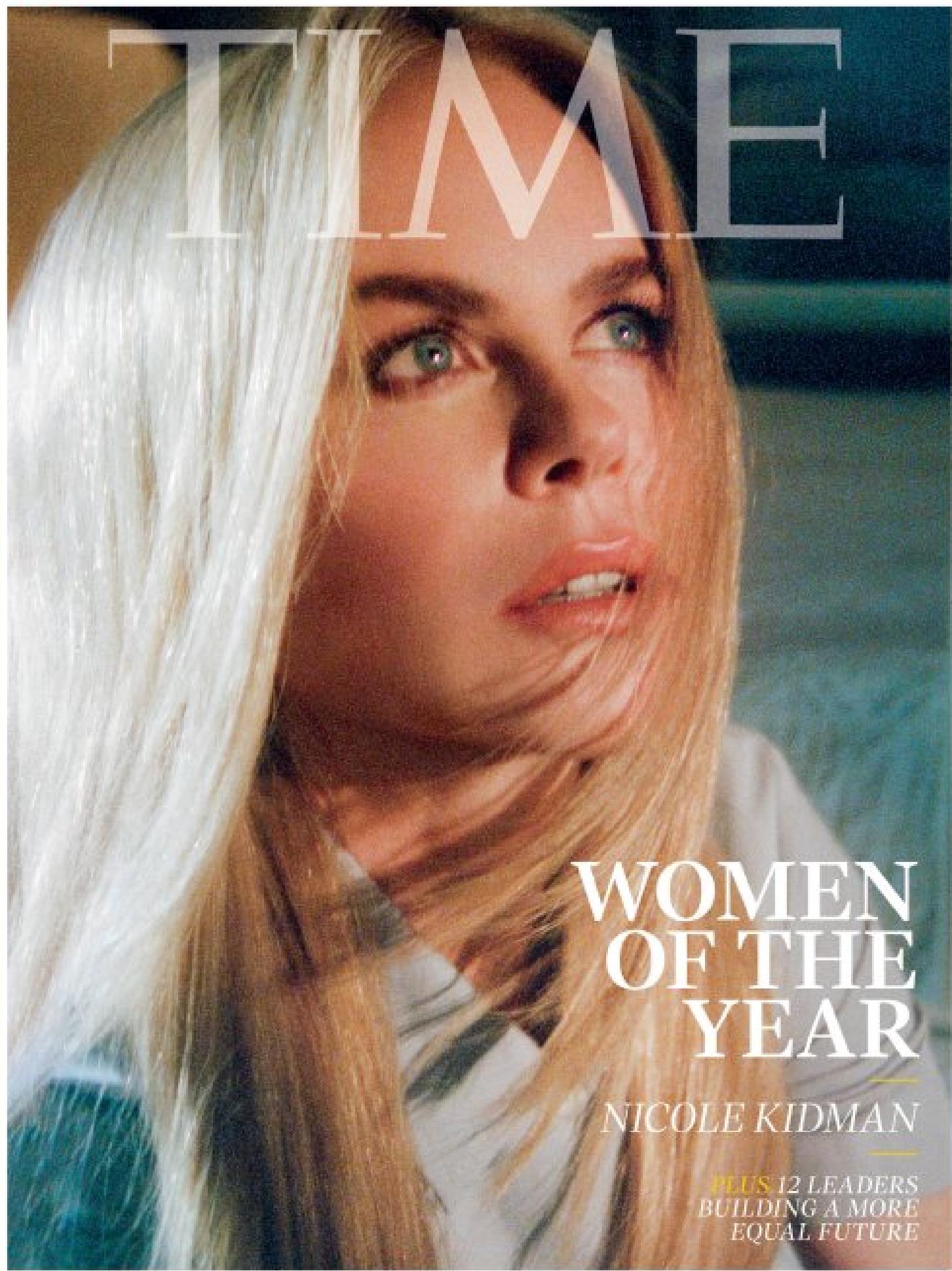


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Why Nicole Kidman Never Stops Working

Eliana Dockterman is a correspondent at TIME. She covers culture, society, and gender, including topics from blockbuster movies to the #MeToo movement to how the pandemic pushed moms out of the workplace.



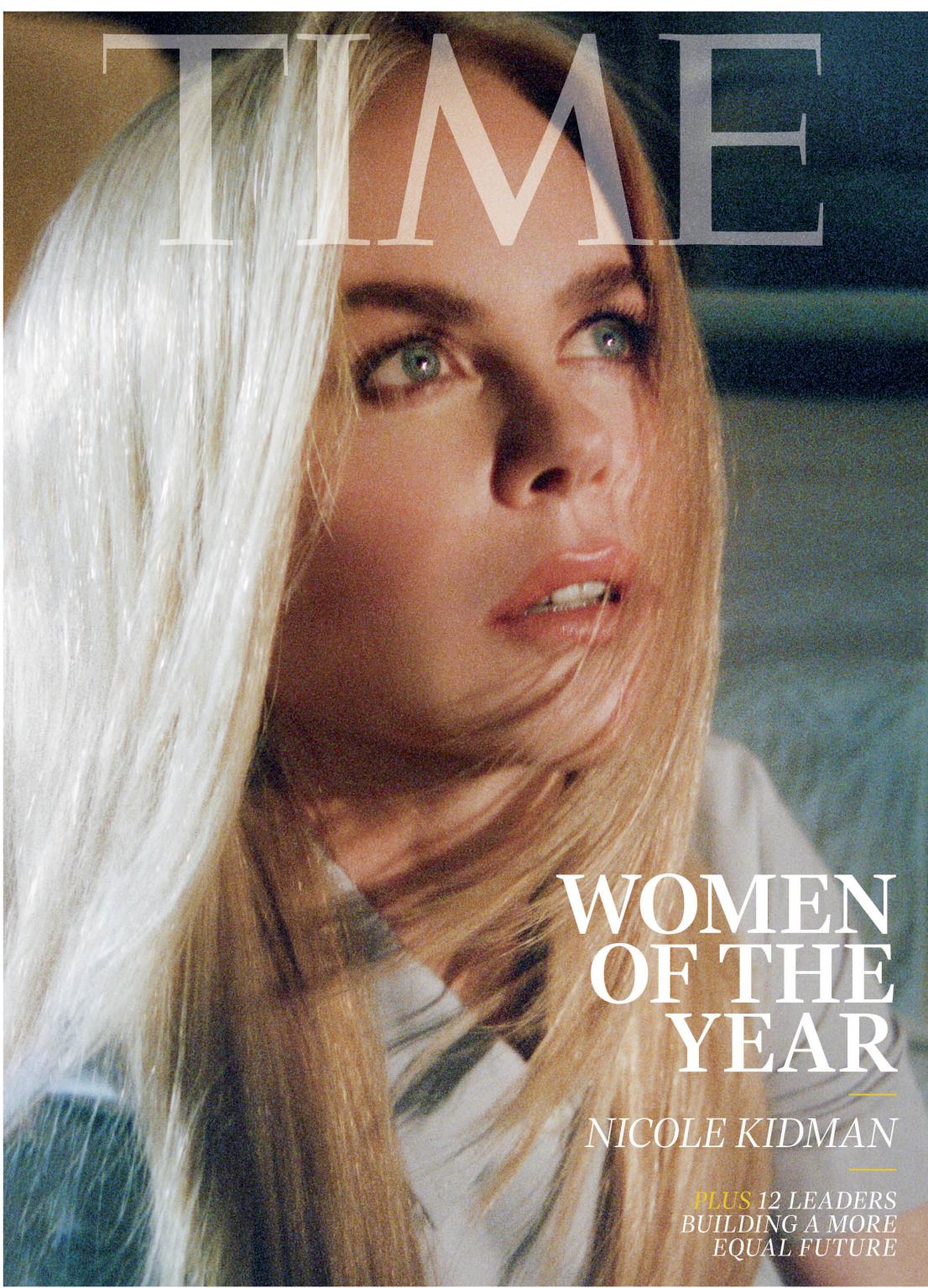
In the days after giving birth, Nicole Kidman found herself unable to breastfeed. “I was so terrified, asking, What just happened? Where’s my milk?” she says. “I remember standing naked in the shower, and my sister helped me. She was my source of strength. She’d had five children—she had the wisdom to pass on.”

Kidman and I are curled up in chairs beside a fireplace inside a historic Nashville home, not far from the house the Oscar winner shares with her husband Keith Urban, their two daughters, and a serene poodle named

Julian. Kidman is warm and disarmingly inquisitive: she wants to hear about my postpartum experience too.

Perhaps I shouldn't be surprised by the ease of this conversation about vulnerable moments in our lives as women. Kidman, 57, has emotionally exposed herself on screen for decades. On the drama *Big Little Lies*, she huddled under a towel between shooting scenes of domestic violence. In her latest film, *Babygirl*, she growled while masturbating on the floor. She marks all her scripts with notes about her characters, coded for privacy. Then she shreds them: "It's too personal. I want it gone."

MARCH 10, 2025



WOMEN OF THE YEAR

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Filmmakers adore her rawness. “People believe if you have power, you don’t have to go to a place of vulnerability,” says Oscar-winning director [Jane Campion](#), Kidman’s longtime friend. “A lot of actors won’t do that because it’s uncomfortable.” For Kidman to be truly open with a director requires a leap of faith. She describes herself as trusting to a fault. “It’s how I approach all of my relationships. I’ve been hurt because of that, but I’m still not jaded,” she says. “I’m delicate, but I’m very giving. The emotions I offer are very, very real, so I need to know that if I’m giving that to you, you value it.”

She has found that women behind the camera often offer a support reminiscent of how her sister cared for her in those early days after childbirth. And Kidman has made it her mission to use her immense star power to shine a light on emerging directors like Halina Reijn, who helmed the bold *Babygirl*, about a CEO who submits to an intern in a dominant-submissive affair. Many actors called out the dearth of opportunities for female filmmakers in the [#MeToo era](#), but few followed through on promoting talent. Kidman pledged in 2017 to work with a woman director every 18 months. She has far exceeded her promise, partnering as a producer and actor with 19 in film and TV over the past eight years.

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In 2023, [fewer than 15% of films](#) released theatrically were directed by women. For those who do receive funding and support, Kidman says, there’s undue pressure to “be perfect” on the first outing. “It can be changed,” she says, “but it can only be changed by actually being in the films of women.”

With curly, strawberry-blonde hair and a preternaturally intense stare, Kidman stood out among the 14-year-olds in the Sydney-area youth acting school that a 27-year-old Campion once visited to cast her student film. Kidman won the part but dropped out, fearing she’d look silly in the stocking she had to wear on her head for the costume—now one of her biggest regrets. But the two stayed in touch, and Kidman consulted Campion

after making the jump to Hollywood where, at first, her [newsmaking marriage](#) to Tom Cruise in 1990 threatened to overshadow her work.

“By the time she was married to Tom, people in America didn’t understand Nicole had a whole career in Australia that was revered,” Campion recalls. “They just thought she was riding on his career. She was in despair about the roles she was being offered, and wondering how she could change her trajectory.” Kidman jumped at opportunities to work with directors she admired. A series of performances in the late 1990s, in Gus Van Sant’s *To Die For*, Campion’s [The Portrait of a Lady](#), and [Sam Mendes’](#) staging of *The Blue Room* in London, proved her bona fides.



Kidman has since worked with auteur after auteur. When certain directors call, she doesn't even read the script before saying yes: she gleefully signed onto Lars von Trier's 2003 avant-garde thriller *Dogville*; Yorgos Lanthimos' unsettling 2017 drama *The Killing of a Sacred Deer*; and Robert Eggers' bloody 2022 fable, *The Northman*.

And, of course, [Stanley Kubrick's](#) *Eyes Wide Shut*. Reijn has said that *Babygirl* was, in part, inspired by Kidman's performance. In the 1999 movie, her character shares a sexual fantasy that triggers a crisis of masculinity for her husband, played by Cruise. Reijn fantasized about Kidman's character carrying out the imagined affair. It's the kind of evolution Kidman hopes to encourage by opening doors for women: "Stanley was dealing with it from the male perspective, and Halina chose to reinterpret it as a woman."

Babygirl, released on Christmas, capped a year of stories about women's sexuality in midlife. Miranda July's [best seller](#) *All Fours*, the Anne Hathaway romance [The Idea of You](#), the Laura Dern movie *Lonely Planet*, and another Kidman project, [A Family Affair](#), all featured women in their 40s and 50s [entangled with younger lovers](#). "It's always been there—it just hasn't been told. Maybe it's threatening," Kidman says. But she is, as TIME's film critic Stephanie Zacharek posited in her [Babygirl review](#), in her "don't give a f-ck" era. Kidman doesn't swear, but she admits, giggling, that the sentiment resonates. "I have the philosophy to never fight anything," she says. "Surrender."

She's come a long way from the teen who was embarrassed to wear a stocking on her head, Campion says. "That was a lesson to her later: be brave."

When we meet, Kidman has spent the previous day filming the crime series *Scarpetta* with Oscar winner Jamie Lee Curtis in Nashville and will fly to Berlin in the evening to wrap Season 2 of [Nine Perfect Strangers](#) before turning around to promote Mimi Cave's thriller *Holland* at SXSW in Austin in March. Last year alone, she starred in *A Family Affair*, the [Lulu Wang-directed Expats](#), Susanne Bier's beach-set [The Perfect Couple](#), and the CIA drama *Lioness*—all before *Babygirl* hit theaters.



Kidman is able to partner with so many female directors in part because she never stops working. “People go, ‘You’re a superwoman,’” Kidman says. “I hate it.” She doesn’t feel super—she gets fatigued like anyone else—but she’s a lifelong people pleaser. She fretted over bringing home perfect grades. If she can’t think of the exact right response to a text, she’ll ignore it for weeks. She’s often compelled to say yes to roles because doing so creates jobs. “People work when Nicole works,” Curtis says. “*I’m* working because Nicole is working.”

And she knows it’s a privilege. She remembers times when she contemplated quitting: “When there was nothing exciting or relevant coming my way, when there was massive criticism or bullying, when your self-esteem is shattered, when you’ve been hit with some massive loss or grief and go, ‘I don’t want to get out of bed. It’s too frightening.’”

Campion has witnessed Kidman pull herself out of moments of strife. “She’s always been a star, and that star has come up and come down, but Nicole knows that in itself is not what makes her happy. What makes her happy is her work.”

Kidman has been on a run of producing and starring in projects about privileged matriarchs whose lives unravel when a secret comes to light. It’s not that she’s particularly attracted to her glamorous yet guarded characters —those just happen to be the stories that get greenlighted. “I am so open to starting something completely a mess and shattered,” she says. “Where is it? Give me the material.”

But the part works. Audiences eat up her rich, icy characters. Campion, art house to the core, concedes there’s value in Kidman’s ability to tap into a hungry, predominantly female audience. “You can’t have power without being commercial,” she says. “You have to make money. Women want material that fits them, not just macho superheroes.”

And there’s something deceptively progressive in those stories. Prestige roles for women often involve playing the supportive wife. But in her projects, Kidman is the star, with accomplished male actors—Alexander Skarsgard, Liev Schreiber, Antonio Banderas—bolstering her performances. When she says her onscreen husbands have been egoless, I can’t help but raise an eyebrow. “I’ve worked with some of the greatest male actors in the world, and they’ve been so generous. All of them. Is that crazy?” Kidman laughs. She wasn’t intending to flip a trope on its head. She just did it.

Styled by Stella Greenspan; hair by Italo Gregorio; make-up by Gucci Westman; production by Perfect Projects.

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A'ja Wilson and Jordan Chiles Know What It Takes to Win

Lucy Feldman is a senior editor at TIME, where she oversees coverage of books and authors. She is co-editor of TIME's Women of the Year franchise and a member of the TIME100 editorial team.



Jordan Chiles clocked [A'ja Wilson](#) right away when they were thrown together for a Nike event in the run-up to the Paris Olympics. The gymnast was raised in a family of basketball fans—she was named after Michael Jordan—and had watched the WNBA star for years. The two athletes became fast friends. “We were vibing out,” Chiles says.

The mood is upbeat and jokes are flying when Wilson, 28, and Chiles, 23, reunite for a conversation about a landmark year in women's sports, which in 2024 received unprecedented attention and surging investment. The [WNBA](#) and [National Women's Soccer League](#) enjoyed record-breaking viewership and are expanding with new franchises. The women's NCAA basketball championship had more viewers than the men's for the first time ever. College athletes earned massive sponsorship deals. The most-watched days of the Paris Olympics were the ones featuring women's gymnastics. And for the first time in the history of the Games, an equal number of men and women [competed](#).

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Through it all, both Wilson and Chiles reached individual career highs. Coming off back-to-back WNBA championships with the Las Vegas Aces in 2022 and 2023, Wilson set new WNBA records for points and rebounds and picked up her third MVP title. She helped lead the U.S. [Olympic team to gold](#) in Paris and was named tournament MVP. Off the court, she published a best-selling book, *Dear Black Girls*. And in February, she unveiled her new A'One sneaker for Nike, becoming the first Black WNBA player to have a [signature shoe since 2010](#).

Chiles—who helped Team USA win silver in Tokyo when [Simone Biles famously withdrew](#) due to mental-health concerns—aided in the team's gold-medal [redemption](#) in Paris. In the individual floor-exercise competition, Chiles was awarded the bronze for her spirited, [Beyoncé-inspired](#) routine, a twist ending after her coach filed an inquiry with the judges that resulted in an updated score. (That medal has since been [rescinded](#), which Chiles and USA Gymnastics have [contested](#).) Amid the ensuing controversy, she has relied on a support system of family, friends, legal advisers, and strangers, all of whom have helped keep her spirits up. Her joyful routines for UCLA, where she is a junior, frequently go viral. “In every corner, I have somebody,” says Chiles, whose memoir *I'm That Girl* comes out in March.

Wilson and Chiles spoke to TIME about the evolution of women's sports, the pressures they face in the spotlight, and their future plans.

You've both had a stellar year filled with so much success, but there have also been lows. A'ja, you really wanted the three-peat, for your team to win a third WNBA title in a row, but it didn't happen. How do you talk yourself through those moments of disappointment?

Wilson: Not getting the three-peat was hard. The regret is the hardest part that I've had to deal with in this offseason, because I'm like, "What could I have done differently to get a different outcome?" When in reality, it just wasn't our time. And to see New York do it is like, *Ah*. But it's part of the game—it's the healthy balance that you've got to fight through.

Jordan, you've been in ongoing headlines about the controversy over the bronze medal. I know that was a huge heartbreak, made even worse by all the [comments online](#). Where are you with that right now?

Chiles: At the beginning, it was hard. It was something that I had to just push through and see where it would go. I'm in college now, and I have the ability to perform my life away at UCLA. People are always coming to me and just being like, "You're always gonna be loved." So I'm now just able to take what I have, let everybody do the outside work, and just push myself forward.

Legally, you can't talk about the specifics of the case since it's ongoing, but A'ja, you can say whatever you want. Did Jordan deserve the bronze medal?

Wilson: Stop playing me. What kind of question is that? Yes. It's a no-brainer. And I was pissed. Honestly, I prayed for you.

Chiles: Thank you.

Wilson: I know those moments are hard—and here I go, about to cry—you worked your ass off to get to that. I really prayed, not only because you're my friend, but because I see you, I understand you, and it may look different because we're in different sports, but you're fully equipped, and God's gonna always have you no matter what. And that's gonna be my clean version, because the other version...

Chiles: I already got the other version.

A'ja, you made history this year, becoming the first WNBA player to score 1,000 points in a single season—

Chiles: Moment of silence, please!

After that game, you gave [a speech to your teammates](#) in the locker room where you said there are times that you hate being A'ja Wilson. Later, you specified that you were talking about some of the challenges that come with being a Black player in the league. Can you take me back to that moment? And since then, how has it felt to have that sentiment out in the world?

Wilson: Being a professional athlete, people assume that you're supposed to be this perfect human being, you have no worries—why are you even complaining? You live this beautiful life—when they fail to realize that we're still human and things hurt my feelings. I needed my teammates to understand that there are days where they may see me and they're like, That's our captain, but there are also days where I'm faking it, because I know that I have to show up for them. There's days where I'm struggling. It's moments where, no matter how hard you work, it still feels like you're not getting the recognition. It still feels like somebody's got something to say. I needed them to understand that they help me in more ways than they'll ever know. It's hard showing up every day and wearing this crown. It's heavy. It gets extremely heavy. But at the same time, I'm gonna fix it, make sure it's straight, and I'm gonna go ahead and do my work. I hate that it came out in tears, because people are like, Oh, girls are always crying. But it's real. My whole point that I wanted to get across is, one, mental health is important. If your mental health is not in check, you cannot survive in this world. And two, you've got to love on yourself a little bit.

Chiles: I cried watching the video, and I watched it over and over again. That video was honestly something that I feel like not just the world needed to see but other athletes need to see. I just recently watched [Megan Thee Stallion's documentary](#), and she went through this whole process of hiding who Megan Pete really is. As athletes, we do that sometimes. We try to hide who the real A'ja Wilson is, who the real Jordan Chiles is, who the real [Naomi Osaka](#) is, [Serena](#), who those real people are. And it's really cool to

know that you are able to speak your vulnerable self. I really took a lot from that.

We’re constantly told to be vulnerable, be authentic, be ourselves. But there’s a tension that you’re both describing—sometimes you don’t really want to be perceived, because that also invites feedback that can be tough to handle. How do you navigate that?

Chiles: If I had the choice, I wouldn’t share anything about my life. But then I wouldn’t be able to give the younger generation something to look at. We had people before us who were able to walk for others to run. How I think of it is, if you’re gonna sit there and critique somebody, try to get underneath their skin, then it’s something that’s inside of you that you’re not OK with.

Wilson: I’m the complete opposite. I talk back. I’m like, if you can sit there on your little keyboard and type away, then so can I. I like to be petty, because if you got time, then I’m gonna have all the time in the world. Until you can do what I do on a nightly basis, you have nothing you can say to me that’s gonna harm me.



Caitlin Clark got some blowback from something that she said in a recent TIME story. Essentially, she acknowledged that she has certain privileges as a white player, and that she wants to do what she can to help ensure Black players, who have built the league, get more visibility and investment. How does that resonate with you?

Wilson: It's powerful to me. As a Black woman in the WNBA, we have our struggles in showcasing who we really are. A lot of agendas get pushed on a lot of different platforms that may shadow us. You work so hard, but you still have to work 10 times harder just to be seen. So when we can have our counterparts speak up, it speaks volumes to me, because they're in spaces where my path is never supposed to go. It's crazy that we're talking about that in 2025, but it's real. We see those things as Black women. We see where people stand up and speak for us.

I know [Clark] got a lot of backlash from that, because obviously we live in a world where they don't want that, and it's exhausting. But imagine dealing with that and then having to go out and play every single night, having to constantly have to worry, How are they about to downgrade my resume now? What more do I have to do in order to showcase how elite and how serious I take my job? But I also do it with love and passion and fun. A lot of people don't want to see me at the top, and that's fine, but I'm gonna be there, because I worked my butt off to get there.

