

Kennedy Center  
Big on Drama  
Under Trump

Plummeting Sales and  
a Crescendo of Exits

By SHAWN MCCREESH

WASHINGTON — This year’s fall season at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts officially kicked off one Friday night in September with “The Sound of Music,” the 1959 Rodgers and Hammerstein crowd-pleaser about nuns and Nazis.

In the cavernous Hall of States, where the name Donald J. Trump is now etched into the marble, a V.I.P. zone complete with a velvet rope line was set up for various Trump officials and allies. Breitbart, Newsmax, The Daily Caller, The Washington Free Beacon and other Trump-friendly publications all had spots along the red carpet.

The government officials and the right-wing press and hundreds of families settled into their seats. But before the towheaded Von Trapp children got the chance to dance, a voice came over the speakers: All actors needed to immediately clear the stage. There were “technical difficulties,” the voice explained. The crowd whispered as the curtain fell. It stayed down for the next 33 minutes.

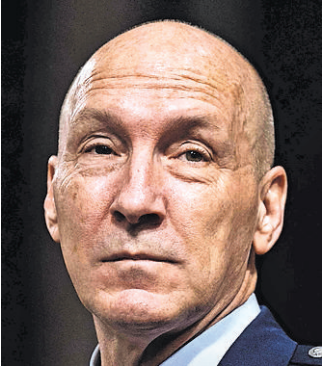
That is not the only breakdown the Kennedy Center has had since President Trump named himself its chairman in February.

Interviews with 25 people, including current and former Kennedy Center executives, board members, longtime employees, recent hires, industry leaders and Trump administration officials, revealed a Washington institution in crisis.

Audiences are staying away. Internal sales figures obtained by The New York Times showed ticket sales down by about 50 percent from the same period last year during one typical week in October. Dozens of employees, many with decades of experience, have been fired or quit. Outsiders with few obvious qualifications aside from party loyalty were handed top jobs. The center’s head of human resources estimated that staffing was down 30 percent from before Mr. Trump took over. Others call that a conservative estimate.

The new bosses insist they are not out to radically change the Kennedy Center but are merely trying to correct some bad business practices while attracting new audiences and donors. Some

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ANDREW CABALLERO-REYNOLDS/AFP  
**Gen. David W. Allvin** retired as chief of staff of the Air Force, halfway through a four-year term.



KENNY HOLSTON/THE NEW YORK TIMES  
**Gen. Timothy Haugh** was fired as the director of the National Security Agency.



STAFF SGT. CATESSA PALONE/U.S. ARMY  
**Maj. Gen. James Patrick Work** worked for Gen. Mark A. Milley, a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs.



JACQUELYN MARTIN/ASSOCIATED PRESS  
**Adm. Lisa Franchetti** was the first woman to be chief of naval operations and on the Joint Chiefs.



TOM WILLIAMS/CQ-ROLL CALL, VIA GETTY IMAGES  
**Adm. Alvin Holsey** retired after raising concerns about striking boats in the Caribbean.



KEVIN DIETSCH/GETTY IMAGES  
**Lt. Gen. William Hartman** was expected to be nominated to lead the N.S.A. and Cyber Command.



KENT NISHIMURA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES  
**Lt. Gen. Jeffrey A. Kruse** led the Defense Intelligence Agency when he was fired.



ANDREW HARNIK/GETTY IMAGES  
**Adm. Linda Fagan**, head of the Coast Guard, was the first woman to lead any branch of the service.



KENNY HOLSTON/THE NEW YORK TIMES  
**Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr.** was the 21st chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff when he was dismissed.

Unusual Purge  
Of Top Officers  
In the Military

Hegseth’s Moves Create  
an Air of Mistrust

This article is by Greg Jaffe, Eric Schmitt and Helene Cooper.

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has fired or sidelined at least two dozen generals and admirals over the past nine months in a series of ousters that could reshape the U.S. military for years to come.

His actions, which are without precedent in recent decades, have come with little explanation. In many cases, they have run counter to the advice of top military leaders who fought alongside the officers in combat, senior military officials said.

The utter unpredictability of Mr. Hegseth’s moves, as described in interviews with 20 current and former military officials, has created an atmosphere of anxiety and mistrust that has forced senior officers to take sides and, at times, pitted them against one another.

