

Hegseth’s Work Troubles
Feed Leadership Doubts

Added Heat for Trump Defense Pick Over
Nonprofit Missteps and Alcohol Use

This article is by Sharon LaFreniere, David A. Fahrenthold, Dave Phillips and Kate Kelly.

Almost from the moment he first went on air at Fox News as a contributor, Pete Hegseth’s star on the nation’s most powerful conservative media outlet was on the rise. A decorated combat veteran, Mr. Hegseth became the weekend anchor of the popular “Fox & Friends” show and a familiar presence to viewers across the country, including President-elect Donald J. Trump.

Mr. Trump was so impressed that he named Mr. Hegseth, 44, as his choice to head the Department of Defense. But less familiar to Fox News viewers — and presumably to Mr. Trump — was what had been happening behind the scenes at the network.

More than once during his early years at the network, Mr. Hegseth’s heavy drinking and raucous behavior at Fox News-related events escalated into episodes that were addressed by company officials or co-workers. Those incidents underscore concerns about his behavior that have imperiled his prospects to lead the Pentagon.

Mr. Hegseth has said that he continues to have Mr. Trump’s full support, but by Tuesday night the president-elect was reported to be weighing whether to find another candidate for the prestigious position.

At Fox News, the network’s human resources department looked into Mr. Hegseth’s conduct at the “Fox & Friends” Christmas

party in 2016 and discussed it with him, according to a person with intimate knowledge who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss a personnel matter.

The following December, Mr. Hegseth got so drunk at a wedding of a Fox News producer that he struggled to stand upright in a men’s bathroom, according to two people with direct knowledge of the episode who declined to be named for fear of retribution. Friends asked a producer who was there to get Mr. Hegseth a ride home so he could make it to the set by 6 a.m., they said.

Timothy Parlatore, Mr. Hegseth’s lawyer, said that “neither of these allegations are true.”

Mr. Hegseth’s bouts with alcohol — which he said never reached the stage of being a problem — have now combined with questions over his managerial experience to jeopardize his prospects to lead the sprawling Defense Department, which has an \$849 billion budget, nearly three million employees and 750 military bases around the world.

Mr. Hegseth also has been battered by accounts in the press about his womanizing and infidelity, as well as a 2017 incident in which he was accused of rape at a speaking event in Monterey, Calif., though no charges were ever filed. Mr. Parlatore has said that the encounter was consensual.

Mr. Hegseth’s successive tenures as the head of two non-

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Syrians welcomed anti-government forces to Hama on Thursday, only days after the rebels took control of another large city, Aleppo.

Chasing Down Clues in Insurance Chief’s Killing

By ED SHANAHAN
and ANDY NEWMAN

Security-camera images of a man wearing a hooded jacket and an easy smile. A fake ID. A cellphone found on a Manhattan sidewalk. Bullets marked with the words “deny” and “delay.”

Investigators chased those and other leads on Thursday as the search for the person who fatally shot Brian Thompson, the chief executive of the huge insurer UnitedHealthcare, stretched into a second day.

By late Thursday, the shooter’s travels before the brazen slaying were coming into focus, a senior law enforcement official said. He arrived in New York on a bus from somewhere south of the city on Nov. 24, checked into an Upper



The New York City police released an image they said showed the face of the shooter.

West Side hostel sometime after that, left on Nov. 29 and checked back in the next day, the official said.

As the manhunt continued, the law enforcement authorities also appeared to be focused on a gun bought in Connecticut that resembled the one used in what the police say was a targeted attack.

The shooting stunned a city heading into a festive holiday season, shocked an industry that re-

garded the victim highly and prompted an ugly outpouring online among those who view health insurers as villains. By Thursday, amid the schadenfreude and grief, the shock had receded as investigators pursued their quarry methodically and New Yorkers were left to wonder when the shooter would be caught.

More than 24 hours after the killing and despite an avalanche of tips, the authorities were still uncertain of the man’s name, according to two law enforcement officials familiar with the investigation.

