek to rehabilitate his approval ratings, Mr. Christie was trying out on Monday for his possible next role by filling in for Mike Francesa, the popular sports radio host on WFAN, who is on vacation. Mr. Francesa announced that he would be

[leaving the station](#) at the end of the year, and a spokeswoman for the station confirmed [to The Bergen Record](#) that Mr. Christie's appearance would be an audition.

Mr. Christie will host alongside Evan Roberts on Monday and Tuesday from 2 to 6:30 p.m.

The governor is a frequent guest on another morning sports radio show, "Boomer and Carton," and he has been a more frequent presence recently, perhaps to hone his bantering chops for this week's audition.

His spokesman, Brian Murray, said the governor would be juggling both jobs on Monday.

"The governor enjoys the opportunity to talk about sports on WFAN and is happy to have the chance to do that with Evan Roberts for eight hours next week over two shows," Mr. Murray said in a statement. "Despite those eight hours, as always, he will be on the job as governor. As for the governor's future, he appreciates the interest and concern about his next employment from his friends in the media, but he is not concerned at all about it."

[Continue reading the main story](#)

China's Wanda Signals Retreat in Debt-Fueled Acquisition Binge

Wanda battled Disney with plans for 13 theme parks across China. When Disney opened its [Shanghai resort](#) last year, drawing enormous crowds, Mr. Wang declared that "the frenzy of Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck and the era of blindly following them have passed."

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Such aggressive expansion plans are now under increased scrutiny in Beijing. Last month, a senior Chinese banking official warned that some of China's largest and most indebted companies may pose a [systemic risk](#) to the country's banks and to the health of the broader economy.

The deal-making ambitions have also been tempered by a backlash overseas, as politicians and policy makers express concerns over China's influence. American lawmakers [are pushing](#) for regulators to keep a closer watch over money flowing into the United States from China.

The combination of forces at home and abroad has put global deal makers on the defensive.

Last month, the Chinese government [detained Wu Xiaohui](#), the chairman of the Anbang Insurance Group, for undisclosed reasons. Anbang, with multibillion-dollar deals for properties like the Waldorf Astoria hotel in New York, [tested regulatory limits](#) in China and drew political censure in the United States.

HNA Group, a Chinese conglomerate with stakes in Deutsche Bank, Hilton Hotels and Ingram Micro, [has been criticized](#) for its opaque ownership structure. Last week, shares in Fosun International slid on speculation that the company had lost contact with its chairman, Guo Guangchang, who is often called the Warren E. Buffett of China. Fosun called the speculation “malicious rumors,” saying that everything was normal.

Wanda has not been immune to the pressure.

American lawmakers are concerned that Wanda’s Hollywood ambitions are part of a broader play by the Communist Party in Beijing to control how China is portrayed. This year, Wanda’s [\\$1 billion deal to buy Dick Clark Productions](#) fell apart for unknown reasons.

Investors’ confidence has been shaken.

Shares of Wanda Film, a unit listed in the Southern Chinese city of Shenzhen, have fallen about 11 percent in the last month. In December, Standard & Poor’s downgraded the long-term corporate credit rating for Dalian Wanda Commercial Properties and Wanda Commercial Properties, both listed in Hong Kong, citing high leverage and capital expenditures.

The deal announced on Monday would help Wanda pay off some of its debt.

Sunac would pay \$4.4 billion for a 91 percent stake in each of the 13 tourism projects, all in China, and would take over the loans for the projects. Wanda also agreed to sell 76 hotels for \$4.9 billion.

“Through the sale of these assets, Wanda Commercial’s debt-to-asset ratio will drop dramatically,” Mr. Wang, the Wanda chairman, told the Chinese business weekly Caixin. “All the cash will go to repaying loans.”

The move also plays into a broader shift by Wanda in recent years, to a so-called asset-light strategy that could free up more capital. Under this model, Wanda is looking to own fewer properties outright and to collect more money from management fees and other services.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

In the deal with Sunac, Wanda would continue to operate all of the projects under the company's brand name, and it would own fewer underperforming hotels.

"Wanda is selling the noncore part of its cultural tourism business," said Deng Zhihao, a real estate economist with Fineland Assets Management Company based in Guangzhou, China. "Ultimately, what they are selling are properties that the market doesn't like."

Even so, the deal amounts to an about-face for Wanda. The company had made tourism central to its focus, looking to capitalize on China's growing middle class.

But Wanda's record with theme parks has been mixed: Only four of the 13 theme parks being sold are up and running; most are in the planning stages. Wanda opened its first theme park, an indoor one, in the Chinese city of Wuhan. But it closed after 19 months for "upgrades and renovations," and it has yet to reopen.

For the first half of this year, Wanda said its cultural segment, of which tourism is a component, rose 5.9 percent from a year earlier, to \$4.5 billion.

"Given all the talk about how this was the centerpiece of the strategy for moving away from more traditional commercial real estate, it's hard not to see it, to some degree, as a form of capitulation," said Ronald Merriman, managing director of planning and advisory services for Pro Fun Management Group, a firm based in California that provides management services for theme parks and that has advised Wanda.

Mr. Merriman said Sunac had paid a steep price for "what are a handful of good but not stellar performers."

Sunac, too, faces skepticism over its deal making. Last week, its shares fell amid investor fears that it would take a loss from its \$2.2 billion investment in [the beleaguered LeEco Group](#), which is struggling to repay creditors.

"I don't understand this move by Sunac," Mr. Deng said. "Where are they getting this endless flow of money?"

[Continue reading the main story](#)

"Last year, they were the property developer that bought the most number of properties," he added. "And this year, they've spent a lot of money to save LeEco."

[Continue reading the main story](#)

How Many Died in London Fire? Anger Rises as Police Won't Say for Sure

The volunteer researchers have used different methods to arrive at their own estimates.