Mr. Hegseth has delayed or canceled the promotions of at least four senior military officers because they previously worked for Gen. Mark A. Milley, a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff whom President Trump loathes and has repeatedly accused of disloyalty. One is Maj. Gen. James Patrick Work, who was expected to be the deputy commander at U.S. Central Command, which oversees troops in the Middle East, officials said.

General Work, one of the

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APPEALS COURT  
REBUFS TRUMP  
ON SNAP DENIAL

HE TURNS TO JUSTICES

Some States Have Begun  
to Step Up to Resume  
Food Assistance

By TONY ROMM

WASHINGTON — A federal appeals court on Friday denied a last-minute attempt by the Trump administration to halt food stamp funding during the federal shutdown, prompting the government almost immediately to elevate that fight to the Supreme Court.

The legal wrangling played out as a growing number of states, including New York, Kansas, Pennsylvania and Oregon, said that they had to release full food stamp benefits to their residents anyway, as they scrambled to restart the nation’s largest anti-hunger program after weeks of delays.

The appeals court decision was the second legal defeat in two days for the Trump administration, which had repeatedly refused to tap an ample reserve of federal funds to sustain the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, which helps about 42 million poor Americans purchase groceries.

Even though President Trump has long claimed to possess vast powers over federal spending — and has frequently reprogrammed the budget to advance his agenda during the shutdown — he and his aides maintained that they could not source all of the money to send full nutrition benefits to the roughly one in eight Americans that receive them.

A coalition of cities, religious groups and nonprofits quickly sued over that refusal, telling the U.S. District Court for the District of Rhode Island that the administration had a legal and moral obligation to supply the necessary funds. Twice, Judge John J. McConnell Jr. agreed, and on Thursday, he directed the White House to tap two accounts at the Agriculture Department that would fund SNAP benefits in their entirety.

In its appeal, the Justice Department maintained on Friday that there was no “lawful basis” to force the president to find money in the “metaphorical couch cushions.” Lawyers for the government even argued that a directive to fund SNAP had “scrambled ongoing political negotiations” — even though none appear to be ongoing.

But the U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit declined to impose a temporary halt to the

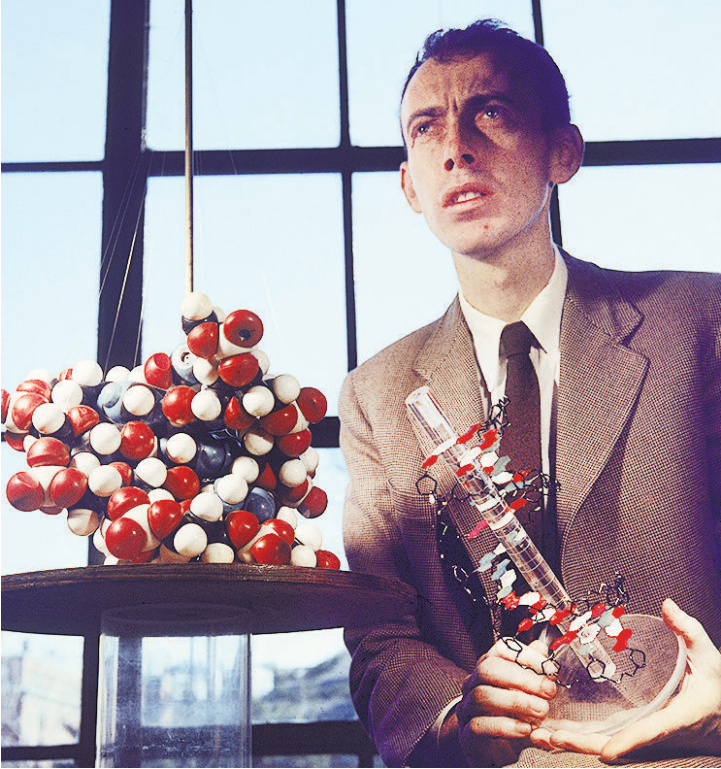
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**HARD WAITS** Some of the 42 million people on SNAP tell of a nerve-racking week. PAGE A10

‘I wasn’t even looking to make sure that it was safe.’

**Arianna Payton**, on exploring a Walmart dumpster; a nearby food bank was empty.

Giant in Science Shared Breakthrough on DNA



ANDREAS FEININGER/THE LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION, VIA SHUTTERSTOCK

James D. Watson, one of the most important scientists of the 20th century, later caused an uproar with his comments on race.