I have a privilege in a lot of different ways. I can be in spaces where a lot of other Black women, white women, however you want to see it, are not—but that's where I'm going to try to use my privilege of being a professional athlete to help others, because that's what gives me my why. So claps, steps, all the in-between, because I know it's hard to speak out on that. That's why I try to speak out as much as I can, but people just see it a different way. That's OK. I just want people to understand that when people can speak up about us as Black women in rooms that we may not be in, that means a lot. Because it's a little piece of us in there—they can hold that door open for us to walk through. So I'm grateful.

I also want to talk about the evolving image and inclusivity of gymnastics. Jordan, you were part of a big moment in Paris, when you, Simone Biles, and Brazil's Rebeca Andrade all received medals for floor

exercise and made up the first all-Black podium in Olympic gymnastics. How have you seen the sport change since you started?

Chiles: The diversity in our sport has obviously changed a lot. Knowing there weren't a lot of women of color when I was younger, and knowing that I can help that—and I've been helping that—is really cool. That all-Black podium was just the beginning of something that will hopefully continue, not just within our sport, but within sports in general. It's always going to be in history books, no matter what, and I really appreciate knowing that I was a part of that. Having two icons, two legends that you looked up to ever since you were younger, and you're on that podium with them, it just makes it more memorable.

A'ja, what would it take for there to be true equity between WNBA and NBA?

Wilson: A lot. We would have to switch body parts. I've seen a lot of comments like, Oh, your sport doesn't matter. And I'm like, but you're a basketball fan. That doesn't make sense to me. For us to get a little equity in that sense, realistically, it will take a shift of the world. It will take a shift of society to understand that we are all, both leagues, great at what we do.

We can't worry about constantly having to work to be equal. We're gonna do it with what we have now and showcase why we are the greatest. Yeah, I would love for my bank account to look like an NBA player's, but realistically, will it ever get there? I don't know. But what I do know is what I got now and how I can continue just to spread that out to young girls, so then when they get up and want to play in the W, maybe the accounts will look the same.

I heard a podcast. It was a former NBA player...

Wilson: Oh, the one-on-one thing?

Yes, Jeff Teague was saying on the Club 520 podcast that you would not be able to beat any man in the NBA one-on-one, since you told the Knicks' Josh Hart on his show that you thought you could beat him. What do you think about that?

Wilson: I said it in a way, to a great friend of mine, Josh Hart, in a sense of just a competitor, and I don't think Josh saw it in any disrespect. I could look anyone in the eye, and I'm like, Yeah, I'm gonna beat you, because that's the competitor in me. I have random little guys in my DMs, like, Oh my God, you are delusional for thinking that. Am I? OK, I could be a little delulu, but I'm still gonna believe in me.

Would you ever do a Battle of the Sexes-type Billie Jean King vs. Bobby Riggs game?

Wilson: I don't really care for too much of that, because it's one of those situations where you're damned if you do, damned if you don't. If you win, they're gonna have an excuse for it. If you lose, they're gonna be like, Duh, you look dumb for doing that. But if we do a little two-on-two, I do got my partner.

Why did you decide not to participate in Unrivaled?

Wilson: I like to enjoy my offseason. That's my time to really just decompress. Unrivaled seems great—my teammates are loving it. Obviously, the money in it is amazing. And it's like, Dang, missing out. But wholeheartedly, not even trying to front, I just didn't want to. I just want to protect my peace. Because once the season gets in, no one's gonna think, Oh, you just got done playing Unrivaled, let's take it easy.

Would you ever play for a different WNBA team?

Wilson: I don't want to. That's more of a front-office question, but Vegas will forever be my home. I was their first draft pick ever of the franchise, so they really brought me in. And the things that we've done—straight out the gate, we set the standard for the league to follow, and we put a lot of other franchises in the league on their heels. If I could retire an Ace, I would love to. I don't see myself putting on any different jersey.

Are we going to see you in L.A. for the 2028 Olympics?

Chiles: Why are you looking at me? She asked you!

Wilson: She asked both!

Chiles: Mine's not a yes and mine's not a no.

Wilson: Mine is a better—you better.

Chiles: Period.

Wilson: She's gonna be there too. See us in L.A.

—

Styled by Jessie DuBois; hair by Myesha Jamerson; make-up by Regina Craig; production by Crawford & Co. Productions

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A Mining Billionaire's Case for Ditching Fossil Fuels

Justin Worland is a senior correspondent at TIME in the Washington, D.C. bureau. He received Covering Climate Now's inaugural Climate Journalist of the Year award in 2022, among other awards. He is the Outrider Foundation fellow at TIME.



It does not take long at lunch with Andrew Forrest for him to start seeming less like an Australian mining billionaire and more like a climate activist-meets-zealous prosecutor. His rugged features quickly appear not to reflect the arid expanse of Western Australia's Pilbara region, home to the core operations of his \$38 billion Fortescue iron-ore business. Rather, they appear the result of a succession of high-stakes court battles. When we meet at a luxurious Paris brasserie, he speaks passionately about a client that he's been

representing for several years: the planet. His case? Corporate bosses must act now—and act fast—to tackle climate change, an argument he delivers with force and the [unrivaled credibility](#) that comes from decades in the carbon-spewing industry.

Then, his soup turning cold, he grabs me by my lapels and rattles off the facts as he sees them: fossil-fuel industry executives are “culprits,” doing all they can to resist a transition to a [cleaner economy](#). In other heavy industries, bosses have been “lazy” and shortsighted, focused on quarterly returns while the world burns. It’s time for businesses to stop talking about long-term targets, he tells me, and completely ditch fossil fuels in the coming years rather than in the coming decades. “If you think you can’t go green, then you’re right,” he says of his industry colleagues. “It’s time for you to get off the stage and learn from someone with more talent, more conviction, or initiative than you who can lead your company.”

Critically, this isn’t simply talk. At Fortescue, the mining behemoth [he founded in 2003](#), Forrest has begun just such a transformation: he’s building renewable-energy projects, purchasing a fleet of electric mining trucks, and trying to catapult green hydrogen to market. “It’s about character. It’s about leadership,” he says.

MARCH 10, 2025

TIME

Why Australian
mining billionaire
Andrew Forrest
believes going green
is good business

THE PLANET'S UNLIKELY ALLY

by JUSTIN WORLAND



time.com

Central to Forrest's pitch is a cutting dismissal of the corporate fixation on quarterly returns. His preferred yardstick is the medium term—a long enough time period to make meaningful change but soon enough so that he will actually be around to judge the results. Fortescue's [\\$6 billion green investment](#), for example, is meant to transform his company into an environmentally friendly powerhouse by 2030. "We're taking long-term bets, which accrete value on the way," he says. "I make it sound simple, but it is actually pretty simple." And then, just as quickly as he had begun, our lunch still unfinished, he stops himself almost midthought: "Is this enough to start?" With his opening argument delivered and a slap on the back, he's gone in a flash—off to his plane, which was waiting to whisk him to Munich for an engagement with Ukrainian President [Volodymyr Zelensky](#).

That was last February. In the year since, I've watched Forrest take his argument global, traveling with him to Las Vegas, where he announced a \$3 billion investment in electric mining trucks, and catching him at conferences in New York and Switzerland where he cajoled other executives to come aboard his climate quest. The image that emerged is of a rare private-sector voice literate in both climate science and financial markets—and one willing to make the business case for climate to any audience. "If we want to solve the climate crisis, we need more leaders in business to act with the same dogged determination and sense of purpose as Andrew," says Al Gore, the former U.S. vice president who won a [Nobel Peace Prize](#) for his climate work.

The biggest challenge for Forrest isn't one of technical feasibility. If all goes according to plan, actually decarbonizing Fortescue will be the easy part. To succeed, he must convince investors, employees, and, perhaps most importantly, other CEOs that going green is worth the risks—financial, reputational, and otherwise.

The task couldn't come at a more important time. A wave of populist sentiment has led political leaders to take a step back on climate action even as the effects of a warming planet become ever more apparent—and grow ever more dire. It is a complex needle to thread: companies can act on their own, of course, but to do so they need to be sure they will make money. If he succeeds, Forrest and his project to transform Fortescue, where he serves as chairman, would become more than a forceful case for saving the planet—

they would become a powerful case study for generating financial dividends [by decarbonizing](#). Failure, on the other hand, would discourage other business leaders already nervous about the current political climate. “The dangerous part about what we’re doing is that if we’re not successful, the inspiration for thousands of other companies won’t be there,” he says. “And if we lose money on this in the long term, people say, well, that’s philanthropy.”



Forrest's tale begins with a warning: “It’s not a pretty story.” We’re sitting at the dining table of his company jet en route to Las Vegas from New York last September, and I’ve just asked him to recount the story of how he became a climate advocate. Between bites of chicken wings, he rewinds the clock to 2016. He was hiking in a remote part of Australia known as the Kimberley when he [fell off a cliff](#) into a gorge. In gory detail, he described

how his leg was reversed, stuck pointing in the opposite direction, when someone pulled him out of the water. He survived, but it would take years to recover. Forced to take a break from his hectic day-to-day CEO life, he decided to pursue a Ph.D. in marine ecology. That opened his eyes to the alarming realities of how climate change is harming the oceans: the acidification that is [killing marine ecosystems](#) and the looming risk that oceans will not continue absorbing carbon at the same rates, meaning faster growth of carbon in the atmosphere. He says that the deeper understanding steered him to “do everything we can to stop global warming.” It was, in short, a sort of Damascene conversion, transforming a mining industry veteran into a climate campaigner.

Since then it’s been a whirlwind. The Minderoo Foundation, founded in 2001 and co-led by Forrest and his wife from whom he is separated, has come to fund everything from efforts to address lethal humidity to climate migration. And he has committed deeply to the cause of protecting the oceans. While many of his billionaire counterparts buy yachts to party, Forrest bought one and turned it into a research vessel for ocean scientists. M. Sanjayan, the [CEO of Conservation International](#), talked to Forrest as he fundraised for a new initiative aimed at protecting 5% of the world’s oceans. In their phone conversation, Forrest realized that he was soon going to fly over Sanjayan’s office in Washington, D.C., so he directed the plane to land. A few hours later they had dinner near the airport, and Forrest became a top contributor to the [\\$125 million initiative](#). “He’s just larger than life,” says Sanjayan, reflecting on that first meeting.

Forrest’s biggest climate initiative, though, is what he’s doing with his own company. Under the mantra of [Real Zero](#), a play on the increasingly controversial phrase *net zero*, Forrest has said his company will ditch fossil fuels in its land-based operations entirely by 2030. To make it happen, in 2022 the company launched a \$6.2 billion capital [investment plan](#) to decarbonize its primary mining operations in Australia’s Pilbara region. That money has funded everything from efficiency to renewable energy generation.



When we arrived in Vegas, I saw the unveiling of the effort's crown jewel. Shortly after entering the Las Vegas convention center, the exhibition area

turned dark. Triumphant music blared as drummers and dancers performed. The curtain dropped to reveal a massive electric mining truck capable of hauling 240 metric tons of material. In Forrest's phrasing, his plane could fit inside the truck's bed. It wasn't hyperbole: even at my height of 6 ft. 3 in., I had to look up to see the top of one of the truck's tires. Forrest said Fortescue, which partnered with a Swiss manufacturer called Liebherr to develop the trucks, had already [placed an order](#) for 360 vehicles. The deal, valued at nearly \$3 billion, sent shock waves across the industry. "It's metamorphic for Fortescue, and it's a turning point for the world mining industry," Forrest tells me. "Shareholders are going to say this company's going green and saving us money." The cost savings switching from diesel fuel to electric mobility is expected to total in the hundreds of millions of dollars annually.

The work has garnered the praise of big wigs in the climate community. In New York, I watched as Forrest traded compliments with leading climate scientists; in Davos, I sat in as he convened the likes of Gore and former U.S. climate envoy John Kerry. "This guy is willing to make really big bets, and sometimes they pay off, and probably more often than not, they pay off," says Sanjayan. "I'm glad he's making it on something that could be transformative for the planet." Yet many remain skeptical—and it's easy to understand why. Mining is one of the [dirtiest industries](#), contributing upwards of 5% of global carbon emissions. And then there are the local effects, including air pollution that harms nearby communities and concerns about land-use rights given mining often happens on Indigenous land.

Forrest's penchant for spectacle and disarming warmth can be helpful in making the climate case—but it has also raised some eyebrows in the wider environmental community. He's the type of person who will greet you cheerfully, no matter who you are. In January, at the World Economic Forum [annual meeting in Davos](#), Switzerland, a right-wing provocateur chased him down to press him for an interview. Forrest gracefully put his arm around him and disarmed him, saying, "Get rid of that mic, and I'll talk to you. I quite like what you're doing." He jumps on Fox News, keen to make his case even to the most incredulous of audiences. When we arrived in Vegas, Gene Simmons, the rock star and KISS front man, was there to greet him. From Vegas, Simmons joined Forrest on some TV hits to Australia. At the [2023 U.N. climate conference](#) in Dubai, where companies rented out hotel

ballrooms and event spaces to promote their climate programs, Forrest brought Fortescue's 246-ft. ammonia-powered ship to the harbor and invited dignitaries on board for cocktails. Indeed, the man is so amiable, so good at making a splash, that it forces you to pause and ask, "What's the catch?" When Forrest wanted to [endorse an organization](#) pushing for a "fossil-fuel nonproliferation treaty," the organization's leaders were unsure how the backing of a mining boss would be received. So they commissioned a study of Fortescue's climate and environmental practices, assessing its plans and performance against 63 criteria, including its impact to local communities, laid out by the U.N. The [report found](#) the company to be exceptional, with quibbles so minor that explaining them here would require a crash course in the dense lexicon of climate reporting. "He's the real deal," says Tzeporah Berman, who runs the treaty initiative.



If you follow Forrest around long enough, you'll notice he returns to some of the same arguments and language. In settings with other business leaders, he likes to cite his company's financial returns. "For those who don't know me, my name is Andrew Forrest," he said at a September climate forum. "I founded a company which has Australia's highest shareholder return in history." For climate advocates, Forrest citing his mining company's financial performance might sound a bit crass coming from a billionaire who hops around the world on a private plane. But the message is a critical one: Forrest's financial credentials signal credibility to the private sector. And it is precisely what makes Forrest so unique among his peers. Not only does he articulate a financial case for decarbonizing an industrial company, but he also emphasizes it will happen in the next five years. That's not a goal, he says, but a hard deadline. He has told facilities managers that if they haven't figured out how to ditch fossil fuels on-site by 2030, he will shut down their plants. And he has parted ways with many senior executives who paid lip service to his climate ambition but didn't feel committed to executing it. "We had people that said they were for going green," he tells me, "but actually thought it was the dumbest idea ever."

Let's just be clear here. The 2030 deadline puts Fortescue in a class of its own. Apart from big technology firms (which are easier to decarbonize), large industrial companies that have engaged in the climate conversation have set mid-century targets. And it's assumed these targets will be met with some reliance on offsets, where companies pay others to cut emissions rather than doing it themselves. Fortescue will not use offsets, Forrest says. And when I ask him what Fortescue will look like in 20 years, he rejects the question out of hand. "Twenty years, it's really someone else's problem," he says, so brusquely that he later apologetically acknowledges his harsh tone.

Making such a bold commitment to climate at a publicly traded company requires a bullish financial case, and there are several components to his argument. For his electrification drive—think of the mining trucks or mining-site operations—the promise is savings as the up-front cost reduces fuel usage over the long term. It also brings with it a knock-on financial benefit: creating "green iron ore" and "green steel" will give Fortescue a leg up selling its product, as its customers look to decarbonize their own products. And doing the legwork now in developing this technology will create a new revenue stream for the company as it sells it to others. The most

significant of those technologies is [green hydrogen](#), a fuel created by splitting water into hydrogen and oxygen using an electric current powered by renewable energy; this green fuel can replace fossil fuels in heavy industry and transportation. The company is spending hundreds of millions of dollars a year to build out green-hydrogen production facilities in Australia, the U.S., Norway, and Brazil.

More than any of his other green ambitions, its Fortescue's hydrogen goals that attract the most attention of investors. Over the past five years, the hydrogen sector has been on a rollercoaster ride as companies committed billions to mega projects designed to bring green hydrogen to market. But a series of hiccups—from a lack of infrastructure to support it to policy challenges—have led companies to rethink their investments. Fortescue is not immune. Last year, the [company laid off 700 workers](#) as it downscaled its hydrogen ambitions. Many climate activists interpreted the hydrogen pullback as evidence that Forrest lacks sincerity. And yet, for better or worse, there is perhaps no better way to convince the financial community of a commitment to delivering a return than layoffs and reorganization. So how does the market assess Fortescue's climate goals?

In finance lingo, Fortescue has a price-to-earnings ratio similar to, if slightly below, those of its mining peers. That's a standard metric that financial analysts use as a shorthand to assess the growth prospects of a [publicly listed business](#). Fortescue does a little better than its peers on the price-to-net-asset-value ratio, a key mining-industry metric because it shows how much investors are valuing the core assets of a company, in this case mines. But there's little to show that the company's climate commitment is responsible for its financial performance. On earnings calls, analysts probe Fortescue executives about various green initiatives, but the traders whose actions determine the stock price are more concerned that they will make a profit in the short term.

“The main thing driving share prices of mining stocks at the moment is their payouts,” says James Whiteside, head of corporate, metals and mining at Woods Mackenzie. And therein lies what is perhaps Forrest's biggest challenge—more than the state of the hydrogen business, more than the staff turnover. To persuade executives to spend billions on bold bets to take their companies green, they will want to know that their valuations will be

rewarded. And, right now, the market seems unsure, to put it mildly. You might even say it seems uninterested.



When I last caught up with Forrest in January, the global mood around climate had shifted dramatically since we first met a year prior. Donald Trump was back in the White House, and the private-sector enthusiasm around all things climate—already tapering last year—had become even [more muted](#).

Driving down the promenade in Davos, Forrest betrayed some frustration with his counterparts who have used the zeitgeist shift as cover to change course. At many firms, climate and ESG—short for environment, social, and governance—strategies were being rebranded using more palatable terms like *resilience* or *energy security*, even as the core of the work continues. At others, those commitments have been walked back entirely to save money

and face. “It’s letting the wolves out of the cages who never wanted to do anything for the climate anyway, and they’re saying that they now don’t have to,” he says. “Well, all right, let’s just see how that works out for you.”

Forrest remains defiant. If the Republican-controlled government in Washington [nixes clean-technology](#) tax incentives, “you’ll see hundreds of billions of dollars extracted out of the U.S. economy, including ours,” he tells me. And he has the backing of political leaders in Australia, where Fortescue is headquartered. “It’s absolutely critical,” says Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese of Forrest’s climate efforts. But, while policy shifts may change the dynamics of specific projects, the direction of travel won’t change. Fortescue’s plan is rooted in sound economics, he says, and that’s not changing. “We’re staying the course,” he tells me. “Real zero is completely bankable.”

No matter what [President Trump does](#), global markets are changing, increasingly favoring products that are cleaner and resilient to climate risks—whether they are created by the physical world or by our response to them. But assessing the speed of those changes—and then shifting your business to reflect that speed—is a very challenging task even for the most climate-savvy executive. Forrest’s bet is that being first will pay huge dividends. It’s a simple concept, but few have been bold enough to spend billions to test it. For the sake of the planet and everyone who lives on it, let’s hope he’s right.

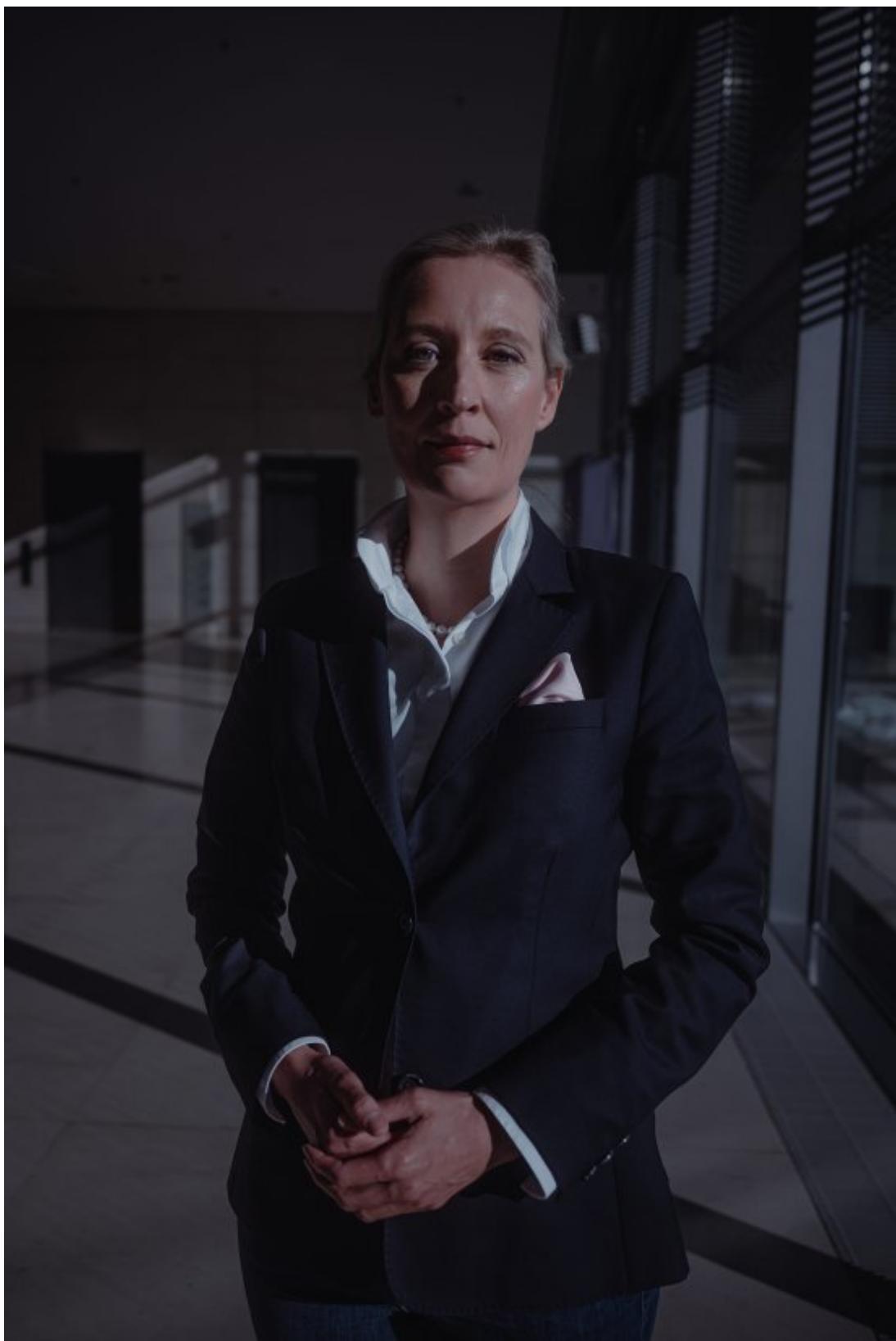
—With reporting by Charlie Campbell/Canberra

TIME receives support for climate coverage from the Outrider Foundation

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Exclusive: Alice Weidel on Her Far-Right AfD Party's Rise, Elon Musk's Support, and the German Election

Simon Shuster is a senior correspondent at TIME. He covers international affairs, with a focus on Russia and Ukraine. For his first book, *The Showman*, he reported inside the Ukrainian President's compound in Kyiv as the Russian invasion unfolded.



