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PHOTOGRAPHS BY LOREN ELLIOTT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Luis Martinez with Rooney, an 11-year-old star of his local soccer team, at their home in Mattawa, in central Washington State.

'It's Just Us': A Firefighter Risks Everything for His Son's Dream

By HANNAH DREIER

MATTAWA, Wash. — Luis Martinez was still trying to figure out how to tell his 11-year-old son that his cancer might be back when his phone rang. He squinted to make out the name of his son's soccer coach.

The coach wanted to know if Luis could drive his son, Rooney, to a tournament in Seattle, three hours away. A last-minute dropout meant their team suddenly had a chance to compete against the best players in the state.

Rooney was in the next room running his nightly footwork drills, the ball thudding against the wall. Luis figured he would want to go. He closed his eyes. He used to feel he knew exactly how

Tournament Trip Holds Dangers for Migrant Ill With Cancer

to keep his son safe, but lately he wasn't sure.

The coach had called instead of texting because Luis struggled to read messages.

His eyes had been damaged two years earlier, when he was 38 and had nearly died of a cancer linked to the job he'd done his whole adult life: fighting wildfires for the federal government.

The coach waited. To have a shot at winning, the team needed

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Luis's leukemia is likely tied to his lifelong job battling wildfires.

Estonia's Star-Spangled Courting of Capitol Hill

By ADAM SELLA

WASHINGTON — When Estonia's liaison to Congress meets lawmakers, his standard ice-breaker line is, "Estonians like to wear their love for America on their sleeve."

It is a fitting introduction for Karl-Gerhard Lille, because he regularly sports an American flag blazer and matching bow tie as he walks the marbled corridors on Capitol Hill, buttonholing members of Congress and their aides.

CONGRESSIONAL MEMO

The flashy outfit is just one piece of his strategy to put Estonia on the map with people in a position to support his small Baltic country on Russia's border, as the Trump administration turns away from Europe. Armed with a pockmarked Estonian candy and endless fun facts about his nation's close ties to the United States, Mr. Lille spends his days on Capitol Hill trying to make new friends for

his country.

When Estonia regained full independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, "we made a specific decision that we're not going to be alone again," Mr. Lille said. "Meaning we can't have enough friends, and to me, that means in my line of work here that everybody's a potential friend of ours on Capitol Hill."

Mr. Lille's unique approach to diplomacy comes at a time when Europe has struggled to court the

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ALEX KENT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Karl-Gerhard Lille, an Estonian diplomat, said every member of Congress is "a potential friend."

INTERNATIONAL A4-11

Claim of Fraud in Honduras

Nasry Asfura, endorsed by President Trump, was declared the president-elect, but his rival protested.

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Cease-Fire, but Still Deadly

Since the truce took effect, death can come for Gazans while on a family outing or sleeping in a tent.

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PHOTOGRAPH BY AP

NATIONAL A12-18

Lifeline for Coal Industry

The Energy Department ordered two plants scheduled to close to remain open, and the E.P.A. gave utilities more time to tackle toxic coal ash.

WEEKEND ARTS C1-8

In a Genre All Its Own

Amanda Seyfried stars in "The Testament of Ann Lee," the director Mona Fastvold's singular musical about the founder of the Shakers.

PAGE C1

Contemplating 'Sixties Surreal'

An exhibition of American art from Eisenhower to Nixon shows how hinged, and how hard to summarize, that period was.

PAGE C1

Bold Plans for New Year's Eve

What are you doing to greet 2026? Our suggestions include black-tie parties, dance-a-thons, double features and a pasta-making class.

PAGE C2

BUSINESS B1-5

Investors Warn of 'Rot'

Buyout firms struggling to sell companies they own have found a work-around: Selling to themselves.

PAGE B1

Education on Misinformation

New technologies are complicating efforts to teach the scrolling generation to think defensively online.

PAGE B1

To Sniff and Protect

New Jersey has honored over two dozen dogs who rushed in to sweep polling places after a wave of bomb threats.

OPINION A20-21

Nicholas Kristof

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THE WEATHER

Today, cloudy, colder, snow arriving late, high 29. Tonight, snow, accumulation 3-6 inches, difficult travel, low 25. Tomorrow, cloudy, early snow, high 33. Weather map, Page B10.

LETTERS ESCALATE A FEDERAL BATTLE AGAINST HARVARD

Ruling May Reach Past Illinois Deployment

By ADAM LIPTAK

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court's refusal on Tuesday to let the Trump administration deploy National Guard troops in the Chicago area was in large part the result of a friend-of-the-court brief submitted by a Georgetown University law professor named Martin S. Lederman.

The argument Professor Lederman set out, and the court's embrace of it, could help shape future rulings on any further efforts by President Trump to use the military to carry out his orders inside the United States.

Professor Lederman's brief said that the government had misunderstood a key phrase in the law it had relied on, which allows deployment of the National Guard if "the president is unable with the regular forces to execute the laws of the United States."

The administration said "the regular forces" referred to civilian law enforcement, like Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Professor Lederman argued that the great weight of historical evidence was to the contrary.

The regular forces, he wrote, was the U.S. military. And, he added, "there is no basis for concluding that the president would be 'unable' to enforce such laws with the assistance of those forces if it were legal for him to direct such a deployment."

Professor Lederman wrote his brief over a weekend. "I hesitate to acknowledge that," he said on a podcast last month, "but it's really true that I didn't have like some great background knowledge in this statute."

A veteran of the Office of Legal Counsel, the elite Justice Department unit that advises the executive branch on the law, Professor Lederman identified what he called a glaring flaw in the administration's argument. "None of the parties were paying attention to it," he said.

But the justices were. A week after Professor Lederman filed his brief, the court ordered the parties to submit additional briefs on the issue he had spotted. They did, and almost two months passed.

In the end, the majority adopted the professor's argument, over the dissents of the three most conservative justices. It was the Trump administration's first major loss at the court in many months. During that time, the parties were paying attention to it,

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It was unclear whether Ms. McMahon's message last week said the opposite. In it, she thanked Dr. Garber for what she portrayed as his commitment to sending \$200 million to the government as part of a deal.

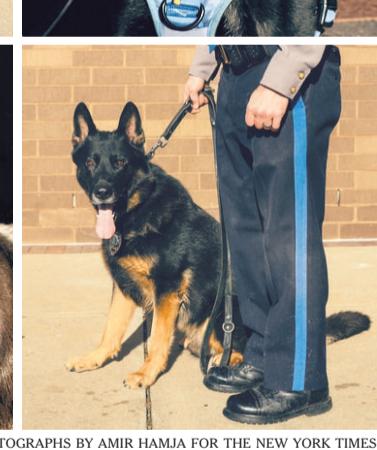
Dr. Garber wrote back to clarify Harvard's position. But, in response, the administration doubled down, introducing terms that were so far-reaching that university officials saw them as non-starters.

It was unclear whether Ms. McMahon's interpretation of Harvard's proposal resulted from a miscommunication or from a deliberate effort to force the university into a year-end deal after months of faltering negotiations.

Whatever the case, it was the latest twist in the long-running dispute between Harvard and the Trump administration, which has shaped up to be the marquee battle in the administration's effort to exert more influence over elite colleges and universities it views as too liberal.

The episode also underscored the emerging role played by people inside the administration who want to extract more concessions from Harvard. And it raised new questions about whether some of those voices were more interested in preserving the power of the government's threat against Harvard as a message to other universities than in reaching a settlement.

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY AMIR HAMJA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

To Sniff and Protect

New Jersey has honored over two dozen dogs who rushed in to sweep polling places after a wave of bomb threats.

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