The software engineer, Joshua Vantard, has been using crowdsourcing techniques on a website, [Gathrer](#), to amass information on those who had been found or were missing. With two volunteer editors, he began poring through public sources to compile the information. He says the data remains too incomplete to allow scientific judgments, but his figure of 93 remains the most complete accounting in the public domain. (Mr. Vantard took data identifying the victims by name offline on Monday, citing privacy concerns raised by people claiming to represent the survivors.)

Among those who began using the Gathrer data was the demographer Michelle vonAhn, who previously worked for another council in London that had similarly large immigrant populations and data about their living arrangements.

"I don't subscribe to the conspiracy theory," she said, "but I do absolutely agree that there has been a purposeful attempt to trickle out the number of deaths, to not have any kind of overall figure in terms of people who may have died there."

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Ms. vonAhn and others working on the subject have concluded that until they know for certain how many people lived in Grenfell, they may never know how many died in the fire. Even DNA samples will not necessarily help, since DNA is usually destroyed by the high temperatures in a fire. In many of the apartments, including the 23 from which no one has been found, only ashes remain.

Sajad Jamalvatan, the Iranian student, who was out the night of the fire and whose mother survived the blaze, said he had his own count of 123 dead, but did not supply the raw data to back up his assertion. "It cannot be 80, it's double that," he said of the police estimate. "They don't want to give out three-digit numbers."

A spokesman for the council, who refused to give his name, was annoyed by suggestions that the council should have some idea how many people were registered to live in Grenfell Tower. "Grenfell Tower is not a gulag," he said. "The U.K. is not a communist state. Why would they have been registered?"

Residents, however, seem unlikely to accept such reassurances anytime soon, in the absence of a detailed methodology. Amina al-Wahadi, who lived near the tower and watched as the flames consumed her brother and his family of five on the 21st floor,

said of the authorities: “They’re stuck on 80, they’re covering their backs, that’s all.”

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Fire Tears Through London’s Camden Lock Market

Ten fire engines and crews from more than five stations were called to the scene. Photographs and video posted on social media showed an enormous blaze ripping through the girders of the building’s roof.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

By Monday morning, 20 firefighters remained on the scene as the police investigated the cause.

The Camden market, which began as a small arts and crafts fair and blossomed into a sprawling market selling vintage clothing, antiques, souvenirs and other items, has long been a center of bohemian London. The area, which was the site of gin distilleries and warehouses in the 19th century, became an important part of London’s swaggering counterculture.

Photo



An image posted on Twitter early Monday showed the blaze at Camden Lock Market. Credit LuisDjLauk, via Reuters

In the 1970s, a [vibrant music scene](#) at [Dingwalls](#), a storied venue for London night life, attracted a generation of bands like The Clash, The Sex Pistols and The Ramones, as well as habitués like the artists David Hockney and Lucian Freud.

Today, the market, which is popular with both tourists and Londoners, is filled with more than 1,000 stalls including street food vendors and independent shops.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Bill Would Give Green Cards to Undocumented 9/11 Volunteers

“They served our country when we needed a hand, and now we are only showing them, unfortunately, the back of ours,” Mr. Crowley said at a news conference outside City Hall on Sunday. “Instead of gratitude, they are being shown the door.”

[Continue reading the main story](#)

The legislation is likely to face an uphill battle with a Republican-controlled Congress, and with the Trump administration, which has vowed to crack down on

illegal immigration. The bill currently does not have support from any Republican members of Congress, Mr. Crowley said.

Mr. Cardona, 47, entered the country illegally by crossing the border with Mexico.

Twenty-seven years ago, he pleaded guilty to selling a small amount of cocaine to an undercover officer, a crime that put him in jail for 45 days. That offense prevented him from obtaining legal status, even though he was married to an American citizen.

The federal authorities issued an order for Mr. Cardona's deportation in 2001 after he missed an immigration hearing. But he was allowed to stay in the country because he was receiving medical care through a federal program for those with illnesses traced to the Sept. 11 attacks.

Under the James Zadroga Act of 2010, which was reauthorized in 2015, compensation and health benefits were extended to victims of Sept. 11 and workers who responded to the attacks, including immigrants who are in the United States illegally. Almost 70 percent of workers who helped in the cleanup showed respiratory symptoms, according to [researchers](#) at Mount Sinai Medical Center.

After the Trump administration issued a [memorandum](#) that prioritized the deportation of undocumented immigrants convicted of a crime, Mr. Cardona was detained on Feb. 28. He was [released](#) on June 28 because Governor Cuomo pardoned him for the drug conviction — the governor's seventh pardon since 2013 granted explicitly to remove the threat of deportation.

Although he was removed from custody and his conviction was expunged, Mr. Cardona's future in the United States still depends on the outcome of his immigration case.

"We keep on fighting," he said.

Mr. Crowley, chairman of the House Democratic Caucus, said there was a precedent for the legislation, in the treatment of immigrants who served in the armed forces during World War I.

His bill could affect 1,000 to 2,000 unauthorized immigrants who aided in the cleanup efforts after the attacks, Mr. Crowley said.

Representative Nydia M. Velázquez, a co-sponsor of the bill, said: "During the darkness of that day, we saw New Yorkers rally together to care for one another and respond to the attack. Immigrants, documented and undocumented, were among those that worked on 'the pile,' searching for survivors and helping our city recover."

The bill, the 9/11 Immigrant Worker Freedom Act, will be introduced by Mr. Crowley; besides Representative Velázquez, of Brooklyn, its co-sponsors are Representatives Adriano Espaillat and Jerrold Nadler, both of Manhattan.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Gunmen Kill 7 Hindu Pilgrims in Kashmir Attack

“The Amarnath yatra has been going on peacefully for centuries and is part of our yearly rhythm,” the statement said, referring to the pilgrimage. “These are enemies of Islam, these are terrorists, and the attack should be investigated.”

