



LAETITIA VANCON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Distributing hot meals during power outages in Odesa, Ukraine, amid the city’s worst shelling in almost four years of war.

Odesa’s Days of Fear Under Russian Fire

By KIM BARKER and OLEKSANDRA MYKOLYSHYN

ODESA, Ukraine — When she hears explosions, Tetiana Rybak does the only thing she can: She lies in her bed and waits. Ms. Rybak cannot walk, cannot go to the shelter. Recently, she asked a social worker to tape over the windows of her apartment with festive red gift wrap, old military posters and a version of the Lord’s Prayer.

That way, she no longer has to see the Russian drones flying past.

Losing Water and Power Tests Residents’ Resourcefulness

For the past two weeks, Russia has focused its military might on pounding her hometown, Odesa, the largest port in Ukraine, repeatedly hitting it with drones and missiles in the city’s worst shelling through almost four years of war.

Ms. Rybak has not had electricity for at

least nine days this month. For four of those, she had no heat and no water. A social worker needed to lug bottles of water to her up seven flights of stairs. Ms. Rybak, who has been disabled for years, dressed in two pairs of socks, two pairs of warm pants, a sweater and a thick terry-cloth bathrobe. She then slid under two blankets.

“Psychologically, no one can withstand this anymore,” said Ms. Rybak, 64, sitting in her bed during a recent visit with social workers. “My nervous system is completely shattered. Just last night, when the power

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For DOGE, Big Disruption Returned Meager Savings

Largest Claims Were Wrong and Real Cuts Were Small, Times Analysis Finds

This article is by **Emily Badger, David A. Fahrenthold, Alicia Parlapiano and Margot Sanger-Katz**.

WASHINGTON — Elon Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency said it made more than 29,000 cuts to the federal government — slashing billion-dollar contracts, canceling thousands of grants and pushing out civil servants.

But the group did not do what Mr. Musk said it would: reduce federal spending by \$1 trillion before October. On DOGE’s watch, federal spending did not go down at all. It went up.

How is that possible?

One big reason, according to a New York Times analysis: Many of the largest savings that DOGE claimed turned out to be wrong. And while the group did make thousands of smaller cuts, jolting foreign aid recipients, American small businesses and local service providers, those amounted to little in the scale of the federal budget.

In DOGE’s published list of canceled contracts and grants, for instance, the 13 largest were all incorrect.

At the top were two Defense Department contracts, one for information technology, one for aircraft maintenance. Mr. Musk’s group listed them as “terminations,” and said their demise had saved taxpayers \$7.9 billion. That was not true. The contracts are

still alive and well, and those savings were an accounting mirage.

Together, those two false entries were bigger than 25,000 of DOGE’s other claims combined.

Of the 40 biggest claims on DOGE’s list, The Times found only 12 that appeared accurate — reflecting real reductions in what the government had committed to spend.

The Times’s analysis helps answer a basic question about DOGE, which was hard to judge in the group’s chaotic heyday, when it had enormous power to cut federal spending and force out government employees who stood in the way. At the time, in the early months of 2025, DOGE listed real cuts alongside fake ones, and made it hard to tell the difference.

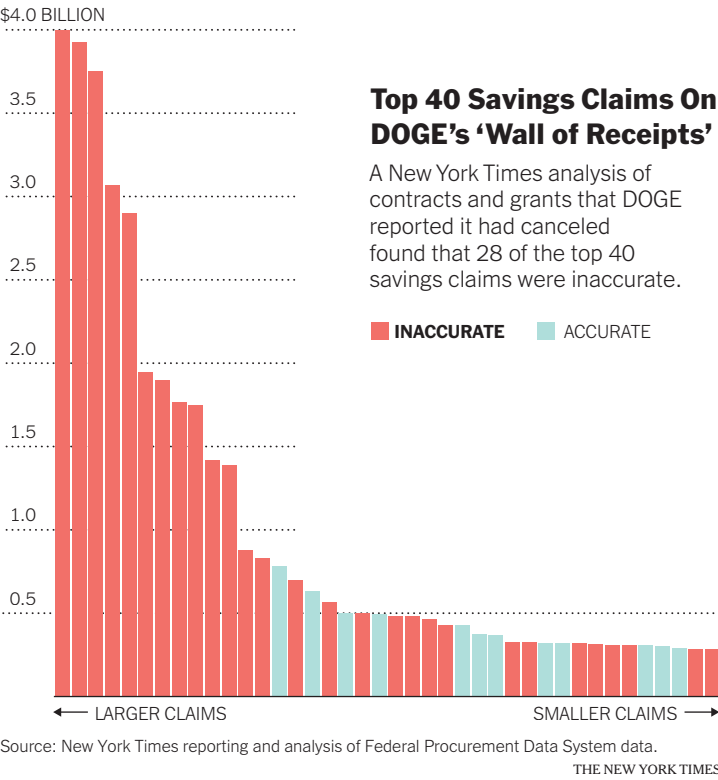
That raised the question of whether DOGE, at its heart, was an exercise in budget cutting or in deception.