The police were offering a \$10,000 reward for information about the crime, and said they were digging into Mr. Thompson’s background and exploring social media for clues.

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REBELS IN SYRIA
STORM KEY CITY

Quick Advance on Hama
Stuns al-Assad Forces

By BEN HUBBARD

ISTANBUL — Syrian rebels stormed into the city of Hama on Thursday as government forces withdrew, bringing the rebels one step closer to the capital Damascus, the seat of power of President Bashar al-Assad.

The swift advance on Hama, one of Syria’s largest cities, and the retreat of government forces were confirmed by both the rebels and the government. The advance came just days after the rebels extended their control over Aleppo, a major hub in northern Syria.

In a video circulated by the rebel group leading the offensive, their leader, Abu Mohammed al-Jolani, jubilantly calls for the rebels to push on toward other Syrian cities, including the capital.

“The people of Homs, prepare yourselves,” he said in the video, which his group said was filmed on Wednesday. “The people of Damascus, the people of Dara’a, the people of Deir al Zour. Victory for all, God willing.” The New York Times could not independently confirm the authenticity of the video or when it was filmed.

The sudden rebel advance has shifted the front lines in Syria’s 13-year-old civil war for the first time in years, adding a new layer of unpredictability to a conflict that has ravaged the country, opened voids exploited by jihadist groups, drawn in world powers including Russia and the United States, and created a long-term refugee crisis for neighboring countries.

Hama is one of the few major Syrian cities where rebels had yet to seize significant control during the civil war, which began with a popular uprising aimed at ousting Mr. al-Assad in 2011.

The city’s name is synonymous with one of the most notorious massacres in the Middle East. In 1982, security forces serving the president’s father and predecessor, Hafez al-Assad, massacred thousands of people there during an anti-government uprising led by the Muslim Brotherhood.

Analysts have attributed the rebels’ surprise success to the cumulative attrition of the war on Mr. al-Assad’s forces and to the fact that foreign allies who have intervened powerfully on his behalf — notably Russia, Iran and

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KENNY HOLSTON/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Pam Bondi, Donald J. Trump’s selection for attorney general.

Center of G.O.P.
To Trump’s Side
For a Major Pick

By PATRICIA MAZZEI

MIAMI — The day before Florida’s 2016 presidential primary, the state attorney general, Pam Bondi, surprised her fellow Republicans and endorsed Donald J. Trump at a rally in Tampa, her hometown.

Her first choice, former Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida, had recently dropped out. Senator Marco Rubio, another Floridian, remained in the race, though just barely. Few big-name Republicans in the state, and none as high-ranking as Ms. Bondi, had yet backed Mr. Trump.

“I kept my word to Jeb and the day Jeb got out of the race, I committed to Donald Trump,” she said in a statement.

In him, Ms. Bondi saw a bit of herself: an outsider with no experience in elective office. She first won the state attorney general’s race in 2010, during the Tea Party wave that catapulted novice Republican candidates like her into power.

By 2016, she was part of the state’s political establishment. But the party, she saw, was on the cusp of another pivotal moment — and her foresight then is responsible

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Trump Ad Tack:
Sway Streamers
Using Less Cash

By SHANE GOLDMACHER

Donald J. Trump’s super PAC called them the streaming persuadables.

It was shorthand for some of the most important voters of the 2024 election — the sliver of truly undecided voters who they believed skewed young and diverse, and disproportionately consumed content on streaming services like Max, Tubi and Roku.

Both broadcast and cable television allow campaigns to advertise almost exclusively by where voters live or what programs they are watching. But many of the ascendant streaming services and smart TVs allow advertisers to be far more precise — down to picking specific individuals to serve ads to.

How the leading Trump super PAC and his campaign targeted these streamers provided a critical yet unseen edge in Mr. Trump’s sweeping victory last month. It helped the Trump team make up for Kamala Harris’s mammoth financial advantage, narrow its dollars and focus on the roughly 14 percent of battleground-state voters it had identified as swayable.