The tweet from Elon Musk arrived a few days before Christmas, and it felt like a gift from heaven to Germany's far-right political party, Alternative for Germany (AfD). It consisted of six words: "Only the AfD can save Germany." The party's leader, Alice Weidel, assumed it must be a hoax. Refreshing her feed, she stared at the message and checked its source: @elonmusk. Then she called an aide to make sure he could see it too. After that, Weidel recalls, "I actually almost fell from my chair."

The AfD, founded in 2013 on a promise to slash spending, close Germany's borders, and forsake the European Union, had never earned such a powerful endorsement. It had always been on the fringe, with about a tenth of the seats in Parliament and no role in the federal government. Ahead of elections on Feb. 23, polls show it has the support of about a fifth of voters. The rest would sooner expect the AfD to embarrass Germany than to save it.

The country's main intelligence service has labelled some branches of the AfD as extremist groups and placed several of its leaders under surveillance. In the European Parliament, an alliance of right-wing groups expelled the party last spring for being too radical. One AfD official had suggested the Nazi SS were "not all criminals." Another has called the Holocaust a mere speck of "bird sh-t" on the glorious sweep of German history.

Read More: [How Germany's Political Stability May Be Fueling the Rise of the Far Right](#)

None of this has stopped the [Trump Administration](#) from embracing the AfD. In mid-February, Vice President J.D. [Vance](#) met with Weidel during his first official tour of Europe. The cornerstone of his trip was an appearance at the Munich Security Conference, an annual gathering of leaders from around the world. As an establishment outcast, the AfD was not invited, and Weidel was not allowed in the venue. So her meeting with Vance took place in the basement of the Westin Grand, where he spent the night.

Vance's [message](#), Weidel says, amounted to a "wake-up call" for the German establishment: the U.S. would no longer allow Europe to keep the far right out of its politics. Vance delivered that message to the diplomats gathered in Munich the same day. "Shutting people out of the political process protects

nothing,” he said from the stage. “In fact, it is the most surefire way to destroy democracy.”

For Europe’s leading political parties, the speech was startling. Some called it a blatant act of interference in the German elections, which were then about a week away. The AfD was projected to take second place, its best result ever, and this time it would enter Parliament with a clear nod of support from the Trump Administration.



Weidel still finds it hard to fathom, let alone explain. “It’s unbelievable,” she says a few days after the Vance meeting, sitting in her narrow, book-strewn office with its bank of windows overlooking the Reichstag. “One of the greatest moments for us.” When asked about the reasons for the Administration’s support, she lowers her voice as though preparing to offer a psychic reading. For Trump, she says, “there might be something personal behind it.” His grandfather, Frederick Trump, immigrated to the U.S. in the late 1800s from Germany. Those blood ties, Weidel says, may have

prompted the U.S. President to look across the ocean and wonder, “What’s going on with the continent of our grandparents?”

An easier way to explain the Administration’s fondness for the German far right would be the vein of resentment they both tap. Much like [Trump](#) and many of his global imitators, the AfD promises a return to national greatness with no guilt and no apologies. It laughs at the wagging fingers of liberal elites and seeks to strip them of power, much as the [MAGA movement](#) has in the U.S.

Trump has other reasons for undermining the German establishment, which he scorns for decades of low military spending within NATO and high levels of immigration from the Muslim world. [Musk](#) harps on a different complaint with Germany’s leaders—their alienation of the AfD. In a striking feat of doublespeak, he frames the issue in the language of freedom and democracy, as though the nation that perpetrated the Holocaust violated its own values by building what Germans call a political “firewall” around the far right.

Read More: [*Column: Elon Musk Is Boosting Germany’s Far Right. It Will Backfire*](#)



Weidel says she heard the same message from Vance in the basement of the Westin: “We need to break down the firewall,” she says. “Open up the corridor for freedom of speech!”

A few days after their meeting in Munich, this corridor indeed began to open up for Weidel. She became the first AfD candidate for Chancellor ever invited to a TV debate on Germany’s public broadcaster. On stage with her three male rivals, she looked defensive and aggrieved, seething when they tried to gang up on her.

The leading candidate, Friedrich Merz, a conservative who has adopted many of the AfD’s hard-line positions on immigration, used his closing statement of the debate to promise his voters that he would never allow the AfD into his government. Under him, he said, the firewall would hold.

Weidel was indignant. “He just copies our program,” she says two days later in her office. “But he can’t implement it, because he needs to govern in coalition with leftist parties … And they do not let him do anything.” On such topics, her tone carries a kind of righteous mockery, at once light and

condescending, as though she is tossing out snark at the haters on social media. But other subjects, especially those related to German history or her party's ties to the radical right, reveal a tense and guarded quality in Weidel. She often reverts to a repertoire of practiced lines to defuse or preempt any suggestion of bigotry in the AfD.

This has long been her role within the party, and it helps explain her rise. Worldly and style-conscious, with a doctorate in economics and a résumé that includes a stint at Goldman Sachs, Weidel, 45, looks nothing like the gruff, tattooed stereotype of the right-wing goon. Thanks partly to her polished image, the AfD has been able to claim a veneer of modernity despite its retrograde stances on gender, immigration, national identity, and just about everything else. The official platform of the AfD defines a family as a "father, mother and children." Weidel's does not fit that mold. Her partner is a woman, the Sri Lankan-born filmmaker Sarah Bossard, with whom she has two sons, both of whom go to school in Switzerland, where the family has a home.

Weidel does not like to talk about that. She prefers to reminisce about her childhood in the small town of Harsewinkel, in western Germany, where many of her core beliefs were forged. As a teenager, Weidel recalls, she was afraid to go to the public swimming pool, because groups of immigrant boys would harass blond German girls like her. "Even in my little village, we had a problem already with Muslim migration, and it was quite painful for us," Weidel says, asking TIME not to print the insults she says were hurled at her. "I came to the conclusion that a proper, peaceful life with a high proportion of Muslims is not working out."

That conclusion underpins her party's platform. On immigration, AfD calls for closing Germany's borders to asylum seekers and for the mass expulsion of immigrants, especially those from the Muslim world. Describing its plan for a "comprehensive repatriation offensive," the platform avoids using the German word Deportation, which is uncomfortably resonant of the transfer of Jews to Nazi death camps during World War II.

In the language and culture of Germany, such mementos of the Holocaust have created awkward stumbling blocks along the AfD's path to power. Like millions of Germans, Weidel feels the moral weight of what her relatives did

during the war. Her family's links to the Nazis are closer than most. Her paternal grandfather, Hans Weidel, was a member of the SS and served as a military judge in German-occupied Poland, an appointment granted by order of Adolf Hitler himself. The job required him to send enemies of the Nazi regime to concentration camps, where millions of people—most of them Jews, but also communists and other political prisoners—were murdered during the Holocaust.

Near the end of the war, as the Allies pushed the [Nazis](#) back toward Berlin, Weidel's father, then around 6, had to flee his home region of Upper Silesia with his mother and siblings. Most of that region became a part of Poland after the war, and Gerhard Weidel, now 86, never went back to his childhood home. But the experience of losing it haunted him throughout life.



"He was completely traumatized," his daughter says. After the family escaped Upper Silesia, she says they got stuck in the town of Kassel during an Allied bombing raid, and they took shelter in a bunker. When they emerged, the entire city was burning, an image that followed Weidel's father

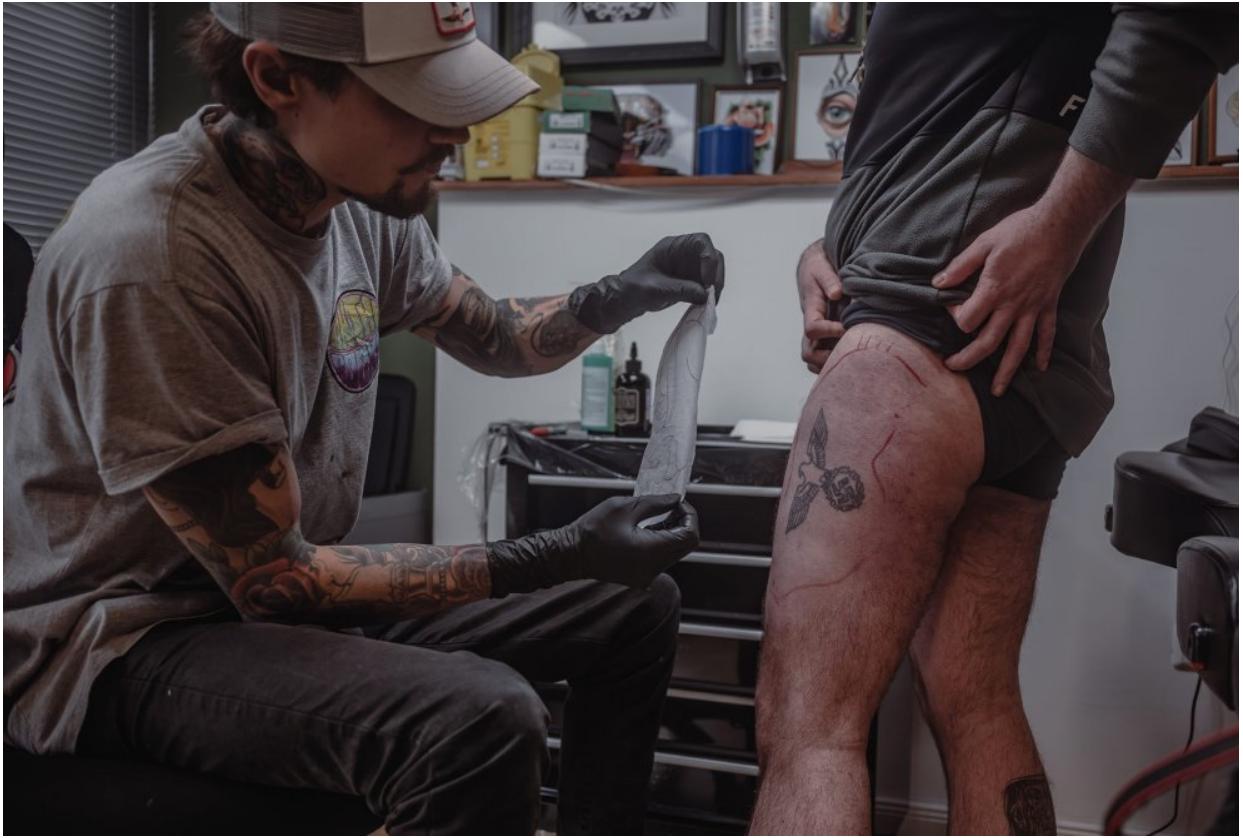
into adulthood. “He would sometimes have these nightmares,” she recalls. “I had to wake him up, because he was screaming.”

The family rarely discussed these events. “It was something he wanted to exclude emotionally,” Weidel says. But around Christmastime, after a couple of beers, her father would sometimes recall the awful months of hunger during the winter of 1948, and the waterlogged basement room where he and his family lived as refugees.

Weidel’s elder son Paul, who is 12, recently began to ask about the war, and his mother has trouble finding the right ways to tell him about it. “We go back to history,” she says. “But I start very early in German history,” reaching far beyond the wartime years to make sure her son realizes how much more there is to his country’s past.

Melanie Amann, a German journalist who wrote a seminal book about the AfD, says a surprising number of the party’s leaders share the experience of wartime dispossession. They are known in German as Vertriebene (the displaced) and some of them have long complained that their suffering is treated as a forbidden subject, along with most appeals to German victimhood during the war.

“They live with this intergenerational trauma,” says Amann. “And for a long time they were not supposed to talk about it.” But in the politics of the AfD, Amann sees an underlying sense of grievance over the way Germans were treated after losing [World War II](#). “It’s a kind of revenge,” Amann says. “They want to break free of all these taboos they see around them.”



Many of those taboos have been written into German law, which criminalizes the use of Nazi slogans and symbols. The publication of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* is banned, as are various forms of hate speech, which the German authorities tend to police with greater vigilance than their European peers—and certainly their American ones. The desire to suppress any resurgence of the far right gave rise to the Brandmauer, or firewall, that excludes the extremist fringe from Germany's governing coalitions.

Read More: [*The Surprising Face of German Anti-Immigration Policies*](#)

The biggest target of this ostracism has been the AfD. Even as its public support has grown over the past decade from less than 5% to around 20% in the polls, the party has remained a pariah in Parliament. When Weidel first took a seat in that chamber in 2017, she says her fellow lawmakers refused to ride in an elevator with her, let alone sit down to talk about legislation. "That's what the firewall means," she says while walking through the halls of Parliament on a recent afternoon, passing stone-faced guards and politicians in the corridors. At first it upset her. "They would not even say

hello to me.” But then she remembers finding a response: “Look,” she would say, “You can insult me. You can throw all the bad things at my head. But it doesn’t hurt me. It hurts my voters.”

Last spring, she got a chance to complain about this to Musk. Left-wing activists rallied to protest the expansion of Musk’s automotive plant in the suburbs of Berlin, setting fire to an electricity cable and disrupting the power supply to the [Tesla](#) Gigafactory. Weidel reached out to Musk’s team and offered her support. He did not respond to her directly, she says. But by the end of the year, the firewall in German politics had become one of Musk’s obsessions.

His support for the AfD has since mirrored the tactics Musk used to help Trump get re-elected. German law prohibits foreign campaign contributions, and Weidel says Musk has never given any money to the AfD. But the endorsement he posted on [X, his social media platform](#), was only the start of his influence campaign. A few days later, he published a full-throated defense of the AfD in a German newspaper, calling the party the “last spark of hope” for the country’s future. In early January, Musk conducted a lengthy interview with Weidel on X. “If you are unhappy with the situation, you must vote for change,” Musk said, “and that is why I’m really strongly recommending that people vote for AfD.”

Two weeks later, Musk appeared via video link at the AfD party convention. The focus of his speech was historical memory and the taboos that it created after WW II. “It’s good to be proud of German culture and German values, and not to lose that in some sort of multiculturalism that dilutes everything,” Musk told the party faithful, adding that there had been “too much of a focus on past guilt.”

Read More: [It’s Tempting to Want to Forget the Past—But Dangerous. My Own Family’s History With the Nazi Party Is No Exception](#)

Projected on a giant screen at the rally, Musk’s face showed genuine sympathy, even kinship, with the weight of inherited guilt that many Germans feel. He was born and grew up in apartheid [South Africa](#), whose racist policies found support among Musk’s family. His maternal grandfather, Joshua Haldeman, expressed sympathy for Hitler and fiercely

defended the apartheid regime, which he saw as the vanguard of white Christian civilization.

“We need to move beyond that,” Musk said to cheers from the crowd at the AfD rally. “Children should not be guilty of the sins of their parents, let alone their grandparents, their great-grandparents.”



The response to Musk’s speech was muted in Germany. Some politicians called it election interference. Yet Musk was entitled to his opinions as a private citizen. Trump had not yet given him a formal role in the [White House](#), and many in Berlin hoped the speech would not reflect the official position of the incoming Administration. That hope died when Vance appeared in Munich and pushed Musk’s criticism a few steps further.

What most alarmed the Europeans was the link Vance made between “free speech” in Europe and the American commitment to Europe’s defense.

“If you are running in fear of your own voters,” he said, “There is nothing America can do for you.” The message seemed clear to the German

politicians in the audience. As one of them put it: “We won’t defend you unless you accept fascists in your coalition.”

Kaja Kallas, the E.U.’s top diplomat, called an emergency meeting of foreign ministers in response. “It’s somewhat confusing,” she tells TIME of Vance’s speech. To Kallas, it resembled the election meddling that Russia has deployed across Europe, funneling support to fringe parties, including the AfD, that align with Moscow’s interests. “At least the Americans are very public about this,” Kallas says. “The Russians say, Well, it wasn’t us.”

Vance’s speech spurred the Europeans to unite in their indignation. “They really found the pressure point,” says Benedikt Franke, the CEO of the Munich Security Conference. “It freaks us out and makes us act.” The maneuver might have seemed clever, Franke added, “even Machiavellian,” were it not for the strangeness of choosing the AfD as the preferred American partner. The AfD calls for Germany to resume its reliance on Russian oil and gas, which Trump has long opposed. “This party is not aligned with American interests,” Franke says. “If they actually read the AfD platform, they would see that it’s all, like, ‘Go, China, go!’”

Weidel, who studied Chinese, held regular meetings with the former Chinese ambassador to Berlin. Early in her career, she lived in Beijing and worked for the state-owned Bank of China. Around then, in the early 2010s, Weidel says, she had her political awakening in response to the actions of [Angela Merkel](#), who was then the German Chancellor. A staunch defender of NATO and the E.U., Merkel said in 2009 that there is “no reasonable alternative” to Germany’s support for the NATO mission in Afghanistan. Merkel used similar language—“no alternative”—to defend other bedrock principles, including the decision to welcome war refugees from [Afghanistan](#) and [Syria](#).

The Alternative for Germany formed in 2013 as a rebuke to such policies, and Weidel joined that year. She clashed with the party’s extremists as she sought to broaden its appeal. Perhaps the most notorious AfD leader, [Björn Höcke](#), has been repeatedly charged with violating German hate-speech laws. Weidel led an effort in 2017 to have him expelled from the party. But they have since made amends, appearing at rallies this year and embracing on stage.



In these elections, the AfD looks set to double the number of seats it holds in Parliament. It has little chance of joining a coalition government, says Sergey Lagodinsky, a German Member of the [European Parliament](#). “But the bigger they get, the harder it is to block them,” he says. “At some point it does become a question of democracy.”

For Weidel, the collapse of the firewall feels like a matter of time. She has already made the debate stage and won the support of millions of voters. Now the White House appears to be on her side. As a symbol of her gratitude, she keeps a red baseball cap displayed in her office, inscribed with the words Make Germany Great Again. She tried it on with a smile during our interview. The Trump Administration, she says, “feel that something is severely going wrong in Germany.” With their help, Weidel intends to set it right.

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How We Talk About the Holocaust Now

Massimo Calabresi is TIME's Washington bureau chief.



[Vice President J.D. Vance](#) arrived at the Dachau concentration camp under low, gray clouds. He climbed out of his armored Suburban SUV and approached the stucco and cement gatehouse, gravel crunching underfoot. Waiting for Vance beneath a low arch, in front of a gate that had the words *arbeit macht frei* set into its ironwork, was Abba Naor, a survivor of the camp.

Over the course of the next 80 minutes, Vance, 40, toured the site with Naor, 97, at his side. In the first room of the memorial's main exhibition building, a large map displayed the network of Nazi concentration camps that existed at the height of World War II. Gesturing to the map, Naor

showed Vance his hometown of Kaunas, Lithuania, and described the route by which he arrived at Dachau in 1944, via the Stutthof concentration camp. On the way, he was separated from his mother and younger brother, who were sent to Auschwitz. “The moment I saw my mother and brother heading toward the train, I realized that was it,” Naor [told Yad Vashem](#), Israel’s official Holocaust memorial. “I could say ‘goodbye’ forever.” At Auschwitz, and at other death camps like Sobibor, Treblinka, and Belzec, 6 million Jews—2 of every 3 in Europe—were killed.

In the next room, where arriving prisoners were processed, Naor showed Vance the identity card he had been given when he came to Dachau. Naor was dispatched to perform slave labor in the network of Dachau’s 140 subcamps. Dachau wasn’t created to exterminate Jews: the Nazis opened it in 1933, soon after Hitler took power, and among the first held there were Communists, Social Democrats, and other political opponents. Of the more than 200,000 people who passed through Dachau, more than 40,000 died. “The subcamps, this was our problem,” Naor tells TIME the day after his visit with Vance. “The people couldn’t stay long alive.” But Naor did, surviving a death march until he was finally liberated by American troops after his captors fled. “This is something you never forget,” Naor says. “I told [Vance] it was Japanese Americans who liberated us. He was happy to hear this.”

Read More: [TIME’s 1945 Report on the Horrors of Dachau.](#)

Vance emerged from the camp’s museum with his wife Usha and made his way toward a memorial. A wreath of ever-green branches, accented with white roses, lay propped nearby, with a red, white, and blue ribbon reading “We remember” on one end and “United States of America” on the other. Vance and his wife picked up the wreath and placed it in front of the memorial. Vance prayed briefly and crossed himself. He adjusted the end of the wreath reading we remember so that it was visible.

Then he walked to a large wall nearby, which bore the words “Never Again” in several languages. Vance thanked Naor for sharing his story. “I really am really moved by this site,” Vance said to the assembled media and officials of the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site. “While it is, of course, a place of unspeakable atrocity and terror and evil, it’s very

important that it's here, and it's very important that those of us who are lucky enough to be alive can walk around, can know what happened here, and commit ourselves to prevent it from happening again."

Vance's visit to Dachau on Feb. 13 came at a fraught moment for the U.S., for Europe, and for the effort to sustain awareness of the Nazi genocide. As the last survivors die and power passes to leaders who were born decades after the German attempt to annihilate the Jews of Europe, the way we talk about the Holocaust is changing.

Until recently, there was near consensus that the systematic extermination of 6 million lives was above politics. Now, leaders on the right argue that nationalist parties with neo-Nazi ties are being unfairly excluded from the democratic process. Pro-Palestinian activists have adopted "Never Again" as part of their campaign to hold Israel responsible for alleged war crimes in Gaza. Left and right accuse one another of fueling a rise in antisemitism, incidents of which have doubled in the past year, according to recent studies.

Vance's visit to Germany on the eve of that country's Feb. 23 elections spotlighted the politicization. The day after he met Abba Naor at Dachau, the Vice President spoke at the Munich Security Conference, delivering an attack on Europe's postwar approach to fighting a return of Nazism, including limits on free speech and the exclusion of far-right parties from power in a tacit agreement between mainstream parties called the "firewall."

"Democracy rests on the sacred principle that the voice of the people matters," Vance told the heads of state, foreign ministers, and intelligence chiefs packed into an ornate hall at the Bayerische Hof hotel. "There is no room for firewalls. You either uphold the principle or you don't." Later, the Vice President met with Alice Weidel, the leader of Germany's nationalist AfD party, some of whose officials have downplayed the Holocaust and embraced Nazi rhetoric, and which has run second in pre-election polling.