JAMES D. WATSON, 1928-2025

five weeks, according to the National Air Traffic Controllers Association, a union that represents nearly 20,000 aviation safety professionals. Struggling to pay their bills and put food on the table, controllers, who must work without pay during the shutdown, say they remain dedicated to keeping air travel safe but are running ragged trying to support themselves and their families.

“I’m broken down. I’m sore. I’m mentally drained,” said one controller at an airport in the Southeast, who has spent nearly all his

By GABE CASTRO-ROOT

One air traffic controller earns cash by hanging Christmas lights for his neighbors. Another stocks grocery store shelves for six hours before heading in for his shift. A third drives for DoorDash after clocking out.

Hundreds of air traffic controllers across the United States have taken on second jobs driving for Uber and Lyft, delivering food, or working in restaurants as the government shutdown stretches past

Navigating Air Traffic and Odd Jobs to Survive During Shutdown

Exhausting Work Amid  
the Impasse Raises  
Safety Concerns

free time this week — almost 40 hours — hanging Christmas lights for pay. “There’s some times where I felt like just going into the corner and crying because it’s been pretty tough to push through the physical pain, the tiredness and waking up the next day hav-

ing to do it all over again.”

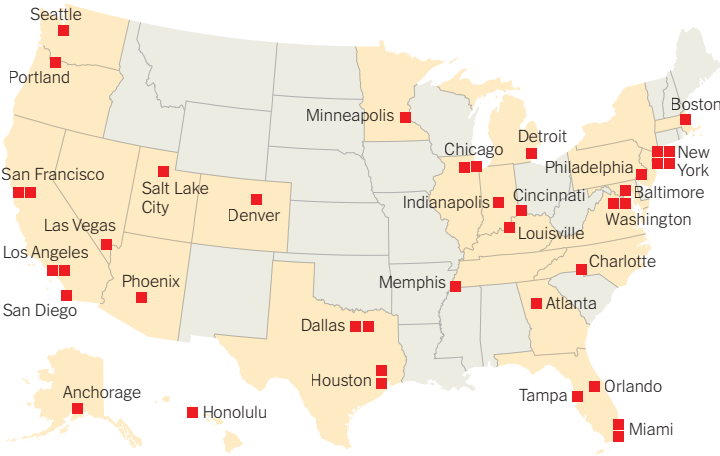
The controller, like others interviewed for this article, spoke on the condition of anonymity out of concern that making frank comments about the Federal Aviation Administration could get him fired.

Nick Daniels, NATCA’s president, said in an interview that controllers working other jobs in their spare time “absolutely” made the air traffic system less safe. But he added that he understood, as mortgage and car payments come

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Limited Disruptions as Flight Cuts Begin

About 3 percent of flights were canceled in major cities Friday. Page A11.



Cornell Will Pay a Fine to Restore U.S. Funding

By STEPHANIE SAUL and ALAN BLINDER

Cornell University reached an agreement with the Trump administration on Friday that will restore hundreds of millions in federal funding to the university, according to school and government officials.

The agreement would also end government investigations that placed the Ivy League school under months of federal scrutiny over accusations of antisemitism and admissions discrimination. It is the fifth such deal that the Trump administration has announced since early July in connection with its pressure cam-

paign against top schools.

Under the terms of the agreement, Cornell is expected to pay a \$30 million fine to the government — a pledge that the president of a Cornell faculty rights group called a “bribe” — and to invest \$30 million on programs designed to enhance efficiency and lower costs

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The National Center for Civil and Human Rights is expanding its exploration of America’s racial dynamics. PAGE C1

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Kendrick Lamar and Bad Bunny emerged among the top contenders for the awards show in February. PAGE C1



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Elon Musk got a trillionaire pay package at a time when others think it’s time to heavily tax the rich. PAGE B1

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In 1925, the first motel opened on a California highway, ushering in a new era of convenience and comfort. PAGE C8



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A military plant’s cartridges for AR-15-style weapons are the most common at crime scenes, new data shows. PAGE A9

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The Supreme Court is deciding whether to accept a case asking it to revisit the issue of same-sex marriages. PAGE A15

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The mayor-elect’s plan to tax the rich has the governor in a tight spot. PAGE A17

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