It had elements of both, The Times found. But among DOGE’s largest claims, the bogus savings were both larger and much more common than the real ones. Similar errors and exaggerations recurred across the group’s work.

The Times analysis shows that, in trying to demonstrate progress toward its budget-cutting goal, Mr. Musk’s group turned other promises inside out.

Mr. Musk had said that DOGE

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After Felons Are Cleared by Uber, Passengers Accuse Them of Rape

By EMILY STEEL

Uber says its background checks are essential for keeping passengers safe, promising that all of its drivers have passed a screening for violent crimes.

The claim, made in marketing materials, ignores a critical detail: The system approves people with many types of criminal convictions, including violent felonies. That is because Uber has limited the criteria used to vet potential drivers, part of a push to speed them onto the ride-hailing network while keeping costs down, a New York Times investigation found.

Uber rejects prospective drivers who have been convicted of murder, sexual assault, kidnapping and terrorism. But in 22 states, The Times found, the company approves people convicted of most other crimes — including child abuse, assault and stalking — so long as the convictions are at least seven years old.

There are also gaps in Uber’s screenings. Background checks in 35 states are based on where a person has lived in the past seven years. The result is that a crime that happened elsewhere could go unnoticed.

Over time, company executives considered and ultimately chose not to expand the types of offenses that would disqualify someone, according to internal documents reviewed by The Times.

They also debated how thor-

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DeSantis Push Is Making Over Liberal College

By ANEMONA HARTOCOLLIS

SARASOTA, Fla. — April Flakne strides into the classroom to teach a course on “The Odyssey,” a new requirement at New College of Florida.

She has taught philosophy at the small state college for 25 years, but this class is different — seven weeks on one classic book, required of all students. Normally, her focus is on philosophers like Hannah Arendt and Simone de Beauvoir, and their theories of totalitarianism, revolution and feminism.

This class on Homer is a turn-about from all that, and marks a signature accomplishment for conservatives who want to re-direct higher education.

In early 2023, Gov. Ron DeSantis, a Republican, executed what many viewed as a conservative takeover of New College, a struggling state school. With fewer than 1,000 students, the liberal arts college had long been a draw for nonconformists, where grades were verboten and students designed their own classes and majors.

It was “a little Club Med” for people who were “all ideologically the same,” said Richard Corcoran, the school’s new president.

Under a new board and president, and as required by a new state law, the school has installed a curriculum emphasizing the traditional Western canon, with “The



ZACK WITTMAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

April Flakne, a philosophy professor at New College, and other longtime colleagues are reserving judgment during the shift.

Odyssey” serving as a foundational text. It has created new teams for sports like baseball, basketball and beach volleyball and recruited athletes to fill out their rosters. It has hired dozens of new professors, some with conservative backgrounds and a few who are known for their vocal opposition to liberal orthodoxies, like Spencer Klavan, a lecturer at

the college last year, and host of the Young Heretics podcast, about classical education.

In September, it announced that a statue of Charlie Kirk, the assassinated conservative activist, would be placed on campus.

And the college was among the first to say it would sign the Trump administration’s Compact

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Holiday Spirit Of Puerto Rico In Cozy Drink

By TAYLOR ROBINSON

Milly Rodríguez’s recipe came from her grandmother, who she said patented it in Puerto Rico in the 1940s. Minerva Minaya is known for a blend she has named Nostalgia.

They sat side by side in a Spanish Harlem apartment complex, two of seven finalists in Coquito Masters, which has been crowning the best bottles of the Puerto Rican holiday drink in New York City for nearly 25 years.

Both women have entered the contest many times, but neither has won first place. “I’m always the bridesmaid,” said Ms. Minaya, 66, “never the bride.”

The ingredients in coquito are fairly straightforward — canned milk, cream of coconut, rum, and generous amounts of cinnamon and other spices — so the variation in measurements is what sets each bottle apart.

For generations, families developed recipes and kept them top-secret, some so protective that they would not write them down for fear of leaks. But in recent years, because of social media and competitions like Coquito Masters, the drink has not been so locked down.

At 787 Coffee, a Puerto Rican chain with locations around the city, New Yorkers can order a coquito latte with rum-infused espresso beans. This fall, the tea

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