

"All the News
That's Fit to Print"

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SUNDAY, JUNE 23, 2024

Prices in Canada may be higher

\$6.00

THE WEATHER
Today, hot and humid, an afternoon storm, high 94. Tonight, humid, thunderstorms, low 74. Tomorrow, partly cloudy with a thunderstorm, high 87. Weather map, Page 20.

A SHADOW INDUSTRY



How pharmacy benefit managers inflate the cost of prescription drugs for millions of people.

JENS MORTENSEN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

By REBECCA ROBBINS
and REED ABELSON

Americans are paying too much for prescription drugs.

It is a common, longstanding complaint. And the culprits seem obvious: Drug companies. Insurers. A dysfunctional federal government.

But there is another collection of power-

THE MIDDLEMEN
A Mirage of Creating Savings

ful forces that often escape attention, because they operate in the bowels of the health care system and cloak themselves in such opacity and complexity that many people don't even realize they exist.

They are called pharmacy benefit managers. And they are driving up drug costs for millions of people, employers and the government.

The three largest pharmacy benefit managers, or P.B.M.s, act as middlemen overseeing prescriptions for more than

200 million Americans. They are owned by huge health care conglomerates — CVS Health, Cigna and UnitedHealth Group — and are hired by employers and governments.

The job of the P.B.M.s is to reduce drug costs. Instead, they frequently do the opposite. They steer patients toward pricier drugs, charge steep markups on what would otherwise be inexpensive medicines and extract billions of dollars in hidden fees, a New York Times investigation found.

Most Americans get their health insurance through a government program like Medicare or through an employer, which pay for two different types of insurance for each person. One type covers visits to doctors and hospitals, and it is handled by an insurance company. The other pays for prescriptions. That is overseen by a P.B.M.

The P.B.M. negotiates with drug companies, pays pharmacies and helps decide which drugs patients can get at what price. In theory, everyone saves money.

"We're really, really good at what we

do," Jon Mahrt, president of UnitedHealth's P.B.M., Optum Rx, said in an interview. The main lobbying group for the P.B.M.s says that in 2022 they saved their clients and patients \$286 billion.

But those savings appear to be largely a mirage, a product of a system where prices have been artificially inflated so that major P.B.M.s and drug companies can boost their profits while taking credit for reducing prices.

The Times interviewed more than 300 current and former P.B.M. employees, patients, physicians, pharmacists and other industry experts, and reviewed court documents and patient records. The investigation found that the largest P.B.M.s often act in their own financial interests, at the expense of their clients and patients. Among the findings:

- P.B.M.s sometimes push patients toward drugs with higher out-of-pocket costs, shunning cheaper alternatives.
- They often charge employers and gov-

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Migration in France, as in U.S., Has Centrists Leaning to Right

By ROGER COHEN

PARIS — At the heart of the rapid rise of the nationalist right, with its view of immigrants as a direct threat to the essence of France, there appears to lie a growing feeling among many French people that they are no longer

at home in their own country. That feeling, a vague but potent malaise, has many elements. They include a sense of dissession, of neighborhoods transformed in dress and habits by the arrival of mainly Muslim immigrants from North Africa, and of lost identity in a fast-changing world. The National Rally, whose anti-immigrant position lies at the core of its fast-growing popularity, has benefited from all this.

"No French citizen would tolerate living in a house without doors or windows," Jordan Bardella, the smooth-talking 28-year-old symbol of the Na-

tional Rally's advance to the brink of power, recently told France 3 TV. "Well, it's the same thing with a country."

In other words, nations need effective borders that can be sealed tight.

This message, echoed by rising nationalist parties across Europe, and a central theme of Donald J. Trump's presidential campaign in the United States, has proved potent. In France, it propelled Marine Le Pen's National Rally to victory over President Emmanuel Macron's party in voting for the European Parliament this month.

So rattled was Mr. Macron by the defeat that he threw open the country's political future with a risky bet. He called for legislative elections, the first round of which is June 30. France may have a nationalist far-right government, with Mr. Bardella as prime minister, before the

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Novel Ally in the Classroom

Male kindergarten teachers are rare, but they are uniquely positioned to help put boys, who struggle in school, on track. *Page 12.*

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New Party Etiquette

Several dozen highly sociable people, from Ivy Getty to Rufus Wainwright, offer tips on how to be a stellar guest and a gracious host.

SPORTS 24-27

Say It Ain't So, Leo

Will the Copa América be the swan song for Lionel Messi? The soccer world, particularly Argentina, tries to come to grips with saying farewell.