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Every summer, as many as 100,000 Hindu pilgrims make a steep trek to a frigid cave where water freezes into [a stalagmite shaped like a phallus](#), which is considered to be a symbol of Lord Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction.

The procession winds through a part of the disputed territory of Kashmir where Muslim separatists have attacked Hindus in the past, prompting thousands of Indian soldiers and police officers to be deployed along the pilgrims’ path to provide protection. This year, surveillance drones hovered above the procession for added security.

Mr. Khan said the bus that was attacked was not part of the main convoy and was not registered with the state government, perhaps explaining why it was traveling in the dark and was not more closely guarded.

He said he believed the attack was in retribution for the recent killing of militants by security forces.

A shopkeeper in Botengoo said he heard gunshots at around 8:25 p.m.

“Every shop in the area was open, and people were walking on the roadside,” Iqbal Ahmed Parray, 32, said. “Suddenly, there were gunshots and everyone started pulling down the shutters of their shops and running for their life.”

The state’s chief minister, Mehbooba Mufti, arrived at the scene shortly after the attack, which she called “an assault on our values and traditions.”

A former chief minister of the state, Ghulam Nabi Azad, added: “I don’t think anybody in Kashmir would support this attack. Everybody will condemn this.”

The pilgrims, who include families, businessmen and barefoot ascetics, depart from a base camp near Botengoo for a 19-mile journey to a spot that is about 10,000 feet above sea level. The number of people making the trek has grown over the years, even after Kashmir was convulsed by a separatist insurgency in 1989 that has sought to wrest control of the region from India.

The ice formation was discovered more than 200 years ago by a Muslim shepherd who then summoned a Hindu priest to the site. That priest named the site Amarnath, which according to Hindu teaching is the home of Lord Shiva. The journey to the cave is dangerous even without insurgent violence, and pilgrims and guides often slide off the narrow paths into ravines.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

At G-20, Beethoven Sends a Mixed Message to Trump

But Beethoven's Ninth is an especially slippery reference point, and may have triggered very different associations among guests at the summit. The message Ms. Merkel probably intended to send — promoting a culture of tolerance and brotherhood — may have been garbled.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Beethoven's own intentions were not unambiguous, either. When this greatest of German composers worked on what would be his final symphony in the 1820s, his admiration for Napoleon had curdled, amid political repression, into disillusionment. In that sense, the poet Friedrich Schiller's "Ode to Joy," an invocation of a humanity unified in the pursuit of joy and friendship, may have felt to Beethoven like an indictment of those in power when he chose to set that text in his symphony's great choral finale.

Photo



From left: Brigitte Macron, President Emmanuel Macron of France, President Trump and Melania Trump were in the crowd at the Elbphilharmonie concert hall in Hamburg. Credit Pool photo by Felipe Trueba

But then again, he ended up dedicating the Ninth to a king: Frederick III of Prussia.

But if Beethoven's symphony was meant to hold up a mirror to rulers, they have tended to see in it only a flattering reflection of themselves. Hitler was fond of the piece, programming it for the opening of the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin. In the early expansionist years of , it was the most performed Beethoven work in Germany, until the tide of battle turned and Nazi presenters favored the more tragically hued Fifth Symphony.

To Soviet leaders, the Ninth sounded like a Communist anthem; during the Cultural Revolution, it was one of the few Western works of music not banned in China. The tune of "Ode to Joy" became Rhodesia's anthem, only to be discarded with the end of apartheid and the birth of Zimbabwe. It's become a symphonic symbol of nationalism and globalism, colonialism and freedom.

Today "Ode to Joy" is the anthem of the European Union. Its stirring melody played as Mr. Macron entered for his victory rally when he was elected in May, a signal of his continued commitment to European integration in the age of "Brexit" and nationalist surges.

[The Group of 20 summit meeting took place in the German city of Hamburg. What is the G-20, and what happens when its members meet? See how much you know.](#)



Those overtones probably played a key role in Ms. Merkel's decision to program the Ninth for the G-20 leaders. But while its text celebrates openness and equality, the work remains a touchstone of Western — and especially German — culture.

That point was also reinforced by the choice of a local orchestra and choir, with an all-German quartet of soloists. (There wasn't, for example, the sprinkling of musicians from around the world that the New York Philharmonic's outgoing music director, Alan Gilbert, included in a recent ["Concert for Unity" performance](#) of a Mahler symphony.) For all its invocations of a global brotherhood, Friday's performance was also a display of German cultural pride not so different from the ceremonial sword dance with which Mr. Trump was honored during a recent visit to Saudi Arabia.

But in this election year in Germany, Ms. Merkel's decision to put Beethoven at the center of the conference may also resonate with some of her own voters. Since her last victory at the polls, in 2013, she has stunned some of her supporters with her decision to open the country to hundreds of thousands of refugees.

