

NEWS ANALYSIS

Musk’s Pledge To Ax Trillions Faces Reality

Legal Fights and Lags Will Await His Efforts

This article is by David A. Fahrenthold, Alan Rappeport, Theodore Schleifer and Annie Karni.

WASHINGTON — These are frenzied times for the nascent Department of Government Efficiency.

In Silicon Valley, tech leaders are eagerly seeking positions or introductions to the department, even though for now it is not an actual part of government, but a loose grouping that Elon Musk named after an internet meme. On his social media platform, X, Mr. Musk posted a “Godfather”-style photo of himself as the “Dogefather,” asking government employees, “What did you get done this week?”

And in Washington, a House subcommittee has been announced to help push through President-elect Donald J. Trump’s vision, announced on Nov. 12, for a department that would slash the \$6.7 trillion federal budget.

Members of Congress — even Democratic ones — have been offering up ideas for where to cut what Mr. Musk said could be \$2 trillion out of the budget.

“It’s going to be very easy,” Elon Musk’s mother, Maye Musk, told Fox News on Tuesday, after she sat in on some of her son’s meetings. Mr. Musk will lead the department along with Vivek Ramaswamy, a former Republican presidential candidate.

The coming months will show if her prediction proves right.

When Mr. Trump takes office, Mr. Musk’s group will face a daunting reality. An entire apparatus has developed over the centuries that allows the government to keep marching on in the face of economic shocks, wartime hardships, or — as in this case — political vows to diminish its size and spending.

Any effort to slash the federal government and its 2.3 million civilian workers will likely face resistance in Congress, lawsuits from activist groups and delays mandated by federal rules. Unlike in his businesses, Mr. Musk will not be the sole decider, but will have to build consensus among legislators, executive-branch staffers, his co-leader and Mr. Trump himself. And federal rules ostensibly prevent Mr. Musk and Mr. Ramaswamy from making decisions in private, unlike how many matters are handled in the business world.

Meetings would have to be open and minutes made public, said Brian D. Feinstein, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania who studies administrative law.

“All of this would have to happen in the sunlight,” Mr. Feinstein said.

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DAVE SANDERS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Looking for a Shopping Haul
Black Friday deal hunters in Albany, N.Y. Retailers are finding that buyers have grown more choosy about their purchases. Page B1.

Amid the Graves, Letting Nature Take Its Course

By CARA BUCKLEY

Across the country, where the dead lie, life is increasingly thriving.

It’s happening in Catholic and Jewish cemeteries; in burial grounds up and down the East and West coasts and in the Bible Belt; in sprawling private graveyards that double as public greenspaces, and in century-old potter’s fields.

Groundskeepers, deacons, horticulturists, conservationists, arborists and newly minted gardeners are changing how they tend to burial sites. They are letting grasses grow longer and reducing how much they mow. They’re ripping out invasive plants, encouraging native shrubs to thrive, forgoing pesticides, and replacing

Cemeteries Resilient to Climate Change, and Helpful to Wildlife

manicured turfgrass with wildflower meadows.

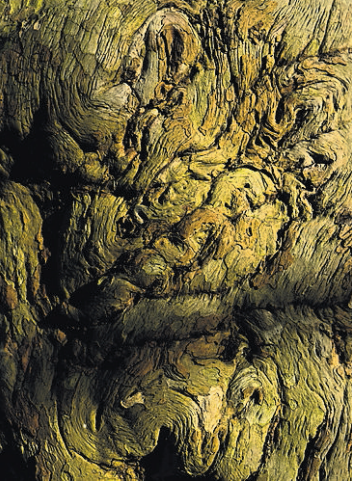
Cemeteries have often been the largest green spaces in cities, providing vital havens for wildlife. But during the pandemic, many of them grew especially popular as spots where people could safely gather and enjoy pastoral settings. In 2020, Laurel Hill, a 265-acre historic cemetery straddling the Schuylkill River in Pennsylvania, saw its attendance more than double. Green-Wood in Brooklyn, with 478 acres of rolling hills, lush

plantings, thousands of trees and serene vistas, counted 200,000 new visitors.

The surge coincided with an effort underway by Green-Wood and other cemeteries to swap swaths of manicured lawns for meadows filled with wildflowers and drought resistant native shrubs. Earlier attempts to let grass grow longer at Green-Wood had been met with fierce resistance. But as people sought solace in nature during pandemic lockdowns, they brought with them a new openness.

“We’ve seen a huge sea change in terms of people’s willingness to accept this,” said Joseph Charap, Green-Wood’s vice president of horticulture, as he wound his way through one of the cemetery’s new

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY BING GUAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

More and more cemeteries, like Brooklyn’s Green-Wood, are letting the grass grow longer.

In Airline Math, Late Departure Equals On Time

By BEN BLATT

The average flight today from Kennedy Airport to Los Angeles is slower than it was in 1995 in every conceivable way. Planes face longer delays leaving the gate; take more time taxiing before taking off; and spend more time in the air.