SUNDAY BUSINESS

The Future of Streaming

As losses mount, we talked to nearly a dozen top media executives and asked them to predict what lies ahead and which services may not make it. *Page 4*

ARTS & LEISURE

Conan O'Brien's Humility

Since leaving late-night TV, the comedian has become more reflective about life (and death), and is given to philosophical flights of fancy. *Page 10*

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IN JITTERY NATION, AN EARLY DEBATE FILLED WITH RISKS

Fears of Being Rushed to Front Unprepared

By CONSTANT MÉHEUT

KYIV, Ukraine — First, Vladyslav stopped going into Kyiv's city center to avoid draft officers checking papers. Then he stopped exercising at the gym because of patrols in his neighborhood. Now, he spends most of his days holed up in his apartment, often using his binoculars to watch officers serving draft notices to commuters leaving a nearby subway station.

"They're everywhere now," said Vladyslav, 45, who, like other Ukrainians in hiding interviewed for this article, requested that his last name not be published. "I'll try to avoid getting caught," he said, "but I'm not sure it's possible."

As Russian forces are on the attack across the front line, the Ukrainian military has been desperately trying to replenish its war-battered forces, embarking on a large-scale mobilization campaign backed by new laws.

While many Ukrainian men have answered the call to serve, some others have tried to evade conscription. Even before the latest mobilization push, thousands of men had fled the country to avoid service, some of them swimming across a river separating Ukraine from Romania. Now, as officers scour the country's cities to draft men of military age, currently 25 to 60, many people like Vladyslav have gone into hiding, fearful that conscription is a one-way ticket to the front line.

It is not clear how many men are hiding out, but in big cities like Kyiv and Lviv, social media groups alerting members to the movements of draft officers include tens of thousands of mem-

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HIGH-STAKES REMATCH

Biden and Trump Aim to Avoid Missteps That Could Linger

This article is by Lisa Lerer, Shane Goldmacher, Jonathan Swan and Maggie Haberman.

The debate between President Biden and former President Donald J. Trump this week will be the highest-stakes moment of their rematch, plunging two presidents into an extraordinarily early confrontation before a divided and angry nation.

For Mr. Biden, the debate in Atlanta offers an opportunity to remind voters of the chaos of his predecessor's leadership, his criminal convictions and to warn of an even darker future should he win a second term. For Mr. Trump, it's a chance to make his case that America has grown more expensive, weaker and more dangerous under his successor.

But the face-off on Thursday also poses significant risks for the two men — both of them the oldest candidates ever to compete in a presidential race — who have been locked in a contentious rivalry defined by mutual hatred for more than four years. That animosity heightens the evening's unpredictability. A notable misstep — a physical stumble, a mental lapse or a barrage of too-personal insults — could reverberate for months, because of the unusually long period until their second debate in September.

"This is a big inflection point," said Karl Rove, a leading Republican strategist who guided George W. Bush's two successful presi-

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Columbia Puts Deans on Leave Over Rude Texts

By HURUBIE MEKO

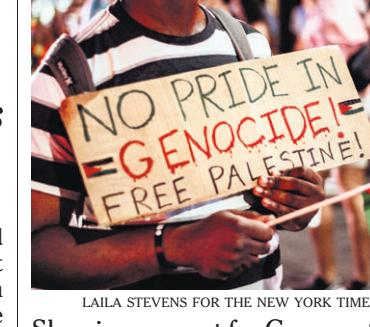
Columbia University placed three administrators on leave last week, a university spokesman said on Saturday. The moves came a little more than a week after images emerged showing the university officials sharing disparaging text messages during a panel discussion about antisemitism on campus.

The panel, which focused on Jewish life on campus amid tensions over Israel's war in Gaza, occurred during a Columbia College reunion on May 31.

The spokesman did not identify which officials were placed on leave, but The Washington Free Beacon, the website that first published the images, reported that they were Susan Chang-Kim, the vice dean and chief administrative officer; Cristen Kromm, the dean of undergraduate student life; and Matthew Patashnick, the associate dean for student and family support.

Ms. Chang-Kim also exchanged texts during the event with Jose Sorett, the dean of Columbia College, according to The Free Beacon. In one exchange, Mr. Sorett texted "LMAO," for "laughing my ass off," in response to a sarcastic message Ms. Chang-Kim had written about Brian Cohen, the executive director of Columbia/

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LAILA STEVENS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES
Showing support for Gazans at a Pride event in Brooklyn.

Gaza Tensions Fray Relations In Gay Enclave

By LIAM STACK

FIRE ISLAND PINES, N.Y. — In the upscale gay resort town of Fire Island Pines, colorful flags honor L.G.B.T.Q. history makers like the actress Wanda Sykes and the drag queen RuPaul in a small park near the harbor. For a few hours this month, one flag also honored Representative Ritchie Torres, the first openly gay Latino member of Congress.

But Mr. Torres is also an outspoken supporter of Israel, and not long after his flag went up, it was torn down by the gay activist group ACT-UP, which was also honored at the park, and replaced with two flags, one of which honored queer Palestinians.

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