Their integration remains a challenge, with many on Ms. Merkel's center-right side of the political spectrum calling for greater insistence on *Leitkultur*, or lead culture:

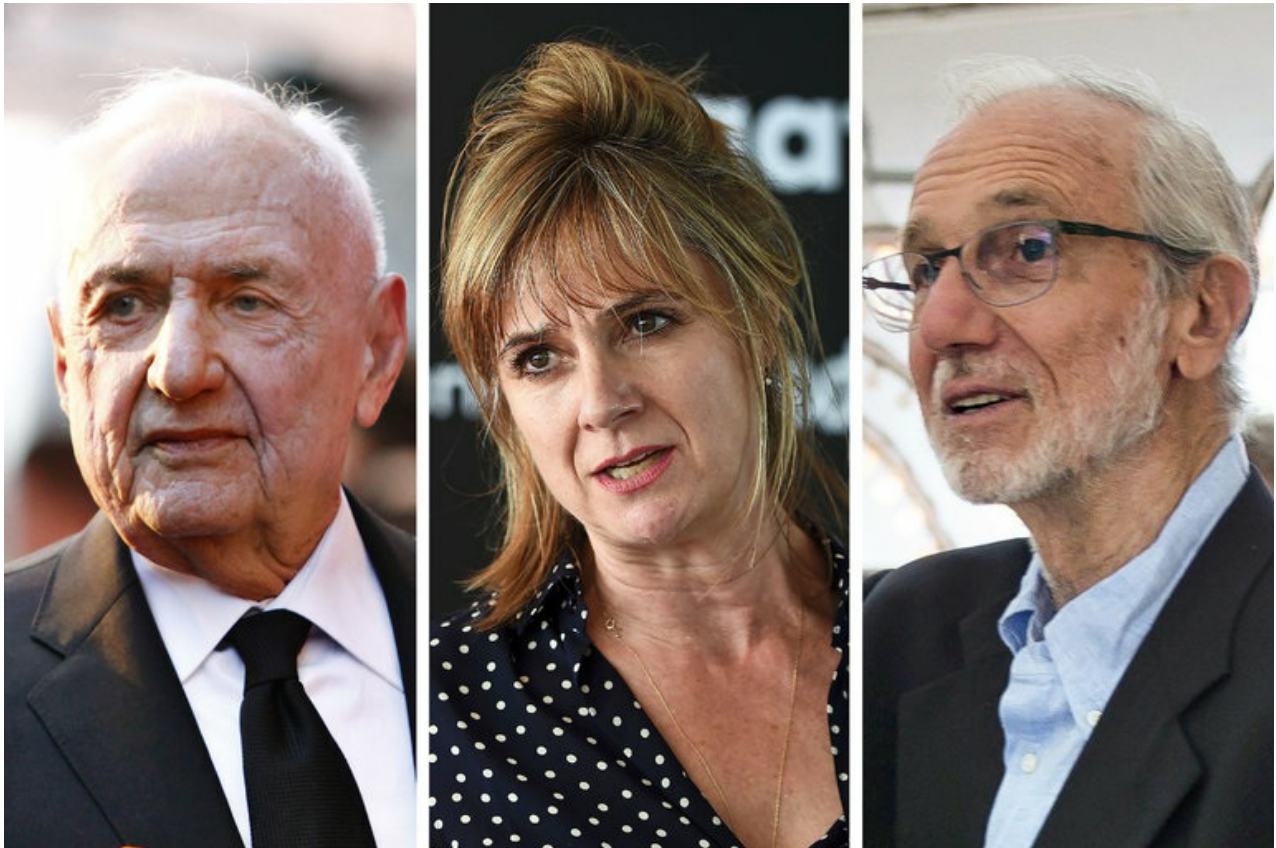
the assertion of core German values. The term can be a red flag to those who bristle at its suggestion of Eurocentric supremacy. And few works of music embody the notion of *Leitkultur* as neatly as the Ninth.

“We write symphonies” could thus have been the motto of Friday’s concert, too. With the added reminder that the best-known symphony of them all is, as the label might say, made in Germany.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Shortlist of Architects Announced for Music Center in London

Photo



From left, Frank Gehry, Amanda Levete and Renzo Piano, some of the architects who made the shortlist to design London’s new Center for Music. Credit From left: Michele Tantussi/Getty Images; Patricia de Melo Moreira/Agence France-Presse -- Getty Images; Pedro Puente Hoyos/European Pressphoto Agency

Amanda Levete, Norman Foster, Renzo Piano, Diller Scofidio + Renfro, Frank Gehry, [Snohetta](#): The starriest of starchitects are on the shortlist to design London’s new Center for Music, a future home for the London Symphony Orchestra

and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

All of the architects on the shortlist, which was announced Monday, have extensive experience working on cultural buildings. Ms. Leveté, who heads the architectural firm [AL_A](#), and is collaborating on the Center for Music proposal with Diamond Schmitt Architects of Canada, recently designed the [extension](#) to the Victoria & Albert museum in London. Diller Scofidio + Renfro is currently working on an expansion project for the Museum of Modern Art in New York as well as designing the Shed, a major new Manhattan cultural center.

Mr. Piano's France-based firm designed the just-opened Santander art gallery in Spain, while Mr. Foster's practice has designed the Carré d'Art in Nîmes, France, and the Winspear Opera House in Dallas. Snohetta, a Norway and New York-based collaborative, has designed a theater for the [Norwegian National Opera and Ballet](#), as well as the International Center for Cave Art in Montignac, France.

The éminence grise of the batch, Mr. Gehry, is known worldwide for his distinctive titanium-clad Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, as well as for the Walt Disney Concert hall in Los Angeles and the Vuitton Foundation in Paris.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Truce in Part of Syria, Announced by Trump, Survives First Day

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a monitoring group, reported that despite small breaches, including bursts of gunfire at the front lines, the truce had largely held since it went into effect at noon on Sunday.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Similar truces have been brokered before between the United States and Russia, which back opposing sides on the battlefield. They have all eventually collapsed.

But this truce was the first to be announced by the Trump administration. President Trump seized on it as a measure of diplomatic victory during [his first meeting with his Russian counterpart](#), President , at the Group of 20 summit meeting last Friday in Hamburg.

Russia brokered a truce with Turkey, an important rebel sponsor, in northern Syria last December. That, say local residents, has tamped down violence there, notably the Syrian government's aerial bombing campaign.