But paradoxically, even with an average rise in travel time of 18 minutes, the percentage of flights on this route arriving after the scheduled arrival time has decreased. In 1995, the arrivals were behind schedule 51 percent of the time; today it’s just 37 percent.

Why do today’s flights arrive early more often, even though they’re slower? Airlines have extended their *scheduled* flight durations even more than the flights have lengthened in *actual* duration. The average scheduled duration from J.F.K. to Los Angeles has increased 23 minutes since 1995, according to an Upshot analysis of Bureau of Transportation Statistics data.

Thanks to those more forgiving schedules, a majority of domestic flights nationwide arrive early or on time. If your plane reaches the gate at exactly the estimated arrival time, you are actually on a plane that is running slower than usual.

For airlines, scheduling the extra time has little downside, while

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Cyclist’s Death Inflames Clash Over Paris Streets

By RICHARD FAUSSET and SÉGOLENE LE STRADIC

PARIS — It sent a shock through Paris, a city striving to transform itself into one of the great cycling metropolises in the world: a bicycle rider, crushed under the wheels of an SUV in a bike lane just a few yards from La Madeleine, the landmark neoclassical church, in what prosecutors suspect was a deliberate act of road rage.

A murder investigation has been opened, and last week, Mayor Anne Hidalgo led the Paris City Council in a minute of silence for the cyclist, Paul Varry, a 27-year-old who was also a cycling advocate. Ms. Hidalgo, a member of

A Road Rage Inquiry Exposes a Divide on an Anti-Car Push

the Socialist Party, delivered an emotional speech in which she signaled she would continue to roll out her notably aggressive policies that aim to drastically reduce the role of the automobile in Parisian life.

“I am truly angry,” she said. “The future does not belong to cars.”

An outpouring of emotion over Mr. Varry’s Oct. 15 death has put a spotlight on the dangers facing cy-

clists in a city that has seen an explosion in bikes and cycling lanes in recent years. But it has also underscored the frustrations that motorists increasingly feel in a place that has chosen to limit the movement, speed and parking options of cars.

As cycling organizations, spurred by the death of Mr. Varry, have demanded more protections from aggressive drivers in recent weeks, others have complained about Parisian bikers themselves, some of whom have earned a reputation as dangerous risk-takers.

Ratcheting up tensions this month is a new policy banning motorists from driving through the four arrondissements, or dis-

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U.S. Looks Away on China’s Misuse of Panda Aid

By MARA HVISTENDAHL

WASHINGTON — For decades, American zoos have raised tens of millions of dollars from donors and sent the money to China for the right to host and display pandas. Under U.S. law, those funds were required to be spent protecting pandas in the wild.

But the Chinese government instead spent millions on apartment buildings, roads, computers, museums and other expenses, records show. For years, China refused even to account for millions more.

Regulators with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which oversees the payments, have for two decades raised concerns about



ARIANA DREHSLER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A panda at the San Diego Zoo.

this with American zoo administrators and Chinese officials alike. The U.S. government, on three occasions, froze payments to China over incomplete record keeping, documents show.

Zoos, too, have known that the money was not always going toward conservation. But they worried that if Fish and Wildlife cut off the money altogether, China could demand the return of its bears. Zoos count on pandas for visitors, merchandise sales and media attention.

Ultimately, the regulators allowed the money to keep flowing and agreed not to check the spending in China so thoroughly, according to records and former officials.

“There was always pushing back and forth about how the U.S. shouldn’t ask anything,” said Kenneth Stansell, a former Fish and Wildlife official who traveled to

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Syrian Rebels Escalate Attacks
An attack on the major city of Aleppo raised alarm that a long-running civil war was flaring up. PAGE A8

Notre-Dame in a New Light
France’s president, Emmanuel Macron, toured the renovated cathedral before it opens to the public next week. PAGE A4

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Justice Dept. Bracing for Test
President-elect Donald J. Trump’s plans to install loyalists have left officials fearful that he will undermine the department’s independence. PAGE A15

Last Resort for Rikers Island
A federal judge is likely to employ a rarely used remedy to try to fix problems in New York City’s jails. PAGE A17

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Aiming High in Season 2
The Professional Women’s Hockey League is counting on an influx of talent to build on its early success. PAGE B6



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Reprising a Killer Role
The murderer played by Mark Duplass in the found-footage “Creep” films has returned in a TV series. PAGE C1

‘And Don’t Call Me Shirley’
Revisiting gags from “Airplane!” and other movies that Jim Abrahams, who died on Tuesday, helped create. PAGE C1

BUSINESS B1-5

Rethinking Airline Loyalty
Some frequent fliers, frustrated with changes to rewards programs, have stopped chasing status and are adopting different strategies when booking flights and using credit cards. PAGE B1

Hostile Days Ahead in Health
Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and others with marginal experience are in line for top health posts, raising alarms at drug makers and setting the stage for battles over regulatory changes. PAGE B1

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Vickie Wang PAGE A19



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