The Harris side, awash in cash, mostly ran streaming television ads the old-fashioned way — targeting by geography.

“In the seven states, we were talking to 6.3 million people — they were talking to 44.7 million,” explained David Lee, a top pollster for the super PAC, Make America Great Again Inc. “There’s roughly 38 million people that they’re hitting who’ve already made up their mind. So I don’t care how much more money you have than us to spend, you’re wasting 85 percent of your money.”

Practically every presidential election brings about a technolog-

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Global Alarm to Detect Tinkering With the Sun

By CHRISTOPHER FLAVELLE

BOULDER, Colo. — In a guarded compound at the foot of the Rockies, government scientists are working on a new kind of global alarm system: one that can detect if another country, or maybe just an adventurous billionaire, tries to dim the sun.

Every few weeks, researchers in Boulder release a balloon that rises 17 miles into the sky. Similar

BUYING TIME
Guarding Earth’s Thermostat

balloons are launched with less frequency from sites in Alaska, Hawaii and New Zealand; Réunion Island, near the coast of Africa; and even Antarctica. They make up the building blocks of a system that would alert American scientists to geoengineering.

As the planet continues to heat up, the idea of intentionally trying to block solar radiation — sometimes called solar radiation modification, solar geoengineering or climate intervention — is gaining attention. Governments, universities, investors and even environmentalists are pouring millions of dollars into research and modeling of geoengineering systems.

It could be a relatively quick way to cool the planet. But it could also unleash untold dangers.

Many worry that solar geoengineering could have unintended consequences, shattering re-

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TATSIANA CHYPSANAVA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Dr. Penny Smale launching a balloon that will measure aerosols in the atmosphere, near Lauder, New Zealand, in September.

NATIONAL A12-20

School’s Major Shift on D.E.I.
The University of Michigan, a bastion of D.E.I., will no longer require diversity statements in hiring decisions and is considering broader changes. PAGE A16

Boeing Guilty Plea Is Rejected
A federal judge raised concerns on several levels about how the agreement to pay a fine of up to \$487 million had been handled. PAGE A17

7.0 Quake Rattles California
Over a dozen aftershocks were reported in less than two hours and a tsunami warning was issued after a temblor off the coast south of Eureka. PAGE A13

INTERNATIONAL A4-11

Disabled Gazans Live in Agony
Destroyed homes, sidewalks and roads, and a lack of wheelchairs and hearing aids add to the nightmare. PAGE A6

Youths Love Dakar’s Biennale
A new kind of art lover, smartphone in hand, is making what is already Africa’s hottest art show even trendier. PAGE A4



BUSINESS B1-6

Bitcoin Hits \$100,000
The price of a single Bitcoin rose to six figures for the first time, an extraordinary level for a cryptocurrency once dismissed as a sideshow. PAGE B1

Tariff Threats Over Dollar
President-elect Donald J. Trump threatened tariffs for countries that seek to rival the dollar or undermine its global reserve currency status. PAGE B1

France’s Economy Hit Hard
Already struggling with flat growth and debt, the country faces a new period of instability without a functioning government or a budget. PAGE B1

WEEKEND ARTS C1-12

Capturing a City’s Towers
In her cityscapes, the Manhattan artist Martha Diamond created delicate registers of light and shadow. PAGE C10

A Laid-Back Luna Luna
The New York version of an art carnival has lost the anarchic charge it was born with almost four decades ago. PAGE C1



SPORTS B7-10

Considering the Golden At-Bat
What if a team could choose one at-bat to send its best hitter to the plate even if it wasn’t his turn to hit? PAGE B7

Prepare the Merchandise
The 14th W.N.B.A. franchise, which will begin play in 2026, now has a name and logo: Meet the Toronto Tempo. PAGE B8

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Carlos Lozada PAGE A23