The Syrian battlefield is populated by a mix of rebel groups, supported by Jordan, Turkey, the Persian Gulf countries as well as the United States. Backing the government of President of Syria are soldiers and advisers from Russia, Iran and Hezbollah.

Syrian and Russian forces have justified their military attacks on many rebel groups as targeting terrorists; Al Qaeda affiliates in Syria and the Islamic State have not been part of the truces.

On Monday, Syrian forces said they had attacked Islamic State fighters in one area covered by the truce, an assertion disputed by local rebels, some of whom have received covert aid from the United States and its allies. They said the area contained no Islamic State fighters.

The latest truce covers three important areas in Syria's southwest: Dara'a, Quneitra and Sweida. The Syrian government had announced a unilateral truce in those areas last week, with the latest international agreement extending it.

Dara'a is where the rebellion against the Assad government [began in 2011](#), and much of its countryside is held by rebel factions, armed and aided by the United States, Jordan and others. An extended halt in violence there would help Jordan make the case for the return of Syrian refugees from its territory.

The United Nations secretary general, António Guterres, welcomed the truce but said it should not be used to push refugees back into Syria until they are ready.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

"Notwithstanding this positive development, the secretary general urges all countries to preserve the right for all Syrians to seek asylum and enjoy refugee protection until conditions are conducive for return in safety and dignity," his office [said in a statement on Monday](#).

Sweida is dominated by the Druse minority, which is largely loyal to the Assad government; Al Qaeda affiliates are scattered in the area along with nonextremist rebel factions who fight under the banner of the Free Syrian Army.

Quneitra is important to Israel because it presses against the Israeli-held portion of the Golan Heights, a strategic area Israel captured from Syria in their war in 1967. Syrian forces in Quneitra are backed by Hezbollah fighters, and on Sunday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel, while welcoming the cease-fire, warned against "Iran and its proxies" establishing themselves in the area.

Iran, which was not part of the deal, called on Monday for the cease-fire to be expanded nationwide.

What impact — if any — the southwestern truce deal will have on the United Nations-brokered talks in Geneva is unclear. Representatives of the rebel factions have yet to negotiate face to face with their adversaries from the government.

They have convened in different rooms in what the United Nations special envoy in charge, Staffan de Mistura, has called “proximity” talks.

Asked about the southwestern Syrian truce, Mr. de Mistura suggested to reporters in Geneva on Monday that he was optimistic about it.

“In all agreements there is a period of adjustment. We are watching very carefully,” Mr. de Mistura said at a news conference. “But we can say we believe it has fairly good chances of working out.”

Correction: July 10, 2017

An earlier version of this article misquoted Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel. He warned against “Iran and its proxies” establishing themselves in southwestern Syria, not “Iran and its satellites.”

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Art Deco Buildings Make Asmara, Eritrea, a Unesco Heritage Site

Hanna Simon, the country’s representative to Unesco, said the recognition brought the city “tremendous pride and joy” as well as “a profound sense of responsibility and duty.” Critics of the government say it lacks the financial resources to maintain the historic structures.

The city’s Modernist buildings include an Art Deco bowling alley and the Fiat Tagliero building, a service station shaped something like an airplane, with a central tower supporting a pair of 60-foot cantilevered wings. There is also a garage, built in 1937, that resembles the hull of a ship with porthole windows. The Bar Zilli building looks like an old-fashioned radio set, with windows like tuning buttons.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

The Fiat Tagliero building, by the architect Giuseppe Pettazzi, is often called one of the most beautiful in the world, but its design, radical for the time, was met with some skepticism. When it opened in 1938, Mr. Pettazzi [is said](#) to have pulled out a gun, and either pointed it at a builder who expressed doubts, or threatened to kill

himself if the structure collapsed when the temporary supports used to build it were removed.

In addition to Asmara, Unesco named [two other World Heritage sites](#) in Africa on Saturday: Mbanza Kongo, the remains of the former royal capital of the Kingdom of Kongo, in present-day Angola, and the ancestral lands of the Khomani San people, in South Africa near the borders of Botswana and Namibia.

On Sunday, the organization [added three sites](#) on other continents: the ancient Hellenic city of Aphrodisias in southwestern Turkey; the Lake District in northwestern Britain; and the Valongo Wharf in Rio de Janeiro.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

James Levine to Replace Andris Nelsons in the Met's New 'Tosca'

Photo



James Levine, at Carnegie Hall in 2015. Mr. Levine, the Met's music director emeritus, led a "Tosca" in his first performance with the company — on June 5, 1971. Credit Hiroyuki Ito for The New York Times

Its star soprano and tenor dropped out. Now the Metropolitan Opera's hotly anticipated new production of Puccini's "Tosca," planned for next season, is losing its star conductor — and replacing him with a familiar baton.

The Met announced on Monday that Andris Nelsons, who leads the Boston Symphony Orchestra and, starting next season, the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra in Germany, would not be conducting the "Tosca," scheduled to open on New Year's Eve. Mr. Nelsons "has withdrawn," the company said in a statement, providing no further explanation.

But the Met has come up with an experienced replacement: James Levine, its music director emeritus, who led "Tosca" in his first performance with the company, on June 5, 1971, when he was 28. ("He brought to 'Tosca' a dramatic tautness frequently missing in the Met's pit," the critic Speight Jenkins wrote then, adding, "Levine should have a great career ahead of him.")

Now 74, Mr. Levine [stepped down](#) as the Met's music director last year because of health problems but remains a dominant presence on its podium. In addition to "Tosca," next season he will lead Mozart's "Die Zauberflöte" and a trio of Verdi works: "Il Trovatore," "Luisa Miller," and the Requiem.