Read More: [The Memory of the Holocaust Is Still Up For Debate.](#)

The U.S. has refrained from attacking the German approach, and the speech shocked European leaders. The next day, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz began his speech to the conference with a retort to Vance. “A mere 20 km separates this conference venue from the National Socialist concentration camp in Dachau,” Scholz said, “where the most unimaginable crimes against humanity were perpetrated by Germans and in Germany’s name.” Preventing it from happening again, as Vance pledged to do at Dachau, Scholz said, cannot be reconciled with support for the AfD.

More is at stake than German politics. For 80 years, the democracies that lived through the war shared a commitment to ostracizing extremists. That consensus has been beneficial on both sides of the Atlantic. Economic and political interests are fickle, but shared values like democracy and humanism endure, and they have provided decades of prosperity and peace. “Like the fish swimming in the water, we may no longer be really aware of how important that environment is for us,” says Democratic Senator Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island, who co-led with Republican Senator Lindsey Graham a delegation of American lawmakers to the conference. “But any efforts by the U.S. to degrade that comes with real national-security peril.”

While some European diplomats in Munich feared a rising international alliance of far-right parties led by Trump, others say that behind the scenes they received reassurances of continuing American commitment to shared values from Vance. “Every Administration brings new things to the table,” says Kaja Kallas, the E.U.’s top diplomat. “You’re not seeing a fundamental shift in the way America sees its vision for Europe or its relationship with Europe.”

Yet Vance is at the vanguard of a movement that views itself as turning the page on the establishment consensus on everything from the U.S. Constitution to international trade to foreign policy. That includes the postwar alliance forged in the fight against Nazism. “The foreign policy establishment is obsessed with World War II historical analogies,” Vance told TIME last spring. “Everything is some fairy tale they tell themselves from the 1930s and 1940s.”

The diplomats left Munich. Vance flew back to Washington, where his political ally Elon Musk, an AfD supporter who recently made a gesture during a speech that looked a lot like a Nazi salute, was at work dismantling U.S. aid programs around the world. Naor returned to Dachau. In a room just off the main exhibition space where he and Vance had been four days earlier, he spoke to some 80 students, a laptop open in front of him on a desk. The camp receives around 40 groups a day, and close to 1 million visitors a year. Naor wants to ensure they learn the truth about the Holocaust. “I come almost every day, meet children, and they listen to my story,” he says.

Naor is not particularly emotional about the inevitable passing of the generation of survivors. The Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site itself will endure, he says: “They will have a place in Dachau where everyone will be able to find my story.” As for the meaning of that story for a new generation of leaders, he says, the Holocaust transcends politics. Says Naor: “Dachau is the truth.” —*With reporting by Melissa August/Washington*

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What the FAA Layoffs Mean for Air Safety

Nik Popli is a reporter at TIME, based in the Washington, D.C. bureau. He covers economic policy and national politics, focusing on Congress, technology, and the economy.



The nation's top aviation regulator was thrust back into the spotlight this weekend as the Trump Administration fired hundreds of Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) employees, just weeks after the midair collision over Washington, D.C. that killed 67 people.

The firings, which [primarily targeted probationary employees](#), are part of a broader push spearheaded by the newly-established Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), an initiative associated with billionaire Elon Musk to streamline government operations. While no air traffic

controllers were let go, the firings have raised concerns about the agency's ability to maintain essential functions at a time when it's already facing staffing shortages and increasing pressure from a recent string of incidents. On Monday, at least 18 people were injured after a Delta Air Lines passenger jet from Minneapolis made a crash landing at Toronto Pearson International Airport, flipping upside down on the tarmac.

[video id=QwxXfz8H autostart="viewable" vertical]

Aviation safety experts and union representatives are warning that the cuts could further strain an agency that has long been under pressure to improve its safety record and address gaps in its workforce. The union representing some of the employees [called the firings a “hastily made decision”](#) that would “increase the workload and place new responsibilities on a workforce that is already stretched thin.” The union’s statement added that “it is especially unconscionable in the aftermath of three deadly aircraft accidents in the past month.”

Transportation Secretary [Sean Duffy responded](#) Monday night in a post to X that “the FAA alone has a staggering 45,000 employees. Less than 400 were let go, and they were all probationary, meaning they had been hired less than a year ago. Zero air traffic controllers and critical safety personnel were let go.”

Here's what to know about the FAA.

What is the FAA and what does it do?

The FAA is the nation's primary authority for maintaining aviation safety. It's an agency within the U.S. Department of Transportation tasked with regulating civil aviation and overseeing air traffic control, airport management, and the certification of aircraft.

The agency was established by Congress shortly after a military jet from Nellis Air Force Base collided with a passenger plane 21,000 feet over Las Vegas in 1958.

Beyond overseeing day-to-day air traffic, the FAA also plays a lesser-known role in national security. The agency helps defend U.S. airspace against potential threats through programs like the National Airspace System Defense Program, which manages radar systems designed to detect missile threats or unauthorized aircraft activity. It is also responsible for regulating the operation of unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), commonly known as drones, within U.S. airspace. In December, the agency temporarily banned drones in the New Jersey area in the wake of complaints about unexplained, brightly colored flying objects.

The FAA also regulates rocket launches, including those by Musk's aeronautics company SpaceX. Last year, the agency proposed civil penalties against SpaceX for allegedly [failing to follow license requirements](#). Musk threatened to sue the FAA for "[regulatory overreach](#)."

According to a [report last year from the Government Accountability Office](#), a congressional watchdog, the FAA has struggled with workforce shortages and outdated technology for years. The report found that more than a third of the FAA's systems were "unsustainable," either due to being outdated or a shortage of spare parts. The GAO noted that the agency has been slow to modernize and, in some cases, lacked clear plans to address certain critical systems.

The impact of recent firings

Department of Transportation officials were quick to downplay the significance of the latest cuts, stating that they primarily affected probationary workers and did not include air traffic controllers. Yet they come as the agency has faced criticism from President Donald Trump and others about its ability to function effectively.

Union representatives say the layoffs disproportionately impacted staff in technical positions, including those involved in radar maintenance and other key infrastructure roles.

"This decision did not consider the staffing needs of the FAA, which is already challenged by understaffing," David Spero, the national president of

the Professional Aviation Safety Specialists, AFL-CIO, [said in a statement](#). “Staffing decisions should be based on an individual agency’s mission-critical needs. To do otherwise is dangerous when it comes to public safety. And it is especially unconscionable in the aftermath of three deadly aircraft accidents in the past month.”

The FAA employees laid off over the weekend were among thousands of federal workers across the country hit with layoffs that began on Thursday with little prior notice, targeting probationary workers—those who have been employed in their current positions for less than one or two years and are easier to fire. The Trump Administration has ordered most agencies to let go of nearly all probationary employees who haven’t yet gained civil service protection.

Read More: [*‘The Worst I’ve Ever Seen’: Trump’s Mass Layoffs Leave Federal Workers Baffled and Angry*](#)

One of the individuals let go, Charles Spitzer-Stadtlander, worked for the FAA National Defense Program. In a [post on LinkedIn](#), he said his program was “tasked with protecting the National Air Space from threats such as missiles, enemy drones, aircraft used as weapons (think 9-11), and so forth.”

“FAA NDP is a small, yet critical part of protecting the American public and many of our border states that are at risk of attack from our foreign adversaries such as China and Russia,” he said.

Musk allies reviewing air traffic control system

Duffy, the Transportation Secretary, [said](#) that he intends to overhaul the air traffic control system with help from a team of engineers from Musk’s aeronautics company, SpaceX, whose rocket launches are regulated by the FAA and which currently faces proposed civil penalties by the agency. On Monday, the team visited the FAA’s command center in Virginia “to get a firsthand look at the current system, learn what air traffic controllers like and dislike about their current tools, and envision how we can make a new, better, modern and safer system,” according to Duffy. It was not

immediately clear what expertise the SpaceX engineers could bring to the FAA.

Trump's criticism of the FAA

President Donald Trump made clear his dissatisfaction with the FAA after the D.C.-area crash in late January, which Trump blamed on diversity efforts despite no evidence to suggest any such connection.

“Brilliant people have to be in those positions,” the President said, claiming that the agency changed its standards under former President Joe Biden and was “actively recruiting workers who suffer severe intellectual disabilities and psychiatric problems and other mental and physical conditions under diversity and inclusion hiring initiatives.” Trump’s comments have been widely criticized, as opponents say the President is overlooking the critical, technical work done by FAA employees across various departments, and that the air controller diversity program he criticized was launched [during his first term](#).

Trump has also [faced backlash](#) for eliminating all the members of the Aviation Security Advisory Committee, a panel mandated by Congress after the 1988 PanAm 103 bombing to advise the Department of Homeland Security on aviation safety. While the committee technically remains in existence, it has no members to carry out its work of reviewing safety concerns and offering recommendations to improve airport and airline security.

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‘Terrifying’: Public Health Experts React to Senate’s Confirmation of RFK Jr. to Lead HHS



The Senate confirmed Robert F. Kennedy Jr., one of America’s most notorious vaccine skeptics, to run the country’s leading health agency, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), on Thursday, sparking outrage among public health experts who worry that Kennedy will harm public health and further erode trust in science and medicine.

“I think it’s a sad day for America’s children. I think it’s a sad day for public health when someone who is a science denialist, conspiracy theorist, and virulent anti-vaccine activist is [leading] the biggest public health agency in the United States,” says Dr. Paul Offit, director of the Vaccine Education Center at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, who has served on vaccine

advisory committees for the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). “I think every Senator who voted for his confirmation should be ashamed of themselves for their unwillingness to stand up for the health of the American public.”

[video id=3Y7Dh8xV]

Kennedy, 71, was one of President Donald Trump’s most controversial Cabinet nominees. For years, Kennedy has spread medical disinformation, enraging experts in the field. He’s repeated the [debunked claim](#) that vaccines cause autism—even though research overwhelmingly proves that vaccines are both safe and effective—and has made controversial statements about [raw milk](#) and [fluoride in water](#). During his [confirmation hearings](#), he faced [heated questioning](#) by Senators over his [anti-vaccine views](#), flip-flopping stance on [abortion](#), and previous support for some [conspiracy theories](#), such as his assertions that Lyme Disease and COVID-19 were engineered bioweapons. He appeared unfamiliar with certain issues he would oversee as the head of HHS, at times seemingly confusing Medicaid and Medicare. All the same, Kennedy was confirmed by a vote of 52 to 48, with Sen. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky—a polio survivor—the only Republican who voted against his confirmation.

Read More: [*RFK Jr. Outlines His Health Secretary Priorities in Post-Confirmation Interview With Fox News*](#)

Public health experts first [sounded the alarm](#) when Trump announced Kennedy as his nominee to lead HHS back in November. As head of HHS, Kennedy will oversee health agencies like the CDC and the FDA.

At the forefront of experts’ concern is the influence Kennedy would have over vaccines. Kennedy tried to distance himself from his previous anti-vaccine statements during his confirmation hearings, saying that he’s not “anti-vaccine” but “pro-safety,” and he has [said](#) that he and the Trump Administration wouldn’t take vaccines off the market. But experts cast doubt on whether the Administration would hold true to that statement, and many worry that Kennedy could appoint people to agencies like the FDA

and CDC who could impede or revoke vaccine approvals, not only limiting access to but also sowing distrust in a powerful public health tool.

Dr. Rob Davidson is an emergency physician in Michigan and executive director of the Committee to Protect Health Care, which had circulated a [petition](#) garnering more than 22,000 signatures from physicians calling on the Senate to reject Kennedy. Davidson says he worries about how Kennedy will respond to emerging diseases, such as H5N1, more commonly known as [bird flu](#). In addition to his anti-vaccine rhetoric, Kennedy has [previously suggested](#) putting a pause on infectious disease research, sparking backlash from many public health experts.

“He’s just a dangerous individual when it comes to public health,” Davidson says. “It’s dangerous to have a guy who’s led [the vaccine skepticism] movement being the head of this agency, the mouthpiece of the U.S. government when it comes to public health. So that is truly terrifying.”

“I think a lot of lives are at risk potentially because of this person running this agency,” Davidson continues.

Read More: [RFK Jr. Denied He Is Anti-Vaccine During His Confirmation Hearing. Here's His Record](#)

Experts are also concerned about the actions Kennedy could take on abortion. Kennedy, who had previously expressed support for people’s right to choose, has since shared anti-abortion statements, saying during his confirmation hearings that he agrees with Trump “that every abortion is a tragedy” and abortion policy should be left up to individual states.

During the hearings, Kennedy was asked about the abortion medication mifepristone, which was approved by the FDA for abortion purposes more than twenty years ago but has recently been [unsuccessfully challenged in court](#) by a group of anti-abortion doctors and organizations. Kennedy gave vague answers when asked about the drug, saying that Trump asked him “to study the safety of mifepristone” and that the President “has not yet taken a stand on how to regulate it.” Davidson worries that, under Kennedy’s leadership, HHS and the FDA could make mifepristone less available or accessible.

Read More: [*The Powers Trump's Nominees Will Have Over Abortion*](#)

The one area in which Kennedy has garnered some favor among health experts is his stance on [food and nutrition](#). Kennedy has [shared a plan](#) to “Make America Healthy Again,” in which he vows to “ban the hundreds of food additives and chemicals that other countries have already prohibited” and “change regulations, research topics, and subsidies to reduce the dominance of ultra-processed food.”

Dr. Dariush Mozaffarian, a cardiologist and director of the [Food Is Medicine Institute](#) at Tufts University, says he thinks Kennedy and the Trump Administration “have a chance to really coalesce around the top crisis facing our country, which is food-related chronic conditions.” While he hopes that Kennedy will focus on addressing this issue and turn away from his more controversial statements on vaccines, Mozaffarian says he was disappointed by Kennedy’s responses to questions over his anti-vaccine rhetoric during his confirmation hearings. “I think he had a chance there to put that controversy to rest and show he’s going to really focus on where the consensus is, which is that our food system is broken,” Mozaffarian says.

Many health experts are skeptical that Kennedy will actually take meaningful steps on food and nutrition. “It is absolutely eclipsed by his other controversial views,” Davidson says of Kennedy’s stance on food. “The danger of him is so much greater than any potential benefit of those views.”

Experts worry that Kennedy could exacerbate public distrust in science and medicine, and many say that his confirmation and the support he’s received is already a concerning sign of that.

“I think today really is a marker in the road, marking growing mistrust in institutions, marking power of changing information landscape, but most prominently, the marker that the lines between truth and falsehoods are blurred and how we navigate this new world is going to require a different approach,” says [Katelyn Jetelina](#), an epidemiologist and founder of the newsletter [Your Local Epidemiologist](#). “What I’m most concerned about is

the rhetoric and the sowing of doubt and the confusion ... that we're all going to be facing."

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Trump Says Minting U.S. Pennies Is ‘Wasteful.’ Does Making Cents Really Make No Sense?

Chad de Guzman is a reporter for TIME based in Singapore. He covers the Asia-Pacific region and global overnight news.



President Donald Trump doesn't ever need a penny to offer his thoughts, and on Sunday during the Super Bowl, he shared his on the penny.

“For far too long the United States has minted pennies which literally cost us more than 2 cents,” Trump [posted](#) on his social media site Truth Social. “This is so wasteful! I have instructed my Secretary of the US Treasury to stop producing new pennies. Let’s rip the waste out of our great nations budget, even if it’s a penny at a time.”

It's not the first time politicians have mulled the reform of the one-cent coin. "Anytime we're spending more money on something that people don't actually use, that's an example of something we should probably change," President Barack Obama [said in 2013](#). A number of attempts to do that have been made in Congress—in 1989, [legislation](#) was introduced to round cash transactions to the nearest nickel; as recently as 2023, [bills](#) to change the composition of coins to cheaper materials have been introduced—but all have failed.

The debate over the penny has reemerged amid the Trump Administration's focus on cost-cutting, with the [Elon Musk](#)-led Department of Government Efficiency [posting about it on X](#) during the first week of Trump's second term.

But does making cents really make no sense? Here's what to know.

Every penny counts: facts about the one-cent coin

The penny was one of the first coins the U.S. Mint made shortly after its establishment in 1792. Once larger and made of pure copper, the penny has since been downsized to three-quarters of an inch and is now 97.5% zinc and plated with copper. (In 1943, pennies were temporarily made of steel with zinc plating, because copper was needed for military production during World War II.) Because of the value of the materials, today it remains illegal to [export or melt](#) one-cent and five-cent coins.

The U.S. Mint, which manufactures currency coinage by Congress' [authorization](#), produces pennies in Philadelphia and Denver, and the penny remains the highest share of coins minted. An estimated 240 billion are in circulation, according to a 2024 [New York Times Magazine](#) article. In 2024, some 3.2 billion pennies were minted—more than 57% of all 5.61 billion coins produced last year.

A penny saved is a penny earned: arguments for eliminating the one-cent coin

The main argument against the penny is the one made by Trump: it costs more to make than its value. A [2024 U.S. Mint report](#) says the unit cost for the one-cent coin is more than 3.69 cents and has exceeded its face value for 19 years. And according to a [2014 U.S. Mint report](#): “There are no alternative metal compositions that reduce the manufacturing unit cost of the penny below its face value.”

Producing pennies also takes a toll on the [environment](#) due to the carbon dioxide emissions, pollutants, and energy use associated with mining the ores to make the coins.

But even costs aside, Harvard economist [N. Gregory Mankiw](#) argued against the one-cent coin on the basis of its lack of everyday utility, writing in a 2006 [Wall Street Journal](#) editorial: “The purpose of the monetary system is to facilitate exchange, but I have to acknowledge that the penny no longer serves that purpose. When people start leaving a monetary unit at the cash register for the next customer, the unit is too small to be useful. I know that some people will be upset when their favorite aphorisms become anachronistic, but a nickel saved is also a nickel earned.”

Indeed, according to the [Federal Reserve](#), the purchasing power of a penny declined more than 30-fold between 1900 and 2022. In 2015, former U.S. Mint Director Philip N. Diehl [wrote](#), “Today, the value of a penny has shrunk to the point that, if you earn more than the minimum wage, you’re losing money stopping and picking up a penny on the sidewalk.”

A penny wise, a pound foolish: arguments against eliminating the one-cent coin

Not everyone is on board with pinching the penny. Mark Weller, executive director of the pro-penny group Americans for Common Cents (ACC), [responded to DOGE](#) on Jan. 23, asserting that the government “won’t save money if the penny is eliminated” and that such a move would instead “have a massive negative impact on the US Mint’s cost structure.” The group argues that eliminating the penny would require producing more nickels to “fill the gap in small-value transactions.” But nickels suffer from

a similar “[seigniorage](#)” problem: the 2024 U.S. Mint report said the five-cent coins have a unit cost of 13.78 cents each.

ACC also points to [polling](#) that shows Americans generally favor keeping the penny in circulation. ([Other polls](#), however, say otherwise). And even the [anti-penny comedian John Oliver](#) can’t deny the sentimental value of chucking a penny into a fountain to make a wish or spitefully paying someone in a stash of one-cent coins.

Other arguments against the elimination of the penny come from economists who say that eliminating the one-cent coin would have disproportionate impacts on the poor. Retired Pennsylvania State University Prof. Raymond Lombra, a former senior staff economist at the Federal Reserve Board, has argued that a resultant “[rounding tax](#)” on consumers who use cash would be regressive because the [poor tend to use cash more](#). An economics student in Canada, which stopped minting one-cent coins in 2012, [found in 2017](#) that rounding “imposes a tax of \$3.27 million Canadian dollars from consumers to grocery stores on a yearly basis.”

Some defenders of the penny also point to [charities](#), which have historically been able to collect huge sums of coins because of how easy many people find they are to give away, though according to the [New York Times](#), charitable “roundups” on credit card transactions can be even more lucrative.

The penny dropped: precedent for eliminating small coins

If the Trump Administration succeeds in tossing out the penny, the one-cent coin would not be the first low-denomination coin to be discontinued in the U.S.: Congress ordered a stop to minting the half cent coin in 1857.

Outside the U.S., many countries have already eliminated their one-cent and other low-denomination coins for various reasons. Australia [removed](#) both its one-cent and two-cent coins from circulation in 1992. South Africa [stopped the minting and distribution](#) of one-cent and two-cent coins in March 2002. Singapore’s Monetary Authority [stopped issuing one-cent](#)

[coins from April 2002](#), though existing one-cent coins remain legal tender. And in January, [Estonia](#) became the latest E.U. nation—joining Finland, the Netherlands, Ireland, Italy, Belgium, and Slovakia—to phase out the use of one- and two-cent Euro coins by rounding cash transactions to the nearest five cents.

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NIH Budget Cuts Are the ‘Apocalypse of American Science,’ Experts Say

Alice Park is a senior health correspondent at TIME. She covers the COVID-19 pandemic, new drug developments in cancer and Alzheimer's disease, mental health, HIV, CRISPR, and advances in gene therapy, among other issues in health and science. She also covers the Olympics, and co-chaired TIME's inaugural TIME 100 Health Summit in 2019. Her work has won awards from the New York Press Club, and recognition from the Deadline Club. In addition, she is the author of [*The Stem Cell Hope: How Stem Cell Medicine Can Change Our Lives*](#). Follow her on Instagram at [@aliceparktime](#).



The U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) is the largest funder of biomedical research in the world, and its grants create the foundation of basic science knowledge on which major health advances are built. On Feb. 7, the NIH [announced](#) that it would cut “indirect expenses” in the funding it provides to research grants by nearly half.

“We were all just dumbstruck,” says Dr. Richard Huganir, professor and chairman of the department of neuroscience at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, who relies on NIH grants for his research into therapies for autism and intellectual disabilities. “I’m calling it the apocalypse of American science. This will basically change science as we know it in the U.S.”

“We’re going to see health research kneecapped,” says Dr. Otis Brawley, professor of oncology and epidemiology at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine and the Bloomberg School of Public Health. Brawley has overseen grants at the National Cancer Institute (which is part of the NIH) as well as received them for his cancer research.

The funding cut took effect on Feb. 9 and targets indirect costs, which include facilities and administration costs.

In an immediate response, 22 states [sued](#) the NIH and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (which oversees NIH), calling the action “unlawful” and saying it would “devastate critical public health research at universities and research institutions in the United States.”

Hours later, the Massachusetts Attorney General [issued a temporary restraining order](#) preventing the NIH from immediately cutting billions in the grants it issues to scientists and their institutions.

Here’s what to know about the ongoing funding turmoil at the NIH.

What’s an ‘indirect cost’?

NIH awards around \$30 to \$35 billion in grants each year to a wide range of disease-related research projects. It helped fund the mRNA technology that

eventually led to the recent COVID-19 vaccines, for example.

In a Feb. 7 [post on X](#), the agency said about \$9 billion of its annual research grant budget goes toward indirect costs, which are charged by academic institutions receiving the grants. Institutes that receive NIH grants negotiate indirect cost rates, taking into account how much they need to pay for things like heat, air conditioning, and electricity inside research facilities. Administrative costs include those required to comply with legal and regulatory requirements to conduct the research. Once a rate agreement is reached, it applies to all federal grants from NIH to that institution.