The maestro switch comes a few weeks after the soprano Kristine Opolais, Mr. Nelsons's wife, [said she would leave](#) the "Tosca" production "for personal reasons." In March, the tenor Jonas Kaufmann [withdrew](#), citing a desire to spend more time with his family in Europe. They were replaced by Sonya Yoncheva and Vittorio Grigolo, both making role debuts in this production, directed by David McVicar and also starring Bryn Terfel, as the vicious Scarpia.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

In the Deep, Dark Sea, Corals Create Their Own Sunshine

But deeper in the water, it's dark and the little light that reaches that far down is only in the blue part of the spectrum. Somehow, there are corals that live up to hundreds of feet below the surface and also manage to glow burning hues of orange and red.

The reasons for this fluorescence have remained a mystery, until now: These [deep-sea corals](#) glow to get more sunlight, according to a [study](#) published on Wednesday in the journal Proceedings of the Royal Society B. Their proteins soak up the scarce light and shine it back out as red-orange light that penetrates deep inside their

tissues where their microscopic roommates take up residence. This means there's light for photosynthesis, and the algae creates energy and food for the coral.

"This is a strategy that some corals pursue to cope with the challenges of a low-light environment," Prof. [Joerg Wiedenmann](#), a biologist at the University of Southampton in Britain who led the study, wrote in an email. It's quite an adaptation, with a brilliant byproduct.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

'The Cradle Will Rock' Returns With Its Brazen Politics Intact

Still, the show went on, and provided one of the most memorable nights in New York theater history. Houseman found a theater uptown, though there were no sets or costumes, and union restrictions kept everyone except Blitzstein from performing onstage. He played the opening bars and began to sing — and from the audience, the actress who played a prostitute joined him. The opera unfolded with just a solo piano and actors, in street clothes, singing from their seats.

Patti LuPone Sings "The Nickel under Your Foot" Video by rogersmile83

While the opera was in development, Blitzstein shared "The Nickel Under Your Foot," a prostitute's showstopping song about the power of money, with the German playwright Bertolt Brecht, who responded: What about the other "prostitutes" in society? (At the top of the finished score, Blitzstein wrote, "To Bert Brecht.")

Photo



Blitzstein at the piano during the 1937 premiere of "The Cradle Will Rock," a stripped-down staging after a last-minute move to another theater. Credit Kurt Weill Foundation for Music

Musically, the opera is indebted to Kurt Weill, Brecht's collaborator on similar works, including "The Threepenny Opera" and "Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny." (Weill, after the premiere of "Cradle," was said to have quipped about it, "Have you seen my latest musical?")

Howard Pollack, a [professor at the University of Houston](#) and author of the 2012 biography "[Marc Blitzstein: His Life, His Work, His World](#)," said that the success of the premiere has, over the years, encouraged people to recreate it. "The dramatic events probably helped make this premiere a legend, but it's kind of obscured the original intention," Mr. Pollack said.

Lawrence Edelson, Opera Saratoga's artistic director and the director of the new "Cradle" staging, said that the premiere has "actually overshadowed what the piece itself is."

For this production, Mr. Edelson said, he wanted to return to the original plans for "Cradle": scenery, costumes and Blitzstein's full orchestration, which hasn't been heard in the United States since 1960. But as he studied the work, he saw themes

that spoke both to liberals and Trump supporters. “People don’t need to be left-leaning politically to see something that resonates with themselves with this piece,” he said. “It hits a nerve. It’s inherently part of the DNA of our society.”

Photo



Opera Saratoga will stage “The Cradle Will Rock” 80 years after its storied debut. Credit Gary David Gold

It would be easy — too easy — to update “Cradle” with a Mr. Mister resembling Mr. Trump, Mr. Edelson said. “I don’t think we need to hit the audience over the head,” he added. In fact, his earliest inspiration to stage the opera came not from Mr. Trump’s presidency, but during the primary season debates between Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders, which exposed the problem of “how the wealthier people within society are able to assert power and control through wealth,” Mr. Edelson said.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

By setting his production in the 1930s, Mr. Edelson plans to let the allegory speak for itself. Mr. Mauceri, for his part, said the opera's ideas would be more clearly delivered with the full, original score. (A commercial recording, the first ever with Blitzstein's orchestration, will be made from the coming performances.)

The fashionable way of performing "Cradle" with a solo piano, Mr. Mauceri said, "homogenizes everything." With more instruments, he added, references to Weill are more evident. Mr. Pollack said that the orchestration brings out the score's riches, including street theater sounds that create a Brechtian distancing effect.

Mr. Pollack added, "Can you imagine 'La Bohème' performed with just a piano?"

That the solo piano version of "Cradle" has persisted over the orchestrated score is, from a musicological perspective, an unfortunate side effect of the opera's premiere. But that performance also gave rise to Welles's formative Mercury Theater, and a longtime friendship with Blitzstein.

As it happens, Mercury Theater's first production, for which Blitzstein wrote the incidental music, was a provocative adaptation of "Julius Caesar" in 1937. World War II wasn't far off, and this Caesar bore a striking resemblance to Benito Mussolini.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

[**Carbon-Neutral Dream Eludes Oasis City Near Abu Dhabi**](#)

Times journalists around the world bring you a new 360 video every day.

[**Your Guide to New York Fashion Week: Men's**](#)

New York Men's Day, afternoon session

[Private Policy](#): Having graduated from Parsons School of Design in 2015, the partners Haoran Li and Siying Qu design men's and women's wear for a candy-colored dystopian future. [Maiden Noir](#): Designed in Seattle and made in Japan, Nin Truong's monochromatic drawstring pants, sweatshirts and shorts are appropriate for the upper echelons of an urban phys. ed. class. [R. Swiader](#): The soft draping of Raf Swiader's materials are at the heart of a men's wear brand that aims to fulfill a

“utilitarian lifestyle” (his words). [Descendant of Thieves](#): Specializing in shirts and knit tops, the staples designed by Dres Ladro and Matteo Maniatty carry a whiff of their Mediterranean heritage. [Heliot Emil](#): The Copenhagen brand is drastically minimalist and impertinently unisex. *Dune Studios, 55 Water Street, 4:30 to 6 p.m.*

Photo



Models for Private Policy.