Read More: [Why Are So Many Young People Getting Cancer? It's Complicated](#)

Indirect costs can range from nearly 30% to 70% of a research grant, depending on the institution. Certain non-academic institutes that have fewer resources than academic universities tend to have higher indirect rates, from 90% to 100%, says Brawley. In its X post, the NIH says Harvard has charged 69%, Yale 67.5%, and Johns Hopkins 63.7% in indirect costs. (Johns Hopkins' rate recently changed to 55%, Brawley and Huganir say.) Under its new policy, the NIH would cap indirect costs for all institutions at 15%.

Huganir says indirect costs are essential for modern-day research. In addition to keeping the lights on in labs, they cover maintaining and staffing critical scientific equipment and resources such as animal facilities, DNA sequencing, and imaging.

“Right now we are in the middle of developing therapies that could really cure certain forms of intellectual disability for millions of kids across the world,” he says. “We are terrified that the research is going to stop.”

Why is the NIH cutting indirect cost payments?

The NIH did not immediately respond to a request about what prompted the change, directing journalists to the agency’s [Grants Policy Statement](#). However, Elon Musk—tasked by the Trump Administration to address

efficiency in government spending—[called out](#) the high percentage of indirect costs that the NIH had been supporting. “Can you believe that universities with tens of billions in endowments were siphoning off 60% of research award money for “overhead?” he wrote on X on Feb. 7.

The 15% cap puts NIH grants in line with those from private philanthropic agencies that support research. The NIH says that these entities—such as the Gates Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative—allow a maximum of 10% to 15% of a research grant for indirect costs. But philanthropic foundations and academic institutes aren’t comparable to the federal government when it comes to funding science, Brawley and Huganir say, since foundations tend to support more focused and specific endeavors, such as individual faculty members or targeted projects.

Who will pick up the slack?

So far, it’s unclear. In his post on X, Musk hinted that endowments should be part of the solution. But health experts say endowments aren’t a consistent or practical source of funding for overhead costs, since many outline narrow purposes or projects for the funds that are legally allocated and can’t be redirected to cover things like research expenses.

Read More: [*8 Ways to Shorten Your Wait for a Doctor’s Appointment*](#)

“Nobody else can really afford to pay for it,” says Brawley. “What’s worked nicely over the last 50 to 60 years is that the NIH does a lot of basic science research, asking questions that people can’t make money from. And the corporations, including biotech, can swoop in, and take that basic science information and do engineering and turn it into things you can sell and treat diseases with.”

How will the new NIH policy affect research?

Without the funding to support indirect costs, much of the scientific work that has been a mainstay of the U.S. biomedical field may not happen, or

would take much longer. “The bottom line is that we are going to have a lot less resources, which obviously means we are going to have to lay people off, and research will be slowed down,” says Huganir.

Brawley is also concerned about the quashing effect such actions will have on young scientists to remain in the field and create new labs. “Nobody wins the Nobel Prize for what they did when they were 50,” he says. “I’m worried about the loss of creativity from young people; that’s where all the really good ideas come from.”

Read More: [8 Symptoms Doctors Often Dismiss As Anxiety](#)

He also notes that while a lot of attention has been focused on large academic universities with big endowments and deeper financial resources, the policy will likely have an even stronger impact on smaller community hospitals that supply many of the patients who participate in clinical trials. “People who are getting treated in clinical trials now for cancer will find many of those trials will close down,” he says.

That will affect the pipeline of new treatments for diseases like cancer. Brawley says that drugs approved in the last six months have been tested in trials over the last decade, so curtailing funding in research today will slow down the pace of progress and eventually result in fewer drugs. “I anticipate that the number of drugs approved is going to go down dramatically in the next five to 10 years,” he says.

What will happen to current NIH research grants?

“We have been working all weekend trying to calm faculty and students and everybody who is concerned about future careers in science,” says Huganir. “We have lots of committees addressing different aspects of this, and we’re trying to come up with ideas about how we can compensate for any losses we are experiencing.”

“That may mean laying people off and maybe putting hiring freezes on new faculty,” he says. “We will have to make up for the difference through cost

cutting in some way.'

With the temporary restraining order, NIH grantees have some time to come up with a plan for how they will try to maintain the pace of scientific research with much less NIH support.

"Perhaps we need to reimagine or re-envision our entire system for how we fund science and how people make money off of science," says Brawley. "But the way to do that is not to threaten on Friday night to cut everybody's indirect [costs] down to 15%."

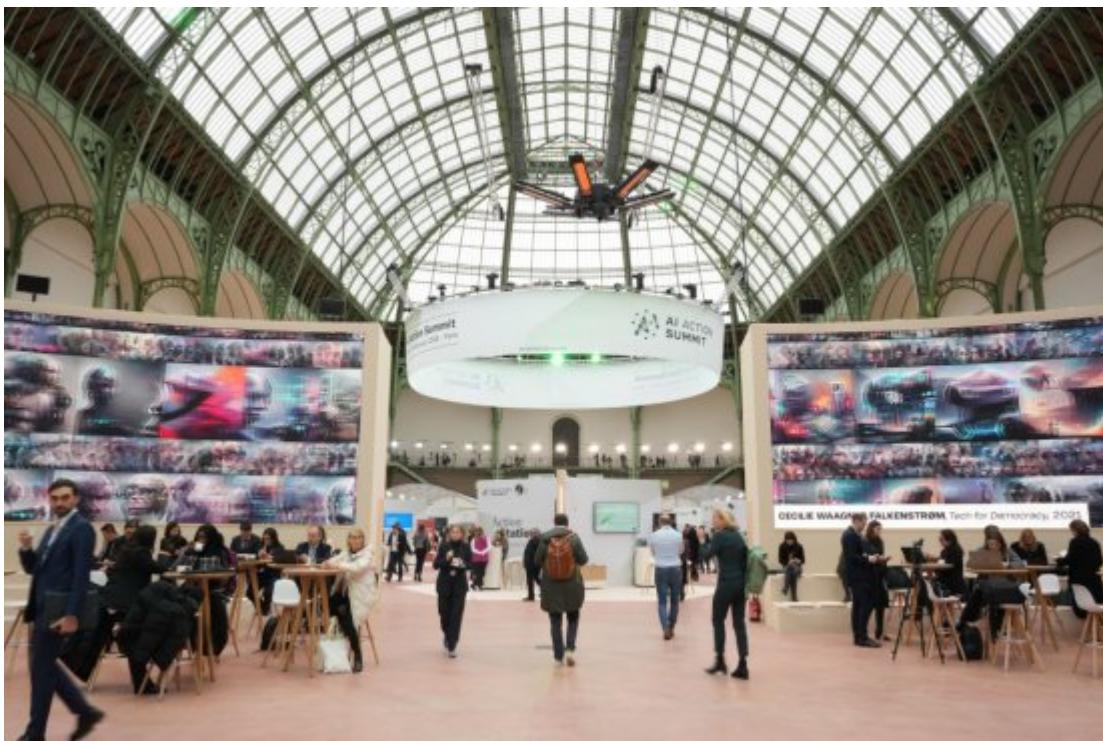
Ultimately, scientists say the American public will pay a price for the drastic funding cuts. "The American people should know that this is going to impact them—the health of their families and their children," says Huganir. "And the economies of communities around these institutions that get a lot of NIH funding are going to be impacted as well."

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Safety Takes A Backseat At Paris AI Summit, As U.S. Pushes for Less Regulation

Billy Perrigo is a correspondent at TIME based in the London bureau. He covers the tech industry, focusing on the companies reshaping our world in strange and unexpected ways. His investigation ‘Inside Facebook’s African Sweatshop’ was shortlisted for the 2022 Orwell Prize.



Safety concerns are out, optimism is in: that was the takeaway from a major artificial intelligence summit in Paris this week, as leaders from the U.S., France, and beyond threw their weight behind the AI industry.

Although there were divisions between major nations—the U.S. and the U.K. did not sign a final statement endorsed by 60 nations calling for an

“inclusive” and “open” AI sector—the focus of the two-day meeting was markedly different from the last such gathering. Last year, in Seoul, the emphasis was on defining red-lines for the AI industry. The concern: that the technology, although holding great promise, also had the potential for great harm.

But that was then. The final statement made no mention of significant AI risks nor attempts to mitigate them, while in a speech on Tuesday, U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance said: “I’m not here this morning to talk about AI safety, which was the title of the conference a couple of years ago. I’m here to talk about AI opportunity.”

The French leader and summit host, Emmanuel Macron, also trumpeted a decidedly pro-business message—underlining just how eager nations around the world are to gain an edge in the development of new AI systems.

Once upon a time in Bletchley

The emphasis on boosting the AI sector and putting aside safety concerns was a far cry from the first ever global summit on AI held at Bletchley Park in the U.K. in 2023. Called the “AI Safety Summit”—the French meeting in contrast was called the “AI Action Summit”—its express goal was to thrash out a way to mitigate the risks posed by developments in the technology.

The second global gathering, in Seoul in 2024, built on this foundation, with leaders securing voluntary safety commitments from leading AI players such as OpenAI, Google, Meta, and their counterparts in China, South Korea, and the United Arab Emirates. The 2025 summit in Paris, governments and AI companies agreed at the time, would be the place to define red-lines for AI: risk thresholds that would require mitigations at the international level.

Paris, however, went the other way. “I think this was a real belly-flop,” says Max Tegmark, an MIT professor and the president of the Future of Life Institute, a non-profit focused on mitigating AI risks. “It almost felt like they were trying to undo Bletchley.”

Anthropic, an AI company focused on safety, called the event a “missed opportunity.”

The U.K., which hosted the first AI summit, said it had declined to sign the Paris declaration because of a lack of substance. “We felt the declaration didn’t provide enough practical clarity on global governance, nor sufficiently address harder questions around national security and the challenge AI poses to it,” said a spokesperson for Prime Minister Keir Starmer.

Racing for an edge

The shift comes against the backdrop of intensifying developments in AI. In the month or so before the 2025 Summit, OpenAI released an “agent” model that can perform research tasks at roughly the level of a competent graduate student.

Safety researchers, meanwhile, showed for the first time that the latest generation of AI models can try to deceive their creators, and copy themselves, in an attempt to avoid modification. Many independent AI scientists now agree with the projections of the tech companies themselves: that super-human level AI may be developed within the next five years—with potentially catastrophic effects if unsolved questions in safety research aren’t addressed.

Yet such worries were pushed to the back burner as the U.S., in particular, made a forceful argument against moves to regulate the sector, with Vance saying that the Trump Administration “cannot and will not” accept foreign governments “tightening the screws on U.S. tech companies.”

He also strongly criticized European regulations. The E.U. has the world’s most comprehensive AI law, called the AI Act, plus other laws such as the Digital Services Act, which Vance called out by name as being overly restrictive in its restrictions related to misinformation on social media.

The new Vice President, who has a broad base of support among venture capitalists, also made clear that his political support for big tech companies

did not extend to regulations that would raise barriers for new startups, thus hindering the development of innovative AI technologies.

“To restrict [AI’s] development now would not only unfairly benefit incumbents in the space, it would mean paralysing one of the most promising technologies we have seen in generations,” Vance said. “When a massive incumbent comes to us asking for safety regulations, we ought to ask whether that safety regulation is for the benefit of our people, or whether it’s for the benefit of the incumbent.”

And in a clear sign that concerns about AI risks are out of favor in President Trump’s Washington, he associated AI safety with a popular Republican talking point: the restriction of “free speech” by social media platforms trying to tackle harms like misinformation.

With reporting by Tharin Pillay/Paris and Harry Booth/Paris

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8 Ways to Shorten Your Wait for a Doctor's Appointment

Angela Haupt is a health and wellness editor at TIME. She covers happiness and actionable ways to live well.



If you've tried to schedule a doctor's appointment recently, you might have had to flip your calendar to a different season. There simply [aren't enough physicians](#) in the U.S.: [By 2037](#), the deficit is expected to reach 187,130 doctors, including more than 8,000 cardiologists and 4,000 nephrologists. That means patients routinely wait a long time—an average of 38 days, [according to some data](#)—before they're able to snag an appointment with a doctor they really need to see.

“People are constantly trying to get in to see doctors,” says Dr. Gerda Maissel, a physician in New York’s Hudson Valley who works as a [patient advocate](#) and helps people navigate the health care system. She once

worked with a man who wanted to see a specialist at a major academic center about his worsening neurological disease. After he accepted an appointment 10 months down the road, “he and his wife were just beside themselves,” she recalls. “He had a tremendous need, and the academic center was just like, ‘Yeah, sorry, everybody wants [that specialist].’” Thousands of different versions of that story unfold every single day for patients across the country, she says.

Long waits for necessary care can add emotional distress during an already stressful time—plus, of course, open the door to symptoms that aren’t caught or treated in time. Fortunately, patients can sometimes take steps to get in sooner. We asked experts to share their favorite hacks to see a specialist as soon as possible.

Find out if the office has multiple locations

Many doctors see patients in a variety of locations—some of which are busier than others. Always ask for the wait time at alternative locations, advises Sara Mathew, associate director of research and operations administration at Weill Cornell Medicine, where she leads the surgery department. Mathew thinks about health-care wait times constantly, both as an administrator and as a patient, and has found traveling slightly farther away can be helpful. When she recently tried to schedule an OB-GYN appointment in Manhattan, for example, she was told the next available slot was a year out. So she asked if there was anything available sooner—and the doctor’s office told her that if she was willing to travel to the Upper West Side instead of the East Side, she could be seen in two months. Flexibility is your friend when you’re in a hurry to see a doctor.

Make sure you’re on the cancellation list

Not every medical office automatically adds patients to the cancellation list. If you want to be notified if an earlier appointment opens up, let the receptionist know—and make it a point to flag that you could drop everything and be there with little notice, if that’s in fact the case, says Christina Robertson, a regional director for Reproductive Medicine

Associations, where she oversees the patient scheduling team. “Ask their percentage of cancelled appointments,” she suggests, as well as whether those cancellations usually happen the same day or a few days in advance. That information can help set your expectations.

Read More: [8 Symptoms Doctors Often Dismiss As Anxiety](#)

If the office where you’re trying to get an appointment doesn’t have a cancellation list, call and check in frequently. “I knew somebody who called every day,” Maissel says. You run the risk of annoying the scheduler, she acknowledges, but you’ll also stay front of mind. “It’s communicating what you would like, and if you’re not quite getting it, then nicely popping up again and asking for it.”

Ask your referring doctor to call on your behalf

Depending on the severity of your situation, your primary care physician or other referring doctor could make a call on your behalf. Sometimes, that extra step will encourage the specialist’s staff to squeeze you into the schedule, which might mean before or after typical clinic hours, Mathew says. “I wouldn’t abuse that for every kind of diagnosis,” she says. “But if you went for a routine GI checkup and they noticed something on your gallbladder or colon, and there’s a possibility it could be cancer, find every way to get in faster. You definitely want to know if you have something like that sooner, so you can be treated faster.”

Make a personal plea

Nicoletta Sozansky’s daughter was born needing life-saving surgery, which she received in Florida. When the family returned to their home in New Jersey, they wanted their daughter to see a pediatrician who specialized in complex care. None of the doctors they shortlisted were accepting new patients—or, they had impossibly long wait lists.

So Sozansky, a patient advocate and founder of the concierge health care navigation company [Healthcare Redefined](#), called each doctor’s office and

requested to speak to a practice manager. These staffers tend to be empathetic, she's found, and are more inclined to offer empty slots to people they've connected with on a personal level.

Read More: [Long Dismissed, Chronic Lyme Disease Is Finally Getting Its Moment](#)

After introducing herself, Sozansky asked if she could write an email to the specialist, explaining her daughter's medical history and making the case for an appointment that wouldn't require waiting many months. It worked: "This letter opened the door to every pediatrician we reached out to," she says. "From what I've experienced, doctors who are treating complex cases like your stories. They like a challenge."

Be clear about your needs

When you're trying to schedule an appointment, clearly state whether you're seeking a new diagnosis or already have one and are looking for treatment or a second opinion. Diagnostic appointments tend to be more time-consuming, Sozansky says, so it might be easier to grab an appointment if you simply need to start a treatment plan. It took her years to be diagnosed with mast cell activation syndrome, for example, but once she knew what she was dealing with, appointments became much shorter and more readily available. "When I was switching from one doctor to another, the helpful thing was that I already had the diagnosis, and I could say, 'Hey, I would love to get on the schedule,'" she says. "It's much easier to convince the front desk."

Consider providers who aren't doctors

Keep an open mind about whether you're willing to see another type of provider—like a nurse practitioner or physician's assistant—who typically has greater availability. Every office works a little differently, Maissel says: In some, these providers are "very much like an extension of the physician," she says. They'll collaborate closely with the doctor to figure out how to best treat you. In other offices, they operate more independently.

Read More: [What to Do If Your Doctor Doesn't Take Your Symptoms Seriously](#)

“In general, if I have to choose between waiting six months or seeing the NP next week, I’m going to see the NP next week,” she says. “And then I’m in the practice, and if I make friends with that NP, I can say, ‘I’m really worried about this thing that you’ve told me you’re not sure about. How do I get in to see Dr. Jones?’” The nurse works with the doctor every day, she points out, and has insights into their schedule—which means they could help facilitate more rapid care. Plus, providers like physician’s assistants can get crucial testing started, Maissel adds, and often have more time than physicians to spend addressing your needs.

Ask the receptionist for their ideas

If the next available appointment requires an unbearably long wait, politely tell the scheduler instead of hanging up the phone and grumbling, Maissel advises. “It’s fine to say, ‘Oh, gosh, that’s too far out,’” she says—but be mindful of your tone: “It’s not exactly what you say; it’s how you say it.” Barking at the scheduling team won’t do you any favors. But if you make it clear that you know the lack of appointments isn’t their fault, you might find they’re willing to brainstorm with you. Ask them if they have any suggestions, she suggests, and perhaps they’ll recommend calling a different office or will identify another doctor with more availability. “Most people want to be helpful,” Maissel says. “Most people in health care are there because it’s a mission-driven thing to do.”

Be nice

Not being able to see a doctor as quickly as you want to—or need to—can feel maddening. But it’s essential to not let your emotions get the best of you when you’re trying to schedule an appointment. “Be nice to the scheduler,” Maissel urges. “Despite what they say, they may have a little bit of discretion—so you want them to know, like, and think of you.” Asking how their day is going, and remaining positive while you talk, can go a long way.

And remember: Physicians are typically doing their best to see as many patients as possible, as quickly as possible. Some are simply so specialized that they're in impossibly high demand. "It is truly hard to accommodate," Mathew says. "I rarely see any of our surgeons sitting. They don't end up taking lunch, and they see as many patients as they can. Just be mindful, and explore the possibilities."

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The Rise of America's Broligarchy and What to Do About It

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As Elon Musk, the world's richest person and President Donald Trump's [top](#) campaign donor, [rampages through the federal government](#) shutting down [agencies](#) and [firing](#) workers seemingly without any regard for his own conflicts of interest, the danger of concentrated private interests capturing our political system has never been more apparent.

While the corrupting influence of big money over our government is not new, the specifics of this danger are different today than perhaps at any other time in our nation's history. Tech billionaires, who already had enormous power, helped underwrite a winning presidential campaign in ways that would have been illegal just a few elections ago. And there are now fewer restraints than ever before on their ability, or the president they helped elect, to break through the checks and balances of our political system. This system, President Joseph Biden recently [warned](#), can best be described as an "oligarchy." Or, as others have dubbed, a "[broligarchy](#)."

None of this means the situation is hopeless. Musk's depredations are already encountering [legal](#) and [political](#) resistance, and it's likely that the political pendulum will eventually swing back. When it does, those who care about the security of American democracy will need to be ready with fresh, bold solutions that meet the political moment, to ensure that our political system can actually respond to the needs of regular Americans.

Still, the question remains: How did we get to the point of having a tech billionaire campaign donor openly running huge parts of the federal government? And where do we go from here?

The rise of the broligarchy

Three key changes have contributed to this singular moment. First, is the collapse of legal safeguards designed to curb the outsized influence of money in elections. As a result of Supreme Court decisions, most notably the notorious [Citizens United](#) decision from roughly 15 years ago, the wealthiest donors can play a more direct role in funding and running political campaigns than we have seen since the Gilded Age. In 2024, [just 10 individual donors](#) were able to supply nearly half of the money raised to support Trump's candidacy. The total amount of money in the presidential race coming from people who gave at least \$5 million [more than doubled relative to 2020](#).

While the super PACs these individuals funded and ran were supposed to be separate from the president's actual campaign, that was a legal fiction. Musk spent [at least \\$288 million](#) to help elect Trump and became the

president's leading surrogate. His PAC took on core functions of the campaign, such as [door-to-door canvassing](#) and get-out-the-vote efforts, and he also used his ownership of X (formerly Twitter) to [boost pro-Trump content](#). Before the *Citizens United* ruling, none of this would have been legal.

Second, the presidency itself has been transformed. Recent decades have seen [presidents from both parties](#) erode laws and norms meant to restrain their power, increasingly without the sort of pushback from members of their own party that restrained their predecessors (including FDR). In his first weeks in office, Trump has accelerated this process, issuing [unconstitutional](#) executive orders and directives purporting to repeal birthright citizenship and directing OMB to freeze funding for thousands of federal programs [in violation](#) of an act of Congress. Trump also fired at least seventeen agency inspectors general (internal federal government watchdogs who investigate waste, fraud, and abuse) without providing the necessary notice to Congress. Plus, Trump has [reportedly](#) allowed Musk and his private sector employees to access sensitive government computer systems, including the Treasury Department's payment processing system, through which trillions of dollars in taxpayer funds flow each year.

[Courts](#) have [temporarily blocked](#) some of these actions. But ultimate review will be in the hands of the Supreme Court, which has itself taken a [chainsaw](#) to legal constraints on the president's power over the executive branch, gutting the independence of key federal agencies and holding that former presidents are immune from prosecution even for certain blatantly illegal abuses of power.

The combination of unregulated money in politics and expanded presidential power with fewer checks from Congress would be a recipe for more corruption under any president, but there are special dangers when they combine with Trump's explicitly transactional approach to wielding power. The president campaigned openly on the promise to reward friends and [punish](#) enemies. He has once again (as in his first term) refused to meaningfully separate from his private business empire. There are plenty of indications that corporate leaders have gotten the message. Media companies that offended him are [rushing to settle](#) even seemingly meritless

private lawsuits. And before Trump was even inaugurated, a Chinese billionaire who is fighting a fraud lawsuit from the Securities Exchange Commission [poured](#) \$30 million into a new crypto venture started by the president and his family.