Christopher Lowman

Following an eclectic fall 2017 debut inspired by the film “The Outsiders,” this young New Yorker is looking to gain more support from the industry. *July 11, 1 to 2:30 p.m., Restaurant at Rose Hill, 34 East 32nd Street*

EFM Engineered for Motion

The label [EFM Engineered for Motion](#), designed by Donrad Duncan, will take another stab at the future of sportswear. *July 12, 10 a.m.*

Kenneth Ning

[Kenneth Ning](#), who got his training at Michael Kors, takes the traditional American sportswear archetype and infuses it with the looseness of his hometown, San Francisco. *July 12, noon, Cadillac House, 330 Hudson Street*

Deveaux

The designers behind [Deveaux](#) — Matt Breen, Patrick Doss and Andrea Tsao — are dedicated to tailoring and dressing men like grown-ups. Their made-in-the-U.S.A. collection offers clean takes on luxurious sportswear for both men and women that look impressive, as opposed to “OMG” or “tight.” *July 12, 1 to 2 p.m., En Japanese Brasserie, 435 Hudson Street*

Landlord

The [Landlord](#) designer, Ryohei Kawanishi, specializes in blasts of color, with proportions borne of an unfettered imagination. This season’s collection is reggae-inspired. *July 12, 3 p.m.*

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Luar

For [Luar](#), Raul Lopez, a founder of [Hood by Air](#), makes minidresses and thigh-highs for men, as well as too-long-on-purpose T-shirts and shorts. His clothes don’t challenge gender; they’re postgender. *July 13, noon, Cadillac House, 330 Hudson Street*

Linder

Sam Linder and Kirk Millar, who own the boutique [Linder](#) in SoHo, ventured into women’s wear in February. It seemed like a natural progression for a brand known for its experimental men’s wear. *July 13, 1 p.m., 237 East 18th Street*

New Kids In Town

Teddy Ondo Ella

The Gabonese designer will introduce New York to his signature Abacost suit, the centerpiece of a collection that marries European and African styles. *July 10, 3 p.m., Artbeam Gallery, 540 West 21st Street*

Sanchez Kane

Bárbara [Sánchez-Kane](#), an illustrator and artist with an engineering degree, has an innovative men’s wear line worth checking out. *July 12, 7 p.m.*

CH24 Los Angeles

For those without chemistry degrees, C₂H₄ is the molecular formula for ethylene,

which ripens plants. [C2H4 Los Angeles](#) is a streetwear brand committed to being not just another streetwear brand. It is designed by Yixi Chen, who comes from Shanghai and has a thing for denim. *July 13, 7 p.m.*

Poolside

Parke & Ronen

Who wears short shorts? Models for the [Parke & Ronen](#) do. To celebrate its 20th anniversary, the label has invited members of the press and special guests backstage before the runway show for a peek at the “notoriously hunky models” as they rehearse their walks. *July 12, 2 p.m.*

Photo



Models backstage at the Parke & Ronen show last July. Credit Krista Schlueter for The New York Times

Katama

The swimsuits and tops, offered by Garrett Neff, [Katama](#)’s founder, are amicably retro. Mr. Neff named his label after Katama Bay in Massachusetts, where he spent his childhood summers. *July 12, 9 to 10 a.m., Grand Banks, Pier 25.*

Thorsun

George Sotelo's [swimwear](#) for men is all funky colors and patterns applied to traditionally cut bathing trunks that come in two styles: Apollo and Titan. *July 12, 5 to 7 p.m., 172 Madison Avenue, penthouse.*

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Hitsville U.K.

N-p-Elliott

The Scotsman Nicholas Elliott has his own idea of streetwear that has included such pieces as a military jacket reminiscent of the one worn by Chairman Mao. *July 11, 2 p.m.*

Feng Chen Wang

One of the few women showing during the week, [Feng Chen Wang](#) has previously displayed her namesake label's wares with VFILES. Look for inventive outfits that have, in the past, balanced leather briefs with the world's puffiest jacket. *July 11, 10 a.m.*

Represent

Manchester, England, is home to [Represent](#). After the city's traumatic spring, it will be fascinating to see if, and how, the collection reflects the turbulent times. *July 13, 10 a.m.*

Correction: July 8, 2017

An earlier version of this article misspelled the surname of a men's wear designer. He is Nicholas Elliott, not Elliot, and his label is N-p-Elliott, not N-p-Elliot. The article also misstated the name of the presentation by the label Jahnkoy. It is the Messanjah, not the Messiah. The article also misidentified the designer of Matiere; he is Scot Shandalove, not Jake Zeitlin, who recently left the brand.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Where and How to See the Total Eclipse This Summer in the U.S.

Small but Stellar

Madras, Ore. It is a largely agricultural community of 6,000 people in central

Oregon that is attracting a huge amount of attention from eclipse chasers, given its reliably clear summer weather and position in the center of the path of totality. Hotels in Madras have been sold out for years. The Days Inn, in nearby Bend, Ore., was advertising standard rooms at [\\$1,600 a night](#) as of May 1. But officials in Madras say there are still [plenty of campsites](#), and visitors will have a chance to take in [live music](#), check out a superb [aviation museum](#), hike at [Smith Rock State Park](#), and sample brews at dozens of [brew pubs in Bend](#).