Campaign finance rules and checks on presidential power are collapsing just as leading technology corporations have gained massive power over our political system. This third development is in part a story of even greater concentration of wealth. [The seven largest tech companies](#) in the United States represent approximately one-third of the value of the S&P 500 and [have a market cap greater than any non-US stock market in the world](#). Many commentators have noted that President Trump seated the leaders of three of these companies—Musk, Jeff Bezos and Mark Zuckerberg—ahead of cabinet members and other world leaders at his inauguration. Collectively, those three men have a [net worth of nearly \\$1 trillion](#), a value that is approximately 200 times [all the money spent in support of the presidential candidates in 2024](#).

But their power is not just in their massive wealth. As the journalist Ezra Klein has [noted](#), the billionaires given front row inaugural seats were more than just the wealthiest men alive —they were among the biggest players in the so-called “attention economy.”

This is the “tech-industrial complex” that President Biden [warned of in his farewell address](#) which has increasingly replaced traditional media as the source of political information for Americans (often tailored based on their personal data that these very companies collect) and which is largely unaccountable to the general public for how it can manipulate our understanding of reality. In particular, the combination of legal protections (such as [Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act](#)), [opaque algorithms](#), and lack of [regulatory oversight](#) (including over the mining of personal data of users) means that the public often has little sense of how tech companies collect and use information about users or what information is fed to them.

Any of these changes by themselves would pose a challenge to the American political system. Taken together, they represent a looming crisis.

But as dire as all of this is, the situation is not hopeless. The United States is still a democracy, however imperfect, with a decentralized electoral system that is not easy to fully subvert. Eventually, as we've seen in previous eras of political corruption from the Gilded Age to Watergate, those in power are likely to overreach and prompt a backlash that will open the door to reform.

Indeed, just a few weeks into Trump's first term, Americans already [express unhappiness](#) with the role Musk and other billionaires are playing. This is on top of [poll](#) after [poll](#) showing that the overwhelming majority of voters are deeply unhappy with the role of money in our political system.

The challenge to resisting a new American oligarchy is not to convince the public that there is a problem, but to offer compelling solutions. In that regard, reformers have a lot of work to do. The typical solutions we and others resort to when discussing the outsized political role of billionaires and corporations include ethics reforms, closing campaign finance loopholes, and public financing for elections. All of these actions remain necessary but nowhere near sufficient.

Indeed, the need to overturn *Citizens United* and other harmful Supreme Court decisions on campaign finance has never been clearer. So long as these decisions stand, unlimited money from a handful of donors can continue to pour into our campaigns, further reinforcing the ability of those with the most money to extract profits from our political system.

We must also re-establish the bedrock principle that nobody—including the president—is above the law. As long as that is in doubt, too many avenues for corruption will remain.

Finally, the next wave of reform must also address the concentrated power of a few tech oligarchs as a core anti-democratic threat. In recent years, tech policy advocates in the United States have suggested many ways to check this power, from stronger [antitrust rules](#), to [Section 230 revisions](#), to [mandating algorithmic transparency from](#) social media platforms and AI developers. There are many reasons to explore such policies, but few are more important than ensuring this private power does not come to exceed the strength of our democracy.

Cycles of corruption and excess followed by waves of reform are an enduring feature of American history, from the [Progressive Era](#) reforms that followed the [Gilded Age](#) to the passage of major ethics and campaign finance legislation after [Watergate](#). But whenever the pendulum does swing back, will we be ready?

If there is any silver lining to the excesses we are now seeing, it's that the stakes are now much harder to ignore. After Trump's first term, Congress tried to pass democracy reform legislation that included some popular campaign finance reforms. Despite coming close, [it didn't pass](#).

It is now up to elected leaders and civil society to push back against the abuses of power we are seeing and lay the groundwork to fix our political system and make it work for everyone.

Above all, Congress must do more to fully reassert its authority as the “first branch” of our government. That means not only restraining the worst impulses of the Trump Administration, but ultimately passing bold campaign finance, ethics, and rule of law reforms that restore meaningful guardrails against self-dealing by those in power, undo as much as possible the damage done by *Citizens United* and other Supreme Court decisions (and ultimately lay the groundwork for reversing them), and finally place meaningful checks on both presidential power and the emerging tech oligarchy.

There is still much we do not know about how the next four years will unfold. But one thing is clear: failing to address Americans' concerns and restore their sense of ownership over their own government could be a mistake from which our democracy might not recover.

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Why South Korea's Political Drama Will Produce Waves Overseas

Ian Bremmer is a foreign affairs columnist and editor-at-large at TIME. He is the president of Eurasia Group, a political-risk consultancy, and GZERO Media, a company dedicated to providing intelligent and engaging coverage of international affairs. He teaches applied geopolitics at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs, and his most recent book is [The Power of Crisis](#).



South Korea's political crisis continues. After President Yoon Suk-yeol was [impeached](#) and [arrested](#) following his aborted [imposition of martial law](#) last December, the country's Constitutional Court will now [decide his future](#).

Legal experts say Yoon will soon be removed from office and sent to prison.

To complicate things further, the same court will also make a ruling that [could disqualify](#) opposition leader [Lee Jae-myung](#) from an election he's currently favored to win—and which would have to take place within 60 days of Yoon's formal removal from office. Lee is appealing his conviction for election-law violations in 2022, and if two appellate courts affirm it, he will be barred from public office for 10 years. A final ruling is [expected next month](#). Yes, it's a mess.

And the soap-opera aspects of the crisis obscure an important reality: South Korea's foreign policy is about to change dramatically, with major implications for the U.S., China, North Korea, and Japan. Lee, the runner-up in the last election in 2022, is a talented politician who has consolidated support within the center-left Democratic Party of Korea (DP). The ruling conservative People Power Party (PPP) is in disarray and doesn't appear able to field a heavyweight candidate quickly enough to win.

Yoon's government [greatly improved](#) the country's long-troubled relationship with Japan, its former colonial master, and has worked closely with Washington on East Asia security strategy. For now, Lee, running as a centrist, is insisting that the U.S.–South Korea alliance must remain the [“rock foundation”](#) of South Korea's diplomacy, national security, and economic development. But Lee's persistent criticism of Yoon's pro-U.S. emphasis suggests friction with the Trump Administration over trade, security cooperation, and engagement with North Korea. Lee has already proposed the creation of a bipartisan committee that would focus on preparation for the “highly likely trade war” with the U.S., signaling a much more confrontational approach to Washington.

Lee has also [called for](#) new diplomatic talks with North Korea to ensure that South Korea isn't pushed to the side if President Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un stage new talks. At the first Trump-Kim meetings in 2018 and 2019, former center-left South Korean President Moon Jae-in [was excluded](#).

In a recent foreign policy speech, Lee said little about relations with Japan and China, but here too his intense criticism of Yoon's engagement with Tokyo signals a different approach. Lee accused Yoon of ignoring the crimes Japan committed against South Korea in the 1930s and '40s and of bowing and scraping before Japan's current government. We should also expect Lee will support deeper economic and diplomatic engagement with China. National Assembly Speaker Woo Won-shik, an ally and confidant of Lee's, [visited China in February](#) and met with China's President Xi Jinping. Woo used the trip to reassure Xi that a DP government in South Korea would privilege better relations with his country, and Xi's decision to meet with Woo personally signaled just how happy China is to hear this. In the unlikely event that a court blocks Lee's candidacy, Woo would be a formidable replacement.

Meanwhile, Yoon faces a [separate criminal trial](#) on charges of insurrection. If convicted, he could face the death penalty, but even a prison sentence will be enough to further enrage pro-Yoon protesters, who [rioted in January](#) when he was first arrested. Watching from the sidelines, policy-makers in Washington, Beijing, Tokyo, and Pyongyang are focused on both the dangers and the opportunities that South Korea's political turmoil will create.

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Why Voice Notes Are a Small Act of Love

Stauffer is the author of [All the Gold Stars](#). She's a freelance writer and Kentuckian



Somewhere in the blur of 2020, as I slipped outside with a mask and running shoes in the early morning to walk around the block, the lilting drawl of a friend's "hiiiiii" nearly stopped me in my tracks. It was the first voice note I remember clicking play on: a friend from our shared home state, Kentucky, talking me through a life update as we lived and worried and wondered about reaching out to one another from opposite sides of the country—me in DC and her on the West Coast. It felt like the surprise of an unexpected letter because we normally didn't communicate that way, mixed

with the convenience of a text—a compromise for people who wanted to catch up but whose schedules rarely matched.

At the time, I only sent voice notes sporadically. Stage fright would kick in, as if I was concerned my rambling would be rated like a podcast episode. I worried—more than I did with in-person or phone conversation—that I’d say the wrong thing, or that others would experience the same full-body cringe upon hearing a recording of my voice that I do. I think better in writing, I’d tell myself, clinging to my texts.

But recently, I’ve found myself recalling how my friend’s chatter broke through loneliness—hers and definitely my own. Particularly during a season that’s supposed to be all about love, I think about all the ways that can look—specifically, how we reach out to loved ones and connect. As I’ve sent more random voice messages to loved ones, it’s become obvious how much I was craving this point of connection, finding solace in their voices even if I couldn’t see their faces.

If anything, I’m a late adopter of voice messaging. A [2023 poll by YouGov](#) found 30% of Americans communicate with voice messages on a weekly, daily, or multiple-times-a-day basis. Fans cite it [being a needed break](#) from typing on a screen, [says reporting from The Washington Post](#) by Tatum Hunter, or how [flexibility](#) makes it more accessible, absent the anxiety some feel about phone calls and with more clarity than texts, [according to NPR](#). In 2024, a man’s TikTok on his [weekly routine](#) with friends—sending short videos to each other every Wednesday to keep each other posted on everything from struggles to milestones—went viral. Meanwhile, even dating apps, like Hinge, or work-focused platforms, like Slack, have voice options, [according to Natalie Daher in Axios in 2023](#). Reporting by Shirin Ghaffary [on Vox](#) outlines that by hearing someone’s voice, we get “paralinguistic cues” that can’t come via text. There’s a level of closeness that comes with this kind of listening.

Read More: [Learning to Want Again](#)

If we think of a voice message as existing between a phone call and a text, it “allows the richness with [the] understanding that we can’t always talk right in the moment,” says Natalie Pennington, PhD, Assistant Professor of

Communication Studies at Colorado State University. When we hear someone's voice, we get a better understanding of their emotional state, she says. A phone call is rich in social cues and synchronicity, so we're getting immediate reactions. Meanwhile, with video calls, you can experience a drop-off, feeling as if someone was there with you when they weren't, all while having to look at yourself, she explains. "There is really that value of this sweet spot that voice sort of captures," she says.

2021 research by professors Amit Kumar and Nicholas Epley found that voice, including phone, video chat, and voice chat, created stronger social bonds when compared to text interactions, writing that that voice can create understanding or connection.

"Connection" is what I found in hearing not just my loved ones' voices, but the soundtrack of their lives playing in their 2-minute recordings: kids playing, how joyful someone sounded walking back from a good first date, the clatter of cooking utensils, gossiping about work. In fact, it was listening in on moments like this—realizing that hearing them made it feel more like I was *with* my loved ones—that nudged me toward sending more voice notes of my own. A longtime lover of the random catch-up phone call, this was the asynchronous step toward a different way of showing up, even if that meant getting over my nerves that I'd ramble. Listening to them move through their lives made me want to be vulnerable in that way, too.

Others mentioned the feeling of "being there" as a reason to love voice messaging. Greg Mania, 33, developed a routine with his best friend, Tara, of "voice noting from sunrise to sundown." With a voice note, you can take time to formulate a response, reply when you can, and pick right back up where you left off, they say. You can also keep a voice note, Mania says: sometimes, they both say things that inspire the other, and they're able to listen to those notes whenever needed. "For us it's a never-ending phone call, and a vital part of our days, and our relationship," Mania adds.

Danielle Mathias, 32, has a lot of long-distance friendships and says that "being able to hear their voice is really special to me," adding that she thinks hearing someone makes her feel more involved in their lives. "It almost feels like they're there with you in your apartment while you're

listening to their voice note, which can be really nice when you're missing somebody that's really far away." Draea Johnson, 47, echoes that: Through social media, she sees loved ones' lives evolve, but that feels like watching from the outside. "I know that many, many of my friends and acquaintances feel similar, many are very disconnected, so any time I can send a little love their way via voice notes, I do," she says.

In the thick of all this is the fact that loneliness was declared a "[public health epidemic](#)" in 2023, and a poll found that when Americans feel lonely, [about 50%](#) opt for a distraction, like TV, podcasts, or social media. Based on how many people describe getting a voice note as a [personal, mini-podcast](#), getting to listen to each other is a meaningful way to stay in touch that liking an Instagram story just isn't.

Still, voice notes remain somewhat divisive: Though many apps have a [transcription feature](#) for voice notes, communicating this way isn't accessible to everyone. Some wonder about the etiquette (or [how to follow best practices](#) with them); others find them intrusive, stressful, or even self-centered—the idea that someone *wants* to hear your monologue.

But the thing is: I *do*; I'll take the rambling and awkward pauses that might come with closeness. I think of voice notes as just one part of the ongoing conversation of phone calls and texts and endless Instagram memes and, fingers crossed, in-person hang-out time. Sometimes, someone replies to a voice note with a text or opts to call instead, but it's all part of the same catch-up. Different relationships have different communication preferences. But I cherish getting to listen in as friends narrate their grocery trips, vent about their bosses, or just want to hear what's up lately. It's a small act of love, I think, to want to talk to someone—however you choose to do it.

The day after I sent a voice note to a childhood friend just because something reminded me of her, I got an unexpected voice note from my younger sister, a previous passionate hater of voice messaging. She'd just sent her first one to someone, she told me, and was surprised by how freeing it felt. "It kind of makes me want to keep talking," she said.

I was just glad I got to hear about it.

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For Many of America's Aging Workers, 'Retirement Is a Distant Dream'

Alana Semuels is an economic correspondent at TIME. She covers work, consumer spending, retail, gender, and technology. She is a four-time finalist for the Gerald Loeb Award for Distinguished Business and Financial Journalism, and has won awards from the Society of Business Editors and Writers and the Los Angeles Press Club.



Walter Carpenter walks across the ski resort's dining room on a knee that needs to be replaced and a hip that's going bad. Lumbering into the kitchen, he deposits a brown bin of dirty dishes on a counter before heading back out to collect more bowls of half-eaten tomato soup and plates littered with sandwich crusts. "One foot in front of the other," he jokes to kitchen prep worker Kim Hopper, 72, as they pass each other.

Carpenter, 69, has worked winters at the Mad River Glen ski area in Waitsfield, Vt., for the past 15 years. Four times a week, he clocks in around noon, and makes \$20 per hour carrying dishes up and down the three flights of stairs in the "base box," as the kitchen and bar area is called, putting plastic food baskets and metal tongs and soup ladles in their rightful place, loading the industrial dishwasher with cups and bowls. He has peripheral neuropathy, which can leave him without feeling in his feet or legs. Some days, his phone tells him, he walks more than five miles during his shifts.

He never thought he'd be on the job at this age, but without much in retirement savings, Carpenter has no plans to stop. "I'm broke and poor and still working at 69," he says as he once again ascends the carpeted gray stairs with a bin full of dishes, his shoulders slightly stooped, his gray mustache and hair hidden under a baseball cap, a scruffy Einstein with a slight Boston accent. "But at least I'm still here."

Mad River Glen, where a daily adult lift ticket costs \$115, couldn't run without staffers like Carpenter. If you include part-timers on the ski patrol, the kitchen crew, and the employees at the retail shop, about half its workers are over 65, according to marketing coordinator Ry Young. That's not entirely surprising in Vermont, where about 26% of residents 65 and older are still working—the highest share in the U.S. The state is at the forefront of a national trend: as birth rates decline and the country ages, older people are staying in the workforce longer. Today, about 19% of people 65 and older in the U.S. are still working, up from 10% four decades ago.



They do it for a variety of reasons. Some, like John Mandeville, 75, the executive director of the Central Vermont Council on Aging, find fulfillment from their jobs and want to keep going until they can't anymore. Others, like Hopper, the prep cook, have ample retirement savings but still want to be around people, and work part time to stay connected. But about half of workers 65 and older are people like Carpenter, according to Craig Copeland, director of wealth-benefits research at the Employee Benefit Research Institute. For one reason or another—an illness, an investment scam, a lifetime of jobs without a pension or means to save for retirement—they have no choice but to keep working to pay the bills.

For these people, the finish line can feel miles away, and every time it draws closer, something moves it back again. Maybe they thought they could get by with their retirement savings until inflation started climbing. Or perhaps they were on track to quit at 65 until the stock market took a dive. Many are like Carpenter, who has worked for 55 years, doing construction, picking apples, running ski lifts, and managing parking lots, but can't retire because most of his jobs were low-paying, with meager benefits.

There will likely be more of these Americans in the years to come. Half of babies born in the U.S. in 2007 are projected to live to 103, according to the World Economic Forum. As lifespans lengthen, wages are not keeping up with inflation, and even a decent nest egg may not go far enough. That's especially true as employers have shifted the burden of retirement savings to employees, offering 401(k)s rather than pensions that promise a certain benefit every month. As a result, millions of Americans are going to have to keep working longer. "The issue more than anything is the high cost of living," says Mandeville, the Council on Aging director. "It's really strained people's retirement budgets."

The growing class of people who want to stop working, but can't, represents a crack in a social compact that assured citizens who worked hard that they could take it easy when they hit 65, if not before. As that crack grows, it will put economic strain on younger generations who have to care for family members, contributing to a growing burden of debt that includes student loans and homeownership. Retirement savings will become

one more discouraging thing that young workers can't afford as their costs grow but their wages do not. Forty years ago, a teacher or a municipal worker or an employee on a manufacturing line was guaranteed a good retirement after putting their time in. Today, more people are working in service-industry jobs, but longtime workers like Walter Carpenter cannot afford retirement. "I just have to keep working," he says as he clears away dirty dishes. "Right now, retirement is a distant dream."

In the mornings, Carpenter sits down at a desk in his rent-subsidized apartment in downtown Montpelier and writes letters. He sends missives to newspaper editors about the need for single-payer health care, the problems with the private insurance market, and the importance of gun control. Evidence of his political advocacy adorns the otherwise bare walls of his spartan apartment. There's a picture of him with Senator Bernie Sanders taken on the steps of the Vermont state capitol; a letter from former Senator Patrick Leahy; a commendation from former Governor Peter Shumlin. Carpenter spends hours sitting at his big desk, the main piece of furniture in his couchless living room, writing about the flaws of the American economy. "What will happen when, as a friend so aptly put it, I become 'too frail to work and too poor to live?'" he wrote in one 2017 letter advocating for state-sponsored retirement benefits.

Carpenter became a health care advocate in 2006, he says, after he became seriously ill from a liver disease caused by gallstones in the bile ducts. His health-insurance company wouldn't preapprove blood work and radiology tests that were needed to figure out what was wrong, he recalls, forcing him to spend hours and hours on the phone with them, advocating for his own treatment. The illness forced him to take a 12-week absence from his job at Stowe Mountain Resort, which was owned by a different company than it is now. He'd worked there since 1995, in a series of jobs that had health insurance and a 401(k) and paid \$10 to \$12 per hour—not a huge sum, but well above a state minimum wage that sat at \$7 at the time. But when Carpenter was ready to return to work, he says, the company had gone through a restructuring, and his job was gone. He applied for other full-time gigs with benefits, but no one seemed to want to hire a 52-year-old man with a history of health problems.

When people lose good jobs in their 50s, it's common for them to struggle in their 60s and in retirement, says Lisa Berkman, a professor of public policy and epidemiology at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health who has studied older workers. The 50s are a fork decade professionally, Berkman says. Around half of Americans are not working full time throughout them, and the odds of those people being able to find good jobs in their 60s are low. In contrast, about 80% of people who work full time through their 50s go on to work in their 60s. "When you get to be 60, all the inequality that has accumulated over your lifetime comes into Technicolor," Berkman says.

So it has been for Carpenter. Since his illness, he has been a seasonal worker, spending winters at Mad River Glen and summers at Vermont's Waterbury Center State Park, where he is a park attendant for \$22 an hour. The pay isn't bad, but the cost of living in Vermont is higher than the national average. Even with a rent-subsidized apartment, Carpenter's finances are tight. There's the \$235 he has to pay monthly for his Medicare supplement, and the \$184 deducted from Social Security for Medicare Part B, plus hundreds of dollars on groceries, his cell-phone bill, and expenses for his car, which he drives about 50 miles per day to get to and from work in the winter. The salt does a number on the undercarriage of his 2015 Subaru Forester. One year he had to dip into his retirement savings to get it in shape for its annual inspection.

Carpenter's situation may sound like bad luck, but it's a reality for many older Americans. About 1 in 5 people over 50 have no retirement savings at all, according to the AARP. The problem is getting worse over time. A 2023 government survey found that 20% of low-income workers had a retirement-account balance in 2007, but only 10% had one in 2019.

Carpenter has had a colorful life—a self-identified hippie, he's studied the flute at the Berklee College of Music, taken trains across Canada, lived in Israel, and survived the eruption of Mount St. Helens in Washington State. The hospitality industry found him when he moved back to the East Coast to care for his aging father, a professor, and started working odd jobs. This, too, is a common problem: as more people are thrust into caregiving for aging parents, they'll either have to spend much-needed money for that care

or scale back their own work, compromising their fragile finances even further.

Carpenter sometimes wishes he'd thought about retirement earlier, back when he was traveling the world and working part-time jobs. It can be hard sometimes to go to events like his high school reunion and see old schoolmates who are retired and financially secure. He's worried about what will happen over the next decade. That's why he scrimps and saves now, eating the half-priced food at Mad River Glen whenever he can, subsisting on deli meat from the kitchen. "There's going to be a time when I can't do this anymore," Carpenter says, wiping his hands on the dirty rag tucked into his pants. "So for now, I have to save as much as I can."

The sun is setting at Mad River Glen one December evening, and the cafeteria is closing. Customers clomp across the vast dining room in their ski boots, ready to go home. In the kitchen, things are slowing down; workers mop the floor as a boom box blasts the Grateful Dead. Carpenter tosses a green bag of sopping compost into a bin, then bends over to pick up a black plastic bag filled with trash. "You have to know how to lift things in this job," he says, gesturing to the rolling cart full of trash bags and compost.

Donning his jacket, he rolls the cart to the elevator, takes it to the ground floor, and drags it outside. It's about 10°, but Carpenter is cheerful as he hoists the trash, recycling, and compost, and tosses them in the proper bins. It is a job for a younger person. When it eventually becomes too difficult, he may ask to become a cashier like his colleague Ron Anderson, 81, who retired from a career in advertising decades ago, then decided to come back to work for camaraderie and the free lift ticket given to all employees.