Hopkinsville, Ky. A farm just outside [Hopkinsville](#) has the distinction of being considered the “point of greatest eclipse,” which means that from the center of the earth, the moon makes its closest path across the sun there, giving viewers the best view of the solar corona, which some say looks like a bright diamond ring. Brooke Jung, who is coordinating Hopkinsville’s eclipse marketing efforts, says the eclipse is the most exciting thing to happen to the town — which they are now branding “[Eclipseville](#)” — since the same date (Aug. 21) in 1955, when a dozen “little green men” [allegedly landed nearby in a spaceship](#).

In addition to their annual [Little Green Men Days](#) festival, which commemorates the extraterrestrial occurrence that supposedly inspired the 1982 film “E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial,” eclipse chasers can drink moonshine at two bourbon distilleries, attend a event, and take in the [Friday night bluegrass jam](#) at the nearby Rosine Barn. Ms. Jung says that the county has closed schools for the day, ordered 100,000 pairs of solar eclipse glasses (\$1 each), and has requested 85 members of the National Guard to direct traffic.

“It’s like us and the other towns in the center of the path of totality are preparing to host a Super Bowl,” she said.

Big Blowouts

Jefferson City, Mo. Capital Eclipse Village, in northern Jefferson City is the center of the action, with live music, art installations, circus-style performances, beer and wine stands and children’s activities. The site Capital Eclipse ([capitaleclipse.org](#)) lists programming there and elsewhere in Jefferson City. The total eclipse is expected at 1:14 p.m. for 2 minutes 29 seconds.

Lincoln, Neb. Haymarket Park, near the city center, is one of the largest viewing sites in the area. On the day of the eclipse, professors from the University of Nebraska’s department of physics and astronomy will set up sun-viewing telescopes and will be on hand to answer questions. There are a [number of other places to see the eclipse and ways to celebrate it](#), including a “ribfest” ahead of the event and a commemorative T-shirts. The eclipse can also be seen from [125 smaller parks](#) in and around Lincoln. Totality is expected at 1:02 p.m. for 1:24. Although most hotels

in Lincoln are sold out during the eclipse period, Tracie Simpson of the city's Convention and Visitors Bureau office can help you find accommodations. Contact her at tsimpson@lincoln.org or 402-434-5339.

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Nashville The most promising eclipse event is the [Music City Solar Eclipse Festival & Viewing Party](#) at the Adventure Science Center, a popular children's science museum. Though [the festival starts on Sunday](#), Aug. 20, the highlight is total eclipse day, where totality is expected at 1:27 p.m. for 1 minute 55 seconds. Indoor activities include multiple showings of Eclipse: The Revealed, a show in the planetarium that the center produced in honor of the eclipse. Outdoors a giant screen will show NASA's broadcast of the eclipse from space. There will also be science-themed games, food trucks and solar telescope viewing stations. The easiest way to find a place to stay is to search for hotels on [the Music City Solar Eclipse Package](#) page, provided by the city's Convention & Visitors Corp. Make sure that wherever you stay, you [listen to the city's eclipse Spotify playlist](#).

Casper, Wyo. The community is putting on the [Wyoming Eclipse Festival](#), a five-day celebration culminating on Aug. 21. The festival has more than 40 events throughout the city, including races, music concerts and space-related exhibits. Also, on Sunday, Aug. 20, Ira Flatow, the host of the NPR show "Science Friday," will give a speech at Casper College's Wheeler Concert Hall titled "Science Is Sexy." On eclipse day, when totality is expected at 11:42 a.m. for 2 minutes 26 seconds, the city will have several viewing events such as Solabration on the Circle, at Bart Rea Learning Circle along the North Platte River, which includes guided yoga, children's activities, breakfast and viewing glasses. The cost is \$110 a person plus \$33 per car for parking. But it will be tough to find a place to stay. All public campgrounds in the area are sold out, and most hotels are also full. "We're encouraging travelers to consider alternatives such as private land camping or home rentals through sites such as Airbnb," said Anna Wilcox, the executive director of the Wyoming Eclipse Festival.

Columbia, S.C. The [Total Eclipse Weekend](#) lists more than 50 eclipse events taking place in Columbia from Aug. 18 to 21. One example: [Solar 17 at Lake Murray](#), the city's largest viewing area, will have tents set up, and guests can receive free water and viewing glasses. Totality is expected at 2:41 p.m. for 2 minutes 36 seconds.

Charleston, S.C.: Of the more than 100 eclipse events listed on [Go Dark Charleston](#), one of the largest is expected to be [Eclipse on a Warship](#), which takes place on the aircraft carrier and warship museum U.S.S. Yorktown. Visitors will be able to catch the eclipse from the boat's flight deck, where Dr. Christian Iliadis, chairman of the department of physics and astronomy at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, will give a presentation on the eclipse and answer

questions. Totality is expected at 2:48 p.m. for between 90 seconds to two and half minutes. A full listing of hotels is available on the city's Convention and Visitors Bureau [site](#).

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Wildfires Spread Across at Least Six States and Canada

Sections

Search

[Skip to content](#)[Skip to site index](#)

Evacuations in California

More than 14 active wildfires in Nevada

A state of emergency in Arizona

Partially under control in Montana

Oregon, Washington and elsewhere across the West

Thousands evacuated in Canada

July 10, 2017 Daily Mini Crossword Puzzle

	1	2	3	
4				5
6				
7				
	8			



Across

1. 1Three-ingredient sandwich
2. 4Wear for the queen
3. 6Diet that excludes all processed foods
4. 7Angry, with "up"
5. 8W.S.J. alternative

Down

1. 1Scarecrow's wish in "The Wizard of Oz"
2. 2Candy on a stick, to Brits
3. 3Many a presidential statement, now
4. 4Revival technique
5. 5Silent assent