As the nation ages, workers like Carpenter and Anderson will play a greater role in the economy. The Census Bureau predicts that the 65-and-older population in the U.S. will leap from 58 million in 2022 to 82 million by 2050, when the group is projected to make up more than a quarter of the country's population. The share of people in the workforce who are 55 and older is growing, while the proportion of people 16 to 54 has been shrinking since the late 1990s, according to a recent report by the Employee Benefit Research Institute. Older workers are becoming more prevalent as the youngest contributors to the economy—people 16 to 24—no longer work as often as they once did, instead pursuing school or other interests.

With its high proportion of older workers, Mad River Glen—and the state it serves—offer a glimpse of America's future. Vermont is the third oldest state in the nation; the number of residents 65 and older has nearly doubled during the past two decades, according to the Vermont State Data Center. The cost of living deters some people from moving here and often sends locals in search of an exit. As employers report worker shortages, state officials are beginning to look for ways to support older workers willing to fill the gaps, says Mandeville, the 75-year-old Council on Aging director.

That's how a business like the Trapp Family Lodge, a resort in Stowe, Vt., came to put out an ad in 2022 that targeted retirees: "Are you retired and looking for a part-time job to get you out of the house/make play money?" it asked. Bob Schwartz, the resort's marketing director, said the idea came as management looked for the "low-hanging fruit to beef up our workforce."

Flexibility is one of the biggest demands from older workers, says Jena Trombly, director of human resources at the Clara Martin Center, a nonprofit mental-health facility in Vermont. The center has cobbled together a staff by hiring many older people for part-time jobs, agreeing to give them ample time off to travel or visit their grandkids. The center has kept on some longtime workers by allowing them to transfer from full time to part time, keeping their knowledge in the organization. "It's a win-win all the way around," she says.

Japan is a good model for what America might look like if its workforce is increasingly made up of older people. About 80% of Japanese workers want to continue their jobs after retirement, according to the World Economic Forum, and about 1 in 4 people 65 and older were still working in 2022. The country has encouraged companies to help by employing older workers and raising the mandatory retirement age above 60. Technology helps too. Some companies have used robots to help elderly workers continue at jobs that their bodies might not otherwise be able to do.

But having everyone work longer isn't the only option. A new type of savings plan spreading around the U.S. could help more people put aside money for retirement. Called an auto-IRA, the plan sets aside money from people's paychecks, which it then invests in stocks and bonds. The program costs employers nothing; their only responsibility is to inform workers about it. "This means that people who, for the most part, never had a chance to save can do so," says David John, a senior policy adviser to the AARP who helped invent the concept. Vermont passed a law allowing auto-IRAs in 2023, and 17 other states either have operational auto-IRAs or are putting plans in place. In some states, like California, almost all employers have to participate.

The program appears to be helping workers grow their retirement savings in the states where it's already operational, according to the Pew Charitable Trusts. More than a million people have amassed more than \$1 billion in assets through such plans since 2018, according to John. In one Pew survey, nearly two-thirds of low-wage workers participating in an auto-IRA plan in Illinois said they were satisfied with it.

Walter Carpenter supports the idea. In one of his letter-writing campaigns in 2017, he penned a missive to the online publication VTdigger advocating for Vermont to support state-sponsored retirement plans. In the letter, Carpenter referred to himself as "someone who knows what it means to lose any hope of retirement through circumstances beyond my control."

Employers in Vermont can now start offering this type of plan. But unfortunately, Carpenter is unable to avail himself of the benefits now. It's too late for the contributions he'd make at this point to amount to much. He

reflects on this as he sits in the basement staff dressing room at Mad River Glen, pulling off his apron, swapping his work boots for snow boots and his jeans and sweatshirt for something clean.

“Someone who has worked for 55 years like me should be able to retire,” he says. Instead, he keeps going—one foot in front of the other. He’s cleaned the kitchen counters with dish soap, taken out the trash, and stacked chairs on tables. He’s ready to go home for the night. But he’ll be back tomorrow, and for many days after that.

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Laufey Is Bringing Jazz Traditions to a New Generation

Andrew R. Chow is a technology correspondent at TIME. His covers crypto, AI, tech regulation, and culture.



There's only one singer in the world who has their jazz scat solos sung back at them note-for-note by arenas filled with adoring fans. That would be [Laufey](#), a Gen Z artist who transcends genre and medium. The Icelandic 25-year-old (pronounced *Lay-vey*, full name Laufey Lin Bing Jonsdottir) draws inspiration from Ella Fitzgerald recordings, Schubert impromptus, and Taylor Swift bridges; she excels performing alongside solemn [symphony](#).

[orchestras](#) as well as in [lighthearted TikTok videos](#). While her untraditional approach has engendered backlash from genre gatekeepers, Laufey has learned to embrace opposition.

“I used to think that was such a scary thing: that nobody had walked that trail before me,” she says, taking a break from recording her upcoming third studio album in New York City. “But I now realize that when you’re the one determining which steps to take next and which branches to pull to the side, that’s when you know you have something good on your hands.”

Laufey’s music most closely aligns with the Great American Songbook: swinging, debonair midcentury pop written by the likes of Cole Porter and Jerome Kern. While she comes from a classical-music family and learned to play classical piano and cello at an early age, she veered toward jazz standards as a teenager. “The Great American Songbook is my bible,” she says. At the [Berklee College of Music](#) in Boston, a hotbed for rising jazz prodigies, Laufey honed a singing voice tailor-made for the genre: low, rich, and honeyed, with traces of Peggy Lee.

When the school sent students home in the spring of 2020, Laufey returned to Iceland and began posting videos of herself recording midcentury classics. These comforting, cozy videos drew an audience during a time when solace and escapism were badly needed. “I want people to enjoy the music without feeling like they have to be super educated on its history,” she says. “Like any other kind of music, it can be something that lifts you up or accompanies you on a sad day.”

Laufey could have turned this success into gigs on the jazz circuit, performing familiar repertoire. Instead, she started writing her own material: songs in the style of those old standards, but imbued with modern slang and conveying big, relatable feelings, especially the throes of unrequited love. “Listening to you harp on ‘bout some new soulmate/ ‘She’s so perfect,’ blah, blah, blah,” she sings on “From the Start,” which now has 600 million streams on Spotify. “How I wish you’ll wake up one day/ Run to me.”

With their counterintuitive mix of influences and nostalgic quality, Laufey's songs earned her fans of all ages, but [especially Gen Z](#). On TikTok, she has displayed a cunning social media fluency, posting acoustic versions of pop songs, outfit pics, and memes to her 7 million followers. Her dance moves were imported into the [video game Fortnite](#), and she's made fast friends with other Gen Z rebels like [Olivia Rodrigo](#) and Beabadoobee. "There are a lot of young women who connect with each other—and me—through this feeling of being the outcast," she says.

She's also thrived performing in front of audiences who love orchestra arrangements and earned the plaudits of older artists who have also blended jazz and pop, like Norah Jones and [Jon Batiste](#). Last year, she won her [first Grammy](#) for Best Traditional Pop Vocal Album, typically a stodgy category, for *Bewitched*.

Laufey's rapid ascent has led some to anoint her as jazz's savior. This, in turn, has angered jazz musicians who feel she isn't doing enough to engage with the genre's varied history or boundary-pushing present. Laufey brushes off both the crown and the criticism. "That's where things have gotten convoluted—people saying I'm the 'savior of jazz.' I don't consider my music jazz. I record jazz standards, I can be a jazz singer, but 90% of what I put on my albums is not jazz music," she says.

Conversely, she fiercely defends her bona fides and her right to engage with a genre that often feels like it has protective walls around it. "I think it's really easy to point at a young woman and say she doesn't know what she's talking about," she says. "But I know I've studied this enough to understand exactly what it is."

While *Bewitched* relied on classical and acoustic instruments, Laufey says her upcoming record will be more "daring," mix genres more fluidly, and expand her sonic palette with newer sounds. "I want to see if I can keep the integrity of my music but also allow myself to try out a bit of what modern technology allows," she says.

Plenty of artists have gotten in trouble with their fans for expanding their sense of self and trying new modes of expression. This sort of experimentation might be especially challenging for some Laufey fans who

view her music as purely a nostalgia act. But if there's anything she has learned in the past few years, it's the importance of refusing to be boxed into categories. "The fact that the jazz and classical worlds seem to struggle with the idea of an artist being both commercially successful and musically interesting—it breaks my heart a little," Laufey says. "Why can't I be both?"

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Olivia Munn Is Raising Awareness About Breast Cancer

Jamie Ducharme is a health correspondent at TIME. She covers the COVID-19 pandemic, Long COVID, mental health, vaping, psychedelics, and more. Her work for TIME has won awards from the Deadline Club, the New York Press Club, and the Newswomen's Club of New York. Additionally, she is the author of [*Big Vape: The Incendiary Rise of Juul*](#), which was adapted for a forthcoming Netflix docuseries.



When Olivia Munn was [diagnosed with breast cancer](#) in 2023, she struggled even to tell her family. Her now husband, comedian John Mulaney, had to break the news to her relatives because “the words got stuck in my throat,” the actor says.

Later, she found her voice in a big way. In a March 2024 Instagram post, Munn detailed her winding health journey. Just months before her diagnosis, she had a clean mammogram and tested negative for numerous genetic signatures associated with cancer. It wasn’t until her ob-gyn used the [Tyer-Cuzick Risk Assessment Calculator](#)—a simple tool that concluded Munn had a 37% chance of developing breast cancer—that she pursued additional testing, which revealed fast-growing cancer in both breasts. She

had a double mastectomy shortly thereafter, and subsequently had her uterus, fallopian tubes, and ovaries removed to stop production of hormones that could feed her disease.

[video id=TvBIBOoG autostart="viewable" no_rec]

It was because her diagnosis was so unexpected that Munn decided to [speak out](#). “I look at videos of me laughing with my son, running around in the park, feeling and looking healthy—all the while having this really aggressive, fast-moving cancer spreading through my breasts,” she says. “I thought, ‘Man, there’s so many women out there just like me.’ They might have no idea. And it may be too late by the time they find out.”

Read More: [Why Are So Many Young People Getting Cancer? It's Complicated](#)

Munn’s candor has had a tangible impact. After she came forward, the National Cancer Institute saw an uptick in use of the type of screening test she took, and at least one person—[journalist Alison Hall](#)—has gone public about being diagnosed as a result. “It was everything that I had hoped would happen,” Munn says.

Although Munn, 44, is still recovering, taking a range of medications and weathering the effects of medically induced menopause, she is also easing back into work, co-starring in the [forthcoming Apple TV+ drama Your Friends and Neighbors](#). These days, Munn says, she has a simple barometer for roles: “If something comes around that makes me really happy, then I will do it.”

She’s applying the same philosophy to life. Conscious of the pivotal role hormones play in her health, she’s lowering her stress levels as much as possible. In difficult situations, “the first thing I ask myself is, ‘If this stress feeds any cancer that could possibly be in my body, would it be worth it?’” Munn says. “The answer is always no.”

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Raquel Willis's Fearless Fight for Bodily Autonomy



Raquel Willis isn't afraid to take risks. She has organized large-scale marches to protest violence against Black trans lives and rallied outside the Supreme Court to support the trans youth at the center of the ongoing case [*U.S. v. Skrmetti*](#), which will decide whether [gender-affirming health care](#) bans for minors are constitutional. Last December, Willis was arrested at the Capitol for staging a [bathroom sit-in](#) in defiance of a proposal to ban trans

women from women's restrooms on federal property. The title of her 2023 memoir, *[The Risk It Takes to Bloom](#)*, underlines her fearlessness.

But to Willis, "a proud Southern, Black, trans, queer woman" from Augusta, Ga., the riskiest thing she's done so far is choose to live authentically. "Our society is not primed to honor queerness or transness," she says.

Willis, 33, is the co-founder of [Gender Liberation Movement](#) (GLM), the grassroots collective responsible for the Brooklyn Liberation Marches that drew thousands of people in 2020 and 2021. In 2024, GLM organized an inaugural [Gender Liberation March](#) in Washington, D.C., in an effort to highlight the ways in which the fights for abortion and trans rights are connected. "For us, gender liberation is about bodily autonomy, self-determination, the pursuit of fulfillment, and collectivism," she explains. "We want to be the glue between these different fights and get people talking about how restrictive ideas around gender impact us all." The way Willis sees it, restrictions on choices surrounding our bodies pose a danger to everyone, no matter how you identify.

"Many institutions have failed us and will continue to do so," she says. Since President Trump's Inauguration, a number of Executive Orders [targeting trans and gender-nonconforming people](#) have already been signed—one states that the U.S. will only recognize "two sexes, male and female." But thinking of the long road ahead, Willis is trying to maintain a sense of calm. "We have to remember that communities on the margins have experienced struggles and hardships in every era. We'll figure out solutions that serve us." And, perhaps unsurprisingly, she adds, "I'm going to find ways to take risks to move us closer to collective liberation."

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Gisèle Pelicot Is Galvanizing a Movement for Survivors of Sexual Violence

Vivienne Walt lives in Paris and has written for TIME since 2003, from dozens of countries around the Middle East, Africa, and Europe.



Were it not for a security guard in a small-town supermarket, the world might never have known of Gisèle Pelicot—and indeed, she might have remained in her own mind a mother of three and grandmother of seven comfortably retired in picture-perfect Provence with her husband of more than 50 years, Dominique Pelicot.

Instead, Dominique's arrest in 2020, for surreptitiously filming up the skirts of women as they shopped, shattered the veneer of domestic tranquility,

culminating in a [2024 rape trial](#) the likes of which France—and much of the world—had rarely seen. The evidence was as overwhelming as it was chilling: police found more than 20,000 photos and videos on Dominique’s laptop and other devices showing Gisèle, drugged into unconsciousness by her husband, being raped on their bed by more than 70 different men without her knowledge over nearly a decade; Dominique marked one folder of videos simply “Abuse.”

The horrors, and Gisèle’s response to them, made headlines around the world as she defiantly chose to waive her legal right to anonymity. By the time Dominique Pelicot, 72, and 50 others were [convicted last December](#) of rape, attempted rape, or sexual assault, Gisèle had gone from obscurity to global icon in the campaign against sexual violence, training a deeply unsettling microscope on its darkest corners.

A diminutive presence in the Avignon courthouse, clad in tailored shirts and fine scarves, Gisèle, 72, insisted on attending the entire three-month trial and having the horrific footage aired publicly before her attackers. For many French, she defined heroism: an ordinary person taking extraordinary actions. Thousands marched in support. Murals of her face appeared across the country. A banner hung from Avignon’s ancient ramparts [reading merci gisèle](#). After the verdicts, she acknowledged her significance, telling hundreds of journalists, “I think of all the other victims whose stories remain untold … We share the same fight.”

And yet, that fight will not be easily won. Amid the detritus of a shattered family, and despite France reeling from the testimony, the question remains: Will Gisèle Pelicot’s act of profound bravery create lasting change?

A French parliamentary study in January estimated only 20% of the country’s rape survivors ever press charges. Of those cases, about 94% are dismissed without a trial, [according to one study](#) last year. Unlike the U.S. and many countries in Europe, France does not define rape as sex without consent, but rather as intercourse committed by violence, surprise, constraint, or threat. Lawyers say the narrow definition complicates rape cases; the French Parliament is now debating how to change it. Gisèle Pelicot’s attackers—many of them fathers and husbands, including a nurse, a journalist, and truck drivers—argued that Dominique’s invitations for

them to have sex with his unconscious wife seemed as good as having her permission, and 17 have since appealed their convictions. “These men looked at these videos and said, ‘That is not rape,’” Gisèle’s lawyer Antoine Camus tells TIME, shaking his head in dismay. He believes the intense focus on his client might finally force legal changes. “This is the first time in France you have deep thinking on this,” he says. “I think there will be a ‘before’ and ‘after’ of this trial.”

Sexual-violence experts caution that legal measures are just the start. Some fear that making Gisèle Pelicot a hero might absolve people from confronting the deeper, troubling truths about her ordeal, including how in 21st century France this could have occurred, and for so long. “She does not want medals pinned on her jacket. She wants things to change,” posits Anne Bouillon, an attorney in the French city of Nantes who specializes in representing survivors and has been following the case.

In some ways, change has already come. Gisèle Pelicot’s courageous fight against sexual violence has blasted open a sealed door through which other survivors now feel free to walk. “I hear this from my clients who I see every day in my office,” Bouillon says. “They mention Gisèle Pelicot as an authorization to speak out. It is amazing.”

Gisèle herself said it best, from a place she never imagined being: on the witness stand last October, with the world’s attention fixed on her. “I wanted all women victims of rape—not just when they have been drugged, rape exists at all levels—I want those women to say, ‘Madame Pelicot did it, we can do it too,’ ” she said. Her motivation to participate so publicly in her trial, she said, was not simply courage. “I say it is not bravery,” she told the court. “It is will and determination to change society.” Few can claim to have as credible a chance to do just that.

[video id=nL0KidQM autostart="viewable"]

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Anna Sawai Wants More for Asian Women in Hollywood

Cate Matthews is an editorial director at TIME, where she works on franchises such as the TIME100, Women of the Year, and the Earth Awards.



It was at an early screening for *Shogun* that [Anna Sawai](#) realized the significance the historical epic set in feudal Japan would take on for audiences. A young woman approached her and tearfully shared what it meant to her to see Sawai's portrayal of Lady Mariko, a *naginata*-wielding translator who, amid weighty societal expectations, still lives according to her own moral compass. "I've always felt this weird pressure to be a good

person and to be easy to work with,” Sawai recalls the young woman saying, a pressure she then tied to the expectations she faced as a Japanese woman.

Sawai, who has also appeared in Apple TV+’s *Pachinko* and *Monarch: Legacy of Monsters*, is cognizant of the responsibility that she and others in the industry bear as storytellers—especially when it comes to portrayals of Asian women, who have long been objectified and sexualized in Hollywood. “We have so much more inside of us,” says Sawai, a New Zealand-born, Japanese actor. “I want to make sure that the roles that I choose are not going to perpetuate those images that I feel are incorrect, and I want to make sure that they’re very human.”

Shogun, FX’s most expensive scripted series of all time, took home a [record 18 Emmy Awards](#), including Outstanding Drama Series, in September—the most that any single season of a television show has ever received. Sawai, 32, became the [first Asian woman to win](#) the Emmy for Lead Actress in a Drama, and later received its sister trophy at the [Golden Globes](#) in January.

Following the samurai-era series’ widespread success, Sawai has been approached about taking part in new period pieces. But she’s also excited to try her hand at other genres, including rom-coms and action and adventure. “I want the next role that I find to be something that challenges me, because I haven’t done it in the past,” she says. “I don’t want to keep repeating what I’ve done.”

That desire calls back to a crucial decision she made in 2018, when she abandoned her early career as a singer, despite pressure to stay in her girl group, and restart her career as an actor. “You need courage to start something, but you need even more courage to quit,” she says of that leap of faith. “If there is a part of you that’s going to look back and think, Oh, I should have maybe tried something new—then you should do it.”

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This Conservationist Is Saving One of the World's Most Endangered Storks

Kyla Mandel is a senior editor at TIME. She oversees climate, science, and space coverage.



[Purnima Devi Barman](#) remembers the day her life changed. It was 2007, and she got a call that a tree, home to a family of greater adjutant storks, was being chopped down in India's Assam state, where she lives. When Barman arrived, a nest of endangered baby storks was on the ground. Shocked, she asked the man who cut down the tree: Why would you do this? He told her the bird is a bad omen, a pest, a disease carrier. The stork

is locally known as *hargila*, or bone swallower, because of its tendency to be found near garbage dumps. Her neighbors were angry at her for questioning the man's actions.

"Everyone surrounded me, started whistling at me," the biologist and wildlife conservationist, 45, recalls. But all she could think about were her infant twin daughters. Like the storks, they were so small. Barman was compelled to rescue the birds. Feeling their heartbeats moved her. "For the first time, I felt the importance—the call of nature," she says. "From that day, my mission started."

At the time, there were an estimated 450 greater adjutant storks left in the region. In 2023, thanks to Barman's work, the stork was moved from endangered status under the International Union for Conservation of Nature's classification to "[near threatened](#)." Their population in Assam has soared to more than 1,800.

Barman could not have done this without her "[Hargila Army](#)"—a team of some 20,000 women who protect the birds' nests and educate others about the beauty of these imposing, nearly 5-ft.-tall scavengers. The network is ever expanding, not just in Assam but also throughout India and now Cambodia. Schools as far away as France teach students about her work.

Today, Barman proudly dons her traditional dress and shawl decorated with images of the storks woven by members of the Hargila Army who are able to earn a living by selling such items. Be it clothing, songs, or celebrating baby showers for new chicks, says Barman, "this bird is now a part of our tradition and culture."

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Amanda Zurawski Won't Give Up the Fight for Reproductive Rights

Charlotte Alter is a senior correspondent at TIME. She covers politics, social movements, and generational change, and hosts TIME's Person of the Week podcast. She is also the author of [*The Ones We've Been Waiting For: How a New Generation of Leaders Will Transform America*](#). Her work for TIME has won a Front Page Award from the Newswoman's Club of New York and has been nominated for a GLAAD Media award.



Amanda Zurawski never set out to be an activist. But in 2022, when she was four months pregnant after years of trying, her life changed forever. She dilated too early, her water broke at just 18 weeks, and suddenly, her pregnancy was in distress. Zurawski's doctors told her "with complete certainty" that she would lose the baby.

If Zurawski, now 37, had lived in another state, or in another time, her doctors would've been able to give her standard medical treatment, in this case an abortion. She would've been able to heal and go on to have a healthy pregnancy. But Zurawski lived in Texas in the aftermath of the [Supreme Court's Dobbs decision](#). Her water broke the same week that Texas' trigger law went into effect, banning abortion in almost all circumstances.

Because her fetus still had a heartbeat, her doctors could not treat her miscarriage. "I had to wait until the baby died inside me or for me to be on death's door before I could get care," she says. She went into septic shock and was hospitalized for a week. "Now my reproductive organs are permanently compromised," she says.

After sharing her story publicly, Zurawski became the lead plaintiff in the Center for Reproductive Rights' lawsuit challenging Texas's abortion ban. That lawsuit, [Zurawski v. Texas](#), inspired others around the country. Zurawski became the face of the abortion-rights movement, and her story became one of the most prominent examples of the dangers abortion bans pose to women's health.

In May 2024 the Texas Supreme Court [upheld the ban](#). The decision felt like "a slap in the face," Zurawski recalls. "It felt like they were trying to take away our voices, erase us from history, and silence us."

Zurawski refused to [back down](#). She made dozens of campaign trips for President Joe Biden and then Vice President Kamala Harris over the course of 2024, warning about the dangers another Donald Trump presidency would pose to reproductive justice.

After Harris lost, Zurawski was devastated. But she didn't let herself wallow for long. "The anti-choice movement would want us to be tired, they'd want us to rest," she says. "It's not in my nature to give up. It can get worse, and it will, if we don't continue to fight."

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This Activist Wants to Stop Female Genital Mutilation Once and for All



For Fatou Baldeh, the past year was critical in the fight to end female genital mutilation. A survivor and the founder of the organization Women in Liberation & Leadership (WILL), Baldeh, 41, is a leading activist fighting against the practice in Gambia. Although FGM has been banned in her country since 2015, it still happens: about 75% of women and girls ages 15 to 49 have been cut, according to the [United Nations Population Fund](#). FGM can lead to long-lasting health effects and is internationally recognized as a human-rights violation. Advocates say the law banning the practice is poorly enforced. “We continue to have those issues where we will have a case, we go to the police and report, and the police would be

like, ‘This is our culture, this is our tradition.’ So they do not see it as a crime,” Baldeh says.

This past year, Gambian parliamentarians considered a bill to [overturn the ban](#). “This was an attack on women’s rights,” Baldeh says. She and WILL worked with other organizations to fight the bill. They connected with survivors, who shared their experiences with parliamentarians, and discussed the issue with religious leaders. They conducted a nationwide study to document the health impacts of FGM and brought that evidence to politicians. And they succeeded: in July 2024, Gambia’s parliament [rejected the bill](#).

Baldeh says this past year has opened up the conversation: “People are talking about it, and that is a positive thing because we cannot end the practice if we don’t talk about it.” Baldeh says news of the bill has brought the issue of FGM back “in the limelight”—not just for Gambia, but for the rest of the world too. “It’s 2025, and little girls are being pinned down and their genitals are being cut in the name of culture and tradition,” she says. “When this whole issue happened in Gambia, it really made people pay attention.”

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Claire Babineaux-Fontenot Is on a Mission to End Hunger in the U.S.

Solcyré (Sol) Burga is a general assignment reporter at TIME. She covers U.S. news with a focus on student loans and LGBTQ+ issues.



[Claire Babineaux-Fontenot](#), CEO of Feeding America, began to work at the country's largest domestic hunger-relief organization—overseeing a network of more than 200 food banks and 60,000 partners—two years before the [COVID-19 pandemic](#) shook the global economy. Many people assume that food insecurity rates peaked in 2020, when those facing hunger became more outwardly visible, Babineaux-Fontenot says, but the problem is now more pressing than ever. “When all of those long lines of cars and the people that they represented went back to the insides of buildings, it’s like they disappeared from the American consciousness,” she says.

In 2023, an estimated 13.5% of households, or 1 in 7, were food insecure, up from 10.5% in 2020, according to the [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#). The price of food in the country has [risen by nearly 28%](#) since 2019. And while that rate has recently slowed, the emphasis on the economy in the 2024 election showed just how urgent an issue the cost of living has become for Americans.

Babineaux-Fontenot, 60, embraces the nonpartisan nature of her work. “No matter what your political positions are in this country, people consistently believe that people deserve to have access to nutritious food,” she says. Her purpose as a nonprofit leader has been deeply informed by her untraditional upbringing in a family with 108 children (connected via biology, fostering, and adoption), and by her Catholic faith, instilled in her by her devout parents.

Last year, her dedication to service earned her the University of Notre Dame’s prestigious [Laetare Medal](#), previously awarded to Presidents Joe Biden and John F. Kennedy. “To have been bestowed the highest honor bestowed to an American Catholic and to know how imperfectly I walk presented a bit of a challenge to me,” says Babineaux-Fontenot. “There will be nothing I’m asked to do in this work that will ever be anywhere near as difficult as what tens of millions of people in this country are asked to do every day. And I’m privileged that I get the chance to be their partner in this.”

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The CEO Who Wants to Ensure Parents Never Face Another Formula Shortage

Eliana Dockterman is a correspondent at TIME. She covers culture, society, and gender, including topics from blockbuster movies to the #MeToo movement to how the pandemic pushed moms out of the workplace.



Laura Modi, a CEO and mother of four, is intimately familiar with the stigmas around feeding a newborn. When raising money for Bobbie, the organic formula company she co-founded, a visibly pregnant Modi pitched the idea to a male investor who scolded her for discouraging women from breastfeeding. “I went to pure motherly fury. I came back with, ‘What would you say to a woman who wasn’t *able* to feed their baby?’”

His loss. The market for parents who cannot breastfeed—or choose not to—is robust. Within 18 months of launching in 2021, Bobbie, whose European-style products are sought after because they omit typical additives like corn syrup, [surpassed \\$100 million in revenue](#).

[Bobbie for Change](#), the company's mission-driven arm, pushes for parental leave, gives free formula to moms who have had mastectomies, and has introduced legislation that would bolster U.S. manufacturing to help prevent another formula shortage like the one that created a crisis for millions of families in 2022. When wildfires devastated Los Angeles earlier this year, Bobbie [provided formula](#) for families who lost their homes. “I didn’t get into this because I like making powdered milk,” Modi, 39, says. “Becoming a parent makes you an activist.” She believes that Bobbie’s advocacy wins over new customers.

Bobbie also partners with influencers like tennis champion Naomi Osaka, [Queer Eye's Tan France](#), and cookbook author Molly Baz, who [recently posed on a billboard](#) in New York City's Times Square breastfeeding her son while also holding a Bobbie bottle. “We could have chosen to have her on a billboard feeding her baby a bottle, and we didn’t,” Modi says. “We respected that she was a combo feeder, and having her baby on her boob was showing the world it’s not your typical formula company. We paint a picture of all feeding journeys.”

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Robert De Niro's Netflix Political Thriller *Zero Day* Holds an Uncanny Mirror to Contemporary Chaos

Judy Berman is the TV critic at TIME. Along with reviewing current television, she writes about the ways in which entertainment and pop culture intersect with our larger social and political realities. Her TIME essay on [*Ted Lasso and modern masculinity*](#) won a New York Press Club award in 2022.



In an early scene of the Netflix thriller *Zero Day*, a former U.S. President is visiting the site of a deadly Manhattan subway crash when an onlooker starts shouting about [crisis actors](#). A fight breaks out. Barricades fall. The chaos horrifies George Mullen, a revered leader played by [Robert De Niro](#), who

has been summoned to soothe the public after a cataclysmic event. “What’s the matter with you?” he scolds the agitator. “If we keep shouting at each other, what are we gonna accomplish? We’re Americans!... You’re afraid. And you think if you get worked up over some bullsh-t conspiracy nonsense, that won’t make you afraid? No. You’re not behaving like an American, nor a patriot.”

It’s a cathartic rant, even if you’re aware that it takes more than a stern lecture from an authority figure to cure conspiracy thinking—and especially if you’ve been less than impressed with the moral instincts or off-the-cuff oratory of our last few real Commanders in Chief. Intelligent, principled, and brave, Mullen has all the qualities any reasonable person would want in a President. As an admirer marvels, he was also “the last President in modern memory who was able to consistently rally bipartisan support.” Which raises the questions: What political party does Mullen actually represent? What policies did he champion, and what did he accomplish?



We never find out. Creators Eric Newman ([American Primeval](#), the [Narcos](#) franchise) and Noah Oppenheim, a former president of NBC News, are so thorough in their avoidance of naming characters’ parties and positions, it must have been a choice. *Zero Day* is a well-built political thriller, with a

superb cast and blockbuster production values. It takes pains to establish an atmosphere of division and distrust that mirrors the present. Yet its evasion of the substance of contemporary American polarization—an increasingly common approach in a Hollywood desperate for hits that will play in red states, blue states, and internationally—undermines that verisimilitude. The show’s extreme efforts to avoid offense, the bromides about truth and liberty it offers in lieu of more specific and potentially controversial insights, feel a bit like a betrayal of its plainspoken hero.

When we meet President Mullen, he is immersed in the pleasures of retirement. Living in bucolic upstate New York, he goes on leisurely morning jogs with his dog, swims in an outdoor pool worthy of *Architectural Digest*, neglects a long-delayed memoir as his publisher grows impatient. But when the nation is hit with a cyberattack—the power grid briefly crashes, causing accidents that kill thousands, as “This Will Happen Again” appears on every smartphone screen—George is persuaded by the current POTUS (a presidential but underused [Angela Bassett](#)) to find the culprit and prevent a second catastrophe. A President’s work is never done, even when he’s no longer President. While Russia emerges as the [obvious suspect](#), evidence points elsewhere. George has the integrity to follow it.

There is a sense that in leading the investigative commission, he is resolving unfinished business. A popular single-term President, he declined to run for re-election after the death of his adult son. (You may well notice parallels to a [certain recent occupant](#) of the White House.) But, as ethical and sharp as he usually seems, George is still an elderly man with a bathroom cabinet full of prescriptions. Moments of disorientation coupled with what might be hallucinations force him to question the soundness of his mind—and he’s not the only one.



Netflix was clearly invested in making *Zero Day* a hit. Directed by prestige-TV fixture Lesli Linka Glatter ([Homeland](#), [Mad Men](#)), the six-episode series is as stylish and fleet as any feature thriller and smartly deploys its big-name actors. George's wife, a judge portrayed by Joan Allen, is worried enough about him to beg his hypercompetent former White House chief of staff ([Connie Britton](#)) to join the commission. Lizzy Caplan is George's aggrieved daughter, Alex, now a Congresswoman. Alex has found a surrogate father in Matthew Modine's slick House Speaker. Jesse Plemons is George's in-over-his-head deputy. Gaby Hoffmann, [Dan Stevens](#), and Bill Camp have small but crucial roles.

Zero Day is, among other things, the ultimate example of the so-called dad show. An oasis for men of a certain age amid a TV landscape full of [unscripted soaps](#), [Bridgerton](#) clones, and auteur dramedies, dad shows find traditionally masculine, mostly AARP-eligible heroes solving crimes or leading empires or fighting for their families—if not all three at once. Genres vary, from action thrillers like the [Idris Elba](#)–led *Hijack* to medical dramas like [The Pitt](#) to the [Yellowstone](#) western franchise, starring [Kevin](#)

[Costner](#) and [Harrison Ford](#). The constant is the archetype of one righteous man with the courage to save the day. *Zero Day* does more than most dad shows to humanize this character, a credit to both the writing and De Niro's turn as an august leader struggling with his own decline and that of a nation where he once wielded supreme power.

It also makes smart and inventive use of 21st century history to conjure a fictional crisis that feels real. George's investigation recalls the closely watched work of [Robert Mueller](#). Supporting first responders on the site of the subway crash, he brings to mind a pre-disgrace [Rudy Giuliani](#) reassuring a terrified nation after 9/11. Hoffmann's tech billionaire rings true in the age of [surveillance capitalism](#). One character's fate has echoes of the [Jeffrey Epstein case](#). Even as the plot twists become a bit far-fetched, the world George inhabits remains grounded in our own.



So vivid is *Zero Day*'s evocation of contemporary corruption and unrest that its evasiveness on political affiliations plunges it into the realm of the uncanny. We get the sense that Americans were agitated long before the

attack, though details remain murky. The show leans hard on assumptions viewers across the political spectrum will bring without challenging any one set. It shares with another recent, cautiously nonpartisan Netflix thriller, [The Madness](#), an inherently uncontroversial abhorrence of extremists, no matter their agenda. One character rages against “half the country caught up in a fever dream of lies and conspiracy, and the other half shouting about pronouns and ranking their grievances”—a nod to reality that’s also a false equivalence for the ages.

In an era when TV aimed at mass audiences, from Netflix’s splashy [The Diplomat](#) to Amazon’s dopey spy franchise [Citadel](#), often tries to [set stories within governments while avoiding partisan statements](#), *Zero Day* stands out for taking on American polarization without so much as identifying its characters’ parties. This limits our grasp of their motives and relationships. That Newman and Oppenheim felt they needed to go to such lengths to keep viewers red, blue, and independent rooting for a hero played by De Niro speaks to how ossified our biases have become, or at least how spooked platforms and creators are by them.



It wasn't so long ago—about two weeks into Barack Obama's second term—that Netflix debuted *[House of Cards](#)*, the chronicle of a ruthless Democrat's rise to power, as its first big original series, apparently without fear of offending liberals. Nor did anyone blink when [Shonda Rhimes](#) set *[Scandal](#)* within the White House of a wishy-washy, adulterous GOP President who'd unwittingly stolen an election. Two of Aaron Sorkin's best-loved projects, *[The West Wing](#)* and *[The American President](#)*, did romanticize Democratic POTUSes. But when the satire *[Veep](#)* neglected to mention its titular VP's party, it was for good reason. The point was that the people who occupy our halls of power are too plagued by pettiness, vanity, and incompetence to care about ideals.

Of course, *Veep*'s sycophants, buffoons, and backstabbers bear little resemblance to the vanguard of our latest regime. If Trump 45 was a norm-shattering ringmaster surrounded by faceless enablers, then Trump 47 is just one name in an outré, scandal-ridden mix among whom [Elon Musk's DOGE](#) and its college-age havoc breakers have become the breakout characters. None of the professional politicians in *Zero Day* would so giddily court chaos. They make the decisions they make, most of the time, in hopes of preventing it.

Conceived long before Trump took office in January, *Zero Day* couldn't have predicted the details of this new era. Yet its unwillingness to mirror the moment in other basic ways makes it as much a victim of our toxic times as it is a plea for moral leadership in the face of them. The blandly universal dilemma it finally puts before George is whether a need for safety and self-protection must necessarily supersede the confrontation of an unpopular truth. It's a question the creators might have asked themselves.

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In Oscar-Nominated Ukrainian Documentary Porcelain War, Three Artists Cut Through the Noise of War

Simon Shuster is a senior correspondent at TIME. He covers international affairs, with a focus on Russia and Ukraine. For his first book, *The Showman*, he reported inside the Ukrainian President's compound in Kyiv as the Russian invasion unfolded.



War has a way of attracting storytellers, different kinds at different phases of the story. Usually the journalists get there first, before the authors and historians arrive to place events in a grander narrative. The artists tend to be among the stragglers, though their works, once out in the world, can have the greatest resonance.

The release of *Porcelain War*, the [Oscar-nominated documentary](#) about the [Russian invasion of Ukraine](#), shows that the artists have arrived to tell their version of this story, and it is unlike anything the experts and reporters have shown us. For the filmmakers, this was no accident. “My main fear in making the film,” the co-director, Slava Leontyev, told me recently, “was that we would end up capturing something like a reportage.” His partner on the project, Anya Stasenko, puts an even finer point on it: “I refused to make it about the blood and gore and violence.”

Set in the frontline city of [Kharkiv](#), about 25 miles from the Russian border, the film cannot escape the violence of the war, and it does not seek to sugarcoat it. Russian shells rain down constantly, destroying parts of the city and its suburbs, killing thousands and forcing over a million civilians to flee the area. Leontyev, the co-director, serves in the Ukrainian special forces, and we follow his platoon into battle at one point in the film, watching the carnage through the cameras they attached to their uniforms.

But this scene is an exception to the overall tone of the film. Its main focus is not on the war itself but its antithesis: the beauty and humanity that war destroys. The action follows three artists: Leontyev and Stasenko, as well as their friend Andrey Stefanov, an oil painter who doubles as the film’s cinematographer. They fight the war not only with weapons but through their struggle to continue making art even as the air-raid sirens howl around them. These acts of creation, Leontyev explains, become a critical form of resistance against the Russians, whose goals in this war is not only to conquer Ukrainian territory but to eradicate Ukrainian culture.

Read more: [Where to Watch Every Oscar Nominated Movie](#)

The porcelain in the title of the film refers to the figurines the artists create, depicting phantasmagorical creatures like a baby dragon and a pegasus. Leontyev, in the spare time he has between training civilians to use assault rifles, designs and molds the figurines, while his partner Stasenko decorates them with her exquisite drawings. Their close friend, the oil painter Andrey Stefanov, is the film’s cinematographer, and the mastery he shows in setting up each frame seems all the more remarkable given his total lack of experience in camerawork.



All three of the artists are amateur filmmakers. At the start of the [Russian invasion](#), they relied on their American collaborator, Brendan Bellomo, the writer, editor and co-director of the film, to provide the equipment they needed to make it. Bellomo never came to Ukraine to help them. On video calls that would go on for hours, he taught them how to use the cameras and microphones he sent to Kharkiv with the help of couriers, often mixed in among shipments of humanitarian aid.

The technical mastery of the film, as well as the accolades it has received, can seem difficult to reconcile with the fact that the Ukrainian filmmakers were basically winging it. *Porcelain War* won the Grand Jury prize at the 2024 Sundance Film Festival for best U.S. documentary. Stefanov has been nominated for the American Society of Cinematographers Documentary Award, a rare feat for a first-timer. Last month the film was nominated for an [Academy Award](#) for best documentary feature.

The Oscar in that category went last year to another film about the war, [20 Days in Mariupol](#), a towering work of journalism made during the Russian siege and bombardment of that city in southern Ukraine. Its director, Mstyslav Chernov, is a war correspondent for the Associated Press, and he has often spoken of his desire to show the war in all its horror, even as he recognized the risks of doing that.

“To watch people crying, it’s hard,” he [said in January 2023](#), around the first anniversary of the Russian invasion. “When you place an audience for 90 minutes into this chaos and this mess and this violence, there is a risk of people getting too overwhelmed or even pushed back by the amount of this violence.”

The subtlety of *Porcelain War*, which premiered in the U.S. in November, helps the film avoid that risk. At its heart is the love story of Leontyev and Stasenko, whom we observe in their quiet moments, crafting figurines in their workshop or walking their dog Frodo through the mine-strewn woods around Kharkiv. Such languorous scenes led one of my friends, a seasoned war reporter, to remark that the film was short on action, and its pace is undeniably slower than the typical war documentary.



But its approach offers an answer to the problem Chernov recognized in releasing *20 Days in Mariupol*. As the war grinds, it becomes harder for journalists to grab and hold the attention of their audiences. President Volodymyr Zelensky, himself a former filmmaker and comic actor, was keenly aware of this danger from the start. “It’s only a matter of time,” Zelensky told me in April 2022, about two months into the Russian invasion. “Sadly our war is perceived through the big social networks. People see this

war on Instagram. When they get sick of it, they will scroll away. It's a lot of blood, a lot of emotion, and that tires people."

A year and a half later, when we discussed this problem again, Zelensky sensed it was getting worse. "Exhaustion with the war rolls along like a wave," he told me in the fall of 2023. "You see it in the United States, in Europe. And we see that as soon as they start to get a little tired, it becomes like a show to them: 'I can't watch this rerun for the 10th time.'"

Zelensky's answer to this challenge has been to travel the world, giving interviews to reporters and convincing his foreign leaders not to succumb to what some Western pundits have termed "Ukraine fatigue." *Porcelain War*, through its beauty and the magnetism of its characters, offers another way to address this dilemma. The film connects with its audience in a register that only works of art can reach. As the war enters its fourth year, Ukraine needs new ways to tell the story of the war, and artists may turn out to be its most effective messengers.

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Halle Berry Says It's Time to Talk About Menopause

Alice Park is a senior health correspondent at TIME. She covers the COVID-19 pandemic, new drug developments in cancer and Alzheimer's disease, mental health, HIV, CRISPR, and advances in gene therapy, among other issues in health and science. She also covers the Olympics, and co-chaired TIME's inaugural TIME 100 Health Summit in 2019. Her work has won awards from the New York Press Club, and recognition from the Deadline Club. In addition, she is the author of [*The Stem Cell Hope: How Stem Cell Medicine Can Change Our Lives*](#). Follow her on Instagram at [@aliceparktime](#).



Oscar-winning actress Halle Berry has a new passion: menopause, a neglected area of medicine long in need of a little love. Doctors often downplay or fail to thoroughly treat the biological changes that trigger physical, emotional, and social shifts at midlife, and Berry is asking hard questions about why the medical community doesn't adequately address this important stage with patients.

Berry talked to TIME about her advocacy work and [Respin](#), the new company she created to provide women with reliable and comprehensive information about menopause.

You've become a vocal advocate for more research and information about women in midlife. How did your personal experience bring you to this work?

The more I started to [talk about what I was going through](#), I started to realize how other women were suffering and how little other women had. I started to see the need to continue efforts in Washington to get a bill passed with substantive dollars [for more research on midlife and more clinical trials for menopause]. I saw the need for more education.

I had no answers, no one to turn to. I was floored to find the dearth of nothingness in this space—and how little doctors knew. I thought I had the best doctors I could have.

How are you working to change how we talk about menopause?

We are working on the federal level to get the bill through, and working at the state level, too, with governors and leaders. We're talking to them about what programs they might be willing to support in their states to support women.

Why are more doctors not talking to women about menopause and midlife?

It's not really their fault. It's not something that's made important for them in medical school. But what I hold against doctors today is that now that we are out there talking about it—and screaming that women deserve better—they don't go back to take it upon themselves to get an education. Every practitioner should know about the menopausal body. Women are living to their 80s, and menopause can start in your 40s. We spend half our lifetimes in it now.

Read More: [Why It's Time to Uncouple Obstetrics and Gynecology](#)

If men went through this time of life in the same horrific way we do [with symptoms of hot flashes, night sweats, and mood changes], there would be lots of answers, research, and a lot of money raised to fund studies to help men live their best lives. But because we are women, we suffer sexism and ageism; when we get to this time of life, we're expected to white-knuckle it and bow out gracefully. Because society told us our primary and best years are for childbearing, and all we are meant to do is make babies. When we are done making babies, we're left to fend for ourselves. No one cares about us any more.

You have testified in Congress on behalf of a bill that would increase research and clinical trials to better understand women's midlife. Why is there so little funding for this work?

We refuse to understand that menopause is a thing. It's a very important time in a woman's life when she needs to be cared for and understand what is happening to her body so she can live her best life in the next 30 years. We haven't acknowledged that, and that's why we never support it with money.

How can women change the current stigma and lack of knowledge about menopause?

There are so many ideas and information and misinformation swirling around. That's why I created Respin. It's a community for women to talk to each other and learn from each other. But there is also a health component with health coaching, nutritionists, and experts to talk about exercise and learning how the lack of estrogen and changing hormones affect our heart, brain, bones, and entire body. I felt like there was something really missing in the market for women in midlife.

How will Respin help women in menopause?

Women can get whatever level of support and care they need. A woman in her 30s can get educated about menopause; a woman in perimenopause can get a health coach and devise a plan for her needs, whether that includes [hormone replacement therapy](#) or supplements, and a woman post-menopause can come for the services she needs, too. It all depends on where a woman is and what her needs are when she enters the community.

Read More: [Menopause Is Finally Going Mainstream](#)

How can the medical system change to be more supportive and knowledgeable?

That's my next crusade. After I get the bill passed in D.C. for more research and clinical trials, I'm going to the universities and putting pressure on them, too. We need to help them understand why this is important and reimagine their curriculum to make menopause and midlife for women more than one chapter in medical-school textbooks.

And this isn't just for gynecologists. This isn't [bikini medicine](#). Every doctor—every cardiologist, every neurologist, every general practitioner, every rheumatologist—should understand the effect that a woman's loss of her hormones does to her body and every single one of her organs.

We women have to start demanding more. That's who I am today: a woman demanding more. I am demanding more because we deserve more.

[video id=EkBbhRuI autostart="viewable"]

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